

Armeno-Aethiopica in the Middle Ages: Geography, Tales of Christianization, Calendars, and Anti-Dyophysite Polemics in the First Millennium*

ZAROUI POGOSSIAN, Università degli Studi di Firenze

Introduction

In 1912 the eminent Russian Ethiopianist Boris Turaev dedicated an article to Armenian–Ethiopian relations where he discussed Ethiopian manuscript folia preserved within Armenian codices in the form of flyleaves. At that time these were in the library of the Holy See of Ējmiacin. Turaev described four such fragments and published their texts, indicating that a further search may reveal

* Research for this article was carried out under the auspices of a project funded by the European Research Council (ERC) within the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 647467, ERC-funded Consolidator Grant JewsEast at the Centrum für Religionswissenschaftliche Studien, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, PI Alexandra Cuffel) and the Innovators Fund of the RUB Research School. I would like to thank various individuals whose help and support was fundamental for starting and carrying out this research on Armenian–Ethiopian relations. I am grateful to the members of the Armenian community of Addis Abāba who shared their knowledge and memoirs on this historical community with me, particularly Vartkes Nalbandian and family, Vahe Tilbian and family, Kohar Kevorkian and family. Contact and communication with them would have been impossible without my friend and colleague Sebouh Aslanian who put me in touch with this small but vibrant community and whom I wish to thank profoundly. I express my gratitude to my friends and colleagues from the JewsEast project, Sophia Dege-Müller and Bar Kribus, who were instrumental in introducing me to Ethiopia, not least by organizing a field trip there, as well as the PI of the ERC project JewsEast Alexandra Cuffel who consistently supported and encouraged my research into Armeno-Aethiopica. The assistance of the representative of the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage of Ethiopia who accompanied us on this field trip, Sāmenaw ‘Aśrat, was precious and I wish to thank him. The joint research visit to the Maštoc’ Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Matenadaran (Erevan) with Fr Rafał Zarzeczny, SJ, confirmed the valuable evidence that Ethiopian flyleaves in Armenian manuscripts represented and the importance of advancing our knowledge in this field. Last but not least, I thank the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Matenadaran, for opening their doors to us, allowing us to examine these manuscript folia *in situ* and providing us with their digital reproductions.

more specimens.¹ When the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (the Maštoc‘ Matenadaran) was established in Erevan in 1959 almost all of the Ējmiacin manuscripts were transferred there.² Naturally, since then the Ethiopian fragments have also been housed in the Matenadaran. In 1969, Bernd Manuel Weischer brought them to the attention of the scholarly world again, studying them based on microfilms that he received from Ernst Hammerschmidt.³ Weischer identified the current (Matenadaran) shelf marks of two of the manuscripts that Turaev had studied in Ējmiacin as M685 and M947.⁴ He then described these fragments and published their texts: Psalms and the *Homily on Melchizedek* ascribed to Cyril of Jerusalem, in addition to three facsimile black and white reproductions. In 1888 Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare brought copies of fragments with Gə‘əz writing to the Bodleian Library. According to Edward Ullendorff’s catalogue, they were ‘40 leaves of tracings on paper of varying sizes. Taken by F. C. Conybeare in 1888 from fragments contained in Armenian MSS in the Library of Etschmiadzin’.⁵ The descriptions of the fragments in the Bodleian Library are identical to the originals currently preserved in the Matenadaran, confirming the supposition that Oxford fragments are copies of the originals once in Ējmiacin and now in Erevan.

This article is the first of a planned series of publications dedicated to Armeno–Ethiopian connections inspired by this data. My initial purpose was to provide an excursus into Armenian–Ethiopian relations during the Middle Ages up to the fifteenth century, to provide the historical background against which one may better comprehend the phenomenon of the appearance of Gə‘əz fragments in Armenian manuscripts. The idea was to complete, update, complement, and, sometimes, provide new data to Pankhurst’s research which aimed to collect all possible references to real-life interactions between Armenians and Ethiopians

¹ Turaev 1911–1912, esp. 05–08. In this article all Armenian words and names will be transliterated according to the Hübschmann-Meillet-Benveniste system, as per *Revue des Études Arméniennes*. However, biblical names will appear in their commonly accepted English versions, unless direct quotations from Armenian texts are cited.

² The history of the formation of the collection may be found in Eganyan et al. 1965, cols 13–198. The holdings of the Matenadaran were enriched over the years due to the tireless efforts of its founding fathers and their searches, purchases, donations, among others, and continues to be augmented.

³ Weischer 1969.

⁴ Armenian manuscripts will be cited according to the convention of the Association Internationale des Études Arméniennes (https://sites.uclouvain.be/aiea/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/10_List-of-acronyms.pdf).

⁵ Ullendorff 1951, 27.

from the earliest notices in Late Antiquity up to the twentieth century.⁶ The course of the research, as often happens, revealed different kinds of material that broadly fit the theme of Armeno-Aethiopica, rather than evidence on direct contacts and interactions between the Armenians and Ethiopians. There is no evidence on this at least up to the eleventh–thirteenth centuries. Yet, it is perhaps no less interesting to trace the understanding of Ethiopia in medieval Armenian sources and in the Armenian *imaginaire* before the close of the first millennium, as this first article sets to accomplish. Subsequently, in forthcoming articles I shall delve into real-life interactions between members of the two communities, their locations, and possible agents, as well as the literary exchanges that resulted from such encounters. Finally, Fr Rafał Zarzeczny, SJ, will explore one of the outcomes of such encounters: Gə‘əz fragments in Armenian manuscripts, analysing them palaeographically and from a philological perspective.

Ethiopia in the Armenian *Imaginaire*: Between Translations and Native Literary Production

Since the creation of the Armenian alphabet at the beginning of the fifth century, translations (and adaptations) from Greek and Syriac had been an important component in the formation of its literary culture. It is through translated texts that we can trace how notions on Ethiopia, its geography, zoology, anthropology, and real or fantastic topoi associated with this land and developed between

⁶ Pankhurst 1977; Pankhurst 1978–1979; Pankhurst 1981. The lion’s share of Pankhurst’s research is relevant to the period between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, which is understandable given the available sources. The most important contribution to medieval Armenian–Ethiopian relations written in Armenian is a series of articles published in the journal *Ējmiacin* in 1956 by Harut’yun T’uršyan (T’uršyan 1956a; T’uršyan 1956b; T’uršyan 1956c; T’uršyan 1956d). He focused, among others, on the voyage of the monk Ewostatewos to (Cilician) Armenia in the fourteenth century, as well as sought to affirm ancient ties between the two Churches. As important as T’uršyan’s research was in the 1950s, it is in need of critical revision. For example, the idea of an ‘Armenian’ foundation of the monastery dedicated to St Stephen (Däbrä Ĕstifanos) on Lake Hayq by Armenian monks, that fled their land due to Arabic conquests (T’uršyan 1956c, 90–91), has no evidence in the sources, as discussed in Tedeschi 1990. Nor is this part of the oral tradition of the monastery, as confirmed during my visit there, organized with the precious help of my colleague Sophia Dege-Müller, and interviews with the monks in October 2017. Yet, it is interesting from the point of view of the positive relationship imagined between the Armenian and Ethiopian cultures since antiquity that also permeated twentieth-century research. The journey of Ewostatewos is discussed in Fiaccadori 1985 and Fiaccadori 1984–1985. A critical appraisal of T’uršyan’s work and a hypothesis about the location of Ewostatewos’s burial will be presented in my next article.

the time of Homer and the early Church Fathers, were channelled to Armenian readers—mainly members of the clerical class or of monastic communities. In later centuries too, we find Ethiopia in contexts that denote the specific Armenian authors' or their sources' access to knowledge that circulated in the wider eastern Mediterranean realm. Not surprisingly, Alexandria and later Cairo emerge as important focal points whence images and topoi on Ethiopia and Ethiopians travelled throughout historical Armenia. Thus, though my initial intention was to focus on Armenian–Ethiopian 'real life' contacts and interactions, research led me in a very different direction. This article in particular will reveal the importance attached to Christian Ethiopia and its religious and scientific-calendrical traditions in late antique and medieval cultures of the eastern Mediterranean and beyond, on the one hand, and the participation of the Armenians in that very world, and its knowledge-creation and transfer processes, on the other. It is possibly on this basis that we find yet other unexpected appearances of Ethiopia in late ninth- and tenth-century theological treatises that polemicalized with the dyophysite (Eastern Roman or 'Byzantine') Church and where Armenian theologians imagined an immense world of non-dyophysite orthodoxy of which the Ethiopians were part.

Graeco-Roman Traditions, the Bible, and Dependent Narratives

A convenient starting point for a survey of the material available in Armenian is the 'queen of translations'—the Armenian Bible—one of the first texts to be rendered in that language from Syriac and Greek through the newly invented alphabet in the fifth century.⁷ For centuries the biblical text served as a source of information on the location and genealogy of peoples of the inhabited world based on the account of the *Diemerismos*. From the biblical narrative the Armenian readers would know that Nimrod—the first king—descended from Ham through Kush (Gen. 10:6–11). While Ham and Kush were traditionally associated with the Horn of Africa, Nimrod's field of action in the Bible was also Mesopotamia, a location that could be considered incongruous with his Kushite provenance.⁸ A further crucial source of information for Armenian readers was yet another early translation: Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chronicle* (now fully extant only in Armenian) translated most probably in the fifth century. Eusebius affirmed that Ham received the 'land of the Egyptians and Lybians' as his lot, but

⁷ On the Armenian translations of the Bible see Cox 1982; Cox 2005, and a concise overview in Cox 2016.

⁸ Schneider 2004, 30, 63, esp. 135–137 on Judaeo-Christian authors on the descendants of Ham. On the difficulties of harmonizing biblical Nimrod's Mesopotamian field of action with his purported Kushite genealogy, and possible explanations, see Levin 2002.

that his offspring Kush was an ‘Ethiopian’.⁹ At the same time, the next descendant of Ham and Kush, Nimrod, was said to be the founder of Babylon and Assur. When recording the history of yet another Mesopotamian (Assyrian) city—Niniveh—Eusebius claimed that, according to ‘Hebrew books’, Assur, now appearing as a (human) personal name rather than a toponym, ‘who was from the sons of Sem’, laid its foundations.¹⁰ Eusebius traces one more genealogical branch citing Abydenus who considered King Ninus of Assyria to be an offspring of ‘Bēl king of Assyria’. Indeed, in Eusebius’s chronological tables the kingdom of the Assyrians starts with the reign of Ninus.¹¹ Eusebius, thus, clearly separates the descendants of Ham geographically associated with the Horn of Africa from those of Sem connected to Syria/Mesopotamia. However, sources attest that there did not necessarily exist a unified tradition on these genealogies since we may observe much confusion or conflation between the individual members of each lineage.

Besides Eusebius, other early Christian authors, such as Jérôme, Isidore of Seville, the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, or Malalas, attest to various interpretative possibilities of the biblical genealogies. Ambiguities or confusion persisted with regards to the sons of Ham (through Kush) versus the sons of Sem, their localization in Ethiopia versus more widely the Babylonian or even the northern Mesopotamian realm.¹² These Judaeo-Christian intellectual speculations often relied upon or, indeed, were permeated by Graeco-Roman classical and Hellenistic notions on Ethiopia that blurred the geographical boundaries between Nilotic Ethiopia, the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, and India. Armenian sources indicate that such ideas on Ethiopia circulated widely and were adopted and adapted by the educated Armenian clerical elites, among others. Moreover, legends on Nimrod, Bel, Ninus, and his celebrated queen Semiramis (Šamiram in Armenian sources), had local reverberations, and oral tales were incorporated into both the biblical narrative and Graeco-Roman traditions. These entangled and not always congruous genealogies and the respective heroes’ deeds underwent peculiar developments in Armenian sources. Some authors simply reported information without further elaboration, some aimed to resolve what appeared to be contradictory data, while others fused local traditions and interests in their retellings.

⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea 1818, I, 109, ll. 3–5, 13–16. Most recently on the value of the Armenian translation of Eusebius’s *Chronicle* see Greenwood 2008, 198–207.

¹⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea 1818, I, 110.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, 78; II, 2.

¹² Schneider 2004, 135–137.

Stories on Bel, Ninos, and his wife Semiramis were part of Armenian pre-Christian lore and very likely circulated independently of the Bible even after the Christianization of Armenia. Harmonizing these traditions with those culled from Eusebius of Caesarea could lead to curious developments about Ethiopian connections. Thus, Movsēs Xorenac‘i, one of the most interesting but also hard-to-interpret and date authors of late antique Armenia, affirmed the identity of Bel and Nimrod, which made Bel an Ethiopian: ‘Many of the chronographers say that Nimrod, who is Bel, was an Ethiopian, and we agree that this is a reliable [tradition] considering that he lived at the borders of Egypt’.¹³ Bel was tied to Ninos in Eusebius’s text as we saw above, and this was most likely Movsēs’s source.¹⁴ Similarly, in his genealogical list Ninos appears as Nimrod’s (= Bel’s) sixth descendant. Despite these Mesopotamian connections of the ‘Ethiopian’ Bel, Xorenac‘i accurately placed Ethiopia near Egypt, and later on made a typical remark about the blackness of the Ethiopians.¹⁵

The blackness as an indivisible accidental attribute of the Ethiopians is used as an illustrative example of that category of attributes by a late antique Neoplatonic philosopher known as David the Philosopher in his *Commentary on the Isagoge of Porphyry*.¹⁶ Indeed, David was employing a type of explanation utilized in the writings of other Alexandrian Neoplatonic philosophers, such as Ammonius, Elias of Alexandria, and John Philoponus.¹⁷ An Alexandrian tradition of allegorical interpretation is evident also in a *Commentary on the Genesis*

¹³ Movsēs Xorenac‘i 1991, 20.

¹⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea 1818, I, 78. See Thomson’s ‘Introduction’ to his translation of Movsēs Xorenac‘i and the importance of Eusebius as one of his major sources in Moses Khorenats‘i 2006, 13–14, 31–35.

¹⁵ Movsēs Xorenac‘i 1991, 18, 20–21, 27, 237. It is not the appropriate venue here to discuss the date of Movsēs Xorenac‘i’s *History of the Armenians* which is placed between the fifth (the traditional date, claimed by the author himself) and eighth centuries, each proposition presenting its own problems and anachronisms, with no scholarly consensus thus far. For an overview of issues at stake see the ‘Introduction’ in Moses Khorenats‘i 2006, 1–59; Mahé and Mahé 1993, esp. 88–91; Topchyan 2006. Mahé and Mahé 1993, 62–63 explore the nexus of folkloristic and written traditions on Semiramis in Movsēs. On the ‘blackness’ of the Ethiopians in classical and Hellenistic sources see Cracco Ruggini 1974, 147–148, n. 33; Snowden 1970.

¹⁶ Davit‘ Anyalt‘ 2004, 277–278. In the Armenian tradition David is known with the honorific title of Anyalt‘ (the Invincible), The complicated issues of this David’s identity and confusion with other homonymous authors is not of concern here. For a recent study with extensive discussion see Contin 2017, esp. 33–55, and pp. 51–52 for the date and personality of the author of the *Commentary on the Isagoge of Porphyry*. The sections on ‘Ethiopian blackness’ are analysed and translated to French in Contin 2017, 126–129.

¹⁷ Contin 2017, 144–146.

attributed to the Armenian author Elišē and extant only partially, including in the oldest Armenian paper manuscript dated 981. Here ‘Nimrod son of Kush’ is introduced in an extremely negative light, as a model of evil and rebellion against God (e.g. the construction of the Tower of Babel by him). His being ‘Ethiopian’ is emphasized for its lack of light, clearly signalling his blackness. According to the editors, this passage was inspired by Philo of Alexandria.¹⁸ We will see below that other concepts relevant to Ethiopia or Ethiopians attested in Armenian texts are due to sources with connections to the Alexandrian late antique intellectual milieu.

To return to Movsēs Xorenac‘i, the primordial battle between the eponymous ancestor of the Armenians—Hayk—and his Assyrian rival Bel, whereby Hayk killed Bel with an arrow, would potentially place Bel’s Ethiopian origins in a negative light. There were, however, no elaborations in this vein either by Xorenac‘i or later authors. The animosity between the descendants of Hayk and Bel was formulated as between the Armenians and the Assyrians.¹⁹

A seventh-century Armenian text based partly on an anonymous Greek *Chronicle* mentions that the borders of Ham stretched from Assyria to Ethiopia. Moreover, it knows of two Ethiopias, one placed south of Egypt facing India, and another near ‘the river of Kushites’. This author assumes a Hamite/Kushite genealogy for the Ethiopians with no further comments.²⁰

Subsequent Armenian authors repeated these notices where biblical and Eusebian genealogies were mixed. Some of them relied directly on Eusebius while others on Movsēs Xorenac‘i, and each developed these themes according to his own agenda or purpose. Thus, the late ninth-/early tenth-century T‘ovma Arcruni sought to affirm the biblical ancestry of his own dynasty (and that of his patrons Grigor and his son Gagik Arcruni) by citing a legend that connected the Arcrunis to Sennacherib, king of Babylon.²¹ Apparently, Nimrod/Bel’s rule or association with Babylon cast doubts on the biblical genealogy of the Arcrunis making it uncertain whether they, as offsprings of Sennacherib, were the progeny of Sem or Ham. T‘ovma wished to affirm the former and to resolve any inconsistencies. He stated, ‘Nimrod [son] of Ham built Babylon—the first city—and was its first king. However, since Babylon was the lot of Sem, Nimrod con-

¹⁸ Elišē 2003a, 925, and 766 on manuscript witnesses.

¹⁹ See, for example, Movsēs Xorenac‘i 1991, 44, 45–48.

²⁰ This source is published several times and attributed to different authors, among which Anania Širakac‘i and P‘ilon Tirakac‘i. See Greenwood 2008, 207–249. I have used the following edition: P‘ilon Tirakac‘i 2005, 907–908, 910.

²¹ For an analysis and interpretation of Arcrunis’s genealogical constructions, see Toumanoff 1963, 199–200, 327.

quered it by force and established the rule of the Ethiopians there, whereas Asur, son of Sem, built Nineveh the first city in the kingdom of the Assyrians'. Then he goes on to explain how 'Ninos of Bel' became king of Assyria through his wife Semiramis, thus uniting Hamite and Semite lines of descent.²² The slightly later historian Catholicos Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i continuously identified Bel with Nimrod, retelling the combat between Hayk and Bel as between Hayk and Nimrod. He does not explicitly cite Nimrod's Ethiopian ancestry, but this is in line with his earlier warning to the readers that he would not elaborate upon the genealogies of Sem and Ham.²³ Another tenth-century historian Uxtanēs relied on Movsēs Xorenac'i without adding new information. The identity of Bel with the 'Ethiopian' Nimrod is not specifically mentioned, however.²⁴ Late tenth-century Step'anos Tarōnec'i, on the other hand, used Eusebius directly, identified the lands allotted to Ham as 'Egypt, Lybia and the lands west of those', and affirmed Nimrod's Ethiopian descent.²⁵

When Xorenac'i accepted Ninos' progeny from Bel (= Nimrod), he implied an Ethiopian lineage of an Assyrian king, further complicated by the figure of his legendary wife Semiramis. Although Xorenac'i himself did not connect Semiramis with Ethiopia, other sources, some of which he knew, did so, particularly associating her with the African kingdom of Meroe. One such source with which Movsēs was closely familiar was the *Romance of Alexander* translated from Greek in the fifth century based on the so-called *recensio vetusta*.²⁶ The queen of Meroe Kandake appears as 'one of the queens of Semiramis' (Շամիրամայ բամբ[ի]ձ) or 'the daughter of Queen Semirais' (դուստր Շամիրամայ թագուհւոյ) in Armenian, in accordance with the Greek original.²⁷ In the *Romance of Alexander* Kandake's reign is localized south of Egypt, though never specifically identified as 'Ethiopia', while the association with Semiramis implies a geographical confusion between this eastern African region and Asia, something not unique to this source, as discussed above.²⁸ Xorenac'i also recorded Cambyses's defeat or escape from the hands of the Ethiopians

²² T'ovma Arcruni 1985, 14.

²³ Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i 1912, 10, 15.

²⁴ Uxtanēs Episkopos 2011, 458–460.

²⁵ Step'anos Tarōnec'i Asolik 2011, 652–653. In a recent translation and commentary on Step'anos Tarōnec'i, Greenwood states that Tarōnec'i used Eusebius independently of Xorenac'i. See Greenwood 2017, 114, n. 145.

²⁶ The edition of Armenian versions in Simonyan 1989; on the Armenian translation and the affinities with Movsēs Xorenac'i, whom various scholars, including Simonyan, consider to be the translator of the *Romance* cf. Traina and Ciancaglini 1999; and Bernardelli 2004.

²⁷ Simonyan 1989, 297, 427; Cracco Ruggini 1974, 144–145.

²⁸ Schneider 2004, 125–127, 131–132.

somewhere in Asia, reported by Greek authors, such as Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, further associating Ethiopia/Ethiopians with Asia.²⁹

An Ethiopian involvement in Asia, later blurred with India, was linked to another semi-legendary figure of the Graeco-Roman tradition—Memnon.³⁰ The myth of Memnon is possibly what lies behind Xorenac‘i’s notice on an otherwise unattested Armenian commander Zarmayr who led a retinue of Ethiopian soldiers fighting under him, while he himself was ‘at the service of the Assyrians’ on the side of King Priamus during the Trojan War.³¹ The tenth-century historian Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc‘i’s *History* and the thirteenth-century *Historical Compilation* by Vardan Arewelc‘i appear to be the only two later Armenian sources that picked up this tradition, without any further elaborations.³² It has been suggested that Xorenac‘i transformed Memnon of Eusebius’s *Chronicle* into Zarmayr. Indeed, Xorenac‘i’s simultaneous association of Zarmayr with Assyria and an Ethiopian army echoes speculations on Memnon by Diodorus Siculus on whom Eusebius relied. Furthermore, Eusebius also mentions Homer in the same textual environment, as does Xorenca‘i, who, again, probably depends on Eusebius.³³ On the other hand, as recent scholarship has emphasized, Xorenac‘i often recorded oral, folkloristic tales, some of which survived independently for centuries among the rural illiterate population and were ‘discovered’ during the nineteenth century by ethnographers and travellers. The location of the notice on Zarmayr as the concluding narrative of Book I may indicate that Movsēs was, indeed, harmonizing local and classical or Hellenistic traditions.³⁴ It is, thus, not to be excluded that in this case too Xorenac‘i recorded oral legends that, for whatever reason, perpetuated a memory of Armenian–Ethiopian military cooperation. Be that as it may, the presumed military command of an Ethiopian force under an Armenian leader, even if it were an episode entirely invented by Xorenac‘i, would propagate the idea of a positive relationship between the two peoples in the *imaginaire* of those Armenians who were familiar with Movsēs’s *History of the Armenians*. This would dispel negative

²⁹ Movsēs Xorenac‘i 1991, 126. On the Greek sources, i.e. Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, cf. Cracco Ruggini 1974, 146.

³⁰ Schneider 2004, 396–397.

³¹ Movsēs Xorenac‘i 1991, 88. For classical and late antique authors on Memnon see Schneider 2004, 113–116, some of whom identified him as ‘Indian’ rather than ‘Ethiopian’, as yet another instance of confusion between the two lands. See also Awgorean 1946.

³² Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc‘i 1912, 20; Vardan Arewelc‘i 1862, 15.

³³ Moses Khorenats‘i 2006, 121 citing Awgorean 1946.

³⁴ For an overview of such legends and relevant bibliography see Mahé and Mahé 1993, 20–24; on the significance of the location in the text of Xorenac‘i where Zarmayr is mentioned, see Mahé and Mahé 1993, 28.

notions on Ethiopia that a connection with Assyrian (turned into Ethiopian) Bel or a Hamite origin may have produced.

Geographical Notions

The ambiguity or confusion between Ethiopia and India, as well as a three-way association of Ethiopia–Arabia–India lead to a parallelism of themes where legendary or factual notices on India were transferred to Ethiopia and vice versa. This is a well-studied phenomenon in Greek and Latin sources.³⁵ It can be observed in Armenian sources too. A seventh-century *History*, conventionally published under the authorship of Sebēos, mentions a vaguely conceived ‘India’, which could refer both to Ethiopia and to Arabia.³⁶ On some occasions Sebēos employs the term ‘India’ to indicate the subcontinent, correctly from the point of view of modern geographical knowledge.³⁷ In other cases, however, the concept of India encompasses the Red Sea area, this too a well-attested conceptual ‘confusion’ since Classical Antiquity.³⁸ Most intriguing in this respect is Sebēos’s casting of the rise of the ‘sons of Ismaēl’ in an eschatological framework based on the vision of Daniel on four kingdoms (Dan. 7:23). The historian weaves biblical conceptions about Abraham and his progeny into references to ‘Indians’ living south of Babylon:

Now south of these [Babylon and ‘regions of the north’] are Indians, and in that direction the nations dwelling in the great desert who are the sons of Abraham born from Hagar and K‘etura [...] and still more

³⁵ On different views on Ethiopia ranging from geographical knowledge, more or less accurate, to mythologizing tales in Graeco-Roman sources up to the late Roman period, see the magisterial treatment of Cracco Ruggini 1974. Most recently, Greek and Latin material from Homer up to the sixth century CE has been thoroughly treated in Schneider 2004, who provides also a survey of the previous literature and adds important methodological observations on the different types of ‘confusion’ between Ethiopia and India, and questions the very concept of ‘error’ when dealing with ancient texts. Dihle 1964 focuses especially on Christian sources. See also Mayerson 1993.

³⁶ As the editor of the *History* Gevork Abgaryan has shown, the attribution of this work to a ‘Bishop Sebēos’ is a mistake. The name is maintained here for the sake of scholarly convention. The details on this historical-philological problem are not pertinent to this article, but the interested reader may find out more in Sebēos 1979, 25–30, 371–385.

³⁷ Sebēos 1979, 102, 139.

³⁸ Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 133, n. 826 also interpret this ‘India’ as the ‘area towards the Red Sea’. On the triple association of India, Arabia, and Ethiopia, see Schneider 2004, 242–249.

who were to the south of the Indians, north of these, from the great and fearsome desert where Moses and the sons of Israel dwelt.³⁹

Sebēos seems to have in mind two different ‘great deserts’—one in Arabia proper, and the other in the Sinai Peninsula. He may be alluding to traditions that considered Homerites as offsprings of Abraham and Qetura.⁴⁰ In an earlier chapter that described the rise of Islam in greater detail, however, Sebēos assumed that the Arabs were the progeny of Hagar.⁴¹ One wonders if his knowledge of ‘Indians’ somewhere around the Red Sea may also be an echo of notices on the Aksumite kingdom. That this ‘India’ (= Ethiopia) was contingent to lands inhabited by the sons of Ismaēl may be a tantalizing memory of the Aksumite involvement in the Himyarite kingdom circa a century earlier.⁴² Yet, other Armenian sources are surprisingly silent on the dramatic events that threw the Christian communities of the Najran oasis into turmoil in the 520s. I will return to this below.

Hellenistic geographical knowledge was most conspicuously adopted by and diffused through the seventh-century polymath Anania Širakac‘i whose descriptive *Geography* (*Ašxarhac‘oyc‘*) relied heavily on the lost work of Pappus of Alexandria, itself based on Ptolemy.⁴³ This was particularly true for those regions of which Širakac‘i had no direct experience or first-hand knowledge, such as western Europe or Africa. From Pappus, ultimately from Ptolemy, Širakac‘i (and his readers) learned that Ethiopia or ‘Upper Ethiopia’ in the Short Recension was below Egypt, along the Red and the Arabian Seas ‘extending to the Torrid Zone’, while Lower Ethiopia was east of the ‘Unknown Land’. The land’s natural features (rivers, lakes, mountains), its flora and fauna, and anthropological details, such as the black skin of its inhabitants, or some fantastic characteristics such as ‘tall Ethiopians’ or ‘man-eating Ethiopians’, were all based on information from Pappus and—through him—Ptolemy. Both Long and Short Recensions of Širakac‘i’s *Geography* mention thirty-six ‘peoples’ of Ethiopia. Moreover, the Long Recension cites the Aksumites, who are told to have

³⁹ Sebēos 1979, 162. Translation from Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 133.

⁴⁰ Fiaccadori 1992, 64, n. 55 citing Philostorgius’s *Ecclesiastical History* III.4 as preserved by Photius, on Homerites as descendants of Abraham through Qetura.

⁴¹ Sebēos 1979, 134.

⁴² Beaucamp et al. 1999–2000; Bausi’s ‘Introduzione’, in Bausi and Gori 2006, 3–18, with further bibliography.

⁴³ On Anania Širakac‘i and his works, see Mahé 1987, esp. 159–167 and Greenwood 2011, esp. 134–160 on what we know about Anania’s life and an overview of scholarship on him. For his *Geography* see Hewsens 1992, 1–35 and Hewsens 1994, 7–19.

audiences in Syro-Mesopotamia and beyond through his letter(s).⁴⁸ Yet, despite the close ties of Simeon of Beth Aršam with the Armenian ecclesiastical hierarchy and his participation in the important Council of Dwin in 505 or his second visit to Armenia c.508, no evidence of his letter (or letters), aimed at disseminating knowledge on the Najran massacres especially among the miaphysite communities, survives in Armenian.⁴⁹ One of the reasons for the lack of relevant information may be a gap in extant historiographic writing in Armenian datable to the sixth century. However, we do possess important collections of ecclesiastical, theological, and Christological treatises from this period, and even later sources do not transmit information on Najran or the Ethiopian involvement there. It appears that these events became known to the Armenians two centuries after they took place, through the translation of the *Martyrdom of Arethas* into Armenian from Greek, from a particularly archaic recension, likely accomplished at some period in the eighth century.⁵⁰ It was also via the Armenian versions of Michael the Syrian's *Universal Chronicle* mentioned above that the sixth-century turmoil in Najran, the persecution of its Christian population by the ruling Jewish king, as well as help from the 'Kushite' king or the 'king of the Habaš', whose miaphysite orthodoxy was emphasized, were rendered into Armenian.⁵¹ Nevertheless, there does not seem to have been an important resonance on these events in Armenia if we are to judge by the available sources.

Calendrical Works and *Hemerologia*

Anania Širakac'i's production is also valuable for the topic of this article in other respects. Being a scholar versed in the knowledge of mathematics and astronomy, the contemporary Catholicos Anastas (661–667) entrusted him the task of reforming the Armenian calendar. He, thus, left various works on the calendar, celestial bodies, the Easter computus, and the date of the Nativity, as

⁴⁸ On the importance of sources authored by or attributed to Simeon of Beth Aršam on the Najran massacres, such as one (or two) letter(s), see Briquel-Chatonnet 2010; Detoraki 2007, 88–96. There is considerable literature on the events in Najran and their dossier, among which see the following studies, including earlier bibliography: Beaucamp et al. 1999–2000; Beaucamp et al. 2010.

⁴⁹ On Simeon of Beth Aršam's ties to Armenia see Sarkissian 1965, 197–213; Garsoïan 1996, 104; Garsoïan 1992, 47, 65–69.

⁵⁰ Van Esbroeck 1974 and Outtier 2010 on the Armenian versions of the *Martyrdom of Arethas*. Van Esbroeck's poignant definition of the Armenian editions as 'une version arménienne mal publiée' (Van Esbroeck 1974, 118) still holds true.

⁵¹ Michael the Syrian 1870, 246–252; Michael the Syrian 1871.

well as information on calendars of different peoples.⁵² In his *Treatise on Easter* Širakac‘i reviews Jewish and Christian evidence on the Passover and Easter computus. He ascribes the calculation of 19-year lunar cycles of ‘Egyptians and Ethiopians’ to Leontius (Łewontes in Širakac‘i), the ‘father of Origen’, which correctly indicates the Alexandrian (Egyptian) origin of the Ethiopian calendar, though this father of Origen is not otherwise known.⁵³ This piece of information was echoed by later Armenian authors too, as we shall see. Yet, this is a completely different stream of tradition compared to that of the Ethiopians themselves who credited Demetrius, patriarch of Alexandria, as the author of their computus.⁵⁴ Širakac‘i, then, explains how differences in the Easter computus among different Christian peoples emerged and why, as well as the problem of establishing a new 532-year cycle that became an urgent necessity during the rule of Emperor Justinian.

Širakac‘i’s (and his readers’) main concern was to justify the Armenian date of Easter Sunday vis-à-vis that of the (Byzantine) imperial Church when these did not correspond due to differences in calculations. In doing so, Širakac‘i seems to be at the origin of a tradition repeated in many later calendrical compositions on the role of a sixth-century Alexandrian scholar Aneas in establishing the 532-year cycle in the 550s, which became the basis of the Armenian Easter computus. Moreover, Širakac‘i recounts Aneas’s disagreement with another Alexandrian scholar—Heron (Irion/Iron/Eron in Armenian sources) whose cycle the Byzantine Church adopted.⁵⁵ It is not my purpose here to disentangle this textual tradition or evaluate its veracity, but to emphasize that Širakac‘i, following his source that has not been identified, affirmed the Ethiopian participation in a collaborative scholarly effort led by Aneas of Alexandria.⁵⁶ According to Širakac‘i, when Aneas ‘the head of philosophers’, a native of the city of Alexandria which Širakac‘i defines as ‘the metropolis of all the philosophers’, set on producing a 532-year Easter cycle, he worked with ‘peers’ (lit. friends/ընկեր) in a remarkable multi-ethnic and multi-religious effort: ‘P‘enehez [Pinḥas] the

⁵² Abrahamyan 1944, 283–291 for *On the Epiphany of our Lord* and 292–299 for the *Treatise on Easter*. Mahé 1987, 165 thinks that the *Treatise on Easter* and *On the Epiphany of Our Lord* were once part of a single, larger calendrical work.

⁵³ Abrahamyan 1944, 295.

⁵⁴ Mauro da Leonessa 1934, 45–47; Neugebauer 1979, 92–93.

⁵⁵ Abrahamyan 1944, 295–297.

⁵⁶ Interested readers should consult Mosshammer 2008, 245–255, whose presentation of Armenian sources and their dating is, however, in need of a critical revision and perhaps new translations. Naturally, there is more abundant literature in Armenian, among which see Eynat‘yan 2015 where earlier works are cited. See also Mahé 1987, 167.

Jew from Tiberias, Gabriel the Syrian, Yohan the Arab, Abdiē the Ethiopian, Sergius the Macedonian, Eulogius the Greek and Gigas the Roman'.⁵⁷

The presence of the Ethiopian Abdiē (in other MSS Abdi) in this gathering of international experts is noteworthy. Certainly, it is hardly surprising from the pen of Anania. We know that Anania Širakac'i's 'academic genealogy' made him a descendant of the Alexandrian scholarly tradition, hence his admiration for the city and its philosophers. Indeed, his teacher, the Greek philosopher Tykhikos, with whom Anania studied in Trebizond for ten years, was himself the disciple of a 'great master from Alexandria' who has been identified as the Neoplatonic philosopher Stephen of Alexandria.⁵⁸ Anania also testified that Tykhikos had a rich library that had 'all the books in the world'. Undoubtedly it was either through those books or Tykhikos's teaching itself that Širakac'i learned about Ethiopia and Ethiopians, as well as their ties to Alexandria. An Ethiopian's presumed participation in a calendrical endeavour that took place in Alexandria, whether historically accurate or not, nevertheless implies that in the Alexandrian intellectual milieu there was awareness of Ethiopian learning and their standing in the Christian oecumene and its problems, at least in the fifth–sixth centuries.⁵⁹ It is interesting that centuries later the Ethiopian church authorities, under Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl may have relied on the Armenian Easter computus to establish the Easter Sunday in 1538/1539.⁶⁰

Many later Armenian authors or anonymous treatises dealing with the calendar and the Easter computus cited long or short passages from Anania's *Treatise on Easter*, some preserving and transmitting the reference to 'Abdiē of Ethiopia' as one of Aneas's collaborators. Thus, we find the same narrative on Aneas and his associates in a treatise on the Easter computus by the eleventh-century Yovhannēs Sarkawag Imastasēr (Philosopher), a highly influential author who established the Armenian unmovable calendar and prepared a new 532-year table. He included Abdiē of Ethiopia in the tale on Aneas.⁶¹ Somewhat later, Abdiē became 'Obel of Ethiopia' in the *Chronography* of the twelfth-century Samuēl of Ani.⁶² The twelfth/thirteenth-century monastic teacher Vanakan Vardapet is familiar with this tradition but does not provide any names except for Aneas and Irion,

⁵⁷ Abrahamyan 1944, 296.

⁵⁸ Greenwood 2011, esp. 136–159.

⁵⁹ The subject of Ethiopia within the Mediterranean and Red Sea cultural orbit has been emphasized in various studies. See, for example, Cerulli 1960; Bausi 2012a, xxiv–xxvii.

⁶⁰ Kropp 1988.

⁶¹ Abrahamyan 1956, 273.

⁶² Samuēl Anec'i and Continuator 2014.

and the same is true of his disciple, the thirteenth-century celebrated author Kirakos Ganjakec'i.⁶³

Anania Širakac'i mentions Ethiopians in other works concerned with the calendar. In his *On the Epiphany of the Lord* he argued for the authenticity of the Armenian tradition of celebrating the Nativity and the Epiphany together on the 6 January.⁶⁴ Then, to demonstrate the diversity of calendars among different peoples, he brought forth examples from other parts of the world, such as Egyptian, Macedonian, Roman, as well as Ethiopian, who, he says, celebrated the Nativity 'in the month of T'eras, always on the 11th day'.⁶⁵ Anania Širakac'i is likely the earliest Armenian author to categorize the Ethiopian months as representing an Egyptian-type calendar. He also provided an Armenian transcription of Gə'əz month names in a *hemerologion*. Because the transcriptions of Ethiopian month names into Armenian are remarkably faithful to the original, Anania must have relied on a source that had access to first-hand knowledge of Ethiopia and its calendrical culture. This is noteworthy for Ethiopian linguistics or Ethiopian studies in general, considering the dearth of any sources in Gə'əz after the seventh century.⁶⁶

Generations of scholars or scribes, composing or copying treatises on the calendar or specific feasts repeated all this information produced by Anania. Moreover, instructions on how to find the concordances of feast days among different Christian peoples or according to different calendars, usually included the Ethiopian calendar, too.⁶⁷ Considering the potential importance of this tradition beyond Armenian studies, this table of Ethiopian month names, including manuscript variants, in Armenian, Gə'əz and respective transcriptions are provided in the Appendix.

The evidence adduced from works that are concerned with the Easter computus, calendars of various peoples, and the concordances of ecclesiastical feasts represent a genre that disseminated information on the calendars and liturgical

⁶³ Xaç'ikyan 1995, 185; Kirakos Ganjakec'i 1961, 42–43, 212–213.

⁶⁴ This Armenian tradition is based on the fourth-fifth century Jerusalemite liturgical calendar, transmitted through the fifth-century translation of the Lectionary. See Renoux 1965, 343–359 and Renoux 1989, 428–433.

⁶⁵ Abrahamyan 1944, 290.

⁶⁶ Abrahamyan 1944, 117 presumes that the author of the original list was Anania Širakac'i; Abrahamyan 1956, 67–71 states that also Yovhannēs Sarkawag composed *hemerologia*, following Širakac'i. The list of Ethiopian month names published by Abrahamyan is reproduced in the Appendix.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Abrahamyan 1956, 215, by Yovhannēs Sarkawag Imastasēr. Given the latter's major fame as a scholar of calendrical works, new treatises elaborated on his work, rather than on Širakac'i's.

customs of peoples of the (mainly eastern) Mediterranean in its wider sense. Within the genre there were some set traditions on typologies of calendars or their founders and this information was passed on to generations for centuries. What we read there about Ethiopia, the Ethiopian calendar, or the Ethiopian month names do not necessarily imply direct contact and continuous knowledge of this people among the Armenians. Rather, in the *imaginaire* of the Armenian readers the Ethiopians were part of an oecumene of lettered peoples, with their own intellectual traditions. This oecumene stretched from the Horn of Africa and Egypt to the eastern Mediterranean, the Persianate world and the Caucasus, not necessarily restricted to the Christian peoples.

Accounts of Christianization and Related Traditions

In the biblical tradition one of the earliest pagan converts to Christianity was an Ethiopian. He was the celebrated ‘Ethiopian eunuch of Kandake’ of the Acts 8:26–40, in whose figure Graeco-Roman notions of ‘Ethiopian piety’, as old as the *Odyssey* or *Iliad*, found their Christian outlet.⁶⁸ The eunuch, then, appeared as an apostle to the Ethiopians in Irenaeus of Lyon’s *Against Heresies*, a text counted among the earliest translations to Armenian, or as the very first pagan convert in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*. The Armenian text of Eusebius, following its Syriac *Vorlage*, replaces ‘Ethiopia’ of the Greek original with ‘India’ of the Syriac version.⁶⁹ While in Latin, Greek, Syriac, and Coptic traditions the eunuch of Kandake was subject to elaborations, a missionary activity was credited to him on a wide geographical scale ranging from South Arabia to the island of Taprobane, and hymns of praise were composed in his honour, the Armenian tradition has only a few references to him.⁷⁰

Nevertheless we find him in a *Homily on the Passion of the Lord* attributed to the fifth-century author Elišē. Here he is mentioned as the agent of Apostle Philip, sent to Ethiopia after his baptism to bring the Word of God to his people.⁷¹ Several centuries passed before another Armenian author spoke of the eunuch of Kandake, explicitly identifying one of his sources as Ephraem the Syrian. This was the thirteenth-century theologian Gēorg Skewrāc‘i and the location of his activities in the monastery of Skewrā in Armenian Cilicia is significant in light of the availability of first-hand information on Ethiopia in that region. His com-

⁶⁸ Cracco Ruggini 1974, 142 on Ethiopians as ‘free, just, and peace-loving’ in classical sources.

⁶⁹ Störk 1998, 240. For the Armenian texts see Irenaeus 1910, 81–82 and Eusebius of Caesarea 1877, 77–78.

⁷⁰ Störk 1998, 240–243.

⁷¹ Elišē 2003b, 1046. On this homily see Thomson 2000.

mentary on the biblical episode emphasized, among other things, the eunuch's humility and the perfection of his faith, but it was also an emblematic case for exalting the mystery of baptism.⁷²

Through yet another translation from Greek—the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates Scholasticus—the story of the conversion of King 'Ezana of 'Inner/Ulterior India' (ներքսսագոյն Հնդկաց/միւս այլ Հնդկաց) by Frumentius and Aedesius became known to Armenian readers from the seventh century onward.⁷³ In Socrates the replacement of 'Ethiopia' with 'India' as the area of Frumentius's and Aedesius's evangelization is complete. Thus, one wonders if his readers considered this 'Inner' or 'Other India' or simply 'India' to be a different place from 'Ethiopia' that according to the same author was the lot of the Apostle Matthew.⁷⁴ Socrates is, indeed a case in point of how Graeco-Roman geographical traditions that confused India with Ethiopia persisted among Christian authors and, through translations, spread wider than the limits of the speakers/readers of Greek or Latin, as discussed above.⁷⁵

Notices on Christianity in Ethiopia or the Christianization of the Ethiopians are scattered in varied sources but are not an important theme of reflection in Armenian texts. The sixth- or seventh-century bishop of the Mamikoneans Abraham knows a tradition according to which a relic of St Peter was to be found 'perhaps also in Ethiopia and Persia'.⁷⁶ It is not clear what his source of information was, and, at any rate, he gives this notice with a sense of hesitation. Regarding biblical or parabiblical stories, a curious tradition recorded by the tenth-century great mystical poet and theologian Grigor Narekac'i may be noted. In a hymn dedicated to St John the Baptist he alludes to the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt (Matt. 2:14) but employs the geographical designation 'Ethiopia' in its place.⁷⁷ Some Armenian authors, such as Mxit'ar Ayrivanec'i and Vardan Arewelc'i also picked up the tradition of Moses in Ethiopia channelled

⁷² Gēorg Skewrāc'i 2013, 172–173.

⁷³ The Armenian version of Socrates, translated in the second half of the seventh century, is in the so-called Hellenizing style. A more readable adaptation, known as the Short Socrates, was soon made available too (Socrates Scholasticus 1897, 56–60). On the date of the translation and adaptation, its author(s) and sponsor(s) cf. Shirinian 1982 and Thomson's 'Introduction' in Socrates Scholasticus 2001, 6, 9–26. For an analysis of Socrates's testimony of Ethiopia's evangelizers see Dombrowski and Dombrowski 1984, for different tales on the Christianization of Ethiopia see the relevant articles collected in Bausi 2012b.

⁷⁴ Socrates Scholasticus 1897, 57.

⁷⁵ Dihle 1964, 16 for *India Tripartita* of early Christian authors, and its confusion with Ethiopia. See also note 35 in the present article.

⁷⁶ Abraham Bishop of the Mamikoneans 2004, 368.

⁷⁷ Grigor Narekac'i 1981, 145. French translation in Mahé and Mahé 2014, 126.

through the Armenian translation, or rather adaptations, of Michael the Syrian in the thirteenth century.⁷⁸

Council of Chalcedon and Anti-Dyophysite Polemics

Ethiopian sources from roughly the mid-fourteenth century onward developed an idealized image of Armenia as a land of untrampled orthodoxy, and often as the *only* other orthodoxy left outside of Ethiopia.⁷⁹ It is noteworthy that a similar, albeit much less evolved and chronologically circumscribed, phenomenon is evident in some Armenian theological treatises. In these Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Church are cited in support of the Armenian orthodoxy or liturgical practices. These notions appear in a series of texts linked to each other with a traceable transmission. Their authors belonged to the same ecclesiastical circles, and some were also relatives of each other. Their intellectual, spiritual, and ecclesiastical-political pedigree linked them to two Armenian *catholicoi* of the ninth and tenth centuries.

To my knowledge the earliest reference to Ethiopia as an orthodox land in an Armenian source is an extensive *Demonstration of the Orthodox Confession* attributed to the ninth-century theologian Sahak Mřut (820?–890?). As the secretary of the Armenian Bagratid prince (later king) Ařot I, Sahak participated in the Armeno–Byzantine discussions for a union between Armenian and Byzantine Churches that took place in the 860s (with reverberations in the 870s) and a church council held in řirakawan in 862.⁸⁰ On the Byzantine side these negotiations involved Patriarch Photius (858–867 and 877–886) and Emperor Basil I (868–886), the founder of the Macedonian dynasty. Sahak Mřut’s *Demonstration* is a major theological treatise with a complex structure and various techniques of argumentation that range from biblical and parabiblical proof-texts to testimonies by Church Fathers, from philosophy and syllogistic reasoning to the authority of those Armenian theological works that were also highly regarded in the Byzantine Church. Demonstrations based on specific examples completed

⁷⁸ Information provided by Prof. Michael Stone in private correspondence, based on his as yet unpublished research. I thank Prof. Stone for bringing this tradition to my attention. See Mxit’ar Ayrivanec’i 1860, 33 and Vardan Arewelc’i 1862, 18.

⁷⁹ Turaev 1911–1912; Grundfest 1973; Ćernecov 2001.

⁸⁰ Sahak Mřut 2008, esp. 411. The text was included in the *Book of Letters* and has been published in this collection as well, *Girk’ t’it’oc’* 1901, 413–483. On Sahak Mřut and his role in Armeno–Byzantine negotiations of 860s–870s see Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 90–95. While there is no unanimity on the authorship of this *Demonstration*, Sahak Mřut seems the most likely candidate considering the numerous affinities of this work with other texts that he authored. These issues are briefly discussed in Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004.

the panoply of argumentation techniques. Sahak's purpose was to explain and prove the authenticity of the most important precepts of the Armenian doctrinal position and liturgical peculiarities, against what he perceived as false accusations on the part of dyophysite theologians and church leaders. The issues he raised were all hotly debated between pre-Chalcedonian (miaphysite) Armenians and members of Byzantine or Georgian (dyophysite) Orthodox Churches for centuries.⁸¹

One of the disagreements revolved around the formula of the *Trishagion*—Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal—to which the Armenians added 'who was crucified for us'.⁸² After adducing several proof texts, in this case Ignatius of Antioch, Socrates Scholasticus, and John Chrysostom, Sahak appealed to the practice of twelve other Churches that, he claimed, shared this same tradition. They were 'Egyptians, Africans, western Indians, Ethiopians, Romans, Spaniards, the great Frankish people, eastern Indians, the Chinese, the Syrians, one nation from the land of the Huns, the [Caucasian] Albanians, and we the Armenians'.⁸³ If this text or its list of peoples is, indeed, a ninth-century creation and if there are no interpolations, Sahak's geographical scope, in an effort to position the Armenian ecclesiastical praxis as part of a much vaster world of orthopraxy vis-à-vis Byzantine accusations of error, is impressive. Nevertheless, evoking the Spaniards and, above all, the 'Franks', who became much more familiar to the Armenian authors and audiences after the Crusades and via the Cilician Armenian kingdom, raises certain doubts regarding the authenticity of the passage. This scepticism, however, is not insurmountable. References to western European lands could also stem from Sahak's knowledge of Photius's not always peaceful dealings with the Church of Rome. Their inclusion in the letter expressed the Armenian theologian's desire to capitalize on this difficult relationship by positing an imagined agreement between the Armenian and these western Churches' traditions. This type of argumentation could have been a response to the Byzantine party's insistence that Armenians' 'errors' were aberrations that isolated the Armenian Church from the rest of the Christian world, that went in parallel with the Macedonian dynasty's policy of eastward expansion. Where

⁸¹ While I use shorthand conventional terms, such as 'miaphysite' and 'dyophysite', I am aware that there was a whole range of different positions within each category. These, however, are not relevant to the present discussion and will not be analysed in detail.

⁸² For a circumstantial source-critical analysis on polemics regarding the addition to the *Trishagion* between Armenian, Georgian, and Byzantine theological writings, see Martin-Hisard 2010.

⁸³ It is also possible, however, that there should be no comma separating 'western Indians' and Ethiopians, since the two could have been considered identical. For the confusion or conflation and India and Ethiopia see the relevant section in this article.

Sahak received this information and in what way he imagined Romans, Spaniards, and Franks agreeing with the Armenians is outside the scope of this article. His purpose was to demonstrate the validity of the Armenian Church's liturgical usages on the basis of examples from other peoples' praxes, as well as refute accusations of its isolation. Ethiopians were part of this larger world of non-Byzantine orthopraxy, a statement that he thought was believable not only for his party in Armenia but also their Byzantine interlocutors. Such a reference to Ethiopia in the context of a Christian oecumene is comparable to the inclusion of Ethiopian calendrical peculiarities in computational treatises that we saw above. There is a difference here, however, in that now, under the pen of the ninth-century Armenian theologian Ethiopia shared a membership in a different, orthodox oecumene, where the 'orthodoxy' or 'orthopraxy' were not necessarily defined in the terms of the imperial Church. On the contrary, one may anachronistically call it 'an anti-imperialist' orthodoxy and orthopraxy that included lands well beyond the reach of the Byzantine Empire.

Sahak was a close collaborator of the contemporary Catholicos Zak'aria Jagec'i (in office 855–877). His works, thus, must have been accessible in the catholical archives and likely circulated more widely in Armenian ecclesiastical circles. These circumstances partly explain the adoption of similar argumentation in three tenth-century sources all linked to the Catholicos Xaç'ik I Aršaruni (972–992) or even commissioned by him.

One is a treatise by Anania Narekac'i against the dyophysites called the *Root of Faith* (հաւատարմատ/hawatarmat), composed at the request of the Catholicos Xaç'ik in the 980s.⁸⁴ Anania's life spanned the tenth century and he was the first abbot of the celebrated monastery of Narek established in the 930s on the southern shores of Lake Van, now completely destroyed.⁸⁵ He was a major theologian and author, and not least the mentor of the revered mystical poet Grigor Narekac'i, who was his great nephew.⁸⁶ According to Anania's own allusions, he was related to the Catholicos Xaç'ik, whereas Xaç'ik himself was the nephew (sister's son) of the earlier catholicos, Anania Mokac'i (949–965).⁸⁷ Anania, thus, came from a family well represented among the Armenian ecclesiastical elites.

⁸⁴ Anania Narekac'i 2011, 480–598; for the date and circumstances T'amrazyan 2011a, 319–320.

⁸⁵ T'amrazyan 1986 and T'amrazyan 2011a, 311–327.

⁸⁶ Grigor Narekac'i's mother and Anania Narekac'i were cousins, cf. T'amrazyan 2011a, 314.

⁸⁷ T'amrazyan 2011a, 322–323.

Anania Narekac'i's *Root of Faith* is, like Sahak Mrut's work, a sophisticated piece of polemics which employs diverse argumentative techniques. His reference to Ethiopia likewise reverberates concerns similar to Sahak Mrut's, but he is more explicit than his predecessor. His purpose is to rebut accusations that the Armenian Church was the only one not to have accepted the Council of Chalcedon. The question must have been posed by a Byzantine interlocutor and Anania's treatise seems to be a programmatic answer to issues regularly raised by imperial Church representatives. Anania first lists those provinces of the Byzantine Empire where, according to him, despite political pressures, there were numerous communities that did not adhere to the decisions of that council. Then, he enumerates all the other countries outside the borders of Byzantium where either the council *in toto* was rejected or where there were problems with some of its decisions. The list is, again, surprising, though the reasons for including each of the countries or regions cannot be explored here. It starts with the city of Rome, where the author remarks the popular dislike for the Emperor Marcian (who convoked the Council of Chalcedon) and cites the Roman usage of unleavened bread as a point of disagreement with the decisions of that council. This was a clever move as this Roman tradition also agreed with the Armenian praxis. The other locations cited in the letter include Italy, Galatia (perhaps standing for Gallia), the islands of Sardinia and Sicily, Spain, Europe (*sic*), Germania, Attica, and Hellada (*sic*).⁸⁸ Then, Anania lists countries 'on the other side of the Ionian sea', indicating Egypt with Alexandria, Africa, Mauritania, Upper and Lower Thebaid, Great and Small Ethiopias until the Sea of the Indians, Arabia Felix, and Mountainous Arabia.⁸⁹ Compared to Sahak, Anania Narekac'i's world of non-Chalcedonian orthodoxies was much vaster. Moreover, its anti-imperial stance, that is, questioning the imperial Church's ability to impose its version of orthodoxy even on its own subjects, is much more caustically stated. However, for the purposes of this article, the reference to Ethiopia is noteworthy. Ethiopia as part of an orthodox world seems to have become a *topos* by this time.

The other near-contemporary source is a letter commissioned by the same Catholicos Xaç'ik Aršaruni in response to the Greek metropolitan of Sebastia Theophilus, and preserved in the *Universal History* by Step'anos Tarōnec'i Asohik completed c.1000. The letter must have been accessible to Step'anos from the catholical archives. It has also been published under the authorship of Xaç'ik

⁸⁸ Anania Narekac'i 2011, 557–558 and K'yoseyan 2000, 378 note that the geographical notions in this section were borrowed from the seventh-century *Anonymous Chronicle* ascribed to P'ilon Tirakac'i or Anania Širakac'i. For this source, see Greenwood 2008.

⁸⁹ Anania Narekac'i 2011, 558.

himself, although this is most likely not the case, and can be dated roughly to 986/987.⁹⁰ Unlike Sahak Mṛut and Anania Narekac'i, its author did not consider it necessary to include a specific list of what he perceived to be orthodox countries. Intriguingly, however, the geographical argument must have been rather important and tossed back and forth frequently in the high-profile tenth-century epistolary-polemical exchanges between Armenian and Byzantine churchmen. Indeed, with a sense of irony verging on sarcasm that permeates the entire letter the author questioned the penchant to judge the validity of faith based on the extent of one's wealth and population numbers. He rebutted that the 'Persians and the Tačik [Arabs]', as well as all the other peoples settled until the ends of the universe were much more numerous and wealthier than the empire's subjects.⁹¹ Thus, the author's community—the Armenians—and their faith could hardly be judged by their numbers.

Finally, the archives of Catholicos Xaç'ik preserved another response to theological enquiries made by the Greek metropolitan of Malatya (Melitene) Theodore, authored by Samuēl Kamrjajorec'i. He too was a well-known theologian and anti-dyophysite polemicist who collaborated with the Catholicos Xaç'ik Aršaruni. Thus, belonging to the same intellectual circle as Anania Narekac'i, the two theologians knew each other personally, and Samuēl used Anania's works for his other compositions.⁹² Eventually, Samuēl Kamrjajorec'i's letter was included under the title of *Confession* (Բան խոստովանութեան/*ban xostovanut'ean*) in the official collection of the Armenian Church's ecclesiastical correspondence known as the *Book of Letters*.⁹³ In the *Confession* Samuēl Kamrjajorec'i expressed, among other things, similar concerns to Anania Narekac'i on the peculiarity of Armenian liturgical traditions. He too emphasized that the Armenians were far from the only people who did not accept the Council of Chalcedon. However, Samuēl came up with a different list of peoples

⁹⁰ Step'anos Tarōnec'i Asohik 2011, 770–800, esp. 798 for the name of the addressee; English translation in Greenwood 2017, 253–283, comments on the significance of the letter and an analysis in Greenwood 2017, 64–68. See also Xaç'ik Aršaruni 2011. The editor Kēosēean emphasizes the thematic and compositional affinities between this letter and Anania Narekac'i's *Root of Faith*, cf. Xaç'ik Aršaruni 2011, 663.

⁹¹ Step'anos Tarōnec'i Asohik 2011, 794. See Greenwood's suggestion that this argument was a reaction to the dangers that the perceived wealth of the imperial Church represented in the eyes of the Armenian prelates, who feared and strove to limit the 'conversion' of their Armenian flock to Byzantine dyophysite orthodoxy, cf. Greenwood 2017, 66. Yet, this was a common trope in Jewish–Christian and later Christian–Muslim polemics where political and military successes were seen as a sign of superiority of one's religion.

⁹² Kēosēean in Samuēl Kamrjajorec'i 2011, 692–693.

⁹³ *Girk' t'ht'oc'* 1901, 302–322. New edition in Samuēl Kamrjajorec'i 2011.

and countries, one that looked to a region stretching between the eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, as well as the Caucasus, completely neglecting the West. Samuēl lists ‘[Caucasian] Albanians, Lp’ink’, Kałp’k’, Čiłbk’, Syrians who are Jacobites, all of Egypt, Great Ethiopia, Arabia, Arabinar and all of India’.⁹⁴ Ethiopia, again, was included in this list of orthodox peoples.

Anania Narekac’i’s *Root of Faith* was fully incorporated in yet another anti-dyophysite compilation assembled by his eleventh-century namesake from the northern Armenian monastery of Sanahin—Anania Sanahnec’i. While the latter added little new material or reflections toward this type of geographical argumentation, he is important for tracing the transmission process whereby Anania Narekac’i’s ideas spread among various monastic communities of north-eastern Armenia in the course of the eleventh century.⁹⁵ On the contrary, this type of argumentation is completely absent in the twelfth-century Armeno-Byzantine dialogue and negotiations for a union of the two Churches that took place in the Cilician Armenian kingdom (in the late 1160s and 1170s).⁹⁶ It is fairly certain that the lack of any references to this type of geographically-inspired argumentation on the vastness of territories where non-Chalcedonian Churches thrived (and were imagined to be in agreement with each other) was due to the negotiations’ ‘ecumenical [spirit] *ante litteram*’, where convergences, rather than divergences, between Armenian and Byzantine Churches were highlighted.⁹⁷

To sum up, in the high-profile ecclesiastical letters or anti-dyophysite treatises written between the ninth and eleventh centuries, evocations of Ethiopia as a land of orthodoxy and orthopraxy had a specific function in Armenian theological reflections. Far from witnessing new knowledge or contacts between the Armenians and their perceived coreligionists in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia was cited rather as part of a vast non-Chalcedonian orthodox community. It was employed as an argumentation technique whose purpose was to refute Byzantine imperial claims of Orthodoxy based on the geographical extent of the presence of dyophysite Churches. The Armenian theologians depicted a different world where non-Chalcedonian (miaphysite) Churches and peoples were anything but a minority or living in isolated communities.

⁹⁴ Samuēl Kamrjajorec’i 2011, 761. Lp’ink’, Kałbk’, and Čiłbk’ were Caucasian populations. I have no explanation for Arabinar at this stage of my research.

⁹⁵ Anania Sanahnec’i in K’yoseyan 2000, 192–331, esp. 291–293 for the relevant section. T’amrazyan 2011b discusses the dept of Anania Sanahnec’i to Anania Narekac’i.

⁹⁶ The relevant correspondence has been published several times. I have relied on this edition: Nersēs Šnorhali 1871, 85–166.

⁹⁷ For a definition of this dialogue as ‘ecumenical *ante litteram*’ and its reasons, see Zekiyān 1980 and Zekiyān 1986.

In this light, it is remarkable that a similar argument was employed by the late tenth-century celebrated Coptic bishop of Ashmunain Severus ibn Muqaffa, one of the first Coptic authors to write in Arabic, too.⁹⁸ In his disputation with the Melkite bishop Saʿīd ibn Baṭṭīq (Eutychius) of Alexandria, he employs an explicitly anti-imperial argument by presenting the dyophysites as a community that had bent itself to the will of an emperor, rather than that of God. He then enumerates those Christians that never yielded to such pressures. These include the ‘king of Abyssinia, the land of the Gallas and of Nubia’, as well as ‘Copts, Syrians and Armenians’.⁹⁹ In another composition he, again, affirmed that the ‘world resisted firmly’ to the imposition of the Chalcedonian faith by Byzantine emperors. For Severus those who persisted in the ‘orthodox and apostolic faith’ included ‘the Egyptians [...] as well as Nubians, Abyssinians, Armenians, and Syrians, whereas the doctrine of Chalcedon did not expand beyond the country of the Romans’.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere in the same composition Severus repeats that the ‘Copts, Nubians, Abyssinians, Armenians, and Syrians have the same faith’.¹⁰¹

The argument resurfaces also in the twelfth century when the eminent West Syriac theologian and metropolitan of Amid, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d.1171) addresses a question posed by Rabban Ishoʿ, a deacon drawn to the Melkite Church, who emphasized the isolation and limited number of the miaphysites. In remarkably similar terms as the authors witnessed above, bar Ṣalībī writes: ‘Further, how did you assert that all Christians believe in two natures except us and the Armenians, while the Egyptians, Nubians, Abyssinians, the majority of the Indians, and the country of Libya [...] accept the faith of St Cyril and St Dioscorus, and of the great Severus’. With respect to the singing of the *Trishagion* he reiterates, ‘We, Syrians, with the Armenians, the Egyptians, the Abyssinians, the Nubians, and Indians, refer the *Trishagion* to the Son’.¹⁰²

At this stage of research it is not possible to establish any clear lines of transmission of argumentation techniques between the Armenian and Coptic theologians. It is rather more understandable and unsurprising that Dionysius bar Ṣalībī would have access to such knowledge of Armenian argumentations against the dyophysites. Further research is required in order to shed new light on possible Armenian–Coptic exchanges in the tenth century and the impact of these on the world view of each community and its intellectuals. Nevertheless,

⁹⁸ On this author and works attributed to him see Samir Khalil Samir 1975.

⁹⁹ Sévère ibn-al-Moqaffaʿ 1909, 204.

¹⁰⁰ Sévère ibn-al-Moqaffaʿ 1911, 517, 521.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 521.

¹⁰² Mingana 1926, 446, where he uses ‘Ethiopian’ for Abyssinian; and Mingana and Harris 1927, 26, 58. Mingana interprets ‘India’ as a reference to the Himyarites.

we shall allow for the possibility that non-dyophysite Churches found it expedient to argue for the veracity of their Christological position or liturgical praxes not only based on theological and/or philosophical precepts, or calling forth the antiquity of one's traditions, but came up with argumentations that one may dub as anti-imperialist *ante litteram*. Although the Armenian and Coptic Churches had very different dynamics with the Byzantine Empire and the imperial Church in the tenth century, such an outlook compelled them to fix their gaze beyond the Byzantine Empire in search of 'orthodoxies' that transcended the geographical limits of Byzantium and the imperial Church. Such motives also animated Dionysius bar Šalibi's anti-dyophysite polemic. It is in this process that a new *imaginaire* of Ethiopia as an orthodox land emerged in Armenian theological writings.

Conclusions

An overview of Armenian sources between the fifth and eleventh centuries reveals that images, stereotypes, notions of geography, genealogy, and anthropology associated with Ethiopia were rather variegated. Through translated literature, including the Bible itself, Ethiopia was anything but an unknown land. Indeed, some of the biblical figures associated with Ethiopia, such as Nimrod, were incorporated into Armenian oral traditions and legends. Nimrod was identified with Bel, the archenemy of the eponymous forefather of the Armenians—Hayk. Yet, this association with an anti-hero did not leave negative traces or unfavourable reflections about Ethiopia or Ethiopians in the Armenian sources. On the contrary, through another process that possibly incorporated legends of Memnon into an Armenian world view, Movsēs Xorenac'i described an Ethiopian army contingent fighting under an Armenian commander Zarmayr during the Trojan War. Notions from classical and Hellenistic literature about Ethiopia, such as the geographical confusion between Ethiopia and India, the proverbial piety of its inhabitants or their blackness, also circulated in Armenian due to translations and were part of various writers' *bagage culturel*, as were diverse narratives about the Christianization of the land.

Research for this article revealed two noteworthy streams of tradition in Armenian sources about Ethiopia that, on the one hand, reflect wider eastern Mediterranean ideas circulating in Armenia, and specific Armenian concerns on the other. One is an account of efforts to establish the Easter computus in the sixth century. The seventh-century Anania Širakac'i is the first Armenian author to transmit this information. He presents it as an international scholarly effort that brought together illustrious contemporary minds to Alexandria, representing what for him were the 'high profile' cultures of the eastern Mediterranean realm. Among them, was a Jewish wise man from Tiberias—a centre of Rabbinic

learning in Late Antiquity—as well as Syriac, Arab, Macedonian, Greek, Roman, and Ethiopian scholars, the latter called Abdiē. Not all the invitees were necessarily Christian, apparently, as attested by the presence of Pinḡas. This was a multi-religious gathering, or at least was remembered as such. These scholars created a new 532-year Easter cycle. This short tale was copied and transmitted by other Armenian authors and scribes throughout the Middle Ages and became a stock theme in Armenian treatises on the calendar and the Easter computus. Anania Širakac‘i seems to be also at the origin of a list of Ethiopian month names in the form of a *hemerologion*. The close phonetic correspondence between the transcription and the Gə‘əz original alludes to Anania’s knowledge and use of a source that had first-hand access to Ethiopian information, an enticing possibility considering the lack of sources in Gə‘əz after the seventh century.

The circulation of this account, sometimes in abbreviated form and with alteration of names, nevertheless perpetuated the image of Ethiopia as a Christian land of learned men and sophisticated culture. Then, roughly two centuries later, another series of texts appeared, adding further positive connotations to the image of Ethiopia. In discussions or polemic with the representatives of the Byzantine Church ninth- and tenth-century Armenian theologians appear to have employed a new type of argumentation about the orthodoxy of their Church. They placed it in a wider world of fellow Christians who shared the Armenians’ (nondyophysite) orthodoxy and orthopraxy vis-à-vis the imperial Church. Ethiopia and Ethiopians were part of this friendly world too, according to this line of thought. The purpose of these texts, like the calendrical treatises, was not to single out Ethiopia as a land that had a special affinity with Armenia, but it was imagined as one of those Christian cultures that agreed with the Armenians’ notions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Intriguingly, similar arguments were advanced by contemporary Coptic theologians against their Melkite peers, and were known to a famous Syriac churchman—Dionysius bar Šalībi—in the twelfth century, too. The possibility of common techniques and arguments of disputation that circulated among non-Chalcedonian Churches in the tenth century and beyond is well worth further analysis.

In both types of textual clusters, the Armenian sources do not imply direct contact between Armenians and Ethiopians, but rather communicate positive perceptions of Ethiopia in the Armenian *imaginaire*. Although incapable of proof of any direct relationship, a very similar situation and positive idea about Armenia will be formed in the Ethiopian literature and society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This, however, occurred in a very different kind of a world and, this time, due to direct and very real contacts between the two peoples or, at least, some of their representatives.

Appendix: Ethiopian Month Names According to Anania Širakac‘i’s *Hemero-logion*¹⁰³

M1917 fol. 16v	M2068 fol. 358v	M1973 fol. 34r	Gə‘əz	Transcription
Մակքւան <i>Makk‘wan</i>	Մաքարամ <i>Mak‘aram</i>	Մասքուան <i>Mask‘uan</i>	መስከረም	<i>mäskäräm</i>
Դեկտեմբեր <i>Dekemēt‘</i>	Դետեմբեր <i>Detembet‘</i>	Դեկեմբեր <i>Dekemēt‘</i>	ጥቅምት	<i>ṭəqəmt</i>
Իտեղար <i>Xedar</i>	Իտեղա <i>Xeda</i>	Իտեղար <i>Xedar</i>	ኅዳር	<i>ḥədar</i>
Թարսար <i>T‘arsar</i>	Թաոսթա <i>T‘aost‘a</i>	Թարսար <i>T‘arsar</i>	ታኅሣሥ	<i>taḥśās</i>
Թեր <i>T‘er</i>	Թերա <i>T‘era</i>	Թեր <i>T‘er</i>	ጥር	<i>ṭərr</i>
Իմքաթիթ <i>Imk‘at‘it‘</i>	Եմքաթիթ <i>Emk‘at‘it‘</i>	Եմքաթիթ <i>Emk‘at‘it‘</i>	የካቲት	<i>yäkkatit</i>
Գմաւիթ <i>Gmawit‘</i>	Գմաւիթ <i>Gmawit‘</i>	Գմաւիթ <i>Gmawit‘</i>	መጋቢት	<i>mäggabit</i>
Միազի <i>Miazi</i>	Միազի <i>Misali</i>	Միազի <i>Miazi</i>	ሚያዝያ	<i>miyazyā</i>
Գեմբոթ <i>Gembot‘</i>	Գեմբութ <i>Gēmbut‘</i>	Գեմբութ <i>Gembut‘</i>	ግንቦት	<i>gənbot</i>
Սանի <i>Sani</i>	Պոնակի <i>Ponaki</i>	Սանի <i>Sani</i>	ሰኔ	<i>sāne</i>
Խաղմի <i>Xalmli</i>	Պամի <i>Pamli</i>	Խաղմի <i>Xalmli</i>	ሐምሌ	<i>ḥamle</i>
Նհասի <i>Nhasi</i>	Նհասի <i>Nhasi</i>	Ննհասի <i>Nnhasi</i>	ነሐሴ	<i>nāḥase</i>
		Աւելեսց (extra month)	እገ-ሜን	<i>paḡwəmen</i>

¹⁰³ A list based on M1973 is published in Abrahamyan 1944, 120, another one based on three distinct manuscripts, reproduced here, is found in Abrahamyan 1956, 73. The Gə‘əz portion of the list was kindly prepared by Fr Rafał Zarzeczny to whom I would like to express my gratitude. This is based on ‘Christian Calendar’, *EAE*, I (2003), 668a–672b (E. Fritsch and U. Zanetti).

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Summary

Research for this article had the purpose of exploring medieval Armenian–Ethiopian connections. The investigations revealed three main contexts where Ethiopia and Ethiopians feature in the Armenian sources of the first millennium, without necessarily implying real-life encounters. Firstly, the earliest Armenian texts locate Ethiopia and discuss the genealogy of its people in line with the biblical account of the *Diamerismos*, as well as notions based on Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Chronicle* translated into Armenian from Syriac in the fifth century. Each author, then, interpreted this information according to his narrative needs or the purpose of a given composition. The discussion of these sources reveals the circulation of classical and Hellenistic notions on Ethiopia and the Ethiopians in Armenian, too, such as the confusion between Ethiopia, Arabia, and India, as well as anthropological or spiritual features attributed to Ethiopians already by classical authors. Secondly, the article analyses a series of calendrical treatises, starting with one authored by the seventh-century polymath Anania Širakac’i, that passed on a short tale about a sixth-century gathering of scholars in Alexandria in order to determine the date of the Easter and establish tables for its calculation in the future. An Ethiopian wise man Abdiē was part of this international endeavour too, according to this tradition, and his presence marked Ethiopia as part of the eastern Mediterranean learned world, with its own cultural traditions. Armenian language *hemerologia* also preserved month names in Gə’əz, reproduced in the Appendix. Thirdly, the article draws attention to a completely new way of viewing Ethiopia in ninth- to eleventh-century Armenian anti-dyophysite (anti-Byzantine) treatises where the Armenian Church and its doctrines or ritual practices were imagined as part of a vast, non-dyophysite orthodox world that included the Ethiopian Church. Intriguingly, this argumentative technique, formulated in terms that one may call anti-colonial *ante litteram*, may be traced among Coptic and Syriac polemicists as well, a subject of research that would benefit from further analysis.