

ՁԵՌԱԳՐԱԿԱՆ**TWO UNPUBLISHED 11th CENTURY EVANGELIST PORTRAITS
FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION**

Our study concerns several pages of a manuscript in the private collection of Gary Tatintsian (Gary Tatintsian Gallery, Inc. New York, Dubai). The manuscript is a Four Gospels written on thick paper folios in bolorgir and illustrated in 1318 AD by scribe and illuminator Hovhannes (John), in the city Berkri of Vaspurakan region (Western Armenia) upon the request of the church ministers of St. Garabed and St. Gevorg (of Berkri), to be used during the religious ceremonies in those churches. The Gospel book actually has 247 pages. The dimensions of the binding are 24,5x16 cm, the dimensions of the pages are 24x15,5 cm. In this article we would like to concentrate on four parchment flyleaves, three of which had been added initially at the beginning of the manuscript and one at the end of it. These pages are cut from a Gospel Book written in fine angular erkat'agir script dating probably from the 11th century. The first flyleaf (1r, 1v) is purely textual, while the 2 following ones are depicting the portraits of 2 Evangelists (**image 1**). We have the portrait of John with Prochorus on the folio 2v (**image 2**) and the portrait of Luke on the folio 3r (**image 3**). The reverse sides of the folios (2r, 3v) contain the last lines from the Gospel of Luke (2r) and the Gospel of Mark (3v). The pages have been heavily trimmed from all four sides which means that their actual size might have been around 35x25 cms.

In the painting on folio 2v, John the Evangelist is standing while he receives the Gospel from heaven and is dictating it to Prochorus, who is seated at his feet writing (**image 2**). John has an elongated neck and his head is turned towards the segment of the sky from where the blessing hand of God appears. John wears a blue tunic with a dark purple cape over it. In the background, behind Prochorus we see blue and red hills of mountains through which the artist has tried to create a landscape. Prochorus is dressed in a light blue tunic with a dark blue drapery covering his knees. There is a Greek inscription between the segment of the sky and the head of St. John which reads “[‘Ο ἅγιος] Ἰω(άννης) ὁ Θεολόγος,” or “Saint John the Theologian”. While on the right side of his head we see another inscription in Armenian that reads “ՅՈՀԱՆՆԵՍ” or “John” (**image 4**). We find another Greek inscription above the head of Prochorus which reads “[‘Ο ἅγιος] Πρόχορος]” or “Saint Prochorus”.

On folio 3r Saint Luke the Evangelist sits on the chair in front of the working desk (**image 3**). Slightly forward posture of the evangelist creates the impression of movement as if he is going to write with his pen on the register put on his knee. He is seated on a on double-red and green cushions placed on his ornate chair. The square working desk placed in front of him has a round platter on it, containing the tools used by a scribe. Luke is wearing a dark blue tunic with a brown-red drapery crossing his shoulder and legs. In the background we see architectural stylization of the interior, indicating that the Evangelist is in a room with windows and there is

a shelf with vases behind him. In the right upper corner we see the segment of the sky with the blessing hand of God from which a red ray of light is moving towards the Evangelist. Below the segment we see another Greek inscription that reads “[’Ο ἅγιος Λουκάς]” or “Saint Luke”, while just next to it an Armenian inscription reads “ԼՈՒԿԱՍ” or “Luke” (image 5).

Even though the faces of the Evangelists are quite harsh, however the facial types remind early byzantine artwork, with narrow, widely set eyes and evident whitewashed lines, with red roundels on the cheeks and brown contouring lines on the forehead, which were supposed to accentuate the impression of a monumental image of a saint. In both of the portraits we notice the disproportionately small hands and feet of the evangelists which are in some way archaizing the style of paintings.

A number of characteristics make us date this portraits with 11th century: The type of angular script, the Greek inscriptions and of course the overall style of the paintings.

Considerations: In the 11th century, the first part of which was a period of great prosperity under the Bagratids, Arts’runis and other dynasties, we have a clear picture of the composition of Gospel miniatures. Of some 50 surviving illustrated Gospel manuscripts or fragments from the 11th century, some 15 have portraits of evangelists, of which only ten are precisely dated.¹ The iconography of the Evangelist portraits from this period is usually showing them standing all together on one page, while only six manuscripts have sitting portraits of the Evangelists surviving.

The style of the script makes us date the parchment flyleaves to the formative period of Armenian miniature painting,² but taking into account that the Evangelist John is here represented together with Prochorus it is more likely to date our pages with 11th centuries, since it is from that very period that we have the first examples of this duo appearing in the Armenian Gospels.

Speaking about the 11th century miniature painting we have 3 groups of manuscripts that usually come to mind: The sumptuous gospels that are grouped under the name Byzantinizing or the Kars-Tsamados group³ (which includes the Adrianople Gospels, Trapizond Gospels and

¹ Venice Mkhitarist Library Ms. N 887 (from 1007 AD), Matenadaran collection Ms. 4804 (from 1018 AD), Matenadaran collection Ms. 238 (from 1033 AD), Matenadaran collection Ms. 6201 (from 1038), Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate Ms. N 3624 (from 1041 AD), Matenadaran collection Ms. 3723 (from 1045 AD), Matenadaran collection Ms. 3793 (from 1053 AD), Matenadaran collection Ms. N 3784 (from 1057 AD), Matenadaran collection Ms. N 10099 (from 1060 AD), Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate Ms. N 1924 (from 1064 AD). The not precisely dated manuscripts with evangelists portraits are Vencie Mekhitarist library Ms. N 1400, Matenadaran collection MS. N 974, WAF 47.3, Matenadaran collection Ms. N 7736 and Ms. N 10780. Two other seated evangelists, by style of the eleventh century, are preserved on surviving fragments of different manuscripts used as guard sheets: Matenadaran collection Ms. N 963 (Matthew) and Ms. N 10147 (Luke); D. Kouymjian, ‘Armenian Manuscript Illumination in the Formative Period: Text Groups, Eusebian Apparatus, Evangelists Portraits’, *“Il Caucaso: Cerniera fra Culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (siecoli IV-XI)”*, *Settimana di Studi del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo*, XLIII, 20-26 Aprile 1995, Spoleto, Presso la Sede del Centro 1996; Измайлова, Т. А. Защитные листы некоторых рукописей Матенадарана с «византинизирующими» миниатюрами XI века. Volume 10, (1971), pp. 69-77.

² All the Armenian manuscripts created until 1100 belong to the formative period; D. Kouymjian, ‘The Evolution of Armenian Gospel Illumination: The Formative Period (9th-11th Centuries)’, Christoph Burchard, editor, *Armenia and the Bible, Papers Presented to the International Symposium Held at Heidelberg, July 16-19, 1990*, Atlanta, 1993, pp. 125-142.

³ T. F. Mathews, T. M. van Lint, ‘The Kars-Tsamandos Group of Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts of the 11th Century’, in: *Der Doppeladler. Byzanz und die Seldschuken in Anatolien vom späten 11. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*,

Gospel of King Gagik), the provincial manuscripts from the Melitene group with their typical horizontal pages and evangelists portraits grouped in four, and a group of manuscripts that is usually being attributed to the school of Ani and was created under some aristocratic patronage.

Speaking about this last group we need to underline some parallels that are noticeable between them and our pages. As we have mentioned above only six manuscripts from 11th century appear to have seated portraits of Evangelists. Three of those six manuscripts are being attributed by the scholars to the same scriptoria of Ani:⁴

- The four gospels of 1053 AD (N3793) from Matenadaran collection,
- The fragments of the Begunts Gospel (N 10099) the major part of the miniatures of which are lost today and are mostly known to us thanks to the slides of the photos done by Garegin Hovsepyan in 1930s.
- The Four Gospels of Mughni dating by the end of 11th century (N7736) in Matenadaran collection.

During the years 1044 to 1064 the Bagratuni kingdom (Ani) was under the Byzantine domination. But the everyday life in the city continued and the monasteries around the city continued to function. The aristocracy continued commanding manuscripts and these three richly illustrated manuscripts of that period are considered to be the proof of that prosperity. It is quite difficult to judge about the miniature painting of the period of the Bagratuni Kingdom since no complete manuscript has come down to us from that period which would have been executed in Shirak region. But the Begunts Gospel and the Four Gospels of 1053 created in Arshakuniq which was on the border of Shirak let us guess that these manuscripts have been the orders of the aristocracy which was living in the Bagratuni kingdom, so they can be attributed to the miniature school of Ani. Our theory about the dating of our Evangelist portraits with 11th century is also being supported by the fact that some of the evangelist portraits from the above mentioned group have Greek inscriptions as well⁵. Even though the iconography of our evangelists slightly differs from the ones appearing in this group, however some stylistic details like the harsh facial features with whitewashed lines, rose cheek roundels and brown contouring, or the ornate chairs of Evangelists decorated with exactly the same ornaments are still recalling the art of our parchment pages (**images 6; 7**). Other rare example of a portraits of seated Evangelists from 11th century that also happen to have Greek inscriptions appear in the Trabizond and Adrianople Gospels which belong to the so-called Byzantinizng group, considered to be the most sumptuous manuscripts of that period.

In fact all these Greek/Byzantine influences on the Armenian miniatures and our Evangelist portraits have a very simple explanation. In the 10th-11th centuries Armenia was still a battleground between the two great powers of the time, the Byzantine Empire and the Muslim Caliphate.

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⁴ Т. А. Измайлова, *Армянская миниатюра XI века*, изд-во «Искусство», Москва, 1979, 240 стр., 153 илл.; Т. А. Измайлова, 'Локализация группы иллюстрированных армянских рукописей XI века по их памятным записям', *Lraber* N 9 (1966), Yerevan, pp. 42-56.

⁵ Like John and Prochorus from The four gospels of 1053AD (N3793) from Matenadaran collection, or John and Prochorus and Luke from the fragments of the Begunts Gospel (N 10099).

The Abbasid Caliphs placed emirs in a number of locations, the majority of whom recognized the Bagratid family's local Armenian kings. On the other hand, the Byzantines attempted to annex more and more provinces in order to eliminate their rulers. The ruler of Vaspurakan, for example, ceded his kingdom to the Byzantine Emperor Basil II in 1022, while the most powerful Bagratid kingdom of Ani faced a similar fate.

In 1045, the Byzantine Empire annexed Ani, and in 1064, King Gagik II of Kars was exiled and surrendered his kingdom to the Byzantines. He was given a kingdom in Asia Minor in exchange, which he ruled until his death in 1081. Only a few months after the Byzantine conquest, the Seljuks took Ani and Kars in 1064, and by 1071, the Seljuks had already taken all of Armenia. From the middle of the 11th century to the 13th century, the attacks and invasions of the Seljuk Turks slowed down the development of the artistic life of Armenia itself. The fall of the Bagratid kingdom in 1041-1071 led to the emergence of semi-independent Armenian kingdoms, the authorities surrounded by the Muslim emirates, and the Sultanate of Iconium. The geopolitical situation undoubtedly had its impact on the development of manuscript art as well. Cultural centers gradually began to move south-west to avoid the Seljuks. And in fact we are dealing with a situation where the manuscripts created during the 11th century were executed by Armenian artists trained in their mother land and in the byzantine colonies. The source for the seated group of eleventh century evangelist portraits is clear: Byzantine models, since manuscripts with strong classicizing features, including all those with seated evangelists, bear identifying Greek inscriptions on the miniatures.⁶ Even though our portraits of the Evangelists are rendered in quite primitive style but you can still feel the zeal of the artist to recreate the delicate painterly elegance of faces and garments of the Byzantine prototype the presence of which is once again being confirmed by the Greek inscriptions giving their names.

A comparative study of the portraits of the Evangelists shows that a different quality of manuscript was used as model in more prestigious scriptoria with rich patronage than in provincial centers. The seated type of evangelist portrait was reserved for aristocratic commissions displaying strong Byzantine influence while the standing evangelist type pointed to an insistent indigenous manner⁷ (like those from the famous Melitene Group). It is interesting to notice that both of our portraits appear without a filled background, which makes us think that the original Greek prototype of the miniatures had a golden background.

Finally the last stylistic detail that needs to be underlined is the frame that is decorating the portraits of our Evangelists. We see a similar frame in the portraits of seated evangelists of the oldest Armenian manuscript (**image 8**) that has an exact date, the so called Gospel of Queen Mlke of 862 AD.⁸ The transitioning gradient roundels in blue red and green are another

⁶ Venice Mkhitarist Library Ms. N 887 (from 1007 AD) and Ms. N 1400, Matenadaran collection Ms. N 3793 (from 1053 AD), Ms. N 10099 (from 1060 AD) and Ms. N 7736.

⁷ D. Kouymjian, 'Armenian..', op. cit., p. 8.

⁸ Historically this manuscript is connected with name of the wife of King Gagik of Vaspurakan, the Queen Mlke. The manuscript was offered by the royal family to the Monastery of Varaga in Vaspurakan where it stayed for a long while. Some scholars think that the queen Mlke and King Gagik were not the commissioners of this manuscript but they were its second owners. The problem is that an inscription added to the colophon of the manuscript dating

interesting feature that has been probably copied from an earlier Byzantine prototype.

At last but not least I should like to mention the fact that during the rule of Abu Sayyid Ilkhan (whose name is mentioned in our manuscript's colophon by scribe Hovhannes) in 1319, a great earthquake took place in the Armenian capital Ani, which almost destroyed it. The once magnificent capital of Armenian Kingdom of Bagratuni's began to desolate. People who were migrating to different countries took with them whatever was left from their once aristocratic lives and the remains of an 11th century aristocratic manuscript must have been one of those. It is more than probable that our scribe who was also the binder of the manuscript took the pages that have survived from 11th century and added them as parchment leaves to his manuscript to keep them safe and to transfer them to the future generations.

Taking into account all of the above mentioned parallels and convergences, we should conclude that the parchment guard sheets of the our manuscript belonged to once remarkable Four Gospels created in 11th century under the patronage of a representative of Armenian aristocracy, on the territory of the Byzantine part of Armenia, by the hand of a Latinophile artist who was using a Byzantine prototype for the creation of our Evangelist portraits. The discovery of these pages is a remarkable event not only in the studies of Armenian miniature painting, but it is also another important proof of Armeno-Byzantine artistic and historical close contacts that has survived until our days.

List of Illustration

1. The 11th century parchment pages inside the manuscript, before the restoration.
2. Portrait of John with Prochorus on the folio 2v, after the restoration.
3. Portrait of Luke on the folio 3r, after the restoration.
4. Greek inscription between the segment of the sky and the head of St. John which reads “[’Ο ἄ(γιος) Ἰω(άννης) ὁ] Θεολόγος,” or “Saint John the Theologian”, and on the right side of his head we see another inscription in Armenian that reads “ՅՈՀԱՆՆԵՍ” or “John”
5. Below the segment of sky we see another Greek inscription that reads “[’Ο ἄ(γιος) Λουκᾶς]” or “Saint Luke”, while just next to it an Armenian inscription reads “ԼՈՒԿԱՍ” or “Luke”
6. Left: Fragment from Luke's portrait of our Gospel. Right: Fragment from Matthew's portrait. The Four Gospels of Mughni dating the end of 11th century (N7736) in Matenadaran collection.
7. Fragments from the portrait of John and Prochorus: The portrait of Prochorus: Left: The Begunts Gospel (Matenadaran Ms. N 10099) lost today, photographed by Garegin

908 AD mentions their names. Which means that it was probably ordered by some other member of royal family of Arcruni around 50 years before and after his death has come down to Gagik and Mlke. Besides that the style of the manuscript doesn't look like that of the manuscripts created in Vaspurakan, the evident byzantine influence makes the scholars think that this manuscript was created in the byzantine part of Armenia; 3. Акопян, Художественные и иконографические истоки миниатюр Евангелия Царицы Млке (862 г.), Лазаревские чтения, Материалы научной конференции 2011, изд-во Московского университета, 2012, pp. 15 – 38.

Hovsepyan in 1930s.; Right: Our Gospel's parchment guard sheets.

8. Evangelist Luke from Queen Mlke's Gospel of 862 AD, Ms. N 1144/86 Mekhitarist Congregation's Library in Venice.



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5



Image 6

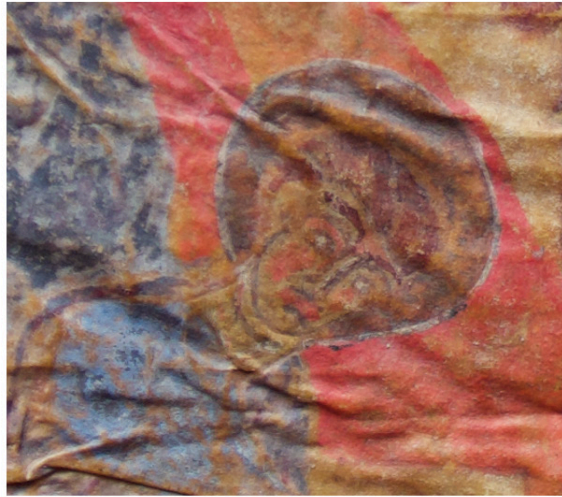


Image 7



Image 8

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