

VARDAN ASLANYAN

ARISTOTLE AS THE BASIS OF NEOPLATONIC INSTRUCTION IN THE ARMENIAN TRADITION

Abstract

This article examines the role of Aristotle in the formation and development of the Neoplatonic educational system within the Armenian intellectual tradition from late Antiquity to the modern era. While Neoplatonism remained the dominant philosophical paradigm in Armenia for more than a millennium, Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy provided its indispensable propaedeutic foundation. Particular importance is attributed to David the Invincible, whose commentaries established Aristotelian logic as the preparatory stage of philosophical education and shaped the Armenian *cursus studiorum* for centuries. The article traces the development of this curriculum through medieval monastic schools and universities, highlighting the interaction of Greek, Syriac, Arabic, and Latin traditions and the continuous renewal of Aristotelian scholarship through translations, commentaries, and manuscript transmission. Special attention is devoted to Armenian and European manuscript collections, which testify to the central place of Aristotelian texts in Armenian intellectual life. Against the view that Aristotelian studies declined after the Middle Ages, the article argues for their continuity into the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries through new translations and printed logic handbooks. It concludes that Aristotle was not merely received in Armenia but functioned as a fundamental component of Neoplatonic education, shaping Armenian philosophy, theology, and scientific thought.

Keywords

Aristotle, Armenia, Logic, Neoplatonic Instruction, Curriculum

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1. The Reception of Neoplatonism in Armenia

According to historical sources and the current state of research, Neoplatonism was the dominant and enduring paradigm in the Armenian tradition throughout late antiquity, the entirety of the Middle Ages, and into modernity. Neoplatonism was readily adopted in the Armenian world through its pagan, Christian, and later Arabic branches, both in Greek before the creation of the Armenian script and, after that milestone, in the form of translations and multilingual commentaries. This reception significantly advanced Armenian philosophy, theology, and various scientific fields. And since Aristotle always held an indispensable introductory and explanatory role within Neoplatonic instruction, I aim to delineate the significance of Aristotelian studies in the Armenian Neoplatonic tradition throughout its entire duration.

To provide some context, there is evidence of a century-long presence of Armenian scholars at Hellenistic centers of education dating back at least to the first century BCE. Some of these scholars even rose to prominent positions in the School of Athens and other Hellenistic centers,¹ which introduced the philosophical treatises of the classical period to Armenian intellectual circles. However, we can speak of the genuine incorporation of Aristotle and Neoplatonism into the Armenian tradition only after the emergence of the Armenian script. This major development initiated a fundamental translation project known as the Hellenizing School,² which systematically transmitted ancient philosophical thought to the Armenian region. The first translators clearly recognized the need to enrich the linguistic framework and vocabulary of the newly formed writing system in order to translate demanding philosophical texts, such as those of Aristotle, and, of course, to compose their own treatises and commentaries. Even the late ancient Armenian historian Moses of Chorene, a disciple of Mesrop

¹ Aslanyan (2022) pp. 101-2; Zakaryan (2025) pp. 27-31.

² Dating between the 460s and the 730s. See more in Aslanyan (2022) pp. 88-95; Calzolari (2016) pp. 47-70; Muradyan (2014) pp. 321-48; Terian (2008) pp. 25-44. The translation of fundamental philosophical works, though, is not limited to the era of Hellenizing School: Plato's translations into Armenian, for instance, were completed in the 10th and 11th centuries.

Maštoc³ (the developer of the Armenian alphabet), reports in his *History of Armenia* that Mesrop and the Patriarch Sahak sent a new group of students to Alexandria and Athens on account of the difficulties encountered with word formation.⁴ The task of this group was to master Greek grammar and to find new ways of translating philosophical and grammatical terms accurately into Armenian. The scholars of the Hellenizing School created the necessary tools for translation by finding suitable equivalents for Greek prefixes and suffixes, without which the translation of philosophical works would have been unimaginable: e.g., ἐκ-/սպ-, ὡς-/սպ-, δια-/սրաւ-, παρα-/սար-, ἐπι-/մակ-, συν-/բաղ-հաւ-, ὑπο-/սոսո-, ὑπερ-/զեր-, ἀνα-/վեր-, προ-/նախ-, προσ-/սոս-, ἀπο-/բաց-, and so on.

Researchers have also provided lists of works translated by the Hellenizing School.⁵ Among the most important translations produced during this period are: Aristotle's *Categories*, *Peri Hermeneias*; Porphyry's *Isagoge*; Iamblichus' *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories and Commentary on the Isagoge*; the pseudo-Aristotelian *On the Cosmos* and *On Virtues and Vices*; David the Invincible's *Definitions of Philosophy* and *Commentary on Isagoge*, as well as his commentaries on *Aristotle's Categories* and *Prior Analytics*. It is worth noting that the Syriac philosophical corpus, created during the corresponding period, consists of the same works by Aristotle, Pseudo-Aristotle and Porphyry that were translated into Armenian.⁶ Moreover, the Hellenizing School translated two works of the *Organon* at the end of the fifth century and beginning of the sixth century: the *Categories* and *On Interpretation*,⁷ which were notably the same treatises that Boethius translated into Latin around the same period (approximately 510-524). And although, according to the late medieval author John of K'ina, only these two works and the *Analytics* were known to the Armenian world before the fourteenth century,⁸ other treatises by Aristotle, including apocryphal

³ Armenian transliterations are given in the *Revue des Études Arméniennes* (REArm) system.

⁴ Moses of Chorene, *History of Armenians*, III, p. 61.

⁵ Arevshatyan (1971) p. 16; Akinian and Ter-Poghossian (1977) pp. 11-8.

⁶ Calzolari (2016) p. 57.

⁷ Arevshatyan (1980) p. 12.

⁸ John of K'ina, *On Grammar*, pp. 36-7.

ones, were also widely cited in secondary sources such as the commentaries of David the Invincible.

The figure of David the Invincible stands out in the Hellenizing School. This Neoplatonist of the Alexandrian school elevated Neoplatonic studies to an institutional level in Armenia and emerged as a masterful commentator on Aristotle. Especially through David's philosophy, Aristotelian logic was introduced to the Armenian world and incorporated into the philosophical curriculum. David's commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry, as well as his *Definitions*, were an indispensable part of the philosophical curriculum up to and including the eighteenth century, inspiring later authors to continue the tradition of Neoplatonic commentary in Armenia.

David's commentaries were written for a student audience to guide beginners on the path to philosophy. Therefore, he writes in great detail and with great clarity,⁹ sometimes even adopting a passionate style to motivate and inspire his readers.¹⁰ The treatises attributed to David are among the works known as ἀπὸ φωνῆς ('as dictated'), meaning they are based on notes taken during class.¹¹ Although some researchers consider David to be unoriginal or superficial,¹² because he drew on the commentaries of Olympiodorus, Ammonius, and Elias, reworking them into a broader form, his approach nevertheless served a pedagogical purpose and did not impose any limitations on his abilities as a commentator. Even Simplicius, in his extensive 400-page commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, explains that he wrote only an introductory treatise intended to help the dedicated reader better understand the more

⁹ For example, if we compare David's *Definitions of Philosophy* with the last three Alexandrians: Elias' treatise, according to Busse's edition, is twice as long as that of Ammonius Hermiae (twelve lessons - παράξεις), and David's treatise is twice as long as Elias' (24 lessons).

¹⁰ As stated in the introductory sentence of his *Definitions*, which is considered a classic statement in Armenian philosophy: "Those who love philosophical discourses, if they have touched the pleasure that derives from them with the tip of their finger (ἄκρῳ δακτύλῳ γευσάμενοι), and who have bid farewell to all earthly cares, are clearly driven towards them by some kind of sober madness", transl. by Gertz (2018) p. 83.

¹¹ Calzolari (2012) p. 140.

¹² Khostikian (1907) p. 79; Wildberg (1990) pp. 40-1. Busse (1892) p. 13, describes David's style as "prolixity without much thought".

abstruse commentaries of Porphyry and Iamblichus.¹³ Khostikian and Busse argue that, although David is described in the Armenian tradition as an outstanding and highly original philosopher, he is the least original figure of the Alexandrian school, and that he ‘buried the old Neoplatonic tradition with his person’.¹⁴ Contrary to this view, other scholars consider his commentary on the *Isagoge* to be one of the finest on this frequently studied work.¹⁵ Furthermore, his commentaries on Aristotle and his *Definitions of Philosophy* influenced prominent thinkers such as John Damascene, al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Avicenna.¹⁶

In 1833, the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice published a collection called *Corpus Davidicum*, containing all the works and translations attributed to David in the Armenian tradition. The corpus includes translations of the works of Aristotle and Porphyry, as well as four commentaries on them and two theological treatises. This large number of works could not, of course, have come from the pen of a single author, which is why this legacy should be viewed as a collective result of the first two stages of the Hellenizing School.¹⁷ Therefore, scholars distinguish, under the collective personality of ‘David the Invincible’, a total of seven different authors who carried out their philosophical and translation activity between the 450s and the 730s.¹⁸ This multifaceted approach to Davidic heritage is largely accepted in modern scholarship. In 2004, the Center for Armenian Studies at the University of Geneva initiated a project entitled *Commentaria in Aristotelem Armeniaca – Davidis Opera*, the main objective of which is to recover and publish the critical Greek-Armenian texts of David’s Aristotelian commentaries, resulting in an ongoing cascade of scholarly publications, conferences, and workshops.¹⁹

¹³ Simplicius, *In Cat.* III.13-17 (Barnes 2009, p. 5).

¹⁴ Khostikian (1907) pp. 74, 76-7, 80.

¹⁵ Helmig (2018) p. 2096; Barnes (2009) p. 13.

¹⁶ Arevshatyan (2009) pp. 178-9.

¹⁷ Calzolari (2014) p. 355.

¹⁸ Helmig (2018) p. 2085. One of these Davidic personalities has been suggested as a possible author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (Aslanyan 2022, pp. 37-43).

¹⁹ Three out of five planned volumes of the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Armeniaca – Davidis Opera* are already published by Brill in the series “Philosophia Antiqua” (vols. 116, 122, 127).

David the Invincible marked the beginning of the Aristotelian epoch in the philosophical commentary tradition in Armenia, and many renowned medieval Armenian philosophers and theologians up to the period of scholasticism followed his lead, establishing themselves as masterful commentators on Aristotle. Noteworthy are the commentaries by Vahram Rabuni, Chancellor of the Cilician Armenian Kingdom, on the *Isagoge*, *Peri Hermeneias*, *Categories*, and *On the Cosmos*; and those by the headmasters of Tatev University John Orotneč'i (on the *Categories*, *Peri Hermeneias*, and a treatise entitled *Explanations of the Complicated Questions in Porphyry*) and Gregory of Tatev (on the *Isagoge*, *On Virtues and Vices*, and on the Aristotelian commentaries of David). John Orotneč'i had a particular affinity for Aristotle, frequently quoting works of Aristotle that were unknown in Armenian translation (e.g., *Physics*, *Topics*), as well as Aristotelian commentaries by Avicenna and Averroes.²⁰ These numerous medieval Armenian commentaries on Aristotle could themselves serve as the subject of scholarly publications.²¹

2. The Formation of the Neoplatonic Educational System in Armenia and its Aristotelian Foundations

As mentioned above, since antiquity, classical philosophical works and Neoplatonic commentaries have been studied in Armenia directly in Greek and translated into Armenian, leading to the creation of a unique Armenian *cursus studiorum*. This instructional system was based on the classical approach of the Hellenistic schools, but gradually developed a distinct and elaborated form through continuous reforms by the headmasters of Armenian monastic schools and universities. First, however, the Neoplatonic instructional system underwent major transformations throughout antiquity. By the end of the first century CE, the tripartite

Two upcoming volumes will be dedicated to David's *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* and his *Prolegomena to Philosophy*.

²⁰ Grigoryan (1980) pp. 34-5.

²¹ We possess five Armenian commentaries on *Categories*, three on *Peri Hermeneias*, one on the *Analytics*, and one on *Metaphysics* written before the 17th century (Grigoryan 1980, pp. 28-46).

division of philosophy into ethics, physics, and logic – adopted by the Hellenistic schools – was modified by Plutarch for pedagogical purposes and presented as a model of gradual ascent along the educational path: logic was regarded merely as preparation for philosophy, while theology, also called metaphysics or epoptics, was regarded as the culmination of philosophy.²² Similarly, Theon of Smyrna considered the disciplines of logic, politics (instead of ethics), and physics as preparation for epoptics.²³ Additionally, there was the tripartite scheme of the Middle Platonist Alcinous (2nd century CE); in his textbook *Διδασκαλικὸς τῶν Πλάτωνος δογμάτων*, he reformulated the Hellenistic tripartite division into practical philosophy, theoretical philosophy, and (Platonic) dialectics.²⁴ Building on this basis, Gregory of Tatev, in the fourteenth century, describes a division of philosophy in the Armenian tradition that synthesizes these three classical divisions and is structured as follows: philosophy (excluding the preparatory stage) is divided into two parts:

Practical Philosophy includes three main areas according to Aristotle: 1) Ethics, 2) Economics, and 3) Politics; Theoretical Philosophy comprises 1) Arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy,²⁵ 2) Physics, and 3) Theology (Metaphysics) regarded as the pinnacle of philosophy.²⁶

As for logic, particularly the corpus of works by Aristotle and Porphyry, it has traditionally served as the preparatory stage in philosophical education. Even Ammonius Saccas, the precursor of Neoplatonism, strongly recommended beginning not with ethics, but by studying philosophical subjects in the following order: logic, ethics, physics, mathematics, and theology.²⁷ The introduction to Aristotelian logic was typically provided by Porphyry's *Isagoge* and the extensive commentaries on it by later Neoplatonists such as

²² Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 382d (Perkams 2015, p. 150).

²³ Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio rerum mathematicarum*, pp. 14-5.

²⁴ Perkams (2015) p. 151.

²⁵ The study of these disciplines (three to five in number, depending on whether arithmetic and stereometry are counted together with geometry or separately) was also prescribed by the Pythagoreans and Platonists before the study of philosophy (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, II.4; Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio rerum mathematicarum*, p. 14).

²⁶ Gregory of Tatev, *Handbook for Winter Semester*, XXXII, p. 163.

²⁷ Ammonius, *In Cat.* V.31-VI.22 (Tarrant 2014, p. 26).

Ammonius Hermiac, David, and Elias. These Neoplatonists addressed first-year students in their commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* or Porphyry's *Isagoge*, indicating that these texts were assigned at the start of the curriculum.²⁸ After this initial stage, students proceeded to study the works of Aristotle and Plato in a specific sequence,²⁹ beginning with Aristotle before moving on to Plato. This order was followed because Neoplatonists regarded Plato's philosophy as more inspired and superior to Aristotle's. Accordingly, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* occupies a position in the Neoplatonic curriculum midway between his natural science and the true and perfect theology found in Plato's *Parmenides*. It may seem paradoxical, then, when David suggests that an exegete of Aristotle must be familiar with all of Plato's works, while simultaneously presenting Aristotle's works as an introduction to Plato's.³⁰ However, it is generally understood that the works of both philosophers serve to illuminate and interpret each other, creating strong interconnections between all the branches of philosophy. As David explains:

One ought indeed to know, that Aristotle always discourses on nature even when writing theology, whereas Plato, by contrast, is always the theologian, even while studying nature, and introduces the doctrine of Ideas everywhere.³¹

Thus, the study of Aristotle's works was not an end in itself for the Neoplatonists but rather a necessary preparation for engaging with Plato's philosophy.³² Therefore, according to David, one must begin with logic as a tool and only then learn where and how to apply it.³³ Since Plato did not write a treatise dedicated to logic, Aristotle's logical works were used as a substitute tool for the introduction to philosophy (hence, the term *ὄργανον* – tool, instrument).

²⁸ Hadot (1991) p. 182.

²⁹ Calzolari (2012) p. 135.

³⁰ David, *In Cat.* 123.9-11 (Hadot 1991, p. 185).

³¹ David, *In Cat.* 120.30-121.3 (Hadot 1991, p. 183).

³² Hadot (1991) p. 189.

³³ David, *In Cat.* 118.20-24 (Barnes 2009, p. 9).

3. Aristotelian Studies in Armenia in the High and Late Middle Ages

Advancing the development of the Neoplatonic curriculum, the study of the trivium and quadrivium – systematically introduced in late antiquity as a foundation for philosophical studies – became the cornerstone of university education during the High and Late Middle Ages. In the High Middle Ages, the study of the seven liberal arts and the associated curriculum were once again rigorously regulated in Armenia. Gregory the Magistros (eleventh century), founder of the school in Ani, the capital of Greater Armenia, and translator of Plato's dialogues, justified in his letters the necessity of dividing the seven liberal arts – also called the “encyclopedic arts”,³⁴ in a postscript from 1106 – into the trivium and quadrivium.³⁵ Additionally, Kirakos the Grammarian (fifteenth century), writing about his teacher T'ovma Mecop'ec'i, a renowned historian and student of Gregory of Tatev, provides a list of subjects and philosophical treatises studied during his university years:

all twelve branches of philosophy [the seven liberal arts plus ethics, economics, politics, physics, and theology according to Gregory of Tatev's division] [...], the grammatical art [Dionysius Thrax], Definitions [David the Invincible], Porphyry [Isagoge], the Categories, Peri Hermeneias, On the Cosmos, On Virtues and Vices of Aristotle [the last two pseudo-Aristotelian] [...], 50 sophisticated works [Cappadocians, Philo of Alexandria, Dionysius the Areopagite, etc.], and 51 historical treatises.³⁶

This important record clearly demonstrates the order of the university curriculum: the liberal arts, grammar, prolegomena to philosophy, introduction to Aristotelian logic, the works of Aristotle, followed by studies of Neoplatonic works. Notably, the in-depth study of Aristotle was common to both Armenian and European educational systems. The same Aristotelian corpus, along with Porphyry's *Isagoge*, was declared an indispensable part of the syllabus by papal bulls and university statutes from the thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century; Aristotle “determined the entire study process”.³⁷

³⁴ Classical Armenian: *neršrjakan arbestk'*, a loanword from the Greek ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία (Khacheryan 1998, p. 222).

³⁵ Barkhudaryan (2013) p. 4.

³⁶ Hovsepyan (1914) p. xiii.

³⁷ Monroe (1907) pp. 144-5.

The second major reform of the curriculum was implemented by John Orotneč'i through the incorporation of Latin works and scholastic Aristotelianism. In the philosophical manuscripts M2382,³⁸ M1659, and M3902, commissioned by him, we find, among others, the following works clearly used for teaching purposes:³⁹ commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Peri Hermeneias*, on the *Isagoge*, on the *Liber de sex principiis* (also the translation of this anonymous twelfth-century logical treatise formerly attributed to Gilbert of Poitiers into Armenian) by Peter of Aragon,⁴⁰ as well the treatises *On the Five Universals* and the *Dialectic* by Bartholomew of Bologna.⁴¹ The last work, for example, presents the reader with the development of logical systems from Aristotle and Boethius to Thomas Aquinas and Peter of Spain. These scholastic works, produced in Armenia by foreign authors, can also be confidently regarded as a genuine product of Armenian intellectual reality.⁴²

This scholastic influence which originated in Europe and which was propagated by Dominican and Franciscan missionaries, along with their Armenian Uniate followers, significantly deepened and diversified the study of Aristotle in Armenia. The Uniate writings primarily consist of translations, compilations, and excerpts from systematic works across various fields: exegesis, dogmatics, canon law, moral theology, church history, apologetics, sermons, liturgy, and, of particular interest to us, scholastic and Aristotelian philosophy. For instance, in the treatise *On the Hexaemeron* by Bartholomew of Bologna, which Gregory of Tatev copied in 1371 for the university

³⁸ 'M' stands for the manuscripts from the Matenadaran collection (Institute of Ancient Armenian Manuscripts in Yerevan, Armenia).

³⁹ La Porta (2015) pp. 283, 289-90. According to a statement by the Uniate Franciscan brother Mekhithar, John Orotneč'i delivered lectures to his students based on the treatises *On the Virtues of the Soul* (an excerpt and adaptation in classical Armenian of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*) by John of Swineford and the *Book of Vices* by Peter of Aragon (Oudenrijn 1955, p. 34).

⁴⁰ Oudenrijn (1960) pp. 200-1; M3776, M4142, M4147, M4148, M4261 (La Porta 2015, p. 291). The *Liber de sex principiis* can also be found in the statutes (1252) of the University of Paris (Rashdall 1987, p. 441).

⁴¹ Oudenrijn (1960) p. 188.

⁴² For the complete list of the Uniate scholastic treatises produced in Armenia, see Aslanyan (2022) pp. 128-9.

library in Tatev,⁴³ we find quotations from more than ten treatises by Aristotle,⁴⁴ some of which would otherwise be unavailable in Armenian. These include the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *On the Heavens*, *History of Animals*, *Topics*, *On Sleep and Waking*, *On Coming-to-Be and Passing-Away*, *On the Soul*, *Meteorology* and the pseudo-Aristotelian *On Plants*.

4. *The Persistence of Aristotelian Studies in Renaissance and Modernity*

The next question, following this chronology, is: after the Middle Ages and scholastic period, what shifts occurred in the teaching of Aristotelian logic during the Renaissance as it approached modernity? The crisis of the medieval scholastic tradition in Europe did not imply a rejection of ancient logic;⁴⁵ it remained in active use throughout the Renaissance and up to the seventeenth century, when the early modern and algebraic logic took over. Similarly, interest in ancient logic persisted in Armenia not only until the fourteenth century, as some researchers suggest,⁴⁶ but also much later – reaching the eighteenth century and beyond – as I shall demonstrate in light of newly discovered evidence.

The revival of Aristotelianism in Armenia after the period of decline following the Mongol invasions was a highly challenging endeavour. After a general decline in scholarship during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Aristotelian instruction was restored at the beginning of the seventeenth century through the efforts of some accomplished archimandrites at several monastic islets in Armenia that had survived the wars and devastation of the period. The first figure in this intellectual tradition was Basil of Ałbak (†1615), the head of the Amlordu Monastery. He gathered all the existing works and commentaries on Aristotle in classical Armenian from various regions of Armenia, meticulously studied them, and then began the systematic instruction of his pupils.⁴⁷ His disciples Nerses Mocac‘i, Melik‘set‘

⁴³ M1659 (La Porta 2015, p. 292).

⁴⁴ M9478 (Khachikyan 2017, p. 472).

⁴⁵ Capozzi and Haaparanta (2023) p. 319.

⁴⁶ Marenbon (2023) p. 301.

⁴⁷ Chaloyan (1958) p. 91.

Vžanec'i, and Simeon of Ĵula continued this tradition, teaching in Etchmiadzin and Ĵula throughout the seventeenth century.⁴⁸ The next generation, which included Stephan of Poland and Simeon of Yerevan, achieved even higher levels of Aristotelian scholarship. Among Stephan of Poland's remarkable accomplishments, in addition to his masterful Aristotelian and Neoplatonic commentaries, was the translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* into Armenian.⁴⁹ This first Armenian translation of the *Metaphysics* from Latin, completed before 1675, was the fourth language into which the original Aristotelian treatise had ever been translated, following Latin, Arabic and Italian,⁵⁰ and symbolizes the enduring interest in Aristotle in the Armenian intellectual circles during the early modern era, as clearly demonstrated by the printed and manuscript collections of that period.

5. Evidence of Manuscript and Printed Collections

When examining Aristotle's reception in the Armenian tradition, I should naturally consider the works of Aristotle himself, as well as all the commentaries and treatises on Aristotle produced by both Armenian and non-Armenian classical authors that have become part of the Armenian written heritage. The handbooks of Aristotelian logic compiled and circulated within Armenian circles are also essential to this study.

The influence of Aristotelian works on the Armenian tradition is particularly evident in the manuscript heritage. Even a brief survey of the Armenian manuscript collections worldwide, along with the bibliography of related publications, reveals the undeniable prominence of Aristotelian studies and their educational significance in Armenia.⁵¹ To illustrate this, I

⁴⁸ Mirzoyan (2017) pp. 138-9.

⁴⁹ These are primarily presented in the Matenadaran collection, for example, manuscripts M5249, M10032 (AD 1675), which also contain Stephan's commentary in the margins, as well as M10868, which includes a separately written commentary.

⁵⁰ Apart from the unpublished seventeenth-century Italian version by Bartolomeo Beverini, the first translations into other European languages, such as English, German, French, and Russian, appeared only in the 19th century.

⁵¹ Alishan (1893) pp. 384-5; Oudenrijn (1955) pp. 26-8; Oudenrijn (1960) p. 126; Ashjian (1994) pp. 50-1; La Porta (2001) pp. 20-3; Khachikyan (2017) pp. 468-9.

will provide a brief analysis of two essential collections of Armenian manuscripts: one from the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Armenian Manuscripts in Yerevan, and the other from the University Library of Tübingen. The former is the largest collection of its kind, offering a comprehensive overview of the Armenian reception of Aristotle, while the latter is notable on account of its unique acquisition history.⁵²

In the Matenadaran collection alone, I have identified approximately 300 manuscripts containing Aristotle's works, 247 manuscripts of David's commentaries on Aristotle, and 183 manuscripts of Porphyry's *Isagoge* (excluding the commentaries in Armenian). Additionally, around 160 manuscripts contain commentaries by medieval Armenian thinkers on Aristotle, Porphyry, and David. Even these approximate figures indicate that Aristotelian works constitute the largest philosophical segment of existing Armenian manuscript collections, far surpassing, for example, the most popular Neoplatonist in the Armenian tradition, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.⁵³ In order to make this quantitative dimension more explicit and meaningful, and to show that Aristotelian works served as an indispensable foundation for Neoplatonic commentary and had a significant impact on the sciences in medieval Armenia, it is necessary to provide a couple of examples here. One case to consider is the incomplete scholia by John Orotneç'i on Pseudo-Dionysius' *Divine Names*, which has survived in a single extant manuscript.⁵⁴ Orotneç'i interprets the treatise solely in the light of the principles from Aristotle's *Categories* and *Posterior Analytics*, distinguishing between eponymous, homonymous names and epithets, discussing the name as a definition of the nature, focusing on humans as name givers, as well as following the scholastic interpretation of Albert the Great, who classified the art of proclaiming divine names (*Ars nominandi deum*) according to the theory of

⁵² The Tübingen collection of Armenian manuscripts (classified as *Ma XIII*), comprising a substantial number of 105 units, is a notable example of a collection acquired through a single purchase (from Constantinople in the early 1900s). It clearly demonstrates the significant presence of Aristotle in a random private collection. For further details, see Finck and Gjandschezian (1907) pp. iii-vi.

⁵³ Aslanyan (2022) pp. 14-5.

⁵⁴ M2121, 331'-334' (AD 1726), deciphered from classical Armenian and integrated into my monograph; see Aslanyan (2022) pp. 189-96.

science in the *Posterior Analytics*.⁵⁵ Furthermore, a notable example from the medical field can be drawn from the statement in the preface of the twelfth-century treatise *Relief of Fevers* by the renowned Armenian physician Mxit'ar Herac'i: "since the learned physicians first took the five predicables from Porphyry's *Isagoge* on Aristotle and established them as the foundation and merit of the medical art".⁵⁶ These examples clearly demonstrate the paradigmatic role of Aristotle, whose ideas served as a cornerstone for almost every treatise in the fields of philosophy and science.

Regarding the character of the Aristotelian manuscript collections in Armenia, certain patterns in manuscript allocation can be observed. First, the previously mentioned manuscripts primarily represent *spicilegia* – collections specifically designed for educational purposes – copied at monastic schools and late medieval universities. For example, the precious *spicilegium* of Mxit'ar Ayrivanec'i from the Gelard Monastery, dating to 1283, consists of nearly 1,200 folia and contains, among other philosophical and theological works, Porphyry's *Isagoge* and David's commentary on the *Isagoge*, as well as the Davidic translations and commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Peri Hermeneias*, arranged in a specific order. It is also noteworthy that the Aristotelian corpus was often placed in these codices immediately after grammatical works, where logic was traditionally included in the curriculum.⁵⁷ *Spicilegia* composed solely of Aristotelian content, enriched with scholastic works, were also produced by Dominican Uniate scholars. For instance, manuscript M1646, dating to the mid-fourteenth century, contains Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories* and *Peri Hermeneias*, combined with the commentaries of Peter of Aragon and the treatise *Liber de sex principiis*, in which he presents his interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics. Some manuscripts (e.g., M926, 191^r-286^v) include extensive citations from Aristotle under the title "Words of Aristotle", which were again selected for educational purposes. Another point to mention is that since the seventeenth century, these manuscripts have been produced not only in Armenia but also in various educational centres of the Armenian diaspora, such as

⁵⁵ See also Weismantel (2010).

⁵⁶ M416 (AD 1279), 5^r, (my transl.).

⁵⁷ M2359, M2361, M2364, M2368, M3029, etc.

Lviv (M1916, 1633), Stanisławów (M1966, 1727), St. Petersburg (M3355, 1740), and Venice (Mekhitarist collection).

Furthermore, the Aristotelian corpus is prominently represented also in the Tübingen collection. The manuscript MA XIII 74 (1557) contains an extensive set of Aristotelian treatises, including the first logico-philosophical chapter of St John Damascene's *The Fount of Knowledge* (which primarily addresses Aristotle's *Categories*), commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Peri Hermeneias*, the text and commentary on the pseudo-Aristotelian treatises *On the Cosmos* and *On Virtues and Vices*, as well as commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and David's commentary on the *Isagoge*.⁵⁸ In Ma XIII 76 (1679), one of the earliest copies of the complete Armenian translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by Stephan of Poland is preserved.⁵⁹ Notably, the Tübingen collection includes three logical treatises by Armenian authors and Armenologists from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century: a nine-chapter compilation on Aristotle's *Physics* by the Italian Armenologist Clemente Galano (Ma XIII 79, 1^r-12^v, seventeenth century), a commentary on Aristotle's *Analytics* by Petros Alamelean Bert'umeanc', which extensively utilizes David's commentary on this work (Ma XIII 77, 1^r-85^v, 1771), and a two-part handbook of theoretical philosophy and logic by Joseph of Arc'ax, heavily based on Porphyry (Ma XIII 78, 1^r-97^v, 1816). These findings at the Tübingen University Library demonstrate that Armenian Aristotelian treatises, compiled specifically for pedagogical purposes, were copied and disseminated much more rapidly than in medieval times, circulating from distant regions of Armenia through Istanbul and eventually reaching Tübingen.

In the modern era, we also witness an increasing number of new publications, including handbooks of logic, translations, and commentaries on Aristotle, printed in Constantinople, Venice, St Petersburg, Tbilisi, and other cultural centres of the Armenian diaspora. One of the most significant works is the *Handbook of Logic* by Simeon of Jula, composed at the beginning of the seventeenth century and published twice – in 1728 and 1794 – was even translated into Georgian. It covers almost the entire content of the *Organon* and remained the most popular logic textbook in Armenian

⁵⁸ Ma XIII 74, 2^r-35^v, 45^r-204^v, 208^r-216^r (Finck and Gjandschezian 1907, pp. 111-3).

⁵⁹ Ma XIII 76, 95^r-325^r.

schools until the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ His disciple, John Mrk'uz of Ĵula, authored his own treatise entitled *Short Logic*, which was printed during his lifetime in Amsterdam in 1711 and also served as a school handbook. Stephan Rošk'a, the Armenian Catholic Bishop of Poland, wrote a monumental two-part work on philosophy, entitled *Philosophy or Introduction to Aristotelian Logic* (Stanisławów, 1727), which was widely used as a logic handbook in Armenian circles.⁶¹ It is also worth mentioning a scholastic work in three volumes (1666) by the logician Antoine Goudin, which offers a synthesis of the principles of Aristotelian logic, physics, morality, and metaphysics. This work was translated into Armenian in 1737 by the Armenian archimandrite Luke of Xarberd and printed in Venice by the Mekhitarist Fathers (1750-1751). Goudin's work had a significant influence on Armenian authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Joseph of Arc'ax, who published his own handbook of logic in 1840, heavily based on excerpts from Goudin's edition.⁶²

*6. The End of Neoplatonic Instruction and the Persistence
of Aristotelian Tradition in Armenia*

To conclude the historical progression and the long chain of transformations described in this article, the Neoplatonic instructional system, deeply rooted in the Armenian world for around one and a half millennia, was abandoned by the end of the nineteenth century, due to the permeation of the new ideological currents from Europe and the modernization of the educational system. In the twentieth century, Soviet philosophy emerged with a harsh critique of Aristotle's political and ideological views,

⁶⁰ Mirzoyan (2017) pp. 139-40.

⁶¹ M1966 (Mnacakanian 2017, pp. 33-4).

⁶² In my opinion, the *Liber de causis*, largely drawn from Proclus, should also be added to this list. Although falsely attributed to Aristotle during the Middle Ages, it was still regarded at the time as an Aristotelian treatise. This work is widespread in Armenian manuscript collections and has consistently been used for teaching purposes, especially following the emergence of a new translation from Latin by Stephan of Poland in 1660 (first printed in 1750, Constantinople).

particularly his support of monarchy, aristocracy, and the slave state. Scholasticism was regarded as a flawed version of Aristotelianism, with ethics interpreted through the lens of class struggle and the moral norms of socialist society. Notably, the article on Aristotle in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia is filled with critical references from Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx.⁶³ Despite the dominance of Marxist teachings in Armenia, scholarship on Aristotelian logic and commentaries was preserved through the legacy of the Neoplatonist David, who holds great significance in the Armenian tradition, and through the efforts of dedicated Soviet-era Armenian scholars such as Chaloyan, Arevshatyan, and Mirzoyan. Thanks to this continuity, Aristotle continues to play a prominent role in the Armenian university curriculum, becoming an indispensable part of courses on logic, history of philosophy, ethics, philosophy of language, hermeneutics, and more. Aristotle studies today certainly have even greater potential for popularization beyond academic circles, supported by new translations of Aristotle into modern Eastern Armenian, which are already appearing,⁶⁴ as well as by ongoing research into the vast heritage of Aristotle's Armenian reception, with many treasures still awaiting scholarly study.

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⁶³ Great Soviet Encyclopedia (1970), 3rd ed., A. Prochorov (Editor in Chief), II, pp. 195-6.

⁶⁴ The first critical translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* was published in 2025 (trans. by G. Muradyan and A. Topchyan).

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