

The Key of Truth:

A Monument of Armenian Unitarianism

Abstract

Although commonly labeled adoptionist, *The Key of Truth* is in fact a biblical unitarian text. What's less clear is who authored it and when. In this essay, I will critically examine three main possibilities: (1) *The Key of Truth* is a medieval text used by the Paulicians in the seventh to tenth centuries; (2) it is a Tondrakian text from the tenth to fourteenth centuries; and (3) it was composed in the eighteenth century by Armenians living under the Ottoman Empire. After concluding the last possibility is most plausible, I will weigh potential influences, including Protestants, Anabaptists, and Socinians.

Introduction

In 1898 Frederick Conybeare, professor of theology at Oxford University, published *The Key of Truth: A Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (henceforth *The Key*). The volume contained a nearly 200-page introduction, *The Key* in Armenian, Conybeare's English translation, and nine appendices containing historical sources related to the Paulicians and Tondrakians.

In 1891, Conybeare had gone to Armenia looking for information about the Paulicians and discovered *The Key* in the Library of the Holy Synod at Ejmiatsin. Written in Taron in 1782, the small octavo manuscript totals 149 leaves with 30 missing.¹ Upon first inspection, he identified it as an internal treatise of the Paulicians, on account of its rejection of icons, Mariolatry, and crosses. Unable to copy it himself, he departed, waiting until 1893 to receive a copy from Galoust Ter Mkherttschian. Conybeare told of his surprise when he examined *The Key* in greater detail.

My first impression on looking into it afresh was one of disappointment. I had expected to find in it a Marcionite, or at least a Manichean book; but, beyond the extremely sparse use made in it of the Old Testament, I found nothing that savoured of these ancient heresies. Accordingly, I laid it aside, in the press of other work which I had undertaken. It was not until the summer of 1896 that ... I returned to it, and translated it into English in the hope that it might advance his [colleague's] researches [*sic*].

And now I at last understood who the Paulicians really were. All who had written about

¹ According to the Armenian authorities who seized *The Key*, George of Arkhveli tore out these 30 pages once he realized he was in danger. Presumably, they contained the most offensive portion of the work, probably detailing the problems with the Armenian Apostolic Church and doctrinal expositions about the sect's Christology.

them had been misled by the calumnies of Photius, Petrus Siculus [Peter of Sicily], and the other Greek writers, who describe them as Manicheans. I now realized I had stumbled on the monument of a phase of the Christian Church so old and so outworn, that the very memory of it was well-nigh lost. For *The Key of Truth* contains the baptismal service and ordinal of the Adoptionist Church, almost in the form in which Theodotus of Rome [2nd century] may have celebrated those rites. These form the oldest part of the book, which, however, also contains much controversial matter of a later date, directed against what the compiler regarded as abuses of the Latin and Greek Churches. The date at which the book was written in its present form cannot be put later than the ninth century, nor earlier than the seventh.²

Conybeare's assertions that *The Key* is Paulician, that it is medieval, and that the Greek writers were wrong about the Paulicians have all received significant criticisms. We will consider the case for and against the document's antiquity before investigating its community of origin. But first, I would like to make a correction to Conybeare's assessment above and show that *The Key* is not adoptionist,³ but biblical unitarian⁴ in theology.

Christology of *The Key of Truth*

The Key is not a systematic theology, but a composite document containing a treatise on Jesus' baptism, admonitions about Satan, detailed instructions on repentance, baptism, and communion, a liturgy for ordination, and a catechism. Sprinkled throughout we find several places where *The Key* refers to Jesus as a created being. In many of these, someone has erased the offending word from the manuscript, though thankfully the censor often failed to completely obliterate the word, making it possible for Conybeare to restore it with varying degrees of confidence.⁵ According to *The Key*, the Father is the uncreated one who created Jesus as a new Adam.

Several times *The Key* offers unitarian statements, extolling the Father as the only God.⁶ The author recognized Jesus' exalted position as the head of all, while simultaneously affirming God's superiority over him. Standard unitarian prooftexts like John 17.3, Hebrews 3.2, 1

² Frederick C. Conybeare, *The Key of Truth: A Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898), v-vi.

³ Adoptionism is the idea that Jesus' birth was the result of Joseph and Mary reproducing. Although an ordinary man, his extraordinary obedience led God to adopt him as his "Son" at his baptism.

⁴ Biblical unitarians hold to the doctrine that the Father of Jesus Christ is the only true God, that the human Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, that he lived a sinless life, died for the sins of the world, was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will return to judge the living and the dead. Biblical unitarians deny that Jesus is deity, that he is eternal, and that he is equal to the Father. Biblical unitarians are "biblical" because they recognize the Christian Scriptures as inspired and authoritative for doctrine and "unitarian" because they hold to strict monotheism.

⁵ See Appendix 1A for a few excerpts that demonstrate *The Key's* Christology.

⁶ See Appendix 1B

Corinthians 11.3, and 1 Timothy 2.5 appear throughout the document, making *The Key* sound similar to today's biblical unitarians.

Nevertheless, owing to a single passage⁷ in chapter two, scholars have labeled *The Key* adoptionist. Yet, upon closer inspection, *The Key's* view of Jesus' baptism, though admittedly elevated, does not necessitate adoptionism. Jesus' baptism was clearly a major event in his life when God conferred upon him many appellations and privileges. Still, he gave them "to his only born Son."⁸ In other words, Christ was Son *prior* to his baptism. *The Key* does not say baptism made Jesus the Son, nor do we encounter the word "adoption" anywhere in the text. Rather, his baptism was his coming of age, the moment when God fully invested him with his anointing and mission.⁹

Furthermore, *The Key* repeatedly refers to Jesus as "the only born Son,"¹⁰ a title that makes sense on a virgin birth but would be strained if God merely adopted him at his baptism. However, we

⁷ *The Key of Truth*, Chapter 2: "First was our Lord Jesus Christ baptized by the command of the heavenly Father, when thirty years old...then it was that he received authority, received the high-priesthood, received the kingdom and the office of chief shepherd. Moreover, he was then chosen, then he won lordship, then he became resplendent, then he was strengthened, then he was revered, then he was appointed to guard us, then he was glorified, then he was praised, then he was made glad, then he shone forth, then he was pleased, and then he rejoiced. Nay more. It was then he became chief of being heavenly and earthly, then he became light of the world, then he became the way, the truth, and the life. Then he became the door of heaven, then he became the rock impregnable at the gate of hell; then he became the foundation of our faith; then he became saviour of us sinners; then he was filled with the Godhead; then he was sealed, then anointed; then he called by the voice, then he became the loved one, then he came to be guarded by angels, then to be the lamb without blemish. Furthermore he then put on that primal raiment of light, which Adam lost in the garden. Then accordingly it was that he was invited by the spirit of God to converse with the heavenly Father; yea, then also was he ordained king of being in heaven and on earth and under the earth; and all else [besides] all this in due order the Father gave to his only born Son; --even as he himself, being appointed our mediator and intercessor, saith to his holy, universal, and apostolic church" (Conybeare 74-5).

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Additionally, the rhetorical function of this passage quoted above is not to establish Christ's baptism as the starting point of his special relationship with God. Rather, *The Key* builds a case for adult baptism over against infant baptism. After the alleged adoptionist statement, the rest of the chapter goes on to make the point that baptism is appropriate for those "at an age of full growth and at no other time." (Conybeare, 75).

¹⁰ *Key of Truth* chapter 17: "the Lord God, through the mediation and intercession of his Son only born, preserve from the temptation of your father" (Conybeare, 90). Chapter 21: "Lest peradventure the unclean spirit approach them that have believed in the **only born Son of the heavenly Father**. Cleanse their spirits and minds, and make them a temple and dwelling-place of the Father increate, of the Son our intercessor, now and ever and unto eternity of eternities. Amen" (Conybeare, 100). Chapter 22: "I thank thee and magnify thee, heavenly Father, true God, who didst glorify thine **only-born beloved Son** with thy holy spirit. Also the holy universal and apostolic church of **thine only-born Son** didst thou adorn with divers graces" (Conybeare, 111). Chapter 23: "'And knew her not until she brought forth her **firstborn Son**...And after eight days his name was called Jesus, which name the angel Gabriel revealed in

can easily put the whole matter to rest when we realize *The Key* quotes Luke's birth narrative, specifically Luke 1.26-38.¹¹ It is impossible to believe in Gabriel's promise to the virgin Mary that she will have a Son apart from a man *and* that Joseph was Jesus' biological father, as adoptionists did. The author of *The Key* is not confused on this subject. For him, Jesus is the Son of God precisely because of God's miraculous power at work in the womb of Mary. Jesus was the Son of God from conception, thirty years prior to his baptism in the Jordan.

The Christology of *The Key* is neither adoptionist nor incarnational. Rather, it is a conception Christology, which regards Jesus as a miraculously created human being who began to exist in the womb of his mother. Church historians call this belief dynamic monarchianism in the ante-Nicene period, Socinianism in the Reformation Era, and in modern times, biblical unitarianism.

The Key as a Paulician Handbook

Conybeare claimed *The Key* was a manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia. The Paulicians¹² were a medieval group of Christians who flourished from the seventh to tenth centuries. Byzantine and Arab authors regularly identified Paul of Samosata (200-275) as the founder of the Paulicians, though modern scholars dismiss this origin story as creative heresiology.¹³

Our sources for Paulician beliefs survive exclusively from hostile witnesses. Conybeare argued that all extant Greek sources, especially Peter of Sicily, Photius, and Euthymius Zigabenus, completely misrepresented the doctrine of the Paulicians, and *The Key* alone revealed their true beliefs. Conybeare dated the *The Key's* composition to 850, based on his theory that Smbat of Zarehavan (the founder of the Tondrakians¹⁴) was the author.¹⁵ He provided four main reasons for an early date.

First, he drew attention to the colophon—a brief statement about the publication of a book, usually containing the location and date. The colophon reads, "This was written in the province of Taron in the year of the Lord 1782; but according to the Armenian Era 1230."¹⁶ Although

the time of her virginity.' See Luke i. 26. For this reason the holy evangelists and the sanctified apostles, yea, and our Lord Jesus Christ, declare Mary, prior to the birth, to be a virgin, but after the birth call her a wife and utterly deny her virginity, as in the aforesaid **the Son of God** asserts in John ii" (Conybeare, 112-3).

¹¹ Conybeare 109-10.

¹² See Appendix 2 for a brief biographical sketch of the Paulicians.

¹³ Heresiologists liked to claim a heresiarch for each heresy and then lump as many groups as possible under that head. Although it's entirely possible that Paul of Samosata's followers survived until the sixth century and that they became the Paulicians under influence from dualism (Manichean, Gnostic, Marcionite, or Zoroastrian), we lack any evidence from that period to support this thesis.

¹⁴ See the next section for more on the Tondrakians.

¹⁵ In another place Conybeare specifies the range as 800-1200. Conybeare, xxxii.

¹⁶ Following this we read an ellipsis where Conybeare says one or more pages is lost and then "...of the all glorious Yohavannes Vahaguni. For they with great fervour were elected by us. But because of their being elected the love of truth abounded in my heart. Wherefore I could not hide the grace of the Holy

perfectly ambiguous, Conybeare claimed the word “written” meant “copied” on the basis of a later statement in the colophon that requested readers to forgive errors that crept into the manuscript from unpracticed copyists. He saw this as evidence that the text “had been handed down through at least several generations.”¹⁷

A second piece of evidence that *The Key* was not originally written in 1782 was that the manuscript contained “many omissions in scripture citations plainly due to similar endings.” This likely refers to the scribal error known as haplography, a mistake in copying due to the scribe’s eyes skipping from one word or ending of a word to the same in a later section, resulting in the omission of a chunk of text. The presence of such errors is common in manuscripts copied and recopied over time.¹⁸ Thirdly, the language of the book—with some exceptions—is classical Armenian. Lastly, the author was someone whose group looked to him as their father figure who would give them the key of truth to open the door of truth long shut by Satan. To Conybeare, this sounded like Smbat who, according to Gregory of Narek, “allowed himself to be worshipped by his disciples” and whom they even called “a Christ.”¹⁹

Nina Garsoïan took up Conybeare’s thesis in 1967, when she published her controversial *The Paulician Heresy*. She admitted that the linguistic evidence for an early date was “unfortunately still inconclusive,”²⁰ then she made her own case based on the similarity of beliefs between the Paulicians and *The Key*. Here are some of the striking similarities between the two:

1. Claim to be the true Christians (PS 37, 115; PH 9, 15; AFB 5)²¹
2. Claim of apostolic origin (PS 119)
3. Rejection of the mass (AFA 6)
4. Refusal to honor crosses (PS 41, 116; PH 13, 22; AFA 8; AFB 5, 15; AFC 4)

Spirit. But I began to write out in order The Holy Sacramentary and The Key of Truth for love of those who ask and receive. Moreover, I humbly entreat you with warm love and faith to forgive the shortcomings, the insufficiencies, and the faults of composition or of grammar. And also as touching the syllables, or writing, or verbs or nouns or eight parts of the eart, if in regard to them ye find any errors or shortcomings, they are not due to ourselves, but have found their way into it as being (the faults) of unpracticed copyists. Glory to the Father truly existent, and to his Son our mediator and intercessor. Now and ever and unto eternity of eternities. Amen.” Conybeare, 124.

¹⁷ Conybeare, xxix.

¹⁸ However, it’s just as plausible that the original author’s eye skipped when copying a scripture into his original manuscript.

¹⁹ Gregory of Narek, *Letter to Convent of Kdjav*, trans. Frederick Conybeare, *The Key of Truth, a Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898), 127-28.

²⁰ Nina Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967), 109.

²¹ PS = Peter of Sicily, *History of the Manichaeans Who Are Called Paulicians*, trans. Hamilton and Hamilton, 65-92. PH = Peter the Higoumenos, *Treatise*, trans. Hamilton and Hamilton, 92-96. AFA = *Abjuration Formula A*, trans. Hamilton and Hamilton, 103-05. AFB = *Abjuration Formula B (the Manichaeian Formula)*, trans. Hamilton and Hamilton, 105-08. AFC = *Abjuration Formula C*, trans. Hamilton and Hamilton, 108-10.

5. Rejection of Mary's perpetual virginity (PS 22; AFA 5)
6. Rejection of venerating Mary as mother of God (PS 39, 117; AFB 5; AFC 3)
7. Rejection of icons (AFB 6, 16; AFC 4)
8. Rejection of church councils and canons (AFC 14, 15)
9. Subordination of Christ to God (AFC 11²²)
10. Rejection of Armenian/Byzantine priests and clergy (PS 45; PH 19)
11. Heavy emphasis on scripture (PS 12, 23, 34, 96, 138; PH 20)
12. Reverent regard for their leaders (PH 6)

In addition to these beliefs, Garsoïan hypothesized that early on the Paulicians also agreed with *The Key's* Christology. We know from Peter of Sicily that Sergius (d. 834) caused a division among the Paulicians, with some following him and others following Baanes (PS 170-172). Garsoïan speculated that Sergius led a significant group away from their biblical roots to dualism and docetism.²³ She called Sergius' corrupted group "Neo-Paulicians" and suggested that they were the cause of the Byzantine accusations of dualism. These Neo-Paulicians eventually made their way to Bulgaria in the West and gave rise to the Bogomils—another Christian dualist group that flourished in the Middle Ages.

This theory, though historically possible, lacks plausibility due to the absence of evidence. It has met strong resistance from historians who work on the Paulicians. After mentioning Garsoïan's hypothesis, Yuri Stoyanov summarized the consensus among scholars today: "It is almost certain that Paulicianism owed to Constantine²⁴ [the seventh-century founder] its specific Christian dualism and Docetism."²⁵ Thus, the movement was dualistic and docetic from the start, not corrupted by Sergius centuries after its founding.

Additionally, James George critiqued Garsoïan's contention that the Greek and Armenian sources contradicted each other. She put forward the idea that the Armenian sources did not see the Paulicians as dualists while the Greek ones did. George showed that this was not the case, since both Gregory Magistros (d. 1048) and Gregory of Narek (ca. 1002)—two of our major Armenian sources—identified them as dualists.²⁶ If the Neo-Paulicians migrated West, leaving

²² "Anathema to those who confess our eternal God is seated above the heavens, but blasphemously claim that His Son and co-ruler, our Lord Jesus Christ, is borne on a cloud below the heavens and teach those who think as they do."

²³ Garsoïan summarized her theory thus: "Two Paulician groups seem, therefore, to have existed in Byzantium. These shared a number of beliefs and practices, but one of them held a dualistic and docetic doctrine while the other apparently accepted the unity of God, but denied the divinity of Christ" (Garsoïan, 180.)

²⁴ Not to be confused with the Roman emperor, Constantine is the Armenian founder of the Paulicians in the middle of the seventh century. For more see the historical sketch in Appendix 2.

²⁵ Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 128.

²⁶ See James M. George, "The Dualist-Gnostic Tradition in the Byzantine Commonwealth with Special Reference to the Paulician and Bogomil Movements" (Wayne State University, 1979), 130.

the conservative followers of Baanes in Armenia to become the Tondrakians, why do our sources say they were dualists? Apart from *The Key*, where is the evidence of these unitarian non-dualist Paulicians and Tondrakians?

Vrej Nersessian likewise found Garsoïan's case unconvincing. He pointed out that although *The Key* belonged to a sect whose beliefs probably derived from the Paulicians, "We cannot be sure that their beliefs had not evolved considerably since the Middle Ages."²⁷ In other words it simply will not do to read an eighteenth-century document into the medieval period and then assume their beliefs didn't change in the intervening millennium.

Although I personally would prefer Garsoïan's historical reconstruction to be true, it's just too difficult to dismiss all our historical sources that repeatedly say the Paulicians were dualists. Of course, I recognize the importance of analyzing our historical sources with a critical skepticism, since they were not only outsiders but also extremely hostile to the Paulicians. Nevertheless, even when we correct for their uncharitable bias, it's too much of a leap to say they all fabricated their accounts of the Paulicians (Conybeare) or that they only condemned Neo-Paulicians (Garsoïan) while the original conservative Paulicians escaped notice entirely. Here is a list of tenets the Paulicians held to that diverge from *The Key*:

1. Dualism: an evil God made our world while the good God has power only over the world to come (PS 36, 38; PH 9; AFA 1; AFB 4, 8, 13; AFC 1, 6, 8; EZ b)²⁸
2. Rejection of the Old Testament as scripture (PS 42, 81; PH 14; AFA 7)
3. Rejection of 1-2 Peter as scripture (PS 44; PH 14)
4. Rejection of baptism, allegorizing it as Christ's words (PH 16; AFB 5; AFC 19)
5. Rejection of communion, allegorizing it as Christ's words (PS 40; PH 12; AFB 5, 14)
6. Rejection of Mary as the mother of Jesus, interpreting her as heavenly Jerusalem (PS 39, 117; PH 11; AFB 5; EZ e)
7. Docetism: the heavenly Christ brought his body from heaven and did not take flesh from Mary (PS 39; PH 11; AFA 4,²⁹ AFB 12,³⁰ AFC 2,³¹ EZ e)

The idea that all these sources conspired to cover up the true beliefs of the Paulicians or that they only addressed a portion of the Paulicians lacks any evidence. Besides, if they knew some Paulicians were bible-believing unitarians, they would not have hesitated to label them

²⁷ Vrej Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1987), 47.

²⁸ EZ = Euthymius Zigabenus, *Dogmatic Panoply*, trans. Hamilton and Hamilton, 171-74. For other abbreviations, see above, footnote 20.

²⁹ "Anathema to him who thinks or believes or says that the Lord brought his body from above and made us of the womb of the mother of God like a bag."

³⁰ "If anyone does not confess that the Holy and undivided Trinity is of one nature, but confesses some imported angel, named Amen, as the Son, and some further different and lesser nature for the Spirit (who is equal in power to the Father and the Son), may he be anathema."

³¹ "Anathema to those who confess that our Lord Jesus Christ suffered, but teach that He was not born in reality from the holy and ever-virgin and wholly pure mother of God, but was born only in appearance."

psilanthropists and trot out their deity-of-Christ prooftexts. What's more, the abjuration formulae were tools Byzantine and Armenian churches used to ensure Paulician defectors were genuinely converting. That they included dualism and docetism in their anathemas is strong evidence that the Byzantines believed the Paulicians held to those tenets.

Janet and Bernard Hamilton explained the weight Garsoïan's thesis must bear:

The acceptance of [Garsoïan's] arguments is only possible if one is prepared to dismiss as sectarian prejudice a large body of contemporary evidence which claims that the Paulicians and the Tondrakians were Christian dualists. The difficulty of setting aside a concordant body of contemporary evidence written by Greek, Armenian and Arabic authors, widely separated in space and time, many of whom were extremely hostile to each other's traditions and most of whom were unaware of each other's work, is considerable. Such a course of action could only be justified by accepting a conspiracy theory of vast dimensions, involving Byzantine, Orthodox Armenian and Islamic establishments over a period of 700 years in a plot to conceal the truth about the Paulicians. The candid reader might feel justly sceptical [*sic*] if the sole evidence for believing in such a conspiracy was a liturgical book written in 1782, which does not even claim to be a copy of a medieval work.³²

Thus, I conclude that, tantalizing as it is to think *The Key* was a kind of time capsule, preserving the original beliefs of the early Paulicians, the historical evidence strongly opposes such a conclusion.

The Key as a Tondrakian Handbook

Now that we have considered the Paulician option, we turn to the hypothesis that *The Key* is a Tondrakian document. Tenth-through-twelfth-century Armenian reports about the Tondrakians sound very similar to those we've already encountered regarding the Paulicians. Gregory of Narek (ca. 987) condemned Smbat, the founder of the Tondrakians, for teaching the communion bread to be ordinary bread, the baptismal water to be mere bath water, and Sunday to be counted just like any other day.³³ Furthermore, he also rejected laying on of hands, genuflexion, the cross as an adored sign, and the sacrament of marriage. Aristaces of Lastivert (ca. 1071) said of the Tondrakians, "Church and church ordinances they utterly reject—its baptism; the great and terrible mystery of the mass (lit. offering); the cross and the ordinance of fasts."³⁴ Paul of Taron (d. 1123) attacked the Tondrakians for rejecting church buildings, the cross, the mass, and the *matal*.³⁵

³² Janet Hamilton, and Bernard Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World C.650-C.1450* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), 297.

³³ See Appendix 2 for an excerpt of Gregory of Narek's account of the Tondrakians.

³⁴ Aristaces of Lastivert, *History of Aristaces*, trans. Frederick Conybeare, *The Key of Truth, a Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898), 140.

³⁵ Paul of Taron, *Epistle of Paul of Taron against Theopistus*, trans. Frederick Conybeare, *The Key of Truth, a Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898), 174-76. The *matal* or

To these sources, we can add the witness of Gregory Magistros (1058) who likewise accused Smbat of rejecting the priestly functions and the consecrated oil of the Armenian Church. The Tondrakians spurned crosses, church buildings, priestly robes, and the mass. Gregory related one incident when a certain Tondrakian leader, named Cyril, entered an Armenian church and, after dipping the bread into the wine, threw it away, saying, "This is the fraud of you Christians."³⁶ Gregory also called the Tondrakians Paulicians and said they rejected baptism, communion, the Old Testament, the apostle Peter, and believed Satan created heaven and earth.³⁷ He also preserved an interesting statement about the Tondrakians known as Thulaili who said, "We confess no circumcised God." He went on to say, "They do not own him God, whether circumcised or not; but they only make of it a pretext for calumniating us."³⁸ This may be evidence of docetism, since docetists could mock any fleshly aspects of Christ.

From this data we can see the Tondrakians agreed much more with the Paulicians than *The Key*. In fact, our sources confirm the Tondrakians agreed with the Paulicians on every practice and point of doctrine—with one possible exception: in one reported statement by Gregory Magistros, when asked, "Why do you not allow yourselves to be baptized?" the Tondrakians said, "We are in no hurry to be baptized, for baptism is death."³⁹ This could mean they held to believers' baptism (like *The Key*) and only rejected the Armenian Church's practice of baptizing infants, or it could mean they rejected baptism altogether (like the Paulicians), preferring to interpret it allegorically.

So, with that one caveat, the Tondrakians generally agreed with Paulician beliefs and practices, including dualism and probably docetism. As Hamilton and Hamilton point out, "That there was a connection between the Tondrakians and the Paulicians seems beyond doubt."⁴⁰ Of course, the Tondrakians could have changed over the centuries from their Paulician dualism to more align with other Christian groups.

At this time, we need to turn our attention to the eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century community that possessed *The Key*. Paul Meherian, writing in 1773, met a group of Armenians in Karin led by Ohannes (an alternate spelling of Yohavannes) whom he thought were "such sectarians as are

madagh is an Armenian practice whereby a sacrifice was made for the dead. Food offerings typically include lamb stew.

³⁶ Gregory Magistros, *Answer to the Letter of the Catholicos of the Syrians*, trans. Frederick Conybeare, *The Key of Truth, a Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898), 148.

³⁷ See Appendix 4 where I have included an important excerpt of Gregory Magistros' account of the Tondrakians.

³⁸ Magistros, 148.

³⁹ Magistros, 148.

⁴⁰ Janet and Bernard Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c. 650-c. 1450* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998), 294.

the Tondrakians or Arewordki.”⁴¹ Meherian’s account aligns with a letter from the Catholicos⁴² from 1792, which said, “Last year a certain priest Ohannes, who on several occasions has denied his faith and religion and later received ordination by force from the governor of Khnus, appeared in Karin and Khnus and is teaching his evil doctrine which is not only foul but also related to the Tondrakians.”⁴³ Government officials, presumably on the request of the Catholicos, captured Ohannes, brought him to Ejmiatsin, and imprisoned him there for six months. According to Meherian and the minutes of the Synod at Ejmiatsin in 1838, Ohannes later converted to Islam.

At the close of the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, almost twenty-five Armenian families emigrated from the Turkish Khnus region to Russian controlled Arkhveli (Lernut). In 1837 the Armenian bishop in Georgia informed the Holy Synod of Ejmiatsin about this group in Arkhveli whom he claimed both practiced the Tondrakian heresy and succeeded at proselytizing the unsuspecting. This initiated an investigation, which lasted until 1845.⁴⁴ In the course of this, one of the Tondrakians recanted his faith and confessed to ecclesiastical authorities that “a certain Armenian priest named Ohannes had joined the sect, and composed a book called *The Key of Truth*.”⁴⁵ The same Synod of 1837 reported, “The heresy of the Tondrakians consists in this, that they reject the mediation of saints, contemn [*sic*] their images, deny the use of fasts, repudiate the value of prayers, reject the immaculateness of the Holy Virgin Mother of God and the sacrament of baptism.”⁴⁶ (I have included three confessions in Appendix 1, which make clear that the community agreed with *The Key* in their Christology.)

This information led to the discovery and confiscation of *The Key*, resulting in its relocation to Ejmiatsin, where Conybeare encountered it roughly 50 years later.⁴⁷ The matter closed in 1845 when the government fined members of the sect 45.90 rubles each. According to Alexander Yersitsyan’s history of the neo-Tondrakians, they also suffered exile to Siberia.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Nersessian, 94.

⁴² A Catholicos is a high ranking leader in the Armenian Apostolic Church who has charge over a region of churches.

⁴³ Nersessian, 94. Nersessian translated Khnus as “Xnus,” which I have altered for clarity.

⁴⁴ The records of the Holy Synod on Arkhveli are at the National Archive of the Republic of Armenia (fund 56, list 1, case 59).

⁴⁵ Nersessian, 90.

⁴⁶ Nersessian, 89.

⁴⁷ Today the manuscript resides at the Armenian Matenadaran’s Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (ms. 6710).

⁴⁸ Anna Ohanjanyan doubts this exile based on death certificates from 1865-1874, which contain the names of some of those allegedly sent to Siberia. Of course, it’s possible they returned from exile after some years and lived out the rest of their lives back in Arkhveli.

So, both persecutors and defectors recognized the community possessing *The Key* to be Tondrakians. This is surprising, since, “After the fourteenth century, the Armenian sources ceased to speak of the Tondrakians.”⁴⁹ Suddenly we had modern Tondrakians and they agreed with *The Key*’s teachings. Scholars have puzzled over the relationship of the ancient Tondrakians and the modern ones, with some claiming the modern Tondrakians are truly descended from the late medieval group, though their doctrines evolved over time,⁵⁰ while others see *The Key* as an entirely modern document unrelated to historic Tondrakians. Ter Mkrttschian suggested the historic Tondrakians had survived until the eighteenth century, but that Ohannes converted them to the doctrines of *The Key*. Whatever the case, the ancient Tondrakians had more in common with the Paulicians than the modern Tondrakians. Thus, the theory that *The Key* is an ancient Tondrakian handbook remains unconvincing.

The Key as Eighteenth-Century Handbook

Against Conybeare and Garsoïan’s claims of antiquity, several clues indicate *The Key* may be a fairly recent document, originally composed by Yohavvnes (Ohannes) in 1782. Let’s begin with the colophon. Conybeare saw the statement, “I humbly entreat you with warm love and faith to forgive the shortcoming and the insufficiencies: they are not due to ourselves, but have found their way into it as being of unpracticed copyists,” as an expression of the copyist’s concern for the poor condition of the manuscript he was duplicating. However, we could more naturally take it as the statement of the author who (1) anticipated mistakes arising from poor copying and exempted himself; (2) observed mistakes in copies and appended the statement; or (3) lacked confidence in his own skill and preemptively blamed copyists for his own errors. Nersessian also remarked that the style and vocabulary of the colophon are very similar to the exordium in the introduction of *The Key*, which implies the Yohavvnes of the colophon was, in fact, the leader of the group.⁵¹

A second problem with thinking that *The Key* is medieval is that it contains chapters and verses from Stephanus, not only in the margins, but also in the text itself. Since Stephanus did not add chapters and verses until 1555, a manuscript containing them cannot be medieval. Conybeare hypothesized that the 1782 copyist inserted these references but cited no evidence for this. Since *The Key* itself never claims to be Paulician, Tondrakian, or medieval, the presence of sixteenth-century references is good evidence that *The Key* came after that time.

Both Garsoïan and Nersessian recognize that Conybeare’s case for the antiquity of *The Key* on linguistic grounds was inconclusive. *The Key* contains modern Armenian elements in the text, including a loose use of prepositions, a lengthened form of verbs, and the use of accusative

⁴⁹ The original had “T’ondrakec’is,” which I altered to “Tondrakians.” Nersessian, 90.

⁵⁰ Nersessian reports a certain Alexander Eric’ian in 1880 who described in detail the Tondrakians in Khnus said, “sectarian movements do not cease to exist but usually after periods of inactivity re-emerge having undergone various changes” (Nersessian, 91).

⁵¹ Nersessian, 92.

relative pronouns at the beginning of new sentences.⁵² The fact that most of the document is in the classical form of Armenian (Grabar) loses cogency when we realize, as Garsoian pointed out, that in Armenia we have evidence of “occasional archaizing use of Grabar as late as the nineteenth century. This is particularly true of ecclesiastical writers.”⁵³

Another factor to consider is that the author of *The Key* claimed to restore the original faith. We read:

Wherefore the Spirit of the Father in Heaven hath taken hold of us and inspired us to write this “way and truth and life.” Forasmuch as for a long time past the spirit of deception had shut up the Truth, as our Lord saith: The tares had suffocated it.

... Wherefore also our Lord first asked for faith, and then graciously gave healing; and after that bestowed holy baptism on believers; but not on unbelieving catechumens. So also St. John and the holy Church of our Lord Jesus Christ—so did they continue to do until the assault of Satan. For when Satan was let loose from his bonds, then he began to steal away the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the holy apostles; and he insinuated his deceitful arguments among teachers, [against] whom as the heavenly Father enables us, let us with the Keys of Truth open the Door of Truth prior to our Lord Jesus Christ, and uttered this command unto the adult (or perfected) souls: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and the rest.⁵⁴

The author of *The Key* was someone who claimed authoritative inspiration to recover original Christianity after Satan had corrupted it. Conybeare himself admitted the author was “some great missionary and restorer of religion in Armenia.”⁵⁵ The likely scenario is that this missionary was Ohannes himself, the author of *The Key*.

Last of all *The Key* never mentions any Paulician leaders, like Constantine or Sergius, nor does it mention Smbat, the founder of the Tondrakians. Even though, as we’ve seen, *The Key* agrees with many Paulician and Tondrakian points, it also contradicted several as well. Even if it completely agreed with Paulician doctrine, that still would not be evidence of the document’s antiquity. Rather that would simply point to dependence. Agreement in doctrine is not, by itself, an argument for antiquity.

Anna Ohanjanyan, who wrote her dissertation on *The Key*, carefully examined the manuscript and concluded that the author composed the original document in 1782 and that the extant

⁵² Conybeare, xxix-xxx.

⁵³ Garsoian, 109.

⁵⁴ Conybeare, 71, 73.

⁵⁵ Conybeare, xxxi.

manuscript is a copy made in 1811.⁵⁶ Furthermore, she gave more information about a confession made as a result of the synod's 1838 investigation. She writes:

The sectarians of Arkhveli mention the author of *Key of Truth*, the priest Hovannes [Ohannes], who composed the book *Key of Truth* 55 years from then in the village of Chevirme of Khnus county of Taron region during the Ottoman rule. The Muslim ruler of Khnus forced him and his family to convert to Islam. But the book *Key of Truth* remained in the possession of the villagers; it was passed from generation to generation, preached and during the migration brought to Eastern Armenia by Mesrop Budaghean, one of the leaders of the sect. When we count "55 years from now," since 1838, it is 1783, an approximate date when *Key of Truth* was composed.⁵⁷

Taking all of these arguments together, it's difficult to deny the eighteenth-century origins of *The Key*. This raises the question of influence. Where did Ohannes get his ideas? *The Key* is not obviously Protestant, though it does agree on many beliefs with the Protestants over against the Latin, Greek, and Armenian churches. Ohanjanyan rightly points out that an "anti-Latin tendency prevails in the text, which is not surprising, as it is entirely in line with the anti-Catholic spirit of eighteenth century Armenia."⁵⁸ *The Key* spurns tradition, rebukes clerics for leading lives of impostors, calls bishops and Catholicoi proud and avaricious, regards as Satanic the worshiping of images, rejects confessing of sins to the priest, denies the perpetual virginity of Mary, repudiates the mediation of saints, stones, crosses, or images, and regards as non-obligatory the sacraments of confirmation, the priesthood, last unction, and marriage.

As it turns out, this list of rejections is more or less held in common by Paulicians, Tondrakians, Protestants, and *The Key*. However, *The Key* lacks typical Protestant emphases. It does not mention any of the five solas,⁵⁹ nor justification by faith, nor predestination. *The Key* strongly and repeatedly condemns infant baptism and stresses the importance of adult baptism for those who demonstrate repentance and commitment to obey Christ. This has raised the question of Anabaptist influence.⁶⁰ The second-Adam Christology sounds like the Socinians in Transylvania or the Polish Brethren. Keeping in mind that King Casimir expelled the Polish Brethren in 1658,

⁵⁶Although Ohanjanyan's dissertation, "The Manuscript *Key of Truth* and Its Historiographical Value" (Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of NAS), is in Armenian, an English conference presentation provides some access to her conclusions: Anna Ohanjanyan, "The Manuscript Key of Truth: A Clue to Antiquity or a Riddle Text of Modern Times?" (paper presented at the The Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Budapest 2013).

⁵⁷ Ohanjanyan, 7. Ohanjanyan mentions another argument against Conybeare's Paulician identification, namely, that he later recanted, embracing dualism for the Paulicians in his 1911 essay: Frederick C. Conybeare, "The Armenian Church," in *Religious Systems of the World*, ed. William Sheowring and Thies Conrad W. (London: George Allen & Company, 1911). However, Ohanjanyan is mistaken. The preface to the volume makes clear that the chapters were lectures delivered between 1888 and 1891, prior to Conybeare's discovery of *The Key*.

⁵⁸ Ohanjanyan, 11.

⁵⁹ The five solas of the Reformation are: grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, to God's glory alone, and scripture alone.

⁶⁰ Still, Anabaptists didn't doggedly insist on thirty as the minimum age for baptism.

it's not impossible that some migrated to Turkey. Still, other aspects of *The Key* make a Socinian identification problematic. In particular, we find multiple references to original sin,⁶¹ prayers to the holy spirit, and a clear affirmation that the first communion entailed the changing of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ.

Apart from serious source criticism on *The Key*, we are left with an eclectic and possibly even contradictory text. Should another manuscript come to light, we could benefit tremendously. Should we find another group from that region with a similar doctrinal package, we could better identify the community's influences. But, for now, it's best to leave our conclusion vague. Ohanjanyan's "free soul" theory is instructive:

Doubtlessly, he [the author] was not a Protestant preacher, but was greatly influenced by Protestantism. It might be assumed that he was a "free soul" of his time, who invented his own system of belief or a micro-church based on his knowledge of Protestantism, Armenian Apostolic and in particular Roman Catholic faith as well as remnants of local religious folklore and apocrypha.⁶²

Conclusion

We began our investigation with Conybeare's discovery of *The Key* and his hypothesis that it was an adoptionist text, the only surviving internal writing of the Paulicians from around 850. However, on close examination, *The Key* is not really an adoptionist document since they clearly believed in the miraculous conception described in Luke's birth narrative over against the natural procreation theory of adoptionism. *The Key* is biblical unitarian through and through. The author believed the Father of Jesus was the only God who created Jesus as a new Adam within the womb of his virgin mother.

Next, we considered the hypothesis that *The Key* was a Paulician handbook. We looked at the evidence advanced by Conybeare and Garsoïan for the antiquity of *The Key*. We saw twelve points of doctrinal commonality between *The Key* and the Paulicians as reported by Peter of Sicily, Peter Higoumenos, and the three surviving abjuration formulae. However, we also found seven points of difference between the two. These significant doctrinal differences exclude the possibility that *The Key* was a Paulician text. We examined Garsoïan's hypothesis of two Paulician groups, but ultimately rejected it due to a lack of historical evidence and a contradiction with the testimony of Gregory Magistros. We concluded that *The Key* is not, in fact, a Paulician document.

Then we looked at the possibility that *The Key* is a remnant of the tenth-to-twelfth century Tondrakian movement. We found that Gregory of Narek, Aristaces of Lastivert, Paul of Taron,

⁶¹ The catechism states, "They were conceived in original sin, they had original sin and operative. But our mediator Christ was not conceived in original sin, and had not original sin or operative like them" (Conybeare, 119).

⁶² Ohanjanyan, 8.

and especially Gregory Magistros described the Tondrakians in terms that agreed in most points with the Paulicians over against *The Key*. Although several sources recognized the eighteenth-to-nineteenth century community that held *The Key* to be modern Tondrakians, their relationship to the ancient Tondrakians remains a matter of speculation. We concluded that either the medieval Tondrakians evolved over time to break from dualism and docetism and embrace the theology of *The Key* or they just happened to be the most recipient audience for Ohannes when he preached his message.

After reviewing the reasons for a late origin of the document, we concluded that the theory put forward by Ohanjanyan that *The Key* was an eighteenth-century document, originally written in 1782 by Yohavnnnes (Ohannes) Vahaguni in Taron, was correct. Next, very briefly, we attempted to identify potential influences upon Ohannes, including Protestants, Anabaptists, and Socinians. I left the issue open, concluding that the author was a free soul who probably constructed his belief system on the basis of his reading of scripture along with his encounters with people from several groups.

I must admit that I had originally taken on this project because I wanted Conybeare's historical reconstruction to be true. Then when I worked through Garsoïan's dense book, I was even more encouraged to uncover the missing link between the biblical unitarianism of Paul of Samosata (d. 268) and the unitarians of the Reformation. The notion that the Paulicians and Tondrakians carried the torch during the "Dark Ages" was as attractive as it was laden with problems. After encountering subsequent scholars from Nersessian to George to Hamilton and Hamilton, and finally, Ohanjanyan, it gradually became clear that the Conybeare-Garsoïan approach couldn't stand up to scrutiny. Our sources about the Paulicians routinely say they are dualists and docetists. Sure, they could have gotten that wrong, but outside *The Key* itself, we have no evidence to the contrary.

But even if the community gathered around *The Key* wasn't medieval, they still matter. They went through so much, from Muslim pressure to wholesale migration to persecution from the Armenian Church. When we judge them by their only barely surviving and badly mutilated manuscript, we encounter a community thoroughly committed to scripture, who took repentance, baptism, and communion seriously, who was not afraid to stand against extrabiblical practices, who boldly taught their unitarian second-Adam Christology, and who courageously evangelized their neighbors. Although they faded into obscurity in the middle of the nineteenth century, they left behind a monument of Armenian unitarianism that continues to challenge us today.

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Appendix 1: Christology Statements from *The Key of Truth*

A. Statements about Christ as the Created Second Adam

4. Satan...slew our forefather Adam and made them and their children, until our Saviour Christ, his slaves and captives, and fastened them in his chains and so forth; and so in bonds until the advent of the **newly-created Adam** kept them...And so it was that it pleased the heavenly Father in pity [**to create**]⁶³ **the new Adam** out of the same deceitful blood. But [**the created**] **man Jesus** knew his Father, and by inspiration of the Holy Spirit came to St. John in all gentleness and humility to be baptized by him. And at the same time he was crowned by the almighty Father, who said: 'Yonder is my well-loved son in whom I am pleased.'⁶⁴

5. ...contemplate the Apostle and High-priest of our confession, Jesus Christ, who is faithful to **his maker** as also was Moses in all his house. Forasmuch as the [**created**] **man Jesus** became very faithful to his Father, for this reason, the Father bestowed on him a name of praise which is above very name...When therefore he had pleased his **increate and loved Father**, at once the Spirit led him on to the mountain of temptation into the mystery of holy godship. For forty days and forty nights...when his [**maker**] took away the feasting and the fellow-converse from him, then he hungered.⁶⁵

8. O sweet Lord of mine, Jesus Christ, we worship, we pray, we entreat and beseech thine all-powerful Lordship, who are at the right hand of thy Father [**and maker**], mediate and intercede for us sinners now and in the hour of our death. Amen.⁶⁶

23. Thus, previously to Mary's bearing **the new-created Adam**, Gabriel the archangel pronounces her a virgin and greets her; but after the birth the same angel does not call her a virgin.⁶⁷

⁶³ Brackets indicate an erased word in the manuscript that Conybeare restored.

⁶⁴ Conybeare, p 79.

⁶⁵ Conybeare, 80-1. The first brackets indicate an entirely obliterated word in the manuscript and the second a half obliterated word.

⁶⁶ Conybeare, 84. The brackets contained a nearly effaced word in the manuscript, which was clear enough to recover.

⁶⁷ Conybeare, 114.

B. Unitarian and Subordinationist Statements

14. No one can remit sins, save **only the one God**. But do you investigate all their other words, and give praise to the heavenly Father, and to his only-born Son.⁶⁸

19 If ye listen unto the Church,
The **infinte God** shall save you.
The Head of all is the Lord Jesus,
Whom the holy Paul doth confess,
And the **head of Christ is God** and Light.⁶⁹

20. We confess and believe that there is **one true God**, of whom our Lord Christ speaketh, John xvii 3: This is life eternal, that they should know thee **the only true God** and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ. Again we confess and believe in Jesus **Christ, [a new creature and not]⁷⁰ creator**, as St. Paul saith to the Hebrews, ch. iii 2: He is faithful to **his creator** as was Moses in all his house.⁷¹

Appendix 2: A Brief Historical Sketch of the Paulicians

Paulicianism in Armenia began with Constantine of Mananalis near Samosata who later moved to Colonea (Şebinkarahisar) around the middle of the seventh century.⁷² Constantine had given hospitality to a deacon on his way home from Syria who gave him two books containing the Gospels and the epistles of Paul.

Paulicians called themselves “Christians” and referred to members of the Byzantine Church as “Romans” (PS 37). They had a reputation as fierce warriors and strong iconoclasts. Although persecuted in their early years, they enjoyed imperial support during most of the reigns of Isaurian dynasty, inaugurated by Leo the Syrian in 717 and lasting until Irene in 802. Particularly, emperor Constantine V (r. 741-775) supported and worked with the Paulicians to affect his iconoclastic policies. He also relocated large populations of Paulicians from Armenia⁷³ on the east to Thrace on the west of Constantinople to protect against the Bulgars and Slavs. Nicephorus I (r. 802-811) also favored the Paulicians, encouraging them to settle in Melitene.

However, after Nicephorous, Byzantine emperors from Leo V (r. 813-820) onward persecuted them with empress Theodora (r. 842-858) boasting that she had killed 100,000 Paulicians during

⁶⁸ Conybeare, 86.

⁶⁹ Conybeare, 93. See also ch 21 where 1 Cor 11.3 is quoted.

⁷⁰ Bracketed words effaced in original, but restored thus both by Conybeare and Alex. Eritzean of Tiflis.

⁷¹ Conybeare, 94. See also ch 21 where John 17.3 is quoted.

⁷² Peter of Sicily mentions the following cities as Paulician centers: Phanaroia/Episparis, Mananlis near Samosata, Cibossa in Colonea, Antioch in Pisidia, Tavium, Argoun, Melitene, Tephrike

⁷³ These cities in modern-day eastern Turkey, north of Syria, were Germanicia (Kahramanmaraş), Melitene (Malatya), and Theodosiopolis (Erzurum).

her reign. This drove them to seek refuge with the Arabs who were happy to enlist the fierce Paulicians warriors in their conquests against the Byzantines. They settled in Tephrike around 850, which the Muslims recognized as a quasi-independent city-state. This lasted until Basil I (r. 867-886) sent an army to attack in 871 and again in 873, destroying the fortress.

After this, the Paulicians, no longer a political threat, disappear from history, while another movement came to the fore in region of Tondrak (Mount Tendürek). Founded by Smbat Zareharewan in 840 (three decades before the defeat at Tephrike), surviving Armenian sources regularly associate the Tondrakians with the Paulicians. This sect became quite popular in Armenia throughout the 11th century before declining into obscurity by the fourteenth century.

Appendix 3: Confessions from 1837 from Those Associated with *The Key*

Below are three confessions of Armenians who were part of the community connected with *The Key*. We do well to keep in mind that these confessions are from somewhat hostile witnesses. The first one from Kirakos happened on his death bed to an priest from the Armenian Apostolic Church as part of his repentance to return that faith. The second confessor, Grigor, doesn't sound like he ever converted since the revelation that *The Key's* community was unitarian precipitated his rejection of the faith. The third confession by Avos was presumably also by someone who either never accepted the unitarian faith or who later defected. Still, even recognizing the hostility of the witnesses, we gain helpful insights into what this community was teaching.

Confession of Karapet Mkrttchean:⁷⁴

In 1837, at the feast of the Transfiguration in the month of June, Kirakos of Giumri Qosababayean, after hearing George the elder of Arkhweli preach, renounced the holy faith, and also preached to me, Karapet, that Christ is not God. Through the preaching of Kirakos, Tharzi Sarkis with his family, Dilband Manuk, Grigor of Kalzwan with his household, Jacob Ergar, Avon of Kalzwan; and we took oath one with another not to disclose our secret to any. They in particular told me to inform no man of it. They

1. convinced me that Christ is not God;
2. made me blaspheme the cross, as being nothing;
3. told me that the baptism and holy oil of the Armenians is false; and that
4. we must rebaptize all of us on whose foreheads the sacred oil of the wild beast is laid.
5. The mother of God is not believed to be a virgin, but to have lost her virginity.
6. We reject her intercession; and also
7. whatever saints there be, reject their intercession.

⁷⁴ Conybeare, *The Key of Truth: A Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia*, xxiv-xxv.

8. They reject the mass and the communion and the confession, but say instead: "Confess to your stocks and stones, and leave God alone."
9. Moreover, those who choose to communicate eat the morsel and drink down the wine upon it, but do not admit the communion of the mass.
10. They say that we are the only true Christians on earth whereas Armenians, Russians, Georgians, and others, are false Christians and idolators.
11. On our faces we make no sign of the cross.
12. Genuflections are false, if made superstitiously.
13. During fasts they eat.
14. The canon-lore of the holy patriarchs they reject, and say that the councils of the patriarchs were false, and that their canons were written by the devil.'

Confession of Manuk Davthean of Giumri:⁷⁵

In 1837, in February, during Shrovetide, on the first of the week, in the chamber of Grigor Kalzwan, I saw Tharzi Sargis reading the Gospel. First he read it, and then explained it.

1. He told us not to worship things made with hands; that is to say, images of saints and the cross, because these are made of silver, and are the same as idols.
2. Christ is the Son of God, but was born a man of Mary, she losing her virginity, as it were by the earthly annunciation of Gabriel.
3. After suffering, being buried, and rising again, he ascended into heaven, and sat on the right hand of the Father, and is our intercessor.
4. Except Christ we have no other intercessor; for
5. the mother of God they do not believe to be virgin; nor
6. do they admit the intercession of saints.
7. Neither are fasts ordained of God, but prelates have ingeniously devised them to suit themselves; wherefore it is right to break the fasts as we will. When you go into church, pray only to God, and do not adore pictures.
8. In the time of baptism it is unnecessary to anoint with oil, for this is an ordinance of men, and not of God.
9. Ye shall not commit sin: but when ye have committed sin, whether or no ye confess to priests, there is no remission. It only avails you, if you pour out your sins to God.
10. Genuflection is unnecessary.
11. To say "Lord, Lord," to priests is not necessary, but it is meet to say regularly that God and not man is Lord.
12. Nor is it necessary to go to places on vows.
13. Last of all he told me that Christ is not God, and then I understood the falsity of their faith.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, xxv-xxvi.

Confession of Avos Marturosean of Giumri:⁷⁶

1. Ye shall keep the ten commandments which God gave to Moses.
2. Christ is not God, but the Son of God and our intercessor, sitting on the right hand of God.
3. Ye shall know Christ alone, and the Father. All other saints which are or have been on the earth are false.
4. There is no need to go on vows to Edjmiatzin or Jerusalem.
5. Ye shall confess your sins in church before God alone.
6. The holy oil of Edjmiatzin is false, nor is it necessary unto baptism; but whenever ye pour one handful of water over the catechumen, he is baptized. For Christ commanded us to baptize with water.
7. Ye shall always go to church; and to the priest at the time of confession ye shall not tell your sins, for they do not understand. But talk to them in a general sort of way.
8. Always go to church, not that our kind considers it real; but externally ye shall perform everything, and keep yourselves concealed, until we find an opportunity; and then, if we can, we will all return to this faith of ours. And we swear, even if they cut us to pieces, that we will not reveal it.

Appendix 4: Gregory of Narek's Account of the Tondrakians

The following is an excerpt from Appendix 1 from Conybeare's English translation of Gregory Narek's letter to convent of Kdjav in the province of Mokatz, dating to 987 or shortly thereafter.

There is much that is divine and everything that is apostolical that is yet denied by them and abolished. Of divine ordinances, there is the laying on of hands, as the apostles received if from Christ. There is the communion in his body, as the Apostle defined it, saying: In eating the bread of communion, we receive and eat God himself, who was united with flesh. This communion-bread, before which we tremble, Smbat taught to be ordinary bread. And as for the birth through spiritual throes, I mean by water and Spirit, of which it was declared that it makes us sons of God, concerning this, he taught others that it consisted of mere bath water.

And as to the exalted day of the Lord, on which [the word of God] created the first light and perfected thereon the light of his rising, and prefigured by an economy the quickening light of his Advent,--this day, adorable for all it doth image, he has explained to them is to be counted just like any other days.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, xxvi-xxvii.

Then among the observances which we know to have been repudiated by them as neither apostolic nor divine, [we know to be] the mysterious prayers of genuflexion, though the Creator of all, Jesus Christ, bowing bent the knee. We know that the Font is denied by them in which Christ himself was baptized; that the communion of immortality, which the Lord himself gave to taste unto all, is denied. We know their filthy habit of lecherous promiscuity, where the Lord reproved and suppressed even a glance. We know that they deny the adored sign (i.e. the Cross), which God, made man, raised and carried on his shoulder as his own glory and authority. We know of their anthropolatrous apostasy, more abominable and cursed than idolatry; of their self-conferred contemptible priesthood, which is a likening of themselves to Satan; of their depreciation of the sacrament (lit. crown) of marriage, which our Lord, by his own miracles, and through his God-bearing mother, prized and honoured. This sacrament (lit. crown) they condemn, and reckon the mere fact of union in love with one another to be perfect love, and from God and pleasing to Christ; saying that God is love and desires the love union alone, and not the sacrament of marriage (lit. crown). I know, too, of their railing and caviling at the first-fruits, which Abel and Noe and Abraham and David and Solomon and Elias appointed to conciliate the Divine wrath. We know they dare to call the head of their abominable sect a Christ; of whom Christ testified beforehand, saying, There shall arise false prophets... Now the very devils knew God the only-born and confessed him to be judge of all; but the foul Smbat, a second Simon, allowed himself to be worshipped by his disciples, men rooted in bitterness and sowers of tares; just like that wizard of Samaria, and Montanus and Pythagoras the illiterate and heathen philosopher.⁷⁷

Appendix 5: Gregory Magistros' Account of the Tondrakians

The following is an excerpt from Appendix 1 from Conybeare's English translation of Gregory Magistros' letter to convent of Kdjav in the province of Mokatz, dating to 987 or shortly thereafter. Conybeare transliterated the region of Tondrak as Thonrak and Tondrakians as Thonraki. In what follows, I have altered his translation on these two names to reflect modern transliteration.

Smbat, who (just as dogs and wolves according to him appeared in the form of a priest but without priestly worth) came forth out of the district Tsalkotn from the village of Zarehavan, and lived in Tondrak. There he began to teach all the sum of evil that can possibly in this life come into a man's head, omissions and neglect of every acts as well as of all belief. He preached that one ought to annihilate or rather reckon as in vain all priestly functions. He himself assumed externally the position of a high priest, but did not venture to openly ordain for himself bishops or deacons, or to consecrate the oil, but said instead: All this is nonsense.

⁷⁷ Narek, 126-28.

...They would say: 'We are no worshippers of matter, but of God; we reckon the cross and the church and the priestly robes and the sacrifice of the mass all for nothing, and only lay stress on their inner sense,' and so forth. But in such language they deem worthless not mere details in our traditions received from Christ, but the whole of it is to them a fairy-tale and mere prattle. This is how one of them, openly a false priest, in controversy with one of our church, spoke before the whole congregation: 'Ho, for your empty hope! What hope of Christians then have you got?' And the others answered and said: 'Such hope as is meet and befitting.' But he went on with his godless utterances; for he took the paste, formed it in his hand, dipped it in the wine, and threw it away: 'This is the fraud of you Christians.' And that was Cyril, the cursed leader (or primate) of the Tondrakians. But they indulge in many other blasphemies against the holy virgin, the mother of God, and against all our mysteries (lit. economies).

...They want to teach us, and so enumerate the groups of heretics one after the other, and say: 'We do not belong to these; those have long ago broken connexion with the Church, and have been excluded.'

...They respect nothing, either of things divine or of things created; but laugh all to scorn, the old law as well as the new. When, however, you ask them openly, they anathematize and swear vehemently and deny; though we know well enough what a pretence [*sic*] all this is.

Here then you see the Paulicians, who got their poison from Paul of Samosata. When we take on ourselves to question them they say: 'We are Christians.' They are for ever sing-singing, quoting the Gospel and the Apostolon; and when we ask: 'Why do you not allow yourselves to be baptized, as Christ and the apostles enjoined?' they answer: 'You do not know the mystery of baptism: we are in no hurry to be baptized, for baptism is death; and Jesus in the evening meal spoke not of an offering of the mass, but of every table.' They say: 'We love Paul, and execrate Peter; also Moses saw not God, but the devil.' That is to say, they hold Satan to be the creator of heaven and earth, as well as of the whole human race and of all creation; yet they call themselves Christians.

Look now at some others, at Persian magi of (the stock of) Zoroaster the Magus; nay, rather at the Sun-worshippers envenomed by these, whom they call the Arevordi. In your district are many of them, and they also openly proclaim themselves to be Christians. Yet we know that you are aware what error and lewdness they practice. And some there are of this accursed tribe of Tondrakians, who call themselves Kaschetzi; they also are a root of wickedness. The Tondrakians in Khnun find in Christ an occasion for blasphemy; that is, they write that Christ was circumcised, but the Thulaili reject that, and say: 'We confess no circumcised God.' But I would have you know that at heart they do not own him God, whether circumcised or not; but they only make of it a pretext for calumniating us.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Magistros, 144-48.