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Linguistic Divergence in Armenian Bible and Lectionary Palimpsests

Abstract: This paper's subject is variant readings of linguistic relevance in Old Armenian Bible and lectionary fragments preserved as lower layers of palimpsests. The aim is to contribute to the linguistic research on these rarely or never studied witnesses of the Old Armenian language. Such research will enhance understanding of the linguistic diversity of Old Armenian and, as may be the case, give us linguistic tools to determine the time and place at which the textual witnesses were produced. To these ends, the paper presents the first results of research into variant readings of linguistic importance in several Bible and lectionary fragments.

1 Research on palimpsest fragments

1.1 The relevance of palimpsest fragments for linguistic variation in Old Armenian

The study of palimpsests containing fragments of Armenian texts as their lower layers is essential for several reasons. Only a small number of studies have dealt with the linguistic divergence and variety of Old Armenian, and this is true for both the diachronic and synchronic perspectives. The diachronic perspective relates to the changes observed in the Old Armenian language over time, as evidenced by the written documents preserved from the inception of Armenian literacy to the present day. The synchronic perspective concerns the linguistic variety of Old Armenian as reflected in written texts that date from the time of the emergence of Armenian literacy in the fifth century. Up to the present day, our understanding of the linguistic characteristics of Old Armenian, notably during the period from the fifth to the tenth century, remains limited from both these perspectives.¹

¹ The existing studies on the language and orthography of the first centuries of Armenian literacy include Meillet 1903; Acharyan 1928; Gyulbudaghyan 1973; Weitenberg 1994; Weitenberg 1997; Weitenberg 2006; and Künzle 1984. The language of Old Armenian texts from the earliest stages of its literacy appears quite uniform; however, researchers have pointed out linguistic features that

The scarcity of studies on the linguistic divergence of Old Armenian is in part due to the limited number of textual witnesses (manuscripts and inscriptions) dating back to the first centuries of Armenian literacy. The oldest dated manuscripts of Armenian go back to the ninth century, and fewer than twenty manuscripts are dated before the year 1000.² Palimpsest fragments are of special importance in the study of the earliest stages of the Armenian language since usually they can be assigned to an older period than the oldest dated non-palimpsest manuscripts preserving the same texts. The groundwork for studying palimpsests containing Armenian undertexts was established through the edition of the Armenian layer of two palimpsests with Georgian overtexts – namely, Sinai, St Catherine’s Monastery, georg. NF 13 and 55 (hereafter: Sin. georg. NF 13 and NF 55) – which also contain the only known manuscript witnesses of the Caucasian Albanian language in their lower layer.³ The study of palimpsest fragments is relevant for understanding the history of text transmission, the development of written tradition, and the linguistic variation of Armenian during the early centuries of its literacy.⁴ And, as noted by Antoine Meillet, the precise study of the Old Armenian language must be conducted based on the oldest preserved witnesses of Armenian literature.⁵ Furthermore, it is likely that the few existing textual witnesses of the first centuries of Armenian literacy represent not the natural state of spoken Old Armenian of the time but only a written standard of it, and all we can hope for are mere indications of change and variety within Old Armenian. For this reason, every significant case of divergence in the textual tradition must be considered.

To date, scholarly literature predominantly focuses on the Classical, Modern Eastern, and Modern Western Armenian standards (and occasionally Middle Ar-

suggest the potential existence of other varieties alongside the written standard (see, for example, Weitenberg 1996 and 2014).

² See, for example, Kouymjian 2015, 38. Beda Künzle (1984) has used two of the oldest manuscripts for his edition of the Gospels: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 6200, of 887 CE (formerly ms 1111 of the library of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, Moscow) and M 2374, of 989 CE (formerly Ejmiatsin, Armenian Patriarchate, 229).

³ See Gippert 2010 for the edition of the Armenian undertexts, Gippert et al. 2008 on the Albanian palimpsests, and Gippert 2022 for the perspectives of working on Armenian palimpsests in general.

⁴ See Stone 1993 for the assessment of linguistic variants and Weitenberg 2014 on the methodology of determining dialectal variation in Armenian manuscripts.

⁵ Meillet 1903, 489: ‘C’est sur l’observation de la graphie attestée par l’accord des vieux manuscrits demeurés fidèles à l’original que doit reposer une étude précise de l’ancienne langue arménienne’ (‘A precise study of the Old Armenian language must rely on the examination of the spelling attested by common accord of the ancient manuscripts that have remained faithful to the original’).

menian), with limited descriptions of dialectal variation in Armenian, as the main concentration is on modern dialects. Critical editions of texts and dictionaries attributed to one of the mentioned strata are adapted to the known grammatical and orthographic rules of the corresponding standard. The editions of biblical texts, too, often tend to emend linguistic and orthographic deviations from the Classical Armenian standard, regarding them as ‘erroneous’, especially when the edition is based on a large number of manuscripts.⁶ However, as Michael Stone has pointed out, it is not the task of critical editions to reflect all the variations occurring in every manuscript,⁷ as that would be simply impossible.

Even considering that there are probably more studies on the Bible than on other texts written in Old Armenian, many linguistic aspects of the study of the Armenian biblical texts remain open. Hence, the study of manuscript- and text-specific linguistic divergences is crucial for the study of the Armenian language in general and for the earlier stages of Old Armenian in particular.

1.2 Palimpsest fragments within DeLiCaTe

Within the framework of the Development of Literacy in the Caucasian Territories (DeLiCaTe) project,⁸ research on the linguistic divergence documented in Armenian palimpsests is a work in progress. The following are the palimpsest fragments that the project has dealt with so far. Apart from Sin. georg. NF 13 and NF 55, which contain fragments of the Pauline Epistles with the Euthalian apparatus and of the Old Testament books attributed to King Solomon,⁹ another palimpsest with an Armenian underlayer is preserved at St Catherine’s Monastery: syr. 7, with fragments from the Epistle to the Hebrews in the undertext of its fols 47 and 48.¹⁰

6 This is true of, e.g., Zōhrapean 1805; Amalyan 1996; and Alexanian 2012. Yovhannēs Zōhrapean does provide variant readings of the manuscripts he has used, but he does not note which variant readings are contained in which manuscripts. Hayk Amalyan’s (1996, 27–28) objective is to reconstruct the original form of the translation of the Bible into Armenian by comparing existing manuscripts and correcting any perceived ‘errors’ within them. He also points to the fact that Zōhrapean has kept all the ‘errors’ of his manuscripts, in an endeavour to render them as faithfully as possible. Joseph M. Alexanian (2012, xi) states that the focus of his edition is ‘on a text and apparatus that may reflect differences in Syriac and Greek *Vorlage*, rather than on a presentation of all manuscript variants to illustrate the development of the Armenian language’.

7 Stone 1993, 24.

8 For details, see Jost Gippert’s contribution to the present volume and the project website at <<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/research/current-projects/delicate.html>> (accessed on 9 April 2024).

9 Gippert 2010.

10 Hebrews 10:20–35, 11:25–39; see also Gippert 2023, 214.

Palimpsests from other collections include Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Collection, Christ. Arab. Add. 124, which also contains fragments from Hebrews.¹¹ Palimpsests of the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) in Yerevan include

- Fragment no. 35 (John 7:44–52)
- M 196 (Proverbs 2:11–18, 2:4–11)
- Fragment no. 461 (Luke 4:8–11)
- M 470 (Acts 25:8–14, 26:14–20)
- M 963 (Luke 24:51–53)
- M 3850 (Acts 15:38–41, 16:1–4).

Lectionary fragments are preserved in M 1306, M 2166, and M 4435 (see Section 3.2 below).

1.3 Palimpsested Bible fragments vs lectionary fragments

There are two important issues that one must keep in mind while dealing with palimpsested Bible and lectionary fragments. The first is their dating: in most cases, the only reliable basis is the dating of the upper layer (if there is any), yielding a *terminus ante quem*. A more precise dating is usually not possible, at least not until well-defined and sound palaeographical, linguistic, and historical indications, among others, have been taken into consideration. Determining the most significant indicator(s) for dating the lower layer of a palimpsest heavily relies on factors such as the history of the relevant language(s) and script(s), the history of the given texts and manuscripts, and various other related considerations. The second challenge lies in distinguishing between palimpsested Bible fragments proper and lectionary fragments. Lectionaries primarily feature readings from the Bible arranged according to the liturgical calendar. This similar content makes it difficult to consistently and clearly differentiate between these two types of texts within palimpsest fragments. In contrast to Bible manuscripts proper, identifiable structural elements of lectionaries are, firstly, the titles of liturgical units, along with the non-sequential rendering of biblical passages from the Old and New Testaments. In this paper, fragments that could not be further identified as part of a lectionary due to the absence of structural clues have been provisionally treated as Bible fragments.

¹¹ Hebrews 11:14–33; see also Gippert 2023, 214.

2 Orthographic variation in Old Armenian and its assessment

2.1 Orthographic variation in Old Armenian

The textual transmission of the Armenian Bible is comparatively consistent. However, the Armenian manuscripts, and especially palimpsest fragments, do show some variation. Till today, we have few descriptions of the orthographic and language variation in the Old Armenian manuscripts. They include Antoine Meillet's short account on the writing style (French *graphie*) of the Armenian Bible, Beda Künzle's description of the variation in orthography and linguistic expression in the Gospel manuscripts E and M (see Section 2.3 below), as well as several accounts by Jos J. S. Weitenberg.¹²

Orthographic peculiarities of a given written specimen are in the first place connected with the phonetic characteristics behind them. Hrachya Acharyan, Sirak Gyulbudaghyan,¹³ and most other linguists dealing with the topic agree that Armenian orthography from the first centuries after the creation of the alphabet was phonetically based. This means that differences in orthography reflected differences in phonetics, that is, pronunciation. Discussing the phonetic values of the Armenian letters and their combinations, Heinrich Hübschmann¹⁴ and, following him, Acharyan point to a few tools for determining the possible pronunciation of the written evidence. These tools include the arrangement of the letters in the Armenian alphabet (in its comparison with the Greek alphabet); the Armenian version of the *Grammar* by Dionysius Thrax; foreign words transliterated into Armenian; and Armenian words transliterated into other languages.¹⁵ Gyulbudaghyan, who offers an account on the orthography

12 Meillet 1903; Künzle 1984, 58*–85*; Weitenberg 1994; Weitenberg 1997; Weitenberg 2006.

13 Acharyan 1928, 286–346; Gyulbudaghyan 1973, 63.

14 Hübschmann 1876, 60.

15 Hübschmann 1876, 60: ‘Diese [the pronunciation of Old Armenian] zu bestimmen haben wir drei Hilfsmittel, 1) die armenische Bearbeitung des Dionysius Thrax, die jedenfalls alt ist, wenn sie auch nicht, wie angenommen wird, in das 5. Jahrhundert hinaufreichen sollte, 2) das armenische Alphabet, 3) die Transcriptionen aus und in das Armenische’. Acharyan 1928, 289: ‘Հայերէն այբուբենի Ե դարու կամ ընդհանրապէս խօսելով՝ հին հնչումը որոշելու համար չորս միջոց կար ասունք են՝ 1. Հայերէն այբուբենի դասաւորութիւնը: 2. Դիոնէսիոս Թրակացոյն քերականութիւնը: 3. Օտար լեզուներէ տառադարձուած բառերը՝ հայերէնի մէջ: 4. Հայերէնէ տառադարձուած բառերը՝ օտար լեզուներու մէջ’ (‘There are four means for determining the pronunciation of the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century or, roughly speaking, the old pronunciation of Armenian. These are: 1. the order of the letters in the Armenian alphabet; 2. the *Grammar* by Dionysius Thrax; 3. the spelling of words transliterated from other languages into Armenian; 4. the spelling of words transliterated from Armenian into other languages’).

of the fifth- to ninth-century texts,¹⁶ emphasises the problem of determining the orthography of Armenian from the fifth to sixth centuries solely based on ninth-century manuscripts. Therefore, he uses epigraphic material and evidence from loanwords. He also indicates ‘certain orthographic deviations’ as a possible indicator.¹⁷

2.2 ‘Linguistic variants’

When searching for linguistic features that can or might indicate an older stage than the oldest dated manuscript witnesses of the Old Armenian language, the first step is to look for non-coincidental patterns of divergence in orthography and language. For this paper, only critical editions of the Bible and lectionaries were taken into consideration. It is clear to me that a more comprehensive analysis must additionally include a comparison with the manuscripts themselves, since the critical editions often harmonise orthographic and other deviations.

We must certainly bear in mind that not all variant readings indicate a change or variation in a linguistic sense, no matter whether the scribe inserted them unknowingly or deliberately.¹⁸ As some researchers have suggested,¹⁹ the assessment of ‘linguistic’ variants, as coined by Michael Stone,²⁰ requires a systematic collection and description of variant readings in Armenian manuscripts of the fifth to eleventh centuries outside the critical apparatus, as no critical edition can satisfy every researcher’s needs. The next step involves situating these systematic descriptions within a broader dialectal and chronological context.²¹ As mentioned by Stone, cooperation between textual critics and linguists is crucial in this respect.²² Such cooperation is one of the goals of the DeLiCaTe project.

¹⁶ Gyulbudaghyan 1973, 12–65.

¹⁷ Gyulbudaghyan 1973, 12: ‘Դժվար է Թ դարի ձեռագրերով որոշել 5–6-րդ դարերի ուղղագրությունը, բայց մեզ օգնում են վիմական արձանագրությունները, որոնք թեև ծավալով փոքր են, բայց հնագույն շրջանից են մնացել. օգնում են նաև հայերենից օտար լեզուներին և օտար լեզուներից հայերենին անցած բառերի, փոխառությունների տառադարձությունը, ինչպես և ուղղագրական առանձին շեղումները’ (‘Deciding on the orthography of the fifth to sixth centuries based on ninth-century manuscripts is challenging. However, inscriptions come to our aid, despite their brevity, as they originate from ancient times. The spelling of Armenian words transliterated into other languages and vice versa, along with certain orthographic deviations, also proves to be useful’).

¹⁸ Stone 1993, 20.

¹⁹ Weitenberg 2014, 223; Stone 1993, 20.

²⁰ Stone 1993, 20.

²¹ Weitenberg 2014, 223.

²² Stone 1993, 21.

2.3 First case studies based on palimpsest fragments

In the following sections, I discuss some orthographic and linguistic variations that can be found in the palimpsested Armenian Bible and lectionary fragments listed above. The following issues are dealt with: some instances of the orthographical differentiation between **ե** <e> and **է** <ē>,²³ and the simplification of the consonant cluster **րհ** <rh> → **հ** <h>.

Two critical editions were consulted for the comparison with the Bible and lectionary fragments preserved as the lower layers of the palimpsests: the complete edition of the Old and New Testaments of 1805 by Yovhannēs Zōhrapean (also called the Zohrab Bible), based on several manuscripts of the Mechitarist collection in Venice, the oldest of which dates from the fourteenth century, and Künzle's edition of 1984, which renders two of the oldest and most complete manuscripts preserving the Armenian Gospels, namely, M = Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 6200 (formerly kept in the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow), dated 887, and E = Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 2374 (formerly housed in the Armenian Patriarchate in Ejmiatsin), dated 989.

3 Orthographic variation between **ե** <e> and **է** <ē> in palimpsest fragments

3.1 The distribution of **ե** <e> and **է** <ē> in Classical Armenian

Due to the presence of two distinct graphemes in the Armenian alphabet created by Mesrop Mashtots for what today is an /e/-sound in both Modern Armenian standard languages (East and West Armenian), we may assume that **ե** <e> and **է** <ē> initially represented two different sounds.²⁴ Etymologically, **է** <ē> goes back to the diphthong [ey]. Manuk Abeghyan assumes that **ե** <e> was pronounced as an open vowel and **է**

²³ See Künzle 1984, 61* and 63* for a short account as well as Weitenberg 2006 'on the use of Armenian *e* and *ē* to render Greek *ε* and *η* in onomastic material in the Gospels and in the book of Deuteronomy' (Weitenberg 2006, 215).

²⁴ See Schmitt (1972) for the transliteration of Armenian, and specifically page 300 for the representation of **է** as <ē>. It is worth noting that the transliteration convention, using what appears to be a long vowel, <ē>, to denote **է** and implying a distinct pronunciation from **ե** <e>, is a practice going back to the works of Heinrich Hübschmann, Antoine Meillet, and Émile Benveniste. Additional details can be found in Schmitt 1972, 297; see also Hübschmann 1882, 31–39, and Hübschmann 1895–1897, 1–2.

<ē> as a closed one.²⁵ The same author points to the appearance of է <e> in the conjunction էթէ <et'e>, թէ <t'e> ('if, that', etc.), in the past tense of the copula (էի <ei> first-person singular, էիր <eir> second-person singular, էաք <eak'> first-person plural, etc.), and in the imperfect (գրէիք <greik'> second-person plural of the verb 'write', etc.), which 'later became' էի <ēi>, էիր <ēir>, էաք <ēak'>, and so on.²⁶

Gyulbudaghyan adduces instances in which է <e> is found in documents of the fifth to ninth centuries instead of the standard writing with է <ē>.²⁷ For this purpose, he considers epigraphic material.²⁸ He outlines two positions in the interpretation of this variation, as represented by Antoine Meillet and Eduard Aghayan.²⁹ Gyulbudaghyan disagrees with Meillet's approach, which suggests that the orthography of the imperfect with է <e> is older than that with է <ē>. Rather, he aligns with Aghayan's viewpoint, according to which the spellings with է <e> and է <ē> are merely confused in the textual witnesses.³⁰ The question remains whether the deviations from the known (or, in Gyulbusaghyan's wording, 'accepted') rules concerning the distribution of է <e> and է <ē> in Old Armenian themselves follow a rule-based pattern or are entirely at random. The answer to this question might be different depending on the time and place at which the written materials were produced (and perhaps also on the background of a given scribe). In other words, the question is whether a chronological or geographical pattern can be established.

Discussing the divergence in several Gospel manuscripts from Ejmiatsin and the Moscow Gospels (M), Meillet points to the fact that some of these manuscripts (five in total, 'les manuscrits corrects') show consistency in many points, including the orthography of the imperfect and of թէ <t'e>, էթէ <et'e> ('if, that') with է <e>. However, three of those manuscripts have undergone more influence of 'the Armenian of the Middle Ages' ('l'arménien au moyen âge') and show a less consistent orthography.³¹ Meillet's statement can be understood in the following way: if certain manuscripts

25 Abeghyan 1936, 9.

26 Abeghyan 1936, 13: 'բայերի անցյալ անկատարը, վոր հնագույն գրութեամբ յեղել է՝ էի, էիր, էաք, էիք, էին գրէի, գրէիր, գրէաք, գրէիք, գրէին, հետագայում դարձել է՝ էի, էիր, էաք և այլն' ('the past imperfect of the verbs that was written with է <e> according to the old writing, էի <ei> 'I was', էիր <eir> 'you, singular' were', էաք <eak'> 'we' were', էիք <eik'> 'you, plural' were', էին <ein> 'they' were', գրէի <grei> 'I wrote', գրէիր <greir> 'you, singular' wrote', գրէաք <greak'> 'we' wrote', գրէիք <greik'> 'you, plural' wrote', գրէին <grein> 'they' wrote', later became էի <ēi>, էիր <ēir>, էաք <ēik'>, and so on').

27 Gyulbudaghyan 1973, 40–45.

28 Gyulbudaghyan 1973, 40–41.

29 Gyulbudaghyan 1973, 42.

30 Meillet 1903, 491; Aghayan 1964, 358–359.

31 Meillet 1903, 490–491.

consistently use a particular spelling, there must be a reason for that consistency. Specifically, one must infer that the manuscripts demonstrating consistency are more closely associated with a time when the pronunciation of Է <e> differed from that of Է <ē>, therefore possibly indicating an older form. After the differences in the pronunciation of the two letters were neutralised, the orthography also changed and conceivably became less consistent over time.

In the palimpsest fragments dealt with in the DeLiCaTe project (see Section 1.2), the conjunctions քԷ <ʔe> and ԷքԷ <et'e> ('if, that' etc.) are always written with Է <e>; the same consistency can be observed in the spelling of the imperfect with Է <e>. This likely suggests that the orthography with Է <e> is older than that with Է <ē>. In Sections 3.2 and 3.3, I introduce a few specific instances of the orthographic variation between Է <e> and Է <ē>.

3.2 M 4435

The manuscript Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 4435 is a Gospel codex dated to the year 1424, to which flyleaves with erased text were bound. According to the Matenadaran catalogue, the flyleaves' undertext is also from the Gospels, written in round *erkat'agir* majuscules, and they even comprise a miniature.³²

The four pages of the flyleaves represent one original folio that was cut in two, with the resulting page order 3 + 6 (Fig. 1a) and 4 + 5 (Fig. 1b).³³ The text is arranged in two columns, with 9 + 9 lines and 17–21 characters per line in each column. One or two characters are missing in the left column of pages 3–6. The flyleaves were erased but are not overwritten. In contrast to the catalogue description, the undertext of M 4435 contains a lectionary fragment with readings from the Old Testament (and not from the Gospels), intended to be recited during the ninth hour of Palm Sunday and on Easter Monday and featuring a reading from Genesis (1:1–7) and Psalm 117:26–27.³⁴ On page 5 (Fig. 1b), one can observe the miniature which is also mentioned in the catalogue.

³² Yeganyan, Zeytunyan and Antabyan 1965, 213; see the Introduction by Jost Gippert to this volume for more information on the miniature.

³³ In the case of flyleaves, pages are numbered instead of folios in the catalogues of the Matenadaran.

³⁴ See Renoux 1971, 258–261 [120–123] for the corresponding passage in the Jerusalem-rite lectionaries.

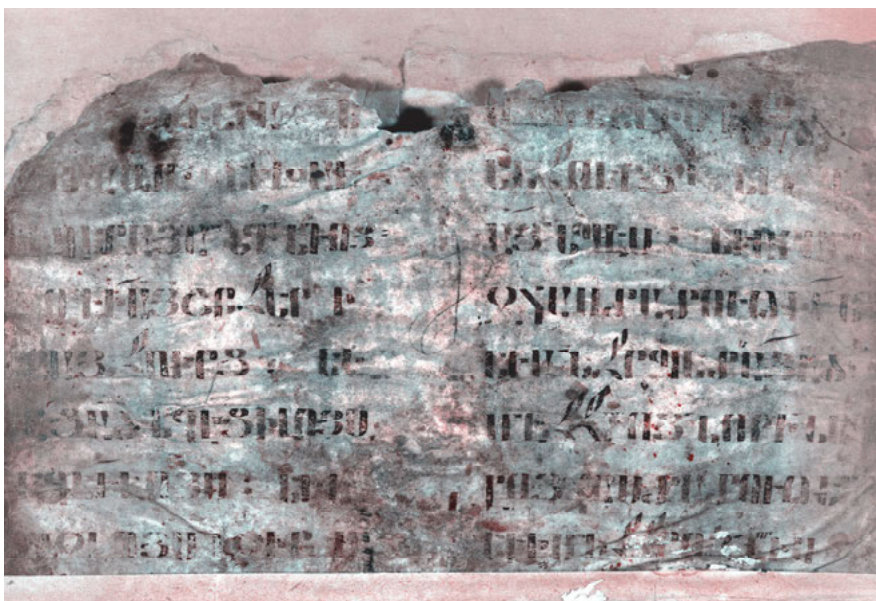
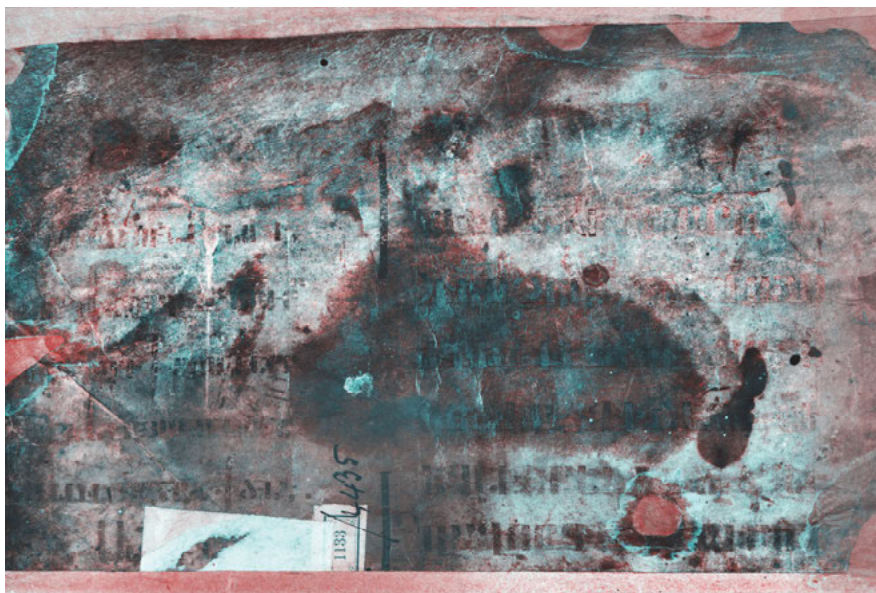


Fig. 1a: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 4435: p. 3 (top) + p. 6 (bottom); red-cyan pseudocolour image, © Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), Yerevan / DeLiCaTe project.



Fig. 1b: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 4435: p. 4 (top) + p. 5 with miniature (bottom); red-cyan pseudocolour image, © Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), Yerevan / DeLiCaTe project.

Page 6 of M 4435 contains an instance of the imperfect form **ՇՐ.ՋԵՐ** <šrjēr> instead of the expected **ՇՐ.ՋԷՐ** <šrjēr> ('(it) was hovering'), see example (1) from Genesis 1:2:

- (1) M 4435, p. 6, col. a, ll. 12–13

<Ե>{Ի} [յ]ոգ-ի ՎՅ **ՇՐ.ՋԵՐ** Ի <Վ>{Ե}րվւն Ջուր-ի

<e>{w} [h]ogi ay³⁵ šrjēr i <v>{e}ray jowrc'

'And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters'

3.3 M 3850

Another attestation of an Է <e> for an expected Է <ē> is provided by **ՄՐԵԻ** <hrēi> (vs **ՄՐԷԻ** <hrēi>) ('of a Jew(ess)') in Acts 16:1. This verse is preserved on a palimpsested flyleaf (page 6, Fig. 2) of Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 3850, a fifteenth-century Gospel codex.³⁶ The flyleaf belongs together with page 5; the original folio was cut in two and additionally clipped at one edge (the left side of page 5 and the right side of page 6), with only the upper half of the folio being preserved.

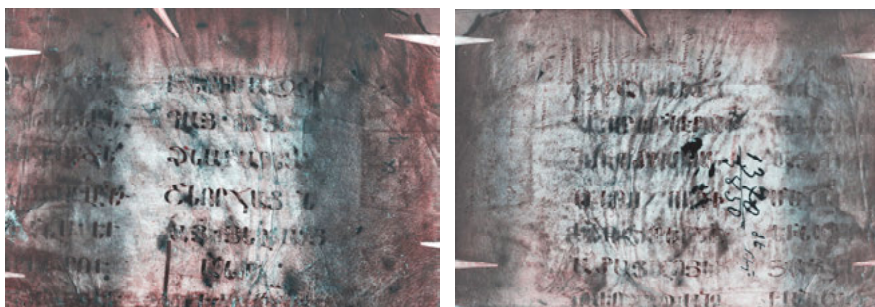


Fig. 2: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 3850: p. 5 (left) + p. 6 (right); red-cyan pseudocolour image, © Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), Yerevan / DeLiCaTe project.

The erased text, written in round *erkat'agir* majuscules in two columns, contains Acts 15:38–41 and 16:1–4, with seven (of originally fourteen) lines preserved in each

³⁵ We cannot be certain if the genitive of **ԱՍՏՈՒԱԾ** <astowac> ('God') cited here is an abbreviated form of **ԱՍՏՈՒՑ-ՈՅ** <astowcoy> or **ԱՍՏՈՒԱԾ-ՈՅ** <astowacoy>, until a written attestation of its full form is found in the oldest Armenian manuscripts.

³⁶ Yeganyan, Zeytunyan and Antabyan 1965, 1096–1097.

column; there are 8–10 characters in each line. ՏՐԵԻ <hrei> appears in Acts 16:1 on page 6:

- (2) M 3850, p. 6, col. a, ll. 1–6

ԱՅԱԿԵՐԺ [ՈՒՐՆ ԷՐ ԱՆՈՒՆ յԻՄՈՎՈՒՆ] ՈՐԴԻ [Կ]ՆԱՋ
ՏՐԵԻ ՄԱՍԿԱՅԵԼՈՅ

ašakert omn ēr anown timovt' eos ordi knoj hrei hawatac'eloy

‘a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a believing woman, a Jewess’

3.4 Further considerations

If the usage of է <e> predates that of է <ē> in examples (1) and (2), one must also consider why and how է <ē> came to replace է <e> in specific contexts. It is worth noting that է <ē> seems to occur less frequently in Armenian orthography as compared to է <e>. Aghayan reinforces his argument that the use of է <ē> in the imperfect is the ‘correct’ Mesropian orthography by pointing out that, in imperfect forms, է <ē> (or է <e>, depending on which one was in the Mesropian orthography) consistently precedes a vowel.³⁷ In Aghayan’s perspective, this suggests that between the է <ē> (or է <e>) and the subsequent vowel, a -y must have been pronounced but not written, given that էււ <ēa> (or էււ <ea>) was not a diphthong in the imperfect. Whether էււ <ea> or էււ <ēa> were pronounced as diphthongs in the imperfect by the time the alphabet was created is hard to determine. However, the fact that է <e> or է <ē> precede vowels in the imperfect might be a plausible reason for the confusion and the shift in orthography from է <e> to է <ē> in the contexts given above. Etymologically, the imperfect of Armenian goes back to a formation of the type Arm. *bere-* < Proto-Indo-European **b^here-* and the Armenian innovation for the first-person singular suffix of the past, *-i*.³⁸ The proximity of է <e> to ի <i> could imply that the pronunciation of the է <e> was affected by the following vowel. Beyond a chronological differentiation, a geographical distribution of the pronunciation of է <e> vs է <ē> in the early centuries of literacy cannot be ruled out.

³⁷ Aghayan 1964, 359.

³⁸ Klingenschmitt 1982, 14–15.

4 Consonant cluster simplification Կ <h> vs ԽԿ <rh>

Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 196 is a codex of the thirteenth century containing books from the New Testament (Acts and Catholic Epistles). The two palimpsested pages 60d and 65a (sic)³⁹ of M 196 are written in round *erkat'agir* majuscules, according to the catalogue. In their reconstructed order 65a + 60d (see Fig. 3a), the two pages were presumably originally two columns of the same page, turned by 180°. Their undertext contains Proverbs 2:4–18.

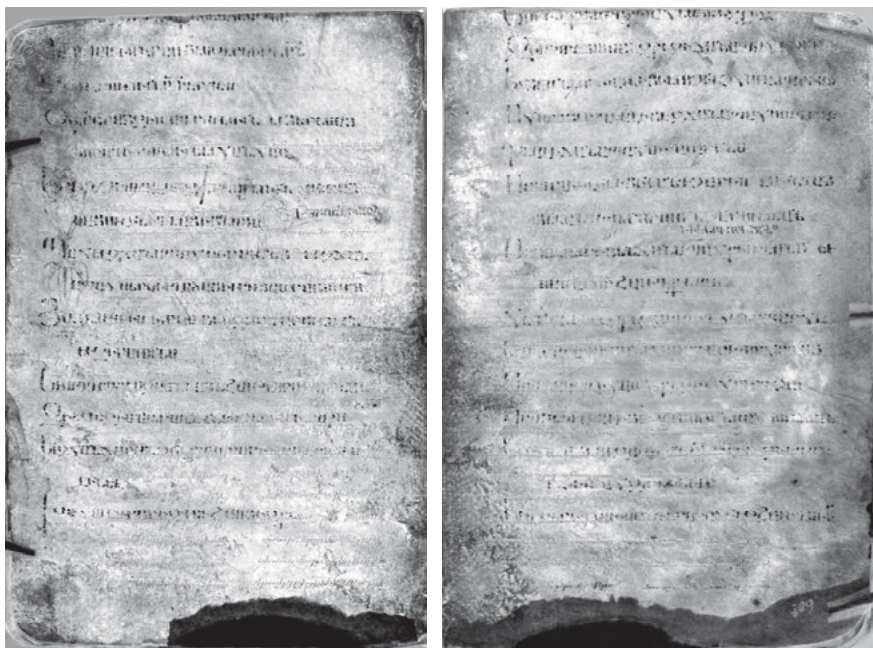


Fig. 3a: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 196, p. 65a (left) + p. 60d (right); multispectral image, divided, © Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), Yerevan / DeLiCaTe project.

Page 60d contains noteworthy instances of the word ճանապարհ <čanaparh> ('road, path') from Proverbs 2:13 spelled as ճԱՆԱՊԱՐԽ <čanapah>.

³⁹ Per the Matenadaran assignment, '65a' and '60d' denote additional pages appended to fols 65 and 60; however, the catalogues do not mention them explicitly. See Yeganyan, Zeytunyan and Antabyan 1965, 270 and Yeganyan, Zeytunyan and Antabyan 1984, 841.

- (3) M 196, p. 60d, ll. 4–5:

ոչ {ոփոօ} [ժ-]{ո}ւ[ե]ւլի՜Ցէ ջճւնսղոս[ս ուփւիւս Գ՛նս] Ի
ճւնսղոսս [Խւիւ]րի՛նս

Oh {oroc} [t']{o}{e}l ic'ē zčanapah[s owl's gnal] i čanapahs [xawa]rins
'Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness.'

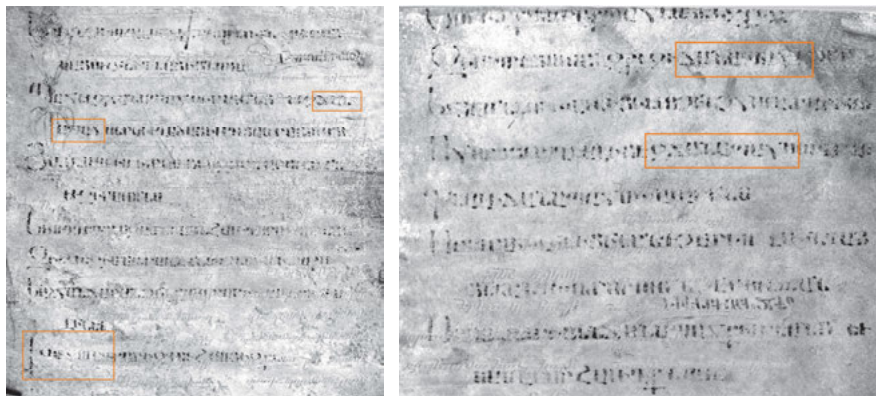


Fig. 3b: Yerevan, Matenadaran, M 196, p. 65a (left) + p. 60d (right), with special spellings marked,
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Three additional occurrences of the variation between ճւնսղոս[ս] <čanaparh> and ճւնսղոս <čanapah> appear on the same page and one more on page 65a, as well as two instances (one on each of the pages) of Խոհորդ <xohowrd> instead of the expected Խորհորդ <xorhowrd> ('advice, idea, meaning'), which strongly suggests that the consonant cluster simplification in these cases is not due to scribal errors (see Fig. 3b).

To ascertain whether the alternation between ph <rh> and h <h> is diachronic or synchronic, recourse to the etymology of the words containing the same consonant cluster could be helpful. An Iranian origin of Armenian ճանապարհ <čanaparh> was proposed by Henrik Nyberg, followed by Acharyan, who derived it from Iranian *čarana-parθ-, a compound whose first element is regarded as a cognate of Old Iranian (more precisely, Avestan: Arm. 'zenderēn') kar-, čara-, čaraya- ('go'); however, the exact form of the initial compound member, *čarana-, is not being discussed.⁴⁰ Acharyan associates the second element with Avestan

⁴⁰ Nyberg 1928–1931, vol. 2, 187; Acharyan 1926–1935, vol. 3, 183.

parətu- ('hole') but does not cite any attestations of the compound in Iranian. Additionally, it remains unclear how the reconstructed **parθ-* with the meaning of 'hole' might evolve into the meaning of 'road' or 'way'. Birgit Olsen proposes an alternative Iranian form for the second element (*-parh*), relying on Harold W. Bailey; the first element, *čana-*, remains doubtful for her.⁴¹ Ralf-Peter Ritter suggests Armenian *čem-* as in *čemim* 'I strut, I walk' (< Parthian *c'm* 'come', *cm* 'run, move') as the basis for the first element of the compound, with a dissimilation of *m* to *n* in the presence of the bilabial *p* in *čanaparh*.⁴²

In any case, given the numerous other Iranian loans in Armenian featuring the same consonant cluster, it is probable that *ճանապարհ* <*čanaparh*> also has an Iranian origin. Giancarlo Bolognesi discusses different dialectal sources for the Armenian loanwords of Iranian origin with the alternation *hr* / *rh* / *h*.⁴³ He observes that the Iranian borrowings in Armenian typically exhibit the Northwestern Iranian, specifically Parthian, isogloss *hr*, which in earlier borrowings experiences either a metathesis *hr* > *rh* or a simplification into *h*. According to Bolognesi, *hr* remains unaltered in later Parthian borrowings. Jost Gippert illustrates that in Armenian, the outcome of Iranian *hr* < **θr* is *rh* in loans dating back to Armenian's pre-literary times, exemplified by the word *աշխարհ* <*ašxarh*> ('world, country').⁴⁴ Additionally, he notes that Georgian counterparts of Armenian words featuring the Iranian consonant cluster undergo a simplification from *rh* > to *h* in loans of later attestations, particularly of the twelfth century.⁴⁵

On the other hand, Acharyan documents various modern dialectal forms of *ճանապարհ* <*čanaparh*>, including *ճամփա* <*čamp'a*>, *ճնապա* <*čnapa*>, *ճանապար* <*čanapar*>, and *ճամբախ* <*čambax*>.⁴⁶ The most prominent variant is *ճամփա* <*čamp'a*>, also spelled *ճամբա(յ)* <*čamba(y)*>.⁴⁷ In this form, possibly through an intermediate stage *ճանապահ* <*čanapah*>, the second *a* is syncopated

41 Olsen 1999, 892–893; Bailey 1956, 104–107. See also Bailey 1986, 7–8 for a possible Iranian origin of *խորհ* <*xorh*> and *խոհ* <*xoh*> ('thinking, counsel') and the derivations *խորհուրդ* <*xorhowrd*> ('advice, idea, meaning') and *խորհիմ* <*xorhim*> ('to think').

42 Ritter 1986, 310; cf. also his etymological considerations on *-parh* as a cognate of *pa(r)hak* 'guard, watch' on pp. 308–310, concluding with a meaning of 'way, path'.

43 Bolognesi 1960, 15–17.

44 Gippert 2005, 148; see also Hübschmann 1895–1897, 14.

45 Alternatively, there is a potential for a third Western Middle Iranian source for *rh* vs *h*; see Korn and Olsen 2012 for more insights.

46 Acharyan 1926–1935, vol. 3, 183; it is also noteworthy that, for example, the colloquial Modern Eastern Armenian variant, *ճանապար* <*čanapār*>, which retains only the *p <r>* from this consonant cluster, represents yet another possible outcome.

47 For this spelling, see, for example, Acharyan 1926–1935, vol. 3, 182.

and the consonant cluster *rh* is reduced to zero. The passages from the manuscript M 196 cited earlier could be an attestation of this intermediary stage. Another attestation of this stage appears to be the dialectal variant ճամբախ *<čambax>*, in which the final *h* has undergone a sound change to *x*. This could also imply that a dialectal variation involving the alternation between ճանապախ *<čanapax>* and ճանապափ *<čanaparh>* cannot be ruled out.

5 Conclusions

The study of linguistic variation in the oldest textual witnesses of Armenian will help better envision the development of the literacy of the earliest stages of Armenian and its contact languages, afford a deeper understanding of language variation in early and modern times, and contribute to the history of text transmission of Armenian and its contact languages. Systematic analysis of this variation might reveal, among other things, more about the linguistic varieties of Old Armenian (fifth to tenth centuries). Reliance on manuscript evidence becomes essential as we endeavour to discern patterns of orthographic consistency. In this context, palimpsest fragments offer valuable insights, since they may date back to earlier times than the oldest dated non-palimpsested manuscripts.

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