



FLORENCE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL
AFRO-EURASIA

2

Cultural Entanglements across Medieval Armenia

Catalogue of the Photo Exhibition

9 April – 12 June 2026, University of Florence, Palazzo Fenzi-Marucelli

Curated by

GOHAR GRIGORYAN, ZAROUÏ POGOSSIAN, IRENE TINTI

within the ERC project ArmEn



All'Insegna del Giglio





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**Armenia
Entangled**
Connectivity and Cultural
Encounters in Medieval
Eurasia 9th - 14th Centuries



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Back cover: Blue-and-white porcelain, bearing the mark of the Ming Emperor Chenghua (r. 1464–1487), found at the Monastery of Gndevank'. Yerevan, Service for the Protection of Historical Environment, Museums, and Nature Reserves, Inv. no. ՊՊ 26 Հ 26/41. Photographic credit: Service for the Protection of Historical Environment, Museums, and Nature Reserves.

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CATALOGUE

INTRODUCTION

The 27 subjects that form this exhibition bear witness to cultural interactions that took place in and around medieval Armenia. These testimonies come from multiple sources: small pieces of pottery and coins; majestic monuments and abandoned ruins; legendary narratives and visual arts; historiographical and juridical texts; lapidary inscriptions and handwritten manuscripts; and even tiny marginal notes that were intentionally erased in medieval times.

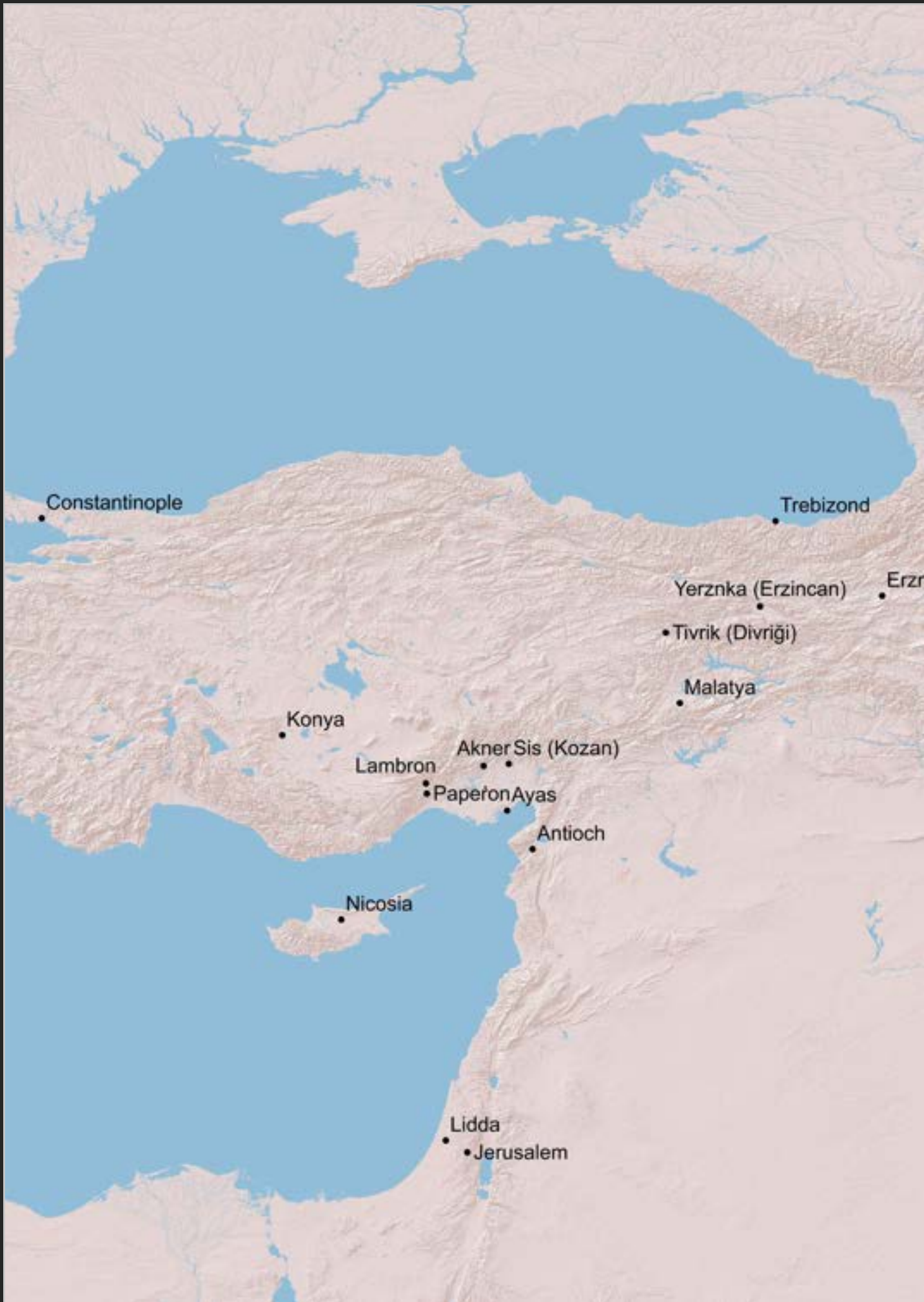
Collectively, these sources and artefacts narrate a story of medieval Armenia and Armenians that spans a multitude of interconnections across Eurasia. Differences in language, religion, confession, ethnicity, and political systems were not always obstacles, but also reasons to seek contacts. Long distances were not an insurmountable problem either, if contacts were necessary. Interactions have always been an integral part of the human experience, with consequences that are rarely insignificant. *Cultural Entanglements across Medieval Armenia* explores these consequences across 27 illustrative case studies.

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

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

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

Gohar Grigoryan



Constantinople

Trebizond

Yeznka (Erzincan)

Erzn

Tivrik (Divriği)

Malatya

Konya

Akner Sis (Kozan)

Lambron

Paperon Ayas

Antioch

Nicosia

Lidda

Jerusalem



Main sites mentioned in the catalogue.

THREE-COLOUR GLAZED POTTERY BETWEEN CHINA AND DVIN

Elisa Pruno

Ceramics, due to the distinctive properties of their primary raw material—clay—and the manufacturing process required for their production, are omnipresent in the archaeological record, most often in the shape of fragments. In pre-industrial times ceramics fulfilled a wide range of functions, and therefore now offer valuable insights into many aspects of the societies that produced, traded, and used them. Thus, studying this material makes it possible to explore social, economic, and aesthetic interconnections. Glazed ceramics—particularly those employing coloured glazes for decorative purposes—reflect a certain level of technological expertise, as well as the desire to produce high-quality objects that are both functional (for glazing renders vessels impermeable) and aesthetically appealing.

The so-called “three-colour glazed ware” displayed here originates in Dvin, Armenia, and dates back to the 9th to 13th centuries. The artistic patterns found on these specimens invite a broader reflection on the dynamics of technological exchange and cross-influence across medieval Eurasia—the subject of a still-ongoing investigation by the Florentine team working in Dvin.

What we see here is a glazed ware covered with a transparent, cream-tinted glaze and decorated using copper and iron metal oxides to obtain green, yellow, and manganese-brown tones. In some other examples—not shown here—the three-colour decorations were further complemented by incised (*sgraffito*) motifs depicting animals, human figures, or vegetal elements. The use of glazes in these colours is attested in a remarkably large number of comparable productions originating from a wide area encompassing Syria and Iran, the Byzantine world, and Italy. In Armenia, in addition to

Dvin, three-colour glazed wares have been recovered in many other medieval sites, including Ani. Most of these similar-looking Eurasian examples have been produced between the 10th and 14th centuries, although the exact chronology varies from one place to another.

The similarities between the extant samples of glazed pottery have led scholars to suggest that a ‘common ancestor’ may have inspired the subsequent widespread production of objects. This ‘ancestor’ is commonly identified with the Chinese *sancai* tradition, which is characterised by the use of three-colour glazes: brown, yellow, and green, with the less frequent addition of blue. Particularly fashionable during the Tang dynasty (618–907), these glazes were especially applied to human and animal figures that formed part of funerary assemblages. If that were the case, how could the *sancai* tradition find its way to productions so widely dispersed across far away regions and periods? From an archaeological standpoint, the introduction of a new product is usually explained either through the movement of practitioners carrying their expertise into different areas, or through the imitation of imported wares (though in the latter case, one would expect eventual acculturative processes to the production of these objects, which do not immediately achieve high standards). However, this theory has been questioned by Oliver Watson who, instead, attributes the shared palette to the use of glazes and metal-oxide colorants in decoration—techniques that consistently yield these hues. Can this observation explain the emergence of the three-colour glazed pottery that was shaped into particularly valued objects, manufactured, and traded across medieval Eurasia over an extended period of time?



a



b



c



d

1abcd. Three-colour glazed pottery found in Dvin, 9th–13th centuries.
 Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. nos. 2048–59 (a), 2292–32 (b), 1917–28 (c), 2048–74 (d). Photographic credit:
 Elisa Pruno, UniFi archaeological mission archive. Used with permission from the History Museum of Armenia.

THE *MĪNĀ'Ī* CERAMICS FOUND IN DVIN

Elisa Pruno

The so-called *mīnā'ī* ceramics are widely regarded as the most luxurious ceramic production of the medieval Islamic world. Presented here are several examples from Dvin, found during the ongoing excavations conducted by the University of Florence (Figs 2ab) as well as earlier ones (Fig. 2c). These are white-bodied stone-paste (frit-ware) vessels decorated with polychrome overglaze enamels in the *haft-rang* (lit. “seven colours”) technique. The decoration often includes gold leaf and, at times, underglaze details of black/cobalt blue colour on a white (or, more rarely, turquoise) glaze. To achieve such a combination of colours, multiple firings are required: an initial firing for body and glaze, followed by a lower-temperature firing in order to fix the enamels and the gold. In a few instances, the *mīnā'ī* can be combined with lustre (Fig. 2d).

The figurative imagery found on *mīnā'ī* pottery is distinctive and often miniaturistic: it includes human and animal figures, courtly scenes, horsemen, musicians, sphinxes, and Kufic inscriptions, all of which recall contemporary manuscript painting. Other than in vessels, the technique described above was also employed for painted tiles: a notable example are the *mīnā'ī* tiles from the Seljuk Palace of Konya (Anatolia), dendrochronologically dated to 1174, which makes them the earliest securely dated

examples of their kind. The production of these tiles seems to have ended with the Mongol conquest, starting from the second decade of the 13th century, and, more specifically, with the destruction of the city of Kāshān (1224), with which the provenance of most *mīnā'ī* tiles is associated. Indeed, petrographic analyses of *mīnā'ī* samples point at Kāshān as their principal, if not sole, centre of production. While the geographical distribution of the extant examples is rather broad, their quantity remains limited. Finds in Iran and Central Asia (Merv, Turkmenistan), Afghanistan, Anatolia (Konya), and Armenia (Dvin) reveal networks of cultural exchange, as well as their possible use as diplomatic gifts.

While the provenance of *mīnā'ī* pottery is related to Iranian models, and their artistic style resembles that used in manuscript painting, their iconography shows affinities with Chinese/Tibetan Buddhist painting as well. This is especially true of the gold halos widely applied to figures (not necessarily confined to rulers alone), of the so-called “moon-faces” (*māh rū*) as an almost ubiquitous ideal of beauty, and of the *mudrā*-like hand gestures.

All the parallels highlighted above reflect long-distance commercial and cultural interconnections along Eurasian routes, one of which passed through Dvin.



2ab. Fragments of *mīnā'ī* pottery found in Dvin during the ongoing excavations conducted by the UniFi team. Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. no. 3834–382–D–84. Photographic credit: Elisa Pruno, UniFi archaeological mission archive. Used with permission from the History Museum of Armenia.



2c. Fragments of *mīnā'ī* pottery found earlier in Dvin.

Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. no. 3834–382–D–84. Photographic credit: Elisa Pruno, UniFi archaeological mission archive. Used with permission from the History Museum of Armenia.



2d. Figured jug combining lustre painting (above) with *mīnā'ī*.

Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, Accession no. 48.1278.

Photographic credit: The Walters Art Museum's Online Collection (Creative Commons License).

CHINESE POTTERY IN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA

Francesca Cheli

Thanks to its geographical location, Armenia has long been a hub for Eurasian trade along the east–west and north–south axes of the Silk Roads. This connectivity is made evident not only by the country’s cultural and architectural productions but also by the imported artefacts uncovered during archaeological excavations, including precious ceramics from China.

Among them are porcelain and celadon, spanning a broad chronological range, from the late 9th–10th centuries to the 17th century. Highly prized in Chinese imperial courts, these pieces were appreciated outside of Asia as well. Their prestige was mainly due to unique raw materials and the sophisticated techniques implemented during production: they were fired at a very high temperature and shaped with ceramic pastes that allowed the fabrication of hard, dense, and compact bodies. This innovative *savoir-faire* largely contributed to the circulation of ceramics in Islamic and Christian Eurasia.

In Armenia, Chinese ceramics have been found in medieval royal palaces, fortified sites, monasteries, towns, and caravanserais (*Map 3a*). The oldest examples come from Ani, located in present-day eastern Turkey, near the Armenian border. Between 961 and 1045, Ani was the capital of the Armenian Bagratid kingdom and a thriving commercial and cultural centre. The city’s position on a secondary branch of the Silk Roads, linking Iran with the Black Sea via Dvin and Trebizond, secured its prosperity during the Bagratid and post-Bagratid periods. Long-range

commercial exchanges resulted in the circulation of objects such as a small six-lobed white porcelain bowl from northern China (*Fig. 3b*) and a celadon plate with incised decoration from the Yue kilns in Zhejiang, southern China (*Fig. 3c*), both of which were found in the royal palace of Ani during excavations conducted by Nikolai Marr in 1907–1908.

At the end of the 20th century, five intact cobalt blue decorated porcelain bowls were found in the monastic complex of Gndevank’, one of which bears the mark of Ming Emperor Chenghua (r. 1464–1487) (*Fig. 3d*). The cobalt blue pigment used for the decoration of this bowl was initially imported from Iran—even if the production of such porcelain objects is associated with China. Although there were brief experiments during the Tang period, the major development of blue-and-white porcelain took place in the 14th century under the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), with Jingdezhen emerging as the main production centre. Its global success reached its peak under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), when it came to dominate overseas markets.

Chinese porcelain, celadon, and other luxury goods of outstanding technological quality found in medieval Armenian sites reflect the prosperity of local cities, as well as the long-distance economic and social contacts that sustained them. More than prestigious objects, they are silent witnesses to the material entanglements that connected Armenia to the wider medieval world.

3a. Sites of Chinese pottery finds in Armenia.

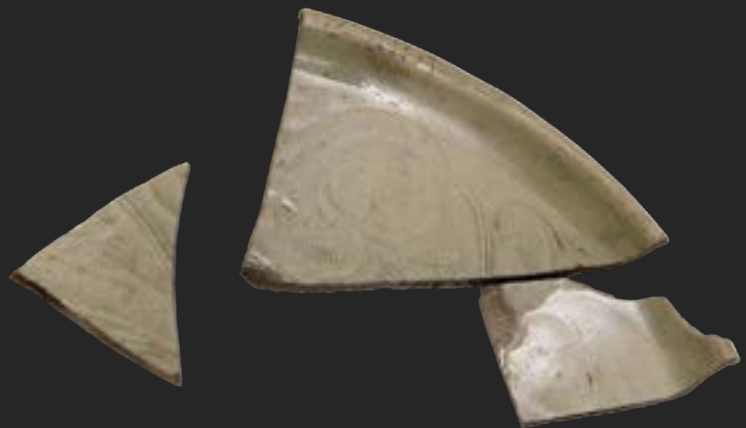
Map: *Francesca Cheli*.

3b. Porcelain bowl from the Bagratid Palace of Ani.

Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. no. 123–772. Photographic credit: Elisa Pruno, UniFi archaeological mission archive. Used with permission from the History Museum of Armenia.

3c. Celadon plate sherd from Ani.

Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. no. 123–374a. Photographic credit: Elisa Pruno, UniFi archaeological mission archive. Used with permission from the History Museum of Armenia.



3d. Blue-and-white porcelain, bearing the mark of the Ming Emperor Chenghua (r. 1464–1487), found at the Monastery of Gndevank’.

Yerevan, Service for the Protection of Historical Environment, Museums, and Nature Reserves, Inv. no. ԳԳ 26 չ 26/41.

Photographic credit: Service for the Protection of Historical Environment, Museums, and Nature Reserves.



CHINA OR ARMENIA?*Michele Nucciotti*

This dish, unearthed during excavations at Dvin and now kept at the History Museum of Armenia, exemplifies the cultural and technological entanglements that shaped medieval Eurasia. It is believed to have been produced in the 11th–12th centuries—a period associated with the early Seljuk presence in the region. The dish is characterised by a hexagonal foliated rim, a creamy glaze, and thin walls decorated in shallow relief with a stylised vegetal motif: palmettes arranged within a ribbon, each flanked by paired leaves.

What makes this piece remarkable is its possible connection to earlier artefacts made in China. Similar forms were first created in northern China during the Tang dynasty (7th–10th centuries), where master potters

crafted fine porcelain dishes of comparable profile. By the Seljuk era, such Chinese luxury wares had long circulated across the Islamic world, inspiring local artisans. The Dvin example shows both imitation and innovation: while the local potters failed to reproduce true porcelain, they developed a siliceous fabric with extremely thin walls, covered in a dense white glaze, and adapted Chinese-inspired shapes to new aesthetic contexts.

Thus, this dish is not a copy but rather a creative reinterpretation—an object that transformed imported models into novel realia for elite banquets in Western Eurasia, reaching Armenia as part of a vast exchange network.



4. Majolica dish excavated at Dvin, 11th–12th centuries.

Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. no. 2048–135. Photographic credit: History Museum of Armenia.

THE 'ANTIOCHIAN' COINS OF KING LEVON I

Gohar Grigoryan

This drawing (Fig. 5a) reproduces a rare example of the so-called *billon* coins, issued by King Levon I (r. 1198–1219) of Cilician Armenia. The Latin legends, running round the edges, read as follows: LEO DEI GRATIA (right) and REX ARMENIOR(UM) (left), that is, *Leo by the Grace of God king of the Armenians*. A second variety of the same *billons*, with Armenian inscriptions, mentions the city of Sis (present-day Kozan, Turkey) as the location of the mint.

The iconography of Levon's *billons* closely resembles Western European and Frankish numismatic imagery, with the ruler's crowned head on one side and a single cross on the other (Figs 5bc). Most importantly, however, they replicate the design of the coins issued by the rulers of the Principality of Antioch, one of the states founded by the Crusaders in the Eastern Mediterranean, which was the

immediate neighbour of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1198–1375).

The *billons* of King Levon were likely issued in the 1200s or 1210s, when the Armenian king briefly took control over the Principality of Antioch, with the far-reaching aim of uniting it with his own state. In an attempt to legitimise his short rule over Antioch, Levon not only opted for an iconography that was popular among contemporary Frankish rulers, but also minted his own 'Antiochian' coins with both Armenian and Latin legends, ostensibly to familiarise the Armenian and Latin communities of both countries with the new political conditions. These conditions did not last long, but the Frankish iconography of Levon's *billons* is a particularly good example of how cross-cultural entanglements are not only a natural outcome of such contacts, but also a deliberate choice on the part of political actors.



5a. *Billon* of King Levon I of Cilician Armenia (r. 1198–1219), with Latin legends.

Drawing (reworked) from: D. M. Metcalf, *Coinage of the Crusades and the Latin East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 135.

5b. Copper coin of King Henry I of Cyprus (r. 1218–1253).

Drawing (reworked) from: D. M. Metcalf, *Coinage of the Crusades and the Latin East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 197.

5c. Silver *denier* of King John of Brienne of Jerusalem (r. 1210–1237).

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Münzkabinett, Object no. 18206298; 0.6g, 16mm, 2h. Photographic credit: Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedermann), Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen (Public Domain Mark 1.0).

COINAGE AS EVIDENCE OF POLITICAL ENTANGLEMENTS

Hasmik Hovhannisyan

Scholars and collectors have long been interested in these rare copper coins, which are the first known numismatic artefacts with an Armenian inscription. The coins were struck by King Kyurike II (1048–c. 1089), the ruler of the small Armenian kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget, located in the north-eastern part of Greater Armenia. The Kyurikids to which Kyurike belonged were a branch of the royal Bagratid dynasty, who concurrently ruled the main Bagratid kingdom centred in Ani. Yet, it was a member of the junior branch who, unlike his more powerful relatives, managed to issue coins, sparking the curiosity of both historians and numismatists. The significant geopolitical upheaval that occurred in the second half of the 11th century, involving several regional players, seems to explain the emergence of the Kyurike coins.

Kyurike II's reign coincided with a turbulent period when an aggressive Byzantine policy of expansion and annexation of Armenian territories forced much of the Armenian nobility to migrate to the Byzantine Empire, in some cases as royal exiles. As a result, by 1065, Kyurike was the only representative of the Bagratid dynasty in Armenia still endowed with royal authority. Soon, however, Byzantium lost

control of most of Asia Minor, including Armenia and Georgia, now conquered by the Seljuks. In an attempt to maintain some influence in the region, the weakened empire strove to find allies there, and most likely found one in Kyurike II.

This alliance seems to be reflected in the design of Kyurike's coins, which were modelled after those struck by contemporary Byzantine emperors. No less importantly, the inscription on these coins refers to the Armenian ruler by the Byzantine title *kouropalates*—a piece of information that is not attested in any other textual sources. It remains unknown when or why Kyurike was granted this title. Similar Byzantine-type coins were issued by neighbouring Georgian kings, whose Byzantine titles were likewise displayed on their respective coins. Both the Armenian and Georgian coins reflect the complex interplay between imperial and local powers, who seem to have forged a fragile alliance to maintain some political balance in a region that was undergoing significant political and demographic changes. As such, other than bearing witness to Kyurike's own ambitions, these coins serve as tangible evidence of how Armenian and Georgian rulers positioned themselves in a shifting political landscape.

6. The first known coin with an Armenian inscription, struck by King Kyurike II of Tashir-Dzoraget (r. 1048–c.1089); copper, 7.97g, 24.6mm, 6h. Obv. Bust of Christ. Rev. Inscription: ՏՐՈԳ ՆԷԿՈՐԻԿ ԷԻԿՈՐԱ ՊԱՂԱ ՏԻՆ [Lord, help Korikē the kouropalātēs].

Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. no. 5391. Photographic credit: Hasmik Hovhannisyan. Used with permission from the History Museum of Armenia.



A MONGOL-ERA ARMENIAN PRINCE

Michele Nucciotti

Dating back to c. 1301–1320, this refined bas-relief from the monastery of Spitakavor in Vayots' Dzor (Armenia) depicts a richly-dressed horseman releasing an arrow toward his prey—already struck at the neck by a previous shot. The figure represents an Armenian nobleman, Prince Amir Hasan (r. 1317–1351) from the P'roshian dynasty, one of the most powerful aristocratic families of late medieval Armenia.

The artistic language chosen for this relief extends far beyond Armenia. The attire, headgear, and even the facial features evoke the fashions of the Asian steppe, reflecting the cultural climate of the Mongol Empire and especially of the Ilkhanids, by whose authority the

P'roshian family governed their own territories in Armenia. Thus, through this image, Amir Hasan projects not only his local authority, but also his integration within the wider aristocracy of Eurasia under Mongol rule.

The relief, however, was commissioned for an Armenian monastery and bears an Armenian inscription, situating it firmly within the spiritual and cultural world of Vayots' Dzor. As such, it embodies a striking duality: the cosmopolitan identity of a Mongol-era prince and the enduring traditions of Armenian monastic culture. In this encounter of steppe imagery and monastic devotion, the valleys of Armenia became a crossroads where distant worlds converged.

7. Bas-relief from the Spitakavor Monastery (1301) in Vayots' Dzor, showing the P'roshian prince Amir Hasan. Yerevan, *History Museum of Armenia*, Inv. nos. 1320, 1322, 1321. *Photographic credit: History Museum of Armenia.*



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

Zaroui Pogossian

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

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

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

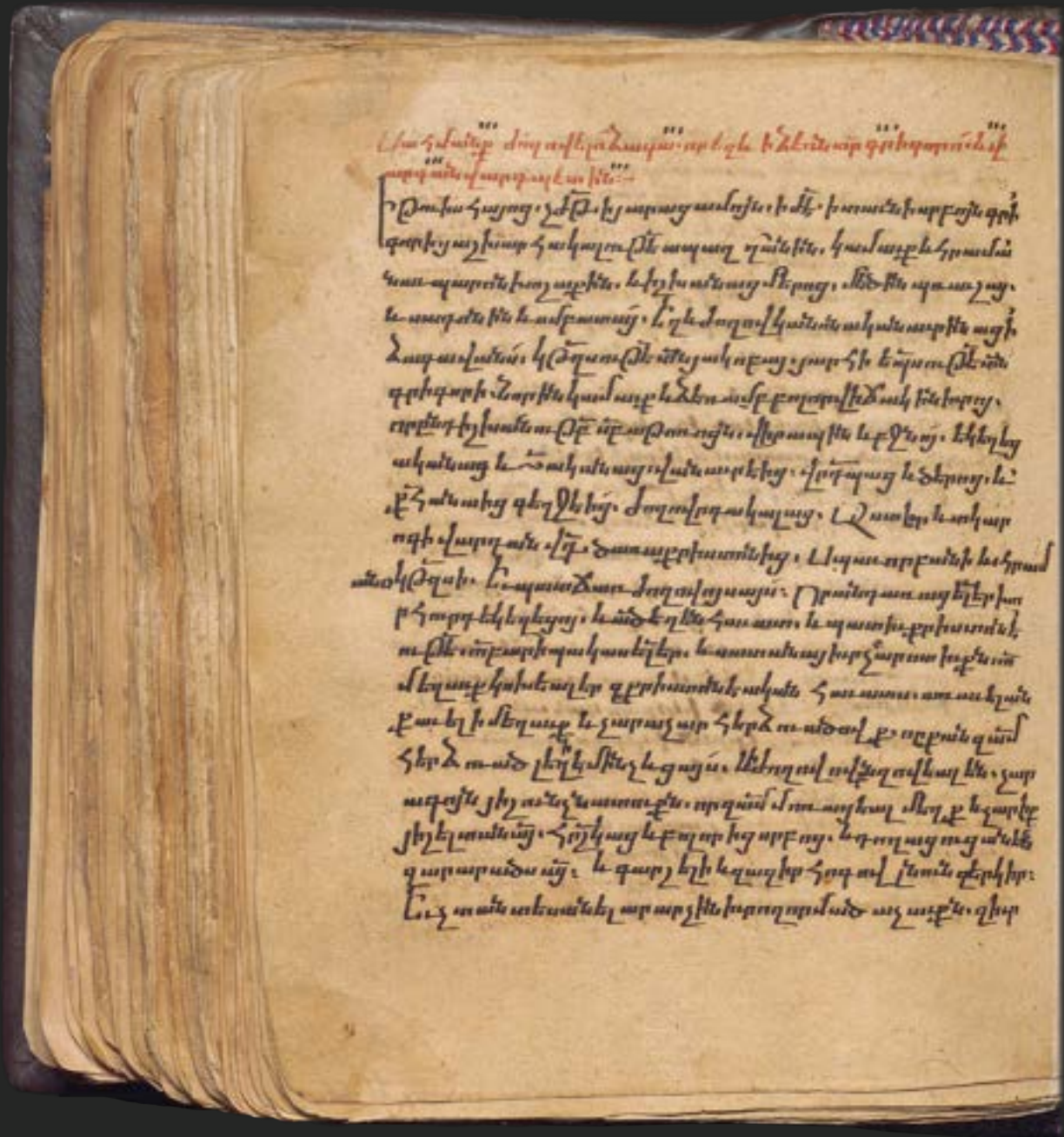
But turbulent times lay ahead. In 1284 her powerful husband fell victim to palace intrigues and was executed. In his will he requested that his wife Khoshak' Khatun be allowed to return to her homeland with their children. Khoshak's presence in Armenia is visible through the inscriptions she left behind,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

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



8a. Locations mentioned in the text.

Map: Leonardo Squilloni.



Լիա հիմանք՝ ժողովելն ձայնս՝ որ զեւ Ի Հելենոսք գրեցորուն ի
 արդանս զարդակս ին՝
 Ի Չուխա հայրոց, շեթ թիցարաց աստոյն, Ի մէ. Ի տանն Ի սրբոյն գրի
 Գործոց այ ի սարհակալութեն ասպաղ զմեն ին, Կամ արքեհրաման
 Կամ պարուն ի սոյ աքիտ, Ե ի յսանաց Բերոց, Ենն ին պաւաչաց,
 Ե սարսեն ին Ե սմբատաց, Ե զեւ ժողով կանան ական արին այ ի
 Զարասլանս, Կ ըզու ըննեցակ ըբաց, յարհի Ե նոս ըննե
 Գրի գորի նորին կամ արքե ընն սմբբորտ ի ընակ իննորոց,
 Երբնոյ ի յսանս Ըբ սբարձոս ոցն, Ե ի սպին Ե ԲՆոյ, Ե կեղեց
 ականաց Ե Ե ականաց ական արեկոց, Կ ըբարաց Ե Տերոց, Ե
 Ըհանաից գեղ Չեկոց, Ե տղարդակալաց, Ե Չուտեր Ե սոկար
 ոգի սարդան, Ե զ. Տասարբիտանից, Ե կասարբանն Ե հրամ
 անոկ ըզու ի, Ե պատճառ ժողովոցս այս, Երանտաւ այ ի իս
 Բհորդ Ե կեղեցոց, Ե անձ Ե զեւ հաստ, Ե պատիւ բրիտանն
 ու ընն տրարի զակասեղեր, Ե սասանաց ի սրհարտա ի սքնե
 մեղարք հոխեւար Ե բրիտանն Ե ական հաստու, ստասեւան
 Բասելի մեղարք Ե յարացար հերձ ու անձով Բ ուրբան զան
 հերձ ու անձ ի զկանն ի Ե ցայն, Ե նորոյ ըմբարտ վնար ըն, շար
 սպոյն յիցանն զաստաքն, որ զան մոսայեալ մեղք Ե շարի
 յիցել անայ, հոյկաց Ե Բոյորից սրբոց, Ե ուղաց ուցանե
 զարարանս այ, Ե Գարչելի Ե զարի զտղար Ե նուն գերիկոյ,
 Ե ի սան ականն Ե արար ին ի սրդորման՝ աչարքն զիսր



8b. Opening lines of a church council in a manuscript mentioning Princess Khoshak' as paron (lord), 1270. Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 582, folio 125v. Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

8c. No lifetime portrayal of Khoshak' is extant, but this image from the Gospels of Khtskonk' (1236), showing a patron couple from Ani, gives an idea of what a 13th-century aristocratic woman would look like. Isfahan (New Julfa), Armenian Holy Saviour Monastery, MS 36/156, folio 124v. Photograph from: S. Der Nersessian and A. Mekhitarian, Armenian Miniatures from Isfahan (Brussels: Éditeurs d'Art Associés, 1986), fig. 46.



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

BADR AL-DĪN LŪ'LŪ' AND MULTIRELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE IN 13TH-CENTURY MOSUL

Gagik Danielyan

The frontispiece of volume XIX of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (“Book of Songs”), a celebrated anthology of Arabic poetry and music attributed to Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī (d. 967), presents a striking image of Badr al-Dīn Lū'lū', *atabeg*—and later sultan—of Mosul. This luxurious manuscript was produced between 614 and 616 AH (1216/17–1219/20) in Mosul, likely under Lū'lū's patronage, as part of a 20-volume series. Of these, six volumes survive with illustrated frontispieces portraying scenes from the life of the ruler and his court. In the present illustration, the name “Badr al-Dīn Lū'lū' [b.] ‘Abd Allāh” appears clearly on the *ṭirāz* armbands worn by the sovereign, affirming his identity.

Originally an Armenian slave who had converted to Islam, Badr al-Dīn Lū'lū' rose through the ranks to become regent of Mosul, ruling in the name of the last three Zengid princes for over two decades, from 1211 onwards. In 1233, shortly before the first Mongol incursions into northern Mesopotamia, he deposed the final Zengid ruler, Naṣīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd, and established himself as the autonomous ruler of Mosul—a position he held until his death in 1259.

Medieval historians speak highly of Badr al-Dīn's political foresight and diplomatic acumen. He is usually presented in the sources as a man of *Realpolitik*, an adept negotiator and a good administrator, who ensured relative peace in Mosul thanks to his political pragmatism,

making it one of the most prosperous urban centres of its time and a vibrant hub of science, literary culture, and craftsmanship.

While Badr al-Dīn's political career has attracted considerable scholarly attention, his religious identity remains a complex and contested subject. Medieval Arabic sources offer conflicting accounts: some accuse him of neglecting Islamic practices and celebrating Christian festivals, while others highlight his apparent affinities with Shī'a Islam. These contradictory portrayals reflect broader historiographical tensions surrounding religious conversion and the exercise of power across confessional lines. The present illustration functions as a visual statement of Badr al-Dīn's legitimacy as a Muslim ruler. Yet, when viewed alongside biographical evidence from Arabic, Persian, and Latin sources, it reveals a more nuanced identity. It is likely that Badr al-Dīn retained aspects of his original Christian background even after his conversion to Islam. Rather than a complete rupture with his former faith, his life suggests the development of a hybrid or multi-layered identity—one that integrated elements of both Christianity and Islam. This blending of religious experiences may have shaped his inclusive approach to governance, contributing to the emergence of Mosul as a cosmopolitan city where diverse religious and ethnic communities coexisted in relative harmony.

9. Badr al-Dīn Lū'lū', *atabeg* of Mosul (an Armenian convert to Islam), depicted in a manuscript of *Kitāb al-Aghānī* by Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī (d. 967), created in Mosul, 1216/17–1219/20. *Istanbul, Millet Library, Feyzullah Efendi, MS 1565, frontispiece of volume XIX of Kitāb al-Aghānī. Image in the public domain.*

مجلس شکر
الشیخ

کتاب: 1574

نور اللمعه



QUSṬĀ IBN LŪQĀ: AN ARAB INTELLECTUAL IN 9TH-CENTURY ARMENIA

Barbara Roggema

The Graeco-Arabic translation movement, which was sponsored by the Abbasid Caliphs during the late 8th through the 9th century, engaged numerous Christian scholars. These scholars were experts in the Greek and Syriac languages as well as native or near-native Arabic speakers. Their linguistic expertise and academic training in ancient Greek learning made them the perfect collaborators in the massive translation project through which virtually all extant works of ancient learning were made available in Arabic. Most of these translators were also accomplished scientists in their own right in the fields of astronomy, medicine, physics, philosophy, and mathematics. One of the most prolific of these was Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, who came from a Christian family in the city of Baalbek in Lebanon. He spent a great part of his life in Baghdad, where he received commissions from the Caliphs and members of the Abbasid elite. He produced over 80 works on diverse subjects such as infectious diseases, the use of the astrolabe, politics and history, and introductions to logic and geometry. For his Muslim patrons, Qusṭā wrote a manual on personal hygiene during the Ḥajj to Mecca. His most widely read work was *On the Difference between the Spirit and the Soul*, in which he reconciles the Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions of the soul. This text circulated widely in medieval Europe in Latin and Hebrew translations.

Qusṭā's immense scholarly output stands in sharp contrast with our rather limited knowledge of his life, of which the dates are uncertain (his date of death is often given as 912, but this is nothing but the Gregorian equivalent of the rough estimate of 300 A.H.) The well-known bio- and bibliographical works, such as Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist* and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's *Uyūn al-anbā' fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭṭibā'*, provide us with scant pieces of information that point to an Armenian connection. Qusṭā is said to have provided Armenian princes with a variety of works, and he is also said to have moved to and died in Armenia. These brief notes about his life are supplemented by references to his circle of patrons in the manuscripts of his writings. Such notes confirm his labour on behalf of Armenian patrons, notably Abū Ghānim and Abū Ghitrif al-Bitrīq. Several modern scholars have taken the biographical notice that Qusṭā

died in Armenia as an indication that he moved there late in his life. In reality, Ibn Abi Uṣaybi'a tells us the opposite:

Qusṭā was induced by Sanharib to come to Armenia, where he settled. In Armenia there was Abū Ghitrif al-Bitrīq who was a man of learning and merit for whom Qusṭā composed many important and beneficial books of great significance, concise in expression and on a variety of topics.

In other words, a significant part of his career took place in Armenia. While identifying these two Armenian contacts of his, Sanḥārīb and Abū Ghitrif, is difficult, there is a third Armenian who is named as his patron in several works: Abū Ghānim al-'Abbās ibn Smbat. Since 'ibn' means 'son of', his father was Smbat. This leads us to Smbat VIII Bagratuni, prince and general who was taken prisoner by the Abbasids in Samarra and is known as having had a son named al-'Abbās. Smbat's brother was Ashot the First, the founder of the Bagratid Kingdom of Armenia (884–1045). He appointed his nephew al-'Abbās as *sparapet*, i.e. supreme commander of the army. In some manuscripts of Qusṭā's works, including a text on the workings and benefit of sexual intercourse, one finds a reference to 'Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, secretary of the Bitrīq al-baṭāriqa'. The latter title, *Prince of Princes*, represents the Armenian term *Ishkhan ishkanats*—a title which Ashot bore from 855 until the year 884 when he was proclaimed King. It seems probable, therefore, that Qusṭā also worked for Ashot, with whom al-'Abbās also had a close relationship.

The Bagratids ushered in a glorious period for Armenia, which lasted from the 860s to the 970s. In this same period, the Abbasid rulers suffered from internal strife and decline. This change of fortune may form part of the background to Qusṭā's decision to move to Armenia. From there he wrote a response to an invitation from a friend to convert to Islam. Qusṭā explained in clear and logical steps why he thinks there is no sound proof that Muḥammad was a true prophet and sent his reply back to Iraq from Armenia. Although Qusṭā was revered as a great scientist in Armenia, according to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, his written heritage is preserved predominantly in Arabic, while Armenian translations of his works have not (yet?) been found.

10. A manuscript page from *Kitāb al-'Ukar*, which is Qusṭā ibn Lūqā's Arabic translation of *De sphaericis* by Theodosius of Bithynia (c. 160–c. 100 BCE). London, British Library, Oriental Manuscripts, Add MS 23570, folio 36r. Photographic credit: The British Library Board.

PETER OF ARAGON: A DOMINICAN AMONG THE ARMENIANS

Irene Tinti

Fra (= *frater*, “Friar”) Peter of Aragon was a European Dominican who spent almost two decades as part of a mixed Armenian-European community at the Upper Monastery of the Holy Mother of God in K’rna (Nakhijevan) (cf. Cat. n° 23). Little is known about his life before then: he was possibly in Nicosia, Cyprus, around the year 1329; he was also a companion to fellow-Dominican Bartholomew de Podio, suffragan bishop of Marāgha in Persia. Alongside Bartholomew he attended the meeting of clerics held in K’rna in 1330, which resulted in the local Armenian community accepting union with the Latin Church and would ultimately lead to the establishment of the order of the *Fratres Unitores* (“Unitarian Brethren”). Peter spent the rest of his life in K’rna and died there, possibly of the plague, in 1347.

His significance is linked to his intellectual activities and his role as cultural mediator and therefore agent of entanglement. His efforts comprised an integral part of the scholarly and spiritual project underway at K’rna, which aimed to provide Catholic Armenians with the necessary tools for conducting their intellectual and missionary activities among their compatriots. He consistently, although not exclusively, collaborated with

another Dominican, Yakob(os), an Armenian known as “The Translator” because of his copious activities in this domain.

Peter authored in Latin—and likely to some extent contributed to the Armenian translation of—sermons and theological works chiefly based on Latin sources, such as the *Book of Virtues*, which was very popular among Catholics and Apostolic Armenians alike (cf. Cat. n° 12). He also contributed to the Armenian version of the *Brief Compendium of Theological Truth* traditionally but incorrectly associated with Albert the Great and to the translation of parts of Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. He wrote philosophical commentaries in the Aristotelian tradition, a book of canon law, a missionary manual known as *Sur Petrosi* (“Sword of Peter”), and helped translate the Dominican missal and breviary.

According to Carlo Alessandro Bonifacio, Peter could also be identified with the Dominican author of the Latin translation (early 1330s) of an Armenian apocalyptic text, the *Vision of Saint Nersēs*. If that were the case, Peter would have acted as a cultural mediator in both directions, making not only European texts known in Armenia, but at least one Armenian text known to European audiences.

11. Possible depiction of Peter of Aragon on the frontispiece of his *Book of Virtues*; full-page watercolour miniature from a manuscript copied in Surs (Mokk?), Monastery of Saint John the Baptist and Saint George the Commander, and Lim, Lake Van, Monastery of Saint George, 1625. Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MiC, Ms. 2053, folio IVv. Photographic credit: Irene Tinti, by gracious permission of the Biblioteca Casanatense.



MARGINAL NOTES, CENTRAL DEBATES

Irene Tinti

This small-size manuscript is a portable codex (18×13 cm, *Fig. 12a*) containing the Armenian version of Peter of Aragon's *Book of Virtues* as well as shorter treatises by the same author. Peter was a Dominican, a member of the Catholic community based in K'rna (Nakhijevan) that would eventually become the order of the *Fratres Unitores* (cf. Cat. n° 11 and 23).

Originally composed in Latin by Peter and translated into Armenian in 1339 by his Armenian religious brothers Yakob and Hayrapet, this work is based on Latin sources, notably Dominicans William Perault (c. 1200–1271) and Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274). Dealing with moral theology and including a section on Faith, it was particularly useful as a repository of theological knowledge and as the object of interconfessional debates: thus, it was copied in both Catholic and Apostolic milieux, as attested by the surviving manuscript tradition. Its currency in both camps is also confirmed by near-contemporary sources, namely, the *Unitor* Mkhitarich' Aparanets'i (c. 1345–1417) and the Apostolic historian T'ovma Metsop'ets'i (1376/9–1447).

The Matenadaran manuscript 46 is particularly important because it was copied on the orders of an Apostolic theologian, Yovhannēs Orotnets'i (1313–1386), by his pupil and later successor as the head of the school of Tat'ev, Grigor Tat'evats'i (1344–1409). Even more significantly, it contains a double series of marginal notes.

The earlier notes were left by Grigor Tat'evats'i himself, and the others by a later Catholic reader, Ignatios. Their annotations were added to textual passages dealing with theological issues at the heart of the Catholic vs Apostolic confessional divide. Ignatios's comments criticised Tat'evats'i's editorial interventions on Peter's text, but he also deleted (*Fig. 12c*) or modified (*Fig. 12b*) Tat'evats'i's original remarks to suit his own agenda. The erasures were so effective that the underlying text has not thus far been retrieved, even through the use of multispectral imaging (*Fig. 12d*).

Thus, manuscript 46 contains a Catholic text based on European sources and translated from Latin. It was commissioned by an Armenian Apostolic theologian, and the text was copied, edited to suit a different context and readership, and annotated by an even more prominent Apostolic theologian. Furthermore, it includes a series of comments left by a subsequent Catholic reader, who sides with the original author and polemically engages with the Apostolic copyist. All this is clear evidence that the same manuscripts circulated in both Catholic and Apostolic milieux and shows at the same time that the exchanges were not unidirectional. It also exemplifies the varied and complex responses to the activities of the *Unitores* among the Armenians: acceptance, confessional adherence, and spirited defence on the one hand; theological rebuttal and intellectual renegotiation on the other.

12a. Front cover of a manuscript containing the Armenian versions of Peter of Aragon's *Book of Virtues*, *On the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, and *On the Eight Beatitudes*. Manuscript commissioned by Yovhannēs Orotnets'i and copied by Grigor Tat'evats'i in the Vaghatin Monastery, Siwnik', before 1386. Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 46. Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

12b. Marginal note written by Grigor Tat'evats'i (before 1386) and later modified by Ignatios (14th–15th cc.). Tat'evats'i: "He [Peter of Aragon] began sowing the weeds with the wheat, did he not?" Ignatios: "Was it not the cursed Grigor Tat'evats'i who began sowing the weeds with the wheat, but in abundance?" Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 46, folio 28r (lower margin). Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

12cd. Erased note, likely originally written by Tat'evats'i; new comment added by Ignatios: "Orotnets'i and Tat'evats'i have sown multiple weeds within this holy book." Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 46, folio 62v (lower margin). Multispectral image by Matenadaran (Vanik Khechoyan); Maximum noise fraction (MNF) analysis applied by Jost Gippert (2025). Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

MULTILINGUALISM IN A COLLECTION OF THEOLOGICAL TREATISES

Zaroui Pogossian

These four folios belong to a 13th-century manuscript with a fascinating history and an impressive content that brings together different linguistic cultures—Armenian, Syriac, and Ge'ez. It was part of a larger codex produced in the royally-founded Akner Monastery of Cilician Armenia in 1215. Then it was moved to Jerusalem, probably at the end of the 14th century, where it was divided into two and was rebound using parchment bifolia with a Ge'ez (ancient Ethiopic) text (*Fig. 13a*). This seemingly secondary piece of codicological evidence attests to a close co-habitation between Armenian and Ethiopian communities in medieval Jerusalem.

The Holy City was not the final destination of this manuscript, for at some point between the 15th and 18th centuries it appeared at the Monastery of Saint Stephen Maghardavank' (presently a UNESCO heritage site in northern Iran). In the 19th century, it was taken to the Holy See of Ejmiatsin (the centre of Armenian Christianity), from there to Moscow during World War I, and again, in 1922, to Armenia (Yerevan)—to later become

part of the collection of the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts.

More than one scribe worked on this manuscript. It features texts about orthodoxy and orthopraxy (the correct mode and calendar of ritual celebrations in the church) and on the last five folios there are two texts attributed to the celebrated Syriac church father Ephrem the Syrian. What is remarkable about one of them is that it reproduces portions of Syriac written in Armenian letters (*Fig. 13bc*). Such a choice marked the intention of Armenian monks to rely on knowledge of spoken Syriac when engaging in discussions with their Syriac peers. This is an eloquent testimony to a multilingual and multi-script world of the past that would have gone unnoticed without philological research.

Additionally, as often happens with Armenian manuscripts, this codex too has a rich colophon that records 'local' and 'global' events in real time. Thus, in 1219, a scribe added a note about the death of the Armenian king Levon I (r. 1198–1219) and about the destruction of the walls and some churches in Jerusalem by Muslims (*Fig. 13d*).

13. Collection of theological treatises (*Homilies* attributed to Gregory the Illuminator, Severian of Gabala, Ephrem the Syrian). Cilician Armenia, Monastery of Akner (near present-day Eĝner village, Turkey), 1215. Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 947, initial flyleaf with a Ge'ez text (*a*), followed by folios 155v (*b*), 156r (*c*), 161v (*d*). Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

THE 14TH-CENTURY TRILINGUAL GRAVESTONE IN YEGHEGIS

Michael Pifer

This enigmatic trilingual gravestone, located today in the village of Yeghegis, remembers a martyr named Tawakkul (as its Arabic inscription tells us) or T'avak'al (as its Armenian inscription tells us), who died sometime in the mid-14th century. Between the Arabic and Armenian inscriptions, a partially worn Persian poem known as a "wandering quatrain," because of its attribution to many authors, asks visitors to reflect on the brevity of life. The gravestone evinces a playful multilingualism, as it seemingly leaves the religious and cultural orientations of the martyr open until the very end, when the Armenian inscription abruptly insists that the deceased was Christian and died for Christ. The trilingual gravestone is a vivid example of the complex linguistic and religious terrains that converged in medieval Armenia.

Inscription in Arabic:

*This is the grave of the young, short-lived martyr,
who is in need of the mercy of God Almighty,
Akbi Tawakkul ... may God [pardon] his sins,
in the month of Muḥarram, 759 [= 1357/1358]*

Partially legible inscription in Persian:

*Even if Egypt, Anatolia, and China your dominion shall be
... Live merrily, for ... shall be*

Inscription in Armenian:

*The faithful servant of God and
of martyrdom [...] and was stained
with his own blood and ... [?]
for the sake of Christ's name ... [?] by the lamp
[at rest] in our metropolis Ye-
[2nd stone] ghegis[.] With true faith and
an upright heart and full of grace
he was martyred and became worthy of the light of Christ
he was martyred[:] the mercy of Christ
reached this T'avak'al physician of all afflictions
Remember our brothers in prayer*

Below the main surface, on the lip of the front-facing side of the 2nd stone:

*Holy Nersēs ... for the sake of Christ's name
This happened in the year 801 of the Armenian Era
[= 1351/1352]*

[Faded Arabic script on a stone tablet, likely a fragment of a larger inscription. The text is arranged in approximately 15 horizontal lines, though many characters are obscured by wear and tear.]

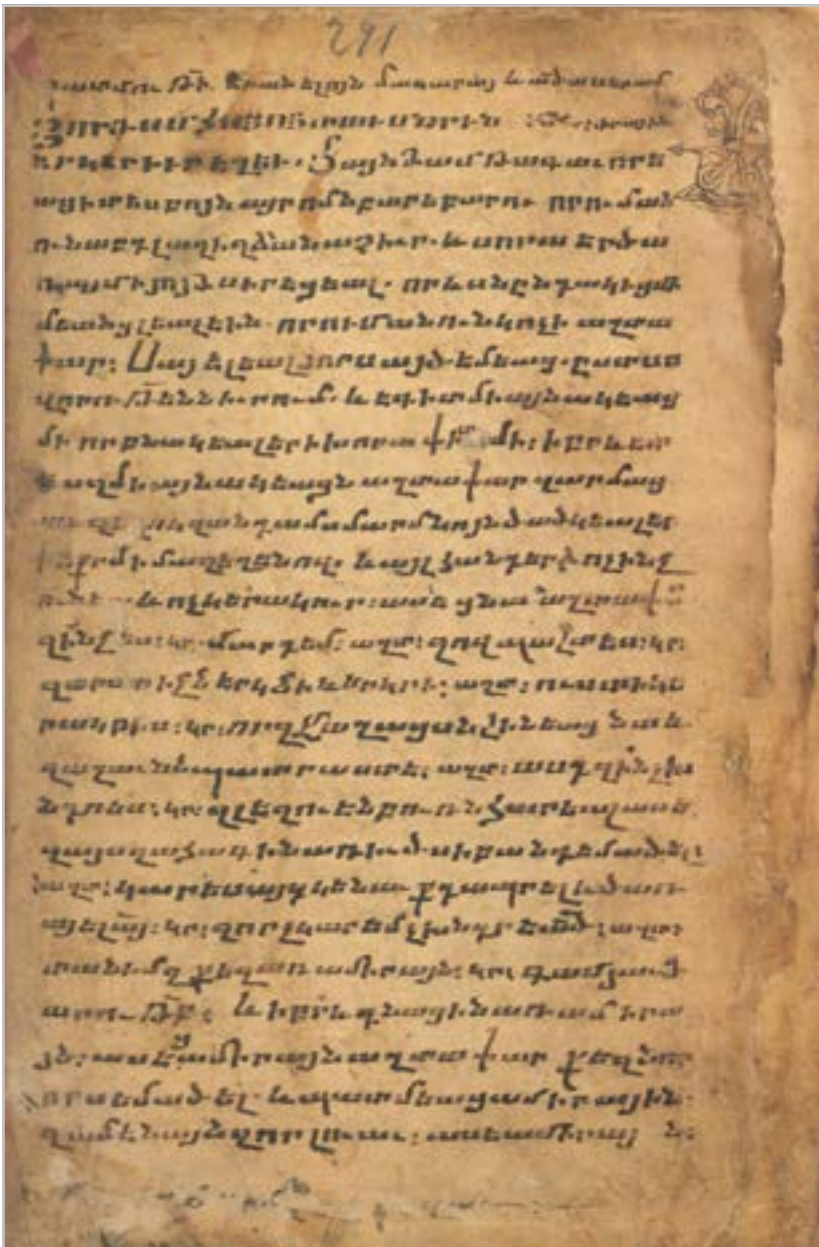
[Clear Arabic script on a stone tablet, featuring decorative flourishes and a structured layout. The text is arranged in approximately 15 horizontal lines, with some lines containing larger, more prominent characters.]

A MONK IN THE MAJLIS: THE TEXT OF AN INTER-RELIGIOUS DEBATE BETWEEN ARABIC AND ARMENIAN

Zaroui Pogossian, Barbara Roggema, Armine Melkonyan

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

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



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

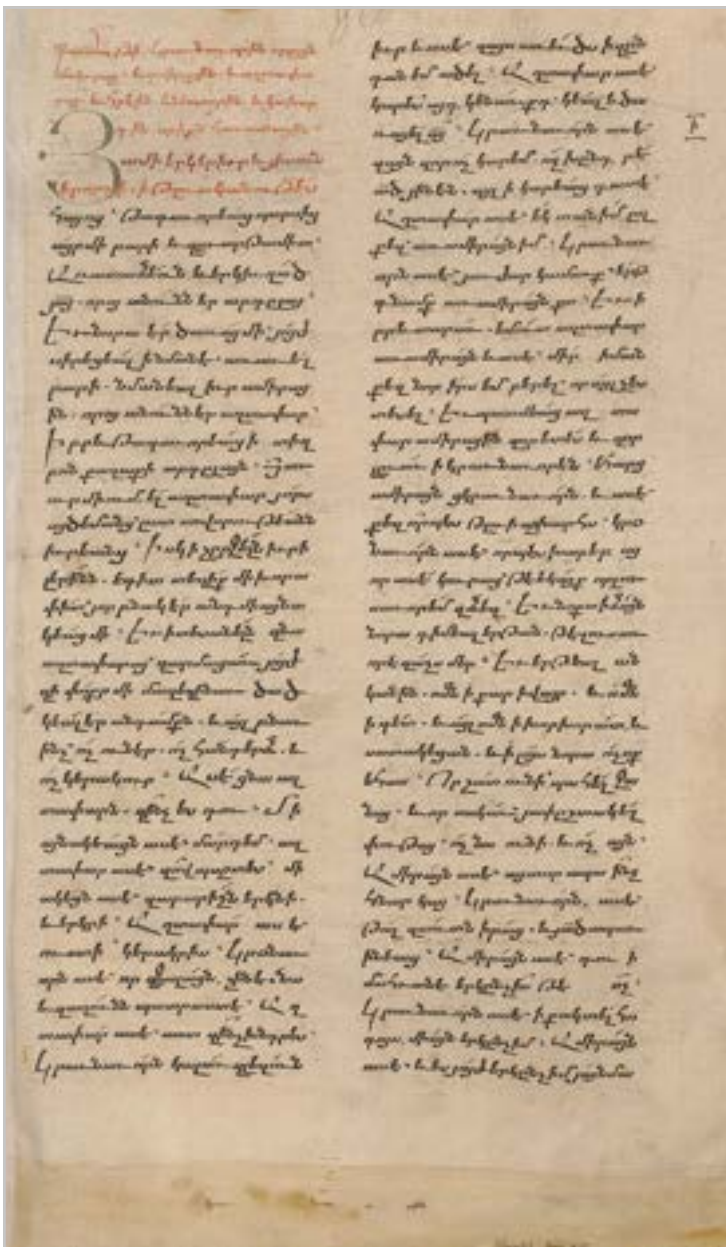
Jerusalem, Library of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, MS 3120, folio 292. Photographic credit: Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

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

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

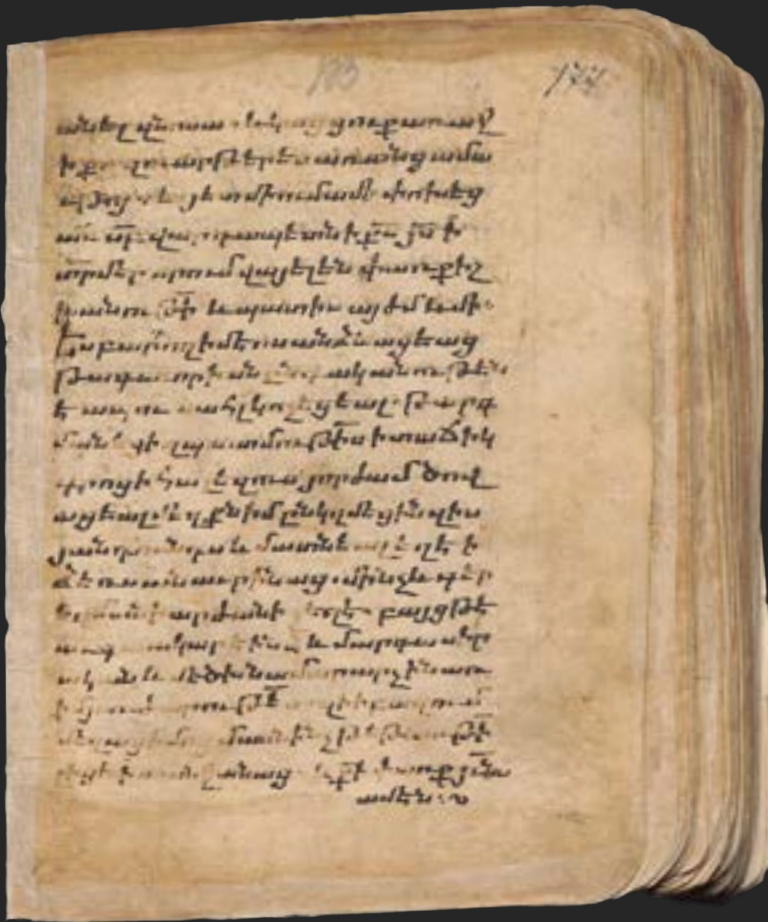
of some Armenian noblemen in the Abbasid capital of Samarra in the mid- to late 9th century. In any event, the presence of Arabic words and expressions in the Armenian translation, as well as references to some historical events in the text, point to a Christian Arabic environment for the composition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

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



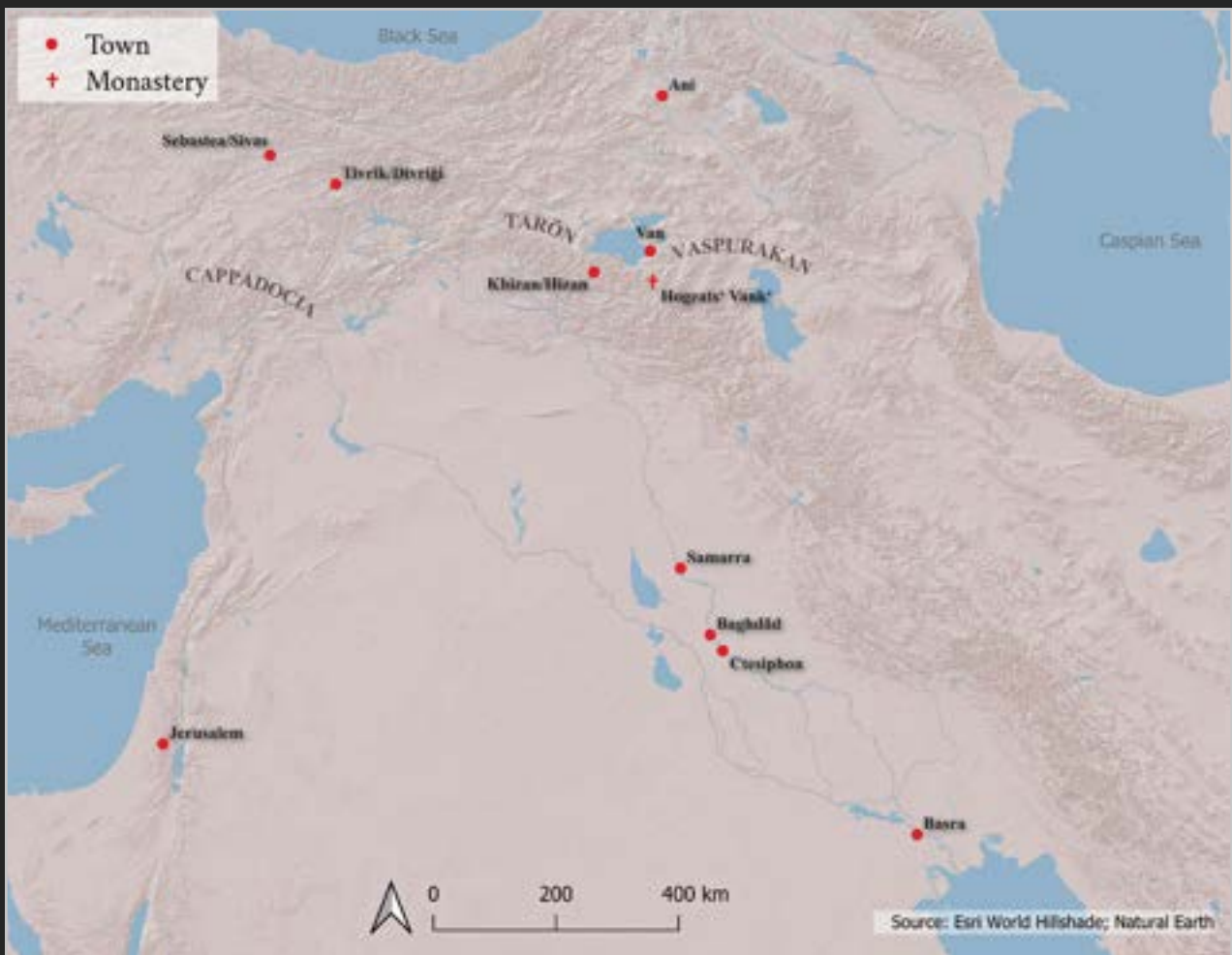
15b. The opening page of the *History of the Holy Monk Makar and the Emir and Aghtap'ar and a Jew and Nestor and a Sorcerer [All of] Whom Believed in Christ*; homiliary, created in the Nkarinay Monastery in the historical region of Vaspurakan (south-west of Lake Van), 1404.

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



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

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



JEWES ON THE MOVE: FROM ARMENIA TO KHAZARIA

Alexandra Cuffel

This document is a fragment that begins in the midst of an account of how Jews came from Armenia to Khazaria and mingled with the population there adopting some of their customs, while some of the Khazars nominally converted from their local religion to Judaism. The document further narrates how their chief is persuaded to abandon local ways and return to ‘unadulterated’ Judaism by his wife. According to the text, he champions Jews and Judaism, despite scorn from surrounding polities, and sponsors religious debates. The discovery of the Torah of Moses in a cave prompts repentance on the part of Jews already in Khazaria and the migration of Jews from Baghdad, Khorasan, and Greece. A Jew, Sabriel, is made king of the Khazars and successfully wages war against Khazaria’s neighbours, in particular against the Byzantine Emperor, Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920–944), who is described as having persecuted the Jews.

Intriguing in the context of Armenian history is that the first word of the exhibited bifolium is “Armenia” (אַרְמֵינִיָּא). The folio begins in the middle of a sentence: “Armenia our fathers fled before them. [...] for they were un[ab]le / to bear the yoke of idol worshippers, and [the people of Qazari]a received them. For the p[ro]p[er]le

of / Qazaria were at first without Torah...” Golb and Pritsak, the editors and translators of this text, suggest that the text implies that Jews came from Armenia to Khazaria. Who is meant by “idol worshippers” is uncertain. The text appears to compare Judaism in Armenia (unfavourably) with that in Khazaria.

This text has been the subject of intensive study and debate. On the one hand, it is one of the main Jewish sources for the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism and the existence of a Jewish kingdom in the region, and potentially, an important indicator of Jewish presence in late antique and early medieval Armenia. Yet despite numerous attestations in Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew sources, scholars attempting to draw historical details from this text have been frustrated in that the details given by various witnesses to Jewish conversion, rule, and martial activity in Khazaria do not correspond exactly with one another. This has led some to deny the existence of a Jewish Khazar kingdom entirely. Others, however, emphasise that the text follows the structure of other approximately contemporaneous hagiographical and legendary narratives of origin and conversion, whether to Islam, Christianity, or Manicheanism.

16. Anonymous letter in Hebrew purporting to be from the Khazar king, describing the origin and conversion of the Khazars to Judaism. Possibly part of a collection of the correspondence of Ḥasdeī ibn Shaprut (c. 905–965), a Jewish scholar and vizier of Caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥman of Cordoba. Egypt, c. 949.

Cambridge University Library T–S Misc. 35.38. Photographic credit: Cambridge University Library. Used with permission from the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.



FRANKISH LAW IN CILICIAN ARMENIA

Gohar Grigoryan

This small-size manuscript, preserved at San Lazzaro degli Armeni in Venice, is an important medieval law code called the *Assizes of Antioch*. Originally composed in French for the Crusader Principality of Antioch, the *Assizes of Antioch* was translated into Armenian in the middle of the 13th century to be implemented in the

Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1198–1375). Its main purpose was the regulation of the feudal relationship between the overlord and his vassal-lords, who owned lands—like the king—and therefore played a crucial role in the country's economic and political life. It is exactly these relationships that are represented on the frontis-



piece to the Armenian version of the *Assizes of Antioch*. King Levon IV (r. 1321–1341) is depicted here in a tense moment of adjudicating between his lords in dispute.

The implementation of the *Assizes of Antioch* catalysed substantial socio-political changes in Cilician Armenia, resulting in a more centripetally driven and

hierarchically organised governance—similar to those Western European systems that were brought by the Crusaders to the Eastern Mediterranean. Because the French original is lost, this Frankish law code is only available in the Armenian translation; this is the oldest extant manuscript known today.

17. King Levon IV adjudicating between his lords in dispute; frontispiece to the *Assizes of Antioch*, created in Sis (present-day Kozan, Turkey), 1331.

Venice, San Lazzaro, Manuscript Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation, MS 107, folios 1v–2r. Photographic credit: Hrair Hawk Khatcherian. Used with permission from the Mekhitarist Congregation.



UNDER THE PROTECTIVE MANTLE OF THE VIRGIN

Gohar Grigoryan

What unifies these five images, created in Cilician Armenia (*Figs 18ab*), Lusignan Cyprus (*Figs 18cd*), and Duccio's Italy (*Fig. 18e*)? They all show a new iconographic typology invented in the 13th century, known as Virgin of Mercy or *Madonna della Misericordia*. In Germanophone literature, the same iconography is also referred to as *Schutzmantelmadonna*—a designation that draws attention to the mantle of the Virgin Mary, whose protection was sought for the religious and secular authorities portrayed beneath it.

The geographical origins of this iconography remain contested: scholars argue in favour of either the Eastern Mediterranean, where some of the early examples of this iconography originate, or Western Europe, where a corresponding textual tradition was formed. Still, most agree in correlating the rapid spread of imagery featuring the Virgin of Mercy with the activities of mendicant orders across the wider Mediterranean region after the mid-13th century. Reflecting new devotional practices associated

with the 'merciful' type of the Virgin, these images witness a shared spiritual and artistic tradition which, in the second half of the 13th century, was embraced by art makers—donors and artists alike—working in Frankish, European, Armenian, and Eastern Christian milieux.

One of the two Armenian examples shown here, the *Gospel-book of Marshal Oshin* (*Fig. 18a*), is the earliest known example whose provenance can be traced without a doubt: according to the colophon, this codex was created in 1274 in Sis, the capital of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia (1198–1375). Was it the result of the Armenian donors' confessional preferences, perhaps influenced by the Latin creed, or an artistic exercise in a novel iconography? In both scenarios, these images testify to a high degree of cross-cultural connectedness that encompasses not only confessional but also artistic entanglements, as well as the tendency to display an 'aristocratic' spirituality that was closely associated with the protective mantle of the Mother of God.

18a. The Virgin of Mercy with Archbishop Yovhannēs of Sis (standing), Marshal Oshin and his sons; a leaf from the *Gospel of Marshal Oshin*, Sis (present-day Kozan, Turkey), Cilician Armenia, 1274. *New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1111, recto. Purchased with the help of The Fellows Acquisition Fund; The Institut de Recherche sur les Miniatures Armeno-Byzantines; The Manoogian Simone Foundation; The L.W. Frohlich Charitable Trust, in memory of L.W. Frohlich and Thomas R. Burns. Photographic credit: The Morgan Library & Museum.*





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18b. The Virgin of Mercy with Prince Vasak and his sons; the *Gospels of Prince Vasak*, Sis (?), Cilician Armenia, 1270s–1280s.

Jerusalem, Library of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, MS 2568, folio 320r. Photographic credit: Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.



18c. The Virgin of Mercy with Frankish donors; mural painting, Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou, Cyprus, late 13th century.

Photographic credit: Gohar Grigoryan.

18d. The Virgin of Mercy with Carmelites; icon previously kept in the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, Nicosia, Cyprus, late 13th century.

Nicosia, Byzantine Museum and Art Gallery of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, BMIAM.006. Photographic credit: Byzantine Museum and Art Gallery.

18e. The Virgin of Mercy with Franciscan friars; icon by Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1280s.

Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Inv. no. 20. Photographic credit: Musei Nazionali di Siena.

THE ALEXANDER ROMANCE BY PSEUDO-CALLISTHENES

Edda Vardanyan

Stories about Alexander the Great were extremely popular across an incredible array of languages in the premodern world. This cluster of texts may be thought of as a quintessential example of cross-cultural entanglements on a continental or even global scale. Armenians told stories about Alexander, too. One composition recounting Alexander's deeds and fantastic adventures was known as the *Alexander Romance* by Pseudo-Callisthenes. It was translated to Armenian from Greek as

early as the 5th century, shortly after the invention of the Armenian alphabet, at a time when the Bible and the Church Fathers were likewise rendered in Armenian. This text made legible both seeming 'historical events' and fantastic images of distant places and peoples to Armenian audiences, through both text and the visual apparatus of manuscript illuminations.

From the 14th century onwards, the Armenian *Alexander Romance* underwent a considerable metamor-



19a. Alexander questions a Persian soldier; the *Alexander Romance*, Monastery of Gladzor in Syunik' (?), 14th century.

Venice, San Lazzaro, Manuscript Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation, MS 424, folio 57v. Photographic credit: Mekhitarist Congregation.

phosis. Appendices were added that turned Alexander into a virtuous ruler and a model of an ideal Christian king. Miniatures illustrating Alexander's life were accompanied by didactic poems that visually reinforced a royal imagery implied in the text. Recent studies have suggested that these miniatures reflected aspirations of re-establishing sovereignty in Greater Armenia, which was a major political concern of its contemporary elites. Thus, the widely circulating *Alexander Romance* also became a text through which Armenians exercised their own political imaginations.

The images presented here come from manuscript 424 preserved in the Armenian monastery of the Mekhitarist congregation in Venice. This codex was most

likely produced in the 14th century, possibly in the monastic university of Gladzor in Syunik'. Its textual and visual materials focus on concepts of royalty and royal sovereignty, but also allow us to identify a convergence of cultural forms. For example, one of the illuminations selected shows Alexander addressing Persian soldiers who were taken prisoner after his battle against Darius; this illumination depicts how contemporary Armenians imagined 'foreign aggressors' and Alexander as a wise ruler (*Fig. 19a*). The other image shows Alexander the Great going to battle against the Indian king Porus (*Fig. 19b*). Tellingly, in these images one finds chain mail, helmets, and weapons that are usually associated with Crusaders.



19b. Alexander's battle against the Indian King Poros; the *Alexander Romance*, Monastery of Gladzor in Syunik' (?), 14th century. Venice, San Lazzaro, Manuscript Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation, MS 424, folio 90r. Photographic credit: Mekhitarist Congregation.

SAINT GEORGE IN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA

Sara Scarpellini

According to legend, Saint George was a Cappadocian soldier martyred for his Christian faith around the 3rd or 4th century in Lydda (modern-day Lod), Palestine, then the Roman city of Diospolis. This military saint holds a prominent place in the Armenian Christian pantheon and is venerated alongside other military saints such as Theodore and Sergius, as well as the Armenian warrior saints Atom, Suk'ias, and Vardan and their respective companions.

This veneration is attested in Armenian hagiographical manuscripts. Numerous texts composed in Armenian, as well as translations from Syriac and Greek—including Lives, Martyrdoms, Miracles, and Odes to Saint George—bear witness to the spread of his cult among the Armenians in a milieu characterised by close interactions with Greek and Syriac Christianities. This popularity can be glimpsed at by looking at *Map 20a* that shows the places of production of the extant manuscripts featuring texts devoted to Saint George. The great number of churches and monasteries dedicated to him, along with artistic representations, further confirms the endurance and significance of his cult. The depiction of Saint George on horseback, as seen in the Matenadaran manuscript 3777 (*Fig. 20b*), is among the most popular types of representations of this saint in medieval Christianity, and the Armenian examples are not exceptions.

The cult of Saint George experienced a significant expansion in the Artsruni Kingdom of Vaspurakan

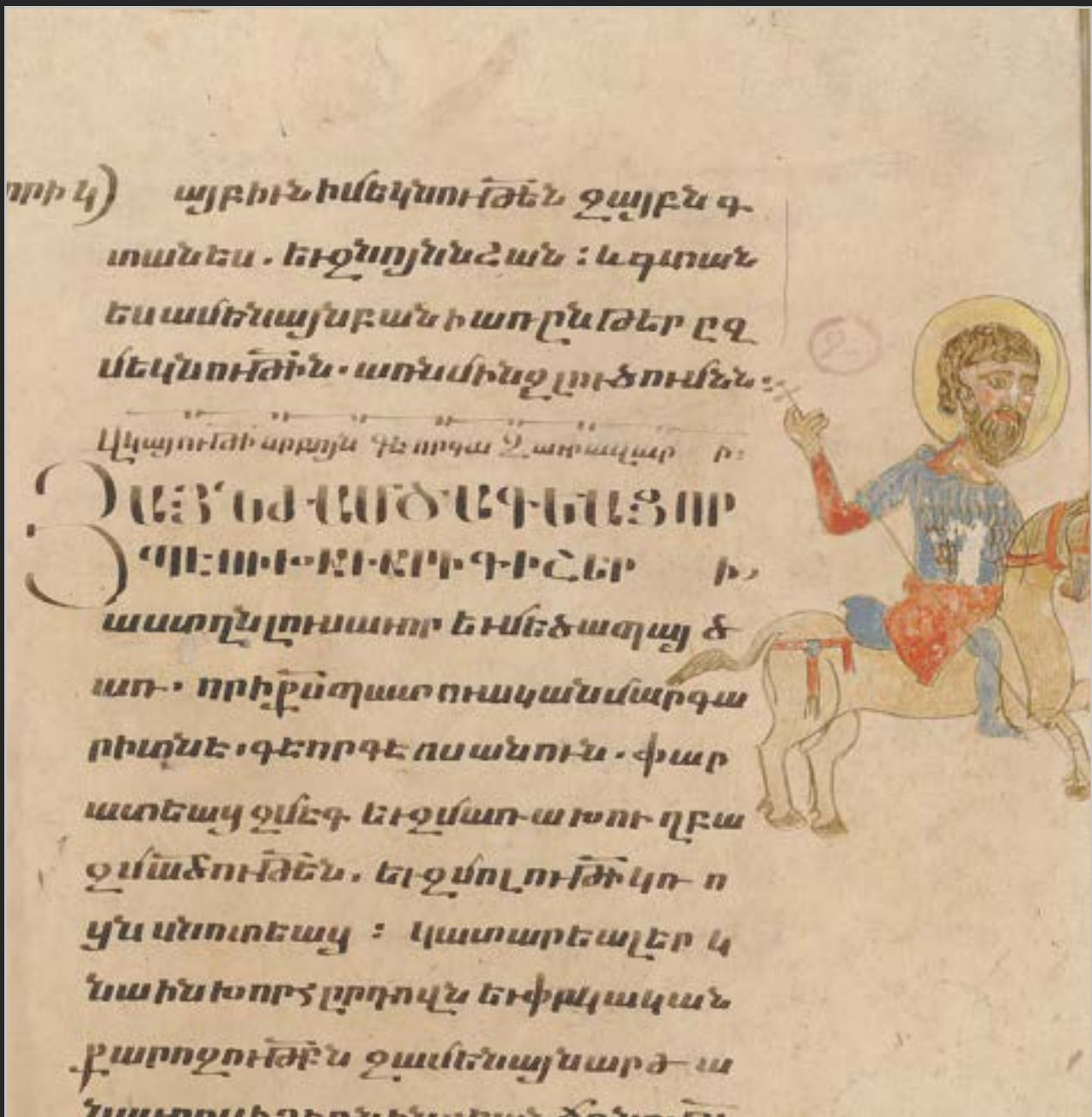
(908–1021), located in the Lake Van region. According to the principal biographer of the Artsruni dynasty, T'ovma Artsruni, King Gagik (r. 904–943) dedicated several churches and monasteries to Saint George. He also collected the saint's relics to invoke his protection against his own political adversaries, which included the rival Armenian dynasty of the Bagratunis, the Abbasid Caliphate or smaller Muslim potentates of the region, and the Byzantines.

One of the most remarkable expressions of Gagik's patronage is the Church of the Holy Cross (*Fig. 20c*) on the island of Aght'amar (present-day Akdamar, Turkey), which is considered a masterpiece of medieval Armenian architecture. Among the exterior reliefs of this church is a monumental depiction of Saint George slaying a man, possibly Emperor Diocletian (*Fig. 20d*). This depiction is reminiscent of the Georgian imagery of the saint vanquishing a human foe and may reflect some knowledge of a similar iconography attested elsewhere in the region.

The veneration of Saint George was also significant during the time of the Crusades, both among the Latins (Franks) and the Armenians of the Kingdom of Cilicia (1198–1375), who turned to the warrior saint as a protector of Christians against Muslims. A noteworthy example of this devotion involves Aplgharip Artsruni, a descendant of the Artsruni dynasty and prince (*ishkhan*) of Papeřon and Lambron, who possessed three seals depicting Saint George.



20a. Places of production of the extant Armenian manuscripts containing texts about Saint George.
Map: Lapo Somigli.



20b. Saint George on horseback; homiliary copied by Markos and the brothers of Mkhit'ar, Saghmosavank' (?), 1185–1188.

Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 3777, folio 6r. Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

20c. The island of Aght'amar on Lake Van, with the Church of the Holy Cross, constructed in 915–921.

Photographic credit: Hrair Hawk Khatcherian.

20d. Saint Theodore slaying a dragon, Saint Sergius slaying a lion, and Saint George slaying a man; bas-relief, northern façade of the Aght'amar Church of the Holy Cross, 915–921.

Photographic credit: Hrair Hawk Khatcherian.



A SYRIAC SAINT, AN ARMENIAN NOTE

Andy Hilkens

This parchment manuscript of a Syriac translation of the Gospels was produced by the Syriac Orthodox scribe Lazarus of K'esun/Kayshum (mod. Çakırhüyük in south-eastern Turkey) in mid-11th-century Melitene (mod. Malatya) for the nearby monastery named after Saint Baršawmō. At that time the monastery functioned as the see of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. In the mid-17th century, the manuscript was kept at the patriarchal library in the monastery of Mor Hananyō, also known as Dayr al-Za'farān (the Saffron Monastery) near Mardin. It was there that it was seen by a group of Armenian merchants from Mardin who

visited the monastery in 1652 or 1653. This group included the coppersmith Nikoghos and Melk'on who both left notes under the image of Baršawmō to commemorate their visit. The fact that they wrote on this page reflects the reverence for Baršawmō in the Armenian church, which also considered him a saint. His Syriac biography had been translated into Armenian in the 12th century and was ultimately included in the Armenian *Synaxarion* (*Haysmawurk'*). Thus, this page from the manuscript represents entanglements between the Syriac Orthodox and Armenian churches in the pre-modern period.



21. Image of Saint Barsawmō, a Syriac anti-Chalcedonian monastic founder (d. c. 458), with two handwritten notes in Armenian underneath. Gospel in Syriac, Melitene (mod. Malatya), mid-11th century; Mardin, mid-17th century.
 Damascus, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, MS 353 (formerly 12/8), fol. 353v. Photographic credit: Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate.

A PLACE WITH MULTIPLE NAMES

Alexandra Cuffel

In this question-and-answer text about the Torah/Pentateuch, the writer presents a list of nine names of towns and regions, all of which are also known by the broader designation “Armenia,” as an example of how a place may have multiple names. Some of these remain difficult to identify, whereas others are more readily understandable. For example: *al-Koniyah* (אלכונייה) may refer to the city of Konya/Konia, which became the capital of the Seljuk sultanate of

Rūm and sometimes is better known by its ancient name, Iconium/Iconion. Alternatively, the term might refer to the whole region of the same name. *Sheki* (שכי) refers to a city (as well as to the surrounding region) known under a number of spellings, including *Shak(k)i*, *Shakhi*, and *Hereti* in Georgian, founded in the 8th century. The author also says that other places are referred to by a multitude of names. This is true of Syria (*bilad al-Sham* / אלשם בלד), Byzantium (*bilad*



al-Rūm / אלרום בלד), Khorasan (כראסאן), Khazaria (*al-Khazar* / אלכזר) *al-Sind* (roughly equivalent to Pakistan / אלסנד), India (*al-Hind* / אלהנד), Ethiopia (*al-Habashah* / אלהבשה), Nubia (*al-Nubah* / אלנובה), the Maghrib (*al-Maghrib* / אלמגרב), and the Sambation River (*nahar al-musabat* / אלמוסבת נהר). The author seems to follow the Iraqi (as opposed to the Balkhī) school of Muslim geography, which included (Caucasian) Albania as part of Armenia.

The fact that a Jewish author was so familiar with the region as to choose it to demonstrate the many places which could be designated as “Armenia,” while also having their own specific place names, suggests that he was either from this region or one nearby with close connections to these cities. The author’s

choice also presupposes a Jewish audience who would immediately recognise these names of Caucasian cities as part of Armenia, which is to say, a community of Jews who were very familiar with the region, either because they traded there, or were among its inhabitants. Given the sparsity of evidence of a Jewish presence in the Caucasus, this text serves as an important additional clue. The author’s further list of regions in Africa and South Asia likewise testifies to the extent of early medieval Jewish geographical knowledge and interest. At the same time, however, the text shows that mythological regions, such as the river which flowed every day except the Sabbath (Saturday), was also very much part of Jewish geographical lore of this period.



22. Fragment of a biblical question-and-answer text written in Judeo-Arabic language, 9th century. Lines 17–19 of folio 1v (right) and lines 1–4 of folio 2v (left) provide a list of geographic designations for Armenia. *Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Second Firkovich Collection, Judeo-Arab II 3292, folios 1v–2r. Photographic credit: National Library of Russia.*

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

Irene Tinti

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

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

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

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

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



23a. Ruins of the central sanctuary of the Monastery of the Holy Mother of God (*Surb Astuatsatsin*) in K'rna, Nakhijevan, in the 1970s/80s. Location: 39.13584420N / 45.65804420E.

Photographic credit: Argam Ayvazyan Archive. Used with permission from Argam Ayvazyan.



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

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

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

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

MEDIEVAL YERZNKA: A CROSSROADS OF TRADE, MANUFACTURE, RELIGION, AND CULTURE

Zaroui Pogossian

In the 13th century, Yerznka (Erznka, present-day Erzincan, Turkey) was a vibrant trade emporium due to its position on a route that connected Ayas (Lajazzo) on the north-eastern Mediterranean to Tabriz as well as Trebizond on the Black Sea. More than a simple passageway, however, it was also a vital textile production centre and was populated by wealthy merchants. Passing through the city on his way east in 1272, Marco Polo lauded the cotton textile manufactured in Yerznka, “bucherame,” as the finest of its kind. The high tax revenues from the city made it a prized possession vied over by competing local powers following the dissolution of the Mongol state of the Ilkhanids in 1335. The early 20th-century photograph showing the market of Yerznka (*Fig. 24d*) certainly does not testify to the city’s medieval past, but it evokes the memory of an important centre, where commercial routes met in the past and present.

Yerznka’s hinterland (*Fig. 24a*) and the mountain slopes that envelop it were home to some of the most popular pilgrimage sites and monastic centres

(*Figs 24bc*) until the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Yerznka was also a city of poets and theologians, whose works open more windows on the cultural and linguistic entanglements of the premodern period of this city (*Fig. 24e*). A notable figure is the 13th-century Armenian poet Yovhannēs, who authored philosophical treatises of Neo-Platonic inspiration and adapted an Arabic-Armenian translation of the Rules for an urban confraternity, which were religious-civil instructions for boys inspired by the Muslim *futuwwa*. A skilled poet, Yovhannēs of Yerznka also sung the love-story of an Armenian boy called Yovhannēs and a Muslim girl called Asha. In his verses, Yovhannēs blended Armenian and Persian lexicons, much like his younger contemporary Konstandin of Yerznka, who was requested by his urban commissioners to write an Armenian poem inspired by the *Shahname*, the masterpiece of Persian epic poetry. Such were the linguistic, literary, and cultural entanglements within the vibrant urban centre that was medieval Yerznka.

24a. The Plain of Yerznka.

Photographic credit: Hrair Hawk Khatcherian.





24b. Pilgrims around the Monastery of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, Mount Sepuh, Yerznka, as shown in a photograph from 1906.

Photograph originally published in: Amēnun Tarets'oyts'ə 17 (1923), 350, and G. Siwrmēnean, Yerznka (Cairo: Sahak-Mesrop, 1947), 88. Image credit: Union internationale des organisations Terre et Culture, Paris. Used with permission.

24c. Awag Vank' (Great Monastery) dedicated to Saint Thaddeus, Mount Sepuh, Yerznka.

Photographic credit: Hrair Hawk Khatcherian.





24d. The market of Yerznka as shown in an early 20th-century photograph. Photograph originally published in: R. H. Kévorkian and P. B. Paboudjian, *Les arméniens dans l'empire Ottoman à la veille du génocide* (Paris: Arhis, 1992). Image credit: Houshamadyan, Berlin. Used with permission from Raymond H. Kévorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian.

24e. An illustrated page from the *Homiliary of Mush*, created in Awag Vank', Mount Sepuh, Yerznka, 1200–1202. Yerevan, Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, MS 7729, folio 3r. Photographic credit: Matenadaran.

DIVRIĞI: A 13TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL WONDER

Sara Nur Yıldız

The three portals of the 13th-century Friday mosque (Ulu Cami) and hospital (*shifā khāna*) of Divriği, of the Sivas province in Turkey today, are among the most effusive and distinct examples of stone carving on medieval Anatolian architecture. Built simultaneously adjacent to one another in 1228–1229, the mosque and hospital comprise one monument of two distinct institutions. Together with a nearby *hamam*, which today lies completely in ruins, these three buildings constituted a public complex, located on the slope of a hill just below the fortress and citadel of Divriği.

Known as Tephrike in Byzantine times and located in the Roman-Byzantine frontier province of Armenia, the largely Armenian-populated town of Divriği lay in the northern catchment basin of the Euphrates, along the west bank of the Çaltı Suyu, a branch of the Euphrates in a remote yet strategic location. Lying to the west of Kemah and Erzincan, Divriği was placed under Turkish Mengüjekid rule in the late 11th or early 12th century. It served as the centre for a lesser branch of the Mengüjekid dynasty and was subordinated to Erzincan which rose to prominence in the mid-12th century under the rule of the Mengüjekid ruler Fakhr al-Dīn Bahrāmshāh (r. c. 1160s–1225). Despite his local power and regional fame as a wealthy patron, Bahrāmshāh nevertheless recognised the Seljuk dynasty of Anatolia, with whom he had close kinship ties, as overlords.

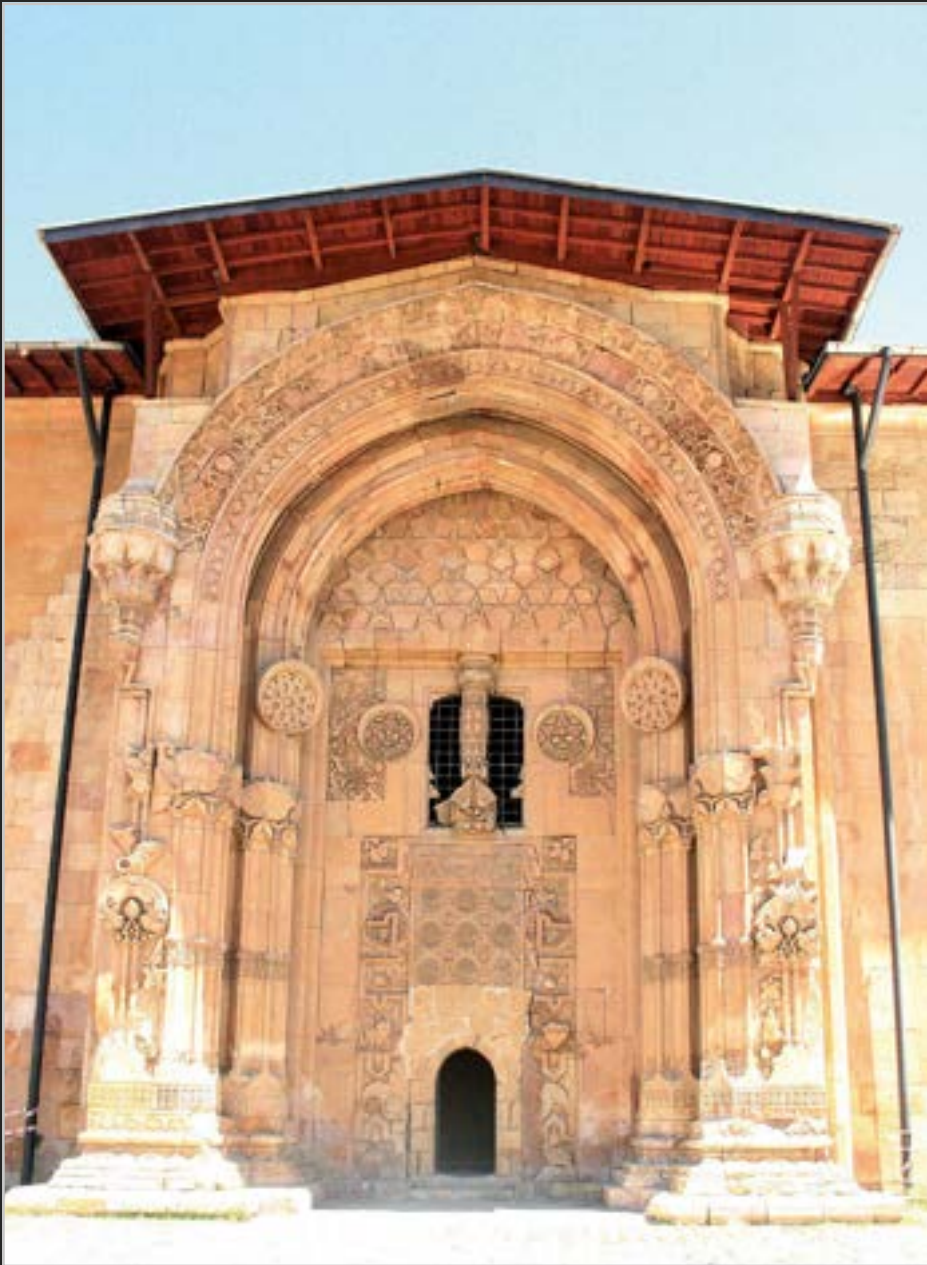
Jointly sponsoring the Divriği complex were Bahrāmshāh's daughter Tūrān Malik and Aḥmadshāh, the newly ascended ruler of Divriği following his father Sulaymānshāh's abrupt death in 1228. Much speculation

has been made regarding the two sponsors' relationship. Popular sentiment has rendered them husband and wife. The possibility that they were mother and son, however, begs to be considered. Great expense went into the construction of the complex, at the same time when the Mengüjekid centre of Erzincan under Tūrān Malik's brother was liquidated by Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Kayqubād, their Seljuk overlord and kinsman. Divriği remained in Mengüjekid hands for some 30 more years, during the early years of the Mongol conquest of Anatolia.

Decoration consisting of interlaced vegetal elements and interlocked geometric shapes is concentrated on the three monumental portals of the two buildings, in high-relief stone carving of truly astounding quality and variety. Of an almost baroque-like quality, the elaborate ornamentation of rose-medallions, crescents and stars, and lotus-buds represent the height of stone carving by master craftsmen from Ahlat, a city long associated with the highest-quality stonework. Located in the Lake Van region, Ahlat was the main artistic centre where such Islamic forms as the *muqarnas*, originally developed in brick, stucco, or wood in Iran and Iraq, were rendered into stone. In the late 12th century, itinerant stoneworkers from Ahlat introduced elaborate stone carving into the Islamic architecture of Anatolia and the Armenian architecture of Transcaucasia, eastern Anatolia, and Upper Mesopotamia. The early 13th-century mosque and hospital complex of Divriği, built by itinerant masters of Ahlat, reflects the ongoing architectural and artistic dialogue between the Armeno-Georgian and Caucasus region and Anatolia.



25a. The Mengüjekid mosque-hospital complex of Divriği, Sivas, 1228–1229. *Photographic credit: Gohar Grigoryan.*



25b. Western portal of the Divriği complex.
Photographic credit: Gohar Grigoryan.

25c. The upper section of the northern portal of the Divriği complex.
Photographic credit: Gohar Grigoryan.

HOSPITALITY ARCHITECTURE ON THE MEDIEVAL SILK ROAD(S)

Leonardo Squilloni

Located on the Vardenis Pass, on the mountain range dividing the Vayots‘ Dzor and Geghark‘unik‘ provinces of the Republic of Armenia, the Selim or Örbēlian Caravanserai stands as a powerful testament to the cultural entanglements that shaped medieval Eurasia. Commissioned in the early 14th century by the princely Örbēlian family, this architectural complex was more than a shelter for travellers and merchants; it was a deliberate political and cultural statement.

Situated on a secondary branch of the Silk Road(s), Selim formed part of a broader Örbēlian strategy to integrate their territory into trade networks connecting Iran, the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and beyond. Through its architecture, Selim reveals how the Armenian aristocracy engaged with global and imperial artistic languages, adopting and reinterpreting forms from Anatolia and Iran.

The shelter hall (*Fig. 26a*, on the left) features a three-nave layout, common to both Armenian basilicas and the Seljuk *hans* of Anatolia. The elevated *iwān* at the end of the central nave echoes Iranian architectural traditions.

The vestibule (*Fig. 26b*), built between 1326/7 and 1332 by Chesar Örbēlian, is the most ornate part of the complex. Its recessed entrance, crowned by a lunette with a Persian dedicatory inscription and framed by an arch, is surmounted by a prominent *muqarnas*—a

three-dimensional niche-like decoration resembling a honeycomb. The apotropaic reliefs of a sphinx and a bull rest above a string course with eight *muqarnas*-shaped niches. These stylistic references aligned the Örbēlians with the imperial visual culture set by the Seljuks and adopted by the Mongol Ilkhanate of Persia, projecting an image of legitimacy and connectedness.

One of the vestibule’s pyramidal skylights features a geometric motif found in other monuments linked to either Örbēlian patronage or the Jewish community of Yeghegis (*Fig. 26c*). Variants of this design appear more broadly, including in the Ulu Cami of Malatya (1273–74) and one of the Üç Kümbet mausolea in Erzurum.

The cultural hybridity of Selim is further expressed through its inscriptions—one in Persian and the other in Armenian (*Figs 26de*). Each addresses a different audience: the Persian text glorifies the Mongol ruler Abu Sa‘īd, while the Armenian inscription highlights the identity and piety of the local patrons. Together, they encode a dual political message: loyalty to the Ilkhanid state on the one hand, and the pursuit of local autonomy on the other. Thus, the Selim Caravanserai is not merely an example of hospitality architecture, but rather a stone document testifying to the co-existence of local and global powers that was made visible to the travellers of the Silk Road(s).

26a. Selim or Örbēlian Caravanserai, located on the Vardenis Pass, 14th century.

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni.



26b. Façade of the vestibule, Selim or Örbēlian Caravanserai, 14th century.

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni.

26c. Interlaced geometric patterns found in: Selim or Örbēlian caravanserai (a), Yeghegis Jewish cemetery (b), Yeghegis Örbēlian cemetery (c), Noravank' Monastery (d).

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni. Drawings: Caterina Fantoni.



26d. Photographs showing the Persian dedicatory inscription on the entrance of the vestibule, Selim or Örbelian Caravanserai. Photographs by Anushavan Shiroyan, 1934.

Yerevan, History Museum of Armenia, Inv. nos. 2331 and 2332. Image credit: History Museum of Armenia.



26e. The Armenian dedicatory inscription on the vaulted ceiling of the vestibule, Selim or Örbelian Caravanserai.

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni.



STONE AND EARTH: FEATURES OF ARCHITECTURE IN DVIN

Leonardo Squilloni

The use of earth as a construction material—whether in the form of rammed earth walls or sun-dried mud bricks—is a practice that spans vast geographical regions and time periods, characterising both vernacular and monumental architecture.

The medieval city of Dvin (4th–13th centuries) was built almost entirely using earth, through a variety of construction techniques that reflect the coexistence of different ethnic groups, each with its own building traditions. Most structures in the city feature stone and river-pebble foundations topped by walls of rammed earth or mud brick (*Fig. 27a*). Some exceptions include buildings made entirely of large mud bricks without stone bases, such as the early 8th-century palace of the

Arab governor on the citadel (*Fig. 27b*) and sections of the city walls.

A few centuries later, a new technique appeared: foundations in fired brick combined with rammed earth walls, as seen in structures from the Seljuk period (mid-11th to late 12th century) in the lower fortress (*Fig. 27c*).

The use of earth in construction continued in the Dvin region well into modern times. Numerous village houses near the site, as well as the 19th-century church of Saint John in the village of Norashen (*Fig. 27d*), built by Armenian settlers from Iran, reflect this continuity. Even the Soviet-era House of Culture in the nearby village of Getazat was constructed entirely of sun-dried mud bricks.

27a. Earthen building on the western slope of the Lower Fortress in Dvin, 12th–13th centuries.

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni.

27b. Mud-brick walls from the palace of the Arab governor in Dvin, early 8th century.

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni.

27c. Rammed earth wall on a fired brick basement from the University of Florence “Area 1000” excavation in the Lower Fortress of Dvin.

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni.

27d. Mud-brick Church of Saint John, Norashen, 19th century.

Photographic credit: Leonardo Squilloni.





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