



Dating Arm.
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R. Meyer
(Oxford)

bit.ly/ArmSynt19

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Arm. PF

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Expectations

Movsēs Xorenac'i
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Preliminary
Conclusions

Dating Armenian sources: the linguistic evidence in Movsēs Xorenac'i

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Outline

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- ▶ the *History of the Armenians* by Movsēs Xorenac'i deals with events prior and up to the 5th century
- ▶ the text and its author suggest that they are contemporaries of at least the most recent events

- ▶ this assertion has been challenged most recently by THOMSON (1978), who calls Movsēs an “audacious, and mendacious, faker” (1978:58) – a view later relativised
- ▶ he proposes instead an 8th-century date
- ▶ in turn, his perspective has been challenged by, *inter alia*, MUŠEŁYAN (1990); NERSESSIAN (1979); TOPCHYAN (2006)



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Some of THOMSON's key reasons for a later date:

- ▶ almost complete lack of reference to specific sources
- ▶ Greek sources likely from later Armenian translation (Josephus, Eusebius, etc) – cf. also MAHÉ AND MAHÉ 1993
- ▶ misappropriation of sources (e.g. the Armenian toponym etymologies attributed to Olympiodoros in MX I.6, II.74)
- ▶ questions regarding the treatment of the various recensions of Agat'angełos – an independent 5th-century witness or just a later summary?



The Problem III

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- ▶ usage of sources post-dating his supposed time of operation:
 - ▶ the equation of Siunik' and Sisakan (6th century Syriac; *Ašxarhac'oyc*)
 - ▶ 'four Armenias': Byzantine provinces not created until 536 CE
 - ▶ Vaspurakan: not used as toponym until 591 CE, as province not before 8th-century *Narratio de Rebus Armeniae*
 - ▶ etc. (THOMSON 1978:58–61)
- ▶ THOMSON is not alone in his criticism and late dating
- ▶ also cf. GARSOÏAN (2003–4); MAHÉ (1992); THOMSON (2004, 2005)



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- ▶ critics of the modern so-called hypercritical approach do not furnish positive proof of Movsēs early authorship, but try to invalidate THOMSON's points
- ▶ alternatively, they appeal to *argumenta ex silentio*, e.g.:

“... how does one explain then Moses’s complete preoccupation with the events preceding A.D. 440 and his silence regarding the events leading up the Arab incursions ...? ... The ecclesiastical interests do not point to the eighth century. There is no echo of the Chalcedonian controversy which engaged the Armenians from 451 to 641 ...” (NERSESSIAN 1979:479–80)

- ▶ while difficult to refute, most of these arguments miss the point concerning the proposed mendacity of Movsēs



A linguistic approach?

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- ▶ since historical and literary approaches have not yielded a consensus, can linguistic evidence help?
- ▶ this would require data that is reasonably securely datable – hard to come by in Classical Armenian

but the periphrastic perfect construction might just work (cf. MEYER 2017)



Morphosyntactic Alignment Types (Selection)

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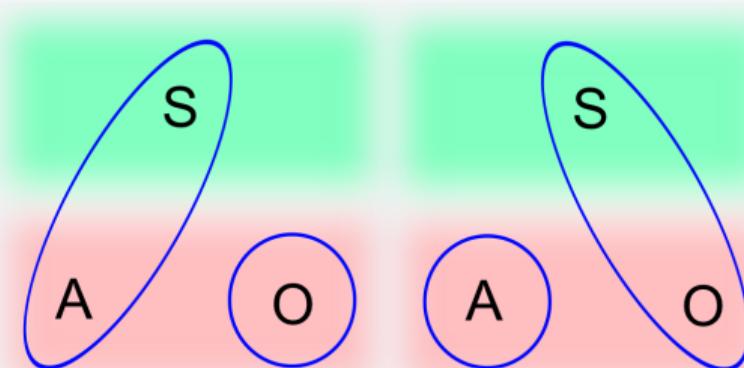
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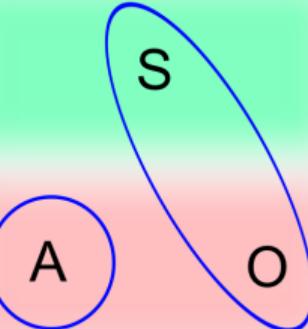
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*intransitive
clause*

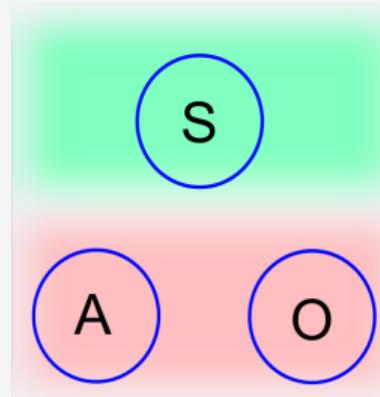
*transitive
clause*



nominative-
accusative



ergative-
absolutive



tripartite



Alignment in Armenian I

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- ▶ for the most part, Armenian has NOM-ACC alignment, verbal agreement with NOM
- ▶ construction: (OBJ-marker +) ACC direct object + NOM subject/agent + verb

(1) ... *elanēr na i telis mehenac‘n* ...
go.3.SG.PST 3.SG.NOM (in)to place.ACC.PL temple.GEN.PL

‘[And after this] he went to the sites of the temples ...’ (Ag. §814)

(2) *du es ayn, or kotorec‘er z=Aris*
2.SG.NOM be.2.SG.PRS DEM.NOM.SG REL.NOM.SG destroy.3.SG.AOR OBJ=Aryan.ACC.PL
aysč‘ap‘ ams ...
so-many year.ACC.PL

‘It is you, who has destroyed the Aryans for so many years ...’ (P‘B IV.54)

- ▶ The perfect intransitive and passive follow this pattern, too (for the most part)



Alignment in Armenian II

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but perfect transitive construction:

(OBJ-marker +) ACC direct object + GEN agent + PTCP (+ 3.SG copula)

(3) *ew gteal Yisusi ēš mi*
and find.PTCP PN.GEN.SG donkey.NOM-ACC.SG INDEF
'And Jesus found a donkey' (Jn. 12:14)

(4) ... *zi ēr paheal z=mez amenazawr ajoyn*
... for 3.SG.PST preserve.PTCP OBJ=1.PL.ACC almighty right.GEN.SG
'... for his almighty right [hand] has preserved us' (Agat'angelos §186)



Alignment in Armenian III

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- (1) Armenian has split-tripartite alignment: NOM-ACC in non-perfective, NOM-GEN-ACC in perfective aspect
- (2) copula agreement in the perfect, where present, is with \emptyset
- (3) on occasion, GEN subjects and NOM agents can be found in the perfect – contrary to expectations

- ▶ traditional genetic approaches do not / cannot explain co-existence of transitive and intransitive constructions, form of copula (cf. e.g. BENVENISTE 1952; KÖLLIGAN 2013; MEILLET 1936; STEMPFL 1983; WEITENBERG 1986)
- ▶ only language contact with Iranian helps in this matter (MEYER 2016, 2017)



Statistics

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- ▶ a 5th-century historiographical corpus (Koriwn, P'awstos, Łazar, Ełišē, Agat'angelos)
- ▶ clear diachronic trends emerge

(1) the increase, under system pressure, of finite verb usage (copula)

(2) the move from tripartite to NOM-ACC alignment
(like from ERG-ABS to tripartite before)

- ▶ the latter is evident since from the 8th century CE onwards, when NOM-ACC is the standard alignment pattern even in the perfect



Stat I: Incidence of Non-standard Argument Marking

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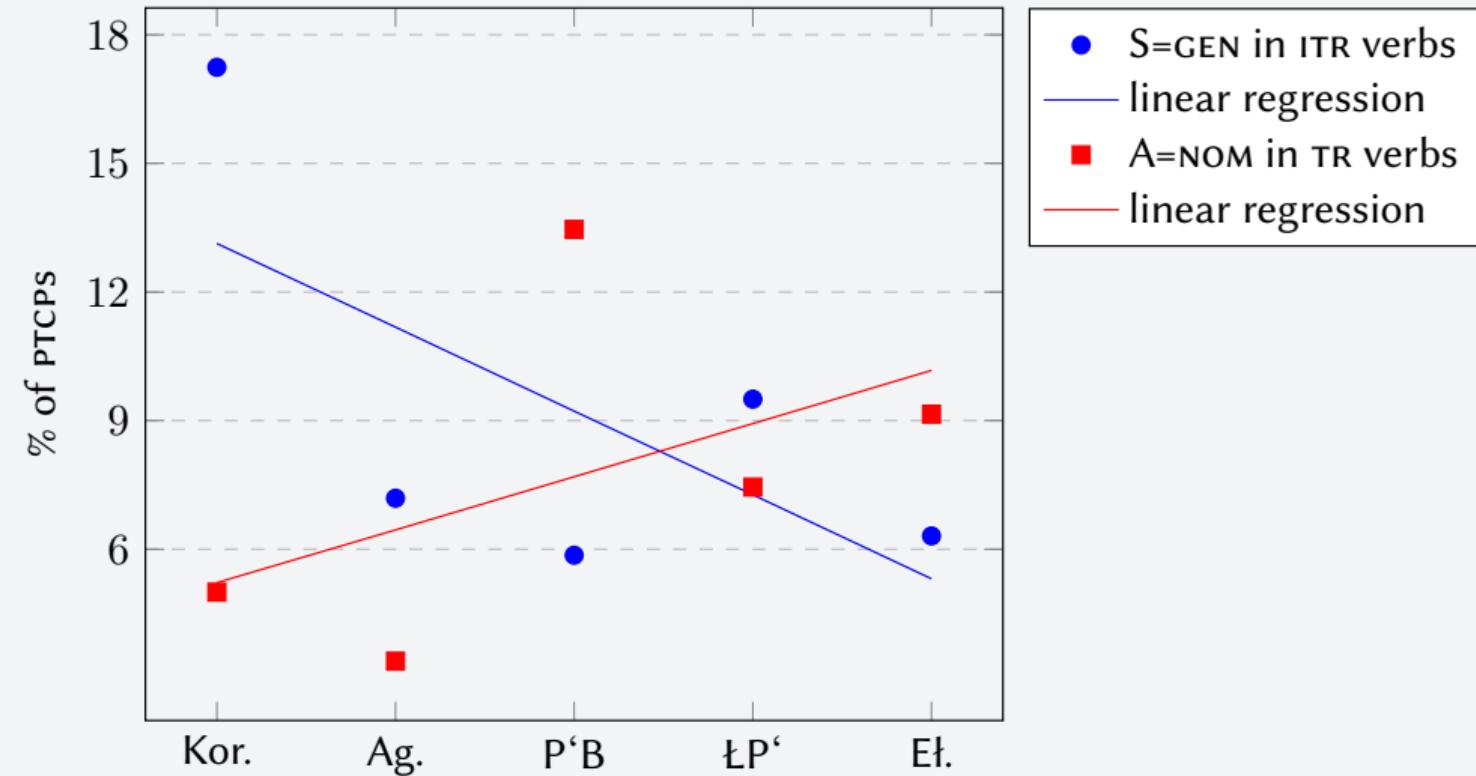
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Stat II: Incidence and Trend of the Copula

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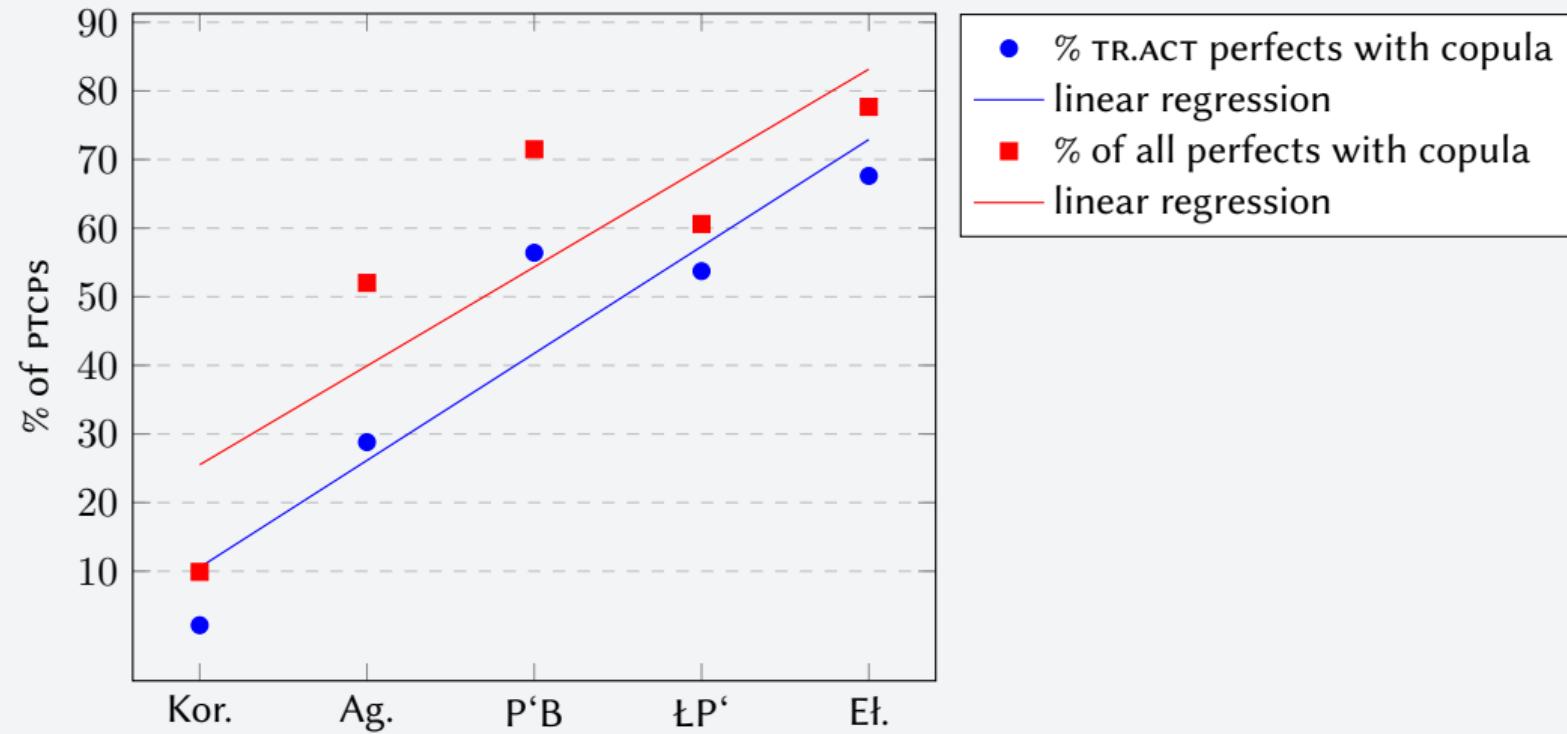
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- ▶ if Movsēs is a **5th-century author**, analysis of his writing should be consistent with the data presented above
- ▶ specifically, the incidence of non-standard argument marking and copula use should be in a range comparable to that of other texts
- ▶ if Movsēs is an **8th-century author**, more non-standard (esp. NOM-agent) argument marking and copula use is to be expected
- ▶ this is a best-case scenario, based on the most obvious diachronic trends
- ▶ it does not take into account literary imitation, and cannot make predictions about other features that might set Movsēs apart



Movsēs Xorenac‘i: (Not) Meeting Expectations I

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[Stats based on partial corpus: MX I]

- ▶ non-standard argument marking in main verbs (main predicate of sentence) is entirely consistent with trend suggested
 - ▶ < 2.5% of intransitive verbs with GEN-subjects
 - ▶ c. 20% of transitive verbs with NOM-agents (= %-age of GEN-agents)

but participles as main verbs make up only c. 20% of uses

and low numbers make for bad statistics

- ▶ non-standard argument marking in converbial expressions (= circumstantial participles) is generally not indicative
- ▶ Movsēs does follow the trend established by the 5th-century corpus

but the data does not allow for any exciting conclusions (yet) as numbers are too small



Movsēs Xorenac‘i: (Not) Meeting Expectations II

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(5) *xatalut‘ean ew šinut‘ean berot iwl̥ov ew*
peace.GEN.SG and prosperity.GEN.SG bring.PRS.PTCP.NOM.SG oil.INS.SG and
meļu z=amenayn hasak parareal
honey.INS.SG OBJ=all shape fatten.PF.PTCP

‘The bringer of peace and prosperity has fattened everyone with oil and honey’ (MX I. 24)



Movsēs Xorenac'i: (Not) Meeting Expectations III

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- ▶ the percentage of copulative perfects is not as high as would be predicted for an 8th-century text
 - ▶ < 10% of participles are used with a copula
 - ▶ copula agreement is always as expected
- ▶ consistent with 5th-century text, but on the early side
- ▶ either Movsēs is a 5th-century author or very skilled literary imitator
- ▶ is there any other data that allows for a clearer perspective?



Movsēs Xorenac'i: Problematic Data I

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- ▶ the incidence of adjectivally used participles is very high in Movsēs
- ▶ c. 28% as compared to an average 15% across the 5th-century corpus

- ▶ many of them are actually part of indirect speech without a conjunction (and need reclassifying)
- ▶ this is extremely rare in the 5th century, only occurring a few times in Eznik (OZOUNIAN 1992:77–80)
- ▶ his usage goes beyond that analysed in OZOUNIAN (1992, 1996–7) and is found even after introductory verbs other than *asem*



Movsēs Xorenac‘i: Problematic Data II

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(6) *bayc‘ asem z=Kronos=d anun ew z=Bēl Nerbovt‘ leal*
but *say.1.SG.PRS* OBJ=Kronos=DET name and OBJ=Bēl Nimrod *be.PF.PTCP*
'But I say that the one called Kronos and Bēl is Nimrod.' (MX I.7)

(7) *bazum ew ayl gorck‘ k‘ajut‘ean i smanē gtanin*
many also other deed.NOM.PL valour.GEN.SG by 3.SG.ABL *know.3.PL.PRS.PASS*
katareal
complete.PF.PTCP
'Many other deeds of valour are known to have been committed by him as well.' (MX I.14)



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(8) *ew aysoc‘ik‘ ayspēs kargeloc‘ ... sksayc‘*
and DEM.GEN.PL thus arrange.PF.PTCP.GEN.PL begin.1.SG.AOR.MP.SBJV
'And with these things being arranged thus ... I will begin ...' (MX I.19)

- ▶ another participle-related oddity is the above passage
- ▶ very reminiscent of a Greek genitive absolute
- ▶ extremely uncommon in Armenian except in Grecising texts (MURADYAN 2012:161–4)

so can both indirect speech with participles and the genitive absolute be explained as late,
grecising elements in Movsēs?



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- ▶ the literary and historical evidence points (if not unequivocally) to a post-5th-century date for Movsēs
- ▶ some linguistic data would agree with this assessment (argument marking)
- ▶ other factors point to him being a **very** early author (copula usage)

but this can be excluded on historical grounds

- ▶ his grecoising tendencies in the realm of syntax—overall more common in later Armenian sources—also speak for a later date
- ▶ the linguistic evidence is not (yet) conclusive, but clearly supports THOMSON's hypothesis
- ▶ more work in this matter is needed



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Merci de votre attention!

Thank you for your attention!



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