III. THE GOLDEN AGE OF YEGHEGIS IN THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

Built Environment, Cultural Heritage, and Local Multiplicities

Abstract / To explore the material cultural heritage of Yeghegis during its thirteenth- and fourteenth-century heyday and the relevant textual sources, this study begins by pointing out the difficulty of harmonizing written sources on the churches and monasteries in Yeghegis with extant monuments. This circumstance raises questions about the dedication and function of such churches as the Zorats' Church and the Cupola Church. The article highlights the importance, but also difficulties when undertaking interdisciplinary research that aims to combine archaeological and written evidence. The study also focuses on the ethno-religious and linguistic multiplicities of Yeghegis and Vayots' Dzor, which included a Jewish community, Persian-speaking Muslim residents and traders, and Western European missionaries who brought Scholastic texts and methods of reasoning. The chapter argues that the increased trade that certainly passed through Vayots' Dzor must have been one, and perhaps the most important cause of the variegated and flourishing culture that characterized Yeghegis.
Keywords / Jews in Yeghegis, multilingualism, trade in the Middle Ages, Vayots' Dzor, Yeghegis churches
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INTRODUCTION

The architectural heritage extant in Yeghegis presented in this volume is predominantly dated to the second half of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century. There are only sporadic visible traces of earlier structures within the village, although their importance should not be underestimated. Indeed, earlier foundations – monasteries or churches/chapels incorporated into later monastic complexes – punctuate the landscape in the vicinity of Yeghegis, testifying to a vibrant construction activity even before the late-medieval heyday of the village. These include the monasteries of Arates, Ts'akhats' K'ar, Gndevank', Herher, Shativank', and others. These constructions presuppose a robust economic situation. Moreover, Vayots' Dzor and Syunik' fully participated in the expansion of cenobitic monasticism in Armenia, sponsored by the great dynasties of the Bagratunis, Artsrunis, and Syunis, with numerous new foundations in the ninth and tenth centuries. Yet, Yeghegis reached its cultural and political pinnacle in the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century, when it also witnessed an unprecedented level of local multiplicity. This phenomenon is traceable especially through the material cultural evidence, although written sources come to add an ulterior dimension to it. The purpose of this chapter is to present and highlight the significance of the material and written heritage in helping us understand Yeghegis' local multiplicities and global connections.

It is thanks to the material culture that we become aware of the Jewish community in Yeghegis and trace the presence and appreciation of the Perso-Arabic culture in Vayots' Dzor. Written sources, on the other hand, reveal yet another tassel in the mosaic of cultural multiplicities in Yeghegis: the encounter – not always peaceful – with Latin scholasticism in its monastic schools, most notably at Gladzor. Although this encounter generated heated polemics that left a strong trace in the written record, it also gave rise to new translations, modes of philosophical reasoning, and educational methodologies adopted within Armenian monastic schools. If one adds to this picture such buildings as caravanserais or guesthouses added to monastic complexes – some bearing multilingual inscriptions – and imagines the passage of unrecorded merchants along this portion of the Silk Road(s) from many parts of the world, we get a portrait of a rural central place with global connections through trade, monks, missionaries, and, obviously, soldiers.

THE CHURCHES OF YEGHEGIS: WRITTEN EVIDENCE AND ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

There are four extant ecclesiastical buildings in Yeghegis. Firstly, the most famous one, known as the "Zorats' Church," datable to the early decades of the fourteenth century, stands on the eastern outskirts of the village. Secondly, the oldest structure, referred to as the "Old Church" in this volume, dates to the ninth century and is located on the south-western edge of Yeghegis. Thirdly, a domed building referred to as the "Cupola Church" of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries, stands west of the Zorats' Church inside the village. And fourthly, the largest of the four – a basilica structure dedicated to the Mother of God (Astuatsatsin), dated to 1703 on the basis of an inscription on its western portal – stands in the middle of the village. The nomenclature here is based partly on what has become conventional since the nineteenth century (such as the Zorats' Church) or following the usage adopted by Barkhudaryan in his publication of the epigraphic corpus from Yeghegis. From these four, only the three early structures are subject to analysis in this chapter and the rest of the volume. The eighteenth-century church falls outside the chronological scope of the present work.

The earliest travelers who described Yeghegis and its monuments in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries include the erudite cleric *Vardapet* Sargis Jalaleants', a descendant of the ancient noble family of Hasan-Jalaleans, whom we saw in

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the previous chapter; a physician with antiquarian interests, K'ajberuni [Gabriel Tēr-Hovhannisean]; a local unidentified connoisseur who sent information to the Mechitarist scholar from Venice, Ghewond Alishan; and the professional ethnographer Eruand Lalayean. More recently, scholars such as Yulius T'amanean, Hovsep' Yeghiazaryan, Paolo Cuneo, and Patrick Donabédian have studied professionally the architectural monuments of Yeghegis, too. T'amanyan, an architect, was also responsible for the reconstruction of the Cupola Church.[1]

As we saw in chapter 2, Yeghegis was the central residence of the senior branch of the Syuni princely family in the ninth and tenth centuries – their *ostan*.[2] The first epigraphic evidence from Yeghegis is dated to this period – the year 851 – and is either coeval or very close in time to the construction of the Old Church on which it was carved. It is published in this volume for the first time (see inscription VI.1 in chapter 11). The text of the epigraph is not easy to decipher because of its worn-out state, but it seems to document the donation of cut stones for the construction of the church. The dedication of the church is unknown. The ninth and tenth centuries were a period of flourishing economy in Armenia, and numerous monasteries and churches were erected in all regions at this time. Syunik' was part of this process too, and some of the most significant monastic centers that maintained their importance even later, such as Gndevank', Ts'akhats' K'ar, Arates, and most significantly Tat'ew, were established in this period.[3] This small church is a modest testimony to this overall cultural and monastic resurgence. Its original function or context has not been explored, for there have been no archaeological investigations in that part of Yeghegis.

The earliest medieval written evidence on the churches in Yeghegis is in the earliest extant colophon of a manuscript copied there, dated 1297, which attests to the existence of a scriptorium and intellectual activity at this time in "the exceedingly illustrious metropolis of Yeghegis." The colophon lists three sanctuaries, affirming that the manuscript was copied "at the feet of the Mother of the Lord [who is] the Mother of God, and of the holy Kat'oghikē and of the glorious holy Protomartyr."[4] It is not clear what kind of structures are meant and which of the still-standing churches in Yeghegis correspond to each of them. Moreover, one wonders what the dedication of the Kat'oghikē – the main (cathedral) church – was. Could it be the same one as the church dedicated to the Mother of God (Astuatsatsin)? The syntax would certainly allow such an interpretation.

1 On these churches, including their ground plans, architectural and archaeological analysis and a map of their locations in Yeghegis, see chapters 7 to 9 in this volume. Sargis [*vardapet*] Jalaleants', *Chanaparhordut'iwn i metsn Hayastan* [Travels to Greater Armenia], 2 vols, Tiflis 1841, 1853, vol. II, pp. 151–155; K'ajberuni [Gabriel Tēr-Hovhannisean], "Chanaparhordakan nkatoghut'yunk'. LZ" [Travel notes. 36], *Ararat,* 21 (1888), pp. 434–444; Ghewond Alishan, *Sisakan. Teghagrut'yun Syuneats' ashkharhi* [Sisakan: A Topography of the Land of Syunik'], Venice 1893, sp. pp. 169; Eruand Lalayean, "Vayots' Dzor. Nshanavor vank'er" [Vayots' Dzor. Noteworthy Monasteries], *Azgagrakan handēs* [Ethnographical Journal], 26 (1916), pp. 5–84, sp. pp. 61–73; Hovsep' Yeghiazaryan, *Azizbekovi shrjani kulturayi hushardzannerə* [Cultural Monuments of the Azizbekov Region], Yerevan 1955. All these descriptions, as precious as they are for documenting the state of the monuments and their context in earlier periods, have different levels of inaccuracies. These will be highlighted when relevant. Although Barkhudaryan's descriptions are extremely brief, he corrects some of the earlier misconceptions or misreadings of the inscriptions in Sedrak Barkhudaryan, *Divan hay vimagrut'yan. Prak III. Vayots' Dzor: Yeghegnadzori ev Azizbekovi Shrjanner* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum. Vol. III. Vayots' Dzor: Districts of Yeghegnadzor and Azizbekov], Yerevan 1967, pp. 104–188 on Yeghegis (henceforth *CIA*, vol. III). See also Yulius T'amanyan, *Vayots' Dzori S. Karapet ekeghets'u veranorogumə* [The Restorations of the Church of St Karapet in Vayots' Dzor], *Ējmiatsin,* 34/5 (1977), pp. 40–45; Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura armena dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo*, 2 vols, vol. I, Rome 1988, pp. 380–381.

2 The word *ostan* is of Parthian origin and means "royal domain." See Hrach'ya Acharyan, *Hayeren armatakan barʻaran* [Armenian Etymological Dictionary], 4 vols, Yerevan 1971–1979, s.v. ոստան (*ostan*).

3 Step'anos Ōrbēlean, *Patmut'iwn nahangin Sisakan* [History of the Region Sisakan], Tiflis 1910, pp. 258–266 on 9th–10th century monastic foundations; on Syunik''s architectural heritage from this period, see Step'an Mnats'akanyan, *Haykakan chartarapetut'yan Syunik'i dprots'ə* [The Syunik' School of Armenian Architecture], Yerevan 1960. On some examples of Syuni monastic foundations in the ninth and tenth centuries, their political implications and social context, see Zaroui Pogossian, "The Foundation of the Monastery of Sevan: A Case Study on Monasteries, Economy and Political Power in IX–X century Armenia", in *Le Valli dei Monaci: Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio, Roma-Subiaco, 17–19 maggio, 2010*, Letizia Ermini Pani ed., Spoleto 2012, pp. 181–215; and a similar process in the neighboring Vaspurakan in *Eadem*, "Locating Religion, Controlling Territory: Conquest and Legitimation in Late Ninth Century Vaspurakan and its Inter-religious Context", in *Locating Religions: Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, Reinhold Glei, Nicolas Jaspert eds, Leiden 2017, pp. 173–233.

4 Artashes Mat'evosyan, *Hayeren dzeṙagreri hishatakaranner. ŽG dar* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts. 13th Century], Yerevan 1984, p. 798. This is a Gospel manuscript, currently in the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Matenadaran, 7482.

The next piece of evidence is yet another colophon written in 1306, and its wording presents further problems of interpretation. It declares that the manuscript (a Gospel) was written "in the metropolis Yeghegis, under the protection of three *tabernacles* – the holy Kat'oghikē, and the holy Mother of God, and the holy Protomartyr."[5] The use of the term "tabernacles" (տաղաւարս) in this context, presumably referring to a church, is unusual, if not unattested, but is repeated in later colophons on Yeghegis, too. The questions asked above regarding the relationship between this written testimony and actual buildings, or their sites, are also open in this case. Moreover, if "tabernacle" refers to an altar within a church, one can imagine two titles referring to one and the same building, which had two altars dedicated to two different saints.

Chronologically, the next colophon of a manuscript produced in Yeghegis is from ca 1315, written by the celebrated poet and intellectual Khach'atur Kech'aṙets'i, who hailed from the Khaghbakean family. About a decade earlier, Khach'atur Kech'aṙets'i had commissioned the Metropolitan Bishop and historian Step'anos Ōrbēlean to compose a *Lament* on the fate of the catholicosate in Vagharshapat (Ējmiatsin).[6] Although it is significant for understanding the intellectual climate in Yeghegis – which attracted this well-known theologian and poet, among many others, this colophon does not inform us about the settlement's built environment.[7] Another colophon of a manuscript copied in 1331 in the monastery of Xumit' or Jermaṙu is noteworthy because it mentions a member of their congregation, Awetis, who travelled to Yeghegis for the purpose of acquiring paper.[8] The enticing possibility that paper was produced in Yeghegis finds no other corroborating evidence. It is easier to imagine that paper was traded there, either in Yeghegis itself or one of the caravanserais located not far from it. In the same year, one of the most brilliant artists of fourteenth-century Vayots' Dzor – the architect, sculptor, and miniaturist Momik – copied and illustrated a Gospel for Step'anos-Tarsayich Ōrbēlean (in office 1314–1331), the metropolitan of Syunik'. Momik says that he embellished the gospel with gold and silver in Yeghegis, in the "new monastery" (ի նորավանս/*i noravans*), where he continues, Burt'el built a new church dedicated to "the Mother of God and St Nicholas and St Cristopher."[9] The location of "noravank'" in Yeghegis with a church that had three dedications is unknown. One may speculate that this refers to the Zorats' Church, which, according to an inscription, was dedicated to the Mother of God. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that in the first half of the fourteenth century, Yeghegis was a lively intellectual and artistic center.

At the end of the fifteenth century (1495), a colophon of a Gospel manuscript provides a somewhat more problematic piece of information. It also mentions three "tabernacles" but then seems to list four items: "under the protection of three tabernacles – the holy Kat'oghikē, and the holy Mother of God, and holy Stephen, and the life-giving holy Sign."[10] Was there a new, fourth structure compared to the previous three mentioned earlier? Or was there the deposition of a relic of the True Cross in the church of St Stephen, wherever the latter may have been located? These questions are not possible to answer at our current state of knowledge. However, this colophon has led some scholars to name the Cupola Church also as the church of the Holy Sign (Սուրբ Նշան/*Surb Nshan*).

It is not easy to correlate the information from the written sources with the existing churches in Yeghegis. Moreover, there is a great deal of confusion

5 Levon Khach'ikyan, *xiv dari hayeren dzeṙagreri hishatakaranner* [Colophons of 14th-century Armenian Manuscripts], Yerevan 1950, p. 42. Emphasis is mine.

6 Grigor Grigoryan, *Syunik'ə Ōrbelyanneri ōrok' (xiii–xiv darer)* [Syunik' Under the Ōrbēleans (13th–14th Centuries), Yerevan 1981, pp. 217–218. For details on the Khaghbakeans and Ōrbēleans of Syunik', see Zaroui Pogossian, "Vayots' Dzor, Syunik', and the World. Global Transformations and Local Dynamics between the 9th and 14th Centuries" in this volume, pp. 24–66.

7 Khach'ikyan, *Colophons* (n. 5), p. 117.

8 *Ibidem*, p. 233. The location of Xumit' or Jermaṙu has not been identified with certainty. According to *Hayastani ev harakits' shrjanneri teghanunneri baṙaran* [Dictionary of Toponymy of Armenia and Adjacent Territories], T'adevos Hakobyan, Step'anos Melik-Bakhshyan, Hovhannes Barseghyan eds, 4 vols, Yerevan 1986, s.v. Ջերմառվաց անապատ/Jermaṙvac' anapat (vol. ii, p. 401) it could be in Syunik', whereas Thierry thinks "*peut-être en Arc'ax*" (p. 275). See Michel Thierry, *Répertoire des monastères arméniens*, Turnhout 1993.

9 Levon Khach'ikyan, Artašēs Mat'evosyan, Arp'enik Ghazarosyan, *Hayeren dzeṙagreri hishatakaranner. ZhD Dar. Masn B (1326–1350)* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts. 14th Century. Part ii (1326–1350)], Yerevan 2020, p. 100.

10 Levon Khach'ikyan, *ZhE dari hayeren dzeṙagreri hishatakaranner. Masn iii (1481–1500 t'.t'.)* [Colophons of 15th-century Armenian Manuscripts. Part iii (1481–1500)], Yerevan 1967, p. 213. See similar perplexities regarding the number of churches intended in this colophon in Alishan, *Sisakan* (n. 1), p. 148.

in modern literature about their dedications. In their nineteenth- or early twentieth-century descriptions, Alishan, Jalaleants‘, and K‘ajberuni do not venture to name the churches but only describe them. Earlier, however, Lalayean had applied names to them. Thus, he calls the Zorats‘ Church the church of St Stephen, based on a misreading of its inscription, which mentions Step‘anos.[11] This inscription, however, referred to Step‘anos-Tarsayich, the founder of the church, and not the saint. Yeghiazaryan made matters even worse. He calls the Cupola Church the “church of the Holy Sign or Surb Karapet” (i.e., of the Precursor or John the Baptist) without providing the sources of his information. None of the colophons mentions a church of the Precursor (Karapet) in Yeghegis. Likewise, in the publication of inscriptions from Yeghegis, Sedrak Barkhudaryan mentions a church of the Holy Sign, without providing any further details.[12] Presumably, he, too, had the Cupola Church in mind, a denomination that he likewise used in this publication. Yet, neither Yeghiazaryan nor Barkhudaryan provides their reasons for applying the name Holy Sign (*Surb Nshan*) to the Cupola Church.

Currently, there is a large seventeenth-century single-nave basilica dedicated to the Mother of God in the middle (southern part) of the village, which was built on the location of an older structure. It is possible, although by no means certain, that also the earlier church was dedicated to the Mother of God. If so, the pre-eighteenth-century colophons must refer to that earlier building. It is not known when the original church was erected, but *spolia* with fragments of an inscription, presumably found in the same location, incorporated in the *bema* of the present building, include the names “Smbat … son of Shanshah.” Though incapable of proof, this could well be the Bagratid King Smbat II (r. 977–990), son of Ashot III (r. 953–977). In its present form, the church of the Mother of God includes various other *spolia* embedded in the walls, dating from various periods (see inscriptions III.1–9 in chapter 11). An art-historical investigation of this church is a *desideratum*, but is not carried out in this volume due to its specific chronological scope.

What renders conclusions complicated regarding the church of the Mother of God, however, is the inscription from the Zorats‘ Church (see inscription I.2 in chapter 11). This building is dated to the golden age of Yeghegis, under the long rule of Burt‘el Ōrbēlean (r. 1300–1348), and was commissioned by his cousin, the already-mentioned metropolitan of Syunik‘, Step‘anos-Tarsayich.[13] Its architectural features make it a unique monument, and it now stands as a symbol of Yeghegis. The metropolitan Step‘anos-Tarsayich mentions Burt‘el and his children Beshk‘en and Ivanē in his foundation inscription. Because they appear as young children in another inscription from Areni (Aṙp‘a) dated 1321, this gives us an approximate date of their birth, perhaps in the 1310s, and a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the Zorats‘ Church.[14] According to this same foundation inscription, it was dedicated to the Mother of God. This raises the question about the identity of the building mentioned as the “tabernacle” dedicated to the Mother of God in the colophon of 1297 (when the Zorats‘ Church was not yet built) vs those of 1306 and 1495.

Which were the Kat‘oghikē Church and the church of the Protomartyr (or St Stephen) mentioned in the colophons? A Kat‘oghikē would imply a large structure, and the only building that would suit such a title would be the one that stood in the place of today’s eighteenth-century basilica of the Mother of God. Presumably, the earlier church was equally a basilica structure and in grand style. However, we do not possess enough information to move beyond an educated guess on this question. Yet, the colophons mention *three* “tabernacles,” and unless we interpret “tabernacle” as an altar, we cannot support the written sources with material evidence. At any rate, no firm conclusions are possible.

We cannot establish whether the church of the Protomartyr was the structure that is referred to due

11 Lalayean, “Vayots‘ Dzor” (n. 1), pp. 63–66.

12 Yeghiazaryan, *Monuments* (n. 1), p. 59; Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 1), p. 115.

13 For these representatives of the Ōrbēlean family, see Levon Khach‘ikyan, “Siwneats‘ Ōrbēleanneri Burt‘ēlean chiwghə” [The Burt‘ēl’s Branch of the Ōrbēleans of Syunik‘], in Levon Kach‘ikyan, *Ashkhatut‘yunner* [Collected Works], vol. II, Yerevan 1999, pp. 7–33 (originally published in *Banber matenadarani,* 9 (1969), pp. 173–199. I have used the 1999 reprinted version, with the relevant page numbers); *Idem*, “Ōrbēlean ishkhanneri Burt‘ēlean gerdastanə ev Siwneats‘ episkopos parontēr Step‘anosə” [Burt‘ēl’s Clan of Ōrbēlean Princes and the Bishop and Lord of Syunik‘ Step‘anos], in Levon Kach‘ikyan, *Ashkhatut‘yunner* [Collected Works], vol. II, Yerevan 1999, pp. 34–42 (originally published in *Patmabanasirakan handes,* 1 (1991), pp. 85–92). See also the genealogical tree on p. 42.

14 Gegham Kirakosyan, “Ōrbēleanneri ishkhanakan tunə XIV–XV dd.” [The Princely House of the Ōrbēlean in the 14th–15th cc.], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut‘yunneri* [Bulletin of Social Sciences], 52/7 (1982), pp. 52–64, sp. p. 55.

its architectonic features as the Cupola Church. The latter is datable to the second half of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century. The late-nineteenth-century physician K'ajberuni, who left his travel notes from this (and other) areas of Armenia, and the ethnographer Lalayean described the foundations of a quadrangular *gawit'* (atrium), accessed through the western door of the church. Within its walls, they saw a semi-interred *khach'k'ar* with an inscription dated 1505. These are no longer available *in situ*.[15] There are numerous gravestones and *khach'k'ars* around the church, which must have been all land that belonged to the church. Currently, some of the monuments are in private gardens or courtyards, including the gravestone with a trilingual inscription south of the Cupola Church, which will be discussed below.

The dedication of the so-called Old Church – the small ninth-century structure – remains likewise unknown. Furthermore, despite the inscription that testifies to a dedication to the Mother of God, the most famous church on the eastern outskirt of Yeghegis has by now firmly established its name as the Zorats' Church, a title that should be taken as part of Yeghegis' intangible cultural heritage. The name is based on the hypothetical and never-proven idea expressed by ethnographer Lalayean, that the congregation, especially soldiers (զոŋբ/*zork'*), participated in the liturgy standing outside, at the large open atrium facing the main entrance of the church.[16] This curious practice is not attested in the sources on Vayots' Dzor and must be considered as a speculation. Last but not least, it is also not clear what the fourth tabernacle of the Holy Sign that appears in the colophon of 1495 was, when the text claims to talk about three. All these incongruities lead me to apply caution when identifying the extant churches in Yeghegis with the tabernacles mentioned in the colophons.

Not much can be said about the built environment of Yeghegis in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Since Yeghegis, like all of Vayots' Dzor, was under Bagratid control in the early eleventh century, it was presumably annexed to the Byzantine Empire for a brief period, as part of their takeover of the Bagratid Kingdom. Shortly afterwards, the Seljuks slowly conquered Syunik', but with a special situation in the area of the Noravank' Monastery in Vayots' Dzor. Some scholars had speculated that the earlier location of Yeghegis was three to four kilometers west of the present village. However, Michael Stone and David Amit, who surveyed the area in 2000 and 2001, concluded that these were "ruined field walls and heaps of stones resulting from clearing the fields" rather than a settlement.[17]

We saw that the valley of the Yeghegis River changed hands between the Ōrbēleans and the Khaghbakeans between the 1210s and 1236/1250, although Yeghegis is not specifically mentioned (see chapter 2). There is no hard evidence on when Smbat Ōrbēlean (d. 1273) elevated its status to a *darapas* and built his residential palace there. The tympanum of the monumental gate to his residence has an inscription and has been published, but it has no date.[18] However, it seems plausible that this occurred after Smbat's second voyage to Qaraqorum (1256), when his possessions in the Yeghegis Valley were reconfirmed by the Mongols with the status of *inju*. On the other hand, I have suggested that the need to strengthen the Ōrbēlean presence in Yeghegis must be linked also to the Přosheans' landholdings in this very same valley. If the hypothesis of Gladzor's location only three to four kilometers east of Yeghegis were to be confirmed, then the elevation of Yeghegis as a central place, with its *scriptoria*, master builders, and the princely residence, would acquire a greater significance than has heretofore been acknowledged.[19]

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF MEDIEVAL YEGHEGIS

The presence of gravestones in and around Yeghegis depict an unexpected picture of multiplicity and ethno-religious diversity of its population that would otherwise be lost to us. Moreover, this diversity in the social make-up of Yeghegis was displayed visually through the medium of writing on stone – inscriptions in Hebrew. The Jewish cemetery on the southern bank of the Yeghegis River, outside the present-day village, is a unique find for medieval Armenia. The oldest inscription from the cemetery is dated 1266,

15 K'ajberuni, "Travel notes" (n. 1), pp. 436–437; Lalayean, "Vayots' Dzor" (n. 1), p. 66.

16 Lalayean, "Vayots' Dzor" (n. 1), p. 63. This is repeated in Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 1), p. 105.

17 *Ibidem*; Yeghiazaryan, *Monuments* (n. 1), p. 57; David Amit, Michael Stone, "Report of the Survey of a Medieval Jewish Cemetery in Eghegis, Vayots Dzor Region, Armenia", *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 3/1 (2002), pp. 66–106, p. 70.

18 Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 1), p. 115.

19 For all these details, see chapter 2 in this volume.

while the latest, a no longer extant grave, was from 1347. This timeframe corresponds perfectly with the *floruit* of Yeghegis. The origin and a more precise date for the settlement of this Jewish community are not possible to establish. Nor do we have information on what happened to it after the mid-fourteenth century. Based on the names on some of the inscriptions, especially the now lost gravestone of Mar Khawaja Sharaf al-Din (from 1347), photographed inside the village in the nineteenth century, rather than in the area of the Jewish cemetery, its members could have been of Persianate origin. This would fit the importance that some Jews reached at the Ilkhanid higher echelons in the thirteenth century. Yet, rising to prestigious positions could be a double-edged sword in a time of extreme confessionalization and Sunnī-Shīʿī polarization, as the fate of the Jewish doctor and vizier in Baghdad Saʿd al-Dawla, executed in 1291, points out.[20] Stepʿanos Ōrbēlean speaks with sympathy about the plight of "Sadadawla," whom he calls "the great divan [...] a virtuous Jew who was in charge of the taxes of the land."[21]

Was the establishment of the Jewish community linked to Smbat Ōrbēlean's raising of the status of Yeghegis as a second *darapas* upon his return from Qaraqorum? This is a distinct possibility, not least because the earliest dated gravestone belongs to approximately ten years after that. Whether there was a deliberate policy to attract a Jewish community that fulfilled a specific function is also impossible to ascertain. What has emerged from the analysis of the language of the inscriptions and the decorative style of some of the gravestones is that this was a well-to-do community with a good level of learning. Some of its members could afford, and were authorized, to commission gravestones with designs featuring the same decorations as those on princely graves of the Ōrbēlean dynastic cemetery at Noravankʿ, perhaps produced in the same workshops. This could hardly be possible without close links and collaboration between the Jewish community and the ruling Ōrbēlean princes.[22] Moreover, a comparative study of toolmarks by Elisa Pruno on Jewish vs Christian Armenian graves indicates that different tools and techniques of incision were employed.[23] This gives further weight to the conclusion that the community was well-to-do, with its own internal diversity that included highly skilled and specialized artisans.

At least some Jews in Vayotsʿ Dzor, perhaps members of the Yeghegis community, also owned land. An inscription from the church of the Mother of God (Spitakawor), in Pŕoshean domains, documents the donation of the land of "Tʿacher and of the Jew" to this religious establishment.[24] It is to be noted that Stepʿanos Ōrbēlean and the inscription from the Spitakawor Church employ the Perso-Arabic term ջհուտ/*jhut*, rather than the biblical "հրեայ/*hreay*" (standing for Hebrew) to characterize Jews contemporary with them. This same pattern may be observed also in Armenian texts from Cilicia, indicating that real life encounters between Armenians and Jews required an "update" of terminology from biblical ethnonyms to those that made more sense in an everyday life context. The term also implies, once more, that the encounter was likely with Persian-speaking Jews.[25]

20 Michael Stone, David Amit, "The Second and Third Seasons of Research at the Medieval Jewish Cemetery in Eghegis, Vayots Dzor Region, Armenia", *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 57/1 (2006), pp. 99–135, sp. pp. 109–110; Stone/Amit correct the date and provide a translation of the originally Russian article by Marr on the grave of Mar Khawaja Sharaf al-Din. See Nikolaj Marr, "Evrejskaja nadgrobnaja nadpis' xv veka v Erivanskoj Gubernii" [A Hebrew Grave Inscription from the 15th Century in the Yerevan Governorate], *Xristianksij Vostok* [Christian Orient], 1 (1912), p. 353 and Table xxii for a photograph. Jonathan Brack, "A Jewish Vizier and his Shīʿī Manifesto: Jews, Shīʿīs, and the Politicization of Confessional Identities in Mongol-ruled Iraq and Iran (13th to 14th Centuries)", *Der Islam*, 96/2 (2019), pp. 374–403.

21 Stepʿanos Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 3), p. 468.

22 Michele Nucciotti, "Light Archaeology at Yeghegis Jewish Cemetery: Analysis and Interpretation", in *Material Encounters between Jews and Christians: From the Silk and Spice Routes to the Highlands of Ethiopia*, Bar Kribus, Zaroui Pogossian, Alexandra Cuffel eds, York 2024, pp. 45–57.

23 Michele Nucciotti, Elisa Pruno, "On the Archaeology of the Silk Roads Landscapes in Vayotsʿ Dzor (Armenia) in 13th and 14th Centuries: New Methodological Approaches", *Facta: A Journal of Late Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval Material Culture Studies*, 15 (2021), pp. 75–97, sp. pp. 92–93.

24 Barkhudaryan, *cia*, vol. iii, p. 98 (n. 1), no 275.

25 On this issue from the Cilician period, see Zaroui Pogossian, "Jews in Armenian Apocalyptic Traditions of the 12th Century: A Fictional Community or New Encounters?", in *Peoples of the Apocalypse: Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios*, Wolfram Brandes, Felicitas Schmieder, Rebekka Voß eds, Berlin 2016, pp. 147–192, sp. p. 190. More generally, on literary evidence on Jews in ancient and medieval Armenia, see now Michael Stone, Aram Topchyan, *Jews in Ancient and Medieval Armenia. First Century bce – Fourteenth Century ce*, Oxford 2022; and Alexandra Cuffel, Zaroui Pogossian, Bar Kribus, "Material Encounters between Jews and Christians in the East: An Introduction", in *Material Encounters between Jews and Christians: From the Silk and Spice Routes to the Highlands of Ethiopia*, Bar Kribus, Zaroui Pogossian, Alexandra Cuffel eds, York 2024, pp. 1–42, sp. pp. 6–11.

A MARTYR AND HIS JOURNEY TO THE AFTERLIFE IN ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND ARMENIAN: THE TRILINGUAL GRAVESTONE OF YEGHEGIS

Another testimony to the level of learning and the multiplicity of linguistic expressions in Yeghegis comes from yet another remarkable material cultural evidence: a trilingual inscription on a flat gravestone south of the Cupola Church, known as the "martyr's grave." The name of the deceased – Tawakkul/T'awak'al – appears in the Arabic and Armenian parts. The Arabic portion mourns the loss of the "brother (*akhi*) Tawakkul," which Khachatryan interpreted as a reference to T'awak'al's membership in a professional brotherhood (*futtuwwa*).[26] The Persian part is a wandering quatrain, as analyzed by Michael Pifer in this volume.[27]

The Armenian part of the inscription is the longest and the most detailed, although it too has *lacunae* due to its worn-out state. Here, the deceased is called a "martyr for Christ" and is said to have been "a doctor of all ailments" (ամենայն ցավոց բժիշկ). Combining this information with the use of the word *"akhi"* (brother) in the Arabic part and *"eghbayr"* (եղբայր/brother) in the Armenian, Khachatryan thought that T'awak'al was a physician and a member of a professional brotherhood. This interpretation is possible but not provable, also because medical metaphors could be used in a spiritual sense too, without implying references to a real doctor.

As for the possibility of a connection to a brotherhood, it is well-known that in 1280 the celebrated poet, philosopher, and theologian *Vardapet* Hovhannēs (Pluz) Yerznkats'i wrote the *Rules of the Brotherhood* of the city of Yerznka at the request of another *vardapet* – Hakob of Sahanin. The *Rules* have come down to us in a manuscript copied only a decade after their composition, currently preserved at the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) no 2239. They were edited, together with the first ground-breaking study of the *Brotherhood* of Yerznka and its context by Levon Khach'ikyan in 1951 and 1962, attesting the existence of such a confraternity among the Armenians of Yerznka, but not only there.[28] Khach'ikyan found evidence of Armenian confraternities in Ani, Van, Caffa, and, significantly, Sultaniyye, between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and later on among the Armenian communities of Ukraine and Poland.[29] Although nothing specific is known about such an organization in Yeghegis or Vayots' Dzor at this time, the latter had strong ties with virtually all the centers of learning, religious foundations, or important Armenian settlements in historical Armenia, Anatolia, Cilician Armenia, and Iran. Indeed, through the first half of the fourteenth century and beyond, disciples, monks, and scholars traveled from all these areas to study at the

26 Alexandr Khachatryan, "Trexjazyčnaja nadpis' iz Elegisa" [The Trilingual Inscription from Yeghegis], *Kavkaz i Vizantija* [Caucaus and Byzantium], 3 (1982), pp. 124–134; *Idem*, "K interpretacii arabskix nadpisej Armenii (VIII–XVI vv.)" [On the Interpretation of Arabic Inscriptions of Armenia (8th – 16th cc.)], *Patmabanasirakan handes* [Historical-Philological Journal], 4 (1989), pp. 151–162, sp. pp. 155–159. This interpretation was not shared by the late Prof. Mohsen Zakeri, with whom I was fortunate to discuss the Arabic and Persian sections of this inscription. He cautioned from translating the word *"akhi"* as anything but a "real" brother.

27 On the concept of "wandering quatrains," see Valentin Zhukovskij, "Omar Xajjam i 'stranstvujuščie' četverostišija" [Omar Khayyam and 'Wandering' Quatrains], in *Muzafirijja. Sbornik stat'ej učenikov profesora barona Viktora Romanoviča Rozena* [Muzafiriyya. A Collection of Articles of the Disciples of Professor Baron Viktor Romanovich Rozen], Saint Petersburg 1897, pp. 325–363.

28 Levon Khach'ikyan, "1280 t'uakanin Erznkayum kazmakerpuats 'Eghbayrut'iwnə'" [The 'Confraternity' Organized in Erznka in 1280], in Levon Khach'ikyan, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, Yerevan 1995, pp. 200–215 (originally published in *Teghekagir hasarakakan gitut'yunneri,* 12 (1951), pp. 74–84) and *Idem*, "Erznka k'aghak'i 'Eghbarts' miabanut'ean' kanonadrut'yunə (1280 t'.)" [The 'Rules of the Confraternity' of the City of Erznka (1280)], in Levon Khach'ikyan, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, Yerevan 1995, pp. 216–227 (originally published in *Banber matenadarani,* 6 (1962), pp. 365–377). More recently on urban confraternities among the Armenians placed in a wider, Islamicate context of Anatolia, see Seta Dadoyan, "A Case Study for Redefining Armenian-Christian Cultural Identity in the Framework of Near Eastern Urbanism – 13th Century: The Nāṣirī *Futuwwa* Literature and the Brotherhood Poetry of Yovhannēs and Kostandin Erzĕnkac'i. Texts and Contexts", in *Redefining Christian Identity. Cultural Interactions in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Jan J. van Ginkel, Helen L. Murre-van den Berg, Theo M. van Lint eds, Leuven/Paris/Dudley (MA) 2005, pp. 237–264; Rachel Goshgaryan, "*Futuwwa* in Thirteenth-Century Rūm and Armenia: Reform Movements and the Managing of Multiple Allegiances on the Seljuk Periphery", in *The Seljuks of Anatolia: Court and Society in the Medieval Middle East*, Andrew C.S. Peacock, Sara Nur Yildiz eds, London 2013, pp. 227–263.

29 Khach'ikyan, "The Confraternity Organized in Erznka" (n. 28), pp. 207–214.

famous monastic school of Gladzor.[30] Among them were scholars from Yerznka, such as Khach'atur Yerznkats'i or the most notable (or notorious) Hovhannēs Yerznkats'i-Tsortsorets'i – a graduate of Gladzor who became a champion for the cause of Catholic missionaries in Armenia. No less significant is the existence of such confraternities among the Armenians living in Sultaniyye – the Ilkhanid capital well known to the Ōrbēlean lords of Vayots' Dzor.[31] Thus, it would not be surprising if knowledge and practices of such brotherhoods circulated also in Vayots' Dzor and, more specifically, Yeghegis.

Another piece of tantalizing evidence *may* support some connection to Yerznka: the mention of St Nersēs on the martyr's gravestone. Khachatryan suggested that St Nersēs may have been the protector of T'awak'al's confraternity of professional doctors.[32] The evidence, however, is very slim. The inscription must refer to St Nersēs the Great (fourth century) rather than the Catholicos St Nersēs Shnorhali (d. 1173). Presently, it is not possible to evaluate the diffusion and popularity of St Nersēs the Great in various regions of Armenia, besides its undoubted presence in the region of Yerznka (see below). His name does not feature in inscriptions from Vayots' Dzor or Syunik', and there is no evidence of a popular cult related to him in this region of Armenia.[33]

On the contrary, in 1272, the relics of St Nersēs were discovered in T'il (today Oğlaktepe in Turkey), where he was buried according to tradition.[34] This was a settlement eight kilometers west of Yerznka (Erzincan), at the feet of Mt Sepuh (Köhnem Dağı – Kara dağ in Turkey), which, in its turn, was famously the location of St Gregory's grave and where monasteries flourished throughout the Middle Ages.[35] On the occasion of the discovery of St Nersēs' relics, Hovhannēs Yerznkats'i wrote a panegyric in verse at the commission of the city's Archbishop Sargis.[36] Thus, Yerznka and the monasteries in its environs were not only the geographical nucleus of the cult of St Gregory and his family, such as his great-grandson St Nersēs the Great, granted the presence of their graves there, but any revival of these saints' veneration would most likely spread from this city. Indeed, the *Panegyric* on the discovery of the relics of St Nersēs in 1272 appears to be part of such a revival project initiated in Yerznka. Therefore, carving the name of St Nersēs on the grave of a martyr in Yeghegis in 1352, who is also associated with "brothers" or a brotherhood, may well hint at a link to Yerznka – the city of many confraternities, among Christians and Muslims alike, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Despite these interpretative possibilities, I would like to remain cautious and leave the interpretation of the inscriptions open. An *"akhi"* or a *"eghbayr"* (brother) could also simply be a reference to a sibling. A "healer of all ailments" may be a medical doctor, just as one could read the word in a metaphorical sense, implying a spiritual guide/leader and healer. The citation of Persian poetry, discussed by Pifer in this volume, would also imply a penchant or

30 Levon Khach'eryan, *Gladzori hamalsaranə hay mankavarzhakan mtk'i zargatsman mej (XIII–XIV dd.)* [The University of Gladzor and the Development of Armenian Pedagogical Thought (13th –14th cc.)], Yerevan 1973; Igit' Gharibyan, *Gladzor*, Yerevan 1983; Artashes Mate'vosyan, "Nor vkayut'yunner Gladzori Hamalsarani masin" [New Evidence on the University of Gladzor], *Patmabanasirakan handes* [Historical-Philological Journal], 4 (1984), pp. 20–31; *Idem*, "Hayots' mijnadaryan hamalsaranə" [The Medieval University of the Armenians], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri* [Bulletin of Social Sciences], 1 (1984), pp. 62–71; Sen Arevshatyan, Artashes Mat'evosyan, *Gladzori hamalsaranə mijnadaryan Hayastani lusavorut'yan kentron* [The University of Gladzor as an Educational Center of Medieval Armenia], Yerevan 1984; Levon Khach'ikyan, "Gladzorean hamalsaranə ev nra saneri awartakan atenakhōsut'iwnnerə" [The University of Gladzor and the Final Dissertations of its Students], in Levon Khach'ikyan, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, Yerevan 1995, pp. 228–246 (originally published in 1946).

31 Khach'ikyan, "The Rules of the Confraternity" (n. 28), p. 217, fn 2 mentions Hovhannēs "head of the youths" (*manktavag*) from Sultaniyye attested in 1329.

32 Khach'atryan, "The Tri-lingual Inscription" (n. 26), p. 133.

33 Although this cannot substitute an exhaustive study, it is perhaps indicative that in the volume dedicated to the inscriptions of Vayots' Dzor and the regions nearby, there are only two other Nersēses mentioned in the whole corpus: a priest who died when he was still too young in 1295 (Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 1), p. 92 no 263) and an abbot of the monastery of Ts'akhats' K'ar in 1367. Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 1), pp. 144–145 no 438.

34 This is attested already in the fifth-century *History* attributed to P'awstos Buzand. See P'awstos Buzand, *Patmut'iwn hayots'* [History of the Armenians], Yerevan 1987, p. 334.

35 Jean-Michel Thierry, "Le Mont Sepuh: Étude Archéologique", *Revue des études arméniennes*, 21 (1988–1989), pp. 385–449.

36 Armenuhi Srapyan, *Hovhannes Yerznkats'i. Usumnasirut'yun ev bnagrer* [Hovhannes Yerznkats'i. Studies and Texts], Yerevan 1958, pp. 27–28. The panegyric is published as *Patmut'iwn yaytnut'ean nshkharats' Srboyn Nersisi* [History of the Appearance of the Relics of St Nerses], in *Sop'erk' Haykakank'*, vol. VII, Venice 1853, pp. 32–80. A. Srapyan has published this *Pengyric* having divided it into verses in Hovhannes Yerznkats'i Pluz, *Bank' ch'ap'av* [Poetic Words], Armenuhi Srapyan ed., Yerevan 1986, pp. 136–200.

preference for metaphors. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that the deceased participated in that world of multilingual intellectual exchanges and their poetical expression that has been analyzed most recently by Pifer.[37]

Although, to the best of my knowledge, a multilingual inscription on a gravestone is unique in this time and place, there are other instances of epigraphy carved in two or three languages from the thirteenth- and fourteenth–century Anatolia and Armenia. One may remember the trilingual (Armenian, Arabic, Syriac) inscription at the internal entrance of Hakim Khan near Malatya, built by the Syriac-Armenian doctor Abu Salim in 1218,[38] or Izz ad-Dīn Kai Kaus' bilingual (Arabic and Greek) inscription on the walls of Sinop from 1215/1216.[39] Interesting examples of multilingual inscriptions come from Ani: on the minaret of the mosque of Abu Mā'maran in Persian, Arabic, and Armenian, carved in 1199 by the Shaddadid Maḥmud bin Shavur bin Mīnuchīhr, and another in Persian, Georgian, and Armenian on the mosque of Mīnuchīhr from 1238.[40] Admittedly, these examples are geographically and temporally far from Yeghegis. It may be more relevant to recall the bilingual (Armenian and Persian) inscriptions at the caravanserai of Selim, dated 1332, only a couple of decades before T'awak'al's grave and located on the route that connected Vayots' Dzor to the basin of Lake Sevan. The caravanserai of Harzhis, further south near the monastery of Tat'ew, likewise features a bilingual Armenian and Persian inscription, possibly of the fourteenth century.[41] Finally, there is an intriguing parallel, but much farther afield: the quadri- (Latin, Greek, Arabic, Judeo-Arabic) and trilingual (Latin, Greek, Arabic) gravestones of Anna and Drogo, respectively, from mid-twelfth-century Palermo. The gravestones with the inscriptions were commissioned by their son Grisandus – a priest at the court of Roger II of Sicily (r. as count 1105–1130, as king 1130–1154). Grisaldus built a funerary chapel for his parents where their remains were deposited, and which was the original location of the gravestones, now in the Museum of Islamic Art (Zisa) of Palermo.[42]

All the examples above come from markedly different contexts compared to a gravestone, except for the improbably too far away (in time and space) tombstones of Anna and Drogo from Sicily. Yet, they all indicate an ethno-linguistic multiplicity displayed publicly, including in Vayots' Dzor, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The location of the trilingual gravestone of Yeghegis, once included in the southern courtyard of the Cupola Church, implies

37 Michael Pifer, *Kindred Voices: A Literary History of Medieval Anatolia*, New Heaven / London 2021.

38 Kurt Erdmann, *Das anatolische Karavansaray des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Part 1, Berlin 1961, pp. 63–67; Scott Redford, "Reading Inscriptions on Seljuk Caravanserais", in *'A mari usque ad mare'. Cultura visuale e materiale dall'Adriatico all'India*, Mattia Guidetti, Sara Mondini eds, Venice 2016, pp. 221–234, sp. p. 228 on Hekim han. See also Kate Franklin, *Everyday Cosmopolitanisms. Living the Silk Road in Medieval Armenia*, Oakland 2021, pp. 91–97. For the caravanserais of Syunik' from an archaeological perspective, see also Leonardo Squilloni, *La via della Seta nell'Armenia medievale: indagine archeologica di tre caravanserragli nel Siunik storico*, MA thesis, (University of Florence), Florence 2020; and *Idem*, "The Caravanserai of Selim in the Framework of Long-Range Connectivity in Medieval Armenia" [forthcoming].

39 Scott Redford, *Legends of Authority. The 1215 Seljuk Inscriptions of Sinop Citadel, Turkey*, Istanbul 2014, pp. 125–129.

40 Levon Gyuzalyan, "Persidskaja nadpis' Key-Sultana Šeddadi v Ani" [The Persian Inscription of Key-Sultan Shaddadid in Ani], in *Akademija nauk sssr akademiku N. Ja. Marru* [The Academy of Sciences of USSR to the Academician N. Ja. Marr], Ivan Meshchaninov ed., Moscow/Leningrad 1935, pp. 629–641. See also Antony Eastmond, "Inscriptions and Authority in Ani", in *Der Doppeladler. Byzanz und die Seldschuken in Anatolien vom späten 11. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, Neslihan Asutay-Effenberger, Falko Daim eds, Mainz 2014, pp. 71–84, sp. pp. 77–78.

41 The limits and purpose of this paper do not allow me to discuss these inscriptions in detail, including a comparison of the content of the Armenian and Persian parts. For the Armenian inscription of the caravanserai of Selim, see Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 1), pp. 177–178; the Persian inscription on the main entrance, now weathered and damaged, was copied for K'ajberuni who sent it to Ghewond Alishan. The latter published it in Alishan, *Sisakan*, Venice 1893, pp. 164–166. I would like to express my gratitude to the colleague Mehdi Shaddel who read the Persian inscription with me, providing some precisions compared to Alishan's publication of the translation to Armenian. For a drawing of the Persian inscription on the entrance gate of the caravanserai of Harzhis, see Parisa Purmohammadi, *Hayastani arevtramshakut'ayin haraberut'yunneri patmut'yunits (ZhG-ZhD dd.)* [From the History of Cultural-Commercial Relations of Armenia (13th–14th cc.)], *Ējmiatsin*, 8 (2012), pp. 64–74, sp. p. 70. I would like to thankfully remember, again, my friend and colleague, the late Prof. Mohsen Zakeri who had discussed the details of this inscription with me. It appears that there are several layers to it: the Armenian in the main lunette, where Arabic letters seem to have been supra-imposed, and a Persian addition above the lunette, which Zakeri thought contained personal names that appear to be part of a later graffiti.

42 For a succinct but informative presentation and further bibliography, see Jeremy Johns, "Lapidi sepolcrali in memoria di Anna e Drogo, genitori di Grisanto / Funerary Memorials to Anna and Drogo, Parents of the Royal Priest Grisandus", in *Nobiles officinae. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo*, vol. I, catalogue of the exhibition (Palermo, Palazzo dei Normani, 2003–2004), Maria Andaloro ed., Palermo 2006, pp. 519–778.

that it was originally a public space. What such a public display of multilingualism, which, nevertheless, had a very private resonance regarding the deceased, means in the context of Yeghegis is the subject of Pifer's article in this volume.

Certainly, multilingualism was anything but unusual in this time and place. It was indispensable, and its practice among the elites was considered a praiseworthy quality. Step'anos Ōrbēlean extols his uncle Smbat (d. 1273) for his multifarious skills and abilities, including his linguistic dexterity, which, among others, guaranteed his "invincibility" at the court of law. We read:

> "Smbat had great intelligence, a powerful mind, [he was] exceptionally clever, abundantly resourceful, profuse and sweet in his speech, expert and ingenious in languages, invincible at the court of law, for he spoke five languages – Armenian and Georgian, Uygur and P'arsi and even Mongolian."[43]

Although colophons do contain praises for Smbat's successors who continued to serve the Ilkhans, we do not have comparable information on their knowledge of languages. Yet, we know that they fought in Ilkhanid military campaigns and were often in Tabriz and later Sultaniyye, where, among others, they supported Armenian scribes and artists who left colophons with words of gratitude for their patrons. They most likely continued to be fluent at least in Persian, but likely also in Georgian. It is harder to ascertain knowledge of Arabic in this part of Armenia at this time, and Yeghegis' trilingual gravestone is a crucial piece of evidence in this respect.

The choice to also include an Arabic portion may speak of the deceased's origin outside of Yeghegis. It may imply that it was *he* who spoke Arabic, rather than an expectation that the viewers knew that language. While this idea must remain hypothetical, knowledge and use of both Arabic and Persian on the gravestone may also mean that the deceased was originally Muslim but converted to Christianity. Could this be the reason for his martyrdom? That question will be hard to answer at this stage of our knowledge. Whatever the case, those who carved the inscription on T'awak'al's grave were part of the multilingual environment of Yeghegis and probably expected at least the elite viewers of the grave to be so as well.

"WE PREFER TO DESCEND TO HELL WITH OUR FATHERS RATHER THAN ASCEND TO HEAVEN WITH THE ROMANS"[44]

Yeghegis' local ethno-religious multiplicity has not left a strong trace in the written record. Historical narratives, such as Step'anos Ōrbēlean's *magnum opus*, or the colophons, do not discuss these different religious communities as rival groups representing any kind of real or perceived threat to the faith of the Christian population. There is no literary production specifically targeting non-Christians, such as Jews/Judaism or Islam/Muslims, on theological, philosophical, or other grounds produced in Yeghegis, Vayots' Dzor, or Syunik' until Grigor Tat'ewats'i (1344–1409) included a chapter "Against the Jews" and one on Muslims in his *Book of Questions*, completed in 1397. Yet for the chapter "Against the Jews," Grigor Tat'ewats'i relied on a Latin source – an abridgement of a treatise by the Genoese Carthusian monk Porchetus de Salvaticis, completed in 1303, but itself reliant on the Dominican scholar Raymond Martini's (ca 1210–1285) monumental *Pugio Fidei,* composed in 1278. His anti-Islamic chapter has been less studied, but many of its tenets have parallels in Christian Arabic sources.[45] Thus, rather than representing a native Armenian interest in or concern with Judaism in view of daily interactions with members of a Jewish community, Grigor Tat'ewats'i's *Book of Questions*, as well as his other compositions, highlights the complex interaction between Armenian intellectuals of Syunik' and Latin, especially Dominican, missionaries from Western Europe to the East. Indeed, what *did* worry the best intellectuals in Vayots' Dzor in the fourteenth century and beyond were Franciscan and Dominican missionaries and their assertive proselytism, which set them apart from the other religious communities living in these lands, such as Muslims or Jews. There were sizable conversions to

43 Step'anos Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 3), p. 405.

44 *Ibidem*, p. 459.

45 Sergio La Porta, "A Fourteenth-century Armenian Polemic against Judaism and its Latin Source", *Le Muséon,* 122/1–2 (2009), pp. 93–129. For the chapter on Islam, see Kristin Arat, "Gregor von Tat'ew und seine Einstellung zum Islam", in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter,* Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner eds, Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 275–288; Sergio La Porta, "Gregory of Tat'ew", in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History. Volume 5 (1350–1500),* David Thomas, Alex Mallett *et al.* eds, Leiden/Boston 2013, pp. 229–238.

Catholicism among the Armenians, initially especially monks, in Syunik‘ and the Ilkhanate’s Persian domains more generally. The monastery of Tsortsor near Maku and K‘ŕna near Nakhichevan became centers of encounter with Western European intellectual production, particularly Scholastic philosophy, via a close collaboration with the Dominicans and Franciscans, respectively. K‘ŕna’s brotherhood eventually evolved to become an order of Armenian (Catholic) monks known as *Fratres Unitores*, which merged with the Dominican order in the sixteenth century and disappeared in the nineteenth. The fourteenth-century missionizing activity included an intense movement of translations, especially of philosophical and theological texts from Latin to Armenian. Intriguingly, in the initial period, this activity relied on the mediation of Persian as a common language between Latin and Armenian interlocutors before the latter would learn each other’s idiom.[46]

The Armenian response to Latin missionaries was complex and cannot be reduced to a mere hostility. Certainly, there were polemics and heated debates that involved some of the best intellectuals and disciples that the school of Gladzor produced, such as Hovhan Orotnets‘i, Grigor Tat‘ewats‘i, and others. On the other hand, Gladzor’s celebrated teacher Yesayi Nch‘ets‘i’s attitude to the Western missionaries and their intellectual novelties was more complex, and certainly, anything but one-dimensional.[47] Hovhannēs Yerznkats‘i-Tsortsorets‘i, the greatest intellectual who accepted Catholicism, was also a graduate of the school of Gladzor and originally came from Yerznka. Thus, despite the extreme antagonism depicted in the sources, the encounter with the traditions of learning, theology, and philosophy that arrived in this part of Armenia from Catholic Europe and Latin scholasticism in general triggered a great deal of intellectual curiosity and fascination among Armenian monks and scholars, giving rise to new directions of thought and even new monastic orders. One of many responses on the part of the Armenians was the absorption of modes of theological and philosophical reasoning informed by Latin Aristotelianism, which became especially in vogue in the monastic schools of Syunik‘. Novel reflections on and even teaching methods inspired by those of the Uniate monastery of Tsortsor were adopted within the highly anti-Latin Syuni monastic centers, too. Yeghegis and Vayots‘ Dzor were geographically adjacent and part of these lively, if not heated, intellectual debates, a fact that attests to the far-flung connections of this rural settlement, once more.

CONCLUSIONS

The material cultural heritage of Yeghegis stands as a testimony to its most vibrant period of history – from the mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century.

46 On the Latin missionaries and their cultural production, as well as the Armenian *Fratres Unitores,* see Claudine Delacroix-Besnier, “Les missions dominicaines et les Arméniens du milieu du xıve siècle aux premières années du xve siècle”, *Revue des études arméniennes,* 26 (1996–1997), pp. 173–191; Marcus Antonius van den Oudenrijn, “Uniteurs et Dominicains d’Arménie. 1. L’Union de Qrnay 1330”, *Oriens Christianus,* 40 (1956), pp. 94–112; *Idem*, “2. Le nouvel athénée”, *Oriens Christianus,* 42 (1958), pp. 110–133; *Idem*, “3. La congregation des Uniteurs”, *Oriens Christianus,* 43 (1959), pp. 110–119; *Idem*, *Linguae Haicanae Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum, Congregationis Fratrum Unitorum et ff. Armenorum ordinis S. Basilii citra mare consistentium quotquot huc usque innotuerunt*, Bern 1960; Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, *La Société des Frères Pérégrinants*, Rome 1937; Levon Khach‘ikyan, “Artazi haykakan ishkhanut‘yunə ev Tsortsori dprots‘ə”, in *Ashkhatut‘iwnner* [Collected Works], vol. ıı, Yerevna 1999, pp. 43–121 (originally published in *Banber matenadarani,* 11 (1973), pp. 125–209); and *Idem*, “K‘ŕnayi hogewor-mshakut‘ayin kentronə ev Yovhannēs K‘ŕnets‘u gitakan gortsunet‘yunə” [The Spiritual-Cultural Center of K‘ŕna and the Scolarly Activities of Hovhannes K‘ŕnets‘i], in *Ashkhatut‘iwnner* [Collected Works], vol. ıı, Yerevan 1999, pp. 43–121; Peter Cowe, “The Role of Correspondence in Elucidating the Intensification of Latin-Armenian Ecclesiastical Interchange in the First Quarter of the Fourteenth Century”, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies,* 13 (2003–2004), pp. 47–68; Sergio La Porta, “Armeno-Latin Intellectual Exchange in the Fourteenth Century: Scholarly Traditions in Conversation and Competition”, *Medieval Encounters,* 21 (2015), pp. 269–294; Paolo Lucca, “La traduzione armena del breviario domenicano (Venezia 1714). Note di storia, codicologia e bibliografia testuale”, in *Armenia, Caucaso e Asia Centrale. Ricerche 2016*, Aldo Ferrari, Erica Ianiro eds, Venice 2016, pp. 135–176; *Idem*, “La diocesi armeno-cattolica di Naxĭjewan e i suoi rapporti con Roma nel xvıı secolo”, in *Un genocidio culturale dei nostri giorni. Nakhichevan: la distruzione della cultura e della storia armena,* Antonia Arslan, Aldo Ferrari eds, Milan 2023, pp. 105–129; Irene Tinti, “Tampering with Peter of Aragon? Grigor Tat‘ewats‘i, a Catholic Reader, and an ‘Entangled’ Note in Ms M 46”, in *Armenia Entangled: a Reader* [forthcoming], with further bibliography. I would like to thank my colleague and ArmEn team member Irene Tinti for discussing the Franciscan and Dominican missions in Armenia, clarifying various details and providing much appreciated precision on several entangled questions.

47 La Porta, “Armeno-Latin Intellectual Exchange” (n. 46), pp. 274–275; van den Oudenrijn, “Uniteurs” (n. 46), pp. 103–105; Tinti, “Tampering” (n. 46).

Its elevated artistic, architectural, and historic value has rightly been appreciated. In this chapter, I looked at what this heritage can tell us about the local multiplicities of a rural settlement that seems so out of the world today. Yet, during the period taken into consideration, Yeghegis was not only a center of the local princely dynasty – the Ōrbēleans – but was a settlement well connected to the vast world beyond it, from Qaraqorum to Tabriz to Rome.

To underscore the local multiplicities and global connections, the paper started by linking material and written evidence from the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Yeghegis. Presently, there are four standing churches in Yeghegis, the most famous among which is the so-called Zorats' Church, dated to the early fourteenth century. The oldest among the churches, however, is a small chapel at the southwestern edge of the village, built ca 851, while the latest is a basilica structure dedicated to the Mother of God, dated to 1703 AD. The latter stands on the location of an older church and contains *spolia* that are as early as the tenth century. Finally, there is a centrally planned domed church west of the Zorats' Church whose dedication is unknown, and which is datable to the first decade of the fourteenth century. Although sanctuaries (or altars?) of the Mother of God, St Stephen, and a Katoghikē Church are mentioned in colophons since 1297, these are not easy to identify or correlate with the actual buildings. This difficulty is due, among others, to the use of an unusual word to indicate a sanctuary, or perhaps even an altar – *taghawar* or tabernacle.

A unique feature of Yeghegis is its medieval Jewish cemetery, which is an exceptional testimony to the existence of Jewish communities in medieval Armenia. The significance of this material evidence cannot be overestimated, given the very rare mention of Jews living in Armenia in Armenian sources. Based on some of the inscriptions, it is possible to hypothesize that this community was of likely Persianate origin. Its members probably owned land, and the community was wealthy and well-connected enough to commission tombstone decorations identical to those of the Ōrbēlean graves

Another unique material cultural evidence from Yeghegis is the grave of a martyr with a trilingual inscription: in Arabic, Persian, and Armenian. Although nothing else is known about the deceased, it may be that he belonged to a confraternity, possibly with connections to the city of Yerznka. These suggestions must remain hypothetical, given many *lacunae* in our information. The trilingual inscription combined with information in the written sources indicates that Yeghegis and perhaps Vayots' Dzor and Syunik' more widely, were places where multilingualism was highly prized. The ruling elites spoke at least two, if not more, languages, and we have examples of more than one bilingual inscription (Armenian and Persian) from this region.

Contrary to the material examples above, evidence on the presence and proselytizing activities of Dominican and Franciscan missionaries comes entirely from the written sources. Despite their conflicting relationship with the monks and priests of the Armenian (Apostolic) Church in Syunik', their presence added yet another layer of complexity and multiplicity to this region. Yeghegis was an integral part of these processes too, given that a number of graduates or teachers from the monastic school of Glazdor either fought against or adhered to the Catholic doctrine. Yet, the encounter with Latin Scholasticism and Aristotelianism set in motion new cultural processes in Armenian monastic schools themselves.

Yeghegis, thus, appears to have been a center of flourishing art, architecture, literary production, philosophical debates, manuscript illuminations, and, last but not least, trans-continental trade. It is thanks to the combination of material and written evidence that this efflorescence becomes visible to modern viewers and readers.