

Byzantophilia in the letters of Grigor Magistros?

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The letters of Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni demonstrate the multivalent methods by which Grigor negotiated being an Armenian aristocrat in service to the foreign power of Byzantium. While they display a Hellenic aesthetic and make use of the norms of Byzantine letter-writing culture, they nonetheless show that Grigor Magistros maintained a strong Armenian cultural identity even when holding a Byzantine title.

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The early eleventh-century Byzantine annexation of the autocephalous Armenian kingdoms intensified Byzantine cultural penetration into the multi-cultural geographies of Eastern Anatolia. Byzantine-Armenian contacts in this period were of course not new: Armenians had long had paths for integration into the Byzantine world.¹ However, the period of the annexation required those Armenians who did not leave Armenia to serve the *Rhomaioi*, to engage with and, at times, *participate in* sources of legitimate authority which derived from the Byzantine presence, either as a substitute for or in addition to their own prior indigenous authoritative structures. Examining these types of contacts seems to suggest a model of Byzantine-Armenian encounter which was rooted in conflict and difference: on the one hand, Armenians who moved into Byzantium must have ceased, in at least some sense, to be (the same kind of) Armenian, and on the other, the movement of Byzantine concepts and culture into Armenian space was, by definition, overtly imperializing and transformative.

However, this model scales down badly, especially when we consider an individual Armenian and his contacts with Byzantium or if we conceptualize eastern Anatolia as a liminal space which was neither Byzantine, nor Islamicate, nor Armenian – but instead a shifting combination of these three as well as other elements, not limited to Turkic, Persianate, and Syrian. The initial model of conflict and difference is both oppositional and monolithic: Byzantine versus Armenian, with both of these categories being

1 N. Garsoian, 'The problem of Armenian integration into the Byzantine empire', in H. Ahrweiler and A. Laiou (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, D.C. 1998) 53–124.

discrete – and it is supported by one recently-dominant strand of scholarship on the autocephalous Armenian kingdoms which has imagined these tenth- and eleventh-century Armenian polities as independent, singular, and nationalistic. However, as the most compelling of recent Armenophone and Western-language analyses have noted,² the evidence supports a plural and inclusive definition of ‘Armenian’, in both a doctrinal and a cultural sense. There were a multitude of Armenias and ways of being Armenian in the eleventh century, and the existence of independent Armenian kingdoms did not produce an isolated ‘Armenia’ which, suddenly and for a brief time, existed outside Byzantine and Islamic cultures and power-structures. Medieval Armenians could access and perform layered loyalties and self-definitions: Bagratuni (or Artsruni, and so forth), Armenian Christian (or Chalcedonian), of Armenian (or Arab) descent, loyal to one empire or another (or both, in sequence or simultaneously). They made alliances and gave loyalty free of particular institutional, ethnic, or covenantal constraints, but instead in accordance with a *Realpolitik* which dynamically responded to the pressures of political realignment in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus.³

Therefore, in order to consider the process of Byzantine cultural imperialism in this contested multi-cultural area it is useful to look at blurry edges: people who shifted back and forth between supposedly-clean definitions of ‘Byzantine’ or ‘Armenian’ – who moved through spaces, both physical and psycho-geographic, which were simultaneously Byzantine *and* Armenian. Grigor Pahlavuni, commonly known in both contemporary literature and modern historiography as Grigor Magistros after his Byzantine title, was an example of a man embedded in local, non-Byzantine power structures who acquired a place within Byzantine imperial authority when it became politically necessary to interact with such authority.⁴ Grigor Pahlavuni acquired the last name of *Magistros* in the Armenian historical record after receiving that title from the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos in 1044 in exchange for his Pahlavuni ancestral domains. Grigor’s surrender of his patrimony – the town of Bjni and the fortresses of Kayean and Kayston in Siwnik⁵ – to the Byzantines was part of the empire’s mid-eleventh century absorption of the previously independent Armenian polities. In concert with the increase in Seljuk Turkish raiding, this absorption would spell the end of Armenian self-governance in Greater Armenia in the medieval period. Grigor, a member of the influential princely family of

2 T. Greenwood, ‘Armenian neighbours (600-1045)’, in J. Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge 2008) 333–5; H. Bartikian, ‘Byzandian ev Haykakan petakanutyunê X-XI dd’ (Byzantium and Armenian statehood in the 10th-11th centuries)’ in *Studia Armeno-Byzantina*, vol. 1 (Erevan 2002) 655–78.

3 S. Dadoyan, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World: Paradigms of Interaction: Seventh to Fourteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, NJ 2011).

4 On Grigor Magistros, see most recently K. Mat’ewosyan, ‘Grigor Magistros Pahlavunu arjazazutyunê Keč’arisun’ (‘The Inscription of Grigor Pahlavuni Magistros in Keč’aris), in *Pages of History of Ani-Širak (Collected Articles)* (Erevan 2010) 138–149.

5 ‘The historical compilation of Vardan Arewelci’, trans. and ed. R. Thomson, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989) 193.

the Pahlavuni, which traced its ancestry to the old Armenian Arshakuni royal dynasty and more particularly to St. Gregory the Illuminator,⁶ was intimately involved in the political events which would eventually result in this disintegration of the Bagratuni kingdom at Ani, the last independent Armenian polity. For handing over his own portion of that kingdom to the Byzantines, Grigor would become *magistros* – but would also receive the office of *doux* of Mesopotamia, and would in this fashion serve the Byzantine imperial project during its most extensive and final push into Eastern Anatolia.

Some scholars have seen Grigor Magistros' philhellenism as a straightforward source for his political activities: that is, he was willing to exchange his patrimony for Byzantine titlature and powers, after a long history of choosing pro-Byzantine factional alliances within the Bagratuni court, because he was personally driven by and attracted to Greek culture. Yarnley expressed this view most clearly, stating that 'what he sought was to be a member of the Holy Kingdom of the Romans, because the Byzantines were heirs of the culture which meant most to him.'⁷ This is, in the light of more modern views of Armenian *Realpolitik*, a simplification; it was clearly possible for Armenians to shift their loyalties between Byzantine, internal, and Islamic emirate interests in order to maintain personal, aristocratic, or polity-level power, and Grigor's intense and unusual philhellenism did not automatically make him a supporter of a Byzantine agenda. To assume that it did also assumes a Grigor Magistros who was, as an Armenian, extremely isolated from the larger frame of Eastern Anatolia – in short, to present an Armenia which was so isolated from the surrounding cultural geographies that philhellenism should be read as an endorsement of every aspect of Byzantium.

This essay will therefore examine how Grigor Magistros *communicated* and *portrayed* his Byzantine service to his fellow *nax'arars* – the Armenian hereditary landholding nobility. It examines several of Grigor's letters in which he discussed his work while serving as *doux* of Mesopotamia, with reference to his opinions about events, accomplishments, and commands, paying particular attention to those that he found worth mentioning when describing his service to Byzantium.

In telling his fellow Armenians about his activities, Grigor did not shy away from acknowledging the authority under which he was operating – he was clearly working for Byzantine interests – but he nevertheless maintained a personal autonomy and individual differentiation from that authority. His letter collection was undoubtedly Hellenophile, fluent in and enamoured with the classical Greek education which animated his life as a teacher and scholar, and equally fluent in and enamoured with Byzantine-style literary communication and maintenance of cultural ties. Nevertheless, when he described his service to Byzantine masters in his letters, he did not demonstrate an affection for Byzantine imperial policy as much as an employment of the aspects of Byzantine

6 This ancestry for the Pahlavuni is claimed by catholicos Nerses Shnorhali, the Graceful, who was Grigor Magistros' great-grandson. Nerses Shnorhali, *Vipasanut'ivn (Poetical Work)*, ed. M. Mkrch'yan (Erevan 1981) 108–10.

7 C. J. Yarnley, 'The Armenian Philhellenes: a study on the spread of Byzantine religious and cultural ideas among the Armenians in the 10th and 11th centuries AD', *Eastern Churches Review* 8/1 (1976) 50–1.

culture which he found valuable, while attempting to maintain personal and cultural loyalty to his own native Armenia.

The surviving letters of Magistros, composed between approximately 1030 and 1059 CE, comprise eighty-eight letters to forty-six correspondents. Sixty-seven are to twenty-six known persons and twenty-one have unclear or missing addressees.⁸ Grigor's most frequent correspondents were other Armenians of similar erudition and political achievement: the catholicos Petros Getadarj, the archbishop Yovhannes Siw-nec'i, and the bishop of Mekk' (also named Grigor); but his collection also includes philosophical letters composed to a Muslim emir named Ibrahim and multiple letters addressed to Grigor's own students, as well as some letters which speak directly about Grigor's activities as a Byzantine agent in possession of a Byzantine title and office. The most discussed of this latter type are those letters concerning Grigor's persecution of the T'ondrakian sect on Byzantine orders.⁹

The epistolary collection¹⁰ was written in a convoluted high-style Armenian which has been a notorious bane of scholars; perhaps the most common adjective applied to Grigor Magistros in modern scholarship is 'inaccessible'. However, this is a fiction: Grigor's letters were not inaccessible to his contemporaries. He was known among them for his erudition, not for his incomprehensibility. The eleventh-century Armenian historian Aristakes Lastivertc'i wrote of Grigor that he '... was a sagacious man deeply versed in divine books, and there was none like him.'¹¹ What is particular to Grigor's letters is the interpolation of Grecizing grammatical structures and loanwords into his Armenian, alongside an elaborate classical syntax, and that he – like a middle Byzantine letter-writer¹² – employed a plethora of Hellenic and Biblical references in his epistolary communication. Like his Byzantine contemporaries (including persons such as Michael Psellos, Nikephoros Ouranos, and Theophylact of Ochrid)¹³, Grigor laced his letters with references to Homer, the Psalms, Plato, Porphyry, Aristotle, and the Church Fathers.¹⁴

8 K. Kostaniants' (ed.), *Grigor Magistrosi T'ght'ere* (Alexandropol 1910) 249–50.

9 Grigor Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, ed. K. Kostaniants' (Alexandropol 1910) 64–66, 148–70; see F. C. Conybeare, F. C., *The Key of Truth, A Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia* (Oxford 1898) 141–51, for English translations, although these translations have lately been called into question by Federico Alpi in his forthcoming thesis from Leiden University.

10 This paper will use the numbering of the letters as they appear in the Kostaniants' edition.

11 Aristakes Lastivertc'i, *History, (Patmut'iwn Aristakisi Lastivertts'woy)*, ed. K.N. Yuzbashyan (Erevan 1963) 62.

12 M. Grünbart, 'L'epistolografia', in G. Cavallo (ed.), *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo. 3. Le culture circostanti. Volume I. La cultura bizantina* (Rome 2004); S. Papaioannou, 'Fragile literature: Byzantine letter-collections and the case of Michael Psellos', in P. Odorico (ed.), *La face cachée de la littérature byzantine: Le texte en tant que message immédiate* (Paris 2012) 289–328; A. Riehle, 'Epistolography as autobiography: Remarks on the letter-collections of Nikephoros Choumnos', *Parekbolai* 2 (2012) 1–21.

13 A. Weller, *Imagining Pre-Modern Imperialism: The Letters of Imperial Agents Outside the Metropole*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Rutgers University (2014) 50–1.

14 A. Sanjian, 'Gregory Magistros: an Armenian Hellenist', in S. Vryonis, J. S. Langdon, J. S. Allen, and A. Kyprianides (eds.), *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.* (New Rochelle, NY 1993) 142–3.

The twelfth-century Armenian poet Nerses Shnorhali described Grigor's writing as being 'measured in the manner of Homer, expressed in the manner of Plato, steeped in the art of the Greeks, learned from their sages'.¹⁵

The presence of the long heritage of Greek learning in Armenia is part of the political and cultural interpolation of Hellenic, Persianate, and Arabic influences on the Armenian plateau: it is an example of how Armenia was not an isolated culture in the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, Grigor's epistolary collection belonged to someone who was, even beyond the standards of an educated man of his time and place, immersed in that Greek learning: both conversant and invested.¹⁶ Grigor was demonstrably familiar with Byzantine rhetoric, having produced a commentary on the *Grammar* of Dionysius Thrax which contains some of the basic building blocks of the Byzantine epistolographic tradition.¹⁷ Whether he acquired this knowledge through the original Greek, or by working from the earlier Armenian commentary by Step'anos Siwnec'i, the Byzantine epistolographic tradition was certainly part of Grigor's education. This education included the rhetorical arts, as an anonymous 1240 CE biography of his famed great-grandson Nerses Shnorhali would later describe Grigor's youthful training as comprising the 'internal and external sciences', Armenian and Greek literature, and ending in an attainment of the ranks of rhetor and philosopher.¹⁸ As an adult, he transmitted this education to younger Armenian students, teaching 'various subjects pertaining to the *trivium* and *quadrivium*'.¹⁹

It is within this context that Grigor Magistros' letters must be considered, along with his other writings, which include translations of Plato and a thousand-line poetic retelling of the Bible. Much of Grigor's writing displays a type of imitation of the sixth-century Armenian school of translation known as the Hellenizing School.²⁰ Specifically, it makes use of the hyper-Hellenic lexicon which is characteristic of the Hellenizing School.²¹ It displays an extensive use of words with prefixes calqued from Greek to deal with philosophical terminology, an exemplary feature of Hellenizing Armenian from the earliest translations of Dionysius Thrax onward,²² as well as occasional examples of Hellenizing syntax, such as the presence of accusative-infinite constructions and the

15 Nerses Shnorhali, *Vipasanuntium* [Epic] (Venice 1820) 410.

16 This investment is particularly visible in his translations of Greek works into Armenian, which may possibly include Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* alongside others, such as Euclid.

17 N. Adontz, *Dionisii Frakiiskii I armianskie tolkovateli* (St Petersburg 1915) 221–49.

18 L. Alishan, *Hayapatum: Patmut'iwn Hayots'* (Venice 1901) 108–10.

19 Three letters from Magistros to his students appear in the *T'ght'ere*, 105–107, 234–237. For the *trivium* and *quadrivium* in medieval Armenia, see J.-P. Mahé, 'Quadrivium et cursus d'études au VII^e siècle en Arménie et dans le monde byzantin', *Travaux et Mémoires* 10 (1987) 159–206.

20 G. Muradyan, 'Greek authors and subject matters in the *Letters* of Grigor Magistros', *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 35 (2013) 29–77.

21 G. Muradyan, *Grecisms in Ancient Armenian* Hebrew University Armenian Studies 13. (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA 2012) 24.

22 Muradyan, *Grecisms in Ancient Armenian*, 28–9.

genitive absolute.²³ However, two points of differentiation between Grigor and the Hellenizing School must be maintained. First, Grigor's Hellenizing elements were mostly localized to his lexicon and only appeared in a limited fashion in his syntax.²⁴ Second, and more significantly, Grigor was writing in imitation of a group of translators who were many centuries removed from his circumstances, on the other side of the hiatus in Greek-Armenian relations caused by the Arab conquests of the eighth and ninth centuries.²⁵ His use of the lexical and syntactical habits of the Hellenizing School was a conscious archaizing move which gave his writing an intellectual cachet similar to that employed by Byzantine writers who made use of pseudo-Attic forms and syntax in order to demonstrate their erudition.²⁶ The use of this hybrid grammar and syntax in his epistolary collection demonstrates the depths to which Grigor was educated both in his native tongue and in Greek – and how much the two languages were intertwined in his most expressive and intellectual accomplishments. His letters are thus described as 'unique in Armenian literature [...], conscious imitations of Byzantine epistolography.'²⁷

Grigor's choice of Hellenizing archaisms did function as an in-group signal to his peers; we should not forget that all of Grigor's letters had an audience, and that – with some exceptions²⁸ – he wrote with an expectation of being understood, and presumably with a hope of demonstrating his great intelligence and depth of knowledge. His correspondence with the catholicos Petros Getadarj is a prime example of an ideal audience for Grigor's 'flood of references', as Getadarj was an equally politically active man who moved in the same aristocratic circles as Grigor himself. If anyone was capable of interpreting Grigor's Hellenizing and obscure style, it would be the catholicos. Getadarj's extensive contacts with Byzantine authority in Constantinople – contacts which have been interpreted as pro-Byzantine in terms of convincing Gagik II of Ani to journey to

23 Grigor Magistros, 'Letter to Lord Petros at the time of the tumult' (K2), *T'ght'ere*, 5.

24 G. Muradyan, 'Style hellénisant des *Progymnasmata* arméniens dans le context d'autres écrits originaux', in *Actes du Sixième Colloque international de Linguistique arménienne*, SLOVO 26-27 (1999) 83-94.

25 For an overview of these topics, see N. Garsoian, 'The Arab invasions and the rise of the Bagratuni (640-884)', in R. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, I (London 1997) 116-42; and T. Greenwood 'Armenian Neighbours (600-1045)', 333-64.

26 For one contemporary Byzantine example amongst many, see Nikephoros Ouranos, letter 13 in J. Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle* (Paris 1960) 259; where Ouranos back-forms new Homeric verb forms – and he assumes that his audience will be able to interpret those verb forms, that is to say will be similarly familiar with Homer's grammar.

27 Sanjian 140.

28 See particularly A. Sanjian and A. Terian, 'An enigmatic letter by Grigor Magistros', in A. Terian (ed.), *Opera Select Teriana: A Scholarly Retrospective* (New Rochelle, NY 2008) 85-95, which discusses Letter K12, addressed to Yovhannes the archbishop of Siwnik', whose deliberately obscure metaphors concerning fish are intended as a symbolic pointer towards a particular scriptural passage (Matthew 17:24-27) concerning the disposition of money obtained from donors. Also worth noting is Letter K71, addressed to the Muslim Emir Ibrahim on philosophical principles, which is perhaps the most difficult of the letters stylistically and claims that philosophy can only be achieved with substantial effort (see Theo van Lint, forthcoming publications, for detailed analysis.)

Constantinople where he too would be persuaded to renounce his throne (but never to convert to Chalcedonian Christianity)²⁹ – also provided him with a common source of cultural influence. If Grigor was to produce letters in a particularly ‘Byzantine’ mode, or letters which particularly reflected Byzantine letter-exchange practices, it would be in the correspondence with Getadarj – and indeed, it is within these nine letters that we see substantial evidence for a common appreciation of particularly ‘Greek’ references.³⁰

Letter K2, which was sent to Getadarj in consolation when the city of Ani was sharply displeased with his actions³¹ – that is, in response to his encouragement of Gagik II’s transfer of sovereignty to the Byzantine emperor – demonstrates the range of Grigor’s Hellenizing references. He discussed the travails of famous philosophical and historical figures as being analogous to Getadarj’s current situation, attempting to inspire and reassure the catholicos and strengthen his resolve to do well by the Armenian people. He commented on the exile of Pericles at the hands of Appinos, ‘արտալածի սակս իրաւացի գոլոյ նմա ի խուժանէ’ – ‘as a result of an uprising, despite being righteous’,³² and then listed similar exemplars: Plato, sold to Sicily; Socrates, killed by ‘the stubborn’; the Homeric Melampus; Demosthenes; and Odysseus, here called ‘the rhetor’. These figures from Greek history are held up to Getadarj as models for behaviour and strength in times of opposition from his native land, as all of them – in Grigor’s framing – were unjustly exiled by their own people. Grigor chose them as a framing preamble to a more traditional exhortation based on Scriptural references. Grigor presented Getadarj’s situation as being a common one for the righteous, writing, ‘For which of those living, whose conduct is according to the will of God, will not be in opposition to the world?’ and then demonstrating that there have always been those opposed to righteous men, dating from the time of Moses and Aaron and culminating in those Jews who allowed Christ to hang on the Cross.³³ As a final step in this chain of contextualizing references, Grigor moved to Aristotelian philosophy as transmitted through the works of the sixth-century Armenian philosopher David the Invincible, and from there to a discussion of bodily and spiritual ills with reference to Hippocrates.³⁴ The entire effect is certainly one of a ‘thicket of references’. They were employed to great rhetorical effect – letter K2 positioned Getadarj as being a worthy successor to Greek statesmen, righteous martyrs, and eventually the first catholicos, Grigor the Illuminator,

29 Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades: Tenth to Twelfth Centuries: the Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, ed. A. Dostourian (Belmont, MA 1993) 77-79; Lastivertc’i 84-5. See also J. Shepard, ‘Skylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s and the role of Catalon Cecaumenos’, in *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 11 (1975-76), and G. Dédéyan (ed.), *Histoire du peuple arménien* (Toulouse 2007) 285.

30 For a general survey of Grigor’s Greek references in his letters, see G. Muradyan, ‘Greek authors and subject matters in the *Letters* of Grigor Magistros’, *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 35 (2013) 29-77.

31 ‘ի ժամանակի խուժան յանէլոյ ի քաղաքին ի վերայ նորա’ – ‘at the time of the tumult rising against him in the city’, Magistros, ‘Letter to Lord Petros at the time of the tumult’ (K2), *T’gh’t’ere*, 4.

32 Magistros, ‘Letter to Lord Petros at the time of the tumult’ (K2), *T’gh’t’ere*, 5.

33 Magistros, ‘Letter to Lord Petros at the time of the tumult’ (K2), *T’gh’t’ere*, 5.

34 Magistros, ‘Letter to Lord Petros at the time of the tumult’ (K2), *T’gh’t’ere*, 7-9.

while demonstrating Grigor's great friendship with the catholicos and his credentials in assuring him about his political and spiritual situation. That is, by using this series of references, including those which recall pagan antiquity, Grigor claimed the authority of the philosopher – and then extended that authority to shore up Getadarj, whose authority had been damaged by the disorder which led to his exile from Ani.

This sort of referentiality is entirely characteristic of the Atticizing style of middle Byzantine letter writers.³⁵ Although Grigor adorned his references with local, specifically Armenian examples (that is to say, David the Invincible and Grigor the Illuminator) as well as Scriptural and classical allusions, the general pattern is strikingly similar to, for example, the letters of Leo, metropolitan of Synada³⁶ or Michael Psellos.³⁷ In performing this sort of referentiality in personal correspondence, Grigor may be unique amongst contemporary Armenians. While the Hellenizing School did inject a substantial amount of Greek literature into Armenian literary culture, these translations were mostly of third to sixth century Christian literature like the works of the Church Fathers, alongside Philo and Josephus and some classical philosophy and rhetoric.³⁸ Briefly, there is little translated literature from Greek to Armenian which actually dates from the Byzantine period.³⁹ It seems that for most Armenian intellectuals, Byzantine literature was not a model to be emulated⁴⁰ – even where Greek was the language of intellectual aspiration, it was the *language* and its classical expression in philosophy and the theology of the Church Fathers which was aspirational, not Byzantine stylistics. While not forgetting that in writing to people like Petros Getadarj, Grigor was certainly writing with the expectation of being understood – and with the expectation that his allusions and referents would have an efficacious meaning to his recipient (letter K2 was a letter of consolation, after all) – one must nevertheless presume that Grigor's Byzantine habits of letter-writing style were particular to Grigor. They were thus a place where Byzantine culture had a visible influence on him outside the norm of his colleagues. For whatever reasons – and these may remain obscured by the impossibility of directly enquiring of Grigor what he personally found useful or pleasurable about allusion and referentiality – here we can see that this kind of writing *did* have a particular utility for Grigor.

35 M. Mullett, 'Originality in the Byzantine letter: the case of exile', in A. R. Littlewood (ed.), *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music* (Oxford 1996) 39–58.

36 M. P. Vinson (ed.), *The Correspondence of Leo, Metropolitan of Synada and Syncellus*, *Dumbarton Oaks Texts 8* (Washington, D.C. 1985). See especially the introduction.

37 For the most recent analysis of Psellos' double erudition in both biblical and classical allusion, see S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2013).

38 A. Muradyan, *Grecisms in Ancient Armenian*, (Leuven, Paris, Dudley MA 2012) 3–5.

39 The exceptions being the *Hexameron* of George of Pisidia and letters sent to Armenia by Greek patriarchs.

40 R. Thomson, 'The reception of Greek literature in Armenia', in J. Koumoulides (ed.), *Greek Connections: Essays on Culture and Diplomacy* (Notre Dame 1987) 41.

However, was the presence of Byzantine stylistic choices in his letters a consequence of Grigor's exposure to Byzantine incursions into Armenian cultural space? Did Grigor's appreciation for and emulation of the cultural heights of Greek learning correspond to an attempt to move through newly Byzantinized areas? – or, at the very least, areas in which a newly powerful Byzantine presence could not be denied? Grigor certainly displayed cultural fluency, but his reasons for such fluency are more difficult to determine. The direction of cultural influence is a particularly significant issue: was Grigor's acculturation to Byzantine practice a result of Byzantine expansion into Armenian space, or was it constructed by Grigor in order to better move through spaces now occupied by Byzantines? In short, how much of Grigor's Hellenism was a constructed identity which he displayed through his letters, for a deliberate purpose?

It is worth recalling that Grigor Magistros was not the only Armenian in the eleventh century to express positive opinions toward Byzantine culture or even toward Byzantine imperial power. By the eleventh century, historians like Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i and Stephen of Taron presented a very positive and glorious representation of Byzantium, particularly of its emperors.⁴¹ Drasxanakertc'i went so far as to describe Constantine VII as follows, in the address to a purported letter to Constantine VII: 'Pious autokrator and emperor Constantine, crowned by God and glory, great and victorious king of the universe, faithful and pious, protector of the illumination of the people and truest conciliator that exists.'⁴² Similarly, Stephen of Taron described with great praise the campaigns of the Byzantine emperors against the Arabs⁴³, and Aristakes Lastivertc'i, despite blaming the Byzantine annexation of the autocephalous Armenian kingdoms for the ruin of Armenia, went so far as to blame the advent of the Seljuk Turks on rebellions against and within the Byzantine state.⁴⁴ Arutjunova-Fidanjan suggests that this predominance of positive imagery of Byzantium in Armenian historiography was a direct result of the Byzantine presence in and expansion into Armenian spaces. Inevitable interaction with Byzantine power produced a historiographical record of that power. In general, the range of Byzantine – and Arabic and Turkic – persons and locations included in Armenian historiography is remarkable, especially when compared to the historiographies produced within Byzantium or the Islamic world.⁴⁵ The thought-world of Armenian intellectuals was not closed or isolated; it was deeply interpenetrated with the activities of the polities which surrounded Armenia.

How then did Grigor Magistros portray his own complex web of loyalties and cultural affinities? His letters – which, like all epistolary communication, were a

41 V. Arutjunova-Fidanjan, 'L'image de l'empire byzantin dans l'historiographie arménienne médiévale (Xe-XIe s.)', in *L'Arménie et Byzance: histoire et culture*. Byzantina Sorbonensia 12 (1996) 10-11.

42 Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*, ed. K. Maksoudian, (Erevan 1973) 190-1.

43 V. Arutjunova-Fidanjan, *Les Arméniens chalcédoniens sur les frontières orientales de l'empire* (in Russian) (Yerevan 1980) 15-17.

44 Lastivertc'i 33.

45 Arutjunova-Fidanjan, 'L'image de l'empire byzantin dans l'historiographie arménienne médiévale (Xe-XIe s.)', 14.

presentation of a constructed self, a self which travels to friends and colleagues over distances and was both designed and deliberately projected – demonstrated the multivalence of his loyalties, and his attempts to move through a Byzantinized cultural space while maintaining both his own autonomy and some of his Armenian cultural markers. We have already seen Grigor's profound attachment to and easy employment of Byzantine modes of writing in his letters; but the content of those letters also included information on the practical ways that he negotiated the Byzantine presence in Armenian spheres.

The letters shed some light on Grigor's involvement with the intense politicking surrounding the accession and then the deposition, at Byzantine instigation, of the Armenian king Gagik II of the Bagratuni kingdom of Ani. This complicated episode merits further discussion. To do so we have to return to the late tenth century and the Iberian Bagratuni prince, the *kouropalates* David of Tayk'/(Tao). David was a distinguished and successful leader: he was praised by Stephen of Taron as being 'a source of peace and prosperity for all of the East',⁴⁶ and his court was a great cultural centre. He became entangled in Byzantine politics during the revolt of Bardas Skleros. He fought on the side of Basil II and was rewarded by Basil II with grants of territory which included Theodosiupolis. However, David's personal ties to Bardas Phokas, which had first led him to support Basil II, later caused him to join in with Phokas' rebellion. As a consequence of Phokas' defeat, sometime around 990 CE, David changed his will to favour the Byzantine emperor. While the exact terms of this document remain obscure, after David's death, Basil II came to claim what he believed to be his legacy, beginning a programme of annexation which would involve both Vaspurakan and Iberia. These annexations tended to involve Armenian nobles exchanging their lands for Byzantine titles and territories further west, in Cappadocia, especially during the 1020s.⁴⁷

During this era of Byzantine advance, the most prominent Armenian prince to retain his independence was the Bagratuni Gagik I of Ani (989-1020 CE). After his death, the kingdom of Ani was divided between his sons, Yovhannes-Smbat and Ashot IV, but the two quarrelled over the division, and the historian Aristakes Lastivertc'i reported that Basil II arbitrated between them⁴⁸. Yovhannes-Smbat may have seen an opportunity to acquire Byzantine imperial backing, as in January 1022, the catholicos of the Armenian church, Petros Getadarj, brought Basil II Yovhannes-Smbat's will, appointing him as his heir. This later became the legal basis of Byzantine attempts to annex Ani, beginning in 1041 CE. Between 1022 and 1041, numismatic evidence suggests that there was ongoing and significant contact between Byzantium and the Bagratuni court – for example, several thousand Byzantine copper coins have been found in

46 Asolik, *Histoire Universelle*, ed. F. Macler, III (Paris 1917) 162.

47 That is to say, the Artsruni princes who exchanged their domains for lands and offices in Cappadocia and moved to Sebasteia with 14000 men and their families.

48 Lastivertc'i 10.

the excavations at Ani and at Dvin.⁴⁹ When Yovhannes-Smbat and Ashot died in 1040 and 1041 respectively, Michael IV tried to claim Yovhannes-Smbat's land, but met resistance in the form of Ashot's son, Gagik II.

Gagik II ascended to the Bagratuni throne unexpectedly, at least from the Byzantine point of view. They were expecting Yovhannes-Smbat's adopted son, Sargis, to succeed, as he had received Byzantine sanction. This failed when the *sparapet* (a hereditary title for the supreme commander of the armed forces, held in the eleventh century by the Bagratuni and Artsruni dynasties) Vahram Pahlavuni, Grigor's uncle, along with over thirty other Pahlavuni family members including Grigor himself, crowned Gagik as king Gagik II in 1042 CE. Bagratuni independence would be short-lived, however, as the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos summoned Gagik II to Constantinople under the threat of military action. Gagik was persuaded to go to the Byzantine capital by the pro-Byzantine faction at Ani, which included the aforementioned Sargis and the catholicos Petros Getadarj, and while there he was persuaded to give up his kingdom after being threatened. In 1045 Ani became Byzantine territory and Gagik received the themes of Charsianon and Lykandos in Cappadocia in exchange. By 1049 all the other autocephalous Armenian polities in Greater Armenia had followed suit.⁵⁰ Grigor Magistros' involvement in this gradual dismantling of independent Armenian power was not passive; his political life was intimately intertwined with the fate of Ani, from his efforts to enthrone Gagik II in opposition to his own son-in-law Vest Sargis, to his longstanding friendship with Petros Getadarj, and to his later conflict and strained relations with the selfsame Gagik II. It is possible that Grigor was exiled by Gagik, under the influence of Vest Sargis, who remained a powerful force at court even after Gagik II's accession.

In his letters, Grigor described a relationship with the young king which was severely strained. This was not expressed in terms of pro- or anti-Byzantine feeling. Grigor wrote that the king was youthful, inexperienced and overly influenced by 'infamous courtiers'⁵¹ – conceivably Vest Sargis and the catholicos Petros Getadarj – both of whom certainly had moments of pro-Byzantine political affiliation. These 'infamous courtiers' had turned Gagik II against Grigor Magistros. This is more demonstrative of the internecine fighting at the court of Ani than of some pro-Byzantine impulse of Grigor's which poisoned his belief in Gagik II. In fact, the most significant evidence in the letters of the strain in the relationship between Gagik II and Grigor occurs in a letter sent in reply to Gagik II's offer of reconciliation. Grigor rejected the offer, claiming that

49 Greenwood, 'Armenian neighbours', 362.

50 Sanjian, 'Grigor Magistros: an Armenian Hellenist', 132-3. This narrative is assembled from Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn (Berlin 1976) 366-7; Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Antaki, *Histoire*, ed. A. Vasiliev (*Patrologia Orientalis* 47) 459-69; Aristakes Lastivertc'i 11-25; Matthew of Edessa, 44-9; and *K'art'lis C'xovreba: The Georgian Royal Annals and Their Medieval Armenian Adaptation*, ed. S. Rapp (Delmar, NY 1998) 281-4.

51 Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, pp. 52-3, 67-9.

he could not associate with a king who was surrounded by such troublesome individuals.⁵² Grigor's political entanglements at the court of Ani did not arise, as seen from the evidence of his letter collection, from the presence of Byzantium. They are instead about Grigor's personal interactions with members of the court whose shifting and multivalent loyalties sometimes intersected with Byzantine interests.

It was only after Gagik II had been enticed to Constantinople, detained and then offered Melitene in exchange for the kingdom of Ani – a scheme reportedly masterminded in part by Petros Getadarj – that Grigor Magistros exchanged his own lands for Byzantine titlature as well. In approximately 1045 CE Grigor travelled to Constantinople – not for the first time – and remained there for several years. During his time there, he composed his *Thousand-Word Poem* or *Magnalia Dei*, a versification of the Bible.⁵³ He also became closely acquainted with the emperor, Constantine IX Monomachos, under whom he conducted a military campaign which earned him the Byzantine office of *doux* and to whom he had surrendered his ancestral lands in exchange for territory in Mesopotamia.⁵⁴ Grigor then governed these areas, performing various services for the Byzantine state, including the suppression of the T'ondrakian heretical movement, until his death in 1059, whereupon he was buried in the Church of the Holy Theotokos in Hasankale, an estate of the extended Pahlavuni clan.⁵⁵ The course of Grigor's political life does not demonstrate a love of Byzantium as much as an ability to shift his allegiances to a location which could give him continued power and influence. In doing so, he showed himself to be similar to other Armenian princes in the mid-eleventh century, like Gagik II of Ani, giving up his kingdom in 1045 in exchange for the Byzantine themes of Charsianon and Lykandos in Cappadocia.⁵⁶

The record in the letter collection of Grigor's service once he had obtained a Byzantine title also merits examination: which events, accomplishments, and commands did he include when describing his work for the Byzantine emperor in his epistolary communication? It is clear that Grigor's military service, in which he was sent on campaign by the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos against the Seljuk Turks along with the generals Katakalon Kekaumenos and Liparit, was *not* mentioned significantly in the letters. We know about this campaign primarily from the historiographical sources, both Byzantine and Armenian (Skylitzes, Lastivertc'i, Matthew of Edessa).⁵⁷ What *is* present in Grigor's letters are claims that he rebuilt the infrastructure in his newly assigned

52 Magistros, *T'ghere*, pp. 62-3.

53 For translation and commentary, A. Terian, *Magnalia Dei: Biblical History in Epic Verse by Grigor Magistros. Critical Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Hebrew University Armenian Studies 14 (Jerusalem 2012).

54 Lastivertc'i 18-19; see also J. Shepard, 'Skylitzes on Armenia in the 1040s and the role of Catakalon Cekaumenos', 296-311.

55 Terian, *Magnalia Dei*, 7.

56 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, trans. J.-M. Chabot, 3 vols (Paris 1901) III, 133.

57 Skylitzes, *Synopsis* 366-7; Lastivertc'i, *Recit des malheurs* 11-25; Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades*, 44-9.

territories in Byzantine Mesopotamia. In a letter addressed to Sargis Vardapet, Grigor described how he had constructed towns, villages, palaces, and churches in Mesopotamia and Vaspurakan, and had kept the southern flank of his territory free from invasion by the Seljuk Turks.⁵⁸ The portrait of Grigor is of a competent administrator and defender of territory; this territory is not conceptualized in terms of his ancestral lands of Bjni, but instead territory in Mesopotamia given to him by the Byzantine emperor. It is worth noting that this is a report of his activities to a fellow member of the Armenian aristocracy, not to a Byzantine; yet it was still important to Grigor to demonstrate that he was taking excellent administrative care of his holdings.

Grigor's best-described action during his tenure as *doux* of Mesopotamia was his suppression of the T'ondrakian heretical sect, which he discussed in three letters. Grigor tells us that the T'ondrakians had been plaguing the Armenian highland for over one hundred and seventy years, despite being anathematized by 'thirteen patriarchs of Greater Armenia and numerous bishops and innumerable priests'.⁵⁹ He described the sect – perhaps with some exaggeration – as being a combination of all previous heresies in Armenia, 'embracing all that was ever heretical – soothsaying, palmistries, incantations and magical arts, wicked poisons, all in the single brew of their heresy...'⁶⁰ Other sources, like Lastivert'i, tell us that the T'ondrakians were practitioners of an anti-establishment, anti-ecclesiastic popular faith movement, with an emphasis on both simplicity of life and a rejection of the 'visible church', claiming instead that the church was simply where the faithful were gathered.⁶¹ Recent scholarship has recognized the T'ondrakians as, figuratively, one fruiting body of a continuously-present sectarian mycelium in Armenia which originated in divisions between Syriac and Hellenic variants of Christianity in the fifth century and which had also produced the Paulicians amongst other 'heretical' groups.⁶² The T'ondrakians, like the Paulicians before them and in turn the Borborits before *them*, were in part socio-economic movements, emphasizing social equality between men and women and renouncing the authority of the priesthood. Some of the intense persecution of the T'ondrakians under the autocephalous Armenian kingdoms clearly resulted from the threat this group presented to the established control of the *nax'arar* nobility.⁶³ Additionally, like the Paulicians and the Borborits, the

58 Magistros, *T'ght'ere*, 65.

59 Grigor Magistros, 'Answer to the Syrian Catholicos', *Book of Letters*, 153-4.

60 *Ibid.*, 154.

61 Grigor of Narek, 'Epistle of the Most Blessed Vardapet Grigor of Narek to the Magnificent and Great Order of Kjav, concerning the beliefs of the cursed T'ondrakians', *Book of Letters*, xcii, 498-502; Lastivert'i, *Recit des malheurs*, 86-91.

62 S. Dadoyan, *The Fatimid Armenians: Cultural and Political Interaction in the Near East* (Leiden, New York, Cologne 1997); J. Russell, 'The last of the Paulicians', *Hask hayagitakan taregirk'*, 7-8 (1995-1996) 33-47; Z. Pargossian, 'The frontier existence of the Paulician heretics', *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 6 (2000) 203-206.

63 S. Dadoyan, *The Fatimid Armenians*, 17-80; E. Ter Minassian, *Mijnadaryan Aghandneri Z'agman yev Zargatsman Patmutyunits* (From the History of the Origin and Development of the Medieval Sects) (Yerevan 1968).

T'ondrakians were a problem for the Byzantines in their attempts to control Eastern Anatolia. Byzantine-arranged or Byzantine-supported destruction or deportation was common to all these heretical groups, as Byzantine politics in Western Armenia consistently required the elimination of dissident Syriac factions.⁶⁴ When Grigor Magistros followed the command of Constantine XI Monomachos to eliminate the T'ondrakians⁶⁵, he was acting in the tradition of centuries of Byzantine administrators attempting to deal with sectarian movements on the Armenian plateau – and also acting in accordance with the desires of the Armenian *nax'arar* nobility.

The longest and most detailed of Grigor's letters, in which he discussed the T'ondrakians and his dealings with them, was addressed to the catholicos of the Syrians at Amida (Letter K67), who had shown some support for members of the sect. This letter is essentially a heresiological letter, in which the heretical tendencies of the T'ondrakians are explained in graphic detail. Most significantly, however, Grigor asked the Syrian catholicos not to show the T'ondrakians any mercy. In the following letter Grigor described his suppression of the sect with pride, and explicitly associated this suppression with the command of the Byzantine emperor Monomachos, on whose orders he had gone to T'ondrak, their stronghold, and endeavoured to root out 'the hidden embers of wickedness'.⁶⁶ He specifically associated his admonishments of the T'ondrakians with the Byzantine command to adhere to imperial Orthodoxy: 'Leave us and our land in Mesopotamia, and all who are under the authority of the holy kingdom of the Romans – do not teach or confirm your evil heresy either through letters or speech.'⁶⁷ It is by Byzantine command that Grigor was engaged in this suppression and it was Byzantine authority which he invoked in completing it. However, he also took credit for his own personal contribution. In doing so, he contrasted his actions with those of the previous Byzantine generals in Mesopotamia, making it explicit that he was *not* a Byzantine: he claimed that he did not physically harm any of the heretics, but instead was merciful towards them, in opposition to the violent punishments inflicted on them by previous Byzantine generals in Mesopotamia, who commonly put out their eyes or murdered them outright.⁶⁸

What does the example of Grigor Magistros' self-presentation in his epistolary correspondence tell us, then, about the effects of consistent contact between Byzantine and

64 Mesrop Mashtots was commanded by the Byzantine court to eliminate the Borborits between 415 and 423 CE; see Movses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, Book III/57; for the Byzantine resettlement of the Paulicians, see N. Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* (The Hague 1967); C. Ludwig, 'The Paulicians and 9th-century Byzantine thought', in L. Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* Papers From the Thirtieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1996 (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT 1998) 23-35.

65 Grigor Magistros, 'Letter to the Syrian Patriarch' (K67), *T'ght'ere*, 154.

66 Grigor Magistros, 'Letter to the Syrian Patriarch' (K67), *T'ght'ere*, 158.

67 Grigor Magistros, 'Letter to the Syrian Catholicos' (K68), *T'ght'ere*, 167-8.

68 Sanjian, 'Grigor Magistros: An Armenian Hellenist', 137.

Armenian interests during the eleventh century? Grigor was not invested in maintaining Byzantine imperial ideology; instead he had to cope with the presence of that ideology in the form of Byzantine efforts to dismantle independent Armenian sovereignty in the mid-eleventh century. Nevertheless, he was aesthetically attracted to and compelled by Greek literature and philosophy. This aesthetic appreciation is widely visible in his letters, which, in their employment of referentiality and use of epistolographic tropes, such as the idea of the letter as an image of the soul of the sender, were particularly Byzantine despite being written in Armenian and mostly addressed to other Armenians. In Grigor's letters Byzantine imperialism existed as a constant undercurrent which problematized his employment of Greek literary culture in communicating with his fellow Armenians. An imitation of Byzantine culture was suggested by Grigor's epistolary production, which made use of Byzantine letter-writing tropes. Coupled with Grigor's political career and his shifts in loyalty between strictly Armenian and Byzantine power, his letters present a view of Byzantine imperialism as a kind of mimetic infusion. Was Grigor threatened by Byzantine imperialism? His choices in composing letters to other Armenians suggest that if he was, this threat was not as important to him as was the aesthetic attraction of Greek literature and culture – or that he was able to separate the two in his own mind satisfactorily.

Grigor's epistolary expressed the multivalent methods by which he negotiated being an Armenian aristocrat in service to a foreign power: his use of Byzantine cultural norms, his affection for and attraction to 'Hellenic things', and his persistent Armenian identity, even when he acted under Byzantine command. Furthermore, this was not just any foreign power, but Byzantium – a power which had extensive cultural capital in Grigor's own home culture, as well as being in the process of dismantling that home culture's political independence. While Grigor was an Armenian intellectual, his own aesthetic preferences valued Greek culture highly. He could not simply reject Byzantine imperial ideology and culture any more than he could simply adopt it by virtue of its Hellenism.