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The Codicological and Cultural Value of Formulae in Armenian Colophons

As is well known, colophons in Armenian manuscripts often exhibit conventional traits, notably with regard to structure, content, style, and lexicon. The most striking ones are, undoubtedly, the so-called "formulae", i.e. more or less set phraseological patterns, recognizable across a number of different colophons.

The aim of this paper is to bring forth the first results of an ongoing doctoral research on the subject. Some peculiarities in colophon formulae are shown, and it is argued that their study is of great relevance to our knowledge of Armenian codex production and book culture. The source material used consists of about 16.000 colophons, as edited by the Matenadaran from 1950 to 1988, and exploited in the form of a computerized corpus.

The most immediate interest of this research probably lies in assessing the likely provenance or authorship of manuscripts otherwise unattributed. This is possible due to the stereotypical nature of a colophon formula, frequently associated – at least in its beginnings – with some particular scribe, copying centre, or region.

Furthermore, trailing formulaic patterns, along with their development and enrichment, throughout the course of time, allows the researcher to evaluate scribe and book mobility among mediaeval Armenians, thus shedding an original light on their vivid cultural activity.