

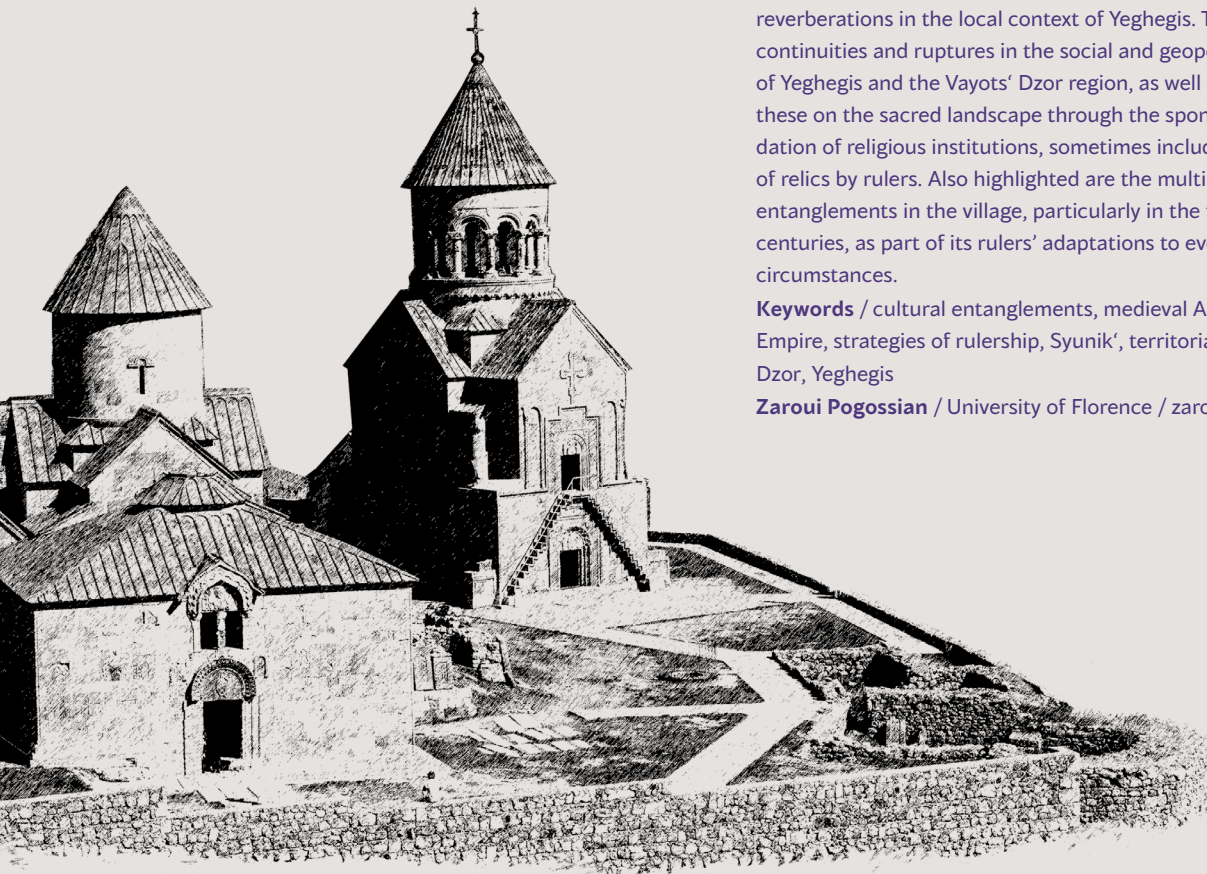
II. VAYOTS' DZOR, SYUNIK', AND THE WORLD

Global Transformations and Local Dynamics Between the 9th and 14th Centuries

Abstract / An exploration of the long-term history of the Vayots' Dzor province and the village of Yeghegis leads to a novel explanation of these areas' centrality in certain periods. Particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries and again in the thirteenth and fourteenth, both Vayots' Dzor and Yeghegis experienced unprecedented periods of flourishing. This study takes a two-tiered scale of analysis: vertical, tracing the region's internal dynamics, its rulers – first from the ancient Syuni, then the Örbëlean and Khaghbakean dynasties – and their strategies of territorial control; then horizontal, looking at shifts and transformations on the regional and continental scale, with reverberations in the local context of Yeghegis. The article points to continuities and ruptures in the social and geopolitical organization of Yeghegis and the Vayots' Dzor region, as well as to the impact of these on the sacred landscape through the sponsorship and foundation of religious institutions, sometimes including the deposition of relics by rulers. Also highlighted are the multiplicities and cultural entanglements in the village, particularly in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, as part of its rulers' adaptations to ever-changing global circumstances.

Keywords / cultural entanglements, medieval Armenia, Mongol Empire, strategies of rulership, Syunik', territorial control, Vayots' Dzor, Yeghegis

Zaroui Pogossian / University of Florence / zaroui.pogossian@unifi.it



ZAROUI POGOSSIAN

INTRODUCTION

The quiet and seemingly remote village of Yeghegis, tucked away behind high mountains, was anything but an isolated backwater during the Middle Ages. Its orchards and private gardens dotted with monumental *khach'k'ars*, the iconic Zorats' Church [fig. 1] proudly displaying a unique architectural design, a medieval Jewish cemetery exceptional of its kind for this period and region, and a trilingual gravestone of a Christian martyr, mark Yeghegis as an erstwhile central place with a thriving culture. In the millennium that goes from the fifth to the fifteenth century, this territory experienced many dramatic events and periods of economic and cultural prosperity that characterized the region of Syunik' and historical Armenia more widely. Its heyday, when Vayots' Dzor became a true center of Armenian intellectual life, was the second half of the thirteenth and the first of the fourteenth centuries, coinciding with the establishment of the global Mongol Empire and its westernmost polity – the Ilkhanate. The rich architectural, artistic, and archaeological heritage of Yeghegis, discussed in the following chapters of this volume, is mainly the product of this period.

The main question that led to the elaboration of this chapter is posed in its last, fourth section: Why Yeghegis? What made this settlement and its surrounding region, Vayots' Dzor, if not unique at least special, to attract an élite patronage of monumental structures that still impress the traveler? To answer this question, the chapter provides a fresh look and novel interpretations of the political, cultural, and religious dynamics in Vayots' Dzor from the ninth to the second half of the fourteenth century, paying a close attention to its rulers' interactions with their neighbors and conquerors, in line with a “connected histories” approach. My objective has been to understand the place and history of Vayots' Dzor at the intersection of a very specific local dimension of events with larger, one may say global, historical processes that changed the face of eastern and western Asia. These included such phenomena as the fracturing of the Abbasid Caliphate, the emergence of the Great Seljuk Empire, the loss of Anatolia and Armenia by the Byzantine Empire, the growth of the Georgian Kingdom as a regional power, and, most importantly, the establishment of the global Mongol Empire.

Throughout this period, the Armenian population and rulers of Syunik', like in other parts of the Armenian plateau, engaged with their neighbors and conquerors in multiple ways, adapting themselves to ever-changing conditions and, when it comes to rulers, adopting diverse strategies of maintaining their elite status. Among these strategies, I explore their efforts at territory control by means of establishing or supporting pre-existent specific markers of the landscape, as well as the continuity of certain sites as “central places.”

The article relies on several approaches and research methodologies. While the focus of this volume – and this chapter – is the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the present chapter first provides a long-term overview, roughly five centuries, of the region's history. The main objective of this chapter is to point out when, how, and especially, why the importance of Vayots' Dzor fluctuated. Furthermore, it relates these fluctuations to local, regional, and “global” politics (in the present study, “global” is limited to Eurasia) through several waves of drastic transformations. Then, the article aims to link local and global perspectives on the history of Vayots' Dzor and especially the settlement of Yeghegis. This long-term approach has allowed me to trace patterns of continuity vs ruptures, including their impact on the physical landscape, which is observed through the prism of strategies of rulership. The junctures when the elite families of Syunik' changed are particularly important for this investigation. I emphasize the shaping of the landscape by secular or religious

* Research towards this paper started under the auspices of the European Research Council (ERC) – funded Consolidator Grant *Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies of Interaction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean (JewsEast)*, at the Center for Religious Studies, Ruhr-Universität-Bochum (grant agreement no 647467). It was completed thanks to the funding within another ERC Consolidator Grant *Armenia Entangled: Connectivity and Cultural Encounters in Medieval Eurasia 9th–14th Centuries (ArmEn)*, at the SAGAS Department of the University of Florence (grant agreement no 865067). Both projects fall under European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program. The field trip to Vayots' Dzor in 2018 was funded from an “Innovators Fund” grant that I received from Ruhr-Universität-Bochum's Research School. My gratitude goes to these various funding bodies that facilitated my research. I am deeply indebted to many friends and colleagues who read earlier versions of this paper and shared their valuable observations and critique. I am thankful to Alexandra Cuffel, Gohar Grigoryan, Hasmik Hovhannisyan, Sergio La Porta, Michael Pifer, Alison Vacca, and Sara Nur Yildiz. Naturally, any errors of fact or judgement are solely mine.



[fig. 1] A view on the main portal of the Zorats' Church, 14th century

leaders as one of their strategies of rulership and, when the sources allow this, highlight the long-neglected significance and agency of elite women. Three periods, broadly defined, are treated: firstly, the Princes of Syunik' in the system of Bagratid Armenia and the Bagratid annexation of Vayots' Dzor; secondly, the Seljuk; and then, thirdly, the Mongol conquests and domination.

In the first part, I provide a brief outline of four centuries of history of Syunik' and its relationship with the regional and imperial, Christian and Muslim, polities and rulers. As the external situation changed, often drastically, and the dominant groups and their centers of gravity shifted, how did this affect the local situation in Vayots' Dzor and the strategies of rulership of its elites? When searching for answers, I pay particular attention to certain symbolic locations, such as holy sites, dynastic burial grounds, and seats of power, to trace continuities vs changes in correlation with external and internal events. As to external politics, I highlight the variegated and ever-changing alliances between the lords of Syunik' with regional Christian and Muslim rulers, analyzing the effects of these policies on the fate of different parts of Syunik', especially Vayots' Dzor. Then, this research draws attention to the reshuffling of social hierarchies. It highlights the increasing role of the religious elites, the significance of marriage alliances and, hence, women of prominent families, as developments that acquired a new meaning in a post-Seljuk context. Also, it continued to remain vital also during the Mongol domination.

In the second and third parts, the article draws attention to factors that contributed to the efflorescence of Vayots' Dzor and, more specifically, Yeghegis, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The role of the Örbēlean and Khaghbakean-Proshean families in this phenomenon has long been recognized. Here, I look at their intertwined history going beyond the reconstruction of political events that have traditionally attracted scholars' attention. Rather, I place the consolidation of these families in a broad perspective informed by the Seljuk, then Mongol conquest of Armenia. To appreciate the articulation of this general trend in the territory of Vayots' Dzor, I undertake some brief case studies. One is focused on the significance of the Noravank' Monastery.¹ The establishment of Noravank' and peripeties of its coveted relic of the True Cross at

1 This monastic complex must be distinguished from two other homonymous monasteries in Syunik': Noravank' of Bgheno and Upper Noravank'. In this article, I follow the Library of Congress transliteration system for Armenian words and names with a slight modification. However, in the case of modern Armenian scholars who had opted for a different spelling of their names in their publications in Western languages, I uniformly adopt that transliteration, even when transcribing from their Armenian-language publications, i.e., Matevosian and not Mat'evosyan, Margarian and not Margaryan, etc.

the beginning of the Ōrbēlean rule provides an opportunity to glimpse into a unique and surprising Christian-Muslim decision-making mechanism. The revitalized importance of Yeghegis, including the burgeoning intellectual and cultural centers in its surrounding monasteries in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not least the celebrated school of Gladzor, marks the acme of the history of Vayots' Dzor. In another case study, I investigate the peak of Gladzor in the context of the Ōrbēlean family's hegemony in Syunik', its members' continuous efforts to shape or reshape the landscape and inscribe their presence in it, their successful navigation in Mongol court politics, and as an expression of their preeminence over their Khaghbakean-Prōshean rivals. By focusing on three generations of Ōrbēlean and Khaghbakean-Prōshean rulers, I trace their strategies of territory control via military service to and integration into the Mongol Ilkhanid system of government, marriage alliances with local and regional power holders, foundation and sponsorship of religious and educational institutions. Moreover, I explore their relationships with representatives of the Armenian Church.

The nature of our sources is such that we can hardly access the kind of detail that would allow a day-to-day reconstruction of historical events or propose anything approaching a microhistory of Vayots' Dzor. Still, it is possible to explore the local dimension of the changes and appreciate their place in the epochal and continental events of the time. This has hardly been a central theme of research on medieval Armenia, including Syunik' and Vayots' Dzor, and the article fills this gap, among others.

PART I GEOGRAPHY, POLITICS, AND RULERS OF SYUNIK': 9TH – 12TH CENTURIES

SYUNIK' AND ITS REGIONS UNDER SYUNI AND BAGRATID CONTROL

The medieval and modern-day village of Yeghegis (Եղեգիս, HMB transliteration Ełegis) is situated in the historical "land" (աշխարհ/ashkharh) of Syunik', the region or district (գաւառ/gawar) of Vayots' Dzor. Syunik' is the ninth and one of the largest among the fifteen "lands" that composed Armenia Major (Մեծ Հայք) in the descriptive *Geography* of the

seventh-century polymath Anania of Shirak (Anania Shirakats'i).² This composition is not a precise administrative geography of one specific period but incorporates information from different sources of diverse dates. As far as Armenia is concerned, it depicts a situation before the end of the seventh century, although its two recensions may refer to different decades. Anania's *Geography* outlines an idealized Armenia or Hayk' (Հայք) – the patrimony of the eponymous ancestor of the Armenians, Hayk – as it was imagined and later longed for by Armenian authors or historical actors. The text places Syunik' "east of Ararat between [the river] Yeraskh (Araxes) and Arts'akh." It then enumerates its twelve regions, of which Vayots' Dzor or Vayu Dzor is the third.³

Syunik' is one of the most elevated landmasses of the Armenian plateau, dominating the plain of Masis (Ararat) from the southeast. The Lesser Caucasus chains crisscross its territory, dividing it into smaller, self-enclosed, often deep valleys. In the pre-modern period, many of the communication routes of Syunik' became impracticable during the winter, making it one of the more impregnable regions of historical Armenia. This, however, hardly meant isolation as the rich material culture of ancient and medieval Syunik' testifies. This volume will provide ample evidence on the connectivity of Syunik' to regional and global events that characterized western Asia and, later, Eurasia from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries.

In the tenth century, the term Syunik' acquired two semantic values. Besides the large territory described by Anania of Shirak as the "land of Syunik'," it could be used in a more restricted sense, referring to the central area of Syunik' known as Tsghukk'.⁴ The village Shaghat of Tsghukk' with its fortress

- 2 It is always a challenge to render medieval administrative-geographical units from one language to the other. In this paper, I will use the word "land" to render Armenian աշխարհ/ashkharh. For the term գաւառ I will use interchangeably "region" or "district."
- 3 Anania Shirakats'i, *Ashkharhats'uyts'* [Geography], in *Anania Shirakats'u matenagrut'yunā* [Works of Anania Shirakats'i], Ashot Abrahamyan ed., Yerevan 1944, pp. 349–350; Robert Hewsen, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxarhac'oyc')*. *The Long and the Short Recensions*, Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 65–65A. For general information on Shirakats'i, see the "Introduction" in Hewsen, *The Geography* (n. 3), pp. 1–35. For various renderings of Vayots' Dzor/Vayu Dzor, see Babken Harut'yunyan, "Mets Hayk'i Syunik' ashkharh'n əst 'Ashkharhats'uyts'i'" (Pamtaashkharhagrakan ditarkumner)" [The Land of Syunik' of Greater Armenia According to the *Geography* (Historical-geographical observations)], *Patmbanasirakan handes* [Historical-Philological Journal], 119/1 (2003), pp. 119–146, sp. pp. 120, 140.

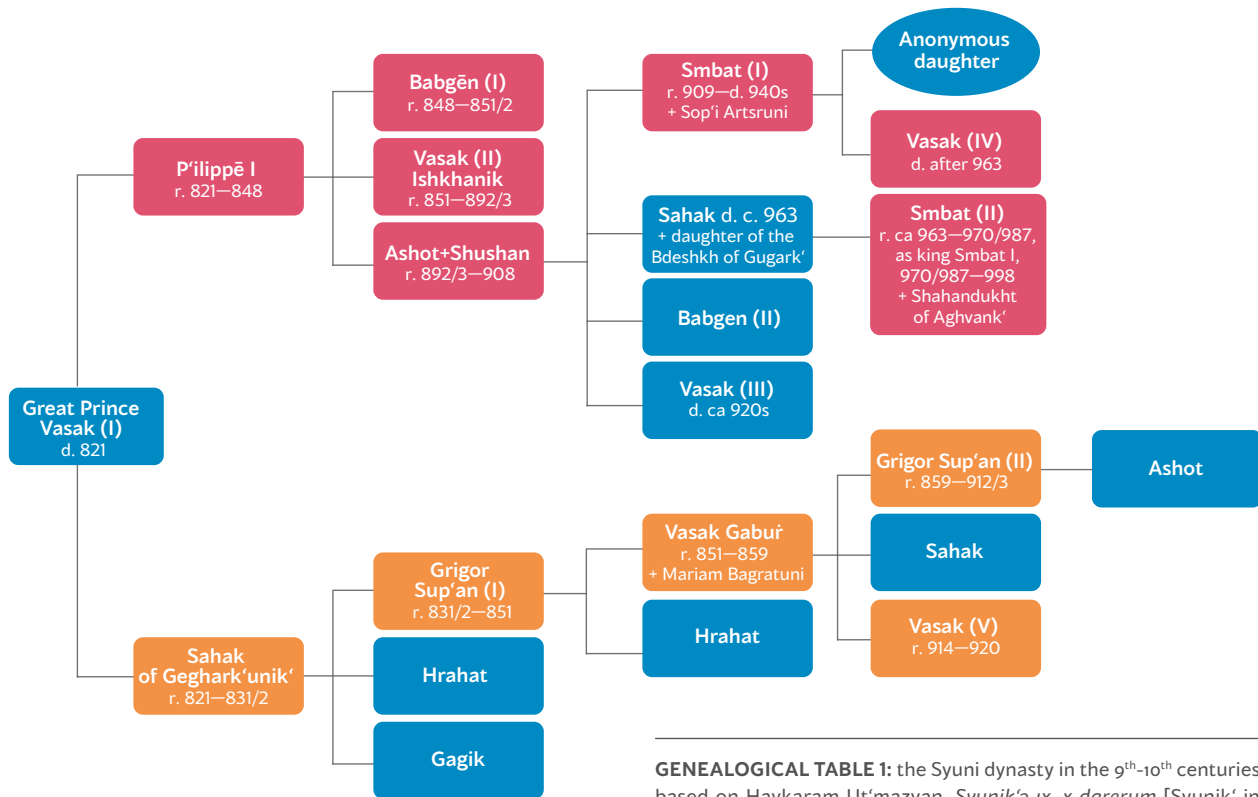
was one of the central residences of the dynastic head, i.e., the *ostan* of Syuni princes in Antiquity and Late Antiquity [map 1]. According to T'adevos Hakobyan, the seat of the bishop of Syunik' was also located in the monastery of Shaghat until the eighth century, after which it moved further south to Tat'ew. The denomination Syunik' for the district Tsghukk' became prevailing especially in the tenth-eleventh-century historiographical sources. Despite the earlier importance of Tsghukk', as Hewsens has rightly remarked, other locations in Syunik' became central places due to different Syuni princes who chose them as their residence – usually making up a settlement system consisting of a village, fortress, and religious center, such as a church or a monastery. This was the case with the settlement of Yeghegis, as we shall see. Due to these decentralized dynamics and movements of the political core of Syunik', Shaghat and its monastery ceased to play any role of relevance in the history of Syunik' in the subsequent centuries.⁵

Vayots' Dzor – literally the Valley of Vays – most likely takes its name from an ancient ethnonym “vay/uay” attested in Urartian inscriptions and surviving in other toponyms of the surrounding area. The folk etymology recorded by medieval historians, according to which the name derives from “the Valley of Woes” (“վայ/vay”) due to a severe earthquake in the eighth century that led to massive deaths of its “sinful” population, has long been discarded, for the toponym already appears in fifth-century sources.⁶ Vayots' Dzor extends on the upper and middle basin of the River Arp'a and includes its tributary river Yeghegis (lit. “reeds” in acc. pl.), more or less corresponding to the modern-day region (Մարզ/marz) of Vayots' Dzor of the Republic of Armenia. The Mountains of Vardenis separate it from the basin of Lake Sevan (Geghama in pre-modern sources) and from the historical region of Geghark'unik' to the north. The pass of Selim with its splendid fourteenth-century caravanserai was (and remains) the main communication route between Vayots' Dzor and Geghark'unik', and hence the valley of Ayrarat – the central Armenian lands. To the east, Vayots' Dzor bordered the innermost district Tsghukk' of Syunik' mentioned above and the district Tsar of Arts'akh. In the south stretched the Vayots' Dzor mountain chain. Extending southward from the latter and delimited further south-east by the Syunik' Mountains was the

region of Chahuk (Jahuk), whose eastern part was known as Shahaponk' in ancient sources. Although geographically separated from Vayots' Dzor by the homonymous chain, at times Chahuk belonged to the same landholding / administrative unit and was ruled by the senior branch of Syuni lords whose seat was in Vayots' Dzor. This was the case in the ninth-tenth and, again, in the thirteenth centuries when the Khaghbakean-Próshean princes who held domains in Vayots' Dzor also controlled Chahuk. On the west, Vayots' Dzor opened to the historical regions of Goght'n (south-west) and Nakhchavan/Nakhichevan (north-west) on the left bank of the Araxes river, and Dvin further north in the plain of Masis/Ararat.⁷

The inclusion of specific regions or districts (գավառ/gavar) under the rule of Syuni princes and of Syunik' conceived as a unit, fluctuated over the centuries. One may remark alterations in the status of Geghark'unik', at the basin of Lake Sevan north of Vayots' Dzor, as well as Goght'n and Nakhichevan, to its west, whose possession was contested and changed hands in various periods, as discussed below. The shifting political geography of these frontier regions affected the strategic importance of Vayots' Dzor. These transformations were closely linked to

- 4 Robert Hewsens, *Armenia. A Historical Atlas*, Chicago/London 2001, p. 121, map no 98, demonstrates the different borders and divisions of Syunik', as well as between its regions, from the seventh to eleventh centuries. For a general geographical descriptions of Syunik', see the fundamental T'adevos Hakobyan, *Syunik' i t'agavorut'yunā patma-ashkharhagrakan ai'umov* [The Kingdom of Syunik' from a Historical-Geographical Perspective], Yerevan 1966, and Vladimir Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, London 1953, pp. 68–70, based also on Muslim sources.
- 5 Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4), pp. 137–141; Hewsens, *Armenia* (n. 4), pp. 121–122.
- 6 Grigor Kapantsyan [Ghap'ants'yan], *Istoriko-lingvističeskoje značenije toponimiki drevnej Armenii* [The Historical-Linguistical Meaning of Toponyms of Ancient Armenia], Yerevan 1940, pp. 384–385; Babken Harut'yunyan, “Vayots' Dzor' teghanvan stugabanut'yan harts'i shuij” [On the Question of the Etymology of the Toponym “Vayots' Dzor”], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri* [Bulletin of Social Sciences], 9 (1967), pp. 85–96; Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4), pp. 6–7.
- 7 For a physical-geographical description of Syunik' and specifically Vayots' Dzor, see T'adevos Hakobyan, *Hayastani patmakan ashkharhagrut'yun* [The Historical Geography of Armenia], Yerevan 1968, pp. 212–216; Harut'yunyan, “The Land of Syunik'” (n. 3), pp. 125–126; Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4), p. 62. For the Khaghbakean-Próshean control of Chahuk and its specific areas, see Garegin Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeank' kam Prósheank' hayots' patmut'ean mej* [Khaghbakeans and Prósheans in the History of the Armenians], vol. 1, Vagharshapat [Ejmiatsin] 1928, cols 45–62.



[tab. 1] A genealogical table of the Syuni dynasty, 9th–10th centuries

GENEALOGICAL TABLE 1: the Syuni dynasty in the 9th–10th centuries based on Haykaram Ut'mazyan, *Syunik'ə ix–x darerum* [Syunik' in 9th–10th Centuries], Yerevan, 1958, pp. 286–315 and inserts, as well as Marie-Félicité Brosset (trans.), *Histoire de la Siounie par Stéphannos Orbélian*, Saint Petersburg, 1866, p. 14, which includes also the spouses of Syuni princes.

The above table includes only those Syuni lines that are discussed in the article, rather than the entire clan. Senior princes are marked in red; the Geghark'unik' branch is below and its senior princes are marked in orange.

For the Syuni kings issuing from prince Smbat II (Smbat I as king), see Genealogical Table 2.

r = years of rule; d = year of death; + spouse

starting with P'ilippē's brother Sahak (r. 821–831/2) [tab. 1]. The Syunis were one of the three dominant princely families in Bagratid Armenia, along with the Artsrunis and the Bagratids.

Despite P'ilippē's choice of Yeghegis as his seat of power and the presumed centrality of Vayots' Dzor in his policy, through the historical record, we can appreciate his diversified approach to controlling the different portions of his landholdings. We may also observe tensions between him and his brother's family that ruled in Geghark'unik'. P'ilippē initiated what would become a long history of patronage of a (then still nascent) religious

center – the celebrated monastic complex of Tat'ew in the south of Syunik' [figs 2a–b]. He built a funerary structure for himself there and made important land donations to it. This was the beginning and part of efforts to contrast the second Syuni branch and, in parallel, the influence of the most prominent Syuni monastery of pan-Armenian significance up to that point – the monastery of Mak'enots' in Geghark'unik'. The Tat'ew Monastery soon overshadowed Mak'enots' or any other religious establishment in Syunik' – a situation that will remain unchallenged up to the twelfth century, when we will see the rise of Noravank' in the narrow valley



[fig. 2a] A view of the monastery of Tat'ew, founded in the 9th century

of the River Gnishik in Vayots' Dzor [figs 3a–b].¹⁰ I have dealt with the growth of Tat'ew, the fate of Mak'enots', and the importance of the monastery of the Holy Apostles on the island of Lake Sevan in Geghark'unik' in the context of ninth-tenth-century inner-Syuni and Syuni-Bagratuni rivalry for territory control elsewhere.¹¹ Here, it is worth mentioning that eventually the tensions between the two Syuni branches took on a more dramatic turn than a competition through the patronage of holy sites or the shaping of the landscape. It came to a major breakdown when P'ilippē's son Babgen I (r. 848–851/2) killed his cousin (Sahak's son) Grigor

Sup'an I (r. 831/2–851) in 851. Subsequently, Babgen himself died a victim of a conspiracy by poisoning.¹² Incidentally, the earliest piece of epigraphic evidence from Yeghegis documenting the donation of ashlar for the construction of a chapel, the

10 Zaroui Pogossian, "Princes, Queens, Bishops, Sultans: Seljuks in Syunik' and the Rise of the Monastery of Noravank'", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 89 (2023), pp. 207–250.

11 *Eadem*, "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.

12 Ut'mazyan, *Syunik'* (n. 8), p. 291.

[fig. 2b] A view of the monastery of Tat'ew from distance



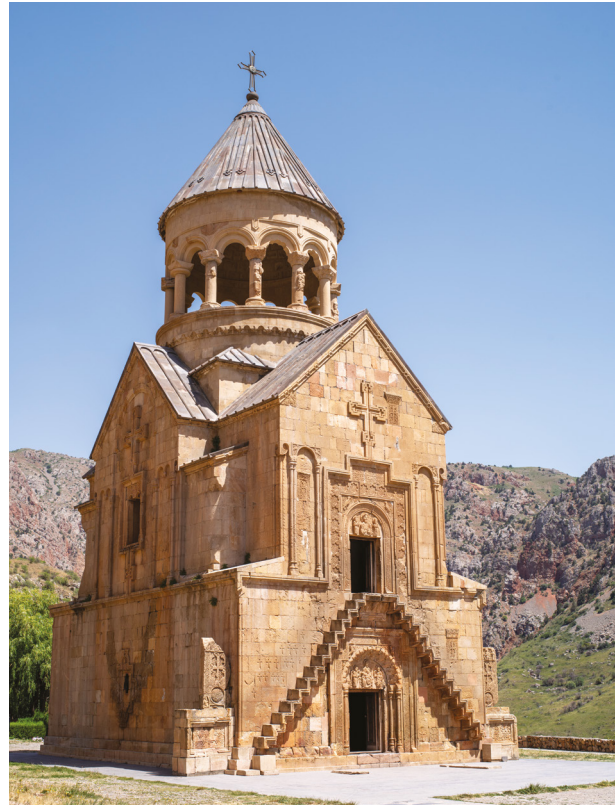
so-called “Old Church,” dates to these tense years, or precisely to 851.¹³

Partially as a result of this fratricidal competition between the two most influential Syuni princes, but also due to other factors, towards the end of the ninth and throughout the tenth century, Geghark'unik' developed closer political and economic ties with the central lands of Ayrarat under the Bagratids than the rest of Syunik'. Subsequently, through a strategy of matrimonial links, foundation and sponsorship of local monasteries and, eventually, simply imprisoning its last lord, Vasak Syuni (ca 914 – ca 920), the Bagratids gradually increased their presence in Geghark'unik'. Around 918–920, King Ashot II Bagratuni (r. 914–929) annexed it to his kingdom, removing this traditionally Syuni district from the control of the Syuni family, concomitantly restricting the geographical concept of Syunik'. As a consequence, it changed the geopolitical significance of Vayots' Dzor – the neighboring region of Geghark'unik' – turning it into the next natural target of Bagratid expansionist strategy, especially in view of its proximity and easy access to the much-prized political and economic central place of Dvin.¹⁴

Besides Geghark'unik', in the first decade of the tenth century, the territory of Nakhichevan briefly annexed to Syunik' but in Anania of Shirak's descriptive geography, part of the land of Vaspurakan became an apple of discord between the Syunis and their south-western neighbors – the Artsrunis. The dispute was among the reasons leading to Gagik Artsruni's coalition with the Sadjid Governor of Ādharbaydĵān Yūsuf b. Dāwūd b. Abī'l-Sāj (r. 901–919, and again 923–928), Gagik's competing coronation as king of Vaspurakan from the hands of the latter, his conflict with his maternal uncle King Smbat Bagratuni, and Smbat's crucifixion in Dvin in 914

13 The inscription was discovered and transcribed by Hamlet Petrosyan during our joint field research in August 2018. See Hamlet Petrosyan, Zaroui Pogossian, “Armenian Inscriptions in and around Yeghegis”, inscription vi.1 in this volume, p. 271. For an archaeological and architectural analysis of the “Old Church,” see Michele Nucciotti, Francesca Cheli, “The ‘Old Church’: An Archaeological Stratigraphic Description” in this volume, pp. 144–159.

14 On the shifting border of Syunik', see Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4); Harut'yunyan, “The Land of Syunik'” (n. 3); Bernadette Martin-Hisard, “Constantinople et les archontes du monde caucasien dans le *Livres des Cérémonies*, II, 48”, *Travaux et Mémoires*, 13 (2000), pp. 368–530, sp. pp. 400–406. According to Martin-Hisard Bagratids annexed Geghark'unik' to pursue a military-strategic goal



[fig. 3a] A view of the Burt'elashen Church of the Mother of God, Noravank' Monastery, 14th century

of creating a buffer zone to the east of the Muslim Emirate of Dvin (pp. 373, 403). On the rivalry between Gagik Artsruni and Smbat Bagratuni with dramatic consequences, see T'ovma Artsruni (and Anonymous Continuators), *Patmut'ivn tann Artsruneats'* [History of the House of Artsruni], Yerevan 1985, pp. 442–444; Hovhannēs Draskhanakertts'i, *Patmut'ivn hayots'* [History of the Armenians], Tbilisi 1912, pp. 236–237; Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4), pp. 35–38, Ut'mazyan, *Syunik'* (n. 8), pp. 96–103; Zaroui Pogossian, “Locating Religion, Controlling Territory: Conquest and Legitimation in Late Ninth-Century Vaspurakan and its Interreligious Context”, in *Locating Religions: Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, Reinhold F. Gleis, Nikolas Jaspers eds, Leiden 2017, pp. 177–178. On the Sadjids, whom Minorsky considers a family of Sogdian origin, see Minorsky, *Studies* (n. 4), p. 111; for the place of Vasak v in the genealogical tree of the Syuni family, see Toumanoff, *Les Dynasties* (n. 8), p. 254, no 20.8. The process of monastic establishments and territory control in Geghark'unik' is discussed in Pogossian, “The Foundation of the Monastery of Sevan” (n. 11). See also Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4), pp. 60–61, on the Bagratid domains in Geghark'unik' in the tenth century.



[fig. 3b] A view from above of the Noravank' Monastery,
12th–14th century

Byzantine, and Georgian sources. The latter is our earliest testimony in this sense: the *Passion of Gობრონ*, written ca 920 makes that distinction. Arabic sources referred to Syunik' as Sīsajān, based on Sassanian Sīsakan, a term we also find in Armenian and Syriac, such as the already mentioned *Geography* of Anania of Shirak, or the Syriac Ps.-Zacharias Rhetor, among others. Besides signifying a region, Sīsajān also indicated a waystation on the Dvin-Partaw route, whose exact localization is still a matter of debate but which was likely in the vicinity of the village Բրբ'ա (today Areni). In the tenth century, according to the geographer Ibn Ḥawqal, the Sallarid (Musafrid) Amir Marzubān b. Muḥammad imposed a heavy tribute on the Lord of Vayots' Dzor, who is named "Abū'l-Qāsim al-Wayzūrī, lord of Wayzūr." Given Ibn-Ḥawqal's date of 955 for this information, the lord in question should be the senior prince Vasak (IV) [tab. 1]. Minorsky hypothesized that this same prince was the one who had earlier attacked Muḥammad b. Shaddād of Dvin at the instigation of the Sallarid (Musafrid) Ibrāhīm b. Marzubān in 951. But somewhat later, the Shaddādids themselves took service with the "Lord of Wayzūr."¹⁹ Adding to these coalitions, Vasak's *rapprochement* with Byzantium, as mentioned above, it becomes evident that he engaged in politics that could appear as anti-Bagratid from the latter's point of view. This may be the reason why in Book II, chapter 48 of *De Ceremoniis*, with a *terminus post quem* 959, Vayots' Dzor is listed as one of ten separate units that were part of Armenia. After the "prince of princes of great Armenia" (ἄρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων τῆς Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας) and of Vaspurakan (τοῦ Ἀσπουρακᾶν ἡγουν Βασπαρακᾶν), numbers seven and eight in the list of other Armenian *archontes* are those of Syunik' (τοῦ Συνής) and Vayots' Dzor (Βαιτζώρ).²⁰

This background, where we see a lord of Vayots' Dzor (and Syunik') involved as an independent player among regional potentates, be those Byzantine emperors' agents, Armenian Bagratid kings, or Muslim rulers of Dvin and Gandzak, reveals his and, as we shall see, his successors' aspirations for autonomy. For these same reasons and because of Vayots' Dzor's strategic position, its control was felt to be crucial for the Bagratids too, especially in their efforts to neutralize the Emirate of Dvin by circumscribing it from the east. It is probably not a coincidence that

as Bagratid pressures on Vayots' Dzor increased, the title of the senior prince passed to Smbat (II)'s line and the center of political gravity in Syunik' shifted from Vayots' Dzor to the region of Baghk' with the town Kapan in the south-east. Subsequently, Prince Smbat II was crowned as King Smbat I by "the sultan of Khorasan," with the support of the lords of Tabriz and Gandzak.²¹ Whoever is meant under these anachronistic titles, one thing is clear: the elevation of Syunik' to kingship relied on eastern, Islamic sources of authority. In parallel, Baghk' – the southernmost region of Syunik' – was so important for the formation of the Kingdom of Syunik' that it became part of the nomenclature of the kingdom. It was known as the "Kingdom of Syunik' and Baghk'" or the "Kingdom of Kapan," the most important town of southern Syunik'.²²

Vayots' Dzor did not remain a part of this new kingdom for a long time. It was absorbed by the Bagratids, in a way almost reenacting the pattern played out when slowly annexing Geghark'unik'

19 Martin-Hisard, "Les archontes" (n. 14), pp. 404–405; Vladimir Minorsky, "Caucasica IV: Sahl ibn Sunbāt of Shakkī and Arrān. The Caucasian Vassals of Marzubān in 344/955", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 15/3 (1953), pp. 504–529, sp. p. 524 [Rpt. in *Idem, The Turks, Iran and the Caucasus in the Middle Ages*, London 1987, no vii]. For the semantic field of Sīsajān, among other geographical notions applied to Armenian territories by Arabic geographers and their possible Sassanian *substratum*, see Alison Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam: Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania*, Cambridge 2017, pp. 49 (the traditional enumeration of Sīsajān within Armenia I), 50, 54 (Ps. Zacharias Rhetor), 56–57, 63–64. For the term Sīsakan and its etymology, see Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4), pp. 160–161; Harut'yunyan, "Dvin-Partav Route" (n. 15), p. 217. On the Arabic sources, see Minorsky, "Caucasica IV" (n. 19), pp. 519, 524, and *Idem, Studies in Caucasian History* (n. 4), pp. 36, 68–72, 69 fn 2.

20 Martin-Hisard, "Les archontes" (n. 14), p. 361 on the date of the chapter; p. 368, for the reproduction of the original text; and pp. 400–406, for a discussion of the political and religious context of this information on Vayots' Dzor specifically and Syunik' more widely.

21 Step'anos Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 300; Minorsky has remarked on the anachronisms in Ōrbēlean's testimony and the difficulty of identifying the "sultan of Khorasan," who in his opinion could be either "some Rawwādī ruler of Tabriz" or "Faḍl I (Shaddadid) of Ganja." See Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (n. 4), p. 70.

22 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 301, 303, 319; Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik'* (n. 4), pp. 58–59; Grigoryan, "The Kingdom of Syunik'" (n. 16), p. 135; Ut'mazyan, *Syunik'* (n. 8), p. 305; T. M. Sahakyan, "Syuniats' t'agavorut'yan himnumə ev nra k'aghak'akan derə xi darum" [The Foundation of the Kingdom of Syunik' and its Political Role in the 11th Century], *Patmbanasirakan handes* [Historical-Philological Journal], 221/2 (1966), pp. 221–228, sp. p. 223.

nearly a century before. In both cases, the process reveals the importance of marriage alliances – and, hence, of elite women – in legitimizing Bagratid expansion to Syuni territories via land ownership rights through the female line. Furthermore, the sponsorship of well-positioned and symbolically important monasteries reassured new lords’ inscription of their names on the local landscape in both cases. In Geghark’unik’, the role of Mariam Bagratuni, daughter of King Ashot I, married to Vasak Gabur’ Syuni, was central. Her foundation of the monastery of the Holy Apostles on the island of Lake Sevan and the latter’s patronage by her father represents an intriguing example of intertwined religious and secular, i.e., dynastic/family, politics.²³ In Vayots’ Dzor King Gagik I Bagratuni (r. 989–1020) ratified his *de facto* conquest of this land through his wife Katranidē (or Kata), who was the only heir of King Vasak (r. 998–1040) of Syunik’. Step’anos Tarōnets’i Asoghik, writing at the turn of the eleventh century, informs us that Gagik I had acquired control over the fortresses in the region by ca 1003. Indeed, Vayots’ Dzor and the neighboring Chahuk are never mentioned as part of the Kingdom of Syunik’ in the sources. In exchange, Queen Kata was instrumental in reinstating the privileges of the bishopric of Syunik’ as a metropolitan see, although she is most famous for her foundation of the celebrated cathedral of Ani. The Bagratid patronage of the monastery of Ts’akhats’ K’ar near Yeghegis underscores their efforts to reshape the sacred landscape in Vayots’ Dzor, in the vicinity of this central place, by leaving visible/legible signs of their presence there. Besides inscriptions left by King Gagik II at Ts’akhat’s K’ar, the architectural style of some of its eleventh-century buildings has been classified as belonging to the “Ani school of architecture,” testifying to the extent of the material traces of this process.²⁴

If non-Armenian sources perceived Vayots’ Dzor as a separate entity from the rest of Syunik’ already in the tenth century, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, its history certainly followed a different path. Its incorporation into Bagratid territories meant that from a central district and a seat of residence of a senior Syuni ruler, it became a periphery, or even something of a marchland of Bagratid Ayrarat, bordering the Muslim Emirates of Dvin and Nakhichevan. The termination of the Bagratid Kingdom and the

Byzantine expansion to its erstwhile territories since the conquest of Ani in 1045, presumably meant that also Vayots’ Dzor passed to Byzantium. The actual workings of Byzantine rule in this easternmost extent of their Armenian domains are not clearly understood. Nor has the topic been the subject of research. Soon after, however, Ani (1064) fell to the Great Seljuk sultan Alp Arslan (r. 1063–1073). In 1064, King Grigor I of Syunik’, too, submitted to the latter with the obligation of paying tribute.²⁵ While Step’anos Örbēlean allows us to trace the history of the Kingdom of Syunik’ during the invasions led by the Seljuks, he sheds only sporadic light on Vayots’ Dzor. Yet, he allows us to reconstruct important episodes from the history of Vayots’ Dzor in the second half of the twelfth century.

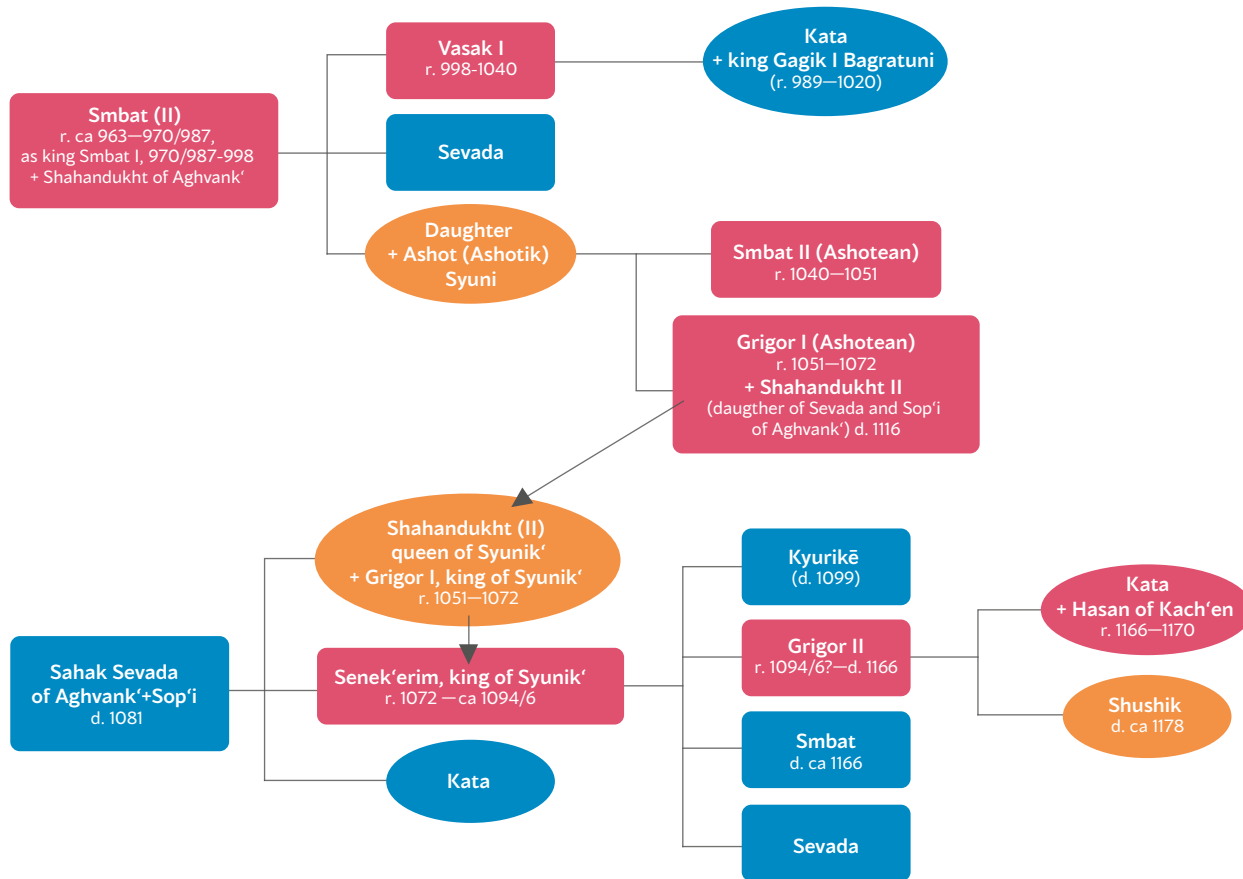
THE SELJUKS IN SYUNIK’ AND THE SPECIAL CASE OF VAYOTS’ DZOR

The senior line of Syuni princes in Vayots’ Dzor came to an end with King Vasak’s death. Just as Vayots’ Dzor had passed to the Bagratids through a female inheritance via Vasak’s daughter Kata, so too did the royal title move to a junior Syuni branch through a female member of the family. Unfortunately, her name has not been recorded, but we know that she was Vasak’s sister. Her two sons were the next two kings of Syunik’: Smbat II (r. 1040–1051) and his younger brother Grigor I (r. 1051–1072) [tab. 2]. This change in

23 Pogossian, “The Monastery of Sevan” (n. 11).

24 Örbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 300, on Kata; on the Bagratid annexation of Vayots’ Dzor and its date, see Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Syunik’* (n. 4), p. 63; Hewsén, *Armenia* (n. 4), p. 119; and Grigoryan, “The Kingdom of Syunik’” (n. 16), p. 137. On Ts’akhats’ K’ar, see Yeghiazaryan, *Monuments* (n. 17), pp. 53–56; and Husik Melkonyan, *Ts’akhats’ K’ar vank’ā (patmahngitakan usumnasirut’yun)* [The Ts’akhats’ K’ar Monastery (a Historical-Archaeological Study)], Yerevan 2024; on its economic importance, see Grigor Grigoryan, *Syunik’i vanakan kalvacatirut’yunā ix–xiii darrerum* [Monastic Estates of Syunik’ in 9th–13th Centuries], Yerevan 1973, pp. 47–48; inscriptions of Gagik II in Sedrak Barkhudaryan, *Divan hay vimagrut’yan. Prak III. Vayots’ Dzor: Yeghegnadzori ev Azizbekovi Shirjanner* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum. Vol. III. Vayots’ Dzor: Districts of Yeghegnadzor and Azizbekov], Yerevan 1967, p. 146, (henceforth: CIA, vol. III). See also Michele Nuccioti, “Light Archaeologies and Territorial Histories of Medieval Yeghegis” in this volume, pp. 82–108.

25 Sargis Bořnazyan, *Hayastanā ev seljuknerā xi–xii dd.* [Armenia and the Seljuks in the 11th–12th Centuries], Yerevan 1980, sp. pp. 101–102; Andrew Peacock, “Nomadic Society and the Seljuk Campaigns in Caucasia”, *Iran and the Caucasus*, 9/2 (2005), pp. 205–230, sp. pp. 213–214, for the second half of the eleventh century; and pp. 227–228, for a chronological list of conquests; *Idem*, *The Great Seljuk Empire*, Edinburgh 2015, pp. 43–82.



[tab. 2] A genealogical table of Syuni kings, 10th–13th centuries

GENEALOGICAL TABLE 2: kings of Syunik' based on Grigor Grigoryan, "Syunik'i t'agavorut'yunə (x–xii darer)" [The Kingdom of Syunik' (x–xii cc.)], *Patmabanasirakan handes* [Historical Journal], 2 (2006), pp. 134–145, sp. pp. 138–144 and p. 144 for an up-to-date chronological list of kings.

Kings of Syunik' are marked in pink, succession through the female line is marked in orange.

r = years of rule; d = year of death; + spouse

the Syuni line corresponds to a change in the royal burial grounds, although the significance of this shift has not been investigated. While Kings Smbat I and Vasak were buried in the prestigious and traditional site of Tat'ew along with generations of senior Syuni princes, starting with Smbat II, the Syuni kings were interred in the especially built monastery of Vahanavank'/Hovhannavank'.²⁶ Nevertheless, the kings of Syunik' never ceased their patronage and support of the Tat'ew Monastery, which thrived under their rule.

Grigor I married Shahandukht (d. 1116), the daughter of Sop'i and Sevada from the prominent princely

house of Khach'en in Arts'akh. The couple did not have a male heir; therefore, the crown passed to Shahandukht's younger brother Senek'erim (1072–1094 or 1096), once more in succession through the female line.²⁷ Shahandukht's importance and her role in legitimizing her brother's rule are highlighted by

²⁶ Grigoryan, *Kingdom* (n. 16), pp. 137–138.

²⁷ See Hakobyan, *The Kingdom of Sunik'* (n. 4); Grigoryan, *Kingdom* (n. 16), sp. pp. 138–144, on which this paragraph is based; and p. 144, for a chronological listing of Syunik's kings based on written sources and epigraphical evidence. The year of Shahandukht's death seems to be too late, following Grigoryan. Limitations of space do not allow me to analyze these dates, but they do deserve a separate treatment.

her frequent mention in Senek'erim's monastic donations.²⁸ King Senek'erim's rule signals a deepening political shift whose signs may be discerned already at the coronation of the first King of Syunik' Smbat I, but which will characterize the history of Syunik' during the next three centuries. Due to the tectonic changes in the political landscape set in motion by the Seljuk conquests, Byzantium, which had not given up hope of extending its influence to Syunik' and more specifically Vayots' Dzor at the end of the tenth century, completely ceased to be of relevance in the local affairs of this region of Armenia. On the contrary, the sources of political authority with which rulers of Syunik' had to negotiate between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries were Muslim (Iranian, Kurdish, Türkmen), later Mongol (Islamized from the fourteenth century onward), and located in such urban centers as Tabriz, Isfahan, Nakhichevan, Dvin, or the distant region of Khorasan. The episode of King Senek'erim's murder itself was the result of an *imbroglio* between local Christian and Muslim rulers competing for power and landholdings in a new context.²⁹

Thanks to Step'anos Örbëlean's *History*, we can trace the situation in the Kingdom of Syunik' after the Seljuk conquests. Due to King Senek'erim's clever military and diplomatic maneuvers, particularly his personal embassy to Isfahan and an agreement reached with Sultan Malikshäh, Syunik' weathered some of the worst devastations compared to other parts of Armenia. Yet, soon after Malikshäh's death, Senek'erim also fell victim to a ruse (ca 1094 or 1096), which presumably involved Malikshäh's erstwhile cup-bearer Ch'ort'man, as well as the Armenian Prince Grigor Apiratean from Ani, whose role, however, is a matter of conjecture.³⁰ As the Kingdom of Syunik' disintegrated and finally came to an end ca 1170, a different fate befell Vayots' Dzor. Here, Bishop Hovhannës Kapants'i (d. before 1168) transformed a holy site in a small river gorge dedicated to St Phokas and the Holy Precursor (St John the Baptist) into a major ecclesiastical center and a bishopric known as Noravank' (lit. "new monastery"). Hovhannës moved to Vayots' Dzor from Vahanavank', where he was the abbot. In the narrow valley of Gnishik, he first set visible boundaries around the estates that belonged (or that he claimed belonged) to the holy site. Because this arrangement was far from the liking of local lords, particularly some that seem to have been

connected to the Seljuks, he travelled to Isfahan twice in the 1120s to meet the Sultan Maḥmud (II), son of Muḥammad Tapar (r. 1118–1131), receiving a *manshur* and a *farman*. These sultanic documents confirmed his jurisdiction over lands in the vicinity of said gorge, as well as some villages and fortresses further afield in Vayots' Dzor. The monastic complex that eventually emerged there came to be known as Noravank'. Bishop Hovhannës Kapants'i's successor, Bishop Step'anos III (1168–1216), was equally active in promoting the special, protected status of the Noravank' Monastery and its sacred possessions. In the meantime, the Great Seljuk Sultanate had broken up into smaller entities, and the real power in the region was held by the Seljuks' *atabegs* – the Eldigüzids. Bishop Step'anos III established excellent personal relations with the Eldigüzids, even receiving an honorific title, "Fakhrelmseh" (Fakhr al-Masiḥ) or "glory of Christ (Messiah)," and was closely familiar with their court etiquette. These qualities will be fundamental for Step'anos' involvement in the rise of the Örbëlean dynasty in Syunik', as we shall see below.

This was the religious and political landscape in Vayots' Dzor when the Örbëlean and Khaghbakean-Prosheans princes emerged on the stage of history as the rulers of this region. They will have to face and adapt to a new formidable power: the Mongol Empire. The main portion and remainder of this paper is dedicated to the intermingled history and dominance of these two families in Vayots' Dzor. The posed question is: How did each family legitimize its rule in Vayots' Dzor, given the region's history, the traces of this history in the local landscape, and the pre-existent dynamics of power into which they had to inscribe themselves? In each case, I follow and highlight the differences in their strategic choices of rulership and legitimation, their relationships with local, regional, and continental players, and the policies and actions they undertook for anchoring their presence in Vayots' Dzor.

28 Örbëlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 322–328.

29 This is discussed in detail in Sergio La Porta, "You say Albanian, I say Armenian: Discourses of Ethnicity and Power around an Albanian King of Armenia", in *Caucasian Albania: An International Handbook*, Jost Gippert, Jasmine Dum-Tragut eds, Berlin 2023, pp. 515–536; and Pogossian, "Princes, Queens, Bishops, Sultans" (n. 10), pp. 221–227.

30 La Porta, "Discourses of Ethnicity" (n. 29); Pogossian "Princes, Queens, Bishops, Sultans" (n. 10).

PART II NEW FAMILIES, NEW TERRITORIAL CLAIMS: THE ŌRBĒLEANS AND KHAGHBAKEAN-PRŌSHEANS IN SYUNIK'

The appearance of the Ōrbĕleans and Khaghbakeans in Syunik' is linked to the conquest of this land, along with many other territories in historical Armenia, by the celebrated Zak'arid brothers Zak'arĕ and Ivanĕ (known as Mxargrdzeli in Georgian sources), who fought under the suzerainty of the Georgian King Georgi III (r. 1156–1184) and, later, his daughter, Queen Tamar (r. 1184–1213).³¹ The gradual preeminence of the Ōrbĕleans over the Khaghbakeans in the course of the thirteenth century was also due to such global events as the Mongol conquests and a completely altered balance of powers in eastern and western Asia. Each of the two families played their hand with varying degrees of success, navigating between a series of religious and political actors – from local bishops to the Mongol khans. The history of the relationship of the Ōrbĕleans and Khaghbakean-Prosheans is impossible to separate from the regional and global history of the time, as the discussion below sets forth. For the Ōrbĕlean family, we are exceptionally lucky to possess one of the most detailed and reliable accounts of medieval Armenian historiography, the work of Step'anos Ōrbĕlean. The positive bias that the historian harbored in favor of his own family in no way diminishes the significance of his work. On the contrary, no such dynastic history exists for the Khaghbakeans, and numerous details regarding their rule in Vayots' Dzor or elsewhere are lost to us. However, we are fortunate to have the magisterial three-volume study on this family by one of the founders of Armenology, Bishop Garegin Yovsĕp'ean. Yovsĕp'ean painstakingly collected, deciphered, and analyzed a variety of sources on the family – their artistic and architectural legacy, colophons, inscriptions, notices in historiography, and church councils – and published a comprehensive history of the Khaghbakean-Prosheans that remains unsurpassed to this day.³²

The centralizing efforts of the (Georgian) Bagratid King David IV the Builder (r. 1073–1125), the break-up of the Great Seljuk Empire after the death of Malikshāh (1092) and the turmoil caused in the balance of powers in the Near East due to the First

Crusade, created favorable conditions for the ascent of the Kingdom of Georgia as a regional power at the very end of the eleventh and throughout the twelfth century. This time is generally considered the golden age of medieval Georgia.³³ The Zak'arid conquest of Syunik' in the first decade of the thirteenth century led to the creation of new local elites – their clients, foremost among them the Ōrbĕleans and Khaghbakean-Prosheans. Yet, the Zak'arids' gradual acquisition of ever greater preeminence along with extended landholdings in historical Armenia was a double-edged sword both for them and the Georgian crown, although for different reasons for each side. The Zak'arids employed various means for asserting their independence from the Georgian court, especially since the death of Queen Tamar in 1213, whereas the Georgian court, naturally, wished to reverse this process, not least by supporting other, competing families whose increasing importance could curb Zak'arid ambitions.³⁴

Ivanĕ Zak'arid, who was in charge of Syunik', placed some of its regions, such as Vayots' Dzor, under the rule of Liparit Ōrbĕlean, on the one hand, and Vasak Khaghbakean, on the other. These two figures not only came from different geographical

31 There is abundant literature on the history of the Zak'arids/Mkhargdzelis, their origin, origin myths and their conquests. I refer the reader to Sergio La Porta, "The Kingdom and the Sultanate were Conjoined: Legitimizing Land and Power in Armenia during the 12th and early 13th Centuries," *Revue des études arméniennes*, 34 (2012), pp. 73–118; Zaroui Pogossian, "Women, Identity, and Power: A Review Essay of Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World*", *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā*, 27 (2019), pp. 233–266, for essential information and further bibliography, see particularly studies of Hayrapet Margarian.

32 Ōrbĕlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 353–509; Garegin Yovsĕp'ean, *Khaghbakeank' kam Prosheank' hayots' patmut'ean mej* [Khaghbakeans and Prosheans in the History of the Armenians], vol. 1, Vagharshapat [Ejmiatsin] 1928, vol. II, Jerusalem 1944, vol. III, New York 1942/3.

33 Hayrapet Margarian, *Hyusisayin Hayastani ev Vrastani ŽB dari patmut'yan mi k'ani harts'er* [Some Questions on the History of Northern Armenia and Georgia During the 12th Century], Yerevan 1980, pp. 51–59, who discusses also the internal socio-political situation in Georgia and the centralizing efforts of the Bagratid King David IV the Builder. See also Roin Metreveli, *The Golden Age: Georgia from the 11th Century to the First Quarter of the 13th Century*, Tbilisi 2010; and concise but to the point observations in Stephen Rapp, Jr., "Georgia before the Mongols", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, Oxford 2017, available online (<https://oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-282>) [accessed on March 4, 2022].

34 La Porta, *Kingdom and Sultanate* (n. 31), pp. 92–95, 100–102, 105, 108; Pogossian, "Women, Identity, Power" (n. 31), pp. 242–243.

areas, but also from very different backgrounds and networks of power.

THE FIRST ÖRBĒLEANS

The ÖrbĒleans of Syunik' issued from one of the most powerful Georgian noble families of the twelfth century – the Örbelis. Despite the historian Step'anos ÖrbĒlean's claim of his dynasty's ancient Chinese origins, written records on the Örbelis start from 1118 and indicate the fortress Örbet', and then Lori in northern Armenia as their seat of power, whereas the dynastic burial grounds were in the monastery of Bet'anġa near Tbilisi.³⁵ In the course of the twelfth century, the Örbelis acquired sufficient political weight to challenge the royal authority itself. IvanĒ Örbeli, who married into the Kyurikid branch of the Armenian Bagratids and likely aspired to create an independent domain for himself with a base in Ani, led a revolt against the Georgian King Georgi III in 1177. Its various stages and reasons have been discussed in scholarship, and most recently minutely revisited by Sergio La Porta.³⁶ There is, thus, no need to recount the details here. The aftermath of the rebellion, however, is directly relevant to this paper as it provides the necessary background for understanding the establishment of the ÖrbĒleans in Syunik'.

A long-term consequence of the rebellion was the complete reversal of the hierarchical relationship between the Zak'arids and the ÖrbĒleans in the thirteenth century. A more immediate outcome was the Örbelis' coalition with the Eldigüzids. As King Georgi's forces besieged IvanĒ Örbeli in his fortress Lori in the winter of 1177, IvanĒ sent his brother Liparit to Gandzak to ask for assistance from Qizil Arslan (r. 1186–1191), the junior son of the *Atabeg* Shams al-Dġn Eldigüz, who ruled in Tabriz at that time, while his elder brother Jahġn Pahlawġn (r. 1175–1186) succeeded his father as the senior ruler.³⁷ The Eldigüzid contingents never engaged in fighting at Lori, because by the time they reached it, the failure of the Örbelis was judged inevitable and a military intervention futile. Rightly fearing reprisals on the part of King Georgi III, IvanĒ's brother Liparit and his sons Yelikum and IvanĒ found refuge in the Eldigüzid court. After crushing the rebellion, the remaining Örbelis were, indeed, severely punished – mutilated or assassinated. Although sources may exaggerate the extent and thoroughness of this repression. The younger

IvanĒ, who had fled to Gandzak, returned to Georgia at the accession of Queen Tamar and revived the dynasty there, while his brother Yelikum remained with the Eldigüzids and excelled in his military and political career, according to the dynastic historian Step'anos ÖrbĒlean. Eventually, he established himself in Nakhichevan, whence his son fled to Vayots' Dzor, and the Armenian branch of the ÖrbĒleans takes its origin from this Yelikum (t) [tab. 3].³⁸ The downfall of the Örbelis in Georgia led to the growing importance of the brothers Zak'arĒ and IvanĒ Zak'arids, who acquired not only the lands but also the offices of the Örbelis, whose subordinates they were prior to the rebellion of 1177.

YELIKUM I: THE FOREFATHER OF THE ARMENIAN ÖRBĒLEANS AND HIS SON LIPARIT

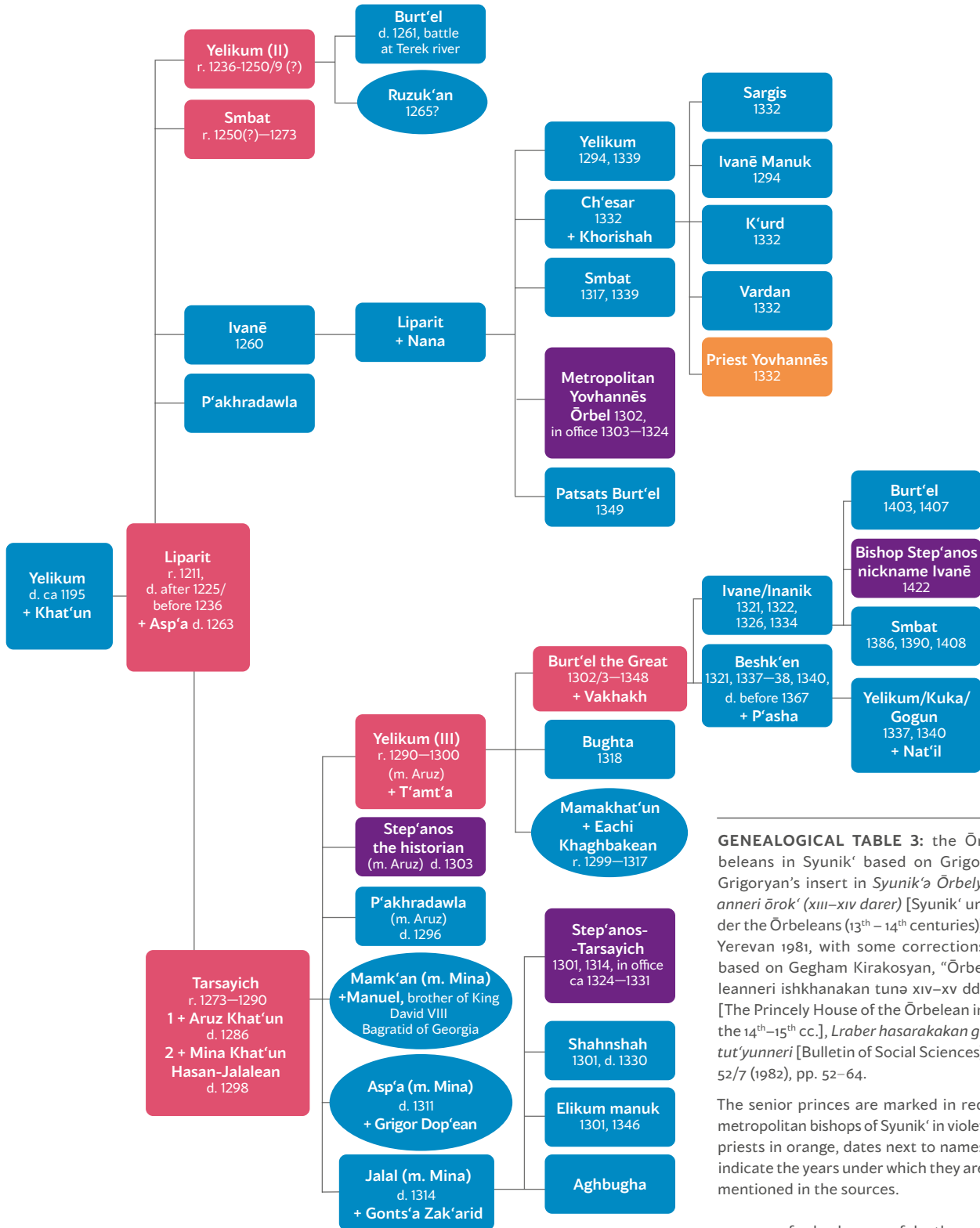
If we believe Step'anos ÖrbĒlean, Yelikum, who remained in "Persia," was honored by the *Atabeg* Shams al-Dġn Eldigüz (who, however, had died in 1175), as well as his sons Jahġn Pahlawġn and Qizil Arslan. After having served as the "emir and governor" of the great cities of Rayy, Isfahan, and Qazvin for twelve years, Yelikum requested territories for himself in the region of Nakhichevan, and, in response, received the fortresses of Yernjak and Chahuk

35 Margarian, *Northern Armenia and Georgia* (n. 33), pp. 152–153. For critical remarks on the legend of the Örbelis' Chinese origin, which is based on the origin myth of another potent family of Late Antique Armenia – the Mamikoneans, see Nicholas Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian. The Political Conditions Based on the Naxarar System*, Nina Garsoġan trans., Lisbon 1970, p. 313.

36 See a detailed exposition in Margarian, *Northern Armenia and Georgia* (n. 33), pp. 147–224; Grigor Grigoryan, *Syunik' ă ÖrbĒlyan-neri ărok' (xiii–xiv darer)* [Syunik' under the ÖrbĒleans (13th–14th c.)], Yerevan 1981, pp. 23–30; for a reappraisal of the motivations and internal dynamics of this rebellion, see Sergio La Porta, "Lineage, Legitimacy, and Loyalty in Post-Seljuk Armenia: A Reassessment of the Sources of the Failed ÖrbĒlean Revolt against King Georgi III of Georgia", *Revue des études armĒniennes*, 31 (2008–2009), pp. 127–165, with a critical review of the earlier literature.

37 Clifford E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties A Chronological and Genealogical Manual*, Edinburgh 1996, p. 123; Peacock, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (n. 25), p. 324. ÖrbĒlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 390 erroneously identifies the ruler as Eldigüz himself, but in 1177 the latter was dead. See La Porta, "Lineage, Legitimacy" (n. 36), p. 151 fn. 98, and p. 153, for evidence from a contemporary colophon, which challenges Step'anos ÖrbĒlean's evidence. However, as La Porta remarks, there may have been an earlier Örbeli embassy to Shams ad-Din Eldigüz himself, headed by IvanĒ's brother Liparit. Step'anos ÖrbĒlean probably conflated the two separate missions.

38 ÖrbĒlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 392–397; Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the ÖrbĒleans* (n. 36), p. 32.



GENEALOGICAL TABLE 3: the Ōrbeleians in Syunik' based on Grigor Grigoryan's insert in *Syunik'ā Ōrbelyanneri ōrok' (xiii–xiv darer)* [*Syunik' under the Ōrbeleians (13th – 14th centuries)*], Yerevan 1981, with some corrections based on Gegham Kirakosyan, "Ōrbeleanneri ishkanakan tunə xiv–xv dd." [The Princely House of the Ōrbelean in the 14th–15th cc.], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri* [Bulletin of Social Sciences], 52/7 (1982), pp. 52–64.

The senior princes are marked in red, metropolitans of Syunik' in violet, priests in orange, dates next to names indicate the years under which they are mentioned in the sources.

r = years of rule; d = year of death; m = mother; + spouse

[tab. 3] A genealogical table of the Ōrbēleians, 13th–15th centuries

in the homonymous regions, as well as the locality of K'alarah in Nakhichevan [map 2]. Step'anos Ōrbēlean explains Yelikum's request to move to Nakhichevan by his desire to avoid marriage to the family of the sultan and, thus, conversion to Islam. Yelikum camouflaged his real intentions by expressing a desire to be closer to his homeland, from where he could take revenge against the Kingdom of Georgia.³⁹ This romanticizing justification is certainly aimed at minimizing the significance of Yelikum's later conversion to Islam while he was severely ill, as per Step'anos, and a subsequent repentance and re-conversion to Christianity.

It is not easy to date Yelikum's transfer to Nakhichevan. On one hand, Step'anos Ōrbēlean explicitly states that Yelikum spent twelve years at the service of the Eldigūzids, which, counting from the year of the rebellion, would take us to 1190. On the other hand, the story implies that Shams al-Dīn was still alive (d. 1175). He urged his son Qizil Arslan, to whom he had entrusted "Atrpatakan, Arān and Nakhichevan," to take care of Yelikum like a father to a son.⁴⁰ Whether this is due to the conflation of two missions to the Eldigūzids in which Yelikum took part remains unclear to me, but his move to Nakhichevan must have taken place around 1190, thus, under Qizil Arslan and during a time of strife between the latter's supporters and those of his brother's widow, Īnānj Khatun, whom Qizil Arslan later married.⁴¹ That this is the likely year is also supported by Step'anos Ōrbēlean's allusion to pressures on Yelikum on the "part of the sultan" to marry into the sultan's family and convert to Islam. A few lines above, Ōrbēlean employs correctly the term *atabeg* to speak of Shams ad-Din; the reference to a "sultan" may belong to that brief window of time when Shams al-Dīn's son Qizil Arslan assumed the title "sultan" and, before his assassination, likely organized by Īnānj Khatun, in 1191.⁴² This was also a period of an increasingly aggressive policy of military expansion adopted by Queen Tamar of Georgia. The military campaigns were carried out by Zak'arē and Ivanē Zak'arids, into formerly (Armenian) Bagratid and Artsruni territories to the detriment of the Shaddādids of Ani and the Eldigūzids of Gandzak.⁴³ Thus, dispatching Yelikum to Nakhichevan suited both parties: it created a new base for Yelikum, whereas Qizil Arslan could count on him as a natural ally against the Georgian monarchy. Upon his establishment in Nakhichevan, Yelikum immediately started

weaving a network of local connections, carefully choosing his interlocutors.

Indeed, from Step'anos Ōrbēlean's account, it would follow that Yelikum's first preoccupation was to find a suitable wife. This was surely one of the most important means of legitimizing one's authority in a new territory, adopted by the previous generation of Georgian and Armenian upwardly mobile military men, often claiming ancient lineages, in a post-Seljuk context.⁴⁴ Tellingly, in Yelikum's case, the choice fell on Khat'un, the sister of the Bishop Step'anos (III), whom we have seen above, connected to the monastery of Noravank'. Thus, despite Step'anos Ōrbēlean's claim that Yelikum could not find "Christian women suitable to his rank" and therefore settled for a relative of a bishop and that "the spiritual rank is higher than [his]," other factors must have influenced this decision, too.⁴⁵ In fact, this was Yelikum's entry into the ranks of local elites via a marriage into an ecclesiastical "dynasty" firmly established in Vayots' Dzor with a history of good relations with the Eldigūzids. Although the situation soon changed yet again as the Eldigūzids slowly lost their hegemony in the region, Yelikum's choice proved to be vital for the future role of the Ōrbēleans in Vayots' Dzor and the survival of his son Liparit (I).

Liparit's childhood and youth were full of vicissitudes. His father Yelikum died soon after his birth, at a battle near Gandzak, according to

39 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 392–393.

40 *Ibidem*, p. 393.

41 On the double mission to the Eldigūzids, see La Porta, "Lineage, Legitimacy" (n. 36), pp. 153–154. This is based on an inscription at Noravank'. However, it is worth noting, that Step'anos Ōrbēlean's reproduction of the inscription differs from the original which is extant. Step'anos speaks of Yelikum's mission to "the atabeg Yeltkuz" in singular (առ աթաբեկն Ելտկուզ), but the actual inscription employs the plural, as if referring to the "house of Eldikūz", i.e., his progeny: "ի տոռնն աթաբալ Էլտկուզաց." For a parallel reproduction of the two sources, see Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), p. 48.

42 On the Eldigūzids, see M. Bala, "Ildeñiz", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2 ed., vol. III, Leiden/London 1986, p. 110; Clifford Bosworth, "Ildeñizids or Eldigūzids", *Ibidem*, pp. 110–113; K. Luther, "Atābakān-e Ādarbāyjan", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, available online (<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/atabakan-e-adarbayjan>) [accessed on January 21, 2022].

43 La Porta, "The Kingdom and the Sultanate" (n. 31), pp. 83–84.

44 For the importance of women in this new situation and other examples of dynastic legitimation via marriage and female members of certain new lineages, see La Porta, "Lineage and Legitimacy" (n. 36), p. 88; Pogossian, "Women Identity, Power" (n. 31), pp. 240–247.

45 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 342, 393–394.

Step'anos Ōrbēlean. This must be related to the various military clashes in the region of Gandzak in 1193–1195 between Abū Bakr b. Jahān Pahlavān Eldigüz (r. 1191–1210) and his rivals, which, at some point, included also the participation of the Georgians who raided Gandzak, Arts'akh, and Syunik'.⁴⁶ Upon this, his mother Khat'un was "abducted" by an unnamed Muslim potentate who married her, and, thus, Liparit grew up as a Muslim "in this foreign household for more than ten years."⁴⁷ Step'anos Ōrbēlean connects his liberation to Zak'arē and Ivanē Zak'arids' conquest of "the whole land" (of Syunik'). It started during the rule of Queen Tamar and her son, co-regent Georgi Lasha, i.e., after 1207, and was completed in 1211. When Liparit fled the household of his (unnamed) adopted father in Nakhichevan, he was between fifteen and twenty-one years old, likely closer to fifteen.⁴⁸ His emancipation was in some way due to his (maternal) uncle Bishop Step'anos III's good relations with "the house of the *atabeg* and all his men, especially those who were in Nakhichevan," thus, the Eldigüzids and their subjects. The bishop managed to take his sister and her son to Vayots' Dzor, where Ivanē Zak'arid met Liparit "with unspeakable joy."⁴⁹ Let us remark that based on this romanticized episode, one gets the impression that Bishop Step'anos had almost free access to the residence of the *atabegs* or their subjects in Nakhichevan, which stands in contrast to the situation of "imprisonment" of Liparit and his mother Khat'un as recounted by Step'anos Ōrbēlean.

Like in his father's case, Liparit's marriage too was a vital political matter, especially in light of his rather weak position in Syunik'. Ivanē Zak'arid's plan of creating a matrimonial alliance with Liparit through his daughter T'amt'a and, thus, strengthening *his* (Ivanē's) presence in Syunik', was thwarted by another high-standing courtier and military man – Buba or Bupak (from Abu Bakr?). One could well imagine the Georgian royal court behind the instigation of such rivalries, who did not wish to see yet another military dynasty – the Zak'arids – gain too strong a foothold in the territories of former Armenian kingdoms with all the possible negative consequences for the Georgian monarchy. This was the case a few decades earlier with the Ōrbelis. In direct competition with Ivanē and by "cheating Liparit through enticing words," Bupak arranged Liparit's

marriage to his own daughter, the "multiply blessed and beautiful" Asp'a.⁵⁰ Bupak was among the military commanders who aided Ivanē during the conquest of Syunik'. He appears in an inscription from 1211 at the monastery of Hayravank' near the eastern shore of Lake Sevan, the region of Geghark'unik', as "the lord of the land," and was among those high-ranking individuals who adjudicated the fate of a True Cross relic litigated between Liparit Ōrbēlean, Vasak Khaghbakean, and Ivanē Zak'arid (to be discussed below). Judging from his possessions and donations to religious establishments around Lake Sevan (in Geghark'unik') and other parts of Syunik', Bupak's position *vis-à-vis* the Zak'arids must have been at least ambiguous, if not downright adversarial, when contracting a marriage alliance with Liparit.⁵¹

Liparit, like his father Yelikum, strengthened his authority and held parts of Vayots' Dzor by reinforcing his position through a marriage alliance and by performing pious donations. His connection to the land was guaranteed through his maternal line, first via his uncle bishop Step'anos III and later through Step'anos' successor in 1216, Bishop Sargis. The latter was Step'anos' nephew, too (sister's son), and thus Liparit's first cousin on the maternal side. The ordination of Liparit's cousin Sargis as bishop of Noravank' in 1216 coincided with two other

46 La Porta, "The Kingdom and the Sultanate" (n. 31), p. 84.

47 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 395.

48 *Ibidem*, p. 392, on the conquest of Syunik' among other territories of historical Armenia. I calculate Liparit's age based on the possible date of his birth between 1190 and 1195, when his father died. Ōrbēlean mentions that at that time Liparit "was a little infant," see *Ibidem*, p. 395; Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), p. 46, dates the "terrible battle of Gandzak" to 1184 without providing enough evidence. If so, Liparit must have been born in 1184 the latest and could hardly be considered "a boy" (տղայ) if he was aged 27 at the time of his liberation.

49 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 396; Kirakos Gandzakets'i, *Patmut' iwn Hayots'* [History of the Armenians], Yerevan 1961, p. 163.

50 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 396–397.

51 Regarding Bubak', see Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), p. 47. The inscription from Hayravank' is published in Sedrak Barkhudaryan, *Divan Hay Vimagrut'yan. iv Prak. Geghark'unik': Kamoyi, Martunu ev Vardenisi shrjanner* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum. Vol. iv. Geghark'unik': Districts of Kamo, Martuni and Vardenis], Yerevan 1973, p. 69, no 261 (henceforth: *CA*, vol. iv). See also Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 353–354, 357. Ivanē's daughter T'amt'a had an eventful life that spanned the entire Eurasian continent. For a reconstruction, see Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia*, Cambridge 2017, with precisions and critique in Pogossian, "Women, Identity, Power" (n. 31).

remarkable and inter-connected events in Vayots' Dzor. Sargis, with the support of Liparit, laid the foundation of a new building in the Noravank' monastic complex – the church of St Stephen the Protomartyr (of Noravank') – which took seven years to complete.

THE FATE OF THE TRUE CROSS RELIC OF NORAVANK': A CASE OF LOCAL MULTIPLICITIES AND DYNAMICS OF POWER

Shortly before 1216, when the previous Bishop Step'anos III was still alive, the newly ordained co-Bishop Sargis set out to reacquire a relic of the True Cross. Intriguingly, Step'anos III had pawned it together with two exquisite ceremonial crosses to a Bishop Petros from the monastery of Otsop' in the neighboring region of Shahaponk'. Ominously, Otsop' was in the domains of Vasak Khaghbakean – the Ōrbēlean's rival. Vasak had removed the relic and the other crosses, donating the True Cross to Ivanē Zak'arid and depositing the ceremonial crosses in his own monastery of Kech'aruyk' (Kech'aris) [map 3].⁵² The torturous story of Liparit's final acquisition and donation of the relic to the monastery of Noravank' is a most eloquent example of inter-religious and inter-ethnic entanglements in Vayots' Dzor. It involved regional Christian and Muslim, Armenian, Georgian, and Seljuk-related military and religious elites, as set forth below.

Sometime in 1216, Bishop Sargis appealed to his cousin Liparit to purchase the relic of the True Cross back from Ivanē Zak'arid. With the requested sum (500 *dahekans*) and “the writing of his uncle Step'anos,” which probably documented the original ownership of the relic and conditions of the pawn, Sargis went to meet Ivanē. The latter was in the midst of besieging the fortress Ch'arek' (east of Lake Sevan). We learn that Liparit's father-in-law, Bupak', supported Liparit and Bishop Sargis. Yet, Ivanē was not happy with the sum. He added another condition: the fall of the fortress as a divine sign that would seal the transfer of the relic as an act pleasing to God. Sure enough, the fortress fell, and Sargis was granted the True Cross. There seems to be a missing link in the story, because Sargis's actions after the acquisition of the relic are not clear. We learn that, instead of 500, Liparit in fact had to pay 1000 *dahekans* due to lingering disagreements. At some point, Liparit, together with his son

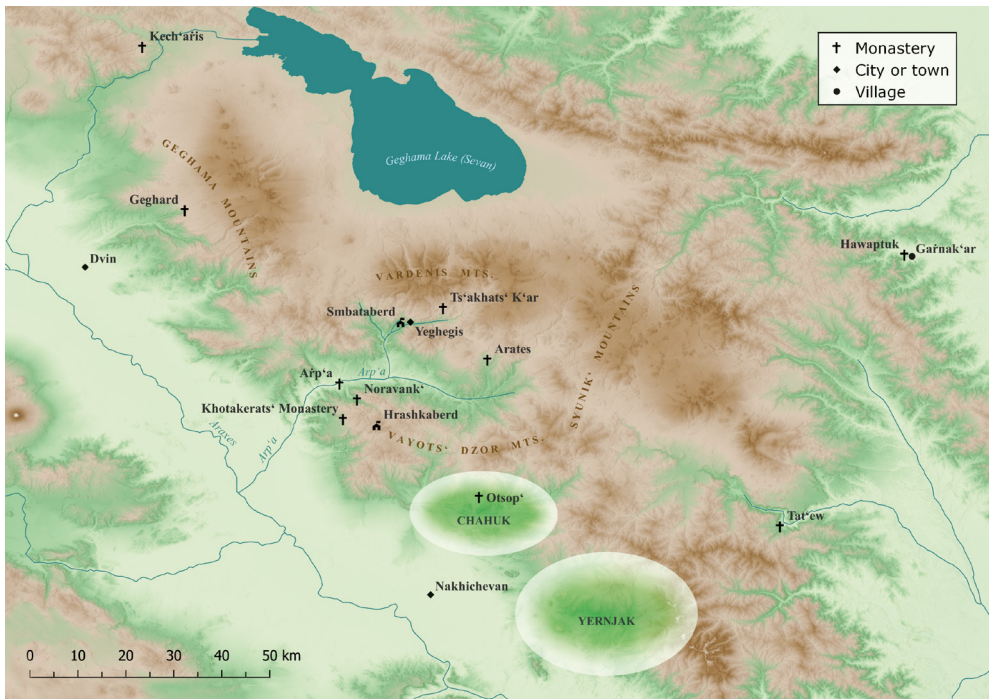
Yelikum (II), the Bishop Sargis, and Bishop Hovhannēs of Tat'ew, had to travel to Dvin to meet Ivanē yet again. It was on this occasion that a council was convened with a most unusual composition: prominent Armenian and Georgian military leaders, religious heads, among whom abbots of monasteries and bishops, and, intriguingly, the qadis of Tiflis, Ani, and Dvin, and the “shaikh of Surmalu.”

Step'anos Ōrbēlean does not comment on the surprising composition of the assembly and the presence of Muslim religious personalities when deciding the fate of a relic of the True Cross, which hardly appealed to Muslim religious sensibilities. It is possible that their involvement bestowed an aura of impartiality and a perceived objectivity to the legal outcome regarding property rights. Indeed, the court's final verdict draws parallels between the acquisition of a relic and the rights of its acquirer to a man who liberates a “prisoner of war” whose fate henceforward depends on the liberator. Through this kind of analogical reasoning, the assembly at Dvin confirmed Liparit's right of ownership of the relic. Perhaps it was on this occasion that Liparit paid the additional 500 *dahekans* to Ivanē. Only upon this final approval of the multi-religious and multi-ethnic jury did Bishop Sargis, with the help of Liparit, return to Vayots' Dzor. Thereupon, they laid the foundations of the church of St Stephen the Protomartyr in Noravank' and deposited the True Cross relic there. It is known as the Senior Holy Sign (սուսո Սուրբ Դշան) in the sources. Sargis officiated at the inauguration of the church (in 1223), and Liparit left a still extant foundation inscription, reproduced in the *History* of Step'anos Ōrbēlean (with some differences). Sure enough, Liparit's father-in-law, Bupak', was among the donors of the newly founded church, too.⁵³

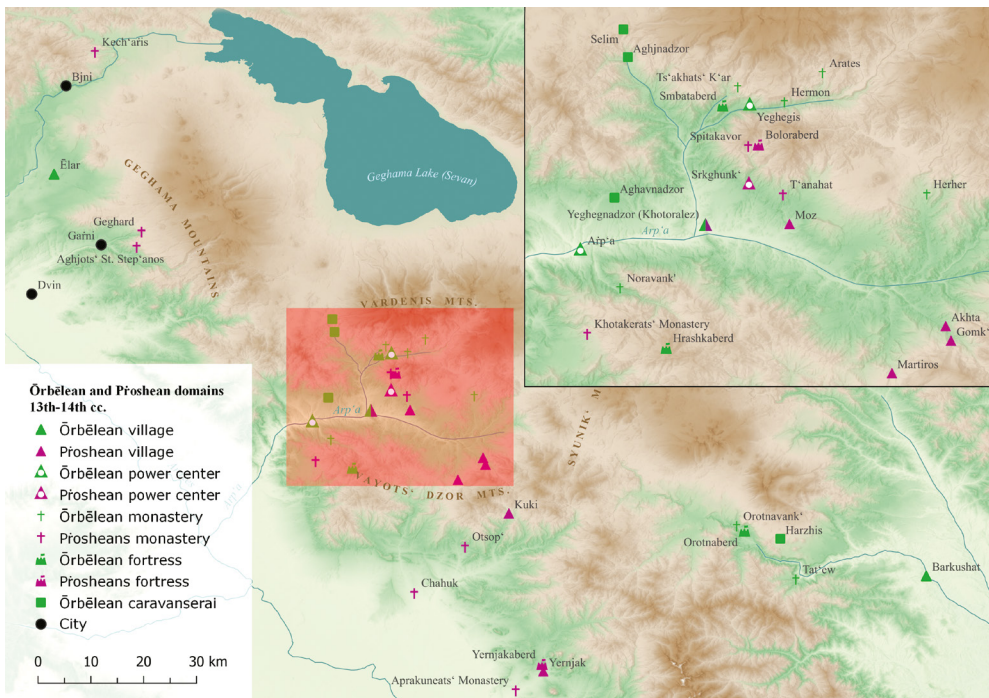
Liparit's foundation inscription on the church of St Stephen in Noravank' is our window for

52 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 352–353.

53 *Ibidem*, pp. 353–356; Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III. (n. 24). The inscription has the year 1221, while Step'anos Ōrbēlean gives 1223 as the foundation date, see Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 358–359. This difference probably reflects the time gap between the finalization of the construction and the actual inauguration ceremony, respectively. For the significance of Noravank' as a site of Ōrbēlean dynastic memory, see Isabelle Augé, “Les lieux de mémoire des princes Ōrbēlean: Mémoire écrite, mémoire inscrite”, in *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Mahé* (Travaux et Mémoires 18), Aram Mardirosian, Agnès Ouzounian, Constantin Zuckerman eds, Paris 2014, pp. 65–82.



[map 2] A map of Syunik' and its regions, ca 12th–13th century. Prepared by Leonardo Squilloni



[map 3] A map of Örbëlean and Pröshean possessions in Syunik', ca 13th–14th century. Prepared by Leonardo Squilloni

understanding his “ideology” of rulership and perceived rights to the land. Although he acknowledges that it was Ivanē Zak’arid who granted him estates in Vayots’ Dzor and elsewhere, he also emphasizes that he received this territory in exchange for the Ōrbelis’ confiscated possessions in Georgia. Furthermore, Step’anos Ōrbēlean specifies that it was King Georgi Lasha, first, and Ivanē *atabeg*, second, to appoint Liparit the ruler of the land (լորդսւսլլալ ալսւ աշխարհի), along with Vasak of Khach’en (i.e., Khaghbakean). Thus, Liparit had to balance his relationship with the Zak’arids, the Khaghbakeans, and, most importantly, the Georgian court, whose massacre of his family a generation earlier he had hardly forgotten. In the inscription, he emphasized his conversion to the “faith of St Gregory,” a statement that may have polemically alluded to Ivanē Zak’arid’s abandoning of the Armenian Church in order to adopt the (Georgian) Chalcedonian confession, a point that certainly had reverberations among the local Armenian population, particularly the clergy. In addition, evoking St Gregory cautiously hinted at Liparit’s independence from Georgia at least in spiritual matters, too.⁵⁴ He also did not fail to highlight his acquisition and deposition of the Senior Holy Sign in the new construction.

Thus, everything was in place to render Liparit as a splendid, fully legitimate, pious lord of Vayots’ Dzor, with strong local connections due to his mother and wider regional ties due to his wife. Furthermore, he appeared as a generous patron of Vayots’ Dzor’s growing spiritual center and the latter’s precious relic – the Noravank’ Monastery. It so happened that Liparit did not live much after this new construction, but the foundations he laid guaranteed the longevity and preeminence of the Ōrbēleans in this part of Armenia for centuries to come. Liparit was still alive and participated in the battle of Garni (1224) between the host of Jalāl al-Dīn Khwārazmshāh and Ivanē Zak’arid, but it was his eldest son Yelikum (II) who headed the family during the Mongol incursions of 1236.⁵⁵

The protracted story of the relic of the True Cross known as the Senior Holy Sign, in connection with the joint foundation of a church by two cousins – a bishop and a prince, respectively – lays bare the kaleidoscope of local and regional rapports on the eve of the Mongol invasions. The True Cross relic

was pawned by the previous bishop and deposited in the neighboring bishopric seat under the jurisdiction of another “new” family in Vayots’ Dzor – the Khaghbakeans. Vasak Khaghbakean removed it and presented it as a gift to Ivanē Zak’arid, who aspired to a supra-regional hegemony, no doubt in exchange for something. Consider that both Vasak and Liparit were Zak’arid clients. Although Liparit purchased the relic, its possession was still contested between all three families. Eventually, a multi-religious court’s judgment and payment of an ulterior sum of money landed it in Liparit’s possession. All these details delineate a fluctuating socio-political and religious landscape in post-Seljuk Armenia. There was room for cooperation, but also fierce competition for territory control. The actors used military power, sponsorship of religious sites and relics, involved Muslim judges, and outright paid in cash for advancing their cause. Did the Khaghbakeans employ the same means as the Ōrbēleans in their own bid for power and control of Vayots’ Dzor or other areas of Syunik’? In order to fully appreciate these dynamics, we must turn to the latter family.

THE KHAGHBAKEAN-PRŌSHEANS

The Khaghbakean family’s ancestral homeland was east of Syunik’ – Upper Khach’en in the historical region of Arts’akh, with the village Gaṛnak’ar as their center [map 2]. The monastery of Hawaptuk, on the slope of the peak where the fortress Khokhanaberd stood, was their dynastic burial ground. We know this from inscriptions, such as an epigraph on a *khach’k’ar* dated 1184, commemorating one Hasan son of Khaghbak.⁵⁶ In a colophon of a Gospel dated 1232 and donated to the monastery of Hawaptuk, the commissioner Vaneni, the daughter of Jajuṛ son of Khaghbak, claims that her family descended from

54 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 360, 397; Barkhudaryan, *ՇԻԱ*, vol. III (n. 24), p. 211; Gandzakets’i, *History* (n. 49), p. 166.

55 Grigoryan, *Syunik’ under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 65–66; Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 403.

56 Yovsēp’ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prōsheans*, vol. I (n. 7), cols 28–30; Sergey Avagyan, Hrip’sime Janp’oladyan, *Divan Hay Vimagrut’yan. Prak v. Arts’akh* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum. Vol. v. Arts’akh], Yerevan 1982, p. 34, no 76; Alexan Hakobyan, *Ark’ayatohmern u ishkhanakan tohmerā bun Aghuank’um ew hayots’ Arewelits’ koghman’um antikits’ minch’ew ŽG dar* [Royal and Princely Dynasties in Proper Aghuank’ and Eastern Lands of the Armenians from Antiquity to the 13th Century], Yerevan 2020, pp. 294–296.

Bak, a companion-in-arms of the celebrated hero of the Battle of Awarayr – Vardan Mamikonean [tab. 4]. The veracity of this origin legend is to be doubted, and claims of ancient ancestry were rather common in the Armenian political landscape following the demise of the old *nakharrar* families and the termination of the Bagratid and Artsruni Kingdoms. Nevertheless, the Khaghbakeans' self-representation as descendants of a lineage other than the most potent family of Arts'akh in the thirteenth century (represented by Hasan Jalal Dawla) has led Hakobyan to discard the hypotheses of previous scholars, most notably Garegin Yovsēp'ean. They viewed the Khaghbakeans as a branch of the Hasan-Jalaleans.⁵⁷ The Khaghbakeans' identity linked to the Vardanank' saints was clearly of vital significance to them and gave them a luster that all Armenians, no matter their origin and rank, would respect and admire. The Khaghbakeans promoted the cult of the Vardanank' in various locations under their control in Vayots' Dzor.⁵⁸

Princess Vaneni's father Jajur was probably the brother of Hasan mentioned on the *khach'kar* of 1184, and of Vasak, whom we saw above participating in the conquest of Vayots' Dzor with Ivanē Zak'arid in the first decade of the thirteenth century. In inscriptions, the Khaghbakeans appear as the heads of the armed forces – *sparapets* – of Zak'arid Ivanē and his son Awag.⁵⁹ The double designation Khaghbakean-Prōshean for the Vayots' Dzor branch of the clan is due to Prōsh, the son of Vasak, who earned fame as an able ruler, valiant soldier, and patron of religious and educational establishments. He was, indeed, the effective founder of the Vayots' Dzor branch of the family. Thus, the background of the Khaghbakeans, and what can be reconstructed regarding their history in the twelfth century, indicates that their ascent to prominence outside their native Arts'akh was impeccable compared to the troubled beginnings of the Ōrbēleans. Being *sparapets* of the Zak'arids, the Khaghbakeans had much stronger ties with them than the Ōrbēleans could hope to attain at the beginning of the thirteenth century. This initially advantageous situation did not necessarily translate into a Khaghbakean hegemony in Syunik' for various reasons.

One among them was the territorial extension of Khaghbakean domains. Even if Vasak Khaghbakean

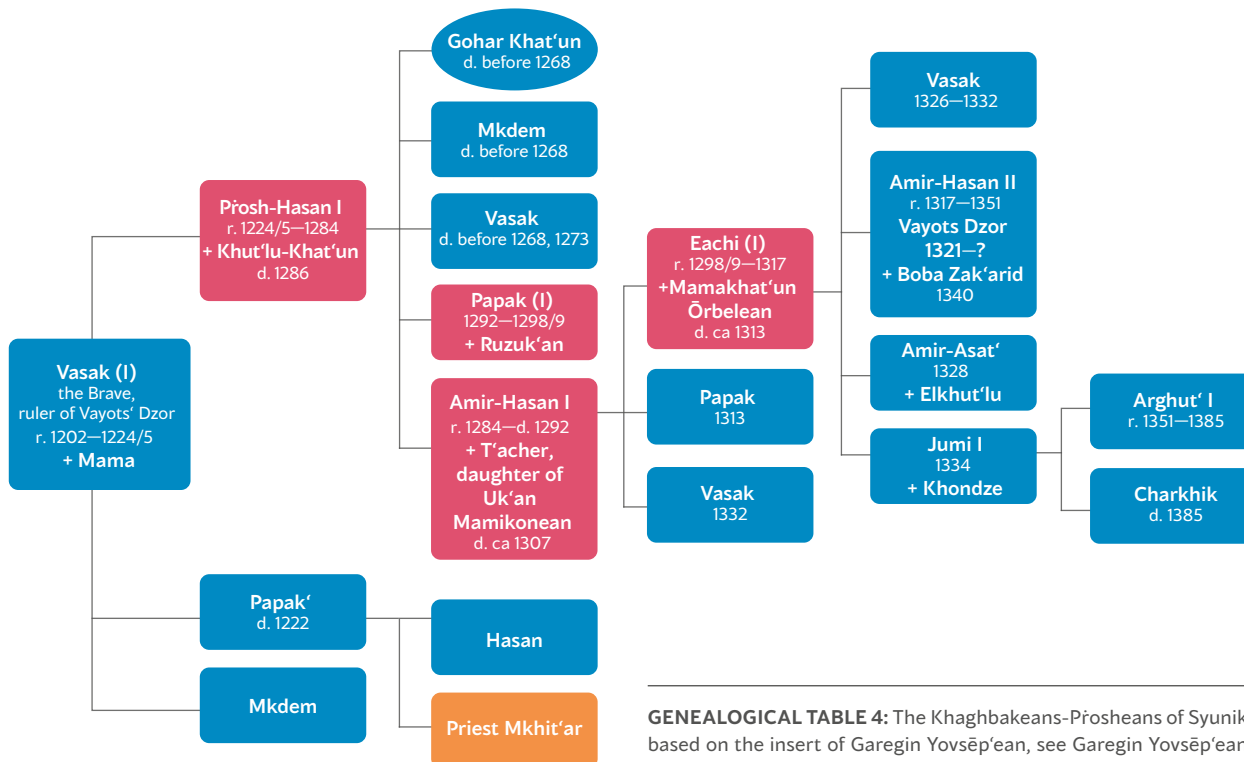
participated in the conquest of Vayots' Dzor in the 1210s under the military command of Zak'arē and Ivanē Zak'arids, as did Liparit (Ōrbēlean), Vasak had other landholdings outside his ancestral Upper Khach'en that were not concentrated in Syunik' or Vayots' Dzor. One significant site for the Khaghbakeans was the monastery of Kech'aroyk' north-east of Lake Sevan, built by the eleventh-century political figure Grigor Magistros Hasanean. In 1214, Vasak Khaghbakean added a new structure within the Kech'aroyk' monastic complex. Significantly, it was to this church that he brought the precious ceremonial crosses taken from the monastery of Otsop', whose ownership was contested between the Ōrbēleans and the Khaghbakeans.⁶⁰ Then, Vasak's son Prōsh purchased the monastery of Ayrivank' (or Geghard) from the Zak'arids in the 1240s [maps 2–3]. Here, magnificent rock-hewn structures were carved in the 60s and 70s of the thirteenth century that still bedazzle the visitor. Both Kech'aroyk' and Geghard hosted the graves of Khaghbakean family members, although it was Geghard that eventually became the dynastic burial of their Prōshean branch. Its prized possession was a relic of the Lance (hence its name, *geghard*, i.e., lance) that had pierced Christ's rib and was brought to Armenia by the Apostle Thaddaeus according to tradition. Vasak's

57 Hakobyan, *Royal and Princely Dynasties* (n. 56), pp. 294–296. The colophon of Vaneni has been published several times. I have consulted Artashes Mat'evosyan, *Hayeren dzei'agreri hishatakaraner. ŽG dar* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts. 13th Century], Yerevan 1984, pp. 181–183. Another, earlier colophon dated 1224 in a Gospel commissioned by Vaneni (now M4823, known as the Gospel of Khoranashat from the name of the celebrated monastery to which Vaneni donated the codex) also mentions her father Jajur Khaghbakean. *Ibidem*, p. 140. For a genealogical tree of the Khaghbakeans, see Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prōsheans* (n. 7), the special insert; Toumanoff, *Les dynasties* (n. 8), pp. 306–308, and tab. 4 in this chapter.

58 Tigran Aleksanyan, "Vardanants' srbavayrerā Vayots' Dzori taratsk'um" [Vardanants' Sanctuaries in Vayots' Dzor's Territory], *Hayagitut'yan harts'eri handes / Armenological Issues Bulletin*, 1/19 (2020), pp. 76–85; *Idem*, "Ditarkumner Vardanank'i Vayots'dzoryan hushardzanneri shurj" [Observations on Monuments Dedicated to the Vardanank' in Vayots' Dzor], in *Vayots' Dzor. Patmamshakut'ay-in Zharangut'yan Drvagner* [Vayots' Dzor: Historical and Cultural Heritage Studies], Tork Dalalyan ed., Yerevan 2021, pp. 250–259.

59 Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prōsheans* (n. 7), col. 153.

60 *Ibidem*, cols 75–78; *Idem*, *Khaghbakeans or Prōsheans*, vol. II (n. 32), cols 1–48; *Idem*, *Khaghbakeans or Prōsheans*, vol. III (n. 32), cols 2–3, appendix 4.



[tab. 4] A genealogical table of the Khaghbakean-Prósheans, 13th–14th century

GENEALOGICAL TABLE 4: The Khaghbakeans-Prósheans of Syunik' based on the insert of Garegin Yovsēp'ean, see Garegin Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeank' kam Prósheank' hayots' patmut'ean mej* [Khaghbakeans and Prósheans in the History of the Armenians], vol. 1, Vagharshapat [Ējmiatsin] 1928.

The senior princes are marked in red, priests in orange, dates next to names indicate the years under which they are mentioned in the sources.

r = years of rule; d = year of death; + spouse

son Prōsh commissioned a splendid reliquary for it.⁶¹ Thus, just like Liparit Örbēlean or his descendants, Prōsh Khaghbakean too attached great importance to the patronage of holy sites, relics, and their cult. Yet, whereas the Örbēleans' pious activity focused on Vayots' Dzor, Prōsh Khaghbakean could afford a wider range of action. The latter and possibly his father Vasak were buried in the monastery of Kech'aroyk', which underscores the importance the family attached to this area even as late as the 1280s, rather than Vayots' Dzor or Syunik'.⁶² In the case of the Prósheans, their dynastic burial grounds – first Kech'aroyk' then Geghard – were very far from their *darapas* – princely residence – in south-eastern Vayots' Dzor. This was the village Srkghunk'

(now Vernashen), with the fortress Boloraberd (or Prōshaberd). Only in the fourteenth century did the foundation of the monastic complex known as Spitakawor (see below) complete the pattern of settlement – monastery – fortress of a Próshean center in Vayots' Dzor [map 3].

61 Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prósheans* (n. 7), cols 100–115; *Idem*, *Khaghbakeans or Prósheans*, vol. II (n. 32), cols 88–135.

62 On the burial of Prōsh in Kech'aroyk', see *Ibidem*, col. 136, who expresses his perplexity as to the reasons for choosing it over Geghard. For our purposes it is important to highlight that both of these structures were far from Vayots' Dzor. See also Avedis Sanjian, "The Örbelians and Proshians of Siwnik': Patrons of Religious Institutions", *Handes Amsōreay* [Monthly Journal], 101 (1987), pp. 911–924, sp. p. 916.

The Khaghbakean sponsorship of Geghard and Kech'aroyk', nevertheless, remained constant, even after they had set deeper roots in Vayots' Dzor. Prosh's sons Papak' (r. 1284–1298/9) and Amir-Hasan (d. 1292) continued to underwrite new constructions as well as made donations to bo institutions.⁶³ In the fourteenth century, however, we see Amir-Hasan's wife T'acher and their son E'ach'i as patrons of religious establishments also in Vayots' Dzor, such as the pre-existent monastery of T'anahat and the church of the Holy Cross of Arkaz, as well as new foundations, such as the church of the Mother of God known as Spitakawor and others.⁶⁴ Thus, the Prosheans' greater involvement in Vayots' Dzor's sacred landscape consolidated only in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Let us note here that these structures were all in the south-eastern part of Vayots' Dzor and clearly indicate that now the valley of the River Yeghegis (to the north) was firmly under Örbëlean control and the Prosheans could not be patrons in that valley, even if they had wanted to.

Writing at the end of the thirteenth century, when the rivalry between the Örbëlean and Proshean families had subsided, not least due to intermarriage, Step'anos Örbëlean praises Vasak Khaghbakean's courage and piety.⁶⁵ Yet, the situation on the ground was different at least from the second half of the twelfth century all the way to the 1270s. Take the control of the vital fortress Hrasek (Hrashkaber), overlooking the gorge of Noravank', as an example. After Hovhannēs Kapants'i acquired it through a *manshur* in the 1120s, it had again been taken by "the Persians," then conquered from the Seljuks by Vasak Khaghbakean and Akht'amar of Arp'a, a military man from the important village of Arp'a (the future *darapas* of the Örbëleans), under the command of Ivanē Zak'arid in the 1210s. Despite this, in his foundation inscription on the church of St Stephen of Noravank', Liparit Örbëlean affirmed that *he* received the fortress of Hrasek and the adjacent region, as well as many villages in Vayots' Dzor as his property. These villages are not named, and one cannot know exactly where they were located, but probably near the gorge of Noravank' and the fortress of Hrasek. When exactly Hrasek changed hands from the Khaghbakeans to the Örbëleans, and what this transaction involved, cannot be reconstructed due to

the lack of sources. During the first Mongol assault of Vayots' Dzor in 1236, it was Liparit's son Yelikum who was in control of Hrasek, where he resisted the new conquerors, as we saw above.

Given the absence of a dynastic history for the Khaghbakeans, we have to turn to epigraphic evidence in an effort to reconstruct a more nuanced story of their interactions with the Örbëleans and the shifting boundaries of their domains in Syunik' in the thirteenth century.

Two inscriptions juxtaposed next to each other are telling. One is by Vasak Khaghbakean, dated 1220, and carved on the exterior of the western façade (to the north of the entrance) of the domed church from the monastic complex of Arates, possibly dedicated to the Mother of God. The Arates Monastery is about eight kilometers northwest of Yeghegis.⁶⁶ In it, Vasak underscores his control of the middle valley of the River Yeghegis, very likely including the village of Yeghegis itself – the future second residence or *darapas* of the Örbëleans (second half of the thirteenth and throughout the fourteenth centuries). The second inscription is by Liparit Örbëlean's youngest son, Tarsayich, who became the senior prince from 1273 onward (see further details on him below). Because the last letter of the date in the latter inscription is damaged, the exact year cannot be determined. Therefore, 1273 is considered the earliest possible year when it was carved. The inscription is positioned on the southern façade of the church of Surb Karapet (St John the Baptist) in the interior, within the monastic complex of Ts'akhats' K'ar, only four kilometers north of Yeghegis. Both of these monasteries were older foundations, dating back to the tenth century, while some of their structures are earlier. In the thirteenth century, they were reclaimed and patronized by the new rulers of Vayots' Dzor.

63 Yovsëp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prosheans*, vol. II (n. 32), cols 143–144. It is not clear if Papak' and his wife Ruzuk'an were buried in the new structure built by Papak'.

64 Yovsëp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prosheans* (n. 7), cols 147, 153.

65 Örbëlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 397.

66 For an architectural-archaeological survey of the monastery of Arates, see Michele Nuccioti *et al.*, "The Making of the Silk Road in Armenia (cc. 7th–14th): Vayots Dzor and Arates Monastery", in *VII Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, Paul Arthur, Marco Leo Imperiale eds, Florence 2015, pp. 493–498.

Vasak Khaghbakean's inscription
from Arates, 1220⁶⁷

:ՈԿԹ: Ի թագաւորութեան վրաց Լաշաին եւ
յաշխարհակալութեան Իւան[Է]ի աթաբակի, ես Վասակ
որդի Խաղբակա կողմնապահ ի Գառնոյ մինչեւ ի
Բարգուշատ եւ առի զամրոցանիս Եղեգեաց ձորոյս
աւզնութեամբն Ա[ստուծոյ] ի յայրապետութեան[ն] Տ[Է]
ր Սարգսի...

1220 During the kingship of Lasha of the Georgians and
the rule of <this> land by Iwanē at'abak, I, Vasak, son
of Khaghbak and holder of the territory from Garni to
Bargushat and [I] took the fortresses of the valley of
Yeghegis with the help of God, during the patriarchal
office of Lord Sargis ...

Tarsayich Ōrbēlean's inscription
from Ts'akhats' K'ar, c. 1273⁶⁸

Թ :Զ: Այս գիր ճշմարիտ յուսոյ [յ]իշատակ հոգո անջնջելի
[...] Տարսաիհի իշխանաց իշխանի որդի մեծի Լիպարտի
եղբայր Սմպատա արթաի կողմնակալի այսմ նահանգի
որ իշխեցող է ի Բարգուշատա մինչ[եւ ց]Գամ[ն]ի
սահմանքս մեր Երասխ, մեր յուս Ք[րիստո]ս է ...

[In the] year 12[73] This writing of true hope [is an] in-
delible memory for the soul [...] of Tarsayich, prince of
princes, son of the great Liparit, brother of king Sm[b]
at holder of this region, who rules from Bargushat to
Garni. Our border is Yeraskh, our hope is Christ ...

When it comes to the southern limit – the Bargushat chain – the dynastic historian Step'anos Ōrbēlean (who was Tarsayich's son), affirmed that his grandfather (and Tarsayich's father) Liparit had received the fortresses Orotn, Bargushat and others because he had led Ivanē Zak'arid's conquest of Syunik'.⁶⁹ There is no doubt that it was imperative for Tarsayich Ōrbēlean to announce the extent of his territories upon his accession. Besides this inscription, there were at least two more dated to 1273 that claimed ownership of lands stretching from the Bargushat chain northward. In one of them, now lost but once on the church of the Mother of God in the village Əghuerts (presently Darapas), his domains are defined from Bargushat to the plain of Dvin.⁷⁰ In the second one, from the prestigious monastery of Tat'ew, their northern limit is the

border of Bjni – very close to the Khaghbakeans' own holy sites, such as in Kech'aroyk' [maps 2–3].⁷¹ These competing claims within a distance of fifty years' time indicate that the relationship between the Ōrbēleans and Khaghbakeans had undergone important transformations in the meantime.

Indeed, the international situation between 1220 and 1273 had changed dramatically during this period, witnessing the Mongol conquests and the establishment of the Ilkhanate, which shook many of the pre-existing relationships and hierarchies. If we take only these two inscriptions into consideration, we can already spot that the weight of regional players, such as the Georgian court, had been transformed. In his inscriptions, Tarsayich not only omits his dependence on any external source of authority, although we know that the Ōrbēleans had submitted to the Mongols, but he exalts the titles of his father Liparit and his elder brother Smbat, whom he even calls king.⁷² Most importantly for our purposes,

67 Reproduced from Barkhudaryan, *CI*, vol. III (n. 24), p. 123, no 357. I will not discuss the paleographical or grammatical features of this inscription, as it would take us beyond the scope of this article. I have resolved the abbreviations by adding the relevant letters in [...]. Modern punctuation has not been introduced in the Armenian reproduction of the inscription, but it has been added to the English version to make the translation readable. See also Yovsep'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prosehans* (n. 7), cols 68–69, including an analysis of the territorial extent mentioned in this inscription.

68 Barkhudaryan, *CI*, vol. III (n. 24), pp. 149–150, no 451. As in the case above, I cannot subject this inscription, parts of which are damaged, to a detailed analysis. The purpose here is to indicate changing claims to the same land, titles and legitimation between Vasak Khaghbakean and Tarsayich Ōrbēlean, in a period that goes from 1220 to 1273. Only the relevant excerpt of the inscriptions is provided, because the decipherment of the whole inscription, with all its lacunae and previous reconstructions, requires a more careful analysis than is possible to carry out here. Step'anos Ōrbēlean also singles out Tarsayich's donations to Ts'akhats' K'ar attesting once more this monastic complex's importance for Tarsayich's rule in the valley of Yeghegis. Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 424–425.

69 *Ibidem*, pp. 350, 360, 397, 403; Sedrak Barkhudaryan, *Divan hay vimagrut'yan. Prak II. Gorisi, Sisiani ev Ghap'ani shrjanner* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum. Vol. II. Regions of Goris, Sisian and Ghap'an], Yerevan 1960, p. 211, no 677 (Henceforth: *CI*, vol. II).

70 *Ibidem*, p. 114, no 336.

71 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 416.

72 Karen Matevosyan, *Noravank'i vimagrera ev hishatakarannerā* [The Epigraphy and Colophons of Noravank'], Yerevan 2017, pp. 23–27, denies the significance of the title and thinks that it reflects the Mongol term “ark'ayun” applied to Christians and Smbat specifically. It is hard, though not impossible, to imagine that Tarsayich would employ the term in the Mongol sense rather than the quite conventional and usual Armenian meaning.

while in 1220 Vasak Khaghbakean declared the lands between Garni and Bargushat as his possessions, at least from 1273 onwards it was Tarsayich who insistently laid claim to this very territory. The latter, however, reversed the order, i.e., from Bargushat to Garni, which I do not think was accidental. It reflected his stronger connection to Syunik' rather than Garni in the region of Kotayk', as opposed to what Vasak Khaghbakean's inscription implies. Indeed, as we saw above, the Khaghbakeans did have lands and interests in Kotayk'. This is at least part of the reason why it was the Ōrbēleans, with their tenacious attachment to and grip on Vayots' Dzor, who eventually earned the primacy as the most significant rulers of Syunik' at the end of the thirteenth and throughout the fourteenth century. Not least noteworthy are the locations of the two inscriptions: two old and important monasteries adjacent to the settlement Yeghegis, the erstwhile seat of power – the *ostan* – of the Syuni princes. Yeghegis, then, became one of the two *darapas(es)* or princely residences of the Ōrbēleans, together with the older Aṛp'a.⁷³ The effort to create a continuity with the previous rulers of Syunik' was part of the Ōrbēleans' and Khaghbakeans' strategy of rulership, but, again, it was more pronounced among the Ōrbēleans, especially in light of their patronage of the monastery of Tat'ew which they reconstructed with the support of the Mongol general Baiju's wife (see below).

PART III THE ŌRBĒLEANS AND THE KHAGHBAKEAN-PRŌSHEANS IN SYUNIK' UNDER THE MONGOLS: AN ENTANGLED HISTORY

Many scholars have remarked on the interlocked nature of Ōrbēlean and Khaghbakean possessions in Vayots' Dzor, which may also explain why the same stretch of land was claimed by both sides in the two inscriptions presented above.⁷⁴ In theory, this could correspond to the realities on the ground, but referring to different patches within the same wider region, although we have seen that chronologically they also express different geopolitical situations. As intertwined as the boundaries set at the

time of Ivanē Zak'arid's conquest of Syunik' in the 1210s may have been, they hardly remained constant. The evidence cited above indicates that the control of some areas of Vayots' Dzor, specifically the valley of the River Yeghegis, which is the focus of this volume, gradually passed from the Khaghbakeans to the Ōrbēleans. In this process, the Mongols were the crucial element that set the new rules of the game.⁷⁵

The Mongol conquest of Syunik' was entrusted to Aslan Noyan, who besieged the fortress Hrasek in the year 1236. Yelikum (II) sagaciously chose the path of no resistance, surrendering the fortress, and submitted to Aslan Noyan, as did numerous other princes of Armenia and Georgia, including Awag Zak'arid (the son of Ivanē).⁷⁶ Moreover, according to Step'anos Ōrbēlean, Aslan Noyan relied on Yelikum's knowledge on the ground to reach Ani, conquering everything in between. Mongols sacked Ani in 1239, as numerous colophons and the historical record testify. In exchange, Yelikum received what Vasak Khaghbakean considered his own lands ten years prior to this: "Vayots' Dzor and Yeghegis, all the way to the village Yererōn in front

73 Garegin Yovsep'ean, *Tarsayich Ōrbēleani ew Mina Khat'uni serunda* [The Progeny of Tarsayich Ōrbēlean and Mina Khat'un], Antilias 1948, p. 2. Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 53–54. These authors assume that Aṛp'a was the first *darapas* of the Ōrbēleans, even as early as Liparit I's reign, whereas Yeghegis received that status later. This would make sense considering Liparit's patronage of the Noravank' Monastery at the very beginning of this reign, which is very close to Aṛp'a (now near Areni).

74 Sanjian, "The Ōrbelians and Proshians" (n. 62), pp. 911–924; and Yovsep'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prōsheans* (n. 7), throughout.

75 Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 50–53.

76 Hakob Manandyan, *K'nnakan tesut'yun hay zhoghovrdi patmut'yan. Seljukyan shirjanits' minch'ev Sefyanneri hastatumn Iranum (xi–xv dd.)* [A Critical Survey of the History of the Armenian People. From the Seljukid Period until the Establishment of the Sefevids of Iran (xi–xv cc.)], *Complete Works*, vol. III, Yerevan 1977, pp. 192–219; Robert Bedrosian, "Armenia during the Seljuq and Mongol Periods", in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1, Richard Hovannisian ed., New York 1997, pp. 241–71; Bernhard Limper, *Die Mongolen und die christlichen Völker des Kaukasus. Eine Untersuchung zur politischen Geschichte Kaukasiens im 13. und beginnenden 14. Jahrhundert*, PhD thesis (University of Cologne), Cologne 1980, pp. 126–129. Limper thinks that between 1236–1240 the Mongols regularly raided the conquered Armenian territories and that the situation settled down by 1240 only. Most recently on the Mongols in Armenia, see Bayarsaikhan Dashdondog, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220–1335)*, Leiden/Boston 2011.

of Garni.⁷⁷ It is exactly from this point on that we can trace the Ōrbēleans' control of nearly the entire valley of the River Yeghegis.

Upon the submission of the Armenian and Georgian princes to the Mongols, they took part in the Mongol campaigns in Anatolia. According to Step'anos Ōrbēlean, it was during one of these, and specifically the siege of Mayyāfāriqīn (ca 1259–1260), that Yelikum was wounded and died soon after. His body was brought to Vayots' Dzor and interred in the dynastic cemetery of Noravank'.⁷⁸ This chronology contradicts other information Step'anos provides, including the date when Yelikum's younger brother Smbat became the head of the Ōrbēlean family, i.e., 1250, and undertook a journey to Qaraqorum. Furthermore, the historian alludes to ongoing tensions between Awag Zak'arid and the Ōrbēlean brothers and insinuates that Awag (d. 1250) was behind Yelikum's death by poisoning. In this case, too, Yelikum's death must date before that of Awag, i.e., before 1250, rather than the siege of Mayyāfāriqīn almost ten years later.⁷⁹ It is noteworthy that Step'anos Ōrbēlean does not mention the participation of Prince P'roskh Khaghbakean (the son of Vasak) in this important conquest. The historian Kirakos Gandzakets'i, on the other hand, is explicit in this regard. According to him, P'roskh played a key role in the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 and was the emissary of the Ilkhan Hülegü (r. ca 1259–1265) to the last Abbasid caliph al-Musta'šim bi'llāh (r. 1242–1258). Step'anos Ōrbēlean is completely silent on this.⁸⁰

SMBAT ŌRBĒLEAN VS P'ROSH KHAGHBAKEAN

P'roskh's long rule (r. ca 1223–1284) coincided with that of four Ōrbēlean princes: Liparit, and his sons Yelikum (II) (r. ca 1236–1250), Smbat (r. 1250–1273), and Tarsayich (r. 1273–1290) in that order. Smbat was unquestionably one of the most capable rulers of his time. Due to him, the Ōrbēleans rose to become one of the most powerful families in the Caucasus again and maintained their vitality for the next two centuries. Smbat's able diplomacy, well-calculated "gifts" brought to the Mongol court in Qaraqorum, and a judiciously built network of connections with Mongol military and civil elites were behind the Ōrbēleans' continuous prominence.⁸¹ Sometime around 1250, Smbat allowed David of Svaneti to escape through his territory, as

the latter fled Mongol captivity in Haband, obtaining from him an oversized gem, possibly a ruby. Grigoryan suggests that this episode testifies to Smbat's participation in the Armeno-Georgian uprising of 1249–1250 against the Mongols, identifying David of Svaneti with David Narin, the rival of the Georgian King David VII Ulu (r. 1247–1270). He considers Smbat's first voyage to Qaraqorum (in 1250–1251) as a dispatch under arrest ordered by the Noyan Baiju.⁸² Whatever the case, Smbat's travel to Qaraqorum and the subsequent three-year stay there, coinciding with the first years of the Great Khan Möngke (1251–1259), was nothing unique or extraordinary. It reflected a pattern. Numerous rulers who had submitted to the Mongols, including Armenian and Georgian princes or kings, acted or were forced to act similarly. Their presence at the Mongol court and an extended sojourn there served not only to reinforce their submission but also to weaken their hold on the respective territories, while they were away for a considerable length of time.

77 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 404. For evidence from colophons on reactions to the sack of Ani and other urban centers in Armenia, see Zaroui Pogossian, "Armenians, Mongols and the End of Times: An Overview of 13th Century Sources", in *Caucasus during the Mongol Period / Der Kaukasus in der Mongolenzeit*, Sofia Vashalomidze, Manfred Zimmer, Jürgen Tubach eds, Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 169–198, sp. pp. 179–181. On the early Armenian perceptions of the Mongols, see also Zaroui Pogossian, "An 'Un-known and Unbridled People': Vardan Arewelc'i's Colophon on the Mongols", *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 23 (2014), pp. 7–48.

78 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 404; Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), p. 68. Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, *Jāmi' u't-tawarikh / Compendium of Chronicles; a History of the Mongols*, Wheeler Thackston trans., vol. II, Cambridge (MA) 1999, p. 502, dates the beginning of the Mongol siege of Mayyafariqin to 2 September 1259.

79 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 404; for a critical appraisal of this notice, see Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), p. 68, who rightly remarks that Awag (the son of Ivanē Zak'arid), who had died almost a decade before could not have organized the poisoning of Yelikum. On the other hand, Smbat ruled Syunik' as the senior prince and undertook the journey to Qaraqorum in 1251 and it would be more logical and reasonable to assume that he did this at the beginning of his rule and in order to receive an official investiture by the Khan. Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or P'rosheans* (n. 7), col. 94; and *Idem, Tarsayich and his progeny* (n. 73), p. 9, considers Step'anos Ōrbēlean's information on the participation of Yelikum unreliable and unacceptable.

80 Gandzakets'i, *History* (n. 49), pp. 377–386.

81 Limper, *Die Mongolen* (n. 76), p. 138.

82 Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 72–73. On Baiju, see Sara Nur Yildiz, "Baiju: The Mongol Conqueror at the Crossfire of Dynastic Struggle", in *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia. Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals*, Michal Biran ed., Berkeley 2020, pp. 44–63.

Upon this first journey to Qaraqorum and due to Smbat's skills in advancing his case at the Mongol court, his possessions in Syunik' and elsewhere were granted the status of *inju*, i.e., crown lands directly subject to the Mongols. Smbat reinforced this condition by asking that taxes due from his family be lifted from the registers (ჩუღღუღ) of Georgia or elsewhere and placed under direct Mongol administration. On this occasion, Step'anos Örbëlean lists again the territories in Syunik' under Smbat's control, now reconfirmed by the Great Khan. These were Orot'n (controlled by Smbat's brother Tarsayich), Yeghegis, and "all the region of Vayots' Dzor, as well as P'oghahan, Urts, Vedi and its gorge until the village Yererön," territories in the region Kotayk', and many villages in Geghark'unik'" [maps 2–3]. Moreover, he secured tax exemptions for all the religious establishments in his domains. Significantly, upon his return, he set on to reconstruct some of the abandoned monasteries and, with the help of Baiju Noyan's wife, the most prestigious monastery of Tat'ew, as mentioned above.⁸³ His nephew and protégé, the historian Step'anos Örbëlean, will then unify the bishopric see of Tat'ew with that of Noravank' and carry the title of the metropolitan of Syunik'. This office will remain in the Örbëlean family for more than two hundred years.

Parallel to the growing importance of the Örbëleans, their uneasy relationship with the Zak'arids expanded geographically to include the Georgian royal court. Given the close relationship of this branch of Zak'arids with the Khaghbakeans, we can imagine further reasons for tensions between the Zak'arids and the Örbëleans, too. Awag Zak'arid's wife Gonts'a (Gvantsa Kakhberidze) had married the Georgian King David VII Ulu after Awag's death in 1250. The historian Step'anos Örbëlean describes how Gonts'a and her daughter (from Awag) Khoshak', the future wife of the powerful Mongol official *ṣāhib-dīwān* Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī, schemed against Smbat and tried to convince Arghun Aqa, the Mongol tax administrator between Oxus and Anatolia, to "get rid of Smbat." This led to Smbat's second voyage to Qaraqorum ca 1256, and the outcome was even more spectacular. In Qaraqorum, Smbat grasped the opportunity to testify in favor of Arghun Aqa against allegations of embezzlement, saving the latter's life and gaining his esteem. Step'anos affirms that they returned to the west together, which, if true, surely allowed more opportunities for fraternization.⁸⁴

Back in Syunik', Smbat had reached the pinnacle of his influence, putting "all his enemies and adversaries to shame" in the words of Step'anos Örbëlean. Yet, other sources, like the decisions of the Church Council of Dzagavan from 1270, present a less brilliant picture, as we shall see below. Like his protector, Arghun Aqa, Smbat went on to serve Hülegü (r. 1259–1265), the founder of the Ilkhanate. Step'anos claims that Smbat participated in reprisals against rivals or rebels, including the drowning of the queen Gonts'a in 1260 "at the order of Hülegü," after another attempted Armeno-Georgian uprising in 1259–1261. Its repression, besides Gonts'a, led to the strangulation of another influential prince – Hasan Jalal Dawla of Khach'en, who himself had made the journey to Qaraqorum not long before. Step'anos Örbëlean even claims that Smbat became the guardian of Gonts'a's daughter Khoshak' Zak'arid despite their earlier enmity.⁸⁵ Interestingly, however, even after the executions of 1260–1261, the Hasan Jalaleans and King

- 83 On the institution of the *inju* as crown lands, see Ann Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Administration*, London 1991, pp. 77–78; for other Georgian and Armenian princes whose lands were given to them as *inju*, see Bedrosian, "Armenia during the Seljuk and Mongol Periods" (n. 76), pp. 262–263; on the administration of Caucasian lands and their specifics before the establishment of the Ilkhanate, see Dashdondog, *Armenians and Mongols* (n. 76), pp. 68–69, and p. 76 on the *inju* status; Smbat's travel and stay in Qaraqorum, not lacking miraculous accounts, are described in Örbëlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 407–412. Grigoryan thinks that P'oghahan referred to silver mines from which money was coined, see Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Örbëleans* (n. 36), p. 141. This underscores the vital economic significance of its possession.
- 84 The dates provided by Step'anos Örbëlean for Smbat's first and second voyage to Qaraqorum (1251 and 1253/4) do not agree with Jackson's reconstruction of Arghun's journey's to Qaraqorum. Arghun's trial and liberation at the court is dated to 1256 rather than 1253/4. Nevertheless, troubles involving Mongol finances in their western territories and intrigues at the court that involved Arghun, correspond to a situation presented by Step'anos Örbëlean. See Örbëlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 412–415; Peter Jackson, "Arġūn Āqā", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, available online (<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/argun-aqa-a-mongol-administrator-in-iran-d-1275>) [accessed on February 14, 2022].
- 85 Gandzakets'i, *History* (n. 49), p. 390; Örbëlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 418; Dashdondog, *Armenians and Mongols* (n. 76), p. 92; Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Örbëleans* (n. 36), pp. 75–76. However, scholars have questioned the accuracy of Smbat's guardianship based on other sources that unanimously indicate another Armenian nobleman – Sadun Mahkanaberdts'i – as Khoshak's guardian. Sadun had a spectacular military career under the Mongols having built especially close ties with the formidable *ṣāhib-dīwān* Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī. Khosak's life is brilliantly analyzed in Hayrapet Margarian, "Ṣāhib-dīwān Šams al-dīn Muḥammad Juvainī and Armenia", *Iran and the Caucasus*, 10/2 (2006), pp. 167–180, sp. pp. 172–175. See Örbëlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 418–420.

David Ulu maintained their importance in the region. Smbat's brother Tarsayich went to seek Hasan Jalal's daughter Mina Khat'un as his new bride even after Hasan Jalal's fall from grace and assassination by the Mongols [fig. 4]. Did he hope to extend Ōrbēlean rule also to Khach'en through this new marriage, given the momentary disorientation of the local reigning family due to Hasan Jalal's death? This calculation may well have been on Tarsayich's mind when asking for Mina Khat'un's hand. In this mission, he was accompanied by the Georgian King David Ulu. This testifies, among others, to the improved relationship between the Ōrbēleans and the Georgian court. We can hardly take Step'anos Ōrbēlean's word for it that it was solely due to Smbat's intercession with Hülegü that David Ulu was spared the fate of his wife Gonts'a. However, we can well imagine that David needed regional allies and supporters. It is, thus, plausible that in exchange and upon Smbat's request, he did "throw into the fire and burn" all the records about the rebellion of the Ōrbelis of 1177–1178, nearly a hundred years earlier.⁸⁶

The purpose and implications of Smbat's last great political move are hard to interpret. He travelled to Tabriz in 1273 to meet the *ṣāḥib-dīwān* Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī. While there, he fell ill and died. Before passing away, however, he nominated his brother Tarsayich as his successor, placing him under the protection of Arghun (the future Ilkhan) and the Sahib Divan, in the apt words of Margarian, "prefer[ring] to have as his patron *ṣāḥib-dīwān*, who was at the top of the Īl-khānate's hierarchical system, rather than the hostile Armenian and Georgian rulers."⁸⁷

The growing fortunes of Smbat went hand in hand with the construction or reconstruction of religious establishments, residential buildings, bridges, and, not least, the acquisition of relics while on Mongol campaigns and their transfer to Syunik', enriching the holy sites in his domains. There is no precise indication in the sources, but one may suppose that it was after Smbat's second voyage to Qaraqorum (1256) that he felt strong enough to establish another *darapas* or courtly residence for the Ōrbēleans in the once central village of Yeghegis, in addition to Aṙp'a. We shall recall that Yeghegis was the old seat of the ancient Syuni dynasty's senior line. An inscription on the lintel of the entrance gate to Smbat's palace, once in the village of Yeghegis, testifies to its renewed importance during Smbat's rule.⁸⁸ Unfortunately, it is not dated. However, other material remains from



[fig. 4] Tarsayich Ōrbēlean and his wife Mina Khat'un, lunette of the ceremonial portal (now lost except for small fragments) of Tarsayich's residential palace in Yeghegis, ca 1273–1290

86 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 421–423.

87 Margarian, "Juvainī and Armenia" (n. 85), pp. 175–176.

Yeghegis, such as gravestones with inscriptions, the presence of a Jewish cemetery at its outskirts, the production of manuscripts with refined illuminations, all indicate novel developments in the social, economic, religious, and intellectual make-up of the settlement that started roughly in the middle of the thirteenth century, i.e., under Smbat's rule.

Although we have less details on the Khaghbakeans, as mentioned above, it is clear that they did not remain idle in advancing their interests in Syunik' and regions adjacent to Vayots' Dzor, more specifically. They, too, carried out their policies via the support of religious establishments, among others. Shortly before 1267, another religious controversy broke out between the two families. This time it was about the territorial extent of the bishopric of Syunik', which had been closely linked to the Ōrbēlean family and its jurisdiction over the villages owned by P̄rosh Khaghbakean. On this occasion and only here, Step'anos Ōrbēlean calls him "a certain Prince P̄rosh son of Vasak" and narrates how he attempted to create a new bishopric with a seat in Yernjak and place his villages of Vayots' Dzor under its jurisdiction. To do so, he promoted one Hovhannēs from the nearby village of Aprakunis, the son of a deacon, and sent him to Cilician Armenia to receive ordination from the aged Catholicos Kostandin Bardzraberts'i (1221–1267). The latter's last year in office gives us our *terminus ante quem* for Hovhannēs' travel to Cilician Armenia. Soon, however, with the support of Tarsayich, the two bishops of Syunik' – Sargis II from Noravank' (1260–1288) and Hovhannēs VIII or IX from Tat'ew – putting aside their own differences and rivalries, travelled to Cilician Armenia to bring their grievances against this state of affairs and prevent the creation of a third bishopric seat in this territory.⁸⁹ When they arrived, a new catholicos, Hakob I (1268–1286), was in office, which means that they reached Sis after 1268. They convinced Hakob I to excommunicate Hovhannēs of Yernjak and confirm the unity of the metropolitan diocese of Syunik' under the jurisdiction of two bishopric seats – Noravank' and Tat'ew. Moreover, Catholicos Hakob, new in office and desirous of ascertaining the unity of his church and the support of the powerful Ōrbēleans, sent a letter of admonition to P̄rosh. On this occasion, Step'anos Ōrbēlean exhibits an entirely different attitude to the Khaghbakean prince, praising him in laudatory terms: "[...] and he [P̄rosh] due to his intelligent mind and great hope in faith" repented,

backtracked on his plan of erecting an independent bishopric, and was blessed by the two bishops.⁹⁰

It is reasonable to suppose that the entire episode took place between 1265 and 1270.⁹¹ One wonders if Smbat's agenda when undertaking his last journey to the Ilkhanid court in Tabriz (in 1273) included, among others, the confirmation of what was achieved internally through the Armenian Church hierarchy regarding the abolition of the short-lived bishopric of Yernjak. In the meantime, the rule of the land was left to his brother Tarsayich in his absence. Be that as it may, it is remarkable that both the incident involving the True Cross and the ceremonial crosses (in the 1210s), and the attempt to raise Yernjak to the status of a bishopric (ca 1265–1270), took place in the same geographical area – the south of Vayots' Dzor ruled by the Khaghbakeans.

The demise of the bishopric of Yernjak did not mean a major loss of prestige or preeminence for P̄rosh on the regional scale, however. Indeed, in a church council convened at Dzagavan in 1270, P̄rosh appears in the second place among the signatories. Intriguingly, the leading person and the first signatory was a woman – Khoshak', whom we saw above and who was at that point the wife of the powerful Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī. Moreover, in that list P̄rosh was followed by Sadun Mahkanaberdts'i – Khosakh's erstwhile guardian and a close associate of Juwaynī. Smbat was the last prince in the sequence of signatories. Thus, although Smbat was at the height of his power in Vayots' Dzor and Syunik', had close relationships with the Mongol hierarchy and is profusely praised by Step'anos Ōrbēlean, whom Smbat had

88 Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 24), p. 115, no 338.

89 I agree with Abrahamyan, the modern translator of Step'anos Ōrbēlean's historical work that this was Yovhannēs IX bishop from Tat'ew (1292–1295) but that he undertook this mission before he had assumed this office. It is not excluded, however, that another Hovhannēs from the monastery of Tat'ew could have been involved. See Step'anos Ōrbēlean, *Syunik'i patmut'yun* [History of Syunik'], trans. and comm. by Ashot Abrahamyan, Yerevan 1986, p. 505, n. 1199.

90 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 366

91 Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or P̄rosheans* (n. 7), col. 98, places this event after 1273, when Tarsayich assumed the reign of Syunik'. However, the inner chronology as narrated by Step'anos Ōrbēlean does not necessarily support this late date. Nor does the sense of urgency. If Hovhannēs of Yernjak was ordained ca 1266–1267 there was no reason why the Ōrbēleans would wait for six-seven years to redress the situation. The two journeys to Cilicia took place before and after 1268 when the catholicos changed. Karen Matevosyan dates this to 1268 without a discussion, see Karen Matevosyan, *Patmahnagitakan ditarkumner* [Historical-Archaeological Observations] Yerevan 2020, p. 106.

adopted as a child, his status in the eyes of some local prelates of the Armenian Church hierarchy beyond Syunik' (indeed, Dzagavan is in the north, rather far from Syunik') was not superior to that of P'ros'h. Again, one may wonder if P'ros'h's lingering importance led to Smbat's journey to Tabriz in 1273, where he died.

About a decade later, in 1280, P'ros'h undertook another endeavor that would immortalize his name: inviting Nersēs Mshets'i, originally from the monastery of the Holy Apostles near Mush, to establish a new center of learning with a brilliant history. Nersēs and his patron P'ros'h founded one of the most illustrious spiritual and intellectual centers of medieval Armenia – the renowned monastic school of Gladzor, whose significance for the intellectual culture of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Armenia cannot be overestimated.⁹² What interests us in this paper is what the foundation and location of Gladzor can tell us about the dynamics of power between the Ōrbēlean and P'roshean princes. I will therefore make a detour in discussing its possible location and the latter's implications.

ŌRBĒLEAN-P'ROSHEAN RIVALRY AND THE LOCATION OF THE GLADZOR MONASTIC SCHOOL

There has been much discussion in the scholarly literature on the location of Gladzor. Independently from this, some researchers have also explored the Ōrbēlean-P'roshean rivalry in the thirteenth century. However, these two streams of investigation have not been brought together to appreciate what the location of Gladzor could tell us about the position of P'ros'h Khaghbakean *vis-à-vis* the Ōrbēleans and if it could help us understand some of the decisions of the Ōrbēleans themselves. It was in the celebrated school or university of Gladzor where so many intellectuals of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Armenia were educated and produced their artistic, scientific, religious, spiritual, philosophical, and literary creations. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the details of this debate. However, some of the hypotheses taken up anew in recent years may give novel insights towards a better understanding of Ōrbēlean vs P'roshean domains in Vayots' Dzor and their competition for its control.

Because Gladzor was established through the patronage of P'ros'h Khaghbakean, scholars have searched for its location in those areas of Vayots' Dzor that firmly belonged to this family. For Yovsēp'ean

it should have been near the *darapas* of the P'rosheans in Srkghunk' (now Vernashen), possibly in the nearby gorge, north-east of the village where he photographed ruins of some structures. The late nineteenth, early twentieth-century ethnographer Ervand Lalayan, on the other hand, was the first to identify the monastery of T'anahat with Gladzor, an opinion that most scholars have rejected, despite another effort in the 1980s by Igit' Gharibyan, who conducted excavations at T'anahat, to reassert this point of view. Following Grigoryan, Sanjian thought that it was credible to identify the ruins near an abandoned church of the Mother of God located four kilometers east of Yeghegis with the site of Gladzor.⁹³ In recent years, this hypothesis has been taken up by a local *connoisseur*, Tigran Mkrtchyan, who has explored the ruins of the church. Karen Matevosyan

- 92 There is voluminous literature on the school of Gladzor, dedicated to its various aspects: its curriculum, students, theological and philosophical output, artistic production, etc. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present an exhaustive bibliography, but to indicate only some works on its history, cultural importance, and location, see Levon Khach'eryan, *Gladzori hamalsaranā hay mankavarzhakan mtk'i zargats'man mej* (xii–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 hamalsaranā" [The Medieval University of Armenia], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri*, 1 (1984), pp. 62–71; Sen Arevshatyan, Artashes Mate'vosyan, *Gladzori hamalsaranā mijnadaryan Hayastani lusavorut'yan kentron* [The University of Gladzor as an Educational Center of Medieval Armenia], Yerevan 1984; Levon Khach'ikyan, "Gladzorean hamalsaranā ev nra saneri awartakan atenakhōsut'iwinnerā" [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). Other works on Gladzor are cited in the relevant footnotes.
- 93 Garegin Yovsēp'ean, "Mkhit'ar Sasnets'i", *Ararat*, (1899), p. 160; *Idem*, *Khaghbakeans or P'rosheans* (n. 7), cols 37, 39–40, fig. 8, for an image of the presumed ruins of Gladzor. On the debate regarding the identification of Gladzor with T'anahat, see Khach'eryan, *Gladzor* (n. 92), pp. 15–18; a forceful affirmation of this identification may be found in Gharibyan, *Gladzor* (n. 92). This was refuted (earlier) by Barkhudaryan, *CA*, vol. III (n. 24), pp. 71–72 and (later) by Mate'vosyan, "The university of Gladzor" (n. 92). G. Grigoryan remains ambiguous, accepting the location of T'anahat but then suggesting another site with ruins of a church of the Mother of God – four kilometers southeast of Yeghegis, see Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 157–159. For a summary of the arguments in English, see Sanjian, "Ōrbelians and Proshians" (n. 62), pp. 918–920. Most recently the question was revisited, with a review of newer evidence, in Matevosyan, *Historical-Archaeological Observations* (n. 91), pp. 102, 113–116. Sanjian and Matevosyan consider the site of a ruined church four kilometers southeast of Yeghegis as a plausible hypothesis.

has cautiously accepted this possibility, calling for undertaking archaeological excavations at the site before drawing definitive conclusions. Moreover, he has also emphasized the close links between Gladzor and the monastic school of Hermon, the exchanges between their monks and scholars, as well as the transfer of the whole institution to Hermon upon the demise of Gladzor, whose reasons are still not clearly understood. These are all factors that would further suggest the proximity of the two structures, and the short distance between the ruined church of the Mother of God and the monastery of Hermon would fit this reasoning.⁹⁴

If the school of Gladzor, established in 1280 under the aegis of Prosh Khaghbakean, were indeed positioned so close to Yeghegis, its political significance would assume a whole new magnitude. Scholars have noted how, after the failure of creating a new bishopric in Yernjak, the founding of Gladzor provided Prosh a unique opportunity to highlight his patronage of a significant pan-Armenian religious and educational institution in his domains of Vayots' Dzor without raising concerns within the hierarchical structure of the Armenian Church. His support for the arts and learning, through the sustenance of Gladzor, deservedly received great praise both during his lifetime and in the centuries that followed, as attested in colophons. This, however, should not make us forget what an immense political statement it represented – establishing and supporting what became *the* most prestigious center of learning, a “stone’s throw” away from Yeghegis – the residence of his rival Ōrbēleans, should the hypothesis of Gladzor’s location near Yeghegis be confirmed. Gladzor attracted students from all over Armenia and Cilicia throughout its existence, carrying Prosh’s fame far and wide. Step’anos Ōrbēlean himself was educated there, as were numerous outstanding intellectuals, artists, philosophers, and poets during the fourteenth century. Although in the fourteenth century the Ōrbelans are also mentioned among the benefactors of Gladzor, throughout the centuries the Prosheans held the pride of place as Gladzor’s foremost patrons. On the contrary, Step’anos Ōrbēlean and his successors tried to counter the influence of Gladzor by sponsoring other centers of learning and culture around Yeghegis, such as the monastery of Arates, Upper Noravank’, later Hermon, and, of course, the monastic school of Tat’ew.

If the above hypothesis of Gladzor’s location is correct and Prosh Khaghbakean owned territory in such close vicinity to Yeghegis, this may perhaps explain why Smbat established his second *darapas* precisely there. His brother Tarsayich added his own new residential building with a monumental entrance that featured himself and his favorite wife Mina Khat’un [fig. 4]. In doing so, the Ōrbēleans marked their presence all along the River Yeghegis in a tight network of settlements and monastic sites: starting from their *darapas* in Arp’a (connected to Noravank’) and reaching the settlement Yeghegis along the river, with the adjacent monastery of Ts’akhats’ K’ar and the fortress Smbataberd, then moving further upstream to include the monasteries of Arates and Hermon. But why was the control of the valley of middle Arp’a and Yeghegis so vital? I will look into this question in Part IV for some possible answers.

THE ŌRBĒLEANS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MATRIMONIAL NETWORKS

While Prosh Khaghbakean strengthened his status in Vayots’ Dzor via religious and educational foundations, the Ōrbēleans diversified their own policy. To appreciate what this meant for the next generation of the Ōrbēleans, we must acknowledge the importance of Tarsayich’s and his children’s marital choices.

Tarsayich Ōrbēlean’s two marriages open a window into a world of multi-layered alliances against an inter-religious background that has habitually remained below the radar of coeval historians. His first wife and the mother of the historian and Metropolitan of Syunik’ Step’anos Ōrbēlean was Aruz. The historian tells us that she was an “Ismaelite” and “the daughter of the lord of Syunik’.” Then, when describing his own descent, Step’anos affirms: “I was born of a Sisakan mother and an Ōrbēlean father who [was] called Tarsayich.”⁹⁵ Employing the term “Sisakan” created a link to the imagined primordial forefather of the ancient Syuni nobility – the *Nahapet* Sisak from whom the “Sisakan nation” took its origin.⁹⁶ Step’anos exalts his mother’s piety and fear of God upon her conversion to Christianity. Yet, we are left wondering: who was this Muslim lord, the father of Aruz, living in Syunik’ in the thirteenth century, who was, on top of it, a “Sisakan” prince.

94 Matevosyan, *Historical-Archaeological Observations* (n. 91), p. 122.

95 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 416, 477–478.

96 *Ibidem*, pp. 11–12.

One possibility is that Aruz's family belonged to a branch of the old Syuni house that had converted to Islam during the Seljuk conquests and domination. Because in this context Step'anos specifies that at that time Tarsayich ruled the area around Orotn, we are entitled to suppose that this could be the area of Aruz's original family's domains. Given our present knowledge, this suggestion must remain hypothetical. Alternatively, her family descended from an otherwise unknown Seljuk military man, who may have received an *iqṭa'* in Syunik', possibly near Orotn, and became the lord of the land somewhere in the vicinity. This latter hypothesis has its problems, too. It is unlikely that Step'anos Ōrbēlean would call a local Seljuk ruler the progeny of Sisak – the legendary forefather of the Syuni (Sisakan) dynasty. On the other hand, Aruz's father's name, carved on her grave that was destroyed after the earthquake of 1931, was Sadun.⁹⁷ This name was not typical of Syuni or Ōrbēlean princes but was common in the Mahkanaberdt's'i family that held territories in northern Armenia. For this family, we have, indeed, a record of more than one inter-religious dynastic marriage.⁹⁸ The question of Aruz's original family remains unclear, at our present state of knowledge, and requires a separate investigation.

Because these are all open questions, one cannot fully evaluate the political implications of Tarsayich's first marriage. The only certain conclusion one may draw is that the choice of Aruz as Tarsayich's bride could not have been accidental, and her family could have hardly been insignificant, especially given the possible date of their union (the marriage must have taken place ca 1250), when the Ōrbēleans were actively consolidating their hold in Syunik'. If we are to judge from the lack of any mention of Aruz, as opposed to Tarsayich's second wife, Mina Khat'un's substantial presence, in inscriptions, the historical record, and the colophons, the marriage with Aruz did not produce the expected political benefits. Of course, one cannot entirely rule out the emotional factor and Tarsayich's greater attachment to Mina Khat'un.

Tarsayich married Mina while Aruz Khat'un was still living, and to the consternation of the clergy. Yet, polygyny and inter-religious marriages were anything but unknown among Armenian and Georgian elites of the time.⁹⁹ Mina was the daughter of the once-powerful Hasan Jalal Dawla of Khach'en mentioned above. The latter was rumored to have

adhered to a planned anti-Mongol uprising for which he was asphyxiated in 1260. The marriage brokered by the Georgian King David Ulu took place after Hasan Jalal's death and attests, once more, to a *rapprochement* between the Ōrbēleans and the Georgian court after the drowning of David's wife Gont's'a. Indeed, Step'anos Ōrbēlean credits Smbat for having spoken favorably of David at the court of Hülegü, as well as having become the guardian of David and Gont's'a's son Demetre, a charge that his brother Tarsayich assumed after Smbat's death. There is, however, no other corroborating evidence of these relationships.¹⁰⁰ Tarsayich took other measures to strengthen his ties with the Georgian Bagratids, as we shall see below. Mina Khat'un appears in numerous inscriptions left by her husband and their male and female children. Her and Tarsayich's images were carved on the

97 Barkhudaryan, *CA*, vol. II (n. 69), p. 39. Matevosyan, *Noravank'* (n. 72), pp. 38–39, where other evidence from colophons about Aruz is cited.

98 Hayrapet Margarian, "Mahkanaberdt's'ineri (Saduneanneri) ish-khanakan tunə ZhB-ZhD darerum [The Princely House of the Mahkanaberdt's'i (Saduneans) in the 12th–14th Centuries], *Haykazeen hayagitakan handēs* [Haykazeen Armenological Journal], 18 (1998), pp. 9–36.

99 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 421, reports that the Georgian King David Ulu (vii) married a Mongolian princess Yesugan while his wife Gont's'a was still alive. There are various attestations of marriages between members of Christian and Muslim élites in Georgia, Armenia, and Seljuk Anatolia. The marriage of the Georgian Queen Rusudan's daughter Tamar, known as Gurji Khatun in Islamic sources, to the Seljuk Sultan Kaykhusraw II (r. 1237–1246), is perhaps the most well-known, but also that of Mahperi Khatun, the daughter of an Armenian Chalcedonian from the Cilician area, has received much attention recently. While there is no single systematic study of the subject of inter-religious marriage in medieval Armenia, Georgia, and Anatolia, the reader may fruitfully consult: Patricia Blessing, "Women Patrons in Medieval Anatolia and a Discussion of Mähbari Khātūn's Mosque Complex in Kayseri", *Türk Tarih Kurumu*, 78/282 (2014), pp. 475–526; Susan Yalman, "The 'Dual Identity' of Mahperi Khatun: Piety, Patronage and Marriage across Frontiers in Seljuk Anatolia", in *Architecture and Landscape in Medieval Anatolia, 1100–1500*, Patricia Blessing, Rachel Goshgarian eds, Edinburgh 2017; Pogossian, "Women, Power, Identity" (n. 31), pp. 245–246; Margarian, "Juvaynī and Armenia" (n. 85), p. 176; Rustam Shukurov, "Harem Christianity: The Byzantine Identity of Seljuk Princes", in *The Seljuks of Anatolia: Court and Society in the Medieval Middle East*, Andrew Peacock, Sara Nur Yildiz eds, London 2015, pp. 115–150; David Durand-Guédy, "The *Ribāt* of Gurjī Khātūn ('the Georgian Lady'): New Data about Women Patrons, Chancery Practices, and Foundation Inscriptions in Seventh/Thirteenth Century Saljuq Anatolia", *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā*, 29 (2021), pp. 181–216. I am grateful to my friend and colleague Sara Nur Yildiz for pointing out this article to me, as well as our numerous fruitful discussions on Gurji Khatun and politics of Seljuks in Anatolia.

100 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 421, 425.

tympanum of the monumental entry to their residence in Yeghegis [fig. 4].¹⁰¹

Aruz Khat'un died ca 1286. She was not given a burial in the Örbēlean dynastic cemetery of Noravank', something that Mina Khat'un would certainly oppose, given her own pious donations to Noravank' attested in inscriptions. However, Aruz was hardly relegated to an inferior rank after her death, and one senses a fine ambiguity in the choice of her gravesite: the prestigious monastery of Tat'ew, which hosted numerous princes and princesses, as well as two kings, of the ancient Syuni dynasty.¹⁰² Can we take the location of her burial as yet another evidence for the authenticity of her family's Syuni origin? Or was this honor due to her son Step'anos, who was soon to attain the rank of the metropolitan bishop of Syunik'? At the state of our present knowledge, the answer must remain open. Mina Khat'un, on the other hand, was buried in Noravank' next to her husband Tarsayich and her grave proudly declared her royal origin, alluding to her paternal family's relationship to the kings of Syunik' and Aghvank'.¹⁰³

MARRIAGE ALLIANCES AND REGIONAL NETWORKS: THE CHILDREN OF TARSAYICH

Tarsayich's children's marriages and careers reinforced the Örbēleans' network with some noteworthy Armenian and Georgian families of the time. His eldest son Yelikum married T'amt'a, and although Step'anos Örbēlean does not reveal her dynastic belonging, she may be related to the Zak'arids, given her name. Step'anos, taken under tutelage by his uncle Smbat, followed an ecclesiastical path and became one of the most prominent intellectuals, spiritual leaders, and political personalities of his time, with an impressive list of travels and associations with high-ranking individuals at the Armenian court of Cilicia or that of the Ilkhanids in Tabriz. Step'anos reports the death of his full brother P'akhradawla with no other information, whereas their eldest brother Yelikum took up the reign of Syunik' after their father's death in 1290. Tarsayich and Mina's daughter Mamk'an married Manuel, the brother of the Georgian King David VIII (r. 1293–1311),¹⁰⁴ Asp'a to the Dop'ean Prince of Khach'en – Grigor, and the youngest son Jalal to Gonts'a – a direct descendant of the general Zak'arē Zak'arid.

Tarsayich, thus, like his predecessors, carried out a policy of fine diplomacy, sealed through marriages,

among others, and balancing acts between the Mongol overlords and other regional players. It is not always easy to differentiate between fact and pious dynastic stories reported by Step'anos Örbēlean. Nevertheless, he affirms that the Ilkhan Abaqa (r. 1265–1282) greatly loved his father, who fought for the Mongols from Khorasan to al-Sham, from Egypt to Derbend, participating in nine campaigns and earning fame as a valiant warrior. He was so highly praised in front of Abaqa that on numerous occasions the latter would:

[...] take off his royal clothing and dress Tarsayich from head to toe, and he would tie his belt from pure gold and embedded with precious gems and pearls, around his [Tarsayich's] waist."¹⁰⁵

Allsen has brilliantly analyzed this well-documented Mongol custom of cloth-giving and its political implications.¹⁰⁶ Intriguingly, a colophon dated 1292 that mourns the death of Prosh Khaghbakean's son Amir-Hasan includes a long encomiastic section which emphasizes the admiration Amir-Hasan earned at the court of the "kings" of the "Nation of the Archers," specifically Hülegü and Abaqa, employing very similar wording to Step'anos Örbēlean's about his father Tarsayich:

"They [the Ilkhans, Z.P.] would dress him [Amir-Hasan, Z.P.] taking off from their own selves brocades woven

101 Yovsēp'ean's discussion of Tarsayich, his marriage to Mina Khat'un and their progeny remains indispensable to this day. On Mina Khat'un, see Yovsēp'ean, *The Progeny of Tarsayich* (n. 73), pp. 1–6.

102 Örbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 425; on the date of Aruz's death, see Matevosyan, *Noravank'* (n. 72), pp. 38–39.

103 Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 24), p. 237, no 776.

104 Grigoryan argues that this was King David Ulu VII (d. 1271) and the brother in question was Manuel who died in 1270, see Grigoryan, *Syunik' under Örbēleans* (n. 36), p. 83. This is unlikely for at that time Mamk'an would be nine years old at most, but possibly even younger, considering that the marriage of her parents occurred after 1260. Exactly in 1270 the Council of Dzagavan established the earliest permissible age for girls to get married as 14, and in no way younger than 12. See Garegin Yovsēp'ean, "Dzagavanits' zhogovā" [The Council of Dzagavan], *Shoghakat'*, (1913), pp. 22–46, sp. p. 43. In all likelihood these were David VIII and his brother Manuel, sons of the already mentioned King Demetre II and grandsons of the unfortunate Gonts'a who was drowned.

105 Örbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 423.

106 Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Steppe. A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 46–57.

with gold and tie around his waist a golden belt embedded with gems [and] pearls.”¹⁰⁷

These two pieces of evidence are an eloquent testimony to the equilibrium that the Mongols established among the princes of Armenia (and Georgia). They adopted a clever strategy of bestowing similar (or even the same) gifts, promoting a self-perception among the nobility that tied its fortunes and fame to the generosity of the Ilkhans and limiting the acquisition of too much local power by a single family through the creation of rivalries, but also keeping them away from their territories while on long military campaigns for the Mongols.

A full integration into the system of relationships under the overlordship of the Ilkhanids meant that the struggles at the court and the turmoil that characterized the Ilkhanid history affected all the local rulers. A crisis that evolved between 1282 to 1284, leading to the execution of several high-standing courtiers, among them the most famous Shams al-Dīn Juwaynī in October 1284, was one such case. Step’anos Ōrbēlean does not comment on the *ṣāhib-dīwān* and his fate, except for listing him among those who, according to him, conspired with Tegüder-Ahmad (r. 1282–1284) against the future Ilkhan Arghun and were executed. We know that many of Juwaynī’s close companions were annihilated or severely demoted. On the other hand, the Georgian King Demetre II (r. 1270–1289), who, according to Step’anos Ōrbēlean, was among the conspirators, managed to survive and was even “greatly loved” by the Ilkhan Arghun (r. 1284–1289). Step’anos states that Demetre had grown up in the household of Tarsayich, and the rise of his fortunes coincided with the latter’s own success, who was appointed as the *atabeg* for Armenia. However, in another turn of fortunes and palace turmoil that led to the fall of Arghun Khan, Demetre was accused “unjustly,” according to Step’anos Ōrbēlean, and executed in 1289. This was his punishment for (presumably) having participated in the poisoning of the Ilkhan Arghun.¹⁰⁸ Step’anos Ōrbēlean affirms that Demetre II’s sons, the future King David VIII and his brother Manuel, were placed under the guardianship of Tarsayich Ōrbēlean. According to Georgian chronicles, on the other hand, David’s guardian was Sadun (II) Mahkanaberdt’s son Khutlu Bugha, and the future king (David VIII) grew up in the lands that once belonged to Awag Zak’arid

(later his daughter Khosak’), with a clear intention of claiming their possession at some point.¹⁰⁹ These two pieces of information do not necessarily contradict each other, for Tarsayich outlived Demetre II by only one year. Contrary to Demetre, he was lucky to die a natural death, in his *darapas* of Arp’a. His daughter, Mamk’an, moreover, married Demetre’s son Manuel [tab. 3].

Upon Tarsayich’s death, a dispute for succession ensued between his eldest son Yelikum (III) (from Aruz Khat’un) and Jalal, Mina Khatun’s only male child, who carried his maternal grandfather’s name. While Yelikum may have had the force of tradition behind him for claiming the seniority and supreme authority within the Ōrbēlean family, Jalal had his formidable mother, Mina Khat’un, promoting his cause. The dispute was resolved at the Ilkhanid court, which designated Yelikum (III) as Tarsayich’s legitimate heir. To prevent a more serious conflict Yelikum, in his turn, put certain areas of Vayots’ Dzor and Geghark’unik’ under the jurisdiction of his half-brother Jalal and his cousin Liparit. Step’anos Ōrbēlean presents an idealized situation of a peaceful joint rule of the three Ōrbēleans who turned Syunik’ into “a Noah’s ark” compared to the rest of Armenia.¹¹⁰

Because Step’anos Ōrbēlean’s precious *History* ends with 1297, we are not lucky to possess the same level of detail on Yelikum III and his children. However, colophons and inscriptions have been fundamental in reconstructing the main events of their lives and their rule.¹¹¹ For understanding Ōrbēlean-Khaghbakean dynamics at the end of the century, it is worth citing an ecclesiastical document, a long dogmatic *Letter of Faith* sent to the Armenian Catholicos Grigor Anawarzets’i protesting his *rapprochement* with the Church of Rome, composed by Step’anos Ōrbēlean himself in 1302. Unlike the *Acts of the Council of Dzagavan*, where

107 Mat’evosyan, *Colophons. 13th Century* (n. 57), pp. 682–683. See also Yovsēp’ean, *Khaghbakeans or P’rosheans* (n. 7), col. 153.

108 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 425–426; Grigoryan, *Syunik’ under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), p. 87.

109 On these dynamics and the role played by Awag’s daughter Khoshak’ in the struggle for claiming her dynastic lands, see Margarian, “Juvaynī and Armenia” (n. 85), pp. 177–178.

110 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 430–432.

111 These have been brought together, with analysis, in Grigoryan, *Syunik’ under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 95–107; Gegham Kirakosyan, “Ōrbēleanneri ishkanakan 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.

Smbat Ōrbēlean was the last signatory among the secular lords, here it was Yelikum and his cousin Liparit that appear before Papak' and Ēach'i, the son and the grandson of P̄rosh Khaghbakean, respectively [tab. 4].¹¹²

THE ŌRBLEANS AND P̄ROSHEANS IN LATE
13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES: FROM RIVALS
TO IN-LAWS

The pinnacle of the relationship between the Ōrbēleans and the P̄rosheans was the marriage of Yelikum (III)'s daughter Mama Khat'un to Ēach'i P̄roshean (d. 1317), which brought the relationship between these two most significant families of Vayots' Dzor a full circle. Step'anos Ōrbēlean, writing in 1297, lauds Ēach'i's courage as he would any Ōrbēlean prince. Moreover, he literally states "our princes Liparit [i.e., Ōrbēlean, Z.P.] and Ēach'i," counting the latter among his family. He extols their joint humiliation of Nawruz (1295–1296). This Mongol tax collector was much disliked for his exorbitant taxation of monasteries, which looked more like pillage to the contemporaries.¹¹³ If we remember Vasak Khaghbakean's inscription from Arates (1220) and Tarsayich's counter-claims from Ts'akhats' K'ar (ca 1273), nothing is more significant than what Ēach'i says in yet another inscription at Ts'akhats' K'ar dated to the last year of his life – 1317. He donated a newly planted orchard in his proper village and *darapas* of Srkghunk' upon which: "our brother Lord Ovan Ōrbel and the congregation set to perform four masses a year..."¹¹⁴ Ovan Ōrbel or Hovhannēs Ōrbel (r. 1300–1324) was the son of Liparit (II) Ōrbēlean, who grew up under the tutelage of his uncle – the historian Step'anos Ōrbēlean – and succeeded him as the next metropolitan bishop of Syunik'. Indeed, Step'anos ordained him as his co-bishop while he was still alive. Hovhannēs Ōrbel was the second cousin of Ēach'i's wife Mama Khat'un, which prompted Ēach'i to call him his "brother," underscoring the completely transformed relationship between these two great families of Vayots' Dzor.

Throughout the fourteenth century, many colophons mention the members of the new generation of the Ōrbēleans – Yelikum's son Burt'el, often honored as "the Great," and his sons Ivanē and

Beshk'en – together with the Prosheans – Ēach'i, then the latter's sons Vasak, Amir-Hasan (II), Amir-Asat', and Jumi. Burt'el's military obligations towards the Mongols saw him often in Tabriz and Sultaniyye. He appears as a patron of the arts and learning not only in his native Yeghegis, but also in Tabriz, in manuscript colophons, as well as inscriptions on churches and monasteries as their founder or donor. Among his foundations, most noteworthy are the iconic two-story church of the Mother of God (Astuatsatsin) in Noravank', known as *burt'elashen*, i.e., "built by Burt'el," designed by the celebrated architect and artist Momik [fig. 3a]. It was during his rule that the Bishop Hovhannēs Ōrbel built another church dedicated to the Mother of God in the Ōrbēlean *darapas* Aṙp'a, always under the direction of Momik. During Burt'el's rule, Yeghegis – the second *darapas* of the Ōrbēleans – reached its artistic apex, as attested by the monuments still extant in today's village. The unique style of bas-reliefs, architectural and decorative features of its churches, as well as manuscript illuminations, have led art historians to speak of the "Vayots' Dzor school" of architecture and manuscript production.¹¹⁵

The P̄roshean Ēach'i and his children did not lag behind in pious foundations and donations. It was in their days that other architectural jewels in Vayots' Dzor were erected, such as buildings within the complex of the Spitakawor Monastery dedicated to the

112 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 462–463; Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prosheans*, vol. 1 (n. 7), p. 145; *Idem*, "The Council of Dzagavan" (n. 104), p. 45; Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 54, 218–220.

113 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), p. 475; Bedrosian, "Armenia during the Seljuk and Mongol Periods" (n. 76), pp. 265–266.

114 Barkhudaryan, *CIA*, vol. III (n. 24), p. 143, no 435, emphasis is mine. Hovhannēs Ōrbel was Step'anos Ōrbēlean's cousin's son.

115 See the general bibliography in note 116, as well as Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile du Matenadaran No. 10.525 de l'an 1306. Contribution à l'étude de la miniature en Siwnik' au XIV^e siècle", *Revue des études arméniennes*, 16 (1982), pp. 327–343; Patrick Donabédian, "Le tympan du monument à deux xac'k'ars d'Elegis", *Revue des études arméniennes*, 14 (1980), pp. 393–413; Astghik Gevorgyan, *Vayots' Dzori ev Orotani manrankarch'ut'yunə 13–17rd darerum* [The Miniature of Vayots' Dzor and Orotan During 13th–17th Centuries], Yerevan 2003; Lusiné Barseghyan, "Aratesi ev Verin Noravank' i grch'ut'ean kentronnerə" [The Scriptoria of Arates and Upper Noravank'], *Handēs Amsōreay* [Monthly Review], 127 (2013), pp. 361–384, with a list of extant manuscripts copied in these two centers.

Mother of God and those of the T'anahat Monastery, among others.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Ōrbēleans held unchallenged hegemony in Vayots' Dzor throughout the fourteenth century.

Thus, in the fourteenth century, the Ōrbēleans finally achieved their goal of attaining an undisputedly dominant position *vis-à-vis* the Prōsheans and, needless to say, any other smaller military-princely families in Vayots' Dzor but also elsewhere in Syunik'. They are often listed in the first place in colophons and inscriptions as the rulers of the land and patrons of the arts and learning. The Ōrbēleans start appearing also as benefactors of the Gladzor university, particularly Burt'el, but also the metropolitan Hovhannēs Ōrbel and his successor Step'anos-Tarsayich (in office 1314–1331).¹¹⁷ This was the time when Yeghegis (and monasteries around it) flourished as a cultural and intellectual center, a topic discussed in more detail in the following chapter of this volume.

PART IV WHY YEGHEGIS?

This chapter began with an appraisal of the strategic military significance of Vayots' Dzor as a region and Yeghegis as one of its most significant settlements in the ninth century, when it was the seat of the senior Syuni princes. It went on to discuss how vital the control of Vayots' Dzor was for the Bagratids in view of the region's easy access to Dvin – the administrative capital of Abbasid Armīniyya. Conversely, if escaping from the plain of Sharur eastward, the impregnable heights and gorges of Vayots' Dzor could become a safe haven. At any rate, they constituted a barrier to all sorts of movements, unless one was closely familiar with the specifics of the local geography and its mountain passes. As the geopolitical situation changed after the Seljuk conquests of Armenia, so did the importance of Vayots' Dzor. The latter's fortunes in the twelfth century were due not so much to military successes but to the able political-diplomatic maneuvering of its bishops and their hard-won privileges from the Seljuk, then Eldigūzid courts. A brief Zak'arid hegemony on behalf of the Georgian court did not last long enough to evaluate what significance Vayots' Dzor would have acquired

in their wider Armenian land-holdings. Logically, viewed from the north, where the Zak'arids, but especially the Georgian court, had their centers of power, this area could become an important southern march. Ivanē Zak'arid's failed plans to marry off his daughter T'amt'a to Liparit Ōrbēlean underscore the importance he attached to Syunik', if not specifically to Vayots' Dzor, for this reason. However, Zak'arids' reliance both on the Ōrbēleans and the Khaghbakeans in their conquest of Vayots' Dzor pitted these two families against each other *a priori* for the control of Vayots' Dzor or Syunik' more widely. Consequently, each of them employed all possible means at their disposal to legitimize themselves as the *only* rightful rulers of these lands. In yet another dramatic turn of historical events within a short span of time, Syunik' became part of the largest land empire of all time – the Mongol Empire and then its offshoot – the Ilkhanid state. How did this affect the fortunes of Vayots' Dzor and Yeghegis? Why do we continue to observe a prolonged Ōrbēlean-Prōshean rivalry, especially for the control of the valley of the Yeghegis River, as attested by their competing patronage of religious or educational establishments in this specific area, even before the Mongol conquests and all the way to the 1280s?

Certainly, the physical geography that characterized this region and its access to Dvin and Nakhichevan from the east and north, respectively, made it a vital territory in the ninth and tenth centuries. Its military-strategic importance did not diminish in subsequent periods. However, in the second half

- ¹¹⁶ Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 96–107; Levon Khach'ikyan, "Siwneats' Ōrbēleaneri Burt'ēlean chiwghə" [The Burt'ēlean Branch of the Ōrbēleans of Syunik'], in *Ashkhatut'iwinner* [Collected Works], vol. II, Levon Kach'ikyan ed., Yerevan 1999, pp. 7–33, (originally published in *Banber matenadaran* [Bulletin of the Matenadaran], 9 (1969), pp. 173–199. I have used the 1999 reprinted version, with the relevant page numbers); *Idem*, "Ōrbēlean iskhanneri Burt'ēlean gerdastanəv Siwneats' episkopos parontēr Step'anosa" [The Burt'ēlean House of Ōrbēlean Princes and the Bishop and Lord of Syunik' Step'anos], in Kach'ikyan ed., (n. 116), pp. 34–42 (originally published in *Patmabanasirakan handes*, 1 [1991], pp. 85–92. I have used the 1999 reprinted version, with the relevant page numbers); Kirakosyan, "Ōrbēleans in the 14th–15th centuries" (n. 111); Grigoryan, *Syunik' under the Ōrbēleans* (n. 36), pp. 54–55, on Burt'el's rule as the last great period of the Ōrbēleans of Syunik', and *Ibidem*, pp. 119–120.
- ¹¹⁷ Yovsēp'ean, *Khaghbakeans or Prōsheans* (n. 7), cols 53, 102, 190, 199–207; Kirakosyan, "Ōrbēleans in the 14th–15th centuries" (n. 111).

of the thirteenth century, rather than representing centers of rival or antagonistic polities, these cities remained nodes of trade now incorporated within the global Mongol Empire. We shall recall that a portion of the Dvin-Partaw road passed through Vayots' Dzor, and the revival of commerce during the so-called *Pax Mongolica* made this road, among others, crucial again. There is no doubt that the Ōrbēleans attached great importance to trade. This is evident, among others, when we look at their constructions of bridges, caravanserais, and guesthouses, not only in Vayots' Dzor but elsewhere in Syunik'. They cannot all be presented here in detail, but a sampling of the most important such projects in Vayots' Dzor gives us a sufficient idea.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a portion of long-distance international routes passed through Vayots' Dzor. Scholars have provided various hypotheses on the exact trajectory of the road that from Dvin and Nakhichevan moved eastward through Vayots' Dzor, then further north and east reaching Partaw.¹¹⁸ This was the "Dvin-Partaw" section of the system known as the Silk Road(s). The route followed the River Arp'a, entering Vayots' Dzor from the plain of Sharur. Approaching Arp'a (today Old Arp'a on the opposite side of the river from modern Areni), which became a *darapas* of the Ōrbēleans, the physical geography would require the traveler to cross the river and continue on its right bank. It was at this important crossing that, upon Tarsayich's request, Bishop Sargis II of Noravank' (1264–1287, d. 1298), his distant cousin, built a monumental bridge, of which only a small portion is extant.¹¹⁹ Although there were other medieval bridges at different locations across the River Arp'a, indicating considerable care in maintaining good communication routes, their building or renovations are either not dated or are dated to the seventeenth or later centuries.¹²⁰ Thus, we cannot credit the Ōrbēleans for these constructions with a fair degree of certainty, although it is possible that at least some of them were originally built or renewed under their patronage. Even more impressive are the remains of caravanserais and especially their number in a rather circumscribed geographical space. Besides the famous and monumental caravanserai of Selim, built by Ch'esar Ōrbēlean in 1332, there were others in the near vicinity: Aghnjadzor

(three kilometers from Selim), another one near the village Aghavnadzor, and a third twelve kilometers south of the caravanserai of Selim, near the village Leŋnants'k' [map 3].¹²¹ Only a high volume of trade, apparently encouraged by the Ōrbēleans, would justify the expenses for creating such a tight system of waystations. The history of trade in Vayots' Dzor under the Ōrbēleans requires a much more circumstantial treatment than is possible here. However, we can safely state that the wealth created from such commercial activity was also at least partially used to cover the costs of trade-related infrastructure development, as well as the foundation of educational institutions in Syunik'. But that same wealth made the control of the middle stream of the River Arp'a, including its two most important settlements and princely residences of the Ōrbēleans – the villages Arp'a and Yeghegis – more desirable than any other extension of land in Vayots' Dzor.

CONCLUSIONS

The historical land of Syunik' and its region Vayots' Dzor are home to an impressive architectural and artistic heritage. To understand the contexts wherein these were created and to appreciate their multiple functions, this article traced the political geography and socio-political history of Syunik' and its rulers in a broad, long-term perspective. Regional and global processes from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries were taken into consideration. Today's Yeghegis Village was the political center of Syunik' in the ninth-tenth and again thirteenth-fourteenth centuries and its cultural legacy is a material testimony to these periods of prosperity, especially the latter. It is probably not a coincidence that both these periods saw a general revival of trade and the inclusion of Armenia in international commercial networks. What patterns emerge when taking

118 Harut'yunyan, "The Dvin-Partaw route" (n. 15), with an overview of previous hypotheses on the exact location of the road. I rely on Harut'yunyan for this paragraph.

119 Ōrbēlean, *History* (n. 17), pp. 429–430.

120 Varazdat Harut'yunyan, *Mijnadaryan Hayastani k'aravanatnēr u kamurjnerā* [Caravanserais and Bridges of Medieval Armenia], Yerevan 1960, pp. 102–112.

121 *Ibidem*, pp. 17–26, 35–37, 48–50. Leonardo Squilloni, "The Caravanserai of Selim in the Framework of Long-Range Connectivity in Medieval Armenia" [forthcoming].

a long-term view on the socio-political history of Syunik' during this time? And what ruptures or new processes may one observe?

Some central places exhibit a remarkable continuity between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, such as Yeghegis and Arp'a in Vayots' Dzor, or Tat'ew in south-eastern Syunik', whereas others emerged due to new processes and circumstances in the twelfth century, such as Noravank'. The rise and fall, or the continuous vitality of central sites, including holy sites, was closely connected to the strategies of territory control of Syunik's secular and religious lords. This is one of the unsurprising patterns of continuity that is traceable even as we see ruptures in the ruling dynasties of Syunik' and even if their different generations had different specific problems to resolve. Yet, local dynamics are hardly sufficient for explaining their strategies of territory control and the rise or fall of central places. External – regional or even global – events must necessarily be taken into consideration and analyzed concomitantly with an internal analysis. In this respect, the ability of Syunik's secular and religious leaders to adapt to new circumstances determined by wider Eurasian processes, such as Seljuk or Mongol invasions, was key.

Thus, Yeghegis was the political center of Syuni princes as long as Vayots' Dzor was an integral part of this family's possessions. However, for tenth-century external viewers, Vayots' Dzor was a self-contained unit, different from Syunik'. Indeed, the subsequent Bagratid annexation of Vayots' Dzor in the eleventh century did separate its history from the rest of Syunik', whose south-eastern regions, i.e., the area of Baghk', gained greater importance for Syuni princes. Baghk' became the center of the Kingdom of Syunik', changing the status of Vayots' Dzor to a frontier area if viewed from the nucleus of Bagratid power – the capital Ani. On the other hand, it was the Seljuk conquest of the Kingdom of Syunik' that initiated Vayots' Dzor's second period of *floruit*. The able political-diplomatic actions of Bishop Hovhannēs Kapants'i and his successor Step'anos III, who managed to establish a *modus vivendi* with the Seljuks and their *atabegs*, the Eldigüzids, laid the groundwork for Vayots' Dzor's "renaissance" at the end of the twelfth century and the emergence of a new religious center there – the Noravank' Monastery.

The activities of the Bishops Hovhannēs and Step'anos are representative of a more general phenomenon of the Armenian history of this period: the rise of the bishops' importance in a vacuum of local "secular" power or Christian patrons of the land, who secured the patronage of its key strategic locations and sacred sites. Bishops took on not only spiritual but also administrative responsibilities and often negotiated directly with the new overlords, in this case, the Seljuks. The situation started to change with Zak'arid conquests, but especially the arrival of the Mongols, when new land-holding, military elites emerged, claiming ancient "noble" origin and, hence, the right to own and control land acquired recently. They employed various means to legitimize their ownership of land besides military conquest, such as marriage alliances, the deposition of holy relics in specific churches, the founding of new religious sites, or the reclaiming of pre-existent markers of the landscape by impressing their names on them through inscriptions. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and in the specific context of Syunik', the Örbēlean princes secured internal peace. This led to the cultural flourishing, especially in the Örbēleans' residences of Arp'a and Yeghegis, as well as the monastic establishments in their domains. These two seats of power were linked to the ancient trade route that connected Dvin (and the valley of Ararat) to Partaw, and there is no doubt that the wealth that was required for the Örbēleans' extensive artistic commissions was generated, among others, by trade that the Örbēleans now controlled and encouraged. The building of caravanserais or guest-houses adjacent to monasteries was a part and parcel of this policy.

The successful rule of the Örbēleans in Syunik' during the Mongol period was due to their skills in diplomacy and negotiations with the Mongol military and administrative elites, their accomplishments while on Mongol campaigns, their ability to build regional and global networks of power through military and matrimonial alliances, but also the sheer luck of being in the right place at the right time. This was the case with Smbat's second voyage to Qaraqorum.

It is worth noting that the analysis of the sources indicates that roughly from the late twelfth to the fourteenth centuries Örbēlean and Prōshean families recognized at least two, if not three, sources of

authority: external – e.g., Seljuk, Georgian, Mongol – and internal – the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia and, in parallel, the office of the Armenian catholicos, especially (and naturally) when it came to religious matters. When one family was able to acquire the support of the latter authority, as the Ōrbēleans did in the case of preventing the elevation of Yernjak to a bishopric in direct competition with the metropolitan see of Syunik', the other sought alternative means of exerting its influence on a local level. Prōsh Khaghbakean's foundation of the celebrated Gladzor monastic school was, among others, the result of these dynamics. The continued significance of the Armenian Church and the authority of the catholicos as a supra-national body, with his residence in Hromklay, then Sis, in Cilician Armenia, despite its considerable distance from Syunik', is particularly striking. These connections were maintained by numerous voyages to and from Cilicia, a phenomenon that attests to the good conditions of the roads and the capabilities of logistical organization, as well as the availability of financial means to undertake such long journeys.

Another factor that emerges forcefully as crucial for the local and regional dynamics of power, as well as strategies of legitimation and control of territory, is the matrimonial alliances and, at times, the practice of following a female line of succession. There are several cases of transmission of princely or royal authority through a female family member (wife, nephews through a sister, wife's brothers, etc.). The successful future of the Ōrbēleans in Vayots'

Dzor itself depended on the matriarch of the family – the niece of the Bishop Step'anos III, Khat'un, who married the ancestor of the Syunik' branch of the Ōrbēleans – Yelikum. It was through Khat'un and her relatives that she and Yelikum's son Liparit (I) could secure local connections and compete as the legitimate ruler of Vayots' Dzor with the rival Vasak Khaghbakean. Liparit owed his very emancipation from the Eldigūzids to these connections.

Local ties were important enough to overlook religious differences, too. The story of the first marriage of Tarsayich and the enigma of the descent of his originally Muslim wife Aruz, who is said to belong to the ancient Syuni nobility, is telling. Although there are many blind spots in the story, it seems to represent the tip of the iceberg of complex inter-ethnic and inter-religious connections, conversions, and the creation of networks that did not fully make it to the historical record. In the subsequent generations, too, the Ōrbēlean and Khaghbakean princes had to carefully weave their network of alliances through marriages to local or regional elites. This process came full circle when the descendants of these two once rival families struck a matrimonial union in the late thirteenth century.

This local dimension, combined with the generally strong connectivity of Syunik' with the Seljuk and then the Ilkhanid rulers, as well as the thriving trade that crossed this land, led to local multiplicities in this territory. It has also left its impact on the material cultural heritage of Yeghegis, which is the subject of the following chapters of this volume.