

**THE VOSKAN BIBLE OF ARCHBISHOP ASTVADZADOUR  
FAKHRABADTSI IN THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM  
(PML 199389):**

*An Inscribed New Julfa Binding and Armenian Practices of  
Commemorative Book Patronage and Distribution\**

**ՀՏԴ: 929:800(479.25)Ոսկանյան**

**DOI: 10.54503/2953-8092.2026.1(7)-145**

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Սույն հոդվածը նվիրված է “Morgan Library & Museum”-ի հավաքածուում պահպանվող Ոսկանյան Աստվածաշնչի մի բացառիկ օրինակին: 2025 թ. հունվարին գրավաճառ Ադամ Վայնբերգերը (Նյու Յորք, ԱՄՆ) և “Konstantinopel Rare & Fine Books” գրավաճառ ընկերության ներկայացուցիչ Ռոբերտ վան դեր Գրաֆենը (Էնսխեդե, Նիդերլանդներ) դիմեցին մեզ՝ պատրաստվելու մինչ այդ անհայտ այս օրինակի մատենագիտական նկարագրությունն ու փորձագիտական եզրակացությունը:

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\* The article was submitted on 17.05.2026, reviewed on 22.06.2026, accepted for publication on 24.06.2026.

Հոդվածը ներկայացվել է 17.05.2026, գրախոսվել է 22.06.2026, ընդունվել է տպագրության 24.06.2026:

Կարճ ժամանակ անց գիրքը ձեռք բերվեց “Morgan Library & Museum”-ի կողմից, որտեղ այն ներկայումս պահպանվում է PML 199389 գույքահամարի ներքո: Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է գրքի մանրամասն նկարագրությունը, քննարկվում են դրա տպագրական առանձնահատկությունները, լրացումները, ձեռագիր հավելումները և հետագա կիրառությունը: Առանձնակի ուշադրություն է դարձվում գրքի բնօրինակ կաշվե կազմին, որը կրում է 1699 թ. թվագրված արձանագրություն և հիշատակում Ֆահրապապոցի Աստվածատուր վարդապետին, նրա ծնողներին ու ընտանիքի անդամներին: Կազմը պատկանում է Նոր Ջուղայի արձանագիր կազմերի ավանդույթին և հանդիսանում է այդ դպրոցի պահպանված լավագույն օրինակներից մեկը:

Կազմի արձանագրության, ձեռագրական աղբյուրների և համեմատական նյութերի ուսումնասիրությունը հնարավորություն է տալիս նույնականացնել գրքի տիրոջը 1725–1745 թթ. Նոր Ջուղայի Ս. Ամենափրկիչ վանքի թեմակալ առաջնորդ, նշանավոր մանկավարժ և եկեղեցական գործիչ Աստվածատուր Ֆահրապապոցու հետ: Վերլուծվում են նաև Աստվածատուր վարդապետի կյանքն ու գործունեությունը, նրա դերակատարությունը Կոստանդնուպոլսի և Նոր Ջուղայի կրթական ու հոգևոր կյանքում, ինչպես նաև նրա կապերը հայկական գրքային մշակույթի հետ:

Հատուկ կարևորություն ունի նաև Հակոբ Դ. Ջուղայեցու (1655–1680) կաթողիկոսական կնիքի առկայությունը, որը պահպանվել է Աստվածաշնչի երկու առանցքային էջերում: Այդ կնիքը վկայում է գրքի վաղ շրջանառության մասին և թույլ է տալիս այն կապել կաթողիկոսի հովանավորությամբ տարածված օրինակների խմբի հետ:

Բացի դրանից՝ ուսումնասիրվում են գրքում պահպանված այլ հետքեր՝ ձեռագիր լրացումները, փոխարինված վերջաբանը և Ղաջարական շրջանի իշխանական կերպարի մատիտանկարը, որոնք վկայում են գրքի երկարատև օգտագործման և փոխանցման պատմության մասին:

Ուսումնասիրությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ “Morgan Library & Museum”-ում պահվող Ոսկանյան Աստվածաշնչի այս օրինակը կարևոր սկզբնաղբյուր է հայկական տպագրության, կազմարարական արվեստի, Նոր Ջուղայի մշակութային միջավայրի և վաղ նոր շրջանի հայկական մտավոր կյանքի պատմության համար՝ բացահայտելով առաջին տպագիր հայերեն Աստվածաշնչի մինչ այժմ անհայտ դրվագները:

**Keywords:** Voskan Bible, New Julfa, inscribed bindings, Archbishop Astvazadour Fakhrabadtsi, Provenance Studies, Armenian Printing, Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsi, seals, Armenian Bookbinding, Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum.

**How to cite (APA style):** Petoyan, S., Chookaszian, E. (2026), The Voskan Bible of Archbishop Astvazadour Fakhrabadtsi in the Morgan Library & Museum (PML 199389): An Inscribed New Julfa Binding and Armenian Practices of Commemorative Book Patronage and Distribution, *Herald of the Armenian Library Association*, 1(7), 145-170. [https://doi.org/10.54503/2953-8092.2026.1\(7\)-145](https://doi.org/10.54503/2953-8092.2026.1(7)-145)

### **Introduction**

The present article examines a remarkable copy of the first printed Armenian Bible, commonly known as the Voskan Bible, distinguished by a number of exceptional features that set it apart from other known examples of the edition. In January 2025, we were contacted by Adam Weinberger (New York, USA) and Robert van den Graven of Konstantinopel Rare & Fine Books (Enschede, the Netherland) to prepare an expert assessment of this previously unpublished copy. Shortly thereafter, the volume was acquired by the Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum (New York City), where it is now preserved under the shelfmark PML 199389.

Beyond its importance as a witness to the history of Armenian printing, this particular copy presents a unique combination of provenance marks, ownership inscriptions, and binding features that shed new light on the reception and circulation of the Voskan Bible within Armenian communities of the early modern period.

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach combining codicological, art-historical, and historical analysis. The research is based on the examination of the Morgan Library copy of the Voskan Bible, including its physical structure, binding, inscriptions, seals, annotations, and later additions. Comparative analysis was conducted with related manuscripts and inscribed bindings preserved in the Matenadaran, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and the Monastery of the Holy Savior in New Julfa in order to identify the owner, reconstruct the provenance of the volume, and contextualize its binding. Archival, manuscript, and

published sources were further consulted to reconstruct the biography of the owner and to examine the broader practices of commemorative book patronage, ownership, and distribution in the Armenian communities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Through an analysis of its provenance, physical characteristics, and historical significance, this study seeks to highlight the unique qualities of the volume and to situate it within the broader history of Armenian printing, bookbinding, and book culture. By examining the evidence preserved within this copy, the article contributes to our understanding of the transmission, ownership, and continued veneration of the first printed Armenian Bible among Armenian communities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### ***The Voskan Bible and the Armenian Printing Revolution***

The first printed Armenian Bible, published in Amsterdam between 1666 and 1668 under the supervision of Voskan Vardapet<sup>1</sup> Yerevantsi, occupies a foundational place in the history of Armenian printing and early modern Armenian culture. Commonly referred to as the “Voskan Bible,” this monumental publication represented not only a technological and intellectual achievement, but also a major artistic and cultural synthesis that united Armenian manuscript traditions with the visual and typographic language of early modern European printing. The publication became one of the most influential books in Armenian history, serving for centuries as the standard printed version of the Armenian Bible and profoundly shaping Armenian artistic production during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The project emerged through the combined efforts of numerous individuals, including Deacon Matevos Tsaretsi, merchant Avetis Ghlichentsi, Voskan Vardapet Yerevantsi, Hovhannes Yerevantsi, and Karapet Vardapet Andrianatsi (PETOYAN 2023: 229).

Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi played a decisive role in initiating the project. Recognizing that such a monumental publication could only

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<sup>1</sup> Vardapet – Archimandrite.

be realized in a major European printing center, he dispatched Matevos Tsaretsi to Europe in 1656 with instructions to establish an Armenian printing house.

After encountering difficulties in Italy due to Catholic ecclesiastical restrictions, Tsaretsi relocated to Amsterdam, whose relatively tolerant commercial environment allowed foreign printing enterprises to flourish. Before beginning the Bible itself, the printing house produced several smaller books in order to test the Armenian typefaces engraved by the renowned master Christophe van Dyck.

Following the death of Matevos Tsaretsi, Avetis Ghlichentsi assumed financial responsibility for the printing house and invited his brother Voskan Yerevantsi to Amsterdam. Voskan arrived carrying with him the royal manuscript Bible commissioned by Hetum II in 1295 (Matenadaran Ms. 180), which served as the principal textual prototype for the printed edition.

The Bible was printed between March 11, 1666 and October 13, 1668, an astonishingly rapid accomplishment for the period. The quality of the typography, engraving, layout, and ornamentation surpassed all previous Armenian printed books and established a new artistic and technical standard for Armenian publishing. The Bible is illustrated with numerous woodcuts derived from European engraving traditions, many of them associated with Christoffel van Sichem the Younger and ultimately based on compositions by artists such as Albrecht Dürer, Hendrick Goltzius, and Maarten de Vos. Closely related to illustrations published in seventeenth-century Dutch Bibles, these engravings introduced Western European iconographic models into Armenian book art and exerted a lasting influence on Armenian manuscript illumination, engraving, and decorative arts throughout the eighteenth century.

The Bible is printed in two columns, with the text block measuring approximately 21×14.7 cm. The title page is followed by a comparative table of Armenian and Arabic numerals and Voskan's preface dedicated to Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi. The publication concludes with

an untitled poem attributed to Hetum II of Cilician Armenia, inherited from the manuscript prototype used for the edition (KHACHATRYAN 2018: 139).

The pages of the Bible are double-numbered in Armenian letters and Arabic numerals, dividing the publication into two principal sections.

Two distinct editions of the Voskan Bible may be identified among the surviving copies, differing from one another in several textual and structural features. The first edition is more closely aligned with the Vulgate tradition of the Catholic Church and includes the deuterocanonical works *The Prayer of Manasseh*, *King of Judah* and *Fourth Ezra*, both of which fall outside the biblical canon of the Armenian Apostolic Church. These two texts are absent from the second edition, resulting in a reduction of twenty-six pages in the second pagination when compared with the first edition (KHACHATRYAN 2018: 133-152).

In copies belonging to the first edition, the Bible consists of eight unnumbered preliminary pages, followed by a first pagination comprising 628 pages and a second pagination comprising 834 pages. The total extent of the volume is therefore 1,472 pages. Although the printed page numbers add up to only 1,470, a pagination error in the text causes pages 175 and 176 of the second pagination to be numbered twice (VOSKANYAN, KORKOTYAN, SAVALYAN 1988: 44), each occurrence corresponding to different content. As a result, the actual number of pages reaches 1,472.

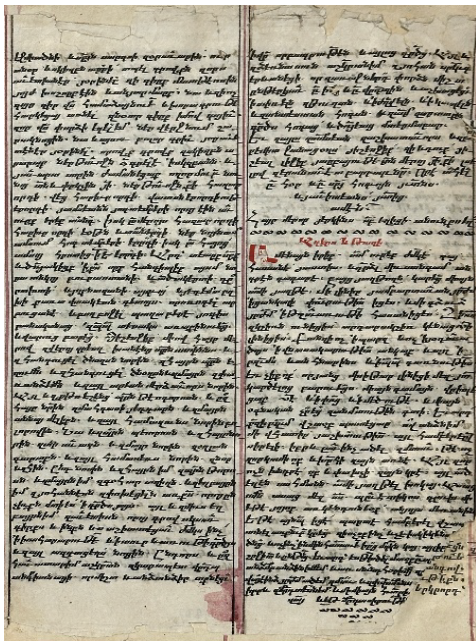
In copies of the second edition, the first pagination remains unchanged, while the second pagination is reduced to 808 pages. Consequently, the total extent of the volume amounts to 1,446 pages.

### ***General Description of PML 199389***

The Morgan Library copy belongs to the first edition type of the Voskan Bibles. Its second pagination contains 834 pages.

Overall, the volume is in a remarkably good state of preservation. The leaves are generally clean and unworn, and both the original binding and title page remain intact. Nevertheless, the book exhibits se-

veral minor losses, restorations, and other noteworthy particularities that merit closer examination and will be discussed below. The present copy lacks the original printed colophon on folios 833–834, which was replaced during the eighteenth century by a handwritten version reproducing the content of the missing printed text [img. 1].



img. 1.

The original colophon replaced by a handwritten one, Voskan Bible, Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, PML 199389, folio 834

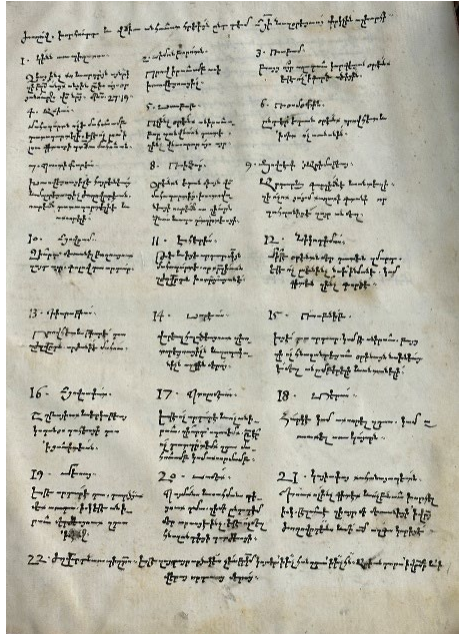
Immediately after the handwritten replacement colophon appears the Prayer of Euphrates, copied by hand. This text is absent from printed editions of the Voskan Bible but appears in the royal manuscript Bible commissioned by Hetum II in 1295, which served as the principal manuscript prototype for the printed edition. The inclusion of this prayer demonstrates that the owner or scribe responsible for the additions maintained direct familiarity with manuscript traditions and consciously sought to restore elements omitted from the printed version.

The volume also contains an additional manuscript folio [img. 2] presenting twenty-two quotations under the title “The Assembly, Council

and Judgment of the Unbelieving Jew Against Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the World.” A concluding note associated with this appendix bears the date 1705. Several additional notes in the margins and throughout the book appear to have been written by the same hand, one of them dated 1820.

Img. 2.

An additional manuscript folio presenting twenty-two quotations under the title “The Assembly, Council and Judgment of the Unbelieving Jew Against Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the World.” A concluding note associated with this appendix bears the date 1705, Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, PML 199389.



The printed text and replacement colophon are executed in boldgir script, while later annotations and additions are written in notgir.

It is also noteworthy that a blank leaf has been inserted between pages 718 and 719. Examination of the volume indicates that this leaf does not form part of the original printed structure of the Voskan Bible and was most likely added during a later rebinding or restoration campaign. Its absence from other known copies of the edition further supports the conclusion that it represents a subsequent intervention rather than an original component of the publication.

Another noteworthy feature of the Morgan Library copy is the system of red markings added throughout the volume to distinguish the

biblical text from the marginal commentary. The pages were ruled by hand with red vertical lines framing the two-column text block, closely following the layout conventions of medieval Armenian manuscripts. Since these lines were added after printing, they likely reflect a deliberate effort by an owner or binder to adapt the printed book to the visual standards of manuscript culture. Their presence demonstrates the enduring influence of manuscript traditions on the reception, use, and presentation of early Armenian printed books, blurring the boundaries between manuscript and print culture in the seventeenth century.

***The Binding of PML 199389 and the New Julfa Tradition***

The most remarkable feature of this copy, however, is its original leather binding [img. 3], which preserves a dated and inscribed colophon. Such evidence is exceptionally rare and offers unique insights into the provenance, ownership history, and circulation of the volume.



**Img. 3.**

*The original leather binding of Morgan Library's Voskan Bible, with the inscription mentioning the name of Astuatsatur of Fakhabad, Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, PML 199389.*

The binding itself represents an outstanding example of the New Julfa tradition of inscribed Armenian bindings, distinguished by the incorporation of historical and commemorative texts directly into the decorative program of the cover.

Within the artistic milieu of New Julfa between 1651 and 1698, the name of a certain Azaria Dpir, son of Priest Mkrtych, emerges as the founder of a distinctive workshop specializing in inscribed Armenian leather bookbindings (MALKHASYAN 2022: 68-78). The ornamental repertoire and decorative tools associated with this atelier continued to be employed for more than a century, until approximately 1736. During this period, over fifty dated and inscribed manuscript bindings were produced, four of which explicitly mention Azaria by name (IBID: 71-73). Nevertheless, despite the continuity of the workshop tradition, significant variations in design, composition, and decorative stamps can be observed among the surviving examples, suggesting the participation of multiple craftsmen and the gradual evolution of the atelier's artistic practices over time.

The binding of PML 199389 consists of two wooden boards covered with thick calf leather, together with a leather fore-edge flap and fastening strap. The most distinctive feature of the binding is the rectangular inscription, executed in erkat'agir script, that extends around the outer border of the upper cover. The text reads as follows: “ՅԻՇԱՏԱԿ Է ԱՍՏՈՒԱԾԱՇՈՒՆՉՍ ՖԱԿՐԱՊԱՏՅԻ ԱՍՏՈՒԱԾԱՏՈՒՐ ՎԱՐԴԱՊԵՏԻՆ ԵՒ ԾՆՕՂԱՅՆ ՅՈՒՆՆԵՍԻՆ ԵԹԱՐԻՆ ԵՒ ԵՂԲՕՐՆ ՀԱԲԻԲԻՆ ԵՒ ՔԵՐՅՆ ՀՈՒՓՍԻՄԷ ՇԱՄԲԱՐԻՆ ԹՎԻՆ ՌՃԽԸ”<sup>2</sup>.

The central field of the cover is decorated with a large sunburst motif composed of tongues of flame surrounding an octagonal geometric star. Similar motifs appear on earlier Armenian bindings from Greater

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<sup>2</sup> The inscription reads: “This Bible is in memory of Astvadzadour vardapet from Fakhabad, [and his] parents Hovhannes and Yetar, [his] brother Habib and [his] sisters Hripsime [and] Shambar in the year 1699”.

Armenia dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Additional geometric and floral motifs decorate the corners and central field.

The binding was executed through blind tooling, using engraved metal tools bearing floral and geometric patterns. This technique reflects a synthesis of Renaissance European and Islamic artistic traditions characteristic of New Julfa culture (KOUYMJIAN 1995: 11-34). Certain motifs, such as the sunburst, appear to have been produced locally in Julfa, while smaller ornamental tools may have been imported from Europe (MERIAN 1993).

The inscription dated 1699 demonstrates that the binding decorations were added after the printing and binding of the book itself (MERIAN 1996: 280-291; MERIAN 1991: 413), which had been completed in 1668.

It should also be noted that the binding of the Bible was generally carried out at the discretion and expense of the purchaser and was often executed by local binders outside the Armenian printing house in Amsterdam. As a result, the production of bindings constituted a separate stage in the life of the book and was not necessarily undertaken immediately after printing.

Sources indicate that even decades after the publication of the Voskan Bible, unbound copies remained in circulation. This circumstance was not related to the printing process itself, but rather to the fact that bookbinding was an independent craft frequently carried out after the distribution of the printed sheets and, in some cases, never completed for every copy. This helps explain the remarkable diversity of bindings and decorative programs found among surviving copies of the Voskan Bible today. The rarity of available copies is further illustrated by the experience of Abbot Mekhitar of Sebaste. When preparing his own biblical publication, he attempted to acquire copies of the Voskan Bible but encountered considerable difficulties. According to Sahak Vardapet Chemchemian, even in Constantinople it was impossible to obtain a copy of the Bible, including unbound examples, indicating that by the early

eighteenth century the edition had already become scarce and highly sought after (CHEMCHEMIAN 1980: 74).

Dated inscribed leather bindings constitute a uniquely Armenian phenomenon associated particularly with New Julfa during the period between approximately 1658 and 1750. Dickran Kouymjian identified roughly ninety such bindings (KOUYMJIAN 1995: 11-34), many of exceptionally high artistic quality.

A closely related binding [img. 4] appears on another copy of the Voskan Bible preserved in the Matenadaran collection in Yerevan (N 2391). The strong similarity between the two examples suggests that both owners occupied distinguished positions within Armenian ecclesiastical and social circles.

**Img. 4.**

*The inscribed leather binding of  
Voskan Bible preserved in the  
Matenadaran collection in  
Yerevan (N 2391).*



***Provenance of the Bible***

The inscription on the binding allows the identification of the owner as Astvadzadour vardapet from Fakhrabad. This identification is confirmed through comparison with a Gospel manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF Arménien 25), copied and illuminated in Venice in 1659 (KÉVORKIAN AND TER-STÉPANIAN 1998, Ms. 25) [img. 5].



**Img. 5.**

*Gospel book commissioned by Astuatsatur of Fakhrabad, from the collection of Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF Arménien 25), copied and illuminated in Venice in 1659.*

The Paris Gospel manuscript contains later colophons added by Archbishop Astvadzadour in which he identifies himself as “the pastor and leader of the church of Holy Savior of New Julfa.” These colophons mention the same family members appearing in the binding inscription of the present Bible: Hovhannes, Yetar, Habib, Hripsime, and Shambar.

The BNF Gospel manuscript likewise preserves an inscribed New Julfa-style binding reading: “This Saint Gospel Book is in memory of Astvadzadour vardapet from Fakhrabad and my parents, in the year 1730 August 3”.

Astvatsatur's name is likewise preserved on two additional inscribed leather bindings belonging to manuscripts currently housed in the Matenadaran collection in Yerevan. These are a small *Joghovatsu* (Compilation), Ms. 2029 (GENERAL CATALOGUE OF MANUSCRIPTS 2012: 1103-1104), dated 1696, and the History of the Ecumenical Councils (*Patmut'awn Tiezerakan Zhoghovots*), Ms. 9334 (CATALOGUE OF MANUSCRIPTS 1970: 911-912), copied in Galatia and bound in New Julfa in 1709. According to A. Malkhasyan, both bindings were produced in the atelier of Azaria in New Julfa. However, the decorative stamps employed on the binding of the Morgan Library Bible and the BNF Gospel manuscript differ noticeably from those found on the two Matenadaran manuscripts attributed to Azaria's atelier. These differences are evident both in the ornamental vocabulary and in the execution of the decorative program. It is therefore possible that the Morgan and BNF bindings were not produced by Azaria himself, but rather by later craftsmen working within his artistic tradition. Such an attribution would suggest the continued activity of the workshop beyond its founder's lifetime, with subsequent generations of binders adapting and expanding the repertory of tools and decorative motifs inherited from the atelier.

These parallels demonstrate that Archbishop Astvadzadour maintained a particular preference for inscribed bindings and commissioned at least four important books to be decorated in this manner.

### ***Astvatsatur Vardapet of Fakhrabad: Scholar, Educator, and Church Leader***

Astvadzadour Vardapet was one of the most distinguished Armenian teachers and theologians of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He originated from the town of Fakhrabad, located near New Julfa in a region bordering Mazandaran, and is therefore referred to in the sources both as Julfayetsi and Fakhrabadtsi. Owing to his gentle and peace-loving character, he acquired the sobriquet "Aghavni" ("The Dove") (TER-HOVHANYANTS 1881: 57).

The name of Astvazdour Vardapet appears frequently in manuscripts copied in New Julfa, both as a scribe and as the recipient of manuscripts<sup>3</sup>. The colophons preserved in these codices occasionally contain references to episodes from his life, making it possible to reconstruct certain aspects of his biography and to obtain valuable information concerning his activities.

In one such colophon, Astvazdour Vardapet recounts important milestones in his spiritual career. In 1687 he left Fakhradad for Isfahan and New Julfa with the intention of embracing monastic life. Prior to this, he had already received ecclesiastical orders from Bishop Markos, who was his first teacher and spiritual mentor. After arriving in New Julfa, he continued his education and spiritual formation under Stepanos Vardapet, from whom he received the subsequent ecclesiastical ranks. In 1688 he was elevated to the higher monastic orders, receiving the phelonion and veghar, the traditional vestments of Armenian monastic profession. In the same year he was ordained a priest, and in 1691 he was granted the authority of a vardapet. In 1706 he was consecrated bishop by his teacher Aleksandr I Jughayetsi.<sup>4</sup> Aleksandr served as abbot of the Monastery of the Holy Savior in New Julfa between 1697 and 1706 and subsequently as Catholicos of All Armenians from 1706 to 1714.

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<sup>3</sup> Among the most important are a second *Compilation* (Holy Savior Monastery Ms. 269), copied and received by Astvazdour as a priest in 1689; a manuscript of *Gregory the Theologian's Orations* (Holy Savior Monastery Ms. 360), copied by Astvazdour the Hieromonk in 1694; a *Compilation* (Matenadaran Ms. 2029), copied and received by Astvazdour Vardapet at the Monastery of the Holy Savior in New Julfa in 1696; and a copy of the *Treasury of the Testimonies of the Vardapets* (Holy Savior Monastery Ms. 593), copied and received by Ter Astvazdour in 1699.

<sup>4</sup> Holy Savior Monastery, Ms. 593 (*Gandz Vkhayut'eants Vardapetats* [Treasury of the Testimonies of the Vardapets]), copied and received by Ter Astvazdour, New Julfa (Monastery of the Holy Savior), 1699 (see MINASSIAN 1972: 74-75).

In the colophon of another manuscript, Astvadzadour Vardapet names, in addition to Aleksandr Jughayetsi, two other eminent theologians as his teachers: Hovhannes and Mikayel<sup>5</sup>. The former has been identified with the celebrated theologian, philosopher, logician, grammarian, and painter Hovhannes Jughayetsi Mrkuz, one of the most influential intellectual figures of seventeenth-century New Julfa. Following the example of his teacher, Astvadzadour Vardapet attached particular importance to the study of the “external sciences” (ALPOYAJIAN 1947: 571, 573). In the Armenian educational system of the medieval and early modern periods, this term referred to grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy, disciplines that continued to occupy an important place in the curriculum of Armenian vardapetarans and schools throughout the seventeenth century (BAKHCHINYAN 2007: 13).

Aleksandr Jughayetsi actively opposed the activities of Latin missionaries and Catholic preachers in New Julfa. When the Armenian community of Constantinople appealed to the Catholicos of All Armenians requesting the dispatch of several vardapets to counter the growing Catholic influence among the Armenians of the Ottoman capital, Astuatsatur Vardapet, already renowned as a teacher, was chosen for this mission. Catholicos Aleksandr sent him to Constantinople to combat Catholicism through educational and literary activity, considering the teaching of grammar and logic to be among the principal foundations of contemporary learning (ALPOYAJIAN 1947: 571, 573).

According to Astuatsatur’s own testimony, he arrived in Constantinople as a delegate on 7 April 1707. He records this information in the preface to the edition of Agathangelos’ History published in 1709. Catholicos Aleksandr Jughayetsi entrusted Astuatsatur Vardapet with a manuscript copy of Agathangelos’ History written in his own hand and sent it to Constantinople for publication at the printing house of Grigor

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<sup>5</sup> Holy Savior Monastery, Ms. 360 (*Gregory the Theologian, Orations*), copied by Astvadzadour Abegha, New Julfa (Monastery of the Holy Savior), 1694 (see MI-NASSIAN 1972: 52).

Marzvanetsi. However, disturbances that erupted within the Armenian Patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem delayed the publication for approximately two to three years. The work was eventually printed in 1709–1710.

During this period (1707–1710), Astuatsatur Vardapet established a private school in Constantinople. Among its students was the future scholar and poet Baghdasar Dpir (BAKHCHINYAN 2007: 12). The eighteenth-century historian Khachatur Jughayetsi wrote of Astuatsatur Vardapet: “...Astuatsatur Vardapet later went to Byzantium and enlightened them there by teaching the sciences of the external books; from him Baghdasar Dpir learned and composed his Grammar and other beneficial works...” [KHACHATUR JUGHAYETSI 1905: 215]<sup>6</sup>.

Baghdasar Dpir first mentions his teacher in the colophon of the *Aybbenaran* (Primer), printed at the press of Grigor Marzvanetsi in 1723, referring to him as “my tireless teacher, the theologian vardapet Astuatsatur.” He again commemorates him in the colophon of the *Narek* published in 1726, calling him “Aghavni Astuatsatur Vardapet of Fakhra-bad”.

Even more significant is Baghdasar Dpir’s testimony in his two-volume *Grammar* (*K’erakanut’iwn*), published between 1736 and 1738, where he writes:

“My tireless teacher, the humble-minded theologian Astuatsatur Vardapet Jughayetsi ... came to Constantinople as the supreme delegate of Holy Etchmiadzin. Here in Constantinople, together with other brethren, he labored greatly in educating the untrained immaturity of my youthful age. He was so devoted to teaching that even if the hour of instruc-

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<sup>6</sup> The inscription reads: «...Աստուածատուր վարդապետն՝ որ յայպս գնաց ի Բիւզանդիոն լուսաւորեաց զնոսս՝ ուսուցանելով անդ զգիտութիւնս արտաքին գրոց, յորմէ ուսաւ Պաղտատասար դպիրն՝ և արար զքերականութիւն և զայլ շահեկան արդիւնս...».

tion coincided with mealtime, he would forgo eating and complete his lesson and admonition”<sup>7</sup> (BAGHDASAR DPIR 1736–1738: 599).

This testimony not only highlights Astuatsatur Vardapet’s educational activities but also underscores his extraordinary dedication to pedagogy.

From 1725 until 1745, Astuatsatur Vardapet served as diocesan leader of the Monastery of the Holy Savior in New Julfa. He became known for his peaceful disposition, administrative abilities, and cultural and educational initiatives. During his tenure, both monastic discipline and the intellectual environment of the monastery were significantly strengthened. He died in 1745 and was buried in the northern gavit (narthex) of the Monastery of the Holy Savior (TER-HOVHANYANTS 1881: 57).

### ***The Seal of Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi and the Distribution of the Voskan Bible***

On the first page of the Book of Genesis and again on page 718 of the second pagination sequence, corresponding to the final page of the Book of Revelation and marking the conclusion of the biblical canon before the beginning of the deuterocanonical books, the Morgan Library copy preserves the red ink seal of Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi (1655–1680). The seal [img. 6] depicts the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator kneeling before Christ, who indicates with a hammer the future site of the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin. Two angels flank the central scene, while the lower register contains the Lamb of God bearing a cross, a symbol associated with the Armenian Catholicosate since the twelfth century.

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<sup>7</sup> The inscription reads: «Չանձանձիր վարժապետն իմ հեզահոզի, զաստուածաբան Աստուածատուր վարդապետն Ջուղայեցի ... եկն ի Կոստանդնուպօլիս ծայրագոյն նուիրակ... Սուրբ Էջմիածնի: Եւ աստ ի Կոստանդնուպօլիս ընդ այլոց եղբարց՝ առ ի վարժել զանվարժ խակութիւն տհաս հասակիս, բազում աշխատանս աշխատեցաւ: Որև դաս ասելոյ այնքան ունէր փոյթ, մինչ զի թէ ի ժամ ճաշոյն հանդիպէր, թողոյր զուտելն և վճարէր զխրատն...».



**Img. 6.**

*Red seal of Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi (1655–1680), depicting the vision of St. Gregory the Illuminator before Christ indicating the future site of the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin, flanked by two angels and surmounted by the Lamb of God holding a cross.*

The presence of this seal is of considerable importance for reconstructing the early circulation of the Voskan Bible. Although the majority of the edition was undoubtedly intended for sale in order to offset the enormous expenses of printing and to finance future publications, a number of copies were also distributed as presentation volumes. Among the known recipients were prominent ecclesiastical and secular figures, including Pope Clement IX and King Louis XIV of France. Other copies appear to have been entrusted to Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi, who distributed them to monasteries, churches, clerics, and distinguished benefactors within the Armenian world.

Evidence for such a distribution practice survives in several copies of the Voskan Bible. Particularly significant are two examples in

which page 718 of the second pagination bears both the red circular seal of the Catholicos and a dedicatory inscription written by Hakob Jughayetsi himself. One of these copies was presented to a monk of one of the monasteries of Shorot (National Library of Armenia, inv. no. 958-2000, reg. no. 2165 AH), while the other was donated to the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Tsghna (private collection, Yerevan). These copies demonstrate that the Catholicos actively participated in the dissemination of the newly printed Bible and employed selected copies as prestigious gifts intended to strengthen ecclesiastical and communal ties.

Nevertheless, a number of unresolved questions still surround the circumstances under which the volume came into the possession of Astvadzadour Vardapet. The inscription on the binding of the Morgan Library Bible is dated 1699. By that time, Astvadzadour Vardapet had not yet been consecrated bishop, a dignity he would attain only in 1706. At the same time, Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi, whose seal appears in the volume, had died in 1680. It is therefore unlikely that the Catholicos personally presented this copy to Astvadzadour, who at that date was still a young cleric at the beginning of his ecclesiastical career. It also seems improbable that Astvadzadour would have commissioned an entirely new binding for the Bible some thirty-three years after its publication, replacing an earlier binding solely to add his own ownership inscription. The evidence instead suggests a different scenario. The presence of Hakob IV's seal indicates that the volume belonged to a group of copies distributed under the authority of the Catholicos. It is conceivable that a number of these copies reached New Julfa in an unbound or temporarily bound state and remained there for some time before being assigned to individual owners. Within this context, the 1699 binding may mark the moment when the volume entered the possession of Astvadzadour Vardapet. By that date he had already established himself as a respected vardapet within the scholarly and ecclesiastical circles of New Julfa. Given his close relationship with Aleksandr Jughayetsi, who was then serving as abbot of the Monastery of the Holy Savior and would later

become Catholicos of All Armenians, it is plausible that the book reached Astvadzadour through his teacher's circle. Although the precise circumstances of the transfer cannot be reconstructed, the combined evidence of the seal, the binding inscription, and Astvadzadour's biography suggests that the volume remained within the institutional and intellectual milieu of New Julfa before passing into his possession at the end of the seventeenth century.

The seal of Hagob Jughayetsi thus constitutes valuable evidence not only for the history of ownership of this particular volume, but also for the broader mechanisms through which the first printed Armenian Bible circulated among the intellectual and ecclesiastical elite of the Armenian diaspora during the late seventeenth century.

In addition to the red seal of Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi, the title page bears a smaller circular seal impressed in black ink. Although the impression is partially worn and no longer fully legible, it appears to correspond to the personal seal of Astvadzadour Fakhrabadtsi. Comparable impressions are preserved in at least two other manuscripts associated with him: a *Joghovatsu* (Compilation), Matenadaran Ms. 2029, dated 1696, and a copy of the *Discourses of Gregory the Theologian* preserved in the collection of the Monastery of the Holy Savior in New Julfa (Ms. 360) (MINASSIAN 1972: 51-53), copied in 1694.

While the poor state of preservation of the seal prevents a definitive reading of its inscription, its size, form, and apparent design closely resemble the impressions found in these manuscripts.

#### ***Evidence of Later Circulation: The Qajar Drawing***

On the recto of the first unnumbered folio appears a pencil drawing of a young Qajar prince [img. 7] seated cross-legged and holding his belt. The figure wears the characteristic tall headgear associated with Qajar aristocracy.

Portraits of young princes and noble youths became highly popular in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Iranian visual culture (DIBA AND EKHTIAR 1998). The presence of this drawing suggests that the

Bible remained in Iran until at least the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The drawing likely reflects the interests of a later owner or reader who was familiar with contemporary Qajar artistic models.



7b.



7a.



7c.

**Img. 7.**

**7a.** *The first numbered folio from Morgan Library's Voskan Bible with a pencil drawing of a young Qajar prince, Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum, PML 199389.*

**7b.** *Seated Qajar Prince, late 18th–19th century, Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles K. Wilkinson, 72.26.6.*

**7c.** *The portrait of Hajji Mulla Aghasee shown kneeling reading a document, 1842, painting from the album N 1921,0614,0.1.3, The British Museum.*

Although executed informally, this addition represents an important trace of the continuing life of the book as an object circulating within Persian-Armenian cultural environments.

### *Conclusion*

The copy of the Voskan Bible examined in the present study represents far more than a well-preserved example of the first printed Armenian Bible. Through its unique combination of physical, historical, and documentary features, it offers a rare opportunity to reconstruct the life of a specific volume and to situate it within the broader intellectual and cultural networks of the Armenian world at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Particularly significant is the original New Julfa binding bearing a dated inscription of 1699. This inscription not only identifies the owner as Astvadzadour Vardapet of Fakhrabad, later Archbishop of New Julfa, but also preserves valuable information concerning his family and commemorative intentions. Together with the evidence provided by the Paris Gospel manuscript (BNF Arménien 25), the binding allows the reconstruction of a previously undocumented aspect of Astvadzadour's bibliophilic interests and demonstrates his evident preference for inscribed bindings as vehicles of memory and patronage.

The volume further preserves traces of its continued use and transmission through subsequent generations. The handwritten replacement of the missing printed colophon, the addition of the Prayer of Euphrates, manuscript annotations, and the later Qajar drawing all testify to the book's active life as a cherished object that remained in use long after its publication. These additions transform the Bible from a printed text into a layered historical document reflecting the intellectual, devotional, and artistic concerns of successive owners.

The present copy also contributes to our understanding of the circulation of the earliest Armenian printed books within the Armenian communities of Safavid Persia. The seal of Catholicos Hakob IV Jugha-yetsi, the New Julfa binding, and the documented connection with Archbishop Astvadzadour collectively demonstrate the close relationship between Armenian printing, ecclesiastical patronage, and the scholarly culture of New Julfa. As such, this volume occupies a unique position at the

intersection of Armenian printing history, bookbinding art, and intellectual history.

Ultimately, the significance of this Bible lies not only in its status as one of the earliest and most influential products of Armenian printing, but also in the extraordinary body of evidence it preserves concerning ownership, readership, commemoration, and cultural exchange. It stands as a rare witness to the enduring legacy of the Voskan Bible and to the vibrant scholarly and artistic milieu that shaped Armenian culture in the early modern period.

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