

# On the Indirect Tradition and Circulation of the Ancient Armenian Platonic Translations

*Irene Tinti*

*To Theo, in whose office I spent many hours working on the Armenian Timaeus and in the company of our mutual friend, Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni*



## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Ancient Armenian translations of five Platonic dialogues (namely the *Timaeus*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Laws*, and *Minos*), anonymous and undated as well as still lacking a critical or even reliable edition,<sup>2</sup> constitute

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- 1 The present article relates some of the results of a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation through an *Ambizione* grant (<http://p3.snf.ch/project-168147>) and based at the *Unité d'arménien*, University of Geneva. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the SNSF.
  - 2 The available editions (Suk'rean 1877; Zarbhanalean 1890) often alter the text of the only complete manuscript to normalise the language and/or make it adhere more closely to the Greek, and these changes are not always explicitly signalled. On this issue, cf. at least Aimi 2008–2009, 18–19 and 2011, 17–18. Aimi herself has prepared critical editions of the *Apology of Socrates* (2008–2009) and the 5th book of the *Laws* (2016a) for her Master's and doctoral thesis, respectively, but her laudable efforts remain at present unrevised and unpublished; the present writer has been able to consult them by kind permission of the author. For a recent contribution providing useful data towards a critical edition of the *Euthyphro*, see Scarpellini 2016 (based on Scarpellini 2011–2012). Previous works devoted to philological analyses of the dialogues are listed in Tinti 2012a, b and 2016a, as well as in Aimi 2008–2009, 2011, 2014, 2016a. Given this documentary situation, any serious analysis of the five translated dialogues still needs to be chiefly conducted on the basis of the extant (and known) manuscript witnesses. The present writer is in possession of colour photographs of the main codex, V 1123, taken from the original (with permission from the Mekhitarist Congregation) by herself, Dr Madalena Modesti, and (now Dr) Chiara Aimi during a research trip to St Lazarus in 2010.

a substantial and comparatively little investigated dossier.<sup>3</sup> Written in heavily Hellenising Armenian, at the present state of knowledge these texts are attested in their entirety only in one manuscript of uncertain date (17th–18th centuries?),<sup>4</sup> currently kept in the library of the Mekhitarist monastery of St Lazarus, Venice ([V] 1123). Before reaching Italy in 1835, this codex had belonged to Armenians living in New Julfa and Madras.<sup>5</sup> A second Platonic codex, which could have contained either the same dialogues or other Platonic translations, had also been on its way to Venice from Madras, but was lost in a shipwreck near the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>6</sup>

The present writer was engaged for several years in a series of interrelated research projects (respectively based in Budapest, Oxford, and Geneva), whose ultimate goal was to reach reasonable and motivated conclusions on these translations' authorship and date. In particular, her main purpose was to establish whether the traditional attribution to diplomat and scholar Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni (ca. 990–1059) could be substantiated with any compelling evidence.<sup>7</sup>

As part of this wider investigation and while trying to ascertain whether the Platonic translations had left any traces in dated Armenian texts that could help narrow down a timeframe and establish a relevant *terminus ante quem*, she was able to detect a few direct quotations that are unmistakably drawn from the known Armenian version rather than translated anew from the Greek. To the best of her knowledge, some of these have never been presented or discussed before, at least in the context of Platonic scholarship.

3 The Platonic section takes up nearly 600 manuscript pages in the only complete codex (see below).

4 Aimi 2016a, 27. Cf. also Čemčemean 1998, 556. This exemplar is a composite codex whose final section, clearly of different origin, contains Armenian versions of Proclus's *Institutiones Theologicae* and of a commentary on the same text: see Aimi 2016a, 18 ff.

5 Cf. Conybeare 1889 and 1891; Aimi 2008–2009, 14; 2011, 18.

6 Conybeare 1891, 193 calls it “another copy”, thus suggesting that it contained the same dialogues as the surviving one, but, as Aimi 2011, 15 rightly points out, it might just as easily have been a companion book, including a different set of dialogues.

7 For a detailed analysis of the relevant scholarly literature and extensive bibliographic references, see Tinti 2012b (now to be integrated with the information provided in Benati 2018); cf. also Tinti 2012a and 2016a. See also the bibliography listed in Aimi 2014, 298, note 13 and in the other works by Aimi cited above (note 2), as well as in Calzolari 2014, 350–351 and 2016, 54 and 63. The possible authorship of the Armenian translation of the *Timaeus* is briefly discussed in Jonkers 2017, especially 390 ff., although the text contains a few inaccurate details (see notably 390; cf. below). The present writer is currently working on a publication detailing her conclusions on the topic. For additional references on Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni, see the article by Federico Alpi in the present volume.

The purpose of the present article is therefore to present briefly and systematically all traces of textual circulation so far detected for the Platonic versions, including both the aforementioned quotations and textual excerpts attested in manuscripts other than V 1123. In so doing, the author hopes to inaugurate a line of research that will, in time, bring new data to light and contribute to a better understanding of the fortune and reception of the Armenian Platonic dossier in Armenian literature. To that end, a comprehensive analysis of the texts and passages in which the Platonic quotations have been inserted as well as of the function they serve in the new context will be needed. This, however, exceeds the scope of the present contribution, which will focus instead on three basic elements, namely: what the ensemble of these data can tell us about the diffusion of the Armenian Platonic versions; what the minor witnesses and indirect tradition can tell us about the reliability of the sole (and late) complete manuscript, V 1123; and, finally, whether this type of analysis can provide meaningful clues towards solving the complex puzzle of the Platonic versions' date and attribution.

## 2 Potential Significance of the Data and Methodological Remarks

As anticipated, the surviving direct tradition of the Armenian Platonic dossier as a whole is extremely limited and comparatively late. However, that in itself does not necessarily say much about the dialogues' fortune and circulation (or lack thereof) in Armenian milieu. As is well known, even pivotal 5th-century texts are nowadays attested in very few and/or late witnesses, even though they were certainly well-known in the past.<sup>8</sup>

Luckily, new evidence has emerged in recent years that can help us rescue—at least partially—the Platonic versions from the void in which they previously seemed to have existed, as well as to get a glimpse at a state of the text that is certainly closer in time to their composition (whenever one might choose to situate that event).

It should be pointed out immediately that all traces of textual circulation so far detected concern the *Timaeus*, while no secondary or indirect witnesses are known for the other four translated dialogues.

In theory, this could be interpreted as a clue in favour of a different date and/or origin of the *Timaeus* as opposed to the other Platonic versions, especially because the notion that the *Timaeus* differs somehow from the rest of

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Orenego 2010, 449–450. Cf. also Coulie 2014, notably 156 ff.

the dossier has been occasionally brought forward in the relevant scholarly literature.<sup>9</sup> We cannot address the latter claim here, even though it is worth mentioning that the present writer has not been able to detect, in her own investigations, any substantial linguistic features or translation strategies that systematically differentiate the *Timaeus* from the rest.

More pertinently for our purposes, the lack of data for the other four dialogues does not necessarily imply a different origin or date of the texts involved. First of all, as noted above, this line of research is still very much in its infancy and no conclusions on the actual circulation of the five texts, or lack thereof, can be drawn (yet) on the basis of a mere handful of references and secondary witnesses. Secondly, even in (Western) Classical milieu, the *Timaeus* was especially popular among Platonic dialogues; as a matter of fact, one of the textual passages that had a certain amount of circulation in Armenia(n) (see below) happens to be one of the most frequently cited Platonic passages in Christian texts overall.<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, when trying to reconstruct the fortune of the Armenian Platonic translations we need to make sure that the traces we identify pertain specifically to the Armenian versions of the dialogues, since direct translations were not the only way Platonic themes and ideas could enter the Armenian tradition. The most obvious sources of Platonic elements were the Greek texts themselves, which could have been read in the original (cf. Tinti 2016b), but anthologies, commentaries, and secondary references in Greek or Armenian authors could constitute additional or alternative points of entry. Therefore, in order to identify undisputed traces of textual circulation in Armenian contexts, a thematic similarity or even generic lexical parallels are not sufficient:<sup>11</sup> we need to detect either a precise textual match with the Armenian versions of the dialogues, or at least shared elements that could not have arisen independently solely on the basis of the Greek texts, or by chance.

The traces of textual circulation so far detected can be divided into two categories: excerpts from the *Timaeus* that were circulating independently from the main text, and direct quotations or undisputable references to the Armenian version of the dialogue in the writings of Armenian authors.

9 See Tinti 2012b, especially 225–226, for details and references.

10 Cf. Tinti 2012b, 273, note 146, with references.

11 Cf. e.g. Tinti 2012b, 228ff. for a detailed textual comparison between the Armenian *Timaeus* and passages from the *Definitions of Philosophy* by David the Invincible.

### 3 Excerpts from the Armenian *Timaeus*

As previously brought to the attention of the international scholarly community,<sup>12</sup> a section from the Armenian version of the *Timaeus*, corresponding roughly to one page of text in the Venetian codex (see below), has been transmitted in several of the manuscripts containing the *Book on Nature* by Iṣox,<sup>13</sup> a Syrian working in Cilicia in the 13th century. As the title suggests, this work is a treatise on natural philosophy, discussing astronomical, geographical, meteorological, botanical, mineralogical, and medical problems among other topics. It is written in Middle Armenian and is not divided into chapters. However, three additional chapters “On Animals”, “On Taste” and “On Colours”, which do not belong to the treatise, are associated with it in part of the manuscript tradition. Unlike the first two, the chapter “On Colours” is never attributed to Iṣox in any manuscript.<sup>14</sup>

Stella Vardanyan correctly identified the source of this passage by comparing it with Suk'rean's (1877) edition of the Armenian *Timaeus*,<sup>15</sup> and critically edited it on the basis of seven manuscripts from the Matenadaran,<sup>16</sup> the most ancient of which dates to the 15th century,<sup>17</sup> although the excerpt is attested in several other witnesses.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, unlike most of the dialogue, this passage—corresponding to section 67 d 5–68 d 2 in the Greek<sup>19</sup>—is attested in multiple manuscripts, at least one of which is considerably older than the Venetian codex.

A detailed textual comparison would exceed the purpose of the present article, but it is worth pointing out that, generally speaking, the text as edited by Vardanyan does not diverge dramatically from the corresponding section of the Venetian manuscript (59.17–60.21,<sup>20</sup> corresponding in turn to 142.24–143.27

12 Cf. Tinti 2012b, 220–221.

13 Cf. Thomson 1995, s.v.

14 Jonkers 2017, 390 mistakenly states that Iṣox himself had added the chapter “On Colours”.

15 Vardanyan 1979, 70 ff.

16 Vardanyan 1979, 104–105.

17 Jonkers 2017, 390 is likely misinterpreting a similar sentence in Tinti 2012b when he says that the most ancient manuscript of the *Book on Nature* itself dates to the 15th century.

18 These are presently kept both at the Matenadaran and in other libraries: cf. Tinti 2012b, 221 and note 8, with references.

19 Here and elsewhere, for the Greek text and its variants, see the critical editions by Burnet 1902, Serrano Cantarín—Díaz de Cerio Díez 2012, and Rivaud 2021, as well as the studies by Jonkers 1982 and 2017.

20 Here and elsewhere, specific sections of V 1123 are indicated by page and line rather than by *folio* and line (as is the case with other manuscripts); this practice reflects the page numbering present in the manuscript itself, possibly added by the 19th century editor(s).

in Suk'rean 1877). The overall correspondence cannot be attributed to Vardanyan's adapting the text of the excerpt to make it adhere more closely to the dialogue, since, beside not hiding any divergences between the two, she duly puts in brackets any elements drawn from the translated dialogue that have been inserted into her own text for the sake of clarity.<sup>21</sup>

Even more importantly, by examining both the Venetian manuscript and Vardanyan's edited excerpt in comparison with the Greek, the text of the former, albeit attested centuries later, does not appear to be significantly more corrupted. As a matter of fact, not only does the Venetian manuscript preserve elements and/or textual segments that are absent from the other witnesses,<sup>22</sup> but also some variant readings that are clearly preferable.

Consider just the following example, drawn from 59.33–60.1 in V 1123 (= 143.3–4 Suk'rean 1877; 68 a 5–6 Greek; 104.22–105.1 Vardanyan 1979):<sup>23</sup>

παντοδαπῶν ἐν τῇ κυκλήσει ταύτῃ γιγνομένων χρωμάτων

for in this mixture colours of all kinds come into being<sup>24</sup>

պէսպէս գոյնք՝ գալարմամբս այսմիկ լինելով (V 1123)

for by this twisting colours of all kinds come into being

պէսպէս գոյնք գալարմամբս այսուիկ շինելով (Vardanyan 1979)

for by this twisting colours of all kinds are made

Here, while the excerpt as edited by Vardanyan includes the reading այսուիկ, which is probably preferable to այսմիկ, the Venetian manuscript preserves the instrumental infinitive լինելով, which is not only, arguably, *lectio difficilior* from an Armenian standpoint when compared with the alternative reading շինելով, but also undoubtedly a better match for Gr. γιγνομένων, since the bilin-

21 As mentioned above, Vardanyan was working with Suk'rean's 1877 edition of the *Timaeus* rather than with the Venetian manuscript (see the parallel texts in Vardanyan 1979, 70–72). She does not reintegrate into her text all segments that appear to be missing from it, either: compare for instance 59.24–25 in V 1123 (142.32–33 in Suk'rean's 1877) with Vardanyan 1979, 70, lines 13–14.

22 Such as, for instance, a sentence that has likely been lost due to *saut du même au même* in the excerpt: cf. Vardanyan 1979, 104, line 9–10, corresponding to 59.19–20 in V 1123.

23 Cf. also Tinti 2012a, 165.

24 Here and elsewhere, all translations from Greek and Armenian are by the present writer.

gual correspondence between լիւիւմ and γίγνομαι is remarkably consistent in the translation (cf. Tinti 2012a). Of course, the excerpt was transmitted separately from the entire dialogue and no longer associated with the *Timaeus* or even with Plato: that would have prevented any further cross-checking with the source and thus favoured the genesis of textual corruptions such as this one. In fact, one might even argue that, since the passage was being taken out of its original context, whoever copied it first as an autonomous text might have felt less bound to reproduce it exactly in the first place. In that regard it is perhaps significant that the final sentence of the excerpt is dramatically—if overall accurately—shortened and resumed with respect to the corresponding one in the *Timaeus*.<sup>25</sup>

Be that as it may, overall, a comparison between the—admittedly short—excerpt as attested in multiple and/or earlier manuscripts and the complete translation as attested in V 1123 is rather reassuring as to the quality and reliability of the text preserved in the latter. An additional example will be discussed below (§ 4).

A second textual excerpt that had circulated independently from the rest of the *Timaeus* was identified by Chiara Aimi in the early 2010s.<sup>26</sup> This is attested in manuscript (M) 437 of the Matenadaran (f. 253<sup>v</sup>, second column, lines 16–43), and corresponds to lines 13.31–14.15 in V 1123 (= 91.11–32 Suk'rean 1877; 27 d 6–28 c 2 Greek). It focuses on the difference between “being without alteration” and “becoming”, that is, “being subject to change”, which is one of the central themes of the dialogue (cf. Tinti 2012a).

The presence of a section from the *Timaeus* in this manuscript was already known,<sup>27</sup> but Aimi seems to have been the first to bring it to bear in the scholarly debate on the Armenian Platonic translations. By comparing it with the extant version of the *Timaeus*, she was able to establish that it was indeed a section of the same translation.<sup>28</sup> She described the fragment in Aimi 2016b and provided a diplomatic edition thereof in her doctoral thesis.<sup>29</sup>

25 Compare Vardanyan 1979, 105, line 22 with V 1123, 60.21–23 (143.27–29 in Suk'rean's 1877).

26 Cf. Tinti 2012a and b, Aimi 2014.

27 Cf. Eganyan—Zeyt'unyan—Ant'abyan—K'eōškerean 2004, 675–690; see also Cowe 2010.

28 Cf. Aimi 2016a, 36 ff.

29 Aimi 2016a: 38. Aimi kindly shared a reproduction of the relevant section in ms. M 437 with the present writer. A comparison between the latter and Aimi's transcription reveals—beside intentional adjustments such as the insertion of majuscules—occasional discrepancies: cf. e.g. բուիցիւն in 253<sup>v</sup>, second column, line 20, which Aimi gives as բուիցի. Conversely, she gives the corresponding reading in the Venetian manuscript (14.1) as բուիցիւն, whereas the latter actually reads բուիցի.

The excerpt is especially important because, at the present state of knowledge, M 437 constitutes the earliest confirmed manuscript witness for a comparatively extensive section of the *Timaeus*. In fact, on the basis of a few notes and colophons, Cowe (2010) dates the codex to the early 1280s.<sup>30</sup> Its main copyist, Esayi, is generally identified with Esayi Nč'ec'i, who died in 1338 and was a leading figure at the school of Glajor. Based on the proposed date, Cowe suggests that the manuscript could have been copied either at Arak'eloc' Vank', near Muš, or more likely at Glajor itself, whose exact location is still under dispute.<sup>31</sup>

The manuscript was probably conceived as a textbook, and primarily contains propaedeutic explanations to the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Philo, Basil of Caesarea, David the Invincible, Evagrius, and Pseudo-Dionysius. These are interspersed with shorter texts of various contents (but often characterised by an interest in Western Classical culture), which seem to have been inserted as fillers to complete a group of 10 folios or a quire.<sup>32</sup> Among these fillers, in the final section copied by a certain Sargis, the excerpt from the *Timaeus* can be found, clearly marked as such in the manuscript (ՊԼ: Ի սիմիլ տրաւմ: or “Plato, from the dialogue *Timaeus*”).<sup>33</sup>

The surviving excerpt currently takes up three quarters of a column in M 437 (roughly corresponding to half a page in the Venetian manuscript) but Aimi points out that the following sheet was replaced in the 17th century.<sup>34</sup> This is potentially meaningful, since the Platonic section—which ends with an incomplete sentence—could have been substantially longer (according to Aimi, perhaps up to seven times longer than it is now). We do not know at present whether the excerpt was taken directly from a manuscript containing the complete translation,<sup>35</sup> or whether it had been previously separated from it, as is the case with the chapter “On Colours”, and circulated independently, perhaps in miscellaneous volumes (but see below).<sup>36</sup>

30 On the date of the manuscript, cf. also Aimi 2016b, with references. See in particular 272, note 1.

31 Cf. Mathews—Sanjian 1991, 17–21; Aimi 2016a, 35, and 2016b, 274, note 5; Pogossian forthcoming (courtesy of the author), with a discussion of the political significance of different locations in Vayoc' Jor.

32 Cowe 2010, 8.

33 See 253<sup>v</sup>, second column, line 16.

34 Aimi 2016b, 274, note 9.

35 On the potentially direct knowledge of the Platonic versions in Glajor circles, see Aimi 2016a, 41 ff., drawing on Tinti 2012b, 274.

36 Cf. Cowe 2010, 14, note 80: although his remark concerns a different filler text present in the manuscript, a similar reasoning, i.e. that the use as a filler might suggest that the text “was already excerpted from its putative original context (...) in the copyist's exemplar,



From a philological standpoint, a comparison between the excerpt as attested in M 437 and the corresponding section in the much later V 1123 confirms the impression of overall reliability of the latter, provided by the chapter “On Colours” (see above). The divergences between the two witnesses are truly minor—in fact, less substantial than in the previous case—and in several instances the Venetian manuscript actually appears more conservative.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4 Quotations in Armenian Writings

As for references to the extant *Timaeus* in writings by Armenian authors, several years ago the present writer first presented two virtually identical quotations,<sup>38</sup> corresponding to lines 14.16–18 in V 1123 (91.33–35 Suk'rean 1877; 28 c 3–5 Greek), that she had been able to detect in the *Homily on the Prodigal Son*<sup>39</sup> and the *Commentary on the Wisdom of Solomon*,<sup>40</sup> both by Nersēs Lambronac'i, who was active in Cilicia and died in 1198.<sup>41</sup>

When compared with the extant Armenian *Timaeus* (and with the Greek), the relevant lines in these two texts appear in a slightly altered form (see the elements in bold below):

τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦ παντὸς εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν·

thus, finding the maker and father of this Universe is a difficult matter, and, having found him, it is impossible to tell everyone

**խսլ արդ՝** զհայրն եւ զարարիչն ամենեցուն՝ **գտանել գործ է:** եւ գտել ամենեցուն պատմել անհնար է (*Timaeus*, V 1123)

but finding the father and maker of all things is a difficult matter. And, having found him, it is impossible to tell everyone

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which may then have been a miscellany composed of diverse materials” could apply to the Platonic excerpt as well. On this possibility, see below, § 4.

37 Cf. Aimi 2016a, 39–40.

38 Tinti 2012b, 268 ff.

39 Oskean 1928, 133.

40 Tanielian 2007, 545.

41 Cf. Thomson 1995 and 2007, s.v.

բայց գհայրն՝ եւ զարարիչն ամենեցուն գործ է գտանել եւ զտեալ ամենեցուն, պատմել՝ անհնար է (*Prodigal Son*, Oskean 1928)

but finding the father and maker of all things is a difficult matter, and, once everyone has found him, it is impossible to tell;

with a slight change in punctuation, the sentence can be (better) translated as below:

բայց՝ գհայրն եւ զարարիչն ամենեցուն գործ է գտանել, եւ զտեալ՝ ամենեցուն պատմել անհնար է (*Wisdom of Solomon*, Tanielian 2007)

but finding the father and maker of all things is a difficult matter, and, having found him, it is impossible to tell everyone

Without repeating here the textual analysis presented in Tinti 2012b, which addressed the potential significance of these minor divergences and the likelihood that two almost identical, yet independent translations could have been made of the same passage, we will just repeat the relevant conclusion, namely that Lambronac'i undoubtedly quoted, twice, a passage ultimately drawn from the extant Armenian *Timaeus*, possibly with a slight mnemonic interference with a passage from the biblical *Book of Proverbs*, 20:6.

These two quotations are of the utmost importance because, at the present state of knowledge, they constitute the earliest undisputed *termini ante quem* for the Armenian version of the *Timaeus*, which must have been realised before Lambronac'i's death in 1198.

As remarked (with further details and references) in Tinti 2012b,<sup>42</sup> these are not the only allusions to the *Timaeus* (or indeed to other Platonic writings) in works by Lambronac'i. Most notably, the *Commentary on the Ecclesiastes*,<sup>43</sup> which according to Tanielian (2007) dates back to the same years as the *Commentary on the Wisdom of Solomon*,<sup>44</sup> namely towards the end of the author's life (1193–1198), includes a non-literal, less than precise reference to the contents of the dialogue.

Thus, on the one hand, Lambronac'i quotes the exact same passage of the *Timaeus* twice, in different works; on the other, in yet another work, he refers to the *Timaeus* in more generic and, more importantly, less accurate terms. One

42 Tinti 2012b, 272 ff.

43 von Sachsen 1929, 7.

44 Tanielian 2007, 83.

cannot help but wonder whether this might be of some significance, namely whether Lambronac'i even had access to the entire dialogue, or whether he knew just this one fragment, which, as anticipated, is the most popular quotation from the *Timaeus* in Christian authors, thanks to its obvious theological implications. In fact, we will see shortly that other references to it (more or less matching the extant translation) are attested in Armenian texts.<sup>45</sup>

At the present state of knowledge, it is virtually impossible to answer this question with any certainty. Even if he did have access to the dialogue at some point, he might not have actually been in continuous possession of the text, and therefore he might have jotted down his own recollections of it, or taken the inaccurate piece of information from commentaries and secondary literature, without being able to check it on the *Timaeus* itself. If he did know just this one fragment, his source might have been one as yet undiscovered earlier quotation in an Armenian author, or, perhaps more likely, an excerpt that circulated independently from the entire version. In that regard, it is worth stressing that, tantalisingly, the relevant lines (corresponding to 28 c 3–5 of the Greek) follow immediately the section included in the mutilous excerpt attested in manuscript M 437 (corresponding to 27 d 6–28 c 2). Of course, based on Cowe (2010)'s proposed date (early 1280s), the Glajor manuscript would postdate Lambronac'i's lifetime by almost a century,<sup>46</sup> but we could imagine that Lambronac'i had access to an earlier miscellany including the same excerpt. That would substantiate the notion that the passage had circulated independently even before being used as a filler in M 437 (see above).

Besides the quotations in Lambronac'i, other textual references to the extant *Timaeus* exist that, to the present author's knowledge, have never been brought to bear in the scholarly literature concerning the Armenian Platonic translations.

Not surprisingly, the famous passage about the “father and maker” has had some fortune in later texts. For instance, it is quoted in a section explicitly attributed<sup>47</sup> to a discourse/ homily by 13th century author Vahram (Rabuni)

45 See Tinti 2012b, 273, note 146 (with references) for a freer allusion, clearly not matching the extant Armenian *Timaeus*, in the Armenian version of the *Apology of Aristides*.

46 It is perhaps worth pointing out that Tanielian 2007's edition of the *Commentary on the Wisdom of Solomon* uses as its main source manuscript M 421, dating back to the year 1292.

47 *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 46, 507. Cf. K'yoseyan 1995, 223. This page marks the beginning of a section entitled “On the Holy Trinity, One Divinity, and the Salvific Providence of Christ, pronounced by Lord Vahram *Vardapet*”.

*vardapet*,<sup>48</sup> included in Grigor Tat'ewac'i's (1340–1411)<sup>49</sup> *Oskep'orik* (“Book of Golden Content” or “Gold-filled”).<sup>50</sup>

K'yosesyan (1995) had already recognised the *Timaeus* as the source of these lines, and pertinently mentioned the relevant page in Suk'rean's 1877 edition,<sup>51</sup> but this passage does not appear to have been included in any discussion on the fortune of the Platonic versions before. In any case, it should be pointed out that K'yosesyan does not seem to differentiate between literal quotations from the Armenian Plato, such as this one, and more generic references; that could explain why the special significance of these lines has gone unnoticed so far.

The relevant passage (minus the abbreviations used in the 1746 edition) reads as follows:

Որպէս պրատոն ասէ թէ՛ զհայրն եւ **զպատճառն ամենայնի** զսանել զործ է. եւ գտեալ՝ պատմել անհնար է:

As Plato says that: finding the father and cause of everything is a difficult matter; and, having found him, it is impossible to tell.

If we compare them with the corresponding lines from the Armenian *Timaeus* (see above), a couple of differences are immediately apparent (in bold in the text above), namely singular ամենայնի for plural ամենեցուն, and, most notably, the use of պատճառ (“cause”) instead of արարիչ (“creator”, “maker”). We might ascribe both divergences to an imperfect quotation from memory, especially since the word պատճառ is used elsewhere in the Armenian *Timaeus*,<sup>52</sup> but this choice in particular could be due to the author's preference for what amounts to a key word (“cause”) in the preceding lines.

Still, the text is otherwise a good match for that of the dialogue, and, interestingly, follows its word-order rather than the one attested in Lambronac'i, which suggests that the quotations in the latter's writings were likely not the source of this one. Whether Vahram Rabuni drew them from the Armenian *Timaeus* itself, from an excerpt, or from other secondary literature, cannot be ascer-

48 Cf. Thomson 1995 and 2007, s.v.

49 Cf. Thomson 1995 and 2007, s.v.

50 *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 46, 546, lines 15–17. Cf. K'yoseyan 1995, 238.

51 See K'yosesyan 1995, 268, note 108; 258, note 19.

52 Cf. e.g. 14.24 in V 1123, corresponding to 29 a 6 Greek.

tained at the moment, although another, less literal reference to Plato immediately follows in the text,<sup>53</sup> and one is attested earlier in the same chapter.<sup>54</sup>

It should also be pointed out that the same passage about the “father and maker” is quoted, more freely, in an earlier section of the *Oskep'orik*,<sup>55</sup> and, interestingly, one that is not ascribed to Vahram *vardapet*. This reference to the *Timaeus* had also been spotted by K'yosesyan (1995).<sup>56</sup>

The relevant lines (minus any abbreviations and orthographic peculiarities in the 1746 edition) read as follows:

Եւ ի վերայ ամենայնի պղատոն կնքէ ասելով. (որպէս զհայրն՝ եւ զարարիչն իմանալն դժուարին է եւ պատմելն անկարելի):

And about everything Plato concludes saying: ([like] knowing the father and maker is difficult and telling is impossible).

In this case, the pair “father and maker” appears as in the Armenian *Timaeus*, but the vocabulary is otherwise quite different; overall, the quotation in itself is less than precise and does not provide any compelling clues about Tat'ewac'i's (as opposed to Vahram *vardapet*'s) possible knowledge of (and access to) the extant translation of the dialogue.

Whilst other explicit references to Plato in the *Oskep'orik* are not more helpful in this regard,<sup>57</sup> the text actually includes a literal quotation from a different passage of the *Timaeus*.<sup>58</sup> This line is not ascribed to Plato in the text itself, and its source has thus not been recognised by K'yosesyan.

The relevant bit (minus any abbreviations present in *Oskep'orik* 1746) reads as follows:

Որպէս զոշն ի սեւէ եւ ի սպիտակէ:

As grey (originates) from black and white.

The corresponding line in the *Timaeus* (60.14–15 in V 1123; cf. 68 c 3–4 Gr. and 105.15 in Vardanyan 1979) reads:

53 *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 46, 546, lines 17–19. Cf. K'yosesyan 1995, 238.

54 *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 46, 517, lines 22–24. Cf. K'yosesyan 1995, 227.

55 *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 10, 113, lines 1–3. Cf. K'yosesyan 1995, 47.

56 K'yosesyan 1995, 258, note 19.

57 See *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 4, 29, line 10; cf. K'yosesyan 1995, 12. Also, *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 7, 66, lines 17–19; cf. K'yosesyan 1995, 28.

58 *Oskep'orik* 1746, ch. 44, 479, line 8; cf. K'yosesyan 1995, 210.

φαιόν δὲ λευκοῦ τε καὶ μέλανος

and grey (originates from a mixture) of white and black<sup>59</sup>

Էւ գոշ ի սպիտակի Էւ ի սեւի (V 1123)

and grey (originates from a mixture) of white and black

Գոշ՝ ի սեւէ Էւ ի սպիտակէ լինի (Vardanyan 1979)

grey originates from black and white

This sentence concerning the colour grey as a mixture of black and white may be brief, but it is nevertheless significant, not least because it includes the lexical element գոշ, a comparatively rare variant of գորշ, with a phonetic development *rš* > *š* that, although attested earlier, became widespread only in Middle Armenian.<sup>60</sup>

The source passage belongs to the section “On Colours”, which knew some degree of textual circulation independently from the rest of the translated dialogue, as detailed above. As a matter of fact, the textual comparison shows that the quotation in the *Oskep’orik* follows more closely the excerpt as edited by Vardanyan than the Armenian *Timaeus* as attested in the complete Venetian manuscript.

Interestingly, according to the examples provided in the thesaurus *Nor bargirk’* 1836–1837,<sup>61</sup> the same passage is also quoted, more extensively, in a miscellaneous text, probably later than the 12th century.<sup>62</sup>

Շէկ՝ որ է խարստեաշ, Էւ գոշ՝ ի խառնմանէ լինի: Գոշ ի սեւէ Էւ ի սպիտակէ լինի:

59 See the extended text below.

60 Cf. Karst 1901, 94 ff. At the present state of knowledge, գոշ with the meaning of “grey” does not seem to be attested as such in any dated text before the 12th century (see also below). Together with other lexicographical data, this detail is being included by the present writer in her analysis of the date of the Armenian Platonic versions.

61 S.v. գոշ.

62 The text is indicated by the abbreviation Ոսկիփոր. In the *Nor bargirk’* 1836–1837, the examples simply labelled Ոսկիփոր(իկ) can be drawn from any one of several miscellanies, mostly later than the 12th c. (see *Nor bargirk’* 1836–1837, 17).

Red, that is yellow and grey, originates from a mixture. Grey originates from black and white.

The extended text in the *Timaeus* (60.13–15 in V 1123; cf. 68 c 3–4 Gr. and 105.14–15 in Vardanyan 1979) reads:

πυρρόν δὲ ξανθοῦ τε καὶ φαιοῦ κράσει γίγνεται, φαιὸν δὲ λευκοῦ τε καὶ μέλανος

and red originates from a mixture of yellow and grey, and grey, (from a mixture) of white and black

իսկ շէկ ի խարտեշի՝ եւ ի գոշի խառնմանէ լինի՝ եւ գոշ ի<sup>63</sup> սպիտակի եւ ի սեւի (V 1123)

and red originates from a mixture of yellow and grey, and grey from (a mixture of) white and black

իսկ շէկ՝ ի խարտեշի եւ գոշի խառնմանէ լինի: Գոշ՝ **ի սեւէ եւ ի սպիտակէ** լինի (Vardanyan 1979)

and red originates from a mixture of yellow and grey. Grey originates from black and white

The comparison between all these versions seems to suggest that the text of the unidentified miscellany, at least as it is quoted by the *Nor bargirk'* 1836–1837, is partially corrupted. The transition from գոշի to գոշ ի (in bold above) could obviously occur very easily (and it has occurred even in V 1123 in the second part of the sentence).<sup>64</sup> If գոշ was interpreted as a nominative, that in turn would have favoured the correction of խարտեշի into խարտեաշ, for the sake of symmetry, and the consequent restructuring of the sentence, with the insertion of որ է to explain the juxtaposition of two nominatives.

Be that as it may, the second part of the quotation is the most significant for our purposes, since, once again, it is clearly a better match for the

63 See following note.

64 The manuscript reads: եւ գոշի սպիտակի եւ ի սեւի, with no space between գոշ and the following ի; furthermore, the sign which usually precedes the preposition ('ի) is absent. Missing spaces and signs are by no means rare in V 1123, and not necessarily significant, but it is worth noting that the preposition is otherwise consistently written as 'ի in this sentence.

text as attested in the excerpt “On Colours”. In theory, both the quotations (in Tat’ewac’i’s *Oskep’orik* and in the unidentified miscellany) and the excerpt could belong to a different branch of the textual tradition than the one attested in the Venetian manuscript, but it is perhaps more likely that the two quotations ultimately derive from the excerpt itself (which does not necessarily mean that they derive from the surviving manuscript, of course).

Overall, taking into account the inherently miscellaneous nature of Tat’ewac’i’s *Oskep’orik*,<sup>65</sup> it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that the Platonic references in the text may derive from excerpts and quotations included in other secondary literature rather than from the complete translation itself, although that cannot be ruled out, of course.

In any case, as far as the state of the text is concerned, it is worth noting that V 1123 seems once again closer to the Greek (and thus, possibly, to a more genuine form of the Armenian version), at least in the second part of the sentence, than the earlier witnesses. Even setting aside the inversion between white and black, which could occur rather easily in either manuscript tradition (Greek or Armenian),<sup>66</sup> the presence of the ablatives (սւնէ and սպիտակէ) instead of the genitives (which match the Greek) in the other witnesses seems to reflect an attempt to normalise the Armenian.<sup>67</sup>

Although a lexicographical investigation is beyond the scope of the present contribution, it is also potentially significant that the comparatively rare word գոշ (“grey”) is attested in other late texts that explicitly refer to the colour as a mixture of black and white, and thus are possibly influenced, directly or indirectly, by the *Timaëus* (or by the excerpt that circulated independently).<sup>68</sup>

65 Cf. K’yosesyan 1995, v–vi.

66 It should be pointed out, though, that it does not seem to be attested in this particular passage in the Greek manuscript tradition (see Burnet 1902, ad loc., Serrano Cantarín—Díaz de Cerio Díez 2012, ad loc., and Rivaud 2021, ad loc., as well as Jonkers 1982 and 2017), so it could be surmised that the word order as attested in V 1123 is closer to the source text (with the caveat that the relevant variant could have existed at some point, and simply not be attested in the extant witnesses).

67 As for the first part of the sentence, it is debatable whether իսկ շէկ՝ ի խաւրտէշի եւ գոշի խառնմանէ լինի of the excerpt, which reflects *πυρρόν δὲ ξανθοῦ τε καὶ φαιῖοῦ κράσει γίγνεται* but also happens to be more natural in Armenian, is to be considered preferable to իսկ շէկ ի խաւրտէշի՝ եւ ի գոշի խառնմանէ լինի of the *Timaëus*, which is symmetrical to the prepositional phrases of the second part.

68 In that regard, the *Nor bargirk’* 1836–1837 mentions for instance a relevant occurrence in the Armenian version of John of Damascus (13th century), but a search in the digital library *Digilib* also reveals one in the *Commentary on Grammar* by Vardan Arewelc’i (13th century). Further investigations are needed in this regard.



## 5 Preliminary Conclusions and Perspectives for Further Research

Let us summarise the acquisitions presented above and try to draw some preliminary conclusions on the three points we set out to discuss.

First of all, what can the ensemble of these data tell us about the diffusion of the Armenian Platonic versions?

Even at this preliminary stage in the investigation, it is clear that, contrary to what has long been assumed, the Armenian *Timaeus* at least did not exist in a void. Rather, it seems to have had a certain amount of textual circulation, at least in the form of excerpts from two different and distant sections of the text, and subsequent quotations most likely drawn from the same sections. At the present state of knowledge, we cannot rule out that other parts of the dialogue might have had some amount of independent circulation and/or been quoted by subsequent authors. At the same time, we cannot say for certain that the other four Platonic (or Pseudo-Platonic) versions did not leave any traces in Armenian literary tradition. What we can say with confidence is that sections of the *Timaeus* at least seem to have been known in vastly different areas of the Armenian speaking territory, such as Cilicia and Glajor, from the 12th century onwards.

Secondly, what can the minor witnesses and traces of indirect tradition tell us about the reliability of V 1123, the sole (and late) complete manuscript?

The relevant data actually provide some reassuring indications as to the value of the Venetian manuscript as a witness, since the latter, despite being quite recent, seems to preserve in many cases a more conservative state of the text.

Thirdly, can this line of enquiry provide meaningful clues towards solving the complex puzzle of the Platonic versions' date and attribution?

As stated above, Lambronac'i's quotations provide a definite *terminus ante quem* to the late 12th century, for the *Timaeus* at least. In that regard, it might also be interesting to note that Lambronac'i was a direct descendant of Grigor Magistros Pahlawuni, who, about a century and a half earlier, according to his own testimony, could not find any Platonic versions and thus personally authored a translation of the same dialogue (among other texts).<sup>69</sup> This in itself is of course not enough to support an attribution of the extant *Timaeus* to Grigor. Still, even without suggesting that Lambronac'i was necessarily aware of Grigor's (potential) authorship, it is tempting to imagine that the family link and/or family tradition might have favoured his awareness that such a trans-

69 Cf. Muradyan 2012, letter n. 50, 330.

lation existed, and perhaps prompted his desire to consult it. To shed further light on this point, it could be worth investigating any potential links between the books known to have been available to (and have been used by) Magistros and Lambronac'i respectively, to see whether any (other?) meaningful links between their respective libraries can be established.<sup>70</sup>

This is all of course, at this stage, mere speculation. However, tantalisingly, not only is the first author to quote a line from the Armenian *Timaeus* a descendant of Magistros's, but all traces of textual circulation so far detected post-date the latter.<sup>71</sup> Of course, a negative argument—i.e. the lack of earlier traces of textual circulation—cannot stand on its own, but it could potentially back up and solidify a conclusion reached by other means.

Finally, it is worth repeating that our enquiry into the fortune and circulation of the Armenian Platonic translations is still very much a work in progress, and one which will hopefully be made easier by the gradual cataloguing of manuscript collections and the digitisation of manuscripts and/or of reliable editions. The creation of searchable texts in particular will make it easier to compare different passages and detect textual parallels even in the absence of an explicit attribution to Plato, to the *Timaeus*, and perhaps even to the other translated dialogues.

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<sup>70</sup> The present writer owes this suggestion to an anonymous reviewer, to whom thanks are due.

<sup>71</sup> Previous attempts at establishing earlier *termini ante quem* do not stand up to closer scrutiny: see Tinti 2012b, 227 ff.

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