The King's Mellifluous Tongue
Study, Social Bonding, and the Making of Middle Armenian as a Language of the Elite in Medieval Cilicia

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Abstract   This article on social history examines the study of Middle Armenian manuscripts at the Cilician court, placing the language's development within a Mediterranean context that includes Outremer French and Byzantine Greek. In particular, it argues that King Het'um I (d. 1270) bolstered his status as educated king through the commission of two works from theologian Vardan Arewelc'i (d. 1271): an encyclopedic compendium and commentary on grammar, which aided vernacular study in different ways. By balancing the microhistory of these manuscripts against the macro-history of Cilician Middle Armenian's configuration in writing, this article shows how vernacular Armenian became an object of elite study, seemingly capable of representing all the knowledge in the world.

Keywords   Middle Armenian. Medieval Cilicia. Social history. Vernacular. Old French. Byzantine Greek. Het'um. Vardan Arewelc'i. Žłlank'. Educated king. Compendium. Grammar.

Summary   1 Introduction: A Rupture. – 2 The Written Cultivation of Cilician Middle Armenian Among Court and Church. – 3 A Pleasant Conversation Between Grammarian and King. – 4 Grammaticality and Armenian Kingship. – 5 Conclusion: Docile Speech, Pleasing Labour, and Ties that Bind.

1 Introduction: A Rupture

This story about language – which is also a story about power – begins with a murder. In 1225, the Cilician Armenian nobility arrested Philip of Antioch, poisoned him, and killed him in prison. This may not have been of great historical significance had Philip, though a Frank, not also been the king of the Kingdom of Armenia in medieval Cilicia, a territory perched on the northeastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, Philip had become king only three years prior by marrying Zabel (d. 1252), who was heir of the Ṙubēnid dynasty that had ruled since Cilicia had become a kingdom in 1198.[1] However, a powerful Armenian noble named Kostandin (d. 1263), who was also Zabel's regent, had other plans. After disposing of Philip, he promptly marched his army to Silifke Castle, captured Queen Zabel, and then married her off to his son Hetʻum I (d. 1270). Thus, in the year 1226, the Hetʻumid dynasty began their reign over Armenian Cilicia with an unsettling marriage that was also the primary legal source of their legitimacy (Kirakos Ganjakeʻci 1961, 188-9; cf. Vardan Arewelcʻi 1991, 141). Zabel was perhaps only eleven years old when she was wed for the second time; Hetʻum would have been around thirteen. The couple would not produce a child for another ten years (Tēr-Petrosyan 2005-07, 2: 257).

Smbat Sparapet (d. 1276), military commander and older brother to King Hetʻum, barely mentions this episode in the chronicle attributed to him (1956, 225).[2] He chooses instead to portray the event as the somewhat natural restoration of Cilician power to Armenian

1 Zabel is another form of the name Elizabeth, as is the name Isabella, and was spelled many ways in the premodern period, including as Zapel, Zapēl, Zabēl, and, in Vardan Arewelcʻi's historical compilation, even as Zapil, reflecting the pronunciation of the "Franks" (1991, 141). In this article, I follow its traditional spelling, which also reflects its probable Cilician pronunciation in transliteration. Cf. also Ačaṙyan 1944, 2: 159-62.

2 On the attribution of the *Chronicle*'s variants to Smbat, cf. especially La Porta 2020.

stewardship, additionally blaming the flight of Zabel, a child and a widow, to Silifke Castle on a "diabolic fury" within her (226).[3] Still, it could hardly have escaped Hetʻum that his claim to legitimacy in Cilicia was on a different footing than it had been for the Ṙubēnids, whose rule was legitimized in part by a crown they received directly from the Holy Roman Empire. Hetʻum, on the other hand, drew legitimacy from his marriage to Queen Zabel.[4] It therefore should not come as a surprise that Hetʻum sought to bolster his own rule, both implicitly and explicitly, even in ways that previous kings in Cilicia had not. Most famously, he disguised himself as a commoner, snuck out of his kingdom, and made the long journey eastward to Qaraqorum to forge a new alliance with the Mongols, subtly rebalancing political power in Anatolia in the process.[5]

In counterpoint, this article sheds needed light on a less dramatic cultivation of authority and royal identity pursued by Hetʻum and his successors; one which arguably long outlasted his alliance with the Ilkhanate, yet also one that has received relatively little scholarly attention aside from its treatment by a handful of linguists and historians in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As opposed to the sweeping historical drama of Hetʻum's clandestine journey to Qaraqorum, this strategy was far more understated: for the most part, it revolved around the study, commission, composition, translation, and discussion of 'vernacular' or Middle Armenian texts at court. These activities were generally not seen by the people whom the nobility ruled, but rather were undertaken for the court's own benefit and to showcase royal erudition to other Armenian nobles and visitors. Still, taken in sum, these acts played a role in marrying the medieval Armenian vernacular to elite audiences in Sis, and especially to Hetʻum's cultivation of his image as 'educated king'. This *topos* was commonplace at medieval courts around the Mediterranean world, found in sovereigns such as the learned Byzantine ruler Theodore II Laskaris (d. 1258); the polyglot king of Sicily and Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (d. 1250); and Alfonso X of Castile (d. 1284), who promoted use of vernacular Castilian in knowledge production at court.

In the Armenian iteration of this *topos*, reports of Hetʻum's erudition likewise circulated far beyond the court. In the words of

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3 Դիւական բարկութիւն. Despite the lack of discomfort over this union in the Armenian chronicles, its profound ambivalence was well represented by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century painter Vardges Surenyancʻ (d. 1921), whose 1909 painting Զաբէլ թագուհու վերադարձը (The Return of Queen Zabel) depicts the despondent queen, surrounded by the trappings of court, searingly resigned to her fate.

4 Bohemond VI of Antioch, in a letter from 1237 to the pope, thus challenged the legality and legitimacy of Hetʻum's rule on the grounds of a "third degree of kinship" between the king and Zabel. Cf. the quoted passage and discussion in Neagu 2021, 217.

5 For an English translation of this account, cf. Boyle 1964.

the thirteenth-century clergyman and historian Kirakos Ganjakec'i, who hailed from the eastern region of Greater Armenia, Het'um was known as an "amiable man and wise and erudite in scripture [and/or books]".[6] Similar depictions also grace less prestigious historiographic genres. Thus, in the colophon to a hippiatry, the scribe reports that Het'um commissioned three translations while abroad in 1258, when he joined the Mongol conquest of Baghdad. During this campaign, the scribe tells us, Het'um encountered a deacon at the caliph's court named Step'anos, a man educated in many scripts and languages who "became beloved to the King of Armenians on account of [his] robust knowledge".[7] The king took advantage of this meeting, and asked the scholar to translate a treatise on the care of horses, another on the art of fashioning sabres, and yet another on the study of the sun and moon, all from Persian originals.[8]

Het'um's family also commissioned, composed, and read works in 'vulgar' Armenian at home in Sis, the capital of the Kingdom of Armenia in Cilicia. Not only did such acts buttress Het'um's authority as cultivated and educated king, but, as I will argue, they helped to further the correlation of 'vernacular' Armenian with statecraft, science, and learning more broadly. Just as importantly, the production of texts in this language helped to bring different elite actors together at court and in the church, whose Holy See was located some two hundred kilometres east of Sis (near Kozan in modern day Turkey) across a mountainous terrain, into a shared project of knowledge production that benefited these figures in different ways. Its usage moreover helped to provide opportunities for different forms of social and kinship bonding at court, including between the king and his wife, mediated by the teachings or actual presence of clergy from the Armenian Apostolic church.

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6 Այր քաղցր էր և իմաստուն և գիտնաւոր գրովք (Kirakos Ganjakec'i 1961, 370).

7 Սիրեցեալ եղև ի Հայոց թագաւորէն վասն հզոր գիտութեանն (Mat'evosyan 1984, 299).

8 More generally, foreigners also remarked positively on the kings of Cilicia; Het'um was king when Niccolò and Maffeo (Matteo) Polo travelled through the major Cilician port of Ayas on their return journey from China; in 1271, just shortly after Het'um's death and the beginning of the reign of his son, Marco Polo likewise travelled with his father and uncle through the port of Ayas, asserting that the king of Lesser Armenia (Cilicia) ruled his territory well and "with justice" (*en justice*) (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, fr. 1116). The rest of the Armenian nobles did not much impress a young Marco Polo, he says, as they were good for nothing but heavy drinking. Somewhat analogously, the chronicler Michael the Syrian, whose work was translated from Syriac into Armenian by the theologian Vardan Arewelc'i (d. 1271) with the help of a Syrian named Išōx (fl. thirteenth century), praises Het'um as զեղեցիկ հասակաւ և բարի խորհրդով, մեծահոգի և երկայնամիտ, հեզ և հանդարտ ('comely in stature and right in thought, magnanimous and patient, tranquil and calm'; Michael the Syrian 1871, 506), the very image of a wise ruler fit for the throne. Similarly, in his own history, Vardan lauds the young Het'um as 'wise' and 'right-minded' (հանճարեղ) (1991, 141).

Of course, as we shall see, the development of Middle Armenian had begun before Het'um's rise to power; it also continued in an intensified form after his death. Hence, while one should not claim a special causality between Het'um and the accelerated development of Cilician Middle Armenian as a written language, it is possible to observe a turning point in the history of the Armenian vernacular that overlaps roughly with his rule. In the history of a language, call this period the hastening of the tempo of life. It was a time when Middle Armenian writing began to flourish in a widespread manner in Cilicia, and moreover it was a time when Middle Armenian, for complex reasons, provisionally became an object of study in more than one manner. The Het'umids played a role in this process as it unfolded specifically in Cilicia, at their court in Sis, though far from the only role. Still, the ways in which the king and his circle used the Armenian vernacular at this pivotal moment provide us with a useful window into this broader linguistic realignment of power, culture, and knowledge production among Armenians in the Mediterranean.

This article consequently seeks to balance a macro-history of the medieval Armenian vernacular during this period against the micro-history of textual production for Het'um's court. It is divided into three parts, each of which advances an interlocking argument about the complex life of Cilician Middle Armenian in relation to courtly study. My overall contention is that what made Cilician Middle Armenian a language of the elite was not only that the nobility spoke a form of dialectal Armenian by situation of birth, or necessarily because they employed this language in the administration of their kingdom for pragmatic reasons. Rather, it was because these Cilician nobles and clergy often made an effort to use the language as a written vehicle for knowledge production in ways that sometimes supplemented, and sometimes supplanted, the other available languages at the court and in the church. Plainly said, they used Middle Armenian often as a conscious choice in their writing (and reading) during this period because of what it could do for them. Within this context, the early Cilician Middle Armenian textual corpus demonstrates that vernacular had become a medium through which the nobility, in partnership with the church, could fashion expressions of their own authority and royal erudition in an abundance of ways.

In the first part of this article, I offer an expansive look at Middle Armenian before and after Het'um was crowned, charting the development of the Cilician vernacular against the backdrop of other classical and vernacular languages that circulated in the medieval Mediterranean world, with a selective comparative focus on Vulgar Latin, Outremer French, and Byzantine Greek. Although many specialists have fruitfully explored the grammatical and lexical formation of the medieval Armenian vernacular more broadly, this section seeks to break different ground by focusing on the relatively neglected social

and epistemic functions of the vernacular Armenian language, especially as they are presented in the linguistic behaviours of elite figures at the Cilician court in Sis and at the seat of the Armenian church in Hṙomklay. Hence, although Middle Armenian is generally termed the 'official language'[9] or the 'state language'[10] of Cilicia in secondary literature, the first section of this article seeks to distinguish the vernacular's social and epistemic history at court beyond the chancellery, shedding light on what it meant for the nobility to employ the vulgar tongue in writing among themselves. By tracing the gradually changing attitudes and social practices that coalesced around Cilician Middle Armenian at court, I show that the Armenian vernacular made certain forms of knowledge and power available to a wide array of actors, even while it was appreciated for its perceived familiar and 'mellifluous' qualities.

Upon this stage, I center two unpublished and relatively neglected manuscripts composed in Middle Armenian, in part to demonstrate what these broader linguistic transformations looked like on the ground. Each manuscript is connected to King Hetʻum in different ways. The first is the *Žłlankʻ* (Middle Armenian for 'Pleasant Labour', with additional connotations of conversation and dialogue; Ališan 1885, III; Antʻabyan 1987, 1: 156-7; Łazaryan, Avetisyan 2009, 258), an encyclopedic compendium that focuses on the interpretation of scripture, with entries that touch adjacently on theology, grammar, animals, astronomy, music, the natural world, and many other subjects; among other things, it also includes a primer for the study of other Armenian manuscripts.[11] King Hetʻum commissioned this monumental work from the renowned theologian Vardan Arewelcʻi (Vardan 'the Easterner', meaning Vardan from Greater Armenia) for his own personal study; Vardan completed it in 'vulgar' Armenian by 1246.[12] As I argue, the *Žłlankʻ* did many things for King Hetʻum, helping him to cultivate his image as 'educated king' at court, in

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9 Պաշտոննական լեզու (Ačaṙyan 1951, 235).

10 Պետական լեզու (Łazaryan 1954, 331-6).

11 The Middle Armenian word *žłlankʻ* would seem to be derived from the Middle Armenian word *žułl* (today *žłul* in colloquial Eastern Armenian), meaning 'speech', 'dialogue', or 'conversation' according to the compilers of the *Middle Armenian Dictionary* (Łazaryan, Avetisyan 2009, 259); in modern colloquial Armenian *žłul* denotes an amusing pastime, diversion, or pleasant occupation, and in this sense has a secondary meaning of 'conversation' (Malxaseancʻ 1944, 2: 144). Both *žułl* and *žłul* are derived from the Arabic word *shughl*, meaning "occupancy, filling, taking up; detention, prevention, distraction"; in the plural (*ashghāl*) meaning "occupation, activity, work, job; business, concern" (Wehr 1979, 556). Usages of *shughl* can connote both physical labour as well as the occupation or preoccupation of the mind.

12 For the most detailed assessment of the *Žłlankʻ*, its contents, and its many recensions, cf. Antʻabyan 1967; 1987, 2: 110-26. E. Prudʻhomme has also translated various excerpts from the *Žłlankʻ* in French (Vardan Arewelcʻi 1871).

addition to providing a medium to bring him and his wife together, at times under the supervision of a priest, in the intimate study of many subjects. Similarly, it established a model, based on the pedagogy of a monastic education, that was intended to serve the king's children in developing their own *bona fides* as educated rulers, in the mold of their father, in the future. Finally and most subtly, it served as implicit proof-of-concept that Middle Armenian could house within itself the knowledge of the world, and therefore become a suitable medium to impart a royal education. Works like the *Žłlank'* helped to prompt an era of 'vulgar' learning among the nobility more broadly at this time, rooted in a vernacular pedagogy that drew on the teachings of the church, and further correlated Middle Armenian usage with elite study in medieval Cilicia.

The second manuscript I briefly examine here is among the oldest grammars to be composed in Middle Armenian, straddling a world both in and out of court. It is a loose translation of a Classical Armenian grammar that King Het'um also commissioned, again from Vardan Arewelc'i, who came west to reside in Cilicia around 1242. Vardan's grammar continues a long tradition in Classical Armenian of commenting on the *Tékhnē grammatikē* (Art of Grammar) by the foundational Greek grammarian Dionysius Thrax (d. 90 BCE). In this sense, Vardan's *Meknut'iwn k'erakani* (Commentary on Grammar) is not a language textbook as one might expect of modern grammars, but rather contains something like a theory of language, or a different kind of proof-of-concept: a demonstration that the Classical Armenian language was capable of auto-theorization, and that the student of Armenian was capable of taking on any subject that language can express.[13] Quite clearly, this grammar was a part of Het'um's correlation of his own power with erudition and study.

It is therefore significant that the *Commentary on Grammar* was adapted into Middle Armenian, though for unknown purposes. The oldest extant copy of this work preserves a colophon dated 29 June 1335, but it may also have been translated prior to this year. As this third section shows, the unpublished Middle Armenian grammar likewise demonstrates Middle Armenian was capable of theorizing language, and therefore was capable of serving as the gateway to "wisdom" and "knowledge" (M2283, 4*r*) as it states, through a diglossic relationship with the Classical language. Crucially, such works indicate that the clergy experimented with the Armenian vernacular as an intermediary link that might aid in the study of Classical Armenian, suggesting that the vernacular might provide a cornerstone in the study of grammar, the first of the arts in the medieval *trivium*

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13 The title of this work is also sometimes translated as *Commentary on the Grammarian*.

and hence the basis of a Christian education. This relatively neglect-ed Middle Armenian adaptation of Vardan Arewelc'i's *Commentary* matters, then, precisely because it marks a moment when the Arme-nian vernacular gradually became an object of study in its own right, and moreover, an object to be contemplated by elite figures who were perhaps beyond the court.

In sum, these dual metamorphoses – Middle Armenian's capability of totalizing seemingly all knowledge, on the one hand, and its par-tial transformation into an object of study, on the other – occurred against the backdrop of the broader Mediterranean world, and more locally against a shared multilingualism with the Crusader states. Hence, the production of such works during this period reflects an-other step in the evolution of Middle Armenian into a primary lan-guage by which knowledge was produced for the multilingual court, rivaling even other vernaculars in their presence in medieval Cili-cia. However, at least in these examples, Middle Armenian does not seem to have especially rivaled its Classical sibling during this ear-ly stage at court. As Łazaryan has observed, the vernacular emerged out of a delicate partnership with the Classical Armenian language, drawing heavily on Classical grammar and syntax, even as it began to weave new grammatical forms, a new lexicon, and a new pronunci-ation of Classical words into its warp and weft, setting off a process of gradually increasing differentiation (1954, 331-2). In some sense, one might thus consider Cilician Middle Armenian to have developed out of an ongoing dialogue between the spoken Armenian dialects from Greater Armenia that had migrated to the Mediterranean coast, on the one hand, and the other languages of the Mediterranean world, including now also Classical Armenian, that grounded these dialects in preestablished styles and genres of writing, on the other.

At the same time, Cilician Middle Armenian also developed as a written language out of a series of conversations between the court in Sis, the Armenian church, and other actors with varying degrees of closeness between the two, including from Greater Armenia. These relationships were both of an intimate nature and incredibly gener-ative for Middle Armenian as a language of science and statecraft. The cultivation of Middle Armenian as a courtly language of study may thus be seen as part of a broader project, explored in recent years by scholars such as Abkarian, Grigoryan Savary, Rapti, and Vardanyan, in which the Het'umid court sought to bolster Armeni-an authority over their corner of the northeastern Mediterranean in many ways.[14] Of course, in retrospect, this larger project would be

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14 There has been a renewed interest of late regarding the Armenian nobility's ar-ticulation of their authority in Sis, particularly in art history (Grigoryan Savary 2022; Rapti 2022; Vardanyan 2022), and also in the study of how these figures constructed

short-lived; the Cilician state fell to the Mamluks in 1375, ending the last Armenian kingdom. Yet this outcome was hardly inevitable in the early thirteenth century. After all, this was a world in which one could murder the king of Armenia, who was the son of the ruler of Antioch, an ally and a Christian neighbuor, and in many respects get away with it. It is all the more remarkable, then, that one aspect of the Het'umid project of consolidating authority among the other elites in Sis in fact succeeded wildly, long outlasting Het'um's alliance with the Ilkhanate and even Armenian statehood in Cilicia altogether. This was the selective transformation of dialects from Greater Armenia, rarely preserved in extant writing before their migration to the Mediterranean coast, into a chosen courtly language of the last Armenian kings and an enduring medium of knowledge production.

2 The Written Cultivation of Cilician Middle Armenian Among Court and Church

Before turning to the intellectual partnership between King Het'um and Vardan Arewelc'i, it is illustrative to sketch a broader arc for the development of Middle Armenian during the Cilician period here. Middle Armenian is often termed a 'vernacular' language, and the language that medieval Armenians actually spoke (when they spoke Armenian), but these descriptions generally conceal as much as they reveal. Notably, Middle Armenian does not entirely conform to Pollock's classic formulation of a vernacular language as one that looks to a separate and classical antecedent (such the relationship of Kannada to Sanskrit), from which it derives its literary and rhetorical models. Thus, for Pollock, the choice to write in the vernacular is a choice to write in a language that does not travel in the same way as the cosmopolitan or classical language (1998a, 8; 1998b; 2006). In contrast, Middle Armenian does not fit this mold quite so well (Pifer 2023, 317-18). For one, the relationship between Middle and Classical Armenian is closer to the relationship between Byzantine and Classical Greek than it is to the relationship between Old French and Latin. Though Middle Armenian and Classical Armenian have their own

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their genealogies across disparate historical and literary sources, as in the work of Abkarian (unpublished), whose treatment of the Cilician representations of authority in the Mediterranean world is the subject of a forthcoming dissertation. My interest here is not on authority per se, but rather in how the nobility, in partnership with the church, specifically used the vernacular to further specific aims at court even beyond the chancellery, both socially among themselves and also in concert with the leaders and major intellectuals of the Armenian Church. For historical background on Armenian Cilicia more generally, cf. also the rich studies by Der Nersessian 1962 and Mutafian 1988; 1993; 2012.

distinctive grammatical and lexical forms, they exist along a linguistic continuum rather than as entirely independent and separate languages, and different points on this spectrum interface with neighbouring literary and linguistic forms in divergent ways.[15] Of course, the same is true to a degree of the modern Eastern and Western Armenian 'vernaculars', which likewise take a sizable amount of their lexicons and grammatical forms from Classical, Middle, Early Modern (Civil), and dialectical Armenian(s). It is perhaps more accurate to envision the Armenian language as a large and unruly family with many siblings, cousins, and parents who each vied for prominence in different ways, and as the result of different language ideologies, than as incommensurate tongues. Put differently, the Armenian language is one that houses vernaculars in the *plural*, even as it sometimes unsettles contemporary models for what those 'vernaculars' might do in relation to each other or to their classical language.

That said, even at the early period under consideration in this article, Cilician Armenian authors were often sharply aware that they were not writing in a classicizing mode. In the words of Mxitʻar Heracʻi (d. c. 1200), the celebrated Armenian physician who composed an early Middle Armenian book called *J̌ermancʻ mxitʻarutʻiwn* (The Consolation of Fevers) in late twelfth-century Cilicia, he made his book in a "rustic [*gełǰuk*] and unrestricted tongue" that would be easy for his readership to understand (1832, viii).[16] Implicit in his words is the assumption that Classical Armenian (known as *grabar*, or the written language) was apparently not accessible for Mxitʻar's desired audiences. Tellingly, glimpses of this same rhetoric also reflect moments of vernacularization elsewhere in the medieval Mediterranean. For instance, Roman Catholic officials at the third Council of Tours in 813 instructed clergy to no longer deliver sermons only in Latin, which was apparently difficult for some audiences to comprehend, but rather to preach in the *rusticam Romanam linguam*, or the 'rustic' romance language, meaning Vulgar Latin, which

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15   I have borrowed the notion of a 'linguistic continuum' from Mavroudi (2022, 265), who uses it to distinguish the cases of different medieval registers of Greek and Arabic from their classical languages, as opposed to the European model of the classical and vernacular languages, which are separate from each other.

16   Գեղջուկ և արձակ բարբառով. Here I employ Cowe's insightful translation of արձակ as 'unrestricted' instead of 'prose' as it is sometimes understood, which he reads as the language being freed from the "various rules set out in textbooks and taught in schools" on Classical Armenian (2020b, 109). It is also worth observing that Mxitʻar's other epithet, *gełǰuk* or 'rustic', predates him by several centuries. For instance, the historian Yovhannēs Drasxanakertcʻi, who was Catholicos of the Armenian Church from 897-925, reports that Šapuh Bagratuni wrote a history in the ninth century in a *gełǰuk* register, though this work is now lost to us. So too did the ninth-century grammarian Hamam Arewelcʻi term a form of Armenian as *gṙehik* or 'vulgar'. Cf. the discussion by Ačaṙyan 1951, 229-31.

encompassed what might be termed the 'proto-Romance dialects' or the 'Latin of the illiterate' (Werminghoff 1906, 288, l. 28; Gravel 2021, 561-2). But what did using the 'rustic' language really mean for these diverse figures, straddling opposite shores of the Mediterranean world?

In some ways, it may have meant something relatively similar. Akin to Latin, which predated the development of the 'proto-Romance dialects' for many centuries, Classical Armenian (*grabar*) gained admission to writing in the fifth century CE, following the invention of the Armenian script. By the thirteenth century, Classical Armenian was an archaic language, and moreover one that required diligent study to read and to write in any capacity – it was therefore not spoken by the nobility or the Armenian populace at large. Instead, when these figures spoke Armenian, they spoke dialectal forms of the language that had developed over many centuries and were used across broad swaths of Armenian society in Cilicia, as is suggested by the manuscript record and which I will discuss shortly.[17] This language is known today under the rubric of 'Cilician' Middle Armenian, even while other varieties of the premodern Armenian vernacular developed in writing in a decentralized manner both simultaneously and over the following centuries.

At least in its written forms, early Cilician Middle Armenian drew a great deal of its lexicon and grammar from Classical Armenian, while it also introduced new vocabulary and simplified or subtly altered many of those grammatical forms. Perhaps most famously, Cilician Middle Armenian interfaced with the major cosmopolitan and vernacular languages of the Mediterranean world in its adoption of new loanwords, which sprung from the floodgates of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Outremer French, Greek, and Latin.[18] The textual corpus of

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[17]   In fact, many premodern dialectal strands of Armenian developed centuries before the configuration of Cilician Middle Armenian as a written language, sometimes seemingly as early as the fifth and sixth centuries; not all of these were necessarily antecedents to the Cilician vernacular, however (Winter 1966; Weitenberg 1983).

[18]   On the development and forms of 'Middle' Armenian, cf. the foundational studies by Hovnanean (1897) and by Karst (1901), as well as the discussion in the overview of grammar in the modern vernacular by Aytɔnean (1866). Aytɔnean does not always take an appreciative view of the premodern vernacular variants and forerunners of modern Armenian, calling their use of foreign loanwords and lack of uniformity a kind of "ugliness" (անգեղութիւն) (142), even while scaffolding aspects of Middle Armenian history into his construction of a modern vernacular ideology. On Middle Armenian's grammatical and historical development, cf. also *Aknarkner mijin grakan hayereni patmut'yan* (Ałayan, Ĵahukyan 1972-75), and the studies by Ĵahukyan (1969), Łazaryan (1960), and Avetisyan (2016). Avetisyan does not consider 'Middle' Armenian, in his usage, to be a literary language on account of its internal heterogeneity and non-standardized character; instead, he chooses to bifurcate 'literary' Armenian into two more general and overarching periods, that of Classical and that of the 'vernacular', which underwent standardization in the modern era; Middle Armenian, in this light, served as a kind of

Middle Armenian reflects the cross-cultural and multilingual environments in which it emerged, remaining internally diverse throughout its long life. Even in Armenian-ruled Cilicia, which represents the most centralized phase in the configuration of the medieval Armenian vernacular, a wide and heterogeneous array of Middle Armenian forms appear. Mxit'ar Herac'i, for example, had migrated to Cilicia from Khoy, today in northwestern Iran, and he likely brought a different dialectal strand of the Armenian vernacular with him. Hence, he pluralizes some nouns in a different manner than do the vernacular writers in Cilicia who immediately follow him (Ačaṙyan 1951, 253).

This does not necessarily mean, of course, that the variety of medieval dialects and literary registers housed under the rubric of 'Middle' Armenian were restricted to the speech of non-elite Armenian actors. No one would argue that Mxit'ar's decision to write in his 'rustic' tongue was for the benefit of 'peasants' or 'villagers', which is another meaning of *geḷǰuk* (Bedrossian 1875, 115).[19] His was a medical treatise which served in the training of other physicians, both in and beyond Cilicia itself. The foundational nineteenth- and early twentieth-century studies on Middle Armenian were well aware of its relationship to royal power and knowledge production during the Cilician period; it is no coincidence that Cilician Armenian is by far the most studied form of the Middle Armenian vernacular, in part for this reason. Still, it is somewhat common to encounter the assertion that the Armenian vernacular was spoken by the 'people', while Classical Armenian remained a language of the church and the elite,[20] with-

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holding place for the 'literary' Armenian vernaculars that exist today. However, it is worth observing, at least in passing, that many premodern vernacular languages likewise displayed a wide degree of variation and non-standardization even in literary texts. In my opinion, it is more productive to consider how and to what degree a premodern language interfaces with particular styles, aesthetics, and genres, and moreover how and to what degree it does so in particular times and places, than it is to try and categorize what is explicitly 'literary' or not 'literary' about its products according to modern benchmarks. For broad investigations into the development of the Armenian language, including its 'Middle' period, cf. also Ačaṙyan (1951, 226-54) and Nichanian (1989). Finally, for an introduction to the evolution and development of the premodern Armenian dialects, which began long before Middle Armenian was introduced to writing in Cilicia and also continued long after, cf. the detailed linguistic studies by Pisowicz (1995), Weitenberg (1983; 1984; 1996; 1999-2000; 2002), and Winter 1966. On Middle Armenian textual study and readership in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, cf. Budak, Pifer 2024 and Pifer 2023.

19 Likewise, as Ačaṙyan observes, although Mxit'ar Goš (d. c. 1200) wrote his law code in a simple Classical Armenian register, he did so for the benefit of other specialists and officials in the Cilician legal system, and not for the public at large (1951, 232).

20 For example, as the editors of the three volume *Heritage of Armenian Literature* observe in passing, "Part of the movement toward secularization, especially from the twelfth century on, was the emergence of a new literary idiom: Middle Armenian, a diction that could be comprehended by the masses. *Grabar* (Classical Armenian) continued to exist alongside the various spoken dialects, however, and gradually became

out always a great deal of effort to place these two very broad poles along a more graded spectrum.[21]

Here, too, comparison within a broader Mediterranean framework is instructive. Take, again for example, the famous (and often misunderstood) injunction at the third Council of Tours: the command to preach in the *rusticam Romanam linguam* was not directed toward the general Christian populace, but rather seems to have been intended as an instruction for use in the training of *clergy*, as Gravel (2021) has argued. This 'rustic' tongue was, in this context, also a language of priests, albeit those who seem to have had difficulty receiving a complete education in Latin grammar, and yet those who still possessed some education in relation to a generally illiterate and unlettered populace.[22] In the case of Middle Armenian, it is certainly true that many poems were composed in part for relatively uneducated (by monastic standards) audiences in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, both in Cilicia and in Greater Armenia; these poems were often composed by Armenian clergy, in part to inculcate knowledge of Christianity among their scattered flocks. However, beyond the form of poetry, there is another strand of Middle Armenian's history that deserves to be teased out here: namely, its connections to knowledge

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the language of the church, just as in western Europe Latin was gradually confined to the church and related areas of scholarship" (Hacikyan et al. 2002, 201). It is important to acknowledge the validity of this observation, even while one might speculate where we should place the interpretive communities of groups such as the nobility, physicians, scribes in the chancellery or at the customs-house in Ayas, and certain vernacular poets from the period, such as Kostandin Erznkac'i and Frik, each with different commands of the language and each with slightly differing audiences, in-between these very broad poles of the clerics and the 'people'. The same can be said of different uses and registers of language within the Armenian Church itself.

21   Of course, this over-identification of the 'vernacular' with 'the people' also has an old genealogy. As Mavroudi has aptly observed, "The romantic conceptualization of the 'vernacular' as the 'language of the people' owes much to Herder's eighteenth-century identification of language as the fundamental characteristic of a nation and its deployment in nineteenth-century German cultural and political life – in part, a reaction to French cultural dominance in the German lands and elsewhere in Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries"; therefore, she notes, the identification of a 'vernacular' simply with the 'people' is also anachronistic in the premodern world (2022, 264). In this case study, the corpus of Middle Armenian – even in its early period in the thirteenth century – is simply too diverse, and to an extent too decentralized, to ascribe a single kind of audience or function to, and one should be skeptical of any attempt to do just that. For instance, during this century, Middle Armenian was used at times by theologian-poets in Greater Armenia such as Yovhannēs Erznkac'i who explicitly state that their (sometimes) lay audiences could not read scripture and therefore they composed poetry (1958, 208); it was also used at the court in Sis by nobility who actively studied Classical Armenian, although did not seem as comfortable in the Classical language as they did in the Middle register, as this article will show.

22   Similarly, as Agapitos observes of Byzantine Greek, "there can be no question of class distinction in the use of the learned and the vernacular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, given that both idioms belonged to the educated elite" (2022, 264).

production and to royal power, even before the establishment of the Kingdom of Armenia in Cilicia, and even apart from the chancellery at court.[23] Middle Armenian was likewise a language developed in its written forms first and foremost by elite Armenian figures, including by the heads of church and court. In this context, the various branches of Middle Armenian were 'rustic' primarily in relation to the archaic, learned language of Classical Armenian; this epithet is thus not necessarily reflection upon those who used the vernacular, as this was a capacious group that included kings and queens.

In fact, elite usage of the Armenian vernacular dates to its earliest appearances in the manuscript record. For example, one of the oldest extant Armenian language manuscripts, an Armenian-Latin glossary produced in late ninth- or early tenth-century France, features many dialectal forms and may have been dictated by an Armenian physician to a Frankish monk (Weitenberg 1983; Redgate 2007). This work is known as the Autun Glossary; it is contained within a Carolingian manuscript that includes a copy of the letters of Jerome (d. 420). Slightly later in time, but further to the east in Greater Armenia, a physician near Diyarbakır named Busayid wrote the oldest known Middle Armenian prose text that is still extant today: a prescription for the treatment of the liver, which he recorded in 1037.[24] Tellingly, Busayid's patient Grigor was the son of Vahram Pahlawuni (d. 1045), who bore the hereditary title of the *sparapet* (military commander-in-chief) of the Bagratuni kingdom. As these early examples suggest, Middle Armenian has long been a language of knowledge production, and in particular of medical knowledge, even as it was also correlated with elite figures, including physicians (who may or may not have been Armenian) and the Armenian nobility.[25]

Remarkably, this relationship only deepened after the collapse of Bagratuni rule in the mid-eleventh century. It was during this period when migrating waves of Armenian nobles began to settle in Cilicia, bringing with them many dialectal forms of medieval Armenian, which took on new lives in exile from their native lands and in partnership with Classical Armenian (Łazaryan 1954, 332). While the admission of Middle Armenian to writing seems to have happened first in Greater Armenia, it is in Cilicia where its literarization, or the

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[23] The connection of Middle Armenian to Cilician statecraft has been observed at least since the foundational study on the documents of the chancellery by Langlois 1863.

[24] For the text, cf. Ačaṙyan 1951, 233-4. Cf. also the discussion in Hovnanean 1897, 414-20.

[25] Łazaryan considers the development of Middle Armenian to have taken place during Bagratuni rule (and hence to have developed already before its period of flourishing in Cilicia), beginning in the tenth century, and contextualizes its early development against other social and economic shifts during this period (1960, 67-114).

cultivation of language within a literary context, appears to have begun.[26] One of the earliest known authors of this new literature is another elite figure of Pahlawuni descent: Nersēs Šnorhali (d. 1173), the Armenian Catholicos, who rewrote the Bible as a series of versified Middle Armenian riddles in Hṙomklay, the new see of the Church.[27] He did so, according to one thirteenth-century Armenian historian, so that Armenians might recite these scriptural enigmas at wine-bibbings and weddings in the place of more worldly forms of entertainment (Kirakos Ganjakec'i 1961, 147). Somewhat like the command to preach in the *rusticam Romanam linguam*, these riddles remained popular in monastic settings, where they were largely copied numerous times throughout the medieval period, even while they reportedly had currency in other social contexts. Right from the start, the church's use of the vernacular was invested in a particular pedagogical program, in other words, and that pedagogy seemingly had currency beyond the walls of the monastery.

Nersēs seems to be at the vanguard of a trend. As noted earlier, one decade after Nersēs's death, the erudite Cilician physician Mxit'ar Herac'i composed his famous medical treatise in Middle Armenian so that his work might be "easily understood" (դիւրահաս լիցի) by readers (1832, viii). Mxit'ar's choice of linguistic register was likely not coincidental: he worked in both Sis, the capital of Armenian Cilicia, and also at the see in Hṙomklay; moreover, he received patronage from Nersēs and Grigor Tłay, the next head of the Armenian Church, and was associated especially with Nersēs. Though the exact audiences of both figures remain somewhat shrouded by time, Nersēs and Mxit'ar were part of overlapping circles – ordained clergymen and lay Cilician physicians – who incrementally tilted modes of knowledge production toward this new 'rustic' idiom, which now assumed a role in shaping the interpretation of holy scripture (in the poetic riddles of Nersēs) and in collating medical science culled from Greek, Arabic, Syriac, and Persian (in the prose work of Mxit'ar). These were no small tasks.

By the turn of the thirteenth century, there was a quantitative and qualitative shift in Middle Armenian textual production that was driven by another elite coterie, tipping the language's gravitational center toward the royal court in Sis. This new phase of the language's history coincided roughly with the takeover of Cilician Armenia by the Het'umid dynasty in 1226, when the regent of Queen

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26   For the terms and definitions of literization (the admission of a language to writing) and literarization (the admission of language to a literary standard), cf. Pollock 1998b; 2006.

27   For the text of the riddles attributed to Nersēs, and for information on their reproduction in manuscripts, cf. Mnac'akanyan 1980, 40-191.

Zabel conspired to wed her to his son Hetʻum I. Somewhat akin to the vernacular riddles of Nersēs, which contain within themselves the sweeping range of biblical texts, this phase in the Armenian vernacular's development had its own encyclopedic bent, serving as performative proof-of-concept that the vernacular was capable of housing within it all the knowledge of the world (and, simultaneously, that the king enjoyed command over this diverse material). For instance, it was around this period when an anonymous translator rendered into Middle Armenian the Arabic version of the *Geoponica*, a treasure trove of information on weather, agriculture, and animal husbandry, originally compiled in Greek for Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos in the tenth century (Ališan 1877; Greppin 1987). As I will examine shortly, it was likewise during this period when King Hetʻum commissioned Vardan Arewelcʻi to compose the encyclopedic *Žłlankʻ* for his own study, a work that shares affinities with other 'encyclopedic' projects in Outremer French.

Such activity may not have been limited to Armenians alone. Syrian physicians in Cilicia, such as Išōx and Faraǰ, likewise composed books that appeared in Middle Armenian during the mid to late thirteenth century; their works collectively touch on anatomy, the natural world, cosmology, and horses (Vardanyan 2008, 276; cf. Cowe 2010).[28] The court in Sis sometimes played a role in the production of such works. King Smbat (r. 1296-98) commissioned the hippiatry by Faraǰ, for instance (Cowe 2010, 101). The production of these works in Cilician Middle Armenian suggests a broader shift in the vernacular's efficacy, which was gradually becoming a regional language of knowledge production, buttressed by royal patronage and the activities of a variety of physicians and translators who benefited from that patronage. Moreover, the appearance of 'rustic' scientific and medical works in Cilicia is also suggestive of courtly activity in other ways. To give one prominent example, Queen Zabel established a hospital in 1241-2 (Ališan 1885, 554); it is not difficult to envision how these same 'rustic' texts would have been used at this institution, which depended on the patronage of the court. The nobility not only commissioned works in Middle Armenian directly, in other words, but just as crucially developed institutional spaces within which the vernacular could find purchase. They provided much of the language's needed infrastructure, albeit sometimes language cultivation would not seem to be their primary objective.

Parallel to this story, as Middle Armenian's status as a language of learning among the rulers of Armenian Cilicia continued to grow, so too did the court practice certain forms of institutionalized study.

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[28] On Syrian-Armenian intellectual and cultural exchange from this period, cf. also Tēr-Petrosian 1989.

Near the end of the thirteenth century, the Dominican traveller Burchard of Mount Sion spent ten weeks with King Lewon II (d. 1289), the son of Het'um.[29] He was particularly impressed by the piety of the king and his family, noting a specific form of study that the king and nobility exercised daily:

> *Reges et principes et omnes nobiles audiunt libentissime uerbum Dei. Vnde cotidie ad horam tertiam uerthapate siue monachi curiam regis uel principis adeunt alicuius ad quos statim accedunt principes ipsi uel domini cum filiis suis et potentibus de curia sua, et apponitur liber aliquis de sacra scriptura, et legitur coram eis in uulgari, quia linguam aliam nesciunt sed linguis et literis propriis utuntur, et exponitur eis textus a monachis illis, et ubicumque dubitant seculares et questiones mouent, a monachis instruuntur et questiones soluuntur secundum dicta sanctorum. Ego quesiui ab ipso catholicos, quos doctores maxime sequerentur in scripture sacre expositione et dixit, quod inter precipuos sunt isti: Iohannes Chrisostomus, Gregorius Nazancenus, Cyrillus Alexandrinus quem Kyrillum uocant quia C litteram non habent, et Effrem.*

> The kings, the princes, and all the nobles hear the word of God most willingly. For this reason daily at the third hour the verthabite [vardapet] or monks visit the court of king or a prince; the princes themselves or the lords with their children and officials of their court come to them at once. Some book of sacred scripture is brought and read before them in the common tongue, because they know no other, but use their own languages and script. The text is expounded to them by the monks, and whenever the lay people have doubts and raise questions, they are taught by the monks and questions answered in accordance with the sayings of the saints. I enquired from the catholicus [Catholicos] himself which doctors of the church they followed in particular in expounding sacred scripture. He said that among the important ones were these: John Chrysostom, Gregory Nazianzus, and Cyril of Alexandria, whom they call Kyril, because they have no letter C, and Ephraem. (Burchard of Mount Sion, O.P. 2019, 206-9)

Three details are especially worth unpacking here. First, clergy would come and read books about scripture to the nobility and their families "in the common tongue [*in uulgari*]", or form of vulgar

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29 Lewon II is also called Lewon III in scholarship, due to the fact that there was a Ṙubēnid ruler named Lewon prior to the crowning of Lewon I (d. 1219) (when he became 'the first' as king, and no longer only 'the second' as prince), who was the first king of the Kingdom of Armenia in Cilicia.

Armenian, because their audience apparently did not know other languages. Perhaps the scriptural books at court were read aloud in Classical Armenian, following a discussion in a more colloquial and contemporary register of Armenian, as happens even today in Armenian churches around the world. It may also be that the clergy actually read aloud from a vernacular Armenian text, as Antʿabyan has suggested (1967, 157-8).[30] At the least, Burchard's observation marks a clear partnership between the nobility and the church, which facilitated learning and piety among the highest echelons of Cilician society. Second, and just as important, study at court was reportedly a social affair, bringing the nobility, their wives, their children, and even servitors and officials together. As it would seem, this study inculcated a kind of familial intimacy based on a shared commitment to learning at court – an intimacy which, of course, was also shaped by the priest or monk who was present. And finally, study in the 'common' tongue was a dialogic affair, as it apparently included not only a form of instruction, delivered by the priest, but also made room for different responses and questions from the nobles and their children. These aspects of Burchard's report are significant, as we will see in the following section, in part because many of these threads reappear in Vardan Arewelcʿi's vernacular pedagogy for the instruction of Hetʿum and his immediate family, which predated this account by a generation.[31]

Nonetheless, Burchard's latter claim about the monolingualism of the Armenian nobility, as if they were merely forced to use the vernacular out of lack of other options, was probably overstated. At least some of the nobility were well-versed in Outremer French, a

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[30] There is also reason to suggest that Dominicans in the region, who had been dispatched partly to proselytize to the Mongols but turned their attention to Armenian Christians, whom they converted instead, employed Middle Armenian in part because they could not acquire monastic training in the Classical language. Cf. the discussion by Cowe 2020b, 109-10. Cowe posits that Dominicans in Cilicia and Greater Armenia "did not have access to Armenian Apostolic monastic academies and therefore, when they wrote their own works, would do so in a form of Middle Armenian, so much so that in his letter to them from the 1320s Esayi Nčʿecʿi goes out of his way to write in that idiom, though the remainder of his correspondence is penned in Classical Armenian, and it is against this backdrop that we should interpret Grigor Tatʿewacʿi's remarks in his renowned *Girkʿ Harcʿmanc* (Book of Questions) to the effect that it is written in the Classical form for *banibun* (i.e. highly educated) vardapets, perhaps disparaging the Dominicans' lack of control of that idiom". On Armeno-Latin intellectual exchange, cf. also Cowe 2013 and La Porta 2015.

[31] Antʿabyan (1967, 157-8) quotes part of this passage in Armenian translation in his indispensable study of the *Žłlank*, largely to argue that the nobility may have also studied non-scriptural texts read by clergy, as some entries of the *Žłlank* would seem to suggest. Elsewhere, he also posits that Vardan's *Žłlank* may have been responsible for establishing this tradition (Antʿapyan 1987, 1: 157). My interest in this report lies more in the social component in the courtly act of study, and in particular the rather direct mediation of a priest in this process.

vernacular tied to statecraft on the eastern fringes of the Mediterranean world. The Armenian nobility seems to have considered these two vernaculars as somewhat related; so extensive was the exchange of vocabulary from Outremer French to Middle Armenian, that even today the word in the modern Eastern and Western Armenian dialects for 'mister' or 'sir' is the French *baron* (Aslanov 2021, 181). So too did the Cilician nobility translate texts from Outremer French into their native vernacular. Smbat Sparapet, the older brother of King Het'um, thus translated the *Assises d'Antioche* ('Statutes of Antioch', or *Ansiz Antiok'ay* in Armenian), a legal treatise from the Crusader state of Antioch, from Outremer French into Middle Armenian in 1253; this work survives today only in Middle Armenian, though many other legal codes in Old French have come down from this period.[32] Remarkably, upon completion of this Middle Armenian translation, Smbat states that he sent his version back to the court in Antioch to be compared against the originals in Outremer French and verified as accurate (Smbat Sparapet 1876, 3). In other words, as he implies, it was not enough simply to render the text as comprehensible or accessible in Armenian. Rather, his Middle Armenian translation had to be technically exact in accordance with the Outremer French originals, and even acknowledged as such by his relatives and allies in Antioch, who likewise apparently knew both Middle Armenian and Outremer French. Smbat's claim thus does some nimble argumentative work, buttressing both his skill as translator and Middle Armenian's capacity to convey the same juridical discourses as Outremer French. The salient idea here is that justice demands exactitude, and Middle Armenian could now plausibly deliver both within the context of the Cilician courts, in a manner legible to other vernacular legal systems found in nearby states.

Crucially, as I contend, these vernacular texts activated and made available certain forms of power at court. Such works were clearly products of the court's significant and deliberate investment in producing Middle Armenian codices in particular. Sargis Picak, one of the most renowned Armenian artists of his time, helps to bring these points into relief: in 1331, he skillfully illuminated the frontispiece of a copy of Smbat's *Assises d'Antioche*. Sargis Picak depicts King Lewon IV (d. 1341) in a seated position, dispensing "correct judgment" to other men at court, who are positioned hierarchically below him.[33] A divine hand lingers above the king, in the left-hand corner of the image, from which King Lewon receives his authority, and, more important, which transforms

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[32] For a linguistic analysis of the Middle Armenian *Assises d'Antioche*, cf. Ouzounian 2014.

[33] Middle Armenian: ՈՒՂԵՂ ԴԱՏԱՍՏԱՆ. For a detailed and comparative study of the depiction of Lewon IV, cf. Grigoryan 2023.

King Lewon into the conduit through which divine judgment is meted out on earth [fig. 1]. The implication, in this case, is that such judgment is also mediated through the 'vulgar' text of Smbat's translation, which is also constitutive of the court's adjudicating power. The image, like the translation from one 'vulgar' tongue to another, underscores a form of divinely-appointed Armenian authority claimed and exercised by the royalty through the production of vernacular texts.

Figure 1   The frontispiece of Smbat Sparapet's Middle Armenian translation of Assises d'Antioche. V107, *1v-2r.* Mekhitarist Order, San Lazzaro, Venice. Courtesy of the Librarian Rev. Father Vahan Ohanian

In short, it is clear that texts in Middle Armenian held a significant relationship to their readers and commissioners at court, who were willing to patronize the illumination of even non-Biblical texts. This investment also helps to distinguish Middle Armenian texts from certain other vernaculars that likewise existed along a linguistic continuum with their classical languages, such as Byzantine Greek. For instance, Agapitos has observed that unlike "some Western medieval vernacular works, no single Byzantine vernacular text survives in a luxury book with illustrations, though we have a few remnants of rather crude ink drawings in some manuscripts" (2022, 226). The Armenian court in Sis seems to have felt differently about their own vernacular, perhaps in part because their exposure to rival vernaculars came not only from

the Byzantine Empire, but more immediately from the Crusader states and Outremer French, as well as from other cultural contexts. Moreover, this exposure to 'vernacularity' included both proper vernaculars that were separate from their classical languages and languages that existed along a continuum with their classical counterparts.[34]

The Armenian nobility's use of Outremer French even extended to at least one notable composition. In 1307, Het'um the Historian (d. c. 1310-20), the nephew of Het'um I and Smbat, composed his widely popular history *La Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient*, concerning the Mongol invasions, in Outremer French at the request of Pope Clement V. This work was richly illuminated and even translated into Latin, then back again into French, with additional translations in Spanish later in the century and in English in 1521 (Jackson 2016).[35] Its frontispiece was illuminated with an image of Het'um, who had joined the Premonstratensian Order in Cyprus, delivering his vernacular codex to the Pope. Unlike Sargis Picak's miniature of King Lewon, here the hierarchy of power is quite different, with the Armenian submitting to Rome in humility. So, too, is a crimson crowned lion, the coat of arms of the ruling family of Cilicia, nestled within a large illuminated letter, which likewise assumes a lower hierarchical position on the folio in relation to the figure of the Pope [fig. 2]. In each of these cases, however, such power differentials were negotiated and affirmed by a vernacular codex. Quite clearly, Outremer French gave the Cilician nobility access to different forms of power (whether in the northern Mediterranean or more locally, in relation to the Crusader States in the eastern Mediterranean), as well as ideas about how to articulate certain forms of authority and law in their own territory. It is therefore worth noting, even at this early stage, how cross-culturally entangled Cilician Middle Armenian was, drawing its models especially from Greek, Arabic, Syriac, and Persian (in the transference of medical and scientific knowledge)

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34 Similarly, though in less lavish detail, a notable Cilician manuscript from 1292, which contains the majority of the *Žłlank'* alongside several other texts, features a simple illuminated frontispiece that depicts Moses as the author of the Pentateuch (Church of the Forty Martyrs, Armenian Church, Diocese of Aleppo, ALQ155). In some cases, the illumination of 'vulgar' Armenian texts that were originally composed during the Cilician period even continued after the kingdom's downfall. The most notable, and indeed one of the most beautifully illuminated Armenian manuscripts extant today, is from a copy of the Alexander Romance that was made on vellum, in Constantinople, for the patriarch of the Armenian church in 1544. The renowned manuscript features both the original prose translation of the Alexander Romance in Classical Armenian, alongside the medieval Middle Armenian poetry that adapts and occasionally updates the same story for later audiences. The scribe reports that he copied this manuscript at the request of his 'learned' (*banibun*) patron, who apparently had an appreciation of both the Classical and vernacular tongue, which were jointly mediated by abundant miniatures throughout the manuscript (Manchester, The University of Manchester Library, Armenian MCR3, 182*r*).

35 For a recent linguistic analysis of the Cilician Armenian absorption of Outremer French, cf. Aslanov 2021.

and from Outremer French (in the transference of juridical knowledge), reaching both eastward and westward in the entwined labour of producing knowledge, cultivating language, and pursuing the aims of the kingdom. These early authors of Cilician Middle Armenian straddled multiple cultural and linguistic worlds, and these experiences shaped the early corpus of vernacular Armenian texts in a profound way.

Figure 2   Het'um the Historian's presentation of *La Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient* to the Pope. BnF NAF 1255, 1*r*

Equally important during this period is a discourse of familiarity, and even of agreeability, that ran alongside courtly endeavours in the vernacular. For example, in 1265, Smbat composed another law code in Middle Armenian based in part on the simple Classical Armenian work by Mxit'ar Gosh. Smbat Sparapet carefully explains, in the introduction to his Cilician Middle Armenian *Datastanagirk'* (Lawcode), that he chose to adapt this work both because the original Classical Armenian was difficult, and also because he seems to have had a fondness for Middle Armenian itself:

Եւ այլ շատ ի վերայ իրաւանցս կու պնդէ մարգարէն։ Առ որս ես Սմբատս անարժան եւ մեղաւոր ծառայս Աստուծոյ, որդի Կոստանդեայ Թագաւորահօրն եւ եղբայր բարեպաշտ թագաւորին Հայոց Հեթմոյ բազումս աշխատեցայ ի սա ծերացեալ մտօք ի հին եւ յանհասկանալի բառից։ Եւ ես բազում աշխատութեամբ փոխեցի զսա ի մեր հեշտալուր բառս, ի թուականութեանս Հայոց ՉԺԴ, ի հայրապետութեան Տեառն Կոստանդեայ, եւ ի թագաւորութեանն Հեթմոյ եւ որդւոյ սորա Լեւոնի: (Mat'evosyan 1984, 328; Hovnanean 1897, 201; cf. Karst 1905, 1: XV-XVI; cf. Nichanian 1989, 220-2)

And the prophet asserts many other [clarifications] upon these laws. Concerning these, I, Smbat, an unworthy and sinful servant of God, son of the King's father Kostandin and brother to Het'um, the pious king of Armenians, laboured greatly over this, with an intellect grown old in years, [due to the language's] ancient and incomprehensible words/expressions. And with great labour I modified this [book] in our mellifluous words/expressions, in 714 [= 1265] of the Armenian Era, during the patriarchy of Kostandin and the reign of Het'um and his son Lewon.

This illuminating passage has long drawn the attention of scholars, not least because it has come down in two quite different manuscript recensions; the variant quoted here is housed in Venice (V107),[36] and an alternate passage was discovered in Ējmiacin. In the Ējmiacin recension, a second commenter inserts himself in the passage, and claims that Smbat had given him the book to 'alter' (փոխսել), apparently after it was completed, begging the reader to remember Smbat, his 'baron', in their prayers (Karst 1905, 1: XV-XVI). As Hovnanean observed over a century ago, this second manuscript recension reclassicized Smbat's vernacular register throughout the book, minimizing its Middle Armenian forms (1897, 201-32). Nichanian has further remarked that these changes raise questions about what degree of vernacularization was considered acceptable at this time in the

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36 V107 contains both the Lawcode and Assises d'Antioche.

written language, though we know little about the classicizing scribe in this case, who was possibly a member of the clergy (1989, 220-2).

What I wish to draw attention to in the case of Smbat, however, are two related and overlooked points. The first is that Smbat essentially admits to having difficulty reading Classical Armenian texts; yet, despite this, he still made the effort. He wrestled with the literary language of Classical Armenian, which required much study to read and to write in any capacity. Even more, it would seem that Smbat prevailed to a degree. Second, and most crucially, he does not seem to have taken a great degree of satisfaction from this struggle; to paraphrase Roland Barthes, there was little pleasure in the text for him. On the contrary, Smbat implies that it is the 'rustic' tongue which brings him relief. Hence he terms his register *heštalur*, a compound which means many things: 'tractable, docile', 'mild' (Bedrossian 1875, 401), easy to understand, and pleasing and 'mellifluous' or easy to hear (Awetik'ean et al. 1836-37, 2: 86). The term *heštalur* would thus seem to include a vernacular orality with its connotation of audition, encompassing more than a simple declaration of Middle Armenian's intelligibility. At the least, Smbat's ear is very close to this language, which is amenable to his thoughts: it is a language grown docile by his hand. He therefore labels Middle Armenian speech or words 'ours', as opposed quite strikingly to Classical Armenian, whose ownership is left dangling and unclaimed.

In this sense, Smbat offers a counterpoint to the learned physician Mxit'ar Herac'i, who labelled his own vernacular Armenian 'rustic' and 'unrestricted'. Mxit'ar, in his direct proximity to two Catholicoi of the Armenian church and therefore also to the study of Classical Armenian, seems to have considered Middle Armenian as freeing but perhaps also uncultivated – or, at least, as having less to do with the circles of higher learning that he moved within than did the Classical register. By Smbat's time, and in the courtly setting of Sis, that picture has evolved: now the Middle language is 'docile' and even 'delightful', still a sigh of relief from the anachronisms of the Classical register, yet also an established medium for knowledge production. The court and its affiliated institutions have rubbed off on it, and vice-versa.[37]

It therefore seems that Het'um's family found the written vernacular not only useful but also familiar, even agreeable. This matters, as we shall see, because not all clergy in the church would react to the 'mellifluous' Armenian tongue in the same manner as did

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[37] In this sense, Smbat's characterization of Middle Armenian loosely corresponds to how contemporary authors had begun to speak of Old French. To give one notable example, in the thirteenth-century *Les Estoires de Venise*, Martin de Canal describes Old French as the 'most delightful' (*la plus delitable*) language to read and to write (Zinelli 2018, 238).

Smbat's classicizing scribe; other priests were perfectly ready to employ aspects of the vernacular to strengthen the personal and ideological bonds between the court and church. Smbat's remarks also matter because they index an ongoing and diglossic relationship between Classical and Middle Armenian at court, one in which each written branch of the Armenian language held a different proximity to the hearts (and ears) of the noble families. The court made various uses of each language; though some readers like Smbat sometimes found the Classical tongue vexing, they did not entirely relinquish their study of texts in an archaic register, either. Case in point, Smbat also commissioned a poetic inscription in mono-rhymed Classical Armenian, which names him as its author, to adorn the castle walls in Babaron (Çandır Castle), today in the province of Mersin (Ališan 1885, 73). More privately, so too did he commission a magnificently illuminated copy of the Gospels for his personal study.[38] This manuscript bears Smbat's name in his own hand in its margins, alongside the pristine Classical Armenian translation of the Bible, informing the reader in red ink that Smbat sought "to amend this [text] with grammar", likely referring to the addition of stresses and unstressed pauses, also in red ink, over the black text **[fig. 3]**.[39] It is clear that Smbat laboured over the Classical Armenian Bible even as he composed marginalia, in this same manuscript, in a decidedly more 'vulgar' register. In ways both intimate and publicly facing, Classical Armenian still held many uses for the elite in Sis, however contingent on genre, medium, and function those uses sometimes were. Middle and Classical Armenian registers of the language thus often coexisted alongside one another at court, as both made available different forms of knowledge production for the nobility.

38 Yerevan, Matenadaran (Mesrop Maštoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts), M7644.

39 Քերականաւ ուղել ըզսա. Smbat also alludes to these stresses, and their aid in reading or chanting the Bible, in his colophon on 124*r* in this manuscript, lamenting that his people have grown estranged from such knowledge.
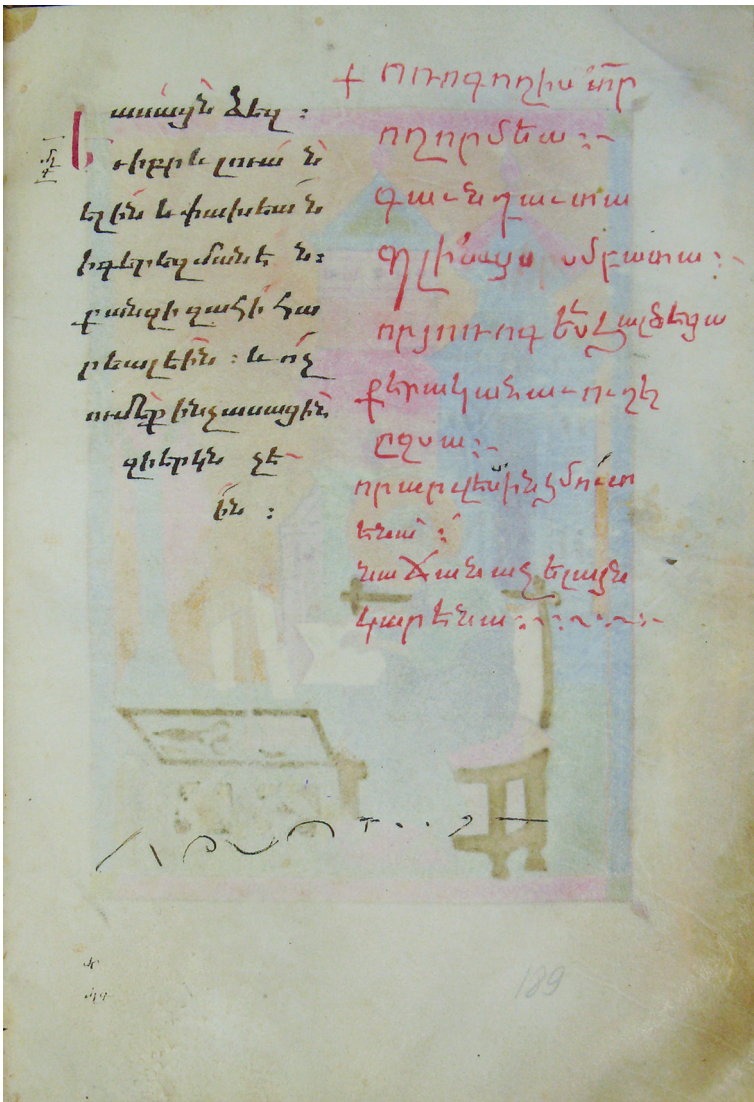
Finally, it is important to note that the nobility's use of the 'mellifluous' language was never limited to the court itself, as we have seen in the context of the Cilician medical school and beginnings of its legal system(s). In a complementary vein, the court made the correlation between Middle Armenian and royal power explicit for actors even

beyond Cilicia, issuing several proclamations from the chancellery in the vernacular.[40] Some of these documents, such as the privilege issued by the Latinophile king Lewon I to the Genoese in 1201, were originally issued in Middle Armenian and Latin simultaneously, though today only the Latin translation survives (Bais 2014, 235-6). Still, other Cilician Middle Armenian privileges have reached us today, as when Lewon II (d. 1289) proffered his *sigeł* (Latin: *sigillum*) to the Genoese, renewing trading rights in 1288 (Langlois 1863, 154-8). Other proclamations, such as the privilege of King Ōšin (d. 1320) to merchants in Montpellier in 1314, followed by a later privilege to the same merchants by Lewon V (d. 1393) in 1321, soon appeared in Middle Armenian, as did another privilege to the Silicians in 1331 (178-9; 185-90). The marginal notation on these documents moreover addresses a wide array of different officials in the kingdom, including those who held offices at the customs house and the harbour master in Ayas, even directly by proper name in the former case. As I have noted elsewhere with Budak, these forms of address point to the widespread efficacy of the Armenian vernacular in the administration of the kingdom (Budak, Pifer 2024). Not surprisingly, then, such efficacy took many forms. More generally, throughout this period, even when notable clergymen wrote to the Cilician nobility, they began to do so in Middle Armenian, despite being in full command of Classical Armenian, implicitly acknowledging the Middle tongue of their audiences was in fact the language correlated with royal power (Ačaṙyan 1951, 235).[41]

Taken in sum, it thus appears that Middle Armenian's ascendancy at court arrived through a cooperative (though unequal) relationship between the Cilician nobility, the Armenian church, a wide array of Cilician institutions, such as the customs house and chancellery, and the activity of lay scholars and physicians such as Mxit'ar Herac'i, in addition to the circulation of more peripheral figures, such as Dominican priests who spoke with Armenians in this region, or the vernacular poets who composed in Middle Armenian both in and beyond the domain of Cilicia proper. Moreover, its earliest written documents at court were generally diglossic, as its authors sought to blend, rather synthetically, Classical and 'vulgar' grammatical forms and lexicons in the construction of their authority, let alone the authority of the court itself, for the benefit of other elite audiences, including one another.

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40 The chancellery also made use of Latin and Old French, as Langlois notes (1863, 12-13). The chancellery of the neighbouring Lusignan court of Cyprus exercised a similar notarial practice, issuing documents in Latin, Old French, and Greek (Beihammer 2011).

41 For instance, in the early fourteenth century, the Catholicos Grigor Anawarzec'i (d. 1307) composed an epistle counselling King Het'um II (d. 1307), his 'baron', on spiritual matters using a mixture of Middle and Classical Armenian forms (Hovnanean 1897, 249-52).

3 A Pleasant Conversation Between Grammarian and King

In many ways, the Cilician program of language cultivation for Middle Armenian follows a broader pattern that extends even beyond the Mediterranean. During the years 1000-1500 CE, part of what Pollock calls the "vernacular millennium", courts played a pivotal role in creating new cosmopolises, or territorial spaces in which language and power were ultimately conjoined (1998b). In these broader Mediterranean and Eurasian contexts, it is unsurprising that the court of the last Armenian kingdom, which took its cues from the various states in which it had contact, likewise cultivated something akin to a 'vernacular' during this era. To whatever degree this undertaking was by design or more a byproduct of Cilician pragmatism (in concert with many other historical factors), their choice to write in the 'rustic' language helped to differentiate their rule from nearly all extant Armenian writing that came before them, much as Cilicia itself was distinguished geographically from previous Kingdoms of Armenia.

Within this context, there is perhaps no figure as important to the establishment of vernacular study at Het'um's court than Vardan Arewelc'i. Vardan Arewelc'i (Vardan 'the Easterner', or from Greater Armenia) entered monastic study and eventually attained the station of *vardapet* (teacher) in the Armenian church. He first came to Cilicia in 1239/40, just over a decade after Het'um's coronation, on a return journey from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Catholicos invited him to reside in Cilicia for a time; so, too, did the young king make a warm welcome for the theologian. We know that Vardan remained in Cilicia until 1246 before returning to Greater Armenia, and then travelled again to Cilicia at least by 1248, this time staying roughly three years. Like King Het'um himself, Vardan also made the journey on a diplomatic mission to the seat of the Ilkhanate's power in 1246, meeting with Hulagu Khan alongside his king (Vardan Arewelc'i 1991, 155-9). As I will discuss here and in the following section, Vardan also composed at least two major works at King Het'um's request: the *Žłlank'* and the *Commentary on Grammar*, both of which contributed to the bolstering of Het'um's image as 'educated king' and to supporting Middle Armenian as a language of knowledge production, in complementary though different ways. Both works, moreover, contributed to a vernacular pedagogy at court and potentially beyond it, establishing a model for Het'um's descendants to become educated rulers in their own right.

In fact, Vardan subtly supported Het'um's rule through multiple avenues, even beyond the production of these two important works. We should recall that Het'um partially displaced the Ṙubēnid dynasty as the king of Cilicia when he married Zabel; his right to the crown was somewhat more ambiguous in terms of succession than it was for his

predecessors on the throne. Like the Ṙubēnids, however, he continued to style himself as the King of Armenians, and pursued many ways of supporting his claim to the crown. Vardan was indirectly useful in this regard, even when working independent of Sis, as he composed the only known medieval Armenian geography during this period. In this work, Vardan asserted a truly expansive Armenia (Hayastan) stretching from Cilicia to the Caucasus, even though the 'King of Armenians' did not directly control much of this territory (1960, 9-50). Likewise, Vardan also composed a new universal history around 1267, after he had departed Cilicia for the second time, which attempted to place Armenia into a more global frame of reference that included the births of Christ and the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the activities of the Byzantine Empire and the Mongol expansions. Perhaps not coincidentally, this work praises Het'um for providing aid to the surviving forces of Kitbuqa Noyan, a Christian general who served the Ilkhanate. These soldiers "came to the king of Armenia, from whom they found great compassion; [he provided] clothing, horses, and money, so they returned gratefully to their lord, Tatars and Christians", Vardan writes. "Thereby the name of Christ was greatly glorified for King Het'um at home and abroad".[42] Both implicitly and explicitly, Vardan provides us with something like an aspirational sketch of what Armenian rule over Cilicia might become, rooted in the broadly recognizable authority among both "Tatars and Christians" of its wise king.

Vardan's writings thus may be understood as pursuing overlapping aims in a differential manner: they do this by bolstering Het'um's standing at court, rooted in the *topos* of the educated king (in matters scientific and grammatical, which in this case are the same); by envisioning a geographically massive Armenia, implicitly under Het'um's rule as 'king of the Armenians', whether or not that territory was actually under the control of the court at Sis; by centering Armenia within the scope of recorded human history, stretching back to the Tower of Babel in the Hebrew Bible; and finally by correlating knowledge production and kingly authority with Middle Armenian directly. This is not to say, of course, that Vardan necessarily had all of these aims at the forefront of his mind, or even as the primary reason, for undertaking labour both within and beyond Cilicia in each of these disparate genres. Still, it does suggest that Vardan sought to support the king through a spectrum of writings in both Classical and Middle Armenian, which collectively construct a portrait of Het'um as a wise and educated king, devoted to both his church and his queen.

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[42] Եկին առ թագաւորն Հայոց. և 'ի նմանէ լոյով գտեալ մարդասիրութիւն, հանդերձ և երիվարս և ոսկիս, եկին զոհութեամբ առ տէրն իւրեանց, Տաթարք և քրիստոնեայք: Եւ յայնմանէ լոյով փառաւորեցաւ անունն Քրիստոսի յարքայն Հեթում, յստոարաց և յրնստանեաց (Vardan Arewelc'i 1991, 152; Vardan Arewelc'i 1989, 218). Perhaps tellingly, other Armenian sources do not seem to recount this episode; cf. Vardan Arewelc'i 1989, 218.

These threads converge most clearly in his encyclopedic compendium known popularly by its Middle Armenian name, the *Žłlank'*, a term Vardan uses in the colophon to his work. However, he titled this compendium somewhat differently in Classical Armenian as Լուծմունք ի սուրբ գրոց Վարդանայ Վարդապետի ի խնդրոյ բարեպաշտ Թագաւորին հայոց Հեթմոյ (Explanations from the Holy Bible, [by] Vardan Vardapet, at the request of Het'um, the devout King of Armenians) **[figs 4-5]**. As mentioned, the work is a compendium of knowledge, with many entries on the Bible that also make diversions into other fields. Many of its entries are provocative: the *Žłlank'* contains, for instance, a slightly alternate telling of the discovery of the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century CE.[43] Another entry, composed by the Catholicos, directly counsels Het'um on how to defend the confession of the Armenian church against the Roman church, maintaining a boundary between the Armenian faithful and the Pope.[44] Woven alongside and even into its biblical and creedal entries, the *Žłlank'* also contains scientific information on many subjects, such as the celestial bodies, botany, and animals, interspersed with other sections on the fine arts, considering music and its role in the church. In stark contrast, Vardan speaks rather disdainfully of poetry, a literary form which had begun to flourish during his day especially in Middle Armenian and borrowed heavily from Persianate styles and Islamicate themes.[45] Given his status as a staunch defender of Armenian Christianity, it is probably not for nothing that Vardan declares "for the wise person it is nothing to craft versified words […] but the Muslims honour [such things]".[46]

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[43]   Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, MS Arménien 42, 125*r*-128*v*; cf. Ant'abyan 1967, 174-7.

[44]   MS Arménien 42, 139*v*-149*r*.

[45]   The Middle Armenian retellings of the Alexander Romance are a prime example of this. These short poems, known as *kafa*s after the Arabic word for 'rhyme', accompanied the original Classical Armenian translation of the Greek romance. However, they wove the romance itself partly into a Persianate sensibility, using the Middle Armenian vernacular as their language. Xač'atur Keč'aṙec'i (d. 1331), writing in Greater Armenia, was the first author to do this poetic rewriting of the romance, choosing to render the speech and descriptions of Alexander – the paradigmatic philosopher king – into dialectal and 'rustic' forms of Armenian not so different from those spoken by the elites in Sis. On the selective use of Middle Armenian in the formal aspects of this poetry, cf. MacFarlane (2022); on the adaptability of this genre in the Armenian vernacular more generally, cf. also the important work of MacFarlane (2023a; 2023b). On the illumination of the Armenian Alexander Romance, cf. Maranci 2003-04.

[46]   Իմաստունյ չէ փորյթ տաղական բան առնել: […] բայց համայելյացիքն պատունեն. Diocese of Aleppo, Church of the Forty Martyrs, Armenian Church, ALQ155, 340; cf. Ant'abyan 1967, 179.

Figures 4-5   The opening folio of Vardan Arewelcʻi's compendium, with marginal note on the left hand side.
BnF MS Arménien 42, 1*r*

Significantly, Vardan seems to have intended the *Žłlankʻ* to aid the king in the study of other manuscripts at the royal library.[47] The *Žłlankʻ* includes, for instance, an extensive set of pictographs that stand for common terms one encounters in Armenian manuscripts, ranging from patriarchs in the Hebrew Bible such as Abraham to a variety of Armenian names, as well frequently used words like 'musician', 'heaven', 'Egypt', 'world' and 'money'.[48] Many of these abundant pictographs function in the Armenian manuscript record essentially as commonplace

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[47]   There is no doubt that the Cilician court collected many books in Sis, though we presently possess relatively little information about the royal library itself. Still, some revealing clues remain, particularly from the colophon record. For example, a bishop named Stepʻannos from Sebastia reported, in the colophon of a copy of the Gospels from 1320, that he had traveled to Cilicia where he was warmly received by King Ōšin, who gave him permission to enter into the *yarkels* (coffers) of the palace and examine its books. Stepʻannos reports encountering many diverse copies of the Gospels (which is what he was primarily seeking), and finding one in particular that was beautifully yet incompletely illuminated. He then reports commissioning the renowned illuminator Sargis Picak, who also illuminated a copy of Smbat's *Assises d'Antioche*, and paying him a sum of 1,300 dram to complete the work (Xačʻikyan 1950, 162-3).

[48]   MS Arménien 42, 136*r*-139*r*.

abbreviations; others in the compendium seem to have been invented by Vardan and are not well attested elsewhere (Abrahamyan 1973, 210). In any case, their inclusion suggests that Vardan intended the *Žłlankʻ* to serve as a basis for the king's education, opening the way for his continued study of other manuscripts in either Classical or Middle Armenian [figs 6-7]. Hence, we should probably not consider the use of the vernacular or Classical language to be mutually exclusive, either for Vardan or for his audience, in the case of the *Žłlankʻ*. Just as important, Vardan also provides ample opportunities for one to practice deciphering these pictographs throughout the *Žłlankʻ* itself, offering the reader a kind of training ground for future study in other contexts.
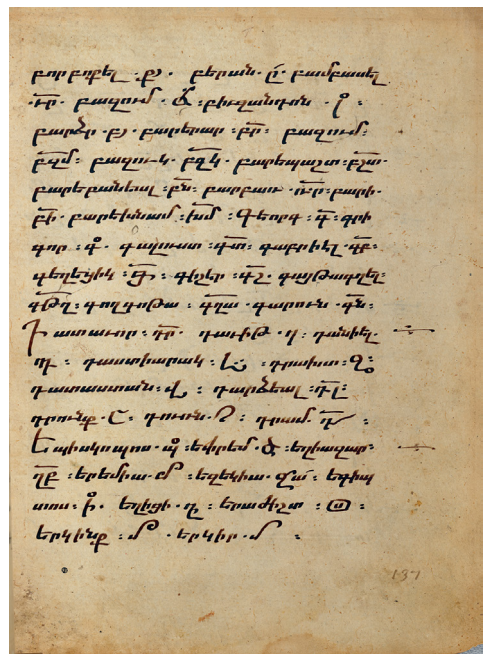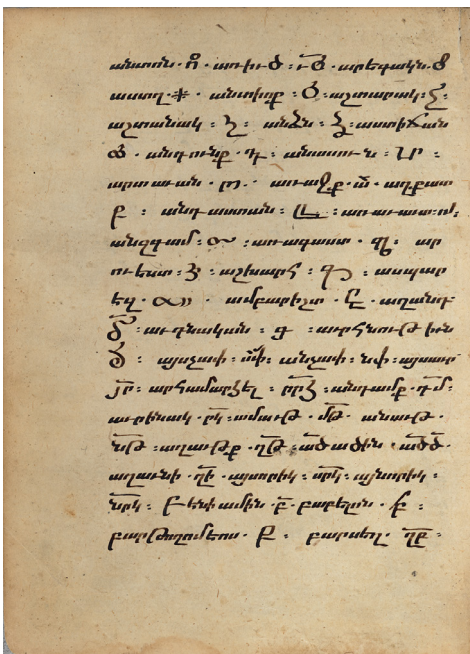
Figures 6-7 Pictographs to aid in the study of reading and writing Armenian texts. BnF MS Arménien 42, 136*v*-137*r*

There are additional indications that the *Žłlankʻ* served as a foundation for Hetʻum's education at court. In another entry, Vardan provides an explanation for basic grammatical parts of speech, offering definitions of nouns, verbs, participles, articles, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions (Xačʻikyan 2012). After each definition, which are coded numerically in the margins for easy reference, Vardan supplies a simple sentence in Armenian to illustrate his point. Grammar was widely considered to form another cornerstone

of a medieval education in Armenian monasteries; elsewhere, Vardan calls the study of grammar the entry point into acquiring wisdom, since one needs grammar to properly decipher any kind of text or discourse. For this reason, Het'um had also commissioned a Classical Armenian grammar from Vardan, known as the *Commentary on Grammar*, which I will return to in the following section. However, whereas the *Commentary* seeks to dazzle the reader with its explications of the Greek grammarian Dionysius Thrax, the *Žłlank'*'s entry on grammar is downright workmanlike, covering essentials in a succinct and efficient manner. The composition of a simplified explanation of basic grammatical forms, stripped of lofty attempts to theorize language, speaks to the continuing importance of grammatical learning in Vardan's pedagogical program. Though one can only speculate, perhaps it also suggests that the king also had use of a less theoretical grammar, delivered in a different linguistic register, than the *Commentary* that Vardan additionally delivered.[49]

This brings us to the question of language itself. Vardan composed the *Žłlank'* in grammatically mixed and diglossic registers of Armenian. At times, his language is nearly indistinguishable from a literary register of Classical Armenian, such as briefly near the end of a colophon in dedication to King Het'um, which is also mixed lightly with Middle Armenian grammatical forms. At other times, his register is decidedly more serviceable, such as his entry on grammar, which, not coincidentally, requires very little knowledge of Armenian grammar to understand. In 1862, the Mekhitarist historian Ališan simply noted that Vardan wrote the *Žłlank'* in a simple and 'vulgar' (ռամկական) style (Vardan Arewelc'i 1862, III); the nineteenth-century French Armenologist Prud'homme likewise termed it "la langue vulgaire" (1871, 7). Other scholars have observed that Vardan made explicit use of Middle Armenian forms throughout the compendium and throughout his many other works, which sometimes come to the fore and sometimes recede into the background of a simplified Classical register (Ant'abyan 1967, 179-80; 1987, 294-9; Łazaryan 1960, 86, 105, 121-4; Xač'ikyan 2012, 258).[50] Generally speaking, its language does not seem intended to be demanding, but rather to be accessible and perhaps familiar, ushering the reader into a broad pedagogical program that begins, but does not end, with the *Žłlank'* itself.[51]

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49 Vardan originally wrote this entry on grammar in the *Žłlank'* for the brother of the Catholicos, who apparently also had use of a simplified Armenian register (Xač'ikyan 2012). Still, he clearly thought it would impart useful information to other vernacular learners such as Het'um and his family.

50 Hovnanean (1897, 254) has noted that Vardan incorporated dialectal features seemingly from Greater Armenia within his Cilician Middle Armenian writings.

51 As Łazaryan has observed, Vardan additionally appears to have defended the use of 'vulgar' Armenian in his *Commentary on Grammar*, also composed for King Het'um,

Why, then, might the 'devout King of the Armenians' have desired such a work? We have but a few clues. As we have seen, around this time, an anonymous translator rendered the *Geoponica*, another compendium, into Middle Armenian from Arabic; the original was composed in Greek for the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. Compendia were both popular in many languages adjacent to Cilicia, and moreover were also correlated with the erudition of the sovereign. Similarly, other compendiums were beginning to flourish in Old French at roughly the same time Vardan composed the *Žłlankʿ*; such works include Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou trésor* (Book of Treasure) dating from the mid to late thirteenth-century, and the *Livre de la fontaine de toutes sciences* (better known in English as the 'Book of Sydrac the Philosopher') from the late thirteenth century.[52] We also have at least one encyclopedic example from Outremer in the *Image du monde*, copied at the scriptorium of Acre in the thirteenth century (Minervini 1999, 92-3). The original of this work was composed by the Catholic priest Gautier de Metz, and gifted to the brother of the French king Louis IX in 1246; this was likely the same year that the Armenian Apostolic priest Vardan made an analogous encyclopedic gift to his king in Sis.

Vardan's own compendium would appear to be riding an early wave of this broader vernacular trend, coinciding with or even predating many of these other works. He therefore helps us to observe a moment in time in which elites around the Mediterranean coast found use in vernacular collections of knowledge on seemingly every subject. The scriptorium in Acre, where the court of the Kingdom of Jerusalem was located, along with other courts where vernaculars flourished, such as the Byzantine court in Constantinople and Nicaea, the court of King Louis IX, and the Armenian court in Sis, were all part of an epistemically entangled Mediterranean world, although scaffolded within it in different ways. The implication of composing an Armenian vernacular compendium against this backdrop would perhaps be twofold in this case: first, that Middle Armenian could do what these other languages could do; and second, that the Cilician nobility were capable of undertaking the same forms of study as did other elite audiences at neighbouring vernacular courts.

Although this is somewhat speculative, we can at least say that Vardan requires the reader to reflect on Hetʿum's erudition repeatedly throughout the *Žłlankʿ*. In no subtle terms does he correlate an

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such as when he states: և չէ՛ պակասութիւն, զի որ չգիտէ ասել երկոտասան՝ ի՞նչ պակաս է լսելն տասնևերկուն (And [this] is not a deficiency, since [for] he who does not know [how] to say twelve [in Classical Armenian], what loss is it in saying ten and two?"; Vardan Arewelcʿi 1972, 133; Łazaryan 1960, 86).

52   For general background, cf. Prince 1993 and Steiner 2021, 177-209.

image of the 'educated king' and the study of his vulgar compendium. In fact, Vardan addresses Het'um directly in multiple entries (Ant'abyan 1967, 166), many of which take the dialogic form of questions and answers; Vardan makes so many asides that one gets the impression of reading over the king's shoulder at times. At one point, he explicitly states that his aim is to instruct the king in an accessible and pleasing manner: "It is our desire to give you the substance of [each] thing, and not to compose a systematic exegesis", he writes, "thus to gain for you whatever seems novel to us, for the delight of [your] heart".[53] Simply put, Het'um is as much a character in this work as Vardan. This dialogic nature of the compendium is also suggested by its title, *Žłlank'*, whose root has an additional connotation of 'conversation'. In this sense, as Ant'abyan has observed, the entire work takes the structural and rhetorical form of a dialogue between Vardan and his king (1987, 1: 157); a pleasing labour that instructs the mind by delighting it.

Nowhere is this more explicit, and nowhere is Het'um's kingship configured so precisely in relation to his vernacular erudition, as when Vardan describes why he wrote the *Žłlank'* in a lengthy colophon, which appears in slight variation across the manuscript record. For instance, in a severely damaged recension of the colophon in Matenadaran M750,[54] Vardan addresses Het'um in Middle Armenian as իմ պարոն (my baron), as Ant'abyan has observed (1967, 158). In another variant, found in Matenadaran M341, Vardan at times addresses Het'um intimately as 'you', in the familiar second person singular;[55] at other times, he addresses the king more formally as his proper superior. This fluctuation between formal and informal may thus suggest a twining of Vardan's dual aims: first, to forge bonds of closeness with the king that befit the relationship between a teacher and student; and second, to offset this intimacy by establishing reverence for the higher station of his student. In a measured way, Vardan thus seemingly uses this balancing act to remind the king of his shared humanity and of his exalted responsibility to rule. Moreover, throughout these oscillations, he largely writes in a simple Classical Armenian register with slight vernacularisms and irregularities sprinkled in. His linguistic register therefore actualizes this interpersonal dance between formality and familiarity, subtly basing the king's piety in no small part on the study of this very manuscript:

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53 Կա՛մ է մեր քեզ նիւթ բանի տալ, և ոչ կարգաւ մեկնութիւն գրել, ապա և զոր ինչ նոր թուի մեզ, զուամել քեզ, ի բացումն սրտի (MS Arménien 42, 63*r*); cf. Prud'homme's French translation of this line (Verdan 1867, 26).

54 Yerevan, Matenadaran (Mesrop Maštoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts), M750.

55 Yerevan, Matenadaran (Mesrop Maštoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts), M341.

Ա՛յսպէս արա՛ և դու. սակաւ մի աշխատեա՛. քո սակաւ աշխատիլն զայլոց շատն արժէ: Զի որպէս լուաք ի քրիստոսէ ամէն մարդդ ⟨pictograph⟩ [pictograph for հրեշտակ] կա պահապան, և ձեզ որ ազգի գլուխս և թագաւոր էք, ինքն գլուխն քրիստոս է պահապան, և անմեկնելի: Մի՛ պաշտեր զնա որպէս հեռաւո՛ր. այլ որպէս առ քե՛զ, ի սրտի՛ն, և յոգւոջ: ուր կամիս զգլուխստ և զերեստ դնել ի պատիւ նմա, ի գիրկն դնես, և յաստուած միանաս: և զոգի իմ տառապեալ և տկար յիշեցէ՛ն և որ զքեզ սիրէ, առաւել քան զասել: Վասն որոյ զայս աշխատութիւն տկար մարմնով. կատարեցի սիրով ձեր զաւրացեալ. և աւժանդակեալ: և յիշեա՛ զոր ի ձեռն Թորոսի հրամանեցիք. վասն եղաբերից կանանցն գրել ձեզ և ի խորհուրդդ պատարագին, և ապա երեսաւք յանդուլն հրամանեցիք որ գրեաք ձեզ ժղանք. ի մեկնութենէն քերականին: և ես այլ յաւելի սիրով գրել ձեզ ձեռամբ լուծմունս. յաւետարանէ՛ն: և յարարածոգն. ուստի տեսէք թէ շա՛տ էիք հարցանել. և սիրէք սրտիւ: Է՛ որ հանգուցանէ՛ զձեր միտքդ: և իմանաս որ պատճառ լինի ձեզ բանաւորութեան: զայս հարցանելոյ. և զստոյգն զտանել: [...] Եւ ես գիտե՛մ որ այս չէ թագ[աւոր]ական իրք. այլ ոսկէգի՛ր պիտեր. և ճարտա՛ր գրշի: և ես շա՛տ պատճառ ունէի, որ խափաներ զիս յայս ձեռնարկութենէս: տկարութիւն և մութն խրճի՛թս: և հողմ պարիսարո՛ւ, փոշխիասն փչելով ընդ պատուհանս, և պաղ աւդյս, բայց սիրովն հրաշագործիԼ յաղթահարեալ եղէն պատճառքն. և որպէս տեսանէք եղեւ. (M341, 103r-104r; cf. Antʻabyan 1967, 157; Hovnanean 1897, 234-6)[56]

Conduct yourself thusly: labour moderately; your moderate labouring is worth the abundant [labour] of others. For as we heard from Christ, every man has an angel as protector; as for you, who are the head of the nation and are King, it is He, Christ, who is the head protector and inseparable. Do not worship him as though distantly, but as near to you, within your heart and your soul. When you wish to cast [down] your head and face in honour of him, you cast them upon [His] bosom and are united with God. Remember my miserable and feeble soul, which loves you more than is possible to say. For this reason, I, weak in the flesh, completed this labour strengthened and sustained by your love. Recall that you commanded, through the aid of Tʻoros, to compose [works] concerning the Oil-bearing Virgins and the mystery of Holy Mass; afterwards you

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56 In this passage and the one cited below, I have not attempted to 'correct' any irregularities in punctuation or spelling that the scribe did not correct himself (at least, these textual features may be irregular from the perspective of a more formal Classical Armenian register), as does Antʻabyan at times. Instead I simply present this text as it appears in the manuscript, with the exception of common abbreviations, which are spelled out in full here. For readability in English, however, my translation does not always preserve the punctuation, but instead occasionally follows Antʻabyan's interpretation in his edited transcription.

personally ordered me to compose for you, in Andul [monastery], a pleasant occupation for the mind [*žłlank'*] out of the *Commentary on Grammar*. And then, with greater love, [I undertook] to write for you by [my] hand Explanations [*lucmuns*] of the Gospels and Genesis. Hence, recall that you had posed many questions [to me]; you [now] delight in heart. It is [this book] which sets your thoughts at ease; you apprehend that this [book] shall help you to gain understanding and interrogate these [matters] to discover what is true. […] And I know that [this book] is not a regal object, for it should have been [written in] gilded letters and a dexterous hand. I had many reasons that impeded me from this undertaking: weakness, the dark in this cell, and the wind of Barkhar blowing, mixed with dust, through this window and this frigid air. Yet with miraculous love these reasons were overcome. And, as you see, it was so.

Vardan performs a rhetorical sleight of hand here. He freely admits that his scriptural entries, which lacked a finer hand and gilded letters, are not 'regal' or 'kingly'. Certainly, this may be true to an extent; aside from the presumed material condition of his original manuscript, now lost to us,[57] Vardan is moreover not concerned with statecraft or diplomatic relations exactly here. Yet he does make the case that the king is the beloved of Christ, and commands Het'um to embrace Christ within his own heart and soul.[58] Christ, the head of the Church, and Het'um, the head of the kingdom, are to become one under Vardan's tutelage. This process coincided with Het'um's request for another text: an explication of the commentary on the grammar of Dionysius Thrax, which I will return to in the following section. For now, it suffices to say that grammatical learning is a cornerstone of the king's education, as it would also be for monastic students. The very next stone in the king's education, likewise, is

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[57] As Vardan continues in his colophon, he notes that Het'um may ask the scribe Grigorēs to improve the hand and presentation of the manuscript, should this be the king's desire.

[58] Vardan's colophon is also reminiscent of the words he reports speaking to the Ilkhan ruler Hulagu (Hulawu), whose wife was a Nestorian Christian. As Vardan reports, Hulagu told him personally that his mother was likewise a Christian; the Armenian priest was moved to give his own reply in turn: Եւ բռնեալ էր զիմ ձեռքս, և մեք ասացաք զինչ Աստուած երետ ասել բան. թէ Որչափի 'ի վեր ես դու քան զայլ մարդիկ, մօտ ես յԱստուած (Vardan Arewelc'i 1991, 157). "He had seized my hands, and we said what words God gave us to speak: 'The more superior you are to other men, the closer you are to God'" (Vardan Arewelc'i 1989, 220). Interestingly, as Thomson notes in the footnotes to his translation, Vardan introduces colloquial forms when recounting the meeting between himself, King Het'um, Hulagu and others in this scene; in this passage, when Vardan says that God "gave" him the words to say, he uses the Middle Armenian third person singular form *eret* (1989, 220, fnn. 4, 2). Compare also with Vardan's earlier colophon on the Mongols, which depicts their claim to rule in a far less favourable light (Pogossian 2014).

a commentary on the Bible, interspersed with a performative sampling of seemingly all the knowledge in the world.

There are other layers to peel back as well. Vardan's colophon, seemingly for the king's eyes only, was also read by many audiences over the centuries. In fact, this manuscript was quite popular; it was copied in near completion at least seven times by the early fifteenth century (Antʻabyan 1967, 163). We do not know, of course, to what degree Hetʻum whiled away the hours in study over the *Žłlank'*. Still, under the guise of providing an explanation for his compendium, Vardan crafts something far more wily: a discursive model of an Armenian educated king, to be read by other Armenian nobles and elites. Moreover, by recasting his monastic pedagogy to serve another social context, Vardan fashions an intellectual genealogy for his erudite king, beginning with the study of grammar and continuing with the interpretation of the Bible, which clears the way for the study of the celestial bodies and the natural world, in addition to subjects such as the fine arts of music and poetry, which are present in the compendium. Finally, as Vardan makes apparent, the *Žłlank'* did not represent learning for learning's sake, but rather, again following a monastic pedagogical model, served as an attempt to bring the king closer to Christ. The salient difference, of course, is that unlike a student embarking on a monastic education, the king is head of the Armenian people; his closeness to Christ, as with his closeness to Vardan, is to help him better rule. In other words, the composition and study of this work enacts the labour of making a social and theological hierarchy: the king is over his people, mirroring Christ's rule over the dominion of the earth. Correspondingly, the *Žłlank'* speaks to Hetʻum intimately, at times both in the second person singular and in the king's 'mellifluous' tongue, which was gradually also becoming a language of royal power.

As if this could not be any more clear, Vardan steps in again and instructs the king on *how* to study the *Žłlank'*. First and foremost, he is not to study alone. As Vardan counsels, the queen is also to take on a role in this labour, supplementing the king's learning through her own study:

Թող թագուհի՛ն պահէ, և ի պիտոյ ժամն առնոյք ի նմանէ: և նմա հրամաէ պաւդս հարցանել զձեզ: և զպատշաճն ծանուցանել: և պարտական՛ն են ասէ: ապրեցուցանելոյ զիրեարս, առն և կնոջ: և զերկոսինդ ապրեցուսցէ տէր լիսուս կենդանութիւն ձեր: ի խնամս հաւր, և ի զուԹ հոգլոյն սրբոյ: յոռոգումն սննդեան դալար արձա՛կ, տնկաբորբո՛ջ շառաւեղեալ ոստոցդ, ծիրանածին տղայոցդ ի զիրկս սիոն սրբոյ: ի կատարումն պասակման հայակոյտ ազնւական ազգաց, և ազանց, տոհմից ազատաց, ազատեցուցի՛ք արեանառու զարմից: լծադի՛րք, և բեռնաբարձաւդ՛ք կորացուցի՛ք աւտարաց ազգաց, ի փառս փառաւո՛ր և պաշտեցեալ աստուածութեան որ է աւրինեալ

յալխտեանս ամէն. (M341, 104*v*; cf. Antʻabyan 1967, 158; Hovnanean 1897, 234-6)

Let the queen keep [this book], and at a suitable hour you [may] take it from her. St. Paul commands her to question you and to reveal what is suitable, and, he says, man and wife are obligated to save one another. And may Lord Jesus, [who is] your life, deliver the two of you, in the care of the Father and the mercy of the Holy Spirit, for the sprinkling of instruction [over] your verdant, thrusting, sprouting, budding branches, your sons, born in the purple, in the embrace of holy Zion, for the perfection of the crowning of the people and nation of the noble Armenian flock, of highborn lineage, liberators of kindred houses; [those] who subjugate, who burden with heavy loads, who destroy foreign peoples, for the glory of the glorious and adored God, who is blessed forever, amen.

The colophon and the entire *Žłlankʻ* rest on this ending, which is directed not to a broad public but rather to the king and queen directly, who are at the center of a dense social and kinship network that encompasses all Armenians. Hetʻum is to draw near to Christ through the vernacular compendium; Zabel is to draw near to Hetʻum through the same compendium. In other words, here, too, is Hetʻum's legitimacy as both educated king and leader of his people is bound to Zabel, from whom he originally derived his power, though he is also positioned as *her* teacher in all things. Implicit in this is that 'docile' or 'mellifluous' Armenian, intertwined with Classical, is a language that brings king and queen together, that sets the kingdom in order with Christ as protector of its head. It is not merely a language that is bound up with Hetʻum's legitimacy as king; to some degree, it is also a language that is supportive of that legitimacy, insofar as it shapes him into the very 'educated king', both discursively and performatively, as he sought to present himself. Moreover, it is also a language whose offshoots continue in the lives of Hetʻum's sons, who are described as ծիրանածին (the Armenian calque of the Greek *porphyrogénnētos*), literally 'born in the purple', as they bring together the Ṙubēnid bloodline of Zabel with the bloodline of the Hetʻumid dynasty, cementing Hetʻum's claim to the throne.[59] The *Žłlankʻ* serves Hetʻum because it is for his sons; the compendium itself is therefore future oriented, presenting a pedagogy meant to bind the royal family, going forward, within the teachings of the church and to one another.

It is equally revealing that these unsettling hierarchical relationships (Christ over Hetʻum; Hetʻum over Zabel; Hetʻum and Zabel over

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[59]   On Cilician genealogies as technologies of authority in other contexts, cf. Abkarian unpublished.

their offspring; Armenians over 'foreign peoples') are preserved genealogically, through the same compendium that activates them, for other readers. Arguably, these relationships are also somewhat different from other attempts by Hetʻum to correlate his legitimacy with Zabel. Famously, for example, Hetʻum also minted a silver coin that declared him ՅԵԹՈՒՄ ԹԱԳԱՒՈՐ ՅԱ/Յ (HETʻUM KING OF ARMENIANS) on one side, and the inscription ԿԱՐՈՂՈՒ – ԹՒՆ ԱՅ Է (IT IS THE AUTHORITY OF GOD) on the other (Bedoukian 1958; Pavlou 2017, 390-1). This latter inscription encircles an image of Hetʻum and Zabel, who stand together, holding aloft a large cross. Quite obviously, these coins served as visual reminders, for anyone engaged in Cilician commerce, that the authority of king and queen were bound together in their shared proximity to Christ. The *Žłlankʻ* stakes a similar claim for a more selective audience: namely, for the other Armenian nobility who descended from Hetʻum or who studied the compendium for themselves. In fact, we know that subsequent nobles followed Hetʻum's model for vernacular study between husband and wife. One of the oldest extant copies of the *Žłlankʻ*, dating to 1274, thus includes multiple marginal notes throughout its many entries which ask the reader to remember Queen Keṙan (d. 1285), the commissioner of the manuscript.[60] Keṙan was married to Hetʻum's son Lewon II, who had become king only four years prior. Like Zabel, she seems to have assumed the role of caretaker for the *Žłlankʻ*, presumably studying it with her husband, Hetʻum's son, another 'educated king' whom Vardan also prays for in his colophon (Antʻabyan 1967, 164).

What the *Žłlankʻ* helps to bring into relief, then, are many gradual transformations at court: the ascendancy of 'vulgar' Armenian as a language of courtly erudition; the implicit correlation of the educated king, and indeed even the royal marriage, with the vernacular compendium and the teachings of Vardan; the tacit acknowledgement of Vardan that the nobility desired to be instructed in this 'mellifluous' register, even while he potentially left the door open for the future study of manuscripts in Classical Armenian; and finally the capability of the vulgar tongue to successfully impart knowledge of scripture and of the natural world.

More broadly, the *Žłlankʻ* gestures toward a moment of vernacular flourishing on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, which witnessed the spread of analogous genres in Outremer French, as well as the competition of other emergent vernaculars, such as the Mamluk translations of Persian literary works into Turkish. As Vardan sat to compose the *Žłlankʻ*, these processes were still ongoing, as was perhaps his own embrace of 'vulgar' Armenian, which he mixed with an abundance of Classical forms. The future of written Middle

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60 MS Arménien 42, 29v, 38v, 132r.

Armenian, like the future of the Kingdom of Armenia in Cilicia, was far from settled, but one thing had grown clear: Cilician Middle Armenian was gradually becoming an instrument through which the nobility articulated their authority and performed their erudition *to one another.* At the same time, it served additional purposes for a different set of elite figures – the clergy of the Armenian church – who, after all, had a vested interest of their own in cultivating Het'um as a pious defender of church teachings, and moreover were implicitly willing to employ this 'rustic' Armenian in part to realize those aims.

4 Grammaticality and Armenian Kingship

The *Žłlank'* helps us to see how the broader ascendancy of Middle Armenian in Cilicia looked on the ground, configured in tandem with the image of Het'um as educated king. Still, this granular look at Middle Armenian as a language of royal erudition during this period would be too provisional without briefly addressing the preeminent form of medieval language cultivation – the patronage and production of grammars – which was also a significant feature of the commission and study of manuscripts in Sis. Moreover, the court's interest in grammar also helps to shed light on study in 'mellifluous' Armenian in contexts removed from the court, yet still related to its program of knowledge production.

The art of grammar and forms of royal and clerical power have long been close companions, even in widely disparate times and places. In the case of the Sanskrit cosmopolis in South Asia, Pollock has posited that kingship and grammaticality were to an extent mutually constitutive. He argues that this was demonstrated by

> the celebration of grammatical learning especially in kings, the royal patronage of such learning, and the competitive zeal among rulers everywhere to encourage grammatical creativity and adorn their courts with scholars who could exemplify it. (2006, 165)

For Pollock, this "assertion of grammaticality, and with it literary skill" was therefore an absolute necessity "for the fully realized form of kingliness" in part because grammar was a precondition for knowledge of literature, and therefore was a precondition for the formation of the cosmopolis in the first place (166). We might expand this frame somewhat further. Elsewhere in medieval Europe, grammatica, or the institution of grammar and the first of the arts in the trivium, also held an intimate relationship with power. Irvine argues that for

> the dominant social and political institutions of medieval Europe, grammatica functioned to perpetuate and reproduce the most

fundamental conditions for textual culture, providing the discursive rules and interpretive strategies that constructed certain texts as repositories of authority and value. (1994, 2)

Grammatica, for Irvine, thus consisted of "technologies of authority" which produced both literacy and normative Latinity (306).

Though Pollock and Irvine attend to widely different contexts, they help to index a general relationship between the premodern study of grammar and power, if not the authority of the king (or church) in particular. In this light, it is not surprising that the first Classical Armenian grammars likewise bore a complex relationship with power. Until the seventh century CE, these works were largely produced by a professional and lay elite who were in active dialogue with the Hellenic world, whose massive geographic footprint was established with the conquests of Alexander the Great. As this world began to gradually wane in Armenia, Armenian grammarians slowly replaced Hellenic literary references, such as the work of Homer, with citations and figures from the Bible (Cowe 2020a). So, too, did Armenian clergymen displace their lay grammarian counterparts, even as they continued to produce and collate commentaries on the *Tékhnē grammatikē* (Art of Grammar) by the foundational Greek grammarian Dionysius Thrax (d. 90 BCE). Such commentaries proliferated in Classical Armenian throughout the medieval period and continued to be read and produced by the educated classes of the Armenian church. Yet given the close relationship between grammar, literary culture, and power, the question necessarily arises: aside from a brief entry in the *Žłlank'*, where then are the Cilician Middle Armenian grammars?

The answer is complicated. In fact, King Het'um did commission a grammar in his lifetime. He made this request again of Vardan Arewelc'i, who completed his *Meknut'iwn k'erakani* (Commentary on Grammar) "at the request of Het'um King of the Armenians", as the heading to his commentary tells us, sometime between 1244-46.[61] Unlike the terse grammatical entry in the *Žłlank'*, this work is a commentary on the seminal grammatical work of Dionysius Thrax. Hence, the aim of Vardan's *Commentary* is not to teach readers the Armenian language as would a modern language textbook, though it does contain ample linguistic information on the conjugation of verbs and declensions of nouns. Rather, like the tradition it belongs to, this work proposes a much broader philosophy and theory of language

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61 Ի խնդրոյ թագաւորին Հայոց Հեթմոյ (Vardan Arewelc'i 1972, 73). Here, too, Vardan would seem to speak with Het'um, albeit in a more oblique manner than in the *Žłlank'*. For example, in an entry that explains the meaning of being *erkanun* (binomial), or having two names, he gives the name and title of the king's brother, 'Smbat' and 'Sparapet', respectively, as examples (1972, 117).

(Xačʻikyan 2012, 257). Vardan therefore defends his work as more than mere տեղեկութիւն (information). Grammar is հմտութիւն ('wisdom' or 'understanding'); it is գիտութիւն ('science' and 'reason'), and it is concerned with the proper interpretation of the essence of written texts, whether they be in verse or prose (1972, 73-4).[62] The wisdom of grammar allows one to distinguish whether a text is orthodox or not, or even to discern whether a text is medical or astrological in nature (75). Thus, for Vardan, the study of grammar is the most necessary and foundational art for those who wish to be wise. In this context and for the many other Armenian commenters in this tradition, grammar is part of the branch of literature (գրականութիւն); in fact, it is the cornerstone of literature, poetry and prose, unlike the modern relegation of grammar to the branch of linguistics.[63] This, too, is a repository of authority and value, to paraphrase Irvine.

Where power and wisdom are correlated, the production of Vardan's *Commentary* is clear. Still, things become more complex where language enters the picture. The critical edition of the *Commentary*, compiled by the erudite scholar Xačʻeryan, presents a relatively seamless Classical Armenian text, though slight vernacularisms appear throughout.[64] In fact, the vast majority of premodern recensions of this text are in Classical Armenian. The scribes who copied Vardan's *Commentary*, following the collapse of Cilicia in 1375, clearly considered the Classical Armenian original to be the authoritative version. However, the ever-resourceful Middle Armenian still found its way into this work, as is made clear by Matenadaran M2283.[65] Unlike other recensions, this unpublished variant of Vardan's *Commentary* presents an explicit adaptation in Middle Armenian. Moreover, although M2283 was copied in a later century, it preserves a colophon composed by a scribe named Yakobak, who reports finishing the labour of

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[62] Cf. also Xačʻeryan's discussion in the introduction to the critical edition of Vardan's *Commentary* (Vardan Arewelcʻi 1972, 8-9).

[63] Cf. Xačʻeryan's detailed introduction to the *Commentary* (Vardan Arewelcʻi 1972, 10); cf. also Antʻabyan's shorter overview of Vardan's grammatical work (1987, 1:123-33; 2: 147-51). On Vardan's grammatical works, including a discussion on popular or 'vulgar' elements, cf. also the grammatical study by J̌ahukyan (1954, esp. 243-59).

[64] For instance, Vardan is the first grammarian to describe the differences in the thirteenth-century pronunciation shift between the letters *aw* and *o*, as the former had a palatal pronunciation and the latter a nasal one (1972, 86). The *ku* particle, which marks the present and imperfect indicative in Middle Armenian verbal conjugations, also appears in the Classical Armenian text, as if out of nowhere, perhaps giving some of Vardan's erudite explanations a more 'mellifluous' feel (86). Most prominently, Vardan (or a scribe after him) offers an explanation of the Middle Armenian form *grenkʻ* – i.e. 'let us write' or 'we shall write' – as belonging to the future tense (123; Xačʻeryan 1992, 157). In contrast, the text reports that the Classical Armenian form *gremkʻ* (we write) is used for the present tense. In general, however, whereas the *Žłlankʻ* leans into a 'vulgar' register of Armenian, the *Commentary* skews more toward a formal register of the classical language.

[65] Yerevan, Matenadaran (Mesrop Maštocʻ Institute of Ancient Manuscripts), M2283.

copying the contents of this miscellany on 29 June 1335 (126*r*-126*v*). It is uncertain whether Yakobak's Middle Armenian recension was copied from a manuscript that was produced before 1335.

The two linguistic variants of the *Commentary* do not diverge by an order of magnitude, just as Middle and Classical do not diverge from one another by an order of magnitude during this period. However, unlike the Classical Armenian recension, the vernacular *Commentary* regularly conjugates verbs in Middle Armenian forms, as well as opting at times for a slightly different vocabulary in its use of nouns. It also replaces aspects of the Classical text, such as declensions that may have required a different kind of grammatical knowledge, with a simpler register of Middle Armenian, at times using a light form of circumlocution to make its point. Its use of Middle Armenian forms were both deliberate and pervasive, in other words, unlike its Classical counterpart.

Still, 'vulgar' Armenian also had defined limits in this work. Xač'eryan demonstrates that the manuscript simplifies (and in some cases slightly confuses) the Classical Armenian version of the text, which he believes is the only version that sprung from Vardan's pen (Vardan Arewelc'i 1972, 50-61).[66] Even more, it is worth observing that the Middle Armenian adaptation generally preserves the Classical Armenian text in discussions on specific grammatical forms, such as conjugations and declensions, perhaps so as not to confuse the reader with two competing registers or grammatical systems.[67] In contrast, it employs a Middle Armenian lexicon and grammar especially in more theoretical passages on language itself. In other words, its aim is not to teach the reader Middle Armenian grammar using a model culled from a Classical text, but rather, akin to the *Žłlank'*'s entry on pictographs and abbreviations, to aid the reader in future study, leaving the door open to acquire a nuanced understanding of the Classical language. This adaptation might therefore be thought of as an intermediary text, and an intermediary link, between the 'vulgar' and Classical language, as it uses the former in part to facilitate study of the latter.[68]

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[66] It is worth observing that the Middle Armenian recension also omits mention of Vardan's authorship or Het'um's patronage in the title.

[67] Compare, for instance, Vardan's discussion on the Middle Armenian form *grenk'*, which is basically identical in both the Middle Armenian variant and in the Classical Armenian text. So, too, are the conjugations of verbs left according to their Classical forms here (Vardan Arewelc'i 1972, 123; Matenadaran M2283, 29*r*).

[68] Currently, we know of no such intermediary grammatical text in the case of Byzantine and Ancient Greek, another vernacular and classical language set within the same linguistic continuum. A somewhat closer analogue, again, might be found in the case of Old French and Latin. For example, the Parisian scholar Alexander Neckam compiled his *De nominibus utensilium* (On the Names of Useful Things) in the late twelfth century, a widely popular word-list of Latin and vernacular English, which also included

And yet, its functional purpose is the same: to theorize the various parts of language itself, using Dionysius Thrax as its departure point. Although the aim of the vernacular rendition of the *Commentary* is not to teach the reader Middle Armenian, it does often allow the reader to learn to theorize language *through* Middle Armenian, which is also what the Classical Armenian original does. Hence, in every entry, Vardan opens by quoting Dionysius Thrax, in Armenian translation, and then glosses his words in different ways. For example, in one heading, Dionysius Thrax likens writing to the elements. Vardan explains this statement in a slow and methodical manner, gradually fleshing out the implications of a correspondence between the physical, elemental world and the Armenian alphabet in particular:

Որպէս տարերք որ ունին հակառակութիւն և հաշտելութիւն այ՛սինքն միաւորութիւն. և այնի՛ն կու զոյացնեն զամէնայն, նոյնպէս և զիրն ի ծայնաւորաց և յանձայն իրաց իւրեանց. զոյացնէ զբանն. ի լերկից և ի թաւից ի բթից և յայլոցն որպէս յառաջ ունիս ուսանել. և որպէս վերո՛յ ասացաք. Մարդո է նըրման քերականութիւնս. տառն ի հոգի և զիրն ի մարմին և այս ելեն ծայնաւոր գրերս. յելեն զգայարականքն ի մարդոյն որով կու յարդարի մարդութիւն և որպէս ի զաւղուածքն` միւն պատուականագոյն` է՛, քան զմին այլն. Նոյնպէս և ի գրերոյ՛ս է որ պատուականագոյն է միւն քան զմին այլսս:[69]

69   The original Classical Armenian is only slightly more detailed, and reads as follows: Որպէս տարերքդ, որ ունին հակառակութիւն և հաշտութիւն, որ է միաւորութիւն, և իւրեանց միաբանութեամբն ծանանին զամէնայն, նոյնպէս և զիրն ի ծայնաւորաց և յանձայնից միացեալք զոյացուցանէն զբանն ի լերկից և ի թաւաց, ի բթից և յայլոցն, որպէս յառաջ ունիս ուսանել կամ իբր վերոյ ասացաք: Արդ՝ զի՞նչ նմանի քերականութիւնս. – մարդոյ. տառն ի հոգի և զիրն ի մարմին: Եւ այս ելեն ծայնաւոր գրերս յելեն զգայարականքն մարդոյս, որով յարդարի մարդութիւնս: Եւ ո՞ր են ելեն զգայարանքս. – աչքն, ականջքն, քիթն, բերանն, շաւշափականն, հոգին և մարմին: Եւ որպէս ի յանդամսն ոմն քան զոմն պատուականագոյնք են, նոյնպէս և ի գրերոյս է, որ պատուականագոյն է միւն քան զմիւսն, և առաւել զարդարէ զբանն: (Vardan Arewelc'i 1972, 85). Note here that the Classical text actually names the 'seven' sensory organs: the eye, the ear, the nose, the mouth, the sense of touch or feeling, the soul, and the body.

As with the elements [*tarerkʻ*], which possess contrariety and con-
ciliation, that is to say, conjunction, and through which they bring
everything into being, so it is with letter[s] [*gir*], which, from their
substance out of vowels and consonants, create the word [*ban*],
and [moreover] out of soft consonants, and heavy consonants, and
blunt consonants,[70] and out of other [such things], which you have
[in hand] to study prior [to this], as we said above. Grammar is
akin to mankind; the letter [*taṙ*] [which is pronounced] is like the
soul, and the letter [*gir*] [which is written] is like the body; and
these seven letters, which are vowels, are like the seven senses in
man, by which human nature is fashioned. And as with members
[of the body], one is all the more venerated over another, so it is
among these letters, that one [set] is more venerated over others
(Matenadaran M2283, 8*v*-9*r*).

It is common to find such discourse in Armenian grammars, and here
the translator makes a fine metaphysical meal of it [fig. 8]. The mate-
rial of the world is formed out of a tension that brings synthesis: air,
fire, water, and earth do not go together, and yet through their com-
bination, everything is formed. In the grammarian's eyes, the same is
true of the dissimilar sounds that the Armenian consonants produce.
He also gives the seven letters of the vowels prominence, as they cor-
respond to 'seven' human senses, which, in Aristotelian terms, serve
as the gateways that connect the material world to the rational mind,
and therefore are more honoured than other parts of the body (like
vowels, which render articulate speech possible). In fact, Vardan con-
tinues to elaborate on this theme, and in the following entries declares
the vowels *ē* and *ō* to be the 'divine' letters, as they have a long pronun-
ciation, he says, indicating the boundless existence of God within ver-
balized speech (Matenadaran M2283, 8*v*-9*r*).[71] In short, Vardan weaves
his commentaries on the Armenian alphabet into a Christian sphere
of meaning-making, even while retaining his original ancient Greek
source material, including references at times to Homer and the *Illiad*.

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70 *Butʻ* denotes both an unstressed pause, and, in the case of pronunciation, "blunt"
consonants that follow a vowel. Cf. Petrosyan et al. 1975, 69.

71 The Classical Armenian text conversely gives the 'long' vowel in its original writ-
ten form, as *aw* (Vardan Arewelcʻi 1972, 86); Middle Armenian adopted the letter *ō* dur-
ing this period, and the translation uses this new letter in the Armenian script. It is
additionally worth observing that the letter *ē* numerically means seven, correspond-
ing again to the 'seven' senses, as well as serves as the auxiliary third person singular
verb for 'he/she/it is'. In the Armenian church, the letter *ē* is also explicitly connected
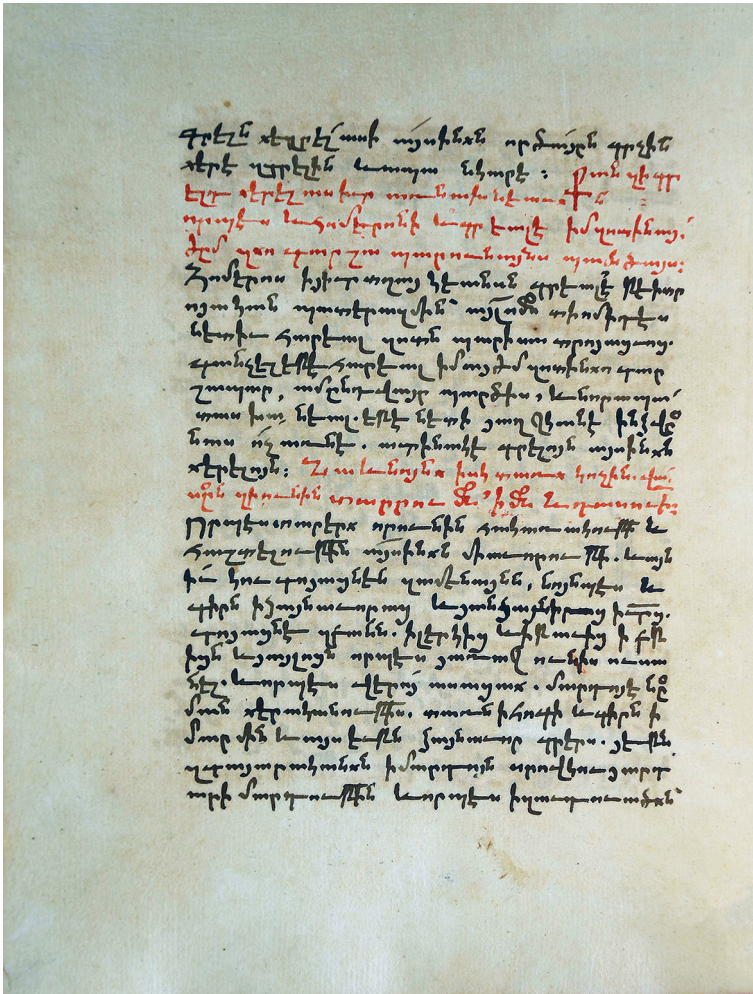with God, the one who 'is', and hence also holy.

Figure 8 Discourse on letters in the Middle Armenian adaptation of Vardan Arewelc'i's Commentary on Grammar. M2283, 8*v*. Courtesy of the Matenadaran (Mesrop Maštoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts)

Quite obviously, his grammar teaches much more, and much less, than only the paradigms of grammar as might a modern language textbook. Rather, it serves to guide the reader to reflect on language within a broader symbolic order, which is to say, to contemplate the ways that language metaphysically interfaces with its analogues in the physical world and with the Christian theology of the Armenian church. When one reads this text in its Middle Armenian adaptation, one also is invited to consider these same correspondences through Middle Armenian as a medium of thought. Arguably, in this

light, the Middle Armenian *Commentary* is not only a simplified, and sometimes corrupted, version of Vardan's (largely) Classical Armenian original, as Xač'eryan would imply. Instead, it is an invitation to do this labour in the 'mellifluous' tongue, just as one might do it in Classical – which, after all, still shares the same basic constitutive elements of language, including aspirated and unaspirated consonants and seven vowels. By implication, this vulgar adaptation is also a subtle indication that Middle Armenian might be capable of providing part of the cornerstone in any medieval Armenian education – the study of 'grammar' – and hence serve as a basis for all future learning, presumably in both Middle and Classical Armenian.

What the Classical and Middle Armenian recensions of Vardan's *Commentary* collectively demonstrate, at the least, are three important points. First, in his self-presentation as an 'educated king' at court, King Het'um took an active role in commissioning a new Armenian grammar; grammaticality was therefore also tied to his kingship in Cilicia, much as it was at other courts during the 'vernacular millennium'. Second, the movement to use Middle Armenian as a language of knowledge production, which was also correlated at this time with the education and even authority of the nobility, was robust enough to support both the translation of works from other languages *and* the adaptation of Classical Armenian texts into the vernacular, even in cases where the originals were still available. In this case, the Middle Armenian adaptation of Vardan's *Commentary* arguably served to aid readers who had difficulty studying the same work in Classical Armenian, or who preferred the 'mellifluous' register over the Classical standard. Third, and perhaps most important, the Middle Armenian *Commentary* served as a similar linguistic proof-of-concept as did the Classical Armenian recension. That is, it implicitly demonstrated that Middle Armenian was a language capable of auto-theorization, just as it was a language capable of producing legal, encyclopedic, medical, and theological works, even as Vardan's Middle Armenian *Commentary* still gave primacy to the classical language.

The relationship between grammaticality and kingship has received relatively little attention in the history of the Armenian language. Indeed, the Middle Armenian *Commentary* has never been published, even as an appendix to Xač'eryan's critical edition, in part because of practical limitations due to space, and in part because he did not place as much value in a Middle Armenian recension that seemed less sure of its subject than did its Classical Armenian counterpart. Yet this relationship between grammar and power seemed quite clear to our premodern subjects, even in the expression of Middle Armenian 'grammaticality'.

It is telling, then, that the Middle Armenian adaptation of Vardan's *Commentary* did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, its composition (or at least its copying) roughly coincides with the activities of

Yovhannēs Kʻṙnecʻi (d. 1347), an Armenian priest who was a member of the Fratres Unitores, which advocated for the reunification of the Armenian and Roman churches – a position which Vardan Arewelcʻi staunchly opposed – and eventually became a branch of the Dominican Order. Unlike nearly all the Armenian grammarians who preceded him, Yovhannēs actually provides and explains many of Middle Armenian's grammatical paradigms in a clear manner, and with abundant examples (Yovhannēs Kʻṙnecʻi 1977; cf. Cowe 2020b, 109-12), though he wrote generally in a simple Classical register.[72] He also broke with the long tradition of commenting on Dionysius Thrax, aiming to impart less a theory of language than its finer points of syntax, which he accomplished by melding Armenian with Latinate syntax in particular.

Yovhannēs perhaps did not undertake this task to elevate Middle Armenian to the level of other more standardized 'vernaculars', but rather to assist his fellow Dominicans and students who could not study Classical Armenian at the Apostolic monasteries of the Armenian church, as Cowe has proposed (2020b, 110). It is also worth noting that, in some respects, the Middle Armenian adaptation of Vardan's *Commentary* presents an inversion of Yovhannēs's grammar: the former uses Middle Armenian especially in prose sections that theorize language, but instructs its audience using the grammatical paradigms of Classical Armenian; the latter generally uses a simple Classical Armenian in its prose, yet instructs readers in many 'vulgar' grammatical forms. In other words, both make use of the 'mellifluous' tongue, yet for different reasons, and presumably to serve the needs of different audiences. It is unknown whether Yovhannēs grasped, to whatever degree, that Middle Armenian had become both a language of erudition and a hallmark of knowledge production at the court at Sis, in addition to serving as a written language for an increasing number of clergy in the Armenian church. Still, at the least, he exhibits the importance of folding both Middle and Classical Armenian into his Latinophile sphere, aligning the language of the court with the language of the church he desired to unite with his own, whether this was his explicit intention or not.

Through its close relationship with the Classical standard, then, Middle Armenian gradually became an object of study, both for the

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[72] To give but one illustration of this, in the following sentence, Yovhannēs (1977, 177) sets up his explanation in a simple Classical register, but conjugates verbs in the present tense using the Middle Armenian particle *ku*: "Արդ ցուցականքն են, որ ցուցանեն զժամանակ, զդէմս, և զթիւ՝ եզական և բազմաւորական: Եւ են այսպէս. ներկա ցուցական, եզական կու սիրեմ, կու սիրես, կո[ւ] սիրէ..." (Now the indicatives, which indicate the tense, person, and number, [i.e.,] singular and plural, are as such: in present indicative, singular, 'I love', 'you love', 'he/she/it loves'...). His use of Middle Armenian in present and imperfect indicative is generally pervasive throughout his *Grammar*, though he also often uses Classical forms for the other tenses.

(unnamed) audiences of Vardan's 'vulgar' *Commentary* and also for Dominican and/or Armenian readers of Yovhannēs's *Grammar*, although in different ways. Again, this was not only learning for learning's sake, but rather, in the case of Yovhannēs's *Grammar*, represented a subtle effort to exert a kind of cultural, theological, and political leverage, assisting his fellow Dominicans in nudging other Armenians toward the Catholic church and the Latinate world, but through a 'mellifluous' tongue. Of course, the writings of partisans of the Armenian church, such as Vardan Arewelc'i, continued to be copied, to circulate, and most of all to be studied at the court in Sis. Middle Armenian had become a language of the elite in Cilicia not only by default, as a language that kings spoke simply because it was also their mother tongue, but also for its epistemic, and pedagogical, and authoritative currency in multiple social contexts: it was a language fit to instruct the Armenian nobility; it was a language the nobility and the church used to articulate their conjoined legitimacy; and finally it was a language that erudite Apostolic and Dominican figures undertook to study and to reproduce in different degrees, as through the production of diglossic Classical and Middle Armenian grammars, even beyond the court. Middle Armenian's moment as a companion of elite power, and thus as a new front line in the battle over the cultural and religious orientations of Cilicia, would therefore seem to have fully arrived.

5   Conclusion: Docile Speech, Pleasing Labour, and Ties that Bind

A language is a dialect with an army and a navy – or, at least, so goes the maxim widely attributed to Max Weinreich. It is not hard to see the implications of the Weinreich witticism, as it is sometimes called: what rises to the upper branches of the linguistic taxonomic tree, and hence what becomes the subject of academic study and even cultivation, is often underpinned by a form of state power. In the case of Middle Armenian's gradual ascendancy as a court language in Sis, the Weinreich witticism is doubly true: to some degree, the court and church's proximity to Middle Armenian also helped nudge it to become an object of study in premodern Cilicia. Likewise, this proximity is what initially drew the attention of linguists in the late nineteenth century, who reinvigorated the study of Middle Armenian in the modern age, even as Armenians lacked their own form of modern statehood.

Given the fact that elite proximity or 'closeness' is what made it possible to study Middle Armenian today, it would therefore behoove us to consider its relation to power not merely in the abstract, as though somehow coequal with Cilician statehood writ large, or

in the administrative context of specific branches of the court, such as the chancellery or legal system's use of the language. Rather, as I have outlined briefly here, the use of 'rustic' and 'mellifluous' Armenian in Cilicia often took place in discrete social contexts, both in and out of court, for the benefit of elite audiences who in this case study were largely other Armenian nobility. Of course, this is but a small moment in the early life of Cilician Middle Armenian, as seen here from the perspective of the king, a member of the clergy, and their extended networks in the church and at court. Even during the height of Het'um's rule, the medieval vernacular was used in more decentralized ways than the ones I have briefly sketched, just as it had a broader life at court beyond the texts composed by or adapted from Vardan Arewelc'i.

There were also clear limits to the reach of Middle Armenian in Cilicia. As the *Žłlank'* and the *Commentary on Grammar* show, the 'vulgar' Armenian tongue did not exactly angle to displace its Classical sibling in its slow rise to power: after all, Het'um commissioned works in both Middle and Classical Armenian; even more, his Middle Armenian compendium drew heavily from Classical Armenian grammatical forms, albeit in a relatively simple manner. Both Classical and Middle Armenian were also employed to articulate different sorts of royal self-fashioning and authority by the court, depending on the context, from this period onward in the history of Armenian Cilicia. For instance, Het'um's son Lewon II commissioned a versified history about his family, known as Vahram's *Chronicle*, in a mono-rhymed Classical Armenian; this history was explicitly modelled upon the former Catholicos Nersēs Šnorhali's own versified history, which narrates the genealogy of his family. Vahram's *Chronicle* thus had to be composed in Classical Armenian, in part because Nersēs also composed his poetic history in Classical Armenian, as Abkarian has observed (unpublished). However, akin to Nersēs, who additionally penned biblical riddles in versified Middle Armenian, Lewon II also employed the vernacular for other ends, notably issuing a Middle Armenian privilege to the merchants of Genoa in 1288. Of course, the audiences and functions of these works were also different: one explicitly aimed to adapt a poem by the head of the church, while the other addressed tax collectors at the customs house in the port of Ayas (and, at least in theory, also the Genoese directly). The salient point is that the Het'umid line had many ways of exercising their power, and those articulations fell across a spectrum of literary and dialectal registers, depending on their particular need.

In these senses, although part of a 'linguistic continuum' with its classical language, Cilician Middle Armenian enjoyed a very different life at the Armenian court in Sis than did vernacular Greek, which likewise existed along a spectrum of language, at the Byzantine court. Chiefly, as this article has shown, the Armenian court and

church tasked Cilician Middle Armenian with producing knowledge across multiple genres (compendia, exegesis, pharmacopoeia, jurisprudence, grammars, etc.), unlike Byzantine Greek, which was never used for these purposes during this period. Cilician Middle Armenian's life at court thus more closely paralleled the uses of Old French in Outremer, even though the latter's classical antecedent was Latin and hence a different language, which, again, is quite different from the case of the Armenian vernacular and Classical Armenian. It would seem in part that Cilician Middle Armenian's many deviations from its adjacent vernacular neighbours were due to its development out of multiple intersecting and multilingual environments, even as it engaged in a diglossic dance with its classical counterpart. In the case of the court at Sis, the nobility demonstrated different degrees of fluency in Classical Armenian, Middle Armenian, and Old French in Het'um's time. Other servitors, visitors, and clergy at court added languages into this mix (such as Latin, Arabic, Syriac, and Greek in particular; Burchard of Mount Sion also observed a few Mongols at court during his visit). Additional languages, such as Georgian, New Persian, and Anatolian Turkish, further interfaced with the Armenian dialects in Greater Armenia and Anatolia. Arguably, Cilician Middle Armenian developed at court as a written language out of its uneven interface with many of these tongues.

It is difficult to consider this language as especially 'rustic' within the courtly setting of Sis, as Nichanian has aptly observed, stressing instead the vernacular's configuration in writing at the crossroads of many languages and genres (1989, 234). Here, we can add that courtly Middle Armenian was 'rustic' to the extent that Vulgar Latin, which became a language for the training of Catholic clergy in the ninth century, could also be accurately described as a 'rustic' tongue at the Council of Tours: both vernacular registers extended a bridge to forms of knowledge production in the classical language, even while both were implicitly and explicitly contrasted against the rigorous forms of learning that use of the classical language necessitated.

Most crucially, as I have posited here, Cilician Middle Armenian likewise developed in writing out of its interface between different elite figures and institutions across and beyond this space. In particular, the 'mellifluous' tongue served an important role in bringing together a grammarian from Greater Armenia and his king in Cilicia, who grew closer in a mutually beneficial relationship forged in part through their interest in and use of language. As we have seen, Vardan often addressed Het'um directly, at times even in the second person singular 'you' instead of by a formal title more appropriate to the king's station. He also employed a vernacularized Armenian, mixed with Classical forms, to converse with his sovereign in an accessible and perhaps familiar manner. In other words, by braiding a rhetoric of intimacy into a blend of classical and vernacular forms of the

Armenian tongue, Vardan sought to produce a specific form of authority: one founded upon this very dialogue, which produces closeness between the Armenian church and the royal court, just as it produces closeness between the Hetʻumid and Ṙubēnid dynastic lines and closeness between 'vulgar' and Classical Armenian.[73] In this light, his pedagogy aimed not only to establish a program for the king and his immediate family members, but rather for the future of courtly study in Sis under the auspices of the Armenian church more broadly.

It would seem that Vardan, along with his colleagues in the church, were rather successful in this endeavour at least in the short term. When Burchard of Mount Sion visited the court in the late thirteenth century, he was impressed not only by the austerity of the Catholicos, who chose to don a shirt of hair despite his personal wealth, but also by the closeness between the clergy and the king's family in the social act of study:

> *Regem Armenie et Cilicie uidi cum omnibus optimatibus suis sedentem ualde humiliter et cum magna reuerentia ante pedes eius pluries cum filio suo primogenito, et cum magna deuotione audientem ab eo uerbum Dei. Iste cum omnibus suis prelatis archiepiscopis et episcopis et ceteris per totam quadrigesimam in pane et aqua abstinebant, et rex idem similiter et omnes optimates sui, nisi in festo annunciationis, et tunc me presente idem Catholicus cum ipso dispensauit, ut pisces comederet et biberet uinum. Illo die interfui misse coram eodem Catholico et rege et regina. Et habent officium deuotum ualde.*

> I saw the king of Armenia and Cilicia with all his nobles sitting very humbly and with great reverence before the feet of the Catholicus, frequently with his first-born son, listening with great devotion to the word of God from him. The Catholicus with all his prelates, archbishops, bishops, and others, fasted the whole forty days of Lent with bread and water, and the same king and all his nobles similarly, apart from the Feast of Annunciation, and then in my presence the same Catholicus gave himself a dispensation that he might eat fish and drink wine. That day I attended mass before the same Catholicus and the king and queen. They take their liturgical duty very seriously (Burchard of Mount Sion, O.P. 2019, 204-5).

Here, as in Vardan's *Žłlankʻ*, an intellectual genealogy (and with it, a social hierarchy) is on display: the king and his first-born son,

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73 The familiarity of this tongue was also outwardly facing, toward audiences not at court. For example, in the Middle Armenian privilege to the merchants of Montpellier from 1314, King Ōšin addresses the tax collectors at the port of Ayas in the same familiar, singular 'you' that Vardan uses to speak with the king, just as he employs a lexicon that contains loanwords of Greek and Arabic origin.

surrounded by the nobility, sit at the feet of the Catholicos, from whom they receive their instruction directly in the spoken Armenian vernacular. Burchard furnishes a tableau in which the uses of Cilician Middle Armenian obviously intersected with many other pedagogical, theological, and political, and social developments at court. The activity of manuscript study at court, both in Middle and Classical Armenian linguistic contexts, thus provided a kind of infrastructure that produced social propinquity between disparate and sometimes distant actors. At times the configuration of Middle Armenian as a written language of elite study may have been a byproduct of the complex and shifting interpersonal and inter-institutional relationships among elite actors in Cilicia. At other times, this configuration in turn seems to have subtly informed those other interpersonal and inter-institutional relationships, as when it opened a channel for dialogue between the king and his grammarian, or when it served as an implicit medium for Het'um's legitimacy to be buttressed by the "budding branches" of his sons, who were joined to his program of vernacular study.

As I have argued previously, we might therefore ask more from the modern epithet of 'Middle' Armenian, which need not only describe a mere chronology of language (Pifer 2023; Budak, Pifer 2024). Rather, the 'mediality' of this language might be used to characterize a quality of both the language and the people who used it. In this case, Middle Armenian was successfully configured into a language fit for the king – in that it served as a medium for the king to conduct study on seemingly any topic in the world – in part because it served as an acceptable go-between for the church, which entered into the lives of Het'um, Zabel, and their sons 'born in the purple', in an intimate manner through the production of works like the *Žłlank'* and the *Commentary*. Moreover, it was a language through which the king aimed to bridge the gap between himself and his wife, between his erudition and her inherited right to the throne, even as it folded them into a patriarchal hierarchy with Christ over all. So too did it serve as a synthetic bridge between truly 'rustic' and dialectal speech, exhibited across Cilicia and Greater Armenia, and the Classical literary standard, even while simultaneously interfacing with other languages of the court in Sis. Finally, it was a language whose life in the Mediterranean, the sea in the middle, distantly mirrored the development of other 'vernacular' tongues, such as the Vulgar Latin in France, the use of Outremer French in the neighbouring Crusader states, the Mamluk patronage of translations into Old Turkish at court, and the development of Byzantine Greek within a linguistic continuum alongside its own Classical language. This was the broader milieu in which it became beneficial to employ 'classical' languages, such as literary Arabic and Latin, in addition to developing seemingly more localized 'rustic' tongues, often at the same courts. Of

course, as we have seen here, this grand drama of Mediterranean multilingualism could also play out on a small and intimate stage: in this case, through the courtly study of a handful of manuscripts between one's kin and an erudite priest.

Tellingly, in this era of linguistic hyperpluralism at court, Middle Armenian even drew the attention of elite actors beyond Cilicia or Greater Armenia. In fact, slightly before the Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia fell to the Mamluks, another court was attempting to study Armenian in a different and more limited fashion. We know this from the Rasulid Hexaglot, a multilingual dictionary composed for the sixth Rasulid king of Yemen (r. 1363-77), which contains entries in Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Mongol, Byzantine Greek, and Armenian (Golden 2000). Notably, the Rasulid Hexaglot also features a list of Middle Armenian imperative forms, supplied by either Armenian slaves or servitors in Yemen. It is unclear whether these Armenians at the Rasulid court only knew the Armenian vernacular or whether they provided this language because it would have been useful in dealing with actors or merchants from the Cilician state. What we can say is that the Cilician court in Sis helped to fashion Middle Armenian into a language that had different sorts of currency at court; in the case of the Rasulids, it just so happens that the elites who took a brief interest in 'Middle' were not always Armenian, but other figures who employed the Armenian tongue, to whatever degree, in part to perform and articulate their own status as educated rulers even beyond the Mediterranean world. At both of these courts, and to different degrees, written Middle Armenian was a language of interest primarily to the educated elite. The same is true, slightly later in time, of attempts to study Middle Armenian at the Ottoman court of Meḥmed II (d. 1481), which likewise produced a detailed grammar of the language in the Arabo-Persian script, and moreover seems to have done so to bolster the universalist, imperial ideology of their own 'educated king' (Budak, Pifer 2024).

This broader social history of Middle Armenian emerges from the mouths and the pens of many actors, in relation to one another, across distances great and small. The Armenian vernacular thus helped to bridge chasms of many kinds, just as it also helped to bring various and perhaps even unwilling historical actors together. Most of all, Middle Armenian was a language of opportunity: a medium to assert overlapping, and occasionally competing, claims to power on behalf of the church and the nobility, even as it sometimes disguised those tensions with a rhetoric of intimacy, if not a pedagogy that produced certain forms of social and dynastic bonding at court. And yet, the development of Middle Armenian as a language of writing, which also was beginning to live a decentralized life beyond Sis, obviously cannot be reduced to a single set of innovations by a particular king or even a specific generation or two among the clergy or nobility, either.

This is partly because Middle Armenian is also an actor in this story, one whose presence at court implicitly proffered new possibilities for the social articulation of power to many others in its midst, as though angling, through its own increasing proximity to both church and king, to secure an elite position even for itself.

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