



CHARLES DOWSETT

Charles James Frank Dowsett

1924–1998

CHARLES DOWSETT was the first person to hold a position in Armenian studies at a British university. His academic career in London and Oxford was not outwardly eventful, but his linguistic versatility and wide-ranging scholarship earned him an international reputation. Many of those now active in the field of Armenian, both in Europe and the USA, studied under him, though not necessarily for an Oxford degree. His influence was not restricted to academic circles, for his many translations of folk tales from Russian, Turkish, and Armenian, were popular with a wider readership. And a more privileged group will treasure copies of his light-hearted renderings of prose and poetry in a multiplicity of languages, including medieval Armenian.

Charles James Frank Dowsett was born on 2 January, 1924. Of his early days and his family he was always reticent. He was brought up by a relative in Islington who acted as guardian after his parents separated. He was educated at Barnbury Central School, and in April 1940 moved to the Dame Alice Owen's School (now in Potters Bar). No personal memories of him are recorded until he went up in 1942 to St Catherine's in Oxford. Although he spent only one year there before military service, he was remembered as an oarsman and sculler. He read French and German, tutored by Dickran Garabedian, the tutor in French for St Catherine's Society and lecturer for Lincoln College. Whether Garabedian first sparked in Charles an interest in Armenian is not recorded. It was not until his return to academic life after his years in the army that he chose that particular path.

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From 1943 to 1947, while on military service, Charles turned his linguistic talents to Russian. During those years he met Friedel Lapuner from Eastern Germany, whom he was to marry in 1949. In 1947 he went up to Peterhouse in Cambridge as Thomas Parke Scholar to read Modern and Mediaeval Languages. In Part I of the Tripos he gained a First Class in Russian and German; for Part II he turned to Comparative Philology, gaining a Distinction in 1949. To the end of his life linguistic and philological questions were to dominate his scholarly interests. Under the direction of Professor (later Sir) Harold Bailey (FBA 1944) he embarked on doctoral research in Armenian, concentrating on the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* by the tenth century author Movses (known as Kalankatuatsi or Daskhurantsi). ‘Caucasian Albanians’ is a standard, but somewhat misleading, rendering of the Armenian *Aluank’*, ‘Albania’ to the Greeks and ‘Arran’ to the Arabs. Not to be confused with the Alans, they were the people who lived to the north-east of Armenia proper, on both banks of the river Kura downstream from Iberia. Although they had a script for their own Caucasian tongue, Armenian remained the language of written documents. Several of Charles’s important publications, the *History of Movses*, the *Penitential of David* and the *Chronicle of Mkhit’ar*, were concerned with authors from this area.

Following the report in 1946 of the commission chaired by Lord Scarbrough concerned with the recruitment of staff in university departments for the study of foreign (especially oriental) languages, Treasury Studentships were established. After a period of training in the appropriate country, those appointed to these Studentships were assured of a post. Charles held one of these for five years, 1949–54. It was not possible for him to spend the time in Soviet Armenia, so he went to Paris. There he studied both classical and modern Armenian and also Georgian. From 1950–2 he was at the Ecole nationale des langues orientales vivantes, where instruction in modern Armenian had been offered since Napoleonic times and was then in the hands of Frédéric Feydit.¹ For classical Armenian and Georgian he attended the Institut Catholique and studied with Charles Mercier, receiving his diploma in 1953.

When not travelling to consult manuscripts in the collections at Venice, Vienna, Jerusalem, Antelias, and Isfahan, Charles stayed at the Collège Franco-Britannique in the Cité Universitaire, where several British students formed a lively coterie; some of the friendships made

¹ This is now the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales.

there continued in later life. Since he had a generous scholarship, his fellow-students could not fail to note that his university fare was frequently supplemented in the more appealing restaurants of the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Good food and drink were to remain a significant feature of his hospitality and a focus for his good cheer and conversation. Among his French Armenian colleagues it was Haïg Berbérian, the noted scholar (who never held any formal academic post), whom he remembered with most affection, and whose voluminous library was a valuable resource. Berbérian's hospitality to visitors was legendary, and like him Charles, when at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, would often entertain his students in local restaurants, Bertorelli's being a particular favourite. After his return to London Charles set up house with Friedel in Barnet, where a long tradition of lively hospitality was inaugurated.

In 1954 his thesis, an annotated translation of the historical passages of Book II and III of the *History of the Albanian Caucasians*, was accepted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Cambridge, and he took up a position as Lecturer in Armenian at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Here he taught for the next eleven years, being promoted to Reader in 1965, the year of his departure for Oxford.

Charles's first scholarly article, dealing with the Persian general Šahraplakan, was published in 1951.² Šahraplakan is first mentioned by the seventh-century Armenian historian known as Sebeos, but Charles was primarily concerned with the two passages in the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* where he is mentioned. He discusses the variant spellings of the name found in the manuscripts he was then using for his doctoral thesis, and investigates its etymology. At the end he compares the accounts of Heraclius's campaigns in 623–4 against Šahraplakan and other Persian forces as found in the Greek and Armenian sources. The emphases on direct investigation of manuscript readings and perceptive linguistic analysis, with a particular interest in etymology, were to remain hall-marks of his scholarly output.

Two further articles dealing with Caucasian Albania appeared in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* in the 1950s. The first dealt with 'A Neglected passage in the History of the Caucasian Albanians'. Charles had noted that in Book III, ch. 20 the printed editions passed straight from the martyrdom of Yovhan in Nakhcevan in

² 'The Name and the Role of SARABLAGGAS or Šahraplakan', *Byzantion*, 21 (1951), 311–21.

834/5 to the death of Khalid b. Yazid in 842/3. Several manuscripts seen by Charles on his travels bridged the gap. The text covers two folios in Or. 5261 of the British Museum, which he published with a translation. The notes dealt with various historical notices and the fabulous ‘dragon-fish’, which caused havoc to fishermen in the Kura. This episode gave Charles an opportunity to expand in lighter vein on the sturgeon and on Armenian views concerning the mythological *vishap*. To mythology and folklore he would often return. The second article, on the *Chronicle* of Mkhitar Gosh, who was also originally from Caucasian Albania, is an annotated translation of the document, which is found at the end of the text of Mkhitar’s famous *Lawcode* in MS 1237 of San Lazzaro in Venice. It begins with a list of Albanian patriarchs from legendary beginnings to Step’annos III (died 1131), and then describes in detail events from 1140 on, concentrating on the efforts of Georgians and Muslims to control Albania. It breaks off in 1162.³ Other editions of unpublished texts and studies of variant passages found in manuscripts appeared in later years.

Quite a different genre of text also occupied Charles’s attention from those early days to the end of his life. He loved to translate tales, old and new, especially those suitable for children’s reading, from a variety of languages. The first was *A Christmas Triptych* by Felix Timmermans, which he rendered from the Flemish in 1955. From Russian he translated Anton Chekov’s stories about Kashtanka, the mongrel bitch which eventually found a home. The more substantial *Russian Tales and Legends*, published by the Oxford University Press in 1956, appeared under a nom-de-plume, Charles Downing, as did *Tales of the Hodja*, rendered from Turkish (1964), and his *Armenian Folktales* (1972). Not all his translations from an amazing variety of tongues found their way into print. Like his own renderings into Armenian—modern, medieval or ancient, prose or verse—and other nonce pieces in numerous languages, they were sent to his friends as the occasion or whim demanded and are now scattered over the globe.

The doctoral thesis, expanded into a translation of the whole *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, appeared in 1961.⁴ Two editions of the original Armenian text had appeared in 1860, one in Paris and one in Moscow. Taking the Paris text as a base, Dowsett drew on his extensive studies of

³ ‘A neglected passage in the History of the Caucasian Albanians’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 19 (1957), 456–68. ‘The Albanian Chronicle of Mxitar Goš’, *BSOAS*, 21 (1958), 472–90.

⁴ *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxurancı*, London Oriental Series, Vol. 8 (Oxford, 1961).

the manuscripts over the past years to produce an English rendering, incorporating numerous corrections and emendations. The sources of Moveses, where identifiable in earlier Armenian authors, he explained; and with his now customary interest in matters philological he concentrated on textual obscurities. The volume was an important contribution to Armenian studies, being the first full translation of this History in any western tongue; only extracts had previously appeared, in French.

In the past forty years Armenian authors, especially the historians, have attracted much attention. There was a spurt of interest in Armenian historians in the mid-nineteenth century, when many texts were published for the first time and translated into Russian, French, and occasionally German. Although further translations appeared in succeeding decades, mostly in French, not until the 1960s was there a significant increase of interest in Armenian texts in the English-speaking world. This change was partly due to the expansion of western scholarship into the areas of Eastern Christian studies, Late Antiquity, and Byzantium, for which Armenian sources were now recognised as significant; and partly to the increasing desire of the English-speaking Armenian diaspora, especially in the USA, to promote Armenian studies in academic circles. Charles was in place at just the right time to find an appreciative readership for his work.

His studies of manuscripts in Venice, Jerusalem, and Bzommar in Lebanon also enabled him to revise a quite different text of Caucasian Albanian origin. A significant *Penitential*, or 'canonical advice for confessors', had been written in the early twelfth century by a certain *vardapet* (celibate priest recognised for scholarly competence and licensed to teach) named David, son of Alawik, from Gandzak. It had been published in 1953 from manuscripts available in Erevan, at that time inaccessible to Charles. What drew his attention to this particular text is not clear, but the peculiarities of David's language and its medieval and dialectical forms would certainly have sparked his curiosity. David's *Penitential* is a valuable source for practices and superstitions of his time. It deals with church discipline in matters of social conduct, advising the priests who hear confession what types of penance to impose for a wide variety of cases.

This was the first major text for which Charles produced a critical edition.⁵ The accompanying volume of translation gave him an opportunity

⁵ *The Penitential of David of Ganjak*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 216, 217, Scriptorum Armeniaci, 3, 4, edition and translation (Louvain, 1961).

to address linguistic problems, and to engage in an extended discussion of David's preoccupation with questions of contamination and pollution. The previous year he had published a much shorter text of a similar kind, 'Advice on Confession', written soon after 1300 in Cilicia by another Movses.⁶ This 'advice' offers a very different approach to the subject, emphasising the value of private confession rather than public penance; the text may be placed in the context of Armenian-Roman Catholic relationships in the medieval Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. Charles did not return again to such topics, though he had noted the importance in medieval Armenian literature of the genre of *khratk'*, 'advice', in a whole range of subjects. He was dismissive of the literary merits of such compositions, even when their linguistic peculiarities and the oddities of their topics intrigued him. His outspoken remarks, such as referring to Movses Daskhurantsi as 'certainly no Bacon and no Shakespeare,' or elsewhere, that 'although it may prefer a more spacious plot, history, like philosophy, may still flourish in a tub', did on occasion upset over-sensitive Armenians.

In 1958 he participated in a Conference on Historical Writing on the Near and Middle East, organised at SOAS by Professor Bernard Lewis and Dr Peter Holt, which dealt with both Near Eastern historians writing in their native languages and western historians writing on the Near East. To the Proceedings (published in 1962) Charles contributed a paper on Armenian Historiography in which he briefly discussed a number of general themes: the social background of Armenian historians from the fifth to the fourteenth centuries; the models they used for their own works; their sponsors and their aims; and their local sources where these can be identified.⁷ Much work has been done on such themes in the past four decades; many of the histories have been translated afresh and critically examined. But in 1958 there was little of a general nature from which an interested student could gain an overview of Armenian historical writing, an important genre in that language. And despite the advancement of Armenian studies in the west, no comprehensive and scholarly assessment of Armenian literature as a whole has yet appeared.

In 1964 he contributed as a former pupil an article on the etymology of Armenian 'ti' to the fiftieth anniversary of the Institut Catholique de

⁶ 'Movses Erznkac'i's "Advice on Confession"', *Le Muséon*, 73 (1960), 135–49.

⁷ 'Armenian Historiography', B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 259–68.

Paris, and produced a briefer piece on ‘Ancient Armenian Roller-skates?’ for the *Geographical Journal*.⁸ This too was concerned with etymology, but began in lighter vein with a comparison of passages in Strabo and the Armenian historian Movses of Khoren which refer to Armenians sliding down icy slopes by a variety of expedients. Tongue in cheek, Dowsett can claim: ‘One can thus reliably credit the Armenians with toboggans, a funicular and snow-boots. Roller-skates, however, are quite a different matter. . . . As a compensation, the Armenians can at least claim to be the first people recorded as wearing what in the world of sport, I believe, are known as “spikes”.’

In the summer of that year Charles visited Cambridge, Massachusetts, to attend a conference organised by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research. He made a lasting impression on the local Armenian community with a speech in modern Armenian at the conference banquet. In the following year he contributed an article on the etymology of the Armenian words *niwt’*, originally meaning something spun, and *hiwt’*, ‘moisture’; in later Armenian these came to be used more or less interchangeably for ‘matter’. The article appeared in the second volume of the new series of the *Revue des études arméniennes*.⁹ The original series had been published in Paris from 1920 to 1930, and was restarted in 1964 under the auspices of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation of Lisbon, with Charles’s old friend Haïg Berbérian as editor. More significant for Charles’s fortunes was another benefaction of that Foundation. They offered to Oxford University an endowment for Armenian studies, thus enabling the first Calouste Gulbenkian Professor to be appointed in 1965. To no one’s surprise Charles Dowsett was selected.

There had long been interest in Armenian at Oxford. The University’s Armenian collection began in the seventeenth century, Archbishop Laud being the first to present manuscripts to the Bodleian Library between 1635 and 1640. The best known scholar there of more recent times was Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare (1856–1924, FBA 1903). Conybeare, however, had not held any university post in the subject; he did not teach Armenian and thus had had no official pupils. Having considerable private means, he resigned his Fellowship at University College in 1887 to

⁸ ‘Ancient Armenian roller-skates?’ *The Geographical Journal*, 130 (1964), 180–3. ‘Armenian *tēr, tikin, tiezerk’*, *Mémorial du Cinquenaire*, 1914–1964, Ecole des langues orientales anciennes de l’Institut Catholique de Paris. Travaux de l’Institut Catholique de Paris, 10 (Paris, 1964), 135–45.

⁹ ‘Armenian *niwt’*, *niwt’em*; *hiwt’*, *hiwt’em*’, *Revue des études arméniennes*, 2 (1965), 117–28.

devote himself to research, travel, and writing. However, his presence in Oxford, until ill health forced him to move further south in 1915, was a definite stimulus to interest in Armenian in the context of classical and of biblical studies, patristics and eastern church history, areas in which Armenian still plays a role in Oxford today. Further encouragement to Armenian studies at Oxford came from a benefaction by His Excellency Boghos Nubar Pasha in 1926. A Nubar Pasha Scholarship was established, which enabled graduate students to devote themselves to research in the subject. The first holder of this Scholarship was Harold Bailey, later to be Charles's doctoral supervisor at Cambridge and life-long friend.

On moving to Oxford, Charles occupied a room at the back of the Oriental Institute, recently built for the Faculty of Oriental Studies, looking across to the Ashmolean's Cast Gallery. Here his pattern of teaching soon became known as somewhat different from the Oxford custom, or indeed the more traditional reading of texts he had pursued at SOAS. Concentrating his classes as far as possible into one day, he opened his door to all and sundry who evinced an interest in Armenian, students or not. Texts in classical and modern Armenian and classical Georgian were set for explication, and all participated according to their abilities. The hours were broken for Armenian coffee or other refreshment produced in the kitchen. On those 'Armenian days' a constant hum of conversation, often broken by laughter, emanated from Room 114. The reading of a text was in fact a slow process, for Charles would stop every few words to investigate interesting etymologies. Those hoping for extended readings were sometimes disappointed, but their faculties were sharpened by the jumping from language to language and the diversity of contributions from those present.

The Gulbenkian Professorship was attached to Pembroke College, so Charles became one of the then twenty-six Fellows. For his first two years in Oxford, before he found a house in Hurst Rise Road, he lived in college during term. There being no undergraduates to tutor, his energies were directed more to the Senior Common Room. His gregarious interests and lively conversation are well remembered many years later by the few who were his contemporaries. An idea of his ability as raconteur may be gained from the 1994 essay for Francis Maddison, an old friend and formerly Keeper of the History of Science Museum, in which Charles Dodgson's own 'Twelve months in a Curatorship' is used as a foil for reflections on Oxford life.¹⁰

¹⁰ 'Two Greek Gadgets in Wonderland?' W. D. Hackmann and A. J. Turner (eds.), *Learning, Language and Invention: Essays presented to Francis Maddison*, Variorum (Aldershot, 1994), pp. 117–23.

As the sole Armenian scholar in London Charles had frequently been asked by the British Museum or by auction houses to interpret inscriptions or offer other advice. These contacts naturally continued after the move to Oxford. Of particular interest was a collection of Armenian illuminated gospel manuscripts offered to Sotheby and Co, for which he prepared a catalogue. This was printed in time for the proposed sale on 14 March, 1967.¹¹ Some of these manuscripts were quite extraordinary, including two illuminated by Toros Roslin, the most famous of all medieval Armenian painters: one dated to 1262, and the other dated to 1268/9 illustrated for prince Het'um (later king Het'um II). Colophons indicated that many of the manuscripts had been given to the Armenian cathedral of St James in Jerusalem. Charles naturally informed the leading Armenian art historian in the west, Sirarpie Der Nersessian (Corresponding Fellow 1975), who had retired to Paris from Dumbarton Oaks in 1965. She realised that many of these treasures came from the patriarchal treasury at the Armenian cathedral in Jerusalem. Being one of the few who had had access to those jealously guarded vaults, she recognised the unpublished illuminations. The resulting scandal shocked the Armenian world. The sale was aborted. No one was prosecuted, and no clear explanation as to how the few key-holders had allowed the manuscripts to be removed was made public. But Armenian confidence in the then patriarchal authorities was not easily restored.

A print acquired by Charles in London sparked a brief but far-ranging article for the volume in memory of W. B. Henning (FBA 1954), the noted scholar of Iranian and a former colleague at SOAS.¹² This late eighteenth-century print, attributed to Utagawa Toyoharu (1735–1814), showed red-haired scholars poring over specimens of sea-shells. An inscription refers to 'medicines of Arumaniya'. This, however, is not 'Armenia', but the Japanese for 'Alemania'. Charles points out that the Armenians were never in Japan at that time, and takes the opportunity to reflect on Armenian medical texts and the role of Armenians in trade between the Far East and the Netherlands.

Charles's knowledge of the Armenian cathedral in Jerusalem, which dated from his travels in the early 1950s, was shown to good advantage in

¹¹ *Catalogue of Twenty-three Important Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts, to be sold at auction by Messrs. Sotheby and Co., Tuesday 14 March, 1967*. 'We are indebted to Professor C. J. F. Dowsett for his invaluable help in compiling the Catalogue', Sotheby and Co., February 1967.

¹² 'Who sift sea-shells by the sea-shore?' M. Boyce and I. Gershevitch (eds.), *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume* (1970), pp. 125–33.

a collaborative study with John Carswell on its tiles. The first volume of *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James, Jerusalem*, published in 1972 by the Oxford University Press, contained his edition of the Armenian texts with translation and notes.¹³ The inscriptions on the tiles include two minor chronicles concerning events of Armenian interest in Jerusalem and Constantinople at the beginning of the eighteenth century; these had been confused by being set on the wall out of sequence. Charles also added appendices on related Armenian inscriptions and other texts used as sources for his own notes and for the Introduction to the volume, which dealt with the Armenian patriarchate in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and relations with the Holy Sepulchre.

A rather different inscription was the focus of his article in the volume in Memory of Vladimir Minorsky (Corresponding Fellow 1943), *Iran and Islam*, edited by C. E. Bosworth (FBA 1992).¹⁴ On the tower east of the main gate of Edessa, sixty feet up, is an Armenian inscription dated to 1122/3. Although it had been noted in 1882 by Sachau (Corresponding Fellow 1907), no good photograph was available until 1967, when Dr Géza Fehérvári (who had been assisting Professor J. B. Segal (FBA 1968) with his research that led to the 1970 publication, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'*) provided one taken with a telephoto lens. The inscription is in Armenian uncials (*erkat'agir*) and refers to Count Joscelin I and Prince Vasil, locum-tenens as duke, in whose days the stronghold was completed. Having elucidated the text of the inscription, Charles devotes most of his discussion to an investigation of the Byzantine and Frankish titles mentioned in it, especially those pertaining to the time of Joscelin's predecessor Baldwin. Here his philological skills are unusually applied to an historical rather than linguistic problem. And with his usual perceptive knowledge of Armenian customs, he notes the parallel between the famous ceremony when Baldwin was 'adopted' by the previous ruler of Edessa, T'oros, and the role of the godfather in an Armenian baptism, which was misinterpreted by western chroniclers. Charles's interest in inscriptions at Edessa, modern Urfa, continued until his death; for he

¹³ John Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James, Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1972). Vol. I: The Pictorial Tiles and Other Vessels, by John Carswell, and an edition of the Armenian Texts with a translation and notes, by C. J. F. Dowsett. (Vol. II, *A Historical Survey of the Kütahya Industry and a Catalogue of the Decorative Tiles*, by John Carswell.)

¹⁴ 'A twelfth-century Armenian inscription at Edessa', C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *Iran and Islam. In Memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 197–227.

kept in touch with a local schoolmaster who regularly sent him copies of Armenian inscriptions scattered about the town.

More typical of Charles's style was an earlier piece, 'On Eznik's Refutation of the Chaldaean Astrologers'.¹⁵ Eznik, one of the disciples of the inventor of the Armenian script, Mashtots, was the author of a most unusual treatise, composed in the 440s. In the sole surviving manuscript the work bears no title, but since the argument proceeds by successive refutations of Greek, Persian, and Marcionite views concerning the origin of evil, it was popularly entitled 'On the Sects.' In the edition by Louis Mariès, seen through the press in 1959 by Charles Mercier, Charles's former Armenian and Georgian teacher, it was entitled 'De Deo'. Its theme is the problem of evil and free-will. Eznik used a wide range of sources in Greek and Syriac, the most significant of which was the *De libero arbitrio* of Methodius of Olympus (martyred circa 311). Although Eznik's work has attracted much attention among modern scholars for its elegance and clarity of language, it was not much quoted by early Armenian writers, whose concerns soon moved to intra-Christian conflicts with other churches and attacks on 'heretical' groups, away from more general problems of theology and philosophy common to different religions.

Although at the end Charles identifies a passage in Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Fatum*, which indeed shows a close parallel with Eznik, the article reads as an after-dinner speech. The quotations from Montesquieu, Aquinas, Luther, fathers of the church and classical authors, do not all seem immediately relevant, but they hold the reader's attention as the author points out the lack of precision in Eznik's attack on 'fate'. Dowsett notes that Eznik's arguments are at variance with Ptolemy and other classical authors, and he expands on the influence of Cicero's comment on the star of fate that determined the death of all who perished at Cannae, bringing in Aelfric and Calvin with other extensive digressions. Here is Dowsett as he was to be remembered, learned and witty, adducing the most unlikely parallels but eventually providing a solution and clinching the argument.

In 1976 he turned to another early Armenian author, the historian Lazar of P'arpi.¹⁶ The standard edition of his *History*, which appeared in

¹⁵ 'On Eznik's Refutation of the Chaldaean Astrologers', *Revue des études arméniennes*, 6 (1969), 45–65.

¹⁶ 'The newly discovered fragment of Lazar of P'arp's *History*', *Le Muséon*, 89 (1976), 97–122.

1904 in Tiflis, was based on seventeenth-century manuscripts. It is not unusual for Armenian texts to have survived only in late copies, written a thousand years or more after the original was composed. In some cases quotations and fragments from earlier dates confirm the reliability of the late copies; in other cases divergent texts appear. Eight pages of Lazar's *History* were discovered on parchment pages used as end sheets of a later manuscript in the St Petersburg Oriental Institute's collection, and were published in 1973. These date from the tenth or eleventh century and evince a text expanded from the one previously known. In his article Charles reproduced the newly discovered Armenian text and provided a translation with elaborate linguistic commentary. The pages are from that section in the *History* where the priest Lewond, in a speech before the Sasanian shah before his martyrdom, derides fire-worship. Charles's interest was aroused by the fact that the passage contains several previously unattested compounds, and that matters of ritual purity are involved. He does not hesitate to expand on comments made in his earlier work on the *Penitential* by David of Gandzak, where such topics are of importance. The etymology of one of the new compounds, *dasht-natun*, 'a menstruation room or house', leads to a lengthy discussion of Armenian attitudes to menstruation.

In the 1970s Charles and Friedel made several trips to Turkey in his Landrover. These did not result in any specific publication, but contributed to his knowledge of the geography of western Armenia. In the autumn of 1976 he went further afield, spending a term at the University of Chicago. Although there was no regular programme in Armenian studies there, interest sparked by the local Armenian community led to visits by noted scholars in the field who taught for a 'quarter' each year. In addition to classes in the university, he gave public lectures on his favourite themes, etymology and folklore as well as miniature painting, and one on travellers' accounts of Armenia and the Armenians with a typically whimsical title: 'Round the Armenian Mulberry Bush'. Another lecture on folklore picked up on his long-standing interest in Gypsy. In 1974, in his article on Gypsy–Armenian correspondences, Charles had pointed to the Armenian loan-words assimilated by most Gypsy dialects, as well as to Armenian attitudes towards Gypsies reflected in proverbial sayings.¹⁷ To some of these borrowings and parallels he would return later.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'Some Gypsy–Armenian correspondences', *Revue des études arméniennes*, 10 (1973–4), 59–81.

¹⁸ See n. 25 below.

In 1977 Charles was elected to the British Academy. He had previously served on the Councils of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1972–6, and the Philological Society, 1973–7. Unfortunately, it was from this time, following his visit to Chicago, that he began to withdraw from his previously very public profile. Though it was not at first apparent, he had begun to suffer from a muscle wasting disease that particularly affected his legs. He remained physically active for several years, but retired from college life. His reclusiveness increased after the death of Friedel in 1984, as his condition gradually worsened. After 1986 he no longer came to the Oriental Institute, but conducted his classes at home. Few members of Pembroke College or of the Oriental Institute who arrived in Oxford during the past twenty years ever met him.

In 1978 Haïg Berbérian died in Paris at the age of ninety-one. Their friendship dated back to Charles's student years, and his elegy, composed in standard eight-syllable Armenian verse, recalls those days. But even Charles could find no medieval Armenian equivalent for the resonant phrase 'vieil ami'. Perhaps by 1950 he was no longer really 'a student green and callow, fresh from hearth and home'. But Paris represented for Charles the beginning of his career in Armenian; the city and Haïg Berbérian had been synonymous for him, so a certain nostalgia could be permitted. Apart from Harold Bailey, for whom he also composed an Armenian ode,¹⁹ Haïg Berbérian had had the most influence on Charles's formative years, not only as an erudite scholar devoted to Armenian studies despite lack of official recognition, but as a remarkable personality. In many ways he served as a 'role model', as raconteur versed in many languages, devoted to hospitality, good food and wine, yet simple in his needs and modest of his accomplishments. Only the Gauloises did Charles not imitate. The *Revue des études arméniennes*, which Haïg Berbérian had edited since its reprise in 1964, continued under the direction of Jean-Pierre Mahé, and Charles now joined the editorial board.

In addition to the Elegy, Charles also contributed a substantial essay to the Memorial Volume.²⁰ 'Little Satana's Wedding Breakfast' is a study

¹⁹ This was composed to celebrate Sir Harold's ninetieth birthday and is now displayed at the institute established by Sir Harold upon his retirement, the Ancient India and Iran Trust, 23 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge. I am grateful to Professor N. Sims-Williams, FBA, for a copy of the text.

²⁰ 'Little Satana's Wedding Breakfast', Dickran Kouymjian (ed.), *Armenian Studies in Memoriam Haïg Berbérian*, Armenian Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon, 1986), 243–63. (As Charles Londonatzi) 'Elegy in Memory of Haïg Berbérian' (Armenian verse and English), *ibid.*, xx–xxiii.

of one of the surviving fragments of pre-Christian Armenian metrical lays preserved in the *History* of Movses Khorenatsi. This History is the most notable in a genre well represented in Armenian. It places the Armenian past in the context of world history as known from Eusebius and other Greek historians, while its defence of Armenian accomplishments owes much to the philosophy of Josephus. Of unusual interest are the snatches of ‘Songs of Goght’n,’ a region on the northern bank of the Araxes famous for its wine, but considered backward and primitive by Movses. One of these deals with the marriage of king Artashes to the Alan princess Sat’nik, which has parallels with the Nart poems of the Ossetes in which princess Satana features, Sat’nik being a diminutive of the corresponding form of that name. According to Movses, at the wedding banquet Sat’nik became possessed of a desire for *z-artaxoyr xawart* and *z-tic’ xawarci*, the meaning of which had remained obscure. By elucidating the hapax *tic’* as ‘diadem’, Charles shows that the phrases refer to a double headdress of a crown composed of leaves or flowers, which is tied with a diadem of a string of buds. Yet the phrasing is ambiguous, and Charles ranges over Iranian, Caucasian and Armenian folklore to elucidate both literal and symbolic parallels.

The death of his wife and his increasing physical disability Charles bore with fortitude. Ani Küpper, a friend of Friedel’s from East Germany and herself now widowed, came to live with him. Together they continued to entertain on ‘Armenian days’ in the Universitas Botleiensis,²¹ as he entitled his house beyond the Botley Road. His articles, less frequent than before, were primarily devoted to linguistic matters and folklore. His real attention was being given to the poetry of Sayat’-Nova, which he was reading with the more advanced students. Intimations of his interest in the poet had appeared in the form of renderings and critical essays in the first two volumes of the journal *Raft*, which is dedicated to Armenian poetry and published in Cleveland, Ohio.²²

The 200th anniversary in 1986 of the English poet’s birth occasioned a lighter, but still substantial, piece on ‘Byron and Armenian’.²³ In 1816

²¹ The examination papers of this august institution bore a striking resemblance to the questions at the end of the chapters in *1066 and All That*.

²² ‘A Song by Sayat’-Nova. To your pure form, drawn by a master’s hand’, *Raft. A Journal of Armenian Poetry and Criticism*, 1 (1987), 22–36. ‘Four poems by Sayat’-Nova’, and ‘A Swan-Song by Sayat’-Nova’, *Raft*, 2 (1988), 5–10, 35–47.

²³ “‘The Madman has come back again!’ Byron and Armenian’, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 4 (1988–9), 7–52.

Byron had first visited the Armenian Mechitarist monastery on the island of San Lazzaro in the Venetian lagoon. Being already not unfamiliar with things Near Eastern, he expressed a desire to learn Armenian. For fifty days he worked on the language with the abbot, extracts from whose published diary Charles quotes with his own light-hearted commentary. He presents samples of Byron's own exercises on the alphabet and Armenian grammar, with extracts of his translations of poetry, ancient as well as modern, and offers donnish corrections and compliments. Byron's regard for Armenian and Armenians was never forgotten by the Mechitarists, and his remark: 'I find the language (which is twin, the literal and the vulgar) difficult but not invincible (at least I hope not)', appears as a frontispiece for their Armenian–English Dictionary published in 1879.

In a more serious vein, Charles returned to etymological questions in 1989 with an article on Armenian *nerk*', primarily devoted to the problem of *k*' as a plural marker.²⁴ Wider-ranging was his article on Armenian–Gypsy parallels, 'A Ghost goes West', published the following year and supplemented in 1992.²⁵ Here the subject is the *cival*, widely used in classical Armenian to mean a monster or ghostly apparition, which was taken into Gypsy in the sense of 'witch', a sense only attested from the eleventh century in Armenian. In the volume of the *Revue des études arméniennes* dedicated to the memory of Sirarpie Der Nersessian Charles returned to the *History of the Caucasian Albanians*.²⁶ This contains an elegy for prince Juansher (assassinated in 681), which was composed for the court by a noted orator, Davt'ak. In alphabetical acrostic form, it is the earliest attested secular poem in Armenian, and a lavish edition of the Armenian with translations in many languages, including his own from the 1961 translation of the *History*, had recently been published in Erevan. The curious title, 'A lamentation of ostriches?' is taken from the poet's contrast between a hypothetical elegy and his own real one. This gives Charles an opportunity to discuss metric forms in Armenian poetry, to range over many of the strange animals of the desert found in the Armenian bible and to turn to the ostrich theme in early Arabic poetry and elsewhere, before dealing with the etymology of the Armenian word.

It is a piece typical of the mature Dowsett in its breadth and depth of discussion, which has an often tenuous connection with the main theme.

²⁴ 'Some Reflections on *nerk*', etc.', *Annual of Armenian Linguistics*, 10 (1989), 27–41.

²⁵ 'A Ghost goes West: Arm. *čival*, *čual* (*n*), Gipsy *čavax*', *Le Muséon*, 103 (1990), 347–65. 'Slightly More on Gypsy Witchcraft', *Le Muséon*, 105 (1992), 187–92.

²⁶ 'A Lamentation of Ostriches?', *Revue des études arméniennes*, 23 (1992), 155–89.

Charles's earlier dismissive opinion of the historian Movses' literary ability, however, has been transmuted into appreciation of the poet Davt'ak's creative achievement. This looks forward to his final and most substantial work, a study of the life and poetry, in Armenian, Georgian, Azeri, and Russian, of Sayat'-Nova, the most noted of all Armenian troubadours (*ashugh*). This, his final publication, would be the culmination of his life's work—not only a demonstration of his extraordinary erudition, but the most personal exposition of his mature style.²⁷

Sayat'-Nova was born in Tiflis, probably in 1712, of an Armenian mother. His poetic career was centred in Telavi in eastern Georgia where, in the eighteenth century, Azeri was the *lingua franca*. The Azeri poems are mostly written in Georgian script, as are some of the Armenian poems. There is thus a considerable challenge of decipherment, let alone interpretation. Although individual poems had appeared in various collections of translated Armenian verse, little was known in western circles about the poet and his work. Charles's monograph has changed this in an exhaustive fashion. The evidence for Sayat'-Nova's life is scanty, so Charles uses the poetry to flesh out the character. As in his earlier articles on Armenian poetry, the argument progresses in a discursive way, bringing in parallels from other literatures eastern and western, ancient, medieval and modern. The leisurely pace of the book gives Charles an opportunity to explore every conjecture and to tackle every possible explanation of obscurities, such as the mysterious circumstances which led to Sayat'-Nova's dismissal from Irakli's court in 1759, probed in a lengthy chapter entitled 'The Court Minstrel and a Dark Lady'.

This comprehensive study of the entire oeuvre was intended for publication in time to commemorate the bicentenary of Sayat'-Nova's death in 1795. But the university press which had published so many of his previous works demanded unacceptable cuts. The book was eventually published in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* of Louvain, where his early work on David of Gandzak had appeared, and came out only a few months before his death. It is his most fitting memorial. Charles Dowsett died of a heart attack on 8 January 1998, and is buried next to Friedel in Botley Cemetery.

Holding the only university position for Armenian studies in Great Britain, first in London then in Oxford, Charles influenced most of those

²⁷ *Sayat'-Nova. An 18th-century troubadour. A biographical and literary study*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 561, Subsidia, 91 (Louvain, 1997).

few who continued in the subject. Many more who never took a degree specifically dedicated to Armenian attended his classes and brought their Armenian to bear on a wide range of disciplines. Charles was a teacher who inspired by example and who shone in the seminar. He was not given to public lectures, but was known in every circle of serious Armenian scholarship. His warmth of personality (which did not prevent him from expressing his opinions quite robustly) and sociable hospitality are particularly remembered by those entertained at home, where Friedel and then Ani shared his role as host. Beyond the coterie of Armenian fans, he had a wider circle of friends and acquaintances bound to him by the poems and squibs he sent off on all manner of topics and in a wide range of tongues; these were often illustrated in his own whimsical manner. Yet his sense of fun did not obscure an amazing erudition. Unfortunately, his increasing seclusion in later years restricted the circle of those he reached directly. But he set a standard for Armenian scholarship which remains a formidable challenge to his successors.

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