Old Armenian nasal verbs : archaisms and innovations

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Summary

Old Armenian was first recorded in the beginning of the 5th century CE, around three millennia after the split of the Armenian branch from Proto-Indo-European. According to historical sources, speakers of Armenian were already present in the South Caucasus in the 6th century BCE, although the exact path and conditions of their arrival to the region remain a puzzle. In comparison to Greek and Sanskrit, Old Armenian shows a stronger impact of language contact and internal drift resulting in an intricate combination of archaisms and innovations. The present dissertation contributes to the study of such archaisms and innovations by examining a set of Old Armenian verbal classes that can be securely connected to their Indo-European prototypes, namely, the so-called nasal classes with a dental nasal phoneme in the affixes marking the imperfective stem of their paradigms.

Traditionally, the comparative historical grammar of Old Armenian has been concerned mainly with formal morphological correspondences, whereas the lexico-syntactic categories behind the morphological changes have been largely neglected. By contrast, in the present dissertation, the evolution of the nasal classes from Proto-Indo-European to Old Armenian is examined according to a set of formal and semantic parameters including the morphological structure of the verbal paradigm, the argument structure, and the aspectual meanings. This diachronic account of developments in the aspectual and valency-changing alternations associated with particular Old Armenian nasal verbs and verbal classes brings Old Armenian historical grammar to a new level of detail. In particular, the dissertation describes Proto-Armenian changes of transitivity marking that affected the nasal classes, analogical spread of the nasal suffixes based on aspectual meanings, the direction of root levelling over the verbal paradigm, and paradigmatic types of nasal classes that can be postulated for Proto-Armenian and dialectal Proto-Indo-European.