



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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ISSN 3035-3785
ISBN 978-88-9285-457-4
e-ISBN 978-88-9285-458-1
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Attribuzione - Non commerciale
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Florence Studies in Medieval Afro-Eurasia, 2
marzo 2026

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

Stampato a Sesto Fiorentino (FI)
BDprint, marzo 2026

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Acknowledgements

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Berlin, Houshamadyan
Cambridge, Cambridge University Library
Cornell University, Caucasus Heritage Watch
Damascus, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate
Florence, Laboratori Archeologici San Gallo
Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem
London, British Library
New York, The Morgan Library and Museum
Nicosia, Byzantine Museum and Art Gallery of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation
Paris, Organisation Terre et Culture
Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense
Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia
Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale
Venice, Manuscript Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation
Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia
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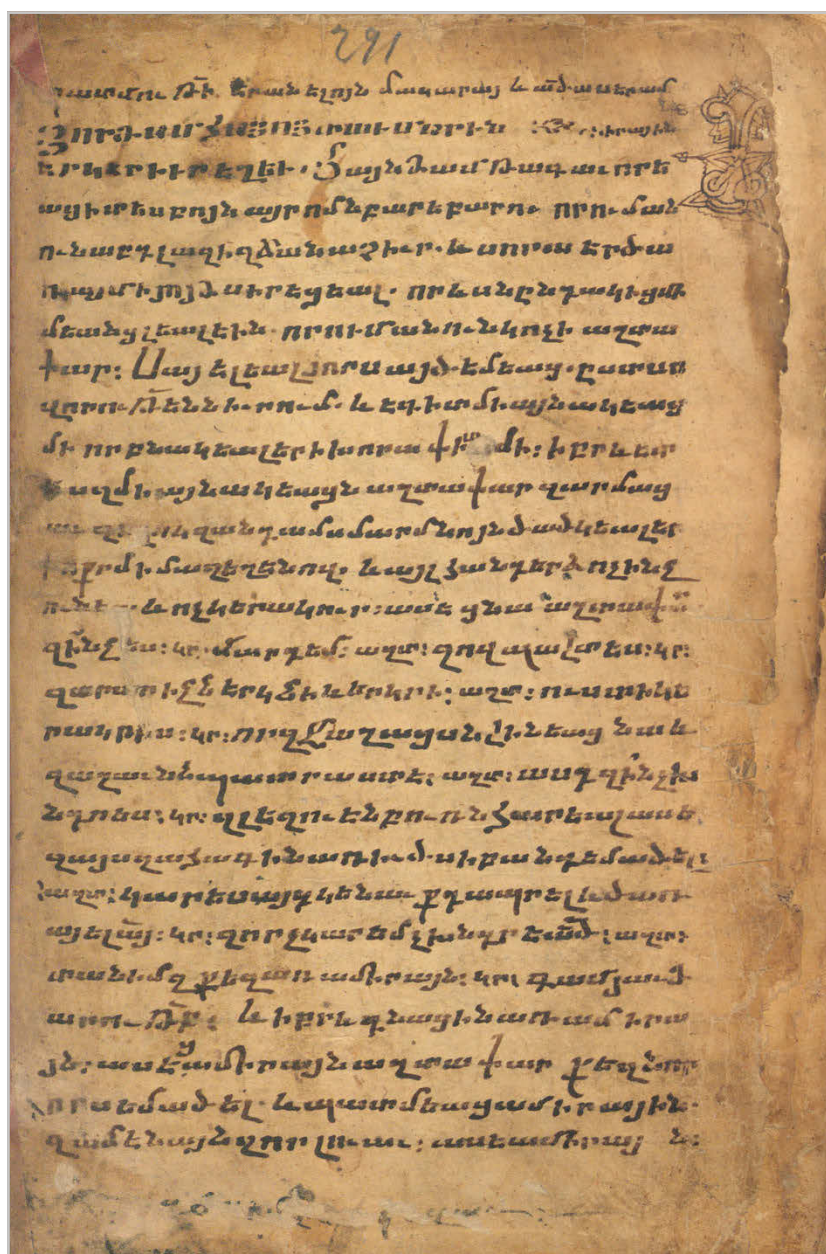
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A MONK IN THE MAJLIS: THE TEXT OF AN INTER-RELIGIOUS DEBATE BETWEEN ARABIC AND ARMENIAN

Zaroui Pogossian, Barbara Roggema, Armine Melkonyan

These folios are samples from an interreligious debate text that was likely translated from Arabic into Armenian and circulated widely in medieval Armenian manuscripts. The text claims to recount a debate that took place in the ancient Iranian capital of Ctesiphon in 801 AD, during the reign of “the Persian emir Abdlay” (in some examples Abdlaziz), who is presented as a generous and God-fearing ruler. The emir’s beloved and faithful servant, named Aghtap’ar, meets a monk called Makar while hunting and takes him to the emir. Almost

the entire text is set up as a debate between the monk Makar on the one hand, and the emir Abdlay, an anonymous Jew, a Nestorian, and a sorcerer on the other. Their questions and answers deal with Christology, the nature of God, and differences in the understanding of God between Jews and various groups of Christians and Muslims. It also addresses divergences in religious and every-day customs. Some intriguing questions revolve around wealth and poverty, courage and cowardice, sexual practices, and the duties of servants and masters.



15a. The opening page of the *Story of the Blessed Makar and the God-loving Emir*; miscellany, created in the Derdzki Monastery near Tivrik (today Divriği, Turkey), 12th–13th centuries (the earliest exemplar of the text).

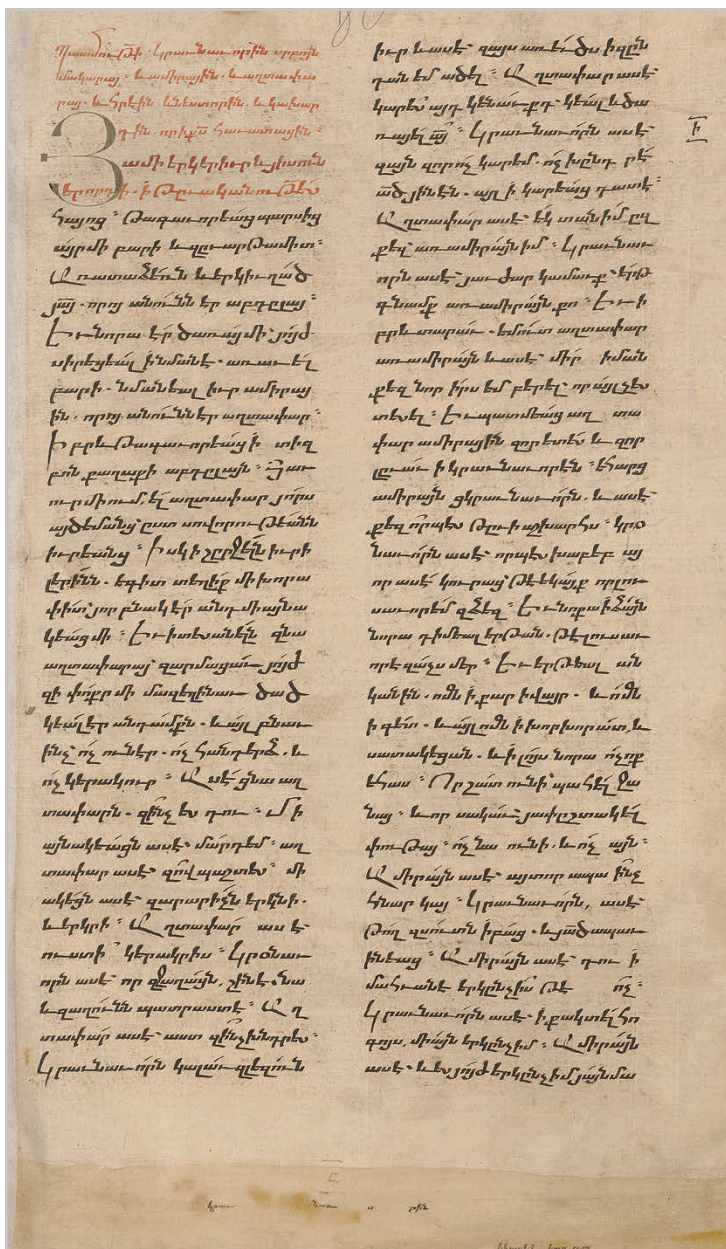
Jerusalem, Library of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, MS 3120, folio 292. Photographic credit: Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

At the end of the story the emir and his servant Aghtap'ar, as well as the sorcerer, convert to Christianity. They are soon baptised by Makar and isolate themselves in a remote desert. Before retiring to the desert, the monk advises the emir to release all the prisoners and, particularly, to redeem those in Basra.

In three of the 14 identified manuscripts, the text has a colophon composed by a translator. He states that his name is "Bardoghimeos" (Bartholomew) and "Apusahl (Abu Sahl) at birth," and that he translated the debate from Arabic when he was imprisoned by Muslims. In two of the examples, Bardoghimeos refers to himself as "king of Andzevats'ik" (a province in the south-west of Vaspurakan, below Lake Van) whereas in one of them, he appears as "the son of the king of Armenia." It can be hypothesised that the translation may have been carried out during the captivity

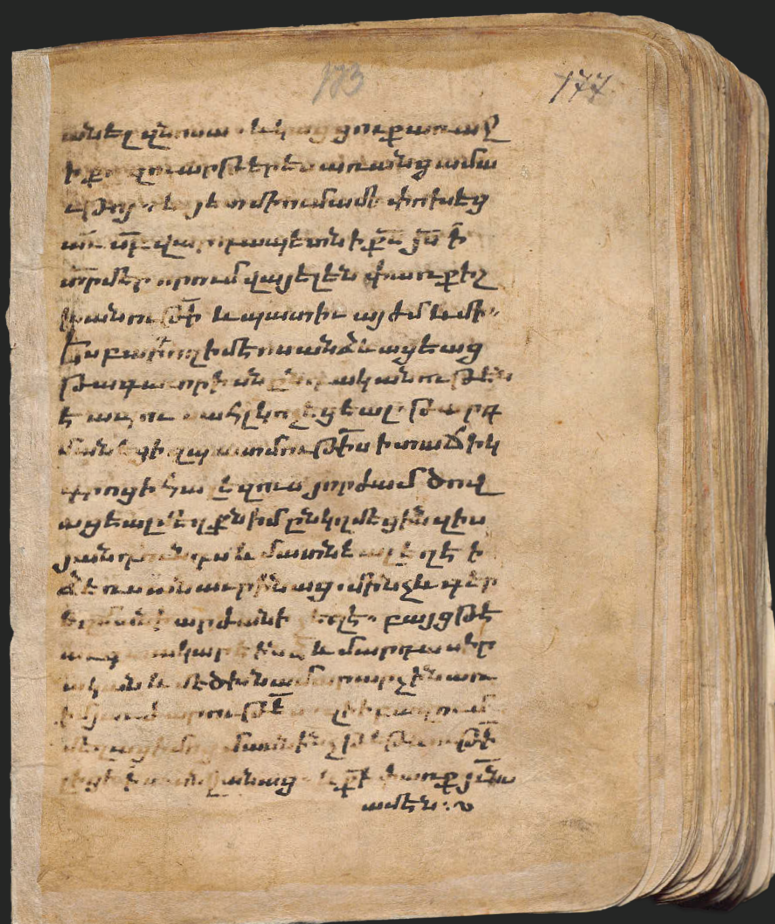
of some Armenian noblemen in the Abbasid capital of Samarra in the mid- to late 9th century. In any event, the presence of Arabic words and expressions in the Armenian translation, as well as references to some historical events in the text, point to a Christian Arabic environment for the composition of the original text.

The chronological and geographical distribution of the manuscripts containing the debate reflect the text's diffusion in Armenia, as well as in important centres of Armenian settlement beyond the original homeland. The earliest codex was produced in Tivrik (today Divriği in Turkey) in the 12th or 13th century, whereas the latest is dated to 1746 and was copied at an unspecified location. Other copies were made in Hizan (Khizan) and in various monasteries of Vaspurakan, Jerusalem, and New Julfa (Isfahan).



15b. The opening page of the *History of the Holy Monk Makar and the Emir and Aghtap'ar and a Jew and Nestor and a Sorcerer [All of] Whom Believed in Christ*, homiliary, created in the Nkarinay Monastery in the historical region of Vaspurakan (south-west of Lake Van), 1404.

Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 1520, folio 80r. Photographic credit: Matenadaran.



15c. The colophon of the translator Bardoghimeos-Apusahl (Bartholomew-Abu Sahl); miscellany, created in the Village of Tayshogh, Vaspurakan, 1441. Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 1665, folio 173r. Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

15d. Locations mentioned in the text and places where the manuscripts were copied. Map: Leonardo Squilloni.

