Towards A “Discourse On Method” In Armenian Studies: A Survey of Recent Debates with Special Regard to the Problem of Textual Hermeneutics

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1 The Discourse on Method in History

It is useless to emphasize here once again the centrality of the principle of method in scholarly inquiry and the grave consequences of disregarding it. The three basic treatises lying at the grounds of modern science, respectively entitled *Novum Organum* (1620), *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* (1632) and *Discours de la méthode* (1637), are to a great extent, even if not uniquely, treatises of methodology. Moreover, ancient wisdom had already stated the unavoidability of the question of the *methodos* in that the *Organon* of the Stagirite and the *Ephodion* of the Siracusan shed light upon the basic *whence, through where,* and *how* of all philosophical and scientific investigation.

Among the many problems implied in the discussion on method, and belonging both to scientific research in general and to human sciences in particular, and more especially to those dealing with the study either of peculiar cultures or cultural areas, an important place is due to such questions as the definition and delimitation of the respective object, the plot and connections of interdisciplinary relations, the reference to human reality, the socio-existential contextualization, and the relations of interference of para- and extra-scientific factors.

2 Author’s Prior Studies

In earlier studies, I dealt mainly with such problems as: a) the question of commensurability of ethnic, cultural, political and religious parameters – in what sense and by what criteria such attributions can be valuable; b) the question of identities: methods and criteria to define them; c) the question of influences and interactions: principles and methods for evaluation; d) the

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1 Zekiyan 1996; Zekiyan 2008.
question of various “mimeses” and “centralisms”. These studies were focused mainly on the political and cultural interactions between the peoples of Subcaucasia, moving within the horizon of the debates, often degenerated into virulent invectives, which animated the cultural, and consequently political, scene of Subcaucasia starting nearly from the late 19th century up to our days. I returned more recently to the same subjects specially on the occasion of two international conferences: a) “Current Advances in Caucasian Studies, Macerata, Italy 21–24 January 2010; b) “The Caucasus: Imagining Freedom, Negotiating Dominion”, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, 16–17 April 2010.

A new notion, that of “model” or “pattern”, which I had already used in research upon single points, was introduced in the latter studies as a general theoretical tool of remarkable heuristic value, when properly used, in order to escape from

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2 I use this term, in a historical perspective, to indicate the regions south of the Caucasian chain, including Greater Armenia, and to avoid at the same time the geographically and historically restricted perspective of terminology of Russian origin, fashioned in modern times, as “Transcaucasia”. “Subcaucasia” includes, indeed, the southern Caucasus, effectively corresponding to the Russian Transcaucasia, where we have today the three Caucasian Republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. But besides this area, which in modern times had its own political configuration, first with the Persian and later with the Russian rule, the concept of “Subcaucasia” includes also the regions to its south and south-west, that is, North-Eastern Anatolia which formed once the most important part of “historic Armenia”, and was ruled later by the Ottoman Empire. In this sense “Subcaucasia” extends, to the south, to upper Mesopotamia and, to the west, to the upper course of the Euphrates. The advantage offered by this neologism is that, differently from other denominations such as Caucasus, South Caucasus, Anatolia, East Anatolia, etc., which do not grasp the entire historical entity of Armenia and of the Armenian Church together with medieval Iberia/Georgia and the Caucasian Albania with their respective Churches, it indicates in a comprehensive view both the South-Caucasian and the East-Anatolian areas in relation to those periods in which they formed a geo-historical entity with certain distinctive features as was normally the case, on a political ground, from Armenia’s early ages to the end of the Ottoman dominion over Southern Caucasus, and on a cultural-religious ground, till the excision of the Armenian Church from Eastern Anatolia consequent to the Armenian genocide of 1915 (See Zekiyan 1996, 433–434, 441–443). The term “Subcaucasia”, proposed by the present writer, has already been adopted in the field of Oriental, Armenian, and Caucasian studies by such scholars as G. Scarcia, J.-M. Thierry, G. Ieni, A. Ferrari, and others (See part. Scarcia 1979; Thierry 1980; Ieni 1986, 64, n. 51. On the concept of “historic Armenia”, to be intended as an ethnocultural indicator for a given area and not as a political concept in function today’s politics, see Zekiyan 1996, 443–444.

3 Zekiyan 2011.

4 Paper read in absentia. Papers read at this conference unfortunately will not be published.