

Armenian Philology in the Modern Era

From Manuscript to Digital Text

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The Archaeology of the Armenian Manuscript: Codicology, Paleography, and Beyond

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The term “archaeology of the book” has become a catch phrase to describe the study of manuscripts as physical objects independent of their texts. It encompasses a number of sub-disciplines: codicology, paleography, binding technique, but also writing surface and method of illustration. Codicology includes ruling, the number of text columns, quire size, recalls (custodes), aspects of parchment and paper, and so forth. The major handbooks on Armenian paleography by Yakob Tašean, Garegin Yovsēp'ean, Ašot Abrahamyan, and our own *Album of Armenian Paleography* did not treat such matters. Fortunately, Armenian manuscript catalogues, beginning with Tašean's model-setting massive 1895 volume of the Vienna Mekhitarist collection and continuing with those of Venice, Jerusalem, and Yerevan of the past century, have consistently included much of the information mentioned above. In the last 25 years specialized studies moved Armenian codicology forward, particularly Sylvie Merian's work on Armenian binding technique, my own on the decoration of bindings, Thomas Mathews' study of miniature painting pigments, and the work of Michael Stone, Henning Lehmann, and myself on Armenian script analysis in the *Album of Armenian Paleography*. The compilers of the master catalogues of the Matenadaran, seven volumes (1984, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012) covering nos. 2400 of the 11,077 manuscripts¹ in the collection, have carefully noted among other things quire organization and watermarked paper as has Raymond Kévorkian in the recent catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Nira and Michael Stone have given extensive information of this type in their *Catalogue of the Additional Armenian Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin*.² The Matenadaran and Antelias catalogues have also systematically provided reproductions of the script for every manuscript and so has the BnF catalogue, but selectively.

The majority of the 31,000 Armenian manuscripts have found their way into a catalogue; Bernard Coulie's *Répertoire* with its three supplements, a work

1 A third volume was published of the résumé catalogue of all manuscripts in the Matenadaran after a long hiatus, volumes I and II having appeared in 1965 and 1970 covering MSS 1–10408: Malxasean & Tēr-Stepanean 2007, MSS 10409–11077.

2 Stone & Stone 2012.

sponsored by our Association, is an excellent guide to them.³ A masterlist of Armenian manuscripts, a project initiated by Michael Stone and Bernard Coulie, waits to be completed, but even more pressing is the continued publication of the Master Catalogue of the Matenadaran collection. More discouraging, despite the heroic work of the late Fr. Sahak Čemčemean, who prepared volumes 4–8 (1993–1998) of the Venice catalogue, more than 2,000 manuscripts in the collection wait publication with no one available to do the work. Nevertheless, with well over 20,000 manuscripts already listed in published catalogues, including the majority of manuscripts from the second largest collection at the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem,⁴ serious work on Armenian codicology can move forward.

1 From Roll to Codex

The early history of the Armenian codex, that is the manuscript with folded pages, is obscure and may remain so. Our oldest dated manuscripts are the Venice Mlk'ē Gospels of 862 and the Łazarean Gospels of 887 in the Matenadaran. Claims that certain not-specifically-dated manuscripts in the Matenadaran are even earlier are not convincing, though some of the 3,000 fragments, mostly recycled as guard leaves, are credibly earlier.⁵ Many of these fragments have been studied philologically, but few codicologically. The Armenian case is remarkable because we know with certainty that the first manuscripts were produced between 404–6, but is confounding due to the hiatus of 450 years between the invention of the alphabet and the first surviving dated codices. We are certain that hundreds of texts were copied and recopied thousands of times in scores of *scriptoria* in this “empty” period simply because those texts

3 Coulie 1992; *idem* 1995; *idem* 2000; *idem* 2004. Though I have embraced Coulie's figure of 31,000 Armenian codices, I have pointed out in a recent study based on a statistical analysis of a select group of manuscripts that we must add 8 to 12 % to the number of individually bound codices to account for volumes that contain more than one complete manuscript, thus, the figure should be between 32,000 and 34,000 individual manuscript: see Kouymjian 2012, 19. A much older study pointed out the value of statistical analyses of the data contained in published manuscript catalogues, see Kouymjian 1984; both articles are available at <http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/faculty/kouymjian/articles/index.htm>.

4 Polarean 1966–1991, MSS 1–2573.

5 Reservation on the antiquity of these fragments has also recently been expressed, Mouraviev 2010, Annex VI: “45–52. Calligraphie libraire antérieure au XI^e siècle?”, 164–184. However, recent palimpsest studies, especially that of Gippert 2010, reveal clearly underwriting before the ninth century.

have survived to our day through such transmission. It is hard to imagine that the technique of producing books remained static for four and a half centuries. What was the evolutionary process in the structure of the Armenian codex and the changes in such things as the script form and size? We do not know.

All Armenian manuscripts are parchment or paper codices, except for phylactery rolls (*hmayil*) from later centuries. The unique Armeno-Greek papyrus, to be discussed shortly, is an anomalous object. The philologist Charles Mercier, following an accepted notion borrowed from Latin paleography, wondered whether the evolution from an upright *erkat'agir* to a slanted one might be due to the passage from the papyrus roll to the codex.⁶ In neighboring Georgia codices of papyrus interleaved with parchment survive from the tenth century.⁷ Did Mesrop and his group first use rolls before codices? There are no Armenian papyrus manuscripts and no mention of any in the sources. Nevertheless, the large number of clay seals, seemingly originally attached to rolls of papyrus or parchment, found at Artaxata suggests a familiarity with this form.⁸

The codex triumphed over the roll in the fourth century. Therefore, it is likely that when Maštoc' devised an alphabet in the fifth century, Armenians used the codex right from the start without a transition from the roll.⁹ If Mesrop worked in the royal chancellery he would have been familiar with the writing culture on rolls, because archives were conservative institutions. The memory of the roll passed into the medieval period, because in some Armenian Gospel portraits of the Evangelists as scribes, they are seen copying an exemplar of a roll instead of the expected codex. This feature was probably borrowed from Byzantine manuscripts, which used the author portraits of classical texts as models for the Evangelists, and these pre-Christian texts were indeed written on papyrus rolls. The first Armenian appearance of this anachronism is in the early eleventh-century Trebizond Gospels, which was strongly influenced by Byzantine iconography with both Mark and Luke copying codices from rolls

6 Mercier 1978–1979, 51–58, especially 52 and 57: "... passage de la droite à la penchée. On a avancé que ce passage aurait accompagné l'emploi du codex au lieu du volumen".

7 These manuscripts were probably produced on Mt. Athos.

8 Thousands of clay seals were found in two "archives" at Artashat in a first-century context. These must have been attached to written documents, either papyrus or parchment, of which there is no trace. See the articles by Khachatrian 1996, and Manoukian 1996.

9 Tašean 1898, 93, had confirmed this notion a hundred years ago: "there is no trace that it (the papyrus) was ever used as a medium for writing among the Armenians".

on their lecterns.¹⁰ Yet, the tradition of the roll survives well into the Cilician period and curiously is also found among provincial manuscripts that owe nothing to the Byzantine tradition in either style or iconography.¹¹

2 Codicology: Structure of Manuscripts – Size, Support, Quires

Size. The earliest manuscripts were very large. Those of the ninth and tenth centuries, mostly Gospels, are on average 34×27 cm (by comparison, an A4 sheet is 29×21 cm.). Eleventh-century manuscripts remain quite large, 31×24 , until the last two decades when they drop in size to less than A4. There are also in the eleventh century at least two very small manuscripts, both now in Venice, signaling a future trend: a Gospel of 1001, 18×14 cm, and one of the tiniest books, a Gospel of St. John dated 1073, measuring just 6.4×4.7 cm, much smaller than a credit card. Afterward, the size drops dramatically: twelfth-century manuscripts are about 28% smaller, 23×16 cm, than eleventh century ones and more than a third smaller than those of the ninth-tenth centuries. In part this is explained by the text and the writing surface; Gospels and Bibles and other liturgical texts were always larger, and parchment manuscripts were a bit bigger than paper ones so with the increase both of the variety of texts and the use of paper, overall size was reduced. Furthermore, the twelfth century was a difficult moment for Armenia, kingless and under Seljuk occupation, yet, the next century was the high point in Armenian book culture. Manuscript production had increased in quantity and dramatically improved in quality; paper had become the dominant medium, and though manuscripts were smaller in size than in the ninth to the eleventh centuries, 28×18 cm, they were nearly 20% larger than those of the twelfth century. Nevertheless the trend was moving toward a smaller, more conveniently manipulated book, as was the case in Byzantium and Europe where manuscripts became more portable as a larger public became literate. Eventually there was a size standardization from the

10 Venice, Mekhitarist Library, V1400, St. Mark, fol. 101v, St. Luke fol. 299v; color ills., Kouymjian IAA, http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/iaa_miniatures/manuscript.aspx?ms=V1400G.

11 For instance, four Evangelists pictured together in an Armenian Gospel of 1224 hold rolls where one would expect codices: Halle University Library, Arm. MS no. 1, fol. 4v, Kouymjian 2011, 134, fig. 24.

fourteenth through the nineteenth centuries, roughly 20 × 14 cm, about half the size of the earliest manuscripts, two-thirds the size of an A4 sheet.¹²

Support. So too in time there was a major shift in the writing surface. Virtually all Armenian manuscripts to the twelfth century were made of parchment, even though the oldest paper manuscript dates to 971 or 981.¹³ The oldest Koranic manuscript on paper was copied just nine years earlier in 972, while in the West, although the oldest manuscript on paper is from the early eleventh century, its use only became widespread in the thirteenth century.¹⁴ In Armenia, however, already by the twelfth century, the majority of manuscripts, about 56%, were made from paper, no doubt supplied from such centers as Baghdad, where paper manufacture, assimilated after the Arab campaign in Central Asia around 751, was flourishing.¹⁵ By the fourteenth century, two-thirds of all Armenian codices were of paper and in the next century nearly 80%. From about 1500 on paper was the exclusive medium for manuscripts and the rare exception was for Gospels or Bibles. This respect for tradition is a common phenomenon; when papyrus gave way completely to parchment after the Arab conquest of Egypt, it was still used for papal, imperial, and private

12 These figures are based on a random sampling of 282 dated manuscripts from various libraries with the following results:

Century	Nr. dated MSS sampled	Height	Width
9–10th	12	34.4	26.7
11th	08	31.3	24.1
12th	18	22.6	16.2
13th	60	26.0	19.0
14th	39	20.2	14.2
15th	23	23.1	16.2
16th	35	18.7	13.5
17th	32	18.3	13.2
18th	37	22.3	14.9
19th	18	19.6	14.4

For more details see Kouymjian 2007b, 42.

13 Erevan, M2679, formerly Ējmiacin 102, a religious *Miscellany*; it is dated 971 or 981 depending on the reading of the second digit of the colophon; Stone, Kouymjian, Lehmann 2002, Nr. 11. For a tenth-century manuscript it is one of the smallest, 28 × 19 cm.

14 The oldest known paper document made in the West is the Missal of Silos in the Monastery of Santo Domingo of Silos near Burgas date usually to the eleventh century; its paper was probably produced in Muslim Spain. By the mid-thirteenth century paper was being manufactured in Italy.

15 Bloom 2001, 42–45 for details; for the early history of the use of paper in the Near East before the late tenth century, see 47–89.

documents until the tenth century. Jewish usage is still to write the Pentateuch and the Book of Esther for ritual use on parchment scrolls. This is a striking case of conservatism both of morphology and of material. It is worth remembering that parchment is said to have been invented in Pergamum in the second century B.C. and that the word derives from the name of the city. It enabled the development of the large codex, though the earliest codices are single quires of papyrus tied often at the top, inner corner (see above for very late usage in Georgia). Paper was cheaper and strong enough to make large codices.

Quires. The codex is made up of folded pages called bifolia, each comprising two folios or four pages. The structural use of quires or gatherings is clear to anyone who has tried to fold in half ever increasing numbers of sheets of paper; after a certain quantity not only is it difficult to fold the bundle, but the inside sheets have a tendency to get pushed out; the pack is not neat. By keeping the number of folded sheets or bi-folios between four and eight, depending on the thickness of the paper or parchment, folding was made easy. Diagrams illustrating this quire structure are now standard in monographs on individual manuscripts.¹⁶ Nearly all Armenian manuscripts to the mid-thirteenth century were made of 8-folio quires, even though almost all manuscripts have some inconsistent gatherings of random sizes from one to seven bi-folios. In the last years of the twelfth and the first of the thirteenth century one encounters 10-folio quires, but these never became popular. In Cilicia starting early in the thirteenth century, the 12-folio quire took hold and became the standard for Armenian books until the end of the scribal tradition.

To insure that the lines of text are uniformly rendered, Armenian manuscripts are consistently ruled with a dry point, and in later centuries in ink. The process of pricking or punching holes along the margins of folios as guide lines for ruling has been well described by Sylvie Merian in the catalogue for the exhibit *Treasures from Heaven*¹⁷ and need not be repeated here. There has been no comparative study of either ruling or pricking, however, among Armenian manuscripts.

3 Paleography

In the recently published *Album of Armenian Paleography* we tried to present an up-to-date study-manual of the discipline. In a long chapter, I tried to

¹⁶ Mathews and Sanjian 1991, 32–42.

¹⁷ Merian, Mathews, Orna 1994, esp. 125–128.

cover in elaborate detail almost everything important on the development of Armenian manuscript writing.¹⁸

Nevertheless, there are still questions and problems confronting Armenian paleography. First there is the terminology used to describe the various scripts: *erkat'agir*, *bolorgir*, *nōtrgir*, *štagir*.

The name *erkat'agir*, iron letter or letters, has perplexed almost all paleographers. In its most majestic form, the script is found in all early Gospel books; it is a grand script in all capitals similar to the imposing uncials of early Latin manuscripts. The *Nor baṛgirk'* of 1836–7 defines *erkat'agir* as “written with an iron stylus” with the derivative meanings “old manuscript”, “capital letter”.¹⁹ The dictionary attributes its earliest use to Mxit'ar Aparanc'i, known as Fra Mxit'arič', a Unitore father who wrote in the early fifteenth century.²⁰ A much older reference, however, is found in a short marginal colophon in a Gospel manuscript, generally dated to the tenth century, in the Mekhitarist library of Venice.²¹ “This *erkat'agir* is not good, do not blame me. In the y[ear] 360 (= 911)”.²² To explain the sense of iron letters, two theories have been proposed: the use of an iron stylus to write the letters or the use of iron oxide in the characteristic brownish ink of early manuscripts. Neither of these explanations is satisfactory. The preferred writing instrument for papyrus – the earliest light-weight writing surface – was a split reed from Egypt, the *calamus*, Armenian *kalam*. Even before the Arabs conquered Egypt, cutting off the unique source

18 Kouymjian 2002, 5–75.

19 *NBHL* 1836–7, I, 686b; Bedrossian 1985, 166, gives “written with a style (read stylus) or large needle, capital; capital letter”, Ciaciak 1837, 470: “written with an iron pen [on?] paper, parchment, or, written with capital letters, *scritto colle lettere majuscole*; the oldest text or manuscripts written with capital letters, *códice scritto a caráatteri majúscoli; lèttéra majúscola*”.

20 *NBHL* 1836–7, 588; the full quotation is given more clearly under the definition for (*grč'agir*): “Written with a pen (*grič'*), especially *boloragir* or *nōtragir*. The entire Psalter is not uniform; in order to be clear *erkat'agir* and (also) (*grč'agir* = *boloragir*), and other means. Histories of parchment and of paper, *erkat'agir* and *grč'agir*”. It has been suggested that *grč'agir* in this period is synonymous with *bolorgir*. Bedrossian 1985, gives the meaning, “written, manuscript” for *grč'agir*. Malxasyan 1955–1956, vol. 1, 587, raises doubt about the meaning: “1. written with an iron pen (?), manuscript written with *erkat'agir*. 2. the old form of Armenian letters”.

21 Venice, MS 123, fol. 4; cf. Kouymjian 2002, 67. Sargisean 1914, 544, the author is not sure what the four letters of the second marginal notation on the same page mean, but if *թ* equals the traditional symbol of “in the year”, then the following letters represent the date, namely 911; cf. Mat'evosyan 1988, no. 64, 50. Yovsēp'ean 1951, does not include this colophon in his collection.

22 *Ays erkat'agirs čē atēk, mi meladrēk'. I T' [uakanin] YK. (= 911).*

of papyrus, the Byzantines and Europeans had already turned to parchment as the favored material for book manuscripts and adopted the *penna*, the feather pen, for writing on it. Metal styluses were used in antiquity, but for durable materials such as clay tablets or waxed boards, the precursors of the codex. As for ferrous inks, many early Armenian manuscripts employed brown ink containing an iron oxide, rather than the black ink of Indian or Chinese origin. But the same brown ink is found in *bolorgir* manuscripts, so a thesis based on ink seems less convincing than the metal stylus theory.

How then do we explain the name iron letters? If the tenth century mention of *erkat'agir* in the Venice Gospels refers to the type of script used, we may associate it with two biblical passages in which the term iron is used in conjunction with writing or engraving. In both, the expression is, *grč'aw erkat'eaw*, "written with a stylus of iron". They are Job 19:23–24 ("Oh that my words . . . were graven with an iron pen in lead or on the stone as eternal witness")²³ and Jeremiah 17:1 ("The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the tablet of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars").²⁴ In both passages an iron stylus is used on hard surfaces. Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History* (I, 16) also describes engraving on the rock of the Van fortress by Semiramis: "And over the entire surface of the rock. Smoothing it like wax with a stylus, she inscribed many texts".²⁵ The term *erkat'agir*, therefore, probably refers rather to writing made by instruments of iron, that is lapidary inscriptions, the letters of which were in form the same as the majuscule used for Gospels, thus associating the "iron letters" with the Old Testament tradition of writing the holy text with a stylus of iron. If the term originated with the scribes of early Gospel manuscripts, one could speculate that the initial meaning of *erkat'agir* was simply the equivalent of "scriptural writing".

*Bolorgir*²⁶ or minuscule, the ancestor of modern Armenian type fonts, dominated scribal hands from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and continued on into the nineteenth. Its use for short phrases and colophons and even

23 Zōhrapean 1984 (1805), 482.

24 Zōhrapean 1984 (1805), 567.

25 Thomson 1978, 101; Movsēs Xorenac'i 1991, 54, "On each side of the stone, rather like leveling wax with a stylus, many letters were written on it".

26 The anonymous BnF manuscript of 1730 uses the term *boloragir* in parallel with *erkat'agir*, so too do some late eighteenth, early nineteenth century scholars; for a detailed discussion see Kouymjian 2002, 69–73.

for copying an entire manuscript is attested as early as the tenth century.²⁷ But it appears even earlier, or at least some of the *bolorgir* letter forms are found in the sixth or early seventh century Armenian papyrus and certain inscriptions and graffiti from the same paleo-Christian period.²⁸ Like medieval Latin and Greek minuscule, *bolorgir* uses majuscule or *erkat'agir* for capitals, creating for some letters quite different shapes for upper and lower case. Most authorities argue that the spread of *bolorgir* was due to time and economics: it saved valuable parchment because many more words could be copied on a page and conserved time because letters could be formed with fewer pen strokes than the three, four, or even five needed for *erkat'agir*.²⁹

The earliest reference I could find for *bolorgir* dates to the late twelfth century. Mxit'ar the scribe, probably writing in Greater Armenia, asks in a colophon: "... remember, in your holy prayers, Mxit'ar the drawer of this *bolorgir* and our parents. . .".³⁰ What is interesting about the reference is not just that it is centuries older than those quoted in earlier literature, but that it is from a manuscript written in transitional or mixed *erkat'agir-bolorgir* script, which for Mxit'ar was *bolorgir*.

Because *bolorgir* is angular with few letters that can be described as rounded, the term has troubled specialists, perhaps in part because they have interpreted its meaning as "rounded letters". In the earliest seventeenth-century Western sources the Latin equivalents have been *orbicularis* (Rivola, Galano) and *rotunda* (Schröder). This may have had the sense of lower-case, the Latin *rotunda* for minuscule rather than a description of the shape of the letters. In Armenian, *bolor* does not only mean "round" or "rounded"; it has an older and stronger sense of "all" or "whole", that is "complete". Thus, scribes when using the term may have just as well meant "whole script", one with both

27 The oldest paper manuscript, M2679, a *Miscellany* of 971 or 981 is a mixed *erkat'agir, bolorgir* script. See above note 13 for a general discussion.

28 Mouraviev 2010, collected in Annex VI; on the papyrus see below.

29 Mercier 1978–9, 53: "Is it not also possible that *bolorgir*, used at first informally, was elevated to formal status because of considerations of time and expense?"

30 Yovsēp'ean 1951, 661–662, no. 299, from a manuscript of Commentaries formerly in the collection of the Monastery of the Holy Cross (Surb Nšan) of Sebastia, Gušakean 1961, 101; cf. Mat'evosyan 1988, 326, no. 338.

upper and lower case letters, like a standard minuscule and unlike majuscule or *erkat'agir*, which had no real capital letters, rather it used the same letters just written bigger.

The other major paleographical problem can be popularly stated as: what letters did Mesrop Maštoc' use? Most scholars hold that Mesrop invented and used a large, upright rounded majuscule, similar to that found in early lapidary inscriptions, and thus call it Mesropian *erkat'agir*. It is further argued that this script eventually went through various changes – slanted, angular, small *erkat'agir* – and eventually evolved into *bolorgir*, and in time into *nōtrgir* and *štagir*. Doubt about such a theory started quite early; Tašean himself, the pioneer of the scientific study of Armenian paleography, hesitated and Garo Łafadaryan in 1939 even maintained that *bolorgir* already existed in the time of Mesrop.³¹

It was also once believed that minuscule gradually developed from earlier Latin and Greek formal majuscule found in inscriptions and the oldest manuscripts. But the late nineteenth-century discovery in Egypt of thousands of Greek and Roman papyri forced scholars to abandon this notion. The roots of Greek cursive of the ninth century can be traced back to the informal cursive of pre-Christian papyri. Latin minuscule is evident already in third-century papyri.³² Is it possible that along with majuscule *erkat'agir* some form of an informal cursive script, which later developed into *bolorgir*, was available in the fifth century?³³

Uncial was used in the West for more formal writing: Gospels, important religious works, and luxury manuscripts. The data gathered for the *Album of Armenian Paleography* point to a similar pattern. The earliest *bolorgir* manuscripts appear chronologically anomalous until one notes that they are philosophical or less formal texts rather than Gospels.

Examination of pre-Christian Latin papyri shows the origins of Caroline script (similar to Armenian *bolorgir*) in earlier cursive minuscule found in them. The invention of the Armenian alphabet in the early fifth century

31 Details in Kouymjian 2002, 70–71.

32 Bischoff 1985, 70.

33 Mercier 1978–9, 57, seemed inclined toward such an hypothesis: “Si, dès le 10^e s., on trouve capitale et minuscule, on n'en peut conclure que ces deux écritures ont toujours coexisté . . .”. On the other hand, there are 500 years between the invention of the Armenian alphabet and the tenth century, plenty of time for an evolution to *bolorgir*.

precludes any pre-Christian antecedents.³⁴ Both Greek and Syriac,³⁵ the languages which most influenced Maštoc' in creating the Armenian alphabet, used cursive and majuscule in that period. It is difficult to imagine that Mesrop and his pupils, as they translated the Bible, a task that took decades, would have used the laborious original *erkat'agir* for drafts as they went along. The use of the faster-to-write intermediate *erkat'agir* seems more than probable, yet it was not a minuscule script, nor cursive. Unfortunately, except for the papyrus, no written documents in Armenian except codex manuscripts have survived before the thirteenth century.³⁶

Deciding between a theory of evolution of *bolorgir* versus the notion that *erkat'agir* and more cursive scripts co-existed from the fifth century will not be easy.³⁷ The development and use of later cursive scripts, *nōtrgir* and the modern every day script with attached letters, *štagir* are discussed in detail in the *Album of Armenian Paleography*.³⁸

3.1 Armeno-Greek Papyrus

The Armeno-Greek papyrus, once thought lost but rediscovered in the Bibliothèque nationale de France during research for the *Album of Armenian Paleography*, is a key document for the study of the evolution of Armenian writing.³⁹ It was brought to Paris from Egypt in the late nineteenth century; it provoked Tašean in the 1890s to write his study of Armenian paleography, even though he and subsequent scholars relied on a photograph of only a part of one side of the papyrus. Since the text is entirely in Greek, but written with the letters of Mesrop, it has been suggested that its author was either an Armenian merchant or an Armenian soldier in the Byzantine army trying to learn Greek. Its Greek contents have been thoroughly analyzed and published by James Clackson.⁴⁰ Whether it is of the early seventh, the sixth or even the fifth

34 Indeed, we have no Armenian manuscript writing of a certain date before the ninth century, though some scholars claim that an undated manuscript (M11056) is older and some fragments in Erevan are from the fifth century.

35 Here the reference is probably to Estrangelo, used for lapidary inscriptions, which Kaplan 2008, refers to as monumental Syriac in her doctoral dissertation.

36 The earliest Armenian chancellery documents are from the Cilician court (thirteenth century) and by then minuscule *bolorgir* was already the standard bookhand.

37 Łafadaryan 1939, believed a minuscule script existed from Maštoc's time not in the form of *bolorgir*, but as *nōtrgir* or notary script; see his conclusions, p. 71.

38 Kouymjian 2002, 73–75.

39 Kouymjian 2002, 59–65, for its importance to Armenian paleography and how I stumbled upon the papyrus in the BnF and references to my earlier articles of 1996, 1997, 1998.

40 Clackson 2000.

century, it is the oldest surviving, extensive, non-lapidary Armenian writing. Most of the letters have the form of angular or slanted *erkat'agir* with some letters looking more like *bolorgir* and others even like *štagir* with attached letters. The overall look is of a cursive script, unlike our earliest dated manuscripts all of which are copied centuries after the papyrus, thus, one can argue that the forms in the papyrus ante-date those of the Mesropian *erkat'agir* of the early Gospels, or stated differently, was this the kind of script used in Mesrop's time?

4 Binding

Binding structure has been very well studied by Sylvie Merian: the use of grecale, the v-shaped notches used for sewing bifolios and consolidating quires, the distinctive Armenian headband sewing, the method of attaching the book block to wooden boards, the use of textile linings or *doublures* to cover the board attachments (but not their artistic analysis).⁴¹

My own interest has been in the decoration of the leather through the study of inscribed and dated bindings⁴² and the localization and analysis of the New Julfa school of binding motifs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴³ However, no serious attempt has been made to present the basic decorative features of earlier bindings. The traditional motifs of these bindings are fashioned almost exclusively of tooled rope work or guilloche bands. I have classified them into three groups, each within an outer frame of braiding: 1) a braided cross on a stepped pedestal, 2) a rectangle filled with braided tooling, and 3) an intricate geometric rosette.⁴⁴

The majority of early Armenian manuscripts are Gospels. Their decoration follows a rather consistent program. On the upper cover is a stepped or Calvary cross and on the lower a braided rectangle. (The geometric design is usually employed on other religious texts: hymnals, miscellaneous collections, even Bibles.) Later, among the hundreds of silver bindings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a Crucifixion, that is Christ on the cross, replaced the plain cross of leather bindings and the Resurrection, the rectangle on the lower cover, thus dispelling the mystery by equating it with the Resurrection. In some

41 In particular her doctoral dissertation, Merian 1993; see also Merian, Mathews, Orna 1994, 130–134.

42 Kouymjian 1992, 403–412; *idem* 1993, 101–109, pls. 1–5; *idem* 1998, 259–274; *idem* 2007a, 236–247.

43 Kouymjian 1997, 13–36.

44 See now, Kouymjian 2008b, 169, fig. 7.

bindings, however, the Virgin appears on the lower cover. Their binders either moved away from the earlier tradition, or simply failed to understand it.⁴⁵

The cross in general, especially the braided cross on a pedestal, had a very prominent place in early Armenian gospel illumination. A full page cross often appears either at the beginning of the initial illuminated quire of Gospels or at the end before the text proper. It is tempting to seek the source in Armenian *xač'k'ars*. The stone cross is a symbol of the Crucifixion but does not show it. Furthermore, while all stone crosses depict the "living cross", characterized by branches or leaves growing out of their bases, none of the braided crosses, whether painted or on leather, are flowering. The style of those on tooled Gospel bindings comes from a source other than *xač'k'ars*. Still the use of this powerful motif of Christ's sacrifice on the very book that recounts His Passion and on *xač'k'ars* of the dead whose souls will also be resurrected, explains its long persistence.

As far as I know the braided rectangle, almost exclusively found on the lower panel of leather Gospel bindings, was first explained in a footnote I wrote some years ago.⁴⁶ Recently I devoted a monograph to the subject.⁴⁷ If the Crucifixion is represented by a cross on the upper cover of Armenian bindings, then logically on the lower cover there should be the Resurrection, or some symbol for it. On silver bindings the predominant image on the upper face is the Crucifixion, a real Crucifixion with Christ on the cross. The majority of these bindings portray the Resurrection on the underside. What relationship does the rectangle on the lower cover of leather Armenian Gospels (the device is unknown on silver covers) have with any of the standard iconographies of the Resurrection? One thinks immediately of the doors of Hell knocked down and trampled upon by Christ in the Anastasis or Descent into Hell.⁴⁸ The rectangle represents the door to Satan's domain opened by redemption through the Savior. But the Byzantine Anastasis, was essentially a foreign intrusion in Armenian iconography when Armenian nobility and clergy had close relations with the Greeks. Thus, choosing such an important symbol from a non-indigenous iconographic source seems improbable. Another element, however, from the iconography of Resurrection presents a better explanation. It is

45 Kouymjian 2008a, 212–214.

46 Kouymjian 1998, 262, n. 1: "Je pense que ce rectangle symbolise la Résurrection comme la croix symbolise la Crucifixion. J'espère préparer, dans un proche avenir, une étude sur ce sujet".

47 Kouymjian 2008a, illustrated with examples from paleo-Christian models, *xač'k'ars*, and of course binding covers.

48 Abundant discussion of the iconography of this seen can be found in Kartsonis 1986.

also a door or rather a stone slab, the one used to close the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea in which Christ was buried. It is often depicted in paleo-Christian representations of the Resurrection showing the Holy Women at the Empty Tomb. In Armenian painting the door appears only rarely in the scene and was not retained as an important element in the rendering of the Women at the Empty Tomb, reducing greatly the possibility that the binding rectangle was borrowed from earlier and now lost Armenian Gospel miniatures. On the other hand, if the rectangle represents the tomb itself, open and empty, then it fits perfectly with that feature seen in earliest Armenian miniatures of the eleventh century. One often reads in the more provincial manuscripts the word *geretzmann*, “the Tomb”, written within the rectangle as witnessed in two miniatures of the eleventh century from Melitene.⁴⁹

If this hypothesis is correct and the rectangle served as the inanimate symbol for the Resurrection as the cross was the inanimate symbol of the Crucifixion, then later when the Anastasis was accepted as the image of Resurrection in certain Armenian Gospels, the doors, in this case of Hell, would have only reinforced the perception of the already existing rectangular device. In later centuries, the rectangle must have lost its meaning to the binders, because in some codices, the rectangle was used on the upper cover or on both covers and even on non-Gospel manuscripts.

When the meaning of the rectangle became obscure, some binders simply replaced it with a visually clearer and more easily understood image of the Resurrection to match what by then had become a very iconic Crucifixion in place of the barren braided cross.⁵⁰

If the above is not a correct interpretation of this enduring rectangular shape, then there is no other option except to follow earlier scholars and pass on the motif in silence.

49 For example the Gospel of 1045, Erevan, Matenadaran, M3723, f. 3; Izmailova 1979, 80, fig. 39, with other eleventh century examples, *passim*; details given in Kouymjian 2008a, 213. See now Kouymjian 2014, 85-86 and Fig. 6, available at <http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/faculty/kouymjian/articles/index.htm>.

50 This phenomenon is particularly evident in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century silver bindings of Armenian manuscripts, Kouymjian 2008a, pl. 4. Gospel manuscript of 1769, Antelias, Cilician Museum, no. 50. The most common substitute for the rectangle on the lower cover of silver bindings, the Virgin and Child, must have represented to those responsible for this arrangement the Incarnation, thus the reverse pair, Incarnation and Resurrection, which on some bindings, for instance in the collection of the Cilician Museum in Antelias, shows the Madonna and Child on the upper cover and the Crucifixion on the lower in proper chronological sequence.

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