



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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LATIN CHRISTIANS IN THE CAUCASUS AND THE EUROPEAN/ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF K'RNA

Irene Tinti

The Upper Monastery of the Holy Mother of God in K'rna (Fig. 23a) was a place of entanglements *par excellence*. In the early 14th century, the Apostolic Armenian Church was officially in communion with the Latin Church, but this union encountered opposition especially in the Caucasus. However, following contacts with Dominican missionaries in Persia, an assembly of clerics was held in K'rna in 1330. Subsequently, the local monastic community and others in the region accepted union with the Latin Church, and some European Dominicans settled there. The new movement became the order of the *Fratres Unitores* ("Unitarian Brethren") between 1337 and 1344 and was approved by Pope Innocent VI in 1356. Its members eventually spread to present-day Armenia, Georgia, Persia, Crimea, Cilicia, Cyprus, and Poland. However, the opposition of the Armenian Apostolic Church and local magnates on the one hand, and the region's political and military instability on the other, resulted in the order's decline. It was officially absorbed by the Dominicans in 1583 and ceased to exist in the early 19th century.

The significance of the circle of K'rna is linked to its intellectual activities, which took place in a multilingual environment. At first, some representatives of this mixed European-Armenian community used Persian to communicate, but later the knowledge of both Armenian and Latin likely became widespread. Its members composed and/or translated from Latin liturgical, homiletic, theological, philosophical, jurid-

ical, and grammatical texts to serve their educational and religious needs and missionary activities. Thus, they made both new sources of ancient western thought (notably, philosophical commentaries in the Aristotelian tradition) and the recent acquisitions of European Scholasticism accessible to Armenian readers. Thomas Aquinas was one of the western authors to be translated here at an early stage. A member of the community, Peter of Aragon (cf. Cat. n° 11), may have also served as cultural mediator in the opposite direction, translating an Armenian apocalyptic text into Latin for a European audience.

The new literature was soon read and re-elaborated upon even in the Apostolic Armenian camp: thus, it influenced the curriculum taught in Apostolic centres of learning and the compositions of great writers such as Yovhannēs Orotnets'i and Grigor Tat'evats'i. The interactions between the two factions, characterised by differing degrees of hostility, are well documented in manuscripts and historical sources (cf. Cat. n° 12).

Located in the present-day Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, an exclave of Azerbaijan, the Monastery of K'rna was completely destroyed in recent decades (Figs 23bc). This occurred as part of the intentional erasure of the historical Armenian presence in the region. The impossibility of studying the material remnants of the Monastery of K'rna makes the value of written sources even more significant, turning philological work into a silent tool against the ongoing cultural genocide.



23a. Ruins of the central sanctuary of the Monastery of the Holy Mother of God (*Surb Astuatsatsin*) in K'rna, Nakhijevan, in the 1970s/80s. Location: 39.13584420N / 45.65804420E. Photographic credit: Argam Ayvazyan Archive. Used with permission from Argam Ayvazyan.

St. Astvatsatsin or "Kusaber" Monastery of Kirna (N.282)
Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan



St. Astvatsatsin or "Kusaber" Monastery of Kirna (N.282)
Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

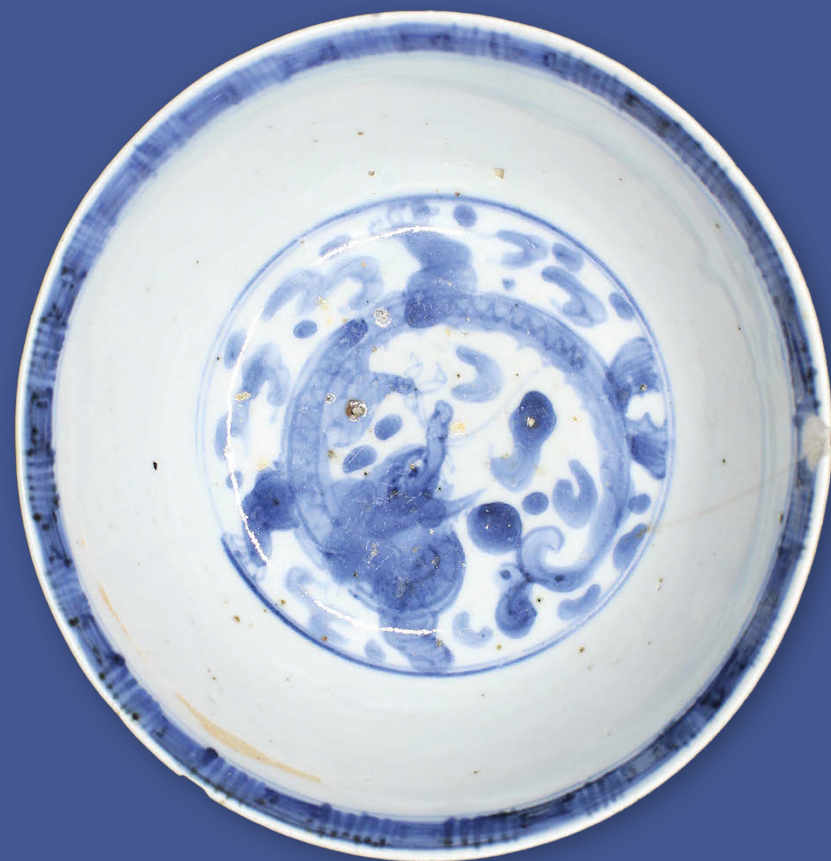


23b. Ruins of the central sanctuary of the Monastery of the Holy Mother of God (*Surb Astuatsatsin*) in K'ina, Nakhijevan, in October 2001.

Photographic credit: 2025 Caucasus Heritage Watch. Used with permission.

23c. Former site of the central sanctuary of the Monastery of the Holy Mother of God (*Surb Astuatsatsin*) in K'ina, Nakhijevan, in November 2009.

Photographic credit: 2025 Caucasus Heritage Watch. Used with permission.



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

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