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CUPRINS/CONTENTS

30/1

STUDII/STUDIES

Ana ĐURIČIĆ, More than Floors and Domes - Contexts around Ovens in the Late Neolithic of the Central Balkans	11
Aurora PEȚAN, Cetatea dacică de la Cucuiș – Dealul Golu (jud. Hunedoara) în lumina datelor LiDAR	31
Vasile IARMULSCHI, Fibule de tip Kostrzewski G din silvostepa carpato-nipreană	41
Ghenadie SÎRBU, Jaroslav PESKA, Tomas TENCER, Sergiu HEGHEA, O necropolă plană sarmatică descoperită în bazinul râului Răut (Republica Moldova), grație unor cercetări non-invazive	53
Adina VELCESCU, Les amphores découvertes dans la zone portuaire de Callatis (Mangalia, Roumanie) dans les années 1960-1970	61
Ioan MUNTEAN, The Sanctuaries of Iuppiter Dolichenus in the Danubian Provinces. A functional interpretation	83
Csaba SZABÓ, Women and Roman religion in Dacia: the epigraphic evidence	99
Remus FERARU, Gladiatori și spectacole în amfiteatru în cetățile grecești din Pontul Euxin.	123
Vladimir PETROVIĆ, The Epigraphic Testimonies from Timacum Maius (Eastern Moesia Superior): The Important Clues for the Character and Organization of Naissus Region	135
Ioan Carol OPRÎȘ, Axiopolis. Stadiul actual al cunoașterii	143
Fatih Hakan KAYA, Musa ALBAYRAK, Martin HENIG, Ergün LAFLI, Earrings from Nicaea in Bithynia (south-eastern Marmara)	179
Nizam ABAY, Grylloi: A Being with Mixed Depictions from Konya	205
Cüneyt ÖZ, Repair of ceramics in Antiquity: Examples from Myra (Lycia)	215
Parastoo Masjedi KHAK, Seyed Mehdi Mousavi KOUHPAR, Hasan Kohansal VAJARGAH, Cui QILONG, Six Sassanian artworks engraved with hunters: king, crown prince, aristocrat, or pretender to the throne?	221
Khachik HARUTYUNYAN, Newly Discovered Inscriptions from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James in Jerusalem	235
Yaroslav CHENTSOV, The problem of the attribution of burials of medieval nomads on the territory of the Ukrainian steppe on the example of three burials from the Novosilsky kurgan complex	249
Maria-Venera RĂDULESCU, Cavalerul în turnir, temă iconografică redată pe cahle medievale din Muntenia	261

RECENZII/REVIEWS

- Tudor ULIȚĂ-SÎNJOAN, Recenzie: Lee I. Levine, Zeev Weis, Uzi Leibner, *Ancient synagogues revealed 1981-2022*, Israel Exploration Society, 2023, 300 p., ISBN 978-965-221-129-3. 271
- Aurora PEȚAN, Recenzie: Alexandru Berzovan, *At the Borders of the Great Steppe. Late Iron Age Hillforts between the Eastern Carpathians and Prut (5th-3rd centuries BC)*, Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, 310 p., 35 pl., ISBN 978-606-020-494-7. 273
- Claudia-Valentina POPÎRȚAC, Recenzie: Maria Alexandrescu Vianu, *Une cité antique à travers ses sculptures. La sculpture en pierre à Tomis à l'époque du Principat (Ier-IIIe siècles)*, Editura Istros a Muzeului Brăilei „Carol I”, Brăila, 2022, 300 p., ISBN 978-606-654-492-4. 276
- Florian BOIȘTEANU, Recenzie: Lucrețiu Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, Ioan Piso (ed.), *Romans and Natives in the Danubian Provinces (1st-6th C. AD)*, Harrassovitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2023, 618 p., ISBN 978-3-447-12096-8. 278
- Tudor ULIȚĂ-SÎNJOAN, Recenzie: Annamária-Izabella Pázsint, *Private Associations in the Pontic Greek Cities (6th century BC–3rd century AD)*, Peeters, Leuven – Paris – Bristol, CT, 2022, 386 p., ISBN 978-90-429-4718-4. 280

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NEWLY DISCOVERED INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE ARMENIAN CATHEDRAL OF ST. JAMES IN JERUSALEM

KHACHIK HARUTYUNYAN

ABSTRACT:

The article focuses on the epigraphic legacy of the Armenian Cathedral of St. James in Jerusalem and its recently discovered inscriptions. Since the late 19th century, scholars have been gathering and publishing epigraphs from the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem, encompassing not just the Cathedral but also other sanctuaries, and the neighbourhoods within the convent. These efforts have provided a valuable resource for those interested in the history of Armenians in the Holy Land.

Similar to inscriptions found in other sanctuaries across the Holy Land, those found in the St. James Cathedral were left by both congregants of the Cathedral and Armenian pilgrims who visited the Holy Land over the centuries. Local inscriptions typically include details about the individuals mentioned, such as their families, birthplaces, and occupations. These sources frequently document renovations or constructions, shedding light on known and previously unknown projects undertaken in the area.

Through epigraphic research conducted in Jerusalem in 2019 and 2022, several inscriptions previously absent from earlier editions were discovered in the Cathedral. This article presents 10 of these newly found inscriptions, accompanied by images and explanatory notes.

ABSTRAIT: NOUVELLES INSCRIPTIONS DE LA CATHÉDRALE ARMÉNIENNE SAINT-JACQUES À JÉRUSALEM

L'article est consacré au patrimoine épigraphique de la Cathédrale Arménienne Saint-Jacques de Jérusalem et à ses inscriptions nouvellement découvertes. Les épigraphes du Quartier Arménien de Jérusalem, y compris celles de cathédrale, des autres sanctuaires et les quartiers à l'intérieur du couvent, ont été rassemblées et publiées au fil des décennies par divers chercheurs depuis la fin du 19^e siècle, offrant ainsi l'occasion à ceux qui s'intéressent à l'histoire des Arméniens de Terre Sainte de se familiariser avec ces sources écrites importantes.

Semblables aux inscriptions arméniennes des autres sanctuaires de Terre Sainte, les inscriptions trouvées dans la cathédrale Saint-Jacques ont été laissées à la fois par les membres de la congrégation Saint-Jacques et par les pèlerins arméniens qui ont visité la Terre Sainte au fil des siècles. Les inscriptions locales contiennent généralement des informations sur les personnes qui y sont inscrites, leurs familles, leurs lieux de naissance et leurs professions. Très souvent dans ces sources, on peut trouver des mentions de rénovations ou de constructions de certaines parties qui permettent aux chercheurs d'en apprendre davantage sur les travaux connus et méconnus réalisés ici.

Grâce à des recherches épigraphiques à Jérusalem en 2019 et 2022, nous avons découvert plusieurs inscriptions dans la cathédrale, qui manquaient dans les éditions précédentes. Dans cet article, nous en présentons 10 avec des images et quelques notes.

KEYWORDS: Holy Land, Jerusalem, St. James Monastery, Armenian congregation, Armenian neighbourhoods, inscriptions

MOTS-CLÉS: Terre Sainte, Jérusalem, monastère Saint-Jacques, congrégation arménienne, quartiers arméniens, inscriptions

Introduction

The work of collecting and studying the Armenian epigraphic heritage of the Holy Land has been going on for more than one and a half centuries. During this time, through the efforts of various scholars (Ghevond *Vardapet* Pirghalemyan, Tigran Savalanyants, Bishop Mesrop Nshanyan, Bishop Mkrtich Aghavnuni, Archbishop Maghachia

Ormanyan, Michael E. Stone, Haroutioun Khatchadourian, Bagrat Purjekian (Berjekian), Yana Chekhanovets and others), the main part of the Armenian inscriptions of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Sinai and some other famous settlements and sanctuaries was collected, deciphered, and published.¹ On the one hand, these collections significantly expanded the already rich repository of Armenian epigraphic heritage, and on the other hand, as preserved samples of ancient Armenian written monuments, they are of essential importance for the study of Armenian epigraphy and palaeography.²

It should be noted that these written monuments have long been not only of purely epigraphic significance but are also among the undeniable proofs of the centuries-old presence of Armenians in the Holy Land. More than once, their presence in various holy places was decisive in matters related to settling inter-church rights and territorial disputes.³ It can be observed that even today the new inscriptions can leave their influence on the history of any shrine or area. Perhaps the cross-stone (*khachkar*), can be considered such a significant example; it was discovered during the construction of a parking lot in 2020 in the famous “Cows’ Garden” area (Arm. Կովերի պարտեզ) belonging to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and dated to the 12th -13th centuries,⁴ which again raised the question of the area belonging to the Armenians in the Middle Ages.⁵

The study and discovery of inscriptions are ongoing processes. The presence of Armenian inscriptions in numerous local sanctuaries, their surrounding areas, and other locations throughout the Holy Land offers continuous opportunities for uncovering new ones. In 2019 and 2022, as part of the “Armenian Inscriptions of the Holy Land and Sinai” project led by Michael Stone, I had the chance to conduct research and fieldwork in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and other cities. This endeavour enabled me to document a significant number of new inscriptions and graffiti in these locations.⁶

In this article, I present some unpublished inscriptions and graffiti found in the Armenian Cathedral of St. James in Jerusalem.

The Armenian Cathedral of St. James and its Inscriptions

The enduring presence of Armenians in the Holy Land for over 1700 years is well-documented in both Armenian and other historical sources, extensively studied by numerous researchers.⁷ It is worth noting that despite the wealth of primary sources available, the origins of numerous local Armenian sanctuaries and related historical details remain obscured by layers of legend and varying accounts of holy events. This phenomenon is not unique to Armenian sites but extends to nearly all holy places throughout the Holy Land.

The Armenian Monastery of St. James in Jerusalem (Arm. Սրբոց Յակոբեանց վանք) is located in the northwestern section of the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. This monastery is an architectural ensemble comprising churches and chapels, each possessing unique features such as distinct architecture, altars, and regular holy liturgies held within them. The compound is a harmonious blend of structures that are individually significant.

The studies carried out until now, as well as the bibliographic information, show that the Cathedral was built and got its present appearance not at one specific time, but due to external and internal additions and changes made in different eras.⁸ It is believed that the oldest structure (5th-6th centuries AD) of the complex is the St. Minas chapel-

¹ Ter-Stepanyan 2013, 25-30; Savalaneants 1931b, 1219-1304, 1374-1386; Aghavnuni 1929; Aghavnuni 1931; Ormanean 1931; Stone 1980; Stone 1981; Stone 1984; Stone 1986-1987; Stone 1990-1991; Stone 1992; Stone 1993b; Khatchadourian and Basmadjian 2014; Purjekian 2015, 80-93; Tchekhanovets 2018, etc.

² Hovsepian 1913, 5; Stone 1990, 52-62; Stone 1993a, 15-26; Stone 1997, 263-268.

³ Currently, the issue of rights is regulated by the “Status Quo”, which was first drawn up in the 18th century, and then revised several times by the Treaties of Paris (1856), Berlin (1878), and Versailles (1919). See Eordegian 2003, 307-328; Bowman 2014, 202-240.

⁴ Ghazarean 2021, 106-113.

⁵ The situation around the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is currently quite tense in connection with the lease agreement for the “Cows’ Garden” and its termination. The contradictory information caused obvious discontent and demonstrations among the local Armenian community. Due to problems related to the deal, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem fired the Patriarchate’s real estate responsible, but as of February 2024, the situation has not been resolved. The tenant organizes various provocations against members of the Armenian community and congregation guarding the territory (Communique 2023, 418-420).

⁶ Stone, Harutyunyan 2020a, 159-177; Stone, Harutyunyan 2020b, 219-245; Stone, Harutyunyan 2020c, 179-205; Harutyunyan 2022, 9-30.

⁷ Aghavnuni 1931, 11-19; Abrahamyan 1964, Thomson 1967, 27-33; 264; Sanjian 1981, 424-445; Stone 1985, 173-178; Stone 1986, 93-110; Hintilian 1989; Stone 2004, 79-89; Tchekhanovets 2018; Bonfiglio, Preiser-Kapeller 2020, 75-85; Stone, Harutyunyan 2020a, 159-177; Mutafian 2022 etc.

⁸ Vincent and Abel 1922, 529-558; Ormanean 1931, 14; Aghavnuni 1931, 251; Kalemderian 2007, 1-23; Tchekhanovets, Berjekian 2017, 119-122 etc.

treasury located in the northwestern part, probably together with the St. Glkhadir chapel founded in the Byzantine period.⁹

This was also confirmed by random excavations in 1957, carried out while tiling the floor inside the Cathedral. Under the southeastern wall, in front of the entrance to the Church of St. Etchmiadzin, after removing the floor tiles, an attempt was made to clear the accumulated soil underneath, and a burial with a complete human skeleton was opened. In total, during these irregular excavations in 1957, 10 complete skeletons, many human bones, and fragments of pottery were unearthed.¹⁰

This discovery led Bishop Shnorhik Galustean, responsible for the renovation works, to carry out small excavations in other parts of the Cathedral to examine the existence of historical and cultural layers. He also carried out some archaeological works inside the Chapel of St. Minas, where traces of an earlier structure and a mosaic floor were discovered after excavations about two meters below the current floor level. Considering the style of this structure and the finds, it was dated to the 5th century. AD.¹¹

According to researchers, the Chapel of the St. Glkhadir is a contemporary of the Chapel of St. Minas, which is directly adjacent to the latter. It is probably around these chapels that the current monastery of St. James was formed over the centuries, undergoing spatial changes, and being enriched with various chapels, churches, and altars dedicated to various saints.¹²

Only regular archaeological excavations and additional research, which have not yet been carried out, can provide information about the moment the monastery was founded and the structural changes made in different periods. The archaeological layers discovered by the partial work conducted inside the Cathedral confirm this.

On the other hand, hundreds of inscriptions and graffiti found in the Cathedral perfectly complement the monastery's history, providing information about the renovation and changes of the structures and the congregation, pilgrims, and visitors of different periods. Those inscriptions are evidence of the monastery's uninterrupted activity over the centuries.

Inside and outside the Cathedral, in different corners of it one can notice many embedded *khachkars*, slabs, flower pots, and wells with various inscriptions or graffiti on them. Here inscriptions are everywhere, from church utensils to curtains, from candlesticks to doors and bookstands.¹³

The inscriptions of the Cathedral were systematically collected for the first time in the 1850s-60s by Tigran Savalanyants, responsible for the printing house of St. James monastery and the secretary of the patriarchate, inserting the collected material at the end of his book entitled "History of Jerusalem," written in classical Armenian (Grabar). In 1931, Bishop Mesrop Nshanyan, the head of the library and the printing house of the monastery translated and published Savalanyants's book into modern Armenian (Western Armenian), significantly enriching the number of inscriptions previously collected by T. Savalanyants. In particular, 94 inscriptions from St. James Cathedral and its narthex are published at the end of the 2nd volume of the mentioned book, 25 of which were found and deciphered by Tigran Savalanyants, and 69 by Mesrop Nshanyan.¹⁴ Earlier, some inscriptions from the Cathedral were published by Bishop Trdat Palyan in the first volume of his book "Description of the Holy Places of Jerusalem".¹⁵

Bishop Mkrtich Aghavnuni, the Armenian patriarchal vicar of Jerusalem, made great use of the local inscriptions and very often presented them separately in his studies dedicated to the sanctuaries of the Holy Land and the Armenians visiting them.¹⁶

Starting in 1980, separate articles containing also some of the inscriptions of St. James Cathedral were published by Michael E. Stone in the series "Epigraphica Armeniaca Hierosolymitana".¹⁷

In 2014, a comprehensive collection of Armenian inscriptions from the Cathedral was published by Haroutioun Khatchadourian and Michel Basmadjian. Their work documented 95 *khachkars* both within and outside the Cathedral, with approximately seventy of them bearing inscriptions.¹⁸

⁹ Vincent, Abel 1922, 544-546; Aghavnuni 1931, 256-260.

¹⁰ Galustean 1958a, 194-197; Galustean 1958b, 232-238; Tchekhanovets, Berjekian 2017, 119-122. It is known that earlier, in 1897, when replacing the tiles on the front floor of the Chapel of St. Glkhadir, two more skeletons were found, see Aghavnuni 1931, 258.

¹¹ Galustean 1958c, 289-293.

¹² Vincent, Abel 1922, 546-558.

¹³ Stone 2001-2002, 465-484; Stone 2005-2007, 359-399; Kalemderian 2008.

¹⁴ Savalaneants 1931b, 1219-1232, 1374-1375. Bishop M. Nshanyan marked his additions with an asterisk.

¹⁵ Palean 1892, 94-118.

¹⁶ Aghavnuni 1929 and 1931.

¹⁷ Stone 1980, 51-68; Stone 1981, 71-83; Stone 2001-2002, 443-464, etc.

¹⁸ Khatchadourian and Basmadjian 2014, 115, 382-394.

In 2015, a total of 20 very valuable and old cross-stones (*khachkars*), some of which also have inscriptions, were opened during the partial renovations inside the Cathedral. In terms of their style and method of creation, the newly discovered *khachkars* are quite old, which is also confirmed by some of the inscriptions that were deciphered and published by Father Bagrat Purjekian (Berjekian).¹⁹

Despite the notable editions mentioned, numerous unpublished inscriptions and graffiti remain visible on the outer and inner walls of the Cathedral. In this article, we present 10 of these discoveries in chronological order.

Inscriptions of the Cathedral

The inscriptions below are first given in the Armenian deciphered version, followed by their translations,²⁰ after which a corresponding note on the inscription is given.

The inscriptions presented are mostly written in *erkat'agir* (majuscule) script, which is the most frequently used script in Armenian inscriptions at all times. It is also the first type of development of Armenian writing.²¹ Only one inscription presented here (n° 9) is in *bolorgir* (minuscule) script, historically used after *erkat'agir*.²²

The abbreviated forms and damaged parts are given in the brackets.

1. Incised inscription on the north-western column inside the Cathedral, 1414 AD (Fig. 1)

Transcription in Armenian

Դ(Ա)Ր(Ե)ԽՕՄ Է ԽԱԶ[Ս] Զ Պ(Ա)Ր(ՈՆ) ՇԱՄՇԱՏՆԻ(Ն) Ե[Բ] Զ չՕՐՆ. ԹՎ(ԻՆ) ՊԿԳ. (1414)

Translation

Դ This cross is an intercessor Զ for paron Šamšatin and Զ (his) father. In the year 963 [AE = 1414 CE]

Note: The inscription is engraved in large *erkat'agir*, well preserved and readily legible. The pillar is covered all around with blue tiles, and only this fragment is visible, or more precisely, it has been preserved under glass in order to be seen by visitors. This part of the pillar was completely uncovered in 1957 for repairs and this inscription came to light, surrounded by numerous pilgrim crosses.²³

The three-line inscription notably includes the male name Šamšatin, which, although listed in Acharyan's onomastic dictionary,²⁴ remains relatively uncommon.

Therefore, we checked the persons registered with this name in the Acharyan's dictionary and Armenian colophons in the same period.

According to the data, we suggest that Paron Šamšatin, commemorated within the Cathedral of St. James, could potentially be the same individual for whom an Armenian manuscript was transcribed in the St. Anthony Monastery in Crimean Kaffa (also known as Theodosia) in 1432 CE by the prolific scribe Kristosatur.²⁵ Our suggestion is based on the sparse circulation of this name in Armenian, the chronological proximity, and the mentioning form. In both the inscription and the colophon Šamšatin is given the honorific title "Paron" (Baron).



Fig. 1. Inscription on the north-western column inside the Cathedral, @Author, 2022

¹⁹ Purjekian 2015, 80-93.

²⁰ Personal names, toponyms, and some words we presented in transliterated forms according to the Hübschmann-Meillet-Benveniste (HMB) system used in "Revue des Études Arméniennes."

²¹ Stone, Kouymjian, Lehmann 2002, 66-69.

²² Stone, Kouymjian, Lehmann 2002, 69-73.

²³ Galustean 1958a, 234

²⁴ Acharean 1948, 141.

²⁵ Khachikyan 1958, 428.

Presumably, Paron Šamšatin was on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1414 and was commemorated alongside his father thanks to his donation. Fourteen years later, he and his son Khachatur are mentioned in the manuscript copied in his honour.

It is worth noting that Kaffa held significant importance as a centre for the Crimean Armenian community during the Middle Ages.²⁶ References to numerous pilgrims from this region can be found in the inscriptions of the Holy Land.

2. Inscription on the tombstone embedded on the external western wall of the narthex, 1744 AD (Fig. 2)

Transcription in Armenian

1 ԱՅՍ Է Տ(Ա)Պ(Ա)Ն Ղ(Ա)Լ(Ա)Թ(Ա)ՑԻ 2 ՊԷՔՄԷՉՉԻ
 Յ(Ա)ԿՈՐԻ ԴՈՒՍ3ՏՐ Մ(Ա)Հ(ՏԵՍ)Ի ՄԷԼԷՔԻՆ 4 [Ո]Ր
 Հ(Ա)ՆԳԵ(Ա)Ի Ի ՌՃՂԳ. (1744) 5 ԹՎ(ԻՆ)

Translation

1 This is the tomb of, from Łalata (Galata), 2 of Yakob
 pēk‘mēzč‘i’s daughter 3 *mahtesi* Mēlēk‘ 4 who died in the year
 5 1193 [AE = 1744 CE]

Note: The inscription is engraved in *erkat‘agir*, between ruled lines. As a result of weathering and the removal of part of the left edge of the stone, the writing is somewhat damaged and difficult to decipher.

The word պէքմէջի (*pēk‘mēzč‘i*) written in line 2 is a Turkish loanword (*pekmez*) in Armenian and means “grape syrup maker or seller”.²⁷ In the same line the abbreviation ՅԻ is used which we propose to resolve as genitive form of the name Yakob (Jacob), though other variants of reading are conceivable (for example: Յ(նվստի)ի, Յ(նվհաւնէտ)ի etc.).

The name Mēlēk‘ inscribed in line 3 is a female name. There are some other female names used among the Armenians and made with this element. Such names were in wide use among the Armenians from the 13th century on.²⁸ The term *mahtesi* written before the name Mēlēk‘, derives from the Arabic “mugdisī” and indicates the person who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.²⁹ It was a widespread word among the Armenian pilgrims and can be seen in almost all local inscriptions.

According to the inscription, the mentioned Yakob was from the Galata district of Istanbul.



Fig. 2. Inscription on the tombstone externally embedded on the western wall of the narthex, @Author, 2022

3. Inscription on the north-western side of the roof of the Cathedral, AD 1765 (Fig. 3)

Transcription in Armenian

1 Ա(ՍՏՈՒԾՈՆ)Վ 2 ԵՍ Մ[Ե]ՂԱՊԱՐՏ ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏ 3 ԻԲՐ ՊԱՏՐԻԱՐԳՍ Ս(Ր)Բ(Ո)Յ ԳԱ 4 ՀԻՍ ՅԵՐԲ ԱՅՍ
 ԵԿԵՂԵՑՈՅ 5 ՏԱՆԻՍՍ ՍԱՅԼԵԼ ԵՏՈՒ 6 ԸՆԴ ԱՅԼՈՅՆ ԱՅՍ ՄԷԿ 7 ՔԱՐԻՍ ԻՄՈՎ ԶԵՆԱՍԲՍ 8
 ԵՂԻ ԱՍՍ Ի ՌՄԺԴ. (1765) ԹՎ(ԻՆ). 9 ՈՐՔ ՀԱՆԴԻՊԻՔ 10 ՏՈՒՔ ԶՈՂՈՐՄԻՆ

Translation

1 By God³⁰ 2 I, the sinful Karapet, 3 as Patriarch of this Holy 4 See, when I had the roof 5 of this Church to pave 6
 with the others I laid this 7 one stone by my hands, 8 here in the year 1215 [AE = 1765 CE]. 9 You who encounter
 (this inscription) 10 offer the “have mercy” (prayer).

²⁶ Mikayelyan 1964, 100-102.

²⁷ Acharean 1902, 350.

²⁸ Acharean 1946, 290-93, s.v. “Mēlēk’” (variants: Mēlēk‘xat‘un, Mēlēk‘naz, and Mēlēk‘tikin).

²⁹ Malkhaseants 1944, 243.

³⁰ Meaning: with God’s help.

Note: The inscription is engraved in large erkat‘agir letters. As a result of weathering, the writing is eroded and difficult to read.

Karapet of Ganjak, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem (1761-1768) is mentioned,³¹ who, in 1765 had renovations and tiling done on the roof of St. James Cathedral. In a colophon of a manuscript copied in 1765 in the Cathedral, Patriarch Karapet’s renovations are mentioned.³² The present inscription also concerns this renovation.

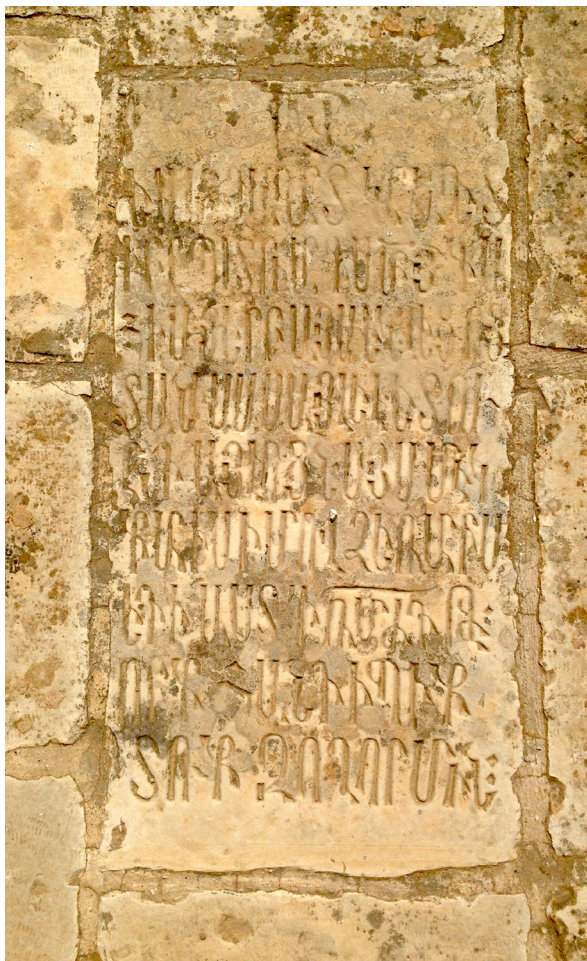


Fig. 3. Inscription on the north-western side of the roof of the Cathedral, @Author, 2022



Fig. 4. Inscription on the north-western side of the roof of the Cathedral, @Author, 2022

4. Inscription on the north-western side of the roof of the Cathedral, AD 1773 (Fig. 4)

Transcription in Armenian

1[ԱՅՍ Է ՏԱ]ՊԱՆ ՀԱՆԳ2]ՍՏԵԱՆ Օ3,ԲՖԱՅ(Ե)ՑԻ 4 ԱԼԼՈՃԻ/// 5ԿԻՆԻՆ/// 6 Ի ԼՐ[ՄԱՆ?] 7, ԹՎ(ԻՆ) ՌՄԻԲ. (1773)

Translation

1 This is the tomb of rep2ose of, from 3 Urfa 4 alləci/// 5 KININ/// 6 completing(?) 7, the year 1222 [AE = 1773 CE]

Note: The inscription is in large erkat‘agir engraved on the tombstone. The right side and the lower parts of the tombstone have suffered surface damage, resulting in the writing being affected and difficult to read. The place name Orfa (Urfa - Edessa) in the second line is not secure. The reconstruction of the word “completing” in line 6 is dubious.

³¹ Aghavnuni 1929, 191; Krikorian 2019, 314-315.

³² Pogharean 1966, 94.

5. Inscription on tombstone set in the western wall of the Cathedral, to the outside (façade), AD 1787 (Fig. 5)

Transcription in Armenian

1 ԱՅՍ Է Տ(Ա)Պ(Ա)Ն Հ(ԱՆ)Գ(ՍՏԵԱ)Ն 2 Ս(Ա) Հ(ՏԵՍ)Ի ՍԱՐԳՍԻ ԿՈՂԱ3 ԿԻՑ Ս(Ա)Հ(ՏԵՍ)Ի ՍԱՐԻԱՍԻՆ, 4 ՈՐ ՀԱՆԳԵԱԲ Ի 5 ՌՄԼԶ. (1787) ԴԵԿՏԵՄԲԵՐԻ 6 Ժ.(10), ՈՐՔ ՀԱՆԴԻՊԻՔ 7 ՏՈՒՔ ՉՈՂՈՐՄԻՆ

Translation

1 This is the tomb of repose of 2 *mahtesi*, Sargis’s wife, 3 *mahtesi* Mariam 4 who fell asleep in 5 1236 [AE = 1787 CE] on December 6 10. You who encounter (this inscription) 7, say a “(Lord) have mercy.”

Note: The inscription is engraved in a large erkat‘agir script, and well preserved.

The rooftops of St. James monastery, particularly the northern part, have many embedded tombstones, of which the present inscription is one.



Fig. 5. Inscription on tombstone set in the western wall of the Cathedral, @Author, 2022

6. Inscription on a metallic and decorative balustrade in the St. Etchmiadzin Church, AD 1798 (Fig. 6)

Transcription in Armenian

1 Ի Պ(Ա)ՏՐԻ(ԱՐ)ԳՈՒԹԵ(ԱՆ) ԱԹՈՌ(Ո)ՅՍ ՄԵԾ ԵՒ ԵՐՉԱՆԻԿ ԵՒ ՍՐԲ(Ա)Չ(Ա)Ն Տ(ԵԱՌ)Ն ՊԵՏՐՈՍԻ ՇԻՆԵՑԱԲ ԵՐԿԱԹԵԱՅ ՎԱՆԴԱԿՔՍ ԳՈՎԵԼԻ ՍՐԲՈՅ ԷՉՄԻԱԾՆԻ ՏԱՃԱՐԻ ԱՐԴԵԱՍԲ ՍԱՐԱԾՑԻ ԱԲՐԱՀԱՄ ԵՊԻՍԿՈՊՈՍԻ 2 ԵՒ ՍՐԲՈՅ ԳԱՀԻՍ (ԵՐՈՒՍԱԳ)Է(ՄԻ) ՀԱՐԱՉԱՏ ՄԻԱԲԱՆԻ՝ ՅԻՇԱՏԱԿ ՀՈԳԵՒՈՐ ԵՒ ՍԱՐՄՆԱԲՈՐ ԻԻՐՈՑՆ ԾՆՈՂԻ. ՅԻՇԵՑԷՔ ԵՒ ԱՍԱՑԷՔ Ա(ԱՍՏՈՒԿ)Ծ ՈՂՈՐՄԻ, ՌՄԽԷ. (1798) ԹՈՒԻՆ, ՅՈՒՆԻՍԻ Ա.(1)ԻՆ



Fig. 6. Inscription on a metallic and decorative balustrade, @Author, 2022

Translation

¹In the Patriarchate of this See of the great and happy holy Reverend Petros, this metal railing of the praiseworthy Saint Ējmiacin Church was prepared at the expense of Bishop Abraham of Maraš ² and an authentic brother of the holy Throne of Jerusalem, in memory of his spiritual and bodily parent. Remember (them) and say a “God have mercy” prayer. In the year 1247 [AE = 1798 CE], on 1 June.

Note: The inscription is written in small erkat‘agir, well preserved and quite legible.

The Reverend Petros of Jerusalem mentioned is Petros of Eudokia (=Tokat, Turkey), the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem (1793-1800).³³ According to the inscription, the decorative railing was prepared at the expense of Abraham of Marash as a memorial of himself and his spiritual and bodily parents.

Abraham of Marash was a member of St. James congregation and was ordained bishop in 1788.³⁴ He also copied manuscripts. In a colophon of the manuscript copied in 1764 in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it is recorded that he copied numerous volumes.³⁵ By birth, Bishop Abraham was from the city of Marash in Cilicia (=Kahramanmarash, Turkey).³⁶

7. Inscriptions on a small marble slab close to the Chapel of Gikhadir, in the northern part, AD 1834 (Fig. 7)

Transcription in Armenian

¹ՅԻԾ(Ա)Տ(Ա)Կ Է ԱՅՍ ԵՐԿՈՒ ԱԶՆԻԻ
²ՔԱՂԻՆՔՍ ԱՐԵԲԵԼՑԻ Մ(Ա)Հ(ՏԵՍ)Ի
 ՍԱՂԱԹԻԷԼԻՆ³ ԵԻԻԲՐՀԱՍԱՅՆՆՆՁԵՑԵԼՈՑ
 Ի ԴՈՒԴՆՍ Ս(Ր)Բ(Ո)ՅՆ ՅԱԿՈՐԱՅ ՈՐ Ի
 ՅԵ(ՈՒՄԱ)ՂԷՄ. 1834

Translation

¹These two fine stones are a memorial of ²Arewelc‘i (from east) Sałat‘iēl *mahtesi* ³ and all his deceased at the door of ⁴ St. James (monastery), which is in Jerusalem 1834.

Note: The inscription is engraved in a slab of white marble in handsome erkat‘agir. The letters are in black paint, the writing is thick and aims to be visible. It is generally well preserved, but at various points, the paint has faded, and because of this, it is barely legible in some cases. Moreover, the painted date is badly affected by the incompleteness of the paint. On the marble slab, at its top, an oval slab of sculptured cross is embedded. Apparently, this cross and the inscribed marble slab constitute “two fine stones,” a memorial of a certain Sałat‘iēl, “the easterner.”



Fig. 7. Inscriptions on a small marble slab, @Author, 2019

8. Inscription on a small marble slab embedded on the wall at the end of the stairs leading to the upper floor, AD 1835 (Fig. 8)

Transcription in Armenian

¹ՇԻՆԵՑԱԲ ՎԵՐՆ(Ա)ՏՈՒՆՍ ² ՅԱՍԻ Տ(ԵԱ)ՈՆ 1835 ³ Ի Պ(Ա)ՏՐ(ԻԱՐ)ԳՈՒԹԵ(ԱՆ) Գ(Ա)ԲՐ(ԻԷ)ԼԻ
 ԱՐՔԵՊ(ԻՍԿՈՊՈ)ՍԻ

Translation

¹This upper floor was built ² in the year of the Lord 1835 ³ in the patriarchate of archbishop Gabriēl

³³ Aghavnuni 1929, 414-415; Krikorian 2019, 321-326.

³⁴ Aghavnuni 1929, 8.

³⁵ Pogharean 1967, 92-93.

³⁶ Hakobyan, Melik-Bakhshyan, Barseghyan 1991, 721.

Note: The inscription is written in large erkat'agir script, well preserved and easily read. The Patriarch mentioned is Gabriel of Nicodemia (1818-1840).³⁷ This inscription states that the church's upper floor was built in 1835-1836.³⁸

Apparently, in place of the present construction, earlier, there were tombstones, and cross-stones (*khachkars*) set in the walls of the Cathedral. Some of these were moved or embedded at the time of the building of the gallery. T. Savalanyants reports that at the time of building in 1835, during the demolition of old walls, a *khachkar* from 1151 came to light.³⁹ From the outside, the building makes the impression of a narthex, but within the church, it resembles a gallery, constructed for women.⁴⁰



Fig. 8. Inscription on a marble slab, @Author, 2019

9. Inscription on the marble altar of the upper floor of the Cathedral, AD 1836 (Fig. 9)

Transcription in Armenian

Յիշատակ է այս Պօլսեցի հանգուցեալ ալանանի մահտեսի Մարտիրոսին, 1836

Translation

This is a memorial of the deceased *alačaci* mahtesi Martiros of Polis (=Constantinople), 1836.

Note: The inscription is in a handsome *bolorgir* script and is all in lower-case letters. Note that another copy of this inscription is to be found on the edge of a similar marble altar at a distance of a few meters. According to Savalanyants, these two altars were dedicated to the Sts. Hripsime and Gayane, and later renamed as altars of *Holy Supper* and *Transfiguration*.⁴¹



Fig. 9. Inscription on the marble altar, @Author, 2019

³⁷ Aghavnuni 1929, 56, Krikorian 2019, 341-362.

³⁸ Savalaneants 1931b, 986.

³⁹ Savalaneants 1931b, 1219.

⁴⁰ Savalaneants 1931b, 986.

⁴¹ Savalaneants 1931b, 986.

Mahtesi Martiros, according to this inscription, was born in Constantinople and was engaged in the sale of cloth (turk. *alaca*).⁴²

10. Graffito incised on the western wall of the Cathedral, outside, facing the courtyard, 15th century (Fig. 10)

Transcription in Armenian

յՁՅՈՎԱՆՆԷՍ ՈՒՍԿԵՐԻԻՉ ՅԻՇԵՅՅԷՔ Ի Տ(Է)Ր

Translation

յ Yovhannēs յ goldsmith, remember յ to the Lord

Note: The graffito is written in a regular, neat *erkat’agir*, well preserved and quite legible. The shapes of the engraved letters Վ, Չ, and Յ attract our attention. They recall forms of these letters encountered in the inscription of the 14th or 15th centuries, sometimes coinciding with even earlier letter-forms. On this palaeographic basis, we propose dating the graffito to the 15th century.

Goldsmith Yovhannēs, probably one of the benefactors of the St. James, is mentioned.

On the upper part of this graffito, it is possible to see another one incised again in *erkat’agir*. Three letters can be seen ՄԱԹ of which the last two are ligatured. We suggest deciphering this graffito as a personal name Մաթ(եռու) “Matteu.” It seems to be a later incision in comparison with the Goldsmith Yovhannēs’s graffito.



Fig. 10 and 10/1. Graffito incised on the western wall of the Cathedral, @Author, 2022

Conclusion

The inscriptions presented above represent only a fraction of the unpublished epigraphic heritage of the Armenian Cathedral and its environs. This collection requires systematic gathering and publication using modern scientific methodologies. We are currently engaged in this essential endeavour as part of the “Armenian Inscriptions of the Holy Land and Sinai” project and anticipate publishing them in the near future.

Summarizing, it should be noted that the Armenian epigraphic heritage of the Holy Land has an important place in the rich repository of Armenian epigraphy. It is worth noting that unlike inscriptions from other Armenian communities, local inscriptions here are distinguished by their antiquity and the uninterrupted continuity spanning about 1700 years. Remarkably, new inscriptions continue to be made in the vicinity of various shrines, and fresh graffiti are often etched onto their walls, continuing the centuries-old tradition of pilgrims.

⁴² *Alacaci* is a Turkish term and means “craftsman who weaves a kind of cotton cloth called *alaca* on a hand loom.” The term *alaca* is mentioned also in Acharean 1902, 62; Malkhaseants 1944, 16.

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Liste des figures

Fig. 1. Inscription sur la colonne nord-ouest à l’intérieur de la Cathédrale, @Auteur, 2022

Fig. 2. Inscription sur la pierre tombale introduite dans le mur ouest du narthex à l’extérieur, @Auteur, 2022

Fig. 3. Inscription sur le côté nord-ouest du toit de la Cathédrale, @Auteur, 2022

Fig. 4. Inscription sur le côté nord-ouest du toit de la Cathédrale, @Auteur, 2022

Fig. 5. Inscription sur une pierre tombale introduite dans le mur ouest de la Cathédrale, @Auteur, 2022

Fig. 6. Inscription sur une balustrade métallique et décorative, @Auteur, 2022

Fig. 7. Inscriptions sur une petite dalle de marbre, @Auteur, 2019

Fig. 8. Inscription sur une dalle de marbre, @Auteur, 2019

Fig. 9. Inscription sur l’autel en marbre, @Auteur, 2019

Fig. 10 et 10/1. Graffito incisé sur le mur ouest de la Cathédrale, @Auteur, 2022

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