

The Reception and Influence of the Corpus of Works Attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite in the Medieval Armenian Spiritual Tradition

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The corpus of works attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite¹ was first translated into Armenian by Step'anos Siwnec'i with the assistance of Dawit' Hiwpatos in Constantinople between 712 and 717.² Along with the corpus, Step'anos and Dawit' rendered the scholia attributed to Maximus

1. Abbreviations have been used for the following Dionysian texts: HH=*Heavenly Hierarchy*; EH=*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*; DN=*Divine Names*. The literature on Dionysius and the corpus is very large; see the bibliographies in J. Hornus, "Les recherches récentes sur le pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie de la Religions* 35 (1955), 404–448; idem, "Les recherches dionysienne de 1955 à 1960," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie de la Religions* 41 (1961), 22–81; *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: de Gruyter), 8:778–780; *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris), 3:244–286; Y. de Andia, *Henosis: L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (New York: Brill, 1996), 457–479.

2. This Armenian version has been edited and translated by R. Thomson, *The Armenian Version of the Works attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 488–489, Scriptores Armeniaci 17–18)*, Louvain: Peeters, 1987). On Step'anos' life and works see M. Findikyan, *The Commentary on the Armenian Daily Office by Bishop Step'anos Siwnec'i (d.735): critical edition and translation with textual and liturgical analysis (Orientalia Christiana analecta 270)*, Rome: Pontificio istituto orientale, 2004), 40–59. On the nature of the translation, see R. Thomson, "The Armenian Version of Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita," *Acta Jutlandica* 27 (1982), 116–119; M. Morani, "Remarques textuelles sur la version arménienne du *De Coelesti Hierarchia* du pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue des Études Armeniennes* 24 (1993), 59–73. Three selections from the Dionysian corpus appeared earlier in Armenian in the seventh-century theological florilegium known as the *Seal of Faith (Knik' Hawatoy)*, compiled during the tenure of the Catholicos Komitas (615–618), *Knik' Hawatoy*, ed. K. Tēr-Mkrč'ean (Ējmiacin, 1914). It is unlikely that these passages were culled from an already extant Armenian translation of the works, Thomson, "Armenian Version," 115. A second Armenian translation of the corpus was completed by Step'anos Lehac'i (Stephen of Poland) in 1662 based on the Latin text of B. Cordier, A. Sanjian, *A Catalogue of Medieval Armenian Manuscripts in the United States* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976), 695.

Confessor, but now shown to be largely the work of John of Scythopolis.³ Later Armenian readers mistakenly thought that Step'anos had composed the scholia himself.⁴

The early transmission of the corpus is hard to establish, as the oldest dated manuscript we possess of the work was copied in 1282, over five hundred years subsequent to the translation.⁵ The corpus had an

3. See the work of B.R. Suchla, "Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des Corpus Dionysiicum Areopagiticum," *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen: i. Philologisch-historische Klasse* 3 (1980), 31–66; idem, "Eine Redaktion des griechischen Corpus Dionysiicum Areopagiticum im Umkreis des Johannes von Skythopolis, des Verfassers von Prolog und Scholien. Ein dritter Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte de CD," *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen: i. Philologisch-historische Klasse* 4 (1985), 179–94; "Die Überlieferung von Prolog und Scholien des Johannes von Skythopolis zum griechischen Corpus Dionysiicum Areopagiticum," *Studia Patristica* 18/2 (1989), 79–83. An English translation of the scholia has appeared: P. Rorem and J. Lamareaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

4. A comparison between the Syriac and Armenian translations of these scholia has revealed that the translators have omitted overt references to Chalcedon or Chalcedonian Christology. As in instances these omissions involve the exact same amount of text and as no evidence has come to light to indicate collusion between the Armenian and Syriac translators, it is likely that a Greek version of these scholia for non-Chalcedonian communities already existed by the early eighth century. The Syriac and Armenian translations of the scholia were based on such a 'cleansed' Greek version of the scholia, suggesting that both the Syriac and Armenian translators obtained their copies of the Greek text of the scholia (and possibly of the corpus) from a non-Chalcedonian, Greek speaking/reading community.

5. Step'anos' teacher, Solomon of Makenoc', is credited with the first application in Armenian of the Dionysian system of nine hierarchical ranks to the general organization of the church in a letter dated between 733–736. Although he may have been familiar with the corpus, he does not attribute his ranking to Dionysius, but merely to 'the Greeks'. Furthermore, the ecclesiastical ranks that he lists are not to be found in the corpus itself, but are a secondary expansion. While the expanded correlation between the heavenly hierarchy and nine ecclesiastical ranks became common in many Christian traditions, it does not derive directly from the corpus itself. Both these factors suggest that Solomon did not, in fact, have the Areopagite in mind when composing this letter, but a Byzantine theory that was dependent ultimately on the paradigm of the Dionysian corpus. On the letter, see M. van Esbroeck, "Salomon de Makenoc', vardapet arménien du VIII^e siècle," *Armeniaca*, Venice 1969, 33–44; idem, "Primautés, patriarchats, catholicossats, autocéphalie en Orient," in *Il Primato del vescovo di Roma nel primo millennio. Ricerche e testimonianze*, ed. M. Maccarone (Pontificio comitato di scienze storiche. Atti e Documenti 4, Vatican, 1991), 493–521; and N. Garsoian, *L'Église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 574, Subsidia 100*, Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 286–289.

immediate impact on its translator who, in chapter VII of his Commentary on the Armenian Daily Office, provides an allegorical interpretation of the vestments employed in the divine liturgy.⁶

Beyond this, it is possible to discern at present the sustained influence of the corpus in three distinct regions and periods between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. These are: 1) the school of Narek during the tenth century; 2) the Catholicosate at Hromklay and Cilicia in the twelfth century; and 3) the monastic schools of Greater Armenia in the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries. As research into this field is still at a relatively preliminary stage, our knowledge of the extent of Dionysius' influence in each of the areas varies greatly and much work remains to be done.

The school at the monastery of Narek

The monastery of Narek was founded in 935 by Anania Narekac'i (910?–985?) near the island of Alt'amar on Lake Van. It quickly established itself as one of the leading monastic institutions and was renowned for its beautiful chanting, as well as for its learning and spirituality. The leading figures of the monastery were Anania Narekac'i himself, his brother-in-law, Xosrov Anjewac'i (c.900–963?), bishop of Anjewac'ik', and Xosrov's son, Grigor Narekac'i (945–1003).

The corpus of works attributed to Dionysius appears to have held a central position in the monastery. The corpus' influence extended deeply into the spirituality developed at the school by Anania and Grigor Narekac'i. A recent study by H. T'amrazyan has demonstrated the tremendous degree to which these authors drew upon the Christian neoplatonic tradition and particularly the works of Dawit' Anyaht' (David the Invincible Philosopher), Dionysius the Areopagite and Philo.⁷ These spiritual masters introduced, enhanced and encouraged exercises and meditations that focused upon the

6. M. Findikyan, *Armenian Daily Office*, 98–105, 140–50, 185–191, 211–215. We should note that the treatise *On the Incorruptible Flesh of Christ* attributed to 'Step'anos the Philosopher', who is likely to be identified with Step'anos Siwnec'i, also cites Dionysius. The passage, however, is taken from one of the passages that appears in the *Seal of Faith*, Thomson, "Armenian Version," 120.

7. H. T'amrazyan, *Grigor Narekac'in ev Norplatonakanut'yuna* (Grigor Narekac'i and Neoplatonism), (Erevan, 2004).

perfection of the human soul or inner man through a process of purification and illumination. In their quest for illumination, these monks explored and developed a Christian aesthetics influenced by the Areopagite in their poetry, particularly in their exploitation of corporeal, earthly images to lift us up to the divine incorporeal world. The goal was to achieve divinization as much as humanly possible through union with God.

Grigor Narekac'i composed the most important and famous work of Armenian spirituality and mysticism, the *Book of Lamentation* (*Matean Otbergut'ean*), towards the end of his life at the behest of his brethren.⁸ The work consists of ninety-five penitential chapters or prayers that may be divided into three parts. Scholars have pointed out that these three parts correspond to various other triads: the three parts of a church (narthex, nave, and altar); the three parts of the incense burner (pan, censer, and lid); and the tripartite structure of the human soul. As the reader or reciter progresses through the book, he spiritually proceeds from the Church's narthex to the altar; his sins are transformed from a fatty burnt offering to the sweet smell of incense; and his soul moves away from perdition towards salvation and divinization.⁹

The tripartite structure of the *Book of Lamentation* witnesses the influence of Dionysius' triadic paradigm of purification, enlightenment and perfection. Likewise, the work's culmination in praise of the holy oil or *myron* in chapter ninety-three reflects the Dionysian paradigm of baptism, Eucharist and anointment. Although no direct citation of the Areopagite is discernable in Grigor's work, phraseology similar to that used in the Armenian version of the corpus may be detected in Grigor's depiction of the power of the *myron*.¹⁰

8. A French translation of this work with an important introduction has been published by A. and J.-P. Mahé, *Grégoire de Narek: Tragédie. Matean Oghbergut'ean. Le Livre de Lamentation, (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 584, Subsidia 106, Louvain: Peeters, 2000).*

9. See J. Russell, "Two Notes on Biblical Tradition and Native Epic in the 'Book of Lamentation' of St. Grigor Narekac'i," *Revue des Études Armeniennes* 22 (1990–1991), 135–145, 135; and idem, "Armenian Spirituality: Liturgical Mysticism and Chapter 33 of the Book of Lamentation of St. Grigor Narekac'i," *Revue des Études Armeniennes* 26 (1996–1997), 427–439; Mahé, *Grégoire de Narek: Tragédie*, 170–3.

10. See S. La Porta, "A Theology of Mysticism: The Vision of God and the Trinity in the Thought of Grigor Narekac'i," in *Saint Grégoire de Narek: Théologien et Mystique*, ed. J.-P. Mahé and B.L. Zekiyian (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 275, Rome, 2006), 83–97; idem, "The

In addition, Grigor's emphasis on the ecclesial context of Christian spirituality shares that important quality with the Dionysian corpus, even if it is not completely dependent on the Areopagite.¹¹ It has been argued that the Dionysian texts are best understood within the context of the liturgy and that one of the possible motivations for their composition was to combat extra-ecclesial spiritual movements, in particular, Messalianism.¹² Narekac'i devoted great efforts to combating the anti-nomian sect of the Paulicians or T'ondrakec'is, who, like the Messalians, did not view the Church and her mysteries as essential to the spiritual life.¹³ Grigor composed direct polemics against the T'ondrakec'is, but the *Book of Lamentation* as well as his Hymns and Odes similarly deny the validity of extra-ecclesial spirituality through their emphasis in situating the locus of true religious experience within the liturgy, feasts and community of the Church.

Grigor's father, Xosrov Anjewac'i, was also familiar with the Dionysian corpus, as is evidenced in his dispute with the Catholicos Anania Mokac'i over the equality of the Catholicosate and the episcopate for which he found himself anathematized. Xosrov argued that just as archangels and angels share the same rank and honor, so do the patriarch and the bishop. Xosrov did not, however, choose to follow the Areopagite's anagogical methodology of liturgical interpretation for his *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, preferring a more textual approach for that work.¹⁴ Xosrov's heated exchange with Anania Mokac'i also reveals that the corpus was held in esteem by the Catholicos. This is supported by Mokac'i's nephew, Catholicos Xač'ik I Aršaruni (sed. 972–991), who cites Dionysius as one

Image of the Beloved in Grigor Narekac'i's *Book of Lamentations*," *Hask Armenianological Annual*, n.s. v.10 (2002–2006), 83–99. We may also note that the thirteenth-century Armenian historian, Kirakos Ganjakec'i, comments that Narekac'i wrote homilies in the style of Dionysius, Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *Patmut' iwn Hayoc'* (History of the Armenians), ed. K. Melik'-Öhanjanyan (Erevan, 1961), 120.

11. La Porta, "Theology of Mysticism."

12. See in particular, A. Golitzin, "Hierarchy versus Anarchy? Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and their common roots in ascetical tradition," *Sr. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38/2 (1994), 131–179.

13. Mahé, *Grégoire de Narek: Tragédie*, 89–97, 787–92.

14. On Xosrov and his work see *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy by Xosrov Anjewac'i*, tr. with an introduction by S. Peter Cowe (New York, 1991), 3–92, esp. 8–13.

of the authorities respected by Armenians in a letter to the metropolitan of Melitene.¹⁵

The Catholicossate at Hromklay and Cilicia

During the twelfth century, two authors in particular were inspired by Dionysius: Nersēs Šnorhali ('the Graceful') Klayec'i (1102–1173) and Nersēs Lambronac'i (1153–98). This is not surprising as both men greatly admired Grigor Narekac'i's work and shared a similar spiritual vision.¹⁶ Nersēs Šnorhali served as coadjutor to his brother, Catholicos Grigor III Pahlawuni (sed. 1113–1166), and then was Catholicos himself from 1166 until his death; he is most remembered for his religious poetry. Šnorhali was fascinated by the structure and order of the cosmos and he composed poems and several hymns dedicated to the heavens and to the angels where he most reveals his indebtedness to Dionysius. In his hymn to the Archangels, for example, Šnorhali not only lists the nine angelic ranks in accordance with the Areopagite, but he also marvels at how they condescend to lift men up to God through their visible forms, demonstrating that he appreciated Dionysius' notions of angelic providence and anagogy.¹⁷

The Dionysian corpus had an even greater impact on Šnorhali's younger relative, Nersēs Lambronac'i, the Archbishop of Tarsus in Cilicia, who relied heavily on the corpus for his interpretation of the divine liturgy, completed in 1177.¹⁸ Lambronac'i refers to Dionysius often in his commentary and praises him as the establisher of ritual practices. In his prefatory observations, he explores the symbolism of ecclesiastical architecture and vestments, and details the correspondence between the

15. Thomson, "Armenian version," 120. Thomson further observes that in another letter to the metropolitan of Sebaste, Xaç'ik quotes from the Dionysian text and refers to the Areopagite's vision of the Saviour.

16. See B. L. Zekiyán, "Armenian Spirituality: Some Main Features and Inner Dynamics," in *Worship Traditions in Armenia and the Neighboring Christian East*, ed. R. R. Ervine (AVANT 3, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press/St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2006), 272–8.

17. *Nersēs Šnorhali: Tater ev Ganjer* (Nersēs Šnorhali: Hymns and Odes), ed. A. K'yoškeryan (Erevan, 1987), 190–192.

18. Nersēs Lambronac'i, *Meknut'iwñ Xorhrdoc' Pataragin* (Commentary on the mysteries of the liturgy), (Venice 1847).

heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Lambronac'i emphasizes the mystical significance of the correlation between these two hierarchies by comparing them to wedding retinues: the heavenly hierarchy attends the groom, Christ; the ecclesiastical, His bride, the Church, awaiting entry to the nuptial chamber.¹⁹

One of the burning issues that divided the Armenian Church in Lambronac'i's day was the debate over the nature of the celebration of the divine liturgy.²⁰ According to some monastic leaders, particularly those at the monasteries of Ani, Hałbat and Kobayr in Greater Armenia, the liturgy was to be celebrated simply and without any material splendour. They criticized Lambronac'i for the ornate character of his church and the materiality of his services. Nersēs appealed to the Areopagite's analogy between the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies to defend the sumptuousness of his services. Lambronac'i argued that as the Church and her hierarchies represent the kingdom of heaven and her ranks, it is fitting that ecclesiastical adornments and vestments reflect the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

In his study on Lambronac'i's *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, C. Gugerotti has further shown how the Areopagite's theories of hierarchical mediation, of the spiritual perfection of the celebrant, of the power and function of symbols and of silent prayer, and of the mystagogical significance of the liturgy find echoes in Lambronac'i's work.²¹ Gugerotti, however, has also suggested important modifications that Lambronac'i has adopted in applying Dionysian concepts to his explanation of the divine liturgy. For example, he argues that Nersēs envisages the celebrant primarily as the image of Christ, while "in Dionigi la designazione del vescovo come 'immagine di Cristo' nella liturgia è quasi inesistente"; the Areopagite generally prefers the notion of deiformity or of likeness to God.²² This distinction may be somewhat exaggerated—Dionysius does explicitly compare the bishop to

19. *Ibid.*, 80.

20. See also, J. Muyldermans, "Le costume liturgique arménien. Étude historique," *Le Muséon* 39 (1926), 259–263; S. La Porta, *The Armenian Scholia on Dionysius the Areopagite. Studies on their literary and philological tradition (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 625, Subsidia 122, Louvain: Peeters, 2007)*, ch. 3.B.

21. C. Gugerotti, *L'Interazione dei Ruoli in una Celebrazione Come Mistagogia: Il pensiero di Nersēs Lambronac'i nella «Spiegazione del Sacrificio»* (Padova: Edizioni Messagero Padova, 1991), 120–146.

22. *Ibid.*, 135.

Christ in his discussion of the Eucharist in EH (444A)²³— but conformity to Christ is more pronounced in Lambronac‘i’s commentary than in the corpus. According to Gugerotti, Nersēs also stresses the anamnestic dimension of the liturgical symbols so that they retain their historical dynamism; this aspect of the power of the symbols is much more muted in the Areopagite’s liturgical thought. These modifications to Dionysius’ concepts underscore the fact that Lambronac‘i did not merely mimic the Areopagite, but integrated the corpus within his own liturgical understanding and adapted its ideas to most effectively elucidate the mystery of the rite.

The monastic schools of Greater Armenia

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were intellectually and culturally vibrant in Greater Armenia. It is from this time that our earliest dated manuscripts of the Dionysian corpus appear. The corpus was central to two polemical issues in particular: 1) the continued debate with regards to the character of the divine liturgy that had occupied Nersēs Lambronac‘i; and 2) the nature of the Trinity, based on Dionysius’ discussion in DN II on the relationship between the unity and distinctions in the divinity. In addition, an exegetical methodology based upon Dionysius’ allegorical and anagogical approach developed in medieval Armenian homiletical literature.

A prominent figure in the establishment of a new intellectual tradition that arose in Greater Armenia was Mxit‘ar Goš (1130/40–1213).²⁴ Although born in the region of Ganjak in eastern Armenia, Goš also studied on the Black Mountain outside of Antioch where a number of monasteries were located. Upon his return to Greater Armenia, he founded an intellectual tradition that lasted until the beginning of the fifteenth century. His most significant literary contribution was his *Lawcode* (*Datastanagirk‘*), the first legal code in Armenian that addressed issues concerning the laity and was not strictly limited to ecclesiastical concerns.

The text of the *Lawcode* reveals that Mxit‘ar was familiar with Nersēs Lambronac‘i’s *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* as he includes part of it in his discussion of the ranks and vestments of the Church in chapter 225. Here

23. See also A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989), 62–3.

24. On Mxit‘ar Goš, see R. Thomson, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk‘] of Mxit‘ar Goš* (*Dutch Studies in Armenian Language and Literature* 6, Rodopi: Amsterdam-Atlanta, 2000), 16–20.

he supports the need for ranks in the Church as well as for the vestments that distinguish them by drawing the analogy with the arrangement of the heavenly kingdom and citing the ‘book of saint Dionysius’.²⁵ How much of Dionysius Mxit’ar may have studied is unknown, but it is clear that he was impressed by the reputation of the Areopagite to whom he refers as ‘the pride of Athens’.

Mxit’ar’s student, Yovhannēs Vanakan Tawušec’i (c. 1180–c. 1251), attests to the stature the Areopagite had attained in Armenian theological circles during the thirteenth century. In 1250/1, the Latins questioned the Armenians as to whether they accepted the filioque addition to the creed or not.²⁶ The Armenians asked Yovhannēs Vanakan Tawušec’i to serve as head of a commission to formulate a reply; the “Confession of Faith” drafted by Vanakan supported the addition. Significantly, Vanakan concludes the “Confession of Faith” by referring to Dionysius: “The holy Dionysius applies the name ‘proceeding’ equally over the Trinity, [i.e., over] the Father and the Son and the Spirit, saying thus: ‘giver of wisdom, empowerer, vivifier [are] proceeding names’ as well as that which is in this style; and also the quality of giver of wisdom, of empowerer and vivifier and whatever else is in accordance with this.”²⁷

This exact quote is not found in the corpus, but Vanakan is clearly referring to DN II.1 which discusses how certain attributes such as those listed by Vanakan are to be applied to the entire divinity in common and not just to one of the Persons. Although the word translated here as ‘proceeding’, *elotakan*, does not occur in that passage, the close form ‘proceedingly’, *elotabar*, does.²⁸ This is the rather literal translation of Greek, *διεξοδικῶς* here meaning ‘in detail’; but to the medieval Armenian reader, *elotabar* or *elotakan* would more readily be associated with the verb *elanel*, ‘to go out’, and the noun *elumn*, ‘procession’, used with reference to the procession

25. *Ibid.*, 282–3.

26. On this council and the subsequent development of the Armenian rejection of filioque, see S. La Porta, “The History of the Filioque Controversy in Armenia,” *St. Nersess Theological Seminary Review* 8 (2003), 85–116.

27. Սուրբն Իսիդորոս զելոզական անունն ի վերայ երրորդութեան հաւասար զնէ՝ հօր, որդւոյ և հօգւոյ, այսպէս ասելով, յւղական անուն, իմաստնացուցիչ, զօրացուցիչ, կենդանացուցիչ, և որ յայս սեմս. և զարձեալ՝ իմաստնացուցչութիւն, զօրացուցչութիւն, կենդանացուցչութիւն, և որ այլ ըստ այսմ. The quote is found in Kirakos Ganjakec’i, *History*, 244.

28. In fact, the word *elotakan* is unattested outside of this source.

of the Holy Spirit from the Father in Trinitarian discussions. Vanakan thus argues that just as names that indicate a 'procession out of' the divinity to humanity are common to the entire divinity, likewise the procession of the Spirit from the Father is also understood to be common to the Son. Despite Vanakan's "Confession", the Armenians eventually rejected the filioque addition.

Vanakan's pupil, Vardan Arewelc'i (1200–1271), further demonstrates that the Dionysian corpus was ensconced in this intellectual tradition. The influence of the corpus is most clearly felt in his homilies where Vardan's exegetical methodology bears the mark of the Areopagite. In his homily, "On Ezekiel's Throne", for example, Vardan echoes Dionysius in claiming that the material imagery used by scripture is meant to simultaneously conceal its meaning from the unworthy and reveal divine matters for those who "turn to the Lord with faith and with love of learning".²⁹ He explicitly refers to Dionysius later in the homily to support his claim that there are no physical beasts or birds or lions in heaven (cf. HH II.2), but that scripture evokes such images in order for them to be explained allegorically.

In the thirteenth century, the Dionysian texts were also included in the curriculum of the monasteries on Mt. Sepuh in the region of Erzinka. From these monasteries derive the earliest two sets of Armenian scholia composed on the Armenian version of the corpus.³⁰ Although their authorship is unknown, they were composed in the second half of the thirteenth century and reflect the way in which the corpus was read in medieval Armenian monastic schools. The second set is clearly secondary to the first and demonstrates that there was discussion within the schools as to how to discern the meaning of the Areopagite.³¹

Step'anos Siwnec'i and Dawit' Hiwpatos rendered the Greek of the Areopagite extremely literally and the resulting Armenian text is often incomprehensible to someone without knowledge of the underlying Greek.

29. Vardan Arewelc'i, *Čark', nerbotėank'* (Homilies, encomia), ed. H. K'yoseyan (Erevan, 2000), 136–160.

30. A critical edition of the Armenian text and an English translation can be found in S. La Porta, *Two Anonymous Sets of Scholia on Dionysius the Areopagite's Heavenly Hierarchy (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 623–4, Scriptores Armeniaci 29–30)*, Louvain: Peeters, 2007). On the dating, authorship, and context of the scholia, see S. La Porta, *Studies*, ch. 1.

31. In addition to these two sets, at least four other sets of scholia were composed on the corpus between the late thirteenth to fifteenth century, see La Porta, *Studies*, ch.I.F

The two also coined many neologisms to represent Dionysius' idiosyncratic Greek. The primary purpose of both sets of scholia is to attempt to explain these neologisms and unpack the complicated syntax—often grammatically impossible from an Armenian perspective—of the translation. Considering their limitations, the scholiasts did a remarkable job in teasing out the meaning of the corpus. Scholiasts like Nersēs Lambronac'i and Mxit'ar Goš emphasize that Dionysius—and therefore apostolic tradition—supports the use of ornate vestments and implements in service of the Church.

In late 1280 Nersēs Mšec'i (1220?–1284), a student of Vardan Arewelc'i, took up directorship of the school at the monastery of Glajor in the Vayoc' Jor region of the province of Siwnik'. Under Mšec'i's pupil and successor, Esayi Nč'ec'i (1255–1338), the school became the most illustrious center of education in Greater Armenia. The tradition of Mxit'ar Goš, Yovhannēs Vanakan Tawušec'i and Vardan Arewelc'i was continued here and the corpus held a prominent position within the school's curriculum.³² Esayi, in particular, seems to have greatly favored the texts and had many copies produced.³³ He also had copies of the Armenian scholia brought from Erzuka. He further added his own set of scholia to the corpus which seems largely based on the two sets from Erzuka. The degree to which the corpus had an effect upon Esayi's exegesis, theology or spirituality is for the moment unknown, but he clearly was instrumental in maintaining the prestige of the Dionysian corpus in monastic intellectual tradition.³⁴

Mxit'ar Sasnec'i (c. 1260–1337), a student of Esayi Nč'ec'i, refers to Dionysius explicitly in his *Theological Discourses*.³⁵ He appeals to the Areopagite in his first discourse in support of his analysis of the relationship

32. On the school and its intellectual tradition, see S. La Porta, "The Development of the Glajor-Tat'ew School," in *Where the Only-Begotten Descended: The Church of Armenia Through the Ages*, ed. K. Bardakjian (forthcoming).

33. On the prominence of Dionysius in the curriculum, see also, T. Mathews and A. Sanjian, *Armenian Gospel Iconography: The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel* (Dumbarton Oaks Series XXIX, Washington, 1991), 26.

34. Despite Esayi's enormous importance for Armenian intellectual history, his work has remained little studied. This situation should be remedied soon as P. Cowe has undertaken the task of editing and translating Esayi's collected works.

35. Armenian text and English translation in P. Cowe, *Mxit'ar Sasnec'i's Theological Discourses*, (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 542–3; *Scriptores Armeniaci* 21–2, Louvain: Peeters, 1993).

of the distinctions of the persons of the Trinity to the unity of the nature of the divinity (cf. DN II). He also notes the distinction between apophatic and cataphatic terms applied to the united nature. Sasnec'i's sixth discourse concerns the necessity of the divine liturgy. He argues that if such spiritually perfect creatures such as the angels constantly celebrate the liturgy to purify themselves and to increase their knowledge and to attain union with God, it is even more incumbent upon humanity to do so. As proof of the angelic service, Sasnec'i explicitly cites Dionysius.³⁶ Later in the discourse, he also notes the anagogical power of the corporeal elements of the liturgy that affect the physical senses. Through the development of the five spiritual senses, Mxit'ar asserts, these visible symbols are able to help raise us up to the invisible.

Interestingly, however, Mxit'ar in his eighth discourse refutes those who advocate the use of ornate vestments to celebrate the divine liturgy. In contradistinction to Nersēs Lambronac'i, Mxit'ar Goš and the anonymous scholiasts, Sasnec'i does not perceive such garments to be a reflection of the heavenly divine service. Rather, according to Sasnec'i, it is one's inner purity and splendour that matter and reflect the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

There is also a brief, unedited, treatise, possibly incomplete, attributed to another of Esayi's pupils, Yovhannēs Orotnec'i (1313–1386), entitled "Concerning Divine Names."³⁷ The text attempts to explain how names are applied to God, who truly has no name. The influence of the Areopagite can be detected not only in the subject matter, but also in the author's insistence on the superiority of apophatic designations to cataphatic ones.

By far the most protracted application of the Dionysian corpus occurs in the work of Orotnec'i's student, Grigor Tat'ewac'i (1344–1409).³⁸ Orotnec'i had moved the school's center from the monastery of Glajor to the monastery of Tat'ew, which was also the seat of the metropolitan of Siwnik'. Under Tat'ewac'i's direction, the school continued to be the most famous Armenian monastic institution and its members played important roles in

36. *Ibid.*, 65 [text], 75 [transl.].

37. The treatise is found in manuscript 2121, ff. 331r–332r, of the Matenadaran, the national manuscript library of the Republic of Armenia.

38. On Tat'ewac'i and his work, S. La Porta, "'The Theology of the Holy Dionysius,' Volume III of Grigor Tat'ewac'i's *Book of Questions: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*" (Ph. D. thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 2001), chs. 1 and 2.

codifying and solidifying the Armenian theological tradition. Although one of the school's aims was to protect the Armenian Apostolic Church from the incursion of Dominican missionaries who had been having success in Greater Armenia from the beginning of the fourteenth century, the school was not blindly reactionary. Latin works were read and studied in translation and the intellectual atmosphere was incredibly dynamic considering the threat which the Apostolic Church felt the missionaries to pose.

Tat'ewac'i devoted the third volume of his monumental *Book of Questions* (*Girk' Harc'manc'*) to "the theology of the Holy Dionysius."³⁹ The volume is divided into three parts that address the nature of the godhead, that of the angels, and that of demons respectively. The first part of the volume concerns itself with the question of unity and multiplicity in God on two levels. First, Tat'ewac'i seeks to explain how there is unity and distinctions within the divinity. Like Sasnec'i, Tat'ewac'i bases his Trinitarian theology on DN II, but his treatment is far more extensive. Second, he examines how God is able to pour Himself out into all of creation and yet remain single and transcendent. The author then turns to characterize the different types of theology mentioned by Dionysius and finally to discuss how we are to understand the more anthropomorphic designations attributed to God in scripture, concluding with depictions of Christ. The arrangement of the chapters in the first part of the volume adheres to the Dionysian paradigm of progression and return. Tat'ewac'i follows the divinity's procession into Trinity and then into creation, ending with a discussion of the Incarnated Christ, humanity's way of return to the godhead.

In the second part of the volume, Tat'ewac'i attempts to provide a description of the angelic nature, moving from more general characteristics to more specific ones. Unlike many other authors, Grigor was not just concerned about the ranks of the angels, but also about their function, number, as well as how and in what way angels think and communicate. For this section Tat'ewac'i relies upon DN IV as well as several chapters of HH.

The third part of the volume on demons is much shorter than the preceding two. As Dionysius does not discuss the nature of demons in great detail, Tat'ewac'i was forced to look elsewhere—mainly to Hugh Ripelin's *Compilatio brevis theologicae veritatis* and the Armenian version of Andrew

39. An English translation of this volume appears in *ibid.*, ch. 3.

of Cappadocia's *Commentary on Revelation*.⁴⁰ Likewise, for both the first and second part of volume three Tat'ewac'i did not limit himself to the Dionysian corpus. He made some use of the scholia of John of Scythopolis attributed to Maximus Confessor/Step'anos Siwnec'i as well as of the anonymous scholia from Erznka; he also added much information from Greek, Latin and Armenian sources.

We may further detect the Areopagite's general influence in Tat'ewac'i's exegetical methodology. Throughout his work, and especially in his homilies, Grigor continually attempts to interpret scripture and the liturgy analogically; that is, he constructs tightly linked exegetical arguments that are intended to ultimately lead the reader or listener up to either a vision of or union with Christ.⁴¹

Conclusion

In the overview given above I have tried to provide a sketch of the impact of the Dionysian corpus on Armenian tradition in the Middle Ages. Even though many lacunae in our knowledge remain to be filled, it is clear that the works played a consistent role in Armenian thought between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. A few general observations can be made concerning the Areopagite's significance in Armenia based upon research up until the present.

Early Armenian tradition was particularly drawn to the Dionysian correspondence between the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Dionysius' vision accorded well with the monastic spirituality already established in Armenia that viewed the ascetic life as the *angelikos bios* and

40. On this text, see R. Thomson, *Nerses of Lambron. Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John* (*Hebrew University Armenian Studies* 9, Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

41. See, for example, S. La Porta, "The Liturgical Imagination of Medieval Armenian Monasticism," in *Worship Traditions in Armenia and the Neighboring Christian East*, ed. R. R. Ervine (AVANT 3, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press/St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2006), 197–221; idem, "Translation and Transformation: Armenian Meditations on the Metamorphic Power of Language," in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. S. La Porta and D. Shulman (*Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture* 6, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 342–67.

the earthly liturgy as a reflection of the heavenly one.⁴² Both the Areopagite and Armenian tradition were likely influenced by Syriac spirituality in this regard; but Dionysius' exposition also inspired a liturgical mysticism, first attested in the school at Narek, that became a characteristic element of Armenian spirituality.

A debate between Armenian clergy as to how the earthly liturgy reflected the glory of the heavenly liturgy emerged as a secondary development from this profound appreciation of the liturgy. In this disagreement, both sides turned to the Areopagite, either to justify the full material splendour of the divine liturgy, or to advocate a less externally ornate service that was resplendent with inner purity.

In the later Middle Ages, Armenian authors refer to the text of DN with greater frequency, as the corpus formed one of the key texts for the Armenian understanding of the Trinity. Associated with this, a particular interest developed in classifying the different names given to God in the Bible and explaining how they reveal aspects of His existence. This interest in the classification of names and their meaning accompanied the study of the Armenian version of Philo and of Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*. Simultaneously, the Dionysian texts encouraged the development of a mystical interpretation of scripture. Particularly in homiletical literature, an allegorical methodology was applied to the biblical text that aspired to attain either a vision of the divine or union with Him.

Finally, we should observe a common characteristic shared by all the circles in which the Areopagite was prominent. The corpus proved attractive to those thinkers who were engaged in dialogue—whether ecumenical or polemical—with either the Greek or Latin Churches. The school at Narek was known or suspected for its tolerant attitude towards Chalcedonianism. Likewise, Nersēs Šnorhali participated in ecumenical discussions with the Imperial Church seeking to find a way to unite the two Churches. Nersēs Lambronac'i was accused by opponents of having too friendly relations

42. On the monastic life as an image of the angelic life in Christianity, see K.S. Frank, *Angelikos Bios. Begriffsanalytische und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum "engelgleichen Leben" im frühen Mönchtum (Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens; 26, Münster)*, 1964. The image is already present in Armenian in the fifteenth canon of the Council of Shahapiwan (444), Kanonagirk' Hayoc' (Canon Book of the Armenians), 2v., ed. V. Hakobyan (Erevan, 1964), I: 453; and in the *Counsel to Solitaries* attributed to Efišē (5th–6th c.).

with other Churches and he labored to achieve union between the Latin and Armenian Churches. Both anonymous scholiasts also display a tolerant attitude towards other Christian denominations. In his "Confession of Faith," Yovhannēs Vanakan Tawušec'i turned to Dionysius to help find common ground with the Latin doctrine of *filioque*; his student, Vardan Arewelc'i, entered into debate with representatives of the Papacy.

The monastic school at Glajor headed by Nč'ec'i fought against the growing influence of Dominican missionaries in the region, but Latin works were copied at the monastery and Esayi himself urged his flock to respect and treat well members of other Christian denominations unless they attempt to persuade Armenians to alter their traditional beliefs and practices. Although Grigor Tat'ewac'i strenuously defended the Armenian Apostolic Church, he, as noted, read and incorporated Latin texts into Armenian tradition as long as they did not contradict established Armenian theology.

The reason for this correlation between increased ecclesiastical interaction and study of the Areopagite rests ultimately in Dionysius' apostolicity. For ecumenicists Dionysius was a figure of Church unity, a Father whose authority in and vision of the Church was accepted by all denominations. For polemicists, too, the Areopagite's authority was indisputable and if one's theology or practice was found to be in agreement with him, it bore apostolic sanctioning. Nevertheless, the works attributed to Dionysius provided both ecumenicists and polemicists a means of communicating with adherents of other Christian traditions.