



FLORENCE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL
AFRO-EURASIA

2

Cultural Entanglements across Medieval Armenia

Catalogue of the Photo Exhibition

9 April – 12 June 2026, University of Florence, Palazzo Fenzi-Marucelli

Curated by

GOHAR GRIGORYAN, ZAROUÏ POGOSSIAN, IRENE TINTI

within the ERC project ArmEn



All'Insegna del Giglio





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Florence Studies in Medieval Afro-Eurasia

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**Armenia
Entangled**
Connectivity and Cultural
Encounters in Medieval
Eurasia 9th - 14th Centuries



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
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SAGAS
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ISSN 3035-3785
ISBN 978-88-9285-457-4
e-ISBN 978-88-9285-458-1
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Florence Studies in Medieval Afro-Eurasia, 2
marzo 2026

All'Insegna del Giglio s.a.s.
via A. Boito, 50-52
50019 Sesto Fiorentino (FI)
www.insegnadelgiglio.it

Stampato a Sesto Fiorentino (FI)
BDprint, marzo 2026

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Acknowledgements

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Berlin, Houshamadyan
Cambridge, Cambridge University Library
Cornell University, Caucasus Heritage Watch
Damascus, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate
Florence, Laboratori Archeologici San Gallo
Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem
London, British Library
New York, The Morgan Library and Museum
Nicosia, Byzantine Museum and Art Gallery of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation
Paris, Organisation Terre et Culture
Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense
Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia
Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale
Venice, Manuscript Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation
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QUSṬĀ IBN LŪQĀ: AN ARAB INTELLECTUAL IN 9TH-CENTURY ARMENIA

Barbara Roggema

The Graeco-Arabic translation movement, which was sponsored by the Abbasid Caliphs during the late 8th through the 9th century, engaged numerous Christian scholars. These scholars were experts in the Greek and Syriac languages as well as native or near-native Arabic speakers. Their linguistic expertise and academic training in ancient Greek learning made them the perfect collaborators in the massive translation project through which virtually all extant works of ancient learning were made available in Arabic. Most of these translators were also accomplished scientists in their own right in the fields of astronomy, medicine, physics, philosophy, and mathematics. One of the most prolific of these was Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, who came from a Christian family in the city of Baalbek in Lebanon. He spent a great part of his life in Baghdad, where he received commissions from the Caliphs and members of the Abbasid elite. He produced over 80 works on diverse subjects such as infectious diseases, the use of the astrolabe, politics and history, and introductions to logic and geometry. For his Muslim patrons, Qusṭā wrote a manual on personal hygiene during the Hajj to Mecca. His most widely read work was *On the Difference between the Spirit and the Soul*, in which he reconciles the Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions of the soul. This text circulated widely in medieval Europe in Latin and Hebrew translations.

Qusṭā's immense scholarly output stands in sharp contrast with our rather limited knowledge of his life, of which the dates are uncertain (his date of death is often given as 912, but this is nothing but the Gregorian equivalent of the rough estimate of 300 A.H.) The well-known bio- and bibliographical works, such as Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist* and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fi ṭabaqāt al-aʿtibāʾ*, provide us with scant pieces of information that point to an Armenian connection. Qusṭā is said to have provided Armenian princes with a variety of works, and he is also said to have moved to and died in Armenia. These brief notes about his life are supplemented by references to his circle of patrons in the manuscripts of his writings. Such notes confirm his labour on behalf of Armenian patrons, notably Abū Ghānim and Abū Ghitrif al-Biṭriq. Several modern scholars have taken the biographical notice that Qusṭā

died in Armenia as an indication that he moved there late in his life. In reality, Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a tells us the opposite:

Qusṭā was induced by Sanharib to come to Armenia, where he settled. In Armenia there was Abū Ghitrif al-Biṭriq who was a man of learning and merit for whom Qusṭā composed many important and beneficial books of great significance, concise in expression and on a variety of topics.

In other words, a significant part of his career took place in Armenia. While identifying these two Armenian contacts of his, Sanḥārīb and Abū Ghitrif, is difficult, there is a third Armenian who is named as his patron in several works: Abū Ghānim al-ʿAbbās ibn Smbat. Since 'ibn' means 'son of', his father was Smbat. This leads us to Smbat VIII Bagratuni, prince and general who was taken prisoner by the Abbasids in Samarra and is known as having had a son named al-ʿAbbās. Smbat's brother was Ashot the First, the founder of the Bagratid Kingdom of Armenia (884–1045). He appointed his nephew al-ʿAbbās as *sparapet*, i.e. supreme commander of the army. In some manuscripts of Qusṭā's works, including a text on the workings and benefit of sexual intercourse, one finds a reference to 'Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, secretary of the Biṭriq al-baṭāriqa'. The latter title, *Prince of Princes*, represents the Armenian term *Ishkhan ishkhanats*—a title which Ashot bore from 855 until the year 884 when he was proclaimed King. It seems probable, therefore, that Qusṭā also worked for Ashot, with whom al-ʿAbbās also had a close relationship.

The Bagratids ushered in a glorious period for Armenia, which lasted from the 860s to the 970s. In this same period, the Abbasid rulers suffered from internal strife and decline. This change of fortune may form part of the background to Qusṭā's decision to move to Armenia. From there he wrote a response to an invitation from a friend to convert to Islam. Qusṭā explained in clear and logical steps why he thinks there is no sound proof that Muḥammad was a true prophet and sent his reply back to Iraq from Armenia. Although Qusṭā was revered as a great scientist in Armenia, according to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, his written heritage is preserved predominantly in Arabic, while Armenian translations of his works have not (yet?) been found.

10. A manuscript page from *Kitāb al-ʿUkar*, which is Qusṭā ibn Lūqā's Arabic translation of *De sphaericis* by Theodosius of Bithynia (c. 160–c. 100 BCE).

London, British Library, Oriental Manuscripts, Add MS 23570, folio 36r. Photographic credit: The British Library Board.

PETER OF ARAGON: A DOMINICAN AMONG THE ARMENIANS

Irene Tinti

Fra (= *frater*, “Friar”) Peter of Aragon was a European Dominican who spent almost two decades as part of a mixed Armenian-European community at the Upper Monastery of the Holy Mother of God in K’rna (Nakhijevan) (cf. Cat. n° 23). Little is known about his life before then: he was possibly in Nicosia, Cyprus, around the year 1329; he was also a companion to fellow-Dominican Bartholomew de Podio, suffragan bishop of Marāgha in Persia. Alongside Bartholomew he attended the meeting of clerics held in K’rna in 1330, which resulted in the local Armenian community accepting union with the Latin Church and would ultimately lead to the establishment of the order of the *Fratres Unitores* (“Unitarian Brethren”). Peter spent the rest of his life in K’rna and died there, possibly of the plague, in 1347.

His significance is linked to his intellectual activities and his role as cultural mediator and therefore agent of entanglement. His efforts comprised an integral part of the scholarly and spiritual project underway at K’rna, which aimed to provide Catholic Armenians with the necessary tools for conducting their intellectual and missionary activities among their compatriots. He consistently, although not exclusively, collaborated with

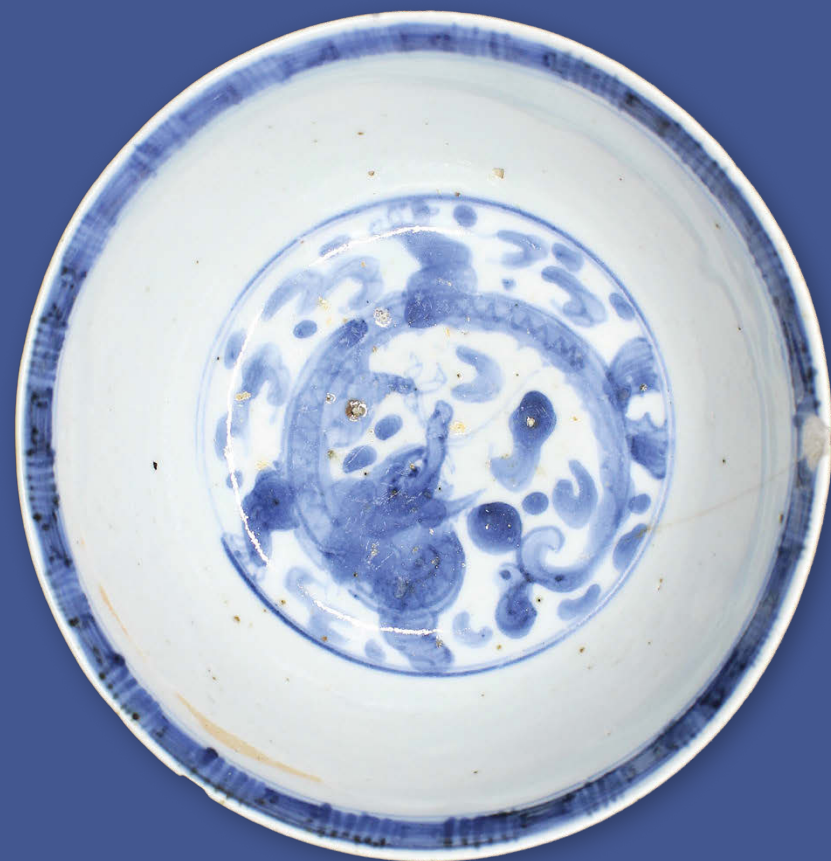
another Dominican, Yakob(os), an Armenian known as “The Translator” because of his copious activities in this domain.

Peter authored in Latin—and likely to some extent contributed to the Armenian translation of—sermons and theological works chiefly based on Latin sources, such as the *Book of Virtues*, which was very popular among Catholics and Apostolic Armenians alike (cf. Cat. n° 12). He also contributed to the Armenian version of the *Brief Compendium of Theological Truth* traditionally but incorrectly associated with Albert the Great and to the translation of parts of Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. He wrote philosophical commentaries in the Aristotelian tradition, a book of canon law, a missionary manual known as *Sur Petrosi* (“Sword of Peter”), and helped translate the Dominican missal and breviary.

According to Carlo Alessandro Bonifacio, Peter could also be identified with the Dominican author of the Latin translation (early 1330s) of an Armenian apocalyptic text, the *Vision of Saint Nersēs*. If that were the case, Peter would have acted as a cultural mediator in both directions, making not only European texts known in Armenia, but at least one Armenian text known to European audiences.

11. Possible depiction of Peter of Aragon on the frontispiece of his *Book of Virtues*; full-page watercolour miniature from a manuscript copied in Surs (Mokk?), Monastery of Saint John the Baptist and Saint George the Commander, and Lim, Lake Van, Monastery of Saint George, 1625.

Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MiC, Ms. 2053, folio IVv. Photographic credit: Irene Tinti, by gracious permission of the Biblioteca Casanatense.



The catalogue presents 27 case studies that bear witness to cultural interactions in and around medieval Armenia. These testimonies come from multiple sources: small pieces of pottery and coins; majestic monuments and abandoned ruins; legendary narratives and visual arts; historiographical and juridical texts; lapidary inscriptions and handwritten manuscripts; and even tiny marginal notes that were intentionally erased in medieval times. Collectively, these sources and artefacts narrate a story of medieval Armenia and Armenians that spans a multitude of interconnections across Eurasia.

€ 24,00

ISSN 3035-3785

ISBN 978-88-9285-457-4

e-ISBN 978-88-9285-458-1



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