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Special Issue

The Transmission of Mark's Endings in Different Traditions and Languages

**papers presented at the International Workshop,
Lausanne, 2-3 June 2022**

**edited by
Claire Clivaz,
Mina Monier,
and Dan Batovici**

Mark 16:9–20 in Armenian Medieval Literature: A Commentary by Barseł Maškeworc‘i*

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The focus of this paper is the Longer Ending of Mark in the Armenian Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Barseł Maškeworc‘i, penned in 1325 in the monastery of Maškewor, in Black Mountain. Based on the autograph, housed at the Yerevan Matenadaran-Maštoc‘ Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, I have reconstructed the biblical text used by the interpreter and have compared it with the other Armenian versions of Mark 16:9–20. My study shows that Barseł made slight additions to Mark 16:17 and 16:18 in order to make the Armenian text closer to his perception and interpretation of the given verses. The author interprets each verse and word, demonstrating quite a ‘critical’ approach to the text, comparing and juxtaposing episodes from the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. In the commentary on Mark 16:9 he describes Mary Magdalene’s sentiments, presents intriguing reflections on why Jesus appeared first to her after he had risen. The author explains biblical events in the light of his own historical context, providing interesting examples that reflect the culture, social relationships, everyday life, and moral values of his time. The paper also briefly touches upon Mark’s endings in the Armenian liturgy and the manuscript tradition.

The Author of the Commentary and his Colophon

The only medieval Armenian Commentary on the Gospel of Mark¹ was created by Barseł² *vardapet* (‘teacher, doctor of theology’), a monk in the monastery of Maškewor, in Black Mountain (present-day Turkey).³ It was

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- 1 In 1844 Abraham *vardapet* of Constantinople, a monk from Lim Island monastery, made a compilative, brief *Interpretation on Mark*, the autograph and the only example of which is at the Yerevan Matenadaran (ms Yerevan, Matenadaran, 4901, ff. 2r–219v). It includes Mark 16:9–20 (ff. 206r–214v). This work reads as a retelling of the Gospel story, with some short explanations. The author must have been familiar with Barseł’s work, but the latter’s influence on this interpretation still needs to be examined.
- 2 All Armenian names and words are transliterated according to the ‘Hübschmann–Meillet’ system of transliteration.
- 3 The monasteries in the Black Mountain or Amanus region were major monastic, educational and cultural centers for Greek, Syrian, Latin, Armenian and Georgian monks. For more about the Armenian monastic and cultural aspects in the Black

published in Constantinople in 1826 by Andreas Narinean,⁴ comparing two fifteenth-century manuscripts, as mentioned in the preface.⁵ Among the extant manuscripts⁶ Barseł's autograph has reached us and is housed at the Yerevan Matenadaran-Maštoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (MS Yerevan, Matenadaran, 1314, hereafter M1314),⁷ on which the current study is based. The autograph ends with a colophon, where Barseł provides interesting information about himself, as well as the time and circumstances of the creation of the Commentary. Thus, it was written in 1325, in the monastery of Maškuor⁸ during the reign of King Levon IV (1320–1341) and Catholicos Kostandin Drazark'i (1323–1326). Barseł appreciates the latter's efforts to bring peace to his country and recounts his travel to Egypt where he met the sultan, by this referring to the fifteen-year peace treaty which the Mamluq sultan al-Nasir Muhammad and the Armenian Catholicos had signed. He speaks highly of the abbot of the Maškewor monastery, Bishop Hayrapet, describing him as a mild and good-natured man.⁹

The author calls himself 'Barseł *vardapet*' in the colophon.¹⁰ In some later manuscripts he was called 'Čon',¹¹ probably being confused with the

Mountain see Ališan 1885, 402–411; Oskean 1957, 281–283; Weitenberg 2006, 79–93; Širinyan 2014, 352–362; Danielyan 2018, 40–42; Gevorgyan 2022, 93–112

4 See also the facsimile reprint, Narinean 2016.

5 Narinean 1826, 4. The editor states that the two manuscripts he used were copied about eighty and hundred years after that time ('իբրև յուրսուն և ի հարիւր ամսաց ամսի'). Nersessian's (2001, 43) statement, that Narinean edited the text comparing two sixteenth and seventeenth century manuscripts, is unclear.

6 Anasyan (1976, 1415) presents twenty-eight manuscripts, Petrosyan, Ter-Step'anyan (2002, 88) mention that there are more than thirty-five manuscripts, listing eight of them. These examples are dated mainly from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

7 For a description of this codex, see K'eōškerean et al. 2008, 887–894.

8 In the medieval sources the name of the monastery is found as Maškuor (Մաշկուոր, e.g. MS M1314, f. 308v), Maškewor (Մաշկեւոր, MS Yerevan, Matenadaran, 1527, f. 75v, f. 141r), Maškawor (Մաշկաւոր), Mašku (Մաշկու), see Ališan 1885, 407–408; Połarean 1953, 243; Oskean 1957, 235–236; Thierry 1993, 168 (n°939). Thomson (1995, 104) presents the author of the Commentary as 'Barseł Maškeron' (Barseł Čon) 1280–1345. Monk at monastery of Maškeron' (in Armenian this would be Մաշկերոն). Neither in the sources nor in other studies have we met the form Maškeron, utilized by Thomson.

9 MS M1314, ff. 308 rv, cf. Xač'ikyan et al. 2018, 495–496.

10 MS M1314, f. 308r: 'Ես յոյ ամուն վարդապետս Բարսեղ' ('I, in name only vardapet Barseł'). All the translations from the Classical Armenian are my own.

11 See MSS Yerevan, Matenadaran, 1384, f. 1r; 2982, f. 1r; 3125, f. 95r, as well as the above-mentioned edition in 1826.

seventh-century Armenian author Barseł Čon.¹² Referring to ms Vienna, Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation, 73 (dated to 1611), Colwell mistakenly identifies the author of the Commentary with archbishop Barseł (Basilus), brother of the Armenian king,¹³ who obviously lived earlier (in 1241–1275). Moreover, in ms Vienna, Mekhitarist Library, 73, the title Մեկնութիւն Սրբոյ Աւետարանին Մարկոսի, գոր արարեալ է երանելոյն Բարսղի արքեպիսկոպոսի եղբոր Հելթմոյ թագաւորին Հայոց (‘Commentary on the holy Gospel of Mark created by the blessed bishop Barseł, the brother of the Armenian king Het‘um’)¹⁴ is a later interpolation, while in the main title only the name of ‘Barseł *vardapet*’ is mentioned.¹⁵ The author of the Commentary has been also considered to be one of the students of the abbot of the Red Monastery (in Cilicia), Bishop Step‘anos Manuk, in the twelfth century, thus being called ‘Šnorhali’ (Graceful)—a title, given to Step‘anos’ students.¹⁶ According to M. Ormanean, whom many scholars follow, Step‘anos Manuk probably had a project of interpretation on the Books of the New Testament.¹⁷ However, the existence of the 1325 autograph, as well as some historical events reflected in the Commentary on Mark prove that it could not have been composed in the twelfth century. Therefore, the author of the Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, is neither Šnorhali (twelfth century), nor the brother of King Het‘um I (1241–1275), nor, moreover, Barseł Čon (seventh century). To differentiate him from other Armenian Barsełs living in the Middle Ages, the author of the Commentary on Mark can be simply called Barseł *vardapet* (as he calls himself) or Barseł Maškeworč‘i, who lived in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.¹⁸ In the list of the participants in the Church Council of Sis in 1342, M. Č‘amč‘ean mentions Բարսղէ վարդապետ ի Մաշկէւորայ (‘Barseł *vardapet* from Maškewor’),¹⁹ who is most likely the author of the Commentary in question. Based on this, N. Połarean infers that he was born in 1280 and died in 1345.²⁰

12 Barseł Čon is considered the editor of the first Armenian Hymnarium called ‘Ճոնրնսիր’ (*Čonəntir*, lit: ‘selected by Čon’), see Hakobyan 1976, 16–20.

13 Colwell 1937, 382.

14 See Dashian 1895, 320.

15 Ibid.

16 Nerses Šnorhali (Catholicos of Armenia in 1166–1173, who left a rich literary heritage that includes a commentary on Matthew), Sargis Šnorhali (known for his commentary on the General epistles), Ignatios Sevlėrc‘i (has authored a commentary on the Gospel of Luke).

17 See Ōrmanean 2001, 1563.

18 For the analysis of different opinions, see also Kiwlėsėrean 1905, 1093.

19 See Č‘amč‘ean 1786, 341.

20 Połarean 1971, 377.

The Structure of the Commentary: the Text of Mark 16:9–20.

In the autograph M1314, the title of the commentary (f. 2r) reads as follows: Երկրորդ հատոր մեկնութեան սրբոյ Աւետարանիս որ ըստ Մարկոսի՝ արարեալ Բարսղի վարդապետի՝ (*Erkrord hator meknut'ean srboyy Awe-taranis or ast Markosi, arareal Barsli vardapeti*, ‘The Second Volume of the Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Created by Barseł Vardapet’). It consists of 308 folios and includes an interpretation on Mark 9:10–16:20, while the first volume, a commentary on Mark 1:1–9:9, is considered lost.²¹

It should be noted that the editors of 1826, as attested in their colophon, had searched for the first volume in various Armenian libraries and monasteries, but in vain. That is why they defined the edition as ‘second volume’.²² However, the definition ‘second volume’ is present in the autograph, as well. Could this be another proof of the existence of the first volume written by Barseł himself or by another author? Based on the fact that in some of the manuscripts the author is called Čon, as mentioned above, B. Sargisean put forward the hypothesis that the seventh-century author Barseł Čon probably wrote a commentary on the first chapters of the Gospel of Mark and Barseł Maškeworc‘i continued his work, creating the second volume.²³ However, even if the first volume of the Commentary ever existed, it was lost already in the eighteenth century. A copyist of the Commentary in 1772–1773, bishop Yovsēp‘ Sanahnec‘i (Arlut‘eanc‘), writes:

I could not obtain the first volume of this, because it was not found, so I only copied the second volume for my own enjoyment.²⁴

The focus of this essay is Barseł’s Commentary on the Longer Ending of Mark, which is of particular significance due to the debate concerning its presence or absence in the fifth-century translation and in different versions of the Armenian Gospel.²⁵ It should be mentioned that in addition to the Stand-

21 Anasyan 1976, 1411–1415; Połarean 1968, 368–369.

22 See Narinean 1826, 498.

23 Sargisean 1899, 29–30.

24 Tēr-Vardanean et al. 2017, 2050.

25 A large proportion of the manuscripts omit 16:9–20. Considering the fact that in most of the manuscripts where this passage is present, it is separated in some way, one could assume that the scribes, even though copying these verses, had reservations concerning them or simply followed an earlier manuscript tradition. The main argument of the scholars supporting its presence in the original Armenian text is that the fifth-century philosopher Eznik of Kołb quoted verses 17 and 18 in his apologetic treatise *De Deo*. Tēr-Movsēsean (1902, 201) assumes that after having been translated in the fifth century the Longer Ending was rejected afterwards, having met some criticism, but in the tenth century it was approved by the Church. Colwell (1937, 384) disputed this theory suggesting that Eznik may have been

ard version (the so-called ‘Zōhrap Bible’),²⁶ there are three other forms of Mark 16:9–20 in Armenian,²⁷ which, however are rare, found only in unique manuscripts.²⁸

Some of the manuscripts of Barseł’s Commentary lack the last three chapters that include Mark 16:9–20.²⁹ Ernest Cadman Colwell referred to one of these examples, MS Vienna, Mekhitarist Library, 73, considering this omission to be another proof of the absence of verses 9–20 in the original Armenian. About forty years earlier, the compiler of the Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in Vienna, J. Dashian, had stated that the last interpreted verse in that manuscript is Mark 16:8, concluding that the reason verses 9–20 are not interpreted is certainly that they were not included in Barseł’s exemplar.³⁰ A. Suk’rean has also considered this Commentary as evidence of the absence of the Longer Ending in the original Armenian version.³¹ Obviously, the Constantinople edition of the Commentary, where 16:9–20 is present,³² escaped Suk’rean’s, Dashian’s and Colwell’s attention. Thus, the Commentary in question is important not only as a piece of Armenian biblical exegesis, but also for the discussion of textual issues related to Mark 16:9–20 in Armenian.

The Commentary in the autograph is divided into 43 chapters, the last four of which, 40–43, ff. 258v–308v, contain the interpretation on Mark 16:2–

quoting from the Greek, and/or quoting something that was not in the Gospels. For the further discussion of this issue, see Colwell 1937, 370–379. Crucially however, Eznik was not simply a fifth-century author, but was involved in the process of the translation of the Bible into Armenian. So, if he was familiar with the Longer Ending, it was most likely translated into Armenian. If it had not been translated because it was unknown or ‘unacceptable’ to the Armenian audience, why would Eznik have quoted it in his treatise, even if it was not from the Armenian text? Moreover, before the quotation, he clearly states ‘just as the Lord himself said to His disciples’ (Blanchard and Darling Young 1998, 85), which proves that the author is referring to the Gospel.

- 26 Zōhrapean 1805, 682–683 (Mark 16:9–20). This edition is based on MS Venice, Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation in St Lazarus, 1508 (d. 1319). On the editions of the Armenian Bible, see Cowe 2013, 253–260 (the Bibliography 284–292).
- 27 Suk’rean 1877, 212; Tēr-Movsēsean 1902, 203; Fērhat’ean 1911, 374 (column B).
- 28 It is possible that these scribes translated Mark 16:9–20 by themselves (or through someone else) in order to include it in their examples. For the transcription and the English translation of MS Yerevan, Matenadaran, 313, see Melk’onyan, Batovici 2022.
- 29 See MSS Yerevan, Matenadaran, 1384 (1740), 2982 (1772–1773), 3125 (eighteenth century), 6493 (1826).
- 30 Dashian 1895, 320.
- 31 Suk’rean 1877, 211.
- 32 Narinean 1826, 428–459.

20 (Mark 16:2–8—chapters 40–41, ff. 258v–284v,³³ Mark 16:9—chapter 42, ff. 284v–290v, Mark 16:10–20—chapter 43, ff. 290v–308v). Mark 16:1 is included in chapter 39, ff. 249v–258v, which begins with Mark 15:42.

Before interpreting certain passages or expressions from the Gospel, Barseł usually presents the complete verse with a marginal quotation mark. Moreover, the quotation marks are not used for all the Bible verses, but mainly for those that are interpreted. Another characteristic of this commentary is that the passages from the Gospel of Mark are quoted literally, with a high level of textual accuracy, while other biblical quotations are sometimes altered, adapted to the content of the interpretation (one can assume that in this case, rather than being copied, they were cited from memory). Based on Gospel quotes in the autograph, I reconstructed the original text used by Barseł and compared it with the text of Mark 16:9–20 of the Zōhrap Bible and three other Armenian versions. The comparison shows that Barseł's text corresponds perfectly to Zōhrap and is completely different from the other versions of the Longer Ending. The only differences between Barseł's and Zōhrap's texts are in verses 17 and 18. In Mark 16:17 of Zōhrap's text the word 'ἕνη' (*nor*, 'new', καινᾶϊς) is missing, while it is found in Barseł's text: 'ἕνη ἵεϛηϛ ἡϛαϛεϛηϛἕ' (*nor lezus xawsesc'in*, 'they will speak in new tongues').³⁴ However, it is worth mentioning that in the autograph the word 'new' is smaller than usual and above the line (f. 299r; fig. 1) or in italics (f. 299v; fig. 2). One could assume that it was not included in the biblical text used by Barseł and by writing in this manner he hints at this fact.

In verse 18 in Barseł's text, 'ի վերայ հիւանդաց ձեռս դիցն էւ թշլիցն' (*I veray hiwandac' dzerš dic'en ew bžškic'en*, 'they will lay hands on the sick and will heal them'), after the word 'թշլիցն' (*bžškic'en*, 'will heal them'), we read 'կամ բարի ունիցի' (*kam bari unic'in*, 'or they will be(come) good')³⁵—conjunction 'or' + the literal translation of καλῶς ἔξουσι (fig. 3).

Later I shall present my approach as to why Barseł made these slight additions to the biblical text he used.

Mark 16:9: the Portrayal of Mary Magdalene in Barseł's Commentary

Chapter 42 of the Commentary (ff. 284v–290v) is entirely dedicated to the interpretation of Mark 16:9. Barseł suggests the apostolic role of Mary Magdalene: he presents intriguing reflections on why Jesus appeared first to her

33 Chapter 41 begins with Matt 28:16: 'So the eleven disciples went to Galilee', which is juxtaposed with Mark 16:7: 'that he is going ahead of you into Galilee'.

34 Ms M1314, ff. 299rv.

35 Ibid., f. 301v.

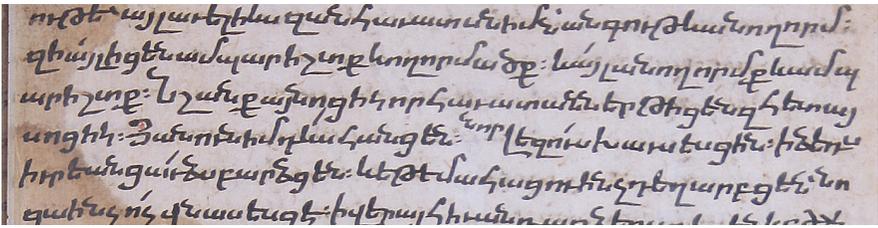


Fig. 1. Ms Yerevan, Matenadaran, 1314, f. 299r.

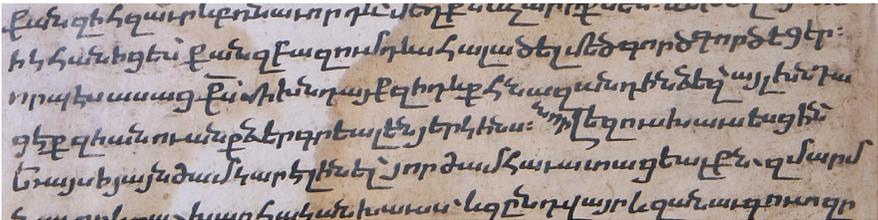


Fig. 2. Ms Yerevan, Matenadaran, 1314, f. 299v.

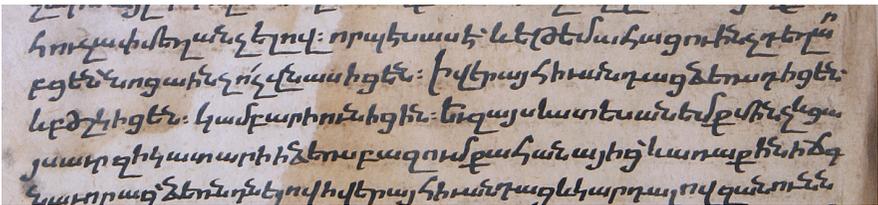


Fig. 3. Ms Yerevan, Matenadaran, 1314, f. 301v.

after His resurrection: he describes Mary Magdalene as an extremely devoted and sensitive woman, yet at the same time strong and courageous.

The author refers first to John 20:1–18 to explain where and how Jesus appeared to Mary. Barseł does not present the exact quotation but recounts the passages most important to him. He considers the fact that the disciples came to the tomb and saw only the empty shroud a true sign of the resurrection:

M1314, ff. 284v–285r: Չի ոչ եթև էր ոմանց փոխեալ գնա զմարմինն մերկացուցանեին: Նաև ոչ եթև գողացեալ էր, հոգ տանեին այնպիսի ծալել զվարշամակն եւ զնել ի բացեա, այլ որպէս էրն առնոյին զմարմինն: Չի վասն այտոյիկ յառաջեալ ասաց, եթև բազում զմոտովք թաղեցաւ, որ առաւել քան զկապար մածուցանէր ընդ մարմնոյն զկտաւսն: ...Չի ոչ այնպէս անմտագոյն էր գողն՝ իբրո՛ւ թէ վասն աւելորդ իրի այնքան յամել.

If he had been taken by others, they would not uncover the body. And again, if the body was stolen, [the stealers] would not have taken care to fold the head covering and place it aside, but they would take the body as it was. Because concerning this he

said before that, [Jesus] was buried with much myrrh³⁶ which would glue the linen coverings to the body more firmly than lead... For the thief was not so foolish as to retard so much for such a superfluous thing.

Barseł describes Mary's meeting with the angels and Jesus based on the Gospel of John, adding some phrases and thus making this Gospel episode even more moving. For example, to the verse, 'Mary stood outside the tomb crying'³⁷ he adds կանացի գթով (*kanac 'i gt'ov*, 'with feminine tenderness') and continues:

M1314, f. 285r: Եւ սպա յես յոյով արտասուացն սկսաւ նայել ի տեղին, ուր եղեալ էր մարմինն՝ միայն այնու մխիթարիլ կամելով: Ուստի արժանացաւ մեծագոյն տեսեան հրեշտակացն պայծառ սգեստութք, զորս աշակերտքն ոչ տեսին.

Afterwards, having wept for a long time, she began to look at the spot where the body was placed with the sole desire to be comforted by it. So, she received the amazing vision of angels in luminous garments that the disciples did not see.

To the next verse, in which Mary meets Jesus and, assuming that he is the gardener, asks him where he has put the body of Jesus, so that she can get him, Barseł adds:

M1314, f. 285r: Չի ես առից զնա եւ փոխադրեցից յայլ տեղի, ուր մեծավայելուչ թաղեսցի: Թերեւս երկնչէր, զի միգուցէ հրեայքն եւ զմեռեալ մարմինն նախատեսցեն, վասն այնորիկ ախորժէր յանձանաւթ տեղի փոխել զնա՝ կնոջական գթասէր բարութք.

So that I might take him and remove [his body] to another place, where he would be buried properly. Perhaps she feared that the Jews might also condemn the dead body, that is why she wanted to take him to an unknown place, for she had a compassionate character typical of women.

In this passage, Barseł refers to the Gospel of John to interpret Mark, presenting the Gospel along with his additions, which are perfectly in tune with the Gospel story. Barseł does not just interpret the Gospel, but based on it, he creates his own story of resurrection—so vivid and touching that it reminds us more of an elaboration than a commentary. With such expressions as 'feminine tenderness', 'compassionate character', he presents Mary as an emotional, but at the same time a very brave person, for she stayed at the tomb when the others left and she was ready herself alone to take away and bury the Lord's body. The narration becomes more emotional at the moment when Mary recognizes Jesus:

36 Cf. John 19:39–40.

37 John 20:11.

M1314, f. 285v: Եւ փառքովք անաշխի եւ փարիլ ընդ նմա իրր յառաջագոյն՝ որպէս փափաքէր, ուստի ոչ ետ թոյլ ասելով՝ Մի՛ մերձենար յիս, զի ուսուսցէ, թէ ոչ եւս այնպէս իցէ մարմինն իւր որպէս յառաջ քան զմահն, այլ երկնային եւ քարձրագոյն.

And [Mary] longed to approach and embrace Him as before, as was her wish, yet [Jesus] did not permit her, saying, ‘Do not touch me’, so that she would learn that his body was not the same as it was before his death, but was [now] celestial and sublime.

Barseł accepts that Mary Magdalene was the prostitute mentioned in the Gospel of Luke,³⁸ who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears. The removal of seven demons from Mary indicated her liberation from all sins. She was the first person to meet Jesus after his resurrection, because the prostitutes and the tax collectors are before the church³⁹ in the Kingdom of God,⁴⁰ as in the case of the criminal who went to Heaven before the apostles. Furthermore, just as the first person who tasted death was a woman, so was Mary the first one who saw Jesus resurrected, so that women would not forever bear shame from men for their sins.⁴¹ As Barseł explains, Mary personifies the sinful person who has received the gift of salvation. Mary is a perfect example of those who want to repent with dignity and not to despair, for although she was deeply immersed in evil, she was privileged to see God before the apostles and evangelists. Having been honored with the apostolic calling (ստաքելիական կոչմամբ պատուէ զնա, *arak ‘elakan koč ‘mamb patuē zna*, ‘[Jesus] honours her with the apostolic calling’), it was she who announced the good news of the resurrection to them.⁴²

Interpreting Mark 16:1, in which Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, Barseł presents Mary as a bride who came to the bridegroom with her friends:

M1314, f. 256r: Այժմ ելանէ սիրելին Սարիամ եւ ասէ՝ Չմենն եանց, անձրևք անցին, ծաղիկք երևեցան յերկրի, ձայն սատորակի յսելի եղև յերկրի մերում, այգիք ծաղկեցին եւ ետուն զհոսս իւրեանց, զի փեսայն ննջեաց ընդ շքով վիմին յերեկոյի ուրբաթուն եւ այժմ յերեկոյի շաբաթոս կամի երևեցուցանել զղէմսն եւ յսելի առնել զբարբառն, որ յոյժ քաղցր է ձայնն եւ զեղեցիկ տեսիլն.

Now, the beloved Mary goes out and says: ‘The winter is passed, the rains are over, the flowers have appeared on the earth, the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land, the orchards have blossomed and spread their fragrance, for the bridegroom slept in the shadow of a rock on Friday evening and now, on Saturday evening, he

38 See Luke 7:37–50.

39 In the Armenian text the word ‘Ժողովարան’, *Žolovaran*, is used, which means ‘council-room’, ‘church’, ‘synagogue’.

40 Cf. Matt 21:31.

41 See M1314, f. 286r.

42 Ibid. f. 285v.

wishes to show his face and make his voice heard, the voice [of whom] is so sweet, and the face is so comely.

In this passage, Barseł indirectly refers to the Song of Songs,⁴³ attributing the bride's words to Mary.⁴⁴ It is known that, in Christian doctrine and literature, the Church is identified as the bride and Jesus as the bridegroom, and Barseł, doubtless, follows this tradition. In this regard, his commentary probably presents Mary as symbolizing the Christian Church as well. However, it is amazing how he combines the Song of Solomon and the Gospel story and how feelingly he presents this episode. This is also a good example of his changing the biblical text to better suit his interpretation.

The explanation of some chapters and verses is followed by an Exhortation, which represents a moral conclusion on the issues discussed.⁴⁵ Thus, in the exhortation following the interpretation of 16:9, Barseł reflects on repentance, grace and punishment. He does not see repentance as a way of living an austere life. Moreover, he preaches that being closer to God is not as difficult as it might seem:

M1314, f. 290rv: ‘Միթէ ի կնոջէ քումմէ արգելու զքեզ, ո՛չ, այլ՝ ի պոռնկութենէ: Միթէ՛ յընչիցն վայելելոյ: Ո՛չ, այլ յազահութենէ: Միթէ՛ զամենայն ինչսն ի բաց տալ ասէ: Ո՛չ, այլ փոքր ինչ տալ կարատելոց: Միթէ՛ զաւր հանապազ ասէ պահել: Ո՛չ, այլ փոքր ինչ ժամանակ ի յարբեցութենէ եւ յորովայնամոլութենէ արգելու: Միթէ՛ զխնդալն արգելու: Ո՛չ, այլ զի զարշելի եւ աղտեղի մի՛ յիցի այն: Ասա՛, ընդէ՛ր զարհուրիս, ուր ամուսնութիւն է եւ ընչից վայելումն եւ ուրախութիւն չափաւոր.

Is it that he keeps you away from your wife? No, only from fornication. Perhaps he keeps you from enjoying your property? No, only from having greed. Perhaps he says we should give away everything? No, just a little to the poor. Perhaps he says that one should fast every day? No, but for a little while prohibits the gluttony and drunkenness. Is it that he forbids rejoicing? No, only that such rejoicing should not be detestable and filthy. Then, tell [me], why are you afraid, that there is a marriage, [that there is] enjoyment of material things and measured pleasure?

Faith and Deeds: Mark 16:10–20 in the Context of Everyday Life in the Fourteenth Century

Barseł Maškeworc՛i compares and juxtaposes episodes from the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, attempting to harmonize the passages that

43 Cf. Song of Songs 2:11–14.

44 Although the author does not specify that this Mary is the Magdalene, it is unlikely that he is referring to the mother of James, especially given Mary Magdalene's prominent role in the Commentary.

45 The Exhortations were separately published in Western Armenian translation, see Daniëlean 1980.

seem to be contradictory. For example, he compares Mark 16:13 and Luke 24:33–35, where Luke says that the Eleven and those who were with them believed that the Lord had really risen,⁴⁶ while Mark says they did not believe it. According to Barseł, the fact that some of those present claimed that ‘the Lord has really risen’ already means that there were some who did not believe this statement and needed material evidence of the resurrection, and this is what Mark informs us about.⁴⁷

Mark 16:14 reminds Barseł of a passage in the Gospel of Matthew which recounts how Jesus appeared to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, and they worshiped Him, but some doubted.⁴⁸ So, the rebuke of Jesus in Mark 16:14, which Matthew omits, concerns those who were doubtful.

Now let us study this Gospel episode and Barseł’s exegesis in view of the old and new translations of Mark 16:14. Here, the Greek verb ‘ἀνάκειμαι’ is used, which means ‘to recline, especially at a dinner table’, as it is usually translated in other languages, including modern Western and Eastern Armenian. This passage is usually compared to Luke 24:36–43 where Jesus appears to the disciples at the supper. In Ancient Armenian, however, the word ‘ἀνακειμένοις’ is translated ‘բազմեալ էին’ (*bazmeal ēin*, ‘were sitting down, were reclined’) without ‘at the table’,⁴⁹ which could also mean that the disciples were sitting down on the mountain: and this is what Barseł had in view when juxtaposing Mark 16:14 with Matt 28:16–17, where the disciples were reclining on the mountain and not at the table. One of the reasons for such an approach to Mark 16:14 may be the next verse, in which the disciples receive their mission, so they must have been on Mount Galilee already. Nevertheless, Barseł explains why the disciples were so hesitant to believe in the resurrection of Christ: according to him, the reason for their disbelief was not their stupidity or disobedience, but human weakness and foolishness. The result of their disbelief was that the truth of the resurrection was revealed to them in various ways, so that we might have no doubts and no need of proof.

46 Luke 24:34.

47 See M1314, f. 291r.

48 Ibid. f. 291v, cf. Matt 28:16–17.

49 Armenian բազմիմ may mean ‘reclining at a table’ but not necessarily always infers specifically ‘at a table’. For example, in Mark 6:39 (‘Եւ հրամայեաց նոցա բազմել երախանս երախանս ի վերայ դալար խոտոյ’, ‘And he ordered them to sit down in groups on the green grass’), Mark 6:40 (‘Եւ բազմեցան դասք դասք ուր հարիւր եւ ուր յիսուն’, ‘So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties’), or Mark 8:6 (‘Հրամայեաց ժողովրդեանս բազմել ի վերայ երկրի’, ‘He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground’) the verb բազմիմ is used to denote that people were sitting down on the grass and on the ground. For further examples and usage of this verb, see *NBHL*, 1, 418–419; *Hamabarbar*, 255.

For Barseł, Christianity is a way of life in the first place, and he interprets the Scriptures from both spiritual and practical points of view. He begins his commentary on Mark 16:16 with examining the following expressions: ‘make a disciple’, ‘baptize’, ‘teach to keep’,⁵⁰ and speaks of the true faith as the root of all virtuous deeds. He emphasizes the importance of faith not only in spiritual life but also in everyday activity, adding:

M1314, f. 297rv: ‘Չի էթե ոչ հաւատայր սերմանաւղն ընդունել զբերս պտղոցն, ոչ աշխատէր եւ վաստակէր: Այլեւ վանառականք, որք ընդ ծով եւ ընդ ցամաք նանապարհորդեն, էթե ոչ ի յոյս հաւատոցն յեցեալ էին շահել, ոչ յայնքան վտանգս զանձինս արկանէին.

If the sower did not believe that he would harvest his crop, he would not toil and profit. In the same way, merchants, who travel by sea and by land, would not put themselves in such great danger if they did not have a strong hope and faith in success.

Barseł first presents biblical events in the historical context of early Christianity, then explains them in the light of social relations and moral values of his time, emphasizing the new understanding of the Gospel story. This is best expressed in the passages where Barseł made additions to the Armenian original text of Mark 16:17 and 16:18, as mentioned above. In the interpretation of 16:17, referring to Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,⁵¹ he says that as soon as people believed and were baptized, they received various gifts that included prophecy, speaking in various tongues, healing and many others. According to the author, these gifts were necessary in the beginning of Christianity, so that the faith would be nourished and strengthened through miracles. Now (i.e. at Barseł’s time), however, the faith of the Holy Church is strong enough and does not require miracles anymore. Therefore, these gifts must be perceived mostly in a spiritual and moral sense. For example, driving out the demons does not only mean to cure from demonic possession, but also from sin, because as the demon shakes the body, so does the sin shake the soul. Again, he considers the ‘new tongues’ not as foreign languages, but as a spiritual language, the word of God. Yet, just as a full vessel cannot be filled with anything else, so a filthy mind cannot be filled with the divine word. Thus, according to the commentator, the believers would be able to speak in new tongues when they detest vain and useless conversations, foul and abusive words, futile and dishonest laughter, demonical songs, melodies and dances. Then they will be able to speak in spiritual and divine tongues, to talk

50 Matt 28:19, 20.

51 Cf. 1 Corinth.12:7–11.

about precious and useful things, to sing songs of praise for Christ our God.⁵² Barsef refers to an Apophthegm to elucidate this verse, which is as follows:⁵³

M1314, f. 300r: Չի գրեալ է, թէ երբեմն նստեալ եին հարքն եւ խաւսեին ընդ միմեանս: Եւ որքան աշխարհական բանս խաւսեին հոգեոնս ոմն ի նոսա տեսանէր գղեւքն նման խոզից յաղբ թաւալեալ եւ մտեալ ի մէջ հարցն՝ աղտեղեին եւ գարշահոտութեամբ լնոյին զամենեսեան: Եւ յորժամ դարձեալ զհոգևոր բանս խաւսեին, ելանեին դեւքն եւ լուսաւոր հրեշտակք շրջեին ի մէջ հարցն եւ անուշահոտութեամբ լնուին զնոսա.

It is written that once some fathers were gathered around and were talking. While they were discussing secular things, one of them, knowing the inmost thoughts of the soul, saw how the demons that were rolling in the mud like pigs entered them, spoiling and filling everyone with stench. But when they started speaking about spiritual things again, the demons came out and bright angels [could be seen] walking among the fathers, filling them with sweet fragrance.

For Barsef, the words we use are not only for communication, but also the key to our good or bad actions respectively. He compares the human mind with a mirror and the words we use with the image reflected in it:

M1314, f. 300r: Չի զամենայն զոր միանգամ ասէ ոք եւ խաւսի՝ եթէ չար եւ եթէ բարի, թեպէտ ոչ կատարէ գործով, սակայն տպաւք կերպարանի ի միտսն: Չի որպէս հայեղին, զոր ինչ դեմք ընդունի, զնոյն եւ կերպարանի, եթէ տգեղ՝ տգեղ եւ եթէ գեղեցիկ՝ գեղեցիկ: Այսպէս եւ սիրտն, զոր ինչ խաւսի լեզուն, եթէ չար եւ եթէ բարի, զնոյն եւ կերպարանի, եւ զոր կերպարանի, նորին եւ ի ցանկութիւն շարժի.

Anything one says and speaks, good or bad, is imprinted in the mind, though not yet put into action. It is like a mirror that takes the form of the face looking in it, ugly or beautiful. In the same way, the heart, whatever the tongue speaks, evil or good, takes its shape, and whatever shape it takes, moves towards the same desire.

He defines the ‘new tongues’ as the language of Christianity in which all the Christians should speak:

M1314, f. 300v: Յաղագս այսորիկ հրամայէ նոր լեզուաւ խաւսել, այսինքն՝ Քրիստոնէութեանն լեզուով խաւսել եւ մի այլով իւրիք: Չի որպէս ամենայն ազգ առանձինն իւր լեզուովն ճանաչի, եթէ յոյն է եւ եթէ լադինացի, այսպէս եւ ազգ քրիստոնէից քրիստոնէական լեզուովն ճանաչին, եթէ քրիստոնէայք են: Եւ թէ որ է քրիստոնէից լեզուն, այն է զինչ Քրիստոս ասաց եւ խաւսեցաւ.

For this he orders to speak in a new tongue, that is to speak in the tongue of Christianity and not another. Just as every nation, whether Greek or Latin, is recognized by its separate language, so Christian people reveal themselves to be Christian by the language of Christianity. And what is the language of Christians? That is what Christ said and spoke.

52 M1314, ff. 299v–300r.

53 Cf. also *Vitae Patrum*, 2012, 383–384.

I suppose that it was Barseł's understanding of the expression 'speak in new tongues' that led him to insert the word 'new' into the Armenian text of his Commentary. Perhaps the Armenian version of this verse, 'լեզուս խօսեացին' [they will speak tongues], was not enough for Barseł to explain his idea of the new spiritual language and the new language of Christianity.⁵⁴

Explaining that 'they will pick up snakes with their hands' in Mark 18, he presents the snake as: 1) an ordinary reptile that bites and kills, 2) Satan and demons, 3) the joys and pleasures that rich people and princes have in this world. Among secular pleasures, 'զուտելն' ('eating'), 'զրմպելն' ('drinking'), 'զպանունանք զգեստուցն' ('dressing up'), and 'զգործն ամուսնութեան' ('the act of marriage') are particularly highlighted, which, however, will not harm anyone if they are moderate. Speaking about 'healing', Barseł states that it was still practiced by many priests and virtuous hermits, who healed the sick by laying their hands on them and praying. Nonetheless, he interprets this part of Mark 16:8 as a spiritual healing rather than a physical one:

M1314, f. 301v: Յայնժամ ի վերայ իիւանդացելոցն հոգևով ձեռն դիցեն, այսինքն՝ խրատեացեն եւ ուսուցեն ասել զչարն եւ սիրել զբարին.

Then they will lay a hand on a spiritually sick person, that is to say they will admonish and teach [them] to hate evil and love good.

Perhaps to better explain his perception of Mark 16:18 Barseł added 'կամ բարի ունիցին' (*kam bari unic* 'in, 'or they will be(come) good') to the word 'բժշկիցեն' (*bž škic* 'en, 'they will heal'; see fig. 3 above). The verb 'բժշկելն' (*bžškem*, 'I heal'), which is found in the Armenian standard text, can be perceived and interpreted also in a moral sense, but it is mostly about physical healing. On the other hand, the Armenian word 'բարի' (*bari*, 'good'), which was added by Barseł, corresponds to the Greek word 'καλῶς' and is understood mostly in a moral and spiritual sense. Therefore, according to Barseł the expression 'they will lay hands on the sick and will heal them or they will be(come) good', means that:

M1314, f. 302r: Այսինքն՝ զչարքն ի բարիս դարձուցեն բարութեամբն իւրեանց: ...2ի որպէս ամենայն արուեստաւոր գործելովն ուսուցանէ զոգէտան առաւել քան ասելովն, այսպէս եւ արուեստաւորն առաքինութեան գործելովն գնոյն սպա կարէ ուսուցանել զոգէտան առաքինութեան եւ ոչ միայն ասելովն.

54 Although more detailed research remains to be done, I have compared this passage in Barseł's work and in the above-mentioned Armenian Interpretation on Mark penned in 1844. The nineteenth-century author, who used the Standard Armenian Bible (without the word 'new') understands this passage to mean the gift of speaking in foreign languages. See ms Yerevan, Matenadaran, 4901, f. 211r.

They will turn the evil ones into good by their goodness. ... Just as craftsmen teach the ignorant by working rather than speaking, so the craftsmen of goodness teach virtue to the ignorant through actions rather than words.

The question now arises as to what sources the author relied on to make these interpolations to the biblical text he used? It should be mentioned that two of Armenian versions have the word ‘new’ in Mark 16:17, which, however, is used differently.⁵⁵ Therefore, it is unlikely that Barseł used other Armenian versions of Mark. In this study, I will suggest that he had at his disposal not only an Armenian but also foreign, most likely a Greek, biblical text (or at least he was familiar with other traditions).⁵⁶ Therefore, Barseł used his own translation or edition of Mark 16:17 and 16:18, for it was much closer to his understanding of this verse. Even so, the commentator approaches the Gospel text with great caution. He proposes his own version, not changing the original text, but by adding the conjunction ‘or’ in Mark 16:18 or writing the word ‘new’ differently in Mark 16:17.

In the commentary on Mark 16:20, endeavoring to persuade the reader that the apostles could do nothing by themselves, without the Lord’s help, Barseł asks the following rhetorical question:

M1314, ff. 304v–305r: Չի ուստի էր նոցա այնքան զարութիւն, մինչ զի երկոտասանքն աշխարհիս ամենայնի յաղթաւոր լինեին: Տե՛ս, ձկնորսն, խորանակարն, մաքսաւորն՝ տգէտքն զիմաստաւէրսն զնարտարսն յիւրեանց ուսմանցն ի բաց մերժեցին զամենեսեան եւ յաղթեցին նոցա ի փոքր ժամանակի.

How was it possible for the twelve [disciples] to be so strong as to win the whole world? ... Look, the ignorant fisher, the tent-maker, the tax collector made the ingenious philosophers renounce their teaching and won them over in a short time.

To illustrate the power that the apostles had through the Lord, he refers to Plato:

M1314, f. 305r: Որքան աշխատեցաւ Պղատոն եւ որք իբրեւ զնա եին՝ ցուցանել թէ անմահ է հոգի եւ ոչ ինչ յայտնագոյն ասացին, վասն որոյ եւ ոչ գոր հաւանեցուցին: Իսկ առաքեալքն Քրիստոսի ձեռնտուութեամբ խաչեցելոյն եւ յարուցելոյն զինչ էր գոր ոչ ուսուցին մարդկան՝ յաղագս Աստուծոյ եւ ճշմարիտ բարեպաշտութեան եւ հրեշտակական վարուց, յաղագս անմահութեան հոգւոյ եւ յարութեան մարմնոյ եւ դատաստանին եւ հատուցմանն

55 Suk‘rean 1877, 212: ‘ս նոր լեզուօք խօսեցցին’. Melkonyan and Batovici 2022, f. 129r, col. 2: ‘լեզուս խաւսեցցին նորս’. Cf. Zōhrapean 1805, 683 ‘լեզուս խօսեցցին’ and M1314, f. 299r: ‘նոր լեզուս խաւսեցցին’.

56 A confirmation of it may be the fact that Barseł wrote his Commentary in a monastery on the Black Mountain, considered ‘an international center of education for Greek, Syrian, Latin, Armenian and Georgian monks, ascetics and simply writers who came in search of spiritual guidance’, see Širinyan 2014, 362.

Plato and his followers made a lot of efforts to show that the soul is immortal, but, since their statements were not clear, did not convince anyone. While the apostles, with the help of crucified and resurrected Christ, taught people everything about God, true piety, angelic behaviour, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the Last Judgment.

Barseł refers to Plato also in the interpretation of a verse from the Gospel of Matthew: ‘then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go’.⁵⁷ The author draws attention to the fact that the disciples did so because Jesus commanded them and explains the importance of acting according to the commandment and not only knowing it, in terms of the relationship between the practical and theoretical parts of philosophy. In this and some other passages (which I will not touch upon in this article) the influence of the ‘Definitions of Philosophy’ by the neoplatonist philosopher David the Invincible is evident.⁵⁸

Եւ ընդէր ոչ սսաց՝ զիտացին ըստ պատուիրանին, այլ թէ գործեցին. զի սաժանելի և դժուարին գործելն է քան թէ զիտելն: Չի ուսանել զպատուիրանսն դիւրին է ամենայն ումեք՝ որ եւ կամեսցի, իսկ գործով լնուլ եւ արդեամբք զնոյն կատարել քաջի առն եւ զօրաւորի ումեք պէտս ունի, ըստ Պղատոնի, թէ՛ զիտուն սսեմ եւ ոչ զյոզնագէտն, եւ ոչ զայն, որ կարօղ է բազում ինչ ի բերան առնուլ, այլ որ ամբիժ եւ անարատ վարս ստացեալ է

And why [Matthew] did not say, that the apostles knew the commandment, but acted [according to it]: because doing something is harder and more tedious than knowing it, learning a commandment is easy for anyone who wants to, but to complement it with action and actually fulfill it, one must be brave and strong. For according to Plato, it is not a man who knows a lot, nor a man who can learn many things by heart whom I call wise, but the man who acquired a pure and spotless life.⁵⁹

The addressee of this Commentary were the ordinary people, and the author was very well acquainted with their daily life and problems.⁶⁰ In the brief preface he compares Christianity with art, and as every art possesses its own tools, therefore, artist cannot succeed without them, no matter how skillful he is, likewise the tools of Christianity, which for him is the greatest of all arts: so, it is the Holy Scriptures that all believers should know. At the same time, Barseł mentions the reasons given by the believers, why they could not manage to study the Bible, which are as follows:

M1314, f. 2r: բազումք զյոյով պատճառս ի մէջ բերեն, այսինքն է զորդիս սնուցանել, կանանց հոգալ եւ թագաւորական հարկաց, սորին վասն չառնուն յանձն զայսպիսի աշխատութիւնս

57 Matt 28:16.

58 More about David the Invincible philosopher, see Calzolari and Barnes 2009.

59 Narinean 1826, 417. Cf. Kendall and Thomson 1983, 15.

60 Daniëlean (1980, 10) assumes that Barseł was a high-ranking clergyman.

Many people give several reasons, such as feeding children, taking care of women and [paying] royal taxes, why they do not undertake such work.

According to him, many evil things occur because of ignorance of the Scriptures, therefore, the knowledge and interpretation of the Gospel is of great practical importance. In the Exhortation following the last chapter, the interpreter admonishes the clergymen, as well as the men and women, to teach the imperfect and the imprudent:

M1314, f. 307r: Չի ոչ թէ մեր միայն ենք պարտական խրատել եւ ուսուցանել, այլեւ ամենեքեան արք եւ կանայք կատարեալքդ հասակաւ պարտիք ուսուցանել զանկատարսն եւ զողայարարոյսն բանիւք եւ զործովք...: Արդ, խրատեսցուք զնոսա լուսաւոր գործովքն առաքինութեան

Because it is not only us [the clergymen] who are obliged to instruct and teach, but also you, all mature men and women, are obliged to teach the imperfect and the imprudent with your words and deeds... Now, let us enjoin them with our [own] shining and virtuous deeds.

The characters of the Commentary are diverse, of different social classes, ages and gender, including kings, princes, healers, soldiers, merchants, rich and poor people, women, men and children.⁶¹ The given examples are not just allegories, but, based on them, one can get the idea of the relationships between different social classes, their attitude towards each other, moral values and everyday life, as the Commentary is ‘spiced’ with scenes representing the daily life of the time.⁶² In this regard, the Commentary provides a good basis for studying the social relations of the time, especially the perception and the influence of the Bible.

The literary sources of Barseł’s work are yet to be investigated.⁶³ As a preliminary observation, I could say that there are no direct references to the Church Fathers, at least, in the passage in question. However, the influence of John Chrysostom is evident: for example, there are some commonalities between Chrysostom’s *Homilia in Ioannem* and Barseł’s work regarding the characterization of Mary Magdalene.⁶⁴ Mkrtič‘ Aławnuni noticed the influence of the apocrypha on the Commentary as well.⁶⁵ Based on some evidences

61 In the last chapter he describes how a child played with his father, also naming the toy.

62 Kiwlēsērean (1905, 1096) notes that: ‘His examples and explanations are so open that the hypocrites do not hesitate to say, ‘How could a monk use such a language and pen?’

63 Such a study would be beyond the scope of this article.

64 Chrysostom 1737, 929–933; Kunder 2019, 110.

65 Aławnuni 1926, 110.

one can say that he also used the ‘Definitions of Philosophy’ by a neoplatonist philosopher David the Invincible.

Concluding Remarks

To summarize, Barseł vardapet composed his commentary on the Gospel of Mark in the monastery of Maškewor in 1325 (the autograph is still extant and is housed at the Yerevan Matenadaran). It includes an interpretation on Mark 9:10–16:20, while the first part, a commentary on Mark 1:1–9:9, is considered lost. The Commentary is an interesting piece of Armenian biblical exegesis, but it is also important for the discussion of textual issues related to Mark 16:9–20 in Armenian. Some of the manuscripts of Barseł’s Commentary lack the last three chapters that include the Longer Ending of Mark. E. Colwell considered this omission to be another proof of the absence of verses 9–20 in the original Armenian. However, even in this case, when 16:9–20 is obviously present in the Commentary it should not be considered as a proof of its presence in the original Armenian: Barseł’s work was written in the 14th century, when the Longer Ending was adopted and became widespread in the Armenian manuscript tradition and liturgy.⁶⁶ It is certain that the author had no doubt about the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20, and he believed that it was written by Mark the Evangelist. The biblical text used by Barseł (which I reconstructed, based on the quotations in the autograph) corresponds perfectly to the Armenian Standard version (the so-called ‘Zōhrap Bible’). In Mark 16:17 the interpreter added the word ‘նոր’ ‘*nor*, new’ to յեզրու խաւսւտցիս (*lezus xawsesc* ‘*in*, ‘they will speak in tongues’) and in 18 added ‘կամ քարի ունիցիս’—the conjunction ‘or’ and the literal translation of ‘καλῶς ἔξουσιν’ to the word ‘բժշկիցիս’ (*bžškiec* ‘*en*, ‘will heal’), presumably based on a Greek exemplum,⁶⁷ in order to make the Armenian text closer to his perception and interpretation of the given verses. Barseł first presents biblical events in the historical context of early Christianity, demonstrating quite a ‘critical’ ap-

66 In the oldest extant Armenian lectionary (ninth or tenth century), only Mark 16:2–8 is included in the Canon of Resurrection, see MS Yerevan, Matenadaran, 987, ff. 209rv, cf. Malxasyan 2005, 58. In many manuscripts, before or after Mark 16:9–20 there is an instruction by the scribe (sometimes intertwined with the colophon) for it to be read on Ascension Day, see MSS Yerevan, Matenadaran 3712, f. 134r (thirteenth century), 3330, f. 121r (dated to 1379), 4931, f. 140r (dated to 1418), 4826, f. 139r (dated to 1420), 4202, 135v (dated to 1484), 4224, f. 137r (sixteenth century). The Longer Ending was included in the Lectionaries over time. It is found in the Canon of the Ascension in the famous Lectionary of the Armenian King Het’um II (dated to 1286), see MS Yerevan, Matenadaran, 979, ff. 277v–278r; Alek’sanyan and Łazaryan 2019, 282.

67 One should not exclude the possibility of a Latin *Vorlage*.

proach to the text, then explains them in the light of social relations and moral values of his time, emphasizing the new understanding of the Gospel story.

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