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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.

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The Significance of Documents in the "Long Version" of the Ecclesiastical History of Socrates of Constantinople

Socrates of Constantinople's Ecclesiastical History (5th c.) has a double reception in Christian Armenian historiography. The first version, called "the long version", is traditionally regarded as a literal translation of the Greek model, although many original documents (synodic letters, imperial letters, quotations, etc.) were not systematically reproduced in Armenian. This work is part of the translations made by the movement of the Hellenizing School and is a major witness not only for understanding the development and characteristics of this movement but also for reconstructing and correcting the Greek original. This Armenian translation has mainly been the subject of philological studies, among which those of Professor M. E. Shirinian.

My paper focuses on the documents omitted during the transition from Greek to Armenian, which have received little attention of researchers until now. The purpose of this study is to understand the logic and reasons that led the translator not to transmit Socrates' work in its entirety on one hand, and on the other hand to make a choice between documents, i.e. to remove or retain specific documents rather than others.

The immediate interest of this research is to shed a new light on the context as well as the practical and moral conditions that guided the creation of this first version of Socrates' Ecclesiastical History in Armenian. Furthermore, this study will allow us to understand the Armenians' interest in translations of ecclesiastical histories, in particular the choice of Socrates' work.