

## “The Heritage of Ancestors” Early Studies on Armenian Manuscripts and Miniature Painting

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**Abstract** This essay deals with the emergence of scholarship on medieval Armenian artifacts with a particular emphasis on the study of manuscripts and miniature painting, and covers the period from the mid-nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. While the title of this article may appear to stress the heritage of the Armenians as belonging to a ‘national culture’, it also alludes to some early approaches, according to which the origins of non-Armenian arts were also sought in medieval Armenia. Amidst the growing waves of contemporary imperialist and nationalist sentiments in the nineteenth-early twentieth centuries, the interest in Armenian miniature painting commenced almost simultaneously in four different intellectual milieus – Russian, German-speaking, French, and Armenian – each approaching the subject from its own perspective and motivated by issues specific to the given cultural-political realm. Additionally, the citations listed here provide a bibliography of Armenian manuscript catalogues published prior to 1900.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Imperial Russia and Illustrations of Medieval Armenian Manuscripts. – 3 Armenian Miniature Painting in the German-speaking Scholarship. – 4 The ‘(in)authentic’ Art of the Armenians in the French Scholarship. – 5 The Armenian Approach to the Native Heritage. – 6 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Armenian miniature painting. Manuscripts. Russification. Imperialism. Nationalism. National art. Eǰmiacin. Orient. Renewal of traditions.

### 1 Introduction

Armenian manuscript illumination, together with Armenian architecture, has received a great deal of attention by all generations of researchers. The scholarly study of miniature painting, and medieval Armenian art in general, commenced in the mid-nineteenth century and emerged among the scholars working in diverse parts of Europe, the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. While the title of this essay may appear to stress the heritage of the Armenians as belonging to a ‘national culture’, it also alludes to some early approaches, according to which the origins of non-Armenian arts were also sought in medieval Armenia. We may distinguish four main ‘schools’ of thought, in which various interpretative paradigms were developed, reflecting cultural and political developments in the countries where they emerged. This paper<sup>1</sup> will explore how in each of these intellectual *milieus* we may trace different concerns and mentality of the time, which played a great role in shaping our understanding of the subject in question.

To some readers, the division of scholarly approaches into four more or less distinct ‘schools’ – Russian, German-speaking, French, and Armenian – with implications of certain features that each of them exhibited might appear too strict. Indeed, researchers who will be discussed below under each of these sub-headings were not merely working in some sort of isolation within their home countries, but they often travelled and, moreover, were well interconnected with scholars and institutions of other countries as well. This division does not attempt to place the authors and their works in strictly and exclusively national frameworks, even though this aspect was largely present and should not be ignored. At the same time, the careers and influence of some of them exerted in scholarly circles surely went beyond their countries. Indeed, the life and work of Josef Strzygowski, the controversial but influential Austrian art historian, reflects perfectly the international academic network that this scholar was able to create owing to his multiple contacts and his broad knowledge of different arts (Marchand

1 I am grateful to Zara Pogossian for her kind help and valuable suggestions for improving the final versions of this paper, and two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments.

2015, 257-85). Another example of such a 'global' scholar might be the Paris-based Armenian intellectual Aršak Č'ōpanean who, being an enthusiastic supporter of contemporary Western-born ideologies, comfortably shared both Armenian and French values and interests, and played a determining role in the *armenophile* movement in France.<sup>2</sup> However, despite clear indications of such global networks among scholars of the time, we might find it difficult to document an equanimous and universally respectful disposition in the work of these early scholars towards all cultures and arts they treated. These authors lived and worked in a century when concepts of ethnicities, nations and the relationship between those conditioned many aspects of political and cultural life, leaving an intense – if not, in certain cases, decisive – impact also on scholarship. It would be naïve to expect nineteenth-century scholars to have been entirely free of biases inherent in their own time, culture and, in some cases, country of origin. Research conducted in the last decades has made it clear that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars dealing with history of art were supported either by their governments or by the concerned (and far from unbiased) circles and individuals who, for one reason or another, showed a keen interest in undertaking research into the past. The various tendencies, then, found their way in the scholarly production of the time.

These general remarks are applicable also when we look at the study of medieval Armenian miniature painting. Thus, the French explorer Jules Mourier, whose relevant publications are discussed in this paper, went to work in the Caucasus with the support of a French government scholarship. Count Aleksej Uvarov, who authored the very first article on Armenian miniature painting, was the founder of Russian Archaeological Congresses that took place on a regular basis and was also the son of Sergej Uvarov, the Minister of Public Education and one of the most renowned authorities in nineteenth-century Russia. No less remarkable was the involvement of Armenian philanthropic organisations and wealthy Armenian benefactors, who, based in different countries stretching from Egypt to the Caucasus, sponsored the education of hundreds of Armenian students in European and Russian universities. Their patronage often covered also

the work and publications of the scholars who were not necessarily of Armenian origin, such as Frédéric Macler.

Naturally, the socio-political realities of mid-nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries were not the same for every scholar; nor did these realities impact everyone to the same extent and in the same way. However, impact of different ideological, political and cultural realities that each scholar experienced in his intellectual *milieu* cannot be neglected, especially when one documents a number of profoundly different interpretations for a single inheritance. One of the most striking and principal issues that make this difference obvious was the perception of 'East' and 'West'. What was understood under 'East' in the contemporary European and Eurocentric approaches was not necessarily the same in the scholarship developed by Armenian scholars (including, notably, the understanding of Byzantine art). The reasons for this are far from being linked exclusively to geography; rather, they are linked to the ideological incongruities and differences between the various 'schools' of research to be considered here.

This paper seeks to understand some of these reasons for at least four distinct 'schools' of thought discussed here, without, however, diminishing or underestimating the merit of these early studies. Aleksej Uvarov and Vladimir Stasov were among the first researchers to dedicate extensive articles on the decorations of Armenian manuscripts and to treat them from an artistic point of view. Josef Strzygowski's work on Armenian miniature painting, with all of its methodological and ideological controversies, opened up a new horizon in the history of Armenian, and Christian art in general, stimulating a still unceasing interest in this field. The contributions of such scholars, as Frédéric Macler, Garegin Yovsēp'ian and many others cited here, are invaluable for discovering and publishing a great number of Armenian manuscripts scattered all over the world. The value of some of these publications produced in the nineteenth and beginning twentieth centuries becomes even more precious in the light of the afterlives of many manuscripts and artworks, which are now lost forever or whose whereabouts are unknown. In the following pages, the

<sup>2</sup> On Aršak Č'ōpanean and his activities, see: Khayadjian 2001. For the *armenophile* movement in France in the nineteenth and beginning twentieth centuries, see also the contributions in Mouradian 2007.

immense work undertaken in the field of miniature painting will hopefully be taken for granted by the readers, but this essay has a different purpose than merely focusing on the value of the early scholars' works, something that has been undertaken on numerous other occasions in the past. Rather, it attempts to outline the ideological hallmarks of each of the main 'schools' of thought that pioneered research in Armenian manuscript painting and to comprehend how the time and place in which these scholars lived and worked shaped their views, which, to a greater or smaller extent, continued to impact the scholarship over the next century.

## 2 Imperial Russia and Illustrations of Medieval Armenian Manuscripts

Until now, the doors of this rich treasury were closed for any European, and the monks who preserve it did not allow any foreigner to enter there, as they strongly believe that it will cause covetousness. (Brosset 1840, 3)

This is how, in 1840 the French orientalist Marie-Félicité Brosset (1802-1880) from the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg described the treasury of the Armenian catholicosate of Ējmiacin in the introduction to the first systematic catalogue of Armenian manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> By this time, Eastern Armenia had fallen under Russian control as a result of the two Russian-Iranian wars, which came to an end with the Treaty of Turkmenchai (1828). The new lands of the Russian Empire attracted the attention of scholars working in imperial institutions, and Brosset was the first to 'discover' the manuscript library of the Armenian catholicosate. Brosset's scholarship left an important mark on the study of medieval Armenian and Georgian history, but it is the aftermath of his Ējmiacin catalogue that is of interest to this narrative, for its publication in 1840 largely stimulated the interest in medieval Armenian history and culture.

A few decades after Brosset's catalogue appeared, Count Aleksej Sergeevič Uvarov (1825-1884) published the first article on Armenian miniature painting, which was presented at the Fifth Russian Archaeological Congress in Tbilisi (1882) organised by the count himself (Uvarov 1882, 350-77). This survey was based on a selected group of 35 illustrated manuscripts, dating from tenth to the late seventeenth century. Uvarov studied them during his six-day visit to Ējmiacin with the help of Nikolaj Tēr-Ōsipov, the procurator of the Ējmiacin Synod, who accompanied Uvarov and translated for him, and the librarian Bishop Nersēs, who "perfectly knew which manuscripts are the most beautiful ones" (351). This short-term research was however enough for the Russian diplomat and scholar to draw sufficient conclusions regarding the illustrations of these manuscripts, in the majority of which he identified Byzantine style and images. Before we discuss Uvarov's specific ideas, let us remember what were some of the political, cultural and ideological currents of his time that appear to have influenced his studies and concepts.

Uvarov's approach must be viewed within the contemporary political ideology of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Russian Empire. In this respect, one of the most important concepts was to represent the cultural heritage of various communities and ethnicities subjected to the empire within the context of homogeneous Orthodoxy based on Byzantine traditions. Already in 1832, under the rule of Emperor Nikolaj I, the idea of establishing a homogeneous society was advanced due to the efforts of Count Sergej Uvarov (1786-1855), the Minister of Public Education, who was also the father of Aleksej Uvarov. It was Sergej Uvarov who came up with the influential concept known as 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality', in which Orthodoxy was regarded as a national religion that had to be further strengthened for the sake of the empire's prosperity.<sup>4</sup> In the following decades and certainly by the 1880s, Russia started to represent itself as the natural successor of the Byzantine Empire and as an authoritative bearer

<sup>3</sup> In fact, the catalogue was prepared by two local monks, Hovhannes Šahxat'unyanc' and Hovhannes Ērimec'i. For both Šahxat'unyanc' and Ērimec'i's contribution to Brosset's catalogue, see Asatur Mnac'akanyan's introduction to the *General Catalogue* 1984, XI.

<sup>4</sup> Modern scholars have demonstrated that Uvarov's source of inspiration for the creation of this ideology can be found in German romanticism - the same source that also inspired the emergence of Armenian art history, discussed below. For Sergej Uvarov and his ideology, see: Whittaker 1999; Zorin 1996, 105-28; Ivanov 2001, 92-111. See also: Clay 2000, 61-82; Rakitin 2013, 101-7.

of Orthodox traditions, a conscious act that was in line with its expansive ambitions and with its desire to maintain inner unity.<sup>5</sup> This new type of Russian identity often went beyond concepts of ethnic Russianness and tried to incorporate all the other peoples within it. This ideology is precisely reflected in the study of arts of different ethnicities, which were seen as parts of the same nation. As will be shown next, it is this multi-ethnic character of a 'nation' that was developed that would allow also medieval Armenian and Georgian arts to be absorbed in Russian art – a concept in which Byzantine art served as a strong argument to substantiate this assimilation. Similarly, Viktor Rozen and his disciples, who later became renowned orientalists, were set off in search of Arabic influence on Byzantium by studying Oriental and Muslim communities within the empire.<sup>6</sup>

It was at this moment that Aleksej Uvarov's pioneering article on Armenian illustrated manuscripts appeared, declaring not only the existence of numerous 'beautiful' manuscripts kept in the Ėjmiacin Treasury, but also, and rather more significantly, their Byzantine background, thus providing an interpretative paradigm that fit comfortably with the Byzantine-oriented search for the origins of Russian religiosity and culture.<sup>7</sup> The latter aspect was quickly developed and enhanced by Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906), another representative of the russophile movement.

In his extensive article entitled "Armenian Manuscripts and Their Ornamentation", Stasov criticised the French translation of Uvarov's work by Jules Mourier, who disagreed with Uvarov, arguing that the significance of Armenian miniature painting was due not only to its absorption of Byzantine influences but also because it was unique in its own right and represented independent artistic style.<sup>8</sup> The respected Russian intellectual expressed regret that the first study on Armenian manuscript illumination written in a European language represented it in an incorrect and distorted way. Stasov stated that it was this understanding that led him to

explore the matter by himself. It is worth citing a passage from Stasov to demonstrate the grist of his argument:

Armenian and Georgian arts of Byzantine era had a strong influence on Russian art during its formative period, and today when studying the first periods of Russian art, be it architecture, ornaments, or miniature painting, it is impossible to leave aside Armenian and Georgian art. It is a great delusion to think that the original sources of our national art can only be found in Byzantine art. In the majority of cases, especially in Russian architecture, the initial influences were not only specifically Byzantine but also Armenian-Byzantine and Georgian-Byzantine (Stasov 1886, 140)

Being an enthusiastic supporter of what was proclaimed as 'Russian national art', Stasov was trying to create a common past for the Russians, Georgians and Armenians, in which they were all strongly tied together due to their common Byzantine roots. By that time, the ideology of having a national art, which would also comprise the cultural heritage of the newcomers, gradually became dominant within the expanded borders of the Russian Empire. In *L'ornament slave et oriental*, published with the support of Tsar Alexandr III, Armenian manuscript illustration appears faithful to the spirit of the above-mentioned ideology. Here, Stasov made similar observations as before:

In the beginning, in accordance with the prevalent opinion, I thought that all this ornamentation [of Russian manuscripts] was borrowed from Graeco-Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serbian manuscripts. Yet, by becoming more closely acquainted with these [manuscripts] in the rich collections of our Public Library, as well as in South Slavic collections [...], I became convinced that the adoption from only the Byzantines, Serbians and Bulgarians would not be enough to explain all ornamental forms of our manuscripts. I

5 Foletti 2011, 38-41; Foletti 2016, 22, 24; Rakitin 2013, 98-109.

6 On Rozen's vision and strategy of Oriental Studies in Russia, see: Tolz 2008, 53-81.

7 Further discussion of Uvarov's article is in the second paragraph.

8 Stasov 1886, 133-54; Mourier 1885. It is noteworthy to mention that in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Stasov's approach on Armenian and Oriental manuscript ornaments was assessed by Soviet-Armenian art historian Ruben Drampjan as having 'a series of correct observations'. See: Drampjan 1946, 37.

think that certain forms also derive from sources other than Byzantium, Bulgaria and Serbia, and these forms have local, that is to say, truly Russian origins. (Stasov 1887, I-II)

By 'local Russian art' was understood the art located within the borders of the Russian Empire. This term was also applied to describe architectural monuments and other artefacts. Indeed, in the six-volume collection of *Russian Antiquities*, jointly prepared by Ivan Tolstoj and Nikodim Kondakov,<sup>9</sup> the thousand-years heritage of various communities who now lived in the Russian Empire was represented as a process of gradual transformation 'into one state with a single nation' and as a great contribution to the treasury of Russian antiquities.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, because of dogmatic differences between the Armenian and Byzantine churches, the concept of pan-Orthodoxy that underpinned Russian scholarship was not suitable when approaching the medieval heritage of the Armenians. While Georgian, Byzantine and Russian churches were essentially in agreement concerning doctrine, the Armenian church remained isolated in this company because of Christological disagreements and the Armenian church's rejection of the Chalcedon Council (451). This point, however, did not seem to matter much, at least in the 1880s. Since the incorporation of Eastern Armenia into the Russian Empire, the relationship between Ējmiacin and the imperial government had developed through a series of controversial phases. The Russian emperor was actively engaged in the election and approval of the catholicos of all Armenians. At the same time he attempted to emphasise by all possible means the Ējmiacin catholicos' supreme status over the catholicos of Sis and the patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> With the introduction of the Statute of 11 March 1836, known as *Položenie*, the Russian government further increased its participation in the election of the Armenian catholicos (Tunjan 2017, 225-40). It is noteworthy to mention that in the aftermath of

this *Položenie*, the Armenian Apostolic church was referred to as 'Gregorian' (after the name of Saint Gregory the Enlightener) within Russian communities, apparently in order to ignore its apostolicity.<sup>12</sup>

Although in the beginning Russia regarded Ējmiacin as a useful tool for its foreign policy in regards to the Ottoman Empire and endowed the Armenian catholicos with some privileges and authority, in the 1880s this attitude changed in accordance with more intensified and systematic russification policies within the empire.<sup>13</sup> With the active presence of numerous schools and periodicals belonging to the Armenian church, as well as of many patriotic organisations based in both the Russian and Ottoman Empires, it became a difficult task to incorporate the Armenians into the new, 'Russian national' identity. The schools operated by the Armenian church (which were also serving as public schools) were forced to close, later to be reopened in 1886, after implementing specific modifications to teaching programs and methods, in which knowledge of the Russian language became obligatory (Sarafian 1923, 263-4; Suny 1993, 36, 45, 69). Religious persecutions became particularly intolerable in the early twentieth century. With the decree of June 12, 1903 issued by Emperor Nikolaj II, the property of the Armenian church was confiscated, and the Armenian schools were closed again (Sarafian 1923, 264.5; Suny 1993, 92). Although the schools were reopened in August 1905 and the confiscated property was returned to the Armenian church, the latter was still regarded as having an antigovernmental position. In light of these developments, Armenian students started to experience difficulties when attempting to enroll in Russian institutions of higher education, since their prior education at the schools run by the Armenian church was not considered valid. A particularly cautious attitude was adopted towards the students who graduated from the Gēorgean Seminary in Ējmiacin, the Nersisean School in Tbilisi, and the Seminary of Nor Naxiĵewan (Rostov-on-Don), which were regard-

9 Tolstoj, Kondakov 1889, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1897, 1899. The Armenian art is treated in the fourth volume subtitled *Christian Antiquities of Crimea, Caucasus and Kiev* (1891).

10 Tolz 2011, 35. See also: Tolz 2005, 127-50; Foletti 2011, 42-3; Foletti 2016, 27.

11 Werth 2006, 205-9. For Russian patronage of the Ējmiacin Catholicos during the first decades of the nineteenth century, see also: Suny 1993, 36.

12 Werth 2006, 204 fn. 3; Werth 2014, 24 fn. 39; Kostandyan 2009, 100; Melikset-Bekov 1911, 3.

13 For the russification policies towards the Armenians in the 1880s, see: Suny 1993, 44-51.

ed as non-Orthodox seminaries and therefore unsuitable as providers of higher education. In an explanatory letter (1907) addressed to Ivan Borgman, the rector of the Saint Petersburg Imperial University, the Deputy Minister of Education, Osip Gerasimov, felt it necessary to explain his decision to accept students who graduated from the seminaries of the 'Armenian Gregorian church'. He felt necessary to assure, among other things, that the level of Russian language and history taught at these institutions were high and concluded his letter by insisting that rather than banning the Armenian students from pursuing their education at imperial universities, they should be encouraged to do so:

It is impossible not to notice that by creating extreme difficulties for the graduate students of Armenian seminaries to enter Russian universities you will contribute to the outflow of young Armenian students to Western European and especially German institutions of higher education, which will reduce the impact of our native universities and will hinder the Russian enlightenment work in the Caucasus. (Kostandyan 2009, 103)

In fact, Borgman's 'alarming' conclusion about the consequences stimulated by European and especially German education was not without reason, as will be seen in the final part of this paper.

### 3 Armenian Miniature Painting in the German-speaking Scholarship

In the mid-nineteenth century, the German art historian Carl Schnaase (1798-1875) had included the medieval architectures of Armenia and Georgia into his multivolume work *Geschichte der bildenden Künste* (Schnaase 1844, 248-76, 312-18). In this work, he set out his thesis that these arts were expressions of a so-called national character, a phenomenon that he found to be substantially based on Christian values.<sup>14</sup>

Here, Armenian art appeared under the general chapter dedicated to Byzantine art, which, for Schnaase, had played a particular role in the formation of not only Armenian and Russian arts but also of the art of the Germanic people. Yet, in Schnaase's view, the art of Germanic people, unlike the first two, was able to reach "a most free and accomplished level of development" (Schnaase 1844, 312-3).<sup>15</sup> Another point worth mentioning is that contrary to Russian scholarship, nineteenth-century German art history highlighted the political and religious 'loneliness' of Armenia, hinting at the non-Chalcedonian orientation of the Armenian church (Schnaase 1844, 315-6, 258). As a consequence, Armenian medieval art, architecture in particular, was interpreted as having an idiosyncratic style, which also inspired neighbouring Georgian architecture (268-9, 273). However, as noted by Vardan Azatyan, although the first German art historians underlined the 'uniqueness' of Armenian architecture and the 'Armenian style', they also usually concluded their observations by subordinating it to European architecture for various reasons. For example, Schnaase's subordination was based on the conviction that Armenian architecture reflects also the 'adventurous' and artistically less significant taste of the Arabs, which places these architectures into a lower position in comparison to the European one (Schnaase 1844, 275-6).<sup>16</sup>

The earliest studies on Armenian miniature painting is closely linked also with the name of Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941). Before launching himself into an exploration of the origins of Armenian architecture in his famous *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa*, Strzygowski's interests focused on miniature painting. Infatuated with contemporary nationalistic and racist ideas, the Austro-Hungarian scholar saw 'Aryan' elements in Armenian architecture.<sup>17</sup> During the preparation of this book, Strzygowski had promised the Armenians that his studies would demonstrate "the extraordinary value of ancient Armenian art", in exchange for the photographs and materials that the local scholars provided

<sup>14</sup> An excellent discussion of Schnaase's approach to Armenian and Georgian medieval arts, as well as the emergence of interest in these arts in Germany, are explored in Azatyan 2012. For a previous discussion on Schnaase's approach, see: Klingenburg 1981, 369-76.

<sup>15</sup> On some ethical issues of Schnaase's theory, see Azatyan 2012, 127-49.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion, see: Azatyan 2012, 100-13, 121-2.

<sup>17</sup> See Christina Maranci's detailed analysis of Strzygowski's work on Armenian architecture: Maranci 1998, 363-80; Maranci 2001, Chapter 3.

him (Marchand 2015, 268). This, however, occurred at a later stage in his scholarly career. His earlier publications on miniature painting represented this field somewhat sporadically, rather than approaching it as a characteristic phenomenon of Armenian culture.

Strzygowski's first study, dedicated to the tenth-century *Ējmiacin Gospel* (now in Matenadaran, no. 2374), was published in the newly created series *Byzantinische Denkmäler* with the support of the well-known Russian diplomat and collector Alexander Nelidov (Strzygowski 1891). Nelidov had facilitated Strzygowski's travels to the Caucasus (August 1888-April 1890) through his many letters addressed to the relevant authorities. Nelidov's own involvement in the project can be explained by his interest in extending the borders of Byzantine art, in accordance with the above-mentioned cultural politics adopted by the Russian Empire, with an eye to including the Caucasus in this field.<sup>18</sup> The resultant monograph was Strzygowski's first work *en route* to producing a history of Byzantine art that aimed to explain "since when and to what extent Byzantine influence appears in such an art-poor region as Armenia" (Strzygowski 1891, VI). Against possibly different expectations of Nelidov, Strzygowski concluded his study by ascribing the illustrations of the *Ējmiacin Gospel* to Syrian miniaturists and associating the origins of Armenian miniature painting with the importation of Syrian archetypes in the sixth century,<sup>19</sup> something which was not entirely incorrect. The observation that there was no Armenian tradition of book illustration prior to the tenth-eleventh centuries fostered further Strzygowski's approach to the origins of Christian art, which, by the scholar's conviction, had to be found in the East, in particular in Syria and Egypt. Unlike the widespread Rome-centred approach, Strzygowski's groundbreaking theory argued that the art of the Orient was able to preserve its originality and remain untouched by classical influences. It is therefore in the Orient

that the scholar suggests to look for the roots of Europe's Christian art (Marquand 1910, 357-65; Marchand 1994, 117-20). It should be mentioned that Strzygowski was not the only German-speaking scholar who identified the origins of Armenian Gospel illustration in Syrian art; similar observations were also made by Anton Baumstark (Baumstark 1911, 249-60).

In his monograph dedicated to the *Ējmiacin Gospel*, Strzygowski drew some parallels between Armenian and Byzantine arts, especially when discussing the manuscript illustration of the following centuries. He would soon change his stance and argue that Armenian miniature painting was directly inspired by more ancient, Iranian and Mesopotamian, cultures and that it was likely that it imparted artistic forms to Byzantine art, rather than the other way round (Strzygowski 1907, 27-8). To illustrate this, Strzygowski discussed the decorations of a twelfth-century Armenian Gospel codex kept in the Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen (no. MA XIII, 1). He associated it with ninth-century mosaics from Baghdad and argued for his thesis through an imaginary Armenian colophon presumably dated to 893, but which was, in fact, falsely represented as the archetypal, original colophon.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, if Russian scholarship was trying to 'byzantinize' and then to 'russify' the art of the recently imperialized Southern Caucasus, Strzygowski's approach of including more far-reaching territories in the east was a part of his Orient-centred project. The medieval art of Armenia located in the Iranian neighborhood made this approach particularly attractive and reasonable, since it would serve to prove the long-lasting presence of Christianity in the region, making it easier to trace the Christian art of Europe back to Iranian artistic forms. Similar methodology and conclusions may be observed in Strzygowski's analysis of Armenian architecture, which he regarded as a transitional stage connecting the 'Aryan' architecture of ancient

18 At that time, Nelidov had also sponsored other young researchers in order to promote the study of Byzantine art. For example, he played a significant role in shaping Theodore Schmidt's scholarly interests, who in 1901 was sent to work on Byzantine monuments in the Russian Archaeological Institute of Constantinople. Being the ambassador of Russia in Istanbul at that time, Nelidov himself was actively engaged in the foundation of this institute (1894). See: Sivolap 2006, 20.

19 Similar observations are made by Strzygowski concerning another tenth-century manuscript, the so-called Second *Ējmiacin Gospel* (no. 2555, Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem). See: Strzygowski 1911, 345-52.

20 The colophon of the Tübingen Gospel is a nineteenth-century falsification, which was copied, largely using the text of a colophon of another Gospel book, now Matenadaran manuscript no. 6763 produced in 1113 in Cilician Drazark. This widespread confusion about the date and provenance of the Tübingen manuscript was caused by the above-mentioned publication of Strzygowski, who relied on the information provided to him by the art dealer.

Iran with that of modern Europe (Maranci 1998, 363-80; Grigor 2007, 565).

The art-historical analysis formulated in Russian and German-speaking studies greatly impacted the work of contemporary Russian and European scholars. Based on Strzygowski's study on the Ējmiacin Gospel, in his book *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art* Dmitrij Ajnalov treated the final four miniatures of this manuscript as Syrian artworks.<sup>21</sup> In 1898, Johan Jacob Tikkanen, the first professor of art history in Finland, published a study about Armenian manuscript illustration, which refers to three manuscripts kept at that time in the Oriental collection of Dr. Fredrick Robert Martin (Tikkanen 1898, 65-91). Faithful to the spirit of current approaches, Tikkanen affirmed that Armenian miniature painting was largely depended on foreign cultures and that it had merely played a role of a mediator as a result of the Armenians' centuries-long existence between Europe, Asia and Africa (Tikkanen 1898, 91).

Similarly, in the second volume of Karl Woermann's *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker*, Armenian art and architecture is labelled as 'Mischkunst', following the approach formulated earlier by Schnaase in his *Geschichte der bildenden Kunst* (Azatyan 2012, 29-30, 203-5). While saying that there was no miniature painting in Armenia (nor in Georgia) prior to the tenth and eleventh century, Woermann was, in fact, repeating Strzygowski's above-mentioned expression, although without mentioning him directly (Woermann 1905, 76). Woermann continued his narrative by delineating what was, for him, typically Armenian. He found these characteristics in a manuscript dating from the tenth-eleventh century, known as the Trapisond Gospel (Venice, Mekhitarist congregation, no. 1400/108). This choice was significant and may be understood based on a previous study done by Stasov (again, without mentioning him), who a few years earlier had paid a particular attention to this same manuscript, developing Uvarov's observations that tenth-century Armenian illustrations had "indisputably Byzantine images, but of modern type" (Uvarov 1882, 354). Shortly after, Stasov added that the Trapisond Gospel expressed this modern, Armenian type of miniature painting,

which could be observed in animal and architectural ornaments, even in 'Armenian physiognomies' (Stasov 1886, 142-7). The designation of the *Trapisond Gospel*, its probable place of creation, and the presence of certain elements (such as inscriptions in Greek), allowing one to speak of Armenian-Byzantine interactions, made this codex particularly attractive to Stasov. In summer 1880, when he visited the Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice and benefited from the valuable help of Lewond Ališan, he was able to see this manuscript personally and to choose it from many other illustrated books, a decision which owed to its 'Byzantine-Armenian' features listed above. The choice of this Venice manuscript was dictated by a-priori political-cultural considerations about the Byzantine nature of Armenian illuminated manuscripts and the search for primarily this type of manuscripts as opposed to many other illustrated manuscripts without such 'obvious' Byzantinizing features.

Following Stasov, Woermann too affirmed the 'Armenianness' of bird ornaments found in the Trapisond Gospel. Yet, for the German scholar, this remained as an artwork of a Mischkunst type.

To sum up, the German-speaking scholarship of the late nineteenth and beginning twentieth centuries on Armenian miniature painting largely followed Strzygowski's studies. Here, only a few selectively chosen manuscripts were treated, mostly those which were related to Early Christian traditions. Strzygowski's choice of these earliest manuscripts was very cautious (as was that of Uvarov and Stasov), for it had to suit the scholar's current concerns on locating the origins of Armenian art (and Christian art in general) in Syria and Egypt. If Baumstark's observations about Armenian miniature painting were entirely inspired by Strzygowski's 'Syrian' approach, then some other followers of the Austrian scholar, like Tikkanen or Woermann, made some more efforts on seeing Armenian manuscript art in the light of other cultures as well. Yet, their conclusions too did not vary significantly from the current tendencies introduced earlier, as their assessment too was based on representing this art as merely having the role of a mediator.

<sup>21</sup> Ajnalov 1900, 58-60. It is noteworthy to mention that in 1890 Strzygowski attended the Archaeological Congress in Moscow, where he met Ajnalov and his professor, slavophilic scholar Kondakov. This meeting may well have deepened further Strzygowski's anti-Roman position. See: Marchand 2015, 267.



#### 4 The '(in)Authentic' Art of the Armenians in the French Scholarship

In the nineteenth century an intensified interest in Oriental studies characterised also French scholarship. In his *Recherches anthropologiques dans le Caucase 1885-1887*, Ernest Chantre assured his compatriots that "the European has placed his cradle in the Armenian Highlands" (Vinson 2004, 73). Hinting at the Biblical story of the Universal Flood and the Mount Ararat, Jules Mourier wrote that Armenia had played a great role in the history of the mankind, for it "is the cradle of the oldest traditions of our race".<sup>22</sup> The enduring idea of Ararat's place as 'the cradle of mankind' was apparently inspired by the Enlightenment and early modern philosophers, and even earlier, by the masters of Renaissance. These figures highlighted Armenia as a place of rebirth, witnessing through their mythic-philosophical visions the great catastrophe of Deluge and the re-creation of mankind, which became a model of a new beginning within their own societies.<sup>23</sup>

In the French scholarship of this period, the vector of a renewal was shifted to the Oriental civilisations, whose early histories were now being relentlessly represented in the light of an imaginative past commonly shared with Westerners. In this discourse, the question was often regarded through the prism of the Christian-Islamic dichotomy and a desire to return to original (Christian) traditions (Vinson 2004, 74-5). These conceptions were also explicitly reflected in the methodology of the first French scholars who explored medieval Armenian art. While it is not possible to include all relevant materials in this brief essay (as for example all accounts of travellers and explorers), this paper will however address at least most of the major studies written on the subject of miniature painting.

Jules Mourier (born in 1846) was the first French intellectual to show interest in Armenian illustrated manuscripts, when he translated Alexey Uvarov's article into French, publishing it under the title *La bibliothèque d'Edchmiadzine et les manuscrits arméniens* (Tbilisi 1885). Yet, Mourier found it important to express his dis-

agreement with Uvarov specifically regarding the conviction that Armenian miniature painting was solely influenced by Byzantine art.<sup>24</sup> A quick glance at Mourier's Caucasian activities might help us to understand why the French explorer was not inclined to see Armenian manuscript illustrations in the shadow of Byzantine art alone and also what he meant by interpreting Armenian art as 'independent and original'.

Mourier moved to work in the Caucasus in the 1880s with the support of a scholarship of 5,000 francs granted him by the French Ministry of Public Instruction. Upon his arrival, he initiated the publication of the first francophone journals in Caucasus, *Le Caucase Illustré* and *La Revue Commerciale et Industrielle du Caucase*, both based in Tbilisi and available for subscription in the Russian Empire and in France (Cheishvili 2013, 13). As he wrote himself, the aim of this sojourn, which was mainly spent in Tbilisi, was to locate "the traces of Oriental peoples' migrations to Europe, as well as to gather Georgian and Armenian artefacts which have some artistic value" (13). Focusing his research on the artistic production of the Georgians and Armenians, Mourier was apparently familiar with the previous work on the region, written by Schnaase, for he applies similar methods and rhetoric used earlier by the German art historian. In *L'art au Caucase*, the arts of Armenia and Georgia are treated by Mourier through the lens of these nations' 'characters', an approach, which characterised the contemporary German scholarship. First, these arts were praised within a Caucasian framework as being the only noteworthy ones, apparently because of their Christian context. Then, following again his German colleagues and implementing a somewhat polemical rhetoric, Mourier accused the Armenians and Georgians of being unable to reach the level of perfection found in Western art, thus identifying the formers as subordinate and inferior to the latter. Typical of the essentializing attitudes of his day, he went on to write the following:

The Georgians are beautiful, bright, brave, and generous. They have strongly developed sentiments of hospitality and honor. But they

<sup>22</sup> Mourier 1894, 109. The notion 'cradle of civilisation' repeatedly appears in the works of many French explorers sent to the Caucasus in this period. See: Mourier 1887a, 10; De Morgan 1889, III.

<sup>23</sup> On the stories of Ararat and their reuse in post-medieval times, see: Matossian 2009; Trompf 2015, 629-66.

<sup>24</sup> In his *L'art religieux au Caucase*, Mourier dedicated a chapter to Armenian and Georgian manuscripts, in which he reproduced the contents of the mentioned article and confirmed his previous statements. See: Mourier 1887b, 91-139.

are lazy, careless and without any spirit of consistency and even less of perseverance. The Armenians have a positive and practical spirit. They have a unique aptitude for trade and are looking for all possible means to double their fortune. Less chivalrous and less brave than Georgians, the insinuating and smart Armenian likes only one thing – money; and because of this he [the Armenian] has lost today all artistic inclinations he could have possessed once. In sum, in the Caucasus only two nations were able to demonstrate any intellectual value: the Georgians and the Armenians. However, this value is quite poor and their moral qualities are scarcely better than those of their intelligence.

The architecture will show that this evaluation is exact in every point. Neither the Armenians nor the Georgians were able to create an absolutely original art. To do so, one needs elevation of spirit, breadth of views, personal inspiration, which they do not possess. Their architecture, like their country, has perpetually undergone foreign influence. Are not their moral weakness and their inconstancy reflected in the exiguity of their constructions? In the period of its splendor, the Cathedral of Ani, the capital of Armenia, also the one of Kutaisi, in Imereti, were not much greater than the churches of villages in the West. (Mourier 1896, 1: 8)<sup>25</sup>

The above text was deeply inspired by Johann Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. It could perhaps be understood as a retelling of Herder's writing, in which he attributed the Armenians and the Georgians with similar characteristics as Mourier.<sup>26</sup> Continuing the reading of *L'art au Caucase*, one can note how Armenian and Georgian arts were gradually merged into one – 'Armeno-Georgian art'. Mourier introduces a general common source from which all Christian arts originated but, here too, he highlights the superiority of Western art, especially Gothic architecture, over others (Mourier 1896, 1: 25-6). Thus, the analysis of Christian ar-

tefacts created by the Armenians and Georgians were carried out in conformity to contemporary European ideas and prejudices about Oriental civilisations and their relationship to the West. When Mourier moved to the Caucasus to study the material heritage of the local peoples, he a priori sketched out the expected results of his future research – to find "traces of Oriental peoples' migration to Europe" (Cheishvili 2013, 13). It is in the context of this presumed migration that the French scholar saw the 'independence and originality' of Armenian miniature painting, which was later assimilated to 'much greater', Western art. As will be shown below, the ideas about such a migration and the erstwhile common traditions believed to have been shared between the East and West were largely present in the works of another celebrated French intellectual, Frédéric Macler (1869-1938).

Having dedicated his life to revealing and propagating the material and literary heritage of Armenia, Frédéric Macler enjoyed the extensive support of such wealthy philanthropists as Levon Mantashev, Boghos Nubar Pasha, Calouste Gulbenkian, Dickran Khan Kelekian, Yervant Agathon Bey, and many others. In the 1900s, the scholar published a study dedicated to the bindings of some manuscripts kept in the National Library of France (Macler 1905, 14-20) and prepared the catalogue of Armenian and Georgian manuscripts preserved in the same library (Macler 1908). The work of cataloguing manuscripts continued also in the following years. This included the manuscripts found in various libraries in Central Europe (Macler 1913b, 229-84, 559-686), Spain, France (Macler 1920, 1921, 1922), Cyprus (Macler 1923), Crimea (Macler 1930), and Transylvania (Macler 1935), in addition to the single manuscripts he was publishing regularly (Macler 1920b, 129-38; Macler 1926a, 169-76; Macler 1926b, 27-31).

A man of his times, Macler too started his research in the field of miniature painting with the same concern and search for origins. He intended to contribute to the question that had become classical by his time – where can the origins of

25 See also: Mourier 1887b, 3-4.

26 Herder 1792, 97-8. Note that, also Immanuel Kant, in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), had described the Armenians, though quite positively, as tradesmen who have "a commercial spirit of a special kind" (for a discussion of the relevant texts of the two German philosophers, see Azatyan 2012, 49-58). Also in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia, there was a prevalent image of the Armenians as commercial people, who entirely controlled the trade in the Caucasus. As for the Georgians, the characteristics quoted above are reflected in the work of the Russian ethnographer Kovalevskij, *Kavkaz*. See: Kovalevskij 1914, 203-73, esp. 234-5 (on the Georgians), 285-309, esp. 299-301 (on the Armenians). See also: Suny 1993, 37-42.

Armenian art be located?<sup>27</sup> While searching for an answer throughout his long and prolific career, he produced numerous works dedicated to illustrated manuscripts, which still impress the reader in terms of their rich and high-quality printings. Discussing the possible contacts between various traditions suggested in previous hypotheses, Macler usually concluded his studies with the observation that Armenian manuscript illumination was to be studied as a distinct field. He proposed that while Armenia was at the centre of cross-cultural contacts, its arts were free of any substantial interactions with other cultures that might have changed its essence and originality.<sup>28</sup> Developing this further, he came to have the conclusion that, whilst travelling to Europe, Armenian artists brought these 'pure' artistic traditions with them. He argued that they played an influential role in the formation of Western art, and used the example of (Cilician) Armenian communities in medieval Italy. This circle was then closed by comparing medieval Armenian miniatures with "their Carolingian congeners" (Abdullah, Macler 1909, 366). Thus, Armenian and Carolingian miniature paintings were seen by Macler as originating from a common 'gene', whose renewal was consistently pursued in the contemporary French society.

In the aftermath of the First World War and the Armenian Genocide, Macler's studies became even more Armeno-centric and were accompanied by increasing hints for finding a positive resolution of the Armenian Question and preserving the Armenian people. The culmination of efforts to demonstrate Armenian-French historical and artistic relationships was Macler's work entitled *La France et l'Arménie à travers l'art et l'histoire*, in which the author started from the period "when France was still called Gaul" (Macler 1917, 7). In another text, within the context of Europe's primacy, the French scholar calls the Armenians as "avant-garde of the Occidental civilisation in the Orient" (Macler 1924, 12). In a later work dedicated to the miniature paint-

ing of secular manuscripts, Macler included the photographs and images of well-dressed and good-looking Armenian women, who at first sight had nothing to do with the content of the book (Macler 1928, 5, 7, 19, 21, 27, 29). Here, through the lens of illustrated Armenian versions of the Alexander Romance, Macler continuously drew parallels between Eastern and Western copies of this romance and concluded his discussion with the following statement:

The Armenians, situated between the Orient and Occident, did not fail in their duties as a civilised nation by producing a History of Alexander in a good and correct prose, as well as interesting miniatures. (Macler 1928, 19)

Whilst maintaining the praise for Armenian art and underscoring its common origins with Western art, Macler and his orientophile compatriots were not, however, seeking Oriental elements that would indicate a change in the essence of French art. Rather, they were attempting to find a new stimulus for further growth in France, which could be provided by Oriental civilisations. The exemplary case studies discussed so far indicate some of the attitudes prevalent in Western scholarship of Armenian art, which fit within a wider perception of and expectations from the Orient common in the West. An apt formulation of such attitudes has been provided by Edward Said four decades ago:

European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. (Said 1978, 3)

Now let us look at the self-perception of the Armenians of their own, or, as they say 'ancestral' art and see how it can compare and contrast to Russian and European approaches.

27 See the introductions to the following works, in which the author repeatedly emphasises the question of the origins of Armenian art: Abdullah, Macler 1909, 280-302, 345-66; Macler 1913.

28 See, for example, the introduction to the first volume of the *Revue des Études arméniennes*, which was founded by Macler, Antoine Meillet and other armenologists (*Revue des Études arméniennes*, 1, 1920, 1-2). See also: Macler 1920a, 13; Macler 1928, 8.

## 5 The Armenian Approach to the Native Heritage

By 1907 when Ivan Borgman, the rector of Saint Petersburg University, raised cause for concern with the Deputy Minister of Education about what he felt were the 'negative' consequences of German education on Armenian students, that education had already shaped the ideological orientation of many Armenians. From the time of Herder, a prevailing idea on the concept of 'nations' circulating in German-speaking societies stressed the utmost importance of language in the formation of a culture and of a nation. This concept was warmly received by young Armenian intellectuals.<sup>29</sup> The Armenian language and the continuing discoveries of its centuries-long heritage as preserved in the language became the central pillar for these future scholars in the reconstruction and conceptualization of their own national identity. In his doctoral dissertation *Der armenische Volksglaube*, Manuk Abeghian – one of the prominent Armenian philologists and linguists of the twentieth century – employed this idea and he was apparently inspired by his own German education (in Jena, Leipzig, Berlin, and then later in Paris). He wrote: "Language serves as one means of differentiating foreign elements from those which are native Armenian or have been Armenized."<sup>30</sup> It was also from the German-speaking intellectual *milieus* of Europe and Russia that the ideas of promoting the arts as a key element in the process of nation-building penetrated into Armenian circles.

When examining early studies of miniature painting scattered throughout Armenian publications of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one regularly comes across expressions that underline the importance of finding and studying the material remnants of the heritage created by the ancestors. As one can deduce from these texts, the uncovering of the original

roots was conditioned by the necessity of reviving national and religious values, which were deeply rooted in the past. The awakening of cultural consciousness was regarded as a knot that would tie the Armenians' past to their present and would contribute to the construction of their glowing future. The patriotic spirit of education and scholarly approach to cultural heritage were regarded as the first steps towards the realisation of these goals. It is within this context that the first art historical studies were produced in Armenian intellectual centres located both in Russian and Ottoman Empires, as well as in Europe, where the Mekhitarist fathers had already started their extensive research activities in the previous century. With the foundation of *Bazmavēp* (1843), the periodical of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice, religious scholars and congregation members wished to research Armenian artefacts "for the sake of love towards the nation" (Grigoryan 2011a, 251-8). It was thought that this would help to transform the Armenians into a cultured people by applying methods similar to those employed by contemporary European scholars.

The scholarly interest in miniature painting developed alongside the cataloguing of manuscripts, which gradually revealed a series of sumptuously decorated specimens. By the end of the nineteenth century, more than 2,000 manuscripts kept in the libraries in Ējmiacin, Sevan, Arc'ax, Kesaria (Kayseri), Karin (Erzurum), Tbilisi, Saint Petersburg, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and Vatican were already described and available to the scholarly community,<sup>31</sup> in addition to several dozen single manuscripts from other libraries and private collections.<sup>32</sup> The clerics and scholars, who had access to these manuscripts, continually expressed hope that, by publishing descriptions of manuscripts, they would reveal the invaluable legacy of their ancestors to the Armenians. Thinking from this perspective strong-

<sup>29</sup> See Azatyan 2012, 60-2, 243-50. Although the importance of language was already noted by the Mekhitarists and expressed in their voluminous studies, it was most likely from the German circles of Europe and Russia that Eastern Armenian intellectuals adopted it.

<sup>30</sup> Abeghian 1899a, 5. English translation by Robert Bedrosian (*Armenian Folk Beliefs*, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Two decades after Brosset's catalogue came out, a more detailed catalogue of the Ējmiacin manuscripts was prepared by the librarian Daniel Šahnazareanc'. The latter is known as 'Karineanc' Catalogue' after the name of Mr. Yakob Karineanc' (from the city of Karin/Erzurum), who had encouraged and supported the publication. See: Šahnazareanc' 1863. For manuscript catalogues of other collections, see: Marr 1892; T'ōp'čean 1898; T'ōp'čean 1900; Palean 1893; Adjarian 1900; Kanajeanz 1893; Dorn 1852, 568-72; Karamianz 1888; Kalemkiar 1892; Dashian 1891; Dashian 1895; Misk'čean 1892.

<sup>32</sup> The following is an incomplete list of individual manuscripts published prior to 1900 (excluding the works which are already cited in my paper): Yovsēp'ean 1898, 519; Palean 1898, 244-8; Xalat'eanc' 1899; Yovhannēsean 1900a, 117-8; Yovhannēsean 1900b, 595-7; Dashian 1900, 353-7.

ly influenced the rhetoric employed by Armenian researchers. Their approach was motivated by a desire to awaken national consciousness and challenge contemporary perceptions of Armenian art as was developed by Russian and Western scholarships. While the Armenian scholars tried to break free of European-imposed paradigms and concepts, they still measured the advances of their own art with a European yard-stick and compared the achievements of Armenian art to European art. In the article "Painting and Architecture during the Time of Our Ancestors" by Yovhannēs T'orosean, a member of the Mekhitarist Congregation, concluded with the following statement:

Thus, all these [artworks] are enough to demonstrate that if the Armenian nation did not have any of Palagi, Michelangelo, Raphael, Rubens, etc., it does not necessarily mean that they were tasteless in architecture and (miniature) painting. (T'orosean 1897, 233)<sup>33</sup>

From the mid-nineteenth century on, Eastern Armenia also became actively involved in the formation of a national education and scholarship, an interest which was motivated by all the same conviction that the cultural heritage was of utmost significance for a nation's further progress. As mentioned above, after the annexation of Eastern Armenia, the Russian government gave certain autonomy to the Armenian catholicossate with a view to use the latter's authority in the Russian Empire's foreign affairs with the Ottoman Empire. Benefiting from this somewhat privileged situation, in 1868, the official periodical of the Mother See of Holy Ējmiacin, *Ararat*, was founded. In the very first sentence of the first volume, *Ararat* makes immediately clear its sympathy for Western-born ideological tendencies:

The Earth's surface demonstrates us that the Sun rises in the East and illuminates all the countries. But, today, it appears likely that

our Armenia is being illuminated in a different way, for its amiable illuminators come from the West.<sup>34</sup>

As defined in this first volume, the purpose of *Ararat* was to satisfy the desire of Ējmiacin's studious clergy, to contribute to the national education, and "to revive the historical relics of national greatness". In one of the following volumes, Łazaros Ałayeanç's article upholds that *Ararat* "must create an image, in which every Armenian can see his past and his present" (Ałayeanç' 1869a, 3). In the same volume, Ałayeanç' signed another article in which he speaks of the role of education and science. In author's view, this does not introduce a contradiction because the Armenians are a religious people; rather, on the contrary, it advances the preservation of their Christian heritage (Ałayeanç' 1869b, 22-4).

The new periodical had to target not only the educated classes but also the broader masses of the Armenian population. To reach this goal effectively, *Ararat* chose the vernacular Ašxarhabar language, the dialect of Yerevan, which was closer to Grabar (Classical Armenian) and, as the editors hoped, was to some extent understandable also to Ottoman Armenians.<sup>35</sup> The studies on the manuscripts from the rich library of Ējmiacin started to appear on the pages of *Ararat*,<sup>36</sup> making it a significant scholarly pavilion and at the same time a peculiar source for nourishing national and nationalistic sentiments.

The new principles of patriotic education proclaimed by *Ararat* were soon put on more practical grounds with the establishment of the Gēorgean Theological Seminary at the Mother See in 1874 (Abeghian 1899b, 84-92; Sarafian 1923, 265). These two major undertakings were accompanied with the creation of the Ējmiacin Museum, all three initiated by Catholicos Gēorg (Kevork) IV (1813-1882). Before moving to Eastern Armenia, Catholicos Gēorg served in several locations (including as patriarch of Constantinople) and was actively involved in organising the Armenian communal life in the Ottoman Empire. The last factor was certainly decisive

33 See also: Azatyan 2012, 246-7.

34 *Ararat*, 1 (1868), in introduction (without pagination). This illustrative quotation recalls Aršak Č'ōpaneian's introduction to the first volume of *Anahit* (1898), in which the author associates 'the elevation of Armenian spirit' with the recovery ability of the stimulus that originates from European ideas. See: Č'ōpaneian 1898, 1-6. On *Anahit*, see also: Khayadjian 2001, 117-8.

35 *Ararat*, 1 (1868), in introduction (without pagination).

36 From 1888, these studies were published under a special rubric called "The Library of Holy Ējmiacin".

in receiving the support of Saint Petersburg for his election. This was the second consecutive time that an Ottoman Armenian became catholicos in Ējmiacin with the support of the Russian government. In the aftermath of the Crimean War, Russia demonstrated a keen interest in observing the situation in Constantinople through the religious leader of the Armenians.<sup>37</sup> Enjoying the initial support of the Russian government and navigating between the two empires, the new catholicos could manage to undertake the foundations of the periodical, the seminary, and the museum, all of which would soon play a significant role in the rise of national sentiments within Eastern Armenia and beyond. As one can learn from the biography of Gēorg IV, his activities were motivated by the necessity of creating new generations of educated clergy who would preserve and spread the traditions of the Armenian Apostolic church and contribute to the national education. It seems not unimportant to mention that the biography of Gēorg IV was written by Manuk Abeghian, who had just completed his German education and returned to Ējmiacin to pursue familiar aspirations inherited from the late catholicos. The ideological convictions of the catholicos (and also of Abeghian) regarding the necessity of modern education and the development and continuity of the nation are particularly explicit in chapter 9 entitled "The Demands of the Time from Catholicos" (Abeghian 1899b).

Indeed, the newly founded seminary immediately became the main educational and intellectual centre in Eastern Armenia, thus joining two other Armenian institutions of higher education in the Russian Empire; the Lazarean (Lazarev) Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow (established in 1815) and the Nersisean School in Tbilisi (established in 1824). With the support of philanthropic societies, the pupils and alumni of the Ējmiacin Seminary had the opportunity to continue their education in universities abroad. Among those organisations particularly supportive were the Armenian Philanthropic Society of Baku (established in 1864) and the Armenian

Benevolent Society of the Caucasus (established in 1881, Tbilisi). One of the students who benefited from this support was Garegin Yovsēp'ean (1867-1952), a pioneering scholar of Armenian art history, whose works still nourish Armenian Studies.

Garegin Yovsēp'ean was born in 1867 in the village of Maḷavuz, in Arc'ax.<sup>38</sup> Graduating from the Gēorgean Seminary in 1890, he soon moved to Germany to study theology, philosophy and history at the universities of Halle, Berlin and Leipzig. In 1897, he acquired the title of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Leipzig for his dissertation on the origins of monotheletism (Yovsēp'ean 1897). Upon his return to Ējmiacin in the same year, Yovsēp'ean's research interests were soon widened to include the study of medieval artefacts and manuscripts in particular. Unsurprisingly, it was from German-speaking intellectual circles that art history permeated into Armenia. Inspired by contemporary European ideas of nations' modernisation and convinced in the key role of cultural heritage in this process, Yovsēp'ean launched himself into an intensive study of miniature painting. His first work on the subject was published in the Tbilisi-based Armenian journal *Lumay* under the title "The Art of Miniature Painting among the Armenians" (Yovsēp'ean 1902, 194-200). While trying to determine the origins and development of Armenian manuscript illustration, Yovsēp'ean names this field *terra incognita*. He stresses that the study of manuscripts should not be disregarded by scholars and continues his narrative with the following words:

The creative spirit of the ancestors is now laying dormant within Armenian people and in (their) church. But it is possible to revive it, if we start to study the ancient art and make it accessible for educated society, and if we follow the churches to be constructed and reconstructed. The uniqueness and independence of our church must be expressed in its architecture and in art in general.<sup>39</sup>

37 For Russia's tolerable attitude towards the Armenian catholicos for the sake of its foreign politics, see: Werth 2006, 203-17.

38 For biographical and bibliographical references, as well as citations from his thoughts, see the commemorative collection of the *Ējmiacin Monthly* (volume 6, 1962) dedicated to the tenth anniversary of Garegin Yovsēp'ean's death. See also: Ghazaryan 1979, 34-45.

39 Yovsēp'ean 1902, 195. It is perhaps reasonable to assume that this short quotation concerning the necessity of (re)constructing Armenian churches alludes to the newly appeared Russian cathedrals and churches in the Caucasus. This could give birth to zealous feelings in Yovsēp'ean, as a fervent protector of native church traditions.

In the same article, Yovsēp'ean speaks about Armenian-Byzantine artistic interactions, dating the origins of this 'alliance' to the sixth, rather than the tenth-eleventh century, as was earlier proposed and adopted by Russian scholarship. Moreover, when speaking about Byzantine miniature painting, Yovsēp'ean did not fail to mention that it was under the reign of the 'Armenian (Macedonian) dynasty' (apparently hinting at the origin of Emperor Basil I specifically, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty) that Christian manuscript illumination had reached its apogee in Byzantium. Concerning 'the golden age' of Armenian miniature painting, he emphasised the importance of manuscripts created in the Kingdom of Cilicia in the twelfth-fourteenth centuries, which, in the author's opinion, "could compete with the same kind arts of all contemporary nations" (Yovsēp'ean 1902, 198). Returning to the necessity of researching miniature painting, Yovsēp'ean writes:

The large field of [miniature painting] needs to be studied, for it is related to the glory of our ancestors and to the conscious advancement of (our) church. This new beginning of spiritual (intellectual) life and civilization must then be expected from the Mother See (of Ējmiacin), if the Armenian people want to nourish their land with love and make it capable of producing fruit. (198-9)

Yovsēp'ean's vision regarding Armenia's modernisation and development was formed around the Armenian Apostolic church and its historical centre of Ējmiacin. Although not entirely ignoring the pre-medieval period, nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectuals viewed Christianity as fundamentally shaping the Armenians, differentiating from their neighbours and unifying them as one nation. This approach required a demonstration of continuity, something that was largely present in Yovsēp'ean's works. The scholar achieved this by comparing various motifs of me-

dieval illustrated manuscripts with those found in carpets and tombstones produced long after the Middle Ages, in an effort to provide material support to his thesis.

In his studies, Yovsēp'ean did not bypass the question of the origins of Armenian art, which he located in the East. As we saw above, also the Western and Russian scholarships were interested in the question of their own arts' origins, whereas Yovsēp'ean had this same approach for 'his own', i.e. Armenian art. Most likely because in Western scholarship Byzantium was viewed as 'the East', the Armenian scholar found it expedient to explain what he meant by the notion of 'Eastern art': "By saying Eastern, we understand Persia, Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Assyria" (Yovsēp'ean 1910, 250). From his narratives it becomes clear that he viewed the formation of Byzantine art as having been under a strong influence of those Eastern arts.<sup>40</sup> At first sight, this approach recalls the theory developed by Strzygowski. Yet, contrary to the Austrian scholar, Yovsēp'ean's studies were clearly aimed at representing Armenia as one of the ancient representatives of Eastern art rather than a recipient of those traditions, and one that had long-standing contacts with equally important Persian and Mesopotamian cultures. Additionally, unlike Strzygowski's morphological and anti-philological methods, Yovsēp'ean's art history was essentially based on literary sources, colophons, and inscriptions, which became a solid factor for placing medieval Armenian miniature painting within a distinct Armenian historical context.

Yovsēp'ean was among the first scholars to research miniature portraits of historical individuals and kings, who were considered to be of particular importance in demonstrating to the Armenians their 'glorious ancestors'.<sup>41</sup> This interest in royal images was also shared by his contemporary Mesrop Tēr-Movsisean (1865-1939), another representative of Ējmiacin,

<sup>40</sup> See, for example: Yovsēp'ean 1910, 252, 257.

<sup>41</sup> The praise of the 'ancestors' heritage' continued to play a central role also later, when Yovsēp'ean moved to the USA as the primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian church (1938) and then to Lebanon as the Catholicos of Cilicia (1943). Although the world had long changed since the time when he first started to study the native heritage, the national awakening to it, which started in the previous century, remained somewhat unaccomplished for the Armenians. The consequences of the Genocide and the sovietization of Eastern Armenia gradually built up a barrier between Eastern and Western Armenians, who were by this point spread all over the world. This new reality kept alive the dreams of the national state, and Yovsēp'ean did not cease to study Armenian artworks, evaluating them as important identity-markers. In his *Towards Light and Life* (Antilias, 1947), Yovsēp'ean came again to this issue stressing that the heritage preserved in medieval Armenian manuscripts put the Armenians among the most civilised nations. For relevant citations, see: K'olanjyan 1962, 26; Grigoryan 2011b, 192.

whose name is much less well-known.<sup>42</sup> Despite the rather unfriendly relationship between these two pioneers of Armenian manuscript studies, both had a familiar, patriotic attitude towards their native heritage.<sup>43</sup>

Inspired by the Viennese Mekhitarists' work, Mesrop Magistros (as Tēr-Movsisean often signed) initiated an extraordinary undertaking to prepare a catalogue of all Armenian manuscripts. What should only have been a work of several years would eventually last his whole life, and still, the catalogue was never completed.<sup>44</sup> While working on this project, he intensively published on illustrated manuscripts, which he came across in Ējmiacin and during his many travels abroad (Istanbul, Jerusalem, Cairo, Rome, Paris, London, Oxford, Venice, etc.). Unlike Yovsēp'ean, Tēr-Movsisean did not raise the question of the origins of Armenian miniature painting, but satisfied his reader with descriptions of miniatures, often accompanied with patriotic remarks about their medieval commissioners.

The study of medieval Armenian miniatures was however not only concentrated in religious centres. Many references to this field are to be found in the *Anahit* (established in 1898, Paris) and *Gelaruest* (Fine Arts) (established in 1908, Tbilisi) periodicals. In the first volume of *Gelaruest*, an article by the editor, Garegin Lewonean, on miniature painting is titled "an attempt of research" (Lewonean 1908a, 1908b, 1909, 1911). Here, Lewonean writes that when one speaks of Armenian art, the architecture of ancient and medieval periods comes to mind, rather than the art of manuscripts. The author then recalls his journey to the Imperial Library of Saint Petersburg in Autumn 1902, during which he met the aged Vladimir Stasov. The latter encouraged Lewonean to study miniature painting and criticised the Armenians for being indifferent to their own art, whereas "Ējmiacin, Jerusalem and Venice are unlimited sources for a scholar" (Lewonean 1908a, 25).

Lewonean's research aims, as shown in the pages of *Gelaruest*, were focused on creating delineating parameters of a national art that would differentiate the Armenians from the other peoples and contribute to the shaping of their national identity. Following Strzygowski and Yovsēp'ean, Lewonean classified the periods of Armenian miniature painting and illustrated their general characteristics. At the same time, he remained faithful to the spirit of the ongoing approach that represented the cultural heritage from a thoroughly national point of view. For him, even if early Armenian miniaturists could have used some 'foreign' elements, the traditions of Armenian manuscript illumination at its apex (a process whose beginning he placed in the eleventh century) was entirely free from non-Armenian patterns, since these masters, who were well-skilled in what Lewonean calls "national independent style", depicted "Armenian faces, Armenian architectural buildings, and Armenian cross(es)" (Lewonean 1911, 27-8). As for Western influences observed in the manuscripts produced in Armenian Cilicia, Lewonean held that these influences

should not nonetheless depreciate (Cilician) miniaturists, given that they might have learned their art from western masters, or they might have even been of foreign origin. (Lewonean 1911, 28)

This brief overview of the approach adopted by scholars of Armenian origin demonstrates that the field of miniature painting was regarded as a source for (re)constructing their national history and identity. Written in Armenian and for the Armenians, these studies strove to revive the 'glorious' memories of ancestors, seeking both continuity and a new beginning, which would lead to the creation of a future Armenian state.

<sup>42</sup> Tēr-Movsisean 1907, 200-4; Tēr-Movsisean 1910a, 332-41; Tēr-Movsisean 1910b, 5-32; Tēr-Movsisean 1911, 683-7.

<sup>43</sup> On Tēr-Movsisean's relationship with Garegin Yovsēp'ean and certain disagreements between the Ējmiacin clerics, see: Ter-Vardanian 1999, 14.

<sup>44</sup> The never before published catalogue, including the descriptions of more than 23,000 manuscripts, is now kept in Mate-nadaran. For this project and the biography of Tēr-Movsisean, see: Ter-Vardanian 1999, 69-83.



## 6 Conclusions

Although this essay mainly focused on manuscript illustration, certain observations and conclusions drawn are applicable also to other artistic media. Most early scholars who approached the subject integrated miniature painting within a broader project whose aim was to locate the origins of Armenian art and to trace its relationship with modernity. While keeping this in mind, the main endeavour of this paper has been to trace the main concepts that characterised the works of different scholars and bring them together in an effort to understand the divergent contexts in which the early study of Armenian miniature painting emerged in different parts of Europe, Russia and by scholars of Armenian origin.

In the pursuit of homogeneous Orthodoxy, which was needed to secure a peaceful, multi-confessional coexistence in the Russian Empire, Russian scholarship of the 1880s characterised Armenian miniature painting as having Byzantine style and images. This was important also because Byzantium was seen as the predecessor of what was called 'Russian national art'. The theory developed by Strzygowski had very different ideological basis and interests. His efforts were aimed at emphasising the Syrian influences revealed by Armenian miniature art, as Austrian scholar was at pains to demonstrate the common origins of pan-Christian art in general. Over a few decades, Strzygowski widened the

geography of his Orient-centred approach and placed the origins of Armenian manuscript illumination within the context of ancient Iranian and Mesopotamian traditions, making it one of the transitional points that connected Ancient Iran with the Christian West. In difference to these, the French scholarship mainly adopted a theory according to which the 'authentic' art of medieval Armenia played a determining role in the formation of Western art, which was seeking renewal and renaissance through the revalorization of the Oriental civilisations.

Compared to the European approaches outlined above, many scholars of Armenian origin both shared some of their concerns in the search of 'origins', and developed some unique explanatory paradigms. They emphasised the Armenianness of Armenian miniature painting that had been largely neglected in the theories proposed by Russian, German-speaking, and French scholarship, valorizing it for what it was, rather than for what it represented as a transmitter of Byzantine and Eastern art-forms to Western Europe and Russia. As a result, the Armenian intellectuals explored the heritage of their ancestors from a uniquely Armenian point of view, possibly avoiding comparative contexts with other cultures and promoting the idea of a 'pure' and unchanging art. Such an approach, they believed, would contribute to the rise of a national consciousness and would pave the way for Armenia's future development.

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