THE ARMENIANS IN THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC WORLD

PARADIGMS OF INTERACTION
SEVENTH TO FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

Volume Two

Armenian Realpolitik in the Islamic World and Diverging Paradigms — Case of Cilicia Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries

SETA B. DADOYAN

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I dedicate this book to my family, Arsen, Talin, and Daniel,
and to my ancestors,
the Barsoumians from the east and the Yaylayans
from the west of the Armenian World

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Transliteration Tables

Arabic Transliteration

أ	ā	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	ʿ
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	ū
ش	sh	ي	ī
ص	ṣ	ء	ʾ
ض	ḍ		

Hübschmann-Meillet Transliteration

Hübschmann-Meillet	Sound: East. Arm/West. Arm	Armenian Letter
a	a	ա
b	b/p	բ
g	g/k (as in Gabriel/Ken)	գ
d	d/t	դ
e	ye/ye (as in y̲ard)	ե
z	z (as in z̲ink)	զ
ē	e (as in a̲ir)	է
ě	e (as in teache̲r)	ը
t‘	t/t (strong, as in t̲ab)	թ
ž	zh (as in French J̲acques)	ժ
i	i/i (as in Ki̲m)	ի

Hübschmann-Meillet Transliteration

l	l/l (as in l̲abel)	լ
x	kh/kh (as in Ri<u>ch</u>ter)	խ
c	ts/dz (as in Her<u>z</u>og)	ծ
k	k/g (as in ca<u>p</u>/<u>g</u>oal)	կ
h	h (as in <u>h</u>am)	հ
j	dz/tz (as in Pi<u>zz</u>a)	ձ
ł	gh/gh (as in Ba<u>gh</u>dad)	ղ
č	ch/j (as in jam)	ճ
m	m/m (as in <u>m</u>ap)	մ
y	h/h (not spelled at the end of words)	յ
n	n/n (as in <u>n</u>ame)	ն
š	sh/sh (as in <u>sh</u>op)	շ
o	o or vo (as in v<u>o</u>rtex)	ո
č‘	ch/ch (as in <u>ch</u>op)	չ
b	p/b (as in p̲ub/<u>b</u>ook)	պ
ǰ	dj/ch (as in j̲ob/chop)	ջ
ṙ	r/r (strong as in <u>R</u>obert)	ռ
s	s/s (as in Sam)	ս
v	v/v (as in vault)	վ
t	t/d (as in t̲ailor/<u>d</u>oor)	տ
r	r (light as in Turne<u>r</u>)	ր
c‘	ts/ts (as in Her<u>z</u>egovina)	ց
w	u/u (light v used to produce French ‘u’)	ւ
p‘	p/p (strong p as p̲ass)	փ
k‘	k/k (strong k as in <u>k</u>een)	ք
ō	o/o (as in o̲pen)	օ
f	f/f (as in f̲ork)	ֆ

Western Armenian proper names of persons are written in the Western Armenian transliteration system, and not the Hübschmann.

Prologue

My initiative to study the Armenian experience in the medieval Islamic world through paradigmatic cases of interaction takes its beginnings from the Armenian condition in the Near Eastern region. It is best explained by Nietzsche's dictum *sum ergo cogito*, "I exist therefore I think." Existential in many respects, this questioning is also its motive and inner dimension. In this perspective, writing about the history of Armenians in the medieval Islamic world means trying to make sense of the circumstances. It means an effort to create/define, rather, to re-create/redefine the historicity of experiences. Being Armenian, almost universally, is having a mobile line of ethnic ancestry that is laden with narratives from the vast historic Armenian *oikoumenē* or habitat from Iran to Constantinople and from the Caucasus to Egypt. This study reflects, then, a questioning that a minimal level of concern about my Armenological Dasein, or my being an Armenologist requires. The condition of my generation of the 1960s, in particular, meant growing up in trilingual and pluricultural communities in ancient cities of mosques, churches, *suk*s, local and missionary schools, and eastern/western ideologies and folklores. Above all, it meant carrying a heavy luggage of vaguely perceived legacies, while learning/living in local and cosmopolitan networks of relations.

However, these and many other factors are not causes for crises, as long as one takes the environment as the ground of identity, no matter how compounded and peculiar it is. In other words, the Armenian condition in Near Eastern countries is not problematic in itself; it becomes so when isolated in a small enclosure such as the glass pyramid of the Louvre. Space/time takes the shape of the pyramid as opposed to and separated from outer space and real time. As far as the pyramid is concerned, the narrative of the classic histories is also a value theory or the "ethics" of being an Armenian. However, in real space/time, this ethics lacks grounds in lived sensibilities, and epistemological criteria for its credibility. This is when the Armenian

condition becomes problematic, the scholarship in the pyramid a parody, and one's existence an unresolved matter. I existed and still do in these circumstances; therefore, I must think, at least to clear the Armenian psyche of sedimentations and fixities.

As of the inception of this work more than a decade ago, and throughout, the objective was to create a broad, inclusive, and definitely critical revaluation of the Armenian condition in the medieval Near East from the advent of Islam to the end of the Mongol period. For its proximity to the lived and recorded experiences, this new study/analysis of the Armenian condition had to be solid enough to stand out as an aesthetically more realistic, historically more accurate, philosophically more consistent, and intellectually more intriguing account.

For a task of these requirements, the key was to identify the problematic aspects of the traditional narratives and constructs in circulation for centuries. I did not have to go too far or search too long to find episodes and texts that served as paradigm cases for a different historicity, even a counter-history.

Contrary to mainstream accounts, Armenian history is far from being monolithic. Several and often contradictory trends went into its making, yet the images in the narratives failed to reflect its rich texture and dynamics. Armenian–Islamic history—as a case study—was just one way of dealing with the problem. In addition, the objective of my interest in the so-called sects is to draw the historicity of Armenian dissidence and the revolutionary elements on all strata and phases. The initiative to see these elements as a part of the whole is novel and for some, even controversial. Surely, the book is not about interactions through dissident channels, but dissidence was a channel of interaction. In addition, this book does not focus on the dissident aspect of Armenian history, because that would betray its holistic logic.

The same can be said about the so-far marginalized question of Muslim Armenians. Their case is not a highlight but just a part of the general argument to look at Armenian history from as many perspectives as possible. Several other subjects in the book, in turn discovered or brought up for the first time, demonstrate the multidimensional and interactive nature of the Armenian experience in the medieval Islamic and wider world. Things could have been—as they, in fact, were—very different than imagined, desired, and told in traditional narratives. This is as much a historical as a deeply existential and epistemological issue, and it is central to a project as ambitious as this book.

I began pondering over the extraordinary channels of interaction and their significance in Armenian history many years ago. I was a graduate student majoring in philosophy when I discovered that an obscure thirteenth-century Armenian manuscript was, in fact, a summary of the esoteric Epistles of the Brethren of Purity of the tenth century.

The broader project matured during a long period, because I was venturing into unchartered territory. There were no studies, and the task was hard, multifaceted, and dangerous but challenging and overdue. The tools were an interdisciplinary training, a critical approach, and a taste for dialectics. After two decades of research, the publication of two books, and several papers on the theme of Armenians and Islam, the opus came together as an "argument" based on and structured by hitherto unnoticed or marginalized paradigm cases. Each one of these cases raised new questions and revealed new patterns of interaction and evolution in the medieval Near East.

The new knowledge that I excavated will hopefully lead to fresh ways and areas of inquiry in Near Eastern as well as Armenian studies. In its intent and rather unconventional content, this book is also a prolegomenon to writing Armenian history in the context of the Near East and also to reviewing Near Eastern things in their interactive aspects. It is supposed to suggest new outlooks and re-assessments in Islamic histories as well.

At this point, a few notes about the method, the selection of sources, and the structure or the aesthetics of the book are in order. The selection and use of sources were based on the necessities of the initial objectives, as stated earlier. The essential was the arrangement of a very large amount of data for a composition that, by its making, presented a new account of Armenian as well as Near Eastern things. In the case of Armenian sources, the focus was on primary Armenian sources. In the case of Arab sources, naturally all basic primary sources and texts were utilized. In fact, most of the arguments and narratives are based precisely on their testimony.

In all detailed narratives, and there are many, the objective was to draw a general context for the reader to understand and have a feel of the period and the argument/s. The sources were selected in this light. Therefore, to keep the framework straightforward—especially for the reader who is not familiar with Armenian and/or Islamic history—I avoided debates on specific issues. This is not a detective's initiative or report, and I am well aware of what some call "scholarship out there."

I also deliberately avoided unnecessary bibliographic "embellishment," if the material did not contribute to or was actually used in the work. Already a very long and complicated text of many strands of arguments, this book could not carry parallel tracks of information. On the other hand, I have intentionally made use of certain details and ideas of relatively old sources such as Gibbon. This was to highlight a point, sometimes humorously, or open different channels of thought/imagination for the reader. After all, similar to all writing and reading, historical writing also is an aesthetic activity even when it carries critical thinking and analysis.

Since making causal connections was essential to the process of deriving and drawing the historicity of otherwise isolated and/or undetected paradigm cases/trends over seven centuries, the sequence of the episodes was an essential part of building the arguments. A chronological approach was the most appropriate means to construct the blocks and arrange the paradigms in the clearest possible composition. A thematic classification not only would have been confusing but would have also seriously impaired the conceptual structure of the work.

A comment should be made about the multiplicity of themes and the content. The great range of interrelated themes may have justified a single and a very large volume. It would have been architecturally more coherent, but the sequence and content of six parts made the division to three volumes so much more accessible and practical. The reader, however, should read the volumes as the parts of a whole. The essential for me was the shaping and illustrating, or the grounding of arguments through paradigmatic cases. From the Prologue of Volume One to the end of Volume Three, a central argument and corollaries bridge the various episodes and issues.

The style in organizing the text and the problem of details should also be commented on. In view of my dialectical–holistic approach, also the objectives and the nature of the study, I did not and could not implement the common technique of maintaining a flowing narrative and keeping the details in the footnotes. Personally, I do not particularly enjoy reading texts of this style and, in turn, avoid imposing double levels of attention on the reader. The details are not just for information and evidence, as most traditionally trained historians take them to be. Details are a part of the story and the argument/s and if they have no relevance to the central themes, they should be excluded. As in Flemish and much later photo-realist arts, the fine details are *trompe*

l'oeil elements to draw the viewer/reader into the "reality" of the work. In other words, these details are necessary, not just as evidence but also to assist the viewer/reader to try to think from within the narrative. Indeed, I write as Chuck Close paints his very large portraits. The fine hair and minutest details on a face are not information; Matisse could tell a big tale with two or three strokes of the brush or with charcoal. Details are elements in a symphonic interaction with an image that is a construction or a composition anyway. This is my style of writing history and naturally, it is shaped by the idea of the opus. Every piece of literature—including and especially a historical writing—is an artifact of sorts. It is a composition of many elements that are deliberately arranged in deliberate forms, order, sequence, proportion, dimension, detail, highlight, intensity, lines, colors, and so on. As in the arts as well, seemingly odd elements contribute to the making of the whole. Even though in a good piece of literature and art, form, content, and subject are ideally one; form is always the key to the latter. I have composed and arranged the larger subjects and their subthemes in such a way as to create an open yet dynamic historic continuity that is closer to the Armenian condition and, as such, more intriguing. By its intent, form, and content, the book will hopefully stimulate a process of revaluating everything, including itself, and reconceptualizing Armenian and Near Eastern histories.

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Introduction

Volume Two is central to the book and generally the subject of Armenian–Islamic interactive history.

In fact, this study had its genesis in the challenge posed by the "baffling phenomenon," as my mentor Professor Kamal Salibi put it, of what I called the "Fāṭimid Armenians." Even more baffling and almost unstudied was the larger question of the Armenian condition in and as a part of the medieval Islamic world, in and outside the traditionally recognized Armenian homeland.

Much earlier, I began following "unorthodox" paths of inquiry into things Armenian, when as a graduate student I almost stumbled on a discovery. I traced the sources of a thirteenth-century Armenian manuscript in an esoteric Islamic source (the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity or *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*). The Ismā'īlī connection was a missing link and led to the study of militant heterodox Armenian factions in Upper Mesopotamia and al-Shām, the Fāṭimid Armenians, and, in general, an Armenian *Realpolitik* during the Seljuk and Crusader periods from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. I gradually came to realize that just as Muslim–Armenian power in the Islamic world was an aspect and product of this realpolitik, so was the rise of an "orthodox" Armenian state in Cilicia just another aspect of the same realpolitik, this time with the Latin Crusaders. Political ideals varied, but the style and mentality were the same and the period must have been taken as a singularity, but was not. This was a new perspective toward the Armenian experience in the medieval Near East, at least. Not only the panorama of these two centuries was fascinating but also the circumstances, courses of action, the peculiarities of peoples' behavior, and many more related details were surprisingly new and intriguing. I can only hope that the reader will have as much enjoyment as I had during the research and writing of this volume.

One of the basic arguments in Chapter 1 of this volume is that during most periods of their history, Armenians made alliances with

and/or fought against all the powers and factions in the region. Rarely, ideology gained priority over interest. The Armenian realpolitik is definitely a very useful paradigm, even for contemporary history in all parts of the Armenian habitat. However, it is also a controversial concept, because it negates the puristic claims in the traditional perception of Armenian history. The blunt pragmatism of many Armenian figures and factions of these times, at least, defies idealistic models of what is called "Armenian identity." The two centuries between the mid-tenth and late-twelfth centuries were periods of great political landslides and flooding, as it were, in the entire region. As the Arabs lost ground, Byzantium moved slowly to the east and south into al-Shām, while the Ghuzz and Turkic tribes began appearing in the region. The Armenian dynastic territories and nobility were receding, and the extra-establishment and often heterodox Armenian element made the most of the chaos. On the Borderlands between Byzantium and the ʿAbbāsids, also in al-Shām and Egypt, they gained political significance. The Turkish Period had begun earlier, yet symbolically, the fall of Manazkert (or Manzikert) in 1071 was a turning point in their favor. However, already a few decades before this spectacular Byzantine defeat, Armenians of heterodox and extra-establishment backgrounds were gaining positions of power both on the Borderlands and in the Islamic world, in general.

The first three chapters of this volume also deal with the circumstances and tools of acquiring power, the social classes involved in these processes, the cultural environments within which they functioned, political alliances, geographic locations, patterns of interacting and manipulating Islam as well as Christianity, and, above all, the peculiar perceptions of ethnicity and national loyalties. These are only some of the intriguing aspects of this phase when the peripheries of the Armenian habitat drastically expanded from the Black Sea to the Caspian, northwestern Iran, and in the south from the Cilician Gates to the Amanus, al-Shām, and Egypt. They acted in new environments and in direct contact with many other peoples and political cultures. The arrival of the Turkic tribes and then the Crusaders served as decisive factors in social–cultural change, and the Armenians made alliances with them as well. These events coincided with the beginnings of urbanization. Armenian–Turkish and Armenian–Islamic—particularly Ismāʿīlī realpolitik (in Fāṭimid Egypt as well)—during this period matched Armenian–Frankish realpolitik in Cilicia (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

This period also saw major changes in class structure. The old nobility receded and a new dominant class emerged from the heterodox and modest factions that had a chance to be militarized and politicized. A new urban "bourgeoisie" of sorts rose in the newly rising cities along with the warlords and territorial masters. In addition, the church lost some of its political–economic significance.

Armenian expansion and political activity in the region culminated in a great number of principalities, territorial lordships, kingdoms, and vizierial powers (as in Fāṭimid Egypt). Instead of total political collapse, as believed and discussed in many histories of these times, what occurred during these two centuries was a fragmentation and a breakdown of Armenian political–cultural energy into new and dynamic patterns and institutions. As extra-establishment and heterodox factions and figures became a part of Near Eastern politics, legitimacy became a relative matter. Furthermore, as many of the traditional fixities—such as the so-called *loyalties* of the Armenian Classical Age (or the fifth century)—dissipated and dichotomies between orthodoxy and heresy blurred, because the institutions that defined these lines either receded or were dismantled. New loyalties and alliances were made with both Christian and Muslim sides free from institutional constraints. There were Latin and Chalcedonian Armenians, just as there were Sunnī, Sh ī'ī, and Ismā'īlī Armenians. Armenian expansion and military–political activity took intriguing patterns and reached unprecedented levels.

Between 1060 and 1080, and almost simultaneously, there appeared at least five Muslim–Armenian powers: the Dānishmandids in Cappadocia, the Bēnē Boghusaks in Sewawerak/Severek (just northeast of Samosata on the Euphrates), Philaretus from Germanica to Antioch, the Nāwiqīs (or the Awāqīs) in al-Shām, and the Fāṭimid Armenians in Egypt. In addition, there were paramilitary groups and small concentrations in many locations. The settlement of the Rubenids in Cilicia also comes in this context and is studied as such. The Armenian Period, rather century in Fāṭimid Egypt, produced a fascinating series of patterns of interactions with Islam. As mentioned, one of the most peculiar and rich phases in Armenian and Near Eastern history was practically lost to Armenian scholarship.

As discussed in Chapter 4, during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, what may be called a "dynastic triangle," or a "Second Age of Kingdoms" came about this time at the hands of "orthodox" Armenians but from outside the traditional nobility. Gradually, an Armenian urban

class developed in the entire Armenian habitat under the Muslims and/or whoever was in power, and in perfect accord with the authorities. Naturally, the condition of rural Armenians was always very different in every respect. In general, conversion was beneficial, and many chose Islam as an alternative religious culture and a way of life. Hyphenated identities are not new and already in the tenth century, hyphenations became realities for Armenians. Historical thinking in terms of dichotomies has lost grounds. There are no bases for exclusions and/or inclusions in mainstream histories, and only a holistic approach will do justice to any phenomenon or episode in the history of Armenians in the Islamic world. Seemingly contradictory details are a part of the same dynamic and rich texture of medieval as well as modern Armenian history, which traditional narratives impoverished beyond recognition.

During the thirteenth century, this dynastic triangle developed in the midst of the Franks, Mamlūks, Seljuks, Georgians, Ayyūbids, and Mongols. Cilicia was in the southwest, the Georgian–Armenian Zak'arids were in the east, and Erzinjān/Erznka was in the north of Cilicia (under the Armenian bishop of the city and his descendants). The situation had many peculiarities and implications. First, it meant that Armenians were everywhere from Cappadocia to the east, south, and north, and in close contact with all the other peoples and powers. Next, this time around, the makers/rulers of these dynastic territories were from the military, with the exception of Erznka. The new nobility in these new locations had greater military prowess and knowledge of the region and the common people, and each group or figure had its own style and choices. Cilician and Zak'arid political cultures and styles in dealing with the political environment were very different from those of the traditional dynastic houses. Even though the culture of Erznka was closer to Cilicia than to the east, it, nevertheless, was more cosmopolitan and closer to Islamic civilization than the latter. The Armenians in the east saw themselves as more "authentic" and "orthodox" than their southwestern compatriots, whereas the Cilicians who, because of their peculiar conditions, created what is known as the Silver Age of Armenian culture and raised the standards of intellectual and artistic production to very high levels.

The diverging paradigms of this second age of kingdoms have not been studied in traditional historiography as aspects of a specific period; and discussions are often limited to narrations of isolated Armenian microcosms, as it were, such as Cilicia, Zak'arid Armenia,