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**Review of "Greek Texts and Armenian Traditions:
An Interdisciplinary Approach. Trends in Classics
- Supplementary volumes, 39"**

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Francesca Gazzano, Lara Pagani, Giusto Traina (ed.), *Greek Texts and Armenian Traditions: An Interdisciplinary Approach. Trends in Classics - Supplementary volumes, 39.* Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2016. Pp. x, 345. ISBN 9783110479119. \$154.00.

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This volume represents the fruits of a conference in Genoa in 2013 that “was held with the aim of resuming a tradition of scholarship that focused on the Classical heritage in the Eastern traditions” (p. ix). The conference focused on Armenia, providing an opportunity for interaction and collaboration among specialists in classics, ancient history, linguistics, and Armenology. Such collaboration helps to advance our understanding of cultural interaction and enhance our appreciation that neither Armenian nor Graeco-Roman cultures existed in a vacuum. Underlying this approach is the contention that scholars are often reluctant to venture outside their areas of speciality or make assumptions about the reliability of texts of which they have limited understanding. This can result in lost opportunities to make full use of available evidence. A notable example is “the father of Armenian history,” Movses Khorenats‘i, infamous for his errors, obscurities, and confusions. Nonetheless, just as we would minimize Herodotus at our peril, scholars of Armenian and classical history would do well to give Movses his due, as long as they account for his weaknesses.

The first section highlights methodological challenges. Drawing on the pioneering work of his mentor Giancarlo Bolognesi, Moreno Morani lays out the difficulties of using Armenian translations to illuminate Greek texts, ideally with the aim of solving problems in manuscripts. This obviously requires mastery of both Greek and Armenian and an appreciation of the grammatical differences that affected how Armenian translators rendered the Greek, often resulting in misinterpretations of spelling, vocabulary, syntactic forms, and so on. Nonetheless, the effort is worthwhile because the Armenian writers often had access to older and better Greek texts than we do today.

The remaining chapters of this section illustrate these points with specific case studies. Giusto Traina demonstrates how scholars lacking knowledge of classical Armenian have produced editions of Pseudo-Callisthenes’ *Alexander Romance* that are problematic because they have undervalued the Armenian recension. This recension does not merely support the Greek ones but stands on its own as “a main witness of the *recensio vetusta*” (p. 24). Alessandro Orenco focuses on the fifth-century bishop Eznik of Kolb. Eznik was one of the earliest writers active after the invention of the Armenian alphabet and thus, through his translation and treatment of Methodius, we glimpse an early effort to render a Greek text into Armenian. Methodius’ work on free will sought to separate the orthodox from the heterodox, and this discourse appealed to Eznik as he

wrote at a time when Christian Armenia was negotiating its religious identity in the face of pressures from Zoroastrian Persia. Valentina Calzolari notes that religious motivations for translating Greek texts into Armenian early in the fifth century gave way, later in the century, to interest in secular texts, among which Neoplatonic treatises played a key role. Calzolari highlights a number of Armenian students in the rhetorical schools of the Greek world and the potential for collaborative work on these texts by scholars of Greek philosophy and Armenologists.

Subsequent sections of the book consider broader issues, in addition to translation and texts, where Greek and Armenian traditions interact, sometimes in the pages of Greek works, as in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, and sometimes in Armenian, as in Movses Khorenats'i's *Patmut' iwn Hayoc' (History of the Armenians)*. Section two, the longest in the book, explores history and historiography. Here we see that Xenophon's interest in Armenia runs more deeply than that of his predecessors, yet there is very little that can be regarded as reliable. Like Cyrus himself, the main Armenian protagonist, a prince named Tigran, is little more than an abstraction. Gianfranco Gaggero suggests that consideration of Movses' section on Tigran can help with the evaluation of Xenophon's text, given the additional details Movses provides, some of which may have derived from native traditions. In the end, however, Gaggero cannot draw firm conclusions about Xenophon's reliability based on available evidence. His use of Movses is interesting, though, as an example of how we should not undervalue this vital source, despite the problems mentioned above.

This attitude animates the contributions by Francesca Gazzano and Francesco Mari. Mari briefly accounts for the possible twists and turns in Movses that may have led from Iranian material through Greek literary output to a nationalistic rendering of events in the time of Cyrus and Astyages, enhancing the role of king Tigran (presumably Xenophon's prince). Gazzano explores Movses' fascinating variant on the Croesus story, in which the second-century BCE Armenian king Artashes I had captured Croesus, explicable as a doublet of accounts of several Achaemenid kings in various Greek sources and, more importantly, enhancing Artashes' status on the stage of world history. She concludes that Movses' methods "would have to be transferred from the plane of invention to that of manipulation, and it would take on an ideological-patriotic rather than a strictly historical character" (pp. 101-102). Though largely conjectural, Gazzano's arguments are consistent with other observations about the workings of Armenian historiography, in which we see, for example, oversimplification of realities on the ground and telescoping of events to serve specific ideological purposes.¹

Roman contexts are explored by Anahide Kéfélian and Federico Frasson. In our sources for the Roman presence in Armenia, the focus is usually on larger political and military affairs. Kéfélian offers a brief but tantalizing ground view by considering how Latin and Armenian may have interacted. She notes certain loan words in Armenian taken from Latin, in some cases by way of Greek, which some Armenians spoke, but also directly from the Latin spoken by Roman soldiers stationed in Armenia. Frasson seeks to establish the chronological range and thus subject matter of the fragments, some of them meager indeed, of Asinius Quadratus' *Parthika*, preserved mainly by Stephanus of Byzantium. Writing in the third century, Quadratus clearly covered Lucius Verus' Parthian war and likely, Frasson contends, the eastern wars of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Alexander Severus, and ("conceivably") Gordian III in ten to twelve books, covering a

period possibly reaching back to the time of Trajan. Only four of the twenty or so fragments specifically refer to Armenia, and so Frasson's use of them to help shed light on the larger historical work is necessarily tentative but not, in the end, unconvincing.

The third section considers intersections of Armenian culture and the broader Judeo-Christian (including Byzantine) milieu. Theo Maarten van Lint explores the example of the eleventh-century intellectual Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni, a figure who embodies the syncretic spirit of medieval Armenia—that is, an intellectual environment that allowed Armenian culture to be influenced by Greek learning, whether contemporary (Byzantine) or through apprehension of earlier material. Van Lint gives a hint of Grigor's interests, as informed in part by Christian theology and Greek philosophy, through analysis of a letter to Amir Ibrahim, a Muslim Armenian. Armenuhi Drost-Abgaryan considers the substantial influence of Eusebius, notably the *Church History* and the *Chronicle*, on Armenian historiography; the *Chronicle* exists today largely as a fifth-century Armenian translation of the original Greek. Drost-Abgaryan hopes to complete a project begun by her father Gevorg Abgaryan to establish a new edition of the *Chronicle*, based on additional material adduced in recent decades, which is summarized in this chapter. The last two contributions of this section further demonstrate the potential service of Armenian translations, such as helping to reconstruct textual traditions and nonextant Greek texts. Alessandro Capone attempts the former in his analysis of passages (in Greek, Latin, and Armenian) of Pseudo-Athanasius' *De incarnatione Christi contra Apollinarium* while Lia Raffaella Cresci attempts the latter in her recovery of the ancient phases, not well represented in thirteenth-fourteenth-century manuscripts, of George of Pisidia's *Hexaemeron*. The results in both cases are tentative but encouraging.

The final section explores intersections of Armenian and Greek culture by focusing on philology, linguistics, and lexicology. Giulia D'Alessandro and Lara Pagani look for Homer in Armenian tradition, based on popular notions that there had once been an Armenian translation of Homeric verse, despite dubious evidence, including a glossary in a sixteenth-century manuscript of 2,000 terms allegedly taken from such a translation. Homer was no doubt well known in Armenia, but no such translation can be proven. However, a wildly divergent account of the Trojan War narrative can be found in a thirteenth-century manuscript that mainly preserved patristic writings, a version that may have been passed down through Byzantine avenues. In an appendix to this chapter, Chiara Aimi discusses the physical features of this manuscript. Irene Tinti examines the hazards of translating Plato's *Timaeus* into Armenian. Those hazards involve the inevitable balancing of linguistic accuracy and proper interpretation of the philosophical content, which the author of the principal manuscript navigated by making informed choices about how to render Greek forms, e.g., the genitive absolute, using both hellenized and Armenian solutions. Touching on some of the points made in other chapters, Andrea Scala explores the implications of Armenia's multilingual (or "plurilingual," as he calls it) status in its early Christian years by examining Greek and Syriac loan words in the Armenian rendition of Acts 22:27-28. Lastly, Rosa Ronzitti takes on the choices lexicographers make when compiling Armenian dictionaries, most notably Hrach Martirosyan's *Etymological Dictionary of the Armenian Inherited Lexicon* (published in 2010), by considering the contribution of foreign loan words to the development of meaning in Armenian vocabulary.

Although there are clearly limits to what can be achieved, given the extent and nature of the evidence within and regarding the Armenian world, nonetheless *Greek Texts and Armenian Traditions* successfully makes the case that Armenia has an important role to play in the study of classical antiquity and vice versa. The broad sweep of topics covered here give merely a hint of the range of possibilities, as I can attest from using Armenian evidence in my own work on Roman frontiers. The focus of this volume has necessarily been on texts, given that philology must be the foundation for further study. Mastery of all relevant languages is obviously essential for building interdisciplinary bridges. The stated aim of the editors is to have more conferences on these matters, and my own hope is that more scholars will participate from wider circles. Some of the chapters are more preliminary than others, but clearly there is potential for much more research in all areas covered. Scholars outside of Armenology would be richly rewarded for familiarizing themselves with research conducted in Armenian and especially with debates within Armenology that potentially inform studies of Graeco-Roman antiquity. For some classical scholars this volume could serve well as an introduction to the process.[2](#)

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Notes:

1. Such tendencies can be detected in one of the central narratives of Armenian history, the country's conversion to Christianity, a process far more complicated than our sources, especially Agathangelos, suggest. See Robert W. Thomson, "Mission, Conversion, and Christianization: The Armenian Example," *Proceedings of the International Congress Commemorating the Millennium of Christianity in Rus'-Ukraine*, O. Pritsak and I. Ševčenko, eds, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12/13 (Cambridge, 1988-1989), 28-45.

2. Overall the book is well edited, with an *index locorum* (although no general index). The chapters, mostly by Italian scholars, are all in English. I found few errors: "of the my Master's teachings" (p. 4); "Moeover" (p. 127); 1929 instead of 1829 as the year of death for Yovhannes Vardapet Zohrabeian (p. 219). Also, in Kéfélian's chapter, "Armenians in Xenophon" appears in the odd-page headers.