

ARMENIAN APOCRYPHA

RELATING TO ABRAHAM

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Number 37

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Michael E. Stone

Society of Biblical Literature  
Atlanta

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## PREFACE

Nearly all of the texts published in this volume are seeing the light for the first time. Two of them, however, are extant in eighteenth-century Armenian printings, texts nos. 11A and 14. In this volume, they too are translated for the first time into a modern language. This book is a sequel to two earlier volumes, *Armenian Apocrypha: Relating to Patriarchs and Prophets* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982) and *Armenian Apocrypha: Relating to Adam and Eve* (SVTP 14; Leiden/New York: Brill, 1996). In view of the wealth of still unpublished Armenian apocryphal literature, further sequels can be envisaged.

Not all the apocryphal Armenian Abraham texts are included in this volume. I have chosen to publish those that seem to be of particular interest. Additional texts have been examined in manuscripts, and some indication of their character and content is included in the Appendix at the end of this work. Even then, more unpublished texts still live on in manuscripts.

I acknowledge the permission of the librarians and curators of the various collections to publish the texts from manuscripts in their collections: the Matenadaran in Erevan, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, the Director of the Oriental Division of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and the British Library. At various points the librarians and their staffs were most helpful. Permission to reprint the section of Biblical Paraphrases (text no. 2 here) from *Armenian Apocrypha: Relating to Patriarchs and Prophets* was granted by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

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I am indebted to my friends Gohar Muradyan and Theo Maarten van Lint, who helped me with some knotty points of reading and decipherment. Ishayahu Landa, Oren Abelman, and Shira Golani were very supportive research assistants.

Michael E. Stone  
Jerusalem, July 2011

ירושלים, תמוז תשע"א



## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AAP</i>	Michael E. Stone, Dickran Kouymjian, and Henning Lehmann, <i>Album of Armenian Paleography</i> (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002)
<i>ALD</i>	<i>Aramaic Levi Document</i>
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
<i>Apoc. Ab.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientaliū
Eusebius	
<i>Dem. ev.</i>	<i>Demonstratio evangelica</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Praep. ev.</i>	<i>Praeparatio evangelica</i>
fol., fols.	folio, folios
GCS	<i>Griechische christliche Schriftsteller</i>
<i>HAB</i>	Իրճ՛եա Աճափյան, Հայոց անձանունների բառարան <i>Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names</i> . 5 vols. (Beirut: Sevan Press, 1972)
<i>IDB</i>	G. A. Buttrick, ed., <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962)
Irenaeus	
<i>Adv. haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
John Chrysostom	
<i>Hom. Gen.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Genesim</i>
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period Supplements
Justin	
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>LAB</i>	<i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i>
<i>MH</i>	Մատենագիրք Հայոց <i>Medieval Armenian Literature</i> (cited by centuries and pages) (Antelias: Armenian Catholicosate Press)

- MHB* Թ. Տ. Լազարյան և Կ. Մ. Ավետիսյան Միջին հայերենի բառարան *Mediaeval Armenian Dictionary*. 2 vols. (Erevan: Erevan State University Press, 1987–1992)
- MX* Movsēs Xorenac‘i [Moses of Khoren], *History of the Armenians*
- NBHL* Գ. Աւետիկեան, Խ. Տիւրմեօլեան, և Մ. Աւիւրեան Նոր բառգիրք հայկազգեսն լեզուի *New Dictionary of the Armenian Language*. 2 vols. (Venice: St. Lazzaro, 1836–37)
- OIP* Oriental Institute Publications
- OLA* Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
- OrChrAn* Orientalia christiana analecta
- Ona* Onomastica Sacra
- Origen*  
*Hom. in Gen.* *Homiliae in Genesim*
- OTP* James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983)
- Palaea* A. Vassiliev, *Anecdota graeco-byzantina* (Moskow: Imperial University Press, 1893)
- PG* J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia cursus completus: Series graeca*. 162 vols. (Paris, 1857–86)
- Philo*  
*Abr.* *De Abrahamo*  
*Cher.* *De cherubim*  
*Post.* *De posteritate Caini*
- Rabbinic writings  
*ARN* *Abot de Rabbi Nathan*
- Babylonian Talmud  
*Ned.* *Nedarim*  
*Qidd.* *Qiddušin*
- BM* *Bet ha-Midrash*  
*Gen. Rab.* *Genesis Rabbah*  
*Lev. Rab.* *Leviticus Rabbah*
- PRE* *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*
- SBLEJL* Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
- SBLMS* Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
- SBLRBS* Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
- SVTP* *Studia in veteris testamenti pseudepigrapha*
- T. 12 Patr.* *Testaments of Twelve Patriarchs*
- T. Ab.* *Testament of Abraham*
- T. Job* *Testament of Job*
- T. Levi* *Testament of Levi*
- Theodoret of Cyrrihus  
*Quaest.* *Ad quaestiones magorum*

TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
vol., vols.	volume, volumes
< >	signifies a change made to a text, either to the reading of another manuscript or to an emendation, as noted in the apparatus.
{ }	corrupt words in Armenian text whether or not they are translated
[ ]	physical lacuna in the manuscript
( )	words added by the translator either for stylistic or for semantic reasons
~	transposed
+	adds



## LIST OF WORKS PUBLISHED HERE BY DATE

Text No.	Name	Manuscript*	Year
01	Lists	M2679	981
02	Story of Father Abraham	M8531	1400-1499
03	Biblical Paraphrases	M3854 M4231	1471 1400-1499
04	Memorial of the Forefathers	M1665 M6092 BLEgerton 708	1441 1600-1699
05	Genealogy of Abraham	Galata 154	1600-1699(?)
06	Poem on Abraham, Isaac, etc.	SBB-IIIE MS or quart 805	1600-1699(?)
07	History Concerning the Tree of Sabek	BLEgerton 708	1600-1635
08	Story of Holy father Abraham: Recension A	BnF Arm 0186 M0569	1618 1618
09	Story of Holy Father Abraham: Recension B	M3411	1600-1699
10	Abraham in an Elenchic Text	M10200	1624, 1634, 1666
11	The Story of Terah and of Father Abraham	M6340 BLHar15459	1651 1698
11A	Concerning Abraham's Hospitality on the Way	Constantinople1730	1730
12	Sermon on the verse concerning the Sodomites	M5571	1657-1659
13	The Ten Trials of Abraham	M717	1700-1799
14	Memorial of the Great Patriarch Abraham	Synaxarium, Cple 1730.	1730
15	Sermon Concerning Hospitality	Paris Arm. Museum 62	1600-1799

1. Manuscripts are referred to using the system of sigla initiated by the Association Internationale des Études Arméniennes, see Bernard Coulie, *Répertoire de manuscrits arméniens* (Leiden: AIEA, 1994).

## LIST OF MANUSCRIPTS PUBLISHED HERE

<b>Manuscript</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Text No.</b>	<b>Name</b>
BLEgerton 708	1600-1635	07	History Concerning the Tree of Sabek
BnF0186 M0569	1618 1618	08	Story of Holy father Abraham: Recension A
Constantinople 1730	1730 (Misc.)	11A	Concerning Abraham's Hospitality on the Way
Constantinople 1730	1730 (Synax.)	14	Memorial of the Great Patriarch Abraham
Galata 154	1600-1699(?)	05	Genealogy of Abraham
M717	1700-1799	13	The Ten Trials of Abraham
M10200	1624, 1634, 1666	10	Abraham in an Elenchic Text
M1665 M6092 BLEgerton 708	1441 1600-1699 1600-1699?	04	Memorial of the Forefathers
M2679	981	01	Lists
M3411	1600-1699	09	Story of Holy Father Abraham: Recension B
M3854 M4231	1471 1400-1499	03	Biblical Paraphrases
M5571	1657-1659	12	Sermon on the verse concerning the Sodomites
M6340 BLHarl5459	1651 1698	11	The Story of Terah and of Father Abraham
M8531	1400-1499	02	Story of Father Abraham
SBB-III E MS or quart 805	1600-1699(?)	06	Poem on Abraham, Isaac, etc.
Paris Arm. Museum 62	1600-1799	15	Sermon Concerning Hospitality



## LIST OF MANUSCRIPTS CONSULTED IN APPENDIX I

M1425	1690	Ējmiacin	Miscellany
M4618	1569-1714		Miscellany
M6541	1830-1862		Miscellany
M10561	1600-1699		Miscellany



## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### CHARACTER OF THE ARMENIAN ABRAHAM TRADITIONS

The documents published here are chiefly narratives telling the story of Abraham, a subject in which the Armenians showed a deep interest. This interest was expressed not only in apocryphal narratives, the focus of the present study, but in poetry, art, and exegesis as well. To trace all this abundance is beyond the scope of the present volume, in which I seek only to make known to the broader public the chief ways in which the Armenians told the Abraham story as preserved in fifteen unpublished, late-medieval manuscripts in Armenian. This corpus is itself not exhaustive. After all, in its simple biblical form, Abraham's is a very dramatic story, moving from one exciting incident and episode to another: Abraham's emigration to the Land of Israel, the binding of Isaac, Abraham's battle against the four kings, the double narratives of Sarah in the palaces of pagan monarchs, the story of Lot, and the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah. Above all, in Christian thought, the visit of the three "men" and their annunciation of Isaac's birth to Abraham, as well as Abraham's offering of Isaac, came to play a pivotal role, foreshadowing the annunciation of Christ's birth and the crucifixion.

To these exciting events, enticing grist to the mill of any storyteller, were added clearly Christian theological dimensions, nearly all in expansions and reformulations of the biblical narrative. Indeed, Abraham's recognition of the true God was an old Jewish theme, and Christians emphasized Abraham's role as the father of all believers (cf. Rom 4:16) and the idea of the bosom of Abraham as the resting place of the righteous souls (Luke 16:23).<sup>1</sup> In Jewish and Christian stories, Abraham's discovery and recognition of God were a focus of fascination. There exist numerous versions of this event in varied sources, going back as far as *Jubilees*, and ancient traditions are mixed with newer ones in the stories retailed here.

The strange story of Abraham offering Isaac,<sup>2</sup> taken as paradigmatic but yet always puzzling, plays a major role. It is not just connected with a trial of the

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1. This was a commonplace in Armenian writing. See, e.g., Zak'aria Catholicos, *MH* 9th century, 279; Maštoc', *MH* 9th century, 650, and many other sources.

2. See Shulman 1993 and Licht 1973, for two interesting perspectives. Obviously the scholarly and exegetical literature on this topic is enormous. The exegesis of the Aqedah material is analyzed by Kessler (2004), while its stark narrative in Genesis is finely presented by Auerbuch (1957, 3-23).

patriarch's faith, for Christians it prefigured God's offering of his Son, and so the central mystery of Christian faith and understanding of the world.<sup>3</sup>

When Abraham knelt down after offering the ram, Isaac's substitute, text no. 15.47 says: "[T]here was a voice from the heavens which said, ' . . . in the same way, I too did not pity my beloved Son for your sake who, having come, will free all the children of Adam from Hell because of your goodness.'" So Abraham's willing sacrifice is not just a parade example of faith, drawn from the past, but it intimates and atemporally reflects God's sacrifice of his Son for the sake of Adam's offspring and, therefore, the central mystery and meaning of the world.<sup>4</sup> Such understandings transform the Abraham narrative from a single, punctual event to a multilayered, eternal foreshadowing of the redemptive dynamic of the cosmos.

This and other themes developed in this fashion were woven into an expanded biblical narrative, and that was moved from a past significance to playing a usually typological or paradigmatic role in the history of salvation, as viewed through a Christian prism. In the present work, a number of other incidents in the Abraham story will be discussed from this perspective. Some of these are readings of incidents in the biblical text, and others are apocryphal and have been added to the line of the narrative, either in Armenian circles or in preceding Syriac or Greek narrations.

Characteristically, this approach regards the biblical story as the presentation of an unified history of redemption from creation to crucifixion, resurrection and parousia. Narrative sequence governs the surface relation of the episodes of the story, but, in fact, the central redemptive event gives an atemporal unity that supersedes any narrative sequence. This led to certain specific Christian interpretations or exegeses of Old Testament events or texts, and to the reformulation of such events as prefiguring, indeed enfolding, the salvific life and death of Christ in which their meaning was found. Both of these tendencies appear in the texts published here.

#### SPECIFIC EXEGETIC AND NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

Once we enter into this worldview, the modern contrast of "Old" and "New Testament Apocrypha" has no meaning,<sup>5</sup> yet, of course, the origin and content of the various narrative events and episodes can and, indeed, should be considered. The preceding remarks bear on how such events and episodes were understood by the Armenian Christian tradition.

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3. See Kessler 2004, 108–14. The typological interpretation of the Aqedah is found often. See, e.g., Zak'aria Catholicos, *MH* 9th century, 300.

4. Precisely this interpretation is opposed in *Aggadat Berešit* 31 (end).

5. See text no. 1 below and also Stone 1999, 30–31; Stone in press A.

It is worth observing, moreover, that the traditions and interpretations that formed the building blocks of these developed narratives were not exclusively Christian in origin. It has been remarked that it is misleading, at least for the first millennium C.E., to treat the various religious and literary traditions that derive from the Bible—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and others—as if they lived and grew hermetically sealed off from one another, basically as independent traditions. Instead, the interrelations between them are complex and dynamic and involve not only diachronic transmission of shared “parabiblical” material but also mutual borrowing and influence over centuries. In light of these relations, an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation took place.<sup>6</sup> For this reason as well, in this book I have not attempted exhaustively to trace exact genealogical lines of derivation for specific elements of tradition, though I have noted some references to striking parallels from Jewish, Christian, and, to some extent, Muslim sources. So often, the attempt to achieve genetic certainty is misleading, for the evidence at our disposal is, by the nature of things, partial, and the fit of the material is only probable and not compelling.

The narratives published here overlap one another at many points and on occasion are quite repetitive. Nonetheless, the different writings have diverse interests and highlight varied points of view. The manuscript copies that we have at our disposal are mostly of the late medieval period, but elements of the embroidered Abraham tradition already occur in the first substantial Armenian literary manuscript, of the year 981.<sup>7</sup> Samuel Kamrġajorec‘i, also of the tenth century, knows such embroidered Abraham traditions.<sup>8</sup> So the embroidery of traditions was already present by then.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, it would be difficult to trace in detail the sources, growth, and development of these Armenian biblical retellings without an extensive investigation of much of the Armenian literary tradition, for Abraham material in one form or another is very widespread.<sup>10</sup> We have already remarked on the difficulties attending the attempt to clarify the genetic origins of specific units of the narrative tradition. The issues of literary interrelationship of these whole Abraham texts are, for the most part, equally problematic. Where the literary

---

6. See, e.g., Reeves 1999; 2005. An interesting example is the material on Jewish and Christian “encounters” collected in Grypeou and Spurling 2009a. At another level, the movement of traditions between different Christian channels, often widely separated in time and place, is significant. Such is illustrated in Stone 2002. Firestone (1990, 3–21) outlines how Islam drew on both biblical and nonbiblical material in its construction of Abraham legends. Islamic sources subsume much material into the Islamic legend of Abraham, Sarah, and the Tyrant; see Firestone 1990, 30–38.

7. See Mat‘evosyan 1995; 1997.

8. *MH* 10th century, 742–44.

9. See also Appendix 2, below.

10. I have carried out some analogous research into the very rich Adam tradition, and I hope that that research will be paradigmatic for those interested in Armenian biblical retellings. I will present it in *Traditions of Adam and Eve in Armenian Literature* (in preparation).

relationships are obvious, they have been discussed below. It is not these obvious instances that pose the most severe challenge. The most difficult matter is the failure (almost fated) of attempts to establish clear relations of literary dependence or derivation between many of the narrative texts. Some sort of relationship is evident: some elements are shared and some expressions or turns of speech are common, but in as many other points the texts differ in this or that way, and one is not obviously more pristine than the other, nor one clearly dependent on another. Yet the exact nature of these literary relationships remains obscure.

Such a pattern of both sharing and difference between text forms typifies what I have called “textual clusters.” I invoked this term to explain the complex relationships among the Adam books and equally among the Esdras apocalypses.<sup>11</sup> Now I suggest that it is appropriate also for describing the relationship among these allied but different Armenian Abraham texts. Having said this, I readily admit that the *description* or *naming* of the phenomenon is not an *explanation* of it. The chief advantage of a description is that it helps us to perceive the phenomenon of textual clusters, by distinguishing it from other types of relationships between texts. It is clearly a type of textual transmission, but it does not yield to conventional stemmatic analysis,<sup>12</sup> and we must consider alternative paradigms of textual development.<sup>13</sup> I stress, the phenomenon exists, we have named it, but naming is not explaining. The etiology of textual clusters may lie in the way the documents were created and used. To resolve this issue is a challenge lying ahead as the study of allied corpora of medieval texts advances.

Our goals here, however, are limited and aim at a more modest level of discourse: (1) to publish a good selection of Armenian Abraham narrative apocrypha with English translations, annotations, and critical apparatus; (2) to indicate in expository notes not merely difficulties of translation or edition but also the biblical sources and the cross-references within the present corpus; (3) to note some parallels from Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other sources even though we do not seek to provide an exhaustive motif history of these stories; (4) to give some examples, from time to time, of the use of the apocryphal themes of these stories in medieval Armenian literature, again without aspiring to be exhaustive.

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11. Stone 2011, 151–71.

12. See Stone 2011, 157 n. 16, relating to Tromp’s textual genetics of the primary Adam Book.

13. It may well be that, if the context of the use of the Abraham texts is clarified, that may contribute to resolving this issue. There may also be something to learn from the types of manuscripts preserving these texts, and equally about their *Vorlagen*. For that, a complete (or as complete as possible) inventory of all Armenian Abraham texts is required as well as their analysis.

## STRUCTURE AND DISCUSSION OF SELECTED ELEMENTS

Each document published in this volume is provided with an introduction dealing briefly with its particular character and manuscripts, as well as major points of interest in its narrative and other significant issues. The document is edited and the text is annotated, mainly with remarks either on issues of decipherment or on those of grammar and language. A full translation is given, the notes to which relate to the content, biblical parallels, similar views in the other texts in this volume, and so forth. When the manuscript situation makes it necessary, a critical apparatus is added between the text and the translation.

In the rest of this General Introduction, I will outline the main narrative units that combined and recombined to form an expanded Abraham tale, into which various traditions and literary sources are woven. The name “embroidered Abraham saga,” designates a reservoir of traditions that, while maintaining a measure of stability, nonetheless combined differently in each document.<sup>14</sup> In the texts studied here, the range and selection of incidents, their combination and recombination, their inclusion and exclusion changed and changed again. This Abraham saga, which is a conceptual construct, does not exist in full in any given textual crystallization and indeed may well never have existed as a whole in any single document anywhere. Even the fullest existing texts do not contain all the episodes, nor do they coincide completely with one another.<sup>15</sup> Of course, it is precisely this state of affairs that led me to regard these narratives as a textual cluster rather than to analyze them as descendants of a single archetype (see above).<sup>16</sup> The overall repertoire of incidents and episodes forms the Armenian Abraham saga, but the reader should bear in mind that this saga is a conceptual construct that does not exist in any given textual crystallization.<sup>17</sup>

In table 1, I enumerate the chief narrative units or episodes of the Armenian Abraham saga. The list abides by the biblical order of events, introducing the nonbiblical incidents at appropriate points, usually at the junctures at which they occur in the actual texts. In the second column, I give the appropriate biblical reference, so a blank in the second column indicates an incident or episode that the Abraham saga introduced *de novo* into the biblical narrative line.

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14. We have dealt with complex tradition transmission in Stone 2011, ch. 6.

15. It should be borne in mind that text no. 15 is another version of text no. 11.

16. We have dealt with complex tradition transmission in Stone 2011, 151–71.

17. At least of those we have published here or consulted.

TABLE 1: CHIEF NARRATIVE UNITS OF THE ARMENIAN ABRAHAM SAGA

1. Abraham's background	
2. Idols and the recognition of God	
3. Story of the Crows: recognition of God	
4. Both stories combined in some versions: recognition of God	
5. Abraham regards the luminaries: recognition of God	
6. Abraham burns the idolatrous temple	
7. His brother dies (for the fault of breeding of the mule) <sup>1</sup>	Gen 11:28
8. Terah dies in Haran	Gen 11:32
9. Abraham goes to Canaan	Gen 12:1–5
10. Abraham and Sarah go to Egypt and the incident with Pharaoh	Gen 12:10–20
11. Excursus: List of ten trials of Abraham	
12. Abraham increases in wealth: separation from Lot	Gen 13:1–12
13. Incident of four kings and Melchizedek	Gen 14
14. Melchizedek of Salem, stories about (not as an ascetic)	
15. Hagar and the birth of Ishmael	Gen 16
16. Circumcision of Abraham	Gen 17
17. The story of Mamrē	
18. Abraham's hospitality	Gen 18:1–5
19. Three men appeared	Gen 18:2
20. The meal	Gen 18:6–8
21. Annunciation to Abraham	Gen 18:9–15
22. Sodom and Gomorrah, destruction of, and Lot's hospitality	Gen 18:20–33; 19:1–29
23. Typology of Abraham and his sacrifice	
24. Abimelech of Gerar	Gen 20; 21:25–34
25. Isaac	Gen 21:1–13
26. Aqedah—binding of Isaac	Gen 22
27. Melchizedek story—Melchizedek as an ascetic	
28. Abraham, naming of	Gen 17:5
29. Sarah's death and burial	Gen 23
30. Rebekah	Gen 24

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18. Achan's (Haran's) fault is not mentioned in the Bible.



31. Isaac marries Rebekah	Gen 24:67
32. Prophecy	
33. Descendants of Abraham	
34. Armenization of the genealogy	
35. Death of Abraham	Gen 25:8–10

This list of incidents reflects the major episodes of the narratives in the Armenian Abraham texts published here. It is instructive to compare the list of incidents with the biblical narrative. The Abraham saga adds major incidents or subjects to the biblical narrative. Particularly notable among these are the stories about the crows and the recognition of God, the Story of Mamrē, and the Story of Melchizedek the Ascetic.

TABLE 2: INCIDENTS ADDED TO THE BIBLICAL STORY

1. Abraham's background
2. Idols and the recognition of God
3. Story of the Crows: recognition of God
4. Both stories combined in some versions: Recognition of God
5. Abraham regards Luminaries: Recognition of God
6. Abraham burns idolatrous Temple
11. Excursus: List of ten trials of Abraham
14. Melchizedek of Salem, stories about (not as an ascetic)
17. The Story of Mamrē
23. Typology of Abraham and his sacrifice
27. Melchizedek Story—Melchizedek as an ascetic
30. Rebekah
31. Isaac marries Rebekah
32. Prophecy
33. Descendants of Abraham
34. Armenization of the genealogy

These items give a background to Abraham, in some texts extending back to the flood. They explain the idolatry against which Abraham reacted as emerging from the degeneration of the postdiluvian generations. Humans forgot God, and in some instances—for example, in text no. 15.1—the book of law is said to have been forgotten.<sup>19</sup> Notable are the various stories of Abraham's recognition

19. See texts nos. 11.1 and 15.1. On Jewish sources for the idea of God's being forgotten

of God. Several versions of this incident, also related in other traditions, are to be found in the Armenian texts. Abraham's role as the "father of all believers," which was noted above, and his recognition of the true God are major themes in both Jewish and Christian readings of this material. In Islamic tradition also, his discovery of God plays a major role.

#### MELCHIZEDEK AND THE STORY OF MELCHIZEDEK

The Story of Melchizedek as an ascetic (table 1, item 27) causes an inconvenience in the story line. It follows the Aqedah, itself sequential to the Story of Mamrē, the Annunciation to Abraham, and the Sodom and Lot incidents. This apocryphal Story of Melchizedek as an ascetic, which is most probably drawn from a Greek source,<sup>20</sup> occurs in two documents, texts nos. 6 and 11 + 15. In a number of other texts, however, the four kings and Melchizedek's welcome and blessing of Abraham, which we call the Expatiation on Melchizedek, precede the Story of Mamrē. Thus, in texts nos. 2, 7, and 12 there are variants on his greeting Abraham, based on (and in the case of text no. 12.15–16, very close to) Gen 14:18–20 including the tithe. It is notable that in no text do both these Melchizedek incidents occur.

In a third type of Melchizedek material, he is consulted as a counseling or oracular source of knowledge: see texts nos. 3 and 4. In these instances it is impossible to situate Melchizedek's entry into the story within the narrative sequence. The remaining texts do not include either the Story of Melchizedek or the four kings incident, mainly because of their limited narrative scope.

The Expatiation on Melchizedek (table 1, item no. 14) occurs in texts nos. 2, 7, and 12. This name designates expansions related to Gen 14 and not the Melchizedek Story found in texts nos. 6, 11, and 15 (table 1, item no. 27). The expatiation on the brief reference in Gen 14:18–20 is directly connected with Melchizedek's importance for Christians as a non-Levitical priest. This understanding is anchored in the Old Testament text ("a priest of the Most High God"; Gen 18:18) and occurs already in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews makes Jesus a member of a high-priestly line founded by Melchizedek (Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; and 7:1–17) and argues for the primacy of the Melchizedek sacerdotal line over the Levitical, descended from Abraham.<sup>21</sup>

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after Noah, see also Beer 1859, 105 and n. 50. In Eznik 3.15.2, the idea is present that, though idolatry was predominant, a measure of piety remained, as is witnessed by Melchizedek's title and taking the tithe (*MH* 5th century, 494). Text no. 11.1A has the idea of a second law, in force from Abraham on. On this idea, described as "unwritten law", see 2 *Bar.* 57:2.

20. See Dochhorn 2004; and Piovanelli In press. Note the detailed introduction, German translation, and rich notes by Böttrich 2010. The combination of several versions of the story is found in the *Palaea*, certain of which are closer to the Armenian story here than others. Fully to analyze this is beyond the scope of this volume.

21. The rabbis make Abraham a priest, applying Ps 110:4 to him in *Gen. Rab.* 26:3; see

TABLE 3: MELCHIZEDEK INCIDENTS IN THE TEXTS

Text no.	4 Kings incident	Story of Melchizedek	Other Melchizedek
2	meets Abraham - brief		
4			Melchizedek as priest consulted by Rebekah
4			Predicts preeminence of Jacob
6		Melchizedek in forest	
7	bread & wine, type of Christ—brief		
11		Melchizedek in forest	
12	meets Abraham—close to Bible		

In Jewish sources of the Second Temple period, Melchizedek takes on a heavenly character and is identified in 11QMelchizedek as a savior figure.<sup>22</sup> In *2 Enoch* he is a type of divine man, born without a father and taken to heaven before the flood, to be brought down in Abraham's time (see *2 En.* 71–72). His connection with Noachic times is highlighted in the widespread view that he was Shem, son of Noah.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Hebrews is building on an anterior Jewish tradition connected with Gen 14 and bolstered by Ps 110:4.<sup>24</sup> For the Christian traditions of the Armenian Abraham texts, Hebrews' view is strengthened by the bread and wine that Melchizedek, the priest, is said to offer Abraham (see Gen 14:18), which offering was readily viewed as a sacrificial, eucharistic act, one of several found in the Armenian Abraham saga.<sup>25</sup> Thus, text no. 6.5 says of the meal Abraham prepared for the Three Men:

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also on this issue Kessler 2004, 52–53. *Yalqut Shim'oni Lek Lēka* 14.74; 17.81 interprets the bread and wine offered to Abraham as priestly instructions.

22. See Steudel 2000.

23. Rabbinic sources are plentiful: see *b. Ned.* 32b, *PRE* 27. See also Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 11 9 (Mathews and Amar 1994, 151) and Ginzberg 1909–38, 1:233 and 5:225 n. 102. On the descent of his priestly line from Noah, see *ibid.* The passage cited in *b. Ned.* 32b and also *Lev. Rab.* 25 speaks of why Melchizedek's priestly function was canceled. According to *PRE* 27, Abraham gives tithe to Melchizedek. Views on this varied and were determined by the opinion of Melchizedek that was espoused. See further Böttrich 2010, 32–33.

24. Hay 1973.

25. See also Böttrich (2010, 15, 37–38), who sees this as part of the *interpretatio christiana* of the story. Eucharistic connections are highlighted, sometimes indeed created,

Unleavened bread, wine and calf he slaughtered for the meal,  
A type of unleavened (wafer) (and) chalice of the Mass.

Text no. 7.13–14, devoted to the Tree of Sabek, says of Melchizedek's offering to Abraham: <sup>13</sup>"Melchizedek took from the grapes of the tree and made wine. And having brought it he offered it to Abraham. And he broke unleavened bread beneath (it) when he came from cutting down the kings. <sup>14</sup>Abraham, having taken it, he himself communicated and his 318 soldiers with him."

Similar reasons lay behind the adoption of the apocryphal Melchizedek story (item no. 27), which was known in Greek and incorporated into the Armenian Abraham story in two texts, nos. 6 and 11.<sup>26</sup> It serves to highlight the Christian perception of the events but shows no overt connections with the biblical text beyond association of Melchizedek, a priest, with Abraham. This story evokes a number of well-known incidents. Melchizedek discovers God in an event very much like those about Abraham in texts no. 11.5–6 and 15.4–5.<sup>27</sup> Melchizedek

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elsewhere in the Abraham stories, such as in the repast of the Three Men with Abraham, in the household offering of Melchizedek, and in the highlighting of his foreshadowing sacerdotal function (text no. 15.48, 55). See also text no. 7.13–14; and *Palaea* 214. On Melchizedek in the *Palaea*, see Böttrich 2010, 8–9. The representation of Melchizedek's offering is placed over the altar in S. Maria Maggiore in Rome: the bread has crosses on it and an image of Christ is incorporated, which shows that the purpose of the image is eucharistic and not merely illustrative (fifth century). The motif is of course extremely popular in Christian literature; see Clement of Alexandria in *Stromata*, who states that Melchizedek offered wine and bread, the "consecrated food", as a type of the Eucharist (ὁ τὸν οἶνον καὶ ἄρτον τὴν ἡγιασμένην διδούς τροφήν εἰς τύπον εὐχαριστίας; Stählin and Früchtel 1960, 15); cf. Eusebius of Caesara, *Dem. ev.* 5.3: "in exactly the same way our Lord and Saviour Himself first, and then all His priests among all nations, perform the spiritual sacrifice according to the customs of the Church, and with wine and bread darkly express the mysteries of His Body and saving Blood"; *Cave of Treasures* (Budge 1927, 148): "and Melchisedek made him [i.e., Abraham] to participate in the Holy Mysteries, [of] the bread of the Offering and the wine of redemption." Böttrich (2010, 30–35) discusses the use of Melchizedek material in *Cave of Treasures* and in *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*. See also George Syncellus 112 (Adler and Tuffin 2002, 141).

26. Böttrich 2010; and Dochhorn 2004. See also the incisive remarks of William Adler in the introduction to his forthcoming translation of the Greek *Palaea Historica* (a work no earlier than the ninth century). The story has been taken into ch. 72 of the long version of *2 Enoch* in a different form, and there the connection with Abraham is not made (see the analysis by Böttrich 2010, 35–37). This leads us to speculate that it was an independent piece associated with Melchizedek (so also Böttrich 2010, 65–66) and connected to Abraham through Gen 14. It is also found in the *Palaea*, see n. 25 above. Much information on works associated with Melchizedek is to be found in Denis and Haelewyck 2000, 215–20. Böttrich (2010, 54–66) maintains that the story had a Jewish kernel and underwent a complex process of Christianization.

27. Below I discuss other aspects of the construction of the Melchizedek figure in conversation with that of Abraham. This connection is pointed out also in Böttrich 2010, 66.

lives as a “hairy ascetic” in a forest on Golgotha, in Jerusalem,<sup>28</sup> is found after eight years by Abraham with God’s help, and becomes Abraham’s household priest. His offering Abraham bread, indeed unleavened bread, and wine is stressed.<sup>29</sup>

In the Abraham saga, the Story of Melchizedek follows the story of Abraham’s ordeal in the Binding of Isaac. In that ordeal, Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son is regarded typologically as foreshadowing God’s sacrifice of his only-begotten Son.<sup>30</sup> This is, of course, in tension with Melchizedek’s father Melk’i’s wish to sacrifice his son. Moreover, in the Story of Melchizedek the incident of the idolatrous sacrifices and the earth swallowing up both the idolatrous temple and all the people is reminiscent of the Korah incident in the book of Numbers (16:20–21, 31–33).<sup>31</sup> It also guarantees the purity of Jerusalem and Golgotha. This Melchizedek story, then, is adopted into the body of two of the texts, being itself created so as to form a typology of redemption: Melchizedek, like Abraham, recognizes God; Melchizedek’s father sacrifices his other son to idols, and Melchizedek is saved (a reverse Aqedah); instead of redemption, the sacrifice of the son leads to a swallowing up of idolaters, while Melchizedek, saved from slaughter, offers the eucharistic sacrifice on behalf of the children of Adam. Christian themes of eremitic character, such as the hairy ascetic living isolated in the forest, are introduced, and Melchizedek, instead of being king of Salem (he is never that in the Story of Melchizedek!), becomes priest to Abraham’s family. The forest is on the Mount of Olives (6.11) or in Jerusalem (Paris 72).<sup>32</sup> Redemption is on the mountain, identified with Golgotha.

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28. See texts nos. 7.18 and 14.13 and notes there. Compare the discussion by Satran 1985, 345–69; N. Stone 2000, 63 note and 126 note; and Böttrich 2010, 57–59 with bibliography. On the figure of the forest-dwelling, wild ascetic, see N. Stone 2000, 63 note and 126 note.

29. Text no. 7.13. See above, p. 10.

30. See text no. 15.47, discussed above in connection with this theme. Further, see M1425 in Appendix 1, below. See most recently Orlov (2000; reprinted in Orlov 2007, 423–39), who discusses this legend.

31. The stress on the swallowing up of all those associated with evil is noteworthy. The result is the cleansing of Jerusalem from idolatry. Swallowing up by the earth is documented in Böttrich 2010, 95.

32. According to text no. 14.13, the Aqedah was on Golgotha, in the mountains of the Jebusites, which once more ties the place of sacrifice to Golgotha, so one has the sacrifice of Isaac, Melchizedek, and the crucifixion all on the one, central place. The texts lack clear geographical knowledge. In *Cave of Treasures* (Budge 1927, 151), which has a different combination of these events, we read:

And Isaac was thirteen years old when his father took him and went up to the mountain of Yâbhôs (Jebus) to Melchisedek, the priest of God, the Most High. Now Mount Yâbhôs is the mountain of the Amôrâyê (Amorites), and in that place the Cross of Christ was set up, and on it grew the tree which held the ram that saved Isaac. And that same place is the centre of the earth, and the grave of Adam,

The chief problem that the Story of Melchizedek raises is its integration not with the Abraham narratives that include it but with the sequence of events that can be inferred from Genesis. In the three documents that have incorporated this story, texts nos. 6, 11, and 15, the other Melchizedek material relating to the four kings (Gen 14) is not found but is replaced by this Story of Melchizedek.<sup>33</sup> However, that produces anomalies in the biblical time line, and at least to that extent the Story of Melchizedek appears to be independent of Genesis. Its modifications contrast with Gen 14 and cause one to wonder about its origins. Moreover, as far as the Armenian Abraham saga is concerned, it is an import, most likely from Greek, and the primary questions of its origin and purpose must be answered from within the Greek tradition.

#### THE STORY OF MAMRĒ

Item 17 in table 1 is the apocryphal story of Mam(b)rĒ.<sup>34</sup> MamrĒ, Abraham's black slave, sets out to pasture the sheep. He is provided with three loaves of bread, and in three incidents *en route* he generously gives his loaves away to starving men.

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and the altar of Melchizedek, and Golgotha, and Karkaftā [i.e., skull], and Gefiftā (Gabbatha). And there David saw the angel bearing the sword of fire. There, too, Abraham took up Isaac his son for a burnt offering, and he saw the Cross, and Christ, and the redemption of our father Adam. The tree (i.e., thicket) was a symbol of the Cross of Christ our Lord, and the ram [caught] in its branches was the mystery of the manhood of the Word, the Only One.

See also *Cave of Treasures* (Budge 1927, 224): “In that very place where Melchizedek ministered as a priest, and where Abraham offered up his son Isaac as an offering, the wood of the Cross was set up, and that self-same place is the centre of the earth, and there the Four Quarters of the earth meet each other.” See also the identification in a catena fragment attributed to Eusebius of Emesa (Petit, van Rompay, and Weitenberg 2011, 233; cf. Kessler 2004, 90). On the rabbinic “pre-history” of Jerusalem, see Gafni 1987, 10–15, and the response to changes of perception as Christian interest in holy places developed. The dominant tradition of the Greek Story of Melchizedek puts his dwelling on Mount Tabor: contrast text no. 11.47, which speaks of Jerusalem. This is documented throughout the introduction in Böttrich 2010, and it should be noted that the conflate version of Grigor of Tat’ew (in Appendix 1 below) has Mount Tabor. Certain sources, however, connect the events with Golgotha (and Adam’s burial) and others with the Mount of Olives. See *Cave of Treasures*, where Noah and Melchizedek bury Adam’s body on Golgotha (Budge 1927, 126–27). Compare also Böttrich 2010, 32–33. In the Athanasian recension of *Story of Melchizedek* 10.3 and in *Palaea* 1893, 210, Mount Tabor is identified with the Mount of Olives. In the Armenian texts published here, Mount Tabor is not given, and it should be observed that St. Gregory of Narek (tenth–eleventh centuries) also mentions the Mount of Olives; see below, n. 57. In the seventh-century Armenian description of Mount Tabor in pseudo-Ehišē’s *Homily of the Transfiguration*, there is no mention of Melchizedek or a chapel dedicated to him or his cave; see Stone 2004.

33. The reverse situation, the presence of the Gen 14 material and the absence of the Story of Melchizedek, occurs in texts nos. 2, 7, and 12; cf. texts nos. 3 and 4. In 1QapGen 21–22 the story of the four kings is told at some length, but Melchizedek is not mentioned.

34. The introduction of a “b” following an “m” is observed elsewhere in Armenian

After this he reaches his goal and falls asleep, having stuck his oaken staff into the ground. When he awakes, the staff has become a great oak tree (cf. Gen 13:18; 14:13; and 18:1),<sup>35</sup> and he, a black slave, has turned white, together with his black sheep. He goes back to Abraham, who recognizes the miraculous nature of the event and returns with him and praises him. In another version, Abraham comes to him and likewise perceives that a miracle has taken place.

Here the origin of Abraham's famed hospitality is explained, which story is itself the lead-up to the story of the Annunciation to Abraham. Abraham observed the miracles that followed on Mamrē's hospitality and, taking this to heart, swore never to eat again without a guest at his table.<sup>36</sup> The narrative sequence—the Story of Mamrē followed by Abraham's oath, Satan's blocking of the way, and eventually the arrival of the Three Men—is found, *mutatis mutandis*, in texts nos. 2, 6, 8, 11, 12, and 15. Thus, this story complex is present in all the major narrative texts.

#### THE ANNUNCIATION TO ABRAHAM OR THE VISIT OF THE THREE MEN

The stress on the Annunciation to Abraham, that is, the visit of the Three Men (items 18–22 in table 1), is also characterized by Christian typology, and the story is thus integrated into the Christian history of redemption or proclamation of Christ. This is extremely explicit (see text no. 8.29). Some of the not very frequent images of Abraham in Armenian manuscript painting are of this Annunciation,<sup>37</sup> and it functions as does the Annunciation to the Virgin. It foreshadows redemption.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the Binding of Isaac intimates the crucifixion,<sup>39</sup> and, according to text no. 14.13, Isaac was offered on Golgotha.<sup>40</sup> The ram, Isaac's surrogate, is given metacontextual significance, since it is identified as Abel's offering and was preserved alive in heaven from Abel's day until Sahak's birth. Then it was offered again by Abraham; so text no. 6.5.3–4:

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transliterations; compare, for example, the Armenian name Smbat derived Shabbat. Compare Greek λαμβάνω.

35. Sextus Iulius Africanus F30 deals with this tree and also knows the tradition that it sprang from Abraham's servant's staff (Wallraff and Adler 2007, 66–67). See also below, text 2.10 and note there.

36. *Genesis Rabbah* 43:19 suggests that Abraham learned hospitality from Melchizedek; it is a common theme in rabbinic writing. See also *Gen. Rab.* 52:1

37. See M4818 (in Durnovo 1961, 145) of 1316 (depicting also cups, wine, and unleavened bread).

38. This is already clearly stated by Anania Širakac'i in *MH* 7th century, 702. On the artistic presentation of the Aqedah, see Kessler 2004, ch. 7.

39. See the statement of Anania Catholicos (tenth century) that Isaac showed the Lord's passion, see *MH* 10th century, 255, 297–98. See here text no. 3.18; Isaac was "a likeness and type of Christ" (texts nos. 4.24, and 11.46). See Kessler 2004, 66–67.

40. On the identification of Moriah and Golgotha, see Kessler 2004, 90–91

Unleavened bread, wine and calf he slaughtered for the meal,  
A type of unleavened (wafer) (and) chalice of the Mass.<sup>41</sup>

In one form of the stories, the calf slaughtered by Abraham in the meal he prepared for the Three Men is resurrected, indicating the salvific meaning of these events. “The marrow of this ram is the sweet oil with which they anointed you,” text no. 8.32 says, evoking the transformative oil of 2 *En.* 22:8–9 and 56:2 and perhaps the marrow of Isa 25:6.<sup>42</sup> Of course, at another level it may refer to the myron, the oil of chrism, used for baptism and unction.<sup>43</sup>

Structurally the Annunciation story is well integrated into the narrative sequence.<sup>44</sup> In illustrations of the coming of the Three Men, Abraham is shown tenting under a tree, presumably the oak of Mamrē, see M4818, 1316 C.E.<sup>45</sup> The story is, of course, an etiology of the oaks of Mamrē in Genesis and is discussed in the following section.

#### THE STORY OF LOT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM

The stories of the incident of Lot and the destruction of Sodom follow the Annunciation story. The sequence is the same as in Genesis and is to be found in texts nos. 2, 8 (brief reference), 11, and 15. Lot is also mentioned in passing in a number of other texts. Not much is made of the Lot story beyond what is related in the biblical narrative, except that Lot is presented as hospitable after the pattern of Abraham.

#### OTHER NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

The additional items in the last part of table 1 above are of a technical nature. They account for Abraham’s death and burial, his descendants, and an Armenized form of his genealogy.<sup>46</sup>

41. Cf. text no. 8.25.

42. Cf. 3 *Bar.* 15:1–2; and see Kulik 2010, 366–68. See also Stone 2000b, 118, 124–27.

43. Compare the oil of joy or gladness in Isa 61:3, Ps 45:8. The marrow is associated with fatness and plenty; see Job 21:24; Ps 63:5; and Isa 25:6. The use of oil deriving from marrow for anointing is not mentioned by Dudley and Rowel in their book on Christian anointing (1993) or elsewhere. Abraham is anointed by God with oil of joy (*Yalqut Shim‘oni Lek Lēka* 12.62).

44. It is missing from Grigor Magistros’s poem, *Ar Manuchē*, which deals with the Annunciation to Abraham in line 125.

45. The tree is also shown bearing bunches of grapes.

46. In Stone In press A, I discusses the Armenization of biblical genealogies and other references, particularly in the context of Armenian apocryphal literature.



## BIBLICAL AND NONBIBLICAL EPISODES IN THE ABRAHAM SAGA

The question can now be raised concerning which elements of the biblical narrative have been omitted from the apocryphal Armenian Abraham saga and which elements of the Abraham saga have no *point d'appui* in the biblical narrative.

First, let us consider those episodes and incidents that are present in the biblical narrative but do not occur in the Armenian apocryphal Abraham texts. In some instances the reasons for their omission seem virtually certain. These are cases where a number of omitted episodes or incidents share a feature or features of content that are absent completely from the apocryphal retelling of the Bible. It seems reasonable to assume that this shared feature provides the motive for omission of these episodes. The texts relating to the promise of the gift of the land to Abraham and his descendants are a good example. These are all omitted, as is the promise of the perdurance of his seed: Gen 12:7 (promise), Gen 15 (the covenant between the pieces and the prophecy of Abraham's descendants' future),<sup>47</sup> Gen 18:17–18 (promise to Abraham about his descendants).<sup>48</sup> These omissions, we suggest, are part of a Christian reading of the Abraham stories, for they all refer to the specific promises to or about the bodily descendants of Abraham, the “old Israel.” In the writers' perspective, these divine undertakings were superseded by the revelation through Christ and the understanding of the Christians as the new Israel.<sup>49</sup> Abraham's promised bodily descendants are replaced by his role as father of all believers. In none of the apocryphal Abraham texts is any attempt made to handle the promises to Israel explicitly; they are simply omitted from the retelling—which is, of course, a way of handling them.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, Gen 25:12–18, dealing with the descendants of Ishmael, is not taken up. Moreover, the rather distasteful (to moderns) story of the daughters of Lot, which serves as an etiology of the Moabites and Ammonites and of attitudes to them (cf. Deut 23:3), is completely absent. Perhaps this seemed irrelevant to the Armenian tradents. If our primary observations here are to the point, they

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47. The Armenian Abraham saga lacks future revelation to Abraham, for which the events of Gen 15 are a primary fruitful locus. Compare *Apoc. Ab.* ch. 9 and 4 Ezra 3:14–15. See Stone 1990, 71, where further sources are cited.

48. The subjects are found throughout early Armenian literature, which makes the incidents' omission from the Abraham saga the more striking. The increase of Abraham's seed is mentioned in texts nos. 11.28, 15.29, and 15.43. It should be remembered that texts 11 and 15 are closely related.

49. This omission is not found in such authors as Step'anos Siwnec'i, *Fragments of Commentary on Genesis* in *MH* 8th century, 2.109.

50. Ephrem in *Commentary on Genesis* 12 does deal explicitly with these promises (see Mathews and Amar 1994, 152–53) as does Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.4.11 (differently from Ephrem).

confirm the conclusion that the Abraham stories were of interest for their role in the history of salvation and not just because they are found in Scripture.<sup>51</sup>

What is more surprising is that the incidents of the four kings and Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham are given only in brief compass and not expansively (texts 2.8, 6.11-12, 7.13, and 12.15-16). The chronological problems involved in relating the two Melchizedek incidents, the one connected with Gen 14 and the other being the apocryphal story, are dealt with in text no. 6.11-12 (see the note there and also the discussion above, p. 12).<sup>52</sup> However, the typological potential of the four kings story is not fully realized, perhaps precisely because of the enhancement of Melchizedek's role elsewhere by the inclusion of the ascetic Story of Melchizedek within the Abraham cycle, even though the two Melchizedek incidents do not occur in any single text.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the general outline of the Armenian Abraham saga shows a profoundly Christian, and occasionally distinctive,<sup>54</sup> selection and editing of material drawn for the main part from the biblical Abraham texts and certain apocryphal sources. A Christian perspective is expressed not only by the (to us) anachronistic use of "Christ" for "God" (e.g., text no. 8.6), but by the introduction of the Melchizedek material and by many typological exegeses.<sup>55</sup> Certain biblical passages, particularly those relating to Abraham's descendants, are omitted completely. All these elements result in a story line that is quite exciting and which is read naturally as part of a revelation by God that is deemed unitary and seamless.

#### DATE OF THE ABRAHAM SAGA

Because virtually all the manuscripts we have seen are late, the Abraham saga cannot be dated from them except to a date *ante quem* of the fifteenth century (M8531). The material in M2679 of 981 C.E. does not bear distinctive signs of the embroidered Abraham saga, though it does have extrabiblical traditions. How-

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51. There are Armenian texts that are basically scholarly and learned. One such is in Galata 154, text no. 5 in this book. Probably the list of the Ten Trials of Abraham also belongs to this category, though it came to be included within narrative texts. See text no. 13 and its reuse in text no. 5. Numerous other copies exist, see the introduction to text no. 5. On Armenian learned literature related to the Bible, see Stone 1996b, 627-28.

52. In the section on "Melchizedek and the Story of Melchizedek," this incident is discussed in detail.

53. Compare the synthetic treatment by Gregory of Tat'ew with discussion of M6524 in Appendix 1, below.

54. The "covenant between the pieces" (Gen 15), which was used for Christian exegesis, is omitted, though the four hundred years' bondage, prophesied there, is found in our texts. See, e.g., Zak'aria Catholicos in *MH* 9th century, 178. See texts nos. 5.8 and 8.28 below.

55. These are pointed out in the notes to the individual texts.

ever, the tenth-century author Samuel Karmrġajorec'ĭ refers to the Mamrē story and so knows this element of the tradition in the tenth century.<sup>56</sup>

The Story of Melchizedek is known to St. Gregory of Narek (945?–1003), and, since its source is non-Armenian and most likely Greek, St. Gregory's familiarity with it only means that it was known in Armenia by the tenth century but indicates nothing about the date of its incorporation into the Abraham saga.<sup>57</sup> He knows about Melchizedek's living at Golgotha on the peak of the Mount of Olives. Of course the Armenian Abraham tales cannot be older than the fifth century, at which time the Armenians began to write their own language. Moreover, the date of the constitutive traditions is not necessarily the date of any particular literary formulation of that tradition.

Moreover, there exists a *Commentary on Genesis* attributed to the fifth-century author Elišē available in an edition prepared by Levon Khachikyan from extracts embedded in the *Commentary on Genesis* of Vardan Arewelc'ĭ (1200?–1271).<sup>58</sup> The editor attributes the text to the fifth-century Elišē, and it contains a number of distinctive traditions, such as that on the birds in Terah's time, considered in the next section. Somewhat similarly, it knows the metaphor of the dry wood that bore fruit for Sarah (see text no. 12.47), which occurs in a number of places (see note on text no. 12.46 for its possible sources). Neither of these cases is distinctive enough for us to date all of the Abraham saga back to the fifth century.

Nonetheless, Elišē's *Commentary on Genesis* has certainly served as a literary source for text no. 12 here. It shares traditions and formulations with that text in §§12.36, 12.38, 12.41, and 12.47 and is cited verbatim in §§12.43–44a, 12.44b–46, and 12.52 (somewhat more distant from Elišē's text). It has a less literal, but still clear, connection with text no. 2.7, 2.14, and 2.16 and possible connections also occur in text no. 4.5, 4.24. Thus, Elišē's *Commentary on Genesis* has served as a source for a number of texts relating to Abraham, though we cannot tell

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56. *MH* 10th century, 704 and 736.

57. Grigor Narekac'ĭ 1985, 622 (93.5); Ոչ ահա Մելքիսեդեկ յարինակ ճշմարտիդ ահաւորութեան ի Ձիթաստանեաց լերինն, ուր յետոյ ոտք մարմագելոյդ աստուծոյ գետեղեալ կացին, ի վերնոց անտի հրեշտակաց ի պտղոց տեղոյն իւղեցաւ. ուստի շիրմի սկզբնահարն պաշտպան եպիսկոպոսական արքայապատիւ ճոխութեամբ ի քէն հանդերձեալ նստաւ. . . . “Was not Melchizedek anointed as a type of your true fearsomeness on the Mount of Olives where afterwards the feet of God incarnate stood, by the celestial angels in the place of fruits (i.e., olives), where by the power put on You from the grave of forefather, protector through episcopal royal power, he sat . . .” (my translation). Observe the differing tradition preserved by Vardan Aygkec'ĭ, cited below in the note on text no. 7.2–7, which reflects yet another combination of Melchizedek material.

58. See Khachikyan and Papazian 2004; the original edition was Xač'ikyan 1992. The text is also reprinted in *MH* 5th century. Note the methodological and conceptual remarks of Zekiyani 1997, esp. 106–8.

whether it was by the intermediary of Vardan Arewelc'i or directly, since all our knowledge of the text comes from Vardan. Perhaps other, unpublished Armenian commentaries on Genesis might also contain source material utilized by the Abraham texts. The determination, however, must await the publication of those commentaries.<sup>59</sup> In any case, the issue becomes one of the "chicken or the egg": Do the apocryphal narratives draw upon the commentaries, or do the commentaries incorporate material drawn from the apocryphal narratives? In the case of text no. 12, the answer is clear, because of sections of word-for-word citation.<sup>60</sup>

#### SOURCES OF THE ABRAHAM SAGA: THE RAVENS

In a fine study, S. P. Brock compares the story of the ravens or crows (see item 3 in the table above) as it occurs in *Jub.* 11–12 with various forms of this story found in Syriac sources.<sup>61</sup> He lists eight points in which the Syriac sources differ significantly from *Jubilees*.

1. In *Jubilees*, the ravens are sent by Mastema, and in Syriac sources, by God.
2. Abraham is fourteen years old according to *Jubilees* and fifteen according to Syriac sources.
3. In *Jubilees*, Abraham is acting with his family; in Syriac sources his father sends him alone.
4. Abraham easily chases off the birds in *Jubilees*. In the Syriac sources, exhausted by his efforts, he converses with God, who identifies himself.
5. *Jubilees* introduces the invention of the seed plough as a result of the ravens incident. Syriac does not have the seed plough but introduces the ravens incident as a lead-up to Abraham's calling.
6. Abraham, fourteen years later, tries to divert his father from idolatry (*Jubilees*), and the Syriac sources put this event right after the ravens. In *Jubilees*, he tries to convert his brothers. Syriac mentions Nahor, but not in detail.
7. In the burning of the idolatrous temple, Syriac explicitly mentions it as of Qainan, the mighty god.
8. *Jubilees* then mentions Terah's departure to Canaan, with no causal connection between it and the temple burning. The Syriac traditions record that the Chaldeans threatened Terah, who consequently fled.<sup>62</sup>

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59. No published ancient commentaries are mentioned in Petrosyan and Ter-Stepanyan 2002.

60. The attribution to Elišē is commonly accepted, but perhaps it should be reexamined.

61. Brock 1978. See Michael the Syrian 2.6 (ed. Chabot 1899, 26–27), Gregor bar Hebraeus, *Chronography* (trans. E. A. W. Budge; repr., Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2003), 10.

62. Brock 1978, 140–41.

When the Armenian versions of this episode and its ensuing results are compared with this list, the following may be observed.

1. God raises up the crows (not Mastema or Satan) (2.3, 12.4, 14.2, 15.3); crows appear (4.2, 8.5).
2. Abraham was fifteen years old (2.3, 4.4, 12.5).<sup>63</sup>
3. His father sent him alone (2.3, 8.5, 12.5); Abraham went on his own (15.3); Abraham considers the birds and concludes that God exists (15.4).
4. Abraham, exhausted, sat down to rest (2.3, 12.5); he observed the luminaries, he was an astronomer, he received enlightenment (2.3, 12.5-6, 14.3, 15.4).  
He has conversation with God who reveals himself (2.4-5, 8.6-7; cf. 12.6).  
Abraham prays and the ravens disappear (4.3, 12.7, 15.5-6).  
The birds do not eat Abraham's fields (15.6).  
Terah departs for Canaan and stops in Haran (2.5, 12.9).  
Abraham at age sixty moves to Haran (14.5).
5. The invention of the seed plough is not mentioned (2, 4, 8, 15).
6. Abraham burns Terah's idolatrous temple (2.6, 4.6, 12.10, 14.6,<sup>64</sup> 15.7).
7. The temple's deity is not specified (all texts).
8. Terah dies, no date mentioned (2.7, 4.7, 12.12, 14.7).  
Abraham departed Haran at age seventy-five (4.8, 14.7);<sup>65</sup> at age seventy-two (8.7).<sup>66</sup>

Text nos. 2 and 15 are full stories, though text no. 15 concludes this episode after the burning of the temple, when Abraham's family is angered at him and he flees and ends up in Egypt; text no. 4 is brief, while text no. 6 is brief and poetic:

1. Concerning the flocks of crows in the fields,  
Who mentioned God on high and the ravens fled.
2. Then there came to his mind the clear thought,  
(That) it is the Creator, God, who does miracles.

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63. Abraham was fourteen years old: note George Syncellus 111 (Adler and Tuffin 2002, 138), also on Abraham as an astronomer.

64. Although John Malalas 57.1 (Jeffreys et al. 1986, 28) mentions Abraham's conflict with Terah over idolatry, he does not mention the burning of the temple. That is found in George Syncellus 112 (Adler and Tuffin 2002, 138). He dates the burning of the idols to Abraham's sixty-first year; cf. Symeon Metaphrastes 33; George Monachus 1.93.16-94.16.

65. Compare also George Syncellus 112 (Adler and Tuffin 2002, 140).

66. For a discussion of the age of seventy-five (the reading of the Masoretic Text and the LXX of Gen 12:4), compare George Syncellus 106-7 (Adler and Tuffin 2002, 130-31). This subject does not appear in the earlier chonography of John Malalas.

He burnt the house of idols secretly in the night,  
And the inventor of the mule perished with it.

Since in none of these instances does the Armenian agree with *Jubilees* against the Syriac traditions, the close connection of Armenian and Syriac becomes evident, or at least the dependence of Armenian on a form of the ravens tradition later than that in *Jubilees*.

Observe further that in the *Commentary on Genesis* by Elišē on Gen 11:32, we read: “A good secret was announced to Terah by God, and he went to Mesopotamia and dwelt in Haran in the land of the Chaldees, because he often visited the magi. The Lord punished them with birds, which ate their fields. And they established a guard to drive them out.”<sup>67</sup> This text knows a tradition of an attack of birds connected not with Abraham but with Terah. In the fragment of surviving text, no discovery of God is mentioned and no relationship with Abraham. What is clear is that, as far as this text goes, it knows a tradition different from that in the Syriac and Armenian sources, and different again from that in *Jubilees*.

#### SOURCES OF THE ABRAHAM SAGA: EARLY ARMENIAN COMMENTARIES ON GENESIS

In the course of this General Introduction and the introductions in the chapters below, we have referred quite often to the *Commentary on Genesis* attributed to Elišē *vardapet*.<sup>68</sup> It will not be discussed in detail in this section, for its intersections with the documents cited here are chiefly in the treatment of some detailed aspects of the narrative and it does not show easily identifiable points of direct contact with the texts of the Abraham Saga.

More like our texts, however, is the *Commentary on Genesis* attributed to Stepʿanos Siwnecʿi, an author of the late seventh and early eighth century.<sup>69</sup> This work, extant in fragments, was recently published.<sup>70</sup> It presents what is more or less a running narrative sequence of Abraham stories, in this respect resembling the literary texts published in the present work.

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67. Khachikyan and Papazian 2004, 113.

68. We have consulted three editions, but mainly Khachikyan and Papazian 2004; cf. Xaçʿikyan (Khachikyan) 1992. Xaçʿikyan’s text is reprinted with an introduction in *MH* 5th century, 765–929. The text is attributed to Elišē, but we regard this as uncertain. Its antiquity, however, is clear.

69. For the text of Stepʿanos Siwnecʿi, see “Fragments of the Commentary on Genesis” in *MH* 8th century, 1:105–29. Introductory information is to be found in *ibid.*, 95–104. In general, see also Thomson 1995, 138–39.

70. See *MH* 8th century, 95–105; the extracts were preserved in a number of manuscripts in the Matenadaran, the oldest of which is dated to the eleventh–twelfth centuries. In all these cases, the fragments of Stepʿanos Siwnecʿi’s commentary have been preserved as citations in other works.

In some sections, it follows the biblical narrative quite closely, but in the passages given below it seems to be familiar with material resembling the embroidered Abraham saga, though the resemblances are not specific enough to make it possible to posit a direct relationship. Note, in particular, its very simple form of the story of Mamrē, which exhibits the main points of the embroidered form of it given in the texts published here but lacks numerous distinctive details. Step'anos Siwnec'i's *Commentary on Genesis* is one of the oldest known witnesses to Mamrē story. The paucity of shared, explicit details prevents my saying that it was a direct source of the material in the Abraham saga, but the story must have developed in an anterior extrabiblical source of some kind.<sup>71</sup>

Different is the list of the Ten Trials of Abraham, which may well be a list or school text imported into Step'anos Siwnec'i's *Commentary on Genesis*. That in itself is an important piece of information, throwing light on Armenian biblical studies and scholasticism at a relatively early date.<sup>72</sup> The list's order and, to greater or lesser measure, its language are remarkably fixed down to the seventeenth century, which strengthens the idea of its independent origin.

What Step'anos Siwnec'i's *Commentary on Genesis* does show is that the Abraham saga has early roots in Armenian tradition, but the narrative texts we introduce to the public for the first time here are considerably more detailed and complex than the material adduced in the seventh–eighth century by Step'anos Siwnec'i. We translate the following extracts from the edition in *MH* 8<sup>th</sup> century, having supplied the subject headings and some annotations.<sup>73</sup>

#### STORY OF MAMRĒ<sup>74</sup>

(p. 109) 68 And it came to pass after this, God appeared to Abram while he was sitting by the oak-tree of Mamrē. 69 They say that Mamrē was Abraham's shepherd. 70 And having seen Abram's good life, his strong faith and his merciful conduct, he learnt his virtue from him and acted mercifully.<sup>75</sup> 71 And, one day, Mamrē gave mercy to poor people and through hope in that, mercifully he planted his oaken staff in the earth. It struck root, greened and became a great

71. See Stone 1999, esp. 24; and Stone 1996b, 627–28.

72. See n. 90 below, where the four versions of this list extant in the documents below are discussed. Many more copies exist, in different types of manuscripts.

73. Page numbers are indicated in the translation. The section numbers of *MH* are indicated.

74. See above pp. 21–22.

75. Mamrē's merciful character is discussed in text no. 11.12. Above, p. 21, the story of the three loaves of bread is discussed. It is not found in Step'anos Siwnec'i, nor is the whitening of a black Mamrē and his sheep. Likewise, the story of the Annunciation to Abraham in Step'anos Siwnec'i lacks many specific details found in the Abraham saga.

tree<sup>76</sup> by which Abram, going off alone, prayed and contemplated the divine things<sup>77</sup> and looked at the coming of guests on the road to him.

#### ABRAHAM'S HOSPITALITY AND THE THREE MEN

72 And he promised in his mind that he would not eat bread without a guest and he passed many days in hunger and did not see a guest, for Satan had obstructed the guests' path.<sup>78</sup> 73 And while Abram was sitting by the oak of Mamrē, lifting up his eyes he saw and behold, 3 (men) were coming above it.<sup>79</sup> 74 Abram arose, ran to greet and bowed down to them upon his face. 75 And, having brought them, he sat them down by the oak of Mamrē, for he recognized the might of their being in the(ir) coming, that they went above the earth and did not tread on (it). 76 And Abram hastened to Sarah and said, "Hasten and knead three measures of flour; make three loaves with finest flour." 77 And having taken the milk and butter, which is butter (*another word*) and the unleavened bread that she had baked, he brought (it) and put it before them. 78 And Abram ran to the herd, that is the flock, took a calf to slaughter and, having brought it, had it roasted and set (it) before them. 79 Abram recognized that he is God,<sup>80</sup> for that reason he did not order his servants to attend (them), but he himself and Sarah served the Lord's face.<sup>81</sup> 80 The Lord (p. 110) said to him, "Where is your wife, Sarah?" 81 Abraham said, "Behold, she is in the tent." 82 And the Lord said, "In this time I will come to you, on the very same day, and Sarah will have a son in her bosom." 83 When Sarah heard, she laughed in her mind, 84 and the Lord said, "Why did Sarah laugh?" 85 Then Sarah was afraid (and) said, "I did not laugh, but I was afraid, Lord." 86 The Lord said, "No, you laughed." 87. And see that Sarah served but she conceived. On account of (her) modesty she slighted the promise of good news, (and) it was allotted to her children to remain in servitude for 400 years.<sup>82</sup>

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76. The complex incident of the oak tree, the shade, and so on, as found in the Abraham saga is not found here: compare text no. 2.9–10, 11.16, 11.18–19, 12.19–20, and 15.17.

77. See texts nos. 2.11–12, 11.16–20. The oak tree as a place of prayer is highlighted in text no. 12.23. Compare the similar phraseology but different context in text no. 12.8. In 12.36 it says of the oak of Mamrē that "Mamrē's field became a royal seat and the oak tree more than paradise of Eden."

78. Satan's obstruction of travelers is a widespread theme: see texts nos. 2.12, 11.24–25, 12.24, and 15.25. The number of days, forty, is absent from Step'anos Siwnec'i.

79. Compare the similar description in text no. 12.27.

80. Contrast texts nos. 2.13 and 12.28–29, where Abraham is of two minds whether the traveler is God. 11A.28 says that Abraham did not know that he was the Lord, compare 12.40, 15.29. This is a prominent theme throughout text no. 12.

81. That is, in the Lord's presence. Abraham and Sarah served the Three Men themselves; see the developed discussion of this in texts nos. 2.15, 12.28, 12.37–38, and 12.42.

82. Not all the Abraham saga texts connect this servitude with Sarah's laughter. The length of the servitude is 460 years in 11.29 and 15.30. See further the discussion of this



88–96 *Story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom.*

97–110 *Abraham receives the commandment of circumcision and discussion of its significance.*

#### THE BINDING OF ISAAC

111 And Abraham being 100 years, and Sarah 90, Isaac was born, which means, “laughter.” 112 And when Isaac was 15 years old,<sup>83</sup> and some say 27, He asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. 113 And Abraham gladly was willing to slaughter Isaac, because he knew that He can raise up even from the dead. 114 Because the calf, which the Lord ate with the angels on the day of the good news, (when) he blessed (him) with seed, after its being eaten he saw it gamboling with (its) mother.<sup>84</sup> 115 And Abraham was made firmer in his faith because, in Isaac’s sacrifice, he took the ram from the tree of Sabek and, having been delivered, Isaac lived. 116 And the tree<sup>85</sup> indicates the Virgin Mary and the Cross, and the ram—Jesus.<sup>86</sup> 118 And when Isaac was 37 years old, Sarah died. 119 And Sarah was Abraham’s sister from (his) father, daughter of Terah. 119 And Abraham’s mother’s name was Malk’at’u and Sarah’s mother’s (name was) Zmrut.<sup>87</sup>

#### TEN TRIALS OF ABRAHAM

120 And Abraham encountered 10 trials from God.<sup>88</sup>  
 First, the going forth from (his) land and family (people), and this is a great trial, to leave his native land and homeland.  
 Second, the dragging of Sarah to the house of Pharaoh.  
 Third, contention and strife between his and Lot’s shepherds.

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figure in note 13 on 11A.29. It is missing from text no. 12. The same idea occurs in Step’anos Siwnec’i, *Fragments of Commentary on Genesis* in *MH* 8th century, 2.108, §49. He too knows four hundred years. Th. M. van Lint contributed to the translation of this sentence.

83. See 4.22 note, on fifteen as the ideal age of a youth. The origin of the number twenty-seven is unknown to me.

84. The resurrection of the calf occurs in texts no. 8.29 and 15.29 in connection with the meal of the Three Men. Its implications for the Binding of Isaac are not taken up in the Abraham saga texts. It is an old tradition, see note 95 on text no. 8.29.

85. The tree’s name, Sabek, is mentioned here and in texts nos. 4.22, 6.6.1, 7 passim, 8.31, 11.45, 14.14, and 14.45. See also the introduction to text no. 4 and note on text no. 4.22.

86. Observe the clear typology here laid forth.

87. The names are not found in the Abraham saga texts.

88. On the Ten Trials, see below, texts nos. 5.2, 6.6–7, 6.13, and 14.12. Except for the poetic treatment in text no. 6, the other texts are identical but with some variation in order. The broad circulation of this list evidences its independent origin.

Fourth, not taking of the booty of Sodom.

Fifth, it was said to him that his seed would increase like the stars of heaven, and he did not doubt.

Sixth, that he delivered Hagar into Sarah's power.

Seventh, that he made Ishmael and his mother apart from him.

Eighth, that Abimelech took Sarah.

Ninth, the He said to him to be circumcised in the time of (his) old age.

Tenth, indeed a great and fearful trial from God, is that, that God asked his son as a sacrifice.

121 And it is known that there was a famine twice, and Abraham was in foreign lands; and Sarah was taken from him twice and Abraham said (that she was) his sister; and she remained untempted by sin, for they gave her back to Abraham and they gladly blamed Abraham (saying), "Why did you say that she (is) your sister." Pharaoh gave Hagar. 122 Abimelech the Philistine king of the Gerarites (gave) 1,000 staters of silver. 123 And the reason that Sarah remained untested (is that) her/his buttocks swelled.<sup>89</sup> 124 And an angel of the Lord God appeared to the two kings and said, "That woman is wife of that man. Give her to her lord and do not sin against the servants of the living God, as David says, 125 (Ps 105:15) . . ."

#### AFFINITIES OF ARMENIAN

Brock's study of the relationship of Syriac with *Jubilees* in one complex incident and our application of the criteria he isolated to the comparison of Armenian, Syriac, and *Jubilees* shows that the Armenian resembles the Syriac sources rather than *Jubilees*. This is, of course, not surprising, for *Jubilees* did not exist, apparently, in Armenian, and *Jubilees*—like traditions in Armenian—may have come through an intermediary source, most likely Syriac or Greek. Below I mention certain of the Abraham traditions in the Greek chronographies. The incident of the ravens does not appear in the Greek *Palaea*, while parallels to various narrative Abraham traditions are to be found in Greek chronographers and are recorded in annotations to the text.

I am conscious of the limited nature of the treatment above and I indicated that to investigate fully the genealogy of the traditions taken into the Armenian Abraham saga would extend beyond the limits set for this research. Indeed, further studies of individual episodes and incidents by experts in the Greek and Syriac traditions at least, will be required, like Brock's of the Ravens story.

#### EDITORIAL PROCEDURES

When Armenian has numerals, in English numerals are also used.

I use capital letters for *nomina sacra*, personal and proper names. Certain manuscripts use a minuscule letter following the end of sentence punctuation

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89. See also Khachikyan and Papazian 2004, 115. Contrast text no. 4.11 and note there.

mark “:”. In addition, in some manuscripts, a majuscule letter follows a major break marked by a single dot. Although these instances contradict modern Armenian usage, we have preserved them in our transcriptions. In the translations we give the usual English forms of biblical names, unless the Armenian is itself exceptional.

The sigla for Armenian manuscripts follow the system of AIEA.<sup>90</sup>

In the translation, we have introduced elided possessives in instances where the words have a suffixed demonstrative, without marking them all specifically.

In the texts, aorist participles are used (and often translated) as finite verbs (cf. Meillet 1913, 115). In such instances as required, “and” is added in brackets. We do not seek absolute consistency in this usage, but to produce a readable English text.

For convenience, I use an author-date documentation system. Full details of all the works to which I refer are recorded in the bibliography at the end of the book.

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90. See [http://aiea.fltr.ucl.ac.be/aiea\\_fr/home\\_french.htm](http://aiea.fltr.ucl.ac.be/aiea_fr/home_french.htm) and also Coulie 1994.