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KHORANASHAT

MATENADARAN
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KHORANASHAT 800

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THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE,
CULTURE AND SPORTS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA



Khoranashat has the imprint of the centuries and at the same time it best expresses the image of our people: damaged, but not destroyed, silent, “Homeland-kipper”, and in general disregarded. The Beauty of our mountainous border, embracing the centuries, has provided God’s light and knowledge for 800 years, educated generations, enveloped the vision of the victorious Armenian statehood, then has been destroyed, and rose again against all the blows and sufferings.

Khoranashat Monastery was born from the vision of great *vardapet* Vanakan, the disciple of Mkhitar Gosh ‘the Holy Light’, as the greatest sanctuary of religious science, education, cultural feat, and national character, which has tirelessly nourished our lives with impenetrable values and truth, from where our great fathers Vardan Vardapet, Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Grigor Aknerts, Stepanos Akhtamartsi, Hovsep Vardapet, Sosthenes the Pilosopher, bishop Israel and others were originated.

Being the heir of Goshavank, Khoranashat Monastery has best continued its spiritual, educational, and cultural traditions, and continuously has spread them throughout Armenia. Today, Khoranashat, like our other sanctuaries, is the indicator, the ‘direct relationship’ and also the mirror of our life. The external aspect of our sanctuaries reflects the inner spiritual character of our people. They are eloquent witnesses of our essence and self-expression. The great Church Doctor Vanakan Vardapet who himself suffered the pain weighing in on all the country is resting today near Khoranashat in a place called the Cemetery of the Poor. He patiently awaits us to brave in continuing his mission, to restore the former glory of our Khoranashat, testifying by this to the unwavering loyalty of the Armenians to God, to the Homeland, to their identity.

This is also why we have declared May 28, the Independence Day of Armenia, as the Day of the pilgrimage to Khoranashat; standing on the border of our state, the Monastery, as a silent witness, tells about the eternity of Armenia. While appreciating and welcoming the organizers and members of the committee for the celebration of the 800th anniversary of Khoranashat, we pray and hope that it would not remain just an occasion among others to celebrate or commemorate, but would become a great step to re-evaluate our identity, to restore our Home, and to revive our self-awareness in order to join great Vanakan Vardapet and the truth of Khoranashat, where only Victories and feats are inscribed, transforming all this into a story of GREAT RETURN.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the sacrament of the Holy Ghost guide us all.

With love and prayers,

Bishop Bagrat Galstanyan.

Prelate of Tavush Diocese

KHORANASHAT AS A FAMOUS MEDIEVAL EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL CENTER

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the Khoranashat Monastery, which is situated in the historical Tavush district of Utik Province. It is a core event symbolizing our centuries-old history and culture, an occasion to once more refresh our self-awareness through educational values.

This monument combines a number of educational and cultural values. First of all, it is one of the best architectural examples of medieval Armenian monastic complexes, which was also a famous educational, academic and cultural center. Many valuable manuscripts have been copied in scriptorium based here. Some of the 13th century prominent Armenian historians, theologians, cultural and ecclesiastical figures studied at the Seminary of Khoranashat and earned the doctoral degree of “Vardapet”, such as Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vardan Vardapet and Grigor Aknerts, bishops Arakel, Hovsep and Israel, *vardapets* Thoros, Markos, Sosthenes, Poghos. By appreciating, valuing and promoting Khoranashat and its history, we reaffirm our rich cultural past, and strengthen our place and role in the historical development of world thought.

Unfortunately, today the famous medieval monastery is endangered; therefore one of our primary tasks is to preserve it, first as an architectural monument, then to inform a broad public about its historical significance, the role it played as a unique school in building spiritual and intellectual values. This book is a notable study of Monastery’s history, a step taken as a lifeline to protect the history of this geographically disadvantaged wonderful monument, and to protect it also from some misinterpretations.

It should be specially noted that the Armenian culture in all its manifestations and without epochal distinction, is always in the center of the State’s attention and care. We highly esteem any initiative aiming to preserve and promote our cultural values, by taking part as a trusted supporter and partner. I wish the organizers a fruitful teamwork, strong willingness and consciousness in patriotic and pro-State activities.

Vahram Dumanyan

Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia

THE LIFE AND ACTIVITY OF VANAKAN VARDAPET

Vanakan Vardapet Tavushetsi (1181-1251) is one of the most prominent figures of the medieval Armenian religious, cultural, and public life, a famous learned monk, theologian, and teacher. He was born in 1181, most probably in Tavush province, the village of Tavush. Now it is the center of the Berd community in Tavush region of the Republic of Armenia.

The social origin of Vanakan is unknown. However, it is indisputable that he was born in a large family where the role of education was appreciated; he was a literate person since childhood, and one of his brothers was a priest.

He is mentioned as Vanakan (Monk) in his students' works, in the inscriptions of Khoranashat Monastery, in his autograph colophon and in those of several manuscripts copied in the Monastery, as well as in the *Synaxary* (Haysmavurk) collections. However, he was persistently called Hovhannes in later Armenian texts. The 17th century historian Arakel Davrizhetsi is the first who called him by this name. Eventually, Vanakan's real name was mistakenly changed to a nickname and was etymologized as an abbot. The reason was that they confused Vanakan Vardapet with Hovhannes



The northern façade of Khoranashat

Tavushetsi. Both of them were *vardapets* from Tavush and were connected with Mkhitar Gosh. The latter was a student of Hovhannes Tavushetsi and the teacher of Vanakan Tavushetsi.

Vanakan pursued his primary education in the Monastery of Nor Getik; he was a student of his brother Poghos. He was ordained a priest at the age of 20. Then, he continued his higher education in the Seminary of the Monastery of Nor Getik, studying under the supervision of its founder, the famous Doctor of the Church Mkhitar Gosh. Vanakan was diligent and clever and became Mkhitar Gosh's favorite, one among two of his prominent students.

It is not accidental that while studying, Mkhitar Gosh made him participate in 1205/1206 at the Council of Ani, summoned by the Chief Commander and Chiliarch of the Georgian kingdom Zakare II Zakarean. The Council discussed some issues related to the rites of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

After having accomplished his studies and having received from Mkhitar Gosh the stock of *Vardapet*, Vanakan as a "perfect learned monk" returned to his native Tavush province, no later

than in 1208. Meanwhile, in 1203, Tavush was liberated from the Seljuk rule by Prince Bluz Zakare Vahramean and was included in the domains of the powerful Vahramean family.

Vanakan Vardapet wanted to build a monastery in order to establish a seminary next to it for academic, cultural, pedagogical, religious, and social activity. He founded Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God) Church probably in 1209. It was the main and chronologically the first building of the Khoranashat architectural complex, located 2.5 km east of Chinari village, in Tavush distric of RA, “in front of the Ergevan castle, behind of the Gardman plain”.

The church construction was completed in 1222. Although the date of consecration is not known, it is a fact that it was already active in 1223.

Earlier, in 1222, Vanakan Vardapet initiated the construction of the *gavit* (nartex) of Surb Astvatsatsin Church. He was then involved in this till the end of his tumultuous and prosperous life, in the meantime establishing also a seminary nearby.

Khoranashat Monastery was built thanks to donators' support.

There is no doubt, that during the construction

of Khoranashat, Vanakan used the building experience for Nor Getik Monastery, which was founded by his teacher Mkhitar Gosh. Obviously, from the beginning, he too surrounded the esplanade of Khoranashat with a wooden church and ancillary buildings. The timber area around Khoranashat gave that possibility.

In 1220-1222, the Mongols invaded twice Vahramean's principality but did not destroy Khoranashat. Vanakan Vardapet was thus able to continue his tireless building and academic activity while being the abbot of Khoranashat.

But what the Mongols did not do, the army of Khwarazmian Empire did. During the spring and summer of 1229, the troops of the last ruler Jalal ad-Din (1220-1231) invaded Vahramean's land. At that time, Khoranashat was destroyed. Fortunately, Vanakan managed to take shelter with his students on the top of a very high rock. It was located in front of the Lorut village, south of Tavush castle. He dug a cave there and built a small church inside. He collected many books and kept the Seminary's activity. When the number of Vanakan's students increased, he forcefully went down from the cave to the bottom of the rock, built a church and cells, and continued his academic work. The reason why he did not return back to

Khoranashat in 1231, after the fall of Jalal ad-Din and the restitution of peaceful conditions in the country, is unknown.

Vanakan Vardapet worked only seven years in the vicinity of Tavush Castle. The Mongol invasions began. During the conquest of Tavush province, men, women, and children took shelter in the monk's cave. However, the cave was besieged on July 6 of 1236, on Vardavar fiest. Three days later, the children nearly died of thirst because of the extreme heat. At the request of others in the cave, Vanakan, accompanied by his students Markos and Sosthenes, risked his life going to the Mongol General Molar Noyin in order to save the people who had confided in him.

The Mongol General asked the monk why he, being wise and prominent, as he had heard, did not welcome them with love and peace from the very beginning. Vanakan answered that they delayed because they ignored about the kindness of the Mongols, they were afraid, they did not speak Mongolian language, and because none of them had been summoned. He also told to Molar Noah that he and his students were neither soldiers nor wealthy people, but they gathered there from different places to study. Then he added, “Here we are in front of you, do whatever you want with us, either life or death.”



Churches of Surb Kiraki (Holy Sunday) and Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God) from the east side

After having heard this, Molar Noyin ordered him not to be afraid and to sit down. Thinking that he might be a secular prince, he asked many questions about Vahram Gagetsi and the fortresses that had not been captured yet. Then he ordered the monk to bring down the refugees from the cave without fear, and promised not to harm them and to rebuild the destroyed villages and farms for his sake.

When the refugees went down, the Mongols released the lay ones but captivated the Vardapet's students, including his nephew Poghos and Kirakos Gandzaketsi. Hoping to save them, he voluntarily joined them by making himself captive. In autumn 1236, Vardapet's students were rescued (except for two priests who were caught and killed while escaping).

As for Vanakan, he offered the Mongols to take him to Gag fortress to be redeemed. The latter do in this way and the inhabitants ransomed him for eighty *dahekan* (gold coins). This reality is a vivid evidence of the great love and fame that the people manifested towards the monk.

Immediately after that, the great *vardapet* went to Khoranashat, restored and rebuilt it, and continued his various activities in relatively peaceful conditions. He especially “taught the doctrinal word” to them, who gathered from every

province. Vanakan left Khoranashat only twice until the end of his life. He went to Tiflis (Tbilissi) in 1238 and retrieved one of the two Gospels bound in silver that had been captured by Mongols in 1236. At a great expense, the local Armenians bought it from conquerors, who had put it up for sale. He left Khoranashat for the second time in 1240, on the feast of Vardavar, at the invitation of Prince Hasan-Jalal of Inner Khachen, to participate in the consecration of St. Hovhannes Church in Gandzasar Monastery. Vardapet gave great splendor to that solemn ceremony by his presence. As for the assumptions about his travels to Jerusalem and Rome, they do not correspond to reality.

In 1244 his nephew Poghos is mentioned as the abbot of Khoranashat. Apparently Vardapet had left the position of abbot considering his age and also the fact that the construction of Khoranashat was nearly completed and that he could focus on teaching and learning activities.

Vanakan Vardapet had close acquaintances and active relationship with some prominent ley figures of the time. The editing of *Synaxary* by his student Israel Bishop and the composing of his *Questions and Answers* (Questiones et Solutiones) was the result of that. Vanakan had instructed Israel to edit *Synaxary* at the request of

Եւ վաճառեալ զբեցիկսն ի
 Կ'նոսաւքս ի սփիւսիս Կաղա
 քի ի Կորանսի բառաւն իցա
 զի գերեալ երաւ եւ սարանս ի սա
 րճոյս ի սոդան ի թաթարէն եւ
 յետ երեցամացաս սրբերելան վն
 աս վաճառեցին ի ԴճԵ թողիս
 զոր փառաւորաւ եւ գերեցսա
 րգիս Զասարակ եղատոռական
 քանանայեւք եւ ծառեր ժողով
 րդական ասն ուտեալ քաղ
 ւմ ծախաւք եւ շխատութեան
 Լեւոնի մեղ : ուրցտացեբս ք
 ւադարձս բարբալտութեւ եւ զոր
 ակտն արձակել ի Կաղանաց մեղ
 աց եւ զանել ի Կաղան եւ ի Կաղան
 ոյց : աստեւ զանելով ի ինքն
 ի Կաղան զոր թէ : բարեխառնութե
 սրբաւ եւ սարանիս եւ ամէն այն
 սրբոց իւրոց : ամէն

Colophon, Matenadaran, n° 4823, Gospel, 1238, Tiflis, scribe: Vanakan Vardapet, p. 155r°



Prince Hasan-Jalal while he wrote the *Questions and Answers* at the suggestion of the latter and Vahram Gagetsi. Vanakan Vardapet had also close relations with Armenian Catholicos Constantine I of Bardzerberd (1221-1267) and Catholicos Nerses II of the Aluanian Church (1235-1262). Both patronised Khoranashat Monastery in 1246.

In that year, Vanakan Vardapet signed through his student Vardan Vardapet the “Encyclical” of Constantine I of Bardzerberd to secular and religious figures of Armenia. In 1250 he accused the members of the sect led by Davit Tsaretsi, “correcting the deceivers, instructing the heretics, disciplining the foolish, converting the guilty.” And he also wrote a *Letter of severe reproach and accusation*, proving the worthless ideology of that sect, which was incompatible with the Credo of the Armenian Apostolic Church. A year later, on the very eve of his death, he with his students Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vardan Vardapet, and Bishop Hovsep masterly responded to a letter from Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254).

Vanakan Vardapet was of middle-height, with a big face and small-nose, broad-bearded, with a respectable, kind and peaceful attitude. In 1251 he fell ill during the days of the Great Lent, and not long after, on March 18 of the same year, at the age of seventy, he passed away in Khoranashat.

According to his wish, his body was buried near the church of Surb Tchegnavor (Holy Hermit) on the east side of Khoranashat, in the cemetery of the poor.

A large crowd attended his funeral, in presence of the bishop of the Province Sargis, many *vardapets* and priests. The next day, Catholicos Nerses II and Archbishop Hovhannes Tuetsi, the spiritual leader of the Vahramean principality, came to the Monastery in order to visit the Vanakan’s tomb and to honor his memory. In all probability, the monumental *khachkar* with a 3m long pedestal, located a few meters south of Holy Hermit church, has been erected on his grave.

Artashes Shahnazaryan



The khachkar (cross-stone) on the tomb of Vanakan Vardapet



The ruins of the Church of Surb Tchegnavor (Holy Hermit).
12th – 13th C



Tavush Castle



Canon Table, Matenadaran, n° 4823,
Gospel, 1224, Khoranashat, miniaturist:
unknown, p. 6r°

THE KHORANASHAT VARDAPETARAN (SEMINARY)

The Khoranashat Seminary was one of the most famous higher educational centers in medieval Armenia, which has inherited the traditions of the New Getik Seminary. It has been founded before the second half of the 1210^s by the great *vardapet* Vanakan Tavushetsi, soon after the completion of the main church of Surb Astvatsatsin and having ensured good conditions for its good functioning.

The learning process at such schools used to last seven or eight years. Accordingly, the Khoranashat Seminary must have given its first graduates in the early 1220^s. At first, the classes were organized probably in a wooden building and later in the Monastery's *gavit* (nartex). Until the end of his life, Vanakan Vardapet supervised the activities of the Seminary overcoming difficult trials.

With the first graduates, the fame of the Seminary and the Vanakan Vardapet himself spread widely all over Armenia. People came to study there from all over the country.

However, when the troops of Khwarezmshah



Saint Mark the Evangelist, Matenadaran, n° 4823,
Gospel, 1224, Khoranashat, miniaturist:
unknown, p. 98v°

Jalal ad-Din destroyed Khoranashat in 1229, Vanakan had to take refuge with his students on the top of a very high rock in the south of Tavush castle. There he dug a cave and built a church inside, then collected books and continued the teaching activity. When there was no longer place in the cave for students, Vanakan decided to move: at the foot of the rock, he built a church and cells and transferred the Seminary there.

In 1236, he was captured with his students by Mongols, and was released in the fall of the same year with a ransom. He then returned back to Khoranashat after about seven years of absence, and continued teaching.

According to the scant information about the teaching program and the inner life of the Khoranashat Seminary, the studying was free. At first, this institution certainly functioned at the expense of the funds provided by the donators, but later on also from the incomes of Khoranashat estates. One should have basic knowledge to study there. The students were first educated in the primary class, and then continued with the higher academic program. The summary of the primary level of that program constitutes the most valuable of the preserved works of Vanakan Vardapet -

Questions and Answers. Unfortunately, it still needs a proper analysis and edition. The given work provides information about the disciplines that the students had to master before passing to the upper level, the curriculum of which included theology, history, science of calendar, literature, philosophy, music, astronomy etc.

Thus, the Vanakan Vardapet who “with his doctrinal word exceeded all existed persons”, made a curriculum for his Seminary according to the spirit of the times. It reflects the tendency of secularization of culture in the Armenian milieu. It is noteworthy that most of his works are written in almost colloquial language.

The graduates of Khoranashat Seminary earned the doctoral degree of “Vardapet”, which means a spiritual teacher and a church doctor. After completing their studies, “enlightened by science, each went to his place, becoming the light of their respective provinces.”

As it is known, the professional orientation of the Armenian medieval higher educational institutions used to depend on the academic preferences of their founders. In that sense, the Khoranashat Seminary was no exception. It had a historical inclination based on Vardapet’s love



*Embossed leather cover decorated with a silver cross,
Matenadaran, n° 4823, Gospel, 1517*



The southern façade of Khoranashat

for that sphere of knowledge. Indeed, three famous historians of 13th century, Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vardan Vardapet, and Grigor Aknertsy studied in Khoranashat with Vanakan Vardapet. As for Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi, although he hadn't been a student of Vanakan, he undoubtedly was related to his school.

Some of the students even started to create while studying. For example, Vardan Vardapet wrote small works, as well as made translations during that time.

Among the students of Khoranashat were the prominent church figure Arakel; Bishop Hovsep from the Artaz diocese, who had a great authority on theological matters and was also the renovator of St. Thaddeus Monastery; Thoros Vardapet, active in the region of Melitene (Malatia); Markos Vardapet, who had a significant role in the political and cultural life of Artsakh-Khachen; Sosthenes, who by his philosophical knowledge was compared with great Vahram Rabuni on behalf of his contemporaries; Bishop Israel, editor

of one of the *Synaxary* collections; Stepanos Akhtamartsy, his nephew Poghos Vardapet, and his cousin Grigoris Vardapet. They “shone like stars with their knowledge,” “dividing as a cross the Eastern Lands, they illuminated it with the life-giving doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”

Of course, the number of students of Khoranashat Seminary is not limited only to the above. Naturally, mostly the famous names reached us. The most outstanding students of Vanakan Vardapet were Kirakos Gandzaketsi and Vardan Vardapet. They did not spare words by praising the Master in their works.

The personal and professional relations of the students with their teacher were not limited only to the years of study. Thanks to his encouragement, some started to write, while others tried to remain faithful to the spirit of his works. For example, Bishop Israel edited the *Synaxary* on Vanakan's instructions. Composing his *Zheghlank*, Vardan Vardapet was inspired by his teacher's *Questions and Answers*. Undoubtedly, Kirakos Gandzaketsi edited the *Synaxary*, and Vardan Vardapet recomposed and systematized the *Commentary*

on the *Liturgical Cycle* (Tonapatchar), on the instructions of Vanakan.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi and Vardan Vardapet quoted in their texts passages from the *History* of Vanakan Vardapet: a work, which did not reach us.

Like their “generous-minded” teacher, the students of Khoranashat were not only intellectual monastic figures but also public ones. They were deeply concerned about the future of their homeland and its people. Without doubt, the Khoranashat Seminary was one of the most qualified Armenian higher educational institutions of all times.

After the death of Vanakan, his cousin Grigoris took over the leadership of Khoranashat Seminary in 1251. However, during his time, its popularity gradually began to fall. It was not only due to the consequent aggravation of Mongol domination, worsening the conditions for a normal functioning of the institution, but, unfortunately, also due to the lack of sufficient teaching and organizing talent, and authority that had his predecessor. Instead, those educational centers grew and gained recognition, where either Vanakan's students or the students of the latter conducted activities.

այն իսկեն վարձ
 ք նոցա .
 յԼ դոյր ժամ
 պահիցես . աւժդ
 գլուխքո . կուայ
 զերեսքո . զի մի
 երեսցիս մարդ
 կան իբրեւ զպահ
 ող . այլ հաւրնքո
 ւմ ի ծածուկ . եւ
 այրնքո որ տեսան
 է ի ծածուկ . հա
 տուացէ քեզ .
 ի գանձեք ձեզ
 զանձս յերկրի . ուր
 ցեց և ուտիչ ապ
 ականեն . և ուրգո
 ղ քական հատան
 են և գողանան .
 յԼ զանձեցեք
 ձեզ . զանձ յերկրի

նա . ուր ոչ ցեցեոյ
 ուտիչ ապականեն
 և ոչ գող քական
 հատանեն . և գողա
 նան . զի ուրգան ձք
 ձերեն . անդ ևս որ
 սք ձեր եղ
 իցին .
 որ ագմար
 մնոյ ականեն
 եթէ ականքո առատ
 է . ամենայն մարմ
 ինդ լուսաւորեղից
 ի . ապա թէ ականքո
 չարէ . ամենայն մա
 րմ ինդ խաւարին
 եղիցի .
 սկարդ եթէ լոյ
 սդ որիքեզէ . խաւ
 արէ խաւարն որ
 ո՞ր չափ ևս .



Marginal ornament and a sample of script, Matenadaran, n° 5601, Gospel, 1503, Khoranashat, scribe: Bishop Hunan, miniaturist: Bishop Stepanos, p. 13r°

Even approximately we do not know when the Khoranashat Seminary, this important medieval Armenian spiritual and intellectual center, ended. Nevertheless, it is almost certain that Grigoris Vardapet was its last teacher. As for the Khoranashat Monastery, it continued to exist as a religious and cultural institution.

Artashes Shahnazaryan





THE KHORANASHAT SCRIPTORIUM

The Khoranashat scriptorium became active immediately after the foundation of the monastic complex. Moreover, the art of copying manuscripts was one of the main subjects taught in the Seminary, as Vanakan Vardapet greatly valued that. He created all the necessary conditions for the work of copying, and personally supervised the process. He used to give to the students more exact and selective manuscripts to copy. According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, Vanakan collected many codices from different places enriching the *matenadaran* (library) of Khoranashat. Besides the work having followed on their own initiative, often the scriptorium received commissions to copy some manuscripts. Vanakan also paid great attention to editorial work. On his instructions, the students compiled and edited ritual collections, especially *Synaxary* (Haysmavurk) and *Commentary on the Liturgical Cycle* (Tonapatchar) texts. Israel Khachentsi and Kirakos Gandzaketsi exceeded in editing *Synaxary* collections, and Vardan Vardapet took on the task of editing and reorganizing the *Commentary on the Liturgical Cycle*.

The art of writing in Khoranashat also and especially flourished in connection with the name of its leader and Master. The scribes in their copied

manuscripts often mentioned the holy place after the name of Vanakan: “in the monastery of Vanakan Vardapet”; and the students spoke with admiration of their teacher. Kirakos Gandzaketsi testified that the school had acquired a great renown and reputation thanks to the wisdom and talent of its head teacher, and that people came from different places to get higher education. Vardan Vardapet and Grigor Aknertsis also wrote with admiration about Vanakan, and the scribes recalled that they were graduated in the school of Vanakan, under his direct supervision.

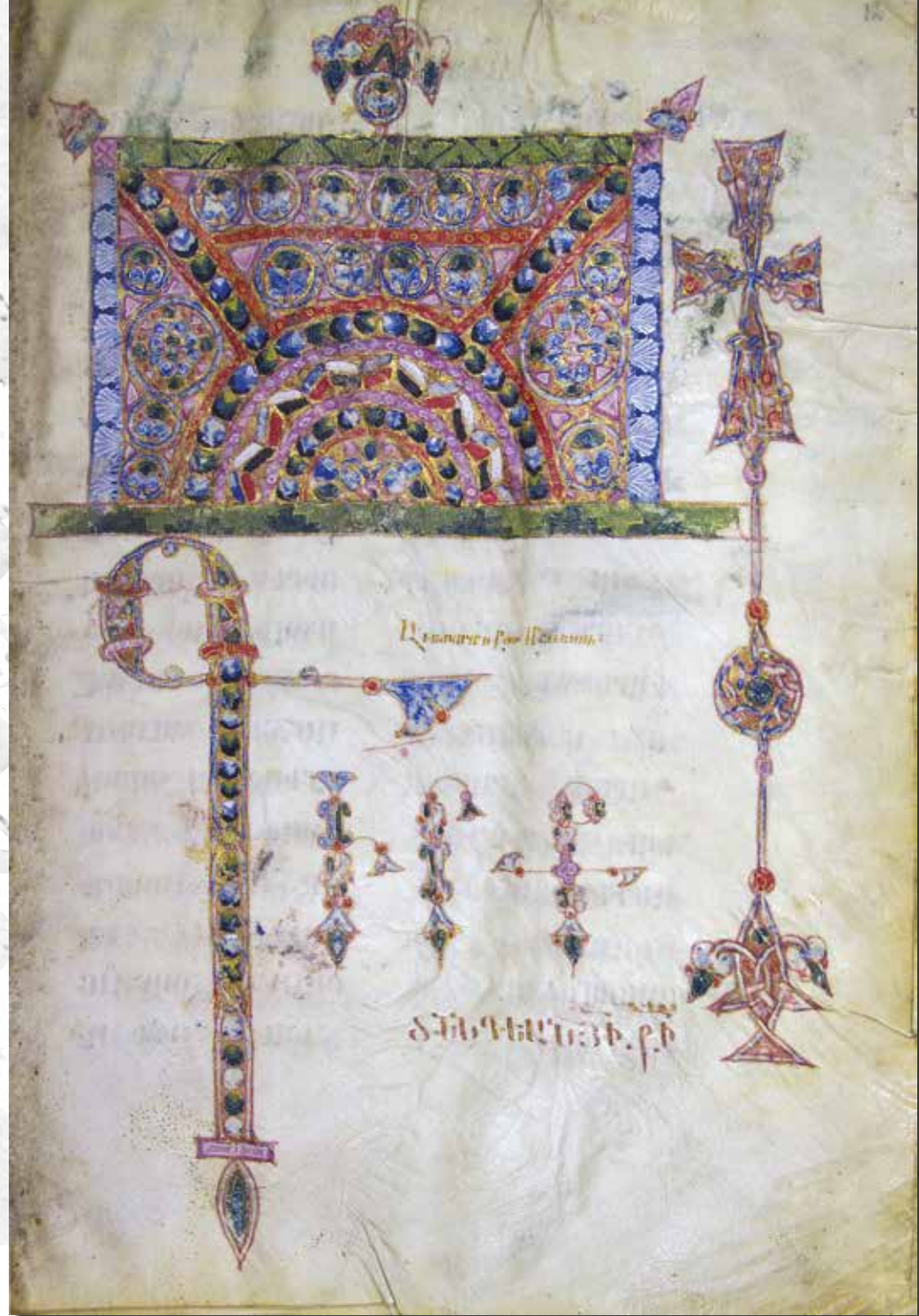
The first scribe known from Khoranashat scriptorium is Stepanos Akhtamartsi. In 1223 he copied there a Collection using the *bolorgir* (‘round script’); it includes philosophical, exegetical, and moralistic works (*Matenadaran*, n° 2101). In his colophons, Stepanos Akhtamartsi writes that he was educated by Vanakan himself “in the Monastery of Khoranashat.” Stepanos first recalled his Master who “shone like a morning star,” and then his own relatives.

A year after, in 1224, an uncial parchment Gospel was copied by the commission of Vaneni Khalbakean, the daughter of Prince Jajur, and “under the hospices of the Church of Holy Mother of God” of Khoranashat; it is called by Vanakan

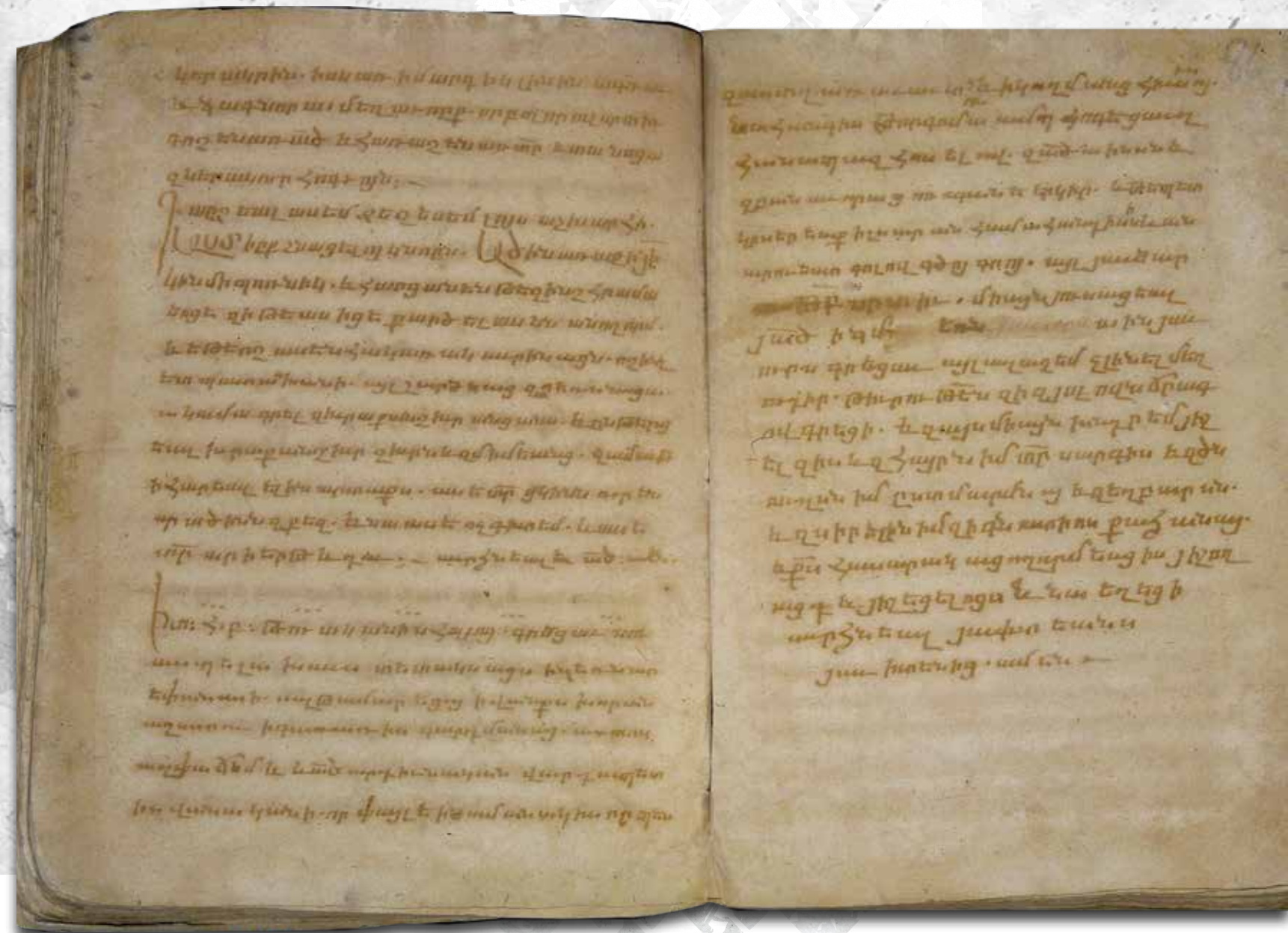


Saint John the Evangelist
Dictating to Prochorus,
Matenadaran, n° 4823,
Gospel, 1224,
Khoranashat, miniaturist:
unknown, p. 247v°





Title page of Matthew, Matenadaran, n° 4823,
Gospel, 1224, Khoranashat, miniaturist: unknown, p. 12r°



Colophon, Matenadaran, n° 2101, Collection, 1223,
Khoranashat, scribe: Stepanos Akhtamartsi, p. 85v°-86r°

Vardapet as *Tavsho Avetaran* (Gospel of Tavush), but later on it was re-baptized *Khoranashat Gospel* after the Monastery where it was copied (Matenadaran, n° 4823). The scribe and miniaturist are unknown. In the colophon, the scribe, referring to Vanakan Vardapet, wrote that the latter had built the Monastery and had become its leader. Other information concerns the manuscript's future "odyssey", including its captivity and ransom.

The codex contains miniatures of four Evangelists with their title pages; ten illuminated canon tables, semi-canon tables, and beautifully performed various marginal ornaments. The miniaturist used harmoniously subtle shades of gold. In 1236 the Mongols captured Vanakan and his students and robbed all the property of the Monastery, including the two silver-bounded Gospels mentioned above. This beautiful parchment manuscript was one of them. The Mongols first took it to Mughra and then to Tiflis in order to sell it. Local Armenians in 1238, with "great expense and effort," redeemed it, and then gave it to Vanakan Vardapet, who did a special journey to Tiflis to get it. We learn about this from the colophon, which is left in the manuscript by Vanakan himself. In 1517, the Gospel was taken to Tatev where the abbot Alexanos changed the silver binding at the request of a man named Ghasum. A new embossed leather binding was put with metal ornaments and a metal cross on the first cover (the manuscript reached us with this same binding). The Gospel was captured again in the 16th century, then redeemed and donated to St. Vardan Zoravar



Mark the Evangelist and Title page, Matenadaran, n° 5601, Gospel, 1503, Khoranashat, miniaturist: Bishop Stepanos, p. 80v°-81r°

Church in the city of Van by Melik Hovasap. S. Ter-Avetisyan, in 1915, saw this Gospel in Van and sent it to Holy Etchmiadzin through the Governor named Ditmen.

The fate of the second Gospel stolen from Khoranashat by the Mongols is still unknown.

Unfortunately, Grigoris, Vanakan's cousin, who became the supervisor of the Khoranashat Monastery after his death, could not maintain the school's reputation at a needed level. As a result, its glory gradually faded, and in 1283, during the leadership of Petros Vardapet, the fertile period of Monastery's activity came to an end. Nevertheless, the scribes of later period continued to qualify Khoranashat Monastery as "very famous," "huge and domed," "glorious holy covenant" in their colophons.

Grigoris Vardapet, who called himself the "disciple of Vanakan," and his successor, copied a collection commissioned by the priest Stepanos, the former student of the famous Holy Savior and Holy Mother of God churches in Taron. The codex included works of Vanakan Vardapet, those of famous Church Fathers Ephrem the Syrian and John Chrysostom, as well as texts from Aristotle, and others (Matenadaran, n° 2273). He also copied Vanakan's *Questions and Answers* for brothers Tadde and Hayrapet in 1255 (Matenadaran, n° 6106).

During the leadership of Petros, the scribe Martiros, in his old age, in 1283, copied Grigor Narekatsi's *Book of Tragedy* (*Book of Lamentation*),

again mentioning “in the Monastery of Vanakan Vardapet” as the place of writing (Matenadaran, n° 1563). It is the oldest copy of the *Book of Tragedy* known from the Northern lands of Armenia. At the request of Mkhitar Vardapet, a certain scribe named Sargis copied the commentaries on *Song of Songs* and on *Daniel*, written by Vardan Vardapet (Matenadaran, n° 5452).

We have one 16th century manuscript from Khoranashat (MM n° 5601); its unknown scribe mentions that it was written “in the most renowned covenant of Khoranashat, under the hospices of [the Church of] Holy Mother of God.” The manuscript was illuminated by Bishop Stepanos with the portraits of the Evangelists, semi canon-tables, and bird ornaments.

Along with the rise of bilateral cultural activities in the 17th century, several manuscripts have been copied in some of the settlements under the jurisdiction of the Khoranashat Monastery. In addition to the places of the scriptoria, the scribes also noted that they were proceeding under the hospices of “Surb Astvatsatsin in Khoranashat”, not forgetting, by the way, to recall Vanakan Vardapet. In 1620, the vicar Hakob copied a Gospel and in colophon wrote that he accomplished it “at the holy precinct of highly renowned Saint Khoranashat and under the hospices of Surb Astvatsatsin, of Saint Vanakan Vardapet and Saint Hovhannis” (Matenadaran, n° 6669). This manuscript is illustrated with the portraits of Evangelists Mark and John, four title pages, marginal illuminations,

and ornaments. The miniatures of the Evangelists Matthew and Luke are missing. Since the art of copying manuscripts is also an art of calligraphy, the scribe apologized for mistakes and for the big size of the letters, trying to justify himself by his old age and his bad vision (literally “low light in the eyes”).

In the 17th century, a famous and active scribe in Tavush was Isaiah, the son of Israel priest. According to the chronology of known colophons, he had been copying manuscripts in Khoranashat for 27 years, from 1631 to 1657. One of them is a *Psalter-Breviary*, in the colophon of which, dated of 1630, he mentions the place of copying as it follows: “In the country of Tavush, in the village called Tavuz, under the hospices of Surb Tchegnavor, at the bishopric See of Surb Astvatsatsin of Khoranashat and the Holy Tomb of Vanakan Vardapet and their servant Dom Archbishop Hovhannes “.

Hovhannes was indeed the archbishop of Khoranashat. Due to his very productive activity, the cultural life of Tavush province, including the art of writing, had notably increased in the 17th century.

In 1631 the priest Khachatur said that he commissioned the *Breviary* to the scribe Isaiah in memory of his parents, the priest Hovhannes and Khatun. However, according to the third colophon of that manuscript, Vicar Poghos, who had lost his family – parents, spouse, and children – and was alone, had bought this book from Khachatur in the same year, at a high price in memory to his



Luke the Evangelist and Title page, Matenadaran, n° 5601, Gospel, 1503, Khoranashat, miniaturist: Bishop Stepanos, p. 137v°-138r°

relatives, imploring to remember them in prayers (Venice, n° 59).

The next manuscript copied by Isaiah that came to us is a *Mashtots* (Ritual Collection), issued in 1637, where again the scribe mentioned the same place as the previous one (Matenadaran, n° 8941). In 1639, “in my bitter and wicked time” - as he

said - he copied a Gospel for the monk Thuma. The colophon states that he accomplished the work “under the hospices of Holy Mother of God in Khoranashat, in the province of Zagam.” In 1640, Isaiah copied another *Mashtots* (Matenadaran, n° 3998).

In 1642, a certain Thamur commissioned to the



John the Evangelist with his disciple Prochorus and Title page, Matenadaran, n° 5601, Gospel, 1503, Khoranashat, miniaturist: Bishop Stepanos, p. 235v°-236r°

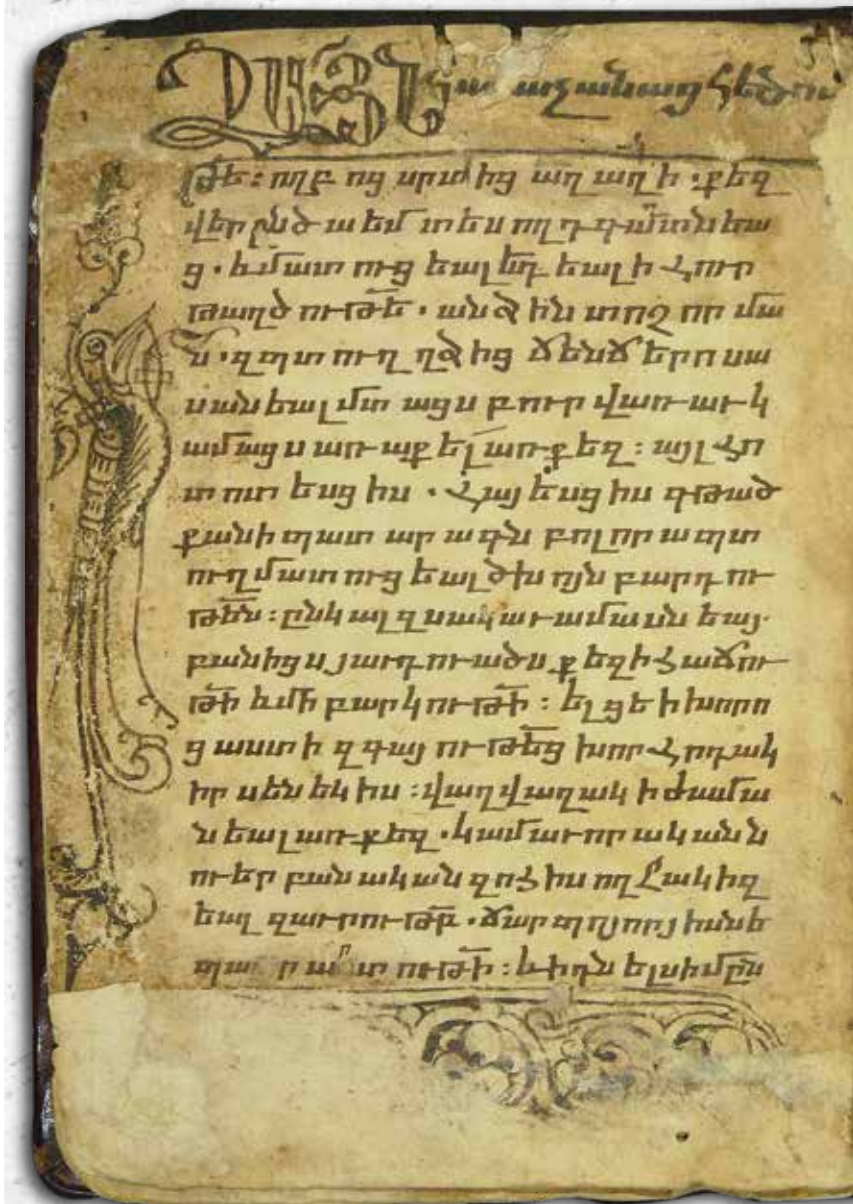
scribe Isaiah, a *Breviary* for his son (Matenadaran, n° 8882). In 1645, he copied a Gospel for a person named Sarukhan, in the colophon of which he described the terrible situation of Armenians during the Persian rule. Particularly, Isaiah reports that the Persian authorities were forcing Armenians to convert to Islam. The last time we are meeting the name of the scribe Isaiah is in a *Collection* book

of 1657, copied for the priest Astvatsatur “in the country of Tavush, in the village called Tavuz, under the hospices of Surb Astvatsatsin and the Holy Tomb of Vanakan Vardapet in Khoranashat”. It contains the sermons of Grigor Tatevatsi and Hakob Ghrimetsi, and some of the canons of Mkhitar Gosh, Hovhannes Erznkatsi, and David Alavkaordi (Matenadaran, n° 2116).

The last known scribe from Khoranashat is the priest Avetis, who in 1674 copied a *Mashtots* (Matenadaran, n° 3536). The codex has been damaged by moisture, and some passages are illegible. The colophon is also damaged, but fortunately the name of the scriptorium, and the approximate date has been preserved: the manuscript was written during the years of Catholicos Petros “in the bishopric See of Khoranashat”.

Thus, Khoranashat was also famous by its scriptorium. Numerous manuscripts from the 13th-17th centuries copied in the Monastery, as well as in the churches and villages under its jurisdiction, especially in the village of Tavush (Tavush region of the Republic of Armenia) have reached us.

Tamara Minasyan



Marginal ornament and a sample of script, Matenadaran, n° 1563, Grigor Narekatsi, Book of Tragedy, 1283, Khoranashat, scribe: Martiros, p. 6v°



*Luke the Evangelist and title page, Matenadaran,
n° 4823, gospel, 1224, gospel, flourishing
unknown 155b-156a*





Title page of Matthew, Matenadaran, n° 5601, Gospel, 1503,
miniaturist: Bishop Stepanos, p. 1r°

THE WRITTEN WORK OF VANAKAN VARDAPET

Vanakan Vardapet left a rich written heritage. It can be divided into the following groups: historiography, commentary and other works.

1. HISTORICAL WORK.

It is now certain that Vanakan wrote a historical work, which according to the tradition we call *History*. Kirakos Gandzaketsi and Vardan Vardapet provide clear information about it. As Vardan testifies, the historical events between 1236 and 1265 have been written in detail by Vanakan Vardapet and Kirakos Gandzaketsi. The latter, referring to Vanakan in his *History*, introduces him as a “very wise, genius, great-minded” doctor, and mentions that he has written the history of his time as an eyewitness.

Based on the information provided by Vardan Vardapet, it has been assumed that Vanakan Vardapet wrote only about the Mongols – the “archer’s nation”, as they are named at that time – and their invasions in Armenia and neighboring countries (a period between 1236-1265). Moreover, it has been argued, that in addition, Vanakan Vardapet wrote a separate work about the church councils in the province of Lori and in the city of Ani on the initiative of Prince Zakare II Zakarean, at the beginning of the 13th century.

This hypothesis about two separate historical works is not justified. Firstly, the information of Vardan Vardapet that Vanakan and Kirakos Gandzaketsi wrote the detailed history of the period between 1236 and 1265 is not sufficient to presume that the *History* of Vanakan started from 1236. Moreover, the work of Vanakan could not be completed in 1265, as he died in 1251. Vardan reports that Kirakos Gandzaketsi wrote his *History* “in a very close manner” to their teacher Vanakan Vardapet.

If we take into account that the *History* of Kirakos begins with the conversion of the Armenians, it would be reasonable to assume that the *History* of Vanakan too would have begun with an earlier chronology, perhaps with the official adoption of Christianity in Armenia, focusing more on the first half of the 13th-century events. As for the separate work about the church councils in Lori and Ani, this is far from being true. As Kirakos Gandzaketsi clearly stated, he took this information from the *History* of Vanakan Vardapet.

Thus, examining the scarce data collected by the sources, it becomes obvious that Vanakan Vardapet wrote a single historical work, a valuable one that was unfortunately lost.

2. EXEGETICAL WORKS.

Vanakan left several theological commentaries. In this, his academic knowledge and teaching experience have certainly played a significant role. Most probably, he composed the commentaries as a teaching material for his Seminary.

a. **Commentary on Job:** This work is the largest one among Vanakan's commentaries. According to its title, sometimes recorded in manuscripts, it has a selective character: there are some excerpts from church doctors David and Isikos, and the names of Stepanos Siunetsi, Ephrem the Syrian, David Kobayretsi, and others appear in the margins.

This work of Vanakan is of great importance because completing the long series of commentaries on *Job*, it also contains fragments from the commentaries of Ephrem the Syrian and Stephanos Siunetsi the entire texts of which are lost; these fragments are not found anywhere else.

The summary of Isikios' commentary is also an important source. According to Fr. Kerovbe Chrakean, Vanakan was the first and only one among the Armenian Church fathers, who was familiar with this exegesis, and by summarizing the text, he would somehow democratized it. Indeed, subsequent theologians from the end of the 13th

century owe to Vanakan and through him Isikos for having elucidated the intricate words of this hardest *Book of Job*. Fr. Chrakyan mentions that Vanakan also used the commentaries attributed to Grigor Narekatsi, however without mentioning his name. It is no coincidence that Grigor Tatevatsi, who wrote *Analysis on Job* under the influence of Vanakan, mentioned that he was the collector of the commentaries.

b. **Explanation of the prayers of the prophet Habakkuk:** This text is written with great care and skill. Although it contains some word-by-word interpretations, however remarkable allegories are abundant.

c. **Comparison of the Old Testament with the New:** It is a mysterious comparative analysis of the Old and New Testaments. Here the most famous words of the Old Testament are introduced with their New Testament symbolic equivalents (for example, heaven - Church, Sun - Christ and Gospel, Moon - law, Sun - John the Baptist, stars - Christians), etc.

d. **Theory of the hymn 'Rejoice, Crown of the Virgin!'** composed by Vanakan at the request of Petros: As the title suggests, Vanakan wrote this commentary at the request of Petros. He is also the author of commentaries entitled *The address of Vanakan on the psalm 'This great sea'* and *Look at the word inside you, it could be something hidden in your heart*.

3. OTHER WORKS:

a. **Lesson on the profession of faith by Vanakan Vardapet:** The great vardapet wrote this

work in response to the request of Pope Innocent III (1243-1254) about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (*Filioque*). The Roman Catholic Church acknowledged that the Holy Spirit came from the Father and the Son. To know the doctrinal definition of the Armenian Church, the Pope addressed to the Armenian Catholicos of the time, Constantine I Bardzerberdtsi (1221-1267). To write an answer to



Leather cover, stamped, Matenadaran, n° 1563, Grigor Narekatsi, *Book of Tragedy*, 1283, Khoranashat



Canon Table, Matenadaran, n° 4823, Gospel, 1224, miniaturist: unknown, p. 10r°

the Pope, the Catholicos, considering the authority of Vanakan and his deep knowledge of theology, asked him to present the doctrine of the Armenian Church on the origin of the Holy Spirit. Vanakan composed an “inter-definition” answer, refraining from fully accepting the doctrinal definitions of the Roman Catholic Church. He wrote that according to the doctrine of the Armenian Church: “the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is seen through the Son”.

b. Letter to David the Deceiver: This indictment is not preserved; it is known from Kirakos Gandzaketsi’s information.

c. The address of Vanakan about the New Year: This is one of his best works. It reveals Vanakan Vardapet’s literary power and academic abilities. It discusses many interesting questions about the New Year, about year, month, Sun, Moon, planets and calendars of several nations, and gives academically turned explanations.

Combined with many facts, the work is an important source for scholars interested in the history of astronomy and astrology. The observations concerning the calendar science are often accompanied by theological and spiritual reflections. The work was addressed to a large public and was read in churches on New Year’s Day – Navasard - in August 11. One can find in the work the *Legend of Artavazd*.

d. The commentary on the First fasting composed by Vanakan Vardapet against the opponents and the mocking of the Holy Fasting: This work is remarkable for preserving medieval tails and traditions.

e. Questions to Vanakan Vardapet about double grinding in one mill: This small piece is part of Vanakan’s extensive *Questions and Solutions* work, but often appears in manuscripts as a separate unit. This same work is entitled as *Vanakan Vardapet on the nature of man* in the bibliographical list made by Vardan Baghishetsi at Amrdoli Monastery.

f. Questions and Solutions composed by Vanakan Vardapet about the Holy Scriptures: It is a rather extensive and comprehensive work, which summarizes all the knowledge that the students of Khoranashat Seminary had to acquire in the initial term of their studies. It is, in fact, a summary of a school program, an encyclopedic work completed in Khoranashat Monastery in 1215-122.

4. UNAUTHENTIC OR QUESTIONABLE SMALL WORKS:

In this series, Hamazasp Voskryan listed the titles of eight works, two of which were published in the Tiflis’ edition of the *Book of Letters*:

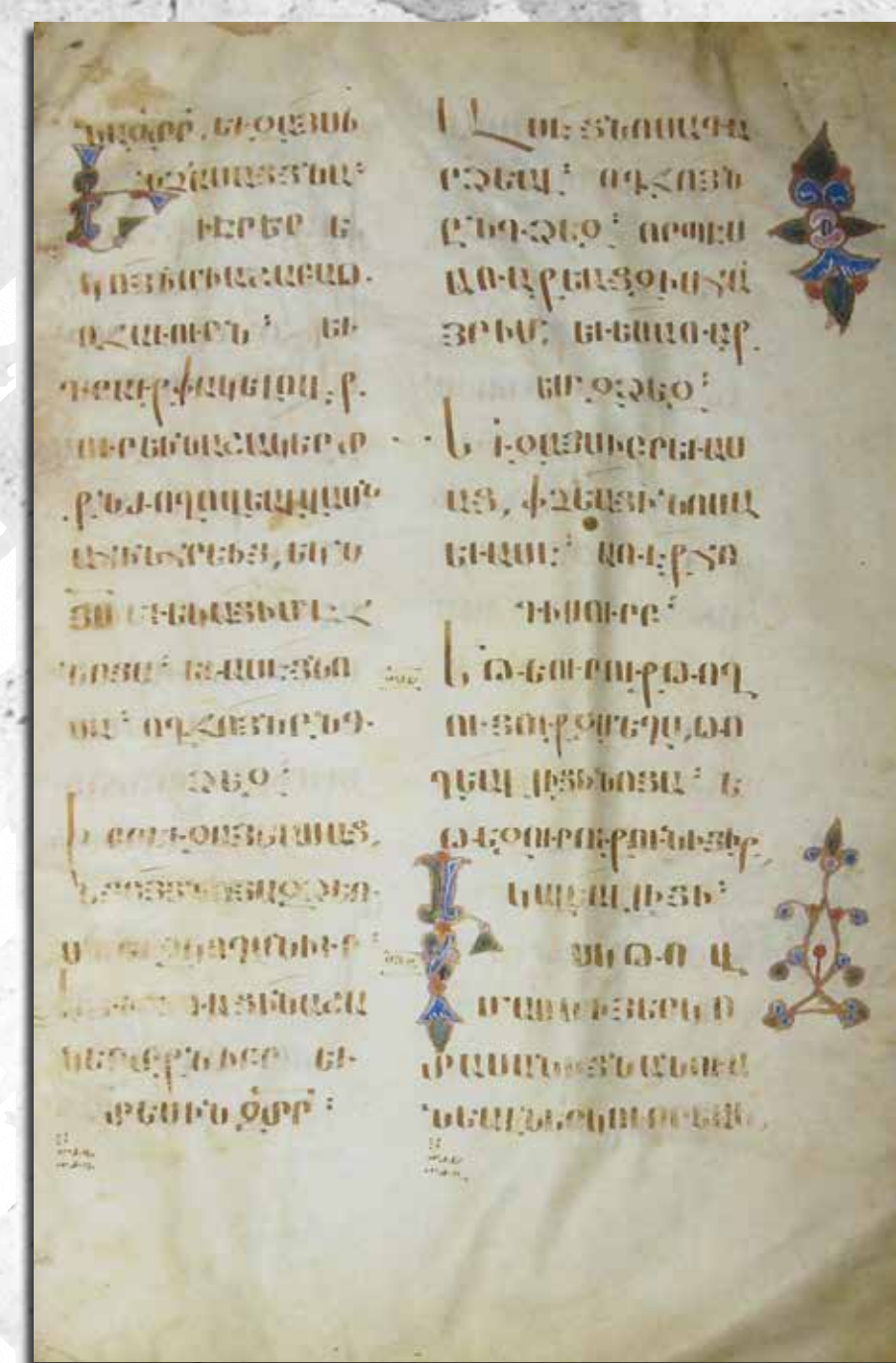
a. Vanakan Vardapet addressed a credible discourse about our nation,
and

b. Other discourse addressed by Vanakan Vardapet

Unfortunately, the written work of Vanakan Vardapet has not been seriously studied yet and has not been properly evaluated.

His writings are scattered in the manuscripts. Most of them are considered unauthentic or questionable, since Vanakan is not the only vardapet bearing this name. Prominent Armenologist Hamazasp Voskryan describes him very nicely: “It will always be certain that he is rather aspired to teach and to write not with one pen, but with many pens of his disciples, because whenever they moved their pens, the instructions and words under his influence would be flown. In this way, he lived with his disciples for a long time, and to this day, he does not have a small place in the history of the Armenian school with his works.”

Fr. Aram Mirzoyan



Sample of script and ornamental letters, Matenadaran, n° 4823, Gospel, 1224, Khoranashat, scribe and miniaturist: unknown, p. 313r°



KHORANASHAT ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEX

Khoranashat monastic complex is one of the famous monuments of medieval Armenia. Its layout and spatial composition, constructive solutions, and decorative means had central importance for the architectural development of the historical Utik province of Armenia.

The Monastery consists of Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God) main church, Surb Kiraki (Holy Sunday) and Surb Tchegnavor (Holy Hermit) chapels, the *gavit* attached to the main church, and other ancillary buildings, of which only the ruins have been preserved. It is located about 2.5 km east of Chinari village of Tavush region, in a small grove of a timbered hillside. The historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi was the first to mention the construction of the complex, which was located “in front of the Ergevan castle, behind the Gardman plain.” It got its name “Khoranashat” because of the great number of altars.

Surb Astvatsatsin Church is chronologically the first building and dominates the monastic complexes (12, 7×11 m). It belongs to the domed hall typology, well spread at that time. The building is rectangular from outside and cross-plan from



Detail of the southern façade. Khoranashat



The gavit of Khoranashat

inside, with double-stored sacristies on both sides of the apse. There is no evidence in the sources about the foundation of the church. We only know that the construction of its western entrance was completed in 1211. Most probably, the work has begun in 1209 and has been completed in 1222,

because the construction of the *gavit* began that year. In any case, in 1223, the church was already functioning.

Twelve windows illuminate the interior space, of which one that opens in the main apse is a twin window. The windows of the western part enclosed

by pilasters are circular. Six of the windows are on the drum. They are remarkable for their layout. Due to the slight rotation in the horizontal area, the windows have a more favorable position toward the sun; it ensured more light penetration into the church.

From outside, Surb Astvatsatsin Church characterizes with clear architectural solutions and original decorative details. It is bordered on all sides: the frieze not only offers the building a proper character, but also plays an architectonic role as a cornice. There is a relief sculpture of an eagle with open wings above the tween windows on the east façade, carved in the semicircle holding the lower part of the cross. It distinguishes with the clarity of the image and scarcity of plastic details. The eagle catches a prey in its claws. Unlike other depictions of eagles, where the latter usually holds a meek animal (sheep, deer, rabbit), here we see a predatory animal - a wolf or a leopard.

The eastern cross, which is formed by the frieze, has straight wings while the northern and western ones are lance-spear-shaped. They are perceived as unique floral patterns. The entrances of the church have the same composition, typical for Armenian secular and religious buildings of the 12th-14th centuries. Externally, they are surrounded by rectangular carved frames and the central openings are modeled with delicate half-columns. The



The roof of the gavit. Khoranashat



*The entrance of the church of
Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God)*





The entrance of the gavut with carved decoration. Khoranashat



The northern entrance with carved decoration. Khoranashat, Church of Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God)



The eastern façade of the church of Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God)



northern lintel is covered with decoration of four-winged or rhomboidal stars, while the western one is carved in six-winged stars; the green-red color interplay is preserved.

Twelve fine pilasters outlined with intricate sections surround the drum. Narrow and tight windows are alternately opened in them. With this kind of carved pilasters, the drum differs from other Armenian monuments. This choice allowed decreasing the mass of the dome, which undoubtedly had a positive impact on the solidity of the structure. The drum with symmetrical structure and architectural decoration harmonizes with the other volumes of the building.

The *gavit* is adjacent to the western façade of Surb Astvatsatsin Church. It belongs to the four-column type with a centered composition based on a rectangular plan (16.8 × 16 m). It has two double-stored pieces located on the east side, which probably served as chapels. The exact date of the foundation of the *gavit* is unknown. Certainly, its construction began immediately after the completion of the church building. The inscriptions dating from 1222, which are carved on the lintels of the small chapels, bear witness of that. The *gavit* was also founded by Vanakan Vardapet. Its construction continued until spring-summer of 1229, the date when the King of Khorezm Jalal ad-

Din destroyed Khoranashat. The work has resumed in 1236, after the liberation of Vanakan Vardapet from Mongol captivity. It was completed before 125, the date of Vanakan's death.

Four monolith columns occupy the central space of the *gavit*. They are connected to each other and to the opposite pilasters by arches. The latter support the lateral vaults and the central roof cut with a dormer. The decoration of the western wall played an essential role in creating the image of the internal architectural composition. Like the main apse of Surb Astvatsatsin Church, it is covered with twelve beautiful niches, six to each side of the entrance. A symbol of eternity is depicted on the entrance lintel. Above that, on the pedestal attached to the wall there is a carving of a man between two lions. He holds the lions by the ropes tied around their necks. This scene represents the Old Testament plot of "Daniel in the lions' den".

The round-sculptures of a soaring eagle and a snake hanging from the central parts of the northern and southern vaults are unique examples of that type.

The central roof of the *gavit* is particularly interesting. It has a braided system, which gives a high artistic expressiveness to the interior space. In addition, it provides an architectonic and anti-seismic stability to the construction.



One of the four pillars of the gavit. Khoranashat



Externally, the *gavit* is also designed with unique decorative elements. The entrance of the western façade is especially remarkable. It has original architectural forms and sculptural decoration. At the borders of the main entrance there are two elegant pillars. Instead of capitals, they are crowned with lion and ox sculptures, which are protective symbols. Identical high-sculpted cruciform carvings are placed evenly above the entrance complementing the decoration of the western façade. The northern and southern façades have relatively modest solutions. Two simple windows and carvings on the tops of the pediments, the southern of which is a rosary styled sundial, while the northern one depicts a symbol of eternity on a hemisphere, vivify them.

The structure of the *gavit* ends with an octagonal drum placed in the central part of the roof. It opens with a dormer having a conical cover.

The small church or chapel of Surb Kiraki is located 4m south of the Holy Mother of God. It has a domed building with a rectangular layout (4.3 × 3 m from the outside). Obviously, it was built before the *gavit*. Judging by the architectural forms, it could be built at the beginning of 13th century.

Inside, twin columns are rising in each of four corners of the structure. The arches stretched from them support the cylindrical drum. The exterior decoration of the church is noticeable. It is built with polished stones. On the west one of the walls, which are ending by pediments and single slopes,

there is a rectangular entrance with a carved surface. A pair of half-columns rises in the central parts of the other façades. They are connected to the rectangular frames of the windows on the eastern and southern façades. On the northern one, where there is no window, the half-columns end in a straight-winged cross, which is preceded by a curve-winged cross. Single half-columns rise along the edges of the façades.

The church or chapel of Surb Nahatak – currently half-ruined – is located about 150 meters east of the precinct's wall. It has a similar layout with the Surb Kiraki Church (4.7 × 3.4 m from the outside). This church must have been built at the beginning of the 13th century. Its decoration was concentrated around the windows and the entrance on the west side. The human faces endowed with different characteristic expressions decorate the four pendentives of the dome. These are undoubtedly the images of the four Evangelists.



Fragment of a pendentive with carved decoration (John the Evangelist?).

The front of the bema was decorated with woven ornaments. There have been crosses at the top of the exterior windows. They were made of twin cylinders, the wings of which ended in rhombic forms.

Thus, the Khoranashat monastic complex, with its architectural composition and singular

arrangement of buildings, has a special place among such Armenian monuments. One of its valuable features consists in the new interpretations of national construction traditions, as well as the original combination of architecture and sculpture.

Hrachya Kartashyan



The roof of the church of Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God)

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