

Comparative Study of the Literary works by Moses of Chorene and Koryun

Khatuna Gaprindashvili

Professional Biography

Khatuna Gaprindashvili was born on October 1, 1983. She completed her studies at the multiprofile lyceum in Chiatura in 2000. The same year she enrolled in the faculty of Eastern Studies at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Ms. Gaprindashvili graduated BA in Armenian Studies. In 2006 she successfully defended her MA dissertation on “Georgia and the Georgians from the viewpoint ancient Armenian writers (V-XVII cc.)” in 2004 and obtained her MA degree in Armenian Studies. At present Khatuna Gaprindashvili continues her studies at the Faculty of Humanities on the doctoral program of Armenian Philology. The topic of her PhD research is *The Life of Koryun Mashtots (Georgian Translation, Research and Commentaries)*. She has been working since 2008 at the National Centre of Manuscripts as a research-assistant. Ms Gaprindashvili is an author of 11 academic publications.

Abstract

The work considers the creation of the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian alphabets by the famous public figure Mesrop Mashtots. On the grounds of a textual analysis of the Armenian writers Koryun and Moses of Chorene the factual differences between them are presented. Comparative study offers a firm basis for considering the reliability of the accounts offered by Moses of Chorene.

Keywords: *Koryun, Moses of Chorene, Mesrop Mashtots, Georgian Alphabet.*

Life of Mashtots by Mesrop Mashtots' disciple Koryun is usually referred to as the earliest and original version of the life of Mesrop Mashtots. Scholarly opinions vary about identifying the secondary source of the life. Part of the scholars offer such an order: Koryun, Moses of Chorene, Lazarus of Pharp [Հարությունյան, 1892: 208; Անանյան, 1964: 7], The other group chooses Lazarus Of Pharp after Koryun followed by Moses of Chorene [Բյուզանդացի, 1900: 9; Մանանդյան, 1962: 31; Կորյուն, 1981: 18; Աճառյան, 1984: 5]. There is a group of scholars who questions the reliability of the accounts of Moses of Chorene [Մարկվարտ, 1962: 135; Օրմանյան, 1959: 274; Ֆնտզյան, 1930:73]. N. Akinian refers to Koryun as the only contemporary historian of the time, he discards all other authors of the same period including Lazarus Of Pharp (he has in mind that chapter, where the deeds of Mashtots are discussed, and considers the first half of the History written by Lazarus of Pharp in the 8th c. [Ալիհնեան, 1935: 459]) and Moses of Chorene [Ալիհնյան, 1949: 245].

Such a critical approach to the accounts given by Moses of Chorene was caused by the existence of multiple and contradictory discussions and evaluations against the historian and his works. This process was over in the scholarship by the middle of the 20th c., when the study was published, the value of its history was recovered and a view emerged that

Moses of Chorene might have been a younger disciple of Mesrop Mashtots who lived and created his *History* in the fifth century [Մայիսյան, 1961: 69-70]. The Georgian and European scholars of Armenian studies refused to share this view of Armenian scholars and they dated by the 11th c. Moses of Chorene who was traditionally considered as the 5th c. historian in the past. [Movses Khorenats, 1984: 6-13].

Armenian scholarship often calls Moses of Chorene as the “Father” of the ancient Armenian historical legacy, “Armenian Herodotus”, “Armenian Tacitus” ...

The history of Armenia is described in Moses of Chorene’s work from the beginning to the 5th century AD. *Armenian History* consists of three parts: 1. About the tribal belonging of the Armenian aristocracy; 2. The history of Armenian ancestors in the middle period; 3. The last part of the history of the homeland of Armenian people [Movses Khorenats, 1984].

The work of Moses of Chorene has often been a subject of scholarly interest. This time we shall emphasize the third part of the work where the deeds of Mesrop Mashtots are discussed and especially his creation of the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian alphabets. The aim of our study is to reveal the similarities and differences between the works of Moses of Chorene and Koryun. Such a comparative analysis will allow us to either rely on the credibility of the accounts given by Moses of Chorene or to question them.

We present those factual differences in the work, which revealed as a result of textual comparisons.

The first and the foremost difference between these two writings is that Moses of Chorene who is traditionally considered as the 5th c. historian by Armenian scholarship uses that version of the maker of alphabet (Mesrop), which refers to a later period and was not yet used even in the 7th century. Until the 8th c. the authors such as Koryun (5th c.), Eznik of Koghba (5th c.), Patriarch Proclus of Constantinople (5th c.), Lazarus of Pharp (5th c.), Catholicos Abraham (7th c.), Ioanne of Odzuni (early 8th c.) and Moses of Kalankatu (7th c.) call him Mashtots. In the work of Moses of Chorene we find once the name Mashtots in the 10th chapter of the 2nd book:

«Եւ վկայ քեզ ի մօտոյ երաշխաւորեցէ Եկէտիաստէ (Sic!) գիրք Եւսեբի Կեսարացոյ, զոր ետ թարգմանել երանելի վարդապետն մեր Մաշտոց ի հայ լեզու:» [the same is confirmed by Eusebius of Caesaria in his *Ecclesiastical History*, translated into Armenian by our blessed spiritual guide Mashtots] [Մովսէս Խորենացի, 1991: 120].

In the end of the 3rd part though, where a few chapters are dedicated to Mashtots, the historian calls him Mesrop, the founder of Armenian script and writing. In this respect the work by Moses of Chorene is rather close to the shorter edition of Koryun (the short version uses the name Mesrop everywhere). Even though the historical narrative often follows the uncut version, there are cases, when it differs essentially from both editions [Javakhishvili, 1935: 158].

Moses of Chorene fills the history of discovery of Armenian graphemes with such new details that are not confirmed by earlier sources.

The 52nd chapter of the *History* describes the cruelty related to St John the Chrysostom in the time of the Emperor Arcadius in Constantinople. According to the historian when the Persian king Vram send the Armenian King Vramshapuh to Mesopotamia with a peacemaking mission, Vramshapuh discerned the need of having Armenian alphabet.: The

Armenian king was disturbed by the fact that he did not have an interpreter with him. Meanwhile one of his companions named Habel promised him that he would bring an Armenian alphabet designed by Bishop Daniel [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991: 325]. Moses of Chorene attributes the creation of the Armenian alphabet to Habel with the help of the Bishop Daniel: «Ձոր [Հարէլն] առեալ, և երթեալ նովաւ հանդերձ քաջ հմտացեալ ի Դանիէլէ, կարգեալ ըստ ձևոյ օրինակի յունականին զվաղնջուցն գրեալ շարագիր տառից՝ եկեալ ետուն ցեծն Սահակ և Մեսրոպ:» [He [Habel] went and obtained a comprehensive information from Daniel, [they] put the alphabet in a Greek order, brought it and handed it to Sahak the Great and Mesrop] [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991: 326].

Koryun does not describe the journey of the King Vramshapuh to Mesopotamia in his work, nor does he mention the facts of finding information about the Daniel's alphabet. According to the story Catholicos Sahak and Mashtots introduced to the King the idea of creating a new alphabet. The King Vramshapuh told them in return about a Syrian bishop Daniel, who by quite unexpectedly turned out to be an owner of Armeian graphemes. Koryun does not explain how the Armenian king knew about the Daniel's graphemes. [Կորյուն, 1981: 90].

The length of teaching using the Daniel's alphabet is also presented in a different way. Both works agree that Daniel' alphabet was brought to Armenia during the reign of Vramshapuh. Catholicos Sahak and Mashtots decided to teach children and at the same time test the new alphabet by using it in their teaching. According to the *Life of Mashtots*, the alphabet was brought on the 5th year of the reign of Vramshapuh, it was taught during two years and finally they realized that these graphemes did not provide sufficient expression for the Armenian language. Moses of Chorene marks the timeline for testing the alphabet as «քաւսս սաւսս» [several months] and he does not refer to the exact time. Neither does the historian comment on the character of the Daniel's alphabet, or about how it ended up with the Syrian bishop. Koryun calls it the script, which «յայլոց դպրութեանց թաղեալք և յարուցեալք դիպեցան, յետ այնորիկ դարձեալ կրկին անգամ ի նոյն հոգս դառնային, և նմին ելս խնդրէին ծամանակս ինչ»: [presented the bookishness of others, originated from a dead language and was reused again, [because of which] it was expected to fulfil a similar function throughout certain time] [Կորյուն, 1981: 94].

The story of Mashtots' journey for the search of the alphabet is described differently in these two sources. Since the alphabet of Daniel did not turn out to be sufficient for expressing fully the Armenian language, Mashtots left for Mesopotamia at the order of the king and the consent of Sahak. He took a group of his disciples with him. Yet, Koryun says nothing about why he went to Mesopotamia. According to Moses of Chorene, however, Mesrop went to Mesopotamia in order to visit Daniel and get additional information from m about the Armenian alphabet. After his unsuccesfull visit to bishop Daniel Mesrop moved to Edesa [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991: 327].

The History by Moses of Chorene is the only source, which mentions the fact of Mashtots' visit to Bishop Daniel and obtaining information from him. The Moses of Chorene's history therefore stands closer to the brief edition of Koryun's work, in which Mesrop accompanied with his disciples goes to Daniel personally in order to bring the alphabet from him [Կորյուն, 1994: 117].

After the failure of Daniel's alphabet, the second phase of the creation of the Armenian alphabet begins. According to Koryun's *The Life*, Mashtots himself is the creator of the Armenian alphabet. He, like his father, bore (created) new graphemes and granted new images to them in Samosar with the help of Hrophanos.

«Որում պարզեւէր իսկ վիճակ յամենաշնորհողէն Աստուծոյ. հայրական չափուն ծնեալ ծնունդս նորոգ և սքանչելի՝ սուրբ աջովն իւրով, նշանագիրս հայերէն լեզուին: Եւ անդ վաղվաղակի նշանակեալ, անուանեալ և կարգեալ, յօրինէր սիդորայիւք կապօք:» [He, with his pure attempt, begot in a fatherly manner new and amazing progeny – The graphemes of the Armenian language. He depicted quickly [these graphemes], gave them names, put them in order and made up letters] [Կորյուն, 1981: 96].

Moses of Chorene attributes the discovery of the Armenian alphabet to divine revelation: «Եւ տեսանէ ոչ ի քուն երագ և ոչ յարթութեան տեսիլ, այլ ի սրտին գործարանի երևութացեալ հոգւոյն աչաց թաթ ձեռին աջոյ՝ գրելով ի վերայ վիմի. զի որպէս ի ձեան վերջք գծին՝ կուտեալ ունէր քարն: Եւ ոչ միայն երևութացաւ, այլ և հանգամանք ամենայնին որպէս յաման ինչ ի միտս նորա հաւաքեցաւ:» [Then he saw in the depths of his soul, through the eyes of his mind and not in his dream or daydreaming, the right palm, writing on a rock so as if it was leaving the traces of lines on the snow. This was revealed not only in front of Mesrop's eyes, but the characteristic signs of all [the graphemes] were collected in his mind like in a vessel] [Մովսէս Խորենացի, 1991: 327].

Scholars interpret the vision of Moses of Chorene in different ways: Hr. Acharian calls the divine miracle, which other historians repeated after him later, the result of misunderstanding Koryun [Աճառյան, 1955: 30-31]. According to A. Kranian, Moses of Chorene provides less technical details than Koryun about the fulfilled task and grants a more mystical character to his History [Կռանեան, 1992: 61-62].

The vision of Mesrop is described differently in the 1843 and 1865 Venetian editions and the №1661 manuscript preserved at Echmiadzin of Moses of Chorene's *History of Armenia*. They mention the 7 vowels created by Mesrop: «...գրելով ի վերայ վիմի. Ա, Ե, Է, Ը, Բ, Ո, Ի»: The Venetian editions rely on the manuscripts dated with 1303, 1660, 1671 and 1683, while the Echmiadzin manuscript №1661 is rewritten in 1676-1678.

According to Fr. Muller, the alphabet found at Daniel was of a semitic origin: it had no vowels. Mesrop created these 7 vowels according to Greek signs, added and filled the missing gaps in the graphemes of Daniel the Syrian. Fr Muller, relying on the texts published in Venice and the Echmiadzin manuscripts, reckons that Moses of Chorene considers Mesrop as nothing more than the discoverer of the 7 vowels of the Armenian alphabet [Միլլէր, 1889: 87].

The educational activities of Mesrop Mashtots in the neighbouring Kartli and Albania are particularly interesting. Moses of Chorene, unlike Koryun, describes briefly the Mesrop's journey to Kartli and Albania. Mesrop creates the Georgian alphabet with the help of the translator Jagha, with the support of King Bakur and Bishop Moses. The History by Moses of Chorene is the only source that offers the names of those of Mesrop's disciples who were left as supervisors in Kartli.

«Եւ քնտրեալ մանկունս, և յերկուս բաժանեալ դասս, և վարդապետս թողու նոցա յաշակերտաց իւրոց զՏէր խորձենացի, և զՄուշէ տարօնեցի:»

[He selected children, divided them in two groups and left for their guidance [the two of] his disciples: Ter of Khordzen and Mushe of Taron] [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991: 372].

After having worked in Kartli, Mesrop moved to Albania and created an Albanian alphabet with the help of King Arsvghen, Bishop Jeremiah and Benjamen the translator. Comparative study revealed another significant difference: as *The life of Mashtots* states Sahak and Mashtots pursued translation work after creating the Armenian alphabet for the sake of promoting Armenian literary tradition. Catholicos Sahak started translating books from Greek: «Ձեռն ի գործ արկանէր ի թարգմանել և ի գրել մեծն Բսահակ՝ ըստ յառաջագոյն սովորութեանն:» «Բսկ երանելոյն Սահակայ զեկեղեցական գրոց գումարութիւնն՝ կանխաւ ի յունական բարբառոյն ի հայերէն դարձուցեալ, և բազում ևս զհայրապետաց սրբոց զճշմարիտ զիմաստութիւնն:» [„The great Sahak began to translate and write according to his previous custom.“ „The blessed Sahak in the beginning translated from Greek full ecclesiastical books and the wisdom of Holy Patriarchs“] [Կորյուն, 1981: 124].

The Armenian History by Moses of Chorene offers a completely different account:

«և գտանէ զմեծն Սահակ թարգմանութեան պարապեալ յասորոյն՝ յոչ լինելոյ յունի: Քանզի նախ ի Մերուժանայ այրեալ լինէին ընդհանուր աշխարհիս յոյն գիրք. դարձեալ ի բաժանել զաշխարհս Հայոց՝ չտային պարսիկ վերակացոյքն յոյն ուսանել դպրութիւն ումեք յիրեանց մասինն, այլ միայն ասորի:» [Mesrop] learned that due to the absence of Greek [books] Sahak the Great had started translating from Assyrian. The thing is that Mehruzhan burned all the Greek books in our country; Besides, at the time of the division of Armenia, on behalf of the Persians [in Armenia] the Persian officials did not allow anyone to adopt the Greek literary customs, but only the Assyrian ones [were allowed] [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991: 329].

This account of Moses of Chorene is repeated in the brief edition of Koryun. The brief edition, like the sources, mentions the parables of Solomon as the first translated works, yet it makes it perfectly clear here that Mashtots translated 22 books of the Old Testament. Moses of Chorene is not satisfied with the books of the Old Testament and adds the books of the New Testament as well.

«Եւ իսկոյն ի թարգմանութիւն ձեռն արկեալ, խորհրդարար սկսանելով յԱռակաց, բովանդակ զքսան և երկու յայտնիսս և զնոր Կտակս յեղուլ ի հայ բան, նա և աշակերտք նորա Յոհան եկեղեցային և Յովսէփ պաղնացի. միանգամայն և զարուեստ գրչութեան ուսուցանել տալով իւրոց մանկագոյն աշակերտացն:» [Mesrop] began to translate immediately and started deliberately with the Parables [of Solomon]. He completed the translation of 22 books together with his disciples Hohan of Ekegec and Joseph of Pagin and they also translated the New Testament. At the same time, he taught the art of writing to his junior disciples [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991: 327].

S. Malkhasian, the modern translator of *The History* by Moses of Chorene mentions in this respect that “It would have been impossible for Mashtots and his two disciples to complete the translation of both Old and New Testaments in Syria. This contradicts Moses of Chorene himself since at one place (part 3, ch. 54) he mentions that St Sahak translated the Holy Book from Syrian, since it was not in Greek. At other place (part 3, ch. 61) he

writes that St Sahak and Mesrop undertook immediate translations”. In the opinion of S. Malkhasian, the place of the New Testament might have been added later [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1981: 385-386].

There is another factual difference traced between the *Armenian History* by Moses of Chorene and *The Life of Mashtots* by Koryun. *The History* describes Catholicos Sahak sending with his epistles Mesrop and his grandson Vardan to the Emperor Theodosius and bishop Attikos in Byzantium. The Koryun’s work does not mention the fact.

Two places attract our attention in *The History* by Moses of Chorene:

1. Catholicos Sahak emphasizes in his epistle to the Emperor Theodosius that the Greek part of Armenia¹ did not adopt that alphabet, which Mesrop obtained by great efforts in the country of the Assyrians.

«Այնչափ ասեցեալ զմեզ, մինչև զնշանագիրս անգամ ոչ ընկալան, զորս եբեր նոյն այր՝ զոր ասաբեցի առ ձեր բարերարութիւնդ, բազում անգամ ճգնեալ դորս յԱսորոց աշխարհին:» [They despise us so much that they even refused the idea of adopting that alphabet, which was brought to your majesty by our man. He obtained [these letters] by enormous efforts in the country of the Assyrians [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991: 333].

2. The ceaser speaks of the alphabet granted through the divine grace in his responding epistle to Sahak: «բայց զի յետոյ պատմեաց մեզ Մեսրոպ, եթէ կատարումն արուեստիդ ի շնորհաց վերնոյն եղև՝ գրեցաք՝ զի ասենայն փութով ուսցին, և զբեզ պատուեալ ընկալցին՝ որպէս զարդարն վարդապետ իւրեանց, հանգոյն արքեպիսկոպոսին Կեսարու...» [Since the when Mesrop told us that the art of writing was granted by the grace from abov, we wrote to him to study it carefully and accept you with respect as a true spiritual guide like the Archbishop of Caesaria] [Մովսես Խորենացի, 1991:335].

The mentioned data is rather contradictory: in one case we have the story of finding the Armenian alphabet in the country of Syrians (we should mention here the alphabet of Bishop Daniel), and the story of the alphabet being originated by the divine revelation in the other case [Աճարյան, 1956:42-44].

Moses of Chorene ends his work by telling the story about the deaths of Sahak and Mesrop.

What are the sources of *The History* by Moses of Chorene? There is a theory that Moses of Chorene must have been guided by the Koryun’s *The life of Mashtots* while writing his work. The historian quotes him sometimes, and sometimes he adds his accounts according to his opinion [Անանեան, 1962: 208]. Yet, unlike Lazarus of Pharp, does not list Koryun as a source but notes “as we have heard from reliable people”. He mentions Koryun only once when he tells us about the trip of Koryun and Ghevond to Byzantium. In scholars’ opinion Moses of Chorene must have been in possession of an edition different from long and short editions, or the historian might be conveying the accounts relying on oral tradition. The use of the name “Mesrop” in his work refers to the late period [Javakhishvili, 1935: 156].

It may be said that the main idea in both narratives by Moses of Chorene and Koryun is the same. Both authors aim to present Mesrop Mashtots as the enlightener of Armenia,

¹ It is commonly known that Armenia split in two parts in 387: the eastern part fell under the influence of Persia, and the western part fell under Byzantium.

Kartli and Albania and as the one who made alphabets for them. Yet, in order to fulfil the task they tell such different stories that we are dealing with two completely different sources.

Those scholars, who believe the work of Moses of Chorene is reliable, consider the nature of the work. This group of scholars notes that unlike the original source, which is only hagiography and is dedicated to Mesrop Mashtots and his glorious efforts of creating the alphabet, the work of Moses of Chorene is the Armenia's general millennial history. It presents the life of Mashtots and his deeds in connection with the events of the time. *The History* by Moses of Chorene has the clearcut arrangement principles. It is commonly accepted that he lived in the time when the movement for creating an Armenian alphabet was rather active. He was the disciple of Mesrop Mashtots and had learned from him about the creation of the Armenian alphabet. He also knew a lot from the older disciples of Mashtots and he also made use of Koryun. In one case we have hagiography and history in the other, in which, quite naturally, facts may be missed out, added or removed. The future of these works is also significant – the number of references, frequency of their rewriting. We should not also forget that the works by Koryun and Moses of Chorene were produced in the 5th c. They, especially the work by Moses of Chorene, were rewritten many times later and since they were handbooks, they were sometimes rewritten by less educated scribes and this must have often caused damages to the accuracy of the texts [Մաթեւոսյան, 1990: 101]. Scholars thus try to justify the differences between the works of Koryun and Moses of Chorene.

According to Gr. Khalatian, Moses of Chorene wrote *The History* with his own additions and changes: The journey of Vramshapuh to Mesopotamia at the order of the Persian king Vram; Arranging the alphabet by Habel with the help of Bishop Daniel – these accounts are not confirmed in the short edition of Koryun influenced by Moses of Chorene. Gr. Khalatian believes that the facts of the journey of Mashtots to Mesopotamia, the meeting with Bishop Daniel, encounter with the pagan Plato in Edessa, search for Epiphanius, meeting Hrophanos and especially the miraculous vision, the vowels depicted on rocks, translation of the Old and New Testaments are nothing but fiction and invented stories [Խալատյան, 1904, 361-367].

The narrative about Mashtots in the work of Moses of Chorene is noteworthy also for the fact that the theme of creating the Armenian alphabet is the only one, which is presented not in one way, neither it keeps consistency in one two or three chapters one after the other, but it spreads throughout 11 chapters and is included in different themes. Ar. Hasakian mentions in this respect that such a narrative style is unusual for Moses of Chorene and the structure of his *History*. In his opinion, the detection of contradictions of logical or informative nature in *the History* of Moses of Chorene should be explained with the changes made to his text. Therefore, if we have frequent divergences or find some informative or stylistic tautologies, which we find in the part about Mashtots, we should be surely dealing with the damage and distortion of the text [Սահակյան, 2012: 52-53].

According to Ar. Hasakian, if we take out the narrative about Mesrop from *The History* of Moses of Chorene, we shall have in the stories the true and authentic account of Mesrop and the discovery of the Armenian alphabet. In spite of such an evaluation or the criticism against Moses of Chorene, the scholar attributes the story of the creation of the Georgian

and Albanian alphabets to the pen of Moses of Chorene and notes that this part leaves the traces of stylistic incompatibility and informational tautology with the other parts that were added by the editor to the story about Mashtots [Uuhuljjuń, 2012: 59]. We believe that this is not the case. Even in this scenario Ar. Sahakian fails to part with the biased tendencies of those Armenian scholars whose sole purpose is to present Mesrop Mashtots as the creator of the Georgian and Albanian alphabets.

Group of scholars explain the different accounts of Moses of Chorene by the misinterpretation of Koryun. This view contradicts the biographical account of Moses of Chorene, in which he calls himself a disciple of Mashtots and Sahak: In order to master perfectly the monuments of spiritual literary legacy, the Armenian scholars were required to demonstrate the Greek language proficiency skills and be well acquainted with Greek culture. With this aim Sahak and Mashtots together with a few other young men was sent to Egypt in the age of 20-25 in order to pursue his studies in Alexandria. Moses of Chorene studied well the Greek language and literature, rhetoric, grammar and other “arts” in Alexandria, he extended his previous knowledge he had gained in Armenia [Movses Khorenats, 1984:5]. Hr. Acharian calls the story of the journey of Moses of Chorene to Alexandria imaginary [Աճարյան, 1961: 35].

It should be noted that not only studying the narrative part on Mashtots, but also studying generally the work of Moses of Chorene revealed that the historian often adds or changes the history according to his own wishes. Among the whole material he has he always singles out that version of the story, which glorifies Armenians and refers to their superiority in historical events [Uurqujuń, 1956: 42]. Moses of Chorene could not possibly misunderstand Koryun since he himself was well aware of the truth. Was not the great work of creating the Armenian alphabet fulfilled in his own times? Then what is the reason of such differences?

Moses of Chorene is not a complier who would present the collected material consistently, but he edits and transforms the material agreeing with the events taking place in his own times (a group of scholars, as we already mentioned, dates Moses of Chorene with the 9th c.) [Thomson, 1980: 1-8]. This often complicates the process of studying and researching *The History* of Moses of Chorene, because it is way too hard to establish where does the narration of the documentary material ends and the voice of the author comes in. One is obvious: if Moses of Chorene presents the significant story of creation of the Armenian alphabet in such a distorted way and then the historians of the later generations follow him automatically, it is way too hard to accept and share the accounts of the activities of Mashtots in Kartli and Albania without a criticism and consider it as a reliable source!

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