Book Review

Seta Dadoyan, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World: Paradigms of Interaction, Seventh to Fourteenth Centuries. Volume One: The Arab Period in Armīnyah, Seventh to Eleventh Centuries* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2011), pp. xxvii-208. Price: $42.95 (hardcover).

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Seta Dadoyan, whose work on the Fāṭimids stands as a staple in medieval Armenian history, recently published her trilogy *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World.* These ambitious books center on several significant points about the nature of Armenian society and the place of Armenian Christians in the broader Islamic world. Aimed at both Islamicists and Armenologists and navigating both Arabic and Armenian sources, they provide an overview of Armenian-Muslim relations from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries. These books join recent studies in dismantling the assumption that there was a single and united medieval Armenian society. Significantly, they argue that we cannot see Armenian experiences as separate from broader Near Eastern civilization. Dadoyan's work paints a broad picture of relations between Armenians and Muslims, suggesting overarching patterns to make sense of diverse accounts and various events over multiple centuries. The first volume, reviewed here, is subtitled "The Arab Period in Armīnyah." It introduces readers to Armenian society and religiosity from the fifth century (Eznik and the Council of Šahapiwan) before focusing on Umayyad and ʿAbbasid rule in the province and culminating in the rise and fall of the Arcruni and Bagratuni.

Historians frequently turn to Armenian sources as outside verification of political, social, and religious developments in other places. This potentially implies that Armenians are other, or even exotic, rendering them observers instead of participants in Near Eastern civilization. We need to pay more attention to setting Armenian experiences into the broader currents of Near Eastern history, whether we identify them as Islamic (as Dadoyan does here) or Iranian (as is more common in studies since the 1970s). The challenge is not related to a civilizational divide, but rather the nature of Armenian historiography and the structure of history as an academic discipline. Armenians

are certainly not intrinsically foreign to the Islamic world, but Armenian sources support a clear divide between Armenian Christians and the "foreigners" (*aylazgi*), a term frequently employed to refer to Arab Muslims.[1] Further, as historians we are trained in *either* Armenian *or* Islamic history. Bridging that disciplinary divide requires engagement with multiple historical subfields that typically do not overlap. As Dadoyan points out, the "so-called objectivity" of the historian is an impossible ideal because our training informs what we look at and how we engage with the material at hand.[2] It should come as no surprise, then, that writing interdisciplinary history is hampered by our training. Predictably, the types of questions Islamicists might ask about the Arab conquest or Umayyad and ʿAbbasid rule in Armenia are not always answered in Dadoyan's book because she has her own filters and concerns.

Dadoyan openly notes in her prologue that she "avoided debates on specific issues" and deliberately did not engage with "what some call 'scholarship out there,'" preferring instead "relatively old sources such as Gibbon."[3] But these debates and scholarship are precisely what would bridge the disciplinary divide and pull Armenia into dialogue with Islamic history. The first volume of her trilogy is organized as traditional dynastic history: Chapter 2 deals with the Arab conquest; Chapter 3, the Umayyad period; and Chapter 4, the ʿAbbasid period, but a broader discussion about alternative periodization in Islamic history would have prompted fascinating questions about how to understand Armenia as a caliphal province. For example, Dadoyan explains that after the death of "the Prophet ʿAlī and the rise of the Meccan Umayyads" in 40AH/661CE,[4] the Umayyads created the caliphal province of Armenia in 73AH/693CE. She describes this as a correction of the commonly-cited 82AH/701CE. There is no demonstrably right or wrong answer here, as the inexactitude of the date is linked to the various Arab military campaigns under Muḥammad b. Marwān against Byzantine and Armenian forces in the North. The problem is not whether we choose the *fitna* of Ibn al-Zubayr or the Marwānid Reforms as the impetus for the creation of caliphal Armenia. Instead, we need to address how we might write a chapter about "Umayyad Armenia" given two main problems. First, as Dadoyan herself argues, the Marwānids created caliphal Armenia. Sebēos's treaty between Tʻēodoros Ṙštuni and Muʿāwiya promises no Arab oversight in the province and, subsequently, Łewond's history gives no indication that there were Sufyānid governors in Armenia.[5] Al-Ṭabarī

1. Thomson, "Christian Perception of History – the Armenian Perspective," in Van Ginkel, Murre, & van Lint (ed), *Redefining Christian Identity* (Louvain: Peeters, 2005).

2. Dadoyan, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World* (New Brunswick: Transaction P, 2011), 2.

3. Dadoyan (2011), xxv – xxvi.

4. Dadoyan (2011), 43 – 44. Presumably, the reference to "the Prophet ʿAlī" is a typo and should be read as ʿAlī, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad. The designation of Umayyads as Meccans reappears later in the book to refer (correctly) to Abū Sufyān. While we might also count ʿUthmān as a "Meccan Umayyad," the Umayyads who rose to power in 40AH/661CE in fact attacked Mecca twice, once in 64AH/683CE and again in 73AH/692CE, even reportedly starting a fire that threatened the Kaʿba itself. It was the heart of Zubayrid territory.

5. Sebēos, *Patmutʻiwn,* ed. Abgaryan (Erevan:

even mentions a Zubayrid governor named Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra stationed there in 67AH/687CE,[6] so it seems unlikely that the Sufyānids ever controlled the territory directly. Second, we only have ʿAbbasid-era sources about the Umayyad period. Sebēos's *Patmutʻiwn* cuts off at the end of the first *fitna* and Łewond wrote his *Patmagirkʻ* after the rise of the ʿAbbasids. Our earliest Arabic sources on caliphal Armenia, such as the works of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, al-Yaʿqūbī, and al-Balādhurī, are from the ninth century. Telling conquest- and Umayyad-era history of a caliphal province without problematizing the extant sources bypasses an enormous body of literature on Islamic historiography.

Dadoyan's attempt to circumvent the problem of reliability of extant sources puts the accounts about caliphal Armenia into a broader history, i.e. looking for patterns that make sense of Umayyad and ʿAbbasid history based on our knowledge of Islamic history *writ large.* Yet her focus on "paradigms of interaction" presents the reader with a frustrating conundrum. On the one hand, Dadoyan is committed to showing diversity and heterodoxy within Armenian society. On the other hand, she proposes that we generalize history, as if "Armenians" and "Muslims" over the centuries always interacted with each other in predictable ways that we can now identify and isolate as paradigmatic. If "[t]he point is that the Armenian experience in the medieval Near East is too diverse and complicated to respond to simplistic and quasi-epic constructions,"[7] then how can the reader make use of "paradigms of interaction"? Every historian looks for shapes to give meaning to our sources and to the events we study, but this surely does not signify that there are broad patterns governing all of the shapes over multiple centuries.

To take a specific example, one of Dadoyan's paradigms of interaction is the proliferation of treaties stipulating Armenian dhimmitude. Dadoyan argues that "the issue of strict authenticity [of any particular treaty] is secondary to the historicity of the tradition of so-called Islamic Oaths to Christians in medieval histories."[8] While scholars have revisited the issue of authenticity recently,[9] she is undeniably correct that Armenians and Muslims frequently signed multiple comparable treaties throughout the entire period of this study and beyond. Still, it is unclear how a paradigmatic framework would allow for an examination of historicity. To support her argument, Dadoyan presents the treaty between Ḥabīb b. Maslama and the people of Dabīl/Dwin, the caliphal capital of Armenia. She compares English translations of the treaty from al-Balādhurī's ninth-century Arabic *Futūḥ al-buldān* and Samuēl Anecʻi's twelfth-century Armenian *Hawakʻmunkʻ i grocʻ patmagracʻ.* As they appear here,

Haykakan SSH Gitutʻyunneru Akademiayi Hratarakčʻutʻyun, 1979), 164; Jinbashian, "Arabo-Armenian peace treaty of A.D. 652," *Haykazean hayagitakan handēs* 6 (1977-8), 169 – 174.

6. al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk,* ed. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879 – 1901), II 750: Muhallab is placed over Mawṣil, Jazīra, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, a province known since M. Bates's 1989 article as "the Umayyad North"; Laurent & Canard, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam* (Lisbon: Librairie Bertrand, 1919/1980), 410 n. 6.

7. Dadoyan (2011), 3.

8. Dadoyan (2011), 59.

9. See Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) and Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the early Islamic Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

these texts are nearly verbatim. She pulls in references to comparable Ayyūbid-, Mongol-, Safavid-, and Ottoman-era treaties and concludes: "it can be argued that irrespicive [*sic*] of their authenticity—which cannot be established anyway—in medieval Armenian histories the tradition of oaths should be studied as a single broad aspect of Islamic-Armenian relations."[10]

With this example, Dadoyan casts a wide net to speak about the long history of Armenian-Muslim relations, but it is in fact a remarkable comparison that can illuminate a much more specific, *historicized* moment: the twelfth century. It suggests that Samuēl Anec'i or his informants had access to Arabic sources and that these informed the Armenian historian so much that he even referred to the city by the Arabic Dābil [*sic*][11] instead of by the Armenian Dwin. This does not necessarily diverge from the findings about other Armenian histories written in twelfth-century Ani,[12] but it does suggest that this is part of a much broader literary interaction that should be contextualized and examined in greater depth instead of as an unmoored paradigm, comparable to the Prophet's Medinan oaths and the Ottomans alike.

While this is a serviceable example of how the paradigmatic approach favors the generalized retelling of history, the matter is moot anyway since Dadoyan's sources cannot be verified. Samuēl Anec'i's text actually covers the Arab conquest of Dabīl/Dwin very briefly and does not mention Ḥabīb b. Maslama at all.[13] Dadoyan's footnote for Samuēl Anec'i's rendition of the treaty points the reader not to the *Hawak'munk'* itself, but to a passage from a modern study of Armenian history that does not mention Samuēl at all. Without recourse to the exact passage in Samuēl Anec'i's text, we cannot make any conclusions about a twelfth-century rendition of the treaty or its potential relation to earlier Arabic accounts, let alone the similarities between it and Ayyūbid-, Mongol-, Safavid-, and Ottoman-era treaties.

We need historians who are brave enough to step back from the minutia, to gather up all of the details, and to shape them into some sort of narrative. Dadoyan takes a look at the big picture and challenges modern presumptions about categorical identities in the Near East. Significantly, the first volume of *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World* is approachable and encourages students of Armenian history to read the Armenian texts against the grain. From a research-oriented perspective, it introduces a number of interesting questions that Dadoyan will hopefully continue to advance in future publications.

10. Dadoyan (2011), 61.

11. The Arabic name for Dwin appears as Dābil consistently in this volume and should instead be read Dabīl. Also, it is unclear why it appears with a macron in this particular instance, since this passage purports to translate the treaty from Armenian and, accordingly, should not have long vowels.

12. Kouymjian, "Mxit'ar (Mekhitar) of Ani on the Rise of the Seljuqs," *REA* 6 (1969), 331 – 53 and Kouymjian, "Problems of Medieval Armenian and Muslim Historiography: the Mxit'ar of Ani Fragment," *IJMES* Vol. 4 No. 4 (1973), 465 – 475. Granted, Mxit'ar Anec'i was probably familiar with Persian sources rather than Arabic.

13. Samuēl Anec'i, *Hawak'munk' i groc' patmagrac'*, ed. Tēr-Mik'elean (Vałaršapat: Ējmiacni tparan, 1893), 80.