



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



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DEGLI STUDI
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CATALOGUE

INTRODUCTION

The 27 subjects that form this exhibition bear witness to cultural interactions that took place 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. Differences in language, religion, confession, ethnicity, and political systems were not always obstacles, but also reasons to seek contacts. Long distances were not an insurmountable problem either, if contacts were necessary. Interactions have always been an integral part of the human experience, with consequences that are rarely insignificant. *Cultural Entanglements across Medieval Armenia* explores these consequences across 27 illustrative case studies.

This exhibition is structured around five thematic foci. It begins with material objects with multiple cultural, geographic, and political orientations. Next it features historical agents who played a crucial role in negotiating borders and boundaries of many kinds.

The third focus concerns widely circulated—though today little-known—texts and stories that attest to multilingual practices and intellectual debates but also to tensions and polemics between various religious and confessional groups. Fourth is an exploration of the stories that were interpreted artistically: it focuses on the Armenian traditions of the *Virgin of Mercy*, the *Alexander Romance*, and *Saint George*—three themes that traversed the literary and artistic cultures of premodern Eurasia. The exhibition concludes with a select number of places that facilitated cross-cultural contact in premodern times. Some of these places are now completely destroyed; others are in urgent need of preservation and additional research.

These case studies showcase the work of 17 researchers affiliated with the ERC-funded project *Armenia Entangled: Connectivity and Cultural Encounters in Medieval Eurasia (9th–14th centuries)*, led by Zaroui Pogossian at the University of Florence between 2020 and 2026. Many more medieval sources, artefacts, and monuments could have been featured in this exhibition. What viewers and readers will find here, of course, is only a glimpse of a complex Armenian world that is still being recovered.

Gohar Grigoryan

PROPERTY, MOBILITY, POWER: THE ARMENIAN PRINCESS KHOSHAK' BETWEEN ANI AND TABRIZ

Zaroui Pogossian

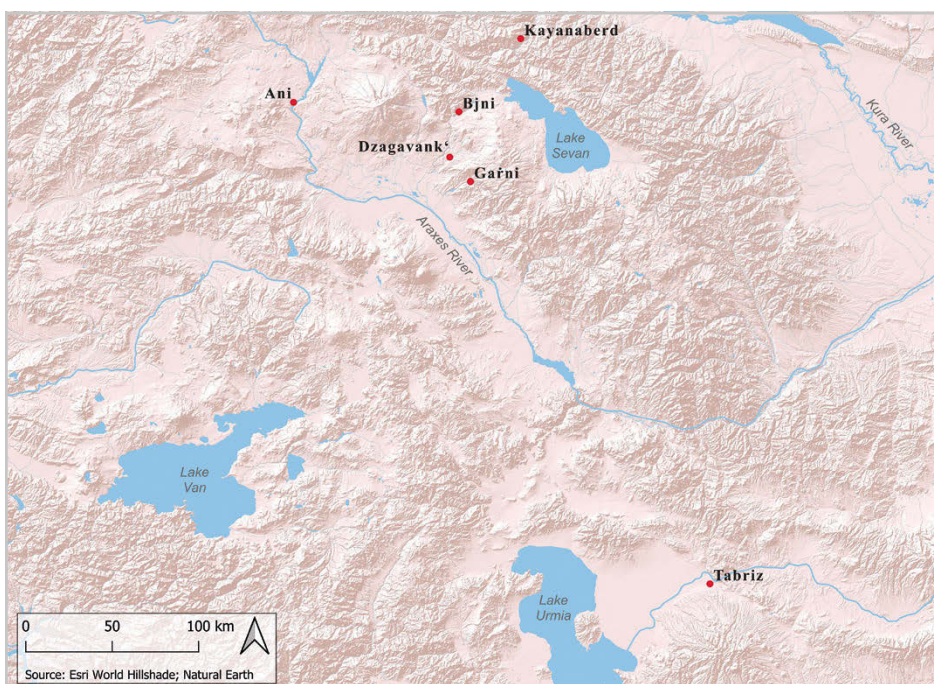
In 1270 an Armenian church council was held in the village of Dzagavan (*Map 8a*) “during the universal rule of Apagha Khan, by the will and at the orders of Khoshak’” (*Fig. 8b*). Who was Khoshak’, who bore a Persian name meaning “pleasant,” and why was she listed in the *Acts* of the council just after the Ilkhanid ruler Khan Abaqa (r. 1265–1282), a great grandson of Gengiz, and even before prominent Armenian military leaders? Historical and epigraphic sources reveal the entangled biography of an outstanding woman whose life story intertwined with local and Eurasian political vicissitudes. Born around 1235, through her father Awag she was descended from one of the most important Armenian military noble families of the time, known as the Zak’arids (Mkhargrdzeli in Georgian sources). Her mother Gonts’a belonged to the Kakhberidze aristocratic family of western Georgia. Khoshak’ was a toddler when the Mongols besieged the family fortress of Kayan (Kayanaberd) in northern Armenia (*Map 8a*). She was the only child of her parents. When Awag surrendered the fortress, she was handed to the Mongols as a hostage at this tender age. We do not know when she came back, but at her father’s death in 1250 she was said to be still a child, living in the town of Bjni (*Map 8a*). The family estates, including the prized city of Ani, passed first to her cousin Zak’arē, then to her mother Gonts’a, and then, through Gonts’a’s second marriage to the Bagratid king David VII, to the Georgian crown. Khoshak’ was left empty-handed.

However, the wheel of fortune turned in 1262 when an Armeno-Georgian rebellion against the Ilkhanate was crushed. Queen Gonts’a, presumably implicated

in the uprising, was assassinated, and Khoshak’ became the official owner of her father’s landed property. Now one of the wealthiest prospective brides in the Caucasus, Khoshak’'s marriage would have significant political and economic implications. In 1269 she married the formidable finance minister of the Mongol Ilkhanate, the Sahib-Divan Shams ad-Din from the prominent Juvaini family. Under the protection of the highest-ranking courtier of the Ilkhanid government, Khoshak’ in turn brought new estates and revenues to be added to Shams ad-Din’s already enormous fortunes. After 1270 Khoshak’ moved to Tabriz with her husband, where they had three children.

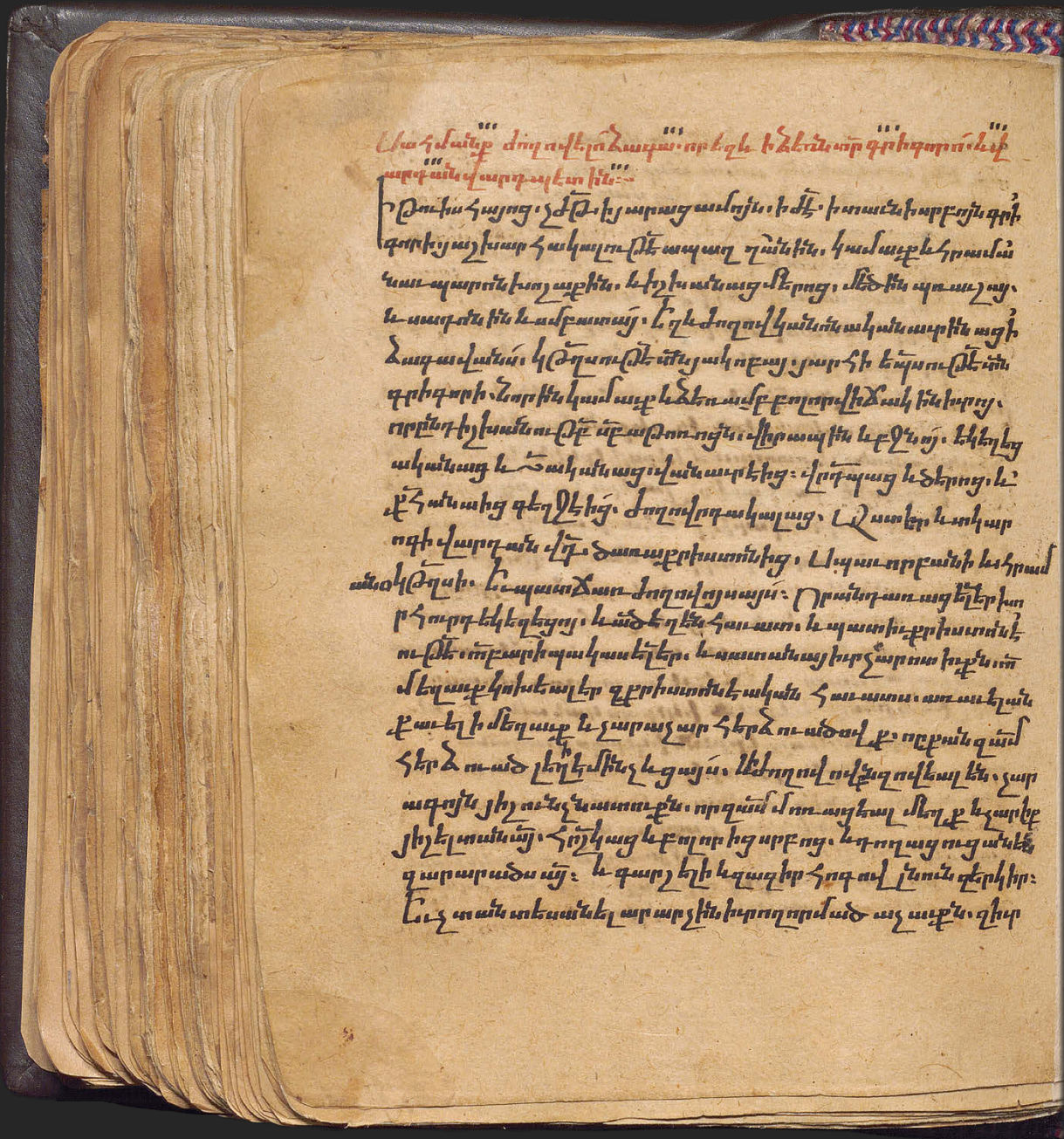
But turbulent times lay ahead. In 1284 her powerful husband fell victim to palace intrigues and was executed. In his will he requested that his wife Khoshak’ Khatun be allowed to return to her homeland with their children. Khoshak’'s presence in Armenia is visible through the inscriptions she left behind, documenting her donations to churches and monasteries in northern Armenia, including Ani, Ga’ni, and Bjni where she appears as *paron* or “lord/lady” (*Fig. 8d*). She likewise features in inscriptions left by her daughter and sons, highlighting her continued significance in sustaining and legitimising the rule and property rights of her children.

Princess Khoshak’, with her mixed Armeno-Georgian descent, marriage to the most powerful Persian-Muslim Ilkhanid official, involvement in Armenian church politics, and a patron of religious foundations, emerges from the available sources as a remarkable woman at the crossroads of empires and cultures.



8a. Locations mentioned in the text.

Map: Leonardo Squilloni.



Մեզմանք՝ ժողովելով ձապա՝ որ էլ ի ձեռնար գրի գործենք՝
 արգան վարդապետին՝
 Ի Թուխ հայոց, չԹուխ արաց անոյն, ի մէջ ի տաւնի արքայն գրի
 գործից չար հակալու ըն ապաղ ղանին, կամ ալ քեհրաման
 նաւ պարուն խոյաքին, եւ ի նաւնաց մերոց, մեծին պռաւչայ,
 և սարունին և սմբատայ, և զեմողով կանոնական արին աջի
 ձապա վանան, կ'Թղսու ընդ յակոբայ, յարհի եպիսկոպոսն
 գրի գործի նորին կամ ալ քեհրաման քաղաքի ի ներքին,
 որ ընդ ի նաւն ու ընդ սբարձոռ ոցն, վերապին և բջնոյ, եկեղեց
 ականաց և Նականաց վանարեից, վորդաց և ծերոց, և
 քհնանից գեղջեից, ժողովողականաց, Լճատեր և տկար
 ոգի վարդան վրձաւաբերիստնից, Ապարթեանի և հրամ
 անով Թղսի, և պատճառ ժողովոյս այս, ըրանորաւաց երկոյ
 ըհորդ եկեղեցոյ, և անձեղեն հաւատ, և պատիւ քրիստոնէ
 ու ընդ տէրաբարկաս երկր, և սատանայ իր ճարտար ի քնն
 մեղաք կոնսեալեր զքրիստոնէական հաւատաւ առաւելան
 քաւել մեղաք և ճարաչար հերձ ու անձալք, որքան զան
 հերձ ու ան լեղի միջև ցայս, և եմողով ու լեղ ու լեղ են, չար
 ազոյն յիշունչ նատալքն, որ զան մոռացեալ մեղք և չարիք
 յիշել տանայ, հոյնաց և բողոքից սրբոց, և որդաց ու ցանկէ
 զարարածս այց, և գարշելի և զաղիր հոգով լնուն գերկիր,
 Եւ չտան տեսանել արարչին իրողորմած աչաքն, զի որ

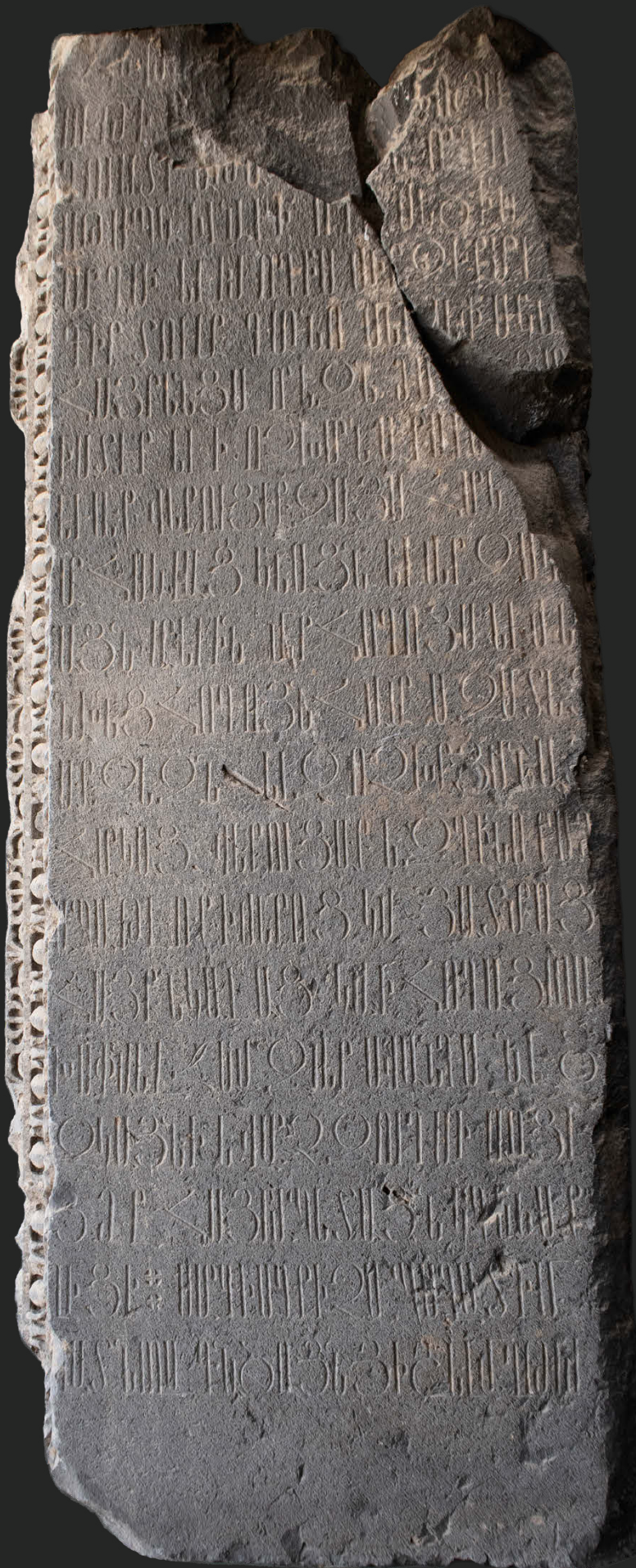


8b. Opening lines of a church council in a manuscript mentioning Princess Khoshak' as paron (lord), 1270.

Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 582, folio 125v. Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

8c. No lifetime portrayal of Khoshak' is extant, but this image from the *Gospels of Khtskonk'* (1236), showing a patron couple from Ani, gives an idea of what a 13th-century aristocratic woman would look like.

Isfahan (New Julfa), Armenian Holy Saviour Monastery, MS 36/156, folio 124v. Photograph from: S. Der Nersessian and A. Mekhitarian, *Armenian Miniatures from Isfahan* (Brussels: Éditeurs d'Art Associés, 1986), fig. 46.



8d. Lapidary inscription from the jamb at the Temple of Gaini mentioning Khoshak', 1291.
Photographic credit: Lapo Somigli.