

Treasonous Translations: Resisting Roman Hegemony in Medieval Armenia

At the beginning of the 12th c., Pōłos Tarōnac'í (Paul of Tarōn) wrote a treatise against dyophysitism in which he reflects upon differing attitudes towards translation between Romans (Byzantines) and Armenians. Pōłos asserts that Armenians have sifted through the crap of Roman literature to extract what is useful, while Romans have not bothered to read anyone else's work because of their pride and laziness. Pōłos contends that Armenians are able to use the Romans' own work against them through the act of refining them through translation. This paper argues that Pōłos' apologia for Armenian translations was not only a personal understanding of the subversive power of translations, but belonged to a larger current of thought regarding translations that can be detected in earlier translations and their reception that emerged in response to the century of Roman annexation of Armenian territory between 966 and 1064. Furthermore, this essay suggests that the rhetorical contextualization of translation in Armenia in the 10th and 11th centuries should be viewed as a twist on Roman-'Abbāsīd imperial discourse surrounding translation and authority.