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“Books before print: Manuscript Distribution Networks
and the Development of the Armenian Intellectual Tradition”

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In a colophon composed in 1379 to a copy of Cyril of Alexandria’s *Scholia on the Incarnation*, the fourteenth-century Armenian monastic scholar, Grigor Tat‘ewac‘i, relates the story of the text’s discovery and dissemination. The Armenian Church in Siwnik‘ was in the midst of what I have elsewhere termed an ‘internal Inquisition’ to root out all converts to Latin Christianity, and Cyril’s work was considered to be of prime importance in combatting their arguments on the nature of the Incarnation. Many copies of the text were therefore needed and needed quickly. According to Grigor, once the copies were prepared, those students loyal to the Armenian Apostolic Church rushed to the area of Latin infiltration ‘and slinging stones we beat [their] blaspheming foreheads with it’, that is, with the text. While Grigor’s words may conjure up Swiftian images of a battle of the books, it is remarkable that the Apostolic Armenian faction was able to produce and disseminate copies of this text so quickly and effectively. The question arises, however: how did they do it? Unfortunately, Tat‘ewac‘i does not give us those details, as he is more concerned to emphasize that the tactic was successful. To my knowledge, no revolutionary technological invention appeared at this time that increased the speed of the scribal art itself. It is therefore more likely that greater efficiency was achieved in the preparation and/or dissemination of the text. In particular, I suggest that the emergence of a distribution network, which revolved around the leading monastic schools in the province of Siwnik‘, assisted in the more efficient production and

dissemination of critical texts on a regional scale. To elucidate this hypothesis, it is necessary to review general patterns in the development of the Armenian intellectual tradition as represented in the monastic schools of Greater Armenia.

As is well known, Grigor Tat'ewac'i became the head of the monastic school at Tat'ew which at the close of the 14th c. could trace its intellectual roots back two centuries to the figure of Mxit'ar Goš. In its more recent history, the school at Tat'ew was the successor to the school at Glajor, founded in the late thirteenth century, which produced the famous Glajor Gospel housed here at UCLA. The schools at Glajor and Tat'ew shared a common 'core curriculum' that consisted of texts relevant to the study of grammar, Patristics, theology, spirituality, and exegesis. What we know of the libraries that supported these pedagogical institutions reflects the similar intellectual bent of both schools. Time and your patience do not permit me to itemize these texts, but I will point out a shared predilection for works of a Neoplatonic flavor such as those of the Cappadocian Fathers, particularly Gregory Nazienzenus and Gregory of Nyssa, and of Philo, of Dionsyus the Areopagite, and of Dawit' Anyat'. The common library and literary (in the broad sense of the term) tastes of these two schools permit us to speak of them as a single 'textual community' —the Glajor-Tat'ew school or tradition—that spanned the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

But we can possibly push the limits of this community further, both temporally and geographically. At least some of the texts housed and studied in the school had their ultimate origins in the scribal centers of Cilicia. Cilicia was a source of intellectual inspiration for the Glajor-Tat'ew tradition's early tradents. The socio-political disruption of Armenian life in the aftermath of the Byzantine expansion and Seljuq invasions of the

11th c., also negatively impacted the scholarly pursuit of knowledge. Thus, for example, Mxit'ar Goš, the asserted founder of the tradition, travelled to Cilicia to enhance his studies; as did Vardan Arewelc'i, a later figure in the tradition, who resided in Cilicia for several years. Both Mxit'ar and Vardan travelled west and returned east along the trade route that crossed Armenia and linked the Mediterranean to Iran.

During the second half of the thirteenth century, however, we may detect an eastward shift in the loci of Armenian manuscript production. The monastic complexes on Mt. Sepuh near Erznka, came to the fore as scribal centers of the texts, particularly those that figure prominently in Glajor-Tat'ew school. Erznka/Erznijan was centrally located on the trade route that crossed Anatolia and Mt. Sepuh was an important pilgrimage site for Armenians as it was the traditional place where St. Grigor Lusaworič' died. These monasteries, situated between Greater Armenia and Cilicia, and endowed with profound religious significance served as an optimal locus of interchange between the Armenian communities in Armenia and on the Mediterranean.

The shift eastward, away from the Mediterranean, of the centers of Armenian intellectual and literary production was assisted by the Pax Mongolica and the general increase in world trade and economic prosperity in the thirteenth century. In her study on the world system prior to European hegemony, Abu Lughoud identified eight subsystems or circuits in the thirteenth century that encompassed Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Asia. Of these eight, three overlapped in or on the borders of Armenia: the trans-Mediterranean (circuit II), the overland circuit that stretched from Peking across Central Asia to the Black Sea and Constantinople dominated by the Mongols (III), and the circuit that ran north from the Levant encompassing the Jazīra and the Persian Gulf

(IV). The province of Siwnik', in particular, thrived economically and was engaged in the commerce that flowed from the metropolis of Tabriz north to Trebizond and thence to the Crimea or to Tiflis, as well as west through Erzuka eventually to the Cilician port of Ayas. Recent excavations near the town of Ełegis in the Vayoc' Jor region of Siwnik', have identified the presence of a Jewish community at this time that participated in this trade economy.

The north-south route that linked Siwnik' to the Crimea and Tiflis seems to have witnessed a marked increase in use in the fourteenth century. Students and scholars came from both places to study at the Glajor-Tat'ew school and graduates were sent there to serve in ecclesiastical institutions. Yovhannēs Orotneč'i, a student of Glajor and later director of the school at Tat'ew, travelled to Tiflis where, in 1363, he commissioned a copy of John of Damascus's works. It was also in Tiflis that he met the young Grigor Tat'ewac'i, whose older brother was employed in the service of the Georgian monarchy, and took him under his wing. Tiflis was a diverse city, which at the time had at least two Armenian Apostolic monasteries, a Roman Catholic community as well as Jewish and Muslim communities. The Armenian presence in the Crimea had a long history but had been augmented in the 1330s and again after the fall of Cilicia in 1375. Even before these immigrations, Kaffa possessed two Armenian Apostolic Churches and one Armenian Church under Latin supervision as the Armenians had developed deep ties with the Genoese colonists in the Crimea. Małak'ia Łrimec'i, the son of a wealthy merchant from the Crimea, played a significant role in the 'Inquisition' of the 1370s, using his inherited wealth to support the cause of the Armenian Apostolic leadership in Siwnik'.

The increased prosperity of the province of Siwnik⁴ certainly contributed to the founding of the monastic schools there. The patronage of the nobility, and the income raised from the lands held by the monasteries made possible the building and furnishing of the libraries needed for scholarly activity as well as for the acquisition and production of texts. One may note as an aside that the monastery of Glajor, at least, does not seem to have spent too much on material comforts as several scribes from the fourteenth century complain about the food and lodgings at Glajor. As important as these educational facilities were, more significant were the people attracted to the schools. Some of the more famous teachers and pupils were from the regions to the west and north of Lake Van stretching from Tarōn through Kajberunik⁴, but some even came from Cilicia, thus reversing the previous movement to Cilicia in pursuit of study. As mentioned, students also came from the Crimea and Tiflis.

To summarize up to this point, the trade routes that had crossed Armenia and Anatolia horizontally on an East-West axis and vertically on a North-South axis had permitted Armenian scholars to form a textual community that intellectually linked the extremities of the Armenian dispersion from Cilicia and the Crimea to Siwnik⁴ and Tabriz. The monasteries of Erznka, centrally located on the trade and pilgrimage routes, constituted a significant node for manuscript production and personal encounter in this intellectual network. By the final quarter of the 13th c., the eastern regions of Armenia had also been able to capitalize on the economic growth that accompanied the establishment of the Pax Mongolica. The monastic schools there emerged as new nodes in the network and encouraged a shift in Armenian intellectual production in their direction.

This intellectual network was obviously rather loose given its territorial expanse and the nature of Armenian monasticism. In contrast to the Latin Church, Armenian monastic houses did not belong to orders. Although the peripateticism characteristic of many Armenian monks maintained communications between monastic institutions, there was no formal relationship between them. The anonymous scholiast of the 13-14thc. on the Dionysian Corpus perceptively remarks in his comments on Dionysius's *Letter VI* to Sosipatros that each Armenian *monastery* had its own rule, just as each Latin *order* had its own. Nonetheless, a regional sub-network of alumni emerged as students of the school took up prominent positions in the monasteries and dioceses of the region and maintained communication with their former teachers.

The Latin orders may have further encouraged the monastic schools in Siwnik' to tighten their network. In his Bull of 1318, the Pope John XXII granted the Dominican order control of the newly-created Archbishopric of Sultānīya. Four of the six sees dependent upon Sultānīya rested on the chief transit route between the port of Ayas and Sultānīya itself and passed either through or directly adjacent to Greater Armenia. This gave the missionaries easy access to the Armenian population, among whom they enjoyed some success. The director of the monastery of S. Astuacacin at Kīna, Yakob, a former student of Glajor, became an adherent of Latin teachings and his community had decided in favor of union with Rome in 1330. Their order, later called the Unitors, undertook the translation of many texts from Latin into Armenian that spread to other monasteries along the trade routes.

By the 1370s the success of the pro-Latin Armenian faction seriously alarmed the regional leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church. As noted above, the leading

representatives of the Glajor-Tat'ew school formed an ad hoc Inquisition, which went from monastery to monastery insuring the orthodoxy of their members. They also sent out their own students and colleagues to direct monasteries in areas where Latin infiltration had been prevalent. Gradually, the directors of the school assumed powers and prerogatives normally accorded bishops, even when they had not been ordained as such. Although no Armenian monastic order was founded, the leaders of the Glajor-Tat'ew tradition were able to exert a certain amount of influence over other regional institutions and that a de facto, if not de jure, degree of centralization of authority had occurred.

Let us return to the *Scholia* of Cyril of Alexandria. I suggest that its dissemination was greatly facilitated by the formation of this intensified, tightened network of scholars and institutions associated with the Glajor-Tatew school that ran along the trade routes. The central position of the school and its directors further encouraged a center-periphery model of manuscript production. Rather than wait for a request for a copy of a manuscript instigated by the desire of a particular monastery or scholar, texts could be produced and sent with students to different locations where the directors thought they were, might, or should be needed.

Studies on the length of time it takes to copy a manuscript in a medieval European context have shown that procuring an exemplar consumed the greatest amount of time in that process. Tat'ewac'i's colophon suggests that, at least in this example, several copies were made of the text at once and then distributed through the network of students to other places where more copies could be made. This center-periphery approach greatly sped up the time required to multiply copies. It is possible that the production of Cyril's text may have been an exception, an emergency method employed to combat a specific

problem. If so, Grigor for one understood its efficacy. Copies of his works are some of the most numerous non-Biblical Armenian texts to have survived. Well over one hundred copies of his Sermonary and his Book of Questions—both lengthy works—have survived either in their entirety or partially. Even more remarkable is that, in addition to the autograph, over a dozen copies of the *Book of Questions* were produced between 1397 and 1409. Tat‘ewac‘i himself supervised the production of at least seven of these; and four of those were most certainly accomplished at Tat‘ew. As in the case of Cyril’s *Scholia*, the production of numerous exemplars for copying, distributed among a network of students and thence through the greater textual community insured that Grigor’s work was disseminated widely and enjoyed an influence beyond its immediate pedagogical context. In other words, the school achieved some primitive form of ‘mass production’ for texts deemed essential.

Those familiar with Dickran Kouymjian’s statistical analysis of dated Armenian manuscripts, may notice that his results for the late thirteenth through fifteenth centuries correspond very well with the developments outlined above. Kouymjian has argued convincingly that the patterns observed, especially in the case of declines in manuscript numbers, reflect historical-political circumstances. I wonder if the peaks may also reflect changes in the organization of manuscript production and distribution—which are obviously not divorced from historical events either. In particular we may note the increase in manuscripts from the final quarter of the 13th through the first quarter of the 14th centuries, when the textual community crystalized; another increase in the 1360s-70s, during the period of the tightening of the network to combat the Unitors; and the steep increase of manuscripts dated to the first two decades of the 15th c., precisely when

Tat'ewac'i's *Book of Questions* and *Sermonary* were disseminated. In my opinion, these correlations merit further investigation.

The successful dissemination of these manuscripts was not without significance for the later history of Armenian printing. Cyril's work as well as Tat'ewac'i's *Sermonary* and *Book of Questions* followed the sojourns of the successive generation of students of the school. Travelling to the monastery of Mecop', thence to the monastic schools of Amrtōlu and Xndrakatar in Bałēš/Bitlis near Lake Van, they eventually made their way to Constantinople. In the eighteenth century, during the cultural revival spearheaded by the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, Yovhannēs Golod Bałišec'i (sed. 1715-41), himself a student of Amrtōlu and of the Siwnik' tradition, they were printed.