

Ժամանակագիրը թուրքերէն բնագրով բերում է «Հրամանագիր դէնպետին», որ ննջեցեալների յիշատակը չվիրաւորելու համար այլեւս չենք վկայակոչում:

Այսպէս, ուրեմն, քրիստոնեայ հանգուցեալին չէր կարելի շարականերգութեամբ եկեղեցի տանել, յուղարկաւորութեան իրաւունքի համար տուրք պէտք էր վճարել: Այլեւս լիովին պատկերացնելու է, թէ հասարակաց գերեզմանատան տարածք ունենալու համար համայնքն ինչ արդելքներ պիտի յաղթահարէր եւ ինչպիսի ծախսեր կատարէր: Որ կացութիւնը դարեր շարունակ իրաւական փոփոխութիւն չէր կրում, կարելի է հաւաստիանալ քսաներորդ դարի սկզբին կայսրութեան դաւաճական քաղաքներից մէկին՝ Խարբերդին վերաբերող Վահան Թօթովենցի վկայութեամբ. գրողի հայրը քաջալերում ու ճանապարհածախս է տալիս խարբերդցի մի «քիւլխան բէյի» (տուն ու տեղ չունեցող երիտասարդ թուրք «մոխրակոյտի իշխանի»)՝ «բոբիկ ոտքերով Մեքքէ երթալու» համար:

Երեք տարի անց ուխտագնացը վերադառնում է՝ արդէն «մարգարէից ստացած

չտեսնուած նուէրներով» եւ երախտահատոյց լինում բարերարին. նրա միջոցով գաւառական հայ կալուածատէրն ու պաշտօնեան ոչ միայն գրաւուած հողեր ետ ստացաւ, ազգականներին բանտից հանեց, այլեւ «մինչեւ անգամ արտօնութիւն ստացաւ ընդարձակելու Հայոց գերեզմանոցը, մի հարց, որի համար մի ամբողջ սերունդ չարչարուել էր, մինչեւ անգամ Պոլիս, սուլթանի մօտ պատգամաւորութիւն էր գնացել եւ մերժուած վերադարձել...»⁸¹:

Եթէ գաւառական քաղաքում «գերեզմանոց ընդարձակելը» առ սուլթանը պատգամաւորութիւն իսկ ուղարկելով չի լուծոււմ, ապա որքան աւելի բարդ պիտ լինէր նման «կենսական տարածք», հայթայթելը կայսրութեան խիտ բնակեցուած մայրաքաղաքում: Ուստի պոլսահայոց գերեզմանատները, թեկուզ միայն մինչեւ մեր օրերը պահպանուածները, նաեւ ապացոյց են տեղիս հայկական համայնքի չէ թէ միայն բազմանդամութեան, այլ եւ կայսրութեանը մատուցած ծանրակշիռ ծառայութեան:

81 Վահան Թօթովենց, Կեսնքը հին Հոովմէական ճանապարհի վրայ, Երեւան, 1979, էջ 145:

THE ARMENIAN INSCRIPTIONS OF CETATEA-ALBĂ FROM THE 10TH TO THE 18TH CENTURIES

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1. The town of Cetatea-Albă

The town of Cetatea-Albă has recently celebrated 2,500 years of documented existence. Over the many centuries of its troubled history, it has borne several names, lived through several reignings, and sheltered people of many nations, Armenians included.

During most of its existence, Cetatea-Albă stood at the crossing of both military and trade routes and commanded a large estuary (of 7 by 22 miles) at the mouth of the Dnestr, a river that has been navigable from the earliest times. There, in Cetatea-Albă, a great many goods gathered together coming from afar and scattered to even farther horizons. The river mouth being strangled, the estuary is actually a lagoon of saltish water bordered by a high, hilly shore upon which military defence fortifications were naturally erected in the old days. On the south-eastern side of the hills one can still see the half-excavated vestiges of a powerful Greek stronghold and the remainings of ancient baths with their mosaic intact. The famous "city of Stephen the Great" is still preserved on the hilltop; it was in fact begun by Genoese builders, enlarged by Prince Alexander the Good, fortified by the Turks, rebuilt and enlarged again by Stephen the Great, but by other subsequent Moldavian rulers as well, so that it can easily be numbered among the world's greatest medieval military constructions. There are authors who claim that certain constructive details in it recall the Armenian strongholds in Cilicia, the German builders, the Moldavian fortifications a.s.o. The stronghold had 16-ft. thick walls and was surrounded by a defence fosse more than 40

ft. wide and 80 ft. deep. Cetatea-Albă, this so-called "Eastern port", could not have had a smooth existence over such a long span of time. Each of its ages had its own significance and the Armenians witnessed more than one.

At mid-14th century, due to the conquests of the Golden Horde led by Ganibeg-Khan, the trade route passing through southern Poland was abandoned. Hence, a new trade route was established somewhat later, in 1382, that went all the way from Lemberg, through Cernăuți, Suceava, Pașcani, Iași, Tîrgul Lăpușna, down to Cetatea-Albă and Chilia. The Caffa merchants who traded in Lemberg would rather have their counterparts in Cetatea-Albă act as middlemen. The Cetatea-Albă and Chilia customs records of the time mention valuable goods such as silk, brocade, taffeta, cotton, soap, rice, wine a.s.o. The great income the town merchants made allowed them to pay a substantial annual tribute to the Sublime Porte. This may be the reason why Sultan Bayazet granted certain privileges to the Chilia and Cetatea-Albă merchants, in the latter half of the 15th century, with regard to the trading of calves, horses, sheep, swine, fresh and salted fish, caviar, oil, fishbone glue, timber, wood, and log-loaded rafts. Polish grain was being loaded in Cetatea-Albă onto ships that sailed to Cyprus, and Trebizond wine was being shipped in. During the 16th century, in spite of history's ups and downs, there was a particular flourishing of all trades, so that 60 to 70 ships came into the Cetatea-Albă port from Nicosia, Constantinople, Sinope, Caffa a.s.o. every day, while caravans of full-loaded carts ar-

rived from Poland, Hamburg, Flanders, Wallonia, or the Ottoman Empire.

The town's trading position went hand in hand with its military and strategic capabilities. Thus, shortly before 1484, Stephen the Great's ambassador with the Doge of Venice spoke of Cetatea-Albă and Chilia in terms such as these: "Your Excellency may think of these two strongholds as making up a wall for Hungary and Poland", while Sultan Bayazet had his scribe write down: "...So Cetatea-Albă is a key-position for us and the gate for all Poland, Russia, and Tatar, as well as for all of the Black Sea". Such quotations from old chronicles may offer a simple answer to the question why the town of Cetatea-Albă was always a bone of contention.

The town was ruled by the Genoese over a time-span of 30 years (1380-1410), 74 years by the Moldavians (1410-1484), 314 years by the Turks (1484-1808), 106 years by the Russians (1812-1918), and 26 years by the Romanians (1918-1944). Over the following 46 years (1944-1990) it remained under Soviet rule and has belonged to the independent Ukraine ever since 1991, and is named now Bilhorod-Dnistrovsk.

2. The Armenian presence in Cetatea-Albă

It is hard to say whether a straight line may be drawn between the earliest documented confirmation of the presence of Armenians in Cetatea-Albă and that of nowadays, especially as far as the remote times are concerned, from which only sparse information has been preserved. It seems that the number of Armenians living there fluctuated wildly and became rather stable only in the early 19th century, after the Turks withdrew from the town. The earliest documented confirmation of the presence of Armenians in Cetatea-Albă dates from the 10th century, in the form of an inscription on a fragmentarily preserved tombstone. It undeniably mentions

the year of our Lord 967. However, one should infer, from that fact alone, that the number of Armenians living in the town at that time was necessarily large, with all the consequences deriving thereof. Moreover, it seems that, after a certain time, those Armenians left the town stage, only to return – others, obviously – at a much later date. Generally speaking, the Armenians in Cetatea-Albă grew vine, dealt in various handicrafts, and carried on as merchants.

An inscription dating from the year 1446, that still exists nowadays, mentions one Edigar. Another, from the following year, mentions Alexander, Salamon, and Emin. The time span ranging from the 10th to the 15th centuries, for which we have no trace of any Armenians living in Cetatea-Albă should be interpreted as such: one must admit that an Armenian "recolonization" of the town area took place during the late 14th or the early 15th century, having to do with the establishment of the new trade route.

In 1457, the Cetatea-Albă parish stood under the authority of the Armenian bishopric in Lemberg, which is tantamount to saying it comprised a significant number of believers. As a testimony of that, in 1460 a bishop and two archimandrites were to be found there! What better proof could there be than the fact the three of them had *finished* copying and illuminating a breviary there, in Cetatea-Albă, which they mentioned at the end of the manuscript? Given the large Armenian community in town, Sultan Mohammed I saw it fit to move a great many Armenian families from Cetatea-Albă to Constantinople a bare eight years after the conquest of Byzance, in order to revive the declining trade. And Sultan Mohammed II followed his predecessor's example – if we are to believe Gregory Doranaguetsy. But, when Caffa too was seized by the conquering Sultan, two shiploads of Armenians fled from that town and took refuge in Cetatea-Albă. Later, when Sultan Bayazet

conquered Cetatea-Albă itself, he had another five hundred Armenian families move from there to Constantinople. Nevertheless, the number of Armenians living in the town remained rather high, which is why historian Nicolae Iorga wrote that "Cetatea-Albă had more Armenians at that time than the towns of Suceava, Siret, Hotin, Iassy, Roman, and Vaslui put together".

In 1484, the Turks took Chilia and Cetatea-Albă. Back then, the town populace counted 20,000 inhabitants. By comparison, Constantinople had 16,324 registered households, while the number of households in Caffa, in 1475, rose to 8,000. In 1783, there were 22 Armenian churches, 13 Greek churches, and 29 mosques in Caffa. The Moldavian towns were peopled mainly by foreigners, especially Armenians and Saxons, and by a small number of Romanians (to quote Lezze). There were, however, other nationalities as well: Italians, Greeks, Jews, Magyars, Ragusani.

In the early 16th century, a rather significant Armenian colony is supposed to have existed in Cetatea-Albă, given the fact that in 1506 no less than three Armenian bishops visited the town (an "inspection", presumably). Trade was flourishing too, if we are to interpret the policy to bearer given by the Polish Armenian merchant Toros Luhanovitch to the Armenian merchant Hasan Aga, of Cetatea-Albă, for a specified quantity of wool and wool cloth. The last quarter of the 16th century, however, brought great nuisances to the town in general and, to be sure, to the Armenians as well. The following "curses" fell upon them all: in 1574, the Moldavian Prince John the Terrible put a devastating fire to the town in order to punish its Turkish rulers; the same year, the Kozaks plundered the town and put fire to it once again; in 1584, they destroyed it altogether; in 1587 and 1589, two further pillagings and fire settings by the Kozaks.

The beginning of the 17th century brought along better times. The Moldavian Prince Stephen Tomşa offered the Armenians in Cetatea-Albă the opportunity to resettle in Moldavia. A judicial document issued by a Turkish court in 1624 mentioned the Armenians relocated from Cetatea-Albă to Constantinople "one hundred and fifty years ago". A missionary named Pidu paid a visit to an Armenian church in Cetatea-Albă in 1669. In 1699, an inscription was laid, testifying to the foundation of the *khoran* of Saint Oxentius.

As far as the origins of the Cetatea-Albă Armenians are concerned, there is little data available. With the exception of a number of families that had come down from around the city of Yerevan and mentioned this fact on their tombstones, all the other information is confusing. Even the Armenians come over from Caffa leave the matter of their own origins pending. One has to rely, therefore, on the very few testimonies that have been preserved to this day. Thus, a certain Arakel of Bayazet wrote, in 1600, that "some of the Armenians did not follow Abbas-Shah; they came to Poland, to Byzance, to Moldavia, to Crimea, and to other places on the Black Sea shore". According to some historians, a great many Armenians come over to Cetatea-Albă seem to descend from the refugees – or their followers – who fled the kingdom of Ani after its downfall.

3. The old Cetatea-Albă inscriptions

The old inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă have long drawn the attention of both archaeologists and historians, both by their masterful artistic achievement and – especially – by the information they provided, whether directly or indirectly, as to the epoch in which they were drawn. Mention should be made, in passing, of the fact that not only Armenian inscriptions have been found in Cetatea-Albă, but also others drawn in Greek, Slavonian, and Moldavian with Slavonian lettering.

These were mainly dealt with by professor Ion Bogdan (in 1908), by N. Bănescu (in 1939) a.s.o. As far as the Armenian inscriptions are concerned, they were studied thoroughly only in the early 20th century. A first survey of the matter was published by Kutchuk-Ioannesov in 1903, in the publications of the Moscow historical society. Later, in 1909, there was a paper by Grigore Goilav, published in the *Journal of History, Archaeology, and Philology*, on the role played by the Armenians as founders of towns in Eastern Europe; this mentioned the Armenian inscriptions in general and the ones in Cetatea-Albă among them, accompanied by photos thereof. In 1911, in Tiflis, Melikset-Bekov published a paper on the Armenian relics from Cetatea-Albă, in which he assigned a major space to the inscriptions. The amount of interest raised by those inscriptions was somewhat dimmed after a short while and for quite some time by the advent of the First World War. After the First and before the Second World Wars, the subject was tackled again, even if partially, by Grigore Avakyan and H.Dj. Siruni.

At the time when they were described, the inscriptions were rather scattered. The main corpus was to be found within the Cetatea-Albă Armenian Church, mostly embedded in the brickwork and flooring (at the entrance); some were being kept in a sort of improvised stone-collection mentioned by Kutchuk-Ioannesov in his work. The collection was sheltered inside the parish school and attended to by schoolmaster Aidinyan. Kutchuk-Ioannesov catalogued a total number of 42 inscriptions. Others were to be found on tombstones in the churchyard. One or two other inscriptions were also mentioned as existing at the fountain-chapel devoted to St. Gregory Lusavoritch ("the Light-Bearer") on the road to Shaba, a small village four miles away from Cetatea-Albă. One other

inscription had been found isolated on the steps of the Bulgarian Church in town.

Today, all the other inscriptions except those within the Armenian Church have been destroyed and their destruction is being blamed on the "vicissitudes of history..." However, the fact that they have been photographed, copied, described, published, and some even translated into other languages allows for the preservation not only of their long-gone appearance, but of the information they contained as well. It has also allowed us to draw this synthesis for whoever may be interested in certain aspects of the life of the oldest Armenian colony on Romanian ground.

4. The classification of the old Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă

The Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă were carved by the town stonecutters in the best tradition of their fellow craftsmen in Armenia. They illustrate almost perfectly the lapidary art brought along from the native homeland. A difference worth mentioning, however, is their lack of the richer ornamentation that characterizes the works of the master stonecutters in Armenia, which makes them look more austere. This may probably be accounted for by the material in which they are carved, namely marble, which is harder and more difficult to work on than the volcanic tuff from "back home".

The Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă come in three major categories: the founding ones, drawn upon the consecration of altars; the votive ones, for the celebration of the beloved; and the ones drawn on tombstones.

4.1. Founding inscriptions

These are inscriptions that mark the important events in the life of a place of worship, for instance its foundation and/or conse-

cration, its major repairs or restoration, an important donation a.s.o. Mention should be made here of the fact that there is no such founding inscription to certify the official dedication of the Armenian Church in Cetatea-Albă to the Holy Assumption. This and certain other aspects suggest that the existing construction is not the same as the original one and should be dated back to an age following that of the earliest establishment. Since there are, in the existing church, inscriptions from the 15th century, one may infer that the first church was much older and its patron saint was handed down as an already established tradition. The above-mentioned historical upheavals support this hypothesis.

The existing church consists of the main nave and two side (north and south) *khorans*. In the south *khoran* there is a three-register founding inscription made of a primary text and two secondary texts, each inscribed within a cross-ornated frame (see Figure 1).

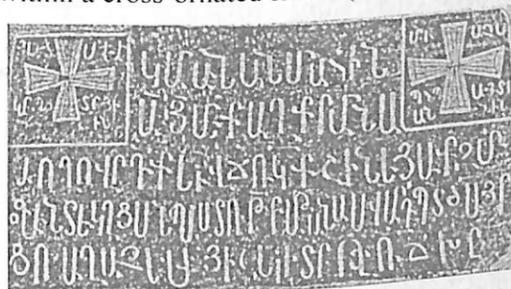


Fig.1

The main text reads:

ԿԱՄԱՎՆ ԱՆՄԱՀԻՆ
 ԱՍՏՈՒԾՈՅ ՄԵ(Ն)Ք ԱՂՔՐՄԱՆԻ
 ԺՈՂՈՎ(ՈՒ)ՐԹՔ ԵՒ Վ(Ա)Ծ(Ա)Ռ(Ա)Կ
 (ԱՆ)Ք ԾԻՆԵՑԱ(Ն) Ք ԶՄՈՒՐԲ ՕԳՍԵՆՏ
 ԵԿ(Ե)Ղ(Ե)ՑԻՍ ՆՊԱՍԹՈՒԹ(ԵՍՄԲ)
 ԱԹԱՆԱՍ ՎԱՐԴ(Ա)Պ(Ե)ՏԻ ԾԱՅՐ
 (Ա)ՑՈ: ԱՂԱԶԵՄՔ ՅԻԾԵԼ (Ի) ՏԵՐ ԹՎԻՆ
 ՌԾՀԸ

i.e.: "By the will of the Immortal God, we, the parishioners and merchants in Ackerman have erected this Church of St. Oxentius un-

der the protection of the Supreme Archimandrite Athanasius, may he be praised in the year of our Lord 1699".

The text in the former frame reads:

ՅԻԾ(Ա)Տ(Ա)Կ Է Ս(ՈՒ)ՐԲ ԽԱԶՍ
 ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏ Տ(Ի)Ր(Ա)Ց(Ո)ՒԻՆ

i.e.: "The Holy Cross, to the memory of deacon Garabed", while that in the latter:

Ս(ՈՒ)ՐԲ ԽԱԶՍ
 Պ(Ա)Հ(Ա)ՊԱՆ ԱՅՏԻՆԻՆ

i.e.: "The Holy Cross, to the safekeeping of Aidin".

In brackets are the missing letters, that were no longer carved because they were self-understood, as was the habit of the Armenian stonecutters.

This founding inscription has been interpreted in several ways. It has been thought of as:

- the foundation inscription for the whole church having Saint Oxentius as its patron saint;
- the consecration inscription for the south-side *khoran*, the one that had Saint Oxentius as its patron saint;
- the renovation inscription of the so-called "older" church.

The first hypothesis does not hold, since the Cetatea-Albă church has always been dedicated to the Holy Assumption. The last seems to spring from the wish to prove, without relying on facts, even though they exist, that the church is prior to the year mentioned in the inscription. It is most likely, however, that the latter was drawn to mark the consecration of one of the two *khorans* to Saint Oxentius, a religious figure with several other places of worship in Moldavia. If we take into consideration the presence here of another votive inscription of one Agopsha, a name that recalls Moldavia once again, we can admit that a certain Agopsha had raised an altar

of that saint in Cetatea-Albă as well. Let it be noted, too, that the saint's name, Oxentius or Axentius, is to be found in no other inscription in Cetatea-Albă.

Another founding inscription, from the north-side *khoran* altar, where the baptistery was, that had St. John as its patron saint, is being carved in a triangular stone, with the letters drawn in an exceptionally masterful manner and surrounded by geometrical decorative motifs. It reads:

ՅԻՇԱՏ(Ա)Կ Է ՎԵՄՍ ՏԱՆԱԿ
ԵՐՅԻ ԽՈՋԱ ՄԵՍՐՈՒԲԻՆ ԵՂ(Բ)Ա(Յ)ՐԻ
Պ(Ա)ՂՏ(ԱՍԱ)ՐԻՆ Ի Դ(ՈՒ)ՌՆ ՍԲ
ՅՕՀԱՆՆԵՍԻՆ

i.e.: "This founding inscription has been drawn to the memory of brother Baghdasar, of Mesrop Hodja from Danaker¹, at the gate of [the church of] St. John". Above the inscription, in a register occupied by an even-arms cross, it is written:

Տ(Ե)Ր Ա(ՍՏՎԱ)Շ
Յ(ԻՍՈՒ)Ս Բ(ՐԻՍԹՈ)Ս
ԹԸՎԻՆ ՌԾԹԲ

i.e.: "The Lord God Jesus Christ, in the year 1703".

Although apparently votive, this inscription has been unanimously considered to be a founding inscription due to its location and to the fact that it refers to the patron saint of the baptistery. One may assume that the founder of this baptistery-*khoran* would rather have mentioned his own name and his brother's name in the first place (see Figure 2).

¹ The village of Danakert lies near the valley of Vanadzor, in Gohtn, not far from the village of Tronis, on the side of Danakert hill.



Fig.2

4.2. Votive inscriptions

The votive inscriptions were also drawn when donations were made. There is an *undated* one among those, that mentions a certain Agopsha, a name often to be found in the inscriptions of northern Moldavia. It says (in translation): "This Holy Cross to the memory of Agopsha and his parents. Tell the Lord to have mercy on them and you will find your own mercy". A large cross stands above the inscription, with two smaller ones under its horizontal arms.

On the church southern wall, there is a three-line inscription carved in white marble that says: "The Holy Cross with the Lord's fine name / That is called the Holy Sign / This is to the memory of Edigar / And of his parents. In the year 1446". The text is written in verses. Above the inscription, there are two crosses separated by coiled pillars and covered by arcades. The overall composition is that of the traditional *khatchikars*. The background is adorned with vine leaves and bunches of grapes. Such reproduction of the style of the inscriptions of back home confirms again the tight relationships existing in the 15th century between Cetatea-Albă and motherland Armenia. No such *khatchikars* are to be found in northern Moldavia (see Figure 3).

On a *khatchikar* from the northern wall there is a five-line inscription saying: "The Holy Sign of Jesus to the memory of Sarkis and Kalust and their parents. In the year 1474". Two crosses surrounded by Armenian floral motifs are being carved beside the text, on the right side of the inscription (see Fig. 4).

Another inscription, from the school stone-collection, contains: "The blessing of the Holy Sign for Alexis, Salomon and Eminbey. Year 1447, in December"

On the old road to Shaba (there is a new one today), in the chapel devoted to St. Gregory Lusavoritch, there was a long inscription that seems to have been drawn by a prominent Armenian from the region of Karasubazar (present-day Crimea), one Tevan-*agha*, who was the manager of the Khan of Crimea's mint. In translation, its text goes as follows: "To the memory of the son of Sakhag [of] Vosgan [from] Paragh, the honorable Tevan-*agha* and [his] son Kevork, to his daughter Arev and



Fig.3

for the soul of their entire family alive or dead [this] was made in the year 1192" (*i.e.* 1743).

4.3. The tombstone inscriptions

These were being carved in various materials, so they have withstood the passage of time differently. People of modest means resorted to the limy stone that abounded in that area and was easy to work upon. Yet such stone could only withstand



Fig.4

the passage of time if moss was not allowed to grow over it, which was rather difficult to achieve in the case of the tombstones displayed horizontally. This is the reason why most have been damaged and no longer exist. The inscriptions carved in marble have survived, however, but, after several decades or even centuries, when there was no one left to take care of the graves, the abandoned tombstones were being reused for different purposes. For instance, the west and east entrances of the Armenian Church in Cetatea-Albă were paved with beautiful tombstones... with the inscriptions on them showing different degrees of erosion due to the parishioners' endless stepping. Even so, the preserved ones can still provide us with a lot of information, as, for instance, a couple of tombstones dating back in 1713, that display similar texts. One goes: "This is the tomb of Markar son of Avak from the village Gamres near Yerevan. He passed away in the year of Christ the Lord 1713, september 22nd". The other displays the same text, with the only differences that the grave belongs to a Harutyun son of Aghabab from the same village and the date is October 8th, 1713. It is worth noting that those people had arrived recently enough to remember their birthplace and mention it on their tombstones.

As has already been said, in the vestibule of the south-side entrance, there are seven former tombstones used to pave the floor, that hold inscriptions with the writing worn out in various degrees. In the same part

of the church, a number of well-enough preserved frescoes with information in Armenian lettering have been uncovered from under the layer of whitewash applied during the Soviet regime. On one of the vestibule tombstones, made of white marble, a 20-line inscription is still visible, with its beautifully carved letters, of which some were "linked". The versified text speaks of a "merry young man" named Magarditch, from the time when Bishop Daniel reigned in Etchmyadzin², who had wandered towards "these alien lands of Khaghkirman" [*i.e.*, Ackermann], deprived of the care of his brothers and friends, and had now departed the realm of the living "at the Creator's irrevocable decision concerning his person, leaving behind a great mourning for his youthful age, so everyone who may happen to drop by his tomb should pray for him". The date is April 21st, 1247 [*i.e.*, 1798]. Being written in the fine language *grabar*, with scholarly phrasing and rare words, the text seems to have been drawn up by some cleric of a higher rank, who must have mastered a broader culture than a mere rural priest. It is even conceivable that the text handed over to the local stonecutter may have been drawn up elsewhere and sent thereof.

Another tombstone, of white marble as well, richly adorned with such floral motifs as the tree of life (see Figure 5), bears the following inscription: "This is the resting-stone of Pirigyul, son of Narin Bek from Danakert, who passed away in the year 1749". This is the second mention made of the town of Danakert. There is also a third one, made on a tombstone dated 1624, that mentions another Pirigyul, son of Nicaghayos, both from Danakert.

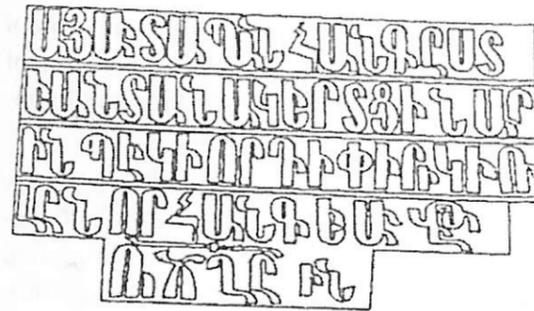


Fig 5

Even the inscriptions that are worn away may still be deciphered, as, for instance, the tombstone in Figure 6, that reads: "This is the tomb of Azdvadzadur from Caffa, son of Yezekiel, who has joined Christ the Lord God at an early age, in the year 1659, January 22nd". The word "Caffa" is perfectly readable. This is a further example of the fact that the Armenians never forgot their places of origin: even though they had settled in Ackerman, they still mentioned their birthplaces. But, since they had left the former capital city Ani for over five centuries, they naturally called that place Caffa now (in just the same way as there is nowadays in Los Angeles a community of the Armenians who left Romania).

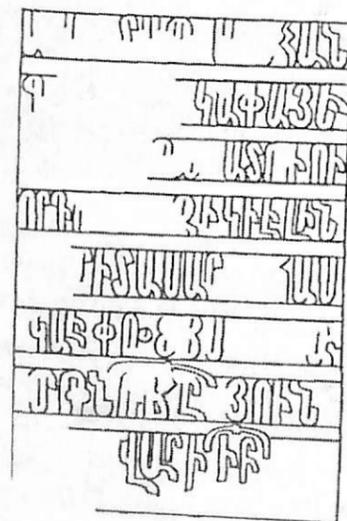


Fig 6

In time, the Armenians became "natives", so they gave up mentioning their far-

² Archbishop Daniel was elected Catholicos in 1802 and held his office for the following six years.

way origins. Hence, there are tombstones on which Ackerman (Cetatea-Albă) was the birthplace now mentioned. A 1756 tombstone written in verses goes: "O, you passers-by, please show your mercy by saying: O, heavenly Father, show Your mercy! And some day He will show you His mercy. For the relative of Dasho Serkis from Aghkerman, who departed this world in the year 1756, on the 22nd day".

Among the scattered stones, Melikset-Bekov mentions one made of white marble, that was found on the road leading to Shaba, near the chapel devoted to St. Gregory Lusa-voritch. Its text is worth quoting for the place of origin of the person for which it was carved: "This is the tomb of Deacon Hovhan-nes, son of Agop from the village of Getvon

near Yerevan, who joined Christ in the year 1715, December 20th".

Another stone from the scattered ones was discovered by Melikset-Bekov at the entrance of the Bulgarian Church in town. It is an inscription carved in white marble, with the following text drawn in Armenian: "Hail to the Almighty. I, Mari, consort (.....) of Hatchadur who has joined the Desired One. In the year 1759, September 23rd, on a Saturday. Alas, I remain miserable and sinful. Whoever reads this let them pray with one voice and show mercy. Amen".

Another tombstone inscription is a genuine piece of local... "literature". It is a white marble slab displaying a short 12-line poem:

Սարգիս վաջառակյան

Ճարտար քաջխոհական
 Ծնունդ Ախքիրմանի՝
 Որդի Խարայ Դարթի
 Նախնի Ախքիրմանու
 Յառինչ գիւղն Աղգասու
 Ջանայ հայցմանը յողոք
 Այլքային բառնայ բողոք՝
 Յերկրես տարագրելոց
 Դարձման եգիտ միջոց
 Ի թուին Հայոց 1211 ղեկտեսր 5
 Օրն չորեքշաբթի (1762)

Sarkis the merchant

Quick-witted and clever
 Born in Aghkirman
 Son of Davit Hara
 And before Aghkirman
 From the village Argasu in Haringe
 Appeals with humble prayer
 To request from the Emperor
 Banished from his own land
 To be shown his way back
 In the Armenian year 1211 [*i.e.*, 1762]
 On a Wednesday December 5th.

5. The oldest Armenian inscription in Cteatea-Albă

The oldest Armenian inscription in Cetatea-Albă is to be found on yet another tombstone and dates back in the 10th century. Since that inscription that Grigore Goilav photographed and several researches described in detail caused a lot of debate, we will dwell upon it somewhat longer.

Known for a very long time, the inscription was presented to the scientific world in the early 20th century by Kutchuk-Ioannesov who published in Moscow, in 1903, a paper entitled "Old Armenian Inscriptions". In that he reproduced for the very first time the oldest inscription in Cetatea-Albă, that bore an unmistakable date, namely the year 416 according to the Armenian calendar, which,

after applying the usual correction $416 + 551$, gives us the year 967 A.D.



Fig.7

The inscription comes as the only discovered fragment from a shattered, formerly cross-shaped tombstone (see Figure 7). Its text is written on four different lines separated by strokes, in the manner of the usual Armenian lapidary inscriptions, making use of abbreviations and monograms (agglutinated letters) that are familiar to those who are specialized in the old Armenian inscriptions and aware of both the old Armenian language called *grabar* and of its medieval version.

The inscription reads as follows:

ՄԲԲ ԽԱԶԻՍ ԶԻՇԱՍԱԿ ԵՍՎԹԻ...
ԳՐԵԱՎ ԹՆԺԶՈ 967Ը

(The Holy Cross in the memory of David...
was written in the year 967)

Kutchuk-Ioannesov, who saw this inscription, read it, examined it, and acknowledged its dating, was puzzled by the time gap between this inscription and the next oldest one in Cetatea-Albă, that goes back to the year 1446. Moreover, there is no other documentary evidence supports the idea of the presence of Armenians in Cetatea-Albă in the 10th century. Kutchuk-Ioannesov came to the

groundless conclusion that the tombstone should have been carved in "some other place" and simply brought over to Cetatea-Albă. Hence, he analyzed the inscription in this light.

Let us look closer at this supposition. First of all, why did the Armenians "leave to some other place"? The great waves of Armenians who fled their home country and exiled themselves were primarily due to the barbarian (Turkish, Tatar etc.) raids, but also to the endless earthquakes that often achieved the raiders' "work". What were they carrying in their luggage? Given the conditions in which they fled, the Armenians took along the bare necessities and whatever material belongings could have provided them a minimal existence. They usually packed their things on the spur of the moment and the most widespread means of transportation were their horses or mules. One can hardly imagine tombstones to have counted among the exiles' priorities when it came to packing their luggage. If so, it was without precedent. Moreover, Kutchuk-Ioannesov spoke of a major influx of Armenians in the Cetatea-Albă area not earlier than the 14th or even the 15th centuries. Are we to infer that the Armenians who arrived in Cetatea-Albă at that time had been carrying along a tombstone already five hundred years old? Let us also ask ourselves: is there anyone among the readers who knows the whereabouts of the tombstone of any of his or her own ancestors from five centuries ago?! All the more so as there have never been five uninterrupted centuries of peace in the Armenians' homeland. It follows that we cannot accept Kutchuk-Ioannesov's supposition that the 10th century tombstone was actually carried all the way to Cetatea-Albă; it should have been carved on site. There still remains, however, the question of the gap between this earliest inscription and that of 1446 preserved to this day in the wall of the Cetatea-Albă Armenian Church.

Another researcher who saw and mentioned the inscription was Melikset-Bekov, in his paper published in Tiflis in 1911, under the title "Armenian Relics in Cetatea-Albă". He neither doubts the dating, nor advances any other hypothesis.

The Romanian readers found out about this inscription from the *Journal of History, Archaeology, and Philology*, published in Bucharest between 1882 and 1922, under the direction of Grigore Tocilescu. Grigore Goilav published a vast survey entitled "The Armenians as founders of towns in Eastern Europe" in several successive issues of this periodical (starting in tome X, year 1909, page 241) and illustrated it with a photograph of the inscription. It is known that Grigore Goilav's son, who was 25 years old at that time and had made a passion for the art of photography (see *Secolul 20 - The 20th Century* -, no. 200/1977). The author presumably had the text of the inscription photographed by Grigore Goilav, Jr. translated by someone else, since it is being reproduced in the *Journal...* as follows: "This cross was engraved in 416 etc.", which differs from the actual text at the level of details, but does not miss the essential: the dating of the inscription, that Goilav does not cast any doubt upon.

Such discrepancies in the translation gives another researcher, Grigore Avakyan, the opportunity to deny the worth of the information provided by Goilav in the *Journal of History, Archaeology, and Philology* altogether. Thus, in a study he entitled "An Outline of the History of the Armenians in Cetatea-Albă up to the 19th century" and published in Cetatea-Albă itself in 1922, under the auspices of the town's Armenian community, Avakyan questioned the accuracy of the translations of Armenian inscriptions published by Grigore Goilav and claimed that the "thousand-year" stone were simply conveying not date! But the accompanying photo leaves no doubt for whoever is familiar with

the Armenian lapidary writing. Let us dwell a little more on the subject, however, in order to do away with any possible doubt, and examine the register in the text where the date of carving is usually being mentioned in the various old Armenian inscriptions from Cetatea-Albă. Thus, the words *tvîn*, *tuîn* (meaning "at the year" or "in the year") or just the letter *t* appear in an almost free variation, as can be inferred from the table below:

Year of the inscription	Mention of the date	Remarks
967	T.	
1446	TV	
1474	TVIN	
1650	T	
1699	(TVIN)	A monogram with the abbreviation mark
1713	(TVIN)	A monogram
1713	(TVI)N	(A monogram) + a letter
1749	(TVIN)	A monogram
1759	T	With the abbreviation mark
1798	TUIN	

As can be seen, the date-marking differs from one stonecutter to another and tends to follow the custom (a somewhat excessive use of monograms). We have, thus, in the 17th and 18th centuries, instances of four or even more letters in one or of the simple abbreviation *T* (the equivalent of *y* for *year*). This latter notation is to be found in the inscription on the 967 tombstone, as well as in other inscriptions of 1650 or 1798. Its repetition suggests that it was widely used by the stonecutters of all ages and makes it acceptable in the eyes of palaeographers. Hence, the Armenian letter-figures that occur after this notation without conveying any other meaning are necessarily figures referring to the year when the inscription was drawn.

However, if we take it for granted that the inscription under discussion was drawn in Cetatea-Albă in the year 967 A.D., we still have to answer the following question: Why

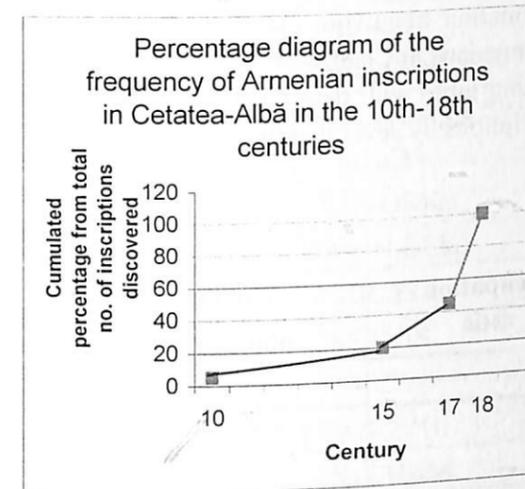
is there no other piece of evidence of any kind to support it?

It must be said, first and foremost, that the preservation of that inscription over such a long time-span is quite exceptional in itself and fortuitous, even though there were certain given circumstances that made it possible. The Armenians in Cetatea-Albă are very arduous keepers of their traditions. For instance, when Kutchuk-loannesov undertook his researches in the early 20th century, he found forty-two inscriptions, a number of which were being "sheltered by schoolmaster Aidinyan in the parish school". This is to say that, for a while at least, the old inscriptions had been gathered and somehow protected in stone-collections. In the 1930s and 1940s, the parish possessed no more stone-collection; everything that was left was damaged after the Soviet occupation beginning in 1944, with the exception of a couple of inscriptions already kept in the church. Moreover, the Armenian cemetery, with all its richly decorated and inscribed tombstones and its several old monument-chapels of great artistic value, was gradually destroyed over the four ensuing decades, between 1944 and 1985, until it became a wasteland. But the Second World War was in no way the first calamity to have struck at the cultural vestiges of the Armenian community in Cetatea-Albă, even though it was the last. The Turkish occupation should be given full credit for it. There was also the forced relocation of a large part of the town's Armenian population in Constantinople in 1461, by order of Sultan Mohammed II (should we consider whether they carried their tombstones all the way from Cetatea-Albă to Constantinople?!) Later on, in 1484, Sultan Bayazet conquered the town and another five hundred Armenian families were moved over to Constantinople. Prince John the Terrible put fire to what he called the "Turkish fortress" of Cetatea-Albă in 1574. Only two years later, the Kozaks did the

same, then again in 1650. All these fighting, slaughtering, fire-laying and looting were not without leaving traces, yet the people kept creating and producing cultural artefacts. The older an object was, the more it was subjected to hostile actions in time, by comparison to a more recent one. Besides, one should not overlook the plain relentless action of time that wears everything away in its passing, and adds to man's destructive work. It is no wonder that the 967-dated inscription was found shattered. It must have been covered by dirt and rediscovered by chance much later, when other works were undertaken. The virtual other inscriptions as old as this, that remained in one piece, must have suffered various vandalizing transformations over the centuries, by chance reusers. Moreover, it so happened that in the 19th century the tombs were moved from the churchyards to cemeteries outside of town, which must have caused further losses of inscribed tombstones that no longer belonged to anybody.

Hence, the "life" of those tombstones should be considered within a society-related dynamics. Like any other social phenomenon that describes a biological multitude, it is subject to a logarithm-type law of variation or to something of the kind. It goes without saying that the lack of information from shorter time-spans forces us to take into consideration the information available from longer ones. If we were to plot the frequency of the stones' "surviving" an entire century, they should follow a line such as mentioned earlier. The ones outside the line should exhibit unexplicable abnormalities. From the diagram below, of the cumulated percentages of frequency for the occurrence in Cetatea-Albă, in various centuries, of stones displaying Armenian inscriptions, a normally joined line results, with the controversial stone at its right place. This may suggest that the inscription fragment really belongs to the series of inscriptions drawn by the Armenians in Cetatea-Albă – in the 10th

century, to be more precise. From all of the above, we may clear-mindedly infer that the Cetatea-Albă inscription analyzed by Kutchuk-loannesov, Melikset-Bekov, and Grigore Goilav is a native one and was accurately dated back to the year 967.



But, once the authenticity of the inscription has been established, does this fact trigger any consequences in real life? Does it mean perhaps that an interrupted Armenian presence in Cetatea-Albă, for over a thousand years, has been proven? We do not think so. The inscription testifies for *one* instance of the presence of Armenians in this area, of course. Hence, we must admit that a community did exist, that built a small church for itself, for the Armenians do that anywhere as soon as they have settled, which does not necessarily mean that it was a large and influential community. In time, maybe after a short while, that community may have broken up for a whole variety of reasons. But the town, that has recently celebrated its 2,500th documented anniversary had been and still was well-known to everybody, hence also to the Armenians. So there is no wonder that the following waves of fleeing Armenians took refuge there once again in the early 14th century. After several decades, this other community was scattered again significantly so other waves of fleeing Armenians had to come to the same town early in the following,

15th, century to revive it. From that moment on we may indeed speak of continuity. There are several cases of massive arrivals of Armenians in Cetatea-Albă. One in 1475, for instance, when Caffa was conquered and two overcrowded ships unloaded many Armenians in their new home town. In 1600, if we are to believe Arakel of Bayazat's chronicle, some of the Armenians who had refused to obey Abbas-Shah and move over to Persia came to this part of the world, so some may have settled in Cetatea-Albă as well. There were also the already-mentioned opportunities presented to the Armenians by the Moldavian ruling princes, including, of course, those from the 1401 patent issued by Alexander the Good.

In conclusion, there really exists a material proof of the presence of Armenians in Cetatea-Albă as early as the year 967 A.D. But the Armenians' living in this town was often a troubled one, with certain interruptions caused by the upheavals of history and by the strategic character of the place, that both the military and the tradesmen wanted to rule upon.

6. The information revealed in the old Armenian Cetatea-Albă inscriptions

There is few and dispersed information to be found in the Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă. Even so, it helps outline certain aspects that should not go overlooked, so we will attempt to make a brief inventory.

6.1. The events

The founders' inscriptions are the ones conveying information on the most important events in the life of the Armenian community, since they mention when and how the two *khorans* were consecrated. The founding inscription of the church main patron saint is unfortunately missing, which allows for some people's conjecturing that three Armenian churches must have existed in Cetatea-Albă.

After those three were destroyed (and, presumably, the community was lessened), a new place of worship was later built in the stead of one of the former churches, iar the *khorans* took over the patron saints of the other two. But this hypothesis does not stand, because it does not explain why the drawing of founding inscriptions was considered necessary for both *khorans* and not for the main church, once it had been rebuilt.

Some inscriptions convey bits and pieces of a personal nature from the life of the

individuals they mention, but those are not particularly significant.

6.2. The origin of certain Armenians in Cetatea-Albă

The inscriptions sometimes provide information about the places of origin of the Armenians in Cetatea-Albă. Here is a summarizing table with data taken from various inscriptions by several authors:

Year	Names	Occupation / title	The persons' places of origin
undated	AGOPSHA		
undated	ANNA		
967 (?)	DAVIT		
1446	(E)DIGAR		
1447	ALEKS SALUMAN EMIN BEY	bey	
1474	SARKIS CALUST		
1624	PIRTULI NEKAGHAIOS		Danakert
1650	AN DREAS HOVHANNES	deacon	
1656	DAVIT		
1659	ASTVATZADUR YEZEKIEL		Caffa
1699	St. OXENTIUS ATANAS GARABED AIDIN	archimandrite deacon	Aghkirman
1703	St. OVANNES MESROP BAGHDASAR	hodja	Danakert
1712	SIMAVON		

	MSIR		
1713	MARKAR AVAK		village of Gamres near Yerevan
1713	AGHABAB OHANNES		village of Gamres near Yerevan
1715	HAGOP HOVHANNES	deacon	Yerevan village of Getvon
1743	TEVAN AREV KEVORK	agha	Parag
1749	NARIN BEK PIRIGYUL	bek	Danaghert
1756	SERKIS	daşho	Aghkrman
1759	FRANGYUL HATCHUM		Danaghert Village of Areshd
1759	MARI HATCHADUR	priest	Argasu near Harindji
1762	SARKIS HARA DAVIT	merchant	
1798	MAGARDITCH DANIEL	at the time of archimandrite Daniel	Haghkirman

Remarks:

1. The names Aghkirman, Aghkrman, Haghkirman are obviously variants of the name Ackerman (Ak Kirman)
2. Certain names originating in the Armenian town of Danakert appear in several instances: 1624, 1703, 1749, 1759.

Let us notice in the table above, first and foremost, that half the inscriptions do not mention the persons' year of birth. Of the other half, however, only a third claim to be from the town of Cetatea-Albă (Ackerman). Three quarters of those who mention their places of origin are most likely to have arrived in the area rather recently at the time the inscriptions were drawn, which supports the

idea that the Armenians came to Cetatea-Albă in several waves over a long time-span: a distant place of origin is being mentioned in the 17th century just as much as it is in the 18th. The most interesting case is that of a family from Danakert that keep mentioning their place of origin during more than a century! There are also families from the villages Getvon and Gamres near Yerevan, from the village Argasu near Harindji, or from the village Parag. The presence of Caffa is also worth noticing in the table: what we have here is a substantial proof that supports the historical ones from the chronicles of the time regarding the Armenians' exodus from Caffa to Cetatea-Albă when the former was conquered

by the Turks. Still, three inscriptions mention Ackerman as the place of origin of the deceased, probably from a sense of imitation, because the fact was obvious to anyone.

6.3. Names of Armenian inhabitants of Cetatea-Albă over the centuries

One can easily notice that almost all traditional Armenian names are to be found in the previous table. Certain names of foreign resonance (Pirigyul, Pirtuli, Msir) may suggest a Persian influence. The absence of women's names is still to be explained. An Anna appears in a votive fragmentary inscription and a Mari speaks of her own mourning as the wife of the deceased. Were the wives not entombed with the same funeral honours as their husbands? Or maybe the husbands were always away on business travels and had no time for ceremonies, while the wives who remained at home suffered for the loss of their husbands from both a moral and a material point of view. Anyway, this is a fact that cannot be accounted for with bare suppositions and requires a closer look.

6.4. Occupations and social statuses

One notices that only about 40 percent of the titles mentioned in the table refer to laymen, while the larger rest to clerics. Only one merchant is being mentioned with his occupation. We have to suppose that other similar mentions have simply not withstood the passage of time for us to see; another possible interpretation is that the vast majority of the merchants actually had modest means and very few among them could afford to pay for a marble tombstone that withstand the passage of time.

Among the laymen, there is a "bey" from the 15th century (1447), when Cetatea-Albă still belonged to Moldavia. That is tantamount to saying that the person had gotten his title elsewhere. There is also a "bek" in the 18th century, when such a title could obvi-

ously be obtained from the Turks who ruled the town at that time. For the rest, we have several clerical ranks: archimandrite, priest, and deacon (three times). The presence in the table of the Armenian medieval noble title "dashkho" should not go unnoticed, although the title may have been used as a proper name (in the same way as Takvor, Takuhi etc.)

7. The language of the Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă

ՄԿՐՏԻՉ ԱՅՍ ԶՈՒԱՐԹ ՊԱՏԱ ՆԻՆ ՈՐԴԻ ՔՐՈՋ ՆՈՒԻՐԱ ԿԻՆ ԷԶՄԻԱԾՆԻ ՍԲ ԱԹՈ ՌԻՆ ՏԵՐ ԴԱՆԻԵԼ ԱՐՀԻՊ ՏԻՆ ՊԱԷԱԶԻՏՑԻ ԵԼՈՎ ՍԸՄԻՆ ԻՅԱՂՔԻՐՄԱՆ ԱՅՍ ՔԱՂԱՔԻՆ ԸՍՏ ԸՆԹԱՑԻՑ ԱՄԱՆ ԿԻՆ ՅԵՐԿԻՐ ՕՏԱՐ ՊԱՆՏԵՍԱԳԻՆ ԶՈՒՐԿ Ի ԲՆԱԻԻՑ ԱՄԵՆԵ ԻՆ ՅԵՂԲԱՐՑ ԵՒ ՄԱՐՑԻ Ի ԳԹՈՑ ՆՈՅՆ ԶՀՐԱՄԱՆ ԱՆԴԱՐՑ ԿԵՆԱՐԱՐԻՆ ՎԵՐԱՊԵԲԵՐԵԱՑ ՅԻՒՐՈՒՄ ԱՆՑԻՆ ԵԼԻՔ ԶԻՒՐԱՆ ԲՈԼՈՐՈՎԻՆ ԵԹՈՂ Ի՛ ՍՈՒԳ ՅՈՒԻԺ ՏՐՏՄԱԳԻՆ ԶՈՒԵԱՑ ԶԶՈՒՍ ՅԱԻԻՏԵՆԻՆ Ի ՄԱՆԿՈՒԹԵԱՆ ԻՐ ԼԱՍԱԿԻՆ ԼԱՅՑԷ ԱՐՏ ՄԷՆ ՄԻ ԶՈՂՈՐՄԻ Ի ԴԻՊՈՂԱՅԴ ԻՐՈՑ ԾԻՐՄԻՆ 1247 ԱՊՐԻԼԻ ԹՎԻՆ 21

The Cetatea-Albă Armenian inscriptions from the 10th to the 18th centuries are written in Armenian. The subsequent ones, from the 19th and 20th centuries, are bilingual – in Armenian and Russian – and later even in Romanian. As was expected, the Armenian language used between the 10th and the 18th centuries to draw the inscriptions, whether votive, funeral or otherwise, was the learned sort of Armenian of the time, namely that called *grabar*. It was the language every cleric had to know, since all the religious books were written in it. One may assume

that the texts meant to be carved into the stones were being composed and fashioned by the clerics. Like any other language, the *grabar* could be mastered in its essence or, in the best of cases, in all its richness at the levels of both vocabulary and style. These levels of knowledge obviously influenced the inscribed texts, depending on whether their author possessed a vast culture or not. In time, the *grabar* evolved towards a middle Armenian; then, in the late 19th century, the *ashkharapar* came along and gained recognition in the process of modernization.

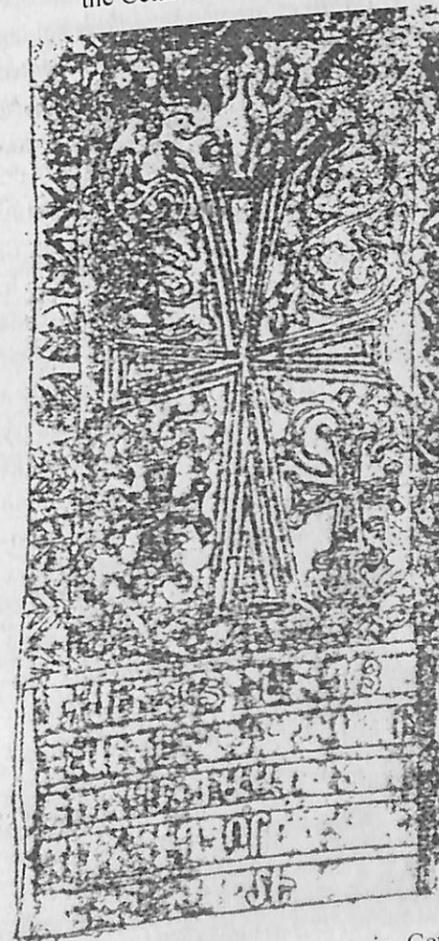
The Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă reflect all these stages. As expected, the older a text is, the more laconic and austere its phrasing, as if it were molded in patterns imposed by compulsory canons. This is how the 15th and 16th-century inscriptions appear. In the 17th century, the language of the inscriptions seems more developed but lacking a style of its own: "By the will of God, we, the parishioners and merchants..." a.s.o. Of course, the merchants paid large sums of money so they be mentioned in particular. But in the 18th century the texts became longer, the sentences were adorned with epithets, they presented circumstances and situations, as in the 1798 inscription. Nine years had elapsed since the French Revolution, the coalition between Austria, Russia, Naples, and Turkey was forming against France, the spirits were in turmoil in Europe, so a few echoes of all this must have reached the mouth of the Dniestr and a larger freedom in expressing an epitaph came as no more wonder to anybody. Moreover, the elevated and somehow ostentatious style, the use of affected words turn the versified epitaph of a child called Magarditch into a piece worthy of a collection (see the original text above, the Armenian year 1247 being in fact 1798).

The versified epitaph of the merchant Sarkis, dated 1762, that was mentioned in section 4 above is another small "poem". It

also provides a characterization of his tradesman's qualities and, of course, his family's place of origin from Armenia. Plus the fact that the entire text is slightly humorous in nature: the deceased addresses a request to the Lord God, that he be shown a way back...

While lacking any particular literary value, these original tombstone inscriptions may find their place in a virtual anthology of the medieval Armenian writings from the area of the Carpathians and the Danube.

8. The art of stone engraving to be found in the Cetatea-Albă inscriptions



The Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă differ from all the other similar inscriptions to be found in the whole area of the Romanian territory in that they exhibit a strong influence of the traditions of the stone-

cutters in Armenia. It is true that very few examples can illustrate this statement, given the effects of the passage of time that has wiped out many inscriptions.

The few remaining ones, however, prove most useful in establishing an unmediated relationship between the art of the *khatchikars* and certain inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă. The most eloquent example is the stele carrying a 3-line inscription dated back to the 15th century (to the year 1446 – see Figure 8). It is in fact a double *khatchikar*, since it has two crosses with the tree of life at their feet, a typical representation for the Armenian *khatchikars*, framed by arches linking together twisted pillars and richly ornamented with grapes. This element is often displayed on many *khatchikars*. Thus, there are decorative representations of grapes on the 4th-century Aghts mausoleum, on the 5th-century reliefs discovered in Dvin, on the arcade of the south entrance to the 6th-century church in Ptghni, on the fragments of the outer arcade frieze as well as on the fragments of the outer arcade archivolt of the 7th-century monument in Zvartnotz, on the reliefs of the 10th-century Holy Cross Monastery on the island of Akhtamar, on the *khatchikar* erected at the south entrance of the 13th-century St. Gayané Monastery in Etchmyadzin – to recall only a few examples. Only the rather reduced size of the stele (approximately 23 by 18 inches) make it different from those in Armenia that are usually bigger. Yet, as far as its artistic achievement, its balanced composition, its rich ornamentation are concerned, the stele, which is embedded in the south wall of the church, is easily comparable to similar works of art in Armenia. It is worth mentioning, at this point, that the Armenians may be credited with the introduction of the grape vine culture in this area peopled mostly by fishermen.

The direct relationship with the art of the Armenian stone engravers goes even fur-

ther. Thus, the undated³ stele with the votive inscription that mentions one Agopsha is actually a *khatchikar*. Above the five-line text there is an Armenian cross having another two, smaller crosses beneath its horizontal arms. Such a three-cross representation is also to be found on a *khatchikar*-pillar from the Sanakhin Monastery, on another *khatchikar* from the porch of the St. Asdvadzadzin Monastery and at the 13th-century Geghard Monastery, at the 14th-century Virgin Mother Church in Amaghov, as well as in other places. The traditions of stone engraving were brought over from Armenia together with the master stonecutters who went on illustrating it in Cetatea-Albă. Then, in time, the otherwise rich decorations gradually gave up these patters; starting in the 18th century, the Italian models became fashionable.

9. The inscriptions preserved in Cetatea-Albă to this day

The Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă have long awakened interest through their ornamental variety and richness and maybe also through the information they conveyed. This is why a schoolmaster made up a stone collection to protect them at the turn of the 20th century: they were already beginning to fall apart and some had even been lost. Towards the mid-century, the stone collection itself no longer existed. Alongside the scattering of the Armenian community following the Second World War, the destructive forces involved in this process took up speed. The yard of the Armenian Church, covering almost 1.5 hectares, was abusively divided into lots and built upon, which caused the destruction of a great many historical vestiges. The cemetery that concentrated many inscription

³ The learned H.Dj. Siruni stated that the inscription is related to the 15th century. A.H. Toramanyan suggested that a later dating was more likely to be true, namely towards the mid-18th century.

was devastated; whatever was left of it was wiped off the face of the earth. This was not done with any utilitarian purpose, since the respective area has remained an unoccupied wasteland to this day. All the inscriptions have obviously been lost.

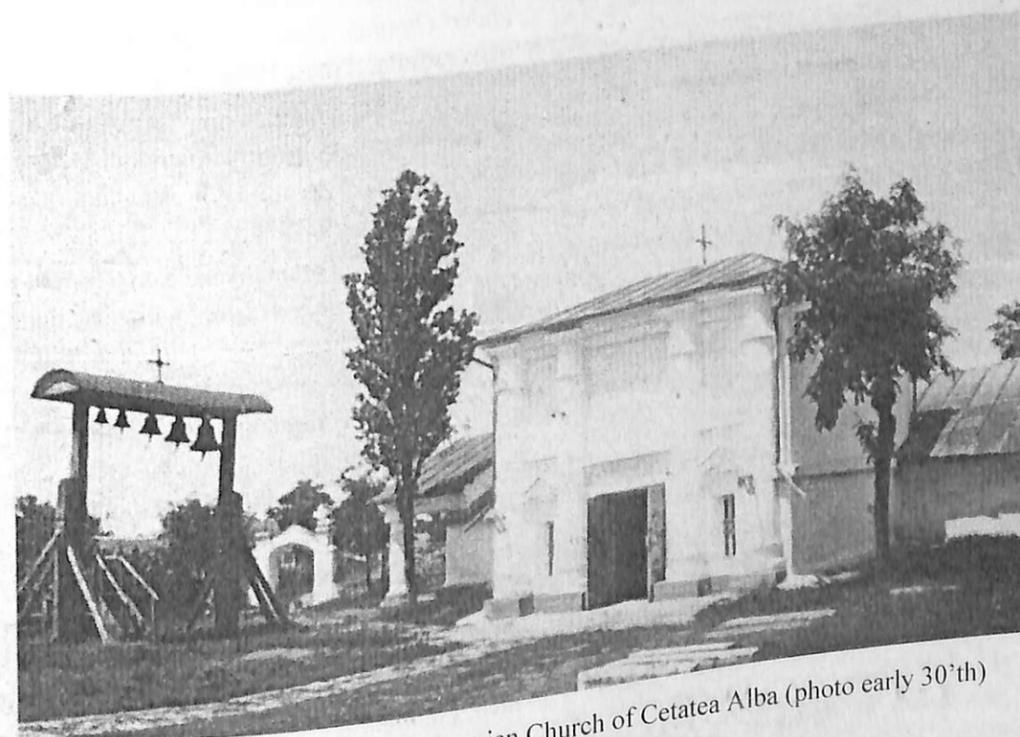
Only the inscriptions within the church have been preserved, namely:

- the ones in the St. Hovhannes *khoran*;
- the ones in the St. Oxentius *khoran*;
- the ones in the church main nave;
- the ones embedded in the pavement of the south entrance (seven pieces);
- the explanations of the frescoes painted on the south entrance walls;
- a number of stones embedded in the pavement under the arcade of the west entrance, but those are completely eroded and can only be read by using advanced labora-

tory equipment (by noticing the dislocations induced in the material by the stonecutter's tools with the use of a special class of X-rays).

The natural influence of the passage of time, the historical vicissitudes, the destructive hostility of the social and political environment have caused almost the whole rich lot of Armenian inscriptions in Cetatea-Albă to disappear. The fact that some representative instances of great historical and artistic value have still survived all these adversities speaks in itself for how large this lot actually was. One should keep in mind, however, that no scientific archeological surveys have been undertaken in this area, so, if they were, one may undoubtedly expect that fresh historically interesting artefacts be brought to light.

Bucharest, November 2005



The Armenian Church of Cetatea Alba (photo early 30th)

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Figure 8: An undated *katchikar* that mentions the name of one Agopsha