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Armenians on the Via Francigena. Armenian and Latin Sources on the Origins of the Armenian Community of Orvieto (Urbs Vetus)

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Abstract An Armenian religious community settled in Orvieto in the 13th century and founded the church and hospice of Santo Spirito, where they provided hospitality to pilgrims on the Via Francigena. Archaeological traces of their presence include a travertine gate with a trilingual inscription, reused in the church of San Domenico (Orvieto), the remains of the church of Santo Spirito, and art pieces removed from the latter. Contemporary Latin documents and an analysis of the historical context suggest that the Armenian presence was well-received by the lay and clerical authorities, and even held as prestigious.

Keywords Armenian Epigraphy. Latin Epigraphy. Via Francigena. 13th-century Umbria. Monastery of Santo Spirito. San Domenico in Orvieto. Armenian communities in Italy.

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1 Introduction[1]

Research on the origins of Armenian communities in late medieval Italy has produced fruitful results, especially since the publication of Msgr Zekiyan's pioneering work on *Le colonie armene del Medio Evo in Italia* (Zekiyan 1978; see also Zekiyan 1996). In addition to collecting information on Armenian communities in the Italian peninsula, most of which originated between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Zekiyan's contribution highlights the broader importance of undertaking such research, whose implications extend beyond the confines of Armenian Studies. Italy, in Zekiyan's words,

> fu il ponte attraverso cui nel Medio Evo l'Armenia conservò i suoi legami con l'Europa. (Zekiyan 1978, 804)
>
> was the bridge by which Armenia preserved its links with Europe through the Middle Ages.[2]

And an in-depth understanding of later Italian relations with the Near East requires a knowledge of the first phases of such interactions. Moreover, exploring the little-known history of these colonies might help historians of late medieval Italy gain a greater understanding of Italy's centrality within a Mediterranean context. This would also lead to a more accurate picture of its cultural complexity and of the contributions made by indigenous and non-indigenous communities to the

1 First of all, we would like to express our gratitude to Prof. Ferrari for inviting us to present our findings at ASIAC 2019, as the timely opportunity has participated in bringing this research together. We must express our gratitude to Marco Prosperini, a most archaeologically-aware hotel porter, for informing coauthor Stephanie Pambakian of the Armenian inscriptions at the gate of San Domenico upon her chanceful visit to Orvieto. Acquiring research material was made easy by the availability, competence and enthusiasm of the people of this city. In particular, archivist Luca Giuliani provided Pambakian with documents selected on the basis of meticulous yet unpublished research conducted by architect Sabina Bordino, who also kindly accompanied Pambakian to the remains of the monastery at Tamburino. On a second visit, Ten. Col. Silvio Manglaviti and the local military helped record necessary measurements of the door at San Domenico, and archivist Roberta Galli, with an impromptu team of archive personnel and users, was of great assistance in the retrieval of the 1292 Cadastre. Pambakian's reading of the inscriptions was aided by Prof. Orengo's first observations (which he generously shared with the authors before publication) and by the expert eye of Prof. Michael Stone, whom we thank profusely. For their precious help in aiding communication at various stages, we would also like to thank Anna Donatelli Landani, Aldo Lo Presti and Prof. Anna Sirinian.

A first electronic version of the present article was published online on October 22 of this year. It contained an error in the transcription of a numeral (and consequently in the dating) in Inscription II. We express our gratitude to Alessandro Rauch for notifying this discrepancy to us. If any mistake is still to be found, it is our own.

2 Unless otherwise indicated all translations are by the Authors.

development of the arts, of theological thought, and of manufacturing.[3]

In this perspective, the present paper focuses on the Armenian community of Orvieto, based on archaeological evidence in Armenian (Classical and Medieval), Latin and a local vernacular, and on archival material, which has not yet been the subject of detailed discussion.[4] It moreover aims at underlining the importance of a close dialogue between specialists from different fields, such as Armenian and Medieval Studies, promoting interdisciplinary practice to allow mutual enrichment and to better gauge the wealth of material and cultural exchanges across Mediterranean communities in the late Middle Ages.

2 Two Inscriptions from the Armenian Monastery of Santo Spirito, Now on the Southern Gate of San Domenico in Orvieto

Two inscriptions occupy a prominent position on the entrance of the Church of San Domenico in Orvieto **[fig. 1]**: one extends over all three horizontal stones of the architrave, and we shall refer to it as Inscription I. Inscription II is a less regular epigraph on the top left stone of the architrave, on which the lintel rests. This is not the original location of this door, which used to be at the Armenian monastery of Santo Spirito (of the Holy Spirit), at Tamburino, in the nearby countryside of Orvieto.

Figure 1
San Domenico in Orvieto © Beweb (https://www.beweb.chiesacattolica.it/edificidiculto/edificio/87296/Chiesa+di+San+Domenico)

3 See for instance Rossetti 1989; Delouis, Mossakowska-Gaubert, Peters-Custot 2019, to name only a few.

4 See Orengo 2018, 85-6 fn. 2 for an overview of the Orvietan epigraphic evidence and a brief contextualization.

Despite their exposure and visibility, these inscriptions have not been studied until recently. Alessandro Orengo was, to our knowledge, the first Armenologist to notice them in Summer 2017 (pers. comm.), and published a first record of his finding shortly afterwards (Orengo 2018, 85-6 fn. 2). Independently of Orengo's discovery, coauthor Stephanie Pambakian came across this piece of epigraphic evidence while visiting the city in Summer 2018.

2.1 Inscription I

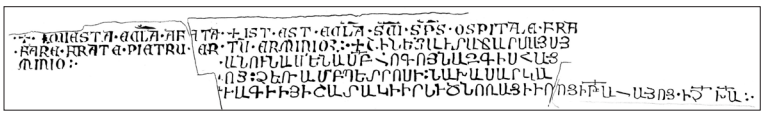


Figure 2 (above, top) Inscription I on the architrave of San Domenico in Orvieto, edited

Figure 3 (just above) Stephanie Pambakian, a drawing of Inscription I from San Domenico, 2018

Inscription I is carved over three blocks of travertine.[5] The central stone tapers in a T-shape, whilst both side stones grow thinner at the centre, to accommodate the 'wings' of the central stone. We number blocks 1 to 3 left to right. Given the position and interconnection of the stones, we allow that measurements may have a certain degree of inaccuracy.

Block 1. Travertine. Measures: H left 26 cm, at the gate opening the flat surface is 23 cm high; W top 83 cm, middle 90 cm, bottom 93 cm; Th 25.5 cm. Writing surface.[6] Margins: L 47.5 cm, top 2.5 cm, bottom 10 cm. Letter size: 3-3.5 cm.

5 Identification by Ten. Col. Silvio Manglaviti, who also kindly took the measurements of the four inscribed stones with the assistance of Antonio Rossitto and Sandro Zaccariello.

6 Measurements of margins and letters were taken by Stephanie Pambakian, with the assistance of Manglaviti and Zaccariello. This and the footnote above apply to all blocks.

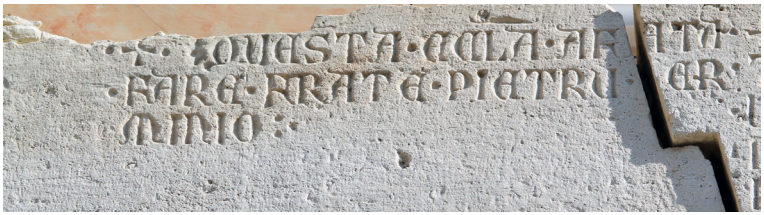


Figure 4 Detail of Block 1, Inscription I on the architrave of San Domenico in Orvieto

Block 2. Travertine. Measures: H flat surface 23 cm; W top 83.5 cm, 78.5 cm middle, bottom 67 cm; Th 25.5 cm. Writing surface. Margins: top 2.5-3 cm, bottom 1.8-2.3 cm. Letter Size: 3-3.5 cm.

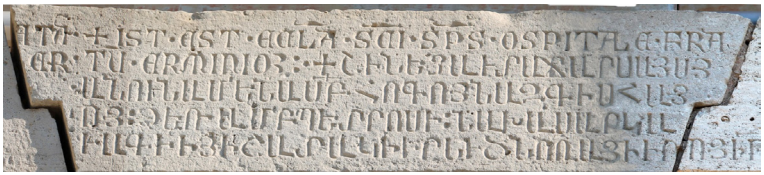


Figure 5 Detail of Block 2, Inscription I on the architrave of San Domenico in Orvieto, edited

Block 3. Travertine. Measures: H right 26 cm, at the gate opening the flat surface measures 22,5 cm; W top 81 cm, 84 cm middle, bottom 91 cm; Th 25,5 cm. Writing surface. Margins: R 49 cm, top 18 cm, bottom 1-1.5 cm. Letter size: 3-3.5 cm.

Figure 6 Detail of Block 3, Inscription I on the architrave of San Domenico in Orvieto

Inscription I. Transcriptions and Translation

1.+.QUESTA. ECL̃A. AFATA + IST. EST. ECL	1 (crux) questa ec(c)l(esi)a a fata (crux)
̃A. SC̃I. SP̃S. OSPITALE. FRA	ist(a) est ec(c)l(esi)a s(an)c(t)i sp(iritu)s
2 FARE. FRATE. PIETRU. ER. TU.	ospitale fra-
ERMINIO2̨:. + ՇԻՆԵՑԱԻ ՏԱՃԱՐՍ	2 fare frate pietru er- t(r)u(m)
ԱՅՍ Յ	erminio(rum) (crux) շինեցաւ
3 MINIO:. ԱՆՈՒՆ ԱՄԵՆԱՄ̃Բ	տաճարս այս յ-
ՀՈԳՈՅՆ ԱԶԳԻՍ ՀԱՅ	3 minio անուն ամենաս(ուր)բ
4 ՈՑ: ՁԵՌԱՄԲ ՊԵՏՐՈՍԻ:	հոգոյն ազգիս հայ-
ՆԱԽԱՍԱՐԿԱ	4 ոց: ձեռամբ Պետրոսի:
5 ԻԱԳԻ Ի ՅԻՇԱՏԱԿ ԻՒՐ ԵՒ	նախասարկա-
ԾՆՈՂԱՑ ԻՒՐՈՑ Ի ՓV ՀԱՅՈՑ. Ի	5 ւագի ի յիշատակ իւր եւ ծնողաց
Ղ̃ vacat Խ̃ Ա:.	իւրոց ի թվ(ին) հայոց.ի չ խա:

In the transcription above, tildes represent signs over abbreviations (either short horizontal lines or small crosses). Dots and other graphic elements are represented as faithfully as possible. Tildes at line 5 do not indicate abbreviations but seem to indicate numerals. Abbreviations are spelt out in the normalised transcription, with integrated letters in brackets.

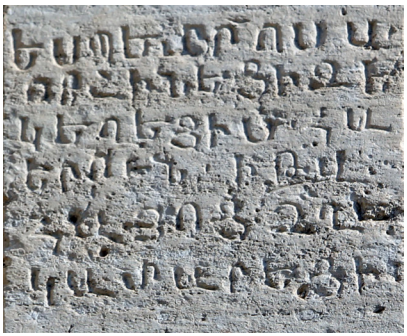
This inscription presents similar content in a form of Umbrian vernacular, Latin and Armenian.[7] The first is written across the first three lines: "Questa ec(c)l(esi)a a fata/ fare frate Pietru er-/ minio", 'This church was commissioned by brother/friar[8] Peter the Armenian'. At line 1, the second Greek cross marks the beginning of the Latin epigraphy (lines 1-2), which reads: Ist(a) est ec(c)l(esi)a s(an)c(t)i sp(iritu)s ospitale fra-/t(r)u(m) erminio(rum)", 'This is the church of the Holy Spirit, hospice of the Armenian brothers/friars'. At line 2, after parts of the vernacular and Latin epigraphs, another Greek cross marks the start of the Armenian dedication, which is the most extensive of the three and runs across lines 2-5: "շինեցաւ տաճարս այս յ-/անուն ամենաս(ուր)բ հոգոյն ազգիս հայ-/ոց: ձեռամբ Պետրոսի: նախասարկա-/ւագի ի յիշատակ իւր եւ ծնողաց իւրոց ի թվ(ին) հայոց.ի չ խա" šinec'aw tačars ays y-/anown amenas(owr)b hogoyn azgis hay-/oc': jeṙamb Petrosi: naxasarka-/ wagi i yišatak iwr ew cnołac' iwroc' i t'v(in) hayoc' i Č'XA. 'This temple, dedicated to the Most Holy Spirit, was built, for our Armenian nation, by the hand of archdeacon Petros, in memory of himself and his parents, in the year of the

7 In the transcription, backslash is used to indicate the next line.

8 On why we have decided to highlight the ambiguity of the term by using a double translation, see footnote 13.

Armenians 741[9] (AD 1292-3)'. At line 5 եւ (ew) presents an incomplete ե, missing the horizontal bar. Apart from this, all languages and both scripts are engraved skilfully and homogeneously, in both letter size and carving depth. No letters present ligatures. Our knowledge of epigraphic practice for multilingual inscriptions in the local context does not allow us to make speculations about the provenance or education of the cutter (or cutters).

2.2 Inscription II



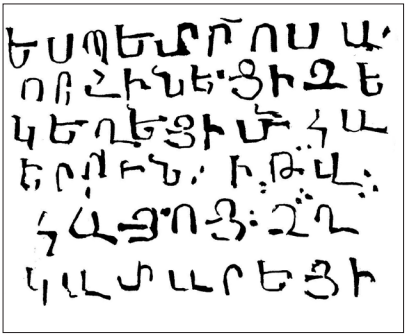


Figure 7 (left) Detail of Inscription II on the architrave of San Domenico in Orvieto

Figure 8 (right) Stephanie Pambakian, drawing of Inscription II, 2018

Single block. Travertine. The block is divided into a part with a flat, partly inscribed surface, and a phytomorphic decorative element to the right. Measures: H 29 cm, W 44 cm; Th 25.5 cm. Writing surface. Margins: L 0.8-2 cm, top 4.5 cm, bottom 7.5 cm. Letter Size: 1.8-2.5 cm with the exception of ւ, only 1.2 cm high.

Inscription II. Transcriptions and Translation

1 ԵՍ ՊԵՏՐՈՍ Վ	1 ես Պետրոս վ(արդապետ)
2 ՈՐ ՇԻՆԵՑԻ ԶԵ	2 որ շինեցի զե-
3 ԿԵՂԵՑԻ ՍԲ ՀԱ	3 կեղեցի ս(ուր)բ հա-
4 [Յ]ԵՐՈՒՆ: Ի ԹՎ:	4 [յ]երուն. ի թվ.
5 ՀԱՅՈՑ ՉՂ_	5 հայոց չղ_
6 ԿԱՏԱՐԵՑԻ	6 կատարեցի

9 This reading, transcription and a translation into Italian were first published by Orengo 2018, 85-6 fn. 2.

This inscription is written in the Armenian script and it is in Classical Armenian, with one term in a medieval form.[10] Here is a normalised transcription and translation:[11] "ես Պետրոս վ(արդապետ)/ որ շինեցի զե-/կեղեցի ս(ուր)բ հա-/ [յ]երուն. ի թվ.(ին)/ հայոց չղ_/ կատարեցի" Es Petros v(ardapet)/ or šinec'i ze-/ kełec' i s(owr)b ha-/ [y]erown. i t'v(in)/ hayoc' č'ł_/ katarec'i. 'I, Petros *vardapet*,[12] who built [this] church, holy to the Armenians in the year of the Armenians 79_ (=134_), completed [it]'.

The size of the letters is quite irregular (see above) and they appear misaligned and not homogeneously carved. Peculiarities: Line 1, we read Վ as an abbreviation of *vardapet*. Line 3, letters U and Ր are joint and are the abbreviation of սուրբ (sowrb) as in line 3 of Inscription I, ամենաս(ուր)բ, amenas(owr)b, 'most holy'. Lines 3-4 հա[յ]երուն, ha[y]erown is taken as a medieval form for հայոց, hayoc' (Stone, pers. comm.), 'of the Armenians'. Curiously, on the very next line we find the correct, Classical form "հայոց" hayoc'. Since this is part of the expression ի թվ(ին) հայոց, i t'v(in) hayoc', 'in the year of the Armenians', we might assume that it was a standard, traditional phrase that would not be altered by vernacular forms. However, it may be observed that the medieval form of the oblique plural at lines 3-4 (հա[յ]երուն, ha[y]erown) represents a parallel to the Umbrian vernacular of Inscription I, contiguous to the Latin epigraph. At Line 5, the underscore indicates a letter or symbol that we have not been able to read clearly, in the place where a numeral indicating units would be expected. This unreadable character is not the only aspect of the inscription's date to pose a problem, as we discuss below.

Inscription II. Date and Proposed Emendation

Inscription I informs us that a certain *frate Pietru*, or "Պետրոս նախասարկաւագ", Petros naxasarkawag,[13] 'archdeacon Peter' d - icates this church in the year of the Armenians 741, corresponding to AD 1292-3, which is at slight discordance with the Latin documents analysed below, but confirms in any case a foundation date in the last quarter of the 13th century. The second inscription would seem to have been engraved later, by a less skilled carver, carrying the personal dedication of "Պետրոս վարդապետ", 'Petros *vardapet*',

10 We do not deem one medieval term sufficient to consider this epigraphic group quadrilingual.

11 The first partial transcription and translation in Orengo 2018, 85-6 fn. 2.

12 Vardapet վարդապետ, lit. 'doctor, master' in Classical Armenian, was later used to indicate members of clergy. It translates 'priest' in Modern Armenian.

13 Found in the Gen. Sing. in the epigraph.

this time not just mentioning the 'building' of the church (շինեցաւ, šinec'aw Inscr. I Line 2), but adding 'I completed' (կատարեցի, katarec'i), suggesting it was engraved at the end of works. One would then expect a date shortly after 741 = AD 1292-3, still in a realistic life-span of Peter, holding as true that he commissioned both inscriptions. However, we are faced with the Armenian date of 79_, that would correspond to a year between 1341 and 1350, which might seem too late. It is certainly possible to assume that the construction works took a while, and that Peter was very young when the first stone was laid, or that he was gifted with unusual longevity, but we would like to explore another scenario. It seems sensible to suggest that this was a mistake, perhaps caused by an assonance between two letters. This potential discrepancy has also been noted by Orengo, and the solution proposed below was first advanced by him. Lines 4-5 read "ի թվ(ին)/ հայոց ՀՂ_" i t'v(in) hayoc' č'Ł_, 'in the year of the Armenians 79_', using the Armenian numerals indicating Հ, č' = 700 + Ղ, Ł = 90 + unreadable unit. We second Orengo's suggestion that the character indicating the tens should be emended into a Խ, x = 40, supposing that the misspelling was caused by the two characters' similar sound. One may as well explore other possibilities, but Ղ, Ł reads clearly and unambiguously, making speculations about a graphic confusion with other letters unlikely, in our opinion. This emendation would bring the previous (seemingly unlikely) date of 79_ (AD 1341-1350) precisely 50 years back, to the 740s = AD 1291-1300. Providing conclusive evidence on this hypothesis is not possible, but we believe it is worthy of consideration. Let us now turn to the question of the unit. It seems that the cutter has engraved a letter or symbol in the shape of a small vertical line joined perpendicularly with a longer horizontal line, resembling letter ւ in its *bolorgir* form. The case that this may be read as a ւ is not to be made, since it does not represent a numeral between 1 and 9 (ա-թ) and is not in a majuscule form. One may propose that this small engraving is an unfinished letter, or the voluntary abbreviation of one (for example the tail of an Ա 'A, 1', or the upper part of an Ե 'E, 5' presuming the cutter wanted to join it to the previous numeral, as in a monograph), but we are not familiar with examples of such practice in date writing. The hypothesis that it may signify zero is to be excluded for two reasons: the first is that Armenians did not positively write 'nought' and had no corresponding symbol for it. Secondly, as mentioned above, inscription I reads the date 741 in the Armenian count, (AD 1292-3), and its content suggest that it was cut before inscription II, which must therefore date to a time between 741 and 749 (AD 1292-1301).

Figure 9 A view of Tamburino from Orvieto. The Armenian monastery of Santo Spirito in the red circle

Figure 10 A view of Santo Spirito from S-W

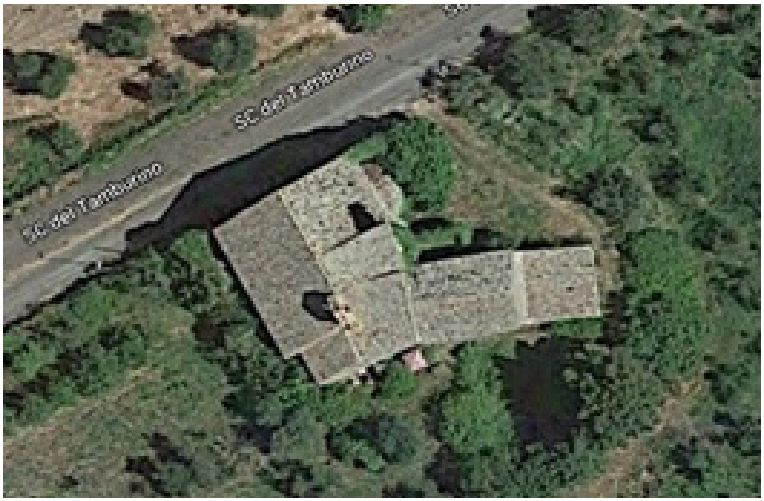


Figure 11 The apse of Santo Spirito from the East

Figure 12 A view of Santo Spirito from the satellite. © Google

Figure 13 The front door

Figure 14 *Annunciation*, detached fresco from Orvieto, church of Santo Spirito at Tamburino. Early 15th century. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Orvieto

3 The Church of Santo Spirito at Tamburino

As mentioned above, the inscribed portal is not set in its original context today. In the 1930 s, when the Church of San Domenico in Orvieto underwent a partial demolition, the gate of the Holy Spirit at Tamburino was reused to open a new door on the south façade. The works at San Domenico and the gate's new context shall be explored below, but we shall first try to present what remains of the church of the Holy Spirit at Tamburino. Figure 9 shows a view of Tamburino from Via Volsina, on the S-W edge of Orvieto, looking to the S-E **[fig. 9]**. The road running straight, cutting the picture in a diagonal is the old way through the village of Petroio, mentioned in the documents below (see § 5), which is now called Tamburino. The red circle indicates the location of the old Armenian monastery, which might seem like any old countryside farm. People in the area, however, identify it without hesitation, and when the vegetation around it is not impenetrably thick, one may see the bellcote **[fig. 10]**, and the outside of a round apse **[fig. 11]**. Both elements may also be seen in figure 12, a bird's-eye view of the old church. Finally, a close look at the façade clearly reveals the removal of a gate, bigger than the door that replaces it. Some pieces of travertine stone may still be seen to the sides of the patch in the wall **[fig. 12]**. This appears to be private property, and we have not been able to gain access to these buildings.

Two pieces of art were removed from the old monastery of the Armenians, and are now kept at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo of Orvieto.[14] One is an *Annunciation* in perfect conditions (Perali 1919, 111; Lo Presti 2011, 212), and currently visible as part of the permanent exhibition on the ground floor of the Museum **[fig. 14]**, measuring 195 × 116 cm (Garzelli 1972, 16-17). Garzelli ascribes this work to an anonymous Umbrian master.[15] Perali also mentions a second piece, which he describes as a "greatly damaged, although excellent work" (Perali 1919, 111) representing the Virgin child with seraphim between Saint Anne and Joachim. Perhaps due to its damaged condition, this piece is not currently exposed, and one may presume it is held in the Museum store.

4 San Domenico in Orvieto

Our gate with the two inscriptions is currently located on the south façade of San Domenico, and it has been there since 1934 (Paolet-

14 We would like to thank the Museum personnel for their kindness and availability.

15 Garzelli dates it to the last quarter of the 14th century, but the Museum's curators date it to the beginning of the 15th.

Figure 15 Virgin and Child, fresco, on the tympanum of the church of San Domenico, unknown date, Orvieto

ti 1958, 45). The church was founded in 1233 by Dominican friars, where St Dominic of Caleruega himself had allegedly laid a small oratory. Its dedication, in 1264, was carried out while St Thomas Aquinas resided there, and it was completed in 1280 (Paoletti 1958, 40), shortly before the Armenians settled down on the Petroio way, just outside Orvieto. San Domenico was heavily damaged by a fire in 1311, and what remained of its original gothic structure was later modified in a great renovation work in the 17th century, when its size was reduced considerably (Paoletti 1958, 40-1). The church was reduced even further when, in 1934, a decision was made to build an Academy of Physical Education for Women. It is at this time that a new door is opened on the south wall, and made into the main entrance to the church. This happened on 25 June 1934, and Paoletti reports that where the new opening was made was "later inserted the splayed, ogival door that belonged to the 13th-century church of the Holy Spirit of the Armenians" (Paoletti 1958, 45). She adds that the door was made 40 cm higher, so that it would fit better in its new position. Paoletti however makes no mention of the Virgin and child wall-painting in the tympanum **[fig. 15]**, right above the architrave. Despite clear signs that its central part of the plaster was fitted in (or perhaps refit), the consistency of all the components and the red pigments seems to indicate that the tympanum was originally con-

ceived and executed as a whole. No evidence is known to us that it is contemporary with the door or with one of the inscriptions, or that it might have already been in place at the time of activity of the Armenian hospice.

5 The Armenians and Orvieto

5.1 Latin Sources on the Armenian Community of Orvieto

The investigation of the trilingual epigraph analysed above is enriched by a comparison with the available Latin sources on the first medieval Armenian settlement in Orvieto, which consist of three parchment documents preserved in the Episcopal Archive of Orvieto. The oldest of these sources is known to the Orvietan scientific community at least from the late 19th century, when it was partially transcribed by the Sienese scholar Piccolomini-Adami in his *Guida storico-artistica della città di Orvieto* (Piccolomini-Adami 1883, 280). This document is in fact the founding act of the Church of the Holy Spirit of the Armenians (Santo Spirito degli Armeni), dated 10 February 1280. In it, the bishop of Orvieto, Francesco Monaldeschi, consents to the desire of brother (*frater*) Peter of Armenia to found a church located

> iuxta viam qua itur ad Montefiasconem in contrata vinearum monasterii Sancti Laurentii. (Archivio Vescovile di Orvieto, henceforth AVO, Codice A, c. 217*r*)
>
> next to the road through which one goes to Montefiascone, in the district of the vineyards of the monastery of San Lorenzo.

In exchange for the support of the prelate, who according to the document was also charged with laying the foundation stone for the Church of Santo Spirito, Peter committed himself to delivering an annual tribute of two pounds of wax to the bishop and his successors, on the occasion of the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary of the fifteenth of August. Members of the clergy of the Church of Sant'Andrea in Orvieto and of the monastery of the Monte di Orvieto, two local religious institutions, also participated as witnesses to the foundation deed.

The second document from the Episcopal Archive that deals with the Church of Santo Spirito degli Armeni dates to 3 January 1288, and is testimony of the payment of the two pounds of wax that had been set as an annual tribute to the bishop of Orvieto, who was still Francesco Monaldeschi (AVO, Codice C, c. 97*r*). It is worth noting that, in this source, another member of the Armenian monastery re-

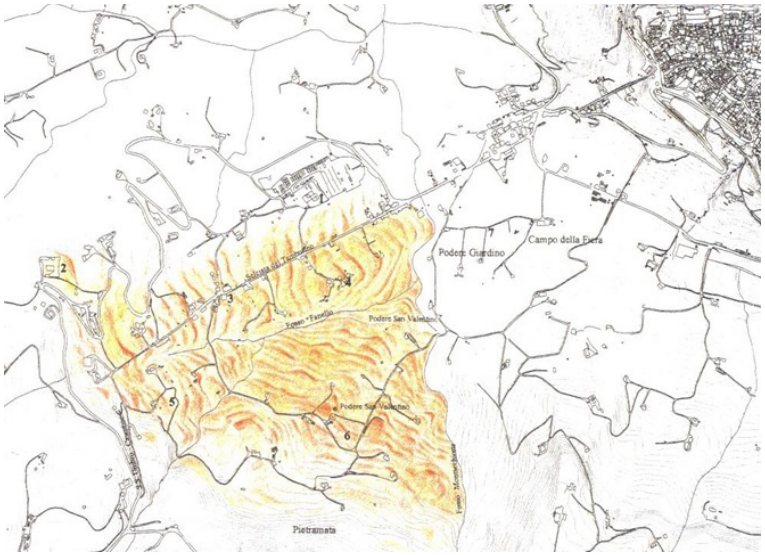


Figure 16 "Mappa ricostruttiva del territorio del Pleberium Petroriii et Petramata seu Sancti Petri in vetere nel 1278" (Satolli 2003)

siding near Santo Spirito is mentioned, namely brother Simon, administrator of the *locus*, or convent, of the Armenians.[16] This indication should probably not be taken as evidence that Peter was no longer alive at this date (which would contradict the information provided by the inscriptions, see section 2 above). Rather, he might have withdrawn to a role of spiritual direction, leaving the more practical functions in the life of the religious community to other brothers, such as Simon. Even richer, and not mentioned so far in any work concerning the Armenian communities of late medieval Italy, is a source written just one year later, and dated 11 January 1289 (AVO, Codice C, c. 113*r*). This document indicates that in this period of time the Armenian community of Santo Spirito had abandoned its first seat, whose location had been described in the founding document discussed above. It further explains that the reason for this relocation

16 It is worth noting briefly that the vocabulary used by the Latin sources for the birth of the Armenian community of Orvieto (*locus*, *frater*) seems to assimilate the Armenian clergy to the Franciscan Order, probably on account of the itinerant and pauperistic nature of both religious groups in the 13th century. The inscriptions also speak of a *frate Pietru* and of the *fratres Erminii*. On the relevance of the word *locus* to define the first Franciscan settlements, characterised by an impermanent nature and established with the help of local bishops and lay elites, see Pellegrini 1977, in particular page 565.

lies in the fact that the road that had previously passed next to the first Armenian church, in the area of Petroio, had been moved a few kilometres south, and that with the construction of this "strata nova de Petrorio" (new road of Petroio), the decision was taken to build a new church for the Armenian community beside the new thoroughfare (AVO, Codice C, c. 113*r*; figure 16 shows a modern reconstructive map of this area) **[fig. 16]**. This indication is confirmed by a document dated February 1286, published in the *Codice Diplomatico* of the commune of Orvieto, which records the decision of the municipal government to create a special commission (*balía*) to be entrusted with the construction of the new road of Petroio (Fiumi 1884, 336, doc. DXII, 20 February 1286). It is very likely that the road was completed during the year 1288, which would explain the relocation of the Armenian community within this time frame. In this same document we find the decision of the bishop of Orvieto to assign the assets abandoned by the Armenian friars to a group of *sorores*, or lay women devoted to religious life, led by Gemma di Bartolomeo Magalotti: these assets consisted of a house provided with a front yard, a vegetable garden and two portions of vineyard (*rasules vinearum*), in addition to the religious building (AVO, Codice C, c. 113*r*). This description leads us to think that the community of Armenians of Santo Spirito had managed, in a rather short period of time, to obtain a moderate level of stability and prosperity.

It appears evident that the dates indicated by the inscriptions for the foundation of Santo Spirito (1292-3 and possibly 1292-1301, if our hypothesis is correct) do not coincide with those provided by the archival sources. The dates of 1280 for the first foundation and of late 1288 for its relocation match with the information available for the construction of the new road of Petroio, and there is no reason to discard them. In order to explain this discrepancy, therefore, one must hypothesize that the dates of 1292-3 and 1292-1301 refer to further stages of completion of the Church and the *hospitale* of Santo Spirito, which the Armenian community celebrated by having the inscriptions carved.

5.2 The Armenians and the Commune

The documents described above allow us to contextualize more precisely the Tamburino epigraphs and the Armenian presence in Orvieto in different ways. First, it should be noted that the upper echelons of the Orvietan clergy seem to have offered their support to the constitution of the new community. In the 1280s Orvieto was one of the main places of residence of the papal court, which was often accompanied by a garrison provided by the Angevin kings of Sicily. The latter's presence was opposed by the *Popolo*, a composite group

of merchants and artisans who had taken control of the municipal government and fought to preserve its independence from external powers (Waley 1952, 55-9). The bishops of the city had traditionally been allies of the municipality against papal claims to hegemony over the city, which was situated on the expansion axis of the Popes. At the time when the Armenian community was founded, however, the aristocratic family Monaldeschi, of which the aforementioned bishop Francesco was possibly a member[17] had succeeded in reaching a position of supremacy in the urban landscape. This was made possible thanks to an alliance with the papacy and the Angevin monarchy, the staunchest ally of the Bishops of Rome and a hegemonic power in Italy after its conquest of the Kingdom of Sicily in the 1260s. Bishop Francesco Monaldeschi, a loyal agent of the papacy, was trying to consolidate his position of power within the city, particularly through an ambitious program of foundation and restoration of religious institutions, reflected in the flourishing of spiritual initiatives which characterized late medieval Orvieto, and within which we may set the foundation of the Church of Santo Spirito (Riccetti 1996, 199 ff.).[18] The support of part of the clergy closer to the municipal government, in addition, can be guessed from the participation of the clergy of Sant'Andrea at the foundation of the church of the Armenians. This institution represented, in this period, the centre of local civic religiosity, on account of the decline experienced by the local cathedral up to its restoration by the same Monaldeschi (Foote 2004, 85, 214 fn. 18; Lansing 1998, 27-8). The sites where the Armenians set up both their original and their second religious institutions certainly helped them to establish their presence within Orvietan society. Although the monastery of Santo Spirito was in theory located beyond the waterways indicating the boundaries of the *tenuta civitatis*, the city's suburbia, at the end of the century the incorporation of the territories of San Lorenzo *in vineis* and of Petroio into the urban fabric was well underway (Carpentier 1986, 51-3). The cadastre of 1292 includes the only landed property described as "in vocabulum Sancti Spiriti", i.e. 'in the proximity of the monastery', in its volume reserved to urban properties, which meant that the only proprietors in the area were endowed with the status of Orvietan citizens (Archivio di Stato di Orvieto, Catasto I, f. 17*v*: "Heredes Petri Blanci [...] habent vineam in vocabulum Sancti Spiriti usque ecclesiam Sancti Spiriti, viam et Angelutium Jacobi"). All these arguments lead us to assume that the initiative to establish an Armenian community enjoyed a transversal support from the citizenry of Orvieto, something which enabled brother Peter and his companions to develop

17 See however, D'Acunto 2011 and Salonius 2017 for doubts about this genealogy.

18 On the spiritual fervour of Orvieto in this period see Frank 2002, 296.

connections within local society, and to collect donations even from supporters of non-Armenian origin. This is suggested by a list compiled in 1350 and registered in the minutes of the council of Orvieto, of churches which received an annual donation from the city, among which the monastery of Santo Spirito is to be found (Piccolomini-Adami 1883, 184; Carpentier 1986, 53). All these elements may have contributed to creating consensus in favour of the new religious foundation in various sectors of the Orvietan clergy and society, who were in conflict in other respects. The Armenian presence could in fact both have contributed to the role of Orvieto as an "important cultural crossroad", as Carol Lansing (1998, 6) defined it, and to offer vicarious legitimacy to the elites as supporters of such initiatives as assisting pilgrims on their way to Rome (Lansing 1998).[19]

5.3 Orvieto as a Strategic Settlement

Having analysed the Italian and local context, the next question is why a group of Armenian religious would desire to settle and open a hospice in the Umbrian countryside. In fact, Orvieto was a very attractive destination for this community. Although the documents available do not provide us with precise information in this regard, it is reasonable to suppose that they, like many members of the Eastern clergy who settled in Italy during this period, were refugees fleeing from the wars fought between Mongols and Mamluks in the territories of Greater and Lesser Armenia. As a striking coincidence, a Mamluk military campaign against the Mongols and their Armenian allies broke out in 1280, the year brother Peter and his companions arrived in Orvieto (Irwin 1986, 34; Mutafian 1988, 452). It is not clear whether this particular group of Armenian refugees/pilgrims came from Greater or Lesser Armenia. Recent studies on the colophons of Armenian manuscripts from medieval Rome have shown that most of the Armenians mentioned in these sources as members of Italian communities came from the region of Greater Armenia, which was the most affected by the destruction brought on by warfare in this period (Sirinian 2016, 2018). The Kingdom of Cilicia (an Armenian and Christian kingdom situated in Lesser Armenia, on the coasts of the Eastern Mediterranean), played however a crucial diplomatic role in fostering relationships with the Papacy. The Kingdom of Cilicia had been advocating since its foundation for the rapprochement of the Armenian and the Catholic Churches, which had favoured the resumption of pilgrimages from the East to Rome (Zekiyan 1978, 847); it has

19 For similar cases of elite support concerning other Armenian communities in Italy see also Sirinian 2018.

to be noted, however, that these pilgrimages had never completely ceased over the course of the Early Middle Ages, as proven among other indications by the cult of the 11th-century Armenian pilgrim Davino in the city of Lucca.[20] Armenian pilgrims normally disembarked in Ancona (where there was another Armenian church dedicated to the Holy Spirit: see Zekiyan 1978, 862) and went through Umbria on their way to Rome. The foundation of new Armenian communities in the Umbrian region is attested in this period also in Perugia (from 1273; Traina 1996, 98) and Gubbio (from 1318; Sezione di Archivio di Stato di Gubbio, Fondo Pesci, b. 4, doc. 97).[21] The position of Orvieto was, moreover, particularly strategic: the most important of the various itineraries of the *Via Francigena* – a set of roads used by northern European and northern Italian pilgrims to reach Rome – passed right through Montefiascone, the locality in the Orvietan territory on the road to which the Armenian *locus* had been established. This itinerary of the *Via Francigena* was the most popular in the 13th century, and followed the tracks of the ancient Roman *Via Cassia antiqua* (Schmiedt 1974, 585; Stopani 2019). Another ancient Roman road that became especially popular among pilgrims at the time was the *Via Flaminia*, as it allowed a detour to Assisi and other places connected to the flourishing cult of St Francis (Stopani 1991, 19; 1998, 141-2). Armenian foundations in Italy were mostly set up as hospices made available by the Armenian clergy to their fellow countrymen travelling to Rome (Orengo 2018, § 3): the inscription of the Tamburino itself defines Santo Spirito as a *hospitale*, or a place dedicated to hospitality. Along the same road that connected Orvieto to Montefiascone, on which Peter the Armenian had asked to build his own church, there was also a hospital of the Teutonic Order, likewise dedicated to assisting pilgrims (Borchardt 2016, 120). The decision to build the church of Santo Spirito in that precise spot, and then to move it on account of the works to build a new road of Petroio, shows a high degree of planning and awareness of their specific vocation towards charitable hospitality of pilgrims on the part of Peter and his confreres. The rebuilding of the monastery on the new road and the Armenians' long-lasting presence in Orvieto alongside other religious communities is to be taken as evidence of the desirability of such positioning on the way to Rome.

20 See Orengo 2018, § 12. More generally on Armenian-Italian contacts in the Early Middle Ages see Zekiyan 2000, 95 ff.

21 We thank Alberto Luongo for this reference, not listed to our knowledge in any publication dealing with Armenian communities in Italy.

6 Conclusion

This article has presented new sources on the Armenian presence in medieval Italy, including a rare instance of a trilingual inscription. Some aspects of them remain unclear, such as the reading of the date provided in Inscription II, and will hopefully be complemented by future studies. The artworks from Santo Spirito described in this contribution also deserve the attention of specialists of Armenian and Italian art, in order to uncover whether they bear the traces of the importation of foreign iconographical models. The Latin sources available for the Armenian community of Orvieto offer useful information about the contexts in which these groups of pilgrims might choose to settle and about the material conditions of their presence in communal Italy. The documents described here may possibly not be exhaustive, and the rich archives of Orvieto might well preserve more sources available for this topic. This case study ultimately offers an example of a small Armenian community, perfectly integrated in the religious and social landscape of an Italian commune. We have tried to substantiate some hypotheses about this successful integration in the course of this article; however, an in-depth study of ecclesiastical, social and political reactions to the presence of similar communities in Italy has yet to come. The fact that they shared the same faith as the locals, but not their prevalently Latin rite, could have resulted in ambiguous attitudes towards them.[22] Papal support for reunification projects with the Eastern Church can explain why religious elites could support the establishment of Oriental communities; however, it does not shed much light on the reactions of lay governments and lower segments of the population to their presence. We hope that this contribution will encourage new interdisciplinary research bringing together specialists of both medieval Armenia and Italy, in order to clarify the circumstances under which Oriental communities were either welcomed or discriminated against.

22 See for instance Quaranta 2004, 638-9, who describes a southern Italian case of persecution of Armenian clergymen as heretics in 1312.

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