

# Armeniaca

International Journal of Armenian Studies

Vol. 4      October 2025

e-ISSN 2974-6051



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari



e-ISSN 2974-6051

# **Armeniaca**

International Journal of Armenian Studies

Editors-in-chief

Aldo Ferrari

Alessandro Orengo

Zaroui Pogossian

Anna Sirinian

**Edizioni Ca' Foscari** - Venice University Press

Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari

Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia

URL <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni/riviste/armeniaca/>

# Armeniaca

## International Journal of Armenian Studies

Annual journal

**Editors-in-chief** Aldo Ferrari (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Alessandro Orengo (Università di Pisa, Italia) Zarouï Pogossian (Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italia) Anna Sirinian (Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, Italia)

**Editors** Paolo Lucca (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia) Sona Haroutyunian (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

**Advisory board** Arsen Bobokhyan (Yerevan State University, Armenia) Azat Bozoyan (Armenian National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan, Armenia) Valentina Calzolari (Université de Genève, Suisse) Peter Cowe (University of California, USA) Patrick Donabédian (Aix-Marseille Université, France) Bálint Kovács (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary) Michele Nucciotti (Università degli Studi di Firenze, Italia) Riccardo Pane (Archivio Generale Arcivescovile di Bologna, Italia) Andrea Scala (Università degli Studi di Milano, Italia) Giancarlo Schirru (Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italia) Theo Maarten van Lint (University of Oxford, UK) Edda Vardanyan (Matenadaran – The Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Yerevan, Armenia)

**Managing editor** Aldo Ferrari (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

**Head office** Università Ca' Foscari Venezia | Dipartimento di Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa Mediterranea | Dorsoduro 2035, 30125 Venezia, Italia | [armeniaca@unive.it](mailto:armeniaca@unive.it)

**Publisher** Edizioni Ca' Foscari | Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari | Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia, Italia | [ecf@unive.it](mailto:ecf@unive.it)

© 2025 Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Università di Pisa

© 2025 Edizioni Ca' Foscari for the present edition



Quest'opera è distribuita con Licenza Creative Commons Attribuzione 4.0 Internazionale  
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License



**Scientific certification of the Works published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari:** all essays published in this issue have received a favourable opinion by subject-matter experts, through an anonymous double peer review process under the responsibility of the Advisory Board of the journal. The evaluations were conducted in adherence to the scientific and editorial criteria established by Edizioni Ca' Foscari.

**Certificazione scientifica delle Opere pubblicate da Edizioni Ca' Foscari:** tutti i saggi pubblicati hanno ottenuto il parere favorevole da parte di valutatori esperti della materia, attraverso un processo di doppia revisione anonima sotto la responsabilità del Comitato scientifico della rivista. La valutazione è stata condotta in aderenza ai criteri scientifici ed editoriali di Edizioni Ca' Foscari.



## Table of Contents

### ARCHAEOLOGY

**A(nother) Urartian Royal Bowl Property of Sarduri (I),  
Son of Lutipri, from Karmir-blur,  
Stored in Hermitage Museum**

Anna Novikova, Annarita Bonfanti, Roberto Dan 7

### LITERATURE

**Die ‚bärtigen Jungfrauen‘  
Das Gleichnis von den zehn Jungfrauen (Mt 25,1-13)  
in Armenien zwischen Exegese und Kunst**

Riccardo Pane 27

**Yovasap‘ of Sebastia:  
From Adam to Noah and the Tower**

Dina Blokland, Nathan Daniel, Shlomi Efrati, David Neagu,  
Michael Stone, William Walk 47

### HISTORY

**The Educational-Ecclesiastic Missions and Networking  
Between the Roman Osroene and Sasanian Armenia  
in the First Half of the Fifth Century**

Anna Usacheva 69

**A Forgotten Voice: Giuseppe Cappelletti and *L’Armenia***

Ruben Campini, Annalisa Moraschi 97

## REPORTS

### **The Armenian-Italian Joint Expedition to Dvin Report of 2024 Activities**

Hamlet Petrosyan, Michele Nucciotti, Elisa Pruno,  
Tatyana Vardanesova, Francesca Cheli, Leonardo Squilloni,  
Hamazasp Abrahamyan, Lyuba Kirakosyan, Miriam Leonetti,  
Lisa Dall'Olio, Fabiana Miceli 119

### **Observing South Caucasus' Historical Landscape: An Open Photo Archive**

**Tools, Activities, and Purposes of the OSCOP Project**  
Stefano Riccioni, Francesca Penoni, Beatrice Spampinato 173

## REVIEWS AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Anna Sirinian, Khachik Harutyunyan  
***Il "Vangelo armeno" (ms. 3290) della Biblioteca Universitaria  
di Bologna: uno sguardo al manoscritto e alla sua storia***  
Alessandro Orengo 199

Petra Košťálová  
***The Stranger on the Road: Simeon from Lviv  
as the First Known Backpacker Travelling  
to the Ottoman Empire***  
Lilit Mnatsakanyan 205

## **Archaeology**



# A(nother) Urartian Royal Bowl Property of Sarduri (I), Son of Lutipri, from Karmir-blur, Stored in Hermitage Museum

**Anna Novikova**

State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

**Annarita Bonfanti**

Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, USA

**Roberto Dan**

ISMEO Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente, Roma, Italia

**Abstract** A ribbed bronze bowl from Karmir-blur inscribed with the name of King Sarduri has been reinterpreted as the earliest known bronze inscription of Sarduri, son of Lutipri, the first Urartian sovereign. Another bowl in the Hermitage, bearing a similar inscription, shares the same features and can likewise be attributed to Sarduri I. Together they form the missing link between the earliest ribbed bowl and the later plain bronze vessels associated with subsequent Urartian kings.

**Keywords** Royal bowls. Inscriptions. Karmir-blur. Urartu. Assyria.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Discovery of the Urartian Bronze Bowls: A View from Karmir-blur. – 3 Urartian Bronze Bowls: An Underrated Object. – 4 History of the Research on Urartian Royal Bowls. – 5 Morphological Description of the Bowl DB-17749. – 6 Conclusions.



## Peer review

Submitted 2025-06-04  
Accepted 2025-09-23  
Published 2025-12-12



## Open access

© 2025 Novikova, Bonfanti, Dan | 4.0



**Citation** Novikova, A.; Bonfanti, A.; Dan, R. (2025). "A(nother) Urartian Royal Bowl Property of Sarduri (I), Son of Lutipri, from Karmir-blur, Stored in Hermitage Museum". *Armeniaca*, 4, 7-24.

**DOI** 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/001

## 1 Introduction

Urartian research is characterized by several long-standing assumptions that are often taken for granted and considered unworthy of further discussion or detailed study.<sup>1</sup> One such assumption is that the Urartians began writing in Urartian at least a generation after the introduction of cuneiform script for royal inscriptions, around 840-830 BCE – a hypothesis drawn from the Hittite case (see van den Hout 2009a; 2009b). This view has recently been challenged by a re-evaluation of a ribbed bronze bowl bearing a Urartian inscription of a king named Sarduri (Dan, Bonfanti 2023). The epigraphic features, unusual morphology, and similarities with earlier Assyrian specimens suggest that the object's owner was not, as previously believed, Sarduri II, son of Argišti, but rather Sarduri I, son of Lutipri.

Until recently, this was the only bronze object from excavations that could potentially bear the name of this king. However, in the Hermitage collection, another bowl with similar epigraphic features has come to light, also inscribed with the name of a king called Sarduri. This article is dedicated to a morphological and epigraphic analysis of this item, its contextualization within the Urartian corpus of bronze artifacts, and a discussion of its significance, underscoring the exceptional nature of this particular bowl. This research forms part of a broader project aimed at reevaluating Urartian royal metallurgy, initiated through a comprehensive study of the Urartian royal bowls from Karmir-blur, now preserved in multiple museums across Armenia and the Russian Federation.<sup>2</sup>

---

**1** The contents of this article were jointly prepared by all the authors. Specifically, A. Novikova wrote “Morphological Description of the Bowl ДБ-17749” and “A History of the Research on Urartian Royal Bowls”; A.S. Bonfanti wrote “Urartian Bronze Bowls: An Underrated Object” and “Analysis of the Inscription”; while R. Dan wrote “The Discovery of the Urartian Bronze Bowls: A View from Karmir-blur” and “Archaeometrical Analysis.” The “Introduction” and “Conclusions” were written collaboratively by the authors. The authors are grateful to Igor Malkiel, the head of the Laboratory for Scientific Restoration of Precious Metals at the State Hermitage. We would also like to thank the History Museum of Armenia for the photos of the bowl 2010/325, and in particular the Museum Director, Davit Poghosyan, the Deputy Director, Nzhdeh Yeranyan, Sona Hovsepyan, Chief Curator, and Astgh Poghosyan. We are also grateful to Gagik Gjurjyan, former Director of the ‘Erebuni’ Historical & Archaeological Museum-Reserve and the archaeological area of Karmir-blur, at the time when I carried out the aerial imagery used in this contribution.

**2** For the first results of these studies, see Bonfanti, Dan 2023; Dan, Bonfanti 2023.

## 2      **The Discovery of the Urartian Bronze Bowls: A View from Karmir-blur**

Karmir-blur is one of the most significant Urartian sites on the Armenian Highlands. It is situated on a low natural rise along the edge of the Hrazdan River valley. Excavations at the site took place between 1939 and 1971 (see Piotrovskij 1950; 1952; 1955; 1970; Oganesyan 1955).

The primary occupation phase dates to the Urartian period (seventh century BCE), during which Karmir-blur became one of the last Urartian fortresses in the Armenian Highlands. Cuneiform inscriptions on various materials, linked to rulers from Minua to Sarduri (III), son of Sarduri, were discovered during investigations, shedding light on the Urartian presence in the region. The site itself was founded by Rusa, son of Argišti, but the discovery of several inscribed bronze shields (CTU B 8-2, B 8-3, B 8-4) and a solid bronze cylinder (CTU B 8-21) attributed to Argišti (I), son of Minua, suggests that these objects, originally created and stored in Erebuni, were relocated to Karmir-blur when it became the new royal residence and the administrative center of the Ararat Plain.

The citadel was accompanied by a large settlement that partially overlapped an earlier one, which the Urartians themselves had destroyed. Its walls were constructed with stone foundations and mudbrick superstructures. The lower level of the fortress, partially subterranean, was inaccessible from the outside and could only be reached from the upper level. This lower section contained approximately 200 storage rooms, most of which were rectangular in shape, with the larger ones featuring central rows of pillars. These rooms primarily served as storage areas for food, preserved in partially buried *pithoi* (*karas*), over 500 of which were found *in situ*. Additionally, specialized workshops were identified within the complex, including facilities for sesame oil production, a brewery, granaries, and pantries for storing meat and dairy products. There were also arsenals for weapons, metal goods, and pottery.

Little is known about the royal palace, which was located on the upper floor, but excavations have uncovered architectural elements, furnishings, and prestige objects that collapsed into the lower structures. The palace was likely adorned with wall paintings, fragments of which were recovered during excavations. Karmir-blur is unique among Urartian sites as the only known palace built on an artificial terrace. This design choice, made by Rusa, son of Argišti, was likely inspired by Neo-Assyrian palatial architecture, particularly Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad, which was constructed on a similar terrace just a few decades earlier (Dan 2015, 48).

As mentioned, the 97 inscribed bronze bowls were discovered stacked inside *pithos* 5 in storeroom 25 (Piotrovskij 1952, 16-27).

Excavations of this room began in 1948 and continued into 1949, when the bowls were unearthed. Storeroom 25 was a large, partially subterranean space measuring 31 × 10.3 m, with three central quadrangular pillars and a buttress along the north wall (Piotrovskij 1950, 59). It contained 82 *pithoi* filled with wheat, barley, millet, and sesame (Piotrovskij 1950, 29; 1952, 8, 19-20). Twenty of these *pithoi* bore cuneiform capacity marks, while the rest featured hieroglyphic notations (Piotrovskij 1955, 23). By the time of the fortress's destruction – possibly in mid-August – these *pithoi* were already empty (Piotrovskij 1950, 31). The *pithos* used to conceal the bowls was positioned in the northern part of the storeroom, far from the entrance. The bowls were deliberately hidden beneath wooden boards (Piotrovskij 1952, 20; 1955, 8-9), suggesting they were part of a hoard, possibly due to their value. Alongside the bowls, storeroom 25 yielded numerous other significant artefacts, including 'Scythian' objects, which indicate interactions between Urartu and the nomadic groups that became increasingly influential in the Near East from the eighth century BCE onward. The available data on storeroom 25 and other rooms at Karmir-blur highlight the site's complex history and raise questions about the timing and nature of the citadel's destruction. Evidence suggests that the fortress may have remained occupied beyond the traditional date assigned to the fall of the Urartian state in the second half of the seventh century BCE. As Piotrovskij observed, the absence of wine residue in the *pithoi* and the lack of everyday utensils suggest that by the time of the final assault, the fortress was already in decline (Piotrovskij 1952, 27; 1955, 22). The room had been thoroughly cleaned, implying that the site's downfall was a gradual process rather than a sudden, catastrophic event.

### 3 Urartian Bronze Bowls: An Underrated Object

The excavation of Karmir-blur [figs 1-2], on the southwestern outskirts of modern-day Yerevan, led to the discovery of 97 bronze bowls stacked inside a *pithos* in a storeroom within the fortress (Piotrovskij 1952, 20). Their deposition does not appear to have occurred immediately before the fortress's final destruction, as they were carefully placed and covered. This suggests they were stored at an unspecified time between the second half of the seventh century BCE, when Karmir-blur was founded, and the Achaemenid conquest of Armenia in the mid-sixth century BCE.





**Figure 1** Aerial view of the northern part of the Karmir-blur site (Kotayk Survey Project Archive)



**Figure 2**  
Plan of the Karmir-blur  
fortress with the location  
of storage room 25  
(adapted  
after Seidl 2004, fig. 2)

The bowls exhibit a standardized morphology: they are shallow with a continuous profile, indistinct rim, and concave bottom. Made of bronze with a maximum tin content of 10%, they were designed to have a golden appearance (Piotrovskij 1952, 54). Their diameters range from 16 to 20.6 cm, with weights between approximately 280 and 450 gr. The depth varies between 4.3 and 6 cm, while the wall thickness ranges from 0.15 to 0.4 cm. All these bowls bear cuneiform inscriptions naming various Urartian kings, which initially allowed scholars to arrange them in chronological order with little difficulty. However, some of these chronological assumptions have recently been challenged (see Seidl 2004, 18; Dan, Bonfanti 2023). The

absence of patronymics in these short inscriptions often prevents definitive attribution to specific rulers, as multiple Urartian kings shared the same names (e.g., Argišti, Sarduri, and Rusa). Besides the inscriptions, the bowls feature a relatively simple but non-standardized iconographic repertoire.

Their significance lies in their uniqueness, as they are the only known royal bowls identified through regular excavations, aside from a few specimens found in Ayanis (CTU B 12-17, B 18-10). The fact that these bowls were discovered stacked together in a *pithos* raises several important questions, particularly regarding the nature of the Urartian royal court, the significance of these objects themselves, and the long-debated issue of Karmir-blur's destruction or abandonment, closely tied to the broader *vexata quaestio* of Urartu's collapse. These bowls also offer insights into more practical matters. The presence of roughly datable inscriptions, which can be arranged in a loose chronological order, provides an opportunity to study the development of Urartian cuneiform ductus on bronze. This, in turn, may help identify the uncertain owners of these objects.

Taken together, these factors underscore the importance of these items, which rank among the most significant discoveries related to the Urartian royal court.

## 4 History of the Research on Urartian Royal Bowls

To date, a systematic study of the entire corpus of Urartian metal bowls directed to an academic audience has yet to be undertaken, despite their frequent mention in Urartian research (but see Dan et al. 2024). The first reference to these objects appears in Boris B. Piotrovskij's 1951 article, where he compiled inscriptions found on bronze artifacts from the 1949 excavations at Karmir-blur. One specific bowl is briefly noted as bearing a text in Assyrian cuneiform characters (Piotrovskij 1951, 111, no. 5). In his second volume on the Karmir-blur excavations, Piotrovskij expanded on this finding, reporting that 97 bronze bowls were discovered inside *pithos* 5 in storeroom 25 (1952, 20). He provided a more detailed analysis in the section on inscribed bronzes (54-64),<sup>3</sup> noting that these bowls bore engraved inscriptions with the names of four eighth century BCE Urartian kings: Minua, Argišti, Sarduri, and Rusa. He attributed those mentioning Sarduri specifically to Sarduri (II), son of Argišti (ca. 757-735 BCE). Piotrovskij again highlighted that two of these bowls, one of which was ribbed [figs 3-4], were inscribed with the signs "NÍG.GA SAR-du-ri-e-" in Assyrian cuneiform. However, after this

---

<sup>3</sup> Here, he reports that the bowls were found inside *pithos* 4 (Piotrovskij 1952, 54).

initial mention, the exact fate of these two bowls became unclear. Only the ribbed bowl occasionally appeared in publications (e.g., Piotrovskij 1970: figs. 73-4; Santrot 1996, 272), due to its unique features within Urartian toreutics.



**Figure 3**  
The bronze ribbed bowl of Sarduri (2010/325 –  
Photo courtesy  
of the History Museum of Armenia)



**Figure 4**  
Views of the gilded bronze ribbed bowl of Sarduri,  
with details of the inscription (2010/325 – Photo courtesy  
of the History Museum of Armenia)

The inclusion of these two bowls in Urartian text corpora began with Friedrich W. König (HChI 112E) and Giorgi A. Melikišvili (UKN 191-2), who listed them among the inscriptions of Sarduri II. However, Ursula Seidl later challenged this attribution, assigning them instead to Sarduri I, son of Lutipri (Seidl 2004, 18, A.1-2) based on the Assyrian style of the cuneiform signs (55). She also stated that both bowls were ribbed but only provided an inventory number for one, 2010/32/14, housed in the History Museum of Armenia. Conversely, Mirjo Salvini, in the fourth volume of his *Corpus dei Testi Urartei*, reaffirmed their attribution to Sarduri II, arguing:

Vero è che la forma dei segni è particolarmente slanciata, e specie il DINGIR ha una forma arcaica, ma questo non basta per l'attribuzione; tanto più che il genitivo *Sarduri=ei* rivela la lingua urartea, mentre Sarduri I redigeva ancora i testi in assiro. (Salvini 2012, 52)

Another issue arose regarding the actual number of ribbed bowls bearing this inscription. Piotrovskij originally mentioned two such inscriptions, but only *one* was explicitly identified as ribbed (1952,

56). Later, in *Karmir-blur, Al'bom*, he mistakenly published images of two different ribbed bowls, both described as inscribed by Sarduri (1970: figs. 73-5); for this reason, since Seidl's study, these bowls have generally been regarded as two separate items.

The inventory number of one bowl, 2010/325 (formerly 2010/32/14), belongs to the History Museum of Armenia, while Salvini (2012, 52) identified the second as DB-17749, housed in the State Hermitage Museum. Only recently have these two bowls been systematically studied and published (Dan, Bonfanti 2023).

## 5 Morphological Description of the Bowl DB-17749

The bowl DB-17749 is well preserved and shares morphological similarities with the majority of known royal Urartian bronze bowls. It is a shallow vessel with a curved profile, an indistinct rim, and a concave bottom that seamlessly transitions into the profile [figs 5-6].



Figure 5-6 Frontal and side view of the Sarduri bowl at the Hermitage Museum (DB-17749 – Photo courtesy of the Hermitage Museum)

Despite its overall preservation, the bowl exhibits some deformations, including a through hole, metal tears at the center, and dark spots. It measures 20 cm in diameter and 5.2 cm in height, with cuneiform signs ranging between 0.4 and 0.5 cm in height. The bowl weighs 258.6 g. The manufacturing process involved shaping the bowl in a circular form using a mold. The central point of rotation is still visible, along with concentric circles formed by a metal ruler, which can be observed on both the inner and outer surfaces. Various hand tools of different shapes were used in crafting the bowl. The cuneiform inscription, arranged in a circular pattern inside the bowl, was engraved using four distinct types of chisels.



## 5.1 Analysis of the Inscription

The epigraph inscribed in cuneiform on the internal side of the bowl's base follows a circular outline [figs 7-9]. The text of the inscription (CTU B 9-22) is the following:

NÍG.GA <sup>md</sup>sar<sub>5</sub>-du-ri-e-i, 'property of Sarduri'.



**Figure 7**  
Detail of the inscription  
in the center of the bowl





**Figures 8-9** Microscopic detail of the wedges on the bowl ДВ-17749

The Sumerograms NÍG.GA correspond to the Urartian term urišhi, meaning “property” (Salvini 1980, 186; 2018, 423). These signs are rarely attested in Urartian bronze epigraphy; indeed, the two bowls bearing this inscription are the only known examples of these signs in epigraphs on metal objects found in regular excavation contexts. Among objects from the antique market, these Sumerograms have been found on a single horse blinker dating to the reign of Minua (Ghirshman 1964-5), which bears the inscription NÍG.GA šá mī-nu-ú-a (property of Minua), Assyrian counterpart of the inscription on the bowl discussed in this article. The genitive case ending -ei in Sarduri=ei indicates that the language behind the use of Sumerograms is Urartian.

As Piotrovskij already noted, the shape of the cuneiform signs is peculiar, presenting a fine and particularly slender ductus, comparable to that of Assyrian inscriptions. This bowl, like the ribbed one (History Museum of Armenia, 2010/32/14), has been dated to the reign of Sarduri (I), son of Lutipri, by U. Seidl (2004, 18). However, this hypothesis was challenged by M. Salvini in his systematization of Urartian inscriptions on metal (2012, 52). Salvini argued that Sarduri (I) only used Assyrian for writing, based on the absence of cuneiform epigraphs written in Urartian and dated to Sarduri (I), son of Lutipri. The only text certainly attributed to him is the *Sardursburg* inscription (CTU A 1-1), which exists in six duplicates and is written

in Assyrian. However, absence of evidence should not be considered evidence of absence: it is entirely possible that Sarduri (I) also wrote in Urartian, particularly given that the ductus of this inscription is not the only feature suggesting an early period.

This bowl, like the ribbed one bearing the same text, lacks the iconographical features typical of later Urartian bronze bowls. Starting with the reign of Argišti, son of Minua, inscriptions on these objects are accompanied by iconographic elements, such as temple-towers and lion heads. These motifs were consistently present on every bowl, including those belonging to the latest rulers of the Urartian state (see Dan et al. 2024). This absence of iconographic elements suggests an archaic characteristic, which aligns with the early-style ductus of the inscription.

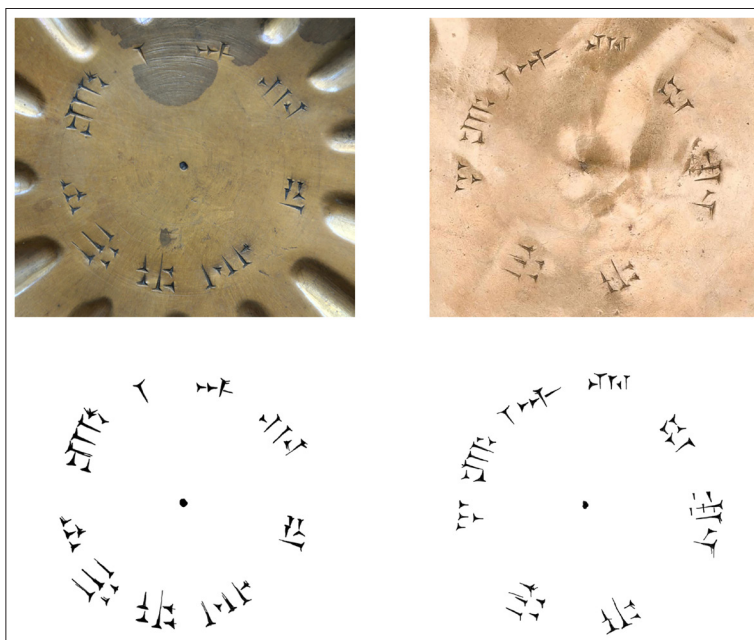


Figure 10 Comparison of the inscriptions on the Sarduri bowls 2010/325 and ДБ-17749

The palaeography of the signs on this bowl appears similar to that of those incised on the ribbed bowl (History Museum of Armenia, 2010/32/14) [fig. 10], which has been suggested as belonging to Sarduri (I), son of Lutipri (see Dan, Bonfanti 2023). It is particularly noteworthy that the pattern of guide marks on both bowls is similar. The guides for the signs DINGIR, *ri*, *e*, and *i* are slightly misaligned and follow a similar, imprecise model. On this bowl, the sign *ri* shows several erroneous guide marks. Based on the position of the

preliminary wedges (two horizontals followed by three additional horizontals), it seems that the sketched sign may have originally been an *i*, rather than a *ri*. Whether this represents a mistake related to the adaptation of Assyrian cuneiform to write the Urartian language is unclear. However, it seems plausible that this is part of the adaptation process, possibly made by a recently trained Urartian scribe still unfamiliar with the system.

Another possible indication of archaicity lies in the use of NÍG.GA. These Sumerograms were employed in accordance with the Neo-Assyrian custom of indicating “property” both as *makkūru* and as NÍG.GA, with a meaning tied to “temple or palace property” (CAD M1, 135), which seems particularly fitting in this case. Their use may be connected to the absence of a specific Urartian word for this concept, which was later conveyed by the term *urišhi*, attested in Urartian inscriptions from the time of Išpuini and Minua (see the bilingual Kelišin stele, CTU A 3-11, Ro. 8, where *urišhi* corresponds to *TILLI* in the Assyrian version). The related Urartian term <sup>E</sup>*urishusi*-, translated as “(chamber) of the treasury” (Salvini 2018, 423), could easily overlap with the Assyrian *bīt makkūri*, also written as <sup>E</sup>NÍG.GA. The use of this specific combination of Sumerograms, which does not appear in later Urartian inscriptions, would be a clue pointing to the archaic date of the items bearing this inscription. It would still be possible to equate *urišhi* with the Assyrian *TILLU*, indicating military equipment (CAD T, 411), except that bronze bowls do not belong to the category of weaponry. A plausible misunderstanding could be hypothesized, suggesting that the scribe who wrote the bilingual Kelišin inscription (CTU A 3-11) had limited knowledge of the Urartian language or the term *urišhi*. Alternatively, it could reflect a broader use of the term indicating the “weapons” of the king to mean all of his belongings. This interpretation would be justified by the fact that the majority of the sovereign’s possessions were, in fact, weapons.

All these small features, when considered individually, may seem insignificant, but together they form a concrete argument for the archaicity of these two bowls. The Assyrian ductus, the absence of a figurative apparatus, and the rare use of the Sumerograms NÍG.GA provide sufficient evidence to support dating them to the reign of Sarduri (I), son of Lutipri.



## 5.2 Archaeometrical Analysis

The metal is heavily work-hardened, with visible cracks and breaks in some areas. Additionally, the surfaces of the bowls are coated with an amorphous nanocarbon film on both sides, approximately 200 nm thick, which may have protected the bowls from corrosion. Metallurgical analysis of the bronze bowl was conducted using X-ray fluorescence (XRF) with the *Olympus Innov-X system*, revealing a consistent composition across both the bottom and side of the object. The alloy consists of copper (Cu) at approximately 90.3% and tin (Sn) at around 9.7%, with minimal variation between the two areas. This uniformity suggests a well-controlled production process, likely involving careful alloy preparation and casting. The binary copper-tin composition is a traditional bronze alloy, commonly used for its mechanical strength and resistance to corrosion. These characteristics are consistent with both the functional and possibly ceremonial purposes for which the bowl may have been crafted. The high copper content (approximately 90%) imparts a distinctive golden hue to the bowl. Copper's natural reddish tone, combined with the addition of tin, creates a warm, metallic sheen that can resemble gold, especially when polished or exposed to light. This aesthetic quality likely enhanced the visual appeal of the bowl, making it suitable for both functional and decorative or ceremonial uses. The analyses were conducted on the object's surface, so the chemical composition of the interior may differ, potentially showing even higher copper percentages [tabs 1-2]. Over time, the copper on external surfaces tends to oxidize, diminishing its presence, while leaving higher concentrations of tin on the surface. This phenomenon could explain the metal percentages detected in the analysis, as the outer layer may not fully reflect the original alloy composition.

These findings align with the metallographic analysis of one of the bowls by G.N. Kozlovsky, who determined that the bowl was made by hammering a cast preform, with intermediate annealing (Piotrovskij 1952, 54). Kozlovsky noted that the cups were made of high-quality bronze with significant tin content (up to 10%). F.N. Tavadze's examination revealed that, despite their great external similarity, the bowls were made from different bronze alloys and using distinct techniques (Piotrovskij 1952, 54). In addition to the hammered bowls, which were based on a cast preform, there are specimens with clear signs of disk-shaped preforms, a stamping method widely used in ancient Caucasian metallurgy (Piotrovskij 1952, 54). This difference could lead to further archaeological investigations of other bowl specimens, where colour alone suggests variations in the metal proportions.



**Figure 11** Indication of the points where samples were taken for archaeometrical analyses

**Table 1** Archaeometrical analysis of the bowl: composition of the outside bottom [fig. 11A]

Element	%	+/-	Spec (C 524)
Cu	90.30	0.11	[88.30-90.97]
Sn	9.70	0.11	[9.00-11.00]

**Table 2** Archaeometrical analysis of the bowl: composition of the outer rim [fig. 11B]

Element	%	+/-	Spec (C 524)
Cu	90.28	0.12	[88.30-90.97]
Sn	9.72	0.12	[9.00-11.00]

## 6 Conclusions

The origin of Urartian royal bowls may be traced back to a process of Assyrianization that began in the middle-Assyrian period, following the first Assyrian campaigns in the north. This process is particularly evident in the reign of Sarduri (I), who adopted and officialized several Assyrian features, linking them to the Urartian state (see Dan, Bonfanti 2023 for a detailed analysis). The reference models for the creation of the Urartian royal bronze bowls tradition can be found in the works of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) (see Frahm 2017, 615), who is depicted multiple times holding a ribbed bowl in the reliefs of the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu/Nimrud (e.g., BM 124535, BM 1849,0502.14, BM 124565). Bowls, mostly ribbed, with Assyrian inscriptions, have also been found archaeologically in the royal tombs of Assyrian queens at Nimrud (Hussein 2016, pl. 40), demonstrating the direct possession of these objects by the ruler and his consort. A key difference between Assyrian and Urartian bowls lies in their material: in Assyria, they are crafted from gold and silver, whereas in Urartu, only bronze is used. The high tin content in Urartian bronze, however, gives these bowls a golden appearance. This Assyrian tradition is still visible in the presence of ribs on the Urartian bronze bowl bearing an inscription of Sarduri, son of Lutipri (History Museum of Armenia, 2010/32/14) (Dan, Bonfanti 2023). Plain bowls have been thought to appear later, around the time of Minua. However, the bowl discussed in this article challenges this perspective, serving as a sort of missing link between the inscribed ribbed bowl of Sarduri, son of Lutipri, and the subsequent royal bowls with Urartian inscriptions: this bowl, it appears, marks the beginning of a centuries-long tradition that developed from this early specimen. The use of bronze by the Urartians to replicate what were likely originally gold Assyrian bowls provides a fascinating example of how metallurgy was employed to express power. By crafting these imitation pieces in a more accessible and durable material like bronze, the Urartians not only demonstrated their metallurgical expertise but also their intent to emulate the symbolic value of gold. Such objects would have been displayed in elite settings, reinforcing the authority of their owners and serving as a reminder of Urartu's connections to broader regional powers, such as Assyria.

## Bibliography

- Bonfanti, A.S.; Dan, R. (2023). "Assyrianizing Elements in the Iron Age cultures of the Highlands. The Decorated Bronze Bowl from the Yeghegnadzor Hoard". *Proceedings of the Museum of the History of Armenia*, 1(11), 8-18, 265-6.
- CAD M1 = Oppenheim, A.L.; Reiner, E.; Biggs, R.D.; Renger, J.M.; Stol, M.; Elswick, M. (eds.) (1977). *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Vol. 10, M1. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- CAD T = Reiner, E.; Caplice, R.I.; Edzardt, D.O.; Groneberg, B.; Hunger, H.; Kienast, B.; Ludwig, M.-C.; Parpola, S.; Renger, J.M.; Roth, M.T.; Van Soldt, W.; Stolper, M.W.; Wiggermann, F.; McLarnan, L. (eds.) (2006). *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Vol. 18, T. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- CTU A = Salvini, M. (2008). *Corpus dei Testi Urartei*. Vol. 1, *Le iscrizioni su pietra e roccia: i testi*. Roma: CNR, Istituto di studi sulle civiltà dell'Egeo e del Vicino Oriente.
- CTU A = Salvini, M. (2018). *Corpus dei Testi Urartei*. Vol. 5, *Revisioni delle epigrafi e nuovi testi su pietra e roccia (CTU A); Dizionario urarteo; Schizzo grammaticale della lingua urartea*. Paris: Éditions de Boccard.
- CTU B = Salvini, M. (2012). *Corpus dei Testi Urartei*. Vol. 4, *Iscrizioni su bronzi, argilla e altri supporti; nuove iscrizioni su pietra; paleografia generale*. Roma: CNR, Istituto di studi sulle civiltà dell'Egeo e del Vicino Oriente.
- Dan, R. (2015). *From the Armenian Highland to Iran. A Study on the Relations between the Kingdom of Urartu and the Achaemenid Empire*. Roma: Scienze e lettere.
- Dan, R. et al. (2024). *The Urartian Royal Bowls*. Yerevan: History Museum of Armenia.
- Dan, R.; Bonfanti, A.S. (2023). "Drinking Like an Assyrian King. A Urartian Inscribed Royal Ribbed Bowl Property of Sarduri (I), Son of Lutipri". *Journal Asiatique*, 311, 171-84.
- Frahm, E. (ed.) (2017). *A Companion to Assyria*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.
- Ghirshman, R. (1964-5). "Notes Iraniennes XIV. Deux oeillères en bronze des rois d'Urartu". *Artibus Asiae*, 27, 49-60.
- HChI = König, F.W. (1955-7). *Handbuch der chaldischen Inschriften*. Graz: im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers.
- Hussein, M.M. (2016). *Nimrud. The Queens' Tombs*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- Oganesyan, K.L. (1955). *Karmir-blur IV: Arxitektura tejše-baini (Karmir-blur IV: Architecture of Teishebaini)*. Erevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Armianskoj SSR.
- Piotrovskij, B.B. (1950). *Karmir-blur*. Vol. 1, *Rezultaty raskopok 1939-1949 (Karmir-blur. Vol. 1, Results of the excavations of 1939-1949)*. Erevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Armianskoj SSR.
- Piotrovskij, B.B. (1951). "Klinoobraznye nadpisi na bronzovyx casax iz raskopok na Karmir-blure v 1949 g." (Cuneiform Inscriptions on Bronze Objects Excavated at Karmir-blur in 1949). *Epigrafika Vostoka*, 5, 110-12.
- Piotrovskij, B.B. (1952). *Karmir-blur*. Vol. 2, *Rezultaty rabot 1949-1950 (Karmir-blur, Vol. 2, Results of the Works of 1949-1950)*. Erevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Armianskoj SSR.
- Piotrovskij, B.B. (1955). *Karmir-blur*. Vol. 3, *Rezultaty rabot 1951-1953 (Karmir-blur, Vol. 3, Results of the Works of 1951-1953)*. Erevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Armianskoj SSR.
- Piotrovskij, B.B. (1960). "Urartskie nadpisi iz raskopok Karmir-blura 1939-1958 gg. (Obščij obzor)" (Urartian Inscriptions from the Karmir-blur Excavations of 1939-1958 (General Overview)). *Epigrafika Vostoka*, 13, 105-9.

- Piotrovskij, B.B. (1970). *Karmir-blur. Al'bom* (Karmir-blur, Album). Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Avrora".
- Salvini, M. (1980). "Iscrizioni cuneiformi urartee su oggetti di metallo". *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici*, 22, 181-90.
- Santrot, J. (éd.) (1996). *Trésors de l'Arménie ancienne des origines au IVe siècle*. Paris: Somogy.
- Seidl, U. (2004). *Bronzekunst Urartus*. Mainz: Von Zabern.
- Spiridonov, J.; Malkiel, I.; Novikova, A.; Verevkin, M. (2021). "The Corrosion-Resistance Bronze Bowls of Urartu: A Microscopic Investigation" (ZEISS Microscopy Use Case/ White Paper; 7 pp.). Zeiss van den Hout, T. (2009a). "A Century of Hittite Text Dating and the Origins of the Hittite Cuneiform Script". *Incontri Linguistici*, 32, 11-35.
- UKN = Melikišvili, G.A. (1960). *Urartskie klinoobraznye nadpisi* (Urartian Cuneiform Inscriptions). Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.
- van den Hout, T. (2009b). "Reflections on the Origins and Development of the Hittite Tablet Collections in Hattuša and their Consequences for the Rise of Hittite Literacy". Pecchioli Daddi, F.; Torri, G.; Corti, C. (eds), *Central-North Anatolia in the Hittite Period. New Perspectives in Light of Recent Research*. Roma: Herder, 71-96.



## Literature





# Die ‚bärtigen Jungfrauen‘ Das Gleichnis von den zehn Jungfrauen (Mt 25,1-13) in Armenien zwischen Exegese und Kunst

Riccardo Pane

Archivio arcivescovile di Bologna, Italia

**Abstract** The article traces the Armenian exegesis (fifth-fourteenth century) of the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25,1-13), highlighting its Greek sources, but also its originalities. Among the iconographic manifestations, the article focuses on two very singular works: a bas-relief from the Hovhannavank' monastery and a miniature by the copyist Yovsian, where the virgins are replaced by men. In addition to the connection of these iconographies with the liturgical tradition and the eschatological perspective, explored in some recent studies, the article shows how the explanation of this unusual iconography of the bearded virgins must be sought in the constant Armenian exegesis, which reinterprets the parable in reference to the spirituality of male monastic communities.

**Keywords** Armenia. Exegesis. Virgins. Parable. Iconography.



## Peer review

Submitted 2025-06-21  
Accepted 2025-10-09  
Published 2025-12-12



## Open access

© 2025 Pane | 4.0



**Citation** Pane, R. (2025). "Die ‚bärtigen Jungfrauen‘. Das Gleichnis von den zehn Jungfrauen (Mt 25,1-13) in Armenien zwischen Exegese und Kunst". *Armeniaca*, 4, 27-46.

**DOI** 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/002

Das Gleichnis von den zehn Jungfrauen (Mt 25,1-13) hat sowohl im griechischen als auch im lateinischen Kontext eine lange exegetische Tradition (Marin 1981; 2002; Pomarici 2023). Auch die ikonografischen Ergebnisse wurden umfassend untersucht (Körkel-Hinkfoth 1994; Mantas 2010; 2015). Obwohl die armenische Exegese des Gleichnisses der griechischen Tradition, insbesondere der chrysostomischen und der origenischen, verpflichtet ist, weist sie einige Originalmerkmale auf, die sich in der Ikonographie widerspiegeln. In diesem Artikel werden wir die grundlegenden Merkmale dieser armenischen Exegese nachzeichnen und uns dann auf einige ikonografische Ergebnisse konzentrieren, die seit langem das Interesse der Wissenschaftler geweckt haben.<sup>1</sup> Unsere Forschung wird sich nicht so sehr auf die übersetzten Quellen konzentrieren – wie zum Beispiel Chrysostomus – sondern vielmehr auf diejenigen, die in der armenischen Sprache geboren wurden. Das heißt, wir werden sehen, ob und inwieweit sich die armenischen Autoren von ihren griechischen Quellen unterscheiden, insbesondere Origenes und Johannes Chrysostomus. Die erste interessante Tatsache ist, wie wir sehen werden, dass die armenische Tradition oft von der Exegese des Origenes abhängt, von dem keine armenische Übersetzung bekannt ist, und nicht nur von Chrysostomus, dessen Übersetzungen uns überliefert sind.

Der wahrscheinlich älteste Text, in dem ein Hinweis auf unser Gleichnis vorkommt, ist der Diskurs 23. über die Asketen des *Yačaxapatum*. Der Autor lädt die Asketen ein, sich in voller Demut dazu zu verpflichten, in einem Kloster und mit einer Gemeinschaft zu leben (Yačaxapatum 2003, 131; Yačaxapatum 2021, 276):

Vielmehr unterwerft euch mit Demut und bereitwilligem Gehorsam dem Gemeinwohl, in Übereinstimmung mit Gottes Gebot und in Treue zu dem von Gott ernannten Vorgesetzten... Verpflichtet euch, in einem Kloster und mit einer Bruderschaft zu bleiben, zur Ehre der Allerheiligsten Dreifaltigkeit... Diese sind jene, die immer das Öl der reinen Liebe bei sich haben und mit ihren Lampen das Hochzeitsgemach betreten, die der allmächtige Vater mit guter Nachricht in der unendlichen Freude des himmlischen Bräutigams willkommen heißt. Doch diejenigen, die sich dazu entschließen, die Gemeinschaft der Bruderschaft zu verlassen, sind wie die törichten Jungfrauen, denen das Öl der Liebe fehlt und denen das

---

**1** Hovsep'yan, Ter-Vardanyan 2013, 229-50; Leloir 1967, 295-9; Malxasyan 2005; Petrosyan, Ter-Step'anyan 2002.

Bräutgemach verschlossen bleibt, weil ihre Hochzeitsfackeln nicht brennen.<sup>2</sup>

Das Öl wird nicht als allgemeine Nächstenliebe interpretiert, sondern als Liebe zu Mitmönchen und zur Klostergemeinschaft, der man angehört. Ist diese ‚klösterliche‘ Konnotation des Gleichnisses völlig originell? Es gehört sicherlich nicht zur vorherrschenden exegetischen Linie, aber es gibt auch im griechischen Kontext einige interessante Präzedenzfälle. Das älteste christliche Werk (2. Jh.), das sich auf unser Gleichnis bezieht, ist die *Epistula Apostolorum* 43-4, wo Jesus die Apostel mit den klugen Jungfrauen vergleicht (Schmidt-Wajenberg 1919, 136-42). In diesem Fall handelt es sich nicht noch um einen echten klösterlichen Kontext, sondern um das Apostelkollegium (Watson 2020). Die Anwendung des Gleichnisses auf das männliche klösterliche Umfeld findet sich deutlicher in Gregor von Nyssa, *De instituto christiano* (1952, 82-3), asketisches Werk, das erhebliche Übereinstimmungen mit dem *Großen Brief* von Ps.-Macarius/Simeon (CPG 2415.2) aufweist und dessen Authentizität noch immer umstritten ist. Gregors Abhandlung zeichnet das Idealbild des Mönchs nach und erinnert, wenn es um das Gebet geht, an die Perikope der zehn Jungfrauen. Das Werk, von dem keine armenische Übersetzung bekannt ist, scheint keinen direkten Bezug zu *Yačaxapatum* zu haben. In diesem letzten Werk stellt das Öl den Gehorsam dar, während es bei Gregor die Früchte des Geistes sind, die Keuschheit des Herzens, die der des Körpers entsprechen muss; den törichten Jungfrauen fehlte das Licht des Geistes: οὐ γὰρ εἶχον ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τὸ φῶς, τὸν τῆς ἀρετῆς καρπὸν, οὐδὲ τὸν τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ λύχνον. Aber es ist nicht der einzige Fall. Die Matthäus-Katenen gaben uns ein Fragment von Cyrill von Alexandria in unserem Gleichnis: Cyril identifiziert die Jungfrauen mit den Hegumenoi des Volkes und erklärt, dass der Hegumenos an Seele und Körper makellos sein muss: παρθένοις παρεικάξει τοὺς τῶν λαῶν ἡγούμενους. ἄσπιλον δεῖ εἶναι τὸν ἱερουργὸν ψυχῇ τε καὶ σώματι (Reuss 1957, 250). Auch hier geht es um die persönliche Tugend des Mönchs und nicht um seine Beziehung zur Gemeinschaft, wie im Fall des *Yačaxapatum*, das sich als recht originell erweist.

**2** Այլ խոնարհութեամբ եւ կամաւոր հնազանդութեամբ նուաճեալք ան հասարակացաւգուտն, եւ հաւանութիւն Աստուծոյ պատուիրանին եւ հաւատացեալ յԱստուծոյ առաջնորդին: [...] Եւ հաւանեալ ի մի վանս եւ ի մի միաբանութիւն փառաց Ամենասուրբ Երրորդութեանն [...] Նորա են, որ գտուրք սիրոյն զհիւն միշտ յինքեան ունին, եւ պայծառյապտերաւքն մտանեն յառազաստն: Չորս ամենակալ Հայրն ուրախ առնէ յաւետիսերկնաւոր փեսային յանսպառ ուրախութիւնսն: Բայց որ որոշին եւ մեկնին ի միաբանութենէ եղբայրութեանն, նորա նմանեալք են յիմարկուսանացն, եւ զհւղ սիրոյն ոչ ունին. որոց փակի առազաստն յաղագս շիջանելոյ հարսանեկանջաիցն:

Elišē (Eliseo l’Armeno 2022, 288) wendet das Gleichnis auf die Priester an, die im Begriff sind, den Märtyrertod zu erleiden: „Die Flamme eurer Lampen erlischt nicht, und der Feind eures Lebens, der die Finsternis liebt, erfreut sich nicht daran“ (նչ շիջանի վառումն կանթեղաց ձերոց եւ ոչ ուրախ լինի խաւարասէր թշնամին կենաց ձերոց). Dies ist der einzige sichere Hinweis auf unser Gleichnis in Elišē. Ein anderer Vorfall wirft weitere Fragen auf: eine der ersten Zusammenfassungen patristischer Interpretationen findet sich in der Predigt *Über die Auferstehung des Lazarus*, die in Manuskripten manchmal Mambrē, manchmal Elišē, manchmal Johannes Chrysostomus zugeschrieben wird (Eliseo l’Armeno 2018, 220-3). Obwohl der Autor des Hauptkerns des Textes mit ziemlicher Sicherheit Elišē ist, finden wir in den letzten Absätzen Übereinstimmungen mit einigen chrysostomischen Texten, vor allem mit einer pseudo-chrysostomischen Predigt *Über die Zehn Jungfrauen* (CPG 4580; PG 59, 527-32), die ebenfalls ins Armenische übersetzt wurde (Yovhannēs Oskeberan 1862, 749). Der Text lautet wie folgt:

Streben wir von nun an danach, in diesem Leben Werke anzuhäufen, die für die zukünftige Auferstehung nützlicher sind, damit wir dem Bräutigam nicht mit erschöpften Lampen entgegengehen, denn wenn wir aus den Gräbern gerufen werden, finden wir das Öl der Barmherzigkeit nahe, mit der unsere Lampen leuchten. Da hinter ihm keine Verkäufergruppe steht, können Sie nicht das kaufen, was Sie sich erhoffen. Jetzt werden Waren zur Schau gestellt, jetzt werden die Armen versammelt: wir schätzen sie, an die sich die Motte nicht klammert, wir glauben, dass sie der Schatz sind, in den der Dieb nicht einbrechen kann. Lasst uns ihn durch sie in Sicherheit bringen, damit wir ihn dort in den Händen des Richters finden. Wir eilen zur Sündenvergebung, bevor das Gericht eingerichtet wird, wir korrumpieren den Richter, bevor der Richterstuhl festgelegt wird, wir bleiben nicht nackt vor allen Anwesenden im Gericht. Es ist besser, erst jetzt mit dem Richter zu sprechen, es ist im Moment einfach, die Schuld freizusprechen. Denn wenn das Licht mitten in der Nacht entzündet wird und die Herrlichkeit der Gerechten offenbar wird, können wir, nachdem wir den Bräutigam aufgehalten haben, ihm mit angezündeten Lampen entgegeneilen, damit wir, befreit vom Gericht, würdig sind das Brautgemach zu betreten und zusammen mit den Auserwählten

die unaussprechlichen Freuden in Christus Jesus, unserem Herrn, zu erben, dem die Ehre in Ewigkeit gebührt.<sup>3</sup>

Die Gleichsetzung von Öl mit Almosen und guten Werken gehört zur authentischen chrysostomischen Tradition, und sogar der paränetische Ton kontrastiert mit dem Stil von Elishē. Tatsächlich gehört die Passage zu einer langen Interpolation, die weder Elishē noch dem Hauptautor der Predigt zugeschrieben werden kann (vgl. Eliseo l'Armeno 2018, 216, fn. 140).

Die Manuskripttradition hat uns einen umfangreichen evangelischen Kommentar überliefert, der Step'anos Siwnec'i (8. Jh.) zugeschrieben wird. Sollte die Urheberschaft bestätigt werden, wäre es auch der erste systematische Kommentar zu unserem Gleichnis im armenischen Kontext (Step'anos Siwnec'i 2007, 213-14; Step'anos Siwnets'i 2014, 206-9). Der allegorische Kommentar von Step'anos hängt weitgehend von Origenes ab, der uns nur in einer lateinischen Übersetzung bekannt ist (Origenes 2004, 388-401). Da keine armenische Übersetzung von Origenes bekannt ist, bleibt die Frage, ob Step'anos den verlorenen griechischen Text von Origenes kannte oder ob die origenische Exegese durch die Vermittlung eines anderen, nicht identifizierbaren Autors zu ihm gelangte. Die zehn Jungfrauen sind Figuren der zehn Sinne, fünf körperliche und fünf spirituelle: Ժ կուսանք Ժ զգայութիւնք եւ ի մեզ, հինգ հոգեւորք եւ հինգ մարմնաւորք (vgl. Origenes 2004, 388: *dicimus sensus qui dicerunt divina ... quoniam virgines sunt virginificatae per Verbum Dei cui crediderunt*; δέκα παρθένους εἶναι φησι τὰς ἐν ἐκάστῃ ψυχῇ αἰσθησεις). Wer die körperlichen Sinne den spirituellen unterordnet, ist weise. Öl wird mit apostolischer und prophetischer Lehre identifiziert: Ժթ քանն առաքելական եւ մարգարեական (vgl. Origenes 2004, 392: *oleum ... id est verbum doctrinae et vasa animarum suarum ab hoc verbo implentes a doctoribus et traditoribus qui illum venundant*). Der Schrei, der mitten in der Nacht die Ankunft des Bräutigams

**3** Փութասցոյք այսուհետեւ աստէն ամբարել զգործս աւգտակարագոյնս առ հանդերձեալ յարութիւնն, զի մի՛ շիջեալ յապտերաւք ելցոյք ընդ առաջ փեսային. զի յորժամ կոչիցիմք ի գերեզմանացն, առ ձեռն պատրաստ գտցոյք գողորմութեան, եւդ, որով յապտերքն մեր պայծառանան: Չի ոչ է յետ այնորիկ ժողովք վաճառուք, ոչ ունիս գնել, զոր յուսասն: Այժմ է հանդէս վաճառաց, աստէն եւն աղքատացն ժողովքն, ի նոսա գանձեսցոյք, որ ոչ ցեց մերձենայ, նոցա հաւատասցոյք զգանձն, եւ ոչ գողն կարել ական հատանել, ի ձեռն նոցա դիցոյք ի պահեստի, զի անդ ի ձեռս դատաւորին գտցոյք: Ընթասցոյք առ յուծումն մեղացն սրագոյն քան զդնել ատենին, կաշառեսցոյք զդատաւորն նախ քան զդնել աթոռոյն, մի՛ կացցոյք մերկս ի հրապարակատես ատենին, լաւագոյն է այժմ միայն խաւսել ընդ դատաւորին, դիւրին է աստէն յուծանել զմեղադրանսն: Չի յորժամ ծագեսցէ յոյսն ի մէջ գիշերի, եւ երեսցի արդարոցն պարծանքն, այսինքն՝ յամեցեալ Փեսայն, կարասցոյք ժամանել ընդ առաջ նորա պայծառ յապտերաւք, զի ի դատաստանէն ապրեալք՝ առագաստին մտիցն լինիցիմք արծանի՝ ընդ հրաւիրեալսն ժառանգելով զանպատում ուրախութիւնսն ի Քրիստոս Յիսուս ի Տէր մեր, որում փառք յաւիտեանս.

ankündigt, kommt von den Engeln. Die Unmöglichkeit, die Öllampen wieder aufzufüllen, weist darauf hin, dass im Moment des Todes die Zeit für spirituelles Lehren und Lernen unwiederbringlich abgelaufen ist: յորժամ ժամանակ էր ուսանելոյ, չուսայք. արդ ժամանակիս վարդապետութիւնն անցեալ է (vgl. Origenes 2004, 398: *quando debuerunt quidem discere, neglexerunt discere aliquid utile ex eis a quibus discere debuerunt*). Obwohl Step‘anos sich nicht ausdrücklich auf Mönche bezieht, schafft der Verweis auf die Lehre (վարդապետութիւն), der von Origenes stammt, eine starke Bindung zu denen, die das Lernen der Lehre zu ihrem Lebenszweck gemacht haben. Tatsächlich dürfen wir nicht vergessen, dass die literarische Gattung des Kommentars, im Gegensatz zur Predigt, für die Ausbildung von Mönchen gedacht war.

Eine der originellsten Exegesen, die keinen Bezug zu anderen griechischen Quellen hat, ist die von Nersēs Lambronac‘i, die in seinem *Kommentar zur göttlichen Liturgie* aus dem Jahr 1177 enthalten ist. Der Kontext ist der der Einkleidungsriten, die der Liturgie vorausgehen (Nersēs Lambronac‘i 1847, 247-8; Nersēs de Lambron 2000, 54-5). Dieser Kontext bestimmt die Interpretation des Eingangs zum Altar, der typologisch mit dem himmlischen Thron und der eschatologischen Dimension verbunden ist. Der Priester bittet darum, gemeinsam mit den weisen Jungfrauen den Hochzeitssaal (das eucharistische Bankett) betreten zu dürfen. Die zehn Jungfrauen stellen diejenigen dar, denen das Siegel verliehen wird: կուսանք ընդ որս փափագէ մտանել են համադասակից նորա ժառանգաւորք եկեղեցւոյ՝ առակեալք ի կուսանք վասն անապական շնորհի պատուոյն որով կնքեցան. Es scheint sich hier nicht um das Siegel der Taufe, sondern um das der heiligen Weihen zu handeln, denn Nersēs führt weiter aus, dass unter der Zahl fünf der Bischof, der Priester, der Diakon, der Subdiakon und der Lektor bezeichnet werden, die der Ehre, die ihnen verliehen wird, würdig oder unwürdig sein können: բայց հինգ թիւ, եպիսկոպոս, քահանայ, սարկաւագ, կէս սարկաւագ, գրակարդաց. Die Lampen stellen somit die Würde dar, die mit den jeweiligen Graden der heiligen Weihen verbunden ist. Das Öl stellt jedoch die spirituelle Gnade dar, die die fünf törichten Jungfrauen zum Ruhm der Welt verschwendeten: ոմանք ի ւնցանէ ի հինգ դասուցս զշնորհն զոր ընկալան եւ զձէթ իշխանութեանն յայսմ աշխարհի ծախեցին, զի ոչ փութացան նովաւ ի փառս Աստուծոյ ըստ որում եւ ուխտեցին... այսինքն զի ի պատիւն որով ի հանդերձեալն էր նոցա խոստացեալ փայլել, յաշխարհ փայլեցան.

Der Kontrast zwischen der Herrlichkeit der Welt und der Herrlichkeit Gottes wird in Yovhannēs Corcorec‘i (1260-1355) eindringlich wiederkehren. Das Thema wird in dem in den Katenen enthaltenen Fragment von Cyrill von Alexandria angedeutet (Reuss 1957, 250, frg. 280): Δι’ ἑργῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐπὶ πλεόν ποιοῦντες ἐκλάμπειν τὴν ἕσωθεν δοθεῖσαν αὐτοῖς ἐκ θεοῦ φωτιστικὴν χάριν καὶ ὠφελοῦντες

καὶ ἑαυτοὺς καὶ ἑτέρους εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ. Aber Nersēs entwickelt es in einem hierarchischen Sinne. Er bezieht sich dann auf die weisen Jungfrauen, also auf jene Bischöfe und Priester, die die Gnade des Geistes konsequent bewahrten und aus diesem Grund von den Menschen empört und verbannt wurden:

բագունք զշնորհն զոր ընկալան՝ երկիւղիւ եւ զգուշութեամբ պահեցին եւ ոչ մարդկանէ նորին վասն փառաւորեցան. Այլ բագունք որպէս եւ ծանեալք զսրբոցն՝ արսորեցան եւ անարգեցան եւ զայս ամենայն արհամարհեալ միայն իւղոյն պատկառ կացեալ՝ զնոյն պահեցին.

Es ist ein Schicksal, das Nersēs selbst ereilen wird, der am Ende seines Lebens aufgrund seiner ökumenischen Annäherungsversuche von Prinz Lewon beschuldigt wird, ein Verräter am wahren Glauben und an der armenischen Kirche zu sein.

Wir bleiben jetzt im gleichen historischen Zeitraum und in der Region Kilikien. Aristakēs und Ep’rem (12. Jh.) sind die Nachfolger von Nersēs Šnorhali, Onkel von Nersēs Lambronac’i, und haben den Kommentar ihres Meisters zu Matthäus fertiggestellt (Petrosyan, Ter-Step’anyan 2002, 82-3). Wenn die Exegese von Step’anos Siwnec’i der von Origenes folgte, beschränken sich die beiden Autoren in diesem Fall darauf, Passagen aus Chrysostomus wörtlich wiederzugeben, ohne ihn zu zitieren (Hovsep’yan, Ter-Vardanyan 2013, 230-3). Der größte Teil stammt aus der armenischen Übersetzung des Kommentars zu Matthäus (Yovhannēs Oskeberan 1826, 76-80), mit kleineren Einfügungen aus der armenischen Übersetzung der pseudo-chrysostomischen Predigt *In decem virginum* (CPG 4580; Yovhannēs Oskeberan 1861, 744-50) und aus dem Kommentar zum *Diatessaron* von Ephräm der Syrer (Éphrem 1953, 266). Jungfräulichkeit wird im wörtlichen Sinne verstanden und Öl wird mit Almosen (ողորմութիւն) und Nächstenliebe (մարդասիրութիւն) gleichgesetzt. Alle mit der Jungfräulichkeit verbundenen Opfer nützen nichts, wenn sie nicht von den guten Werken der Nächstenliebe begleitet werden. Die einzige Möglichkeit, dieses Öl zu erhalten, bevor man im Tod einschläft, sind die Armen, die vor den Türen der Kirchen liegen.

Der nächste Kommentar ist viel komplexer und stammt aus dem Anfang des 14. Jahrhunderts. Der schon erwähnte Yovhannēs Corcorec’i (1260-1355) gehörte zu den Schülern von Esayi Nč’ec’i (1260-1338) in Glajor. Er arbeitete im Kloster Sankt Thaddäus in Mäku, wo die Franziskaner aktiv waren, wandte sich auch an die *Fratres Unitores* und er war auch Übersetzer des Heiligen Thomas (Casella 2024, 119-21). Daher hatte er nicht nur Zugang zu östlichen, sondern auch zu lateinischen Quellen. Der Kommentar von Yovhannēs Corcorec’i (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 545-53) präsentiert zahlreiche Interpretationen für jeden Vers, ohne die

Quellen anzugeben. Im Gegensatz zu Aristakēs, sind die Quellen überarbeitet und zusammengeführt, so dass es oft schwierig ist, die direkte Quelle zu erkennen. Die Exegese von Yovhannēs lässt sich nicht zusammenfassen, da er für jedes Element des Gleichnisses mehrere alternative Interpretationen anbietet. Wir gehen nur auf einige wichtige Punkte ein.

Das *incipit*, zum Beispiel, hängt eindeutig von der armenischen Übersetzung von Chrysostomus ab: er unterstreicht die Bedeutung der Jungfräulichkeit, die jedoch ihren Wert verliert, wenn das Almosenöl ausfällt. Hier führt Yovhannēs eine zweite Interpretation ein, die von Origenes stammt: die zehn Jungfrauen repräsentieren diejenigen, die den richtigen Glauben haben, die keusch in dieser Welt leben: *նշգաւենայն հոգւոց աւել, այլ զհաւատացեալ ուղղափառաց* (Yovhannēs Corcorec‘i 2009, 545), *qui recte credunt* bei Origenes (Origenes 2004, 388). Keuschheit erinnert an die Reinheit der zehn Sinne, fünf körperliche und fünf spirituelle. Die Allegorie der Sinne geht auf Origenes zurück, aber Yovhannēs entwickelt die Bedeutung der Zahl Zehn weiter und präsentiert mehrere Interpretationen. Diese Methode ähnelt der der mittelalterlichen lateinischen Kommentatoren, insbesondere Thomas von Aquin und Albert dem Großen, aber es gibt keine Beweise dafür, dass er diese Kommentare insbesondere kannte, obwohl er, wie wir gesehen haben, Thomas kannte. Zehn ist für Yovhannēs eine heilige und perfekte Zahl: *ասսն սուրբ է... ասսն կատարեալ թիւ է* (Yovhannēs Corcorec‘i 2009, 545), wie bei Origenes: *decem numerus ubique perfectus invenitur* (Hom. Lv. 13,4);<sup>4</sup> auch die Gebote des Gesetzes zehn sind, wie bei Hilarius von Poitiers: *absolute enim in quinque prudentibus et in quinque fatuis fidelium atque infidelium est constituta diuisio, quo exemplo Moyses decem uerba duabus tabulis conscripta acceperat* (In Mt. 27,3). Es kann auch die Welt (*ասսն աշխարհս է*), die menschliche Natur (*ասսն գրովանդակ բնութիւնս մարդկան կոչէ*) und die perfekte Natur Adams symbolisieren (*զկատարեալ բնութիւնս Ադամայ նշանակէ*). Weise sind diejenigen, die ihre Sinne rechtschaffen gehütet haben, andere sind töricht: *իմաստունն եւ յիմար զի նմանք ուղիղ վարին զգայութեամբն եւ նմանք թիւր* (Yovhannēs Corcorec‘i 2009, 546). Ein ähnliches Argument finden wir bei Methodius von Olympus (3.-4. Jh.): *Διὸ δὴ καὶ ἰσάριθμοι πρὸς πέντε διαιροῦνται, ἐπειδὴ περ τὰς πέντε αἰσθήσεις αἱ μὲν αὐτῶν ἐφυλάξαντο καθαρὰς καὶ παρθένους ἀμαρτημάτων, αἱ δὲ τοῦναντίον πλήθεσιν ἀδικημάτων ἐλωβήσαντο φυράσασαι κακίαν* (Symp. 6,3). Die Laternen symbolisieren die Jungfräulichkeit, die alle vereint: *կոյս լիներ... հասարակք հաւատարմ*

<sup>4</sup> Die gleiche Vorstellung von der Vollkommenheit der Zahl Zehn finden wir bei anderen griechischen Autoren, die unser Gleichnis kommentieren: Met. Ol., Symp. 6,2; Sev. Ant., Hom. 121.



Էին (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 546), wie bei Ephrām Syrer: իմաստութիւն ոչ գիւտութիւն նոցա անուանեաց, զի ահաւանիկ ամենեքին նոքա կուսանք Էին (vgl. Éphrem 1953, 266). Sie symbolisieren auch die gute Werke (գրքի գործն) oder die Lehre der Apostel und der *vardapetk’* (գլուսաւորութիւն վարդապետութեան առաքելոցն եւ վարդապետացն), wie bei Origenes: *accipientes oleum nutrimentum luminis sunt quod semper infunditur actibus bonis, id est verbum doctrinae et vasa animarum suarum ab hoc verbo implentes a doctoribus et traditoribus* (Origenes 2004, 392).<sup>5</sup>

Aber Yovhannēs fügt auch eine Interpretation hinzu, die sich auf die Heilsökonomie bezieht: die Jungfrauen, die sich erheben, um dem Bräutigam zu begegnen, sind diejenigen, die vor der Ankunft des Λόγος tugendhaft gelebt haben: նախ քան զգալուստ փեային բարձրացան առաքինութեամբ պատրաստելով զինքեանս գալստեանն նորա... զի բազումք յարաջ էլին ի կենցաղոյս նախ զգալուստ բանին (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 546). Der Hinweis auf den Λόγος stammt von Origenes, aber Yovhannēs scheint auf die Gerechten anzuspielen, die vor Christus lebten, während Origenes eine psychologische Allegorie präsentiert und sich auf die Sinne bezieht, die das Wort Gottes durch den Glauben annahmen:

*in omnibus qui didicerunt Verbum Dei, regnum caelorum adsimilatur virginibus decem ... Sensus omnium qui didicerunt divina, quomodocumque Verbum Dei receperunt, sive occasione sive veritate, quoniam virgines sunt virginificatae per Verbum Die cui crediderunt.* (Origenes 2004, 388)

Die armenische Bibel enthält eine Variante des griechischen Textes und fügt hinzu: „Sie gingen dem Bräutigam und der Braut entgegen“ (եւ ին ընդ առաջ փեայի և հարսին). Yovhannēs präsentiert verschiedene Interpretationen dieser Variante, darunter eine ekklesiologische: փեայ գՔրիստոս եւ հարսն գնախալարուցեալ սուրբսն եւ զյափշտակեալսն զոր եկեղեցի անդրանկաց աւե Պաւղոս, die auch von Origenes bezeugt wird: *veniunt in obviam Salvatori qui semper paratus est venire ad virgines eas ut simul ingrediat cum dignis eorum ad beatam sponsam ecclesiam* (Origenes 2004, 392); und eine christologische: փեայ զբանն աւե եւ հարսն զմարմինն (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 546), die auch bei Hilarius von Poitiers vorkommt: *sponsus atque sponsa, Dominus noster est in corpore Deus* (In Mt. 27,4).

Im Kontext der Inkarnation des Wortes fügt Yovhannēs auch eine Interpretation ein, die Juden (die törichten Jungfrauen, die zuerst

---

<sup>5</sup> Beachten Sie jedoch, dass Origenes die Lehre mit Öl und nicht mit Lampen identifiziert.

herauskamen) und Heiden (die weisen Jungfrauen) gegenüberstellt: յիմարացն նախ քարոզեցաւ բան հաւատոյն, որպէս հրէից երբեմն եւ ապա հեթանոսաց (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 548). Dieser Kontrast ist auch im Kommentar des Heiligen Hieronymus zu Matthäus vorhanden: *duos significant populos, christianorum et iudaeorum, sive sanctorum et peccatorum* (PL 26, 184). Dann das Öl wird, wie bereits bei Aristakēs und Ep’rem zu sehen ist, mit der Nächstenliebe (մարդասիրութիւն) gleichgesetzt (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 547), aber nicht nur das: der Mangel an Öl symbolisiert auch die Jungfräulichkeit ohne Almosen (զկուսութիւն առանց ողորմութեան), oder den Glauben ohne Werke (զհաւատ առանց գործոց) oder die guten Werke aus Ruhmsucht (զբարի գործոց փոխարէս գիտաւս ի մարդկանէ). Für Yovhannēs ist das Handeln zur Ehre Gottes oder zur Ehre des Menschen eines der grundlegenden Elemente der Unterscheidung zwischen klugen und törichten Jungfrauen: ոմն ի փառս Աստուծոյ, իսկ ոմն ի փառս մարդկան, վասն այսորիկ եւ անդ որոշեցան (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 552). Wir haben dieses Thema bereits in Nersēs Lambronac’i beobachtet. In Anlehnung an Origenes und Step’annos Siwnec’i, kommentiert Yovhannēs auf diese Weise die Weigerung der weisen Jungfrauen, ihr Öl aufzugeben (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 551): „Als es an der Zeit war zu lernen, lernte man nicht; jetzt ist die Zeit des Lernens vorbei“ (յորժամ ժամանակ էր ուսանելոյ, ոչ ուսայք. արդ ժամանկ վարդապետութեան անցեալ է).

Sowohl in Aristakēs (Hovsep’yan, Ter-Vardanyan 2013, 232) als auch in Yovhannēs werden die Verkäufer mit den Armen an den Kirchentüren identifiziert. Sie werden ‚spirituelle Schwalben‘ genannt: գնեցէր ի բանաւոր աղքատացն եւ ի հոգեւոր ծիծանցն, որք զհոգեւոր գարունն մեզ մարգարեանան ի դրուսն եկեղեցւոյ նստելով (Yovhannēs Corcorec’i 2009, 551). Die Metapher stammt von Pseudo-Chrysostomus ab (CPG 4580):

Τίνες οἱ πωλοῦντες; Οἱ ταῖς θύραις τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν παρακαθήμενοι πένητες, αἱ λογικαὶ χελιδόνες, αἱ τῶν ψυχῶν εὐαγγελιζόμεναι λογικὸν ἔαρ, οἱ αἰδέσιμοι πρὸς τὸν Δεσπότην μεσῖται, οἱ ἀήττητοι ῥήτορες ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς διαγνώσεως. (PG 59, 529; Yovhannēs Oskeberan 1862, 747)

Es ist interessant festzustellen, dass der *Physiologe* die Schwalbe mit der Askese des νοητὸς ἄνθρωπος in Verbindung bringt (Pitra 1855, 358).

Das letzte große Beispiel der armenischen patristischen Tradition ist das von Grigor Tat’ewac’i (1346-1409). Er sammelt die gesamte bisherige exegetische Tradition und stellt sie in Form von *Quaestiones et Responsiones* erneut vor, inspiriert von der westlichen Scholastik (Hovsep’yan, Ter-Vardanyan 2013, 242-50). Sein Kommentar bringt

jedoch nichts Neues zu unserem Thema und wiederholt lediglich die vorherige Exegese.

Zur ikonografischen Umsetzung des Gleichnisses bot Mantas einen umfassenden Überblick über die armenische Miniatur (Mantas 2010, 145-80). In den meisten Fällen spiegelt die armenische Ikonographie die traditionelle Ikonographie wider, die im gesamten Osten und Westen üblich ist, mit einer besonderen ekklesiologischen Konnotation, dargestellt durch die architektonische Struktur, in der die weisen Jungfrauen von Christus willkommen geheißen werden, und die ihre biblische Grundlage in der griechischen Variante ἐξῆλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου καὶ τῆς νύμφης findet. Diese Variante ging, wie wir gesehen haben, in den armenischen Text des Evangeliums über. Ein Beispiel für diese traditionelle Ikonographie (13. Jh.) ist das Manuskript 32.18, f. 159, Washington, Freer Gallery of Art **[Bild 1]**. Die armenische Ikonographie weist aber auch zwei völlig originelle Fälle auf, die seit langem die Aufmerksamkeit der Gelehrten auf sich ziehen.



**Bild 1** Washington, Freer Gallery of Art, MS 32.18, f. 159 (aus Mantas 2010, Tafel Num. 95)

Das Tympanon der Eingangstür zwischen dem *Gawit* und der Hauptkirche des Klosters Hovhannavank enthält in einer Lünette

ein Basrelief von großem Interesse.<sup>6</sup> Christus sitzt auf dem Thron: zu seiner Rechten werden fünf Figuren mit einer Kerze von ihm gesegnet; zu seiner Linken werden fünf weitere Figuren hinter einer Tür abgelehnt [Bild 2]. Es ist klar, dass es sich hierbei um eine eschatologische Neuinterpretation des berühmten Gleichnisses von den zehn Jungfrauen handelt (vgl. Mantas 2015). Allerdings haben die zehn Jungfrauen eindeutig Bärte! Diese Tatsache hat immer zu Verwirrung und Fragezeichen geführt, so dass die Lünette laut Paolo Cuneo lediglich Christus zwischen den Gerechten und den Verdammten darstellt (Cuneo 1988, 206-9).



**Bild 2** Hovhannavank' (Armenien), Tympanon der Hauptkirche

In Wirklichkeit ist dies kein Einzelfall: in einer Miniatur des Manuskripts M4806, f. 9r (Yerevan, Matenadaran), das der Kopist Yovsian (Géorgean 1998, 572-4; Zanone 2020; 2023) im Jahr 1308 in Vaspurakan kopiert und illuminiert hat (Xač'ikyan, Mat'evosyan, Łazarosyan 2018, 143-4), finden wir erneut Christus thronend mit zehn Männern [Bild 3].

---

**6** Das älteste Gebäude ist eine Basilika-förmige Kapelle aus dem 4.-5. Jahrhundert, die auf einer früheren heidnischen Kultstätte errichtet wurde. Die Hauptkirche mit einem eingravierten Kreuzplan wurde 1217 auf Geheiß des Fürsten Vačē Vačut'ean begonnen, 1221 fertiggestellt und 1734 umgebaut. Das Gawit' wurde zwischen 1247 und 1250 erbaut (Ghafadarian 1986).





Bild 3 Yerevan, Matenadaran, MS 4806, f. 9r (aus Mantas 2010, Tafel num. 100)

Das Vorhandensein des Heiligenscheins in allen zehn Figuren scheint nicht mit der Bedeutung des Gleichnisses übereinzustimmen. Die Erklärung muss wahrscheinlich in einer Passage aus dem Kommentar von Yovhannēs Corcorec‘i gesucht werden, in der der Autor angibt, dass sie alle Jungfräulichkeit hatten, dass sie alle die Lampe hatten, dass sie alle dem Bräutigam entgegengingen, sie also alle Heilige waren: քանզի կոյս լինել էւ զլանտերս ունել էւ ընդ առաջ էլանել հասարակք հաւասարք էին, այսինքն սուրբք էին էւ հաւատացեալք ամենեւեան (Yovhannēs Corcorec‘i 2009, 546).

Die griechische Tradition verbindet die Predigt des Pseudo-Chrysostomus (CPG 4580) mit dem Kardienstag, und die gleiche Verbindung finden wir auch in der *čarəntir* M993 (van Esbroeck, Zanetti 1977, 150). Die Bildunterschriften rund um die Darstellung unserer Miniatur lauten: „Am Dienstag ist der König in den Hochzeitssal eingekehrt und die klugen Jungfrauen traten mit brennenden Lampen heran“.

Aber warum Männer? Auf den ersten Blick fallen uns zwei Analogien ein. Die erste ist das hagiographische Modell der Männlichkeit der Märtyrerinnen, ein Modell, das seinen Archetyp in der Figur der Heiligen Perpetua hat (Mazzucco 1989, 122) und in Armenien in der Figur der Heiligen Hrip’simē (Pane 2015, 185-7), und das jedoch mit dem Ende der Verfolgungszeit endet, viele Jahrhunderte vor unseren

beiden Darstellungen.<sup>7</sup> Die zweite Analogie ist, die der verkleideten heiligen Nonnen, die in der byzantinischen und syrischen Literatur gut belegt ist und in der Figur der Heiligen Thekla einen eigenen Archetyp hat,<sup>8</sup> und seit dem Abschluss des *Thomasevangeliums* einige heterodoxe Entwicklungen kennt (Patlagean 1976; Monaca 2017): „Ich werde sie führen, um sie männlich zu machen, dass auch sie ein lebendiger Geist wird, der euch Männern gleicht. Denn jede Frau, die sich männlich macht, wird in das Königreich des Himmels eingehen“.

Der eschatologische Hinweis auf das Reich Gottes könnte eine weitere Analogie zu unserem Gleichnis darstellen, doch im *Thomasevangelium* geht es darum, die androgyne Vollkommenheit der Engel, des himmlischen ἀνθρώπου zu erreichen: eine Perspektive, die im Gleichnis völlig fehlt. Das Modell der Heiligkeit der als Männer verkleideten Nonnen, das aus diesem Konzept der Aufhebung der Weiblichkeit und Gegensätzen hervorgeht, ist zwischen dem 5. und 8. Jahrhundert bezeugt und verschwindet ab dem 9. Jahrhundert, als das Modell der ehelichen Heiligkeit und der weiblichen Klosterfiguren etabliert wurde. Wir sind sehr weit vom 13.-14. Jahrhundert unserer Darstellungen, und dieses hagiographische Modell scheint in Armenien nie erfolgreich gewesen zu sein. Außerdem ging es in diesem Fall um die Assimilation an Eunuchen und nicht an bärtige Gestalten! Wir glauben daher, dass die Erklärung unserer bärtigen Jungfrauen woanders gesucht werden muss.

Keine der bekannten allegorischen Interpretationen rechtfertigt die Anwesenheit von zehn bärtigen Männern anstelle der zehn Jungfrauen. Wie lässt sich dann diese einzigartige Ikonographie erklären? Mantas bringt, in seinem monumentalen Werk zur Ikonographie der Gleichnisse (Mantas 2010, 157), zwei mögliche Erklärungen vor:

Diese Art der Wiedergabe [...] könnte durch die Kommentare der Kirchenväter zum Gleichnis erklärt werden, die erwähnen, dass sich die Parabel an alle Menschen unabhängig von ihrem Geschlecht richtet, wie auch an die Priester. [...] Durch die Wiedergabe der Jungfrauen als männliche Figuren kommt dieser Parabel-Darstellung eventuell auch eine apostolische Dimension zu, durch die sich die Auswahl der Künstler erklären ließe. Die Positionierung des Reliefs in Hohannavak [sic] über dem Eingangsportal der Kirche könnte als Ziel haben, die Wirkung von Erfolg und Misserfolg der Taten der Priester zu veranschaulichen.

---

**7** Zur Darstellung von Frauen in der armenischen Literatur des 5. Jahrhunderts siehe Zakarian 2021.

**8** Zur Tradition der Heiligen Thekla in Armenien und der Beziehung zu den Heiligen Hrip'simēank' siehe: Calzolari 2022, 81-177; Hakobyan 2022.

Wir glauben, dass Mantas die richtige Erklärung verstanden hat, die jedoch weiterer Elemente bedarf. Die erste Beobachtung ist sprachlicher Natur und geht auf Zak'aryan zurück (1986-87, 423): das Fehlen des Geschlechts in der armenischen Sprache ermöglicht es uns, լուսաւոր sowohl als weiblich als auch als männlich zu interpretieren. Wir können sagen, dass dies die Bedingung der Möglichkeit ist, die unsere Ikonographie autorisiert, aber das reicht nicht aus, um sie zu erklären. Sowohl Zak'aryan als auch Der Manuelian (1984, 100) beziehen sich auch auf einen liturgischen Brauch im Zusammenhang mit dem Kardienstag, bei dem zehn Jungen als zehn Jungfrauen gekleidet werden. Wie wir gesehen haben, ist unser Gleichnis genau mit der Liturgie des Kardienstags verbunden. Beide Wissenschaftler hatten bereits den tiefen Zusammenhang dieser ungewöhnlichen Ikonographie mit dem männlichen klösterlichen Umfeld und der Liturgie verstanden.

Diese beiden kaum skizzierten Interpretationslinien wurden von Grigoryan entwickelt (Grigoryan 2023). Die Wissenschaftlerin geht von der engen Korrespondenz aus, die die armenische Theologie zwischen der himmlischen Kirche und dem Gebäude herstellt. Wenn es eine typologische, fast sakramentale Entsprechung zwischen dem himmlischen und dem irdischen Heiligtum gibt, wird die liturgische Funktion des *Gawit's* besser verstanden, das für Katechumenen und Büsser gedacht ist, die das eschatologische Warten im Geheimnis und im Laufe der Zeit leben, in der Hoffnung, die Schwelle des irdischen Heiligtums heute und des himmlischen Heiligtums nach dem Tod zu überschreiten. Dieser Zusammenhang zwischen dem reuigen Volk, den Katechumenen und der eschatologischen Dimension wird durch den Brauch bestätigt, die Toten im *Gawit'* zu begraben. Grigoryan erinnert auch an den Ritus der Öffnung der Kirchentüren am Palmabend, bei dem das Gleichnis von den zehn Jungfrauen einen der wichtigsten liturgischen Texte darstellte (Findikyan 2010). Während der Fastenzeit wurden nicht nur Katechumenen und Büsser, sondern auch Gläubige und nicht feiernde Geistliche aus der Kirche verbannt. Das Flachrelief von Hovhannavank', das sich direkt an der Tür zwischen dem *Gawit'* und der Kirche befindet, könnte genau im Lichte des Ritus der Türöffnung am Palmentag erklärt werden. Laut Grigoryan,

Zakaryan's view that the Hovanavank' scene served didactic purposes addressed to the local clergy can be reconsidered, for this element may in actuality evoke performances of religious rituals that involved all members – and genders – of the community rather than merely the clergy. (2023, 122)

Die liturgische und eschatologische Dimension, die mit der Ikonographie des Gleichnisses verbunden ist, ist eine unbestreitbare

Tatsache. Insbesondere der Zusammenhang mit dem Katechumenat ist durch die exegetische Überlieferung belegt. Gregor von Nazianz, *Or.* 40,46 (*SCh* 358, 308), wendet sich an die Katechumenen, indem er auf unser Gleichnis anspielt:

Die Haltung, die Sie nach der Taufe einnehmen werden, [...] ist ein Vorgeschmack auf zukünftige Herrlichkeit [...] Die Lampen, die Sie anzünden werden, sind das Geheimnis der Erleuchtung, die von oben kommt, mit der wir dem Bräutigam entgegengehen, wir strahlenden und jungfräulichen Seelen, mit den herrlichen Lampen des Glaubens.

Ἡ στάσις, ἣν αὐτίκα στήσῃ μετὰ τὸ βάπτισμα ... τῆς ἐκεῖθεν δόξης ἐστὶ προχάραγμα [...] Αἱ λαμπάδες, ὥσπερ ἀνάψεις, τῆς ἐκεῖθεν φωταγωγίας μυστήριον, μεθ' ἧς ἀπαντήσομεν τῷ νυμφίῳ φαιδραὶ καὶ παρθένοι ψυχαί, φαιδραῖς ταῖς λαμπάσι τῆς πίστεως.

Sogar die Predigt 121 des Severus von Antiochien, die an die Katechumenen gerichtet ist, basiert vollständig auf der Exegese unseres Gleichnisses (*PO* 29, 95-101). Es besteht auch kein Zweifel daran, dass sich die zehn Jungfrauen auf die gesamte Menschheit, Männer und Frauen, beziehen, wie Augustinus, *Enarr. in Ps.* 147,10, erklärte: *Ergo dicitur virgo tota Ecclesia et masculino genere appellatur populus Dei* (*CCL* 40,2146). Dass sich das Gleichnis auf die gesamte Menschheit bezieht, wird auch von Grigor Tat'ewac'i wiederholt:

Հարց. Ո՞րք են ժ. կուսանք: Պատասխանի. Ա. նախ՝ ամենայն ազգ մարդկան՝ չարք եւ բարիք, որպէս ժ. դրամն եւ զմինն կորուսեալ: Բ. Երկրորդ՝ ամենայն հաւատացեալք արդարք եւ մեղաւորք, ժ. մնասն եւ քանքարն: Գ. երրորդ՝ իւրաքանչիւր մարդ. (Hovsep'yan, Ter-Vardanyan 2013, 243)

Diese liturgisch-eschatologische Beziehung gilt jedoch für die gesamte ikonografische Tradition, sowohl im Westen als auch im Osten, reicht jedoch nicht – unserer Meinung nach – aus, um den Einzelfall der bärtigen Jungfrauen zu erklären. Die von uns untersuchte exegetische Tradition führt uns dazu, den klösterlichen Kontext zu überdenken, in dem diese Darstellungen entstanden sind. Das heißt, wir glauben, dass die exegetische Analyse die Intuition von Zak'aryan und Der Manuelian bestätigt.

Wie wir gesehen haben, gibt es zahlreiche Beispiele für diese männliche klösterliche Interpretation. Bereits die ältesten Zitate des Gleichnisses deuten in diese Richtung: im *Yačaxapatum* wird das Öl des Gleichnisses zum Geist der Gemeinschaft und des Gehorsams innerhalb des männlichen Klosters; Elišē wendet das Gleichnis auf



die Priester an, die im Begriff sind, den Märtyrertod zu erleiden. Es stimmt zwar, dass wir in diesem Fall von Mönchen, aber nicht von Priestern sprechen; Elišēs Werke stammen jedoch aus seiner Zeit als Mönch und einige von ihnen richten sich an die Mönche selbst (Eliseo l'Armeno 2022, 372-439). Wir haben gesehen, dass es im griechischen Kontext mindestens zwei Präzedenzfälle gibt: das *De instituto christiano* von Gregor von Nyssa, wo von Mönchen die Rede ist, und Fragment 280 des Matthäuskommentars von Kyrill von Alexandria, wo er von Hegumenoi spricht.

Die *Geschichte* des Lazarus von P'arpi endet mit der Rede des *Kat'olikos* Yovhannēs Mandakuni anlässlich der Ernennung von Vahan Mamikonean zum *Marzpan* Armeniens. Der *Kat'olikos* ermahnt diejenigen, die den ganzen Tag damit verbracht haben, den göttlichen Weinberg zu kultivieren, der in die Seelen der Menschen gepflanzt wurde, nicht wie törichte Jungfrauen ohne Öl zur Hochzeit zu erscheinen:

Եւ մի՛ առանց իւղ բառնալոյ ընդ անմիտ կուսանսն ճանապարհորդիցէք ի հարսանիսն. գուցէ փակիցի դուռնն, եւ մնայցէք ամաւթալից արտաքոյ: Եւ մանաւանդ դուք, որ զամենայն ցերեկութեանն աշխատութիւն, զտաւթոյ, զքրտան, զվաստակոյ եւ զտեւողութեան յաստուածային յազեցործութեան տնկելոյ յոգւոջ ուրուք. (Łazar P'arpec'i 2003, 2375; 1991, 245)

Laut Step'anos Siwnec'i stellt das Öl jedoch das apostolische und prophetische Wort dar. Deshalb wendet er sich mit folgenden Worten an die törichten Jungfrauen: „Als es an der Zeit war zu lernen, hast du nicht gelernt; jetzt ist die Zeit des Lehrens (վարդապետութիւն) vorbei“ (Step'anos Siwnec'i 2007, 214; Step'anos Siwnets'i 2014, 206-9). Obwohl diese Interpretation von Origenes stammt, ist es möglich dies zu vermuten, dass der Kommentator die Gemeinschaften der Mönche und ihren Bildungsweg im Auge hat. Außerdem spielt ein dem Heiligen Antonius gewidmeter Akrostichon auf das Gleichnis an und bezieht sich auf die Mönche, die bei brennender Lampe auf die Stimme des Bräutigams warteten (Ganjaran 2008, 245). Im Kontext der männlichen klösterlichen Interpretation können wir auch den Schluss von *Ban 7.* von Gregor von Narek hinzufügen, der sich mit einer der törichten Jungfrauen identifiziert:

Վայ ինձ առ ելս անարժան հոգւոյս յեղկելի մարմնոյս, | Ի՞բր դատաւորին յանդիմանեցայց: | Վայ ինձ առ նուագութիւն իւղոյն լապտերաց, | Չի անարժարժելի է աղաւտանալն, | Վայ ինձ առ ճեպ տագնապի ահին պակուցման, | Յորժամ առագաստին մուտն փակեցի, | Վայ ինձ առ ձայնին ահաւորութիւն | Դողացուցաց եւ սարսափեւեացն բանից՝ | Երկնաւոր թագաւորին վճռան կնքելոյ, | Թէ՛ Ոչ գիտեմ զքեզ:

Schließlich müssen wir auch die mögliche Kontamination mit Lk 12,35-8 berücksichtigen, wo wir Diener finden, die mit brennenden Lampen Wache halten und auf die Rückkehr des Bräutigams warten. Die beiden Passagen werden durch den Lukaskommentar von Sargis Kund (12. Jh.) explizit in Beziehung gesetzt: Չգուշացուիք գալստեանսն նորա, որպէս զիմաստունն կուսանսն, որք պայծառ լապտերաւք պատրաստ մտին յառագաստ Տեառն իւրեանց վաղվաղակի (Sargis Kund 2005, 300).

Angesichts der Besonderheit der armenischen Sprache, die nicht nach Geschlechtern unterscheidet, und angesichts des männlichen klösterlichen Kontextes, in dem dieses Gleichnis interpretiert wurde, erscheinen die Darstellungen der bärtigen Jungfrauen von Hovhannavank' und Yovsian weniger exzentrisch, bleiben aber dennoch sehr eigen in der christlichen Ikonographie. Die ersten Zuschauer des Basreliefs waren genau sie, die Mönche, die vor der Tür des irdischen Heiligtums darauf warteten, die Schwelle des himmlischen Heiligtums zu überschreiten. Sie wurden zum Geist der Gemeinschaft im Kloster (vgl. *Yačaxapatum*) aufgerufen, um die Würde ihres eigenen heiligen Ordens zu wahren, um vor dem weltlichen Geist zu flohen (vgl. Lambronac'i), um die himmlische Lehre zu erlernen (vgl. Siwnec'i), solange die Zeit verging Genehmigungen.

## Bibliografie

- Calzolari, V. (2022). *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles in Armenian*. Leuven; Paris; Bristol: Peeters.
- Casella, A. (2024). „Bartolomeo de Podio (da Bologna) e la Scuola teologica tomista dei ‘Fratres Unitores’ in Armenia tra il XIV e il XV secolo. Un caso di interculturazione?“. *Divus Thomas*, 127.
- Cuneo, P. (1988). *Architettura armena*, Band 1. Roma: De Luca.
- Der Manuelian, L. (1984). „Armenian Sculptural Images Part II: Seventh to Fourteen Centuries“. Samuelian, T.; Stone, M. (eds), *Medieval Armenian Culture*. Chico (CA): Scholars Press, 96-119.
- van Esbroeck, M.; Zanetti, U. (1977). „Le manuscrit Érévan 993. Inventaire des pièces“. *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, 12, 123-67.
- Findikyan, M.D. (2010). „The ‘Opening of the Door’ Ceremony on Palm Sunday in the Armenian Church“. Ross, M.C.; Jones, S. (eds), *The Serious Business of Worship. Essays in Honour of Bryan D. Spinks*. London; New York: T&T Clark, 22-41.
- Gēorgean, A. (1998). *Hay manrankarič'ner matenagitut' iwn IX-XIX dd*. Kairo: Gahirē.
- Ghafadarian, K. (1986). „Il monastero di Hovhannavank“. *K'asakhi Vank'er*. Milano: Oemme, 5-9. Documenti di architettura armena 15.
- Grigoryan, G. (2023). „The Construction of Sacred Spaces in Thirteenth-Century Armenia: Liminal Experience and Spiritual Expectations within the Gawit“. Bacci, M. et al. (eds), *Approaches to Sacred Space(s) in Medieval Subcaucasian Cultures*. Rome; Brno; Viella: Masaryk University Press, 101-37.
- Hakobyan, Z. (2022). „Saint Thecla: The Iconographical Tradition and the Witnesses of Her Veneration in Early Medieval Armenia“. Dorfmann Lazarev, I. (ed.), *Sharing*

- Myths, Texts and Sanctuaries in the South Caucasus. Apocryphal Themes in Literature, Arts and Cults from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages.* Leuven; Paris; Bristol (CT): Peeters, 249-76.
- Hovsep'yan, L.; Ter-Vardanyan, G. (2013). *Avetaranakan arakneri meknout'youwnner.* Ėjmiacin: Mayr At'oř.
- Xač'ikyan, L.; Mat'evosyan, A.; ĩazarosyan, A. (2018). *Hayerēn jeřagreri hiřatakaranner, řD dar, masn A (1301-1325),* Band 1. Yerevan: Nairi publishing house.
- Körkel-Hinkfoth, R. (1994). *Die Parabel von den klugen und törichten Jungfrauen (Mt. 25, 1-13) in der bildenden Kunst und im geistlichen Schauspiel.* Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Leloir, L. (1967). *Citations du Nouveau Testament dans l'ancienne tradition arménienne. L'évangile de Matthieu, XIII-XXVIII.* Louvain: Peeters. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 284, Subsidia 32.
- Malxasyan, A. (2005). *Astvacařunč' est Hay Matenagrut'yan (hay ink'nuruyn grakanut'yun, 5-12 dd.).* Band 1, *Nor Ktakaran.* Yerevan: Armenian Biblical Society.
- Mantas, A.G. (2010). *Die Ikonographie der Gleichnisse Jesu in der ostkirchlichen Kunst (5.-15.- Jh.).* Leiden: Alexandros Press.
- Mantas, A.G. (2015). „Parables and Eschatology in Eastern Christian Art“. *Cahiers archéologiques fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Āge*, 56, 45-56.
- Marin, M. (1981). *Ricerche sulla esegesi agostiniana della parabola delle dieci vergini (Mt 25, 1-13).* Bari: EdiPuglia.
- Marin, M. (2002). „La parabola delle vergini da Origene ai Cappadoci“. Girardi, M.; Marin, M. (a cura di), *Origene e l'Alessandrinismo Cappadoce (III-IV secolo).* Bari: EdiPuglia, 243-54.
- Mazzucco, C. (1989). „E fui fatta maschio“. *La donna nel Cristianesimo primitivo.* Firenze: Le Lettere.
- Monaca, M. (2017). „Uomo, donna o eunuco? Tra vite da monaci e sante travestite“. Furnari, M.G. (a cura di), *Identità di genere e differenza sessuale. Percorsi di studio.* Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 139-47.
- Pane, R. (2015). „Pour une interprétation théologique d'Agathange“. *Sacra Doctrina*, 60, 173-95.
- Patlagean, E. (1976). „L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance“. *Studi Medievali*, 17, 597-623.
- Petrosyan, E.; Ter-Step'anyan, A. (2002). *S. Grk'i Hayeren Meknut'yunneri Matenagitut'yun.* Yerevan: Armenian Biblical Society.
- Pitra, J.B. (1855). *Spicilegium Solesmense*, Band 3. Parisiis: Firmin Didot.
- Pomarici, F. (2023). „Misericordia, letizia, sapienza. Alcuni aspetti delle vergini sagge e stolte del vangelo di Matteo“. *Quaderni di storia religiosa medievale*, 26, 57-101.
- Reuss, J. (1957). *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche.* Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Schmidt, C.; Wajnberg, I. (1919). *Gespräche Jesu mit seinen Jüngern nach der Auferstehung.* Leipzig: Hinrichs.
- Watson, F. (2020). *An Apostolic Gospel: The ‚Epistula Apostolorum‘ in Literary Context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series Book 179.
- Zakarian, D. (2021). *Women, Too, Were Blessed. The Portrayal of Women in Early Christian Armenian Texts.* Leiden: Brill.
- Zak'aryan, L. (1986-1987). „Un bas-relief de Yovhannavank“. *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, 20, 419-26.
- Zanone, R. (2020). *Le scene della Passione di Cristo nella miniatura armena del Vaspurakan (secc. XIII-XIV), con uno studio iconografico sulla produzione dell'artista Yovsian* [tesi di dottorato]. Roma: Università degli Studi di Roma Tre.

Zanone, R. (2023). „Le storie dei Vangeli apocrifi nelle miniature dei manoscritti armeni del Vaspurakan (secc. XIII-XVI). Alcuni *case studies*“. Ferrari, A. et al. (a cura di), *L'arte armena e oltre. Nuovi contributi*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 101-32. *Studies in Armenian and Eastern Christian Art 2022*, Eurasiatica, Quaderni di studi su Balcani, Anatolia, Iran, Caucaso e Asia Centrale 20.

## Quellen

- Eliseo l'Armeno (2018). *Omellie e scritti teologici*, traduzione e note a cura di R. Pane. Bologna: Edizioni San Clemente – Edizioni Studio Domenicano.
- Eliseo l'Armeno (2022). *Storia di Vardan e compagni martiri*, traduzione e note di R. Pane. Bologna: Edizioni San Clemente – Edizioni Studio Domenicano.
- Éphrem (1953). *Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant*. Ed. L. Leloir. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 137. Lovanii: Peeters.
- Ganjaran (2008). *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, Band 13. Antelias Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia.
- Gregor von Nyssa (1952). *Gregorii Nysseni opera*. Cur. W. Jaeger, Band 8.1. Leiden: Brill.
- Łazar P'arpec'i (1991). *The History of Łazar P'arpec'i*. Translated by R.W. Thomson. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Łazar P'arpec'i (2003). *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, Band 2. Antelias Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia.
- Nersès de Lambron (2000). *Explication de la Divine Liturgie*, par I. Kéchichian. Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq éditeurs.
- Nersēs Lambronac'i (1847). *Xorhrdacut'iwnk' i kargs Eketec'woy ew Meknut'iwn xorhrdoy pataragin*. Venedig: Surb Łazar.
- Origenes (2004). *Commento a Matteo*, vol. 1. Roma: Città Nuova.
- Sargis Kund (2005). *Meknut'iwn awetaranin Łukasü*. Ėjmiacin: Mayr At'oř.
- Step'anos Siwnec'i (2007). *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, Band 6. Antelias Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia.
- Step'anos Siwnets'i (2014). *Commentary on the four Evangelists*. Transl. by M.B. Papazian. New York: SIS Publications.
- Yačaxapatum (2003). *Matenagirk' Hayoc'*, Band 1. Antelias Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia.
- Yačaxapatum (2021). *Moralia et Ascetica Armeniaca. The Oft-Repeated Discourses*, translated by A. Terian. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Yovhannēs Corcorec'i (2009). *Meknut'iun awetarani or əst Matt'ēi*. Ėjmiacin: Mayr At'oř.
- Yovhannēs Oskeberan (1862). *Meknut'iwn T'tt'oc' Pōłosi*, Band 2. Venedig: Surb Łazar.

# Yovasap' of Sebastia: From Adam to Noah and the Tower

**Dina Blokland**

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Nathan Daniel**

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Shlomi Efrati**

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**David Neagu**

University of Bucharest; Institute for South-East European Studies, Romanian Academy, Romania

**Michael Stone**

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**William Walk**

Harvard University, USA

**Abstract** In this article we present an annotated edition and translation of a poem probably written by Yovasap' Sebastac'i (ca. 1510-after 1564). Member of a longer cycle of biblical retellings in verse, it narrates the history of the world from Adam down to the Tower of Babel. At points, Yovasap' departs from the biblical narrative to offer homiletic or typological elaborations, and shows a deep familiarity with numerous parabiblical traditions. The poem is a fine specimen of the Armenian embroidered Bible, and attests to the ways biblical and parabiblical traditions were accepted and developed in the Armenian literary sphere.

**Keywords** Yovasap' of Sebastia (Sebastac'i). Biblical retelling. Parabiblical traditions. Armenian Medieval poetry. Typology. Pseudepigrapha.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Text and Translation.



Submitted 2025-04-27  
Published 2025-12-12



## Open access

© 2025 Blokland, Daniel, Efrati, Neagu, Stone, Walk | © 4.0



**Citation** Blokland, D.; Daniel, N.; Efrati, S.; Neagu, D.; Stone, M.; Walk, W. (2025). "Yovasap' of Sebastia: From Adam to Noah and the Tower". *Armeniaca*, 4, 47-66.

DOI 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/003

## 1 Introduction

This poem is found in Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS or. quart. 805, ff. 278r-279r.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript is comprised of 317 folios in various hands and, on palaeographic grounds, is to be dated to the seventeenth century. It is written in *bolorgir* script on paper.<sup>1</sup>

The orthography shows many of the variant spellings encountered in mediaeval Armenian manuscripts, and moreover, is inconsistent in that variation. Such variations may be seen in other mediaeval manuscripts, but in SBB or. quart. 805 they are rather prominent. Thus, on some occasions ի > է, but not always. Other variations include:

-եց / -եաց  
կ / ք  
նկ / նգ  
չ / ջ  
-ւ / -վ  
-ւնց / -նց, etc.

In addition to these changes the text also occasionally attests to mediaeval Armenian forms, for instance in stanza 12 line 1: վրայ ջրին.

This poem is a member of a longer cycle of poems which together form a verse retelling of biblical stories. This piece, on the period from Adam to the period directly after the Tower of Babel, is immediately followed by a poem on Abraham,<sup>2</sup> which is followed in turn by a similar poem on Jacob, Joseph, and the patriarchs. It is desirable, of course, that the whole poetic composition, of which the Adam, Abraham, and Jacob poems are sections, be published. The same manuscript also preserves other works including the *History of Alexander* as well as demonological texts. It also contains a number of illustrations, none of which relates to the biblical stories.

Stanza 30 of the poem published here mentions “Yovasap’” as the author. The only poet of this name mentioned in Bardakjian’s

---

The authors are members of the Jerusalem Advanced Armenian Reading Group, guided by Michael E. Stone. Stone prepared a preliminary edition of the poem, which was then verified, completed, and revised by the other authors in 2023-24. Scholarly responsibility is borne jointly.

**1** See Assfalg, Molitor 1962, no. 23, 93-100.

**2** The Abraham poem bears the title, “Poem on Abraham, Isaac, Melchizedek, and Lot”, and has been published in *Arm Apoc* 3, 86-93.

*Reference Guide* and Pogharian's *Armenian Writers*<sup>3</sup> is Yovasap' Sebastac'i (ca. 1510-after 1564). In his discussion of the works of Yovasap', Bardakjian does not mention a rhymed biblical retelling; nonetheless, the text of the poem makes clear that Yovasap' is the author of the poem.<sup>4</sup> A study of Yovasap's biography, accompanied by publication of much of his poetic corpus, was published V.P. Gevorgyan in 1964. In that work, though he mentions the Berlin manuscript and gives a full description of it, based on a re-examination of the manuscript in microfilm format and including listing of the biblical cycle, he does not publish the poems themselves. He assents to the view that it is an autograph of Yovasap's.

Our primary purpose in this paper, however, is not to resolve literary problems nor to study Yovasap's poetry in its own right. That would be best done in conjunction with the publication of the whole biblical cycle. Here, we make available this retelling of the traditions relating to the antediluvian history, as retold in poetic form by Yovasap', which is closely related to Armenian narrative parabiblical texts devoted to the same topic. It is significant to note that whole lines of this poem are incomprehensible without knowledge of those parabiblical traditions. This indicates how widely the Armenian parabiblical traditions circulated. Thus, Yovasap' sometimes simply alludes, by the way, to parabiblical incidents that were apparently quite familiar to his readers.

In addition to such parabiblical embroideries, Yovasap' departs from the biblical details to make homiletic or typological points. Instances of this are pointed out in the notes to the translation below. That is another indication of his approach to the biblical text.

The poem is written in monorhyme. The rhyme is in -hũ (stanzas 1-8) and -uũ (9-32). In the manuscript, coloured initials mark the beginning of each stanza.

---

**3** Bardakjian 2000, 35-8; Pogharian 1971, 453-6. See also Ačařyan, HAB, 3:535. This poem is not mentioned by Abeghian 1955.

**4** Bardakjian 2000, 35-8. Prof. Henrik Bakhchinyan has confirmed Yovasap' Sebastac'i's authorship of this biblical cycle (personal communication with Michael Stone).

## 2 Text and Translation

Ոտանաւոր յԱդամայ հետէ մինչեւ ի Նոյ եւ Յաշտարակն. տուն L. (30)  
Poem from Adam up to Noah and the Tower (30 stanzas)  
Yovasap' Sebastac'i<sup>5</sup>

Ելեալ եւ բնակեր Ադամ դեմ դրախտին, 1  
Տրտմութեամբ վաստակեր գերկիր ի գործին.  
Ծնեալ ուստեր դստեր կնոջն Եւային,  
Մինչ Բ.(2) քառասուն համարով թվին.

Adam went forth and dwelt opposite the Garden.  
Sadly, he toiled in working the earth.<sup>6</sup>  
Eve, his wife, bore sons and daughters  
Until they were twice forty by count.<sup>7</sup>

Իսկ չարն, որ նախ էհան գԱդամ ի դրախտին.<sup>8</sup> 2  
Գրգրեց<sup>9</sup> գԿայեն նախանձ Աբելին.  
Վասն հաճոյ զոհին յանուն Արարչին,  
Եւ նա եսպան զՀաբել յարօտ ոչխարին.

**5** The text was collated by Michael E. Stone and verified by William Walk. Donna Shalev has read the whole and contributed in several important ways and Th. M. van Lint provided, as he has so often in the past, several very insightful interpretations. Matthew Wilson formatted the file.

**6** Observe that agriculture was seen as directly following the Expulsion. This was doubtless understood as a fulfilment of the curse in Gen 3, 17-19. This connection was already made, it seems, in the Armenian *Life of Adam and Eve (Penitence of Adam)* and *Georg* 20:1b. It is shown very strikingly in the frescos of the Adam Cycle in Sucevița (Bukovina): see Stone, Timotin 2023, 119-20 and in Western Europe in the illustrations of Lutwin's *Adam and Eve Codex Vindob.* 2980, f. 23v: see Halford 1980. This undesirable association of agriculture linked Adam's curse and Cain's being a farmer in Gen 4, 2. In the Slavonic and Romanian *LAE*, Satan presents himself as lord of the earth and berates Adam for working it without permission: see Stone, Timotin 2023, 77 and fnn. 20 and 21 there.

**7** The number 80 (2 × 40) is strange. The meaning seems to be that Eve bore twins, a boy and a girl, in each pregnancy; cf. *History of the Forefathers* §29 in *Arm Apoc* 2, 195, where only sixty children and thirty pregnancies are mentioned. See further the references in Stone 1996, 195 fn. 1. In other sources, in Armenian and other language parabiblica, the span of 30 years between the births of Cain and Abel is usual: see *Arm Apoc* 2, 92-3; *Arm Apoc* 7, §9.5 and notes there. As it stands, the poem seems to suggest that Eve bore 80 children prior to Cain's murder of Abel, whereas the biblical text apparently states otherwise (see Gen 4,25 and 5,4).

**8** Here the definite ablative ending -իւ becomes -իմ because of the exigencies of the monorhyme. On several other occasions, Yovasap' changes suffixes for the same reason, as will be pointed out below.

**9** Deviant orthography of գոգոնե(ա)ց:.



Then the Evil One,<sup>10</sup> who before brought Adam out of the  
[Garden,  
Excited Cain's enmity of Abel,  
On account of the pleasing sacrifice<sup>11</sup> to the Creator's Name,<sup>12</sup>  
And he killed Abel in the sheep's pasture.<sup>13</sup>

Իսկ Ադամ եւ որդիքն իւր արտուլ կային, 3  
Ոչ իշխէին յիշել զանունն Արարչին.  
Մինչեւ Էնոսկս կոչեց զՏէր յօգնութիւն.  
Յուսացո եւ Էառ մարգարէութիւնն:

Then Adam and his sons were sad,  
They could not remember the Creator's Name,  
Until Enosh called upon the Lord for help,<sup>14</sup>  
He hoped, and he received the prophetic (gift).<sup>15</sup>

Ասաց Բ. (2) անկամ աշխարհ կործանին, 4  
Մինն հրով լինի եւ մինն ջրին.<sup>16</sup>  
Ծինեաց Բ.(2) արձան, կաւ եւ պղնձին,

**10** This is a common designator for Satan: see Stone, Timotin 2023, 86 fn. 63 and examples there.

**11** See Gen 4, 3-5. The role of Satan in inspiring Cain to kill Abel is to be found highlighted in the story of the two ravens whom Satan sent to mime the technique of killing in the *Cycle of Four Works* in Recension 2 of *Abel and Cain* §§26-8: see Lipscomb 1990, 272-3 and *Arm Apoc* 7, Annotation 19 'The Raven'. See another version of this story in *Abel and Other Pieces* §3.4 (*Arm Apoc* 2, 148). Satan incites Cain to murder Abel on account of his pleasing sacrifice (among other things) also in the *Cave of Treasure* 5:27, as well as in an unedited Syriac homily attributed to Isaac of Antioch. See Glenthøj 1997, 126-7; 280-1.

**12** This sort of hypostatization of the divine Name is not common in Armenian texts. It is present here because of the way Yovasap', or the traditions upon which he drew, interpreted: "[a]t that time people began (literally: it was begun) to call upon the name of the LORD" in Gen 4, 26. "That time" was the birth of Enosh, son of Seth, and exegetes inferred from the phrase "began to call" that previously, the name of the Lord was forgotten. However, the way "Name" is introduced in 2.3 here shows that it was taken as some sort of hypostasis, to which a sacrifice could be made.

**13** See Gen 4.8. For various traditions concerning the place of the murder, see Glenthøj 1997, 148, but the precise motif found here is not mentioned there. Observe the association of Abel with sheep and fields; after all, he was the shepherd (Gen 4.2). Abel's sacrificial sheep came to play a special role in Armenian parabiblica: see *Arm Apoc* 7, Annotation 15 'Abel's Sheep'.

**14** According to Gen 4.26 [Arm] (following the Septuagint): "He [Enosh] hoped to call upon the name of the Lord God". Compare the similar wording in *History of the Forefathers* §34: "And Enosh hoped to call the name of the Lord God. For, up to him, none was able to call (նչ որ իշխէր կոչել; alternatively: dared to call) the name of the Lord God" (*Arm Apoc* 2, 196-7).

**15** On Enosh, see Fraade 1984; 2002.

**16** The declension in -ի is found in Middle Armenian and, of course, fits the monorhyme here.

Գրեաց զհւր յիշատակն փորեալ յերկոսին.

He said that the earth would be destroyed twice,<sup>17</sup>  
Once being by fire and the other by water.  
He built two pillars,<sup>18</sup> of clay and of bronze,  
He engraved his memory on them both.<sup>19</sup>

Թէ հուրն յառաջ տայցէ, պղինձն հալին. 5  
Իսկ / fol. 278v / կաւն ամրացեալ թրծեալ մնացին,  
Եւ թէ ջուրն գայցէ, կաւն ապականին.  
Իսկ պղինձն մնայ եւ գիրն ի նմին:

If the fire will be given first, the bronze will melt,  
But the clay being baked, strengthened will survive.  
And should the water come, the clay will be deformed,  
But the bronze will remain and the writing on it.

Իսկ Էնոփս, որ փոխեաց Ստեղծողն ի դրախտին, 6  
Վասն այն, զի նա պահեաց զպատուերն Ադամին.  
Տնկեաց այգի, գործեաց ի հասս նորին,  
Եարթանասուն տարի ծառայեց նմին.

Then Enosh,<sup>20</sup> whom the Creator transferred to the Garden,<sup>21</sup>

---

**17** The tradition of two floods and stelae appears also in *History of the Forefathers* §§41-4 (*Arm Apoc* 2, 199-200); *Abel and Other Pieces* §4.4 (*Arm Apoc* 2, 151); *Short Questionnaire* §10.7 (*Arm Apoc* 7). It is attested in Josep., *Antiquities* 1.70-1 as well as in Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* (*LAE*) §§49-50, and numerous other Jewish and Christian sources. The Armenian sources stand out in attributing the prophecy of the two floods to Enosh, rather than to Adam (or Eve); in relating the building of the stelae or pillars to the same Enosh, rather than Seth and his sons; and in describing the stelae as made of bronze and clay, rather than stone and clay. Enosh's prophecy is talked of in connection with the two stelae traditions, see *Arm Apoc* 4, 170 and discussion in *Arm Apoc* 7, Exegetical Note on 10.8. See further Ginzberg 1967-69, 5: 148-50 fn. 53; van der Horst 1994; Feldman 2000, 24-5.

**18** "Pillars" (արձան): thus also in the *History of the Forefathers* 43. *Abel and Other Pieces* 4.4 has "columns" (սիւն). The terms are interchangeable in this context (*Arm Apoc* 2, 198, fn. 40).

**19** There is a multiform tradition telling of the transmission of knowledge in inscriptions from antediluvian time. As early as *Jub* 8:1-5, these antique writings were said to have been found by Kainan, after the flood: see on this tradition, *Arm Apoc* 7, fn. 19 on §13.5. On the topos of the discovery of hidden, antique writings, which is widespread in Late Antiquity and after, see Speyer 1970. On ancient attitudes to monumental, antique, stone inscriptions, see Ben-Dov 2021.

**20** The text reads Էնփս "Enosh", but the following narrative concerns Enoch (Էնփք). These two names are easily confused due to their graphic similarity. See Lipscomb 1990, 62-6 and 63 fn. 7; see *Arm Apoc* 1, 13; *Arm Apoc* 2, 151; *Arm Apoc* 3, 146, and elsewhere.

**21** This is an interpretation of Gen 5, 26.

On account of the fact that he observed Adam's command.<sup>22</sup>  
He planted an orchard and worked for its yield,  
For seventy years he served it.<sup>23</sup>

Իսկ սաղաւարտ ի գլուխն եդեալ կապարի<ն>,<sup>24</sup> 7  
Ոչ նայել ի յերկինս ուխտեաց իւր անձին.  
Եւ ոչ եկեր բնաւ ի պտղոյ դրախտին.  
Այլ տայր այլոց զամենն ամենեւին:

Then he put a leaden helmet on his head,  
He promised himself not to look at the heavens,<sup>25</sup>  
And he ate none of the garden's fruit,<sup>26</sup>  
But gave it all only to others.

Յայնժամ Տէրն ողորմած գդաց<sup>27</sup> ի նմին, 8  
Էբարձ հրեղէն կառօք տարաւ ի դրախտին,  
Որ ժառանկեաց ջանիւ զտեղ հայրենին,  
Էհաս անճառելի փառաց եւ պատւին:

Then the merciful Lord, caring for him,  
Took him up to the Garden, ascending in a fiery chariot.<sup>28</sup>  
Who, by labour, inherited the Paternal place,<sup>29</sup>  
He reached the indescribable glory and honour.<sup>30</sup>

---

**22** Enoch planted an orchard but did not eat of its fruit (see below), thus “observing” the commandment which Adam transgressed in the Garden of Eden. See Lipscomb 1990, 62-8 where he discusses in detail the various forms of this tradition of Enoch's Garden. However, the two figures, Enosh and Enoch are woven together in these Adam parabolica, and the matter needs an even broader and more detailed research.

**23** *Ibid.* There is no biblical source for the period of seventy years beyond the function of seventy as a significant number. See *Arm Apoc* 7, fn. 28 on *Questionnaire* 13.7.

**24** This would be the only exception in the whole poem to the monorhyme, so perhaps it should be emended to կապարին.

**25** This incident is found in Lipscomb 1990, 192, 209. Observe that the Armenian parabiblical writings often stress ascetic practices as is also evident in the present context.

**26** That is, the garden he planted: see stanza 6, above.

**27** Orthographic variant of գդաց.

**28** “Garden” here means the heavenly Paradise. There is no biblical reference to Enoch ascending to heaven in a fiery chariot. That is reserved for Elijah: see 2 Kings 2, 11 “And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”. For Enoch ascending in a chariot, see 3 *Enoch* 6:1 and *Sefer HaYašar, Berešit*. In 1 *Enoch* 52:1, a whirlwind is Enoch's chariot: compare *LAE* [47] (38.4); 2 *Enoch* 3.1; *Book of Zerubbabel* 7 and elsewhere.

**29** This is a reference to the heavenly Paradise or the presence of God.

**30** I.e., of the saints in heaven, as described often in eschatological texts.

Ի յորդոց Ադամայ սակավ<sup>31</sup> գովեցան,  
3  
Յետոյ մոլորեցան եւ խոտորեցան,  
Ամենեքեան հաւսար<sup>32</sup>՝ գԱստուած մոռացան,  
2  
Զեխեալ<sup>33</sup> միաբանեալ եւ խառնակեցան:

But few of the sons of Adam were praised.  
Afterwards, they strayed and erred.  
All of them as one forgot God.  
They debauched together and fornicated.<sup>34</sup>

Մինչ յԱդամայ ի վեր ժամանակ<sup>35</sup> անցան.  
10  
ԲՌ. (2,000) տարի եւ Խ. (40) եղան,  
Ետես Տէրն որ յանհուն չարեացն ոչ դարձան  
Հրաման արար Նոյի տապան շինեցան:<sup>36</sup>

Until, after Adam, time passed.  
2,000 years and 40 ensued.<sup>37</sup>  
God saw that they repented not of boundless evils.  
He commanded Noah to build<sup>38</sup> an Ark.

Նոյ եւ Գ. (3) որդին հարսունք միաբան,  
11  
Ը. (8) ոգի կենդանեաւք<sup>39</sup> մտան ի տապան.  
Սահմանք երկնից բացան եւ ջուրք հոսեցան,  
Ջրասոյգ ընկղմեցո աշխարհ<sup>40</sup> միաբան:

**31** Orthographic variant of սակաւ.

**32** Orthographic variant of հաւսար, perhaps used because of the scansion.

**33** Orthographic variant of գեղխեալ.

**34** This refers to the evil of the antediluvian generation, and the stress on sexual sins is notable and typical (cf. Gen 6,2-4; differently Gen 6,11 “all the earth was filled with violence”).

**35** This variation of կ / կք is not uncommon in mediaeval manuscript orthography. See “Index of Repetitive Variants”, no. 333 in Stone, Hillel 2012, 440.

**36** Here, Yovasap' uses a passive ending with active meaning because of the requirements of monorhyme.

**37** Notably in *Arm Apoc* 4, Michael Stone has published chronological texts, e.g., on 31 and 62, in which this figure was 2,242 years. That is in accord with the LXX chronology of the antediluvian generations, which differs from the MT, which enumerates 1656 years from Adam to Noah. On p. 53 of *Arm Apoc* 4, it is 2,223 years and various forms of this chronology are set out in the Tables in *Arm Apoc* 4, 56-7.

**38** The verb-form here is, anomalously, a middle-passive “they were built”. That is caused by the constraints of the rhyme, and we have translated it as an active, *ad sensum*.

**39** Lacuna and blot between ե and ն.

**40** The loss of the h is a not unusual orthographic deviation, see “Index” no. 54 in Stone, Hillel 2012, 423.

Noah and his three sons, together with (their) wives  
8 persons,<sup>41</sup> with (the) animals entered the Ark.  
The heavenly confines opened, and water flowed.<sup>42</sup>  
The whole world was flooded under water.

Տապանն ի վրայ ջրին գայր խաչայնման. 12  
Մինչ աւուրս Խ. (40) ջուրքն հոսեցան,  
Չագռան Էհան ի դուրս, նայ այլոց դարձան,<sup>43</sup>  
Ի հիւսն Անոսիմայ մեռեալ զեխեցան:<sup>44</sup>

The cruciform Ark went on the water,<sup>45</sup>  
The waters flowed for forty days,<sup>46</sup>  
The raven he put out, he returned again,<sup>47</sup>  
It feasted on Anosim the carpenter, who had died.<sup>48</sup>

Նոյ զաղաւնին Էհան ընդ մին պատուհան, 13  
Տերեւով ձիթենոյ շոյտ մի յետ դարձան.

---

**41** 1 Pet 3, 20 also mentions that eight people were in the Ark.

**42** In Gen 7, 11, the Hebrew “*בִּמְשֵׁחַ הַשָּׁמַיִם*” (the windows of the heavens; RSV) is translated as “*αἱ καταρράκται τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*” (the cataracts of the sky) by LXX, but as “*սահմանք երկնից*” (the confines [or: borders, limits] of the heavens”) by Arm Genesis. This is what is reflected here and, moreover, the borders are heavenly.

**43** Again, the writer changes the suffix to fit the monorhyme, so for դարձաւ he writes դարձան. This phenomenon may be observed also in 10.4, 13.2, and elsewhere.

**44** Orthographic variant of զեխեցան:

**45** Typologically the wooden Ark was correlated with the wood of the Cross, and the flood water with the Baptismal water: see Augustine, *contra Faustum* 12.14. In Ephrem Syrus, *Hymn* 49, a connection is made between the cross and the ark: “In its course, it made the sign of its protector – The cross, of its sailor, and the wood, of its navigator, Who came and built for us a Church in the midst of the waters”. Moreover, he says: “In the name of the Trinity, he delivered [the Ark’s] inhabitants: Instead of the dove, the Spirit made its anointing, And [drew] the image of his salvation”. The editor explains: “Reading the motion of the dove in Gn 8.8-11 as cruciform, and of the Genesis narrative as a type of baptism”. See Wickes 2017, 260. Thus, the Ark is seen as a double symbol of redemption. However, the descriptions of the Ark in Armenian tradition present it, not as a Cross, but in the form of a box: see “Form and Structure of Noah’s Ark” in *Arm Apoc* 6, 45-50. Noah’s ark was made of beams forming a square, as the Church is constructed of saints prepared unto every good work: for a square stands firm on any side. This was an ancient view, see: Clements 2010.

**46** These two lines draw upon Gen 7, 17-18, but the order here is reversed.

**47** See Gen 8, 7.

**48** There was a tradition, known in Armenian, that Noah had a workman who helped in building the Ark and this artisan tried to survive the flood by building a room on its roof. However, he drowned and when the raven went forth, it feasted on his corpse. See “Noah and the Cheirograph” in Stone 2021b. The name here is different and the other known source calls him Nersēs.

Ապայ խնդալ Նոյի թէ լոյս ցաթեցան,<sup>49</sup>  
Ելեալ ետես զմեռեալսն դիզան դիզան:

Noah sent the dove through a window.<sup>50</sup>  
It returned quickly with olive leaves.<sup>51</sup>  
Then Noah rejoiced that light dawned,<sup>52</sup>  
Going forth he saw the dead in heaps.

Սարսեց ոգի Նոյի, եմուտ ի տապան, 14  
Մինչեւ հրեշտակն ասաց զխորհուրդ մարդկան,  
Արի շինե աշխարհ, Տեառն է այս հրաման,  
Յայսմհետեւ<sup>53</sup> աղեղն յերկինս քեզ նշան.

Noah's soul trembled, he (re-)entered the Ark,  
Until the angel told the secret<sup>54</sup> to humans,  
“Arise, build the world! This is God's command.  
Henceforth, the bow in the heavens (is) a sign for you.<sup>55</sup>

Գարուն ամառն աշուն ձմռան յանդիման, 15  
Չի չարչարիք կենաւք ի մեղաց խափան,  
Եւ մի լինիք պարապ եւ մեղաց դարան,  
Ջանիւ ապրանք այնել<sup>56</sup> է ձեզ պիտեւան:

Over against winter (there are) spring, summer, autumn,<sup>57</sup>  
For sufferings throughout life prevent sins.  
And be not an empty<sup>58</sup> cupboard of sins,

---

**49** Observe the anomalous plural ending, introduced under the constraint of the monorhyme.

**50** Gen 8, 6-8.

**51** Gen 8, 11.

**52** Shlomi Efrati points to *Genesis Rabba* 25:2 (Theodor-Albeck 1912-36, 1: 240-1; Freedman 1977, 207): “Rabbi Yoḥanan said: The planets did not function the entire twelve months [of the Flood]. Rabbi Yonatan said to him: They functioned, but their effect was imperceptible”. A similar notion appears also in, e.g., Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 6.13.3, on Gen 8:22: “For during the forty days of rain they had (a continuous) night” (Tonneau 1955, 62; Amar, Mathews 1994, 143).

**53** u above line p.m.

**54** Or: plan, mystery.

**55** Gen 9, 12-17.

**56** Middle Armenian form of առնել.

**57** Cf. Gen 8, 22. The exact sense of յանդիման here is not clear.

**58** Or: “empty of good deeds”. Emptiness is a quality often ascribed to sinners.

It is needful for you by effort to prepare supplies".<sup>59</sup>

Զի յառաջ քան գԵոյ նման է գարնան, 16  
Ծառեր անհատ պտղով եւ նոր ծաղկեցան,  
Պտուղ հողոյն լինէր մինն Ռ.(1,000)ան.  
Վասն այն անբանացան. մեղաւք կորան:

For, before Noah, it was like spring,  
The trees fruited unceasingly and flowered anew,  
One fruit of the earth became a thousand-fold,<sup>60</sup>  
Therefore, they became brutish; through sin they perished.

Ելեալ Նոյ եւ շինեաց յառաջ զՆախչվան. 17  
Եւ գերկիր բաժանեց որդոցն յերեսան.  
Իսկ մեծ որդին, որ ծաղր արաւ զՆոյեան,  
Անիծեալ սեւացաւ մարմնով միաբան:

Noah went forth<sup>61</sup> and first built Naxčavan,<sup>62</sup>  
And he divided the earth openly<sup>63</sup> for his sons,  
But the oldest son,<sup>64</sup> who mocked Noah,

---

**59** That is, prepare supply for winter (which did not exist until now, see the following stanza). This is the end of the Angel's address to Noah (Nathan Daniel). At the same time, these lines also convey a moral lesson: Avoid sins in this lifetime, thus, by your deeds, preparing yourself for Judgement.

**60** The spring and the continued fruiting and flowering are unusual in Armenian literature as characteristics of the antediluvian period, though they are fixed features of the Garden of Eden: *Arm Apoc* 7, 71-2. However, rabbinic writings commonly depict the generation of the flood as having enjoyed great abundance which caused them to be haughty and sinful. See, e.g., *Tosefta Sota* 3:6-8 (par.); *Genesis Rabba* 26:5 (Theodor-Albeck 1912-36, 1: 248); *Tanhuma Bereshit* 12. The "thousandfold" topos is ancient, and is found in *1 Enoch* 11:19, *2 Baruch* 29:1, 5. See also Papias (Apostolic Fathers) frag. 4 (Roberts, Donaldson 1977, 153-4).

**61** That is: from the Ark.

**62** This is the Armenian tradition: see Lipscomb 1990, 280; Stone 2010, 310.

**63** "Openly, clearly": The reference is to the *Tabula Gentium* in Gen 10, which passage has numerous reverberations in mediaeval Armenian literature. See Stone 1981, 221-8 and further discussion in *Arm Apoc* 7, Annotation 20. That being said, the form յերեսան can also mean "at Yerevan". This line may offer a folk etymology which connects Noah and the division of the earth with Yerevan.

**64** This designation is surprising: The biblical narrative explicitly relates Noah's mockery to "his little son" (Gen 9, 24).

Was cursed, turned black in body, completely.<sup>65</sup>

Աճեալ բազում տոհմիւք եւ յառաջ եկան,  
Լցաւ երկիր կրկին, մարդիք բազմացան.  
Հ.(70) եւ Բ.(2) իշխանք ժողովեցան.  
Յամենայն աշխարհէ ի դաշտին Քաղան.

18

They increased with many families<sup>66</sup> and came forth,  
The earth was filled again, humans multiplied,<sup>67</sup>  
Seventy-two princes gathered together,<sup>68</sup>  
From the whole earth to the plain of Qaḥan.<sup>69</sup>

Ասեն արվի աշխարհ մեղօք գեխեցան,  
Կրկին պիտի լինի ջրհեղեղ մարդկան,  
Յետ Նոյի ԵՃ.(500) ամ հինկ եւ քսան,  
Կամեցան աշտարակ շինել միաբան. / fol. 279r /

19

They said,<sup>70</sup> “Again, the world has become putrid<sup>71</sup> with sin,  
Again, a flood will take place for humans”.  
500 years and twenty-five after Noah,<sup>72</sup>  
They wished to build a Tower together.

---

**65** Gen 9, 22: Armenian and other sources struggle with the apparent contradiction arising from Ham's disrespect for Noah but Canaan's being cursed (Gen 9, 35): See *Arm Apoc* 7, §13.4 fn. 17. On blackness resulting from sin and on whiteness or luminosity due to righteousness see *Arm Apoc* 7, Annotation 13 ‘Luminous Garments’. The idea that the wicked have dark or black faces is ancient, see: 4 Ezra 7:124, 1 *Enoch* 46:6, 62:10; *Abot de Rabbi Nathan* A25 (Schechter 1887, 79). See also Yovhannēs Erznkac'i, Poem 10.26 in Srapyan 1958, 224-5.

**66** Or: clans.

**67** Gen 9, 7, 19, etc.

**68** Seventy-two princes are frequently designated as builders of the Tower: see *Arm Apoc* 1, 91, 93; *Arm Apoc* 6, 56, 57 and elsewhere. The number is, as will be shown, connected with the number of languages.

**69** Gen 10, 10; “Tower Texts” 1a 4; 1b 5; 1c 2 in *Arm Apoc* 6, 56-8; Hebrew נִמְרֹד. Nimrod was in the foundation story of Babylon and, in Armenian tradition he is identified with Bel, Hayk's opponent. Calne in Isa 10:9 and Amos 6:3 is perhaps a different place, since it is associated with Hamat, which is between Aleppo and Damascus, while this Qaḥan is apparently in Mesopotamia.

**70** “They”: that is, the people of that generation.

**71** Or: debauched itself. Again, variant spelling of գեխեցան. Compare with Grigor Magistros's *Magnalia Dei* (Terian 2012, 40).

**72** This number is found in Armenian chronological texts, with some variations: see, for example, *Arm Apoc* 4, 32, 63. In *Arm Apoc* 1, 83 we see 527, reflecting the common confusion of 5 and 7, due to the method of notation. In *Arm Apoc* 2, 99, we read 515. See also “Tower Texts” 1a 4, etc. in *Arm Apoc* 6, 56, which puts the building of the Tower at 625 years after the Flood.



Բազում ամօք աշխարհի վրայ<sup>73</sup> դատեցան,  
Բարձրացուցին գնա ճամպայ Թ. (9) ամսեան,  
Հսկայքն խորհեցան ի ժամ հեղեղան.  
Ելանել յաշտարակն եւ անփորձ մնան.

20

For many years upon earth they were judged,<sup>74</sup>  
They elevated it to (the height of) 9 months' journey.<sup>75</sup>  
The giants thought at the time of the Flood,  
To climb the Tower and remain (there) unchallenged.<sup>76</sup>

Ոչ կամեցօ ստեղծօղն զխորհուրդն զայն.  
Հողմով ցրեց. հանտարտն<sup>77</sup> որ այ<լ> չիմացան.  
Երբ վաղն լուսացաւ զշինածն ոչ գտան,  
Եւ ոչ մինն զմիոյն լեզուն հասկացան:

21

The Creator did not want that plan,  
With a wind He scattered (it): they knew not any peace again.<sup>78</sup>  
When the morrow dawned, they found no structure,  
And they understood not each other's tongue.<sup>79</sup>

Մ{մ}իուն անունն Բել եր, Կ. (60) կանկնեան,  
Մեկին Հայկ կոչին, եր նա քառասնեան.  
Մարտեան ընդ միմիանս եւ աղմկեցան.  
Ամեն ազգ իր տոհմոքն<sup>80</sup> իւր աշխարհ դարձան.

22

The name of one was Bêl, 60 cubits (high),  
The other was called Hayk and he was a 40-cubit fellow.<sup>81</sup>

**73** Middle Armenian form of վերայ (see Łazaryan, Avetisyan 1992, s.v.).

**74** The import of this word here is unclear.

**75** In "Tower Text" 1b 3; 1c 3 in *Arm Apoc* 6, 57-8 it is said to be ten months, as is the case in "Tower Text" 2 in *Arm Apoc* 6, 62.

**76** That is, untested by the waters of the flood they anticipated.

**77** Deviant orthography of հանդարտն.

**78** "(it)": the Tower. However, compare Gen 9, 8 where it is the builders of the Tower that are scattered, but the construction is not said to have been destroyed. That understanding is also conceivable here. There are fanciful details on the destruction of the Tower in *Arm Apoc* 6, 66 in "Adam's Language" §6.

**79** This incident, aetiological of course, occasions in some parabiblical narrative sequences such as the introductions to material and texts about the various languages, the 72 tongues, Adam's language, and similar material. See *Arm Apoc* 6, 65.

**80** Sic!

**81** The war of Hayk with Bêl is related in Movsēs Xorenac'i 1.11: see Movses Khorenats'i 2006, 83-4. The heights of the two giants are not mentioned there. See also in the *Primary History* in Sebēos: see Abgarean 1979, 48-50, and translated in Thomson, Howard-Johnston, Greenwood 1999, 83-4.

They battled each other and caused disorder.  
Each nation turned to its own country, with (its) families.

Եւաթանասուն Բ. (2) ազգ, որ կոչեցան, 23  
Չի ՀԲ. (72) իշխանք ժողովեցան,  
Մմէն մէկի լեզու ցեղ մի խաւսեցան,  
Նոցա անւա<մր>ք<sup>82</sup> ազգերն անւանեցան:

(There are) seventy-two nations that were summoned,<sup>83</sup>  
For seventy-two princes gathered together.<sup>84</sup>  
Each<sup>85</sup> tribe spoke each single language  
<By> their names, the nations were called.<sup>86</sup>

Մեկին անուն հապաշ, մեկին հայկազան. 24  
Մեկին յոյնք եւ ֆրանկ, եւ այլն ի լման:  
Նոցա որդոցն անւօքն<sup>87</sup> ամսնին եղան,  
Եւ կամ ի յեղանակ աշնան եւ գարնան:

The name of one was Habaš,<sup>88</sup> of one — Armenian,<sup>89</sup>  
Of one – Greek and Frank, and all the rest.  
Their sons were called by the months' names,  
Or of the seasons, autumn and spring.<sup>90</sup>

Կոապաշտութիւն դարձօ աշխարհ միաբան. 25  
ՉԱրարիչն թողին եւ մոլորեցան.

---

**82** William Walk suggests the emendation to *անւաւմք* “by their names” which seems quite appropriate.

**83** The idea of seventy-two nations is widespread. It, and the alternative reading of 70, derive supposedly from a computation of the peoples enumerated in Gen 10. For seventy-two nations and lists thereof, see *Arm Apoc* 2, 158-63; *Arm Apoc* 4, 115-16 fn. 228. In fact, however, both figures are of great numerological significance, being  $10 \times 7$  and  $6 \times 12$ . Another example of the alternation is “the Septuagint” or the seventy as opposed to the 72 translators of the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Greek. See also *Arm Apoc* 7, §13.7 fn. 28. The same variation is to be found relating to the disciples of Christ: Metzger 1959.

**84** For seventy-two nations, see the previous footnote ; for princes, see stanza 18.3.

**85** Literally: one.

**86** The list of the seventy-(two) nations exists as an independent work: see *Arm Apoc* 2, 161-4.

**87** Perhaps an instrumental of *անուն*.

**88** That is, Ethiopia. The text has *Hapaš*.

**89** Literally: “of Hayk”. See stanza 22 and comments there.

**90** The source of these two ideas remains obscure. Such names are not to be found in either the Gregorian or Old Armenian calendar, nor were the seasons called by the names of nations or of Noah's grandsons.

Չանալ<sup>91</sup> կամիմ մեկնել թէ ուստի սկսան.  
Սիրական մեռել է, որ եր մեծ իշխան:

The world, as one, turned to idol worship,  
And leaving the Creator, they strayed. I wish to discern whence  
this separation began: A beloved one had died who was a great  
prince.<sup>92</sup>

Չպատկերն մեռելին հանեց նա նման, 26  
Եւ ոսկով զարդարեց կացոյց յանդիման,  
Յամեն ժամ համբուրեր գողով<sup>93</sup> սիրական,  
Եւ կարաւուն անցնէր սակաւիկ մի քան:

He brought forth an icon in the likeness of the deceased,  
And erecting it in public,<sup>94</sup> all adorned with gold, He kissed it all  
the time, in transports of love  
And his yearning passed, a trifling thing.<sup>95</sup>

Բանասրկուն սատանայ չարեաց գործարան, 27  
Այն որ ըսկսքմանէ<sup>96</sup> հակառակ մարդկան.  
Էմուտ մէջ պատկերին խօսեցաւ մարդկան.  
Մոլորեցոյց զնոսա պաշտաւն դիւական:

The Deceiver Satan, instrument of evil,  
He who from the first (was) an adversary of humankind,<sup>97</sup>  
Entered into the image, spoke with humans.<sup>98</sup>

---

**91** This word is not to be found in the chief dictionaries: NBHL, Malxaseanc' 1944-45 and Łazaryan, Avetisyan 1992. It might be an apocopated form of զանազանել "to distinguish" and we have translated it thus. However, one might, perhaps less persuasively, entertain the possibility of a graphic corruption of ջանալ > զանալ. That would be impossible in the hand of the Berlin MS, but perhaps is more plausible in a hand like AAP 172 of the late eighteenth century.

**92** This text continues without a logical or literary break in the next stanza. What is offered is the standard "Euhemeristic" explanation of the origin of idolatry, the roots of which go back to the Hellenistic period. It may be clearly observed in Wisd. Sol. 14:12-31; see the discussion in Winston 1979, 270-1.

**93** Orthographic variant of գթով < գութ.

**94** That is, opposite himself, before his own eyes.

**95** The syntax of this line is snarled. It could also, perhaps, be taken as "in short order". Perhaps yearning, in this context, could be taken as "yearning for God".

**96** Odd, perhaps mediaeval form of սկզբանէ.

**97** The line evokes the Creation stories, as does the phrasing, drawn from Gen 1, 1.

**98** This notion, inspired doubtless by ideas of demonic possession, is also reflected in the idea that Satan spoke from the serpent's mouth in the Garden of Eden, which is found in various Armenian sources: see Stone 2008, 141-86, especially 146-8.

He led them astray to demonic worship.<sup>99</sup>

Բազում անթիւ հզաւոր հսկայքն, որ եկան, 28  
Եւ կամ շատ թագաւորք զԱստուած ոչ ծանեան.  
Մինչեւ Մելքիսեթէկ այն<sup>100</sup> սուրբ քահանան.  
Եւ ի հայրն Աբրահամ որպէս գրեցան:

The many, unnumbered mighty giants who came forth,<sup>101</sup>  
And many kings, knew not God.  
Until Melchizedek, that holy priest,<sup>102</sup>  
And up to Father Abraham as is written.<sup>103</sup>

Խնարքեմ<sup>104</sup> ի քնն Քրիստոս Աստուած միաբան. 29  
փրկեայ զմեզ ի չարեաց կռապաշտութեան.  
Տուր մեզ ըսգաստութիւն ոգի սրբազան.  
Պաշտել զմի Աստուած ըստեղծող մարդկան:

I beseech you Christ, united God,  
Save us from the evil of idolatry.  
O Holy Spirit, give us chastity,<sup>105</sup>  
To minister unto the one God, creator of humankind.

Եւ մեղօք մեռելոյ երգողի զայս բան. 30  
Յովասափ անարժանի լեր աւգնական,  
Տուր ձեռն ապաւինի եւ մի մխիթարան.  
Զի խիստ եմ վշտացել, մեղք իմ բազում կան:

---

**99** Note that pagan gods were called demons. See already LXX Deut 32, 17. In Armenian, the word ‘dew’ (դէւ), under Zoroastrian influence came to mean ‘demon’.

**100** j below line p.m.

**101** There are old and varied traditions about giants, including that they were the offspring of the union of fallen angels and human women, which idea was widespread in Jewish and Christian texts from the Second Temple period on. For excellent overviews of this subject, see Reeves, “Enoch”, “Giants, Book of”, “Manichaeans”, “Noah”, in Schiffman, Vanderkam 2000. For a different perspective, see also the interesting article: Bremmer 2004. These are but two representative references out of many.

**102** Melchizedek played a prominent role in the parabiblical embroidered Bible stories: see, of course, Gen 14, 18, Ps. 110, 4, Heb. 5, 6, 5, 10, 7, 1, etc. He is called king and priest in Gen 14, 18, which played a role in developing the Christian exegesis of the bread and wine that he gives to Abraham as the Eucharistic offering. There are several Armenian texts about Melchizedek, see *Arm Apoc* 3, Texts 6 and 7, as well as a translation of the Ps.-Athanasian *History of Melchizedek*; see also Dorfmann-Lazarev 2020.

**103** That is, in the Bible, see preceding footnote.

**104** Variant orthography of խնդրեմ.

**105** Or discretion. Armenian texts regularly set high value on ascetic practices, particularly celibacy and fasting: see stanza 7 and comments there. This is discussed in *Arm Apoc* 7, 140-1, 212-13. Sexual sins figure prominently in many Armenian enumerations of transgressions.

And for the sins of the mortal singer of this poem,  
Yovasap' the unworthy, be a helper,  
Give a trusty hand and not a pitying one,  
For gravely am I afflicted, and many are my sins.

*Doxology*

Փառօնք ենք զՀոգի Աստուած Հայր եւ Բան,  
Երրեակ եւ մի բնութիւն յօւտան բաժան,  
Ով որ յիշէ զմեզ յիւր հայր մեղան.  
Նայ Տէրն արժան առնէ իւր արքայութեան:

31

We glorify the Spirit, God Father, and the Word,  
The threefold and single nature, eternally distinguished.  
He who remembers us to his Father—I have sinned!  
Him the Lord makes worthy of His kingdom.

## Bibliography

### Abbreviations for Armenian Apocrypha Series ed. by Michael E. Stone

- Arm Apoc 1* Stone, M.E. (1982). *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Patriarchs and Prophets*. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.
- Arm Apoc 2* Stone, M.E. (1996). *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve*. Leiden: Brill. *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* 14.
- Arm Apoc 3* Stone, M.E. (2012). *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Abraham*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. *Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature* 37.
- Arm Apoc 4* Stone, M.E. (2016). *Armenian Apocrypha: Relating to Angels and Biblical Heroes*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. *Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature* 45.
- Arm Apoc 5* Stone, M.E. (2019). *Armenian Apocrypha: Relating to Biblical Heroes*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. *Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature* 49.
- Arm Apoc 6* Stone, M.E. (2021). *Armenian Apocrypha from Adam to Daniel*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. *Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature* 55.
- Arm Apoc 7* Stone, M.E. (2025). *Armenian Apocrypha: The Short Questionnaire from Adam to Moses*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. *Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature* 58.

## Secondary Sources

- AAP = Kouymjian, D.; Lehmann, H.; Stone, M.E. (2002). *Album of Armenian Paleography*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0041977x03370156>.
- Abgarean, G.G. (1979). *Patmut' iwn Sebēosi (History of Sebēos)*. Erevan: Academy of Sciences.
- Abeghrian, M. (1955). *Hayots' Hin Grakanut' ian Patmut' iwn (History of Ancient Armenian Literature)*. 2 vols. Beirut: Sevan Press.
- Amar, J.P.; Mathews, E.G. (1994). *St. Ephrem The Syrian: Selected Prose Works*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America press. The fathers of the Church 91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284xd6>.
- Assfalg, J.; Molitor, J. (1962). *Armenische Handschriften*. Wiesbaden: F. Steiner. Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland 4.
- Bardakjian, K.B. (2000). *A Reference Guide to Modern Armenian Literature 1500-1920*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Ben-Dov, J. (2021). "Neo-Babylonian Rock Reliefs and the Jewish Literary Imagination". Ben-Dov, J.; Roja, F. (eds), *Afterlives of Ancient Rock-cut Monuments in the Near East*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 345-79. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004462083\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004462083_010).
- Bremmer, J.N. (2004). "Remember the Titans!". Auffarth, C.; Stuckenbruck, L.T. (eds), *The Fall of the Angels*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 35-61. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047404330\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047404330_005).
- Clements, R.A. (2010). "A Shelter Amid the Flood: Noah's Ark in Early Jewish and Christian Art". Stone, M.E.; Amihay, A.; Hillel, V. (eds), *Noah and His Books*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 277-99. Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature 28.
- Dorfmann-Lazarev, I. (2020). "XII. Appendix: Eve, Melchizedek and the Magi in the Cave of the Nativity According to the Armenian Corpus of Homilies Attributed to Epiphanius of Salamis". Bremmer, J.N.; Doole, J.A.; Karmann, T.R.; Nicklas, T.; Repschinski, B. (eds), *The Protoevangelium of James*. Leuven: Peeters, 264-94. Studies in the Early Christian Apocrypha 16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1q26n5t.17>
- Feldman, L.H. (2000). *Judaean Antiquities 1-4*. Leiden: Brill. Flavius Josephus Translation and Commentary 3.
- Fraade, S.D. (1984). *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press. Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 30.
- Fraade, S.D. (2002). "Enosh and His Generation Revisited". Stone, M.E; Bergren, T.A. (eds), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*. Harrisburg (PA): Trinity Press International, 59-86.
- Freedman, H. (1977). *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*. London: Soncino Press.
- Gevorgyan, V.P. (1964). *Yovasap' Sebastats'i. Banastegtsut' iwnner (Yovasap' Sebastac'i. Poems)*. Yerevan: Academy of Sciences.
- Ginzberg, L. (1967-1969). *The Legends of the Jews*. 7 vols. Translator H. Szold. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Glenthøj, J.B. (1997). *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th-6th centuries)*. Leuven: Peeters. CSCO 567; CSCO Subsidia 95.
- HAB = Ačařyan, H. (1972). *Haiots' Andzanunneri Bařaran (Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names)*. 5 vols. Beirut: Sevan Press.
- Halford, M.B. (1980). *Illustration and Text in Lutwin's Eva und Adam*. Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 305.

- Łazaryan, R.S.; Avetisyan, H.M. (1992). *Mijin Hayereni Baṛaran (Dictionary of Mediaeval Armenian)*. 2 vols. Erevan: Erevan State University Press.
- Lipscomb, W.L. (1990). *The Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature*. Atlanta: Scholars Press. University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 8.
- Magistros, G.; Terian, A. (2012). *Magnalia Dei: Biblical History in Epic Verse by Grigor Magistros*. Leuven: Peeters. Hebrew University Armenian Series 14.
- Malkhasiants', S. (1944-45). *Hayerēn Bats'atrankan Baṛaran (Explanatory Armenian Dictionary)*. 4 vols. Yerevan: Armenian SSR State press.
- Metzger, B.M. (1959). "Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples". *New Testament Studies* 5(4), 299-306. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0028688500006585>.
- Movses-Khorenats'i (2006). *History of the Armenians*. rev. ed. Contributor and translator R.W. Thomson. Ann Arbor: Caravan Books.
- NBHL = Avetik'ian, G.; Siwrmēlian, Kh.; Algerian, M. (1836-37). *Nor Baṛgirk' Haykagian Lezui (New Dictionary of the Armenian Language)*. 2 vols. St. Lazaro: Venice.
- Pogharian, N. (1971). *Hay Grogghner 5.-17. Dar (Armenian Writers: 5<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*. Jerusalem: Srboy Hakobeants
- Reeves, J.C. (1996). *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions*. Leiden; New York; Köln: E.J. Brill. Nag Hammadi and Manichaeon Studies 41. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004439702>.
- Roberts, A.; Donaldson, J. (1977). *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Schechter, S. (1887). *Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan*. London, Nutt; Wien, Lippe; Frankfurt a.m.: Kauffmann.
- Schiffman, L.H.; Vanderkam, J.C. (eds) (2008). *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195084504.001.0001>.
- Speyer, W. (1970). *Bucherrunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Srapyan, A. (1958). *Yovhannēs Erznskats'i. Usumnasirut'yun ew bnagrēr (Yovhannēs Erznskac'i. Study and Texts)*. Yerevan: Academy of Sciences. Yovhannēs Erznskac'i. Study and Texts.
- Stone, M.E. (1981). *Signs of the Judgement, Onomastica Sacra, and the Generations from Adam*. Chico: Scholars Press. UPATS 3.
- Stone, M.E. (1996). *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve*. Leiden: Brill. *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* 14.
- Stone, M.E.; Ervine, R.R. (2000). *The Armenian Texts of Epiphanius of Salamis De Mensuris et Ponderibus*. Leuven: Peeters. CSCO 583; CSCO Subsidia 105.
- Stone, M.E. (2008). "Satan and the Serpent in the Armenian Tradition". Schmid, K.; Riedweg, C. (eds), *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and Its Reception History*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2. Reihe.
- Stone, M.E. (2010). "Mount Ararat and the Ark". Stone, M.E.; Amihay, A.; Hillel, V. (eds), *Noah and His Book(s)*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. *Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature* 28.
- Stone, M.E.; Hillel, V. (2012). *An Editio minor of the Armenian Version of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Leuven: Peeters. Hebrew University Armenian Studies 11.
- Stone, M.E. (2021b). "Sadayēl's Fall from Heaven". Chitunashvili, D. (ed. in chief); Aleksidze, N.; Surbuladze, M. (eds), *The Caucasus Between East and West. Vol 2, Historical and Philological Studies in Honour of Zaza Aleksidze*. Tbilisi: Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, 478-88.
- Theodor, J.; Albeck, Ch. (1912-36). *Bereschit Rabba*. 3 vols. Berlin: Itskowski.

- Thomson, R.W.; Howard-Johnston, J.; Greenwood, T. (1999). *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. Translated Texts for Historians 31.
- Tonneau, R.-M. (1955). *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et In Exodum commentarii*. Louvain: Imprimerie orientale. Corpus scriptorum christianorum Orientalium 153; Scriptores Syri 72.
- van der Horst, P.W. (1994). “‘The Elements Will be Dissolved with Fire’. The Idea of Cosmic Conflagration in Hellenism, Ancient Judaism, and Early Christianity”. *Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity: Essays on their Interaction*. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 227-51.
- Wickes, J.T. (2017). *Hymns on Faith*. Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America. Fathers of the Church Patristic Series.
- Winston, D. (1979). *The Wisdom of Solomon*. Garden City (NY): Doubleday. Anchor Bible.



## History



# The Educational-Ecclesiastic Missions and Networking Between the Roman Osroene and Sasanian Armenia in the First Half of the Fifth Century

Anna Usacheva

Universität Bern, Switzerland

**Abstract** This article reexamines Maštoc's first and second journeys to Roman Territory through the lens of frontier networking, utilizing prosopographic analysis of Roman hosts and encounters. I propose that Maštoc's first journey occurred between 406 and 407 during the episcopacy of Pqida of Edessa, countering the identification of Babilas with Rabbula of Edessa. For the second journey, I suggest it likely took place between 422 and 423, with 425 as a *terminus ante quem*. While Koriwn and Movsēs mention Anatolius as Maštoc's assistant, I argue that the evidence does not support his active military role during the 421-22 conflict.

**Keywords** Maštoc'. Armenian Church. Frontier networking. Prosopographic analysis. Roman Empire. Sasanian Empire. Rabbula of Edessa. Anatolius.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Persian Armenia and Roman Osroene: Setting the Stage. – 3 Maštoc' and Theodore. – 4 Maštoc' and Babilas. – 5 Maštoc' and 'the Syriac bishop Daniel'. – 6 Maštoc's Second Journey to the Roman Territory: Historical Circumstances. – 7 The Date of Maštoc' Second Journey. – 8 Maštoc' and Anatolius. – 9 Conclusion.



## Peer review

Submitted 2025-04-28  
Accepted 2025-08-28  
Published 2025-12-12



## Open access

© 2025 Usacheva | 4.0



**Citation** Usacheva, A. (2025). "The Educational-Ecclesiastic Missions and Networking Between the Roman Osroene and Sasanian Armenia in the First Half of the Fifth Century". *Armeniaca*, 4, 69-96.

**DOI** 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/004

## 1 Introduction

This article examines the missionary travels of the famous founder of the Armenian alphabet, Maštoc' and his disciples, focusing on the networking, logistics, and mobility between Persian Armenia and Roman Osroene. The study of the prosopographic traces of Armenian connections with the East Syriac ecclesiastical and intellectual tradition presents several challenges due to the relative scarcity of historical sources. Thus, some scholars have expressed scepticism towards the Armenian sources. For instance, Gabriele Winkler, in her "Obscure Chapter in Armenian Church History (428-439)", discussed a "legitimate suspicion whether the Armenians had good reasons for misinterpreting some of the events or destroying many sources" (Winkler 1997, 85). Similarly, Nina Garsoïan questioned certain prosopographic accounts provided by Armenian historiographers and hagiographers in her reconstruction of early Armenian church history.<sup>1</sup>

While biased master narratives can dominate historical accounts, adapting a prosopographic research approach could help mitigate this tendency. Prosopography facilitates crafting a historical narrative about ecclesiastical networking – not through the "master narrative" of historical events and political strategies, but through individual stories and their interactions. This study employs a bottom-up methodological approach, involving the prosopographic verification of names, dates, and circumstances related to Maštoc's journeys into Roman territory. Prosopographic approach enables a nuanced revision of chronology and networks, potentially shedding further light on the still obscure interactions between Persian Armenia and Roman Osroene.

## 2 Persian Armenia and Roman Osroene: Setting the Stage

Armenian historians have identified the region of Roman Osroene as a primary educational destination for Armenians. Before the time of Maštoc' and Theodore of Mopsuestia, Christian literature in the territory of Persian Armenia was under the influence of Hellenic and Syriac linguistic traditions. The Syriac tradition was particularly prevalent due to the requirements of the Persian administration. As Movsēs Xorenac'i noted, "the Persian governors did not allow anyone to learn Greek in their part but only Syriac" (cf. Movsēs, *Hist.* 3.54,

---

<sup>1</sup> Thus, Garsoïan challenged the account of Maštoc's second journey to Roman territory as presented by Movsēs Xorenac'i (Garsoïan 2004, 190).

translation from Thomson 1978, 323). Łazar P'arpec'i mentioned that during the late fourth century, in the time of Mařtoc', "the worship of the church and the readings of scripture were conducted in Syriac in the monasteries and churches of the Armenian people" (cf. Łazar, *Hist.* 1.10, translation from Thomson 1991, 47). He observed that Syriac liturgies were incomprehensible to the Armenian people. Łazar also lamented the great expenses associated with educational journeys to Roman Syria, which Armenian students were obliged to undertake (cf. Łazar, *Hist.* 1.10, translation from Thomson 1991, 47).

The adoption of Syriac as an official language for Christian liturgy and mission was characteristic of the region of Mesopotamia, where the spread of Christianity was not achieved exclusively through the use of the Greek language.<sup>2</sup> In her study of the historical transformation of the Armenian liturgical tradition, Gabriele Winkler demonstrated that its earliest layer shows a close affinity to the East Syriac rite and terminology (Winkler 1997, 26, 80, 95). Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet has highlighted the importance of the Syriac language in shaping Syriac Christian identity and its subsequent dissemination through religious missions (Briquel-Chatonnet 1991, 257-74).

Another significant phenomenon that shaped East Syrian orthodoxy was the widespread circulation of Syriac translations of treatises by Theodore of Mopsuestia, who had become renowned as a preeminent exegete.<sup>3</sup> His works, along with those of Diodore of Tarsus, were considered part of the curriculum at the so-called School of the Persians in Edessa.<sup>4</sup>

Sources also mention a certain school of Armenians in Edessa. Thus, the Syriac acts of the 'robber' council (Ephesus 449) mention a certain petition submitted against Iba of Edessa, which was signed by "all the clergy and heads of monasteries, monks and members of orders, worthies and citizens and Romans and the Schools of the

---

**2** Thus, Philip Wood (2010, 6) argued that since "major proponents of Nicaea had written in Syriac, the language escaped the fate of the languages of Anatolia, where Christianisation accelerated Hellenisation". For an examination of the intricate relationship between Greek and Syriac, see Sebastian Brock *From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning* (Brock 1982, 17-34).

**3** For an examination of the role and impact of Theodore's heritage on the teaching practices and reputation of the School of the Persians, see Adam H. Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis* (Becker 2008, 6). For testimony of Theodore's prominent position in the School of Nisibis, a successor to Edessa in theological tradition, see Gerrit J. Reinink, *Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth* (1995, 77-89).

**4** In the early sixth century, Jacob of Sarug, in his *Letter 14*, mentioned a certain school of the Persians in Edessa, from which "the whole East was harmed", because in this school the books of Diodore of Tarsus were translated and appreciated (Becker 2006, 52).

Armenians, of the Persians, and of the Syrians (ܐܪܡܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܐ ܕܫܝܪܝܐܢܐ)”.<sup>5</sup>

Whether such an establishment as an Armenian school in Edessa truly existed is difficult to ascertain, but this testimony implies at least the existence of educational connections between Armenian and Roman Syriac territories.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest explicit accounts of the dissemination of Theodore's teachings across the Roman border via the School of Edessa are preserved in Ibas of Edessa's *Letter to Mari the Persian* (433)<sup>7</sup> and in sixth-century Miaphysite sources, including the *Letter from Simeon of Beth Arsham* and *Letter XIV* of Jacob of Sarug.<sup>8</sup>

In his *Letter to Mari the Persian*, Ibas attested that Theodore not only enlightened his own city but also “educated the distant churches with his teaching”.<sup>9</sup> The letter indicates that after the Council of Edessa (431), where the teachings of Nestorius were condemned, Rabbula, the bishop of Edessa, initiated a search and burning of Theodore's books.<sup>10</sup> The identity of Ibas' correspondent, Mari, is debated.<sup>11</sup> However, the text implies that he was a high-ranking church official, either a bishop or an abbot, who had recently stayed in Edessa and was familiar with its current prelate. Mari's identifier ‘the Persian’ suggests that he belonged to the Church of the East. If this identity marker is genuine, it would explain Ibas' intention to inform his friend about recent events in the neighbouring Christian church.

<sup>5</sup> The Syriac text of the *Acts* and its German translation were published by Flemming 1970, 25-6. English translation from Becker 2006, 64.

<sup>6</sup> About other mentions of the School of the Armenians in Edessa and its likely connections with the School of the Persians, see Garsoïan 1999, 69, fn. 97.

<sup>7</sup> Ibas of Edessa became known as the manager of the translation project of Theodore's oeuvre conducted at the School of Edessa. For details, cf. Rammelt 2008, 50-3.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Becker provided a critical reading of the Miaphysite sources, highlighting their biased misrepresentation of the dissemination of the writings of Diodore and Theodore. Nevertheless, Becker's analysis did not undermine the strong connection between the so-called School of the Persians in Edessa and Antiochene theology (Becker 2006, 53).

<sup>9</sup> The Syriac text of the letter of Ibas and its German translation was published by Flemming 1970, 48-9. The Greek version of the text is found in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (Schwartz 1935, 32-5).

<sup>10</sup> About Rabbula's book burning activities, see Doran 2006, 172.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Vööbus suggested that Mari was the bishop of Rev-Ardashir (Vööbus 1965, 25, 356). Georg Günter Blum identified Mari as the metropolitan of Seleucia (Blum 1969, 211). Michael van Esbroeck proposed that Mari was an archimandrite of the convent of the Akoimetoï near Constantinople (van Esbroeck 1986 145-59). Claudia Rammelt disputed van Esbroeck's hypothesis and argued that Mari held a prominent ecclesiastical position in the Church of the East and that he met Ibas during his prolonged educational visit to Edessa (Rammelt 2008, 51-3).

Apparently, Ibas' remark about the transborder spread of Theodore's teachings was accurate, as following Rabbula's lead, Acacius of Melitene also initiated a search for Theodore's writings. Evidence of these actions is preserved in the correspondence between Acacius and Catholicos Sahak Part'ew,<sup>12</sup> dated around 432-33.<sup>13</sup> Acacius informed the Armenian prelate and his people about the outcome of the Council of Ephesus and warned them of the hidden dangers posed by the works of the Mopsuestian teacher, whom Acacius, like Rabbula, associated with Nestorius: "But we are afraid lest someone be found imbued with the discipline of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the evil poison of Nestorius, inciting simple souls".<sup>14</sup>

Aware of the spread of Theodore's works to Armenia and relying on his established connection with Catholicos Sahak, Acacius sought to engage the neighbouring church to remain united in the face of religious conflict.<sup>15</sup>

While this epistolary exchange clearly confirms the transborder spread of Theodore's oeuvre, it is uncertain when this dissemination began. There is a scholarly discussion regarding the earlier (late fourth to early fifth century) *versus* later (beginning with Ibas' episcopate in 435 onward) dating of the translations of Theodore's works.<sup>16</sup> Although the exact timing of the earliest translation projects is debatable, it is likely that while Armenian students from the Osroene schools occasionally brought home the teachings of Theodore, the more formal introduction of his works into Armenia was facilitated by the famous missionary Maštoc'.

---

**12** Cf. *Ep. Ad sanctum Sahak, Armenorum Patriarcham, Responsum Domni Sahak epistulae Akak*, and *Ep. Ab Akak episcopo ad Armenios*. French translation and the commentary of these works was published by Maurice Tallon (1955, 21-39).

**13** For the dating of the correspondence between Acacius and Sahak, see Tallon 1955, 22-3; Winkler 1997, 101-4.

**14** Cf. Acacius, *Ep. ad sanctum Sahak*: "*Sed nobis timor est ne forte quis inveniatur imbutus disciplina Theodori Mopsuestiae maloque veneno Nestorii, instigat animas simplices*". Latin translation of Acacius' correspondence was published by Marcel Richard (1977, 394).

**15** Around 435, Acacius' admonitions were reflected in the *Letter from the Armenians to Proclus*. For the dating of the *Letter from the Armenians*, see Inglisian 1957, 42.

**16** For an account of the scholarly debate regarding the translation of Theodore's works, see Rammelt 2008, 43-6.

### 3 Maštoc' and Theodore

Nerses Akinean and Nicholas Adontz suggested that Maštoc' met Theodore of Mopsuestia during his first journey to Roman Syria.<sup>17</sup> Both scholars linked their hypotheses to the testimony of Patriarch Photius (810-895). In his work *Myriobiblion*, Photius claimed that he had read a treatise in three books against the Persian religion written by a certain "Theodore" and addressed to "Mastoubios of Armenian origin".<sup>18</sup> Photius identified this Theodore as the renowned Bishop of Mopsuestia.<sup>19</sup>

Ervand Ter-Minasean, in an article, presented a thorough and persuasive criticism of the renowned scholars' position (Ter-Minasean 1964, 25-48). I fully endorse Ter-Minasean's opinion and will further review the scholarly discussion, suggesting some nuances regarding the prosopographic interpretation of a hypothetical meeting between Theodore of Mopsuestia and Maštoc'.

Thus, Ter-Minasean doubted Adontz' and Akinean's identification of a certain "Mastoubios of Armenian origin" with Mashtots, referring to the lack of historical evidence that Maštoc' ever held the position of *chorepiscopus* mentioned by Photius (Ter-Minasean 1964, 39-40). Nina Garsoïan also expressed reservations about the opinion of Adontz and Akinean (Garsoïan 1999, 68-9).

Another reasonable doubt about linking Mastoubios with Maštoc' lies in the questionable identification of the author of *Contra Magos* with Theodore. Victoria Jugeli, in her article, has pointed out that Photius's description of the treatise's content does not correspond to Theodore's known teachings (Jugeli 2008, 66-72). According to Jugeli, Theodore never endorsed the restoration of all things to their original, perfect state (ἀποκατάστασις) (Jugeli 2008, 69).

In Jugeli's opinion, another famous Antiochene teacher, Theodoret of Cyrus, supported *apokatastasis* and mentioned in his own writings that he authored a work, *Ad Quaesita Magorum Persarum* (Jugeli 2008, 70). Although Jugeli acknowledged the mentions of a certain treatise against Persian magicians attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia in the work of Leontius of Byzantium and in the *Seert Chronicle*, she still argued that Photius's description in the *Bibliotheca* referred to the work of Theodoret of Cyrus.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Akinean 1949, 95-173, cf. also: Adontz 1925, 435-6. Nina Garsoïan suggested that possibly Maštoc' met Ibas during his stay in Edessa (Garsoïan 1999, 69).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Phot. *Bibl.* 81.63b.33-5: "Ἀνεγνώσθη βιβλιδάριον Θεοδώρου περὶ τῆς ἐν Περσίδι μαγικῆς, καὶ τίς ἡ τῆς εὐσεβείας διαφορὰ, ἐν λόγοις τρισί. Προσφωνεῖ δὲ αὐτοὺς πρὸς Μαστούβιον ἐξ Ἀρμενίας ὁρμώμενον, χωρεπίσκοπον δὲ τυγχάνοντα" (Henry 1959, 187).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Phot. *Bibl.* 81.63a: "Οὗτος ὁ Θεόδωρος ὁ Μοψουεστίας εἶναι δοκεῖ" (Henry 1959, 187).



However, Ilaria Ramelli has persuasively demonstrated that both Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret of Cyrus supported the theory of *apokatastasis* (Ramelli 2013, 539-48, 572-4). Therefore, the argument about Photius's content misrepresentation does not stand. Scholars who have studied the fragments of the treatise against Persian magicians mentioned by Photius attribute the work to Theodore (Reinink 1997, 63-71; Tamrazov 2024, 15-35).

As far as my current argument is concerned, I would like to revise the hypothesis about the dedication of Theodore's *Contra Magos* to Maštoc'. If such a dedication did indeed take place, it would suggest a personal acquaintance between Theodore and his addressee. Hence, the questions arise: When could Theodore have met Maštoc'? Did it happen prior or after Theodore's episcopal consecration?

Photius could not have known whether Theodore wrote the treatise against Persian magicians while he was still a presbyter or after 392, when he became a bishop. Supposedly, Maštoc' travelled to the Roman territory after he left his court duties and began his missionary career. As a missionary, he would have been well within his rights to request a treatise from a renowned exegete, which could assist him in his efforts by providing arguments against the Persian magi. This supposition rests on two assumptions: that Maštoc' was already engaged in missionary work and that Theodore had already established his reputation as an exegete par excellence.

The *Syriac Chronicle of Edessa* indicates that Theodore of Mopsuestia published his famous biblical commentaries after 397 (Guidi 1903, 1-13). Consequently, the earliest possible date for the meeting between the two scholars falls within the first decade of the fifth century. This estimation aligns with the period of Maštoc' first documented missionary journey to Roman Syria. His biographer, Koriwn, places this journey in the fifth year of Vramšapuh, extending into the sixth year, specifically 405-06 (cf. Koriwn, *Life* 7.1 [47], translation Terian 2022, 73). However, some scholars have challenged Koriwn's testimony based on the names of the bishops whose sees Maštoc' visited.<sup>20</sup> A thorough critical analysis of the scholarly doubts concerning Koriwn's dating was offered by Ervand Ter-Minasean in his 1964 article, "*On the Date of the Invention of Armenian Writing and Other Related Problems*" (Ter-Minasean 1964, 25-48). Ter-Minasean persuasively demonstrated the reliability of the information provided by Maštoc''s chronicler – namely, that Maštoc'

---

**20** Nicholas Adontz placed the journey in 406-07 (Adontz 1925, 435-6). Nina Garsoïan also dated the journey to "les premières années du V<sup>e</sup> siècle" (Garsoïan 1999, 68). However, Paul Peeters suggested the date 414 (1951, 171-207). Gabriele Winkler also argued that Maštoc' went to Edessa around 414, where he was hosted by Bishop Rabbula (Winkler 1997, 90). Winkler contends that Maštoc' might have met Ibas and become acquainted with the theology of Theodore.

invented the Armenian alphabet thirty-five years before his death, a timeframe that corresponds precisely to the year 405/406. I fully concur with Ter-Minasean's argumentation, and in what follows I revisit the discussion surrounding the date of Maštoc's journey from a prosopographic perspective.

#### 4 Maštoc' and Babilas

Koriwn recounted that Maštoc' "came to the region of Aram, to two Syrian cities, the first of which was called Edessa and the second Amid. He presented himself to the holy bishops, the first of whom was named Babilas and the second Akakios" (cf. Koriwn, *Life* 7.2 [46], translation from Terian 2022, 73.).

One of the mentioned bishops is easily identifiable as Acacius of Amida (400-25). An active traveller himself, Acacius became renowned for his interactions with the Church of the East and the Persian court.<sup>21</sup> The first mention of Acacius' name in connection with the Church of the East appears in the *Acts of the Synod of Isaac*, which took place in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 (Melloni, Ishac 2023, 602-5). Marutha of Maypherqat, an ambassador of Emperor Arcadius delivered a letter from the Roman bishops to their Eastern counterparts. The letter was read out loud at the Synod of Isaac and subsequently approved.<sup>22</sup> Acacius of Amida and Pqida/Pqidha (ܩܕܝܫܐ), bishop of Edessa (398-409),<sup>23</sup> were among the signatories of the letter (Melloni, Ishac 2023, 565).

If Koriwn's date for Maštoc's journey is accurate, the name Babilas (in Armenian: Բաբիլաս), mentioned in the *Life*, referred to Pqida. This discrepancy in names could be attributed to a misspelling or a scribal error. Ervand Ter-Minasean in his already mentioned article, explained the paleographic features that could have caused the change of Pakidas to Babilas in Armenian manuscripts (Ter-Minasean 1964, 30). Levon Xaç'ikyan in his article published in the same 1964 also identified Babilas as Pqida (Xaç'ikyan 1964, 15).

**21** Acacius was on an official mission in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 419 and participated in the Council of Yabalaha, which began that same year. Additionally, Socrates Scholasticus testified that Acacius ransomed 7,000 Persian prisoners captured during the Roman-Persian War of 421-422. Following this act of mercy, he was invited for a personal audience with the Shahanshah (Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 7.21). Jerome Labourt analyzed Acacius's role in the Council of Yabalaha (Labourt 1904, 90-102). For a concise outline of the council and its acts, see *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta* (Melloni, Ishac 2023, 611-12).

**22** For an analysis of Maštoc's activity, see Honarchiansaky 2018, 59-90.

**23** The dates for Pqida's bishopric are indicated in the *Chronicle of Edessa* (Guidi 1903, 1-13).

However, Paul Peeters and Gabriele Winkler believed that Koriwn referred to Rabbula of Edessa, who occupied the seat from 411 until 435. This identification entailed postponing the possible date of Maštoc's journey to 414. In other words, if Koriwn was correct in dating Maštoc's journey, he could not have referred to Rabbula as his host. Conversely, if Koriwn's dating of Maštoc's journey is incorrect, the name "Babilas" might indeed have referred to Rabbula. Paul Peeters and Robert W. Thomson argued that "Babilas" is a misspelt rendering of "Rabbula" (Peeters 1951, 177; Thomson 1978, 323).

Whether or not Rabbula acted as Maštoc's host, he demonstrated a keen interest in Armenian ecclesiastical affairs soon after the Council of Ephesus (431). To understand this seemingly sudden focus of the Edessan bishop, it is essential to examine Rabbula's background and activities prior to 431.

From the outset of his career, Rabbula was recognized for his distinctly ascetic-monastic profile and his fervent opposition to what he considered as heretical teachings.<sup>24</sup> The correspondence between Rabbula and Andrew of Samosata reveals that shortly before the Council of Ephesus, Rabbula publicly supported the *Twelve Chapters* of Cyril of Alexandria and criticized those who spoke against this treatise.<sup>25</sup> The Edessan bishop also openly condemned the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia and initiated the burning of his writings.<sup>26</sup>

Soon after the council, in his letter to Cyril, Rabbula informed his Alexandrian colleague that the root of Nestorian heresy could be traced back to the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia: "a certain Bishop Theodore from the province of Cilicia [...] sets into [his] writings other [things that are] snares of destruction".<sup>27</sup>

This information was both new and welcome to Cyril. In his response, the Bishop of Alexandria acknowledged Rabbula's keen insight and righteous zeal in his extensive campaign against the

---

**24** For analysis of Rabbula's early career, see Blum 1969, 81-106.

**25** There is a scholarly discussion regarding Rabbula's political allegiance prior to the Council of Ephesus. Winkler argued that initially, Rabbula sided with John of Antioch in his opposition to Cyril. However, after the council, Rabbula openly aligned himself with the Bishop of Alexandria (Winkler 1997, 88). Conversely, Blum and Phoenix and Horn demonstrated that Rabbula was already aligned with Cyril prior to 431 (Blum 1969, 153-5; cf. also Phoenix, Horn 2017, 170).

**26** In his *letter to Rabbula*, preserved in Syriac in *Rabbula's Corpus*, Andrew complained that Rabbula "is behaving against us with many abuses, and not only before a small [group] but also openly before the people", that he "banned (in the church) those who do not agree with the opinion of Cyril of Alexandria and those who read what has been written by us, [namely,] the denunciation of the chapters that were set down by him". Syriac text and English translation published by Phoenix, Horn 2017, 148-9.

**27** Cf. Rab. Ep. ad Cyr. (= Cyr. Ep. 73): *episcopus enim quidam provinciae Cilicium Theodorus...alios autem laqueos perditionis in scriptis ponebat*. Latin text and English translation from Phoenix, Horn 2017, 128-9.

Because you have become so illustrious and have reassured through your wise teaching both those who are under your authority and those who dwell in other cities and places; and you have illuminated also not only those who are near to Your Holiness but those who are far off.<sup>28</sup>

This evidence indicates that, prior to the Council of Ephesus and especially thereafter, Rabbula became increasingly hostile toward the legacy of Theodore, hunting after it also in Armenian territory. If this account of Rabbula's longstanding aversion to Theodore's doctrine is accurate, it raises questions about the inconsistency of Rabbula hosting Maštoc' at the beginning of his episcopacy and facilitating his acquaintance with Theodore's legacy, while roughly 20 years later, he actively sought to eradicate this legacy from Armenian territory. Although several plausible explanations for this inconsistency may exist, I contend that none is needed because Rabbula never hosted Maštoc' and his disciples. I believe that the Armenian embassy occurred under Pqida, whose name was either incorrectly recorded

<sup>29</sup> The letter is preserved in Syriac (Bedjan 1910, 594-6) and its translation in Greek (ACO 4.2:27-8). It was also quoted in the *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum* of Liberatus of Carthage and in the *Letter of Innocent, bishop of Maron* (ACO 4.2:68-73).

78

as “Babilas” or there was a later scribal confusion between a more obscure name of Pqida and that of the well-known Rabbula.

Another argument for identifying ‘Babilas’ as Pqida relates to the correspondence between Acacius of Melitene and Catholicos Sahak. During Maštoc’s second journey to Roman territory, his host was Acacius of Melitene, who later warned Sahak about the hidden dangers of Theodore’s legacy. Scholars have suggested that it was Rabbula who encouraged Acacius to initiate this correspondence (Blum 1969, 184; Sarkissian 1965, 230-1; Rammelt 2008, 140-1; Phoenix, Horn 2017, 191). Acacius’s action demonstrates that an official connection was established through the diplomatic mediation of Maštoc’ between the bishop of Melitene and the Armenian Catholicos. If Rabbula had a personal relationship with Maštoc’ and through him had a mediated contact with Sahak, he would have reached out to the Catholicos himself without needing to appeal to Acacius for assistance.

Regardless of the identity of Maštoc’s host in Edessa and the timing of his journey, one of the significant outcomes of the mission was the establishment of a strong connection with the Antiochian branch of theology and the school of Edessa. Another trace of ties between Armenian and Syriac educational networks is associated with a prosopographic ‘mystery’ involving a certain Syriac bishop named Daniel.

## 5 Maštoc’ and ‘The Syriac Bishop Daniel’

An enigmatic story, recounted by Koriwn, concerns a certain Syriac bishop named Daniel. King Vramšapuh informed Catholicos Sahak that this Bishop had come into possession of certain characters for the Armenian alphabet.<sup>31</sup> In the logic of Koriwn’s narrative, the purported discovery of a mysterious Armenian writing by Bishop Daniel served as an additional motivation for Maštoc’s journey. The characters were delivered to Vramšapuh and Sahak by a relative of Daniel named Habel. Upon examining this script, Sahak and Maštoc’ deemed it inadequate for properly conveying Armenian sounds.<sup>32</sup>

**31** Cf. Koriwn, *Life* 6.1-11 [42-4]: “Ժամ պատմէր նոցա արքայն վասն առն ուրու. ասորոյ եպիսկոպոսի ազնուականի Դանիէլ անուն կոչեցելոյ, որոյ յանկարծ ուրե գտեալ նշանագիրս աղիաբետաց հայերէն լեզուի” (Thereupon the king told them of a certain nobleman, a Syrian bishop named Daniel, who recently happened to possess alphabetic characters for the Armenian language). Translation Terian 2022, 71.

**32** The purely linguistic characteristics of the discovered script were not the only factors leading to its rejection. Ani Honarchian emphasized the social motivations behind the creation of the Armenian alphabet, such as the desire to maintain a distance from Greek (Roman) and Syriac (Persian) influences. For further details, see Honarchian 2018, 45-55.

Consequently, they initiated a mission to Osroene with the aim of creating a new and original Armenian alphabet.

Movsēs Xorenac'i, in his *History*, noted that Maštoc' visited bishop Daniel (cf. Movsēs, *Hist.* 3.52, translation Thomson 1978, 319). Unfortunately, we have little additional information about this bishop, aside from his name, the approximate dates of his office, and his location, making identification a challenge. Nevertheless, some conjectures can be made. The acts of the Synod of Isaac, held in 410, mention several Syriac bishops named Daniel, including Daniel of Erbil, Daniel of Beth-Moksaye, and Daniel of Arzon (Melloni, Ishac 2023, 602-3).

If we accept Movsēs Xorenac'i's account of Maštoc' visiting Daniel during his journey, we should consider the possible routes he might have taken. There were two primary roads leading into the Roman Empire from the Ayrarat district in Persian Armenia. The northern route passed through the city of Satala, while the southern route went through the cities of Martyropolis and Amida.<sup>33</sup> Since Maštoc' entered Roman territory via Amida and subsequently travelled to Edessa, it is likely that he took the southern route. Both Beth-Moksaye and Arzon were located along this southern road, whereas Erbil was significantly farther to the south. Furthermore, Beth-Moksaye and Arzon were relatively close to Edessa, which served as a hub for many Syriac and Armenian scholars, intellectuals, and students seeking Hellenic and Syriac education.<sup>34</sup>

Naturally, students from Armenia who sought education in Roman Osroene not only acquired linguistic proficiency but also absorbed the theological inclinations of their alma mater.<sup>35</sup> The limited evidence available suggests that Armenian students were regular attendees at the Osroene schools, particularly the renowned ones in Edessa. It is plausible to imagine that, while residing in the multilingual and intellectually vibrant environment of the Roman Syriac schools, Armenian students attempted to use the alphabetic characters of the languages they were studying to represent the sounds of their

---

**33** For the maps and description of the routes from Persian Armenia to Rome, see Hewsen 2000, 70; Dillemann 1962, 147.

**34** The so-called School of the Persians in Edessa provided an education grounded in classical Hellenistic standards, covering subjects such as geography, philosophy, history, astronomy, literature, and exegesis. This educational tradition was later carried on at the School in Nisibis. The association of the school with the Persians suggests it maintained close ties with Christians of various ethnic backgrounds living outside the Roman Empire. For further reading, see Drijvers 1994, 49-59; and Vööbus 1965, 1-32.

**35** Paul Peeters traced the influence of the Syriac theological school on the Armenian ecclesiastical tradition (Peeters 1951, 179-85). Louis Mariès specifically examined the impact of Theodore's teachings on *De Deo*, written by one of Maštoc's students, Eznik of Kolb (Mariès 1924, 197-202).

own language.<sup>36</sup> Instances of bilingualism, multilingualism, code-switching, and diglossia have been documented in the Osroene region both before and after the fifth century (Taylor 2002, 298-313).

It stands to reason that certain linguistic experiments to render Armenian in writing, possibly using existing letters from other alphabets, might hypothetically have been attempted within the multilingual scholarly environment of the Osroene schools. It is likely that even if such experiments took place, they did not extend beyond a mere scholastic exercise, deemed unsuitable for serious literary endeavours. In any case, to my knowledge, there is no evidence of any administrative support for hypothetical linguistic experiments with Armenian writing before the initiative of Vramšhapuh, Sahak, and Mashtots, as narrated by Koriwn.

Therefore, if the mysterious writing in allegedly proto-Armenian script found by Daniel really existed, it is plausible to assume that it could have been crafted within the milieu of the Syriac schools. Arguments supporting this hypothesis are that this writing was allegedly discovered by a Syriac bishop, and there appeared to be no prior efforts to introduce it to Persian Armenia. Nevertheless, this hypothetical writing may have been preserved and known at a local level.

According to Abraham Terian, the Armenian text of the *Life of Maštoc'* suggests that Daniel did not merely find a certain writing with proto-Armenian letters but that he was their creator (Terian 2022, 133, fn. 6). Regardless, I believe that the creation of such characters was a private initiative that clearly required remarkable philological expertise in Armenian, as well as Syriac and other forms of Aramaic.<sup>37</sup> This level of linguistic proficiency points to the scholarly environment of the Roman Syriac schools as a likely *alma mater* of their creator. This hypothetical connection may be indirectly supported by the fact that, in their efforts to invent the Armenian alphabet, Maštoc' and Sahak sought assistance from the scholarly milieu of Amida and Edessa.

---

**36** For cases of linguistic influences in multilingual environments, see Pawel Nowakowski 2023, 50-78. Recently, Briquel-Chatonnet published an intriguing study on the reappearance of Western-style Aramaic inscriptions in North Syria after a long absence from local epigraphic sources. Briquel-Chatonnet argued that, as local Aramaic speakers lost their writing skills, they borrowed a form of written Aramaic from a neighbouring region, where it had acquired the prestige of a church language by the fourth century, thanks to the translation of the Bible, Christian liturgy, and the writings of Bardaisan and Ephrem of Nisibis. For more details, see Briquel-Chatonnet 2024, 44.

**37** Koriwn informs us that "the letters were insufficient to fully convey the syllabic sounds of the Armenian language, especially since these letters were found to have been gleaned and recovered from other literatures" (Koriwn, *Life* 6.12 [46], translation Terian 2022, 73). Anahit G. Perixanyan mentioned the adapted Aramaic square script found in ancient inscriptions in Armenia and Northern Mesopotamia and argued that, similarly, Daniel's letters most likely utilized Semitic alphabets (Perixanyan 1966, 103-33).

Whoever the inventor of Daniel's letters may have been, it is likely that this individual lacked the administrative resources necessary to develop the project to a level that would garner approval from ecclesiastical and state officials. Without such authorization, any attempted translation of the Bible and liturgy into a newly created written language would have been unimaginable.

Administrative episcopal resources were necessary for the dissemination of translations among Christian communities of different dioceses. Thus, for example, Jerome, in the prefaces to his translations, always tried to emphasize the authority of prominent ecclesiastic figures who commissioned his work. In the preface to his corrected version of the *Vetus Latina*, he pointed to the precarious position of an author who dared to revise the translation of the New Testament. Jerome claimed that without the urgent request and support of Pope Damasus, who commissioned his work, he would not have undertaken it.<sup>38</sup>

Maštoc' acted on behalf of King Vramšapuh and Catholicos Sahak, but even he required the approval of the Roman Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople to teach the Armenian language within the territory of Roman Armenia. However, it took Maštoc' more than ten years to return to Roman territory in search of political and ecclesiastical support from the highest Roman authorities.

## 6 Maštoc's Second Journey to the Roman Territory: Historical Circumstances

Scholars generally agree on the timing of Maštoc's second journey to Roman territory between 422 and 425. The motivation for this trip arose from preceding religious and political tensions. Since the Council of Isaac in 410, Shahanshah Yazdgerd I had begun to assert his authority over the Church of the East by employing a strategy of religious tolerance and patronage. As Scott McDonough argued in his recent article, this approach effectively increased the authority and power of Christian hierarchs at the Persian court, consequently posing a challenge to the Magian priests (McDonough 2023, 100-22). The Synod of Yabalaha, held in 419-20, reinforced the decisions made

---

**38** Cf. *Incipit praefatio Sancti Hieronymi presbyteri in Evangelio*, 10-12: "*Adversum quam invidiam duplex causa me consolatur: quod et tu qui summus sacerdos es fieri iubes, et verum non esse quod variat etiam maledicorum testimonio conprobatur*" (Against such envy, I am consoled by two reasons: both because you, who are the highest priest, command it to be done, and because it is proven to be untrue by the testimony of even those who speak ill; cf. Weber, Gryson 1983, 1515). In this passage, Jerome spoke about the envy of the critics of his translation, who nevertheless acknowledged some inconsistencies of the old translation.



in 410. However, inter-religious tensions and mutual provocations continued to build, ultimately leading to persecution at the end of 420.<sup>39</sup>

Upon the death of Yazdgerd I and the beginning of Wahrām V's reign, Theodosius II sent his troops to the Persian Arzanene via Armenia. Meanwhile, the Armenian king Šābuhr was assassinated in Ctesiphon. Thus, in 421-22, Armenia became a corridor for Roman military troops, while simultaneously experiencing its own succession crisis and political turbulence. Due to its socio-political context, the Armenian church was closely intertwined with royal and aristocratic power, offering both benefits and challenges, such as political interference in the selection of church leaders.<sup>40</sup>

The peace between Rome and Persia coincided with the end of Armenia's succession crisis. Wahrām V facilitated the enthronement of king Artasēs. However, while neither the peace treaty nor the accession of a king from the Arsacid dynasty substantially altered the existing political landscape, the attitudes and dynamics of state and ecclesiastical politics in Armenia were significantly affected. Discussing the political 'side effects' of the peace between the Romans and Persians and the enthronement of Artasēs, Giusto Traina highlighted the demise of the Armenian royal line, marking the end of the last Armenian king's unsuccessful reign (Traina 2023, 29-39; also Traina 2009, 3-6).

In ecclesiastical politics, instability persisted due to several disruptive factors. These included strained relationships with the Roman state and church, overshadowed by the war, and tensions with the Church of the East, which increasingly sought independence from Rome and aimed to extend its influence over the Armenian church.<sup>41</sup> Both issues were delicate and required careful management. This responsibility was entrusted to Maštoc'.

---

**39** For an analysis of the events leading up to the war of 421-22 and a meticulous study of the conflict's details, see Greatrex and Amanatidis-Saadé 2023, 5-29.

**40** In his recent article, McDonough compared the dynamics between church and state powers in the Church of the East and the Armenian church. He demonstrated that, unlike its southern counterpart, the episcopal sees in Armenia aligned closely with aristocratic landholdings. As a result, Armenian bishops were effectively subordinated to the noble clans (McDonough 2023, 126).

**41** Thus, the first paragraph of the *Acts of the Synod of Yabalaha* lists Armenia among the dioceses subordinate to the Catholicos of the Church of the East (Melloni, Ishac 2023, 621). The Acts do not specify whether a representative from Armenia was among the signatories; however, the absence of Sahak's name – who would have participated had he accepted the authority of Yabalaha – from the list is notable.

## 7 The Date of Maštoc' Second Journey

Most likely, the mission set in late 422, early 423<sup>42</sup> via the northern road from Armenia to Melitene.<sup>43</sup>

Vardazaryan in her article about Maštoc'’s journey to Byzantium presented her hypothesis concerning the probable route.<sup>44</sup> She suggested: Dvin/Vagarshapat-Bagavan-Tigranakert-Amid-Melitene-Arabissos-Caesarea-Ancyra-Nicomedia-Constantinople (Vardazaryan 2019, 158-9). Vardazaryan also argued that Maštoc' and his team secured a permission to use *cursus publicus* and travelled by *angaria* – a covered four-wheeled heavy cart drawn by oxen. Their journey lasted approximately 10-12 months (Vardazaryan 2019, 162-3).

*Terminus post quem* of the journey corresponds to the end of the Roman-Persian conflict. Koriwn mentioned that, during his royal audience, Maštoc' was received by the *Augusti* – the Emperor and his wife (cf. Koriwn, *Life* 17/16 [66.7-11], translation Terian 2022, 89-91). While Theodosius II married in 421, Athenais-Eudokia received the official title of Augusta in 423 (Terian 2022, 162). Naturally, one should not expect the Armenian historian to provide meticulous accuracy regarding the formal acquisition of official titles. However, the journey could not have occurred during the war or prior to the resolution of the succession crisis, as the mission would have made little sense before the establishment of a new *status quo*. Therefore, I disagree with those scholars who propose earlier starting dates for the journey, such as 419-21.<sup>45</sup>

Koriwn noted that when Maštoc' returned from his mission, he “presented himself to the holy bishop, Sahak, and to the king of Armenia, whose name was Artashēs” (cf. Koriwn, *Life* 17/16 [70.24], translation Terian 2022, 89-91). Since the journey likely took no more than a year, it could not have started so early that, by its conclusion,

---

<sup>42</sup> Peeters, Tallon and Arevshatyan indicated 422 as the start date of the journey (Peeters 1951, 212; Tallon 1955, 13-14; Arevshatyan 1997, 309-24.) Winkler argued for 423 and I also stand by this date (Winkler 1997, 92).

<sup>43</sup> The choice of the northern route may be explained by the official pretext for the journey – namely, to seek the Roman Emperor's consent to teach the newly invented Armenian written language to the Roman Armenians. Additionally, the region of Amida, through which the southern route passed, was still a site of post-war negotiations. Socrates Scholasticus reported that Acacius of Amida ransomed 7,000 Persian captives and also negotiated the liberation of the deposed Catholicos Dadisho, who had been imprisoned by the Persian authorities (cf. Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 7.21.1-6; also Baum, Winkler 2003, 19-21).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Vardazaryan 2019, 156-65. In her earlier article, also devoted to the second journey of Maštoc' to the Roman territory, Vardazaryan argued that Maštoc' likely reached Constantinople by Easter and participated in the court Easter ceremonies (Vardazaryan 2016, 219-30).

<sup>45</sup> 419-20 as the starting dates for the mission were suggested by Akinean (Akinean 1949, 95-173) and Sarkissian (Sarkissian 1965, 103, fn.1).

Armenia still lacked a king. *The terminus ante quem* for the mission's end is 425, as this is the last year of Atticus of Constantinople, who also welcomed Maštoc' at court.

The evidence suggesting an earlier date for the mission centres around the figure of the Roman general Anatolius.

## 8 Maštoc' and Anatolius

Koriwn mentioned that Maštoc' was hosted by the bishop Acacius of Melitene and Anatolius, "commander of the land" (*սպարապետն աշխարհին*).<sup>46</sup> Koriwn also relayed that Anatolius facilitated Maštoc''s mission by announcing the Armenian embassy in a letter to the Emperor and securing his approval. Koriwn briefly described the royal audience, mentioning that Maštoc' obtained an imperial decree authorizing the teaching of the Armenian language to the inhabitants of Lesser Armenia and subjugation of the sect of the Borborites. On his way back, Maštoc' passed the decree to Anatolius, who arranged for the teaching of the Armenian alphabet and the subjugation of the Borborites (cf. Koriwn, *Life* 17/16 [66-8], translation Terian 2022, 89-91).

Movsēs Xorenac'i did not provide a step-by-step account of the mission. Instead, he simply announced Sahak's decision to send Maštoc' "to the western regions" of Armenia and then included the texts of Sahak's letters to Theodosius II, Atticus, and Anatolius, along with their respective responses (cf. Movsēs, *Hist.* 3.57, translation Thomson 1978, 326-30). These letters are most likely fictional,<sup>47</sup> invented to mask Movsēs' lack of an access to accurate historical account of the journey. Furthermore, they convey the general idea of Sahak's humble petition for authorization of Armenian teaching and the much more elaborate replies he received. Unlike Koriwn, Movsēs claimed that Theodosius not only granted permission for Armenian teaching but also ordered General Anatolius to build a city in Armenia "to serve as a refuge for yourselves and our armies" (cf. Movsēs, *Hist.* 3.57, translation Thomson 1978, 329). Additionally, Movsēs provided a detailed and rhetorically elaborate description of the construction of the city of Theodosiopolis, which was administered by Anatolius.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Koriwn, *Life* 17/16 [65.4]: "he was sincerely and amicably honoured by the bishops and rulers and provincials of the land, especially by the commander in chief of the land whose name was Anatolios. The latter presented the matters in writing to the emperor, whose name was Theodos[ios], the son of the emperor Arkadios"; [66.5]: "And he took a great many of the disciples to the city of Melitene and entrusted them to the holy bishop of the city whose name was Akakios". Translation from Terian 2022, 87-9.

<sup>47</sup> Garsoïan expressed her doubts about the authenticity of these letters based on their absence from the *Book of Letters* (Garsoïan 2007, 188).

Movsēs conveyed that while Maštoc' was busy teaching the Armenian language, Sahak negotiated a treaty with Wahrām V, which resulted in the enthronement of King Artasēs (cf. Movsēs., *Hist.* 3.58, translation Thomson 1978, 331). Giusto Traina argued that Artasēs's accession was the outcome of "a compromise between Theodosius II and the Great King Bahrām V" (Traina 2009, 3). He also emphasized the role of general Anatolius in the conflict of 421-22. Traina professed that while *magister militiae per Orientem* Ardabur ravaged the border region of Arzazene, Anatolius joined the rebels in Armenia and by the time of Maštoc's return from Theodosius, Anantolius came up close to the Armenian borders (cf. Movsēs, *Hist.* 3.58, translation Thomson 1978, 331). In other words, according to Traina's analysis, Anatolius was active in Armenian territory in 421, and by early 422, he and his troops approached the Armenian border from the Roman side. The scholar also asserted that when Anatolius threatened the Armenian border, the naxarars sought Sahak's assistance, and the Catholicos used his authority to negotiate with Wahrām.

Traina's argument, which primarily relies on Movsēs's testimony, suggests that Maštoc's journey was completed by 422. This account contradicts my assertion that Maštoc's journey began at the end of 422 or the beginning of 423. My dating is based mainly on Koriwn, who indicated that Anatolius assisted Maštoc' on his way to and from Theodosius. Koriwn's narrative is more plausible, as it does not imply that Anatolius provided administrative support to Maštoc' while actively participating in military actions far from Melitene, where the Armenian delegation was hosted. In contrast, Movsēs's account is less coherent, as it assumes that Anatolius could simultaneously assist Maštoc' with his teaching mission, and with the subjugation of the Borborites, oversee the construction of Theodosiopolis, and march his troops to the Armenian border.

I believe that this logical contradiction undermines Traina's interpretation of Anatolius' involvement in the military actions of 421-22. Additionally, it seems highly unlikely that Maštoc' could have set out on a journey amidst the ongoing military conflict. On his way to Melitene, Maštoc' would have had to traverse a region that, according to Socrates, was devastated by the troops of Ardabur.<sup>48</sup> It is more plausible that the Armenian mission took place after the war.

Furthermore, I find it unclear what evidence supports the theory that Anatolius joined the Armenian rebels in 421. This thesis was first proposed by Holum and subsequently supported by Blockley

---

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 7.18 (363.9): "The Roman emperor acted first, despatching a special army under the command of the general Ardaburius. He invaded Persia through Armenia and laid waste one of the Persian districts called Azazene". Translation from Greatrex, Lieu 2002, 38.

and Traina, yet none of these scholars provided specific references to substantiate this assertion (Holum 1982, 101, fn. 102; Blockley 1992, 200, fn. 31; Traina 2023, 34).

Another related question that has sparked scholarly discussion concerns the timing of Anatolius' service as *magister militum per Orientem*. Both Koriwn and Movsēs claimed that Anatolius already held this high military position at the time of Maštoc's journey. It is important to note that if Anatolius had occupied this role during the war, he would have been engaged in active military actions and, therefore, could not have acted as a mediator between Maštoc' and Theodosius or as a curator of the Armenian teaching and heretic-hunting projects.

A number of Roman and Armenian sources assert that Anatolius served as commander of the East from 433 to 446. The Roman sources include the writings of Paul of Edessa, John of Antioch, Theodoret of Cyrus, Evagrius Scholasticus, along with *Codex Justinianus*, *Chronicle of Edessa*, and others (Martindale 1992, 84-5).

However, Cyril of Scythopolis indicated that Anatolius' term as *magister militum per Orientem* occurred during the reign of Yazdgerd I. Interestingly, Cyril placed Anatolius' service in the province of Arabia, rather than in Armenia.<sup>49</sup> Procopius also noted that "The Emperor Theodosius happened to have sent Anatolius, the *magister militum per Orientem*, as an ambassador to the Persians on his own" (cf. Procop., *Bel. Pers.* 1.2.12, translation from Graetrex, Lieu 2002, 42).

Kenneth Holum, Roger Blockley, and Geoffrey Greatrex referenced these testimonies to argue that Anatolius held the high military post during the conflict of 421-22 (Holum 1982, 101; Blockley 1992, 200; Geoffrey Greatrex 1993, 6-8). Greatrex also linked Procopius's account of Anatolius's embassy to the Persians with the aftermath of the conflict of 421-22, rather than that of 440. Blockley regarded Procopius' narrative as anachronistic, attributing it to confusion with the aftermath of the war of 440 (Blockley 1992, 200, fn. 36). Additionally, Holum and Blockley proposed that the Anatolius mentioned in Roman sources as *magister militum* during the war of 421 was a different individual from the Anatolius who held the position from 433 to 446.

Nina Garsoïan dismissed the notion of Anatolius' participation in the 421-22 conflict as commander of the East and expressed general doubt about his presence in the area of Roman Armenia during that time (Garsoïan 2010, 186). She also rejected the idea that Anatolius

---

**49** Cf. Cyr. Scyth. *Vit. Euthym.* 10.5-10: "Διαβληθεὶς οὖν τῷ βασιλεῖ Ἰσδιγέρδῃ λαβὼν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἡμίξηρου, τὸν Τερέβωνα λέγω, καὶ πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν συγγένειαν καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν Ῥωμαίοις προσφεύγει. Οὐστῖνας Ἀνατόλιος ὁ τότε τῆς Ἀνατολῆς στρατηλάτης δεξάμενος Ῥωμαίοις ὑποσπόνδους ποιεῖται καὶ τὴν φυλαρχίαν τῶν ἐν Ἀραβίᾳ ὑποσπόνδων Ῥωμαίοις Σαρακηνῶν Ἀσπαβέτῳ ἐνεχειρίσεν" (Greek text from Schwartz 1939, 19).

oversaw the construction of Theodosiopolis (192). This hypothesis was developed by Greatrex, who argued that the military fortress was built around 420 (Greatrex 1993, 5-8).

I question the hypothesis put forward by Holum and Blockley regarding the existence of two generals named Anatolius, who supposedly occupied the high military post with a ten-year gap between their tenures. It seems more plausible that both Armenian and Roman sources anachronistically ascribed to Anatolius the position he held later. For instance, Elišē referred to the commander of the East, Anatolius, in his account of the war of 440, while Łazar P'arpec'i mentioned him in relation to the events of the Armenian revolt of 450.<sup>50</sup> Koriwn finished writing his history in 443,<sup>51</sup> at a time when Anatolius was indeed a well-known commander, and thus the hagiographer could have easily referred to him by this title.

At any rate, it seems doubtful that Anatolius could have served as *magister militum per Orientem* for 26 years. It is possible, however, that he held this position twice for shorter terms. Given that the period of 433-46 for Anatolius' term in military office is much better attested in the sources, I think that either the mention of the earlier term is anachronistic or he received the honour twice.

Aside from Movsēs Xorenac'i, we do not have any other Roman or Armenian sources explicitly discussing Anatolius' active participation in military actions during the conflict of 421-22. Garsoïan cast doubt on Movsēs's account.<sup>52</sup> The very style of narration regarding Maštoc's second journey suggests that, in the absence of more reliable sources, Xorenac'i resorted to composing fictional correspondence and an *ekphrastic* portrayal of the foundation of Theodosiopolis.

Regarding the possible interaction between Anatolius and Maštoc', I believe that if it is not entirely fictional, it must have taken place after the war of 421-22. This would imply that, following the war, Anatolius was stationed around Melitene, where he assisted the Armenians in their mission.

A distinctive solution to the 'Anatolius' problem' was offered by Olga Vardazaryan (Vardazaryan 2019, 156-65). She provided a detailed analysis of the circumstances surrounding Maštoc's second journey

---

**50** Elišē, *Hist.* 7.61-2, translation Thomson 1982, 123. Łazar P'arpec'i in his account of the events in Armenia when Marcian became Roman emperor (450) conveyed that at that time Anatolius was "a sparapet of Antioch" (Łazar, *Hist.* 41.74, translation Thomson 1991, 118).

**51** For Abraham Terian's commentary upon the date of Koriwn's composition, see Terian 2022, 8.

**52** Garsoïan expressed doubts about Movsēs's testimonies regarding Vardan Mamikonean, the grandson of Sahak, accompanying Maštoc' on his mission, as well as Sahak's journey to Roman territory prior to Maštoc's second mission and the role of Anatolius in the foundation of Theodosiopolis (Garsoïan 2010, 181-96).

to Roman territory. She expressed doubts regarding the accuracy of references to the renowned general Flavius Anatolius in the works of Koriwn and Movsēs (Vardazaryan 2019, 159). Vardazaryan suggested that these references are merely distant and confused recollections of different historical figures. She highlighted the uncertainty surrounding Anatolius's title in the manuscripts of Koriwn, which, in her view, suggests possible interference by an unknown editor and corruption of the original text. Additionally, Vardazaryan pointed out that, within the Roman Empire, the affairs of foreigners were typically managed not by the military but by the *magister officiorum* (magister of embassies or offices) of the provincial capital (Vardazaryan 2019, 160).

Although Vardazaryan's doubts are reasonable, I disagree with her opinion. Given Flavius Anatolius's involvement in the war of 440, as described by Elišē, and the fact that Koriwn published his work by 443, we can confidently assert that the general was well-known among the Armenian nobility (cf. fns 83 and 84). The later mention of Anatolius by Łazar P'arpec'i further confirms this fact. In these circumstances, I do not believe that Koriwn could have deliberately misled his readers regarding the involvement of the famous general in the reception of Maštoc's delegation. On the other hand, since Anatolius was the *magister militum per Orientem* at the time when Koriwn wrote his work, the biographer could have easily made a mistake by referring to him by his contemporary title, which he had not yet acquired during Maštoc's mission. In other words, I can accept Koriwn's lapse in dating Anatolius's title, but I am reluctant to believe that his involvement in Maštoc's mission was entirely fictional. Regarding the duties of the *magister militum* versus the *magister officiorum*, I would like to point out that there is ample evidence from the correspondence between Theodore of Cyrus and Anatolius showing that the general actively participated in ecclesiastic politics while holding his military post.<sup>53</sup>

Koriwn also mentioned Acacius, the bishop of Melitene, as the host for the Armenians. The identity of the bishop Acacius referenced by Koriwn has been questioned by some scholars, who doubt that he is the same Acacius who later sent warning letters to Sahak and the Armenian clergy, and who, along with Rabbula, marshalled the campaign against Theodore of Mopsuestia (Baudrillart 1953, col. 242). The reason for this scholarly debate lies in the uncertainty surrounding the starting date of Acacius' episcopacy. Acacius, known as a supporter of Cyril of Alexandria and a fellow combatant of Rabbula, was active from shortly before the Council of Ephesus onwards. Since the *terminus ante quem* for Maštoc's mission is 425

---

**53** Cf. Theodore of Cyrus, *Letters* 45, 79, 92, 111, 119, 121, 139. On Anatolius's involvement in the ecclesiastic politics see Garsoïan 1999, 73.

(the last year of Atticus of Constantinople's episcopacy), there is a gap of at least five years between the possible date of the Armenian mission and the confirmed start of Acacius' episcopacy. This discrepancy led Winkler to suggest that Maštoc' may not have been received by the famous supporter of Cyril, but rather by his predecessor, who also bore the same name. However, I find this hypothesis unconvincing. Instead, I align with Sarkissian's argument, which points out that Acacius not only hosted Maštoc' but also, according to Koriwn and Movsēs, cared for his students left in Melitene.<sup>54</sup> If my interpretation of the dates of Maštoc's journey and the identification of Acacius is correct, we can tentatively place the start of his episcopacy between 422 and 425.

## 9 Conclusion

I have revised the history of Maštoc's first and second journeys to Roman territory from the perspective of frontier networking, using a prosopographic analysis of the Roman hosts and encounters involving the Armenian missionary and his fellow travellers.

In my analysis of the scholarly discussion regarding the dates of Maštoc's first journey, I propose that it took place in 406-07. This journey occurred during the episcopacy of Pqida of Edessa, whose name was misspelt by Koriwn and Movsēs as Babilas. I reject the identification of Babilas with Rabbula of Edessa, who later sought to influence the theological direction of the Armenian church.

Importantly, during his first visit to Roman territory, Maštoc' not only created the Armenian alphabet but also established significant theological and educational connections with Theodore of Mopsuestia and the schools in Edessa. One of the staff members at the so-called School of the Persians in Edessa was Ibas, who oversaw the project to translate Theodore's works into Syriac. Thus, Maštoc's stay in Edessa reinforced pre-existing ties with the Syriac and Hellenic educational centres in Osroene, a long-established destination for Armenian scholars. These educational connections likely provided fertile ground for the initial attempts to develop a script for the Armenian language, which was associated with a certain Syriac bishop named Daniel. Although there is insufficient evidence to definitively identify this individual, I suggest that he may have been an alumnus of one of the Osroene schools who possessed considerable philological expertise in Armenian and Syriac. By comparing Maštoc's journey with the list of names of the Syriac bishops who were signatories of

---

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Koriwn, *Life* 17/16 [66.5-6], translation Terian 2022, 88-9; also Movsēs, *Hist.* 3.57, translation Thomson 1978, 328; also Sarkissian 1965, 135.



the Council of Isaac (410), I speculate that Daniel of Beth-Moksaye or Daniel of Arzon could be the enigmatic philologist mentioned.

Regarding the second journey of Maštoc', I reviewed the scholarly discussion concerning its starting date and proposed 422-23 as the most likely period for the mission, with 425 serving as a clear *terminus ante quem*. Since Koriwn and Movsēs mentioned Anatolius, the commander of the East, as an assistant and host to Maštoc', I engaged in an extensive scholarly discussion about this notable figure's eventful life. Given the dubious nature of the existing evidence, I suggest that Anatolius did not take an active role in military actions during the conflict of 421-22. Regarding the references to Anatolius' position as *magister militum per Orientem* during this conflict, I suppose that they are either instances of anachronistic usage or that he held this position twice. If the mention of Anatolius in connection with Maštoc's journey has any basis in reality, their meeting likely occurred after the war in 422-23 (possibly extending to 425), when Anatolius was located around Melitene. Maštoc's other host was Acacius of Melitene, who later became known for his support of Cyril of Alexandria and his correspondence with Sahak. Therefore, I contend that the starting date of Acacius's episcopacy, a point of contention in scholarship, could be situated between 422 and 425.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

#### Acacius Melitiensis

Richard, M. (1977). *Acace de Mélitène, Proclus de Constantinople et la Grande Arménie. Opera Minora II*. Leuven: Brepols.

#### Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum

Schwartz, E. (ed.) (1935). *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum. Concilium Universale Chalcedonensis*. Tome 2, volume 1, part 3. Leipzig: De Gruyter.

Price, R.; Gaddis, M. (transl.) (2005). *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*. Vol 1. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. Translated Texts for Historians 45.

#### Biblia Sacra Vulgata

Weber, R.; Gryson, R. (eds) (1983). *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*. Editio quinta. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

#### Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta

Melloni, A.; Ishac, E.A. (eds). (2023). *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*. Volume V/2. Turnhout: Brepols. Scientific editors of the Volume's chapters: "Council of Isaac (410)", M.-J. Pierre & C. Nakano (eds), "Council of Yabalaha (419/420)", L. Van Rompay (ed.), "Council of Dadisho (424)", K. Smith (ed.).

#### Chronicon Edessenum

Guidi, I. (ed.) (1903). *Chronica Minora. Pars prior*. (CSCO Syr. III.4). Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae.

#### Cyrrillus Scythopolitanus

Schwartz, E. (Hrsg.) (1939). *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*. TU 49/2. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs Verlag.

- Greatrex, G.; Lieu, S.N.C. (eds). (2002). *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars. Part II. AD 363-630. A Narrative Sourcebook*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Etišē  
Ter-Minasyan (ed.) (1957). “*Etišē vasn Vardanay ew Hayoc’ paterazmin*” (On Vardan and the Armenian War)”. Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Science Press.
- Thomson, R.W. (transl.) (1982). *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Koriwn  
Terian, A. (2022). *The Life of Maštoc’ By His Disciple Koriwn*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Łazar  
Tēr-Mkrtch’ean, G.; Malkasean, S. (eds) [1904] (1986). *Łazar P’arapec’i, Patmut’iwn Hayoc’*. Yerevan University Press.
- Thomson, R.W. (transl.) (1991). *The History of Łazar P’arpec’i*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar’s Press.
- Liberatus Carthaginensis Diaconus  
Blaudeau, P. (éd.) (2019). *Libératus de Carthage. Abrégé de l’histoire des nestoriens et des eutychiens*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf. Sources Chrétiennes 607.
- Movsēs Xorenac’i  
Abelean, M.; Yarut’iwn, S. (eds) [1913] (1981). *Movsēs, Xorenac’i, Patmut’iwn Hayoc’*. Yerevan University Press.
- Thomson, R.W. (1978). *Movsēs Khorenats’i, History of the Armenians*. Cambridge (MA); London: Harvard University Press.
- Photius  
Henry, R. (éd.) (1959). *Photius. Bibliothèque*, vol. 1. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Rabula Edessena  
Phoenix, R.R.; Jr.; Horn, C.B. (2017). *The Rabbula Corpus Comprising the Life of Rabbula, His Correspondance, a Homily Delivered in Constantinople, Canons and Hymns*. Atlanta: SBL Press.
- Letter from the Armenians to Photius of Constantinople  
Bedjan, P. (éd.) (1910). *Nestorius: Le livre d’Héraclide de Damas*. Paris: Letouzey et Ané.
- Syriac Actis of the Council of Ephesus  
Flemming, J. (Hrsg.) (1970). *Die Akten der ephesinischen Synode vom Jahre 449*, vol. 15. Berlin: Weidmann.

## Secondary sources

- Adontz, N. (1925). “Ancanōt’ ējēr Maštoc’i ew nra ašakertneri keank’ic’ ašt ōtar atbiwrneri” (Unknown Pages from the Life of Maštoc’ and His Students according to Foreign Sources). *Handes Amsorya*, 39, 435-41.
- Akinean, N. (1949). *S. Maštoc’ vardapet* (St. Maštoc’ Vardapet). Vienna: Mxit’arean tparan. Azgayin Matenadaran 158.
- Arevshatyan, S. (1997). “Maštoc’ et les débuts de la patristique arménienne”. Mahé, J.P.; Thomson, R.W. (eds), *From Byzantium to Iran: Armenian Studies in Honour of Nina G. Garsoian*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 309-24.
- Baum, W.; Winkler, D.W. (2003). *The Church of the East: A Concise History*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Baudrillart, A. (éd.) (1953). *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, tome 1. Paris: Librairie Letouzey.

- Becker, A.H. (2006). *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Becker, A.H. (2008). *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Blockley, R.C. (1992). *East Roman Foreign Policy, Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius*. Leeds: The University of Leeds Press.
- Blum, G.G. (1969). *Rabbula of Edessa: Der Christ, der Bischof, der Theologe*. Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO.
- Briquel-Chatonnet, F. (1991). "Rôle de la langue et de l'écriture syriaques dans l'affirmation de l'identité chrétienne au Proche-Orient". *Phoinikeia Grammata. Lire et écrire en Méditerranée = Actes du IXe Congrès du groupe de contact interuniversitaire d'études phéniciennes et puniques* (Liège, 15-18 novembre 1989). Namur, 257-74.
- Briquel-Chatonnet, F. (2024). "To Write in Greek or to Write in Syriac: Dynamics of Languages in North Syria in Late Antiquity". Minets, Y.; Nowakowski, P. (eds), *Shaping Letters, Shaping Communities: Multilingualism and Linguistic Change in Byzantine and Early Islamic Times*. Leiden: Brill, 25-49.
- Brock, S. (1982). "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning". Garsoïan, N.G.; Mathews, T.F.; Thomson, R.W. (eds), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 17-34.
- Dillemann, L. (1962). *Haute Mesopotamie Orientale et Pays Adjacents*. Paris: Librairie Orientale Paul Geuthiner.
- Doran, R. (2006). *Stewards Of The Poor: The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-Century Edessa*. Kalamazoo (MI): Cistercian Publications, Liturgical Press. (Cistercian Studies Series, Vol. 208).
- Drijvers, J.W. (1994). "The School of Edessa: Greek Learning and Local Culture". Drijvers, J.W.; MacDonald, A.A. (eds), *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*. Leiden: Brill, 49-59.
- Van Esbroeck, M. (1986). "Une lettre de Dorothee comte de Palestine aux Archimandrites Marcel et Mari". *Analecta Bollandiana*, 104, 145-59.
- Garsoïan, N. (1999). *L'Église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters.
- Garsoïan, N. (2004). "La date de la fondation de Théodosiopolis-Karin". *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 62, 181-96.
- Garsoïan, N. (2010). *Studies on the Formation of Christian Armenia*. Farnham: Ashgate Variorum.
- Greatrex, G.; Amanatidis-Saadé, G. (2023). "Les relations Romano-Perses sous Yazdgird Ier et Wahrām V". Jullien, C. (ed.), *Discourse, Power Issues, and Images: Transversal Studies on the Reigns of Yazdgird I and Wahrām V*. Leuven: Peeters, 5-29.
- Greatrex, G. (1993). "The Two Fifth-Century Wars Between Rome and Persia". *Florilegium*, 12, 1-14.
- Hewsen, R.H. (2000). *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*. University of Chicago Press.
- Holum, K.G. (1982). *Theodosian Princesses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.
- Honarchiansaky, A. (2018). *Connected Histories in Late Antiquity: A Study of a Peace between the Roman and Sasanian Empires and Its Diverging Impacts on Christianity in Greater Armenia and Iran* [PhD Dissertation]. Los Angeles: University of California. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1r46d0h3>.

- Honarchian, A. (2018). "Of God and Letters: A Sociolinguistic Study on the Invention of the Armenian Alphabet in Late Antiquity". Berberian, H.; Daryaei, T. (eds), *Reflections of Armenian Identity in History and Historiography*. Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 45-55.
- Inglisian, V. (1957). "Die Beziehungen des Patriarchen Proklos von Konstantinopel und des Bischofs Akakios von Melitene zu Armenien". *Oriens Christianus*, 41, 35-50.
- Jugeli, V. (2008). "The Lost Work of Theodoret of Cyrus Ad Quaesita Magorum Persarum". *Phasis: Greek and Roman Studies*, 11, 66-72.
- Labourt, J. (1904). *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la dynastie Sassanide (224-632)*. Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre.
- Mariès, L. (1924). "Le *De Deo* d'Eznik de Kolb connu sous le nom de 'Contre les sectes': études de critique littéraire et textuelle". *Revue des études arméniennes*, 4.2. Paris: Geuthner.
- Martindale, J.R. (1992). *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McDonough, S. (2023). "A Tale of Two Isaacs: Christians and the Crown in Fifth Century Ērānšahr". Jullien, C. (ed.), *Discourse, Power Issues, and Images, Transversal Studies on the Reigns of Yazdgird I and Wahram V*. Leuven: Peeters, 99-127.
- Nowakowski, P. (2023). "Of Presbyters and Stonemasons, or Switching Codes in a Syrian Village". Minets, Y.; Nowakowski, P. (eds), *Shaping Letters, Shaping Communities: Multilingualism and Linguistic Practice in the Late Antique Near East and Egypt*. Leiden: Brill, 50-79.
- Peeters, P. (1951). "Pour l'histoire des origines de l'alphabet arménien". *Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie Orientales*. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 171-207.
- Perixanyan, A.G. (1966). "K voprosu o proisxoždenii armjanskij pis'mennosti" (On the Question of the Origin of the Armenian Script). *Peredneaziatskij sbornik, II: Deshifrovka i interpretatsiya pis'mennosti Drevnego Vostoka*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", 103-33.
- Ramelli, I. (2013). *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment From the New Testament to Eriugena*. Leiden: Brill.
- Rammelt, C. (2008). *Ibas von Edessa: Rekonstruktion einer Biographie und dogmatischen Position zwischen den Fronten*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Reinink, G.J. (1997). "A New Fragment of Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Contra Magos*". *Le Muséon*, 110(1-2), 63-71.
- Reinink, G. (1995). "Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth". Drijvers, J.W.; MacDonald, A.A. (eds), *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*. Leiden: Brill, 77-89.
- Sarkissian, K. (1965). *The Council of Chalcedon and the Armenian Church*. New York: The Armenian Church Prelacy.
- Tallon, M. (1955). *Le Livre des Lettres, Documents arméniens du Ve siècle*. Beirut: Impr. catholique.
- Tamrazov, A.V. (2024). "Novonajdennye fragmenty iz *Contra Magos* i ranee neizdannye sirijskie citaty iz drugix tvorenij Feodora Mopsuestijskogo" (Newly Found Fragments from 'Contra magos' and Previously Unpublished Syriac Quotations from Other Works of Theodore of Mopsuestia). *Bible and Christian Antiquity* 2(22), 15-35.
- Taylor, D.G.K. (2002). "Bilingualism and Diglossia in Late Antique Syria and Mesopotamia". Adams, J.N.; Janse, M.; Swain, S. (eds), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Word*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 298-331.

- Ter-Minasean, E. (1964). “Hayoc’ greri gyuti t’vakani ev ayl harakic’ xndirneri masin” (On the Date of the Invention of Armenian Writing and Other Related Problems). *Bulletin of Matenadaran*, 7, 25-48.
- Traina, G. (2009). 428. *An Ordinary Year at the End of the Roman Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Traina, G. (2023). “Yazdgird I, Wahrām V and the End of Greater Armenia: A Note on the Armenian Sources”. Jullien, C. (ed.), *Discourse, Power Issues, and Images, Transversal Studies on the Reigns of Yazdgird I and Wahram V*. Leuven: Peeters, 29-39.
- Vardazaryan, Ö. (2016). “Inč’pes Maštoc’ə darjaw akimit ” (How Mashtots Became Acoimetos), *Banber Matenadarani*, 23, 219-30.
- Vardazaryan, Ö. (2019). “Maštoc’i uturevut’yunə Byuzandia. Koryuni bnagirə ev patmakan hangamank’nerə” (Maštoc’ Trip to Byzantium: Koriwn’s Text and the Historical Circumstances). *Banber Matenadarani*, 28, 156-65.
- Vööbus, A. (1965). *History of the School of Nisibis*. Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO.
- Winkler, G. (1997). *Studies in Early Christian Liturgy and Its Context*. Aldershot, Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Wood, P. (2010). *‘We Have No King But Christ’ Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400-585)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Xač’ikyan, L. (1964). “Mesrop Maštoc’i cnndyan 1600-amyakə” (The 1600th Anniversary of the Birth of Mesrop Mashtots). *Banber Matenadarani*, 7, 11-24.



# A Forgotten Voice: Giuseppe Cappelletti and *L'Armenia*

Ruben Campini

Masaryk University, Czech Republic; University of Fribourg, Germany

Annalisa Moraschi

Masaryk University, Czech Republic; École Pratique des Hautes Études, France

**Abstract** In 1841, Giuseppe Cappelletti (1802-1876) published in Florence a three-volume work titled *L'Armenia*, aiming to offer a comprehensive description of the country's history, geography, and culture grounded in Armenian historical sources. Despite being the first major Italian-language study of Armenia – and among the earliest of its kind in Western Europe – the work has been largely overlooked in subsequent scholarship. This article reassesses Cappelletti's contribution, situating his oeuvre within its broader socio-political and intellectual context, restoring a long-forgotten voice into the history of Italoophone Armenian studies.

**Keywords** Giuseppe Cappelletti. *L'Armenia*. Armenian studies. Venice. San Lazzaro degli Armeni. Mekhitarist Congregation. House of Savoy.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 *L'Armenia*: An Overview from the Outside. – 3 The Mekhitarists, a Catholic Priest, and the Savoy Crown. – 4 "Controversy Was His Muse". – 5 Conclusions.



## Peer review

Submitted 2024-11-18  
Accepted 2025-08-28  
Published 2025-12-12



## Open access

© 2025 Campini, Moraschi | CC BY 4.0



**Citation** Campini, R.; Moraschi, A. (2025). "A Forgotten Voice: Giuseppe Cappelletti and *L'Armenia*". *Armeniaca*, 4, 97-116.

## 1 Introduction

Throughout much of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> Western engagement with Armenia and its culture remained sporadic and largely confined to ecclesiastical history. After all, the country was rarely visited – especially following the outbreak of the Crimean War [fig. 1] – and occupies a marginal space even in the few travel accounts that mention it, where it appears only as a brief stopover on broader Orientalist itineraries through the East (Laycock 2009, 66-105).<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1 Cappelletti, G. (1841). *L'Armenia*, vol. 1. Frontispiece. Florence: Fabris

---

**1** The first draft of this article was prepared in 2022 as a partial outcome of the international project *Cultural Interactions in the Medieval Subcaucasian Region: Historiographical and Art-Historical Perspectives*, directed by Ivan Foletti and Michele Bacci. The final results of the project have been published in a two-volume monograph: Foletti, Bacci 2023. We would like to express our gratitude to the editorial board of *Armeniaca* and to the peer reviewers for their insightful and constructive feedback. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the Authors.

**2** For more information about the conflict, see Arnold 2010 and French Blake 1972. Broadly, on orientalism: Said 1978.



Against this backdrop, *L'Armenia* [fig. 2], a three-volume work published in Florence in 1841 by the Venetian priest Giuseppe Cappelletti (1802-1876), stands as an unusual and ambitious attempt to provide the public with a comprehensive treatment of Armenian history, geography, and culture. It is arguably the first such study in Italian and one of the earliest in any Western European language (Cappelletti 1841a).<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 2** Franz Roubaud, *Siege of Sevastopol*. 1904. Detail. Oil on canvas, 14 × 115 m.  
Sevastopol: Panorama Museum on the Siege of Sevastopol

Yet despite its broad scope and pioneering nature, the work has been largely neglected by contemporary historiography; Cappelletti himself – as Sona Haroutyunian has recently noted – has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention (Haroutyunian 2018, 27-41).<sup>4</sup>

This article wishes to address this oversight by reassessing Cappelletti's contribution within the history of Italophone Armenian studies. It does so by examining his work, the motivations behind it, as well as the political and intellectual context in which it was conceived.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the work has the year 1842 on the cover, but 1841 on the frontispieces of the volumes.

<sup>4</sup> On 26 March 2009, in the frame of the *III Giornata di Studi Armeni e Caucasic* in Venice, Tamara De Valerio – at the time a Ph.D. student at the University of Rouen – delivered a paper titled “Cappelletti: un armenista veneziano dell'Ottocento”. To the authors' present knowledge, however, there is no publication centred on his oeuvre.

## 2 **L'Armenia: An Overview from the Outside**

"To the ab. Giuseppe Cappelletti, nature was a mother and fortune a stepmother," wrote Rinaldo Fulin (1824-1884) in his obituary of the Venetian priest, "and in this contrast between the gifts of nature and the distress of fortune lies the reason why this man could not truly show what he was worth" (Fulin 1876, 225-6, esp. 225).<sup>5</sup> Despite having authored over fifty volumes primarily devoted to ecclesiastical and Venetian history, Cappelletti died on 2 February 1876 in financial hardship, largely forgotten by the public, and shadowed by a controversial reputation. This neglect stemmed partly from his divisive personality (as we shall explore) and partly from recurring criticisms of his historical work, frequently deemed inaccurate and lacking in philological and methodological rigor (Cappelletti 1844-70; 1848-55).<sup>6</sup>

Yet between the 1840s and 1860s, Cappelletti enjoyed a certain degree of popularity, emerging as a particularly active figure in Venetian religious life. More relevantly for this study, he played a fundamental role in introducing Italian-speaking audiences to a relatively uncharted field: the history and culture of Armenia. His long association with the Mekhitarist Monastery of San Lazzaro, which began in 1827 when he was just twenty-five years old, served as the catalyst for this engagement.<sup>7</sup> There, supported by the Congregation and granted access to its renowned library and printing press, Cappelletti began studying Classical Armenian and undertook the Italian translation of foundational historical texts, including the works of the fifth-century historian Movsēs Xorenac'i and his contemporary Elišē. He also provided the first Latin translation of the oeuvre of Saint Nersēs Klayec'i, further contributing to making Armenian sources accessible to a wider readership (Cappelletti 1841b; 1840; 1833).

Cappelletti's interest in this field culminated in 1841 with the publication of *L'Armenia*, this time an original work whose declared aim was "to refute the innumerable fabrications introduced by those who had previously written on the subject" and to provide a more accurate description of the country in every respect (Cappelletti 1841a, 1: 1).<sup>8</sup> Cappelletti's initial jibe targeted, on the one hand, the travel accounts of the previous century and, on the other

---

5 "All'ab. Giuseppe Cappelletti la natura fu madre e la fortuna madrigna: e in questo contrasto fra i doni della natura e le angustie della fortuna è da ricercare la causa per cui quest'uomo non poté veramente mostrare quanto valesse."

6 For a biography of the author, see Preto 1975, 225-6.

7 About the monastery, see, amongst other contributions: Peratoner 2006; Maguolo, Bandera 1999.

8 "Un'opera sull'Armenia, il cui scopo è smentire le innumerevoli falsità introdotte da quanti scrissero intorno questo argomento e far conoscere la verità qual è in se stessa".

hand, Antoine-Jean Saint-Martin (1791-1832), who had previously published his renowned *Mémoires historiques et géographiques sur l'Arménie* in Paris in 1818 (Saint-Martin 1818-19). Specifically, Cappelletti accused the French scholar of having conducted his study without sufficient knowledge of the Armenian language, thereby perpetuating errors rather than correcting earlier ones. In response, he proposed a thorough revision of the subject based on the direct consultation of Armenian primary sources. This approach echoes the rationale expressed in the preface to the English translation of Mik'ayēl Č'amč'ean (1738-1823) *History of Armenia* by Johannes Avdall, which likewise identified Western scholars' lack of proficiency in Armenian as a major obstacle to historical accuracy (Avdall 1827, 1: XVII). Yet, although Cappelletti did cite ancient sources, his work appears to draw heavily upon secondary materials produced by the Mekhitarist Fathers – especially the historical and geographical treatises of Łukas Inčičean (1758-1833) – which exhibit notable similarities with his writing. The result is a systematic compilation structured into three volumes: the first covers geography, the second addresses history and culture, and the third focuses on religion.

A closer reading, however, suggests that Cappelletti's goal was not merely to correct earlier inaccuracies, but rather to underscore Armenia's significance across all these domains. The second volume is particularly emblematic of this agenda: in the subchapter devoted to the *Arts and Literature that flourished in Armenia*, in fact, Cappelletti asserts that the country was in no way inferior to European nations in cultural achievement and, in certain respects, had even taken the lead (Cappelletti 1841a, 2: 231). He attributes to Armenia a central role especially in the fields of history and medicine, writing that “the Armenian nation, in the historical discipline, surpasses any other nation as regards the number of the writers and their competence in reporting historical facts” (196),<sup>9</sup> and that medicine was “born in Armenia; and from Armenia, it spread to all other nations” (208).<sup>10</sup>

---

**9** “La nazione armena nel ramo storico primeggia sopra qualunque altra nazione, sì per la copia degli scrittori, sì per la loro ingenuità nel riferire le cose”.

**10** “In Armenia, dunque, ebbe principio la medicina; e dall'Armenia si diffuse a tutte le altre nazioni”.

### 3      **The Mekhitarists, a Catholic Priest, and the Savoy Crown**

Cappelletti's celebratory portrayal of Armenia invites closer scrutiny of the underlying motivations for his publication and, more broadly, of his intellectual engagement with the subject. These motivations, we argue, are most clearly articulated in the final paragraph of his work, devoted to the prevailing situation of the Armenian people. Here, Cappelletti highlights the consequences of their fragmentation, a condition that threatened the very survival of their culture:

The arts and sciences are not neglected by the Armenians, but as it now stands, their culture is propagated only by a few existing colleges here and there outside of Armenia; [...] In all of these colleges, young Armenians are educated free of charge in literature, the philosophical sciences, drawing, music, European languages, and other useful knowledge, thanks to which, when they return to their motherland, they can hopefully propagate the light of culture to their compatriots and awaken them from their sleep. (Cappelletti 1841a, 3: 166-7)<sup>11</sup>

In this challenging context, the Mekhitarist Fathers emerged as a cultural vanguard, as they translated, published, and disseminated Armenian historical and religious texts in an effort to preserve national consciousness beyond the borders of their lost homeland. In light of these premises and given Cappelletti's long-standing ties with the Congregation in Venice, it seems likely that the author's ultimate goal in publishing *L'Armenia* was to amplify the visibility of the country and its people – while at the same time drawing attention to the issues they were facing – by foregrounding their historical and cultural legacy. In this sense, it is also tempting to think that the Venetian Mekhitarist Order directly commissioned the work and possibly helped the author in the writing process. Support for this hypothesis comes from an anonymous polemical pamphlet titled *Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro di Venezia* [fig. 3], as it accused Cappelletti of serving as “a tool and even the direct voice of the Mekhitarists

---

**11** “Le arti e le scienze sono affatto neglette nell’attuale stato dell’Armenia; né d’altronde si sparge la cultura che dai nazionali collegi esistenti qua e colà in vari paesi fuori d’Armenia; [...] In tutti questi collegi sono educati gratuitamente i giovani armeni nelle belle lettere, nelle scienze filosofiche, nel disegno, nella musica, nelle lingue europee, e in altre utili cognizioni, per le quali, ritornati che siano al suolo nativo, giova sperare, che spargeranno la luce della coltura nei loro connazionali e li scuoteranno dal funesto letargo in cui sono immersi attualmente”.

from Venice" (*Il mechtarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia* 1852, 23).<sup>12</sup> While conclusive evidence of formal collaboration is lacking, archival sources preserved at San Lazzaro may yet shed some light on the nature of this relationship.<sup>13</sup>

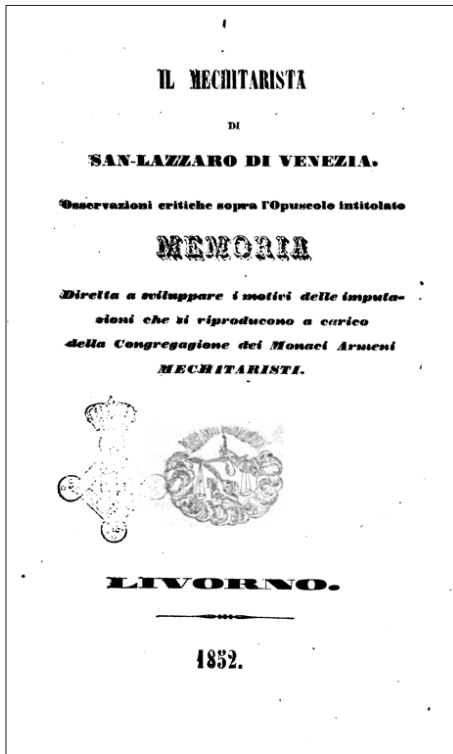


Figure 3

Anonymous [Malachian, P.: Azarian, S.] (1852). *Il mechtarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia: osservazioni critiche sopra l'opuscolo intitolato memoria diretta a sviluppare i motivi delle imputazioni che si riproducono a carico della Congregazione dei Monaci Armeni Mechitaristi*. Frontispiece. Leghorn: s.n.

A second key factor must also be taken into account: since the Mekhitarists were at that time searching for alliances with European powers that might offer symbolic recognition or tangible protection, Cappelletti's decision to dedicate *L'Armenia* to Carlo Alberto (1798-1849), King of Sardinia [fig. 4], takes on added significance

<sup>12</sup> "Strumento canale e quasi direi bocca dei Mechitaristi di Venezia. [...] Ed in questo caso capisco anche io, che citando il Prete Cappelletti in favore della Comunità di S. Lazzaro era lo stesso che citare varii PP della stessa Comunità in suo favore". Fulin also acknowledges, in the Cappelletti's obituary, that he often wrote "on behalf of others". See Fulin 1876, 225-6: "ma col suo nome o senza il suo nome, ed anche a nome e per conto altrui, vagò trattando questioni d'ogni maniera".

<sup>13</sup> In the future, we hope to pursue this line of enquiry further by examining Cappelletti-related documents in the Archives of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice.

(Uluhogian 2006, 495-514, esp. 503). More than a simple honorific gesture, Cappelletti explicitly styled Carlo Alberto as “King of Armenia,” printing the title in bold (Cappelletti 1841a, 1: 1). The title, a merely formal one transferred to the Savoy family through Carlotta of Lusignan (1444-1487), had rarely been used in the official documentation of the Savoy Kingdom and was associated exclusively with the territory of the former Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, conquered by the Mamluks in 1375 (e.g., De Mas Latrie 1855, 3: 82-152). Nevertheless, in a rhetorical flourish in the second volume, Cappelletti urges Carlo Alberto to revive the title in his formal documents, as “it would be sweeter for the unfortunate Armenians to see at least the title of their ancient sovereignty formally restored after four centuries and a half” (Cappelletti 1841a, 2: 61).



**Figure 4** Pietro Ayres (1794-1878), *Portrait of Carlo Alberto of Savoy*, ca 1832. Oil on canvas, 117.85 × 86.6. Racconigi Castle, Piedmont, Italy

This symbolic investment had a precedent, as, in 1828, the Armenian diplomat Deodato Papasian (1808-1868) already made a similar appeal in his *Illustrazione d'alcune antichità armene esistenti in Piemonte*, dedicated to Carlo Alberto's predecessor, Carlo Felice (1765-1831):<sup>14</sup>

**14** The history of the manuscript is quite travailed as explained by Alishan 1899, 114-15 and Carrière 1883, 170-213. See also the more recent Bais 2010, 19-23.

Sire, since the Armenian crown has belonged to the Royal House of Savoy for four centuries, I am glad, oh Sire, to be the first Armenian to be included amongst the subjects of Your ancient throne! Because of this given grace, I plead Your Majesty to let me express my gratitude publicly, by offering You the illustration of some Armenian documents that I made during my time in Piedmont. (Papasian 1828)<sup>15</sup>

This work – of which only a few manuscript copies are known (one held at the Biblioteca Reale in Turin, one at the Library of San Lazzaro, and another in the Fondo Papasian at the Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea in Ferrara) – is particularly significant for its effort to introduce Armenian culture to the House of Savoy through a description of the few Armenian artifacts preserved in Piedmont at the time. Among these is the famous thirteenth-century Skevra triptych-reliquary, then preserved in the Dominican Convent of Santa Croce e Ognissanti in Bosco Marengo and currently in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg.<sup>16</sup>

While Papasian's text constitutes an early attempt to remind the king of the historical relationship between Armenia and the House of Savoy, Cappelletti's appeal is far more ambitious, as the author seems to attribute to Carlo Alberto not only jurisdiction over the former Armenian kingdom of Cilicia but the entire historical region, investing the sovereign with the role of protector of Armenian literature:

Armenia should have in your majesty a new protector, oh Sire, if not of the land at least of the literature of the country; as Armenia is a fulgid gem of your illustrious crown. (Cappelletti 1841a, 1: 5-6)<sup>17</sup>

This rhetorical maneuver, aimed to bestow upon Carlo Alberto the formal (and moral) responsibility for safeguarding the Armenian

---

**15** "Sire, Da quattro secoli che la corona d'Armenia appartiene ai Reali di Savoia, qual gloria per me, o Sire, d'essere il primo tra gli Armeni ai piedi di V.M. ammesso nel novero dei servitori del vostro antichissimo trono! Ad una di tanto insigne grazia, supplico la M.V. di aggiungere quella di concedermi ch'io renda pubblica la mia riconoscenza, col fare omaggio alla M.V. della illustrazione da me fatta durante il mio soggiorno in Piemonte, d'alcuni documenti Armeni". The quote is taken directly from the transcription by Uluhogian 2006, 505-6. For the manuscript see: Turin, Biblioteca Reale, Fondi Manoscritti, Illustrazione d'alcune antichità armene esistenti in Piemonte. Opera dedicata dal Barone Adeodato Papasiany segretario interprete di S.M., MS 301.

**16** The reliquary was first described by Papasian and, later, by Promis 1883.

**17** "Abbia perciò [l'Armenia] nella Maestà Vostra, o Sire, anche ai di nostri un nuovo Protettore, se non il suolo, almeno la letteratura di Armenia; giacché il nome di Armenia è una fulgida gemma della Vostra insigne Corona".



people due to his status as King of Armenia, echoes the notorious attempt by Charles DuCange (1610-1688) to invest the French King Louis XIV (1638-1715) with the task of taking back Constantinople from the Turks by presenting him as the legitimate heir of the Byzantine emperors (Shawcross 2021, 143-80, esp. 176-80). Cappelletti reprises this theme also in his subsequent *Storia del Cristianesimo*, this time dedicated to Queen Maria Teresa of Tuscany (1801-1855) (Cappelletti 1842-46). In the dedication, in fact, Cappelletti reminds the sovereign that she had acquired the title of Queen of Armenia through marriage with Carlo Alberto, reiterating his wish that the title be reintroduced into official usage.

Cappelletti's perspective, however, seems, in both cases, disenchanted. Although it cannot be excluded that he genuinely supported the idea of Armenia's political annexation to the Savoy realm, he appears aware of the impracticality of such ambitions. Nevertheless, given his close relationship with the Mekhitarists – and assuming that he spoke for them – we must conclude that the Congregation itself harbored a certain interest in cultivating Savoy patronage. From this perspective, Cappelletti's decision to publish *L'Armenia* not through the Mekhitarist typography but with Antonio Fabris (1790-1865) in Florence may reflect a deliberate political calculation: issuing a work dedicated to the King of Sardinia in a city still under Habsburg control and with the direct involvement of the Mekhitarist Congregation would have placed the latter in an awkward, if not precarious, position (Issaverdenz 1879, 9).<sup>18</sup> Cappelletti's broader publishing behavior supports this interpretation, as he seems to have been, on the contrary, quite unreserved in the distribution of his texts. This is evidenced by an incident in 1844, when his book *Osservazioni critiche storiche teologiche di Giuseppe Cappelletti prete veneziano sulla tragedia Arnaldo da Brescia di Gio. Bat. Niccolini* was censured by the Austrian Revision and Censorship Office (*Carte segrete* 1852, 3: 49-50). The Office observed that Cappelletti had proclaimed his text in the manner of a large-print poster displayed in a public setting. In the case of *L'Armenia*, he employed a comparable strategy but

---

**18** Cappelletti might have met Fabris in Venice since the latter sculpted the bust of Abbot Mekhitar in 1833 and displayed it in the Library of Manuscripts in San Lazzaro degli Armeni. See Issaverdenz 1879, 9.



chose to do so in Milan, where he published a detailed manifesto of his forthcoming publication (Kojrighiantz 1840, 242-5, esp. 246).<sup>19</sup>

The specific reasons why the Mekhitarists may have indirectly supported Italian political unification are still unclear, especially since the Habsburgs had been giving concessions to the monastery since the beginning of the century, when Emperor Francis II (1768-1835) had greatly enlarged the dimensions of the island.<sup>20</sup> It is conceivable that, amid the shifting ideological landscape of the Risorgimento, the Congregation saw an opportunity to secure political sponsorship by appealing to the House of Savoy's latent claim to the Armenian crown. Viewed in this light, their apparent support for the Savoy cause may have been less an expression of anti-Habsburg sentiment than a calculated gesture of political expediency.

To our knowledge, there are no accounts of any reaction to Cappelletti's publication on the sovereign's part, nor political initiatives supporting the Armenian community in this period. The only documented reaction is a formal letter of gratitude from the king, which Cappelletti proudly reproduced in the preface to the first volume of his *Le chiese d'Italia* (1844) (Cappelletti 1844-70, 1).<sup>21</sup> This lack of initiative 'from above' that Cappelletti wished for might also be due to his combative personality, which reportedly spoiled many of his professional relationships as well as damaged his reputation (Preto 1975, 225-6).<sup>22</sup>

---

**19** "Più estesamente e con assai più di erudizione che non abbia saputo io fare, scrisse sull' Armenia il prete Giuseppe Cappelletti: e ben ce lo promette il dettagliato manifesto, ch'egli l'anno scorso pubblicò qui in Milano. L'Opera, se non è già stampata, dev'essere certamente sotto il torchio: e l'Italia tutta desidera di vederla e di leggerla per rettificare ormai le false idee, che finora ha avuto su questo argomento, seguitando alla cieca guide cieche e inesperte".

**20** Francis I, Emperor of Austria, is often styled with his previous title (held from 1792 to 1806) of Francis II, Holy Roman Emperor, to avoid confusion with his grandfather Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor.

**21** The letter, signed by the private secretary of the King, is attached at the beginning of the volume.

**22** Examples include Gliubich 1860, 3: "Signore! Ebbi il libello, che m'addrizzaste colla posta, né mi recò stupore ritrovare in esso trafuso tutto il pestifero fele del vostro inquieto animo, ché già m'era noto abbastanza per altri vomiti di simil genere. Qui sembra però, che avete superato voi stesso, giacché, cosa rara, ci rappresentate il vostro individuo qual è in suo pieno lume di nudità e d'abbiezza" (Sir! I have the pamphlet that you sent me by mail. I was not surprised to find all the pestiferous bile of your restless soul in it, as I already knew it for other similar vomits of yours. However, you surpassed yourself here because, as rare as it is, you showed yourself in the light of your bareness and vileness); and Casarini 1873, 27: "Mi riservo poi il diritto che mi accorda la legge di muover querela contro il Giornale la Stampa e contro il signor Pr. Cappelletti per le ingiuriose espressioni contenute nel pubblicato Articolo [La Stampa, 10 July 1873, n. 186]" (I reserve the right, as accorded by law, to sue the newspaper la Stampa and the Priest Cappelletti for the vituperative expressions he used in his article).

#### 4 “Controversy Was His Muse”

Cappelletti's reputation as a controversial figure is well-documented,<sup>23</sup> starting from accusations of superficiality stemming from an unfortunate incident in which he purportedly published material from the archives of Venice regarding some diplomatic documents of the Jesuits, believing them to be unpublished (Fulin 1873, 372-5). However, the primary reason for this can be found within the well-known tensions between the Mekhitarists of San Lazzaro, the Holy See of Rome, the Propaganda Fide, and the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople that inflamed the nineteenth century (Dermarkar 2022, esp. fig. 21).<sup>24</sup> By the 1850s, these tensions were increasingly expressed through public pamphleteering, and Cappelletti, ever combative, was both participant and target (Dermarkar 2022).<sup>25</sup>

In 1850, a pamphlet was published in San Lazzaro's typography under the title *Memoria diretta a sviluppare i motivi delle imputazioni che si riproducono a carico dei monaci armeni Mechitaristi*; the text recounted the history of the Congregation, explained its intrinsic value for Armenian society and religion, and defended its positions and rites (*Memoria diretta* 1850). In particular, the pamphlet underlined the attempts to stop their mission in the territories of the Ottoman Empire and alluded to Monsignor Anton Hassun (1809-1884), archbishop of Constantinople of the Armenians, as the motor of these attempts (Dermarkar 2022).<sup>26</sup>

Two years later, in 1852, a second pamphlet was published in Livorno, the aforementioned *Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro di Venezia. Osservazioni critiche sopra l'opuscolo intitolato memoria diretta a sviluppare i motivi delle imputazioni che si riproducono a carico della Congregazione dei Monaci Armeni Mechitaristi*. The author, who opted to remain anonymous, composed a series of 248 pages of inflammatory rhetoric directed towards the Mekhitarists, whom they held responsible for the disorders that had befallen the Armenian Catholic Church. The pamphlet is replete with expressions of calumny, including such terms as 'schismatics' and 'heretics', and advocated the expulsion of the Mekhitarist missionaries from

---

**23** The quote is from Fulin 1876, 225-6.

**24** Zekiyani 1993, 234. See also the fundamental text of Santus 2022, esp. 169-96, 305-428 (Third part: Le conseguenze dell'apostolato cattolico tra i cristiani orientali: il caso armeno). Sirinian 2010, 149-88.

**25** Part three, chapter four, section “La tempête du libelle ‘Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro di Venezia’ (1852-1854)”.

**26** Part three, chapter four, section “La tempête du libelle ‘Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro di Venezia’ (1852-1854)”.

the Ottoman territories and the dissolution of the order altogether (Dermarkar 2022).<sup>27</sup>

Although the publication was originally issued in Livorno, it was suspected already in the same year of originating from Constantinople and potentially being authored by the Latin priest Gaspare Crisostomo Vuccino (Bigoni 1852, esp. 7). An inquiry by the Apostolic Vicar of Constantinople, Julien-Marie Hillereau (1796-1855), revealed that Vuccino had initially claimed to be the author but had finally admitted to being the editor (Dermarkar 2022; Hillereau 1852).<sup>28</sup> The authors were ultimately revealed to be Armenian priests Paolo Malachian and Stefano Azarian, the secretary of Monsignor Hassun (Hillereau 1852; Santus 2022, 194-5, fn. 65). In a letter dated 27 May 1852, from Malachian to Vuccino, revealed during the inquiry, the former indicated he had read Cappelletti's work and found a number of significant errors on the part of the priest and went on to state that they discovered "really big things, absolutely inexcusable from a Catholic mouth" (Hillereau 1852, 18-20).<sup>29</sup> Malachian even sarcastically suggested that the pamphlet might be more suitably entitled *Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro. Osservazioni critiche sopra Cappelletti etc.* (Hillereau 1852, 19). In fact, the pamphlet attacked both the Mekhitarists and Cappelletti in decidedly strong and sarcastic tones:

Does everyone has the right to ask me what is the purpose of this answer direct for the anonymous and indirect to Cappelletti? Without Mekhitarist tergiversation, without professions of faith of being a most docile son of the Catholic Church, which have no place here; I will briefly explain what led me to undertake this work. In the first place, I wrote to dictate to Armenian Catholics the norm of right belief, and to disabuse many of them who unwittingly find themselves in error. Secondly, to convince the anonymous writer of the aforementioned pamphlet "Memorie" of imposture, all those who praise the Academy of S. Lazzaro more than they should. Third, to

---

**27** Part three, chapter four, section "La tempête du libelle 'Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro di Venezia' (1852-1854)".

**28** Part three, chapter four, section "La tempête du libelle 'Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro di Venezia' (1852-1854)".

**29** "Dietro una lettura più attenta e una ricerca maggiore del Cappelletti, noi veniamo a scoprire delle cose veramente grosse, inescusabili assolutamente in una bocca cattolica".

make once clear the frauds, the lies, the errors of the Mekhitarists of Venice. (*Il mechtarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia* 1852, 239) <sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the authors dedicated the entirety of the seventh chapter to Cappelletti, describing him as a “malicious, lying, and ignorant” person (*Il mechtarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia* 1852, 204-11, esp. 209). In their estimation, Cappelletti exhibited a degree of veneration for the Mekhitarists that bordered on slanderous rhetoric directed at the Apostolic vicars and the Propaganda Fide, which was particularly evident in the last volume of the briefly aforementioned *Storia del Cristianesimo* (*Il mechtarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia* 1852, 208-9).<sup>31</sup>

The text represents the concluding installment of a series of four volumes edited by Alcide Parenti between the years 1842 and 1846, where Cappelletti purported to extend Antoine Henri de Bérault-Bercastel’s (1720-1794) famous oeuvre *Histoire de l’église* to his present day (Cappelletti 1842-46; Bérault-Bercastel 1778-90). The preceding three volumes, however, were merely translations of Bercastel’s texts, yet expanded by Cappelletti with a historical account of the Armenian Church. Particularly interesting is the editor’s preface to the first volume, in which Parenti emphasizes Cappelletti’s status as a leading expert in the field, referring to him as the “only Italian Armenist” (Cappelletti 1842-46, 1: XII).

The space given by Cappelletti to the Armenian Church and the Mekhitarists was interpreted – and arguably twisted – by the authors of the derogatory pamphlet of 1852 as anti-Roman, in a clear dichotomy that was out of place at a time when the most extremist positions were moving towards a more moderate stance in favor of recognizing the validity of the Eastern rites, as long as they were dependent on Rome (Santus 2022, 193-6). The rhetorical question posed to Cappelletti is telling: “Cappelletti, have you forgotten to

---

**30** “Ogni uno ha il diritto di domandarmi quale è lo scopo della presente risposta diretta all’anonimo indiretta al Cappelletti? Senza tergiversazioni Mechitaristiche, senza professioni di fede di esser figlio docilissimo della Cattolica Chiesa, che qui non hanno luogo; esporrò brevemente ciò, che mi induceva a intraprendere questo lavoro. In primo luogo, io scrissi per dettare agli Armeni Cattolici la norma di retta credenza, e disingannare molti di essi che inavvedutamente si trovano in errore. 2<sup>a</sup> per convincere di impostura l’anonimo scrittore dell’Opuscolo Cit. Mem. e tutti quelli che lodano più del dovere l’Accademia di S. Lazzaro. 3<sup>a</sup> per fare una volta palesi le frodi, le menzogne, gli errori dei Mechitaristi di Venezia”.

**31** “Un Prete latino non dovrebbe vergognarsi dire simili insolenze contro i suoi confratelli Sacerdoti? Ma questa è la carità fraterna che il Cappelletti ha imparato nel convento di S. Lazzaro! Lasciati i semplici Missionarii attacca Vicarii Apostolici [...] parla brutalissimamente della Propaganda” (Shouldn’t a Latin priest be ashamed to utter such insolences against his fellow priests? But this is the fraternal charity that Cappelletti learned in the convent of St. Lazarus! Leaving the simple Missionaries behind, he attacks Apostolic Vicars [...] he speaks most brutally of the *Propaganda*).

be a Priest and a Christian due to your love of the convent of San Lazzaro?" (*Il mekhitarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia* 1852, 109).<sup>32</sup>

These attacks were vehemently rejected by the Venetian clergy and also by Cappelletti himself in a fiery response pamphlet (*Congregations of the Venetian Clergy* 1853; see also Ferrari 2016, 41-2), which was then added to the list of banned books by the Sacred Congregation of the Index, along with the pamphlet of 1852, further cementing the author's reputation as a polemicist (Cappelletti 1852; Pope Leo XIII 1881, 44).<sup>33</sup> In the encyclical *Neminem Vestrum* of 2 February 1854, Pope Pius IX [fig. 5] mentioned the pamphleteering as such:<sup>34</sup>

This discord of souls, never sufficiently deplored, became so seriously inflamed when both dissident parties, with writings in the vernacular language, began to discuss the religious questions of the people in a public manner. These writings were written with hostile and harsh words, which are contrary to Christian charity and are contrary to what is required to defend mutual harmony; came to light without the knowledge and against the will of this Apostolic See. (Pope Pius IX 1854)<sup>35</sup>

---

**32** "Cappelletti, per amore del convento di S. Lazzaro vi siete dimenticato di esser Prete e Cristiano?".

**33** Cappelletti 1852; Pope Leo XIII 1881, 44. See also Martínez De Bujanda 2002, 188, 603.

**34** Apparently, the Holy See of Rome had asked Carlo Vercellone an opinion on the derogatory pamphlet, see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*. The text was written both in Italian and Armenian and concluded that the Mekhitarists had "Integrity of faith and unblemished and blameless conduct". See Vercellone 1852, 24.

**35** "Questa discordia degli animi, mai abbastanza deplorata, così gravemente si infiammò quando ambedue i partiti dissidenti, con scritti in lingua vernacola, cominciarono a discutere delle questioni religiose del popolo in forma pubblica. Tali scritti furono redatti con parole ostili e durissime, che sono contrarie alla carità cristiana e sono contrarie a quello che si richiede per difendere la mutua concordia; uscirono alla luce all'insaputa e contro il volere di questa Sede Apostolica".



**Figure 5** Chromolithograph of Pope Pius IX, in Triepi 1879

However, he goes on to write that to eliminate all controversy and suspicion, the Mekhitarists of San Lazzaro should have sent a profession of their Catholic faith and doctrine and a signed declaration (Pope Pius IX 1854). Although the issue seemed to have been forcibly resolved, the disagreements would only intensify in the following years, culminating in a series of clashes that were exacerbated after the First Vatican Council (1869-70), when two Mekhitarists opposed the thesis of papal infallibility (Zekiyan 1993, 239). In 1873, some monks who were deemed schismatic were even excommunicated (Martina 1990, 88). Cappelletti died shortly after, in 1876, and Fulin wrote in his obituary:

he wandered around, dealing with questions of every kind, erudite, literary, political, juridical, and also, let's admit it, personal: for controversy was his inspiring muse; an unwise inspiration that oftentimes dragged Cappelletti where he then regretted having passed. Fortunately, these writings were destined to die with the passions that had inspired them; but we regret not knowing whether the mighty works, which Cappelletti courageously wrote

which he almost entirely completed, will have a long life at the end. (Fulin 1876, 225-6)<sup>36</sup>

When reading these words, it is difficult not to think of the Mekhitarist question. His association with the monastery had placed Cappelletti in the orbit of various controversies that lasted more than a century, in which he was little more than an easy quarry, given his combative character and the generally polarizing academic esteem he received during his lifetime. Regardless, Cappelletti's texts dedicated to Armenia constitute some of the earliest examples of interest in Armenian literature, history, and culture in the Italian peninsula.

## 5 Conclusions

At the end of this overview, we can conclude that Cappelletti's *L'Armenia* has great value in its attempt to assert the relevance of Armenian identity in the challenging political landscape of nineteenth-century pre-unitarian Italy. Such an effort to study and disseminate Armenian culture could be interpreted as the result of the collaboration between the priest and the Mekhitarists of San Lazzaro, ultimately aimed at improving the social condition of the diasporic Armenian communities scattered throughout the territory. Although Cappelletti's reputation and his involvement in various disputes led to the marginalization of his work, *L'Armenia* remains the first comprehensive study on the subject written in Italian and, as such, needs to be finally acknowledged within the history of Armenian studies.

---

**36** “vagò trattando questioni d'ogni maniera, erudite, letterarie, politiche, giuridiche ed anche, confessiamolo, personali: giacché la polemica era la sua musa ispiratrice; sconsigliata ispiratrice, che talvolta trascinò il Cappelletti ove poi si pentiva d'esser trascorso. Fortunatamente, queste scritture erano destinate a morire colle passioni che le avevano suggerite; ma ci duole di non sapere se avranno vita lungamente durevole i poderosi lavori, a cui il Cappelletti coraggiosamente die' mano e quasi tutti condusse a fine”.

## Bibliography

- Alishan, G. (1899). *Sissouan ou l'Arméno-Cilicie: description géographique et historique*. Venise: San Lazzaro.
- Arnold, G. (2010). *The A to Z of the Crimean War*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press.
- Avdall, J. (transl.) (1827). *History of Armenia, by Father Michael Chamich*. 2 vols. Calcutta: Bishop's College Press.
- Bais, M. (2010). "L'Armenia di Cilicia vista da un armeno costantinopolitano alla corte dei Savoia". Unali, L. (a cura di), *Una Città tra Oriente e Occidente. Istanbul Shanghai (A City between East and West. Istanbul Shanghai)*, vol. 1. S.l.: SML Telematic, 19-23.
- Bérault-Bercastel, A.H. de (1778-90). *Histoire de l'église*. 24 vols. Paris: Moutard.
- Bigoni, A. (1852). *Il Mechitarista difeso dalle calunnie degli anonimi di Costantinopoli, esame analitico corredato da molti documenti già pubblicati in Costantinopoli, a Parigi ed a Venezia*. Venezia: Tipografia Lorenzo Gaspari.
- Cappelletti, G. (1833). *Sancti Nersis Clajensis Armeniorum catholici opera, nunc primum ex armenio in latinum conversa notisque illustrata*. 2 vols. Venezia: San Lazzaro.
- Cappelletti, G. (1840). *Eliseo, storico armeno del V secolo*. Venezia: Tipografia di Alvisopoli.
- Cappelletti, G. (1841a). *L'Armenia*. 3 vols. Firenze: Fabris.
- Cappelletti, G. (1841b). *Mose Corenese, storico armeno del V secolo*. Venezia: Antonelli.
- Cappelletti, G. (1842-46). *Storia del Cristianesimo dell'Abate di Berault-Bercastel continuata sino ai giorni nostri e nuovamente accresciuta della storia ecclesiastica armena con dissertazioni e note*. 4 vols. Firenze: Parenti.
- Cappelletti, G. (1844-70). *Le chiese d'Italia dalla loro origine sino ai nostri giorni*. 21 vols. Venezia: Antonelli.
- Cappelletti, G. (1848-55). *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia dal suo principio fino al giorno d'oggi*. 13 vols. Venezia: Antonelli.
- Cappelletti, G. (1852). *Contro lo anonimo autore del libello intitolato: "Il Mechitarista di S. Lazzaro di Venezia": breve risposta nella sua specialità del prete veneziano Giuseppe Cappelletti*. Venezia: Tipografia Lorenzo Gaspari.
- Carrière, A. (1883). "Inscriptions d'un reliquaire arménien de la collection Basilewsky". *Mélanges orientaux: textes et traductions publiés par les professeurs de l'Ecole spéciale des langues orientales vivantes à l'occasion du VI<sup>ème</sup> congrès international des orientalistes réuni à Leyde*, 11/ 9, 170-213.
- Carte segrete (1852). *Carte segrete e atti ufficiali della polizia austriaca in Italia dal 4 giugno 1814 al 22 marzo 1848*. 3 vols. Capolago: Tipografia Elvetica, Torino: Libreria Patria.
- Casarini, G. (1873). *Risposta alla lettera del Pr. Giuseppe Cappelletti sul Sarcofago Manin*. Venezia: Visentini.
- Congregations of the Venetian Clergy (1853). *Protesta delle Venerande IX. Congregazioni del clero veneto contro il libello infamatorio intitolato "Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro di Venezia"*. Venezia: Tipografia Lorenzo Gaspari.
- De Mas Latrie, L. (1852-61). *Histoire de l'île de Chypre sous le règne des princes de la maison de Lusignan*. 3 vols. Paris: Imprimerie impériale.
- Dermarkar (2022). *Arméniens et catholiques, de l'émancipation au schisme. Une identité contrariée en temps de l'éveil des nationalités (1809-1888)*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.
- Dizionario biografico degli italiani (s.d.). s.v. "Vercellone, Carlo Antonio". [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-antonio-vercellone\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-antonio-vercellone_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).



- Ferrari, A. (2016). *Armenia. Una cristianità di frontiera*. Rimini: Il Cerchio.
- French Blake, R.L.V. (1972). *The Crimean War*. Hamden: Archon Books.
- Foletti, I. and Bacci, M. (eds) (2023). *Cultural Interactions in the Medieval Subcaucasian Region: Historiographical and Art-Historical Perspectives*. 2 vols. Rome; Brno: Viella. <https://doi.org/10.52056/9791254694978>
- Fulin, R. (1873) "I Gesuiti e la Repubblica di Venezia. Documenti diplomatici... pubblicati per la prima volta dal cav. pr. Giuseppe Cappelletti. Venezia, 1873, Grimaldo, p. 452, in 8.<sup>o</sup>". *Archivio Veneto*, 6, 372-5.
- Fulin, R. (1876). "Giuseppe Cappelletti". *Archivio Veneto*, 11, 225-6.
- Gliubich, S. (1860). *In risposta al prete Giuseppe Cappelletti*. Venezia: Giuseppe Grimaldo Tipografo.
- Haroutyunian, S. (2018). "From Academia Armena Sancti Lazari to the Establishment of Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari". De Giorgi, L.; Greselin, F. (eds), *150 Years of Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 27-41. <http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-252-9/003>
- Hillereau, J.M. (1852). *Inchiesta giuridica sulla compilazione e la pubblicazione del libello intitolato: Il mechtarista di S. Lazzaro di Venezia avente per iscopo di palesare su di chi deve ricadere la responsabilità di detto libello*. Constantinopoli: Torchi di San Benedetto.
- Il mechtarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia* (1852). *Il mechtarista di San-Lazzaro di Venezia: osservazioni critiche sopra l'opuscolo intitolato memoria diretta a sviluppare i motivi delle imputazioni che si riproducono a carico della Congregazione dei Monaci Armeni Mechtaristi*. Livorno: s.n.
- Issavardenz, J. (1879). *The Island of San Lazzaro or the Armenian Monastery Near Venice*. Venice: San Lazzaro.
- Kojrighiantz, G. (1840). "Regno d'Armenia". *Cosmorama pittorico*, 6, 242-5.
- Laycock, J. (2009). *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention 1878-1925*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Maguolo, M.; Bandera, M. (a cura di) (1999). *San Lazzaro degli Armeni: l'isola, il monastero, il restauro*. Venezia: Marsilio.
- Martina, G. (1990). *Pio IX (1867-1878)*. Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana.
- Martínez De Bujanda, J. (2002). *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, vol. 11. Montréal: Médiaspaul.
- Memoria diretta* (1850). *Memoria diretta a sviluppare I motivi delle imputazioni che si riproducono a carico dei monaci armeni mechtaristi*. Venezia: Tipografia Armena di San Lazzaro.
- Nichanian, M. (2014). *Mourning Philology. Art and Religion at the Margins of the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Fordham University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823255245.003.0004>.
- Peratoner, A. (a cura di) (2006). *Dall'Ararat a San Lazzaro. Una culla di spiritualità e cultura armena nella laguna di Venezia*. Venezia: Congregazione Armena Mechtarista.
- Pope Leo XIII (1881). *Index librorum prohibitorum sanctissimi domini nostri Leonis XIII pont. max. jussu editus*. Roma: Ex typographia polyglotta.
- Pope Pius IX (1854). *Neminem Vestrum*. <https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/en/index.3.html>.
- Preto, P. (1975). s.v. "Cappelletti, Giuseppe". *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 17, Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 225-6.
- Promis, V. (1883). *Reliquiario armeno già esistente nel Convento del Bosco presso Alessandria in Piemonte. Brevi cenni*. Torino: Loescher.
- Said, E.W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

- Saint-Martin, A.-J. (1818-19). *Mémoires historiques et géographiques sur l'Arménie*. 2 vols. Paris: Imprimerie Royale.
- Santus, C. (2022). *Trasgressioni necessarie*. "Communicatio in Sacris", coesistenza e conflitti tra le comunità cristiane orientali. Roma: École française de Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.efr.31792>
- Shawcross, T. (2021). "Editing, Lexicography, and History under Louis XIV, Charles Du Cange and La byzantine du Louvre". Aschenbrenner, N.; Ranshoff, J. (eds), *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 143-80.
- Sirinian, R. (2010). "Il monachesimo armeno in Occidente". Vaccaro, L.; Zekiyan, B.L. (a cura di), *Storia religiosa dell'Armenia*. Milano: Centro Ambrosiano, 149-88.
- Tripepi, L. (1879) *Ritratti e biografie dei romani pontefici: da S. Pietro a Leone XIII*. Roma: Tipografia della Pace.
- Uluhogian, G. (2006). "Un armeno al servizio del re di Sardegna". *Pazmaveb*, 1-4, 495-514.
- Vercellone, C. (1852). *Giudizio sul libello: "Il Mechitarista di Venezia"*. Venezia: Tipografia Armena di San Lazzaro.
- Zekiyan, B.L. (1993). "Il monachesimo mechitarista a San Lazzaro e la rinascita armena nel Settecento". Bertoli, B. (a cura di), *La Chiesa di Venezia nel Settecento*. Venezia: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 221-48.

## Reports



# The Armenian-Italian Joint Expedition to Dvin Report of 2024 Activities

Hamlet Petrosyan, Michele Nucciotti, Elisa Pruno,  
Tatyana Vardanesova, Francesca Cheli, Leonardo Squilloni,  
Hamazasp Abrahamyan, Lyuba Kirakosyan, Miriam Leonetti,  
Lisa Dall'Olio, Fabiana Miceli

**Abstract** This report aims to show the results of the fourth excavation campaign at Dvin/Dabil (Armenia), conducted by the Armenian-Italian research group in Autumn 2024. The excavations involved three areas in distinct sectors of the city: the southern portion of the Lower Fortress, where the 2021 square was deepened and enlarged; the so-called 'Market' area, where the 2021 excavations were expanded and a micro-stratigraphic trench was opened; and the excavations of the Tiknuni Areas 1000 and 2000. Additionally, research has started on the analysis of pottery carried out between 2022 and the last year's excavation. We also presented the first results concerning research on faunal remains.

**Keywords** Dvin/Dabil. Stratigraphic methodology. Eurasia. Excavation. Medieval archaeology. Armenia.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Excavations at the Dvin 'Market' (*shuka*). – 3 Area 1000. – 4 Excavations of the Settlement of Tiknuni.



Submitted 2025-09-16  
Published 2025-12-12



**Open access**

© 2025 Petrosyan et al. | 4.0



**Citation** Petrosyan, H.; Nucciotti, M.; Pruno, E.; Vardanesova, T.; Cheli, F.; Squilloni, L.; Abrahamyan, H.; Kirakosyan, L.; Leonetti, M.; Dall'Olio, L.; Miceli, F. (2025). "The Armenian-Italian Joint Expedition to Dvin". *Armeniaca*, 4, 119-172.

**DOI** 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/006

## 1 Introduction

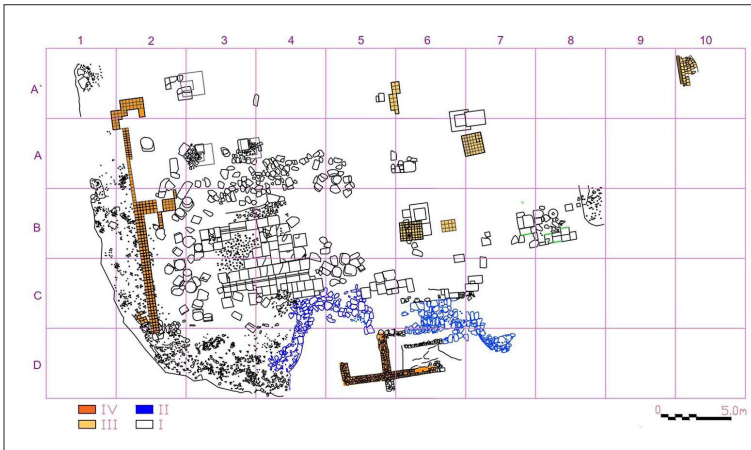
The joint Armenian-Italian archaeological expedition to Dvin was carried out in 2024 by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (IAE NAS RA) and the University of Florence, with the financial support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ERC Project ArmEn (Armenia Entangled). During the autumn campaign, excavations continued in the Market and in Area 1000 (the southern part of the Lower Fortress) within the urban sector of the city. Additionally, two new excavation areas were opened in the territory northwest of the city, at Tikhuni (TKN Area 1000, TKN Area 2000).

- Armenian side. Director: Hamlet Petrosyan. Archaeologists: Tatyana Vardanesova, Hamazasp Abrahamyan. Architect: Lyuba Kirakosyan.
- Italian side. Director: Michele Nucciotti. ArmEn, P.I.: Zaroui Pogossian. Archaeologists: Elisa Pruno (Codirector), Francesca Cheli, Leonardo Squilloni, Miriam Leonetti, Hasmik Hovhannisyan. Students: Lisa Dall'Olio, Leonardo Quercioli, Fabiana Miceli, Margherita Leone.

## 2 Excavations at the Dvin ‘Market’ (*shuka*)

Hamlet Petrosyan, Vardanesova Tatyana, Lyuba Kirakosyan

The 2024 excavations at the ‘Market’ site began on 1 October 2024 and continued until 21 October 2024. Based on the results of the excavations from the previous autumn season of 2023 (Petrosyan et al. 2024), which investigated the line of the horseshoe-shaped embankment in the eastern part of the ‘Market’ territory, it was found that there were dumps of earth from all previous excavations conducted between 1955 and 1961.



**Figure 1** General plan of the 'Market'. Architect L. Kirakosyan

In the general area of the excavation, guided by the colour of the soil, it is possible to distinguish areas of heaps of worked-out earth and voids between them filled with modern debris or refuse, as well as small fragments of earth not affected by previous excavations. Dumps consisted of earth and a large number of broken fired bricks. The size of the bricks throughout the territory of the 'Market' is generally standard and fluctuates between  $0.23 \times 0.22 \times 0.05$  m. Fragments of glazed and simple ceramics of the twelfth century and small architectural details were found in the worked-out earth.

As a result of the 2024 excavations in the square A10, in the north-eastern corner of the area, at a depth of 0.90 m from the top of the embankment, a fragment of a brick wall with an adjacent brick floor was discovered [fig. 2]. This wall and floor are not marked on the general map of the excavations of the 1950s. They had not opened it. The wall fragment is 1.67 m long and is an even row of burnt bricks placed on their edge, which were fastened together with lime mortar. There are 23 bricks in total. The floor fits tightly against the wall. It is laid out with whole and half bricks placed flat. The wall is oriented north-south. At the northern end of the wall, the floor is rounded. It was deliberately laid out in a semicircular shape, which is noticeable by the laying of the slabs [fig. 2].

The fragment of a brick wall and floor discovered in 2024 is not similar in construction technique to the remains of brick walls of two rooms with rammed floors discovered in 2022 in squares D 5, 6 [fig. 3].



**Figure 2** The brick floor opened in 2024. Architect L. Kirakosyan



**Figure 3** Brick wall and floor from the 2023 excavations



## 2.1 Artefacts

The main part of the material extracted from the excavations is ceramics, which are divided into simple and glazed. Total fragments are 102 [tab. 1].

**Table 1** Total fragments of pottery found during the ‘Market’ excavation

Non-glazed ceramics		Glazed ceramics	
42	Total fragments of simple ceramics	Total fragments of glazed ceramics	60
7	Ceramics covered with red engobe and polished	Fragments of stone paste ceramics with blue glaze	12
		twelfth-thirteenth centuries green and yellow-green	40
		ninth-tenth centuries	8

## 2.2 Plain (Non-Glazed) Ceramics

A total of 42 fragments of plain ceramics were found during the excavation. It should be noted that the following molding masses could be distinguished among the fragmentary material:

- ferruginous beige-red clay of a dense structure,
- ferruginous beige-red clay of a loose structure,
- slightly ferruginous clays of a beige-pink hue,
- non-ferruginous white clay.

Fragments of beige-red and beige-pink clay contain artificially added small and, in some cases, large fragments of chamotte as an additive; rare particles of sand and pores from burnt organic inclusions were visible [fig. 4a].

The plain ceramics of Dvin can be divided by colour into ‘white’, ‘red’, and pink ceramics [figs 4b-c]. White and red ceramics are covered with engobe matching their respective colour and have traces of polishing. Pink ceramics are uncoated. Among the ‘white’ ceramics covered with engobe, fragments of vessels made of different body clays can be distinguished. This is non-ferrous white and red ferrous clay, covered with white engobe. Different body clays, but an identical white surface, indicates mass production of this ceramic.

Fine ceramics, covered with bright red engobe with good polishing, are characteristic of Dvin ceramics of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries.



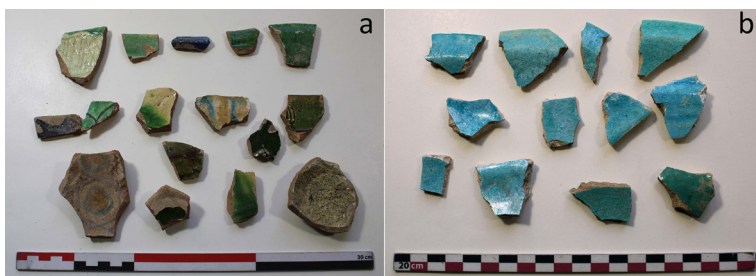
**Figure 4** Pottery sherds from 2024 excavation:  
a. lid, bottom and cone for kiln; b. 'white' plain pottery; c. red and pink plain pottery

### 2.3 Glazed Ceramics

The main group of fragments of glazed ceramics was composed of glazed plates of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries (K'alant'aryan 2008, 82) with green or yellow-green glaze [fig. 5a]. However, in the general mass, several fragments of earlier glazed ceramics of the ninth century and some made of stone paste (*kashin*) with smooth blue glaze, which is also characteristic of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, can be distinguished [fig. 5b].

Among the finds from 2024 were two fragments of a kiln for firing ceramics [fig. 4a], one figured brick (two similar bricks were found in 2023), two double bricks from the masonry of the decorative wall finish, one fragment of stucco with preserved blue within the recessed part of the ornament [fig. 6].

The 2024 excavations cleared 80% of the waste dumps from previous excavations and discovered a new wall fragment. The context of this structure remains unclear and requires further study.



**Figure 5** Pottery sherds from 2024 excavation: a. yellowish-green glazed pottery, 9th-13th centuries;  
b. blue stone paste pottery, 12th-13th centuries



**Figure 6**  
Fragment of stucco  
decoration with blue  
painting

### 3 Area 1000

Michele Nucciotti, Leonardo Squilloni, Miriam Leonetti,  
Elisa Pruno, Fabiana Miceli, Lisa Dall'Olio

#### 3.1 Area 1000 Season 2024: Stratigraphic Description

The goal of the 2024 excavation season was to investigate three different sectors within Area 1000 to expose archaeological stratigraphy and trace the changes that took place between the 11th and 13th centuries. Therefore, excavations were carried out on three fronts [fig. 7]:

- Continuation of the excavation in the southern portion of Area 1000, to complete the removal of the collapse layers of walls SU 1090 and 1115 and to identify layers contemporary with the walls.
- Continuation of the excavation of the eastern extension (opened in 2022) until collapsed wall layers of SU 1090 were reached.
- Northward extension aimed at reaching the floor level with post 1236 pits (A1097).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The activity numbering was changed compared to what had been published in last year's report, as the expansion of the excavation area led to the identification of new activities, requiring a corresponding renumbering. For instance, phases A1099 and A1098 have been reassigned as A1102 and A1101, respectively.



**Figure 7** Area 1000, orthomosaic at the end of 2024 season indicating the walls

As discussed below, the activities in the eastern and northern extensions stopped before reaching the planned level due to the discovery of interesting activities that were not previously identified in the excavation area. The results of the excavation campaign are discussed below, beginning with the southern part of the main sector and then proceeding to the eastern and northern extensions together.

In the southern part of the excavation area, operations resumed with the erosional collapse deposits of walls MSUs 1090 and 1115, interspersed with probable levelling accumulations. The collapse layers (SUs 1091=1149, 1175, 1180, 1094) consisted of sandy, soft, and incoherent soil, sloping from north to south (i.e. from the walls to the south). On top of these layers were ash lenses and deposits (SUs 1174, 1176, 1178, 1179, 1181), which may be accumulations or fire traces. Alternating with the sloping layers showing evidence of burning were levelling layers with a generally horizontal surface, located in a 1.5-2-meter-wide band along the southern section of the excavation area [fig. 8]. The horizontal layers (SUs 1150, 1170, 1172, 1175, 1205,

and 1213) were made up of incoherent soil, with more or less compact lenses and inclusions of mortar lumps and charcoal. These layers contained ceramic and animal bone fragments, smaller in size than those found in the collapse layers of the walls. In addition, on the levelling layer SU 1170 and inside SU 1213, two bronze coins were found, which are currently being cleaned, analysed, and restored. Activity A1089 represents a series of wall collapses (MSUs 1090 and 1115), followed by subsequent ground levelling phases, at a time when the area to the south of the two walls was still in use, likely as an open space requiring ongoing levelling operations.



**Figure 8** SU 1172 covers the N-S oriented ash layer SU 1180

The removal of the layers of A1089 in the southern part of the area allowed the exposure of the floor level SU 1253. This is composed of compacted clay mixed with gravel, fired brick fragments, ceramics sherds, and mortar lumps, located along the southern section of the excavation. In addition to the floor, the removal of the collapsed material uncovered the brick foundation (MSU 1214 in A1078) of



MSU 1115<sup>2</sup> and an additional wall segment (MSU 1237) with a stone foundation and an upper structure in mudbricks or rammed earth (SU 1238), orthogonal to MSU 1090 and situated between the latter and the eastern section of the excavation [fig. 9]. This wall may be contemporaneous with MSU 1090 (A1075).

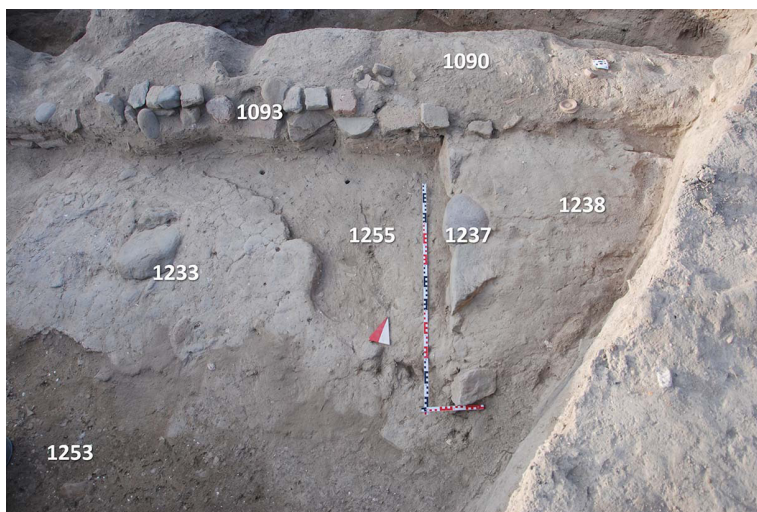


Figure 9 Wall MSU 1237 and mud bricks SU 1238

According to stratigraphy, MSU 1115 was later than MSU 1090, as its brick foundation (SU 1214) rests on a foundation layer (SU 1251) that overlies the collapse layers (SUs 1233 and 1255) of MSU 1090 [fig. 10].

**2** The basement is made of four courses of re-used bricks roughly broken in half. The bricks measure between 18.0 and 21.5 cm in length and between 3.5 and 5.9 cm in thickness. They are typically composed of an orange clay fabric, although some examples with a yellow fabric are also present. Based on current knowledge, MSU 1115 is the only wall with a fired brick foundation and a rammed earth elevation documented in Dvin. The construction technique of the basement, not previously identified, could be compared to some eleventh- twelfth century walls around the hypogeal space in the northern part of the citadel (Babayan 2018). However, excavation reports do not clearly describe the elevations, and the preservation state of the structures does not allow for verification (Łafadaryan 1952, 48-9; Leonetti 2024, 104-6). The introduction of the use of fired bricks in the lower portion of the masonries, usually on a basement of rammed earth, has been recognized in Merv and dated to the Seljuk period. The use of fired bricks has the function to minimize the erosion caused by water and prevent moisture from rising through the structure (Hermann 1999, 50-1). A mensiochronological study of the bricks will help determine whether the foundation can indeed be attributed to the Seljuk period, wich in Dvin goes from the 1060s to the end of the twelfth century. Walls with fired brick on mud brick foundations, but without preserved superstructures, were identified during the excavations in the 'Market' area in 2022 (Petrosyan et al. 2023; Leonetti 2024, 115-17).

Therefore, the construction of MSU 1115 (A1078) was later than an initial destruction phase of MSU 1090 (A1077) and contemporary with the floor SU 1253 (which covers SU 1251). The latter, on the external (southern) side of MSUs 1090 and 1115, was composed of compact clay with gravel, small fragments of fired bricks, mortar lumps, and numerous in-situ broken pottery sherds. In phase A1078, it is thus possible that MSU 1090 was extended or rebuilt in its southwest portion (using a different construction technique and a slightly different orientation) and, at the same time, restored or, more precisely, rebuilt above its original foundation. This reconstruction is evidenced by structural elements (pebbles, stones, and fired bricks) that are part of MSU 1093.

Finally, completing this year's results in the main square, the excavations in the southern portion together with the analysis of the relationships between the wall structures, made it possible to interpret layer 1171 -identified in 2023 north of MSU 1090 - as a floor surface related to the earliest phase of MSU 1090 (probably eleventh century). Since this layer has yet to be excavated and it cannot be stated with certainty that it represents the earliest use surface connected to MSU 1090, SU 1171 is included in A1076, along with SU 1186 (mudbrick structure leaning against the inner face of MSU 1090) and SU 1166 (accumulated material above the floor SU 1171).



**Figure 10** Stratigraphic relations between the walls MSUs 1090 and 1115

L.S.

In the eastern extension (opened in 2022) and the northern extension (opened in 2024), the excavation began with the removal of colluvial

layers and cuts (SUs 1075 and 1200), along with fills (SUs 1076 and 1099), all related to the chronological horizon following the abandonment of the urban site (A1102).

Identified as the most recent anthropic layer in A1101 (collapses and blaze), SU 1007 in the eastern extension served as a key stratigraphic marker linking back to the main square. SU 1007 is an extensive burn layer<sup>3</sup> that covers the destruction layer (SU 1236) and the collapse deposits (SUs 1193 and 1203) of two adjoining walls (SUs 1192 and 1231) at the southern edge of the eastern extension. It also covered the destruction (SU 1263) and north-eastern collapse deposits (SUs 1207, 1208, 1210, 1224, 1209, and 1241) associated with the reconstruction and elevation (MSU 1239) of the eastern portion of MSU 1090 [fig. 11].



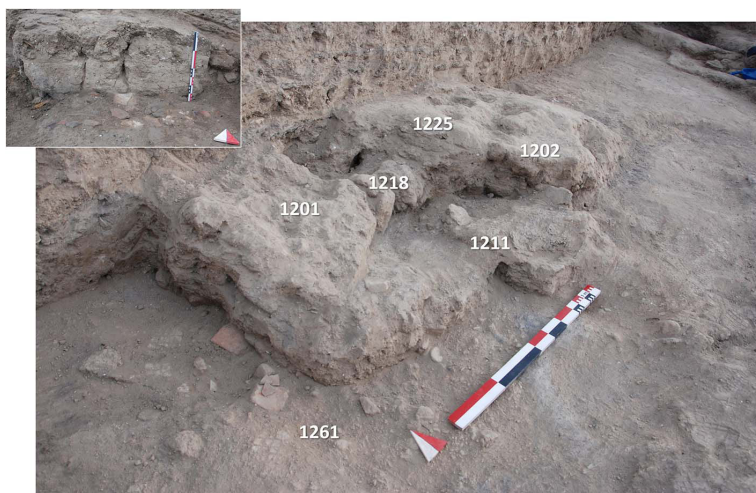
**Figure 11** Collapse SU 1210 from the superstructure MSU 1239

The collapsed wall blocks SUs 1201 and 1202, documented in the northern extension, were likely attributable to structures located north of the excavation area, as inferred from their NW-SE orientation [fig. 12]. Composed of rammed-earth cast in formwork, the blocks were found in a state of partial disintegration (SUs 1225 and 1218).

---

**3** It is unclear whether this was the result of a fire affecting a perishable roof structure located in what appears to have been an open space, or rather the burning of accumulated materials.





**Figure 12** Collapsed masonry blocks (SU 1201 and 1202) in the northern extension

The collapses of A1101 rested upon walking surfaces that are not preserved in the western portion of Area 1000. These surfaces – SUs 1012 and 1206 – are located south and north, respectively, of the reconstructed MSU 1090. Both exhibit a relatively regular and horizontal surface; on SU 1012, ceramic fragments and a heavily concreted, highly oxidized metal object were found.

The two walking surfaces were laid over anthropic accumulations (SUs 1216, 1221, 1220, 1243, 1244, and 1247 south of MSU 1239, and SUs 1242, 1219, and 1212 to its north). These deposits were composed of clayey soil and abundant ceramic material, faunal remains, fragments of fired brick, and occasional small stones. In addition, several collapse layers – likely of natural origin – identified in the northern extension (SUs 1252 and 1249).

Among these layers, SU 1219 deserves a mention: a dump composed of ash and ceramic fragments, likely broken in situ by the collapsed wall blocks SUs 1201 and 1202 [fig. 13].<sup>4</sup> The walking

**4** SU 1219 mainly yielded cooking wares – including a nearly intact small, red-painted short necked handled jar – and storage vessels, along with a few fragments of glazed and engraved and glazed ceramics and one red lusterware sherd. Faunal bones, metal, and glass were also found in the layer.

surfaces, together with the anthropic and collapse deposits described above, belong to A1100.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 13 SU 1219

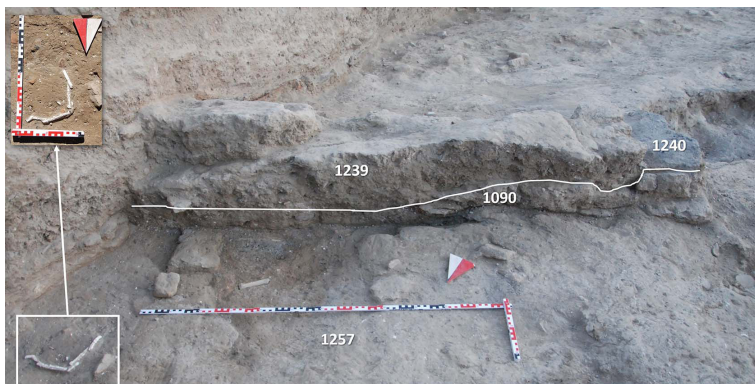
Anthropic accumulations, collapse layers, and walking surfaces of A1100 were related to – and rest upon – the wall structures (MSUs 1239, 1192, 1231) identified in 2024 in the eastern extension, which belong to A1099. As mentioned earlier, MSU 1239 is a reconstruction and elevation of the wall MSU 1090, preserved only in its eastern section [fig. 14]. MSU 1239 was identified at -0.09 m, whereas MSU 1090, documented in 2022, was at -0.94 m.<sup>6</sup> The rebuilding sits on a layer of ash (SU 1240) that covers the cut-down (SU 1087) surface of MSU 1090 and SU 1217=1017, indicating that MSU 1090's superstructure and the construction of the southern space occurred simultaneously and after SU 1017, following activity A1097, when the area featured a walking surface with postholes and rubbish pits (Petrosyan et al. 2024). However, the state of preservation of MSU 1239 does not allow us to determine whether it was built of mudbrick or rammed earth. The reconstruction suggests that this

<sup>5</sup> SU 1014 and 1016 are also included in A1100. The former was already interpreted as a *colluvium* layer consisting of clay soil with many ceramic sherds (glazed, red-painted and unglazed) and crushed stone grouped in small concentrations. SU 1016 consists of a small concentration of broken mudbricks, thrown on top of SU 1010. In the report of the 2022 expedition (Petrosyan et al. 2023, 220), these two SUs were included in 'Phase 2', but the matrix has been uploaded now thanks to the new results of the extensions.

<sup>6</sup> The elevation values are relative to the local coordinate system adopted in the UniFi excavations, whose point of origin is located a few meters southeast of Area 1000.

portion of MSU 1090 remained visible for a long time, albeit in a ruined condition (destruction in A 1089).

Associated with this rebuilding is also the floor SU 1257, identified north of the wall. SU 1257 is made of compacted and leveled clay, and near the base of MSU 1090, oriented orthogonally to it, are two mudbricks, possibly indicating a domestic feature.<sup>7</sup> In addition, cylindrical plaster fragments arranged in an L-shape were found resting on the floor [fig. 14].



**Figure 14** Northern face of the superstructure MSU 1239 over MSU 1090 and floor SU 1257

The two adjoining walls identified south of the eastern extension (MSU 1192 and MSU 1231) run NE-SW and SE-NW, respectively [fig. 15]. They rest on foundations (MSUs 1227 and 1235) built of small basalt pebbles, stones, and rare fragment of fired brick, visible only on the inner elevations.

**7** The soil between the mudbricks is more friable and contains ash, but no evidence of burning was found.



**Figure 15** The corner of the structure in the south portion of the eastern extension (left) and the basement (SU 1227) of the wall MSU 1192 (top right) and the basement (SU 1235) of the wall MSU 1231 (bottom right)

Together, the walls formed the corner of an enclosed space, with the internal area located to the southeast. Within this space, two collapse layers (SUs 1193 and 1203 in A1101) were excavated, beneath which lay the floor SU 1222. This surface, made of compacted clay, was constructed over a floor preparation layer (SUs 1228 and 1230). Removal of the floor preparation revealed the layer (SU 1229) on which the foundations of both walls were built; this layer consists of clay with abundant small lumps of mortar.

The structures of A1099 – with the exception of MSU 1239 – rested upon a walking surface (SUs 1245 and 1017 = 1217 and 1262) identified in the eastern extension and in the eastern portion of the main square. This surface (A1098) has not yet been removed but is composed of anthropically compacted clay layers. It continued to be used as a walking surface in the open area between MSU 1239 and MSUs 1192 and 1231, in parallel with the floors SU 1257 north of MSU 1239 and SU 1222 inside the space enclosed by MSUs 1192 and 1231.

M.L.

### 3.2 Discussion of Stratigraphy

The 2024 excavation season in Area 1000 allows for a broader interpretation of the microstratigraphic data retrieved from this sample – albeit of limited extent – which I had ironically (but not entirely unjustly) described in the 2023 report as a ‘peephole’ through which to observe the history of material transformations within the Lower Fortress of Dvin.

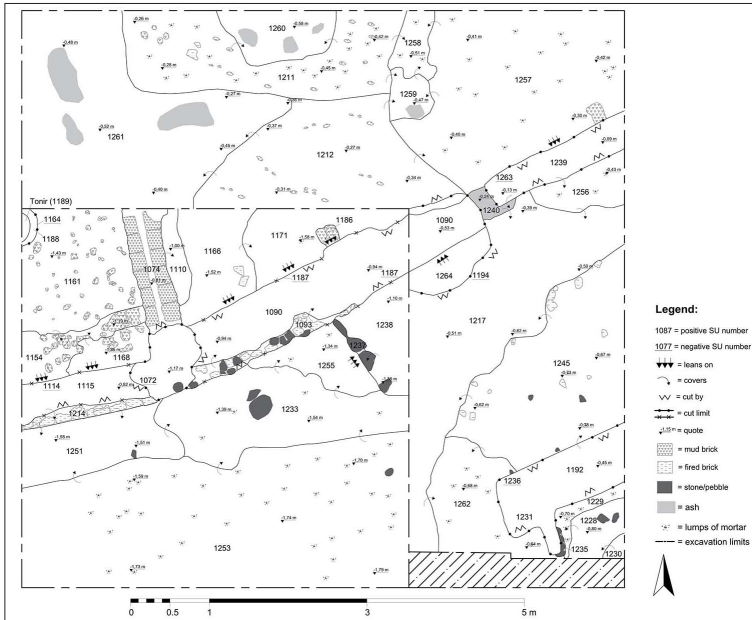


Figure 16 Area 1000, 2024 final plan

Without revisiting issues more extensively discussed in the previous section dedicated to the stratigraphy – particularly regarding the revised sequence of activities identified in 2023, to which Figure 17 provides an updated version of the matrix – I would like to focus these concluding remarks on two main points: the transformations following A1096 and A1097, and the signs of a late re-engagement with the ‘material memory’ of Dvin’s urban fabric, epitomized by what we observe occurring in activity A1099 in relation to the earlier activities A1075 and A1076.

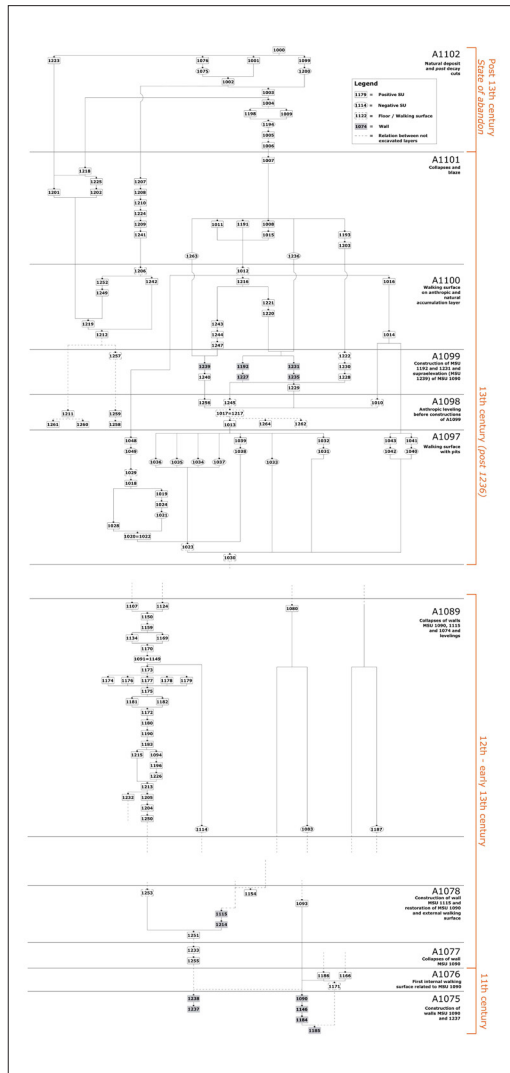


Figure 17 Area 1000, 2024 matrix showing only this year's excavated activities



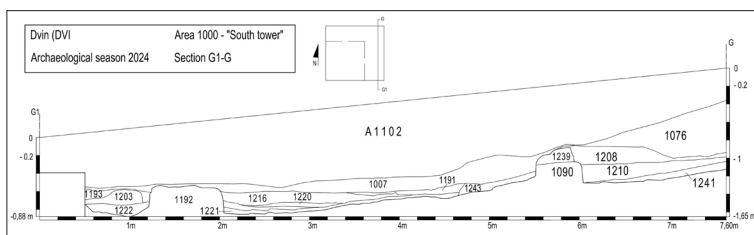


Figure 18 Area 1000, 2024 G1-G section (eastern extension)

Concerning the first point, I must revise the conclusions I offered last year (Petrosyan et al. 2024, 235-43), specifically to refute the statement: “It is certain that from these two moments onwards (A1089 and A1090), Area 1000 retains the material memory of an ‘open-air’ portion of the city”. Simply put, the 2024 investigations have demonstrated that this was not the case.

Excavation of the northern and eastern extensions of Area 1000 has unexpectedly revealed that – after the collapse of the eleventh-century architectural structures (MSU 1090 and later reconstructions within A1078, particularly MSU 1115), which can be placed within A1089 and A1090, and after a significant rise in the occupation surface, from the levels of A1090 to those of SU1025-1054 (the earliest levels with evidence of ephemeral installations in perishable materials, namely rubbish pits associated with clusters of postholes, characterizing A1096 and A1097) – the area was reoccupied as a permanent and structured settlement.

This reoccupation is marked by the construction of buildings in mudbrick and rammed earth as MSUs 1192, 1231 and 1239.

Assuming, as still seems plausible, that activities A1096 and A1097 belong to the early Mongol period – namely, the years around 1236 – it becomes clear that the city, in ways and to an extent we are not yet able to fully quantify, responded with a partial reactivation of its urban fabric. The walking surfaces and architectural remains in Area 1000 bear witness to this. It was, as ceramic evidence suggests, a short-lived response – an impulse that did not give rise to sustained long-term settlement. But that is a different story.

The northern and eastern extensions of Area 1000 clearly reveal a renewed phase of urban occupation (A1098, A1099, A1100, A1101), following its earlier use as an open space from the early thirteenth century (A1089–A1090) and up to the use levels of the early Mongol period. This evidence confirms hypotheses previously advanced on the basis of epigraphic sources and numismatic inference by Žamkoč’yan (2015, 208), particularly in relation to the excavations

in the South Tower area.<sup>8</sup> It strengthens the broader conclusion: Dvin survived the Mongol invasions, and the city undertook a process of reorganization.

Turning now to the second point of these conclusions – namely, the signs of a late re-engagement with the ‘material memory’ of Dvin’s urban fabric during the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – it is instructive to reflect on the modalities through which the building impulse embodied in A1099 took shape.

What we can observe of the post-Mongol-invasion urban grid appears to derive from the alignment of earlier eleventh-century structures (and plausibly roadways), mediated by the survival of a portion of the ruined MSU 1090, originally constructed in A1075. The restoration of this ruin, which can be chronologically assigned to A1099 (MSU1239), provided the alignment for the construction of the parallel structure MSU 1192<sup>9</sup> [fig. 16]. From this observation, several interpretative paths emerge, which we aim to explore more fully in the final publication of the excavation, but which deserve to be anticipated here.

First, it became evident that the building programmes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries – such as MSU 1090 in Area 1000, more broadly linked to the large-scale urbanization of the so-called residential-productive quarter of the Lower Fortress (K’alant’aryan 1996, 51-2) – played a foundational role in shaping Dvin’s long-term urban fabric, well into the ‘late medieval’ period. Second, a question arises regarding the mechanisms of technological and spatial recovery of urban building traditions after the Mongol invasion. By whom were these processes enacted? I am inclined to suggest that local builders – who continued to inhabit parts of the city spared from the thirteenth century processes of deurbanization – played a central role. This interpretation aligns with a model of gradual, spatially differentiated abandonment, rather than a singular, catastrophic rupture of urban life in the 1230s. It was likely these same builders who, in the aftermath of the invasion, demonstrated both the intention and the capacity to revive the urban setting – evident in

---

**8** Similarly, the stratigraphic levels provided in Žamkoč’yan (2015) for contexts dated to the thirteenth century are consistent with the evidence observed in Area 1000. Žamkoč’yan (2015), as well as K’alant’aryan (1996, 53), report that one coin of the Georgian King David Ulu (1245-1274) was found in the western portion of the citadel and that Mongol-period coins have been found in the plain of Dvin. The plain of Dvin is mentioned in the commemorative inscription for the foundation of the Monastery of St. Astuatsatsin at Darbas, commissioned by Tarsaich Ōrbēlean. According to Žamkoč’yan (2015, 207-8), this reference suggests that the city was still inhabited at the time, even if it does not mention the city itself.

**9** Alternatively, the alignment of MSU 1192 may have been provided by MSU 1090, already in a ruined state as indicated by SU 1187, and only later was MSU 1090 restored through the construction of MSU 1239.



the recognition of the ruined MSU 1090 as a vestige of pre-Mongol spatial organization and in the use of construction techniques largely consistent with those employed in the city since the eleventh century.

Such intentional retrieval of Dvin's architectural memory – articulated through spatial continuity and technological resilience – lies at the core of a central research question in light of the final interpretation of the Area 1000 excavations.

M.N.

### 3.3 Material and Artefacts from Area 1000

During the 2024 season, the primary objective regarding the documentation of excavation contexts focused on the comprehensive inventory, including cataloging sheets, drawings, and photographic records, of the materials recovered from A1092, 1090, 1089, 1088, 1087, 1085, and 1084 [fig. 19]. In total, during the last mission, we catalogued 1802 fragments, representing 1084 minimum vessel elements. Another quantitative parameter recorded was the weight of different ceramic classes, which will allow us to calculate the fragmentation index of the studied artefacts. This data are linked both to the characteristics of different ceramic productions (for example, more fragile vessels with thinner walls, such as fritware or lustreware, tend to break into a higher number of fragments than thicker-walled vessels, such as a *karas*) and to the formation processes of the contexts and their post-depositional histories. These data enable us for instance to distinguish between the formation of a floor surface and the fill of a pit, or between a deposit that accumulated over a long period and one that formed rapidly.

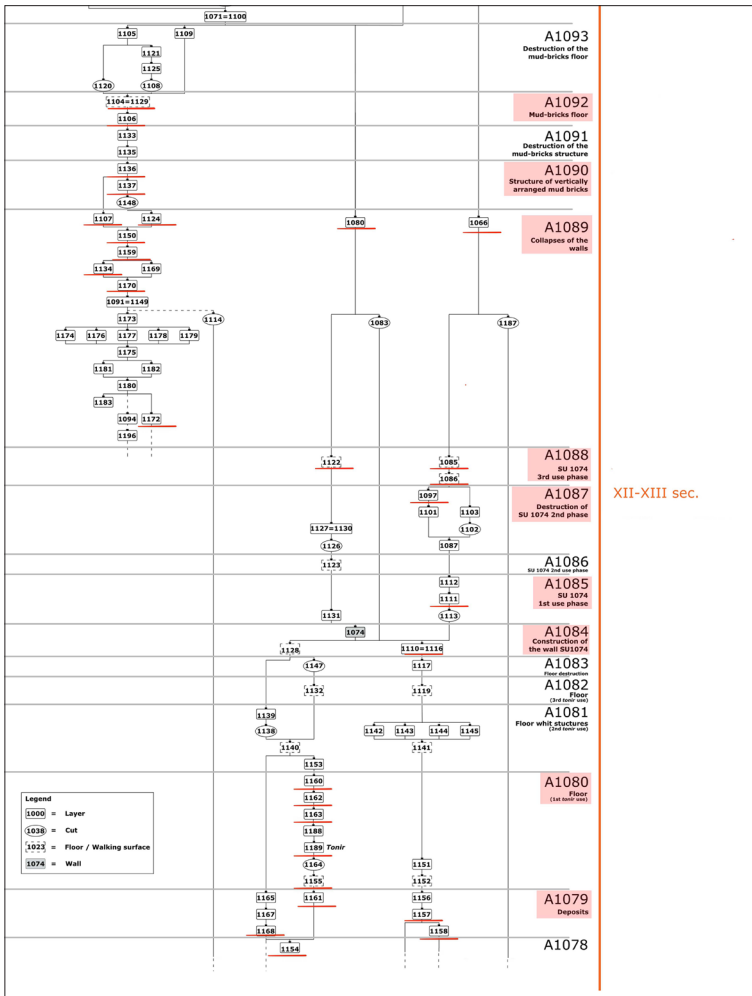


Figure 19 Area 1000 Activities and SUs inventoried this year

For the cataloging process, we continued testing the recording system initiated in previous years with the excavation at Dvin [fig. 20]. This system is based on an evolution of the @Petradata database, which has been in use for decades in projects led by the Chair of Medieval Archaeology at the University of Florence. All fragments are considered, initially classified according to technological categories, with nomenclature as consistent as possible with the relevant Armenian archaeological literature (i.e., previous publications on Dvin as well as other medieval archaeological excavations in

Armenia). In particular, ceramic productions are categorized based on technological distinctions, primarily between handmade and wheel-thrown or moulded vessels. Further classifications were made based on paste composition, the presence or absence of coatings, form, and potential function. Special attention was given to the identification of primary paste types within the technological classes [fig. 21]. The cataloguing descriptions, although based solely on macroscopic examination, are detailed and structured to facilitate the identification of paste families for archaeometric analyses. These analyses will be crucial in determining clay provenance, thereby enabling hypotheses on the production areas of the artefacts.

Site:		Year: 2023																	
Dvin																			
Inv. number	Area	S.U.	Material	Prod. waste	Manufacturing technology	Pottery Class	Typology	Shape	Functional typology	Part of the vessel					Sherd tot. Number		M.N.I.		
										Rim	Spout	Bottom/foot	Handle	Body	T.B.S.				
1	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		Tonir	N.I.					1		1	1		
2	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Painted		N.I.	N.I.					2		2	1		
3	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Painted		N.I.	N.I.					1		1	1		
4	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.					3		3	1		
5	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.	1				1		2	1		
6	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.					1		2	1		
7	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.					1		1	1		
8	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.					1		1	1		
9	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		Close	N.I.					1		1	1		
10	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.			1		1		2	1		
11	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Engobe		Tonir	N.I.					4		4	1		
40	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.					1		1	1		
66	1000	1047	Clay		Hand made	Plain		N.I.	N.I.					1		1	1		
12	1000	1047	Clay		Wheel-thrown	Plain		Close	N.I.					2		2	1		
13	1000	1047	Clay		Wheel-thrown	Plain		Open	N.I.			1				1	1		

Figure 20 Detail of the cataloguing system

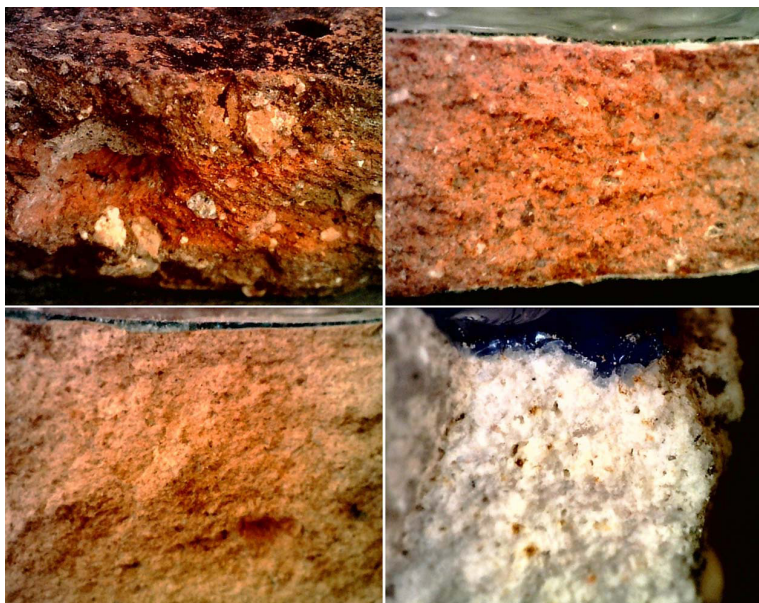


Figure 21 Examples of identified pastes/fabrics

It is worth recalling that kilns were identified in Dvin during earlier excavations, and also we have so far found – albeit in secondary

deposition – a considerable number of production waste materials (e.g., fragments of vessels that failed in their first or second firing). Therefore, it is crucial to precisely identify the ceramic classes produced in Dvin and their chronological framework.

Another important aspect concerns the definition of morpho-typologies for the primary identified productions. This will likely be one of the final objectives of our research, as it requires processing a significant volume of data obtained from the documentation of diagnostic sherds (rims, bases, handles, etc.), which must be compared – where possible – with complete analogue objects [fig. 22]. The goal is to develop morphological typologies that can be analysed stratigraphically to determine whether variations within the same class and form have chronological significance.

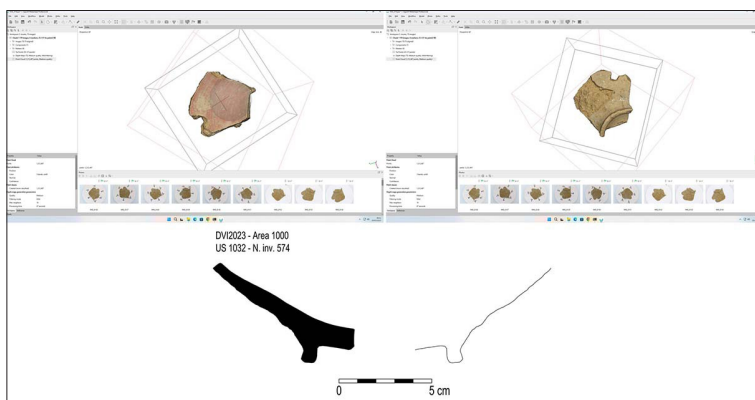
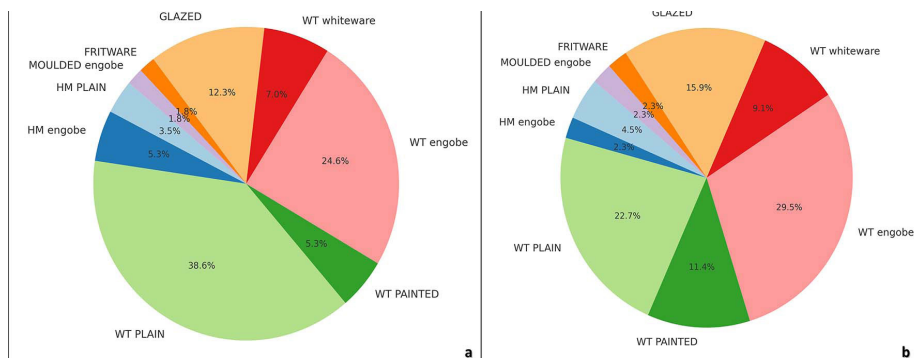


Figure 22 3d model and section of a red painted sherd (DVI574)

To provide an example of the ongoing work, the data collected during the inventory process in the autumn mission primarily aimed to generate information useful for interpreting the functions and chronology of Area 1000. Particular attention was given to the contextual analysis of A 1084, 1085, 1087, and 1088, which relate to the construction of wall SU1074, the activities associated with its use (A 1085 and 1086), its destruction (A 1087), a subsequent phase of use (A 1088), and finally the collapse of the masonry structures (A 1089).

As an example, data from SU 1080 (A 1089), a collapse layer in the northern corner of Area 1000, are presented. This stratum postdates the destruction phase of wall SU 1074 and thus marks an important modification, at least in terms of the function of the area. First, we assess the quantity of material within this SU, which contains a total of 58 fragments [graph 1a] and 49 MNE (minimum vessel elements)

[graph 1b]. The fragmentation index is 0.024, indicating that complete vessels broke into a high number of fragments.



Graphs 1a-b SU 1080: a) total number of the sherds and b) M.N.I.

The small difference between the number of minimum vessel units and the total number of fragments further supports the hypothesis that this deposit corresponds to the destruction and collapse of SU 1074, confirming the loss of its original function. Moreover, diagnostic fragments are scarce, with the exception of an open-form glazed base [fig. 23].

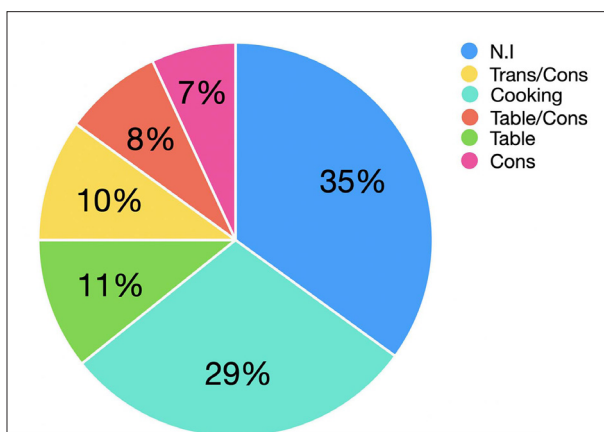


**Figure 23**  
Profile of an open-form  
glazed base

In terms of material composition, this SU contains a substantial quantity of cooking ware (mostly undecorated, with heavy soot traces) [fig. 24a], tableware (including several glazed fragments) [fig. 24b], and storage and transport ceramics [graph 2]. Additionally, red-painted ceramics (likely used for cooking or storage) and a single example of polished red ware were identified. A single, very small fritware fragment with a blue glaze was also recovered. Based on the analysis conducted thus far, this context is tentatively dated to the twelfth-thirteenth century, though this dating will be refined through comparisons with other contexts of the same phase (A 1089).



Figure 24 Cooking ware (on the left) and tableware (on the right) from SU 1080



Graph 2 Chart of primary functional categories in SU 1080

Finally, a few noteworthy finds from the mission included a crucible [fig. 25], not found *in situ* but, when considered alongside other evidence such as ceramic production waste and glass rods (see last year's presentation), further supports the hypothesis of a productive function for this sector of the site. Among this year's inventoried materials, several well-preserved oil lamps were also documented [fig. 26].



Figure 25  
Crucible



Figure 26 Oil lamps

At the end of this part, we would like to present the initial detailed results of the ceramic analysis from A 1097, in order to illustrate the type of work carried out by the Florentine team in the study of the material assemblages. It is worth recalling here that A 1097 refers to a surface level cut by pits containing refuse materials (see Petrosyan et al. 2023, 222, fig. 36).

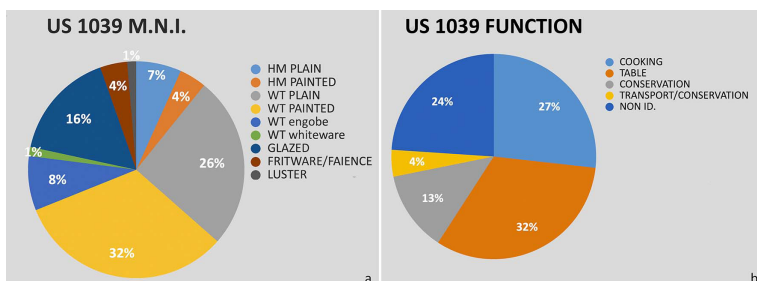
E.P.

### 3.4 Pottery Analysis of A 1097

Fill SU 1039 yielded a total of 107 ceramic sherds, from which a Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) of 71 vessels was identified. These vessels were classified into ceramic categories according to the following MNI-based percentages [graph 3a]: lustreware and white ware each accounting for 1%; fritware and handmade red painted ceramics for 4% each; 7% correspond to hand-made plain wares; 8% to wheel-thrown wares with slip; 16% to glazed ceramics; 26% to plain wheel-thrown wares; and 32% to wheel-thrown red-painted wares. In terms of vessel function [graph 3b], the assemblage includes 4% transport vessels, 13% storage vessels, 27% cooking vessels, and 36% tableware. Due to the fragmentary nature of many sherds, the

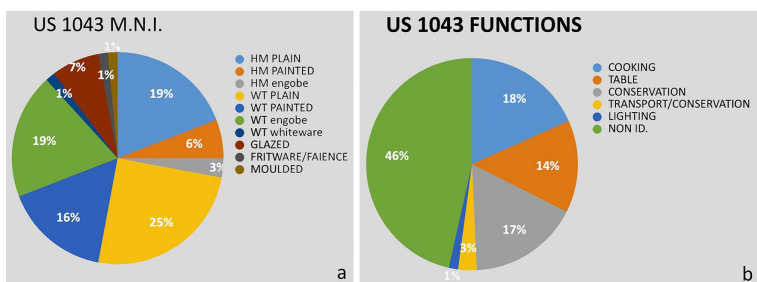


function of 24% of the assemblage could not be determined. A more detailed analysis of the decorated red wares in this context reveals that 67% belong to the red-painted category and 39% to the red-polished type.



**Graph 3** SU 1039: a. chart of M.N.I.; b. chart of primary functional categories

Continuing the analysis of pit fills, attention turns to SU 1043, the fill of cut SU1042. This unit produced 95 sherds, representing an MNI of 66 [graph 4a]. The functional breakdown is as follows: 18% cooking vessels, 17% storage, 14% tableware, 3% combined transport-storage, and 1% lighting vessels [graph 4b]. Of particular note is the high proportion (46%) of sherds for which no functional classification was possible. This is significant, as it reflects the depositional processes of this fill, which consists of highly fragmented material. Although fragmentation does not impede the identification of technological attributes (e.g., handmade, wheel-thrown, glazed), it does hinder functional interpretation.

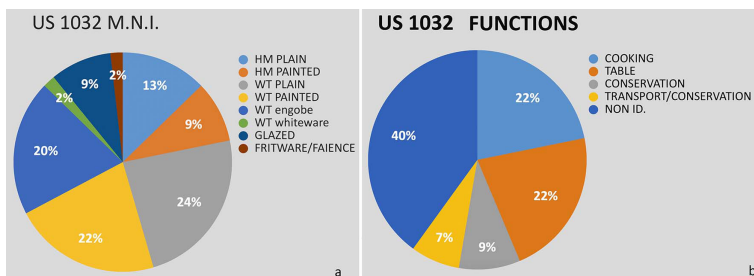


**Graph 4** SU 1043: a. chart of M.N.I.; b. chart of primary functional categories

The analysis then considers fill SU 1041, associated with cut SU1040. This unit produced 18 sherds, corresponding to an MNI of 16. While

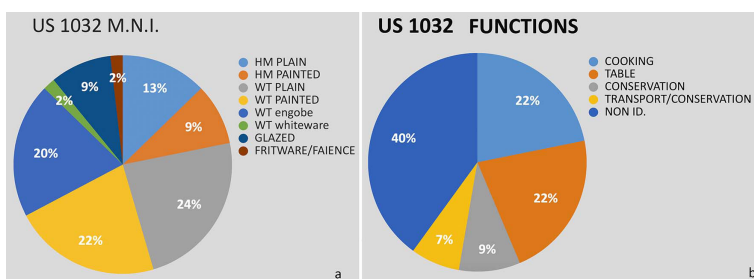


the small sample size limits the statistical reliability of the data, both class and functional distributions are presented in graph 5.



Graph 5 SU 1041: a. chart of M.N.I.; b. chart of primary functional categories

Lastly, fill SU 1032 from pit SU1031 was examined. This context yielded 78 sherds, corresponding to 49 individual vessels. The distribution of ceramic classes is illustrated in [graph 6a]. Functionally, the proportions of vessels related to food preparation (cooking) and consumption (tableware) are roughly equivalent, with the remainder allocated to storage and transport functions. As in other contexts, the high degree of fragmentation prevented the functional identification of a significant portion of the assemblage [graph 6b].



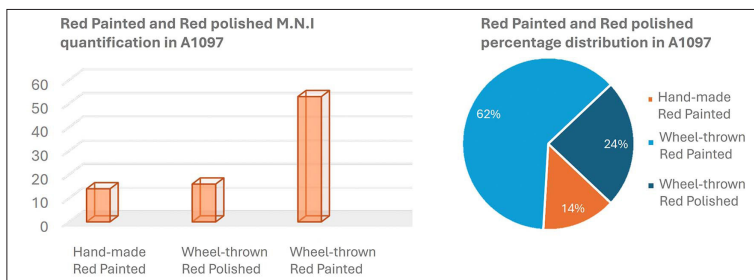
Graph 6 SU 1032: a. chart of M.N.I.; b. chart of primary functional categories

E.P.

### 3.5 Red Painted and Red Polished in A1097

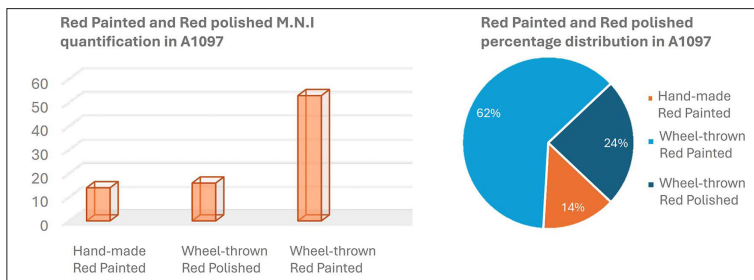
This section presents part of a broader Master's thesis focused on the study of red painted and red polished ceramics found in Area 1000. In A1097, red painted ceramics are represented by 67 sherds, from which 53 minimum vessel forms were identified. The presence of red

polished ceramics is more limited, with 26 sherds and 16 minimum vessel forms. Finally, handmade red painted ceramics are attested by 15 sherds and 14 minimum vessel forms and are characterized by a high degree of fragmentation, which partially hinders their functional interpretation [graph 7].



**Graph 7** A1097: Red Painted and Red Polished M.N.I (left) and percentage distribution (right)

The class of wheel-thrown red painted ceramics, despite interpretative challenges due to the fragmentary nature of the material, includes both open and closed forms, generally associated with cooking activities. The preserved wall thickness ranges between 0.5 and 1.05 cm; the fabrics are largely of the 'sandwich' type, with red surfaces on both sides and a grey core. Inclusions are generally frequent, white and black in colour, with rounded and angular shapes. In some cases, the presence of chamotte is observed, indicative of production techniques aimed at enhancing the thermal resistance of the vessels. Decoration is either incised or in relief, with a predominance of linear and 'V'-shaped motifs.



**Graph 8** A1097: Red Polished fragment with V-shaped engraved decoration; Red Polished lid fragment (right)

As for the wheel-thrown red polished fragments, both open and closed forms are present (including the identifiable shape of a *karas*),

with storage and tableware functions. Wall thickness ranges from 0.5 to 0.8 cm. The fabrics are mostly semi-purified or purified, with predominant colours being brown and orange. Inclusions are very few, mainly white, small to medium in size, and most commonly quadrangular in shape. All fabrics are hard to the touch, with varying firing control – some fragments show signs of uncontrolled firing, while others are well-fired. These vessels show red paint on both the interior and exterior surfaces, though polishing is mostly external; only one example has internal polishing. Additionally, some fragments are decorated with painted inverted 'V'-shaped motifs [graph 8a].

Wheel-thrown red painted ceramics are primarily associated with cooking functions: this is suggested not only by the predominance of closed forms and the presence of lids [graph 8b], but also by the robust and well-fired fabrics, as well as numerous traces of burning. Regarding surface treatment, red paint is observed internally in one case, and externally in another.

F.M.

### 3.6 Faunal Remains from Area 1000

During the 2024 archaeological mission, the preliminary analysis of the animal bones found in Area 1000 continued. The cataloguing of bones found in previous years was completed and most of the remains collected during this latest excavation campaign were analysed.

The sample is pertinent to the twelfth-early thirteenth century and thirteenth century (post 1236) phases and came mainly from accumulation and levelling layers. In particular, most of the remains are attributable to the activities A1089 and A1094 for the twelfth-early thirteenth century phase, and the activities A1100 and A1101 for the thirteenth century phase (post 1236).

During cataloguing, the data required for sample analysis were obtained.

For species identification, several comparative anatomy manuals (Pales, Lambert 1971; Schmid 1972; Barone 1976) and specific articles were used to distinguish between sheep and goat (Payne 1985; Halstead, Collins, Isaakidou 2002; Zeder, Lapham 2010). The data from the mandibular wear stage, useful for the determination of the age of death, was recorded according to the criteria of Payne (1973) for domestic caprines and Hambleton (2001) for cattle and pig/wild boar.

Generic age class information derived from the analysis of long bone epiphyseal fusion was collected according to the work of Bullock and Rackham (1982) for domestic caprines and Silver (1969) for cattle. For osteometric data, the method proposed by von den Driesch (1976) was used as a reference, integrating it with the indications

of Salvagno and Albarella (2017) for domestic caprines. In addition, taphonomic processes (slaughter, processing, burning, gnawing marks) and pathological evidence were recorded.

A total of 1597 bones were catalogued during the 2024 campaign, of which 561 (35%) were determined taxonomically and anatomically, 579 (36%) anatomically, and 457 (29%) could not be determined at any level due to the degree of fragmentation that does not allow for certain identification in the absence of a comparative reference collection [tab. 2].

**Table 2** Identified animal taxa from Area 1000, 12th-13th centuries

Taxa	12th-early 13th c.	13th c. (post 1236)
<i>Equus</i> sp. (horse/donkey/hybrids)	1	3
<i>Bos taurus</i> L. (cattle)	81	24
<i>Sus</i> sp. (pig/wild boar)	4	3
<i>Ovis aries</i> L. (sheep)	72	13
<i>Capra hircus</i> L. (goat)	16	6
<i>Ovis</i> vel <i>Capra</i> (sheep/goat)	260	57
Caprinae	1	-
<i>Canis</i> sp. (dog/wolf)	1	-
Aves	12	5
Pisces	1	1
Total identified bones	449	112
Small/medium vertebra	144	19
Small/medium rib	216	49
Large vertebra	37	12
Large rib	85	17
Unidentified	311	146
Total unidentified bones	793	243

The sample analysed this year consists of both phases almost exclusively of bones from goats, sheep and cattle. To these are added some equids, pigs/wild boars and canids.

In addition to mammals, there are galliform and larger birds, whose specific determination is still in progress, and two large fish vertebrae (diameter 1.5-3 cm).

All anatomical elements of domestic caprines and cattle are represented in both phases while for the other species bones of the head prevail (especially mandibles and isolated teeth). Among bird bones, hindlimb bones predominate, particularly in the later phase.

Data obtained from the analysis of the epiphyses of the long bones of domestic caprines and cattle, indicate that in both phases most livestock were kept alive at least until they reached 3-4 years of age, although some unfused bones show the presence in the sample

of young animals under 1 year of age among domestic caprines and sub-adults (slaughtered around 12-18 months) among cattle. The mandibular sequences, available only for domestic caprines of the twelfth-early thirteenth century phase, confirm this trend and show a higher frequency of culling between 2 and 4 years of age.

Data on the age of death are also available for suids (pig/wild boar). In both phases mandibular sequences show the presence of very young specimens dead by 7 months of age. Sub-adults and adults older than 14 months are absent.

Butchering marks can be traced back to the skinning and removal of meat, the partitioning of bones to obtain smaller pieces suitable for cooking and the division of carcasses into half-carcasses. These traces are visible on vertebrae, generally split in half, in both phases investigated.

The other alterations found on the bone surfaces consist mainly of traces of burning, very frequent in the twelfth-early thirteenth century phase, and gnawing marks poorly attested in both phases.

Pathological evidence is more frequent in the thirteenth century (post 1236) phase. Pathologies in domestic caprines are limited to dental conditions, such as coral-like roots. For the cattle, damage to the short and long bones is more frequent, in particular deformations of the phalanges to varying degrees are attested [fig. 27]. In addition, a distal humerus shows deformations of the capitulum and radial fossa possibly due to trauma.



**Figure 27**  
Cattle's 2nd phalanx with  
pathological disease  
(SU 1012). Palmar view

The sample did not show many differences between the oldest and most recent phases. In both phases, animal husbandry seemed to have been mainly oriented towards the production of meat, wool and hides in the case of domestic caprines, while cattle were probably

kept longer for agricultural works. Furthermore, the presence of mandibles associated with very young suids suggested that the bones belonged to pigs bred on the site or in its immediate vicinity.

Bird bones and fish vertebrae, which are still being studied, suggest that the diet was also supplemented by these animals.

The only thing that differentiates the two periods is the incidence of pathologies, which are much more frequent in the later phase despite the fact that the sample contained fewer findings.

Inflammatory pathologies of tooth roots in domestic caprines affected 5.5% of isolated teeth in the twelfth-early thirteenth century phase and 35.7% in the later phase.

Similarly, the percentage of cattle phalanges showing more or less severe deformations rose from 5.9% in the oldest phase to 30% in the most recent phase.

In the case of domestic caprines, the increase in this inflammatory pathology (coral-like roots), could be due to a change in feeding due to the use of new pastures or to a change in environmental conditions and therefore vegetation (Chilardi, Viglio 2010).

In the case of cattle, the high incidence of degenerative diseases of the phalanges could be due to the advanced age of the animals or to their intensive use in agricultural work, or more likely to a combination of the two factors perhaps as a result of the cultivation of larger portions of land.

The data obtained would have to be integrated with those obtained during the 2023 campaign to enlarge the sample and confirm or deny the trends identified.

## 4 Excavations of the Settlement of Tikhuni

Hamlet Petrosyan, Hamazasp Abrahamyan, Francesca Cheli

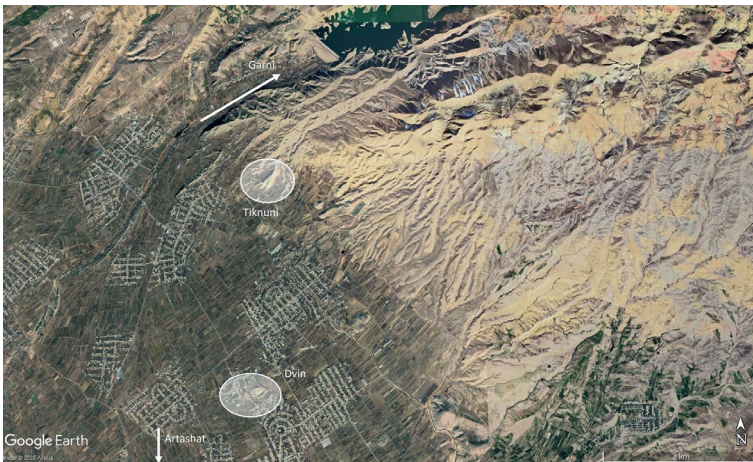
In the autumn of 2024, the team of the Armenian-Italian Dvin expedition of the IAE NAS RA (Hamlet Petrosyan, Hamazasp Abrahamyan, Francesca Cheli) carried out excavations at the site of the Tikhuni settlement (code: TKN), located east of Getazat village in the Artashat community of the Ararat Province [fig. 28]. The excavations were conducted on the western promontory of the settlement and on the hill to the southwest, covering a total area of about 70 square meters.

The Dvin expedition had previously carried out test excavations at the site in 1984 (Žamkoč'yan 1990, 2008). The 2024 archaeological work was preceded by a survey in 2022, which made it possible to identify suitable areas for further excavation.

In parallel with the 2024 excavations, 3D modeling of the Tikhuni settlement was launched, following the cleaning of preserved walls and the removal of vegetation in the settlement area.

#### 4.1 Introduction

The settlement known as Tikhuni is located 4 km from the archaeological site of Dvin, on the left bank of the Azat River, on one of the natural rocky heights descending from the Yeranos Mountains to the Ararat Valley [fig. 29].



**Figure 28** Location of the Tikhuni site in relation to Dvin (by Francesca Cheli)





**Figure 29** Tikhnuni settlement and the pyramid-shaped hill, view from the north

The historical name of Tikhnuni is associated with the founding of Dvin. The fifth-century historian P’awstos Buzand notes that one of the borders of the forest founded by Khosrov II Kotak was Tikhnuni:

He ordered his general to dig up many young trees, to bring wild oak trees of the forests and plant them in the district of Ayarat, beginning from the secure royal fortress called Garni and extending to the plain of Mecamor to the hill called Dvin which is on the north side of the great city of Artashat. Thus, they planted oak trees south of the river as far as the Tikhnuni palace. (PB 1985, 107f)

In the Grabar (Old Armenian) text of P’awstos, it was called “յապարսնսն տիկնունի” (the lady’s dress; PB 1889, 18; authors’ translation), which the NBHL defined as “ուր իցէ տիկին կամ տիկնայք, որպէս բնակարան թագուհւոյ” (where there is a lady or ladies, [it serves] as the queen’s apartment; NBHL 2, 875; authors’ translation). H. Hübschmann considered it “a palace that belongs to the ladies” (1904, 475). There is no other information about Tikhnuni in Armenian sources. From Buzand’s description, it can be considered likely that we are referring to some kind of a palace located near Dvin. The unique name of Tikhnuni, and the search for its traces by the Dvin expedition, ultimately led to the settlement located on a two-tongued rocky promontory rising about 4 km north of the city being



called by such a 'romantic' name, although there were no obvious early medieval traces at the site. It was noteworthy that in the tenth century, a fortress built by Muhammad ibn Shaddād, within hearing distance from Dvin, was also identified by A. Ter-Ġevondyan (1965, 167) with Tiknuni, although the settlement also had no traces from that time. It should be noted that both reconnaissance surveys and especially excavations had so far revealed exclusively the remains of a settlement from the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Thus, following the tradition of the expedition, we only conditionally call the archaeological site under investigation "Tiknuni". It should also be noted that no traces of defensive structures, walls, or towers have been confirmed in the area of the settlement, so it is difficult to call it a fortress. Moreover, it seems that the settlement, founded under Mongol rule (Žamkoč'yan 2015, 208), hardly needed such protection. This is a remarkable issue that will be possible to elaborate on in further research.

Until the 1980s, the Dvin expedition conducted field surveys in the area of the settlement for years, during which remains of structures were recorded and fragments of pottery and glazed tiles were recorded (K'alant'aryan 1987, 144). Archaeological excavations were first carried out in the area of the Tiknuni settlement in 1984 by the Dvin archaeological expedition. The excavations were conducted by the archaeologist Hayk Yesayan. They covered an area of about 100 square meters. Separate parts of buildings built of burnt bricks, tonirs, semicircular hearths, etc. were uncovered. Fragments of simple and glazed pottery and glass objects, as well as parts of plaster decoration on the walls, were found (K'alant'aryan 2008, pl. XLVIII). Snail pendants and a section of a water pipe were also discovered. The main group of finds consisted of several sub-groups of glazed tiles (Žamkoč'yan 1990; K'alant'aryan 2008, pl. XLV-XLVII). The discovered objects were transferred to the History Museum of Armenia. Some of the glazed tiles were kept at the archaeological base camp of Dvin.

After a long break, in 2022 the Dvin expedition conducted field surveys in the settlement area, which were followed by archaeological work in the reporting year. The goal of the 2024 excavations was to conduct stratigraphic excavations in several separate sections of the settlement area and to clarify the dating of the settlement.

Archaeological work was carried out at the TKN Area 1000 and TKN Area 2000 excavation trenches. A preliminary examination of the discovered finds was conducted at the archaeological base camp of Dvin; they were sorted and recorded. Studies of the finds will continue in June 2025.

H.P., H.A.

## 4.2 Excavation Process

Considering that one of the objectives of the expedition was to reconstruct the process of abandoning Dvin and settling the nearby hills during Mongol rule – which was also the aim of the stratigraphic excavations in the Lower Fortress – the expedition conducted exploratory excavations in the area of the Tikhuni settlement in autumn 2024 [fig. 30].

Prior to the actual archaeological work, the expedition explored an area of about 5 hectares of the Tikhuni settlement. The archaeological situations on site, the preserved sections, and the trenches dug by treasure hunters were documented. Eight possible excavation trenches of various sizes were identified in the settlement area, which included the most externally preserved archaeological situations.

## 4.3 TKN Area 2000

Of the eight sections selected for excavations, archaeological work in 2024 focused on one of the preserved walls on the western promontory of the settlement [fig. 31]. A 2 × 2-metre square was chosen for the excavation. The aim of the excavations was to gather information about the archaeological contexts using stratigraphic methods.



**Figure 30** Location of Tikhuni Excavation Area 2000 (red). Accumulation areas of fired bricks marked in white (by Francesca Cheli)



**Figure 31** Tiknuni, Area 2000

Beneath a surface layer, which degraded from the north (where it was thicker, approximately 10 cm) to the south, and was light brown-gray in colour, sandy, and with many roots (SU 2001), extending across the entire area, the site was diagonally divided into two parts by an alignment of irregularly shaped conglomerate stones running NE-SW (MSU 2002). SU 2001 yielded the greatest quantity of material: in addition to bricks (of which only one measurement is preserved), two fragments of architectural tiles (one of which is decorated),<sup>10</sup> two fragments of glazed ceramic, two fragments of unglazed ceramic, and two glass fragments.

After uncovering this alignment, the excavation proceeded simultaneously in the northern and southern portions, which were physically separated by the wall section MSU 2002 [fig. 32].

---

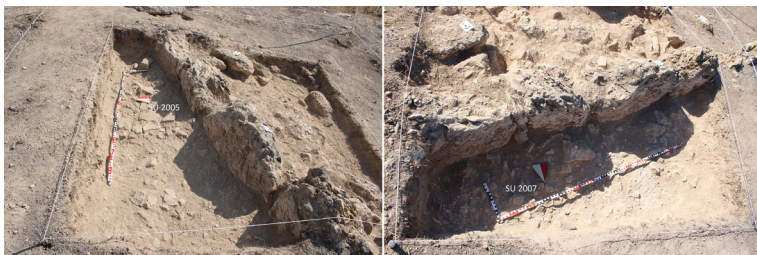
**10** One of the architectural tiles is glazed in a dark colour, tending towards black, while the other features a floral decoration in white and blue on a dark blue background. This decorative motif is present on other architectural tiles found at Tiknuni, dating to the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries (cf. K'alant'aryan 2009, pl. LXX/1; K'alant'aryan 2008, tav. XLVI-XLVII, Babajanyan 2018, 274).



**Figure 32** On the left, the excavation area after the removal of SU 2001; on the right, some of the finds recovered from SU 2001

To the north of MSU 2002, beneath the surface layer SU 2001, a layer of natural origin emerged, with a clayey matrix and fine grain, light brown in colour with frequent gravel (SU 2003).<sup>11</sup> This layer covered an accumulation of bricks, mostly located in the eastern half, bound by a friable clay matrix of light brown-gray colour (SU 2005), which in turn rested on a very friable and fine-grained layer of the same colour as the previous one, but characterized by the presence of small and medium-sized stones and gravel (SU 2007), absent in SU 2005. The layer 2007 was thicker toward the east (approximately 20 cm).

The complete absence of finds, the mostly horizontal arrangement of the bricks from SU 2005 (one of which preserved the three dimensions: 19 × 19 × 4 cm), and what appears to be a ‘intentional selection’ of material (SU 2005 consisting solely of bricks and SU 2007 was made up only of stones) had led us to believe that SU 2005 is not the collapse of a portion of the wall face (possibly the upper part of the wall section SU 2002?), but rather an accumulation of material, possibly even selected (together with the stones from SU 2007), and arranged as the result of human activity [fig. 32].



**Figure 32** On the left, SU 2005; on the right, SU 2007

**11** The layer yielded a small fragment of a decorative tile and a fragment of unglazed ceramic.



At the NW corner, SU 2007 covered a layer with a clayey matrix, light brown-yellow, with a compact horizontal interface, but friable when cut with the trowel (SU 2009). The layer was preserved in a small portion and yielded a glass fragment.

Below this, in the northern portion, there were two layers directly on the bedrock (SU 2014), probably of natural origin. SU 2011 is a whitish layer characterized by the frequent presence of gravel and a whitish matrix, possibly derived from the gravel itself. The layer has a very compact interface and a relatively flat profile, although it features a step in elevation towards the east.<sup>12</sup> Although the compactness of the upper interface might suggest an anthropogenic attempt to level the bedrock, the presence of the change in elevation seems to indicate a natural origin for the layer.

Beneath this, there were areas of brown soil with frequent gravel and small stones, deeper in areas of fractures or depressions in the bedrock (SU 2013).

The bedrock layer, SU 2014, appears to be sedimentary/sandstone, with stratified deposition, and within the interstices of these layers is the natural and sterile layer, SU 2013.

The bedrock layer, SU 2014, descends towards the south and has a change in elevation towards the east [fig. 33].



**Figure 33** On the left, SU 2009 and SU 2011; on the right, the bedrock SU 2014 in the northern portion at the end of the excavation

To the south of SU 2002, beneath SU 2001, a series of layers emerged, likely of natural origin, with variable consistency and completely devoid of archaeological material, characterized by varying amounts of stones of different sizes.

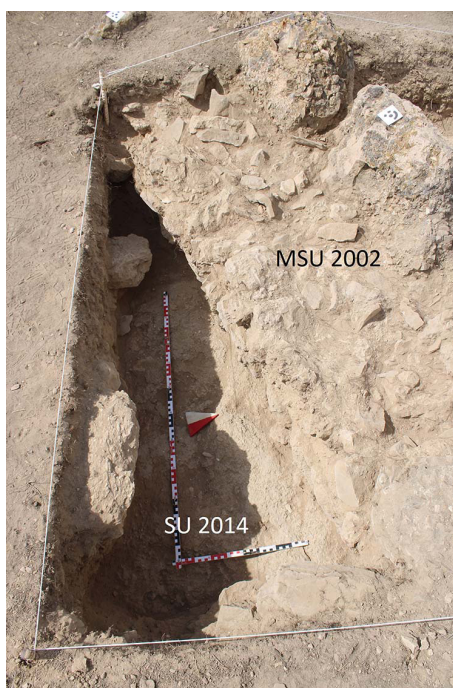
**12** SU 2011 is located at -34 cm towards the west and -55 cm towards the east.

The first of these, SU 2004, located at the southern limit of the excavation, consisted of a clayey-sandy layer, fairly compact, brown in colour, with small stones and gravel.<sup>13</sup>

Beneath this, there was a friable layer of light brown colour, SU 2006, which covered the destruction interface of the wall section SU 2002 (SU 2015).<sup>14</sup>

The underlying SU 2008 was composed of a more compact clayey layer, light brown-grey in colour, which contained clay clumps (possibly originating from the core of SU 2002) and stones of small, medium, and occasional large sizes.

SU 2008 covered a flat-lying layer with rare large stones, SU 2010, located above a friable clayey layer, brown in colour, SU 2012, which directly covered the bedrock outcrop, SU 2014, with a descending slope from north to south [fig. 34].



**Figure 34**  
The bedrock SU 2014 in the  
southern portion at the end  
of the excavation

**13** Within the layer, near the southern section, there was a large conglomerate stone that could only be partially removed. Since it continues into the section, it is unclear whether it is a large stone or part of the bedrock outcrop.

**14** With the removal of U to make it SU 2006, the actual width of the wall section became visible, measuring 78-80 cm.

At the end of the excavation, it was possible to fully expose the wall section MSU 2002, of which only a stone alignment was initially visible. This is a wall section with a NE-SW orientation located in the central part of the area, constructed directly on the bedrock.

The northern face consists of a course of large local conglomerate blocks; the outer face was fairly vertical, with the stones arranged horizontally, except for one placed obliquely. The stones do not all have the same height, and the upper profile is irregular. No marks of working tools are visible, which suggests that the stone bed was used for the detachment of the blocks. Additionally, polygonal stone wedges are present both in the joints and in the beds, though those in the joints are larger.

The southern face is made up of smaller, medium-sized stones and shows an outward bulging toward the south. The stone setting on this side was fairly irregular, with at least three courses visible.

The core is rubble, with small and medium-sized stones, and measures 78-80 cm in width. The binder, washed out on the visible faces, appears to be clay [fig. 35]. At the end of the archaeological excavation, the trench was covered with geotextile and filled with the excavated soil.



**Figure 35** The wall structure MSU 2002. On the left, the north elevation; on the right, the south elevation; at the bottom, a detail of the core

#### 4.4 Discussion of Stratigraphy

The excavation started this year at the Tiknuni hilltop site aimed to investigate, through a small-scale test trench, the archaeological deposit in an area that had not been previously explored.

The Tiknuni site, for which limited documentary information is available, holds significant historical and archaeological value. This is primarily due to the abundance of decorative architectural elements made of glazed tiles, contrasted with a scarcity of both high-quality and common pottery. Additionally, the site features structures that likely existed at the summit, as indicated by visible alignments and substantial brick collapses observed along the hill's slopes.

The location of the test trench was selected based on the indication of a stone alignment, which could be verified, and, more importantly, because it appeared to be in an area not previously investigated.

Although it yielded a small number of archaeological finds, the small test trench provided the opportunity to acquire stratigraphic data, albeit from a very limited area, offering useful information about the wall structure with a NE-SW orientation (MSU 2002) that was uncovered. This structure appears to be built directly on the bedrock (SU 2014) without a foundation trench and is composed of large (on the northern elevation) and small (on the southern elevation) conglomerate stones bound by clay. The wall, approximately 80 cm wide, is not fully visible within the excavation area but appears to be typologically distinct from the other alignments/walls identified during the survey, which seem to be made of sandstone blocks. Although numerous fired bricks collapses are visible on the slopes of the hill, it currently seems unlikely that the brick accumulation (SU 2005, mostly horizontal) can be attributed to the collapse of the elevation of MSU 2002. At the end of the excavation, it was also possible to uncover the bedrock (SU 2014), which descends both from east to west and from north to south (from approximately -35 cm at the northwest to about -60 cm at the southeast from the external walking surface).

At the current stage of the investigation, and given the small quantity of pottery finds, it is difficult to determine the construction period of the structure or the earliest evidence of site occupation. However, the presence of a decorative architectural tile seems to suggest that the area was frequented at least until the thirteenth-fourteenth century.



## 4.5 Research Perspectives

The excavation conducted provided useful information on the archaeological deposits in an area of the Tikhuni site that had not been previously investigated.

Currently, the site appears quite barren, and with a view to continuing the research, it would be advisable to begin with the removal of low shrubbery. This intervention would allow for photogrammetric survey using a drone, with low-altitude shots of the entire hill, in order to produce an initial topographic plan and identify any recognizable structures.

Additionally, a systematic survey of the site and its surrounding area would be valuable, both to further identify the topographical units visible on the ground and to verify and potentially integrate the structures already identified, thus better guiding future archaeological investigations.

Finally, the continuation of stratigraphic excavations could provide valuable insights into the historical events of the Tikhuni site and allow for data collection on the entire stratigraphic sequence [figs 36-37].



Figure 36 Tikhuni, Area 2000: final plan and Matrix

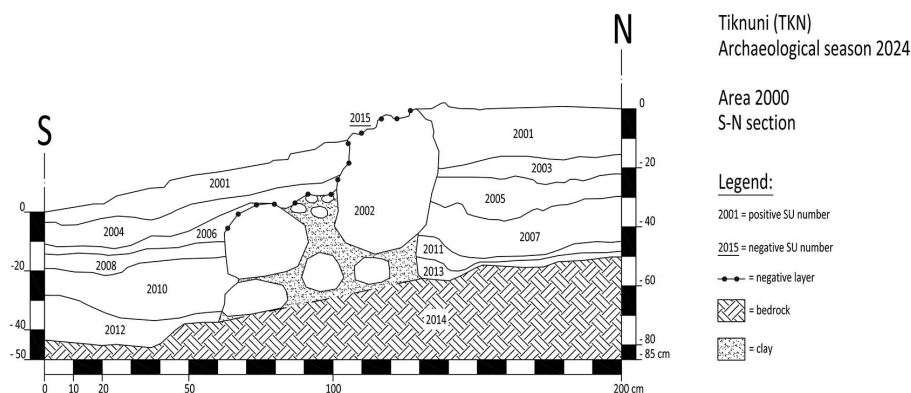


Figure 37 Tikhuni, Area 2000: S-N section

F.C., H.A.

#### 4.6 TKN Area 1000

After the excavations of TKN Area 2000 at the Tikhuni settlement, archaeological work continued on the top of a naturally pyramid-shaped hill located about 400 meters south of the settlement. The top of the hill had been levelled over time. The oval section of the hilltop measured 14 m in width and 26 m in length. The existing unevenness was the result of several holes dug in the area of the tomb, as well as soil removal and refilling. There were also several small treasure-hunting pits, up to 50 cm deep and 1 meter in diameter [fig. 38].



Figure 38 The pyramid-shaped hill located near Tikhuni (on the left) and the top of the pyramid-shaped hill before the excavations (on the right)

In response to a local report of digging activities, test excavations were carried out on the hilltop in 2012. “As a result of the works, a hole about 3.5 m deep was dug in the centre of the hilltop, which opened up and significantly damaged the building made of polished tuff stone. The hole opened from the roof of the building, causing the polished stones of the roof to break and become scattered. The ceiling is decorated with ‘stalactite’ or *muqarnas* ornaments typical of the period. The entrance to the structure (100 × 70 cm) has been preserved, also lined with polished tuff stone, with the edges processed and curved” (Nalbandyan, unpublished report, 26.10.2012).

Later, the pit on the top of the hill was covered and reopened several times. At the beginning of the excavations, there was a pit 240 cm deep and 270 cm wide on the hilltop. A rectangular slab of curved tuff lay in the pit, clearly part of the stalactite decoration [fig. 39]. Similar tuff slab fragments had also been documented in the surrounding gardens, the chapel of Surb David, and the area of the village of Getazat. These traces provided grounds to consider it likely that the remains belong to the prayer hall and burial chamber of the tomb.



**Figure 39** A stalactite architectural ornament dug out by the looters

An area measuring 9 × 5 metres was initially chosen for excavation but was reduced to 8 × 5 metres during the work, depending on the size of the structure to be uncovered and the natural rocks exposed. The new excavation site included the large pit dug by treasure hunters and was given the provisional name TKN Area 1000 [fig. 43]. The primary objective of the excavation was to carry out rescue work in the part of the structure with the ‘stalactite’ decorations that

were constantly damaged by treasure hunters, to remove the recently accumulated soil, and to clean and document the architecture and archaeological contexts of the structure. The excavations involved removing soil that had accumulated as a result of earlier activities, which had also been used to backfill previous investigations.

H.P., H.A.

#### 4.7 The Stratigraphic Description

The excavation activities involved the removal of the backfill used to cover the previous investigations. Although the removal of the deposit is still ongoing, the process has already begun to provide insights into both the stratigraphy and the structure emerging from the excavation, despite the scarcity of ceramic finds.

Beneath a friable brown surface layer containing stones, gravel, and fragments of worked and unworked tuff blocks (SU1001), the boundary of a previous excavation intervention (cut SU 1003) was identified. This earlier cut was filled with a loose, brown soil deposit (SU 1004), containing a heterogeneous assemblage of earth, stones, as well as organic materials such as wood and textile fragments. The cut appeared to follow a NW-SE orientation and was concentrated mainly in the central portion of the excavation area.

In the northern corner, the earlier excavation had intersected a very compact, fine-grained, clayey brown layer (SU 1002), which appeared sterile and may be of natural origin, possibly linked to the natural bedrock (SU 1007). In the southern portion of the area, excavation revealed a compact, light brown clayey level (SU 1010).<sup>15</sup> Beneath SU 1010, the remains of a collapse layer (SU 1005) were identified, likely belonging to a large structure (MSU 1006).<sup>16</sup> This building appears to have been constructed by excavating or adapting the sedimentary bedrock or the sterile deposit, which took the form of an underground structure [fig. 40].

---

**15** Along the SW and SE sides of the excavation area, at a depth of approximately -30 cm, accumulations of medium and large, unworked stones were encountered, bound by a very friable and incoherent matrix of mortar and clay. Since the stones rest on a black layer of charcoal with frequent root presence, they may represent material originating from the structure (possibly the core?), but appear to be in secondary deposition, probably due to previous excavations.

**16** At the current stage of the investigation, since the building has not yet been fully brought to light, it was decided to assign a single number to the structure, which will hopefully be investigated in detail at the end of the excavation activities.





**Figure 40** On the left, overview during the excavation works; on the right, a close-up of a part of the northern wall (MSU 1006) built by excavating into the bedrock (SU 1007)

The building has, on the small visible portions of internal elevations, perfectly squared and smoothed orange tuff ashlar, which do not originate from the same pyramidal outcrop composed of sandstone, and are therefore probably imported from other locations. Although the plan is not yet clearly visible or identifiable, it appears to resemble a Greek cross, probably with a vaulted roof, which is no longer preserved except, partially, at the springing of the vault. The corner spandrels of the impost of the covering preserve traces of muqarnas decoration. These decorative elements are also present in the upper band of the elevation at the springing of the vault, approximately at the depth reached by the excavation.

Although not yet fully visible, some elements suggest that the structure was finely decorated. Among these is a corner ashlar finely engraved with geometric, located to the SE of the excavation area.

The core of the wall is constructed with mostly unworked stones, bound by a fairly tenacious mortar of a whitish-pink colour, with inclusions of gravel and small stones [fig. 41].



**Figure 41** Overall view of the NW (on the left), and NE wall and the core at the end of the excavation (on the right)

Excavations were carried out to a depth of 2 meters and were halted with the intention of continuing in 2025. At the excavation site, the walls of the structure – constructed with lime mortar and rough-hewn stones, without polished stones – begin at a depth of 5 cm on the NW side. The uppermost layer of the polished tuff starts at a depth of 90 cm. Currently, up to three rows of stalactite elements are visible [fig. 42].

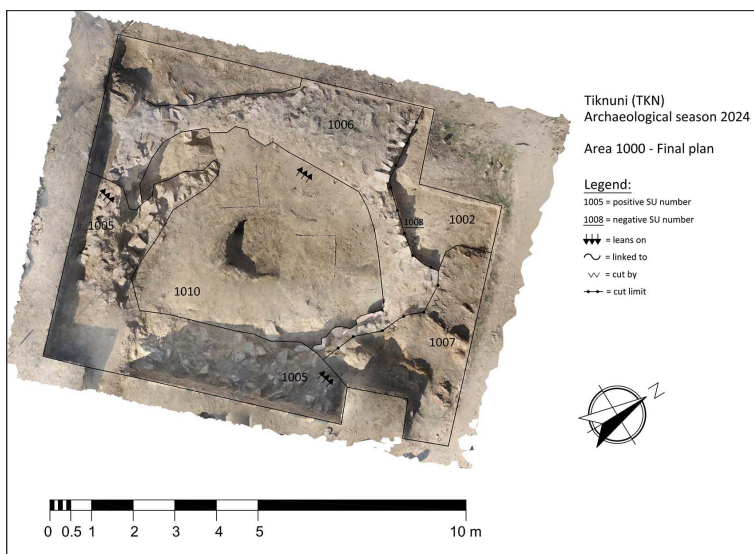


**Figure 42** On the left, a reconstructive hypothesis of the building's plan; on the right, details of the NW side with the muqarnas decoration

The gradually revealed structure is built of smoothed tuff and is cruciform in plan. At this stage, it is difficult to make definitive statements about the above-ground part of the building. The structure had a ceiling decorated with stalactite elements, small portions of which were preserved. The stalactite sections were framed by richly stylized borders, part of which remained in situ, while another fragment was found near the Chapel of Surb David. The core of the walls was filled primarily with unprocessed tuff fragments and lime mortar. Based on its known features, the structure appeared to correspond to the type of Mongol-period tombs known from Yerevan, Khachen, and other locations, built by the master architect Shahik. It appears that we are dealing with a cultural phenomenon characterized by the involvement of Armenian architects and craftsmen in the construction of funerary monuments for new rulers of different faiths.

Following the 2024 archaeological work, measurements and a 3D model of the monument were produced. The excavation site was then covered with geotextile fabric and soil, and the exposed walls were protected with soil-filled bags.

F.C., H.A.



**Figure 43** Tikhuni, Area 1000: plan at the end of the 2024 excavation season and preliminary hypothesis of matrix

## Bibliography

- Babajanyan, A. (2018). "The Glazed Pottery of Armenia in the XII-XIV Centuries in the Cultural Context of East and West". Yenişehirlioğlu, F. (ed.), *AIECM3 Proceedings of XIth Congress on Medieval and Modern Period Mediterranean = Conference Proceedings* (Antalya, 19-24 October 2015), vol. 1. Ankara: Vekam, 271-8.
- Babayan, F. (2018). "Norahayt šinut'yun Dvini miḡnaberduḡ" (A Newly Found Structure in the Citadel of Dvin). *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri*, 3, 332-46.
- Barone, R. (1976). *Anatomia comparata dei mammiferi domestici. Osteologia*. Bologna: Edagricole.
- Bullock, D.; Rackham, J. (1982). "Epiphyseal Fusion and Tooth Eruption of Feral Goats from Moffatdale, Dumfries and Galloway". Wilson, B.; Grigson, C.; Payne, S. (eds), *Ageing and Sexing Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites*. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 73-80. BAR British Series 109.
- Chilardi, S.; Viglio, F. (2010). "Patologie dentarie nei resti animali provenienti dalle UUSS 1-16 del fossato neolitico di Contrada-Stretto Partanna (Trapani)". Tagliacozzo, A.; Fiore, I.; Marconi, S.; Tecchiati, U. (eds.), *Atti del 5° Convegno Nazionale di Archeozoologia = Conference Proceedings* (Rovereto, 10-12 november 2006). Rovereto: Osiride, 119-27.
- Driesch, A. von den (1976). *A Guide to the Measurement of Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites*, vol. 1. Cambridge (MA): Peabody Museum Bulletin.
- Łafadaryan, K.G. (1952). *Dvin k'atak'ə ev nra peḡumnerə* (The City of Dvin and Its Excavations). Vol. 1, *Haykakan SSH GA Hnagitakan aršavaxmbi 1937-1950 t't'. ašxatank'neri ardyunk'nerə* (Results of the 1937-50 Archeological Expedition of the NAS RA). Erevan: HSSR GA hratarakčut'yun.

- Halstead, P.; Collins, P.; Isaakidou, V. (2002). "Sorting the Sheep from the Goats: Morphological Distinctions between the Mandibles and Mandibular Teeth of Adult *Ovis* and *Capra*". *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 29, 545-53.
- Hambleton, E. (2001). "A Method for Converting Grant Mandible Wear Stage to Payne Style Wear Stages in Sheep, Cow and Pig". Millard, A. (ed.), *Archaeological Sciences '97 = Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Durham* (2-4 September 1997). Oxford: BAR Publishing, 103-8. BAR International Series 939.
- Hermann, G. (1999). *Monuments of Merv. Traditional Buildings of the Karakum*. London: Society of Antiquaries of London.
- Hübschmann H. (1904). "Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen". *Indogermanische Forschungen*, 16, 197-490.
- K'alant'aryan, A. (1987). *Dvini aršavaxmbi 1983-1984 tt. ašxatank'neri himnakan ardyunk'nerə* (The Main Results of the 1983-1984 Work of the Dvin Expedition). *Patma-banasirakan handes*, 116(1), Erevan: HSSH GA, 136-46.
- Kalantarian [K'alant'aryan], A. (1996). *Dvin, histoire et archéologie de la ville médiévale*. Neuchatel: Recherches et Publications.
- K'alant'aryan, A. (ed.) (2008). *Dvin k'atak'a ev nra petumnerə (1981-1985)* (The City of Dvin and Its Excavations [1981-85]), vol. 4. Yerevan: NAS RA 'Gitutyun' hratarakč'ut 'yun.
- K'alant'aryan, A.; Karakhanyan, G.; Melkonian, H.; Petrosyan, H.; Hakobyan, N.; Babayan, F.; Zhamkochyan, A.; Nawasardyan, K.; Hayrapetyan, A. (2009). *Armenia in the Cultural Context of East and West. Ceramics and Glass (4th-14th Centuries)*. Yerevan: NAS RA 'Gitutyun' Publishing house.
- Leonetti, M. (2024). *Edilizia civile a Dvin (Armenia) tra IX e XIII sec. d.C.* [MA Thesis]. Florence: University of Florence School of Specialization of Archaeology.
- NBHL 2 = Avetikean G, Sivrmelian Kh.; Avgerean, M. (1837). *Nor baġirk' Haykazyan lezui* (New Dictionary of the Haikazian Language), vol. 2. Venice: St. Lazarus.
- Pales, L.; Lambert, C. (1971). *Atlas ostéologique pour servir à l'identification des mammifères du quaternaire. Herbivores*. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- Payne, S. (1973). "Kill-Fff Patterns in Sheep and Goats: The Mandibles from Aşvan Kale". *Anatolian Studies*, 33, 281-303.
- Payne, S. (1985). "Morphological Distinctions between the Mandibular Teeth of Young Sheep, *Ovis*, and Goats, *Capra*". *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 12, 139-47.
- PB 1889 = P'awstosi Buzandac'woy Patmut'iwn Hayoc' (P'awstos Buzand's History of the Armenians). Venetik: i tparani Srboyn Łazaru.
- PB 1985 = P'awstos Buzand (1985). *P'awstos Buzand's History of the Armenians*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. New York: s.e.
- Petrosyan, H.; Nucciotti, M.; Pruno, E.; Squilloni, L.; Kirakosyan, L.; Vardanesova, T.; Cheli, F.; Hovhannisyan, H.; Abrahamyan, H.; Petřik, J.; Slaviček, K. (2023). "The Armenian-Italian Joint Expedition at Dvin. Report of 2022 Activities". *Armeniaca. International Journal of Armenian Studies*, 2, 193-246. <http://doi.org/10.30687/arm/9372-8175/2022/01/011>.
- Petrosyan, H.; Nucciotti, M.; Pruno, E.; Vardanesova, T.; Cheli, F.; Squilloni, L.; Abrahamyan, H.; Kirakosyan, L.; Leonetti, M.; Dall'Olio, L. (2024). "The Armenian-Italian Joint Expedition at Dvin. Report of 2023 Activities". *Armeniaca. International Journal of Armenian Studies*, 2, 199-268. <http://doi.org/10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2024/01/007>
- Salvagno, L.; Albarella, U. (2017). "A Morphometric System to Distinguish Sheep and Goat Postcranial Bones". *PLoS ONE*, 12(6), e0178543. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0178543>.
- Schmid, E. (1972). *Atlas of Animal Bones*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Company.



- Silver, I.A. (1969). "The Ageing of Domestic Animals". Brothwell, D.; Higgs, E.S. (eds), *Science in Archaeology*. London: Thames and Hudson, 283-302.
- Ter-Łevondyan, A. [1965] (1976). *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*. Transl. By, N.G. Garsoian. Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand.
- Žamkoč'yan, A. (1990). "Čartarapetakan hardarank'i nmušner Tiknuni amroc'ic'" (Samples of Architectural Decoration from Tiknuni Castle). *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri*, 12, 66-75.
- Žamkoč'yan, A. (2008). "Tiknuni". K'alant'aryan 2008, 182-3.
- Žamkoč'yan, A. (2015). *Dvini mijnaberdi haravayin burgi šertagrut'yan patmut'yunic'* (The Excavations and the Stratigraphy at the South Part of Dvin's Citadel). *Mecamor. Kesdarya peŭmneri taregrut'yun* (Mecamor: The Chronicle of Fifty Years of Excavations). Erevan: HH Mšakuyt'i naxararut'yun, 206-17.
- Zeder, M.A.; Lapham, H.A. (2010). "Assessing the Reliability of Criteria Used to Identify Postcranial Bones in Sheep, *Ovis*, and Goats, *Capra*". *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 37, 2887-905. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2010.06.032>.



# Observing South Caucasus' Historical Landscape: An Open Photo Archive Tools, Activities, and Purposes of the OSCOP Project

Stefano Riccioni

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

Francesca Penoni

Politecnico di Torino, Italia

Beatrice Spampinato

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

**Abstract** This article presents the project *Observing South Caucasus' Historical Landscape: An Open Photo Archive*, whose strategic objectives are to collect, digitise, and catalogue a collection of photographs documenting the cultural heritage of the South Caucasus. The preservation and valorisation actions are targeted at three different facets of this heritage: (1) the tangible photographic collection (i.e. the photographic object itself); (2) the intangible historical layers (evolution of site ownership, historical stratification, and corresponding toponymy); (3) the tangible architectural and natural heritage of historical Armenia and Georgia.

**Keywords** South Caucasus. Armenian heritage. Georgian heritage. Photo collection. Cataloguing strategies.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The History of the Photo Collection of the CSDCA Archive. – 3 Work in Progress: Preserving the Material Heritage of the Collection. – 4 The Online Database: A Digital Portal to Intangible Heritage. – 5 Conclusions.



Edizioni  
Ca' Foscari

Submitted 2025-07-02  
Published 2025-12-12



## Open access

© 2025 Riccioni, Penoni, Spampinato | © 4.0



**Citation** Riccioni, S.; Penoni, F.; Spampinato, B. (2025). "Observing South Caucasus' Historical Landscape: An Open Photo Archive". *Armeniaca*, 4, 173-196.

DOI 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/007

## 1 Introduction

The OSCOP project<sup>1</sup> entails the comprehensive preservation and scholarly re-examination of an invaluable but under-researched photographic archive and aims to make it accessible to researchers through an open-access digital repository. On the one hand, it seeks to enhance the content of the archive and hence the historical landscapes, both natural and monumental, of the South Caucasus region; on the other, it unravels an example of 'Western art-historical criticism' in the Middle East, a narrative that is intertwined with the history of the archive itself. The OSCOP project is supported by Ca' Foscari University as SPIN (Supporting Principal Investigator) and by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max Planck Institut (KHI). The Centro di Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena (CSDCA) is actively involved in the OSCOP initiative as a technical partner. The CSDCA owns and houses the photographic collection, provides the necessary scanning and conservation equipment, and offers its library as a workspace for archivists. The photographic collection of the CSDCA comprises approximately 10,000 photographic items (transparencies, negatives, and printed photographs) documenting the cultural heritage of historical Armenia and Georgia. The time and resources of the OSCOP project allowed us to consider only a group of 900 colour slides, selected due to the high perishability of this type of item. The subjects of the slides considered for the database cover a wide geographical (from Iranian Azerbaijan to *de facto* Abkhazia and from Eastern Anatolia to *de facto* Nagorno-Karabakh) and chronological range (from the fifth to the nineteenth century).

Recent decades have seen a marked increase in international scholarly interest in the cultural heritage of the South Caucasus region. The mediaeval monuments of that area emerge as integral components of historical landscapes and are deeply interwoven with an ever-changing ecosystem where urbanisation, construction, restoration [figs 1-2], wars, and geopolitical dynamics perpetuate the influence of human geomorphological intervention on both the natural and monumental heritage.

---

<sup>1</sup> The OSCOP project is funded by Ca' Foscari University of Venice (SPIN Program 2022) and co-funded by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max Planck Institut, in partnership with the Centro di Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena (CSDCA) in Venice. Its principal investigator is Stefano Riccioni. Although the text is the result of collective work, Stefano Riccioni wrote paragraphs 1 and 5, Beatrice Spampinato wrote paragraphs 2 and 3, and Francesca Penoni wrote paragraph 4. Spampinato and Penoni curated the Appendix.



**Figure 1** The Temple of Garni in 1969 (Armenia). © Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena



**Figure 2** The Temple of Garni in 1975 (Armenia). © Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the South Caucasus has faced numerous challenges, from natural disasters [fig. 3] to political tensions and inter-state conflicts, resulting in a rapid transformation of its natural and architectural heritage. This volatile situation presents a formidable obstacle to art historians and archaeologists, hampering their efforts to monitor the ever-changing state of cultural preservation in the region. As a result, scientific exploration and research efforts in the South Caucasus have become of paramount importance. On the one hand, modern tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), and the increasingly streamlined dissemination of digital imagery have made it possible to document existing conditions in real time. On the other hand, digital databases have opened new ways of storing, cataloguing, and preserving images from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



**Figure 3** Church of Surb Amenap'rkich' in Gyumri (Armenia) after the earthquake in 1988.  
© Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena

Over a period of two years (2022-24), the OSCOP project has collected a first batch of 900 items. This first step was intended to encourage collaboration with other institutions and to facilitate cross-study data exchange between international photo collections and archives through an established network of partners. A first attempt in this direction was the collaboration with the KHI project *Aesthetics, Art and Architecture in the Caucasus*, which provides open access to contemporary photographs of the Georgian heritage (Wolf, Hoffmann 2022). In addition to the 2,000 images of Georgian art and architecture already available, the project is in the process of incorporating about 1,000 photographs of prominent Armenian landmarks, which will create a stimulating dialogue with the CSDCA's collection dating back to the Soviet period.

## **2 The History of the Photo Collection of the CSDCA Archive**

In 1967, Alpago Novello took charge of the project “Research on Mediaeval Armenian and Georgian Architecture”, carried out by the Institute of Humanities of the Polytechnic University of Milan. In the same year, together with his colleagues Armen Manoukian and Harutiun Kasangian, he undertook a research expedition to Soviet Armenia, documenting fifty-five sites of its monumental heritage (Kazangian 1996; Alpago Novello 2005). During a second mission in the autumn of 1969, the group of architects, accompanied by photographer Giovanni Nogaro, visited and documented twenty-two additional monuments on Soviet territory. In 1970, three further missions with different research teams extended the area of interest to historical Armenia, Anatolia, and Cilicia. Between 1971 and 1975, the missions of Alpago Novello and Enzo Hybsch focused mainly on the heritage of Soviet Georgia and northern Iran (Brambilla 2021) [fig. 4].





**Figure 4** Adriano Alpago Novello and Armen Zarian during a research trip in Armenia.  
© Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena

Throughout these years, the architect Armen Zarian mediated the official relations between the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and Italian universities (Bevilacqua, Gasbarri 2020), allowing Italian scholars working on the documentation of the Armenian heritage to access Soviet Armenia. The latter's work proved particularly valuable, not only for the outstanding survey results that they shared with their Soviet colleagues, but also in terms of visiting and documenting Armenian and Georgian monuments located outside the Soviet border between Iran and Turkey, which were inaccessible to Soviet scholars (Zarian 1996; Alpago Novello 1996). The efforts to study the heritage of the South Caucasus, led by Alpago Novello, continued until 1992 (Bonardi 2014) **[Appendix]**.

In 1976, almost a decade after the first research mission, Alpago Novello founded the CSDCA, which he directed until his death in 2005. The Centro's mission could be summarised as a passionate commitment to promoting interest and research in Armenian culture and architecture, with the dual aim of producing material of significant scholarly value and disseminating its findings to a wider audience. Its research group has diligently amassed an extensive

collection of written documentation, a substantial library, and a comprehensive photographic archive. At the same time, it has facilitated the creation of an Italo-Armenian network, forging lasting partnerships among individual scholars, public organisations, and research institutions in both countries, as well as with their Georgian and Iranian counterparts. Alpago Novello's decision to set up the CSDCA independently of the Polytechnic University, which at the time was experiencing a period of instability, undoubtedly had a positive impact on the course of the research project and contributed to the continuity of the activities carried out at an international level.

The photographs, surveys, and bibliographical material collected during the missions constitute the secondary sources used by the Alpago Novello's research group to produce landmark publications. The most notable of these is the thirty-year series *Ricerca sull'architettura armena* (Research on Armenian Architecture), published after the missions (between 1970 and 1986, the CSDCA published twenty-five volumes). This series served as an internal departmental resource, intended for a select audience of teachers, collaborators, and interdisciplinary students. In addition, the publishing initiative *Documents of Armenian Architecture*, structured as individual monographs with extensive photographic content, was aimed at a specialist readership but had a wider circulation than its predecessor (between 1968 and 1998, the CSDCA published twenty-three volumes). Each volume in the series was published in Italian, English, and Armenian. Another important output of the research group was the organisation of five international symposia on Armenian art – two in Armenia and three in Italy – between 1975 and 1988. The original papers presented at the Italian symposia were published in three volumes that remain a valuable resource to contemporary scholars. The same is true of the three symposia on Georgian art held between 1974 and 1980 in Bergamo, Bari, and Lecce (Zekiyani 2014; Riccioni 2020).

In addition, the research group curated three photographic exhibitions presented in various national and international venues. The inaugural exhibition of 1968, entitled "Armenian Architecture from the fourth to the eighteenth Century", consisted of 155 panels covering an area of approximately 400 square metres, set up using the Danish "Abstracta Modular System". In 1974, this exhibition format was adapted to present Georgian architecture. It was followed by a third exhibition dedicated to *xac'k'ar* in 1981.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the series' extensive photographic and documentary material, they do not include the entirety of the 4,000 photographs collected during the first missions alone, nor do they convey the

---

2 *Architettura armena* 1975; *Architettura georgiana* 1979; Ieni 1981; Spampinato 2020.

challenges of a long and ambitious research project characterised by linguistic, political, and bureaucratic complexities. The intricacies involved in the creation of this Italo-Armenian collaborative network, the dissemination of its results, the bureaucratic hurdles to be overcome, and the methodological challenges of researching a distant artistic and architectural culture are all documented in the archival material.

In 1992, the library and archive found a new home, moving from the CSDCA's headquarters in Milan to the Loggia del Temanza in Venice. This move coincided with the CSDCA's separation from its former affiliation to the Polytechnic University of Milan and with its membership of the OEMME publishing house and association. Under the umbrella of OEMME, presided by Agopik Manoukian, the activities of the publishing house and of CSDCA converged. The latter, while maintaining its core objectives of studying and promoting Armenian culture, narrowed its focus to two specific areas of interest: a musical section, headed by Minas Lourian, and one specialising in architecture and restoration, coordinated by Gaiànè Casnati (a protégé of Alpago Novello). The transfer of the archives and photographic library was rather hasty, with the materials arriving in Venice in sub-optimal packaging and without prior reorganisation.

Previous efforts, although incomplete for various reasons, laid the foundations for the scanning and cataloguing of the photographic material. At the beginning of the 2000s, Gianclaudio Macchiarella (a Professor at Ca' Foscari University) and Gaiànè Casnati began organising surveys and digitising the photographs. Between 2010 and 2015, the CSDCA participated in the European project *Armeniaca*, and the continued digitisation efforts contributed to a database of photographic material in the possession of prominent European scholars of Armenian heritage. However, these efforts have remained incomplete to this day.

Recently, thanks to a generous donation from the Alpago Novello family (facilitated by Minas Lourian and Manuela da Cortà), the CSDCA has received additional archival material. Building on previous efforts, which had already highlighted the importance of the photographic subjects and objects, the foundations were laid for the development of this project.

### 3 Work in Progress: Preserving the Material Heritage of the Collection

At the heart of the OSCOP project is the careful management of Alpagò Novello's extensive photographic archive. Most of the photographic collection consists of colour transparencies and negatives. However, the documentary files also include printed photographs that have been organised according to recognisable criteria. The reasons for this organisation are given in the brief notes accompanying the printed photographs. The Ektachrome slides, usually grouped according to geographical criteria, have been selected over time to be transferred or reproduced in other sections based on specific architectural typologies and motifs. In general, each photograph in the collection has a 'double existence' – as an image and as a material object (Caraffa 2019) [fig. 5].



**Figure 5** Colour transparency of the Church of Öjun, Armenia.  
© Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena



The paper of the printed photographs and the polyester of transparencies and negatives are not just “neutral supports” but also have physical properties (Edwards, Hart 2004, 2). One of our main tasks regarding the material archive of the CSDCA was the systematic treatment of tangible photographic objects. We scanned each item after thoroughly cleaning and repairing its storage cases and recording the numbers and inscriptions on each case [fig. 6], since several cases were displaced or broken during the transport from Milan to Venice.



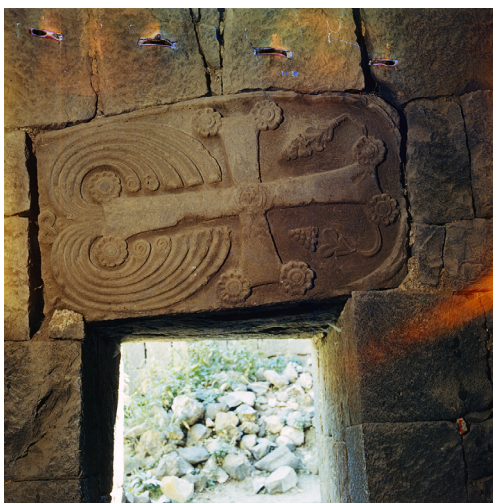
Figure 6 Cases of the colour transparencies of the Church of Surb Gayane in Eġmiacin (Armenia) from the photo archive of Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena

In addition, some of the slides present damp stains (due to unfavourable humidity conditions) and dust stains (due to repeated handling) [fig. 7] and the films are occasionally scratched (probably due to manipulation during scanning) or present marks and traces of glue from previous indexing or cutting. We were unfortunately unable to correct these imperfections on the surface of the film during cleaning. Similarly, the colours of some images have shifted toward blue, green or red. While these defects may affect the aesthetics of

the image, they do not compromise the integrity of the documentary information it conveys [fig. 8]. We therefore chose to preserve these alterations in both photographic objects and digital images, without resorting to restoration and post-production techniques.



**Figure 7** Colour transparency of the Church of Surb T'eodoros in Yelvard (Armenia) with yellowish moisture stains. © Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena



**Figure 8**  
Colour transparency  
of the Church  
of Surb Astvacacin, Kot'avank'  
Monastery (Armenia)  
with staple holes.  
© Centro Studi e Documentazione  
della Cultura Armena

According to R. Barthes, photography is threatened by several 'intimations of mortality', including the mortality of the photographer, the subject, the viewer, but also of the photograph itself (Barthes 1981, 93-4). Moreover, referring to Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, Edwards writes:

Marks on the photographic object point to the history of its presentational forms and engagements with them [...] Handling damage, the torn and creased corners, fold marks, perhaps text on the back, scuffing and dirt point to the use of images or, indeed, neglect of images. (Edwards, Hart 2004, 12)

In other words, the inscriptions, stains, scratches, glue or colour changes described in the previous paragraph make it possible to better link the 'photo-object' to its history.

The conservation of the material collection had a twofold goal; to protect transparencies and printed photographs from further alteration, and to record the condition and 'signs' of the photo-objects during the indexing process. The latter goal was achieved by selecting information directly related to the object - and not exclusively to the subject - in the online index. Once scanned, the new digital renditions were categorised according to an updated nomenclature, as previously described. Moreover, the archivists recorded and translated the 'traces' - meaning, in the words of Maurizio Ferraris (2009), "the alteration of a surface that is valid as a sign or reminder for a mind capable of understanding it as such". Finally, following the sequential numerical sequence of the *Object ID* (an alphanumeric code given to the digital photograph and to the material object in the physical archive), the original order of the transparencies is indicated, giving an insight into Alpago Novello's own methodology. Through this process, we created a meta-language that links the photographic object stored in the case to the photographic subject analysed in the online index and to the space of the subject that can be physically explored.

#### **4 The Online Database: A Digital Portal to Intangible Heritage**

The intangible heritage and its historical layers are documented through the online database of the OSCOP project. The cataloguing system, inspired by that of the Italian Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation, is designed to provide an index card for each digital entry. The index is mainly divided into two sections: the first section focuses on the subject represented in the photograph; the second, on the photographic object itself.



The *Title* provides the name of the main subject of the photograph (e.g., monument, work of art, or natural site), Romanised following the romanization system adopted by the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN). The original name (for instance in Armenian or Georgian) is also provided and becomes a tool to overcome the limitations and misinterpretations caused by name changes over the centuries, due to the evolution of state ownership of the sites. Information about the current location can be found under *Toponym* and *Geographical coordinates* (see below). Geographical coordinates are provided for each site relying on sources such as the Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names (TGN). In order to guide the users based on their research, subjects are categorised on a material and technical basis (*Architecture*, *Sculpture*, *Painting*, *Manuscript*, *Metalwork*, *Cartography*, and *Landscape*). The subject of the photograph is then described in detail through three entries filled with an open vocabulary: *Art and Architecture*, *Ornaments and Iconography*, and *Landscape*. The presence of *Inscriptions* is also recorded by a dedicated entry in order to facilitate research of palaeographic interest. The chronology of the subject is given at the entry *Subject Date*.

In the second section, the object is described according to its material typology (*Object type*), such as colour transparency, colour or black-and-white print, and black-and-white negative. The *Photograph Date* and the *Photographer* are traced by consulting archival material relating to the missions [Appendix]. The entry *Notes* refers to any information about the photographic object, such as written notes recorded on the cases, the conservation status of the photograph, and references to previous publications. Finally, the second section provides a basic *Bibliography* on the subject of the photograph.

Let us now briefly highlight the methodological references and geo-historical context that directed the selection of the listed entries. From the 1960s to the present day, the vast area covered by the visual material collected at the Alpago Novello archive went through several political events that resulted in toponymic transformations: this is what Öktem calls “toponymical engineering”, a practice whose main goal is “the destruction of the interwoven layers of historical and linguistic meaning, i.e. of the ‘archeology’ of place names and their replacement with an alternative toponymic order that conforms with the time and space vision of the nation-state” (Öktem 2008, §17). Numerous Armenian and Georgian toponyms have undergone this process, especially in Turkey and the ex-Soviet Republics, where the central states silenced the historical toponyms in order to legitimize a uniform national toponymic landscape (Saparov 2023). Moreover, when cited in a European or North American context, toponyms and terms are often translated to make them

more familiar to a 'Western' audience. This process, inherited from the colonial approach of the first European missions to 'the East', adds further strain to indigenous terms and toponyms, which lose their connection to the local environment and to specific semantic nuances. Structuring the index around a geohistorical approach that restores a multi-layered toponymic landscape (*Title, Original Language Title, Toponym, Coordinates, Notes*), serves to safeguard the historical layers that could otherwise be lost due to geopolitical shifts and national ideological appropriation. The neutral process of transliterating rather than translating sites' denominations (e.g. *Surb Astvacacin* instead of Holy Mother of God) and indigenous terms (e.g. *xăč'k'ar* instead of cross stone, *gavit'* instead of atrium) further reinforces the attempt to preserve the intangible historical layers of a changing landscape. Geohistory of art encourages us to consider material evidence independently from the community to which it currently belongs, avoiding nationalistic discourses of appropriation or mystification (DaCosta Kaufmann 2005). One such example is that of the *Surb Xăč'* church in *Alt'amar* Island on Lake Van. After the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the church was abandoned and in late 1922 the Treaty of Kars established the new border between the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey. Lake Van was included in the latter territory. Alpagu Novello's study mission in the 1960s found the church in a state of neglect. The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism decided to restore it in 2005-06. In 2007, the church was reopened as a museum thanks to the Faith Tourism Programme, aimed at promoting the multi-religious composition of Anatolia and the image of Turkey as the "cradle of civilizations and religions" (Över 2016, 179). The reopening of *Surb Xăč'* was met with criticism and concern by the Armenian community, as the musealization of the religious building was used to justify the removal of the cross from its top. Today, the church of *Surb Xăč'* is promoted primarily as a tourist attraction under the Turkish name *Akdamar*, with minimal acknowledgement of its association with a specific ethnic or religious community. References to its Armenian identity are marginalised and mostly omitted. In other words, instead of portraying the site of *Alt'amar* as part of a common heritage, there seems to be a process of appropriation for touristic and economic purposes.<sup>3</sup>

The medieval Armenian and Georgian architectural heritage of Turkey, located mainly along its eastern regions (from the northern

---

**3** The official webpage of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism regarding the Church of *Surb Xăč'*, also known as the *Akdamar Monumental Museum*, is below: <https://muze.gov.tr/muze-detay?DistId=MRK&SectionId=VAN01>. The archaeological site of *Ani*, district of *Kars*, was the subject of a very similar process of appropriation (Zeitilian Watenpaugh 2015).

district of Artvin to the southern district of Van), has been not only largely misinterpreted, but also neglected, abandoned, and often made inaccessible (Kaya, Çalhan, 2018). One such example is the Fourteenth century monastery of Surb Bardulimeosi Vank' (Saint Bartholomew) in Başkale, in the Van district, which was left in disrepair for more than six decades until its inclusion into a military zone in 1990. After more than twenty years of use as a military barrack, the site was made accessible again in 2013. However, it was not included in the Faith Tourism Programme, and no actions were taken to improve its poor state of conservation. The CSDCA photo collection also includes several photographs of the Surb Bardulimeosi Vank' dating back to the late 1960s, which can help us reconstruct the rich decorations, still suggested by the remains. The situation is even more complex in the *de facto* states of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, where the lack of international recognition makes it difficult to develop collaborations beyond the highly politicized relationships with their respective 'patron states' (Broers, 2020). Despite the delicate political environment, the OSCOP project does cover these sites: for instance, several religious sites located in Abkhazia were explored and photographed by Alpago Novello's colleague Enzo Hybsch in 1974 [fig. 9], and Nagorno-Karabakh was visited twice by the research group: first around 1969 and again in 1979 [fig. 10].



**Figure 9** Bedia Cathedral (Abkhazia). © Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena



**Figure 10** Cicernavank' (Nagorno-Karabakh). © Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena

The aftermath of the 2020 war and the more recent offensive in September 2023 have led to a rapid and ongoing transformation of Armenian sites, and valuable projects are currently underway to monitor their current state of conservation.<sup>4</sup> Present and past visual evidence is being used as authoritative data against misinterpretation, denial and abuse. Moreover, to meet the need for trustworthy sources, both high-resolution satellite imagery and traditional visual tools such as photography need to be considered (Smith 2023).

---

**4** The Monument Watch platform registers and presents the state of the cultural heritage of Artsakh, below is the link: <https://monumentwatch.org/>. The Caucasus Heritage Watch project uses satellite imagery and open-source media to monitor, and document endangered and damaged cultural heritage, below is the link to their webpage: <https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/>.

## 5 Conclusions

The examples mentioned above illustrate the complexity of the region and the challenges inherent in studying and cataloguing photographs of a contested heritage. Such complexity becomes even more problematic when attempting to translate all of this information into catalogue entries. The careful structure of the index card aims to provide an indexing model for future similar case studies. Moreover, through this digital transformation, the archive has the potential to become a vital research tool, helping scholars to unravel the historical evolution of vast landscapes that have undergone significant changes due to natural processes, destruction, and abandonment. This resource was designed to meet a wide demand, both geographically and in terms of subject area and interest.

The OSCOP project webpage is accessible from the Ca' Foscari University portal.<sup>5</sup> So far, the site provides a comprehensive project overview and an up-to-date list of our outputs. The online database allows users to explore 900 photographs and download copies for personal or academic use. In conjunction with the launch of the database (October 2024), in the framework of the international Conference "Spiritual Landscapes and Photography" held at the KHI, the international academic community was invited to share general methodological reflections and specific case studies on the exploration of both natural and monumental historical landscapes through the lens of photography. The application of this geohistorical approach to the documentation published by Alpago Novello's research group is a fitting continuation of a legacy in which photography emerged as a primary, if not central, medium – not only for display but also for meticulously documenting and studying the heritage of the South Caucasus.

---

<sup>5</sup> This link provides access to the OSCOP section of the CSDCA photo archive: <https://pric.unive.it/projects/oscop/photo-archive>.



## Appendix

List of the sites and regions visited by the research group led by Adriano Alpago Novello from 1967 to 1982. The list provides an overview of the subjects in the photo archive of the Centro Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena. The transliteration in use is the romanization system adopted by the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN). This choice was made to be consistent with the system used in the OSCOP project database.

### 1967

Adriano Alpago Novello

Armen Manoukian

Harutiun Kasangian

Armenia SSR

Anipemza, Basilica of Yereruyk' (Երերույք տաճար), 5th-6th cc.

Aparan, Basilica of K'asagh (Քասաղի բազիլիկ), 4th-5th cc.

Arates Monastery (Արատեսի վանք), 12th-13th cc.

Aruch (Արուճ), Church of Surb Grigor, 7th c.

Ashtarak (Աշտարակ), Church of Surb Astvatsatsin Karmavor (Կարմավոր), 7th c.; Church of Surb Sargis 7th c.; Church of Surb Mariane 13th c.,

Avan (Ավան), Church of Surb Astvatsatsin, 6th-7th cc.

Berjor (Azerbaijan), Monastery of Tsitsernavank' (Ծիծերնավանք) 5th-6th cc.,

Bjni (Բջնի) Church of Surb Sargis, 6th-7th cc.; Church of Surb Astvatsatsin, 11th c.

Byurakan (Բյուրական), Church of Surb Hovhannes, 10th c.; Artavazik Church, 13th c.; Amberd, 7th-11th cc.

Garni, Temple of Garni (Գառնիի տաճար), 1st-2nd cc.

Geghard Monastery (Գեղարդավանք), 12th-13th cc.

Gndevank' Monastery (Գնդեվանք), 10th-12th cc.

Haghartsin Monastery (Հաղարծին վանք), 11th-13th cc.

Haghpat Monastery (Հաղպատավանք), 10th-13th cc.

Harrichavank' Monastery (Հառիճավանք), 13th c.

Hayravank' Monastery (Հայրավանք), 9th-12th cc.

Hovhannavank' Monastery (Հովհաննավանք) 13th c.

Jrvezh (Ջրվեժ), chapels, 4th-5th cc.

Karbi (Կարբի), Church of Surb Astvatsatsin, 13th-14th c.

Kech'arris Monastery (Կեչառիսի վանք), 13th c.

Kosh (Կոշ), Fortress and chapel, 13th c.

Mak'enis Monastery (Մաքենիյաց վանք), 10th-11th cc.

Marmashen Monastery (Մարմաշեն), 10th-11th cc.

Mastara (Մաստարա), Church of Surb Hovhannes, 7th c.

Mughni (Մուղնի), Church of Surb Gevorg, 17th c.

Noravank' Monastery (Նորավանք), 12th-14th cc.

Odzun (Օձուն), Church of Odzun, 6th-7th cc.,

Oshakan (Օշական) Church of Surb Sion – Mankanots' (Մանկանց), 7th c.

Ptghni (Պտղնի), Church of Ptghvank', 6th-7th cc.

Saghmosavank' Monastery (Սաղմոսավանք), 11th-13th cc.

Sanahin Monastery (Սանահին վանք), 11th-13th cc.

- Sevan Monastery (Սեւանականք), 9th c.  
Sisian (Սիսիան) Church of Surb Hovhannes, 7th c.  
Spitakavor Monastery (Սպիտակավոր վանք), 13th c.  
T'alin (Թալին), Cathedral of T'alin, 7th c.  
T'anahat Monastery (Թանահատ վանք) 5th-6th cc.,  
Tat'ev Monastery (Տաթևի վանք), 6th-18th cc.;  
Tegher Monastery (Տեղերի վանք), 13th c.  
Vagharshapat (Վաղարշապատ)  
Voghchaberd (Ողջաբերդ), fortress, 4th-5th cc.  
Vorotnavank' Monastery (Որոտնականք), 10th-12th cc.  
Yeghegis (Եղեգիս), Church of Surb Nshan, 13th c.  
Yeghvard (Եղվարդ), Basilica, 6th c.  
Yeghvard (Եղվարդ), Church of Surb T'eodoros Zoravar (Չորավար), 7th c.
- Georgia  
Akhkerpi (ახკერპი), Khorakert Monastery, 13th c.
- Iran  
West Azerbaijan Province of Iran, Qareh Kelisā (قاريه کليسا), Monastery of Surb T'adeos 12th-19th cc.
- Turkey  
Akdamar Adası, Church of Surb Khach' (Akdamar Adası Kilisesi) 10th c.  
Ani, 10th-13th cc.  
Özlüce, Monastery of Haghots, 10th-13th cc.  
Yanal, Church of the Holy Cross – Soradir (Yanal Kilisesi) 6th-7th cc.

## 1969

Adriano Alpago Novello  
Hagopik Manoukian  
Haroutiun Kasangian  
Giovanni Nogaro

### Armenia SSR

- Akht'ala Monastery (Ախթալայի վանք), 10th c.  
Arates Monastery (Արատեսի Վանք), 12th-13th cc.  
Areni (Արենի), Church of Surb Astvatsatsin, 14th c.  
Arzni (Արզնի), Church of Surb Astvatsatsin, 17th-19th cc.  
Arzni (Արզնի), Church of Surb Kiraki, 6th-7th cc.  
Bjni (Բջնի), Church of Surb Astvatsatsin, 11th c.; Fortress of Bjni, 9th-10th cc.  
Erebuni Fortress (Էրեբունի), 8th c.  
Goshavank' Monastery (Գոշավանք), 12th-13th cc.  
Hayravank' Monastery (Հայրավանք), 9th-13th cc.  
Jiliza (Ջիլիզա), Monastery of Khorakert, 13th c.  
Karmir Blur Fortress (Կարմիր Բլուր), 7th c.  
Koghb (Կողբ), Monastery of Mshkavank', 13th c.  
Nerk'in Getashen (Ներքին Գետաշեն), Monastery of Kot'avank', 9th c.  
Noravank' Monastery (Նորավանք), 12th-14th cc.  
P'rrosh Fortress (Պրոշաբերդ), Vayots' Dzor, 13th c.  
Selim caravanserai (Սելիմի իջևանատուն), Vayots' Dzor, 14th c.  
Spitakavor Monastery (Սպիտակավոր վանք), Vayots' Dzor, 13th c.



## 1970, first mission

June-July

Giovanni Nogaro

Franco Marrà

Walter Pagliero

Herman Vahramian

Turkey

Akdamar Adası, Church of Surb Khach' (Akdamar Adası Kilisesi) 10th c.

Ani, 10th-13th cc.

Başkale, Monastery of Surb Bardughimeos (Saint Bartholomew Monastery), 9th-10th cc.

Bayburt, Fortress of Bayberd (Bayburt Kalesi), 9th c.

Kiagmis Altı Church, 10th c.

Erzerum, Madras of Çifte Minareli (Çifte Minareli Medresesi), 13th c.

Erzerum, Madras of Yakutiye (Yakutiye Medresesi), 14th c.

Erzerum, Mausoleum of Üç Kümbetler, 12th-14th cc.

Erzurum, Khakhuli Monastery (Hahuli Manastırı), 10th-11th cc.

Erzurum, Oğht'ik Fortress (Oltu Kalesi), 10th-11th cc.

Hoşap, Fortress of Khoshab, (Hoşap Kalesi), 17th c.

İşhan, Monastery of Ishkhan/Ishkani (İşhan Manastırı), 9th c.

Kars, Castle of Kars (Kars Kalesi), 12th c.

Kars, Church of Kümbet Kilise, 10th-11th cc.

Kars, Church of Surb Arrak'elots' (On İki Havariler Kilisesi), 10th c.

Şenkaya, Cathedral of Bana/Banak (Penek Kilisesi), 10th c.

Tortum, Fortress of Tortomi (Tortum Kalesi), 10th-11th cc.

Trabzon, Monastery of Amenaprkich' (Kaymaklı Manastırı), 14th-16th cc.

Yanal, Church of the Holy Cross – Soradir (Yanal Kilisesi) 6th-7th cc.

Yusufeli, Monastery of Parkhali (Barhal Manastırı), 10th c.

## 1970, second part

The group consisting of Maria Grazia Sandri, Franco Marrà, and Herman Vahramian visit Turkey focusing mostly on the monumental heritage of the following sites and regions:

Ani

Burdur District

Cappadocia

Cilicia

Konya District

Sivas District

## 1970, third part

Adriano Alpago Novello

Armen Manoukian

Herman Vahramian

Armenia SSR

Agarak (Ագարակ), Church of Agarak, 4th-5th cc.

Aghdzk' (Աղձք), hypogeum mausoleum, 4th-5th cc.

Aramus (Արամուս), Church of Surb Nshan, 7th c.

Arrinj (Արինջ)

Artik (Արտիկ), Church of Surb Astvatsatsin, 5th-6th cc.; Church of Surb Sarkis, 7th c.  
Dvin (Դվին) 4th-7th c.  
Garnahovit (Գառնահովիտ), Church of Surb Gevorg, 7th c.  
Kapoutan (Կապուտան), Church of Surb Minas, 14th c.  
Lmbatavank' (Լմբատավանք), 7th c.  
Marmashen Monastery (Մարմաշեն), 10th-11th cc.  
Masrouts Anapat (Մասրուտ անապատ) Surb Karapet Church, 9th c.  
Pembashen (Պեմաշեն), Makaravank' Monastery, 10th-13th cc.  
Tegher Monastery (Տեղերի վանք), 10th-13th cc.  
Yereruyk' (Երերույք), Basilica of Yereruyk', 6th c.  
Unknown Church of Surb Minas, 10th c.  
Unknown Church of Surb Step'anos, 13th c.

### **1971-73**

Adriano Alpago Novello

Enzo Hybsch

Giulio Ieni

Missions in Georgia (it is not yet possible to provide a detailed list of sites visited)

### **1974**

Mission in Armenia by Adriano Alpago Novello.

Mission in Georgia by Enzo Hybsch: Black Sea coast.

### **1975**

Exploratory mission in Iran by Adriano Alpago Novello: Ispahān and Shiraz.

Mission in Georgia by Enzo Hybsch: Khevsureti and Tusheti district.

### **1976**

Mission in Iranian Azerbaijan by Adriano Alpago Novello, Gabriella Uluhogian, Haig Uluhogian, Nice Vecchione: Tabriz and Khoy districts, city of Ispahān and Nor Jugha.

### **1977**

Mission in Iranian Azerbaijan by Adriano Alpago Novello, Gabriella Uluhogian, Haig Uluhogian, Nice Vecchione: Tabriz, Maku, and Julgha districts, with a specific focus on the Church of Surb Step'anos in Julgha district.

### **1978**

Supplementary study of monuments in Armenia by Adriano Alpago Novello and Gabriella Uluhogian.

## 1979

Mission in Armenia: Ijevan district and Nagorno Karabakh.

Jukhtakvank' Monastery (Ջուխտակ վանք), 13th c.

Kirants Monastery (Կիրանց վանք), 13th c.

Mat'evosvank' (Unknown)

Arrak'elots Monastery (Առաքելոց վանք), 12th-13th c.

Spitak (Սպիտակ), Cave complex

Dadivank' (Դավիթվանք), 9th-13th cc.

Gandzasar Monastery (Գանձասարի վանք), 13th c.

## 1980

Mission in Armenia by Alberto Pensa and Gabriella Uluhogian in Sevan district, Aparan, Amasia, Gyumri, Avan, Yerevan, Etchmiadzin, Marmashen, and Sardarapat Ethnographic Museum.

Supplementary mission in Georgia by Adriano Alpago Novello in Akhaltsikhe.

## 1982

Documentation of modern architecture in Yerevan by Alberto Pensa and Vittorio Intrini.

## Bibliography

- Alpago Novello, A. (2005). "Autobiografia". *Alpaghian. Raccolta di scritti in onore di Adriano Alpago Novello in occasione del suo 70mo compleanno*. Napoli: Scriptaweb.
- Alpago Novello, A. (1996). "Ricordo di Armen Zarian: le ricerche sulla cultura armena del Centro di Studi e Documentazione della Cultura Armena di Milano tra gli anni 1965-1994". Zekiyan, B.L. (a cura di), *Ad limina Italiae. In viaggio per l'Italia con mercanti e monaci armeni*. Padova: Editoriale Programma, 27-31.
- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bevilacqua, L.; Gasbarri, G. (2020). "Percorsi di architettura armena a Roma. Le missioni di studio e la mostra fotografica del 1968 tra premesse critiche e prospettive di ricerca". Ferrari, A.; Riccioni, S.; Ruffilli, M.; Spampinato, B. (a cura di), *L'arte armena. Storia critica e nuove prospettive*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 23-50. <https://doi.org/10.30687%2F978-88-6969-469-1%2F003>.
- Bonardi, C. (2014). "Mezzo secolo di studi italiani sull'architettura armena". *Rassegna degli armenisti italiani*, 15, 13-36.
- Brambilla, M. (2021). "Adriano Alpago Novello and Research on Armenian Architecture in Iran". Boriani, M.; Giambruno, M. (eds), *Architectural Heritage in the Western Azerbaijan Province of Iran: Evidence of an Intertwining of Cultures*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 9-33. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83094-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83094-6_2).
- Broers, L. (2020). "Unrecognised Statehood? The de Facto States of the South Caucasus". Yemelianova, G.M.; Broers, L. (eds), *Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus*. London; New York: Routledge; Taylor & Francis Group, 257-72. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351055628-16>.

- Caraffa, C. (2019). "Objects of Value. Challenging Conventional Hierarchies in the Photo Archive". Bärnighausen, J.; Caraffa, C.; Klamm, S.; Schneider, F.; Wodtke, P. (eds), *Photo-Objects*. Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 11-32.
- Edwards, E.; Janice, H. (2004). *Photographs Objects Histories. On the Materiality of Images*. London: Routledge.
- Ferraris, M. (2009). *Documentalità. Perché è necessario lasciare tracce*. Roma: Laterza.
- Ieni, G. (1981). *Khatchkar. Croci di pietra armene*. Venezia: Tipo-Litografia Armena.
- Kasangian, H. (1996). *Otto grammi di piombo, mezzo chilo di acciaio, mezzo litro di olio di ricino: Vita e avventure di un ragazzo armeno*. Padova: Il Poligrafo.
- Kaya, I.D.; Mehmet, Ç. (2018). "Impediment or Resources? Contextualization of the Shared Built Heritage in Turkey". Rodenberg, J.; Wagenaar, P. (eds), *Cultural Contestation: Heritage, Identity and the Role of Government*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 81-103.
- Manoukian, A. (2014). *Presenza armena in Italia, 1915-2000*. Milano: Guerini.
- Öktem, K. (2008). "The Nation's Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponyms in Republican Turkey". *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 7. <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/2243>.
- Över, D. (2016). "Cultural Tourism and Complex Histories: The Armenian Akhtamar Church, the Turkish State and National Identity". *Qualitative Sociology*, 39(2), 173-94.
- Riccioni, S. (2020). "Gli Studi sull'arte armena a Venezia. Alpagò Novello e le prospettive di ricerca". Ferrari, A.; Riccioni, S.; Ruffilli, M.; Spampinato, B. (a cura di), *L'arte armena. storia critica e nuove prospettive*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 205-24. <https://doi.org/10.30687%2F978-88-6969-469-1%2F003>.
- Architettura armena* (1975) = *Catalogo della mostra* (Torino, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, 16 aprile-16 maggio 1975). Torino: Ages Arti Grafiche.
- Architettura georgiana* (1979) = *Catalogo della mostra* (Rome, Mercati Traianei, 12 giugno-22 luglio 1979). Roma.
- Saparov, A. (2023). "Place-Name Wars in Karabakh: Russian Imperial Maps and Political Legitimacy in the Caucasus". *Central Asian Survey*, 42(1), 61-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2022.2085664>.
- Serena, T. (2011). "The Words of the Photo Archive". Caraffa, C. (ed.), *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*. Berlin; München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 57-72.
- Smith, A.T.; Khatchadourian, L.; Ian, L. (2023). "Monitoring Heritage at Risk: Caucasus Heritage Watch and the Armenian Monuments of Nagorno-Karabakh". Grekyan, Y.H.; Bobokhyan, A.A. (eds), *Systemizing the Past: Papers in Near Eastern and Caucasian Archaeology Dedicated to Pavel S. Avetisyan on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.608099>.
- Spampinato, B. (2020). "La mostra itinerante *Architettura Armena* (Milano 1968-Erevan 1996). Un caso di studio attraverso le carte d'archivio". Ferrari, A.; Riccioni, S.; Ruffilli, M.; Spampinato, B. (a cura di), *L'arte armena. storia critica e nuove prospettive*, Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 247-72. <https://doi.org/10.30687%2F978-88-6969-469-1%2F003>.
- Wolf, G.; Hoffman, A. (2022). "L'archivio fotografico del progetto Georgia al Kunsthistorisches Institut di Firenze". Bevilacqua, L.; Iacobini, A. (a cura di), *Fotografare Bisanzio. Arte bizantina e dell'Oriente mediterraneo negli archivi italiani*. Roma: Campisano, 317-34.

- Zarian, A. (1996). "Armen Zarian. Cenni biografici". Zekiyani, L.B. (a cura di), *Ad limina Italiae. In viaggio per l'Italia con mercanti e monaci armeni*. Padova: Editoriale Programma, 23-32.
- Zeitilian Watenpaugh, H. (2015). "The Cathedral of Ani, Turkey. From Church to Monument". Gharipour, M. (ed.), *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities Across the Islamic World*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 460-73. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004280229>.
- Zekiyani, B.L. (2005). "Dalla Passione per lo studio allo studio per passione. L'itinerario di ricerca di Adriano Alpago Novello dall'imperialità Bizantina alle periferie subcaucasiche e alla fondazione del Centro Di Studi e Documentazione Della Cultura Armena". *Alpaghian*". *Raccolta di scritti in onore di Adriano Alpago Novello in occasione del suo 70mo compleanno*. Napoli: Scriptaweb.

## **Reviews and Bibliographic Information**





# Anna Sirinian, Khachik Harutyunyan *Il “Vangelo armeno” (ms. 3290) della Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna: uno sguardo al manoscritto e alla sua storia*

Alessandro Orenco  
Università di Pisa, Italia

**Recensione di** Sirinian, A.; Harutyunyan, Kh. (s.d.) [2022]. *Il “Vangelo armeno” (ms. 3290) della Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna: uno sguardo al manoscritto e alla sua storia*. Rimini: Imago, 149 pp.

Ci sono libri, piccoli quanto al numero di pagine, che si rivelano decisamente interessanti se solo si prende la briga di sfogliarli, o, ancora meglio, di leggerli. Credo che il lavoro che stiamo presentando rientri pienamente in questa categoria.

La quarta di copertina ci avverte che siamo di fronte a un testo destinato ad accompagnare la riproduzione in facsimile di un evangelario, il manoscritto 3290 della Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna (BUB), ma il nostro volumetto gode anche di una sua circolazione autonoma, che permetterà a quei lettori che non avrebbero potuto accedere all'*opus maius*, di ottenere una serie di informazioni rilevanti, sia sul manoscritto in questione, che, più in generale, sui manoscritti armeni.

In effetti i due autori ci conducono piano piano verso quello che vuole essere il punto focale della loro presentazione. Nel primo capitolo («Manoscritti armeni e il culto della scrittura. Un'introduzione») Anna Sirinian ci parla, sinteticamente ma non superficialmente, dell'invenzione della scrittura armena 'dono di Dio'



Edizioni  
Ca' Foscari

Submitted 2025-09-26  
Published 2025-12-12



## Open access

© 2025 Orenco | 4.0



**Citation** Orenco, A. (2025). “Review of *Il “Vangelo armeno” (ms. 3290) della Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna: uno sguardo al manoscritto e alla sua storia*” by Sirinian, A.; Harutyunyan, K. *Armeniaca*, 4, 199-204.

DOI 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/008

e di ciò che fecero i primi suoi utilizzatori, sia agendo come traduttori (di fatto, nella chiesa armena essi sono venerati, appunto, come Santi Traduttori), che come autori di opere originali. L'esposizione passa poi ad affrontare l'iconografia dei manoscritti, in particolare la miniatura, e le tavole dei canoni, cioè gli indici delle concordanze evangeliche elaborati nel IV secolo da Eusebio di Cesarea, e diffusi sia in occidente che in oriente. Come ricorda Anna Sirinian, in ambito armeno, e solo lì, queste tavole sono anche oggetto di commentari che ne spiegano il simbolismo e la loro funzione. Aggiungiamo che il lettore che volesse scorrere qualcuno di questi commentari, senza sentirsi inibito dalla lingua in cui sono presentati, o da quella in cui sono tradotti, potrà leggere per esempio l'edizione con traduzione in armeno moderno orientale curata da Vigen Łazaryan (1995). Procedendo nell'esposizione, l'autrice ci ricorda che, se la situazione illustrativa di base, per un evangelario armeno, comprende le tavole dei canoni, i ritratti degli evangelisti, e una serie di scene sulla vita di Cristo, a queste immagini standard va aggiunta una serie di miniature, sia figurative che ornamentali, poste a margine del testo, nonché le lettere che si trovano all'inizio di determinate sezioni del testo stesso, e che presentano una forma iconografica elaborata, spesso quella di un uccello.

Passando poi ai colofoni, l'autrice ci ricorda come questi siano spesso dei testi veri e propri, tanto che qualcuno, per noi a ragione, li considera un genere letterario (qui è d'obbligo il rimando a Sirinian 2014, riferimento che poteva essere fatto anche nel libro). In questi memoriali si trovano notizie sullo scriba e sulla sua famiglia, sul committente, sulla situazione politica del Paese e si chiede al lettore, per tutti, una prece, che, quasi un boomerang, avrà effetto non solo sui richiedenti, ma anche sugli stessi lettori che si ricorderanno di quelli. Tuttavia, nonostante l'importanza che il colofone riveste nella cultura codicologica armena, e pur tenuto conto della logorrea che caratterizza molti di questi scribi, possono esistere anche manoscritti che del colofone sono privi, soprattutto se prodotti in serie, quindi non su richiesta di un singolo committente, e destinati alla vendita. Questa situazione tende a diffondersi in epoca tarda, fra XVII e XVIII secolo, quando ancora il manoscritto resta per gli Armeni il formato di libro di maggiore eleganza e pregio, nonostante la stampa esista, fra di loro, dal XVI secolo.

Infine, la confezione del libro. Un tratto su cui l'autrice vuole soffermarsi è certamente la ribalta che completa la rilegatura, un lembo di cuoio che, attaccato al piatto posteriore, si piega e copre il taglio davanti al codice, ma non arriva a sovrapporsi al piatto anteriore. Alcuni legacci e fermagli bloccano poi la ribalta al piatto anteriore, sicché il tutto assume l'aspetto di una scatola, in cui restano scoperti solo il taglio superiore e quello inferiore. Si tratta di una soluzione che, in questa forma, è specifica del mondo armeno, come

lo sono alcuni pigmenti con la cui menzione si conclude il capitolo. Le ricette sulla composizione di inchiostri e pigmenti, come l'autrice stessa ci ricorda, sono innumerevoli, e, aggiungiamo noi, pubblicate più di una volta. Chi, interessato in particolare al pigmento rosso cremisi ottenuto dalla cocciniglia, volesse avere un'idea di come i manoscritti ne indicano la lavorazione, da ultimo può riferirsi alla tesi dottorale di Hermine Grigoryan (2023; 232-9), dove alcune di queste ricette sono edite e tradotte. Può anche essere utile qui ricordare che in uno scritto del VII secolo, il «Sulla contesa circa le immagini» (*Yalags patkeramartic'*) di Vrt'anēs K'ert'oł, opera che l'autrice ricorda per altro motivo, vengono sommariamente indicati i componenti dell'inchiostro e dei colori da usare negli affreschi.

Dopo aver saputo quanto è necessario sapere sui manoscritti armeni in generale, il secondo capitolo, «Il Vangelo della Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna (ms. 3290) un capolavoro dell'arte armena del libro» di Khachik Harutyunyan, ci introduce al vero oggetto del libro. Qui l'autore, dopo aver ricordato le maggiori collezioni di manoscritti armeni nel mondo, e poi quelle presenti in Italia, nonché a Bologna, descrive appunto il manoscritto 3290. Fa subito presente che in esso c'è un'alterazione dell'ordine dei primi fogli, probabilmente attribuibile a chi si è occupato della rilegatura, e si deve prendere atto anche del fatto che il manoscritto è stato mal rifilato, con qualche conseguente danno alle miniature. Khachik Harutyunyan parla poi della presenza della ribalta cui abbiamo già fatto cenno, e d'altra parte dell'assenza di un colofone, sicché quello che sappiamo è che il manoscritto, donato a papa Benedetto XIV nel 1742, deve ovviamente essere anteriore a questa data. Lo si ritiene realizzato nel XVII secolo, come si evince anche dal confronto con miniature contenute in alcuni manoscritti esemplati in quel periodo. Il luogo di copiatura è probabilmente Costantinopoli. Ciò non toglie che, nel f. 240r, una mano diversa da quella dello scriba principale abbia voluto indicare, evidentemente come presunto anno di copiatura, il 593 dell'era armena, ossia il 1144 dell'era volgare. Questo modo di falsificare la data di un manoscritto, che agli occhi di noi moderni può sembrare piuttosto ingenuo, non è peraltro un caso isolato: basti qui ricordare il cosiddetto 'Vangelo dei Traduttori', ossia il manoscritto 537 conservato al Walters Art Museum (già Walters Art Gallery) di Baltimora. Tale manoscritto risale al 966, ma, nel memoriale la data è indicata come il «415 di nostro Signore» (*NŽE t'uakanut'ean t(ear)n meroy*), cosa che, se accettata, ne collocherebbe la copiatura in un'epoca decisamente vicina a quella presumibile per la traduzione dei Vangeli in armeno. Di qui il nome tradizionalmente attribuito a questo manufatto. Solo che, come nota Sirarpie Der Nersessian (1973, 1-2, 84), le parole «di nostro Signore» sono frutto di una correzione, dato che esse sostituiscono qualcosa, probabilmente il riferimento all'era armena, che è stato cancellato. La datazione è ripetuta in

un secondo memoriale, collocato lungo il bordo della pagina, ma anche qui, mentre il testo fino all'indicazione numerica dell'anno è da attribuire allo scriba, un riferimento alla datazione secondo l'era cristiana è un'aggiunta, imputabile a una mano diversa.

Finalmente, con il terzo capitolo, «Struttura del Vangelo (BUB, ms 3290) secondo la presumibile sequenza originaria dei fogli, con elenco delle miniature e dei loro soggetti» di nuovo scritto da Anna Sirinian, veniamo informati di quanto c'è da sapere, e da vedere, nel manoscritto stesso. Intanto l'autrice si prende la briga di riporre nell'ordine che presumibilmente è il loro i ff. 1-41, contenenti un ricco apparato iconografico e che, come abbiamo detto, erano stati mal collocati a seguito della rilegatura del volume. Poi si passa all'apparato iconografico. Dopo un ciclo di immagini a piena pagina su episodi della vita di Cristo e dopo la lettera di Eusebio a Carpiano e le tavole dei canoni, è la volta, finalmente, dei quattro vangeli, le cui miniature, introduttive o marginali, vengono puntualmente riprodotte e commentate. Emergono così dei richiami interni, come il fatto che l'essere (angelo, leone, toro, aquila) che simboleggia ciascun evangelista, e che è riprodotto nel ritratto dell'evangelista stesso all'inizio di ciascun vangelo, è anche utilizzato come lettera miniata della prima parola con cui comincia quella porzione di testo. D'altra parte la rappresentazione dei personaggi che, nelle miniature, illustrano i vari passi dei vangeli, come già notava Gabriella Uluhogian (2010, 46), risulta essere piuttosto stereotipata, anche se si tratta di personaggi diversi.

Il volume si conclude con una bibliografia essenziale, sia su BUB 3290 che su manoscritti e miniature armeni, bibliografia che però prescinde da pubblicazioni in armeno.

Arrivati così alla fine di un percorso che, diciamolo, è decisamente piacevole, non abbiamo difficoltà a riconoscere che, grazie al libro, il lettore viene edotto sulla struttura iconografica di un evangelionario armeno, di cui ha potuto apprezzare tanti particolari: di tutto questo non possiamo che essere grati agli autori, che hanno voluto e saputo farci da guida.

## Bibliografia

- Der Nersessian, S. (1973). *Armenian Manuscripts in the Walters Art Gallery*. Baltimora: Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery.
- Grigoryan, H. (2023). *Between Tradition and Innovation: An Interdisciplinary Approach in the Study of Seventeenth-Century Armenian Manuscripts*. [PhD Dissertation]. Lisbon: NOVA University of Lisbon. <https://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/156948?locale=en>
- Łazaryan, V. (1995). *Xoranneri meknut'yunner* (Commentari alle tavole dei canoni). Erevan: Sargis Xaç'enc' [con riassunto in inglese].
- Sirinian, A. (2014). «On the Historical and Literary Value of the Colophons in Armenian Manuscripts». Calzolari, V.; Stone, M. (eds), *Armenian Philology in the Modern Era. From Manuscript to Digital Text*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 65-100.
- Uluhogian, G. (2010). *Catalogo dei manoscritti armeni delle biblioteche d'Italia*. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato Libreria dello Stato.



# Petra Košťálová *The Stranger on the Road: Simeon from Lviv as the First Known Backpacker Travelling to the Ottoman Empire*

Lilit Mnatsakanyan

Pázmány Péter Catholic University (PPCU), Hungary; The Leibniz Institute  
for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Germany

**Review of** Košťálová, P. (2023). *The Stranger on the Road: Simeon from Lviv as the First Known Backpacker Travelling to the Ottoman Empire (A Narrative from a Double Exile: A Guide through the World of Simeon, an Armenian Pilgrim from Poland to the Ottoman Empire and Italy)*. Sofia: CU Romanistika, 223 p.

Petra Košťálová, Assistant Professor at the Department of East European Studies at Charles University, offers a notable contribution to the study of early modern Armenian travel literature through her monograph based on the 2016 annotated Czech edition of *Ughegrut'iwn* (Simeon Lehatsi's travel accounts). Following the English-language annotated translation and introduction by George Bournoutian (2007) and her own Czech edition (2016), Košťálová's work approaches the text from a different angle. Whereas earlier studies contextualize Simeon of Poland's travels by focusing on their cultural, religious, and ethnographic dimensions, this study places greater emphasis on the traveller's personal experience and emotional narrative. Moving beyond the text's traditional use as a historical or ethnographic source, Košťálová foregrounds the subjective voice of



Submitted 2025-12-05  
Published 2025-12-12



#### Open access

© 2025 Mnatsakanyan | 4.0



**Citation** Mnatsakanyan, L. (2025). Review of *The Stranger on the Road: Simeon from Lviv as the First Known Backpacker Travelling to the Ottoman Empire* by Košťálová, P. *Armeniaca*, 4, 205-208.

DOI 10.30687/arm/2974-6051/2025/01/009



the traveller – his emotions, displacements, and sense of exile, thus situating Simeon as a microhistorical agent.

In terms of methodology, Košťálová employs an interdisciplinary approach, combining microhistorical perspective, discourse analysis, and literary comparison in her analysis of Lehatsi's travel account. The microhistorical perspective allows to examine Simeon not just as a traveler, but as an individual whose fragmented experiences reflect broader social and historical dynamics, particularly those tied to exile and identity. Textual and discourse analysis, with close readings of the language, structure, and rhetorical strategies of the travelogue, especially its use of genres like lamentation (p. 179), which are shown to convey both personal alienation and collective memory. Košťálová also applies genre and literary analysis, emphasizing the hybrid nature of seventeenth-century travel writing, where pilgrimage, ethnography, autobiography, and religious narrative intersect. One of the most original aspects of the methodology is the articulation of the 'double exile' concept, which captures the condition of a diasporic subject departing not from a stable homeland, but from an already exilic space. This conceptual framing allows the author to explore the emotional and cultural density of diasporic subjectivity, ultimately bridging Armenian Studies with broader humanistic inquiry.

The opening chapter lays the foundation for understanding the geographical and cultural framework that shaped the Armenian identity. Košťálová situates the concept of the 'Armenian world' within the historical context of the South Caucasus, Anatolia, and the Armenian Diaspora. This chapter examines how the displacement of Armenians due to political upheaval, such as the Jelali uprisings, influenced their sense of collective identity and the preservation of cultural and religious traditions. By doing so, the author positions Simeon's travels not merely as personal explorations but as collective narratives of dislocation, identity preservation, and religious devotion. This lens is essential for understanding Simeon's motivations and emotional investments in sacred places, such as the city of Jerusalem, or the monastery of St. John the Baptist (Surb Karapet) in Mush, which emerge as anchors of Armenian cultural memory.

Building upon the historical context presented previously, Chapter 2 shifts focus to the specific diasporic community to which Simeon belonged: the Armenians of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the social, political, and economic dynamics of the *Lehahayer* community, particularly in the cities of Zamość and Lviv, where Simeon spent much of his life. Košťálová examines the rights and obligations of Lviv's Armenians, their integration into local society, and the challenges they faced in preserving their cultural and religious identity. The chapter also explores the religious transformations within the community, such as conversions, and how these shifts impacted their collective sense of

self. This sets the stage for understanding the personal and emotional significance of Simeon's later journey.

In Chapter 3, Košťálová situates Simeon Lehaci's travel writings within both the Armenian literary tradition and the broader context of Renaissance travel literature. She explores how Simeon's works reflect the intellectual awakening of the Armenian Enlightenment (*Zart'onk'*), highlighting themes of diaspora identity, religious devotion, and cultural preservation. His use of vernacular Armenian, enriched with Polish and Turkish lexical borrowings, underscores the linguistic and cultural hybridity of the Armenian diaspora. The chapter also places Simeon within the Renaissance tradition of *ars apodemica*, emphasizing the educational and cultural value of travel. Drawing parallels to European travellers like Pietro della Valle and Jean Chardin, Košťálová demonstrates how Simeon blends personal narrative with ethnographic observation. This comparative framework allows her to underscore Simeon's position as an Armenian pilgrim and scribe, offering both *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspectives on the cultures he encountered. Through this analysis, Košťálová underscores the significance of Simeon's work, not only within Armenian literary tradition but also in the broader genre of travel writing, showcasing his contributions to both fields while reflecting the complexities of identity and cultural exchange in the seventeenth century.

In Chapter 4, Košťálová moves from literary analysis to a detailed narrative of Simeon's travels. She puts Simeon's narrative within the conceptual frameworks of microhistory, ego-documents, and discourse analysis. Košťálová interprets Simeon's encounters not just as geographic crossings, but as cognitive and emotional negotiations with the Other. His voice becomes a repository of informal, everyday knowledge, a *petit récit* that stands in contrast to dominant historical discourses. This chapter is especially compelling in demonstrating how the personal story mirrors larger historical ruptures, like the Jelali uprisings or the fragmentation of Anatolian Christian communities.

The final chapter reflects on Simeon's return to Lviv after years of travel. Košťálová examines the emotional and psychological complexities of homecoming, focusing on themes of reintegration, belonging, and the tensions between self-perception and communal identity. The challenges Simeon faces in returning to his community after his prolonged absence underscore the emotional weight of his exile and the transformative nature of his journey. The symbolism of the 'flower' of the Land of Sham (p. 173), referenced in the chapter title, serves as a powerful symbol for renewal, growth, and the enduring connection to one's homeland. It represents not only Simeon's personal journey but also the larger narrative of the Armenian diaspora, whose members constantly find themselves

between displacement and the desire for a renewed sense of home. Through the use of the lamentation genre, Košťálová reveals how Simeon's return is not a straightforward reconciliation but an emotionally fraught process, highlighting the broader diasporic experience of displacement and longing for home.

In conclusion, Košťálová's book offers a fresh perspective by foregrounding the emotional and personal experiences of Simeon Lehatsi, positioning him not only as a chronicler of his time but also as a diasporic subject whose journey intersects with broader cultural, religious, and intellectual currents. The work is particularly innovative in its interdisciplinary approach, blending microhistory, literary analysis, and discourse analysis to offer a structured understanding of Simeon's travelogue as both an ego document and a historical document. This approach marks a significant departure from earlier works, which primarily focused on the historical, ethnographic, and religious aspects of his travels. Particularly compelling is Košťálová's articulation of Simeon as a figure of 'double exile', a diasporic subject departing from an already exilic space. This concept provides a useful conceptual framework for future research on diasporic narratives and the emotional landscapes of mobility.



# Annual journal

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia,  
Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna,  
Università degli Studi di Firenze,  
Università di Pisa



Università  
Ca'Foscari  
Venezia



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA  
DIPARTIMENTO DI STORIA CULTURE CIVILTÀ



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
FIRENZE

**SAGAS**  
DIPARTIMENTO DI STORIA,  
ARCHEOLOGIA, GEOGRAFIA  
ARTE E SPETTACOLO

