

## The Reception and Reworking of Abraham Traditions in Armenian

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We shall discuss a corpus of mostly narrative texts about Abraham that are preserved in late medieval manuscripts in Armenian. The date of origin of these traditions is not explicit, but they can in general be set prior to the 10th century, when constituent elements of them appear in a number of sources.<sup>1</sup> They cannot be older in Armenian than the fifth century, at which time the Armenians began to write their own language. S.P. Brock, in a fine study of the story of the ravens in Syriac (on which more below),<sup>2</sup> isolates points at which it differs from the version of the same events in *Jubilees*. At virtually all these points, the Armenian Abraham saga resembles the Syriac, though we would not claim it is derived from Syriac. The Story of Melchizedek, of which we shall speak below, is most cognate to the Greek Melchizedek tale, while certain other distinctive traditions have not been found in any language but Armenian. Of course, the date of constitutive traditions is not, necessarily, the date of any particular literary formulation of that tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> Naturally, direct manuscript evidence before the 10th century is not available, for the oldest literary manuscript, Matenadaran, Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Erevan is dated 981 (M2679): see Ardashes Mathévossian, *A Book of Knowledge and Belief by Priest David; The oldest armenian manuscript on paper, 981* (Erevan: Matenadaran-Nairi, 1995, 1997) 2 vols. In addition, we find traditions distinctive to this corpus in authors from the 10th century, such as Samuel Kamrājorec'i (Սամուէլ Կամրայօրէց *Armenian Literature*, Vol. 10, 742-43: this major series of collected Armenian works is so named and referred to by century and page.) and Grigor Narekac'i (Grigor Narekac'i, Գրիգոր Նարեկացի *Book of Lamentations*, ed. P.M. Xaç'atryan and A.A. Łazinyan [Erevan: Academy of Sciences, 1985], 622 [գ է 3.5]).

<sup>2</sup> S.P. Brock, "Abraham and the Ravens: A Syriac Counterpart to Jubilees 11-12 and Its Implications," *JSJ* 9 (1978) 135-52.

## Character of the Armenian Abraham Traditions

The Armenians showed a deep interest in Abraham, expressed not just in apocryphal narratives, but in poetry, art and exegesis as well. To trace all this abundance is beyond our scope here, but please bear in mind that the corpus of 15 documents, mainly narratives, which I shall discuss is far from exhaustive.<sup>3</sup>

After all, in its simple, biblical<sup>4</sup> form, Abraham's is a very dramatic story, moving from one exciting incident to another — Abraham's migration to the Land of Israel, his battle against the four kings, the double narratives of Sarah in the palaces of pagan monarchs, the story of Lot, the burning of Sodom and Gomorra, and the binding of Isaac (the Aqeda). Above all, in Christian thought, the visit of the three "men" and their annunciation of Isaac's birth to Abraham, as well as Abraham's offering of Isaac, played a pivotal role.

Here our attention will be directed to the tradition, transmission, and transformation of these stories, to their Christian, specifically Armenian retelling. Which elements of the biblical narrative were emphasized and which omitted, and why? Which non-biblical episodes were introduced; which ideas were reinterpreted? It is to such questions that we shall direct our gaze.

The Armenians narrated the biblical story, inviting grist to the mill of any story-teller, with clearly Christian reformulations. Christians emphasized his role as the father of all believers (cf. Rom 4:16) and the idea of the bosom of Abraham as the resting place of the righteous souls (Luke 16:23). In Jewish and Christian stories, Abraham's discovery of God was a focus of fascination. Numerous versions of this event occur in varied sources as far

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<sup>3</sup> I edited and translated these fifteen narratives in my forthcoming book, *Armenian Apocrypha : Relating to Abraham*. They are cited from that edition by text and section numbers.

<sup>4</sup> I use "Bible" and "biblical" to designate the books of the Hebrew Bible. Old and New Testaments together are called "Scripture" and "scriptural".

back as *Jubilees*, and in the Armenian stories retailed here ancient traditions are mixed with newer ones. The strange story, taken as paradigmatic but yet always puzzling, of Abraham offering Isaac<sup>5</sup> is not just connected with a trial of the patriarch's faith. It foreshadowed God's offering of his Son, and so the central mystery of Christian understanding of the world.

### Abel's Offering

When Abraham kneeled down, after offering the ram, Isaac's substitute, text no. 15 says (§47) that, "there was a voice from the heavens which said, 'Thus, I too did not pity my beloved Son for your sake who, having come, will free all the children of Adam from Hell because of your goodness'." So Abraham's willing sacrifice foreshadows and atemporally reflects God's sacrifice of his Son for the sake of Adam's offspring, and therefore, in a Christian perspective, the central meaning of the world.

Text no. 6.9, telling the story of the Aqeda, says: "He showed him the tree of Sabek, / which is in that place, / And a ram was hung by its two horns, <sup>6</sup>/ He went forth upon the flat rock, <sup>7</sup>/ He took Abel's ram, <sup>8</sup>slaughtered it in the place." Thus, the ram in the thicket (Gen 22:13), which replaced Isaac, is identified with the "firstling of the flock" offered by Abel in Gen 4:4. Abel's offering and Abraham's ram are the same beast, which highlights their role

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<sup>5</sup> See David Shulman, *The Hungry God: Hindu Tales of Filicide and Devotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and Jacob Licht, *Trial in the Bible and in Second Temple Judaism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973) [Hebrew] for two interesting perspectives. Obviously, the scholarly and exegetical literature on this topic is enormous. Its stark narrative in Genesis is finely presented by Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1957) 3-23.

<sup>6</sup> Gen 22:13.

<sup>7</sup> This feature is not found in Gen 22.

<sup>8</sup> Abel's ram is not only identified, like here, with that offered by Abraham, but also with the heifer that Abraham slaughtered for the three men: see on this beast, texts no. 8.32, 11.27, 11A.28, 15.37. The point appears to be the perfect nature of the sacrificial victim — Abel's, Abraham's and God's sacrifice of his Son.

as special sacrificial animals. The ram is Isaac's substitute, and Isaac being offered is the type of Christ on the Cross. Here two different exegetical techniques are used. The first, also used by the Midrash, is the making of exegetical connections and identifications within the biblical stories. The other is typology, seeing events in the Bible as foreshadowing or hinting at those in the New Testament.

Another text explains the chronological anomaly inherent in this identification by saying, "And this ram [i.e., Abraham's - MES] was Abel's ram that the Lord accepted as Abel's offering, and Cain's (offering) He did not accept.<sup>9</sup> And Heaven accepted the ram alive and it was preserved until Sahak's birth,<sup>10</sup> whom Abraham has promised to God" (no. 8.32).<sup>11</sup> This is reminiscent of the Melchizedek theme in *2 Enoch*, where Melchizedek is taken to heaven to return from time to time, and indeed of Elijah. In the present context this supernatural ram, taken to heaven in Abel's day and returned in Isaac's, is the type of Christ as a sacrifice.

The story does not end here. Much attention is paid to the calf that Abraham slaughtered for the three men according to 18:7 of Genesis. This calf is noted to be particularly glorious, *patouakan*, also a hint at its supernatural nature. It too is identified with Abel's sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> In some versions of the story, Christ, who is one of the three men, revives the dead calf by making the sign of the cross, because he is moved by its mother's lowing.<sup>13</sup> Since one of the three men is the Lord, the calf slaughtered by Abraham also takes on a

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<sup>9</sup> Gen 4:3-5.

<sup>10</sup> The idea is similar to *2 Enoch's* statements about Melchizedek: see *2 En 72*.

<sup>11</sup> This promise is not mentioned in the other Armenian Abraham texts.

<sup>12</sup> See on this beast, texts no. 8.32, 11.27, 11A.28, 15.37.

<sup>13</sup> See text no. 8.29.

sacrificial character.<sup>14</sup> At the same time it foreshadows Christ's death and resurrection, which association is heightened by the use of the cross for resurrection of the calf. The lowing mother cow surely prefigures the women weeping at the Crucifixion.

Space does not permit us to analyze further here how incidents of the biblical stories were read and integrated into the Christian *Heilsgeschichte*. Themes were developed in this fashion and woven into an expanded biblical narrative and that was moved from past event to playing a trans-temporal role in the history of salvation, as viewed through a Christian spectrum.<sup>15</sup>

Below, a number of other episodes in the Abraham story will be discussed. Some of them are readings of incidents in the biblical text and others are apocryphal and were added to the narrative, either in Armenian circles, or in preceding Syriac or Greek narrations. These interpretations transform the Abraham narrative. Instead of having a single, punctual significance it became a multi-layered, perpetual foreshadowing and reflection of the redemptive dynamic of the cosmos. Such interpretations arose from a Christian world-view that regarded all of Scripture as one timeless revelation.

## **The Abraham Saga**

Characteristically, this approach regarded the biblical story as a unified history of redemption from Creation to Crucifixion, Resurrection and Parousia. Narrative sequence governs the

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<sup>14</sup> Another dimension of this beast is evident in texts no. 8.32, "[t]he marrow of this ram is the sweet oil with which they anointed you." "You" is Abraham, so the point of the anointing is unclear, for Abraham's anointing is not mentioned in the Bible, but see *Yalqut Shim'oni ad loc.* §62. Yet, the special nature of the calf is quite evident. Moreover, the bones of the calf Abraham slaughtered are not to be broken, evoking the Paschal lamb and another way of talking about the Crucifixion as sacrifice.

surface relation between the episodes of the story, but, in fact, the central redemptive event gave an atemporal unity that superseded narrative sequence. This led to certain specific Christian interpretations or exegeses of biblical events or texts and to their reformulation as prefiguring, indeed enfolding, the salvific life and death of Christ in which their meaning was found. Such tendencies appear in the Armenian Abraham narratives.

Once we enter into this world-view, the modern contrast of “Old” and “New Testament Apocrypha” had no meaning,<sup>16</sup> yet, of course, the origin and content of the various narratives can and, indeed, should be considered.

### **Specific Exegetic and Narrative Traditions**

Of course, the traditions and interpretations that constituted the building blocks of these developed narratives were not exclusively Christian in origin. Scholars have remarked that for the first millennium CE at least, it is misleading to treat the various religious and literary traditions that derive from the Bible — Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and others, as if they grew and lived hermetically sealed off from one another.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the relations between them are complex and dynamic, and involve not only diachronic transmission of shared “para-biblical” material, but also mutual borrowing and influence over centuries. In the

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<sup>15</sup> The techniques used are usually typological or paradigmatic, but we have also seen the use of identifications and equivalations, methods often used in Rabbinic exegesis.

<sup>16</sup> See also M.E. Stone, “Two Armenian Manuscripts and the *Historia Sacra*,” in C. Calzolari Bouvier, J.-D. Kaestli, and B. Outtier (eds.), *Apocryphes arméniens: transmission — traduction — création — iconographie* (Prahins CH: Zèbre, 1999) 30-31; M.E. Stone, “Biblical and Apocryphal Themes in Armenian Culture,” in *Proceedings of Strasbourg Conference of January 2010*, ed. R. Gounelle, forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> An attempt to describe such complex transmission in the Arabian peninsula is made by Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (State University of New York Press, 1990) 3-21; on the general issue, see also papers by John C. Reeves cited in the next note.

course of this, an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation took place.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, it is often difficult exhaustively to trace exact genealogical derivation of specific elements of tradition, though some striking parallels between Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources exist. Indeed, often the attempt to achieve genetic certainty is misleading, since the data at our disposal is, by the nature of things, partial, and the fit of the material is only probable and not probative.

Not only do difficulties attend the attempt to clarify the genetic origins of specific units of the narrative tradition but the issues of literary interrelationship of the Armenian Abraham texts as such are equally problematic.<sup>19</sup> Of course, certain texts stand in obvious literary relationship with one another. Yet, most attempts precisely to establish relations of literary dependence or derivation between the narrative texts seem fated to fail. Some sort of relationship is evident: some elements are shared, some expressions or turns of speech are

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., John C. Reeves, "Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Religious Traditions: Some Initial Soundings," *JSJ*, 30 (1999) 148-77, *idem*, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic* (SBLRBS, 45; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005). An interesting example is the material on Jewish and Christian "encounters" collected in Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, 18; Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009). At another level, the movement of traditions between different Christian channels, often widely separated in time and place, is significant. Such is illustrated in M.E. Stone, *Adam's Contract with Satan: The Legend of the Cheirograph of Adam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> It would be difficult to trace in detail the sources, growth, and development of these Armenian biblical retellings without an investigation of most of the Armenian literary tradition, for Abraham material in one form or another is very widespread. It is also quite unclear whether such research would actually uncover literary relationships. I did some analogous research into the very rich Adam tradition, which I hope will be paradigmatic for those interested in Armenian biblical retellings. See Michael E. Stone, "Adam and Eve Traditions in Fifth-Century Armenian Literature," *Le Muséon* 119.1-2 (2006) 89-120 and M. E. Stone, "Satan and the Serpent in the Armenian Tradition," in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and Its Reception History*, eds. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 141-186.

common, but in as many other points, the texts differ in this or that way, and one text form is not obviously more pristine than another.

Such a pattern of commonality and difference between text forms typifies what I have called “textual clusters”. I invoked this term to explain the complex relationships between the Adam Books and equally between the Esdras Apocalypses.<sup>20</sup> I suggest that this concept is also appropriate for describing the relationship between these Armenian Abraham texts. Having said this, I readily admit that *description* or *naming* of the phenomenon is not an *explanation* of it. The chief advantage of the description is that it helps us to discern the phenomenon of textual clusters, by distinguishing it from other types of relationships between texts. It is clearly a type of textual transmission but it does not yield to conventional stemmatic analysis,<sup>21</sup> and we must consider alternative paradigms of textual development.<sup>22</sup> The aetiology of textual clusters may lie in the way the documents were created and used. To resolve this issue is a challenge lying ahead as the study of allied corpora of medieval texts advances.<sup>23</sup>

## Structure and Discussion of Selected Elements

The rest of this paper will deal with the expanded Abraham saga, into which various traditions and literary sources are woven. In the texts we have studied, the range and selection

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<sup>20</sup> *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011 forthcoming) chapter 6, 151-171.

<sup>21</sup> See Stone, *ibid.*, 157 note 16 relating to Johannes Tromp’s strained textual genetics of the Primary Adam books.

<sup>22</sup> It may well be that if the context of the use of the Abraham texts can be clarified it may contribute to resolving this issue. There may also be something to learn from the types of manuscripts preserving these texts, and also from their *Vorlagern*. For that, a complete (or as complete as possible) inventory of all Armenian Abraham texts is required.

of incidents, their combination and recombination, their inclusion and exclusion changed and changed again. The name “embroidered Abraham saga” designates a reservoir of traditions, which, while maintaining a measure of stability, nonetheless combined differently in each document.<sup>24</sup> We must bear in mind that this saga as a whole is a conceptual construct, not existing in any given textual crystallization.<sup>25</sup> Even the fullest Abraham texts do not encompass all the episodes, nor do the texts coincide with one another. This, of course, leads us to regard these narratives as a textual cluster rather than as descendants of a single archetype.

Table 1 on the enumerates the chief narrative units of the Abraham saga. It abides by the biblical order of events and introduces the non-biblical incidents at the junctures at which they occur in the apocryphal texts. A blank in the second column indicates a non-biblical incident or episode that the Abraham saga introduced *de novo* into the biblical narrative line.

*Table 1: Chief Narrative Units of the Armenian Abraham Saga*

1. Abraham's background	
2. Idols and the recognition of God	
3. Story of the Crows: recognition of God	
4. Both stories combined in some versions: recognition of God	
5. Abraham regards the luminaries: recognition of God	
6. Abraham burns the idolatrous Temple	
7. His brother dies (for the fault of breeding of the mule) <sup>26</sup>	Gen 11:28

<sup>23</sup> More needs to be learned about how this “non-school” literature was created, used and transmitted.

<sup>24</sup> We have dealt with complex tradition transmission in *Ancient Judaism*, chapter 6.

<sup>25</sup> At least of those we have published here or consulted.

<sup>26</sup> A□an’s (biblical Haran; so the name appears here) fault is not mentioned in the Bible.

8. Terah dies in Haran	Gen 11:32
9. Abraham goes to Canaan	Gen 12:1-5
10. Abraham and Sarah go to Egypt and the incident with Pharaoh	Gen 12:10-20
11. Excursus: List of ten trials of Abraham	
12. Abraham increases in wealth: separation from Lot	Gen 13:1-12
13. Incident of Four Kings and Melchizedek	Gen 14
14. Melchizedek of Salem, stories about (not as an ascetic)	
15. Hagar and the birth of Ishmael	Gen 16
16. Circumcision of Abraham	Gen 17
17. The story of Mamrē	
18. Abraham's hospitality	Gen 18:1-5
19. Three men appeared	Gen 18:2
20. The meal	Gen 18:6-8
21. Annunciation to Abraham	Gen 18:9-15
22. Sodom and Gomorra – destruction of & Lot story	Gen 18:20-33, 19:1-29
23. Typology of Abraham and his sacrifice	
24. Abimelech of Gerar	Gen 20, 21:25-34
25. Isaac	Gen 21
26. Aqeda – binding of Isaac	Gen 22
27. Melchizedek story – M. as an ascetic	
28. Abraham, naming of	Gen 17:5
29. Sarah's death and burial	Gen 23
30. Rebecca <sup>27</sup>	
31. Isaac marries Rebecca	
32. Prophecy	
33. Descendants of Abraham	
34. Armenization of the genealogy	
35. Death of Abraham	Gen 25:8-10

It is instructive to compare this list of incidents with the biblical narrative. The Abraham saga adds major incidents to the biblical narrative, which are presented in Table 2. Particularly notable among these are the stories about the ravens and the recognition of God, the Story of Mamrē, and the Story of Melkizedek the Ascetic.

***Table 2: Incidents added to the Biblical Story***

1. Abraham's background	
2. Idols and the recognition of God	
3. Story of the Crows: recognition of God	
4. Both stories combined in some versions: recognition of God	
5. Abraham regards Luminaries: Recognition of God	
6. Abraham burns idolatrous Temple	
11. Excursus: List of Ten Trials of Abraham	
14. Melchizedek of Salem, stories about (not as an ascetic)	
17. The story of Mamrē	
23. Typology of Abraham and his sacrifice	
27. Melchizedek story – Melchizedek as an ascetic	
30. Rebecca	
31. Isaac marries Rebecca	
32. Prophecy	
33. Descendants of Abraham	
34. Armenization of the genealogy	

(1) These items give background to Abraham, in some texts extending back to the Flood, which explains the idolatry against which he reacted as due to the degeneration of the post-diluvian generations. Humans forgot God or forgot the books and the law. (2-5) There exist several differing versions of the incident of Abraham's recognition of God, a major theme in all readings of this material. (17) The Story of Mamrē, Abraham's black shepherd precedes

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<sup>27</sup> As the incidents occurs here they are not biblical: of course, Rebecca and her marriage to Isaac occur in the

the Annunciation to Abraham. Mamrē gave sustenance to the hungry, was turned white with his sheep as a reward, and his staff became the Oak of Mamrē. This story provides a basis for Abraham's famed hospitality as well as an aetiology of the Oak of Mamrē. The source of this story is unclear. (27) The story of Melchizedek as an ascetic was taken from an external source. In those Abraham narratives that contain it, it follows the Aqeda, which itself follows the incidents of Sodom and Lot. Yet, instead of the Story of Melchizedek the Ascetic, in other texts the different incident of Four Kings and Melchizedek's welcome and blessing of Abraham occurs and it precedes the Story of Mamrē.

### Melchizedek and the Story of Melchizedek

The apocryphal Melchizedek story, most probably drawn from a Greek source,<sup>28</sup> occurs in two documents, texts nos. 6 and 11. Where the apocryphal story occurs, the Melchizedek incident of Gen 14 is not mentioned and both Melchizedek traditions never occur in the same text.<sup>29</sup> (see Table 3).

*Table 3: Melchizedek Incidents in the Texts*

<b>Text no.</b>	<b>4 Kings Incident</b>	<b>Story of Melchizedek</b>	<b>Other Melchizedek</b>
2	meets Abraham - brief		
4			Melchizedek as priest consulted by Rebecca
4			Predicts preeminence of Jacob
6		Melchizedek in forest	

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Bible. So also in the next table.

<sup>28</sup> See Jan Dochhorn, "Die Historia De Melchisedech (Hist Melch) — Einführung, Editorischer Vorbericht Und Editiones Praeliminares," *Le Muséon* 117 (2004) 7-48; Pierluigi Piovanelli "Much to Say and Hard to Explain — Melchizedek in Early Christian Literature, Theology, and Controversy," forthcoming.

<sup>29</sup> A third type of Melchizedek material is encountered, where he is consulted for counsel or as an oracular source of knowledge: see texts 3 and 4. In these instances, however, Melchizedek's introduction cannot be situated within the narrative sequence.

7	bread & wine, type of Christ – brief		
11		Melchizedek in forest	
12	meets Abraham – close to Bible		

The name “expatiation on Melchizedek” (no. 14 in Table 1) designates expansions related to Gen 14:18-20 and not the Melchizedek Story found in texts 7 and 11 (Table 1 no. 27). It is directly connected with Melchizedek’s importance for Christians as a non-Levitical priest, a view anchored in the biblical text (“a priest of the Most High God” and cf. Ps 110:4) and that already occurs in Hebrews. Hebrews makes Jesus a scion of a high-priestly line founded by Melchizedek (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1-17) and argues for the primacy of Melchizedek’s sacerdotal line over the Levitical, which was descended from Abraham.

In Jewish sources of the Second Temple period, Melchizedek takes on a heavenly character, and he is identified in 11Q Melchizedek as a saviour figure.<sup>30</sup> In 2 *Enoch* he is a divine man, born without a father and taken to heaven before the flood, to be brought down in Abraham’s time.<sup>31</sup> His connection with Noachic days is highlighted in the widespread view that he was Shem, son of Noah.<sup>32</sup> Thus Hebrews is building on a Jewish tradition connected with Genesis 14 and bolstered by Ps 110:4.<sup>33</sup> For the Christian authors of the Armenian

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<sup>30</sup> See Annette Steudel, “Melchizedek”, in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 535-37.

<sup>31</sup> See 2 *Enoch* 71:37-72.

<sup>32</sup> See M.E. Stone, “Introduction,” in *Armenian Apocrypha : Relating to Abraham*, forthcoming, note 21.

<sup>33</sup> David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (SBLMS, 18, Nashville & New York: Abingdon Press, 1973). In addition, it might be the case that the Story of Melchizedek itself subsumes older Melchizedek traditions from the Second Temple period, presented in a Christian form. It seems to be problematic is to derive the whole Story of Melchizedek complex from exegetical expansions of Ps 110 and Hebrews, not to speak of Genesis. Its elements are too distinctive and differ in so many ways from those biblical traditions.

Abraham texts, Hebrew's view is strengthened by the bread and wine that Melchizedek, the priest, offers Abraham (see Gen 14:18), which offering was readily viewed as a sacrificial, Eucharistic act, one of several found in the Armenian Abraham saga.<sup>34</sup> Text no. 6.3-4 says of the meal Abraham prepared for the Three Men:

Unleavened bread, wine and calf he slaughtered for the meal,

A type of unleavened (wafer) (and) chalice of the Mass.

In Text no. 7.13-14, devoted to the Tree of Sabek, it says of Melchizedek's offering to Abraham that: <sup>13</sup>“Melk‘isēdēk took from the grapes of the tree and made wine. And having brought it he offered it to Abraham. And he broke unleavened bread beneath (it) when he came from cutting down the kings. <sup>14</sup>Abraham took it (and) he himself communicated and his 318 soldiers with him.”

Similar reasons lay behind the incorporation of the apocryphal Story of Melchizedek (no. 27), which was known in Greek (and later in Slavonic) into two Armenian Abraham texts.<sup>35</sup> It serves to highlight the Christian perception of the events but, except for the name of the priest Melchizedek, shows no connections with the biblical text beyond association of Melchizedek and his association with Abraham. This story evokes a number of well-known incidents. Melchizedek discovers God in an encounter very much like those about Abraham in texts no. 11.7 and 15.10. He lives as a “hairy ascetic” in a forest on Golgotha, in

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<sup>34</sup> Eucharistic connections are stressed, sometimes indeed created, such as in the repast of the Three Men with Abraham and in Melchizedek's offering that highlighted his foreshadowing sacerdotal function (texts no. 15.55). See also text no. 7.13-14.

<sup>35</sup> Texts nos. 6 and 11. See “Die Historia De Melchisedech,” and the incisive remarks of William Adler in the Introduction to his forthcoming translation of the Greek *Palaea Historica* (a work no earlier than the ninth century). The story has been taken into chapter 72 of the long version of *2 Enoch*, though there the connection with Abraham is not made. This leads us to speculate that it was an independent piece associated with Melchizedek, utilizing traditions lying outside Gen 14.

Jerusalem,<sup>36</sup> is found after eight years by Abraham with God's help, and becomes Abraham's household priest. He offers Abraham unleavened bread and wine.<sup>37</sup>

In the composite Abraham saga, the Story of Melchizedek follows the story of Abraham's ordeal in the Binding of Isaac. In that ordeal, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son is seen typologically to foreshadow God's sacrifice his Only-Begotten Son.<sup>38</sup> This is, of course, in fruitful tension with Melchizedek's father, King Melk'i's wish to sacrifice his son to idols. Moreover, the incident of the idolatrous sacrifices and the earth swallowing up both the idolatrous temple and all the people is reminiscent of Korah in Numbers.<sup>39</sup> It also guarantees the purity of Jerusalem and Golgotha, as the swallowing up of Korah and his associates purified the Israelite camp in the desert.

This Melchizedek story, then, forms a typology of redemption in intertextual conversation with the Abraham narrative: Melchizedek, like Abraham, recognizes God; Melchizedek's father sacrifices his other son to idols and Melchizedek is saved (a reverse Aqeda); instead of redemption, as with the sacrifice of the Son of God, the sacrifice of Melk'i's son leads to a swallowing up of idolaters, while Melchizedek, saved from slaughter, offers the eucharistic sacrifice on behalf of the children of Adam. Christian themes of eremitic character, such as the hairy ascetic living alone in the forest, are introduced and

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<sup>36</sup> See texts no. 7.18 and 14.13 and notes there. Compare the discussion by David Satran, *Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation of the Fourth Chapter of the Book of Daniel* (PhD. thesis; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1985) 345-369.

<sup>37</sup> Text no. 7.13.

<sup>38</sup> See text no. 15 discussed above in connection with this theme. See most recently Andrei A. Orlov, "Melchizedek Legend of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch," *JSJ* 31 (2000) 23-38; reprinted in *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism: Studies on the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 114; Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2007) 423-439 who discusses this legend.

Melchizedek, instead of being King of Salem (he is never that in the Story of Melchizedek!), becomes Abraham's family priest. The forest to which Melchizedek withdraws is on the Mount of Olives (text no. 6.13) or in Jerusalem (text no. 7.2).<sup>40</sup> Redemption is on that mountain, identified with Golgotha and with Adam's burial.

One chief problem that the Story of Melchizedek raises is its integration, not into the particular Abraham narratives that include it, but into the sequence of events inferred from Genesis. In those two Abraham narratives, texts nos. 6 and 11, the material relating to the four kings (Genesis 14) is not found.<sup>41</sup> This produces anomalies in the biblical time-line in which matter the Story of Melchizedek seems to be independent of Genesis.<sup>42</sup> As far as the Armenian Abraham saga is concerned, the Story of Melchizedek is an import, and the primary questions of its origin and purpose must be answered within its original context. Here we can only be concerned with its function within the Armenian Abraham texts.

### **The Story of Mamrē**

Item 17 on the list of episodes is the apocryphal story of Mamrē, Abraham's black slave, who sets out to pasture the sheep. He has three loaves of bread and in three incidents *en route* generously he gives his loaves away to starving men and is blessed, particularly by the last one. Then he reaches his goal and falls asleep, having stuck his oak staff into the

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<sup>39</sup> Num 16:20–21, 31–33. The stress on the swallowing up of all those associated with evil is remarkable. The result is the cleansing of Jerusalem from idolatry.

<sup>40</sup> According to text no. 14.13 the Aqeda was on Golgotha, in the mountains of the Jebusites, which once more ties the place of sacrifice to Golgotha, so one has the burial of Adam sacrifice of Isaac, Melchizedek and the Crucifixion all on the one, central place. Since Adam was created at the navel of the world and buried there, Golgotha = Zion = the site of Adam's burial and creation, and of the New Adam's Crucifixion and Resurrection. The geography of these texts is located on the plane of sacred place.

<sup>41</sup> The reverse situation, the presence of the "Genesis 14" material and the absence of the Story of Melchizedek, occurs in texts nos. 2, 7, and 12, cf. texts nos. 3 and 4.

<sup>42</sup> Its modifications contrast with Genesis 14 and cause one to wonder about its origins: see note 31 above.

ground. When he awakes, the staff has become a great oak tree<sup>43</sup> and he, a black slave, had turned white, together with his sheep. He returns to Abraham, who recognizes the miraculous nature of the event, and praises him.<sup>44</sup>

Here Abraham's famed hospitality is introduced, leading up to the story of the Annunciation to Abraham. Abraham observed the miracles that followed upon Mamrē's hospitality and swore never to eat again without a guest at his table. The sequence, the Story of Mamrē followed by Abraham's oath, Satan's subsequent blocking of the way and eventually the arrival of the Three Men is found, *mutatis mutandis*, in the major narrative texts.<sup>45</sup> The story is, among other things, an aetiology of "oaks of Mamrē" in Genesis.

### **The Annunciation to Abraham or The Visit of the Three Men**

The stress on the Annunciation to Abraham, i.e., the visit of the Three Men (items 18-22 in Table 1), is also characterized by Christian typology and is thus integrated into the Christian history of redemption.<sup>46</sup> Like the Annunciation to the Virgin, this Annunciation to Abraham foreshadows redemption. Similarly, the Binding of Isaac intimates the Crucifixion;<sup>47</sup> **Ruth, the reference below is from a well known Armenian reference book, known to anyone who reads Armenian and not accessible to anyone else.** This is the

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<sup>43</sup> The oaks of Mamrē are mentioned in Gen 13:18, 14:13, and 18:1. Sextus Iulius Africanus F30 deals with this tree and also knows the tradition that it sprang from Abraham's servant's staff (Martin Wallraff, William Adler et alii, *Sextus Iulius Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments* [GCS NF, 15; Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2007 66-67]). See also below, text no. 2.8 and note there.

<sup>44</sup> In another version, Abraham comes to him, and equally recognizes the miraculous nature of the event. The oak may have taken on some characteristics of the World Tree: see Stone, *Abraham*, forthcoming.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. texts nos. 2, 6, 8, 11, 12, and 15.

<sup>46</sup> Sometimes this is extremely explicit, say in text no. 8.29.

<sup>47</sup> See the statement of Anania Kat'olikos (10<sup>th</sup> century) that Isaac showed the Lord's Passion, see *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, 10<sup>th</sup> century, 255 and 297-98, texts no. 3.18, Isaac was "a likeness and type of Christ" texts no. 4.24 and 11.46. Isaac as a type of Christ is commonplace in early Christian literature.

conventional reference format. according to Text no. 14.13 Isaac was offered on Golgotha. The ram, Isaac's surrogate, is given meta-contextual significance, being identified as Abel's offering and was preserved alive in heaven from Abel's day until the Annuciation of Isaac's birth. Then Abraham offered it again. In one form of the stories, the calf slaughtered by Abraham for the meal he prepared for the three men is resurrected, indicating the salvific meaning of these events. "The marrow of this ram is the sweet oil with which they anointed you," says text no. 8.32, evoking the transformatory oil of 2 *Enoch* 22:8-9 and 56:2 and perhaps also the marrow of Isa 25:6.<sup>48</sup> Of course, at another level it may refer to the myron, the chrismatory oil, used baptism and unction.<sup>49</sup>

### **Biblical and Non-Biblical Episodes in the Abraham Saga**

The question can now be raised, which elements of the biblical narrative have been omitted from the apocryphal Armenian Abraham saga and which elements of the saga have no *point d'appui* in the biblical narrative.

First, let us consider those episodes and incidents that are present in the biblical narrative but do not occur in the Armenian apocryphal Abraham texts. When omitted episodes or incidents share features that are completely absent from the apocryphal material, it seems reasonable to assume that these shared features were the motive. A good example is

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. 3 *Apoc, Bar.* 15:1-2 and see Alexander Kulik, *3 Baruch: Greek-Slavonic Apocalypse of Baruch* (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature; Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2010) 366-368. See M.E. Stone, "The Angelic Prediction in the Primary Adam Books," in *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays*, eds. G. A. Anderson, M. E. Stone and J. Tromp (SVTP 15; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 111-132, 118, 124-127.

<sup>49</sup> Compare the oil of joy or gladness in Isa 61:3, Ps 45:8. The marrow is associated with fatness and plenty, see Isa 25:6, Ps 66:15 and Job 21:24. The use in anointing of oil deriving from marrow is not mentioned by Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell, *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Traditions* (London & Collegville: SPCK, 1993).

the texts relating to the promise of the gift of the land to Abraham and his descendants. These are all omitted, as is the promise of the perdurance of his seed: Gen 12:7, Genesis 15 and Gen 18:17-19. These omissions, I suggest, issue from a Christian reading of the Abraham stories, for they are all the specific promises to or about the bodily descendants of Abraham, the “old Israel”. In the writers’ perspective, these divine undertakings were superseded by the revelation through Christ and the understanding of the Christians as the new Israel.<sup>50</sup> Abraham’s bodily role as ancestor of Israel is replaced his role as Father of All Believers. In none of the apocryphal Abraham texts is any attempt made to handle the promises to Israel; they are just left out of the retelling, which is, of course, a way of handling them.

If our primary observations here are to the point, they confirm the conclusion that the Abraham stories were of interest for their role in the history of salvation and not simply because they are found in Scripture.<sup>51</sup>

What is more surprising is that the incident of the four kings and Melchizedek’s meeting with Abraham is given only in brief compass. The chronological problems involved in relating the two Melchizedek incidents, the one connected with Genesis 14 and the other being the apocryphal story, are dealt with above.<sup>52</sup> The typological potential of the Four Kings story is not fully realized, perhaps precisely because of the enhancement of Melchizedek’s role by the inclusion of the ascetic Melchizedek story within the Abraham cycle, even though the two Melchizedek incidents do not occur together in any single text.

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<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, other early Armenian authors stress these very texts, reinterpreting “Israel” to mean the Church.

<sup>51</sup> There are Armenian texts that are basically scholarly and learned. One such is in ms. Galata 154, texts no. 5 in my forthcoming book. Probably the list of the Ten Trials of Abraham also belongs to this category, though it came to be included within narrative texts: see texts no. 13 and its reuse in texts no. 5. Numerous other copies exist. On Armenian learned literature related to the Bible, see M.E. Stone, “The Armenian Apocryphal Literature: Translation and Creation,” in *Il Caucaso: Cerniera Fra Culture Dal Mediterraneo Alla Persia (Secoli IV-XI)* (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro, 1996) 627-628.

Thus, the general outline of the Armenian Abraham saga shows a profoundly Christian selection and editing of material drawn for the main part from the biblical Abraham texts and certain apocryphal sources. A Christian perspective is expressed not only by the (to us) anachronistic use of “Christ” for “God” (e.g., 8.6), but in the introduction of the Melchizedek material and in many typological exegeses.<sup>53</sup> Certain biblical passages, relating in particular to Abraham’s descendants, are omitted completely. All these means result in a story-line that is quite exciting and which is read naturally as part of a divine revelation that is deemed unitary and seamless.

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<sup>52</sup> Above in the section on “Melchizedek and the Story of Melchizedek”, this incident is discussed in detail.

<sup>53</sup> These are pointed out in the notes to the individual texts in Stone, *Abraham*.