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# Translation and transmission in the Armenian New Testament

A note on Luke 3:23

**Abstract:** The Armenian translation of the Greek New Testament usually follows the original quite closely whilst still employing various translation strategies for dealing with one and the same type of construction. In one passage, Lk. 3:23, none of the common translation strategies are employed: a participle in the nominative singular (Gk. ὧν ὄν) is translated as a relative pronoun in the genitive plural (Arm. *oroc'*). Using corpus-linguistic methods and comparative data, this paper demonstrates that this kind of translation has no parallel in the New Testament corpus. The origin of this peculiar translation unequivocally lies in a translation error, as previously hypothesised, the result of confounding two members of a minimal pair in Greek: the participle (Gk. ὧν ὄν) and the genitive plural relative pronoun (Gk. ὧν ἧν).

**Keywords:** Classical Armenian, Ancient Greek, Bible translation, manuscript transmission, relative clauses

## 1 Introduction

The translation of the Armenian New Testament took place in two phases, commonly referred to as Arm I and Arm II:<sup>1</sup> the former was based on a Syriac translation, the latter on the Greek original. Arm II is the basis of the established version of the New Testament and, apart from a few vestiges, shows few traces of Arm I.<sup>2</sup>

The Armenian translation remains very close to the Greek original in many regards, including word order and other aspects of syntax, even where such closeness leads to constructions rather atypical of non-translated, that is, native, Classical Armenian. That being said, it neither “slavishly” follows the original, as once suggested by Meillet (1913: 3), nor employs techniques associated with later gre-

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier, oral translations may have existed based on the existence of quotations from memory in early authors (Cowe 1990b); for the history of the gospel translation in Armenian, cf. Alexanian 1984.

<sup>2</sup> For these traces and the nature of the Arm I translation, cf. Cowe 1990b; 1990a; 1984.

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cising Armenian (formerly called the Hellenising School), which relies heavily on morpheme-by-morpheme translations, amongst other methods.<sup>3</sup> It has instead been argued that the New Testament translation, along with other early, largely religious texts, forms a separate category of Greek-influenced translations with different characteristics.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the closeness of the Armenian translation and the Greek original of the New Testament, deviations from the expected correspondence are noteworthy (cf., for instance, Kölligan 2008). One such divergence occurs in the Armenian version of Luke 3:23, in which a participial phrase is apparently and inexplicably rendered by a relative clause in Armenian.<sup>5</sup> The resulting translation evades meaningful analysis without knowledge of the Greek original and does not conform to the otherwise attested strategies for translating such participles.

Based on a study of the New Testament corpus, this paper outlines the specific problems in the translation and interpretation of said passage (§2) and presents for comparison the strategies used to render Greek participles in Armenian (§3) and those employed when dealing with relative clauses (§4). Corroborating earlier suggestions and excluding other kinds of external influence, it proposes (§5) that the only viable explanation of this unusual translation is not to be found in linguistic so much as in philological data, going back to the confusion of a minimal pair in Greek (ὧν ὄν vs ὧν ἠὸν): the translation found in Armenian is that expected for the relative pronoun, not the present participle, both of which are near-homophones and near-homographs. The unexpected Armenian translation is therefore the result of a transmission or translation error. In short: the paper demonstrates by means of thorough linguistic analysis that even in an otherwise very conscientious and precise translation produced by competent language users, such flagrant errors can arise and persevere through time without correction.

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<sup>3</sup> For details, cf. Nichanian 1989, Muradyan 2012.

<sup>4</sup> For arguments in favour of the existence of such a tradition, often called pre-hellenising, cf. Coulie 1994: 43; Lafontaine & Coulie 1983: 123–130; Meyer 2018: 76f.; Muradyan 2012: 20.

<sup>5</sup> This passage was first remarked on by Macler (1919: 423) in a list of errors in the Armenian New Testament translation.

## 2 The Problem: Luke 3:23

The Greek version of the problematic passage reads as follows:

- (1) *kai autòs ēn ho Iēsoũs hōseì etōn triákonta*  
 andINT be.3SG.PST ART.NOM.SG.M Jesus like year.GEN.PL 30  
*ark<sup>h</sup>ómenos òn hōs enomízeto*  
 begin.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M **be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M** as think.3SG.PST.PASS  
*huiós Iōsēp<sup>h</sup>*  
 son.NOM.SG.M Joseph

The corresponding Armenian translation, however, differs in one particular detail:

- (2) *ew ink'n Yisus ēr amac' ibrew eresic' skseal oroc'*  
 and INT Jesus be.3SG.PST year.GEN.PL like 30.GEN.PL begin.PTCP.PF **REL.GEN.PL**  
*orpēs karcēr ordi Yovsep'ay ...*  
 as think.3SG.PST son Joseph.GEN.SG  
 'Now Jesus Himself began [His ministry] at about thirty years of age, being  
 (as was supposed) the son of Joseph ...'<sup>6</sup> *Lk 3:23*

The verse quoted in (1) consists of a matrix clause, in which the subject *Iēsoũs* agrees with the inflected verb (*ēn*) and two conjunct participles, *ark<sup>h</sup>ómenos* and *òn*.<sup>7</sup> The second participial phrase (from *òn*) further includes a subordinate clause (*hōs enomízeto*). It is the translation into Armenian of this final participial phrase that is at issue here.

The Armenian version uses a relative pronoun in the genitive plural. The plural form suggests either a referent in the same number, which in this sentence could only be “about 30 years” (*amac' ibrew eresic'*); or a free relative clause, that is, one without a referent in the matrix clause.<sup>8</sup> The latter option can be excluded because of the genitive case of the pronoun, which cannot be motivated by the syntax or semantics of the relative or matrix clause.

If the relative pronoun does refer to the phrase “about thirty years”, the only plausible interpretation would seem to be a temporal one along the lines of: “about

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of (1), whose Greek is taken from the Codex Alexandrinus as it corresponds most clearly to the Armenian version in word order, the Greek text is that of NA28. For reasons of tradition rather than accuracy, the Armenian text is that of Zohrabian 1805. The translation given will be the New King James Version. The Armenian examples will remain untranslated, but aspects of interest will be discussed in the main text.

<sup>7</sup> Whether *ēn* and *ark<sup>h</sup>ómenos* form a syntactic unit, perhaps a progressive or inceptive past tense of Gk. *árk<sup>h</sup>omai*, is not relevant here and will thus not be discussed. For details on this construction, cf. e.g. van Emde Boas et al. 2019: 634f.; Turner 1963: 87f.

<sup>8</sup> On free relative clauses, cf. Lehmann 1984: 293–325.

thirty years ... of/during which he was (as was supposed) the son of Joseph". Such a reading would have serious exegetical repercussions concerning the nature of Christ and it is doubtful that such an exegesis would have been 'slipped in' as part of the translation process.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of a satisfactorily clear translation and indeed grammatical analysis of this passage raises the primary question: could this be a translation or transmission error? Macler (1919: 423) suggests, somewhat laconically, that it indeed was: the translators mistook the nominative singular masculine participle of Gk. *eimi* 'to be' (ὄν ὄν) for the genitive plural relative pronoun (ὅν ἡὸν).<sup>10</sup> Given that this error persisted through time, resulting in an ungrammatical sentence in an oft-used and oft-copied text, this suggestion, however simple and self-evident, cannot be taken at face value for two reasons: (1) Macler counts very few other mistranslations (five in total), which would make this a very rare, unexpected occurrence; (2) the Armenian version of the New Testament is a 'proper' translation, not a gloss, which suggests that idiom and variety may have contributed to renderings which may, on the surface, not correspond to the original *Vorlage*. Is it, therefore, conceivable that the Armenian translators should have committed such a mistake, and that it was not subsequently spotted and corrected?

To answer definitely this primary question and corroborate or dispel Macler's suggestion, this paper addresses first the following secondary questions: does the kind of translation strategy employed in Lk. 3:23—rendering a present participle as a relative clause in an unexpected case—have any parallels in the rest of the Armenian New Testament? Could this passage be a vestige of the Arm I translation mentioned above? Do other New Testament translations exhibit unusual grammatical structures in this passage? In short: can corpus-linguistic and comparative data help to confirm or falsify Macler's proposal? To give an even shorter answer: yes, they can.

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<sup>9</sup> The fact that in Mk. 6:3 Jesus is referred to as "Mary's son" against patronymic convention and the general absence of mentions of Joseph during the latter part of Jesus' life leads Brown et al. (1978: 64) to suggest that Joseph had died at this point. Even reading the present passage in that light—that is, saying that in *that* time he was known as Joseph's son, whilst *now* he is something else—raises the question why this occurs in the Armenian translation, but not in the Greek original. Furthermore, the ensuing verses deal with Jesus' genealogy, linking him to David, Abraham, and Noah, and thus establishing his prophetic credentials; bracketing Joseph out would therefore seem counter-intuitive.

<sup>10</sup> While the two forms are differentiated by accent and breathing marks in modern editions, this was not universally the case in pre-Byzantine manuscripts (Probert 2006: 45–49), even if such marks are attested sporadically from Hellenistic times onwards (Vendryes 1904: 5–18). That means that these two forms were essentially homographs.

### 3 Translations of the participle (Gk. *ὄν*)

The first step on the path to verify or disprove the above suggestion is an enquiry into the New Testament Corpus. Are there other instances of the participle *ὄν* which result in similar translations?

In keeping with the translators' tendency to follow the Greek original closely, the variety of translation strategies of participles in the New Testament are limited and fall into neat categories. Table 1 presents these strategies, their number of occurrences, and the verses in which they are attested for the Gk. participle *ὄν*.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1:** Translation strategies of Gk. *ὄν* in the Armenian New Testament

Strategy	Number	Occurrences
relative clause	24	Mt. 12:30; Lk. 3:23, 11:23; Jn. 1:18, 3:4, 3:31, 4:9, 6:46, 8:47, 10:12, 11:49, 12:17, 18:37; Rom. 9:5, 11:17; 2Cor. 8:9, 11:31; Gal. 2:3; Eph. 2:4; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 16:5
subordinate clause	11	Mt. 1:19; Lk. 24:6, 24:44; Jn. 11:51; 1Cor. 9:19, 9:21 (bis); Gal. 4:1; 2Thess. 2:5; Philem. 1:9; Heb. 5:8
coordinate clause	5	Jn. 6:71, 7:50, 9:25, 10:33; Gal. 6:3
asyndeton	3	Jn. 18:26, 19:38; Acts 18:24
nominal periphrasis	1	Rev. 1:4
participle	1	Titus 3:11

To explain in more detail the short label given to each of these strategies, they will each be exemplified briefly here, beginning with relative clauses, the most common one.

- (3) a. *légei pròs autòn ho Nikódēmos: pōs dúnatai*  
 say.3SG.PRS to 3SG.ACC ART.NOM.SG.M Nicodemus how can.3SG.PRS  
*ánt<sup>h</sup>rōpos gennēt<sup>h</sup>ēnai gērōn ὄν*  
 man.NOM.SG.M birth.INF.AOR.PASS old-man.NOM.SG.M **be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M**
- b. *asē c'=na Nikodemos. Ziard karē mard cnanel*  
 say.3SG.PRS to=3SG.ACC Nicodemus how can.3SG.PRS man.NOM.SG birth.INF  
**or cer=n ic'ē**  
**REL.NOM.SG old=DEF be.3SG.PRS.SBJV**  
 'Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? '  
 Jn. 3:4

<sup>11</sup> For a more general study of translations of Greek participles in the Armenian New Testament, cf. Bănățeanu 1937.

In (3a) the participle stands in apposition to the subject of the clause *ánt<sup>h</sup>rōpos* ‘man’ and governs the predicative noun ‘old man’. In the Armenian version (3b), the verb is reflected not as a participle, but rendered as a relative clause. The relative pronoun *or* agrees in number with its referent *mard* and, as subject of the relative clause, is in the nominative; nothing changes as far as the predicative noun is concerned.<sup>12</sup> With the exception of Lk. 3:23, all other instances of Armenian relative clauses rendering the Greek participle *ōn* have the relative pronoun in the nominative singular, too. The common usage of this type of rendition is not surprising since it is also frequently employed when translating Greek participles into other, even modern languages.<sup>13</sup>

The second most common manner of translation uses non-relative subordinate clauses, employing subordinate conjunctions such as Arm. *k’anzi* ‘because’, *minč* ‘when, while’, *zi* ‘for, because’, etc.

- (4) a. *eleút<sup>h</sup>eros gâr òn ek pántōn pāsīn*  
 free.NOM.SG.M for **be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M** from all.GEN.PL.M/N all.DAT.PL.M/N  
*emautōn edoulōsa hina tous pleionas*  
 myself.ACC.SG.M enslave.1SG.AOR so-that ART.ACC.PL.M many.COMP.ACC.PL.M  
*kerdēsō.*  
 gain.1SG.AOR.SBJV
- b. *k’anzi azat ēi y=amenaynē, ew amenec’un z=anjn*  
**because** free **be.1SG.PST** from=all.ABL.SG yet everyone.DAT.PL OBJ=self.ACC.SG  
*i carayut’ean kac’uc’i, zi z=bazums šahec’ayc’*  
 in slavery.LOC.SG make-stand.1SG.AOR so-that OBJ=much.ACC.PL gain.1SG.AOR.SBJV  
 ‘For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all,  
 that I might win the more.’ 1Cor. 9:19

As the verb form suggests, the subject in both (4a) and (4b) is the first person singular, with which the adjective ‘free’ is in agreement. In this case, the Armenian translation uses a causal subordinate clause introduced by *k’anzi* to render the participle *ōn*; the choice of a causal rather than any other subordinator is not random, but patently motivated by the causal particle Gk. *gâr*. Once more, the use of a subordinate clause with a particular connotation (causal, concessive, temporal, etc.) is a strategy known and used more generally also in other languages when translating Greek participial phrases.

<sup>12</sup> The definite article =*n* at the end of *cer* is a Wackernagel clitic, which frequently occurs in Armenian relative and other subordinate clauses in second position; cf. Vaux 1994.

<sup>13</sup> For more details on the distribution of Armenian relative clauses and their Greek originals, cf. Meyer 2018: 58. It is worth mentioning that next to appositive participles, Armenian relative clauses are also used to translate nominalised participles in Greek, e.g. in Rev. 1:8: Gk. *ho òn*, Arm. *or ē*.

Coordinate clauses follow the same pattern as subordinate clauses, but instead of using a subordination they link the notion expressed by the Greek participle to the main clause by means of a conjunction, mainly Arm. *ew* ‘and’.

- (5) a. *eigâr dokeĩ tis eĩnai ti mēdēn*  
 if for seem.3SG.PRS INDF.NOM.SG.M/F be.INF.PRS INDF.NOM.SG.N nothing.NOM.SG.N  
*ōn*  
*p<sup>h</sup>renapatāi heautón*  
**be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M** deceive.3SG.PRS REFL.ACC.SG.M
- b. *etēhamaric’i ok’ linel inč’ ew*  
 if count.3SG.PRS.SBJV INDF.NOM.SG become.PRS.INF INDF.INAN **and**  
*č’=ic’ē z=anjn iwr xabē*  
**NEG=be.3SG.PRS.SBJV** OBJ=self.ACC.SG 3SG.REFL.POSS deceive.3SG.PRS  
 ‘For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he  
 deceives himself.’ Gal. 6:3

The idea of “being nothing” (*mēdēn ōn*) is coordinated to the matrix clause in Armenian. As in the case of the relative clause and subordinate clause strategies mentioned above, the Armenian verb form replacing the participle is a form of *em* ‘to be’, specifically the third person present subjunctive, which also occurs in the main clause; both clauses are therefore coordinated not only by the conjunction *ew* but also by the use of the same tense and mood. Once more, this strategy is employed not only when translating Greek into Classical Armenian.

The less common means of translating the participle—asyndeton, nominal periphrasis, and the retention of a participle in Armenian—are illustrated in (6–8) below. Asyndeton is, in effect, coordination without a coordinator, wherein the finite verb replacing the Greek participle governs a clause asyndetically juxtaposed to the matrix clause (here *zōrawor ēr grovk’*). Nominal periphrasis refers to instances where instead of using a clause, the idea expressed by the Greek participle is translated as a noun phrase, in this instance *Ē* ‘supreme, eternal being’. Finally, it may seem self-evident that a participle in Greek should be translatable as a participle in Armenian, but this correspondence is complicated by the absence in Armenian of a productive present participle that might be used in analogy to its Greek counterpart; here, the Greek participle in combination with a predicative noun (Gk. *autokatákritos* ‘self-condemning’) is translated as an appositive perfect participle (Arm. *dataparteal*) which governs two reflexively used nouns.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On the reflexive use of Arm. *anjn* ‘self’, cf. Meyer 2013: 416f.

- (6) a. *Ioudaĩos dé tis Apollōs onómati ... katéntēsen eis*  
 Jew.NOM.SG.M PTC INDF.NOM.SG.M/F Apollos name.DAT.SG.N come.3SG.AOR to  
*Ēp<sup>h</sup>eson dunatōs òn en taĩs*  
 Ephesos.ACC.SG.M capable.NOM.SG.M **be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M** in ART.DAT.PL.F  
*grap<sup>h</sup>aĩs*  
 scripture.DAT.PL.F
- b. *hrey omn Apetēs anun ... ekn ehas*  
 Jew.NOM.SG certain.NOM.SG Apollos name.NOM.SG come.3SG.AOR arrive.3SG.AOR  
*y=Ep<sup>h</sup>esos, zōrawor ēr grovk<sup>h</sup>.*  
 to=Ephesos.ACC.SG capable **be.3SG.PST** scripture.INS.PL  
 ‘Now a certain Jew named Apollos[, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and] mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.’ Acts 18:24
- (7) a. *... k<sup>h</sup>áris humĩn kai eirēnē apò ho*  
 grace.NOM.SG.F 2PL.DAT and peace.NOM.SG.F from ART.NOM.SG.M  
*òn kai ho ěn kai ho*  
**be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M** and ART.NOM.SG.M be.3SG.PST and ART.NOM.SG.M  
*erk<sup>h</sup>ómenos ...*  
 come.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M
- b. *... šnorhk<sup>h</sup> and jez ew xatahut<sup>h</sup>iwn*  
 grace.NOM.PL with 2PL.DAT and peace.NOM.SG  
*y=Ēē=n ew or ē=n ew or*  
**from=supreme-being.ABL.SG=DEF** and REL.NOM.SG be.3SG.PRS and REL.NOM.SG  
*galoc<sup>h</sup>=n ē ...*  
 come.PTCP.FUT=DEF be.3SG.PRS  
 ‘... Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come ...’ Rev. 1:4
- (8) a. *eidōs hóti exestraptai ho toiōũtos*  
 know.PTCP.PF.NOM.SG.M COMP be-subversive.3SG.PF ART.NOM.SG.M such.NOM.SG.M  
*kai hamartánei òn autokatákritos*  
 and sin.3SG.PRS **be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M** self-condemned.NOM.SG.M
- b. *gitasjir zi t<sup>h</sup>iwreal ē aynpisi=n ew melanč<sup>h</sup>ē*  
 know.2SG.IMP COMP erl.PTCP.PF be.3SG.PRS such.NOM.SG=DEF and sin.3SG.PRS  
*anjamb z=anjn dataparteal*  
 self.INS.SG OBJ=self.ACC.SG **condemn.PTCP.PF**  
 ‘[Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition,] knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.’ Titus 3:11

As the examples above have illustrated, all occurrences of *òn* in the New Testament have been rendered into Armenian according to one of five translation strategies, most of which are applicable in other languages, too. With the exception of Lk.



3:23, none of these passages shows any divergences in meaning or suggests that the translators used the text to include their own exegesis.

This indicates that a treatment of the Greek nominative singular masculine participle as a genitive plural relative pronoun in Armenian is an outlier, an exception. In order to further corroborate this assumption, and to further back Macler's point, the next section outlines the Armenian translation strategies applied to the other member of the minimal pair, the relative pronoun *hōñ*.

## 4 Translations of the relative pronoun (Gk. *hōñ*)

Having excluded a straightforward translation of the participle, the second step in this enquiry is to show that the relative pronoun *hōñ* is commonly translated as Arm. *oroc'*, thus lending further credence to Macler's point.

The Armenian form *oroc'* is multifunctional, serving as the genitive, dative, and ablative plural of the relative pronoun *or*. Including instances prefixed with the proclitic prepositions *i/y=* 'in, into, from' and *z=* 'about, concerning', this form occurs 114 times in the Armenian New Testament (Meyer 2018: 38). Table 2 (p. 74) takes into account only those occurrences of *oroc'* resulting from a translation of Greek *hōñ* and presents the translation strategies employed, their number of occurrences, and the verses in which they are attested.<sup>15</sup>

Parallel to the procedure in §3 above, in what follows, each of these strategies is exemplified and explained briefly; since the main interest here lies in the dominant strategy, the use of relative clauses, the treatment of the other strategies will be briefer.

The Greek genitive can be used to indicate, amongst other things, possession or appurtenance, a partitive sense, and the standard of comparison, and it can be governed by a number of prepositions such as Gk. *perí* 'about, around', *hypó* 'by', etc. These functions can be expressed in Armenian, too, but not all by means of the genitive, which covers only possession and appurtenance (9); the partitive sense is expressed by means of the preposition Arm. *i/y=* and the ablative case (10), the standard of comparison by *k'an z=* and the accusative case; in other instances, the meaning conveyed in Greek by a preposition governing the genitive can be expressed without preposition by virtue of the basic meaning of the case (such as

<sup>15</sup> Of the 80 occurrences of *hōñ*, 72 are rendered as relative clauses in general, and 39 as variations of *oroc'*; the remaining 75 occurrences of *oroc'* are translations of other Greek relative pronouns (e.g. dative plural *hoīs*, *haīs*), nominalised or appositive participles, or nominalised adverbials.

**Table 2:** Translation strategies of Gk. *hōn* in the Armenian New Testament

Strategy	Number	Occurrences
relative clause	72	Lk. 1:4, 3:19, 5:9, 6:34, 9:36, 12:3, 13:1, 15:16, 19:37, 23:14, 23:41; Jn. 7:31, 13:29, 17:9, 21:10; Acts 1:1, 3:21, 7:45, 8:24, 9:36, 10:39, 13:38[39], 15:29, 21:19, 21:24, 22:5, 22:10, 22:15, 24:8, 24:13, 25:11, 25:18, 26:16 (bis), 26:22; Rom. 3:8, 3:14, 4:7 (bis), 9:4, 9:5 (bis), 15:18; 1Cor. 3:5, 7:1, 15:6; 2Cor. 1:6, 2:3, 11:15, 12:17; Eph. 3:20; Phil. 3:19 (bis), 4:3; 1Tim. 1:6, 1:15, 1:20, 6:4; 2Tim. 1:13, 1:15, 2:17; Heb. 3:17, 9:5, 11:38, 13:11; 1Pet. 3:3; 2Pet. 1:4, 3:6; Jude 1:15 (bis); Rev. 17:8, 20:8
subordinate clause	4	Lk. 1:20, 19:44; Acts 12:23; 2Thess. 2:10
nominal periphrasis	2	Acts 26:2; Heb. 5:8
indirect question	1	Mt. 6:8
anaphor	1	Heb. 13:7

in the instrumental, ex. 11). Some of these correspondences are illustrated in the examples below.<sup>16</sup>

- (9) a. *parēsān dé tines en autōi tōi*  
 be-present.3PL.PST PTC INDF.NOM.PL.M/F in same.DAT.SG.M ART.DAT.SG.M  
*kairōi apaggéllontes autōi perì tōn*  
 season.DAT.SG.M report.PTCP.PRS.NOM.PL.M/F 3SG.DAT about ART.GEN.PL  
*Galilaïōn hōn tò haïma Pilātos*  
 Galilean.GEN.PL REL.GEN.PL ART.ACC.SG.N blood.ACC.SG.N Pilate.NOM.SG  
*émixen metà tōn t<sup>h</sup>usiōn autōn*  
 mix.3SG.AOR with ART.GEN.PL sacrifice.GEN.SG.F 3PL.GEN
- b. *ekin omank' i nmin žamanaki ew patmec'in*  
 come.3PL.AOR INDF.NOM.PL.ANIM in same.LOC.SG time.LOC.SG and tell.3PL.AOR  
*nma vasn Galileac'woc'=n, oroc' z=ariwn=n*  
 3SG.DAT about Galilean.GEN.PL REL.GEN.PL OBJ=blood.ACC.SG=DEF  
*Pilatos xarneac' ənd zoħs noc'a*  
 Pilate.NOM.SG mix.3SG.AOR with sacrifice.ACC.PL 3PL.GEN  
 'There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.' Lk. 13:1

<sup>16</sup> A number of interesting aspects of Armenian relative clause syntax, such as the use of the relative pronoun in the generic singular (e.g. Lk. 12:3), free relative clauses (e.g. Acts 22:15), and double marking by means of relative and anaphoric pronouns (e.g. Rev. 20:8), are not discussed here any further, since the matter of concern is the translation of a specific passage.

The passage in (9) illustrates the possessive or appurtenative function of the genitive in both Greek and Armenian. The talk is of the blood of the Galileans, which in both languages forms the direct object of the relative clause and is related by means of a genitive relative pronoun to its possessors in the matrix clause. With 25 instances out of 72, this direct translation is the most common rendition of Gk. *hōn* into Armenian.

Those Greek genitives expressing other inherent case functions, such as the partitive or ablative, are expressed by means of prepositions and other cases in Armenian;<sup>17</sup> where Greek genitives are the result of case attraction, Armenian uses the syntactically expected case.<sup>18</sup>

- (10) a. *épeita óp<sup>h</sup>t<sup>h</sup>ē epánō pentakosíois adelph<sup>h</sup>oís ep<sup>h</sup>ápax*  
 then see.3SG.AOR.PASS more-than 500.DAT.M brother.DAT.PL.M at-once  
*ex hōn hoi pleíones ménousin héōs árti ...*  
 from REL.GEN.PL ART.NOM.PL.M many.NOM.PL.M remain.3PL.PRS now
- b. *apa erewec‘aw aweli ews k‘anz=hing harewr etbarc‘*  
 then appear.3SG.AOR.more even than OBJ=5 100 brother.DAT.PL  
*miangamayn. y=oroc‘ bazumk‘ kan minč‘ew*  
 together from=REL.ABL.PL many.PL remain.3PL.PRS until  
*c‘=ayžm ...*  
 to=now  
 ‘After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom  
 the greater part remain to the present ...’ 1Cor. 15:6

In (10), the Greek phrasing of a preposition governing a genitive relative pronoun is replicated one-to-one, with the exception that, at least notionally, the case of the Armenian relative pronoun is the ablative; the coincidence of the genitive and ablative forms is the result of case syncretism, which is widespread but paradigm-dependent in the Armenian nominal and pronominal system.<sup>19</sup> Not all relative pronouns have the same form *oroc‘*, however. In the following example, the instrumental case of the relative pronoun is used to reflect a Greek genitive governed by a preposition.

- (11) a. *tí oũn estin Paũlos tí dé Apollōs*  
 INTERROG PTC be.3SG.PRS Paul.NOM.SG.M INTERROG PTC Apollos.NOM.SG.M  
*diákonoi di‘ hōn episteúate ...*  
 minister.NOM.PL.M through REL.GEN.PL believe.2PL.AOR

<sup>17</sup> In two instances (2Cor. 2:4; 1Tim. 6:4), a relative adverb *usti* ‘whence’ is used instead; cp. the occasional usage of Lat. *unde*, Gk. *hót<sup>h</sup>en*.

<sup>18</sup> On this question, cf. Meyer 2018 with details.

<sup>19</sup> For the complexities of Armenian case syncretism, cf. Caha 2013.

- b. *isk ard ov ē Pawlos kam ov Apolos.*  
 PTC then INTERROG.ANIM be.3SG.PRS Paul or INTERROG.ANIM Apollos  
*paštōneayk' orovk' hawatac'ēk'=n ...*  
 official.NOM.PL REL.INS.PL believe.2PL.AOR=DEF  
 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom  
 you believed ...' 1Cor. 3:5[4f.]

The idea of Paul and Apollos as intermediaries is expressed in Greek (11a) through *diá* and the genitive, whilst in the Armenian version (11b) the same notion can be expressed without recourse to a preposition by means of the bare instrumental.

The examples above illustrate that, in the translation of Greek relative clauses by Armenian relative clauses, little out of the ordinary occurs; case forms are adapted in the translation as dictated by the constraints of Armenian grammar, but no further. The uncomplicated nature of the passages above is indicative of the whole corpus.

The remaining strategies—subordinate clauses, nominal periphrasis, indirect question, and anaphor—are exemplified in (12–15) below. Together accounting for only 10% of the whole corpus, they are of no further significance for the present question.

- (12) a. *parak<sup>h</sup>rēma dē epátaxen autòn ággelos kuriou*  
 immediately PTC smite.3SG.AOR 3SG.ACC.M angel.NOM.SG.M lord.GEN.SG.M  
*ant<sup>h</sup> hōñ ouk édōken tèn dóxan tōi*  
 PREP REL.GEN.PL NEG give.3SG.AOR ART.ACC.SG.F glory.ACC.SG.F ART.DAT.SG.M  
*t<sup>h</sup>eōi ...*  
 god.DAT.SG.M
- b. *ew andēn ehar z=na hreštak Tearn p'oxanak zi*  
 and then smite.3SG.AOR OBJ=3SG.ACC angel.NOM.SG lord.GEN.SG instead for  
*oč' et p'ars Astucoy ...*  
 NEG give.3SG.AOR glory.ACC.PL god.DAT.SG  
 'Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not  
 give glory to God ...' Acts 12:23

In passage (12), the relative clause in question begins with Gk. *ant<sup>h</sup> hōñ* lit. "in return for which things", which is best understood as a causal clause. The Armenian rendition copies this causal sense, using the subjunction *zi* 'for, because', but also retains the original bipartite structure, translating Gk. *antí* as Arm. *p'oxanak* 'instead, in return'; while the latter can also function as a preposition governing the genitive, a direct translation as *p'oxanak oroc'* would perhaps not have been faithful to the causal connotation in Armenian. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that all four occurrences of Gk. *ant<sup>h</sup> hōñ* as listed in Table 2 are rendered in the same fashion in Armenian. In general, the collocation *p'oxanak zi* is very

rare in 5th-century Armenian and, outside of the New Testament, occurs less than a dozen times. This suggests it may have been created in the context of translation and illustrates again that corpus-linguistic studies of translations can be useful to unearth such origins.

- (13) a. *kaiper òn huiòs émat<sup>hen</sup> ap<sup>h</sup> hõn*  
 although be.PTCP.PRS.NOM.SG.M son.NOM.SG.M learn.3SG.AOR from **REL.GEN.PL**  
*épat<sup>hen</sup> tèn hupakoén*  
 suffer.3SG.AOR ART.ACC.SG.F obedience.ACC.SG.F
- b. *t'èpēt ew Ordi ē, usaw i č'arč'aranac'*  
 although even son.NOM.SG be.3SG.PRS learn.3SG.AOR from torment.ABL.PL  
*anti z=hnazandut'iwn*  
 therefrom OBJ=obedience.ACC.SG  
 '... though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.'  
 Heb. 5:8

Passage (13) illustrates the nominalisation strategy. The Greek free relative clause *ap<sup>h</sup> hõn épat<sup>hen</sup>* lit. “from [the things] which he suffered” is rendered in Armenian as *i č'arč'aranac' anti* “from these sufferings”. The headless nature of the Greek original may be one factor leading to this translation, but is not decisive since in other instances, such relative clauses are translated as relative clauses in Armenian, too (e.g. Acts 22:15).

- (14) a. ... *oïden gâr ho patêr humõn hõn*  
 know.3SG.PF for ART.NOM.SG.M father.NOM.SG.M 2PL.GEN **REL.GEN.PL**  
*k<sup>h</sup>reïan êk<sup>h</sup>ete prò toũ humãs aitêsai autón*  
 need.ACC.SG.F have.2PL.PRS before ART.GEN.SG.N 2PL.ACC ask.INF.AOR 3SG.ACC.M
- b. ... *zi gitē hayr=n jer z=inč' pitoy*  
 for know.3SG.PRS father.NOM.SG=DEF 2PL.GEN OBJ=**INTERROG.INAN** need.GEN.SG  
*ē jez, minč'č'ew jer xndreal inč' ic'ē*  
 be.3SG.PRS 2PL.DAT before 2PL.GEN ask.PTCP.PF INDF.INAN be.3SG.PRS.SBJV  
*i nmanē*  
 from 3SG.ABL  
 'For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.'  
 Mt. 6:8

In (14), the Greek genitive relative pronoun is dependent on the noun *k<sup>h</sup>reïa* ‘need’. A similar expression, with a noun expressing ‘need’, is employed in Armenian, but here the dependency is inverted: where in Greek one has need (accusative) of something (genitive), in Armenian something (nominative) is of need (genitive) to someone (dative). While Armenian could have employed a relative clause here (*gitē ... z=or pitoy ē jez*), an interrogative pronoun is used instead, introducing an indirect question; the whole clause is the object of the matrix clause verb as marked by the object proclitic *z=*.

- (15) a. *mnēmoneúete tōn hēgouménōn humōn hoitines*  
 remember.2PL.IMP ART.GEN.PL.M rule.PTCP.PRS.GEN.PL 2PL.GEN REL.NOM.PL.M/F  
*elálēsan humīn tōn lōgon toũ t<sup>h</sup>eoũ*  
 say.3PL.AOR 2PL.DAT ART.ACC.SG.M word.ACC.SG.M ART.GEN.SG.M god.GEN.SG.M  
***hōn*** *anat<sup>h</sup>eōroũntes tēn ékbasin*  
 REL.GEN.PL consider.PTCP.PRS.NOM.PL.M/F ART.ACC.SG.F outcome.ACC.SG.F  
*tēs anastrop<sup>h</sup>ēs mimeĩst<sup>h</sup>e tēn pístin*  
 ART.GEN.SG.F conduct.GEN.SG.F imitate.2PL.IMP ART.ACC.SG.F faith.ACC.SG.F
- b. *yišec‘ēk‘ z=arajñords jer or xōsec‘an jez*  
 remember.2PL.IMP OBJ=leader.ACC.PL 2PL.GEN REL.NOM.PL say.3PL.AOR 2PL.DAT  
*z=ban=n Astucoy. hayec‘ealk‘ y=els*  
 OBJ=word.ACC.SG=DEF god.GEN.SG consider.PTCP.PF.NOM.PL into=outcome.ACC.PL  
*gnac‘ic‘ noc‘a, nmanołk‘ eleruk‘ hawatoc‘=n*  
 conduct.GEN.PL 3PL.GEN imitate.PTCP.PRS.NOM.PL become.2PL.IMP faith.GEN.PL  
 ‘Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God  
 to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.’

Heb. 13:7

The Greek relative clause introduced by *hōn* in (15) refers back to *tōn hēgouménōn* “the leaders” in the matrix clause; the genitive is here one of appurtenance, dependant on *tēn ékbasin tēs anastrop<sup>h</sup>ēs* ‘the outcome of conduct’, which is the object of the participle *anat<sup>h</sup>eōroũntes*. The Armenian translation contains an analogous participle (*hayec‘ealk‘*), but instead of connecting the object by means of a relative clause, uses the personal pronoun *noc‘a* as an anaphor, resulting in two unconnected sentences.<sup>20</sup>

All of these examples demonstrate that, with very few exceptions, Greek relative clauses using the pronoun *hōn* are rendered in Armenian as relative clauses as well, many of which use the form *oroc‘*. That is to say that, given a random Greek relative clause in the genitive plural, it is fairly likely that it would be translated into Armenian as a relative clause in the genitive plural, too.

## 5 Comparative data

The final step of the enquiry is to exclude other sources of external influence.

<sup>20</sup> The Armenian choice of anaphor over relative clause may be motivated by the embedded nature of the relative pronoun: forming part of the object of a participial phrase subordinated to the main verb of the subordinate clause (Greek *mimeĩst<sup>h</sup>e*), a translation with a relative clause may have been too complex or unidiomatic. Without further enquiry, however, and given the singular occurrence of this anaphor strategy in the corpus, this is pure speculation.

In neither the Greek or the Armenian *apparatus critici* on the passage is there any indication of alternative readings of the word in question.<sup>21</sup> This excludes errors in transmission post-dating the original translation.

Other early western translations of the New Testament are similarly of little help in clarifying this situation: the Gothic version of Lk. 3:23, for instance, uses neither a participle nor a relative clause, but a subordination introduced by *swaei* ‘so that’;<sup>22</sup> the Vulgate evades the problem in not translating *ón* and setting *filii Joseph* in apposition to *Jesus* as the subject of the matrix clause. In general, this verse appears to be unproblematic in other translations.

Circling back to the beginning of this paper, one final possibility must be considered, namely the possibility of a Syriac vestige from the Arm I translation. The Syriac version of this passage reads as follows:

- (16) *hū dēn yešū’ ʾīt=aw wā ʾayk bar šənīn tālāṭīn*  
 3SG.M PTC Jesus exist=3SG.M be.3SG.PF.M as son.CON.SG.M year.ABS.PL.F 30  
*wəməstəḫar wā bar yawsep*  
 think.PTCP.3SG.M be.3SG.PF.M son.CON.SG.M Joseph  
 ‘Now Jeshu himself was as a son of thirty years, and was considered the  
 son of Jauseph’ (tr. Etheridge 1846) Lk. 3:23 (Syriac Peshitta)

As passage (16) illustrates, there is no trace of a relative pronoun or indeed a participle of the verb ‘to be’, as the verse has been restructured to better fit the requirements of the Syriac language.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that an origin of the Armenian version of this passage in the Arm I translation is very unlikely.

Having excluded a different, Syriac origin as well as comparable problems in other early Gospel translations, transmission problems post-dating the original translation, or a tendency of the Armenian Bible translators to use the genitive plural relative pronoun to translate a nominative singular participle, there do not seem to be any other options than to assume that a translation error has occurred. This corroborates the suggestion of Macler incontrovertibly.

<sup>21</sup> The comment in Zohrabian 1805 is limited to *omank’*. *Orpēs ew karcēr* ‘Some [manuscripts]: as it was indeed/also reckoned’, referring to the insertion of *ew*, which does not occur in the standardised text; similarly, Künzle (1984: ad loc.) only remarks that *skseal* was added. I am grateful to one of the journal’s reviewers for pointing out that in another edition (Constantinople 1895) of the New Testament, Arm. *oroc’* is replaced by *ew ēr* ‘and was’; this reading cannot be old, however, and must be a secondary emendation.

<sup>22</sup> Gothic: *jah silba was lesus swe jere prije tigiwe uf gakuṅḫai, swaei sunus munds was Iosefis, ...* (Codex Argenteus, Lk. 3:23).

<sup>23</sup> While different in certain details, the Old Syriac Codex Sinaiticus Syriacus from the Sinaitic Palimpsest follows the same principle as the Peshitta version and thus does not provide any further help here; cf. Kiraz 1996: ad loc.

## 6 Conclusions

This paper has shown that (a) the nominative singular masculine form of the present active participle of Greek *eimí* ‘to be’ is most commonly translated into Armenian as a nominative relative clause or another subordinate clause; (b) there is no instance except Lk. 3:23 where such a participle is rendered as a genitive plural relative pronoun in Armenian; (c) Greek genitive plural relative clauses are very commonly translated as genitive plural relative clauses in Armenian as well; and (d) there are no variant manuscript readings, comparative data, or other translations which could better explain this passage.

Given that the Greek forms in question—Gk. ΩN in the unaccented uncials without breathing marks of the time in question—are graphemically identical and phonologically sufficiently similar to be mistaken for one another, Macler’s solution to the conundrum of Lk. 3:23 must be accepted. The specifics, however, remain unclear:

**EITHER** On the off-chance that the Greek *Vorlage* of the translation of this passage contained diacritics, reading *hōñ* instead of *ōñ* is based on a mistake in said diacritics; the Armenian translators accepted this reading and translated it as above.

**OR** Far more likely, the translators misinterpreted the *Vorlage* (without diacritics), mistaking ΩN (*ōñ*) for ΩN (*hōñ*).

No other alternatives or more fine-grained approaches to the two proposed above seem feasible, but a favourite interpretation clearly emerges on the basis of what type of *Vorlage* is more likely. The earliest attested Armenian Gospel manuscript dates to the 9th century CE,<sup>24</sup> for which reason a Gospel manuscript closer to the time of translation cannot shed any further light on this question.

The origin of the translation error that occurred in the Armenian version of Lk. 3:23 may be obvious to readers familiar with the Greek text and textual transmission; it was, however, evidently not so patent to later copyists of the Armenian New Testament, who maintained it without fail. It is equally remarkable that the translators themselves did not realise something was amiss in their translation.

This paper has demonstrated in detail, using corpus-linguistic methods and comparative data, that the only explanation for this passage is a translation error.

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<sup>24</sup> While the earliest lapidary inscriptions in Armenian date to the 5th century CE (Stone 1990), the earliest manuscript is the so-called Queen Mlk’ē Gospel (MS V 1144/86), dated to between 851 and 862 (cf. Kouymjian 2014: 6).



The lack of grammaticality of the passage in question raises once more the question of the nature of the Armenian New Testament translation: while evidently not “slavish”, as indicated by the variety of translation techniques illustrated above, it clearly adheres to the Greek *Vorlage* as much as possible and, it would seem, even in such instances where the translators could not (or did not) make grammatical sense of the Greek.

In more general terms, the paper hopes to illustrate that corpus-linguistic enquiries are useful and indeed necessary to corroborate philological arguments, especially in translated texts, and that, owing to its idiosyncrasies, the Armenian New Testament translation is not an optimal source of linguistic data for Classical Armenian. Future grammars and corpus studies intending to survey this language should rely on native literature.

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