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It has always been clear that Armenian-Iranian contact is an extremely interesting field of research for the study of language contact in general, but it has mostly remained a matter dealt with by specialists, due to the numerous philological difficulties that characterize the study of Armenian and, especially, Middle Iranian. This monograph is a very welcome exception to this trend, as it attempts to reconcile an up-to-date theoretical approach to language contact with issues usually discussed

in a more traditional methodological framework, either leaning towards Iranian philology or Indo-European comparative linguistics.

This book is a reworked version of Robin Meyer's doctoral dissertation, defended at the University of Oxford in 2017. The study focuses on four syntactic structures of Classical Armenian which, according to the author, are the result of pattern replication from Western Middle Iranian. These structures are the periphrastic perfect, the *eżāfe*-like nominal relative clauses, the usage of *ink'n* 'self' as an intensifier and of *(e)t'ē* 'that' as a quotative marker. The book is articulated in 8 sections and an Appendix. After an introduction (1), a useful summary of the current notions on Armenian-Iranian contact is provided (2). Then, the author offers a review of the historical sources which can be useful for clarifying the language contact situation (3) and a theoretical introduction to the notions of morphosyntactic alignment and alignment change (4). After proposing the main hypothesis of the study, i.e. that the Armenian periphrastic perfect results from contact with Western Middle Iranian, the author presents a corpus study on the phenomenology of the periphrastic perfect in a selection of authors (5). The next section is dedicated to other possible cases of pattern replication: nominal relative clauses, intensifiers and quotatives (6). There follows a discussion on some general theoretical issues, where it is claimed that the contact situation between Armenian and Parthian is best described as a case of "superstrate shift" (7). The book ends with some conclusions (8) and an Appendix where the author formulates a new etymological hypothesis for the Armenian participial suffix *-eal*.

The lengthy sections 2–4 betray the fact that the work was conceived as a doctoral dissertation, as they do not spare exposing all the premises of the following discussion even when these are well-known facts among specialists. This can indeed be useful, and I myself have benefitted from reading sections 3 and 4, not being an expert in the subjects. Likewise, section 2 will surely be useful for non-specialists, even though, understandably, it sometimes depends on secondary sources which are not always updated as far as Iranological issues are concerned (see below). The most relevant shortcoming of section 2, which is worth mentioning as it affects the overall analysis of the contact situation proposed in section 7, is the failure to adequately emphasize that the bulk of Iranian loanwords must have entered Armenian before the Sasanian period

(224–651 CE). As has been unquestionably demonstrated ([Bolognesi 1960; Schmitt 1983 etc.]) the phonological profile of most of the Iranian loanwords in Armenian is very conservative compared to the state of Manichaean Parthian, attested from the 3rd century CE onwards. Thus, there can be no doubt that these loanwords entered Armenian some time before the 3rd century CE – reasonably at least one century earlier.[1]

The main hypothesis presented in the book is that the Armenian periphrastic perfect results from the replication of the Western Middle Iranian ergative past construction (for simplicity's sake, we are going to speak only of Parthian below). This idea is clearly based on the shared features between these two syntactic structures, and requires explaining as secondary inner-Armenian developments the aspects in which the two structures diverge. These are namely the optional active/transitive value of the Armenian *-eal* ptc., as opposed to the strictly passive/intransitive value of the Parthian past ptc., and the possibility for the copula to be inflected in the 3rd person singular regardless of the subject, whereas in Parthian the copula must always agree with the subject. The proposed hypothesis is indeed reasonable and supported by an abundant collection of data – which, however, could have been presented not only in the form of statistics but also as a larger selection of examples or, at least, of references to passages. This corpus analysis seems to confirm the later character of the transitive usage of the Armenian participle in *-eal* and of the non-standard type of periphrastic perfect with lack of agreement between subject and copula.[2]

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[1] At p. 17, note c, the author suggests that the correspondence between Armenian *p, t, k*, and Parthian *b, d, g* in intervocalic position could be due to a secondary devoicing within Armenian rather than the loanwords entering Armenian prior to sonorization. This is hardly possible, as it would require that the same phoneme (e.g. *b*) was devoiced only in intervocalic position and not in initial position, and there is no apparent reason why this should have happened. Also, there are other archaic features in Iranian loanwords in Armenian which cannot result from an inner-Armenian development, such as the preservation of *xš* (with metathesis) contrasting with Manichaean Parthian *š*: e.g. Armenian *ašxarh* 'world, kingdom, region' vs. Manichaean Parthian *šahr* 'id.' < Old Iranian **xšaθra-*. See also [Fattori 2023a] on another archaic feature that cannot be regarded as secondary.

[2] The originally passive meaning of the participle in *-eal* would also find support in the author's new etymology of the suffix *-eal*, exposed in the Appendix, according

In my view, the problem in postulating a contact-induced change in such a circumstance is that we do not know the state of things prior to the beginning of the contact and, in fact, not even during the crucial stage of contact. A possibility which should have been taken into consideration is that Armenian had some kind of periphrastic structure involving the participle before getting in contact with Parthian, and that some divergences from the Parthian ergative past construction can be explained as a case of imperfect pivot matching. The hypothesis of this kind of convergence with pre-existing structures is envisaged in section 6 for the other assumed cases of pattern replication, and I see no good reason not to extend the author's reasonable conclusions to the periphrastic perfect as well: e.g. "With these latter constructions, however, it is difficult to determine to what extent this Iranian influence was instrumental in the creation of the patterns described, or whether it only aided developments that were already taking place language-internally" (p. 258).

Another point where I think the author chooses too clear-cut a solution, at the expense of the plausibility of his account of facts, is when he claims that the contact situation between Armenian and Parthian must be seen as an instance of "superstrate shift" (section 7.2). I believe that his analysis gives too much weight to historical-political and cultural evidence, which inevitably overrepresents the role of the ruling class. A more reliable way to reconstruct the linguistic dynamics of the Armenian-speaking community as a whole is to evaluate in detail all the known phenomena of linguistic interference happened between Armenian and Iranian. I do not always find the author's judgement in this respect fully convincing. For example, the assumption that "more intense borrowing, specifically of core vocabulary and derivational morphology, but also pattern replication must have taken place in the second half of this period, once the Armenian Arsacids had been politically separated from the Sasanians" (p. 243) can hardly be correct, as the bulk of Iranian loanwords in Armenian must date much earlier, before the advent of the Sasanian empire. Personally, I find it difficult to imagine that the degree of contact between Armenian and Iranian seen in Classical Armenian did not

to which it should go back to a verbal adjective based on the Proto-Indo-European passive present stem with the suffix *-*iie̯*/*o*-.

imply a very high rate of bilingualism in all layers of society, including the lower classes having Armenian as their native tongue. The phenomena I have dealt with in some recent studies seem to me easier to explain in a scenario of language maintenance [Fattori 2023a; Fattori 2024].

Besides these small points of disagreement, which would be alleviated by taking a more nuanced position, I believe that this book represents an important contribution to the field, which will have to be regarded as a reference work both for the rich and critically examined collection of the current notions on Armenian-Iranian contact and for the specific matters addressed in the study.

To conclude, I shall take the opportunity to point out some common notions and problems concerning Armenian-Iranian contact mentioned in the book, which I believe merit reconsideration:

p. 14 fn. 18: on the divergent outcome of Armenian *seaw* 'black' and *Šaw°* in personal names, see now [Fattori 2023b: 387–390], where a simpler explanation, not involving a different Iranian dialect source, is proposed.

p. 23–24: on the problem of alleged Eastern Iranian loanwords in Armenian, the existence of which I doubt, see now [Fattori 2024: 5 fn. 4].

p. 25 fn. 51: on the correspondence between Iranian and Armenian declensions in loanwords see now [Fattori 2023a].

p. 265 fn. 26: on Armenian *karem* and related matters, see now [Kölligan 2024: 364–366] and [Fattori 2024].

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