

ABSTRACT

AN INTERPRETATION OF TEXTILE WEALTH IN THE ELEVENTH-CENTURY ARMENIAN MINIATURE FAMILY PORTRAIT OF KING GAGIK-ABAS OF KARS

The eleventh-century miniature family portrait of Christian King Gagik-Abas is the only known Armenian painting of a Bagratuni dynastic family. Established interpretation of the image suggests that indicators of rank and status are displayed within the iconography and mannerisms of the figures. My analysis focuses on the profusion of sumptuous textiles and the intriguing compositional placement of the female figures in the picture. I interpret these pictorial elements as allusions to dowry wealth and matrilineal inheritance. My thesis suggests that the composition of the image and the opulence of the represented textiles convey dynastic affluence in an effort to support the central figure, the young daughter, within the socio-political context of medieval life in the region. As the only heir of the last Bagratuni king in Greater Armenia, Princess Maren was to inherit the dynastic lineage from her father. Their kingdom was threatened by Seljuk invasions and Byzantine land annexation policies. The image was created during this tumultuous period in the history of the Bagratunis. In such a situation, I suggest that the miniature painting reveals the family's response to the hostile situation of regional politics for Armenian nobles in their homeland. Within the historical context of the image, marital alliances between Armenian nobles were not uncommon and intermarriages existed between Armenian and non-Armenian dynastic families. Showing dynastic lineage and textile wealth in the image was a plausible way to secure a future for Maren through marital arrangements.

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AN INTERPRETATION OF TEXTILE WEALTH IN THE
ELEVENTH-CENTURY ARMENIAN MINIATURE
FAMILY PORTRAIT OF KING GAGIK-ABAS
OF KARS

by
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I am honored to have had Dr. Dickran Kouymjian serve as my reader. The first time that I saw the royal portrait miniature was in Professor Dickran Kouymjian's "Arts of Armenia," course in the fall of 2000. It is an image that has stayed with me for eleven years. Even when I was not yet pursuing a degree in art, the miniature painting had a profound effect on me. In Dr. Kouymjian's classes, I became enthralled with the study of Armenian art. This was when I realized that, within the realm of art history, medieval Armenian art was the study area that made me feel at "home." Having Professor Kouymjian serve on my thesis committee added to the delight of working with him once again. Dr. Kouymjian kindly suggested that I use the original slide photograph from which I reproduced the image found in this text. The slide photograph was taken by Ara Güler. The actual miniature is located at the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

The slide image of the miniature is part of an impressive collection of 300 color slides of Armenian miniatures that Dr. Kouymjian has made accessible to the public via the Armenian Studies Program website.

I am so pleased to have had the remarkable Dr. Gina Strumwasser serve as a reader on my committee. She is a true inspiration to me. She is a wonderfully fun, intellectually engaging and energetic scholar. I am also grateful to Dr. Jennifer Borland, who visited Fresno State for two semesters during Professor Strumwasser's sabbatical. It was in Professor Borland's fall 2006 class, "Women and Medieval Art and Culture," where the cultural study of noble European women had me thinking about the Armenian royal portrait once again. Analyzing the royal portrait miniature from the years 2006 to 2011 has been a long and exhilarating process, resulting in two publications and ten presentations at various national conferences prior to this culmination.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The eleventh-century family portrait miniature¹ (Figure 1) of King Gagik-Abas of Kars is the only known painting of Armenian Bagratuni² royalty. It is a pictorial document of the king, the queen, and their young daughter. Without the benefit of historical information regarding the commission of the portrait, this thesis attempts to interpret its iconography and endeavors to gain an understanding of the intent behind the portrayal of the individuals within their social and historical milieu. The main question motivating my study is: *Why was the portrait of the family represented the way that it was?*

It is recognized that symbolic subtleties embedded within portraiture are purposeful. As a cultural construct, portraiture presents a “response to the natural human tendency to think about oneself, of oneself in relation to others and of others in apparent relation to themselves and to others.”³ Within the context of medieval portraiture, the intentionality of the agent may vary, but in general it was

¹ Dickran Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1992). Photograph Ara Güler, Image No. 69. Accompanied by a [Collection of 300 Slides in Color](#).

² Stephen H. Rapp, e-mail message to author, October 4, 2008. Rapp explained the historical differentiation of the “Bagratuni” name of the medieval *naxarar tun*, the Armenian branch and the K’art’li/Georgia branch, whose family origins are Irano-Armenian. Rapp indicates that once a permanent Georgian branch was established, and in particular, when the splintered family became a power in K’art’li/Georgia lands in the early eighth century, the name Bagratuni could no longer apply to them. During the Georgian Bagratid “Golden Age,” the name became Bagrationi, perhaps deliberately so to distance themselves from the Armenian Bagratunis. Nevertheless, over time the Bagratids (a more neutral form of the pan-Caucasian “Bagratunis”) living in Armenia and those who were living in Georgia become religiously, politically, and linguistically different from one another. Furthermore, pre-modern “Georgian” history is referred to as Georgian because of the patchwork of other culturally-related regions of which it was comprised. See *K’art’lis c’xovreba, The Georgian Royal Annals and Their Medieval Armenian Adaptation*, Volume I, ed. Stephen H. Rapp, Jr. (New York: Caravan Books, 1998), 13. In a later e-mail message to author, September 5, 2011, Rapp stated that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (the period of my thesis), the name “Georgia” reasonably applies to the geographic area after the Georgian Bagratids first achieved a permanent political unification of lands on either side of the Surami Mountains.

³ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 14.

to document a religious or political event, to inspire religious devotion, to memorialize and extend power and piety through visual perpetuity, or to offer the object of portraiture to God for divine protection. Not unlike Byzantine medieval portraiture,⁴ Armenian medieval portraits are generally found within a Christian spiritual and/or ceremonial theme.⁵ In this respect, the deliberate composition of the historical family portrait is not simply a collection of related persons; rather, it is a reflection of a significant set of relationships within a particular setting.⁶ Royal portraits exhibit how the ruler and members of the family wanted to be perceived by others and to posterity. The royal portrait format, including composition, mannerisms, and dress, uses important signs to pictorially validate the power of the figures in the image.⁷ In turn, the socio-political markers assigned to represent the subject figure serve a function in preserving his or her desire to be recognized by the viewer.⁸

⁴ See Iohannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976).

⁵ Dickran Kouymjian, "The Classical Tradition in Armenian Art," *REArm* Vol XV (1981): 264-266. According to Kouymjian, much of the figural art from the time of Armenia's conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century is Christian in content. He indicates that the two major exceptions (while still within a religious context) are the secular elements at Aht'amar and genre scenes scattered around the arcades of canon tables in illuminated manuscripts. Among the many sources for ancient and medieval Armenian art and its philosophical and political connotations, see Lynn Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium, Aht'amar and the Visual Construction of Medieval Armenian Rulership* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007); Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978); Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia*; and Helen Evans, "Kings and Power Bases," in *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoïan*, eds. J-P. Mahé and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

⁶ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 92. Medieval portraiture did not strive for likeness as in modern portraiture, but its purpose was to express social status, religious convictions, or political power. Individuality of the figure in a medieval portrait was primarily rendered through the individual's clothing, heraldry, or other objects related to them. The goal of such images was to present the person or persons in the portrait as how they wanted to be remembered over time and not at a particular moment in time. See *Faces of Power and Piety: Medieval Portraiture* by Erik Inglis, 2008, J. P. Getty Museum, or <<http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/power_piety/index.html>>accessed by author on September 9, 2011.

⁷ Evans, "Kings and Power Bases," 485.

⁸ Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 14.



Figure 1: Portrait of King Gagik-Abas, Queen Goranduxt, and Princess Maren. This image comes from a high resolution photograph of the slide taken by Ara Güler. Courtesy of Dickran Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia* (Accompanied by a Collection of 300 Slides in Color), Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1992. Photograph Ara Güler, Image No. 69.

Background

The family portrait of King Gagik-Abas of Kars visually differs from the more prevalent imagery of medieval Armenian royal art. Much of extant medieval Armenian portraiture in the context of patronage of sacred architecture and manuscript reflects donor piety demonstrated by figures in prayer, holding symbolic elements denoting religious devotion, or portrayed in association with Christ or the Virgin Mary. From what can be discerned in its present state, it does not display the characteristic religious iconography found in other surviving Armenian donor miniature portraits or sculptural reliefs.

The current understanding of the painting suggests that indicators of rank and status displayed in the composition, along with the gesture between the king and princess, reveals an overarching visual intent to validate the succession of the Bagratuni dynastic line. However, I believe that the interpretation of dynastic succession is only a partial analysis of the painting. This approach does not account for the equally prominent presence of the queen and her visual connection to sumptuous textile wealth so elaborately exhibited in the image.

My thesis examines the wealth of cloth in the image and the symbolic motifs on the costumes and interior fabrics, which include Sasanian royal iconography and Sasanian-derived Islamic textile motifs. I also reveal previously unidentified compositional devices used to associate the two female figures in the portrait with the painting's opulent display of textiles. I propose that there is a relationship between the represented textiles and the compositional placement of the queen and her daughter. Establishing the pictorial elements of the portrait in relation to the importance of textiles and cloth within the social context of medieval Armenia, particularly for the female members of noble society, provides an opportunity to review contemporary economics and the use of textiles as valued goods in political marital alliances and dowries. The visual evidence embedded in the painting may suggest an array of possible scenarios with which to better understand the family and its contemporary situation. In the early eleventh century, a period when major religious and socio-political pressures confronted the Armenian nobility from the imperialistic ambitions of the Byzantine Empire⁹ and the Islamic caliphate, it seems reasonable to assume that King Gagik-Abas and his family asserted their dynastic viability in response to the changing societal

⁹ With respect to Armenia, Byzantium is referred to as the "West" and the Islamic caliphate is referenced as the "East."

landscape in efforts to endure in their ancestral land. In this context, I believe that the elaborate display of textiles in the miniature painting is significant as an indicator of dynastic affluence and matrilineal wealth. Given that textiles were both economically and socially important in medieval society, I suggest that its opulence in the royal portrait communicates a statement on behalf of the princess in the realm of marital alliance and her dowry.

Manuscripts, Portrait Miniatures and Colophons

In medieval Armenia, monasteries and scriptoria flourished, producing sumptuous illuminated Biblical manuscripts sponsored by members of royalty, the nobility or princely families and high-ranking clergy, who could afford the high production expenses.¹⁰ As shown by records of donations made by princes during the ninth and tenth centuries, Armenian monasteries had acquired great wealth, and within the medieval monastery complexes, particularly those associated with royal centers, the art of illumination flourished.¹¹

The tradition of medieval Armenian painting is most evident in extant manuscript miniatures, which comprise the largest corpus of Armenian art from the Middle Ages.¹² The subject matter in paintings was essentially Christian, and orthodox tradition dictated the standardized iconography for representation of the

¹⁰ Joseph M. Alexanian, "The Armenian Gospel Text from the Fifth through the Fourteenth Centuries," in *Medieval Armenian Culture*, eds. Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), 386.

¹¹ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 305. Armenian monastic complexes were also known for their large libraries of manuscripts. References to illuminations include decorative design work, architectonic illustrations, casual drawings, marginalia, full-page and half-page paintings as well as portraiture.

¹² Thomas F. Mathews and Avedis K. Sanjian, *Armenian Gospel Iconography, The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1991), 2. The Armenian New Testament was translated first from Syriac in the early fifth century and was revised following the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. from Greek manuscripts. Also see Alexanian, "The Armenian Gospel Text from the Fifth through the Fourteenth Centuries," 381.

life of Jesus. With the advent of the Armenian alphabet in the early fifth century, biblical texts¹³ were translated into Armenian from Greek and Syriac.¹⁴ The primary book of early and medieval Armenian manuscripts was the Gospels.¹⁵

Illuminated manuscripts of the Gospels transcended the functionality of a religious text. These codices were venerated and miraculous powers were ascribed to them. In particular, manuscripts with illuminations were regarded as sacred objects not unlike icons in the Byzantine tradition. These manuscripts served patrons and scribes/painters as “pledges for the salvation of the donors, as imperishable treasures set in heaven.”¹⁶ Armenian Gospels manuscripts of the eleventh century followed a general model that consisted of a set of full-page scenes following canon tables that were followed by portraits of the evangelists,¹⁷ and the illuminations were determined as part of the manuscript production by agreement between the sponsor and the scribe/painter.¹⁸

¹³ The four gospels (John, Matthew, Mark, and Luke) would comprise the set of a complete Armenian Gospels manuscript. Translation of the Bible was probably of the old Syriac version later re-drafted from the Greek Septuagint version. Early Armenian literature was mainly the translation of Greek and Syriac commentaries, homilies, hagiographical writings, patristic writings, and other liturgical books. Fr. Krikor H. Maksoudian, “The Religion of Armenia,” in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 27.

¹⁴ The translation process most likely took place when Armenians learned the codicology of the manuscript. Sylvie L. Merian et al., “The Making of An Armenian Manuscript,” in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 124.

¹⁵ Complete bibles are rare in the collection of Armenian manuscripts, followed by lectionaries, hymnals, and collections of homilies. The majority of extant Armenian manuscripts are Gospel books. Gospels were the most frequently illustrated text because they were the most widely used. Lydia A. Dournovo, *Armenian Miniatures* (New York: Abrams, 1961), 12.

¹⁶ Vrej Nersessian, *Armenian Illuminated Gospel-Books* (London: British Library, 1987), 11.

¹⁷ Nersessian, *Armenian Illuminated Gospel-Books*, 9.

¹⁸ Avedis K. Sanjian, ed., *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480, A Source for Middle Eastern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 9. Also see translated colophons in Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Manuscripts in the Walters Art Gallery* (Baltimore: Trustees, 1973).

For medieval Armenians, to commission an illuminated manuscript was to perpetuate the memory of all those involved in its production, especially if the manuscript was of religious matter.¹⁹ In turn, the act of commissioning illuminated manuscripts was a pious act to affirm love for God, or it was dedicated as a consolation for the patron's soul and his family or that of the scribe and his family. As a memorial to the soul, the production of the sacred manuscript was viewed as the most effective way to attain salvation.²⁰ If the illuminated manuscript was regarded as a sacred object, then perhaps the actual process involved in its creation served a votive function.

Other motivations for the production of illuminated manuscripts were for the edification and enlightenment of the clergy, and as donations to monasteries and churches to demonstrate the pious act of giving. When the codex was produced as a part of a memorial by a sponsor who had no direct heirs, the manuscript remained in the family as an adopted child or as a family heirloom.²¹

Byzantine and Armenian portrait illuminations. The composition of a portrait miniature may be dictated by the type of manuscript in which it is found, whether it is biblical, theological, scientific, or historical.²² When comparing contemporary manuscript illuminations, we see that portraits of noble laity in Byzantine illuminated manuscripts²³ are contained in such books as the Old Testament, the New Testament, theological works, scientific and historical texts,

¹⁹ Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 12.

²⁰ Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 13.

²¹ Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 14.

²² Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 4.

²³ In *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, Spatharakis excludes a study of the portraits of Christ, the Virgin, figures from the Old and New Testaments, and saints.

Chrysobulls,²⁴ Typica,²⁵ and various other types of medieval writings.²⁶ Portraits in Armenian texts are predominantly found in the Gospels. However, there are a number of other religious and non-religious texts that include portraits. In *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, the texts where Armenian portraits from the eleventh to the eighteen centuries were identified include the following: *Lectionnaire* (Lectionary), *Recueil, Passages du Nouveau Testament* (Passages of the New Testament), Bible, *Commentaire* (Commentary), *Assises d'Antioche* (Assizes of Antioch), *Hymnaire* (Hymnal), *Historie d'Arménie* (History of Armenia), *Missel* (Praybook), *Livre de Sermons* (Book of Sermons), *Chansonnier* (Book of Songs), *Synaxaire* (Collection of the Lives of Saints), *Livre d'heures* (Book of Hours), and *Livre des Cantiques douloureux*.²⁷ Type of manuscript, inscriptions and colophons all provide textual information regarding the commission of the codex and, in most cases, a better understanding of the portrait miniatures included in the book.²⁸

In Armenian manuscripts, colophons provided the textual space for scribes, painters, and patrons to document and personalize the manuscript as well as to note personal testimonies regarding their motivation for creating the codex.²⁹ On many occasions pious actions were mentioned in colophons by scribes, who gave

²⁴ The Chrysobull is a generic name for a type of document that contains the Byzantine emperor's gold bulla (seal), later it was used to reference a solemn document regardless if it had a bulla. See Alexander Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 451.

²⁵ The Typikon liturgical is the book with rules that govern the celebration of services. See Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 2131-2132.

²⁶ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 2131-2132.

²⁷ Astghik Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait* (Erevan, Armenia: Sovetakan Grogh, 1982).

²⁸ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 241.

²⁹ Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 7.

high praise to the donor and his or her family. The colophon was used to dedicate prayers, words of praise, or blessings as in a memorial.³⁰ From inscriptions and colophons we gain an understanding of the occasion for which an illuminated manuscript was commissioned. Information in colophons from Armenian manuscripts may indicate whether the sponsor, upon commissioning the codex, received the manuscript for his or her own use, or donated it to a monastery or church as part of the family's pious gesture or as a family or personal memorial.³¹ Furthermore, colophons in Armenian manuscripts add to the historical testimony of the times where scribes would mention contemporary political and social issues within the body of the colophon.³² Sometimes we learn more about the scribe and illustrator from information included in the colophon than from other documentary sources. For example, the Armenian scribe and painter, T'oros Roslin, who had the sponsorship of the royal family and the church in the thirteenth century often signed his work and wrote the year in the colophons of the manuscripts that he illustrated. Interestingly, this renowned medieval painter is not mentioned by his contemporaries nor his pupils or assistants. Only centuries later do we find his

³⁰ Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 7.

³¹ Dedicatory information may have also been agreed upon by commissioner and scribe, where the patron along with family members and close or distant relatives were commemorated seeking the "mercy of the Lord for their souls in the life hereafter." Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 12.

³² The following example comes from a fourteenth-century (1375) Ritual Book where the scribes writes, "Yašēx T'amur [Ašiq Temür al-Māridānī] captured the royal city of Sis, and there was great mourning. In this year there occurred a severe famine in the entire country, and the price of one measure of wheat was 100 *tahiri dram*." Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 99. Both dedicatory and historical information could also be found in a colophon, as follows: "The last recipient of this holy Gospel, I, Fimi, wife of Vahram. In bitter times the castle of Lambron was plundered, and this holy Gospel was brought to the city of Ayas as captive, and I, Fimi, bought this holy Gospel in memory of my soul and the souls of my parents." Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts 1301-1480*, 100.

name mentioned by a seventeenth-century Armenian scribe working in Sebasteia.³³

Occurrence of portrait miniatures with accompanying inscriptions and colophons is the ideal situation when attempting to determine the occasion for commissioned miniatures within a codex. Sometimes the iconography does not readily allude to the purpose of the commission, and it is only from the colophon that intention is revealed. As an example, the Byzantine manuscript *Ivoires 100* was commissioned as a gift to the abbot of St. Denis, with whom the emperor Manuel II visited, but it is only from the colophon that such an assessment could have been made³⁴ (Figure 2). At times, the iconography in the miniature is enough to suggest the occasion of the commission of a manuscript. For example, in *Barberini Psalter gr. 372*, the small son of the Byzantine imperial family in the center of the image holds a representation of the psalter in which the miniature appears. All three figures in the miniature are crowned by angels and Christ. The manuscript was executed on the occasion of the child's coronation as co-emperor. Attention is drawn to the co-emperor by representing him with the psalter, which Spatharakis says is visual evidence that the text was offered for this occasion (Figure 3).³⁵

In cases where inscriptions and colophons provide limited information, multiple portraits of the same person over a period of time allow the study of the person's royal status and life events. In this type of situation, we can discover

³³ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research, 1993), 51. Sebasteia is now called Sivas and it is located in east-central Turkey.

³⁴ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 241.

³⁵ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 241; also see figure 7, *Barb. Gr. 372*, f. 5r, in Spatharakis.



Figure 2: Manuel II and his family.

MS Ivoires 100, f. 2r., Musée du Louvre. Source: Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, fig. 93.



Figure 3: *Barbarini Psalter*, gr. 372, f. 5r.

Source: Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, fig. 7.

changes in ceremonial costume. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of Armenian portraiture, Lewon III provides such an example. There are at least four different portraits painted at various time periods. One is the portrait of Lewon as a young boy. He stands facing front protected by two angels, and along his sides is an inscription with his name (Figure 4). Another is the portrait of Lewon holding the Gospels book posing with Keran on the occasion of their marital ceremony. The portrait is a symbolic representation of their wedding ceremony (Figure 5).³⁶



Figure 4: Portrait of Prince Lewon as a young boy.
Erevan Mat. 8321, fol. 25. Source: Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, fig. 639.

³⁶ Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, 154.

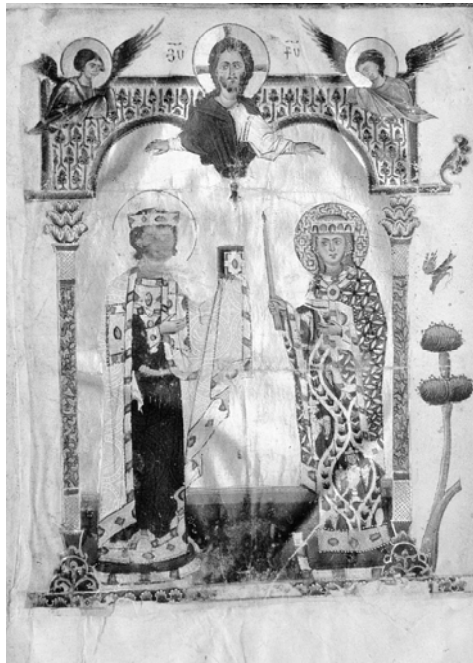


Figure 5: Prince Lewon and his wife Keran.
Jerusalem ms 2660, fol. 228. Source: Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, fig. 640.

More importantly, the portrait miniature served as imagery to express power and convey symbolic information. Using studies of portrait paintings in the Byzantine corpus of illuminated manuscripts, what is revealed is that the figure most portrayed was of the emperor. Portraits of the Byzantine sovereign for public use were commissioned for various occasions: to include official court ceremony or with the imperial family, in military campaigns or in triumphs over enemies, being crowned by Christ or praying as a suppliant, and receiving or giving a donation.³⁷ Miniatures that showed the emperor being crowned by Christ were for manuscripts commissioned on the occasion of a coronation. What can be stated about an image where Christ appears with a Byzantine ruler is that the illustration is a symbolic coronation of the emperor. In this case, the emperor is receiving his authority from God whose power he represents on earth. It is

³⁷ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 3-5.

through the protection of Christ that the emperor, chosen by God, becomes the successor to ruler of a Christian Empire.³⁸ Along with the Byzantine imperial portraits, there were other illustrations in manuscripts that could be categorized as the author portrait, the historical portrait, the portrait of the dead, and the family portrait, each having its own respective iconography.³⁹ For private use, a portrait may have been commissioned for secular purposes. In such situations, an image could have been used to initiate marital engagements. Examples of where a portrait was used for such a purpose include the case of the eunuch Eutropius who persuaded Arcadius to marry Aelia Eudocia based on her picture, and of Heraclius, who showed a picture of his daughter to a Turkish leader.⁴⁰

Against this general background of Armenian and Byzantine manuscripts, colophons, and miniature portraits, I introduce the only known surviving manuscript of King Gagik-Abas of Kars, where the partial royal miniature portrait has been inserted.

The Gospels of King Gagik-Abas of Kars⁴¹

The *Gospels of King Gagik-Abas of Kars* are regarded as the “most accomplished and the most ambitious Armenian manuscript of the eleventh

³⁸ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 242-243.

³⁹ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 246-250. The image of the family portrait in Byzantine society reached its most advanced state in the Palaiologan era (1261-1453).

⁴⁰ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 3-4.

⁴¹ Dickran Kouymjian, “Index of Armenian Art.” Armenian Studies Program, California State University, Fresno. <http://armeniastudies.csufresno.edu/iaa_miniatures/manuscript.aspx?ms=J2556G> accessed by author, 8 May 2008. The database for ms J2556 provides information on the structure and form of the manuscript along with other details. The Gospel text is made of parchment, with paper replacements, and its script is large *erkat'agir* in black ink. The database site also provides thumbnail images of the existing illuminations to include the decorative canon tables, Letter of Eusebian to Carpianus, and several of the extant miniatures in the manuscript.

century.”⁴² The full extent of the illuminations in the *Gospels of King Gagik-Abas of Kars* is not known since over 90 percent of the miniatures were removed by an unidentified collector,⁴³ but the extant miniatures have been described by scholars as lavish and sumptuous in their ornamentation. Of the surviving illuminations,⁴⁴ “The Sermon on the Mount” (fol. 21v) (Figure 6) is an illumination that exemplifies the adoption of Byzantine styles by Armenian artists. Other illuminations in the *Gospels of King Gagik-Abas of Kars* show the incorporation of classical modeling in the treatment of cloth with Armenian artistic interpretation of narrative elements in biblical scenes. These include the “Temptation of Christ” (fol. 244) (Figure 7), where the depiction of a throne is used to indicate the Kingdom of the World, which Jesus refused to accept from Satan; the appearance of four women rather than two at the “Empty Tomb” (fol. 132v); “Christ Appearing before the Apostles (fol. 134v) (Figure 8); and “Christ with the Rich Young Ruler,”⁴⁵ (fol. 330) (Figure 9).

⁴² Thomas F. Mathews, “The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 60.

⁴³ Mathews, “The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” 60.

⁴⁴ Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem* (New York: Caratzas Brothers Publishing, 1979), 147. The manuscript is missing many of its original miniatures and some text. The opening section is fragmentary and the following text illustrations are listed by Narkiss as those in ms J2556: fol. 18, first Temptation of Christ; fol. 18v, second Temptation (partly excised); fol. 19, third Temptation; fol. 21v, Christ choosing the Apostles, or the Sermon on the Mount; fol. 118, Christ in Gethsemane; fol. 125, Christ before Pilate; fol. 127, Roman soldiers mocking Christ (partly excised); fol. 132v, the Women at the Tomb; fol. 134v, Christ appearing to the Apostles; fol. 135v, King Gagik and his family; fol. 143v, the healing of the paralytic; fol. 206v, the Last Supper; fol. 214v, Peter in the High Priest’s courtyard; fol. 222v, picture of the royal family (most of it excised) [I do not understand this entry made by Bezalel since the royal portrait is fol. 135v, and I know of no other image of the family. Unfortunately, I am not in any position to examine this issue more closely]; fol. 244, first Temptation of Christ; fol. 244v, second and third Temptations of Christ; fol. 330, Christ with the rich young ruler; fols. 332, 338, 340, drawing in the margins, questionable copies of missing panels; fol. 353v, Christ and the Pharisees (partly excised); fol. 419, the Pharisees talking to the blind youth who has been healed.

⁴⁵ Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 147.

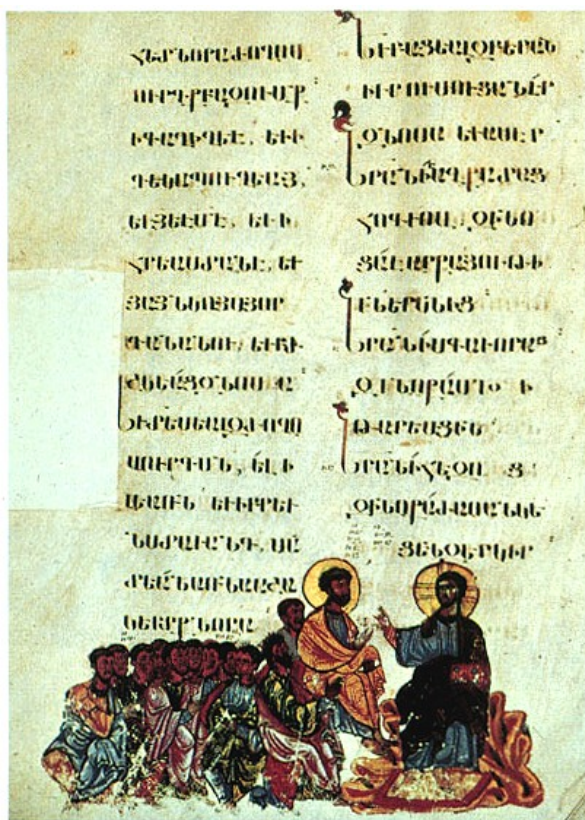


Figure 6: “The Sermon on the Mount” (fol. 21v) ms J2556.
Source: Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 34.



Figure 7: Temptation of Christ, fol. 244, from eleventh century ms J2556.
Source: Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, plate 76, p. 104.



Figure 8: “Christ Appearing to the Apostles,” (134v), ms J2556.
Source: Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 34.

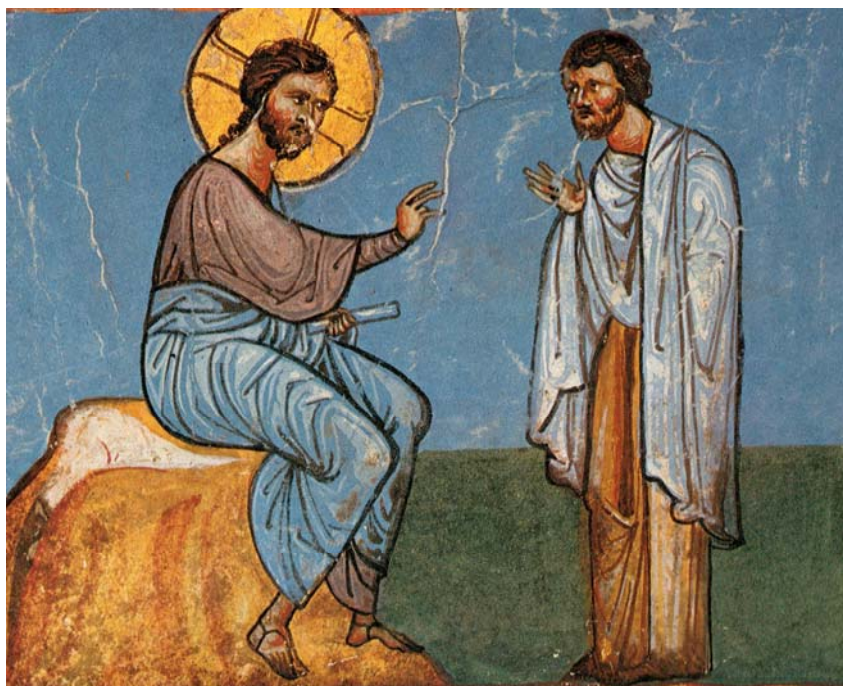


Figure 9: “Christ with the Rich Young Ruler,” (fol. 330), ms J2556.
Source: Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, plate 77, p. 105.

The Discovery and Background of the Royal Portrait Miniature

The partial folio of the Armenian miniature portrait of King Gagik-Abas of Kars, Queen Goranduxt, and Princess Maren was found in 1911 by Bishop Nšanēan in a chest used to preserve manuscript fragments for book bindings located in the print shop of the Armenian Patriarchate.⁴⁶ Over many years of neglect, the miniature endured severe environmental damage and physical defacement.⁴⁷ Existing as the lower half of a folio, there is a cut along the upper portion of the miniature⁴⁸ that excises portions of the faces of the figures. While only the lower half of the queen's face is identifiable, the physiognomy of the king is unrecognizable. However, most of the facial features of the princess are preserved.⁴⁹ Nšanēan made the initial supposition⁵⁰ that the miniature folio was part of the *Gospels of Gagik-Abas of Kars*, also known as Jerusalem manuscript no. 2556 (henceforth ms J2556).⁵¹ He came to this conclusion based on a royal

⁴⁶ Dickran Kouymjian, "An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony," *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies*, 18:2 (December 2009):117, footnote 11. Also see Thomas F. Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Maren of Kars, Jerusalem 2556, fol. 135b," in *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoïan*, eds., J-P. Mahé and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 475; and M. Nšanēan, "The Portrait of King Gagik of Kars," *Ararat*, August 1911: 683-687 [in Armenian].

⁴⁷ Some time during its history, prior to 1703, the pages and parts of pages of the manuscript were cut out. This may or may not explain the reason why the miniature family portrait was cut across at the top of the subject's faces. Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 147.

⁴⁸ Kouymjian indicates that the portrait was most likely located on the verso side of the leaf from pricking evidence. From his brief viewing of the fragment in July 2009, Kouymjian writes that the surviving fragment was the lower part of a folio written in two columns most likely cut in half and folded down the middle to be used for another manuscript as a guard leaf. Kouymjian, "An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony," 117.

⁴⁹ Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia*, Image No. 69, photograph by Ara Güler. Also see Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 33.

⁵⁰ Nšanēan, *Ararat*, 683-687. The royal names were confirmed by other scholars who studied the painting at the time, namely Garegin Hovsēp'ean. See Kouymjian, "An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony," 117, footnote 11.

⁵¹ The King Gagik Gospel is located in the St. James Treasury in Jerusalem. The codex of the four Gospels is dated ca. 1050 CE. It is made of thick parchment and contains 481 folios. It was restored in 1703 at the request of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Lost parchment text was replaced by paper. Narkiss,

name that he identified in the fragmentary colophon located on the reverse of the portrait folio 135v, referencing Gagik *šahanšah*.⁵² This name corresponded to the king among a list of other royal names located in another fragmentary colophon (folio 317v) found at the end of the Gospel of St. Luke in ms J2556. Other names found on the folio in the manuscript mention Goranduxt, the holy queen and their offspring Marem. Based on this information, the miniature portrait was thought to be a donor portrait from ms J2556.⁵³

The image was later inserted at the end of the Gospel of St. Matthew⁵⁴ under the assumption that there were at one time portraits of the royal family at the bottom of each of the folios with dedicatory colophons.⁵⁵ The four fragmentary colophons in ms J2556 are found on the upper-third to the upper-half of folios: 5v, 135v (the miniature portrait), 222v, and 317v.⁵⁶ The miniature family portrait

ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 147. Mathews indicates that the book is about 52 x 40 centimeters before modern rebinding. Mathews, “The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” 60.

⁵²This refers to the title “king of kings” in the translation of the partial colophon of folio 5v. See footnote 56 below for Tim Greenwood’s translation of the colophon as provided to author. The use of the Persian title of *šahanšah* began during the Achaemenid Empire and was bestowed upon a king who ruled over other minor kings with “vassals.”

⁵³According to Kouymjian “An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony,” 118. Der Nersessian believed the fragment portrait to be one of four donor portraits to be placed at the end of each of the Gospels. She believed the surviving royal portrait of King Gagik Abas of Kars was originally at the end of St. John. In correspondence to the author, Kouymjian asserted that the colophon on the recto of the fragment folio is the main colophon of the scribe. As is usually the case, the main colophon is placed at the end of the Gospels, thus it would be at the end of St. John (as suggested by Der Nersessian). At this time, however, the miniature is “hinged onto the verso folio facing the first page of the Gospel of St. Matthew,” where it has been since 1911 (Kouymjian, e-mail message to author April 4, 2010).

⁵⁴The miniature painting is attached to the ms J2556 with a paper hinge between the end of Mathew’s Gospel and the beginning of Mark’s Gospel. The portrait has a fold down the middle and a pair of diamond-shaped stitching holes that are indications of its previous use as a flyleaf for a smaller manuscript as suggested by Kouymjian. See Kouymjian, “An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony,” 99; Mathews and Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars, Jerusalem 2556, fol. 135b,” 475.

⁵⁵Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 147.

⁵⁶Timothy Greenwood, e-mail message to author, May 31, 2007. Greenwood provided me with his translation of the colophon from Hovsep’yan’s collection of colophons (pp. 241-244), and from Der

has been inserted on the verso folio facing the first page of the Gospel of St. Matthew in the *Gospels of King Gagik-Abas*.⁵⁷ Armenian art historian Sirarpie Der Nersessian suggested in 1952⁵⁸ that the miniature portrait leaf may originally have been located at the end of the Gospel of St. John.⁵⁹ Figure 10 provides a view of the physical layout of the miniature within the manuscript,⁶⁰ and Figure 11 provides an image of the partial colophon on the reverse side of the miniature.⁶¹

In 1996, art historians Thomas F. Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalakis compared the colophons in the *Gospels of King Gagik-Abas* with that of the

Nersessian's 1984 article, in *RE Arm* Vol. 18. The translation cited by Mathews and Daskalakis in "The Portrait of Princess Maren of Kars, Jerusalem 2556, fol. 135b," is included within the body of this paper. Greenwood's translation is as follows: "fol. 5v at the end of the Letter of Eusebius<<Holy Trinity, have pity/mercy on Gagik šahanšah/King of Kings>>; fol. 135v at the end of the Gospel of St. Matthew<<Remember to the Lord Jesus Christ the sponsor/patron of this Holy Gospel, Gagik šahanšah, the son of Abas>>; fol. 222v at the end of the Gospel of St. Mark<<Remember to the Lord the sponsor/patron of this Holy Gospel, Gagik šahanšah, son of Abas>>; fol. 317v at the end of the Gospel of St. Luke<<Remember [to the Holy] Trinity the sponsor of this Holy Gospel, Gagik šahanšah, son of Abas, queen Goranduxt and Maren, in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, whose conduct is excellent and who is filled with proper fear of the Lord and perfect behavior; being instructed, he examined all the spiritually-adorned characters...[for the sake of] Goranduxt, the holy queen and their offspring, Maren, so that God will bless them through the long days of his church with years of peace...[incomplete]>>". Also see Figure 11 in this chapter for the image of the partial colophon on the recto of the portrait taken by Kouymjian in July 2009.

⁵⁷ Kouymjian, e-mail message to author, September 3, 2009. Kouymjian had an opportunity to briefly look at ms J2556 during a conference visit in 2009 at the Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

⁵⁸ Kouymjian, "An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony," 99 and 119. In his review article, Kouymjian indicates that Der Nersessian spent six months in 1952 studying the manuscript while her sister took pictures of the image. For a summary on the prolific academic life of Der Nersessian see Chapter 34, "Sirarpie Der Nersessian (1896-1989) Pioneer of Armenian Art History," by Dickran Kouymjian in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, edited by Jane Chance.

⁵⁹ Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," 86. Kouymjian indicates that the portrait was inserted in the manuscript after the sections of St. Matthew. Kouymjian, e-mail message to author, November 6, 2009.

⁶⁰ Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 33, fig. 48.

⁶¹ Image provided by Kouymjian in an e-mail message attachment to author, 3 September 2009.



Figure 10: Physical layout of the royal portrait miniature within ms J2556.
Source: Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 33.

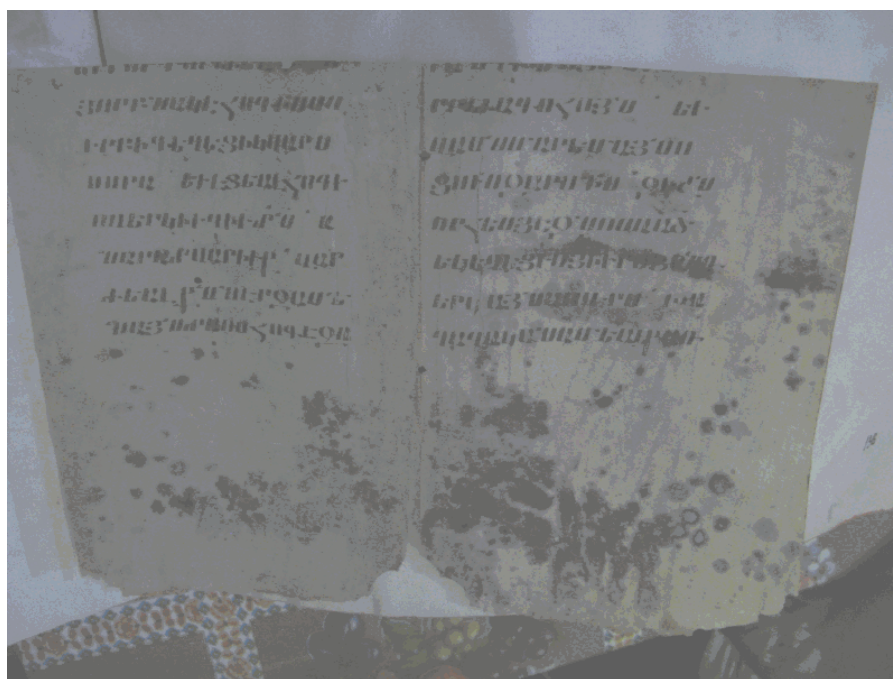


Figure 11: Partial colophon on the reverse of the King Gagik-Abas royal portrait.
Source: Electronic mail correspondence to author by Dickran Kouymjian on November 6, 2009.
Also see Kouymjian, "An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony," 100.

miniature painting. They found that based on the codicology and paleography of the colophons in ms J2556 and that of the portrait miniature, the two were irreconcilable.⁶² By comparing the language, script, and format of the colophon on the reverse side of the portrait fragment to the three surviving colophons of the *Gospels of King Gagik-Abas*, they found major discrepancies that led the scholars to assume that the portrait came from another manuscript commissioned by the king. The Mathews and Daskalakis evaluation established the following: (1) all colophons are ruled for two columns; (2) the partial colophon of folio 135v is written in a slanting hand with close lettering, the columns are slightly narrower, and its rulings are equally spaced; and (3) the colophons of folios 5v, 222v, 317v are ruled in pairs of lines, and the writing is in large upright letters “matching the first lines of text of each Gospel.”⁶³ Translation of the colophon of the portrait fragment (135v) reads: “(First column) ‘in whom dwells the Holy Spirit of the Trinity in his graceful life, filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, with immaculate reputation, erudite, he studied all the holy scriptures...’ (Second column) ‘for the holy queen Goranduxt, and for Marem their offspring, that God may grant them to his church for long days, peaceful years, before...’.”⁶⁴ Based on the disparity between the two sets of surviving colophons, Mathews and Daskalakis suggest that the portrait miniature leaf and ms J2556 came from two different manuscript production workshops in the Bagratuni Kingdom of Kars. They also suggest that based on the devotional reading of the colophon associated

⁶² Mathews and Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars” 476.

⁶³ Mathews and Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars,” 476.

⁶⁴ Mathews and Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars,” 476.

with the portrait miniature, the unknown manuscript may have been either a sacred text, or part of some other volume of scripture or a service text.⁶⁵

In a 2009 review essay in the *Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies*, Dickran Kouymjian provided his assessment of the colophon and its paleography. While not discounting the interpretative work of Mathews and Daskalakis, he offers his explanation for the possible discrepancy between the colophon ruling of the portrait fragment and that found in ms J2556. Kouymjian believes that the *Lazarine Gospels of 887* are a good example to explain the existence of multiple rulings in a single codex.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, whether or not the leaf of the family portrait belonged to the ms J2556 or to a second manuscript, it does not affect the importance of the miniature's composition and iconography.

Interpretation of the Royal Family Portrait

The interpretation of the portrait painting by Mathews and Daskalakis as one signaling dynastic succession was the first contextual analysis of the imagery. In support of their theory, the scholars offered the following ideas regarding the image: (1) there was a distinct secular mode in the composition and iconography of the image, (2) the princess was placed in the center between the king and the queen, (3) the king displayed a gesture of deference to the princess, and (4) the king and princess shared *tiraz* bands, regalia of Muslim nobility that had political inferences,⁶⁷ along with other notable Islamic iconographic elements. Mathews and Daskalakis considered these notions in tandem to suggest that the image of the

⁶⁵ Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars," 477.

⁶⁶ Kouymjian, "An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony," 118.

⁶⁷ Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars," 480.

royal portrait conveyed a political message, suggesting Princess Marem as the successor to the throne.⁶⁸

Several years after the Mathews and Daskalakis contextual study of the miniature portrait, medieval Armenian art historian Lynn Jones conducted her own contextual research of the image by emphasizing the iconographic prominence of the queen and pictorial symbols to suggest her royal role in commissioning the work. However, I challenged this notion based on my comparative formal and iconographic analysis.⁶⁹ Other studies of the royal portrait were confined to specific research areas, such as its provenance with respect to ms J2556, possible date of the image, identification of the figural subjects along with a formal analysis of the costumes and interior setting,⁷⁰ and the contribution of the represented textiles in the miniature to the study of Armenian textiles.⁷¹

Thesis Research and Methodology

The purpose of my thesis is to evaluate the miniature portrait as a pictorial document of the family during the period in which King Gagik-Abas of Kars ruled in his homeland to its takeover by the Byzantines. Using the suggestions made by Mathews and Daskalakis in their paper “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars, Jerusalem 2556, fol. 135b,” I expand upon the notion of dynastic references in the

⁶⁸ Mathews and Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars,” 477.

⁶⁹ Hazel Antaramian-Hofman, “An Art History Commentary on Queen Gorandukht in the Royal Family Portrait Miniature Painting of King Gagik-Abas and His Family,” in *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 18:2 (2009): 71-81.

⁷⁰ These studies include that of Bishop Nšanian (1911), Sirarpie Der Nersessian (1984), and Garegin Hovsēp‘ian as referenced by Dickran Kouymjian in “An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony,” 117, footnote 11.

⁷¹ Marielle Martiniani-Reber, “Les tissus médiévaux arméniens: essai d’identification,” in *Between Paris and Fresno, Armenian Studies in Honor of Dickran Kouymjian*, ed., Barlow Der Muğrdechian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2008), 141-154.

imagery by analyzing other symbolic elements found in the painting. Specifically, I analyze the role of the female figures in the composition with respect to their iconographic connection to the sumptuous display of elaborately decorated textiles represented in the miniature. This analysis is contextualized in terms of the social history of medieval Armenia and the contemporary political situation of the royal family.

In chapter 2, I discuss the overall iconography, composition, and style of the royal miniature portrait. In this chapter, I identify the iconographic and stylistic differences between the miniature portrait and extant illuminations in the ms J2556 and other Armenian donor portraits. The chapter discusses gestures and the placement of the figures in the composition, along with the object held by the queen. With the use of Armenian, Byzantine, and Georgian medieval royal portrait paintings, frescos, and sculptural reliefs, I establish an artistic framework upon which to evaluate the miniature portrait. I also review contemporary Islamic portraiture to comparatively note Eastern courtly mannerisms. In the last section of chapter 2, I describe the interior setting of the portrait as well as other iconographic elements aside from the textile décor.

Textiles, both of costumes and of the decorative interior setting, are discussed in chapter 3. In this chapter, I provide an overview of medieval Armenian textiles and a review of historical commentaries made by non-Armenian sources regarding the value of Armenian textile goods. The vast number of textiles represented in the miniature portrait, as compared to other contemporary Armenian and non-Armenian non-religious figural miniatures, speaks to the importance of this symbolic element in the image. I examine the fabrics in the miniature portrait for their design motifs and for any recognizable cultural derivation.

Chapter 4 provides the social and historical background of the royal family. The chapter summarizes the social, historical, and economic context under which the family operated, as well the political tenor of the time. I expand upon textiles with respect to marital considerations and its economic significance in the medieval Near East. Geopolitical and social realities such as political marital alliances and dowries are also considered in this chapter.

I conclude in chapter 5 with my thoughts as to why the family portrayed itself in the manner that it did. Based on existing historical evidence and the art historical observations made in the previous chapters, the speculations that I put forth attempt to give one interpretation of the miniature family portrait of King Gagik-Abas of Kars. I believe that the miniature painting is unusual among medieval group portrait paintings in that its composition and iconography communicates a message not found in other extant Armenian royal portraits. The emphasis of females and the display of rich textiles in a secularized interior setting assign a socio-political context to the painting.

CHAPTER 2: VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY PORTRAIT MINIATURE OF KING GAGIK-ABAS OF KARS AND COMPARATIVE PORTRAITURE

Iconographic decisions pertaining to portraiture painting are determined by cultural values of importance in the context of the times. These, in turn, shape the social preferences and demands of the patron and the artistic style employed. It is my premise that the royal family portrait studied in this thesis is characterized by a composition, iconography, and an artistic approach that is unique and distinctive to this miniature. There are several aspects of this painting that differentiate it from the traditional tendency of incorporating religious subject matter or iconographic elements into the medieval Armenian portrait. These unique features include the absence of traditional religious iconography, the presence of Eastern secular courtly elements within a sumptuous textile interior setting adorned with sumptuous textiles,¹ and the unparalleled compositional placement and hand gesture display of family members in extant Armenian portraiture. The combination of these elements distinguishes the royal portrait of King Gagik-Abas as one that alludes to a proclamation revolving around the central figure.²

Iconography, Stylistic Character and Composition

A comparative analysis of the composition and iconography between the miniature family portrait of King Gagik-Abas and other extant Armenian and non-

¹ Chapter 3 provides an in-depth analysis of the textile decoration and motif presented in the miniature.

² Thomas F. Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Maren of Kars, Jerusalem 2556, fol. 135b," in *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoïan*, eds., J-P. Mahé and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 48; and Lynn Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium, Aght'amar and the Visual Construction of Medieval Armenian Rulership* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007).

Armenian³ portraiture paintings and sculptural images shows that the depiction of King Gagik and his family may be an uncharacteristic presentation in the oeuvre of extant Armenian medieval portrait painting. Unfortunately, the small number of existing portrait miniatures from around the eleventh century limits my comparative analysis. However, from what is available of medieval Armenian portraiture, it can be noted that the existing royal miniature portrait differs in composition from most Armenian images of donors that are set within a Christian textual context.

For the comparative review, I consulted several publications that catalogued Armenian illuminated manuscripts found in various public depositories and collections. An important source for the study of medieval Armenian portraits was compiled by art historian Astghik Guevorkian in her catalogue of miniatures of laity and non-biblical figures.⁴ The miniatures in Guevorkian's book that are relevant to this study include portraits of Armenian receivers (*réceptionnaires*), royals and their family, married donors (*époux commanditaires*), catholicate, priors (*prieurs*), nobles, and other historic Armenian figures. I used these miniatures, along with those found in other sources including notable catalogues of miniature paintings,⁵ to compare the composition of the figures and settings in

³ Non-Armenian here implies extant Byzantine and Islamic royal portraits available to me for this study.

⁴ See Astghik Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait* (Erevan, Armenia: Sovetakan Grogh, 1982). Guevorkian did not include Armenian miniatures of figures illustrating New Testament scenes or those of the Evangelists.

⁵ Some other references for miniatures include *Armenian Gospel Iconography, The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel* by Thomas F. Mathews and Avedis K. Sanjian, *Armenian Art* by Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century* by Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Treasures in Heaven* by Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck, eds., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem* by Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Miniature Painting* by Father Janashian, and *The Arts of Armenia* (Accompanied by a [Collection of 300 Slides in Color](#)) by Dickran Kouymjian.

the portraits illustrated to the composition of King Gagik's family portrait. Of the 125 miniatures⁶ catalogued in Guevorkian's book of medieval Armenian portraits, five paintings are from the eleventh century, which includes the King Gagik family portrait, and one is from the twelfth century.⁷ The remaining portion of the portraits compiled by Guevorkian is from the thirteenth century or later. Of these thirteenth-century illustrations, the majority of the royal family portraits are those commissioned by Armenian nobility in Cilicia.⁸

Religious Content

Armenian portraits of noble laity are traditionally imbued with religious iconography and Biblical narrative.⁹ There are several examples of this type of portrait painting. An eleventh-century portrait example includes the representation of the Armenian receiver¹⁰ Simeon and his three brothers in the presence of the Archangel Raphael (1033, Erevan ms 283, fol. 3a).¹¹ Others include the

⁶ There are less than 125 different miniatures catalogued in Guevorkian's *Miniature Arménienne Portrait* since a few of the miniatures are details of the same image yet are given separate plate numbers. Nevertheless, the number of different miniatures remains above 100.

⁷ In Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, figures 1 through 5 are from the eleventh century, figure 6 is from the twelfth century; figure 2 is the family portrait of King Gagik-Abas of Kars.

⁸ Eleventh-century politics compelled the immigration of Armenians from Greater Armenia to the interior lands of Byzantium, including the area of Cilicia in southwestern Anatolia. Greater Armenia or proper Armenia, as defined by Sirarpie Der Nersessian in *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire, A Brief Study of Armenian Art and Civilization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1945), 3, is the area east of the Euphrates River, northwest of the river Tchorokh, "on the north by the river Kura...on the east and southeast by the river Araxes, the Lake of Urmia, and the valley of the Great Zab; and on the south, by the valley of the Tigris, and the mountains of Kurdistan." Cilicia is a region in the Byzantine Empire that borders the northeastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Chapter 4 provides in greater detail the historical and geographical context of King Gagik-Abas and his family during this time period.

⁹ This includes any reference to Biblical figures, Christ, the Virgin Mary, or representation of the Gospels, New Testament picture-cycle, and other religious symbols. The family portrait of King Gagik-Abas, as this study will show, does not include any of these religious elements within its composition, and the body posture most commonly associated with donors placed below a religious image.

¹⁰ In *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, Guevorkian writes that Siméon is "le réceptionnaire" in the image.

¹¹ Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, fig. 4.

thirteenth-century *Queen Mariun Gospel*, ms 1973 where there are three miniatures (Figures 12-14) of the queen in full-page panel paintings depicting her within such biblical scenes as the “Nativity of Christ” (fol. 8v),¹² “Entry of Christ into Jerusalem” (fol. 114),¹³ and “Deposition of Christ from the Cross” (fol. 258v).¹⁴



Figure 12. “Nativity of Christ” in thirteenth-century *Queen Mariun Gospel*. Manuscript 1973, fol. 8v. Source: Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, (New York: Caratzas Brothers Publishing), 85, fig. 108.

¹² Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem* (New York: Caratzas Brothers Publishing, 1979), 85, fig. 108.

¹³ Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 86, fig. 109.

¹⁴ Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 88, fig. 110. Note that Guevorkian also cites the image, but indicates that it is folio 208b.

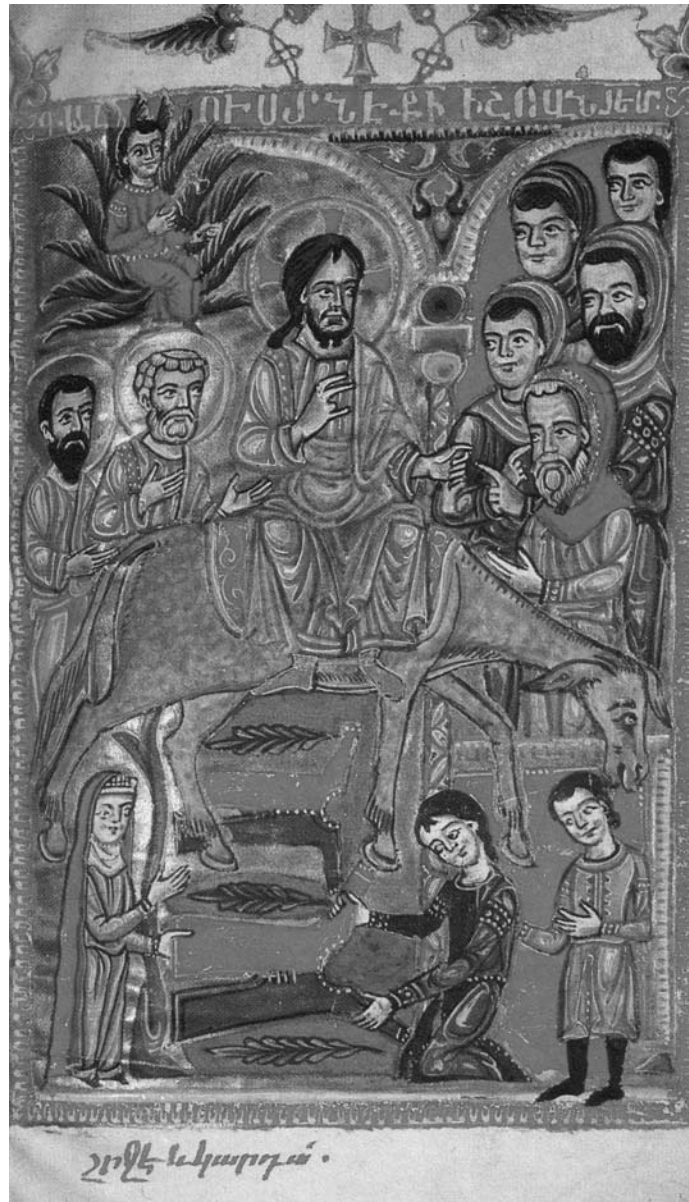


Figure 13: “Entry of Christ into Jerusalem” in *Queen Mariun Gospel*. Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, Manuscript 1973, fol. 114. Source: Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, p. 86, fig. 109.



Figure 14: “Deposition of Christ from the Cross,” *Queen Mariun Gospel*. Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, Manuscript 1973, fol. 258v. Source: Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, p. 88, fig. 110.

Another example includes the dedication page from the late thirteenth-century *Queen Keran Gospel* (ms J2563, fol. 380), where King Lewon II, Queen Keran, and their three sons and two daughters are depicted kneeling in front of a *Deësis*, Christ enthroned and flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist as mediators¹⁵ (Figure 15). In the *Prince Vasak Gospel*, (ms J2568, fol. 320), ca. 1270, the dedication page illustrates the Virgin Mary presenting Prince Vasak and his two sons to the enthroned Christ (Figure 16).¹⁶

¹⁵ Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 64.

¹⁶ Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 68.



Figure 15: Portrait of King Lewon III and Queen Keran with family, 1272.
Queen Keran Gospel, Jerusalem 2563, f. 380r. Source: Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 65.

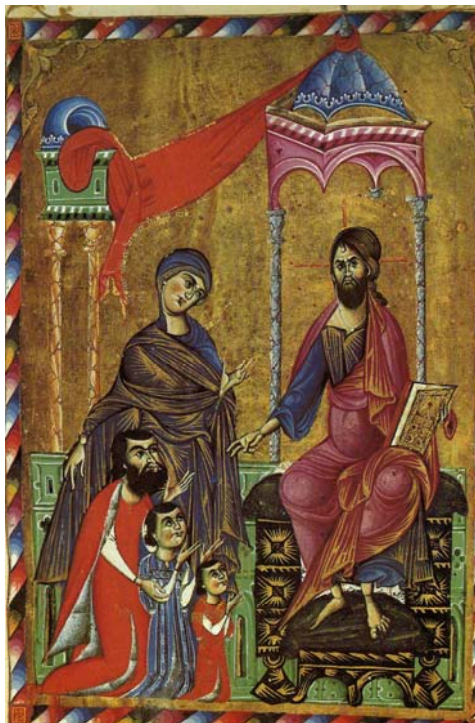


Figure 16: Virgin Mary, Prince Vasak and his two sons before Christ.
Source: Bezalel Narkiss, ed., *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 69.

Armenian medieval miniature portraits assembled in Guevorkian's text seem to follow a consistent pattern where the portrait of the figure is placed in the lower half of the miniature and set off to the side. In this type of composition, the figure is shown in three-quarter profile, with hands gestured to Christ, or a New Testament scene, such as the Last Judgment or the Pentecost, which is illustrated at a higher level in the image, above the donors. The earliest example (Figure 17) of this type of kneeling figure with gestured hands to an enthroned Christ is the twelfth-century image of Arakel, a receiver, in the *Erevan Gospel* ms 7347, fol. 11b, from Hromkla.¹⁷ A fourteenth-century example of a similar posture is found in the *Queen Mariun Gospels* of Sis, where the queen is portrayed in three-quarter profile and placed to the lower right-hand side of Christ¹⁸ in the Deposition scene, with gestured hands extending in front of her torso (Figure 14). This body posture is found in later illustrations as well. A fifteenth-century example includes the *Gospel ms 1327* (fol. 26), a collaborative text from 1475. It was created by the two sponsors, Grigor Berkrts'i, the scribe and the illuminator, and his brother Mkrtich', who commissioned the work and was the abbot of the monastery of Ter Yuskan-Ordi, located on the eastern shore of Lake Van. Set below a scene of the Last Judgment, the two figures are shown kneeling to the lower left and right, each facing the center in a three-quarter view body posture and displaying the hand gesture of offering or prayer (Figure 18).¹⁹ A second fifteenth-century example is a Gospel from Khizan, fol. 10v, where the sponsor and his two sons are illustrated

¹⁷ Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, fig. 6.

¹⁸ Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, fig. 36, in color. Also see Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 88, fig. 110, black and white photograph.

¹⁹ Thomas F. Mathews et al., "Catalogue of Manuscripts," in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds., Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 157, fig. 104.

below the Pentecost (Figure 19).²⁰ A fifteenth-century dedication page miniature, folio 15v from *Garrett ms 18*, shows the sponsor and his family before the Mother of God. The sponsor and his family are placed to the upper and lower left-hand registers of a full miniature page and given a three-quarter body stance with their hands held in an offering or prayer gesture (Figure 20).²¹ In Guevorkian's compilation of Armenian miniatures, there are at least 38 images out of the 125 illustrations documented in the text where this type of figural position and hand posture is used; the earliest image is from the twelfth century and the latest is from the eighteenth century.



Figure 17: Twelfth-century image of the receiver, Arakel, before Christ.
Source: Astghik Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, (Erevan, Sovetakan Grogh, 1982), fig. 6.

²⁰ A second fifteenth-century example is a Gospel from Khizan, fol. 10v, located in the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum, St. John's Armenian Church of Greater Detroit, acc. No. 1988.237, see Mathews and Wieck, 207, fig. 158.

²¹ Mathews et al., "Catalogue of Manuscripts," plate 28.



Figure 18: Fifteenth-century *Gospel ms 1327*, fol. 26.

Source: Thomas F. Mathews et al., "Catalogue of Manuscripts," *Treasures in Heaven*, 157, fig. 104.



Figure 19: Pentecost and Donor with his sons, 1457.

Source: Thomas F. Mathews et al., "Catalogue of Manuscripts," *Treasures in Heaven*, 207, fig. 158.



Figure 20: Donor and family before the Mother of God, 1449.

Garrett ms 18 folio 15v. Source: Thomas F. Mathews et al., “Catalogue of Manuscripts,” *Treasures in Heaven*, plate 28.

Non-miniature portraits of Armenian nobility include sculptural reliefs from as early as the fifth century. The fifth-century Church of Tekor shows two portraits of the founders on both sides of the cruciform opening on the upper part of the west façade. At Mrēn, there is an eighth-century relief of two princes of the Kamsarakan²² noble family standing upright praying before Christ who is accompanied by the apostles Peter and Paul and Saint Gregory the Illuminator.²³

Along with portraying the donor in a religious setting and in the three-quarter body pose with the extended hand gesture, as mentioned above, extant

²² Kamsarakan was the name of an Armenian noble family with claims of direct Iranian descent or origin. See Nina Garsoïan, “The Aršakuni Dynasty (A.D. 12-[180?]-428),” in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol 1, The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Havannisian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 80.

²³ St. Gregory the Illuminator is traditionally credited with converting the pagan Armenian King Trdat (Tiridates) to Christianity. Subsequently, with the king’s support, Armenia adopted Christianity as its official religion at the turn of the fourth century. See Agat’angelos, *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press), 1976.

Armenian donor portraiture includes within the illustration devotional objects such as a religious codex or a model of a church. This means of showing piety, ownership, or sponsorship of the object is traditionally achieved by depicting the devotional item as being offered by the donor. The representation of the Gospels, as the dedicated codex in the miniature, is one of several such religious iconographic features of donor portraits. A good example of this is the portrait of donors Brnavor and Tlatikin, who are kneeling in prayer before a depiction of the Gospels (Figure 21). In the thirteenth-century *Gospel no. 36 of Nor Ġowla*, a gift to the Monastery of Xckōnkh,²⁴ Brnavor and Tlatikin are depicted on the lower half of the folio below the portrait of St. Mark.²⁵ An image more contemporary with the King Gagik royal family portrait is the dedication page of Hovhannēs *protospatharios* of the 1007 *Adrianopole Gospels*, who stands in a three-quarter offering pose with a hand-held copy of his codex to the Virgin Mary and the Infant Christ (fol.7v-8r), (Figure 22).²⁶

Sculptural reliefs also show donor portraits with an offering of the church model.²⁷ The tenth-century Church of the Holy Savior at Sanahin shows the

²⁴ Father Mesrop Janashian, *Armenian Miniature Paintings* (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1970), 166. The Monastery of Xckōnkh is located near Tekor in the province of Širak.

²⁵ Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, 224, commentary No. 10 indicates that the portrait is below St. Matthew.

²⁶ Guevorkian, *Miniature Arménienne Portrait*, plate 1. Also see Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, plates 24-25. Spatharakis notes on page 57 that the copyist of the manuscript did not “harmonize the miniature of the Virgin and Child with that of the donor,” in that the Infant Christ on the lap of the Virgin Mother turns to the left and not toward the donor who is placed on the opposing page to the right. Also see Thomas F. Mathews, “The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 60, and Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 56.

²⁷ Step'an Mnats'akanian, *Aghtamar* (Erebouni Editions, AGBU Alex Manoogian Cultural Fund, 1986), 17.



Figure 21: Brnavor and Tlatikin and the portrait of St. Mark, thirteenth century. Gospel no. 36 of Nor Ġowla Source: Father Mesrop Janashian, *Armenian Miniature Paintings*, fig. 51.



Figure 22: Enthroned Virgin and Christ, and Hovhannēs (John) *protospatharios*. Source: Iohannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, figures 24-25.

crown princes, Gurgēn and Smbat, holding a church model. At Hałbat, the same brothers as King Smbat of Armenia and King Gurgēn of Tašir are shown holding a model of the church built by their mother in their honor (Figures 23 and 24).²⁸ An exemplary donor portrait in sculptural relief is the tenth-century full figure relief of King Gagik of Arcruni, located on the west façade of the Church of the Holy Cross, Alt'amar. The portrait (Figure 25) shows the king offering a model of the church to the figure of Christ, which is located to the right of a church portal.²⁹



Figure 23: Relief Sculpture of Gūrgen and Smbat Bagratuni, tenth century. Church of the Holy Savior. Source: Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 36, fig. 3.1.

²⁸ Mnats'akanian, *Aghtamar*, 16-17.

²⁹ Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia*, Accompanied by a Collection of 300 Slides in Color, slide no. 139, relief carving.



Figure 24: King Smbat of Armenia and King Gurgēn of Tašir at Halbat.
Source: Step'an Mnats'akanian, *Aghtamar*, 16-17.



Figure 25: Relief carving of King Gagik of Arcruni, Alt'amar.
Source: Dickran Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia*, (Accompanied by a Collection of 300 Slides in Color) California State University, Fresno, Armenian Studies Program, (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1992), Image No. 130. Photograph by Dickran Kouymjian.

An interesting variation of the image of an Armenian donor within a religious setting along with a symbol of an offering is found in the *Halbat Gospel of 1211* (ms 6288), where the artist Markaré depicts the narrative scene from the life of Christ, Jesus entering Jerusalem, within the landscape of the church at Halbat (Figure 26). On the left, located beneath the bell tower of the church, there is a female noble figure extending her hand toward Jesus. In addition, other figures of Armenian nobility and/or laity can be found within the image. While not much is written about the female noble figure, we can assume her to be a donor or closely associated with the donor of the Gospels.³⁰



Figure 26: “Jesus entering Jerusalem,” *Halbat Gospel of 1211* (ms 6288).
Source: Dickran Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia*, (Accompanied by a Collection of 300 Slides in Color) California State University, Fresno, Armenian Studies Program, (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1992), Image No. 80.

³⁰ Dickran Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia*, Accompanied by a Collection of 300 Slides in Color, slide no. 80, ms 6288, Erevan, Matenadaran, *Halbat Gospel*, Monastery of Horomos, 1211, artist Markaré, “Entry into Jerusalem,” photograph by Ara Güler.
<<http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/iaa_architecture/index.htm>> last accessed by author, January 28, 2011. I suggest that the figure below the bell tower of the church is a female based on the style of the figure’s hair and the figure’s physiognomy. Also see O. Kh. Khalpakhchian, *Architectural ensembles of Armenia*, 8 c. B.C. – 19 A. D. (Moscow: Iskusstvo Publishers, 1980), 188-189, fig. 21.

What do these images say with respect to being a donor portrait versus being a portrait with another intention? Apart from rare exceptions within the Byzantine corpus of portrait illuminations, the specific iconography associated with donor portraits depicts the presence of the manuscript within the image. The individual is portrayed in the act of presenting his gift.³¹ Donations were seen as part of a gift exchange, the manuscript or church in return for prayer and a greater hope of eternal life.³² In portrait paintings where the presentation of the book is not represented, it is more likely that the painting is not a donor portrait and the manuscript was commissioned for private use. According to Spatharakis, in the majority of manuscripts that were executed for private use, the act of receiving the codex is not represented and the iconography of the possessor varies.³³ What did this mean when making distinctions between donors and patrons and the imagery created?³⁴

Der Nersessian explains that Armenian portraits of nobles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries from Cilicia differed from other owner portraits.³⁵ Later portraits did not show sponsors presenting their commissioned manuscript to Christ or the Virgin. According to Der Nersessian, these types of portraits were

³¹ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 243-245.

³² Anthony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 209.

³³ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 243-245.

³⁴ Eastmond defines the donor as the person who paid for the manuscript or church donation and the patron as the one who devised and controlled the imagery that went into the visual object. Based on these definitions, what is the likelihood that King Gagik may have commissioned the manuscript and the illuminations, but the queen was the actual patron of the portrait miniature? This assumption goes along with what Jones claims in her book, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, in that the queen may have been the patron of the portrait. However, Jones posits this statement via another avenue of thought with which I do not necessarily agree.

³⁵ With rare exception, the portraits were painted at the end of the manuscript, close to the colophon, rather than at the beginning.

not necessarily “donor” portraits in the usual sense, where figures sought divine protection in recalling their specific codex donation.³⁶ Instead, within the presence of Christ and the Virgin Mary, there is a religious tone in the portrait where the figure(s) are at the service of God “for their whole life and that of their offspring” to grant them his special protection through Christ and the Virgin,” and it is in this visually sought protection that the image is depicted, “whether or not the sponsor kneels in adoration.”³⁷

Is it possible to have secular or quasi-secular imagery within a religious context? The sampling of representations provided here show the traditional way Armenian “donor” portraits were characterized with respect to reflecting the strong Christian belief system of medieval Armenian nobles. By contrast, Christian religious elements and postures to denote the miniature as a donor portrait are not found within the extant portion of the family portrait of King Gagik-Abas. Interestingly, when Eastmond studied royal imagery in medieval Georgian churches during the reign of Queen T’amar, he found secular purpose to the schema of the frescos. The depicted figures, especially those in a religious setting, were created to make the most of their social and court ranks.³⁸ So it seems that secular imagery could be integrated into a religious context, a church or sacred manuscript, to support and promote personal power.³⁹ The existing portion of the royal miniature seems to lack significant traditional religious symbolism and composition noticeably prominent in other Armenian miniatures and sculptural reliefs.

³⁶ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century*, Vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research, 1993), 154.

³⁷ Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia*, 154.

³⁸ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 193.

³⁹ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 196.

Cultural Content

In comparison to the extant miniatures in ms J2556, the royal portrait miniature is similar in its sumptuous presentation, but differs in its cultural symbolism. The artistic approach of the illuminations resembles Greek illuminations of the eleventh century, namely, those found in the *Byzantine frieze Gospels* in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale (cod. Gr. 74), and the *Imperial Lectionary* in the Monastery of Dionysiou on Mount Athos.⁴⁰ This similarity may derive from an early common source of artistic style found in the *Constantinopolitan Menologium of Basil II*, c. 1000.⁴¹ A western classicizing style is used to illustrate the intratextual narrative miniatures in ms J2556.⁴² The modeling of the subjects and the classical form of garment drapery found in the *Imperial Lectionary* at Athos⁴³ share a similar topos to those in ms J2556. This is evident when comparing “Sermon on the Mount” (fol. 21v), and “Christ with the rich young ruler” (fol. 330)⁴⁴ to ms J2556 to *Dionysiou Codex 587* (fol. 44v), “The Raising of Lazarus” (Figure 27).

⁴⁰ See Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, p. 110; Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 32; and Mathews, “The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” 60-62; and Kathleen Maxwell, “Armenian Additions to a Greek Gospelbook: Brescia Civica Biblioteca, Fondo Querini, Cod. A.,” VI. 26 in *REArm* 25 (1994-1995):337.

⁴¹ Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 33.

⁴² Mathews, “The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” 60. As noted by Kouymjian in his e-mail message to author on 24 March 2011, the extant Eusebian apparatus, a concordance to the four Gospels, in the *Gospels of King Gagik* (Eusebian Letter and two canon table decorations, and four arcades), relates closely to the decorative scheme of the *Trebizond Gospels* and the dense vegetal decoration of canon tables found in some Byzantine manuscripts. See Dickran Kouymjian, “Armenian Manuscript Illumination in the Formative Period: Text Groups, Eusebian Apparatus, Evangelists’ Portraits,” *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo* (Spoleto, Italy: 1996).

⁴³ Maxwell, “Armenian Additions to a Greek Gospelbook: Brescia Civica Biblioteca, Fondo Querini, Cod. A.,” 337.

⁴⁴ Mathews suggests that the use of the biblical narrative (fol. 330) included in the Gospels may be an allusion to the king himself. Mathews, “The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination, The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” 61.



Figure 27: “The Raising of Lazarus,” *Dionysiou Codex*, Mount Athos.
Source: S. M. Pelekanidis et al., *The Treasures of Mount Athos*, Vol. 1, p. 180, fig. 221.

In contrast, the seated, cross-legged position of King Gagik-Abas in the royal portrait reflects an eastern topos of princely enthronement as found in the tenth-century Armenian sculptural relief portrait of a seated King Gagik Arcruni (Figure 28) on the east façade of the Church of the Holy Cross, Alt’amar, as well as in Sasanian portraits on metal-ware (Figure 29)⁴⁵ and Islamic miniatures of courtly art (Figure 30).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Eva Baer, *The Human Figure in Islamic Art, Inheritances and Islamic Transformations* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2004), fig. 31.

⁴⁶ Baer, *The Human Figure in Islamic Art*, fig. 24.



Figure 28: Vine scroll, partial feast of King Gagik, Church of the Holy Cross.
Source: Henry Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, fig. 11.



Figure 29: Prince and attendant. Blacas Ewer.
London, British Museum. Source: Eva Baer, *The Human Figure in Islamic Art*, fig. 31.



Figure 30: Enthroned prince. Schefer Hariri, ms. arabe 5847.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. Source: Eva Baer, *The Human Figure in Islamic Art*, fig. 24.

The image of the seated noble, originating from Sasanian art then integrated into Islamic art, was a relatively constant model in the artistic expressions developed in Greater Armenia. With only slight variants to the sponsor's dress, the Persian costume model used by Armenian nobles remained comparatively consistent as attire worn in the sphere of the eastern courts. According to art historian Helen Evans, the eastern motif was well integrated with the introduction of early royal portrait types from western Byzantine religious architecture, and eventually penetrated the artistic domain of Greater Armenia by the seventh century.

The seated, cross-legged sponsor model that appears in Armenian portraits from as early as the tenth century reflects the impact of the “eastern cultural mores”⁴⁷ on the Armenian royal portrait tradition. What is unclear is if this model

⁴⁷ Helen Evans, “Kings and Power Bases,” in *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoïan*, eds. J-P. Mahé and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 488. In her article,

from Greater Armenia was simply a stylistic reflection of incorporating eastern cultural traditions in the Armenian royal portrait. If so, this is a departure from the earlier standing sponsor pose in what Evans says is a Byzantine model. If not, the seated, cross-legged sponsor model was a deliberate attempt to advance Armenian royal authority within the dominating Islamic suzerainty.⁴⁸

The sculptural relief of King Gagik Arcruni on the eastern façade of Alt'amar is an early example of the Armenian ruler depicted in the eastern manner (Figure 28). Here, the king is seated on a cushion, holding a goblet in his right hand and a cluster of grapes in his left.⁴⁹ Byzantine art historian Lynn Jones compares the sculptural relief of the seated King Gagik Arcruni to a silver medallion of the 'Abbasid caliph,⁵⁰ al-Moqtadir, where the caliph shares a similar pose and gesture.⁵¹ In combination with the other exterior sculptural representations of King Gagik Arcruni on the Church of the Holy Cross at Alt'amar, Islamic court iconography here is used to politically align the Armenian king to his source of regal authority, the caliphate.⁵² Jones believes that Gagik Arcruni appropriated visual elements of architecture and iconography from the prevailing Islamic power, the 'Abbasid court, to symbolically express his royal authority and legitimacy in the area. She claims that his visual expression of

Evans cites the thirteenth-century sculptural portrait Prince Hasan Ĵalal-Dawla located on the drum of his church in Ganjasar in Greater Armenia as a later example of the seated cross-legged donor portrait.

⁴⁸ Evans, "Kings and Power Bases," 488.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 57, Figure 4.5; Armenag Sakisian, "Notes on the Sculpture of the Church of Alt'amar," *The Art Bulletin* 25:4 (Dec., 1943):353.

⁵⁰ The 'Abbasids were the successors to the Umayyads, who were the first of the Arab conquerors of the region in the seventh century and who were the first of the two great dynasties of the Muslim Empire of the Caliphate. The 'Abbasids were the second dynastic Muslim power. The 'Abbasids overthrew the Umayyad caliphate in 750.

⁵¹ Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 58-59.

⁵² Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 61.

authority was purposefully strategized to maintain his temporal power in the region. Since the Arcruni royal family did not have the prestige associated with a line of pious leaders like the Bagratuni dynastic family, she states that Gagik Arcruni shaped a new visual expression of rulership for himself, which was based on Islamic visual expressions of power.

Non-textile elements in the interior décor of the royal miniature portrait that associate the representation of the family with the iconography of pre-Islamic Middle Eastern monarchy and its historical use by Armenian royalty include the use of two lions to each side of the divan along with two stemmed bowls with fruit that flank the seated family. These two elements have secular significance in medieval art and further define the symbolic nature of the miniature painting.

The symbolism associated with the display of fruit, fruit bowls, or fruit baskets in family portraits suggests abundance and fertility.⁵³ As a pictorial motif, it may also be an indication of the rituals associated with Eastern Mediterranean-styled hospitality as in a guest-host reciprocal relationship similar to the Greek concept of *ξενία* (*xenia*),⁵⁴ or perhaps multiple meanings are represented within the image's entire iconographic presentation. Many times the specific type or variety of fruit depicted corresponds to a symbolic attribute that is contextually associated with the image. In the miniature family portrait, the type of fruit represented is not discernible. At a minimum, two different pigment colors are used to distinguish types of fruit from each other. While the pigments have faded

⁵³ Jack Tresidder, ed., *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 394.

⁵⁴ Prudence Oliver Harper, *The Royal Hunter, Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York: Asia House Gallery, 1978), 107. The traditional interpretation of *xenia* is as a form of hospitality or guest-friendship. It is a type of social bond that extended to such social matters as marriage, which led in the next generations to consanguinity. See Gabriel Herman, "Patterns of Name Diffusion within the Greek World and Beyond," *The Classical Quarterly, New Series* 40:2 (1990):351.

over time; the deep red-colored fruit may denote pomegranates. It cannot be certain that pomegranates are present. However, based on the traditional fruits that would be found in a medieval Armenian context, it is plausible that this particular fruit is represented in the image. Sculptured reliefs of pomegranates and grape clusters are found as part of the thirteenth-century decoration of the portal tympanum of the main church, *katoghike* (built in 1215), of the Gelard monastic complex.⁵⁵ Similar imagery of grape clusters and pomegranates is among the highly decorative sculptural reliefs on the church of the Holy Cross at Alt'amar. The sculptural images of these two fruits are incorporated within the relief band, which includes an image of the seated King Gagik, patron of the church (Figure 28).⁵⁶ Symbolically, it is the multi-cellular nature of the pomegranate with its vast quantity of embedded, liquid-filled seeds that allude to fecundity, abundance, and affluence.⁵⁷ The pomegranate is predominately a fertility symbol in Mediterranean cultures where it is “linked with love, marriage and many children.”⁵⁸ With its botanical origins east of Mesopotamia, its iconography relating to aspects of life and death⁵⁹ became well established in the eastern Mediterranean by the early Iron Age, eventually becoming imagery incorporated

⁵⁵ O. Kh. Khalpakhchian, *Architectural ensembles of Armenia, 8 c. B.C. – 19 A. D.*, (Moscow: Iskusstvo Publishers, 1980), 322. Also see Dickran Kouymjian, “Index of Armenian Art: Armenian Architecture,” and Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia*, Accompanied by a [Collection of 300 Slides in Color](http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/iaa_architecture/index.htm). <<http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/iaa_architecture/index.htm>> last accessed by author, January 26, 2011.

⁵⁶ Mnats'akanian, *Aghtamar*, plate 31.

⁵⁷ Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings, Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2003), 58.

⁵⁸ Tresidder, *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 394.

⁵⁹ Cheryl Ward, “Pomegranates in Eastern Mediterranean Contexts during the Late Bronze Age,” *World Archaeology* 34:3 (Feb., 2003):538. References to death as suggested by Ward are based on the frequent presence of pomegranates in tombs, either as actual remains of the fruit or its representation in glass, ivory or bronze artifacts (Ward, 538). I suggest that perhaps the association to “death” projects the idea of renewal or rebirth, hence coinciding with the “life/fertility” aspects of the fruit.

in texts and visual culture dating to Classical times.⁶⁰ In Buddhism, it was one of the Three Blessed Fruits, and in the Islamic faith, it was maintained by Muhammad that eating the fruit purged the system of envy and hatred.⁶¹ If the pomegranate is present in the royal family portrait within the representation of fruit in the stemmed bowl, then an interesting additional dimension of meaning can be discerned in the overall iconography of the image.

What may be interpreted as the heraldic lion in the portrait, a symbolic power animal, is found in pre-Islamic Persian arts as well as in the arts of their predecessors in ancient Mesopotamia.⁶² The lion motif may have changed little from its symbolic representation in the ancient Near East as a conquering beast⁶³ and to its Far East representation as a guardian of the imperial court.⁶⁴ In the pre-Islamic Middle East, the representational lion⁶⁵ in the architecture sculptural relief of Persepolis, the Achaemenid Persian capital of the sixth century BCE, was considered an emblem of royal power, modified symbolically from its earlier astronomical significance.⁶⁶ Located within the context of a palace, it is reasonable that the lion became a symbol of the power of kingship. Within a Christian context, the winged lion is used as the symbol of the Evangelist Mark;⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Cheryl Ward, "Pomegranates in Eastern Mediterranean Contexts during the Late Bronze Age," *World Archaeology*, 538.

⁶¹ Tresidder, *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 394.

⁶² Willy Hartner and Richard Ettinghausen, "The Conquering Lion, The Life Cycle of a Symbol," *Oriens* 17 (Dec. 31, 1964):164.

⁶³ Hartner and Ettinghausen, "The Conquering Lion, The Life Cycle of a Symbol," 169.

⁶⁴ Osvald Sirén, "A Chinese Stone Lion," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 47:273 (Dec., 1925):276 and 280-281.

⁶⁵ The relief of lion and bull can be found in the decoration of the stairway of the palace of Darius at Persepolis (see p. 32, fig. 15 in *The Art and Architecture of Persia* by G. Curatola and G. Scarcia, 2007).

⁶⁶ Hartner and Ettinghausen, "The Conquering Lion, The Life Cycle of a Symbol," 169.

⁶⁷ Tresidder, *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 291.

however, this is not the case in the miniature family portrait. Rather, considering the royal context of the image, the use of the lion as part of the divan is more likely a demonstration of kingship in what seems to be a presentation of the family upon a “throne”.⁶⁸

It is possible that within the context of the portrait the representation of the lion has dual symbolism. Along with the notion of kingship, the lion throne upon which the entire family sits suggests the apotropaic character of the lion,⁶⁹ as a guard against malevolence. Apotropaism, or turning away evil, is found in the Mediterranean and Near East in the form of talismans, amulets, and potent symbols. Archaeological finds at the Armenian medieval palace of Avan, which flanks a basilica dating to the sixth or seventh century, includes an animal sculpture identified as a “primeval animal (perhaps a lion?).”⁷⁰ It is suggested that its presence is apotropaic. The sculpture structurally adjoins a chimney located inside the central chamber of the palace.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Mathews and Daskalakis indicate that the “association of lions with rulers, and particularly with their thrones” is a long-standing tradition in the Near East. This association was later assimilated and transformed in the Islamic world, and entered the “repertoire of Spanish caliphal ivories” in the tenth century, see “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars,” 478.

⁶⁹ This is an interesting fusion of the functionality and apotropaic nature of the represented lion. Another example of this is provided by Richard H. Wilkinson when he describes the rainwater drainage system of ancient Egyptian temple roofs. Here the outpour spouts were decorated with lion-headed *alto-rilievo*, in *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 69.

⁷⁰ Mario D’Onofrio, “A Medieval Palace in Avan,” in *Medieval Armenian Culture*, eds. Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 121.

⁷¹ Mario D’Onofrio, 121. D’Onofrio suggests that the lion-sculpture that adjoins the chimney may be a possible reference to Mithra, who is associated with fire, and to the Armenian symbolic association of the great Lion-Mher of the medieval Armenian folk epic, Davit of Sasun. Scholars place the epic as taking place around the mid-ninth century. See Agop J. Hacikyan et al, *The Heritage of Armenian Literature, Vol. II* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2002), 967.

Composition

Compositional elements and artistic devices used to depict figures in an image are critical to understanding visual intentionality. Collectively, the striking compositional placement of the king, queen, and princess in the royal portrait of King Gagik-Abas, along with their gestures and direct gaze upon the viewer,⁷² visually signal a statement and/or declaration. Without text to support the communicative aspect of the family portrait, the significance of the image requires inferences based on its compositional elements and the probable purpose of creating such a portrait. As one looks upon the image (Figure 1), King Gagik of Kars sits to the left of the center and Queen Goranduxt is to the right of the center. The central position is reserved for Princess Marem, the focal point of the composition.

In Byzantine group portraits of three, the central position of the composition is reserved for the most important figure being commemorated by the painting. Examples of this artistic device include the early sixth-century donor portrait of Patricia Anicia Juliana,⁷³ (Figure 31) and the eleventh-century imperial family portrait (Figure 3) in the *Barberini Psalter*, which I introduced earlier. The image is where one of the sons of Constantine X Doukas and his wife Eudokia is placed in the center identifying him as co-emperor in the year of his coronation.⁷⁴ Mathews and Daskalakis have interpreted the center placement of Princess Marem in the royal family portrait as one critical aspect of four iconographic elements that politically signal Marem as the successor to the throne.⁷⁵

⁷² Although the portrait is severed midway along the faces of the king and queen, based on their body posture in the image it is likely that they, along with the princess, face the viewer directly. By gazing directly at the viewer, the figure in the portrait gives emphasis to his or her presence within the image.

⁷³ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 145, fig. 95.

⁷⁴ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 28, fig. 7.

⁷⁵ Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars," 479. Along with central placement, the scholars identify the following as important iconographic contributors regarding the princess and the image: secular mode of the painting, hand gestures by the king to his daughter, the king and



Figure 31: Miniature of Anicia Juliana, Vind. Med. gr. I, f. 6v.

Source: Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, fig. 95.

The miniature images of twelfth-century Queen Melisende, of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, in Old French thirteenth-century manuscripts of William Tyre's *History of Outremer*,⁷⁶ provide good examples of how compositions reflect desired artistic emphasis of figures. Tyre's written accounts give Melisende prominence as an effectual queen regarding her political affairs in the Latin Kingdom. Later, artistic representations of Melisende render their own

princess's shared *tiraz* embroidered bands. Mathews and Daskalakis suggest that the king's tunic includes a *tiraz* along his upper arms and that Marek has a short blue scarf or shawl that is embellished with *tiraz*. These Islamic bands of cloth, called *tiraz*, are typically used on garments and furnishings, and they are decorated and inscribed with titles, place-names and dates of rulers, or blessings, in royal workshops. The term *tiraz* is used for textiles manufactured in royal courts and is also applied to the workshops themselves.

⁷⁶ William of Tyre chronicled the queen in Latin fifteen years before his death, c. 1185. The work was later translated in Old French and "given various Old French continuations during the thirteenth century." Queen Melisende (1118-1131), is the daughter of Baldwin II, king of Jerusalem, wife of King Fulk and mother of Kings Baldwin III and Amaury I. See Jaroslav Folda, "Images of Queen Melisende in Manuscripts of William of Tyre's *History of Outremer*: 1250-1300," *Gesta* 32:2 (1993):97. Folda also mentions that in Tyre's text Melisende is remarkably given prominent status. His narrative reveals the significant role she played in the politics of the time. Her historical credits, in some cases, are only known from Tyre's accounts.

iconographic interpretations of events written in the text.⁷⁷ Some of the representations vary in their iconographic treatment of the queen, which illustrate intent of artist and/or patron. For example, manuscript illuminations depicting the same event, the coronation of Baldwin III, Melisende's son, portray the queen markedly different. In the Bern codex (ms 163), she is shown as crowned, relatively centered, and enthroned, unlike the Brussels ms 9492-3 and the Paris fr. 2754, where she is placed within a group of onlookers to the side of the image and dressed in ordinary non-royal clothing. In yet another image, the Paris ms fr. 2824 codex illustrates the queen as crowned, in a compositional placement conveying a strong mother and son relationship that is not captured by the other miniatures.⁷⁸

The compositional analysis of Mathews and Daskalakis of Maren's importance as the central figure in the royal portrait does not account for her centrality as one not equally distributed between her father and mother. Spatially, she sits closer to her mother. The artistic device of compositional "closeness" is observed in the placement of the queen in proximity to her daughter, clearly the focal figure in the painting. Upon further examination, it can be seen that the protrusion of the queen's folded right leg overlaps her daughter's folded left leg, noticeably more so than with the king's left leg. The artist could have easily shifted the daughter's physical position to an equidistant point between the king and the queen or have depicted the king's leg to overlap his daughter's more so than the queen's; however, none of these compositional devices were applied to the image. This artistic device of compositional proximity is more noticeable

⁷⁷ Folda, "Images of Queen Melisende in Manuscripts of William of Tyre's History of Outremer: 1250-1300," 99.

⁷⁸ Folda, "Images of Queen Melisende in Manuscripts of William of Tyre's History of Outremer: 1250-1300," 101-102.

when viewing the negative space between the subjects (Figure 1). The space to the left of the central vertical axis through the figure of the princess is greater than the negative space to the right of the central line. The overlapping effect of the royal couple in front of their young daughter may be a device to economize on space and to suggest depth,⁷⁹ rather than to minimize the princess's importance; or it may convey their continued guardian role as parents to their only daughter.

Based on the highly symbolic nature of the medieval royal miniature, the analysis of hand gestures adds to the overall meaning of the painting. Hand gestures, a phenomenon of semiotics rather than symbolism,⁸⁰ are quite significant in medieval portraiture, in most cases, either substituting for or complementing the spoken language. Actions and emotions in medieval portraiture were communicated visually by gestures and poses. Medieval viewers must have understood these visual expressions and required limited cues to make sense of an image. Examples include condemnation sometimes shown by a single accusatory finger, an argument by a raised arm and open palm with fingers and thumbs straight, or wonder and listening by hands and arms held down.⁸¹

While hand gestures are culturally variable, there needs to be a fair amount of shared meaning and convention within a given culture to understand gestures in portraiture. Without the gestural vocabulary for a specific time and place and its associated social ideology, the task to decode the meaning of a surrogate method of speaking in portraiture is a daunting one. Based on certain agreed-upon choices that an artist and the patron can make for the selection of hand gestures in the

⁷⁹ Meyer Schapiro, *Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language* (New York: George Braziller), 141.

⁸⁰ Tresidder, *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 222.

⁸¹ Roger Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2008), 124.

portrait, it can be argued that the final selection is based either on aesthetics or context, or a combination.

In this situation, the hand gesture of King Gagik-Abas seems to signal the princess for a specified purpose. Mathews and Daskalakis suggest that this gesture, along with other symbolic characteristics associating the king to the princess, alludes to successive “kingship” or the presentation of a royal appointment.⁸² The position of the king’s hands is comparable to Byzantine manuscript portraits, such as the hand gestures of George Pachymeres in his portrait of the early fourteenth-century *Codex gr. 442*. This codex predominately covers the history of Pachymeres, from the years 1255 to 1308, in a total of thirteen books. In the portrait, Pachymeres looks forward and gestures in *deësis* posture (Figure 32).⁸³ In *Codex Hist. gr. 53*, which contains the shorter version of the chronicle of Byzantine imperial secretary Nicetas Choniates, from the death of Alexius I Comnenus to the year 1206, is the portrait of Alexius V (fol.291v), son-in-law of Alexius III Angelus. Alexius V is portrayed in the *deësis* gesture⁸⁴ (Figure 33). In *Sinait. gr. 2123*, the portrait of thirteen-century Byzantine emperor Michael VIII is painted in *deësis* gesture. Spatharakis uses the term *deësis* to describe the “position of the hands”⁸⁵ in the context of patrons offering their work,⁸⁶ thus expressing a votive character to the portrait.⁸⁷

⁸² Mathews and Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars,” 479.

⁸³ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 166, fig. 106.

⁸⁴ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 156.

⁸⁵ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 52, n.161.

⁸⁶ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 248.

⁸⁷ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 248.



Figure 32: George Pachymeres, Monac. gr. 442, f. 6v.

Source: Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, fig. 106.



Figure 33: Alexius V Murtzuphlos (?), Vind. Hist. gr. 53, f. 291v.

Source: Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, fig. 99.

Despite the similarity of gesticulation between the miniature and these manuscript portraits, it is unclear how this type of hand gesture functions within the miniature family portrait and the relevance of *deësis* in this visual connection. The word *deësis*, δέησις in Greek, meaning entreaty to God or to man, has been used since the nineteenth century to identify the gesture of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, with their hands extended while standing on either side of Christ, in Byzantine icon composition. These hand gestures by the Virgin and St. John toward Christ and their intercession between the patron and God,⁸⁸ is known as the Great Deësis.⁸⁹ Expanding upon the notion of *deësis* as the associated verbal expression of entreaty, was this particular gestural imagery as depicted in the portraits of Pachymeres, Alexius V, Michael VIII, and King Gagik-Abas of Kars used to convey a plea, earnest request, petition, or adjuration in the context of the portrait?

Other Armenian royal portraits may display modified *deësis* hand gestures in a display of the Great Deësis iconography. This is seen in the collective portrait of King Lewon II and Queen Keran and their five children (ms J2563). In the miniature, the royal family members, all dressed in ceremonial robes, are kneeling with hands raised in prayer toward the heavenly vision of Christ, who blesses them.⁹⁰ The hand gestures of the royal couple are slightly different compared to

⁸⁸ Alexander Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 599-600. *Deësis*, as a compositional descriptive term, was not used originally for the iconic presentation of the Virgin, St. John, and Christ. The Byzantines used it for the Virgin Mary praying, or the Virgin or a donor presenting a petition, not necessarily to signify intercession. It was intended to “express the privileged role of the Virgin and John as the first witnesses to Christ’s divinity.” It was not until the ninth century that the composition increasingly appeared in contexts that suggested intercession.

⁸⁹ Thomas F. Mathews, *Byzantium, From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 62.

⁹⁰ Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century*, 156.

their children. With one hand, both the king and the queen support the forearm of the child nearest to them and with their other hand they gesture in the *deësis* position while looking up to the two intercessors for the family, the Virgin and St. John the Baptist, who are located on either side of an enthroned Christ. Furthermore, the children exhibit the two-handed *deësis* gesture⁹¹ (Figure 15). Medieval Georgian royal donor images in church frescos show hands in gestures of supplication quite similar to those defined as the *deësis* gesture, Figure 34. The gesture is shown in a drawing from Eastmond's text illustrating the faded fresco where to the far right is the enthroned Christ.



Figure 34: Lower register, painting in the schema of north transept at Q'inc'visi. Source: Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, p.144, fig. 69.

In the King Gagik-Abas royal portrait, the queen also gestures to her daughter, but with only her left hand. The queen holds what appears to be a kerchief in her right hand. The piece of cloth is similar in the patterned design of the queen's veil, which drapes over her shoulders. The pictorial ambivalence of

⁹¹ Narkiss, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem*, 65, fig. 77.

the queen's hand-held object prompted one scholar to suggest that it was a scroll. I challenged the idea of a represented scroll in the hand of the queen by presenting experimental graphics and tally surveys of contemporary Armenian and Byzantine portrait miniatures with hand-held objects to show that such a hand-held item by Queen Goranduxt was highly improbable.⁹²

While the textile décor and the costumes represented in the miniature are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, the symbolic aspect of the kerchief is significant as part of the overall iconography present in the painting. In Byzantine portrait paintings, objects held by royal male and female figures carry symbolic relevance in the composition. An example includes the representations of objects held by Constantine IX and Zoe in the Hagia Sophia mosaic, where Zoe holds a scroll inscribed with a list of her donations to the church and Constantine offers an *apokombion*, a purse of gold coins, to the church.⁹³ As stated earlier, in Armenian donor portraits, objects of symbolic importance denoting patronage or piety may include a model of the commission, such as a church, as depicted in medieval Armenian sculptural reliefs, or a donation of the Gospels as symbolized by a pictorial representation of a codex.⁹⁴ The object held by Queen Goranduxt is a piece of cloth, more specifically, a textile fragment that matches her veil. The symbolism of the explicitly patterned cloth in the queen's hand brings textiles to the forefront of interpreting this miniature.

⁹² Hazel Antaramian-Hofman, "An Art History Commentary on Queen Gorandukht in the Royal Family Portrait Miniature Painting of King Gagik-Abas and His Family," in *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 18:2 (2009). My article also supports Der Nersessian's original assessment that the object in the queen's hand is a piece of cloth or kerchief. See Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," *REArm* 18 (1984): 90.

⁹³ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, fig. 67.

⁹⁴ Medieval Armenian queens are known to have donated religious manuscripts to monasteries and churches, and commissioned the construction of churches that included dedicatory sculptural reliefs of their offspring.

The princess in the royal family portrait of King Gagik-Abas positions her hands palms open facing the viewer and held close to her chest, though not above her shoulders. Her gesture seems to evoke surprise,⁹⁵ rejoicing, or speech, perhaps in response to the gestures made by the king and queen, as in the acceptance of a statement or declaration proclaimed upon her. These are all possible secular interpretations of this form of hand gesture.

There are some physical parallels to the princess's hand gestures, though in explicitly religious settings. There is a similar gesture when showing surprise by the Virgin Mary in Annunciation iconography, when the Virgin hears the news delivered by the archangel.⁹⁶ The positioning of the hands found in many of the Virgin Orans (praying) iconography is slightly different (Figure 35). Here the arms are held further apart from each other, elbows close to the sides of the body, so that the palms of the hands are not in front of the body, but are extended out and held at the sides of the figure. The Orans is an outward sign of supplicating God.⁹⁷

The extended prayer hand posture is physically distinct from the hand gesture that is not extended but held closer to the body. Figure 36 illustrates another example of the Orans, the Icon with Saint Demetrious, an early eleventh-century gold and cloisonné enamel. Here the figure is shown frontally, standing

⁹⁵ Linette Martin, *Sacred Doorways, Beginners Guide to Icons* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2002), 118. Martin writes that the universal gesture of surprise is a hand or hands brought sharply upwards where the palms are open to the front and the body jerked slightly backward from the waist.

⁹⁶ Martin, *Sacred Doorways*, 119.

⁹⁷ William D. Wixom, "Byzantine Art and the Latin West," in *The Glory of Byzantium, Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, eds. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 450-451.



Figure 35: Marble Plaque Icon with the Virgin Orans.

Middle to late twelfth century Byzantine relief. Source: Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium, Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, 451, fig. 291.

on a decorated dais, with both hands raised in prayer.⁹⁸ The iconography of an early eleventh-century low relief serpentine disk of the bust of the Virgin Mary shows her arms raised up frontally rather than the more common position of Virgin Orans (Figure 37). This type of iconography is not completely unknown for the Virgin. Lead seals from the eleventh century show her in such a similar pose. Contextually, the roundel is associated with the emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates, who reigned from 1078 to 1081. The inscription, surrounding the figure of the Virgin, invokes the aid of the emperor Nikephoros.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Popular Imagery," in *The Glory of Byzantium, Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, eds. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 160-161, fig. 107.

⁹⁹ Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Popular Imagery," 177, fig. 130.



Figure 36: Icon with Saint Demetrios.

Source: Carr, *The Glory of Byzantium, Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, 161, fig. 107.



Figure 37: Roundel with the Virgin Orans.

Source: Carr, *The Glory of Byzantium, Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, 177, fig. 130.

There is also some similarity in hand gestures found in the Coptic Monastery at Quabbat al-Hawa, where the monastic saints with square halos hold their hands forward, with palms facing outward and below the shoulders (Figure 38, and detail in Figure 38a).¹⁰⁰ The hand gesture in the image of Saint Katherine has the same frontal hand gesture as Princess Marem. The fresco painting of Saint Katherine is along the north pilaster in the Georgian church of Vardzia, founded by Queen T'amar in 1185. Along with frescos of the queen, as co-ruler, and her father, King Giorgi III, and donor images, female saints assume prominent positions in the naos of Vardzai.¹⁰¹ The frontal, standing figure of Saint Katherine maintains similar hand gestures as Marem in the royal miniature (Figure 39). As with other female saints, Saint Katherine embodies piety and purity. It is suggested that the inclusion of her portrait in the church founded by Queen T'amar, along with frescos of other female saints, are easily related to conveying the virtues of an unmarried queen.¹⁰²



Figure 38: Monastic saints at the Monastery at Qubbat al-Hawa, Egypt.
Source: Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, fig. 10.5.

¹⁰⁰ Gawdat Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries, Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2002), figures 10.5 and 10.6.

¹⁰¹ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 114.

¹⁰² Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 118.



Figure 38a: Detail of Figure 38.

Source: Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, fig. 10.6.



Figure 39: Saint Katherine. North Pilaster of Church at Vardzia, Georgia.

Source: Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, fig. 59.

Were there two iconographic hand/arm gestures signifying prayer in the medieval period? Does the one exhibited by Princess Marem, similar to Figures 37 through 39, represent another symbolic gesture of invocation? How likely was it that there were different types of hand gestures to connate the same information?

There is an obvious disadvantage in analyzing the lower portion of a partial miniature as crucial information may alter the results of the study. We do not know what existed in the upper register of the partial folio of the royal miniature painting. Did it consist of either secular or religious imagery, or a combination? An example of secular imagery is the twelfth-century Byzantine marital ceremony miniature that depicts non-religious scenes in both registers. It is the arrival of Agnes, the daughter of Louis VII of France, in Constantinople in 1179 to marry Alexios II, the heir of Manuel I Komnenos (Figure 40). The upper register shows the arrival, and the lower section shows the princess in resplendent imperial costume sitting on a central throne receiving the homage of the women in the palace.¹⁰³ Another possibility may be the presence of religious imagery, such as the Hand of God, juxtaposed to secular-themed representation of a scene. An example where such a combination exists is the fourteenth-century Armenian miniature of King Lewon IV who is rendering justice to the figures below¹⁰⁴ (Figure 41). The painting shows Lewon represented as a judge, seated cross-legged on a low throne with his right hand raised in a gesture of speech. He lays his left hand on the head of a youth who kneels before him. The young man raises his hand toward the king in an act of pleading and with his left hand he points to

¹⁰³ Henry Maguire, "Images of the Court," in *The Glory of Byzantium*, eds. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 191.

¹⁰⁴ Dickran Kouymjian brought this image to my attention in reference to the uncertainty of the upper portion of the miniature folio.

the bearded men. The inscription states: *Lewon, King. Just Judgment*. These words along with the blessing Hand of God support statements in the *Assizes*.¹⁰⁵ Here the Cilician royal court presided over by the king, judged the criminal affairs and the contestations among nobles relating to feudal rights.¹⁰⁶ At times, Byzantine family portraits incorporated the Hand of God hovering centrally above the individuals symbolizing a blessing. This is seen in the fourteenth-century Slavonic Tetraevangelion's full page miniature of Ivan Alexander, his two sons, and his second wife, the tsarina Theodora. In this image the hand of God appears twice to bless the family (Figure 42).¹⁰⁷ Christ crowning or blessing is also found in the thirteenth-century Armenian miniature of Prince Lewon II and Keran (Figure 5), which is based on Byzantine models. In both the Armenian examples, the Hand of God is found in post-eleventh century examples and may be attributed to a Byzantine pattern. In this respect, it is also possible that at one time an image of the figure of Christ or the Virgin Mary may have been present above the three seated figures in the royal portrait of King Gagik-Abas.¹⁰⁸

Some studies have mentioned that each of the figures in the royal portrait of King Gagik-Abas has a nimbus. The inclusion of halos as radiating light around the head of the figure is a traditional artistic device used in portraits to denote sacred individuals. Its use in Christian art, in varying geometric and artistic forms, served to designate Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, the four evangelists as well as Byzantine emperors and religious figures. Perhaps the illustration of halos in the royal portrait served to demonstrate piety, family members as spiritually devoted

¹⁰⁵ This refers to the collection of medieval legal treatises containing the law of the Crusaders.

¹⁰⁶ Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia*, 159.

¹⁰⁷ Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem," 478.

or dedicated individuals. Eastmond attributes the use of haloes of Georgia royal figures in church settings as “playing a definite role in the hierarchical structuring of society through art.”¹⁰⁹ He says that the haloes were used to make a distinction between the royal family and the rest of society. In this context, haloes were used to symbolically denote regal superiority and sanctity.¹¹⁰ The haloes in the royal miniature portrait are difficult to determine visually and not all scholars who have studied the image mention it. There seem to be traces of nimbi around the heads of the figures. Jones mentions the existence of halos as being within the gold background.¹¹¹ As far as I can determine, there is no mention of nimbed figures in other major written accounts of the royal portrait.¹¹²

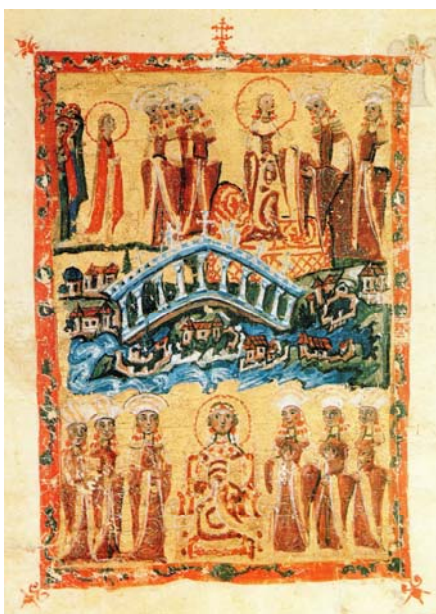


Figure 40: A foreign princess arrives at Constantinople for her wedding. Twelfth-century Byzantine miniature painting. Source: Maguire, *The Glory of Byzantium*, 191.

¹⁰⁹ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 162.

¹¹⁰ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 162.

¹¹¹ Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 49.

¹¹² This assessment is based only on the work of Mathews and Daskalakis in “The Portrait of Princess Marem,” and that of Der Nersessian in “L’Evangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556,” *REArm* 18 (1984).



Figure 41: King Levon IV rendering justice, 1331.

Source: Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century*, fig. 648.



Figure 42: Theodora, Ivan Šišman, Ivan Alexander, and Ivan Asen.

Source: Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, fig. 39.

The brief survey of medieval Armenian royal portraits in this chapter suggests that the incorporation of religious iconography within the context of the patron is an essential element in the composition of the painting or sculpture. Furthermore, the examples presented show that compositional devices of the portraiture are significant with respect to its semiotics. The composition of the royal painting of King Gagik-Abas and his family maintains a secular setting within an eastern manner, confirming suggestions made by Mathews and Daskalakis. Other key compositional elements found in the image include the centralized position of the princess, her relative proximity to each respective parent, specific hand gestures for each member of the family, the piece of designed cloth held by the queen, and the inclusion of such imagery as lions and bowls of fruit. Even if the partial folio had at one time included imagery of God's blessing above the seated figures, such an illustration within a portrait painting, where the gazes of the figures are toward the viewer and not to the heavens, would only suggest a desire for a divine blessing within the context of the commissioned manuscript.

CHAPTER 3: TEXTILE DECORATION AND MOTIF IN THE ROYAL FAMILY MINIATURE

Along with descriptions of textiles in literary sources and those preserved as part of the archaeological record, the study of pictorial representations of costumes and decorative fabrics in portraiture is an important means of research to learn more about medieval cloth. When given a painting with an elaborate display of garments and textile furnishings, not only is there an occasion to investigate the design motifs, but there is also an opportunity to consider the contextual significance of the textiles represented in the artwork.

In the Mediterranean East during antiquity and the medieval period, textile furnishings were used by the nobility and royal courts to impress foreign visitors and demonstrate their wealth and power. In particular, pictorial textiles were used as wall coverings and doorway hangings with intended messages of political posturing and propaganda.¹ Garments, while having an obvious functional value, were also the means by which “an individual identified his changing status.”² It is not an overstatement to say that clothing constituted what historian, Yedida Kalfon Stillman, called a “cultural statement.” Stillman ascribes to this cultural phenomenon the ability of clothes to operate as an effective tool of communication both on the “physical and symbolic level about the society in which it is found.”³

Symbolically, clothing is a reflection of “religious and political norms.”⁴ Given the importance of textiles during the medieval period, it is reasonable to

¹ Lisa Golombek, “The Draped Universe of Islam,” in *Late Antique and Medieval Art of the Mediterranean World*, ed. Eva Rose F. Hoffman (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 105.

² Golombek, “The Draped Universe of Islam,” 103.

³ Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1.

⁴ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 1.

assume that sumptuous fabrics were used to meet the socio-political desires of the nobility. The royal desires of the Armenian nobility were no exception to this social phenomenon. Under the suzerainty of the east, west, or divided between the two,⁵ the precarious geography of Armenia inevitably assured a degree of cultural integration of the prevailing socio-political system. This type of cultural blending or borrowing could also be applied to the insignia found in the textiles and costumes of nobles.

The miniature family portrait of King Gagik-Abas, Queen Goranduxt, and Princess Marem preserves for scholars an opportunity to analyze medieval Armenian courtly opulence in a noteworthy presentation of textiles. This rare painting of a Bagratuni family features both costume and interior fabrics in an elaborate array of detailed design work. Even in its current deteriorated state, the significance of the displayed cloth in the image is clear. There are at least seven discernible representations of cloth and costume in the royal portrait (see Figure 43). This assessment is based on the visible differences of color and motif in the textiles. Where visually evident, there are at least ten different design patterns on the textiles.⁶ Figure 44 provides an illustration to show the patterns. In addition to the identification of design patterns, this chapter reviews the physical description and symbolic nature of the various designs and motifs of the textiles represented in the painting. My examination is based on a high resolution photograph of the miniature portrait. More specific descriptive information of the textile decorations from the various scholars who have studied the image can be found in Appendix A.

⁵ Nina G. Garsoïan, "The History of Armenia," in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 3.

⁶ Figure 43 has eleven textile types labeled; however, numbers ten and eleven presumably represent the same band that appears in two places. Both are marked, one as T10 and the other as T11. Finally, this estimate does not include the embroidered *tiraz* band identified by those scholars who have studied the painting in-depth.



Figure 43. Portrait with alphanumerical notations to designate varying textiles. Image is based on a high-quality photographic print from the slide taken by Ara Güler. Slide and image courtesy of Dickran Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia (Accompanied by a Collection of 300 Slides in Color)* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1992).

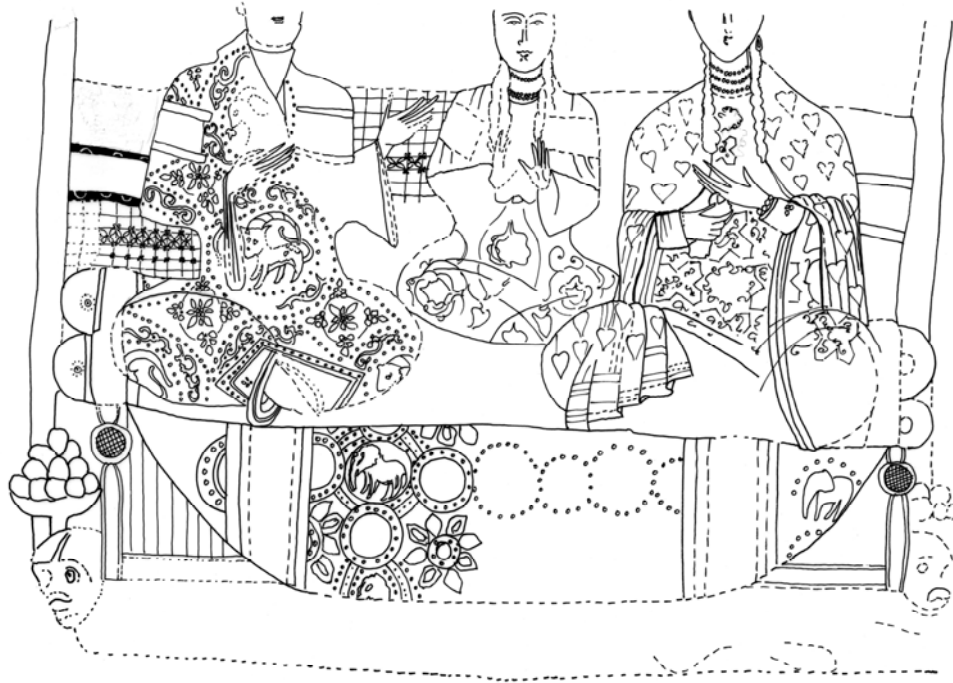


Figure 44. Author's illustration of miniature to accompany photographic image.

Interior Textiles

The textile furnishings encompass coverings of a cloth-covered divan (dais) and cushions, and a tapestry-like “throw” displayed in the foreground. The divan is likely covered in a woven silk, red-colored textile that is decorated with geometric pattern work incorporating minuscule floral-like designs at each corner of the small squares in the pattern. The throw is designed with four large pearl-bordered medallions encircling elephants in the upper and lower registers of the linear design, and four large pearled roundels encircling flowers in the middle registers of the linear designs. The larger roundels (both those encircling elephants and flowers) alternate with the smaller pearled medallions. Symbolically, the elephant embodies various characteristics depending upon the cultural reference point. However, its importance as a signifier of political power

in Eastern cultures seems universal.⁷ Mathews and Daskalakis indicate that it is a royal animal of ancient Persian monarchy. They suggest that the design of the encircled elephants in the royal portrait is reminiscent of the tenth-century silk fragment Khorasan “elephant silk.”⁸ The Khorasan fragment is an example of surviving silk textiles produced in the royal workshops of the Samanid dynasty (819-1005 CE) of the ‘Abbassid period for the general and emir Bukhtakīn. The silk fragment includes two rows of elephants facing each other separated by a strip of heart-shaped motifs.⁹ The elephants decorating the Bukhtakīn silk textile are considered an example of the first well-developed Islamic style of the tenth century.¹⁰ Another example of the elephant motif in textiles includes the eleventh-century silk twill of “fantastic animals” in pearl-bordered roundels encircling elephants, simurghs, and winged horses. The textile is of Byzantine origin, but its design is derived from a Sasanian model.¹¹ Byzantine contact with Persia in war or trade led to exchanges of motifs as well as the movement of artisans. This cultural transfer provided the Byzantine iconographic repertoire with popular Sasanian textile bestiary, such as lions, elephants, and griffins.¹² The use of Sasanian iconography expanded geographically during the early periods of

⁷ Jack Tresidder, ed., *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 166.

⁸ Thomas F. Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Marm of Kars, Jerusalem 2556, fol. 135b,” in *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoïan*, eds. J-P. Mahé and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 479.

⁹ Sophie Makariou, *Islamic Art: The Caliphate Period, The Saint-Josse Shroud*, Louvre Museum website, image and text assessed by author on November 8, 2010, http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp.

¹⁰ Mehmet Aga-Oglu, “Remarks on the Character of Islamic Art,” *The Art Bulletin*, 36:3 (Sep., 1954):193.

¹¹ Adèle Coulin Weibel, *Two Thousand Years of Textiles, The Figured Textiles of Europe and the Near East* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1972), 96.

¹² Michel Thomas et al., *Textile Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 37.

medieval Islam and the Christian west.¹³ Der Nersessian indicates that silk cloths with animals in medallions were a Sasanian tradition later used by the Muslims.¹⁴ However, many of the Persian cultural motifs used in Sasanian textiles were inherited from their predecessors, the Parthians,¹⁵ who in turn borrowed Persian themes of hunting, war and banqueting, and other associated imagery from the earlier Achaemenid culture.¹⁶

The small medallion pattern found on the throw in the miniature portrait includes a winged creature. Sirarpie Der Nersessian identifies the creatures as birds,¹⁷ while Marielle Martiniani-Reber suggests that they are similar to the Sasanian simurgh,¹⁸ a winged creature found in the Persian Pahlavi texts. The simurgh was associated with beneficent attributes such as protection.¹⁹ While it may be difficult to discern whether the winged creature in the decorative motif divan throw is a bird or a simurgh, the use of encircled creatures as a decorative motif in textiles can be found in other medieval Armenian representations of royal garments. An interesting comparison can be made between what scholars describe as a winged creature found in King Gagik's family portrait and the Sasanian

¹³ R. W. Ferrier, ed., *The Arts of Persia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 151.

¹⁴ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 109.

¹⁵ Armenia was ruled by a branch of the Parthian dynasty, the Aršakunis, from the first to the fifth centuries.

¹⁶ Ferrier, *The Arts of Persia*, 152.

¹⁷ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "L'Evangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," *REArm* 18 (1984), 90.

¹⁸ Marielle Martiniani-Reber, "Les tissus medievux armeniens: essai d'identification," in *Between Paris and Fresno, Armenian Studies in Honor of Dickran Kouymjian*, ed. Barlow Der Mgrdechian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2008), 149. A simurgh is also referred to as senmurv.

¹⁹ Prudence Oliver Harper, *The Royal Hunter, Art of the Sasanian Empire* (New York: Asia House Gallery, 1978), 118.

textile of the encircled simurgh shown in Figure 45.²⁰ This type of design pattern is similar to the pearly medallions of animals, including birds, found on the costume of King Gagik Arçruni's sculptural relief on the church at Alt'amar.²¹

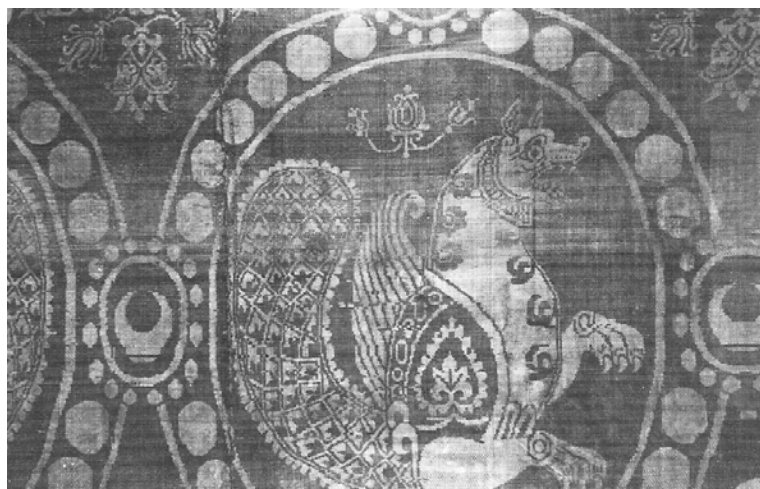


Figure 45: Seventh to ninth century textile fragment from Iran or Transoxiana. Source: Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 136, fig. 60.

Costume Motif and Design

Armenian sculptural portraits of the three surviving Bagratuni kings from the second half of the tenth century are believed by scholars²² to represent typical Armenian ceremonial regalia used in rites of investiture. It is suggested by art historians Antony Eastmond and Lynn Jones that representations of costume that include tunics with pendant sleeves and turbans show a representation of Bagratuni royal status and are not of foreign origin (see Figures 24 and 46).²³

²⁰ Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 136. Also see Weibel, *Two Thousand Years of Textiles, The Figured Textiles of Europe and the Near East*, 38-39.

²¹ Martiniani-Reber, "Les tissus medievax armeniens: essai d'identification," in *Between Paris and Fresno*, 149.

²² Antony Eastmond and Lynn Jones, "Robing, Power, and Legitimacy," in *Robes and Honor, The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordan (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 155.

²³ Eastmond and Jones, "Robing, Power, and Legitimacy," 159. Kouymjian indicates in his review essay, "An Interpretation of Bagratid and Artsruni Art and Ceremony," (p. 98) that the turbans worn

Portraits or sculptures of Armenian kings in traditional Armenian investiture costumes with a model of their founded church are ideological expressions of kingship in an effort to display piety²⁴ in distinct Armenian character. The scholars suggest that the standardization of the presentation of the church in the arms of the king, who wears undecorated tunics under robes with pendant sleeves, and head turbans, is a “continuation of an earlier established tradition of Bagratid royal imagery.”²⁵ This costume display is in contrast to the ceremonial regalia of King Gagik Arcruni, whose “visual expression of kingship” reflects derivations of Sasanian motifs. According to Eastmond and Jones, this purposeful political connection with eastern design aligns the Armenian king, Gagik Arcruni, with the temporal regal authority afforded to him by contemporary Islamic powers.²⁶

Regalia of King Gagik-Abas

The costume of King Gagik-Abas is a blue and purple silk (?) robe. It has broad sleeves and it is tapered at the waist. This garment is similar to the sculptural representation of the one worn by the late tenth-century Bagratuni king Gagik I of Ani, located east of Kars.²⁷ There are distinct blue cuff-like broad bands around the opening of the trousers that appear only at the lower part of the

by Smbat and Gagik Bagratuni served to show kingships are part of Arab regalia. He also states that the sculpture in the round of Gagik Bagratuni (see Figure 46) was believed to have been attached to the church he built. Others have suggested that during the Arab period Gagik was concerned in reviving Armenian national authority harking back to pre-Arab period.

²⁴ Eastmond and Jones, “Robing, Power, and Legitimacy,” 159. Eastmond and Jones indicate that Christian piety is demonstrated by the Armenian kings with the representation of the church in their outstretched hands.

²⁵ Eastmond and Jones, “Robing, Power, and Legitimacy,” 159.

²⁶ Eastmond and Jones, “Robing, Power, and Legitimacy,” 159.

²⁷ The geographical and historical relationship between Ani and Kars is discussed in Chapter 4.



Figure 46: Late tenth or early eleventh century sculpture of Gagik I Bagratuni.
Source: Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 44, fig 3.4.

king's overall garment. The king's tunic is decorated with the motif of what has been identified as a stag, unicorn, or a horned ibex, which stands in profile inside a double-pearled medallion.²⁸ Der Nersessian refers to this animal as a *bouquetin*²⁹ in profile, and Jones writes that the creature is a horned ibex grasping a three-lobed leaf in its mouth.³⁰ The notion that the ungulate is a motif of an ibex

²⁸ Lynn Jones, "The Visual Expression of Bagratuni Rulership: Ceremonial and Portraiture," in *REArm* 28 (2001-2002):387.

²⁹ Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," 90.

³⁰ Jones, "The Visual Expression of Bagratuni Rulership," 387.

counters Mathews and Daskalakis' identification of it as a stag or unicorn design.³¹ Based on the morphology of the actual animal, it is most likely a representation of an ibex, which is not an uncommon motif in Persian fabrics and metallic work. A wool tapestry fragment from the sixth century with an ibex is identified as Sasanian (Figure 47).³² Earlier sources of the ibex image can be found in artifacts as early as 600 BCE, such as the Achaemenid-style bronze Ibex head, Figure 48, as well as an early sixth century BCE bronze incense burner from southwestern Arabia. Emblematically, the ibex is regarded as a “powerful apotropaic symbol representing virility and fertility.”³³

A band of scroll work resembling tendrils of vines is enclosed between the double roundels. Lozenges alternate between the roundels. The lozenges are composed of small circles interspersed evenly at 90 degrees with four-lobed segmented leaf blades. The margin of each leaf terminates in an acute apex that forms the overall lozenge shape. Within the small circle is a dicot flower with four parts. A similar motif is found in a patterned textile of a royal garment on the rock reliefs of Taq-i Bustan in Sasanian Persia³⁴ (Figure 49).

³¹ Mathews and Daskalakis, “The Portrait of Princess Maren of Kars,” 479. Even though the exact identification of the motif is disputed among scholars, the symbolic nature of the motif is maintained to be one of virility.

³² Weibel, *Two Thousand Years of Textiles*, 96.

³³ Kim Benzel et al., *Art of the Ancient Near East, A Resource for Educators*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), 98.

³⁴ Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 123.



Figure 47: Sixth century wool tapestry fragment.
Source: Weibel, *Two Thousand Years of Textiles*, 30.



Figure 48: Achaemenid-style bronze ibex head, 600 BCE.
Source: Munro, *The Golden Encyclopedia of Art* by, 34.



Figure 49: Taq-i Bustan, Sasanian rock relief of Khosrow II (590-628).

Source: R. Ettinghausen *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, plate XXII, fig. 76.

Regalia of Queen Goranduxt and Princess Maren

The queen's costume includes at least two different types of garments. The queen's red silk dress is patterned with green designs of encircled birds that are in turn enclosed by geometric shapes.³⁵ The motif of birds within roundels is found in Sasanian metal work, where birds symbolized benevolence in the Zoroastrian religion.³⁶ Queen Goranduxt's shoulder-cascading veil³⁷ is adorned with cordate leaves or hearts, a popular motif in Sasanian arts and lavishly present as a

³⁵ Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," 90.

³⁶ Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 63.

³⁷ In Eastmond's *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 103, footnote 35, he indicates that T'amar's unmarried state is inferred from the absence of a veil, the traditional symbol of marriage. The veil is seen on T'amar in later images of the queen when she is married.

decorative element in the rock reliefs at Taq-i Bustan, (see Figure 50).³⁸ Der Nersessian indicates that the queen's white veil is patterned with an array of golden designs in the shape of hearts.³⁹ The reference to "golden designs" suggests the use of woven gold thread as part of an embroidered work. Contemporary Armenian historian Step'anos Asolik gives reference to similar "golden" textiles used as a decorative scheme by Bagratuni Queen Katramide of Siwunik (wife of Gagik I), after the cathedral of Ani was completed in the early eleventh century. She is said to have decorated the cathedral with "tapestries embroidered with purple flowers woven with gold and painted in various colors."⁴⁰ The edging of Queen Goranduxt's shawl includes several bands, two of which include the colors of red and blue.⁴¹

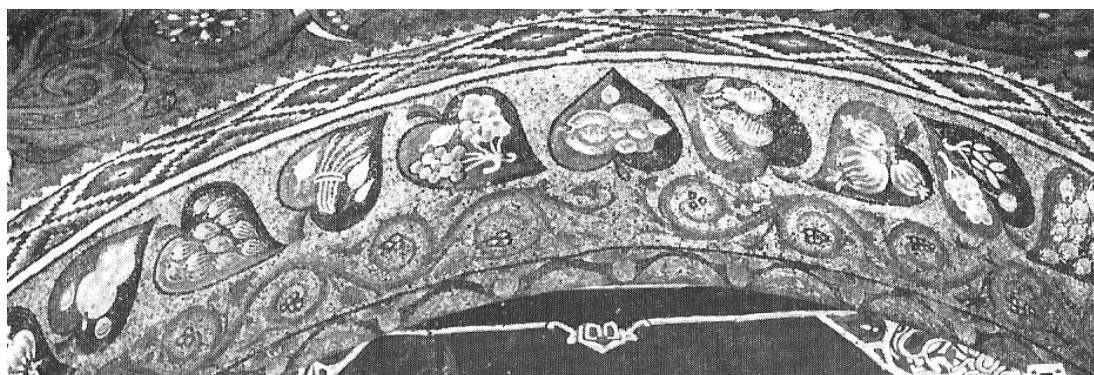


Figure 50: Mosaic in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 691.

Source: R. Ettinghausen *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, plate XXII, fig. 74.

³⁸ Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 119. Note that enclosed in the contours of the cordate shape is imagery of varied fruits. One of these depicted fruits is the pomegranate, thus emphasizing its symbolic presence in Persian arts.

³⁹ Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," 90.

⁴⁰ Garsoïan, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 180.

⁴¹ Der Nersessian's analysis states that it has "deux bandes rouges et une bande mauve," in "L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," 90.

Princess Marem wears a short blue shawl with embroidered bands, and a red tunic with a design of botanical tendrils and dark green palmettes traced by light-colored borders. The palmette-tendrill motif is found on Sasanian metalware (see Figure 51).⁴² She, like her mother,⁴³ wears three strands of pearls at neckline length. Pearls, in the Persian tradition, are the regalia of royalty.⁴⁴ Symbolically, they are associated with fertility because of their watery origins.⁴⁵ Mathews and Daskalakis emphasize that pearls were highly regarded by Muslim rulers as symbols denoting purity.⁴⁶ These precious materials were first used for jewelry by the ancient Egyptians, as early as the middle of the second millennium BCE. However, it was not until the country was conquered by the Persians and direct trade links were established with the fisheries of the Persian Gulf during the fifth century BCE when its use as jewelry reached its prominence in Egyptian culture.⁴⁷ The appeal of pearls was a widespread phenomenon.⁴⁸ In Sasanian culture, part of the royal dress included a pearl necklace, earrings with large pearls, and bands of pearls and other jewels. A stucco bust of a Persian king found at Kish, Palace II (fifth century CE), shows that such dress embodied sacred kingship.⁴⁹ In Christian iconography, the pearl is considered a symbol of regeneration.⁵⁰

⁴² Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 62.

⁴³ The queen also wears a bracelet made of unidentifiable jewels. The colors of the jewels are similar to the colors used for the fruit in the bowls as well as the multi-band edges of her shawl.

⁴⁴ Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 124; and Weibel, *Two Thousand Years of Textiles*, 85.

⁴⁵ Tresidder, *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 166.

⁴⁶ Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars," 479.

⁴⁷ Grahame Clark, *Symbols of Excellence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 78.

⁴⁸ Clark, *Symbols of Excellence*, 80.

⁴⁹ Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 108, plate 41.

⁵⁰ Clark, *Symbols of Excellence*, 81.



Figure 51: Sixth or seventh century Iran (?) silver-gilt roundel.
Source: Prudence Oliver Harper, *The Royal Hunter*, 62.

Finally, Marem's hair is braided like her mother's; however, it may be arranged in multiple braids on each side of her head, whereas her mother seems to have only two braids on either side of her head. Perhaps the significance of the number of braids may be related to marital status, hence the difference of the hair styles between them. This suggestion works well with the representation of Marem in the royal portrait as a young girl within the marrying age consistent with medieval Armenian social life.

Tiraz Bands

There are several rectangular areas with no distinct textile pattern work located on the king's garment, the back of the divan, the sides of the throw, and across the shawl worn by the princess. Der Nersessian's work on the painting as well as the research conducted by Mathews and Daskalakis suggest that these

rectangular areas resemble *tiraz* bands.⁵¹ *Tiraz* bands are embroidered insignia cloth used in the Islamic tradition. These bands of cloth, typically used on garments and furnishings, are decorated and inscribed with titles, place-names and dates of rulers, or blessings, in royal workshops.⁵² Muslim aristocracy, both men and women, have used inscribed *tiraz* to denote political standing. The *tiraz* textiles were also presented as gifts to foreign dignitaries.⁵³ Der Nersessian states that while the color of the two vertical bands that break the design of the divan textile has faded there may have been kufic inscriptions on it similar to the ones woven into the *tiraz* of the sleeves of the king's royal robe.⁵⁴ As with the inscriptions suggested on the *tiraz* bands, other inscriptions in the image, if they did exist, are not detectable.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars," 479

⁵² Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars," 479.

⁵³ Mathews and Daskalakis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars," 480. More information on *tiraz* is provided in my discussion of textiles in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁵⁴ Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," 90, and Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 109.

⁵⁵ This leads me to several concerns related to the suggested *tiraz* in the painting. My illustration of the portrait, as provided in Figure 44, was rendered to clarify certain elements of the painting. It also provided me with an opportunity to closely scrutinize the photograph of the image. From this exercise I began to question several areas of the painting and wondered if there had been any attempts in the past at restoration or general manipulation of the image or parts of the image for whatever reason. First, the area of cloth directly below the queen's face, flanked by her shawl, shows a similar design pattern as her dress; however, the coloring is different, which initially led me to assume that it was another textile. Second, there are several sections of the divan's upright portion (to the king's left side) where the general design pattern seems to be missing, but based upon the pattern work of the divan as found to the queen's right side, it is inferred that this decorative pattern is the same throughout the upright portion of the divan. Furthermore, the paint of the garment on the left portion of the king's folded leg is missing, while an indication of the curvature of the leg remains. The missing area on the divan near the king, along the side of the divan cushions, is similar in its light coloring and "ghosting" of pattern work of the suggested *tiraz* band areas. Third, the suggested bands along the princess's shawl seem suspect. The band widths do not match in orientation and size. Also, if examined carefully, the band to the left shows patchy blue along its inner vertical edge, clearly the same blue color as her shawl. This leads me to believe that at one time, the entire area may have been blue. Was there any physical manipulation of the original paint, and if so, why was it made to resemble rectangular shapes? Before any further speculation can be made, this is an area of investigation that requires more study preferably with the use of highly sophisticated imaging of the actual miniature painting.

My attempt to decipher the symbolic nature of the decorative designs of the textiles in the miniature painting is based on the traditional meanings given to the motifs in the Near Eastern and Mediterranean medieval cultures. In the case of costumes and textiles in the royal miniature portrait, the symbolic associations of such a varied array of motifs may be related to their social use rather than mere aesthetics. While speculative, contextualizing the portrait's textile iconography and richness in display may suggest a highly sophisticated visual message being communicated by the king and his family to the intended viewer(s).

CHAPTER 4: THE MINIATURE PORTRAIT IN HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Sirarpie Der Nersessian said it best when she recognized within the royal family portrait the “influence of the social environment”¹ of the Muslim world both upon princely dress and manners. Since portraits are cultural constructs, it serves an art historian well to study the historical, political, sociological, religious, and economic milieu of the individuals portrayed in an image from the medieval period. While this chapter does not pursue the full extent of such a complicated undertaking, it is my hope to synthesize extant historical and socio-economic information to create a conceptual framework for analyzing the royal family portrait.

This chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section highlights key historical events that indelibly affected the politics of Armenia from the fourth century up to the emergence of the Bagratuni dynasties. To do this effectively and economically, I begin with a brief chronology of medieval Armenia. This is followed by a cursory review of the Bagratunis in Armenia and their historical interaction with the ‘Abbasids, Byzantines and Seljuks. However, I devote a disproportionate amount of time to discuss the Seljuks and the Šaddādids in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. This is purposeful since their presence on the Armenia plateau created the dynamics that transformed the political landscape of Greater Armenia and the future of the Bagratuni dynasties. The entire narrative is developed to set the stage for the historical state of affairs of King Gagik-Abas and his family. To provide a general characterization of King Gagik-Abas, I have gathered together scattered information available to me. I attempt a similar

¹ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 110.

treatment of Princess Marem. To contextualize this family within their social structure, I outline in the second section of this chapter the status and political roles of royal women in Armenia, female royal patronage, dowries and marital political alliances, female inheritance, and the importance and use of textiles. I base much of this chapter on secondary sources while consulting the few primary sources of translated historical sources available to me. Again, the purpose of this chapter is to lend support to my thesis. It is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of the history and social politics of medieval Armenia.

Brief Geographical and Historical Background

The Armenian plateau² for many centuries was a land buffer and battleground between two major powers, the Western classical empires (Graeco-East Roman, Byzantine) versus the Near Eastern empires (Persian, Arabic Muslim) worlds.³ Its principalities were subject to invasions and control by the established superpowers. Many of the imperial military intrusions resulted in political partitions of Greater Armenia, which meant the shifting of land and populace under the social and economic policies of its suzerain.⁴ In turn, Armenian loyalties were not always consistent to support a cohesive defense and

² Robert Hewsen, "The Geography of Armenia," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 1. Located in northern sector of the Middle East, the plateau is the central-most and highest of three landlocked highland areas. To its west is the Anatolian plateau.

³ Nina G. Garsoïan, "The History of Armenia," in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 3.

⁴ Hewsen, "The Geography of Armenia," 15-16. Periodic peace settlements resulted in the land partitions of Armenia, where its main centers fell under the jurisdiction of the major political powers in the region.

diplomatic assurances of its geographic interests.⁵ After the Arab invasions of the mid-seventh century, Muslim principalities were slowly established in historic Armenia and its immediate vicinity. The three major periods of foreign settlements in medieval Armenia include the Arab emirates of the ninth and first half of the tenth centuries; the brief Iranian “interlude”⁶ of invaders and settlers, namely the Kurds and the Daylamites, from the south of Caspian, both infiltrating into Armenia as mercenaries from Azerbaijan during the tenth and early eleventh centuries; and the gradual Turkization of the plateau and other parts of Asia Minor beginning in the mid-eleventh century.⁷

Among those non-Armenian dynasties that figured significant during the Bagratuni period of the late tenth and early eleventh century were the Šaddādids.⁸ Their presence in Armenia over an area extending between the Kur and Araxes rivers has been overlooked when considering the political dynamics of the region. Of note are their residences in Ganja⁹ and the ancient Armenian capital, Dvin. A branch of the Šaddādids later ruled in Ani,¹⁰ the medieval capital of the Bagratuni kingdom from the ninth to the early eleventh centuries, bringing them in close

⁵ This is particularly true in the Bagratuni period of the eleventh century. Robert W. Thomson, “Eastern Neighbours: Armenia (400-600),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, c. 500-1492, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 156-157.

⁶ Vladimir F. Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (London: Taylor’s Foreign Press, 1953), 2.

⁷ Nina Garosian, “Armenian Muslim Emirates,” in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978), 512-513.

⁸ The Šaddādids were prominent Kurdish Muslim dynastic families who ruled in eastern Transcaucasia. Minorsky writes that in Caucasian history, the Šaddādids “were the missing link without which one could see only one side of the events.” See Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (London: Taylor’s Foreign Press, 1953), 1-2.

⁹ Ganja is in present day Azerbaijan.

¹⁰ The archaeological site of Ani is now located in present day Turkey. The medieval kingdom of Ani was a fortress wedged between two major rivers on two of its three sides and had a massively fortified wall on its third side. It was at the crossroads of the internationally-known trade route commonly referred to as *The Silk Road*. Also see footnote 25 in this chapter.

contact with the Armenians and the Georgians.¹¹ The course of their socio-political activities in the region took place at a time when the Byzantines were concerned with securing a military stronghold along their eastern borders and during the increasing Turkic excursions from the East.¹²

In Table 1, I provide a chronology of several major events that shaped the general socio-political landscape of Armenia from the fourth century up to the time of the Bagratunis. Medieval Armenia constituted a set of small kingdoms, not a single state, among a number of minor Arab emirates. The small Armenian kingdoms were in conflict among themselves, and their loyalties were not always aligned with their kinsmen. Figure 52 is a map of Armenian during the sixth century under Justinian. Figure 53 is a map of medieval Armenia, c. 1000 CE, showing the Armenian principalities during the Bagratuni dynastic period.

Bagratuni Armenia and their Suzerains

The rise of the Bagratuni house in Armenia to dynastic status took place during the ‘Abbasid Arabic regime, whose caliphs ruled effectively from 750 to 945. The ‘Abbasid caliphate¹³ was an Irano-Islamic empire, and its political structure was based on the legacy of the Sasanian imperial rule and its institutional practices, which governed both Iraq and the Iranian plateau for more than four centuries before the seventh century Arab conquest.¹⁴ Likewise, the ‘Abbasid

¹¹ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 1.

¹² Minorsky notes that the numerous references to the Šaddādids “are scattered throughout Armenian, Georgian, Arabic and Persian sources, but they are like dead leaves which are no substitute for the original tree to which they belong.” Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 2.

¹³ This was a system of government used by the various bureaucratic empires that ruled the Islamic Middle East.

¹⁴ Douglas E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires, Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, 2011), 12.

Table 1. Chronology of historical events: the Armenian political landscape from the fourth century up to the ninth century.

Time	Setting/Event* ¹⁵
54 to 428	Aršakuni dynasty ruled the kingdom of Armenia. In the mid-third century, the Sasanids came to power in Persia, ending Aršakuni rule in Armenia for a period of time, until the dynasty was re-established under King Trdat III with support from Rome. Armenia was converted to Christianity under King Trdat III in the early 4 th century.
late 4 th century	Power struggles between the Romans and Persians brought about the partition of Armenia around 387 CE, where nearly four-fifths of Armenian territories went to the Persians as Persarmenia, and most of the remaining lands were absorbed as Roman territory. Essentially, Armenia became divided between two spheres of influence: a large Iranian sector east of a line running from Sper to Martyropolis, and a much smaller Roman sector west of that line up to the Euphrates.
mid-5 th century	The division of Armenia between the superpowers and the disintegration of its kingship system under the Aršakuni dynasty in the mid-fifth century left the country politically and culturally fragmented under the suzerainty of the Roman and Sasanian empires.
late-6 th century	In the sixth century, military campaigns by Byzantine emperors greatly impacted Armenian territories along Byzantium's eastern borders, eventually resulting in the Armenian Partition of 591.
early-7 th century	Separation of Georgian Church from the Armenian Church. The Georgian Church adopted the Chalcedonian orthodoxy of the Greek Church.
mid-7 th century	The first Arab invasion of Armenia occurred in 640. To prevent continued devastation and assaults, in 652, an agreement was settled between the Arabs and the Armenians to conditionally accept Arab suzerainty in Armenia.
late 8 th century and early 9 th	Between 785 and 809, Haroun al-Rashid, the 'Abbasid caliph of the Arab Empire, encouraged the settlement of territories under his control, among which was Armenia.

¹⁵. See Robert W. Thomson, "Eastern Neighbours: Armenia (400-600)," and Tim W. Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbours," (600-1045) in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Also see *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. I*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), in particular, see selected chapters by Nina Garosian, "Aršakuni Dynasty" and "The Marzpanate," Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*; Aram Ter-Ghewondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. Nina Garosian (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976); and Robert W. Thomson, *Corpus Christianorum, A Bibliography of Classical Armenian Literature to 1500 AD* (Brepols-Turnhout, 1995).

Table 1. (cont.)

end of 8th century	From 774 to 775, Armenia revolted against the Arabs (first the Umayyads and then the ‘Abbasid Caliphates) in response to excessive tax burdens and repressive policies. The Armenians lost the revolt.
from 428 until late 9 th century	From the end of Aršakuni rule to the beginning of the Bagratuni period, Armenia had no kingship but operated as a group of principalities each governed by <i>naxarars</i> with a head prince, <i>išxan</i> . The presiding prince oversaw all the other princes. As a vassal state of the ‘Abbasid caliphate, the country was ruled by a resident governor, <i>ostikan</i> . The <i>ostikan</i> was appointed by the caliphate. While Byzantium did not have a similar corresponding political position represented in Armenia, it was also recognized as a suzerain. Having both Byzantine and Islamic recognition of Armenian princes was desirable.
mid-9th century	In 850, the Arab caliph appointed Ašot Bagratuni as the governor of Armenia.
mid-9th century	In 884, Ašot Bagratuni was crowned by the Arab caliphate and Byzantine emperor, both recognizing his rule of Armenia. King Ašot I began the Armenian Bagratuni royal dynasty.

military and financial structure of the empire came from the Sasanians.¹⁶ One might conclude that the socio-political dealings of the Bagratuni nobles in Armenian society under the ‘Abbasid Empire may have been relatively similar to Armenian existence under centuries of Sasanian rule.¹⁷

The late ninth century was a time when Armenia was not directly involved in political turmoil at the hands of the Arabs or the Byzantines. The eventual decline of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate as a political power and the reemergence of Byzantine military potency in the middle ninth century provided Armenia with an

¹⁶ Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 15.

¹⁷ Nina Garosian, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 163.



Figure 52: Territorial boundaries of sixth-century Armenia, Justinian period.
Source of Map: Nina Garosian, "A History of Armenia," *Treasures in Heaven*, 2. Map by Robert H. Hewsen.

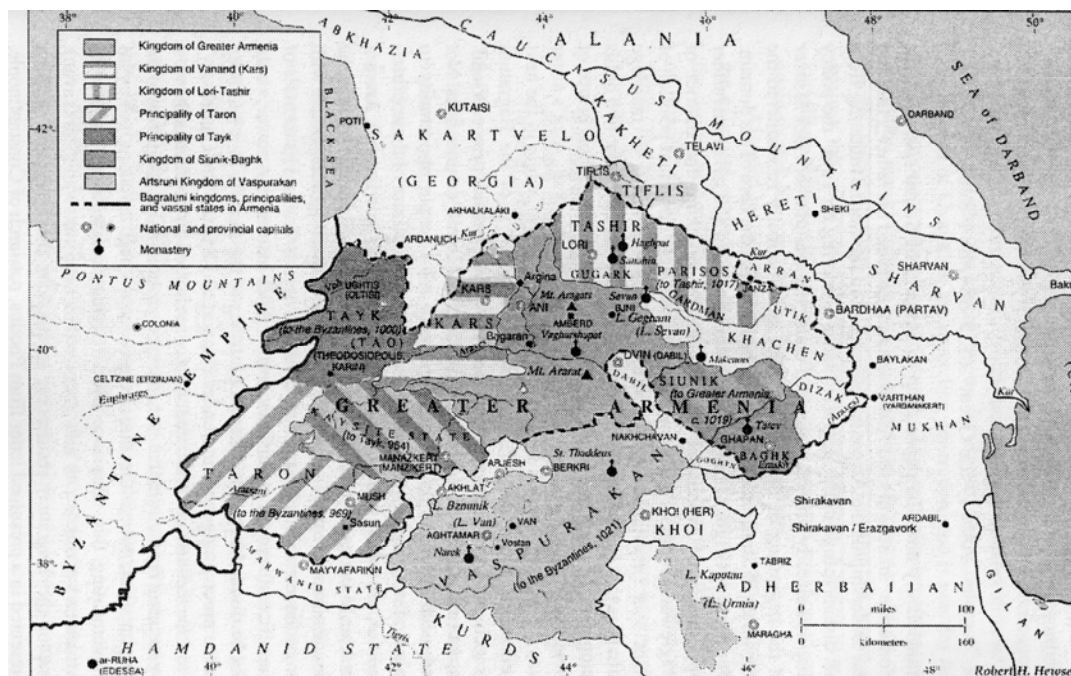


Figure 53: Map of Armenia in the Bagratuni Period, c. 885-1064 CE.
Source: Nina Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, 145. Map by Robert H. Hewsen.

opportunity to prosper and advance the Bagratunis, the leading *naxarar*¹⁸ (princely) family, to royal status. The shift in the balance of power between the two major political empires was what Armenia needed to once again rematerialize as an independent political entity.¹⁹ The disregard of Armenian affairs by the superpowers stimulated an internal development of local dynastic families, who reoccupied former Armenian territory and instituted political and marital alliances to strengthen territorial claims.

Under Ašot I, the Bagratunis emerged as the dominate *naxarar* family and eventually as the first Armenian princely family to become an imperial family at the end of the ninth century.²⁰ With the martyrdom of Smbat,²¹ the political prestige of the Bagratunis was augmented by a spiritual prestige sanctioned within the Armenian Christian faith. It was the faith-based recognition that the Bagratunis had coveted for many years, comparable to that experienced by the once powerful fifth-century *naxarar* family, the Mamikoneans.²² Ašot I transitioned from a *naxarar* status to the king of Armenia, recognized by both the Caliphate and the Byzantine emperor.²³ Under the reign of Ašot I, a new

¹⁸ A *naxarar* is defined as a landed noble, roughly equivalent to a baron or prince in western feudal society.

¹⁹ Nina Garsoïan, "The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 141.

²⁰ Garsoïan, "The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni," 146.

²¹ In 861, Smbat Bagratuni, a *sparapet*, (a hereditary military rank of supreme commander of the armed forces) was imprisoned by general Bugha (Turkic military officer under the 'Abbasids) along with other *naxarars*. While the others chose apostasy in exchange for their freedom, Smbat refused to renounce his Christian faith and died in captivity. His martyrdom in 862 in Samarra (now in present-day Iraq) elevated the status of its *tun* to include spiritual piety and sainthood. See Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 17; and Dickran Kouymjian's "Review Essay," of Jones's *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 95.

²² The martyrdom of the patriarch, Vartan Mamikonean, in 451 CE, over the issue of religious freedom, gave this major *naxarar* family high political standing in Greater Armenia for many centuries.

²³ Garsoïan, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 148

autonomous state in the northwestern portion of the Armenian plateau was redefined under the leadership of the Bagratunis. Despite occasional hostilities from neighboring Kurdish and Arab emirs, from 929 to 1020, the apex of the Bagratuni Dynasty, there was relative peace and prosperity in Armenia.²⁴

In the tenth century, Ašot III ruled at Ani,²⁵ the new capital of the Bagratuni Dynasty. As King Ašot III, he maintained a good relationship with the more powerful Byzantine Empire and its emperor John Tzimiskes.²⁶ However, he faced dynastic challenges. To quell internal political strife among the princes in the Bagratuni dynastic house, King Ašot III created *apanages* (land grants) for his kinsmen and thus unforeseeably weakened the kingdom.²⁷ He moved the Bagratuni capital from Kars to Ani in 961, and granted Kars, with its district of Vanand, to his brother, Mušel, grandfather of King Gagik-Abas. The granting of other districts fragmented the Bagratuni sphere, rendering subordinate kingdoms to the main kingdom of Ani, soon thereafter emerged the Bagratids of Georgia, the Bagratids of Taron, and the Bagratids of Kars.²⁸ These small kingdoms formed autonomous units within the larger Armenian Bagratuni-dominated area. Nevertheless, the restlessness behind seizing power and land was constant, with

²⁴ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 162-163.

²⁵ The archaeological site of Ani is now located in present day Turkey. The kingdom of Ani was an important urban and religious center, and its location on the major trade route made it a vital trade center. Its growth was attributed to the movement of crafts and goods between the Arab east and the Byzantine west. This economic development was only matched by Ani's flourishing culture. Significant developments in the sciences, literature, and the arts, particularly architecture, painting (miniatures), and the applied arts, arose in the late tenth to early eleventh centuries. The city was described by twelfth-century Armenian chronicler, Matthew of Edessa, as the city of "one thousand and one Churches," and with a population of over 100,000 people. See Matthew of Edessa, *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa, Armenia and the Crusades, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries*, trans. Ara Edmond Dostourian (New York: University Press of America, 1993), 102, section 22.

²⁶ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 165.

²⁷ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 166.

²⁸ Garsoian, "The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni," 150.

some family members comfortable with their subordinate position to the king of Ani and others not. For example, during the reign of Gagik I at Ani, c. 989 to 1017, his cousin Abas of Kars (984-1024), father of Gagik-Abas of Kars, accepted his position as a minor king without posing any challenges to Gagik I.²⁹

The ‘Abbasids, Seljuks and Šaddādids

Under the weakened ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate of the eleventh century, political and religious spheres were rife with competing factions aiming to strengthen their position by recognizing the caliphate. Various Middle East dynasties arose under the religious umbrellas of Shī’a and Sunnīs.³⁰ Adding to this was the rise of military aristocracies of foreign extraction. It is within this political climate that the Seljuks Turks found their place and rose in power.³¹

Dramatic changes in ‘Abbasid power gave rise to a growing “nomad dominance” that altered the fundamental political governance provinces. Under the collapse of direct ‘Abbasid authority, “regional rulers sought to maintain the pretext that they acted as ‘Abbasid governors,” and “sought to justify their positions with the ‘Abbasid system” by obtaining recognition from the caliph “while simultaneously attempting to justify their rule.”³² This is where the concept of sultanate³³ emerged, and its title held “unrestricted sovereignty with caliphal certification...the Saljuqs [Seljuks] were the first dynasty of sultans.”³⁴

²⁹ Garosian, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” 170.

³⁰ Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey* (Taplinger Publishing Company: New York, 1968), 13.

³¹ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 7 and 15.

³² Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 18.

³³ Sultanate is a dynastic position within the caliphate whereby the title of Sultan is bestowed on a leader who has sovereignty of rule, such as a governor of a province.

³⁴ Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 18-19. Streusand states (p. 20) that “Saljuq concept of kingship, fiscal decentralization, and nomad power made the ‘Abbasid and Sasanian models impossible to emulate.” Under the “Saljuqs” there was the use of warfare to settle distribution of *appanage* and “tribal

Major changes occurred in the political structural landscape under the ‘Abbasids resulting in a series of “decentralized polities”³⁵ and “confederate tribes.”³⁶ To counter the power of the confederate tribes, war bands were created by rulers as their personal military retinues. The use of war bands strengthened the position of the ruler, but problems still remained. In these situations, rulers of the leading dynasties sought to lessen the impact of the nomadic tribes by “pushing them to the frontier, where they could continue to expand the empire without interfering with the central government.”³⁷ It is the Seljuks’ use of this policy that resulted in the Turkic invasion of Armenian lands and the Byzantine frontier.³⁸

Upon the death of their eponymous leader, Seljuk, his heirs Chaghri-Beg and Tugril-Beg became the new Seljuk Turcoman leaders. More notably, their conversion to Islam and entry into Muslim territory from Central Asia as herdsman-raiders and warriors-mercenaries historically led Tugril-Beg and Turcomans under his command to positions of power within the court of the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate and ultimately as invaders of the Armenian-Byzantine frontiers of the Anatolia plateau.³⁹ Tugril-Beg expanded his areas of Turcoman conquests south-west and further west, while his brother, Chaghri-Beg, maintained a base at Khorasan and its surroundings. When Chaghri-Beg died around 1058,

chieftains used princes as figureheads in their efforts to expand tribal and personal power.” Thus the collective sovereignty resulted in a series of decentralized polities and tribal confederations.

³⁵ Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 20.

³⁶ Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 21.

³⁷ Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 21.

³⁸ Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 22. Streusand does not mention Armenia, but uses the geographical term Anatolia. In effect, this area he calls Anatolia included Armenian kingdoms, including the land ruled by the Bagratunis.

³⁹ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 21-22. Under Tugril-Beg, the Turcoman entered and occupied the routes across Iranian plateau that led to Baghdad from one direction and to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Byzantine Asian Minor from a secondary direction.

his son Alp Arslan replaced him as leader of the geographical areas under his command. Aiding Tuh̄rīl-Beg on the Iranian plateau was his half-brother, Ibrāhīm Inal, who carried out early attacks across the plateau and its routes leading them further west. The final “annexation” of these areas was handled by Tuh̄rīl-Beg, who between 1040 and 1044 gained control over several areas near the Caspian and on the Iranian plateau. In turn, Tuh̄rīl-Beg had to contend with his share of waves of marauding Turcoman who failed to recognize his leadership. To handle the problem, he attempted to divert the pillaging aspirations of uncontrollable Turcoman bands, coming into the area from the east, away from the Muslims and toward non-Muslim areas. Thus he encouraged them to conduct their pillaging ventures via a traditional route from northern Iran to “Armenia and Asian Minor, which belonged to the Byzantine Empire, that is, to Christians, against whom... a holy war could be waged, following the tradition that the Turks had learned from the ghazis of Central Asia.”⁴⁰ While this type of behavior did not interest Tuh̄rīl-Beg himself, he sought its benefits.

The political turmoil at the beginning of the eleventh century also involved increasing pressures from the Byzantines, as explained in greater detail later in this section, and the infiltration of Turcoman bands into Azerbaijan and Armenia. These outside threats were unsettling for those Muslims and Christians living between the Araxes and the Kur, who in response attempted to strengthen their positions in the area.⁴¹

The first Turcoman threat to Armenia occurred in 1043 from renegades from the south who were fleeing the advancing Seljuks. In 1048, a larger force of

⁴⁰ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 23.

⁴¹ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 42.

Turcomans, led by Tuḡrīl-Beg's step-brother Ibrāhīm Inal, headed west toward the direction of Armenia along the Araxes and the upper northern Euphrates toward Trebizond, creating catastrophic conditions along the way and back. Later in 1054, a disastrous attack upon Armenia was led by Tuḡrīl-Beg.⁴² The purpose of his attack was to "bring petty princes of north-western Iran under his effective suzerainty" along with "maintaining his hold over the Turcomans who had remained on the Armeno-Georgian borders" with renegade Turcoman chiefs, one of whom was his cousin, Kutlumush.⁴³

The plundering of areas devastated by the attack of 1048 led by Ibrāhīm Inal was further aggravated by continuous military conflicts along the borderlands, including areas on Georgian territories, and the "lure of plunder" that brought more marauders from the east to the area. The contemporaneous revolt of emperor Isaac Komnenus reduced Byzantine defense along the Armenian frontier, with no chance of sending reinforcements from the empire to its borderlands.⁴⁴ The result was continuous pillaging of Armenia during the late 1050s. The major Armenian chronicler of the time, Aristakes of Last'vertc'i, profoundly lamented the tragedies that occurred during these raids.⁴⁵ The result of the attacks led by the Seljuk

⁴² Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 69.

⁴³ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 69. During the attack led by Tuḡrīl-Beg, Cahen states that his goals were different from the other Turcoman. While he captured notable areas along Lake Van and laid siege on Manzikert in an effort to recapture areas for Islam, his light troops went off to plunder the same regions that were attacked by Ibrāhīm Inal, which included Armenia.

⁴⁴ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 69.

⁴⁵ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 68. Cahen adds (68-69) that some Byzantine troops were called to the area to "check a revolt" and the governors of Georgia, Vaspurakan, and the "areas between Murad Su and the Kara Su" attempted to stop the Turcomans without much success. The principal problem that resulted in the decimation of Armenian lands was not addressed by the Byzantines in their mild response to the military situation, since they were attempting to negotiate with the Sultan regarding military policies along the borderlands. Note that the details regarding the lamentations of Lastivertc'i are discussed later in this chapter.

brothers helped solidify their suzerainty among the Kurdish princes of north-western Iran and compelled the Georgians to recognize them as a political threat to the area. By diverting the pillaging and harsh methods of occupation away from Iraq, the Seljuks gained support of the Caliphate who sought Tughril-Beg's military leadership and protection. He was given the title "King of the East and West,"⁴⁶ affording him the right to conquer all Muslim territories, particularly those areas not recognizing the authority of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate. It is within this capacity that the title of Sultan was bestowed upon Tughril-Beg by the Caliph. It was an official signal that granted Tughril-Beg complete power "with the guarantee of the Caliph's sanction."⁴⁷ The final political seal to this arrangement was the marital union of the Caliph with the niece of Sultan Tughril-Beg.⁴⁸

Within a few years of the newly recognized status of Tughril-Beg, Turcoman revolts led by Ibrāhīm Inal and other distant family members in Upper Mesopotamia and Iran were stopped by the Sultan with the assistance of his nephew, Alp Arslan, thus securing a victory for the Sultan in the eyes of the Caliph. Nevertheless, the Turcoman attacks expanded their areas of assault further west and into Armenia and "plundered the entire region of the Araxes and the two upper branches of the Euphrates as far as their confluence and Malatya/Melitene."⁴⁹

Upon the death of Tughril-Beg in 1063, Alp Arslan became his successor. Arslan carried forth his uncle's political and military vision of leadership while uniting his father's Xorasanian inheritance. Militarily, he confronted marauding

⁴⁶ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 24.

⁴⁷ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 24.

⁴⁸ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 24.

⁴⁹ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 27.

Turcoman⁵⁰ on the frontiers of Central Asia while expanding his territorial gains in the West.⁵¹ He “either voluntarily or because he was occupied elsewhere, never set foot in Iraq, and, interfering less in the Caliph’s affairs, maintained wholly correct relations with the ‘Abbāsīd government.”⁵²

The Byzantines, Šaddādids, and Seljuks

At the north-east borderlands of the Empire, the Byzantines had a strong foothold in Armenia, with Armenians involved in Byzantine affairs. This association was not without conflict. The strains between the two became more prominent at the end of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh century, when Byzantine annexation of Armenian principalities progressed aggressively with the relocation of displaced noble and elite Armenian families and their dependents to interior Byzantine areas as Cappadocia and Cilicia. The years 1045 through 1065 are considered the annexation period of the Bagratuni kingdoms by the Byzantines. As part of a military policy to absorb the Armenian dynasties along its borderlands, the emperor Basil II obtained the surrender of royalty from the Arcruni dynasty of the kingdom of Vaspurakan, centered around Lake Van.⁵³ The Byzantine annexation tactic was later followed by a campaign to take over the senior kingdom of Ani. This strategy was ushered in by the bequest

⁵⁰ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 27, distinguishes between the two groups of Turcomans during the time of Alp Arslan, which he further notes are not all that clear. He says, “there were some, particularly among those taking the south-easterly route, who were probably sent by Alp Arslan for the express purpose of opening up the way for his later ventures. But there were others who were acting independently of any orders or authorization, or who were in fact rebels searching for refuge—even if temporary—outside the Muslim territory that was dependent upon him.”

⁵¹ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 26.

⁵² Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 26.

⁵³ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 52-53.

of the Ani kingdom to the Byzantine emperor Basil II by the Armenian king Yovhannēs-Smbat. To be enacted after the king's death, the transaction was later not honored when the king changed his mind prior to his death. Colophon information indicated that the kingdom would be handed to his nephew Gagik.⁵⁴ Political distractions in Constantinople allowed the accession of Gagik II Bagratuni for a two-year period before Basil II's successor, Constantine IX Monomachos, resumed plans to annex the kingdom.

In a communication with the Kurdish Šaddādid prince of Ganja and Dwin, Abu'l-Asvār, the Byzantine emperor, after having to make certain guarantees and promises under the golden bull,⁵⁵ invited him to attack the territory of Ani. Abu'l-Asvār invaded Shirak, the province of Ani, after which time some of the courtiers of Gagik II induced the Armenian king to visit Constantinople. While in Constantinople, the Byzantines, determined to eliminate the rulership of Gagik II, offered the Armenian king Melitene in return for Ani. The king refused. While away, he was later forced to face a treacherous political situation in Ani. The kingdom had been handed over to the Byzantines while he was in Constantinople. Proof of this disloyalty compelled the king to abdicate in 1045, whereupon he received lands in Cappadocia.⁵⁶ Struggles between family members and church

⁵⁴ Tim W. Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbours," (600-1045) in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 362.

⁵⁵ This is a *chrysobullos logos*, an official Byzantine decree with a golden seal.

⁵⁶ After the death of king Gagik I, his two sons, Yovhannēs-Smbat and Ašot IV argued over the succession of Ani. Eventually Yovhannēs-Smbat assumed control of Ani, while his younger brother controlled other parts of the Bagratuni kingdom. The heirless Yovhannēs-Smbat, fearing attacks, made the emperor Basil II his heir in the event of his death. In 1041, after the death of Yovhannēs-Smbat, who had since changed his mind regarding his heir to the throne wishing instead to pass the kingdom to his nephew Gagik. Many opposed the Byzantine takeover, and Gagik II was put on the throne. Byzantine armies were sent to capture Ani with no success. In 1045, while King Gagik II was detained in Constantinople against his will and the younger brother of Yovhannēs-Smbat was captured, and at the insistence of pro-Byzantines within the population of Ani, the city was surrendered and a Greek governor was installed in lieu of an Armenian king.

officials along with other internal conflicts all played toward the loss of Ani to its last king.⁵⁷

In attempts to find a replacement for their king, nobles at Ani suggested that they entrust the kingdom to a relation of Gagik II, or to Bagrat IV, king of Georgia.⁵⁸ There were those who even suggested the Kurdish emir, Abu'l-Asvār, of the Šaddādid dynasty, who was married to an Armenian princess.⁵⁹ In the end, the patriarch surrendered Ani to the Byzantine emperor. When the Byzantines took possession of Ani, its earlier promises to Abu'l-Asvār were disregarded. The Kurdish prince refused to leave Ani, which instigated a Byzantine expedition again Dvin and further retaliatory military campaigns between Abu'l-Asvār and the emperor.⁶⁰

This was not the only time when the emir Abu'l-Asvār was mentioned in sources with respect to the territorial politics of Armenia. What is known about Abu'l-Asvār is limited in Armenian sources. It is unclear as to the extent of his relationship with his neighboring Armenian royals in Ani and Kars. More certain

⁵⁷ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 52-53. Also see Nina Garsoian, "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 192.

⁵⁸ There is some confusion upon my part as to who this person is. Greenwood mentions a brother-in-law of Gagik II by the name of David Dunats'i ("Armenian Neighbours," *Cambridge History*, 362), while Minorsky writes that it was David Anholin (p. 53). With this I am uncertain of the identity of the Armenian princess who is married to Abu'l-Asvār. While it is evident from the sources that she is an Armenian noblewoman of Tashir, it is not clear whose sister she is. Minorsky says that she is the sister of David Anholin (p. 53; also see Minorsky, footnote 1 on page 58; footnote 1 on page 81), but Garosian states that she may be Gagik II's sister, see Nina Garsoian, "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 192. Minorsky also indicates that the Armenian historian Aristakēs, the contemporary source of the attack on Ani, makes confusing statements regarding the parentage of Abu'l-Asvār's Armenian wife. Aristakēs does acknowledge that he has left out important details in his writings (pp. 59-60).

⁵⁹ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 53.

⁶⁰ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 53.

is that of his relationship to the Armenian king of Tashir, David Anholin, whose sister may have been married to Abu'l-Asvār.⁶¹ However this marital relationship did not deter Abu'l-Asvār away from his political ambitions toward David Anholin, where loyalties were questionable.⁶²

After 1045, Greek governors ruled in Ani up to the territorial conquests by Alp Arslan. When Alp Arslan resumed his uncle's military campaign in Armenia, he entered the Araxes valley, laying siege to various fortresses in the regions between Armenia and Georgia. This included the capture of the former Armenian capital of Ani from the Byzantines on 16 August 1064.⁶³ In 1065, Abu'l-Asvār took possession of territories granted to him by Alp Arslan. After his death in 1067, the dynastic fortunes for the Šaddādids eventually changed from independent kingship to vassalage.⁶⁴ It was Minūchihr (Manuche),⁶⁵ one of Abu'l-Asvār's four sons who received Ani⁶⁶ as emir of his fief, vassal of the Seljuk Empire, sometime in 1072.⁶⁷ Minūchihr was the founder of a new branch of the Šaddādīd dynasty at Ani until c. 1118.⁶⁸ As the son of an Armenian

⁶¹ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 51. Minorsky mentions the close links between the Šaddādids and the Armenians aside from marital alliances. Abu'l-Asvār's son Fadl II was referred to as "the lamp of the Bagratid house" by poet Qatrān, and Abu'l-Asvār's second son had the Armenian name of Ašot. Also see footnote 58.

⁶² Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 51.

⁶³ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 58.

⁶⁴ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 64-65.

⁶⁵ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 59, footnote 1.

⁶⁶ Garosian, "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms," 194. Garosian writes that Ani was sold to the Šaddādids by the Seljuks in 1072, which was a disputed political transaction between the Muslims and the Iberian branch of the Bagratunis to the end of the twelfth century.

⁶⁷ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 80-81. Minorsky states that the year 1072 may have been his coming of age when he began to rule independently. It is reported that Minūchihr repaired and enlarged the walls of Ani and admitted into the town Grigor, the son of Vasak, along with 500 Armenian noblemen. Grigor was a Pahlavid/Pahlavuni, through his mother's side, who was the daughter of Grigor Magistros. Grigor Magistros (as stated later in the chapter) had close ties to Gagik-Abas of Kars.

⁶⁸ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 59.

princess, Minūchihr married a Bagratid (name Kata) when he ruled over the Christian subjects at Ani. Minūchihr's son, Abul-Asvār Šāvur II, returned to the aggressive policies of his grandfather. In 1074, Georgian Bagratid king Giorgi II (1072-89) received Kars from one of his vassals. He was later attacked sometime around 1080 by the Turks led by the emir Ahmad, who captured Kars. During the rulership of Abul-Asvār Šāvur II at Ani (c. 1118-1124?), we learn of his readiness to cede Ani to a Turkish emir at Kars for 60,000 dinars.⁶⁹

To complicate matters more in the region, on the northern front, there was the increasing strength of the Alāns in the tenth and eleventh centuries, with their strong family ties to the Byzantines and the Georgian Bagratids. Georgian king Giorgi's son Bagrat IV (1027-72) was married to the sister of the king of the Alāns. In 1062, and later in 1065, with his Alān allies, he reduced the military invasions of Abu'l-Asvār, an ally of Alp Arslan. This prompted Alp Arslan to turn his attention to the Georgians⁷⁰ around the time of his military campaign against minor princes of north-western Iran. In attempts to halt Alp Arslan's military assault, some rulers in the area made various concessions, including marital alliances. For example, the king of Georgia "gave one of his daughters to the Sultan,"⁷¹ and other lords made their submission to him. As a result, Arslan's campaigns brought him into closer contact with the Byzantines.

Under the command of the Byzantine emperor, General Romanus Diogenes, a military campaign was launched in reaction to Alp Arslan's armed maneuvers. It was at this time that Alp Arslan became aware that the "Byzantine

⁶⁹ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 83-84. From this information we are aware of a Turkish emir at Kars by the early twelfth century.

⁷⁰ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 74-75.

⁷¹ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 70.

army was attacking the frontiers of his own states, by way of Armenia.”⁷² In 1068, Diogenes began an offensive in Aleppo, and the following year he turned towards Armenia. However, he failed to prevent Turkish forces from “carrying out operations in the unguarded rear areas, under cover of the concentration of armies on the frontier.”⁷³ The Battle at Manzikert in August 1071, where there was a direct confrontation between the two leaders, resulted in the beginning of the downfall of one empire and the slow emergence of another.⁷⁴

Kingdom of Kars and King Gagik-Abas

The Kars Kingdom,⁷⁵ located in the area of Vanand,⁷⁶ was a vassal state to the Kingdom of Ani, which was the largest and most influential among the splintered medieval Bagratuni states. Beginning as a fortress at the start of the tenth century, the Kars kingdom rose to prominence toward the end of the century.⁷⁷ By the mid-eleventh century, it was a prosperous city. During the medieval period in Armenia, the international trade along routes through Armenia from the Caliphate to Byzantium and northern Russian lands stimulated urban development and cities, such as Ani and Kars, as well as local industries

⁷² Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 28. Cahen indicates that the Byzantine army was unwieldy and demoralized by the physical devastation of the regions through which it travelled. Furthermore, the army was composed of mercenaries who had no allegiance to the emperor or to each other.

⁷³ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 28.

⁷⁴ Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, 29.

⁷⁵ Kars was the capital of the Bagratuni kings until Ašot III was crowned king at Ani in 961. Ašot III then appointed his brother Mušel as governor of Kars, who later proclaimed himself king of Kars.

⁷⁶ As a result of the Byzantine-Persian partition of Armenia in 591, Vanand, a district in Armenia, became part of the new Byzantine province of Lower Armenia/Armenia Inferior. The center of Vanand was the town and fortress of Kars. See Robert H. Hewsen, “Vanand,” in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978), 353.

⁷⁷ Tim W. Greenwood, “Emergence of the Bagratuni Kingdoms,” in *Armenian Kars and Ani*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, Mazda Publishers, 2011), 62-63.

flourished along the routes leading to Trebizond on the Black Sea. Secondary routes at Kars also linked passages north of the area to eastern Black Sea ports and further to Abkhazia and Eastern Georgia.⁷⁸ Early eleventh-century Armenian chronicler and historian, Aristakēs Lastivertic'i, wrote that Kars was enriched by trade goods brought in by sea and land.⁷⁹

Much of the prosperity documented at Kars occurred during the time when Abas I⁸⁰ and his son Gagik-Abas ruled the kingdom. The tenth-century Kars cathedral built by Abas I, along with the extant manuscript commissioned by Gagik-Abas, testify to the high quality of art attained at Kars.⁸¹ During the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, monasteries acquired great wealth, as shown by records of donations made by the princes. Some crafts were only practiced in these centers, chief among them being the work of the illuminators. Manuscripts were typically commissioned by nobles and clergy. They were considered a luxury item; hence, the quality of work involved and increases in their production coincided with relative increases in prosperity.⁸² The quality of the illuminations in ms J2556, as well as the miniature family portrait created sometime during the precarious political setting of King Gagik-Abas speaks to the extraordinary cultural circumstances at Kars.⁸³ As an important center of learning, extant

⁷⁸ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 178.

⁷⁹ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 180.

⁸⁰ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 107. Abas I built the Church of the Holy Apostles between 930 and 937 when Kars was the capital of the Bagratunis.

⁸¹ Thomas F. Matthews, "Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination," in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Matthews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 60-62.

⁸² Dickran Kouymjian, "Dated Armenian Manuscripts as a Statistical Tool for Armenian History," in *Medieval Armenian Culture*, eds. Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 428.

⁸³ Mathews, "Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination," 61.

historical accounts note that in Kars, King Gagik-Abas pursued academic learning of classical culture and philosophy.⁸⁴

The time period of the commission of ms J2556 is placed sometime during the king's reign between 1029 (the year that he began his rule)⁸⁵ and 1064.⁸⁶ Many scholars have tried to narrow the commission date range based on historical events that can be supported visually by the royal portrait painting. Dating of the royal portrait is based on the likelihood that it was commissioned around the same time as ms J2556.⁸⁷ It is generally assumed that ms J2556 was created sometime after 1045.⁸⁸ Colophons in ms J2556 refer to the king with the title *šahanšah*, which was an honorific conferred upon him in the year 1045. The *terminus ante quem* suggested by Diane E. Bagelli and Thomas F. Mathews is the year of the king's abdication in 1064.⁸⁹ Jones supports the *terminus ante quem* suggested by Bagelli and Mathews by pointing out that the royal robes Gagik is wearing in the family portrait may be those given to him by Alp Arslan sometime in 1063.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Mathews, "Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination," 62.

⁸⁵ Patrick Donabedian and Jean-Michel Thierry, *Armenian Art*, trans. Célestine Dars (New York: Abrams, 1989), 169.

⁸⁶ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire, A Brief Study of Armenian Art and Civilization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1945), 118.

⁸⁷ Der Nersessian, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire*, 118.

⁸⁸ Gagik-Abas was given the title *šahanšah* in 1045 after the fall of Ani to the Byzantines.

⁸⁹ Diane E. Bagelli and Thomas F. Mathews, "Pigments in Armenian Manuscripts of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *REArm* 18 (1984):37.

⁹⁰ Lynn Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium, Aght'amar and the Visual Construction of Medieval Armenian Rulership* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007), 51, points out that in a chronicle entry by Mathew of Edessa (Matt'ēos Edesiats'i), King Gagik-Abas received royal robes from Alp Arslan sometime after the death of sultan Tuḡrīl-Beg and the relinquishing of Kars to the Byzantines. Der Nersessian, in "L'Évangile du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," 86, suggests a *terminus post quem* of 1045 and *terminus ante quem* of 1054, when on the day of the Epiphany of 1054, the Seljuks brutally attacked Kars and massacred many of its inhabitants.

In *The Chronicle of Mathew of Edessa* [Matt'ēos Edesiats'i], there is a reported incident where, “an envoy was sent to him [King Gagik-Abas] by the sultan [Alp Arslan], requesting him to come and do obeisance.”⁹¹ Matt'ēos states that:

Gagik was an intelligent and sagacious man, and so he thought of a way to quietly rid himself of the sultan. He dressed up in a black garment of mourning and sat on a cushion of the same color. When the sultan's envoy saw him, questioning him and desiring to know the reason [for the behavior], he said: ‘why are you dressed in black, for after all you are a king?’ Gagik answered: ‘Since the day that my friend the sultan Tughrul, the brother of Alp Arslan, died, I have been wearing this black garment.’ Amazed, the envoy went and related it to the sultan, and the sultan, enthralled by this, went forth with his whole army and came to Gagik in Kars; there he offered Gagik his friendship and showed that he was pleased [to see him]; moreover, he had the Armenian king dressed in royal clothes. Gagik, in turn, gave a banquet for the sultan. We have heard it said that the Armenian king spent one thousand *dahekans*⁹² on one roasted lamb and also that he gave a table worth one hundred thousand *dahekans* to the sultan, besides placing all his troops at the disposal of that ruler. Thus in this manner Gagik quietly rid himself of Alp Arslan. Sometime after this Gagik abandoned Kars and went over to the Romans.⁹³

This is quite an interesting passage and speaks to several issues. Despite Matt'ēos's inaccuracy with regard to the stated family relationship between Tūrlil and Alp Arslan, the information suggests the following things: (1) there existed concerted cultural and political undertakings by King Gagik-Abas within the

⁹¹ Matthew of Edessa, *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa, Armenia and the Crusades, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries*, trans. Ara Edmond Dostourian (New York: University Press of America, 1993), 104, section 23.

⁹² The *dahekan* or *nomisma* was a unit of mass used in Armenia at the time of Ananias of Širak (610 – 685), an Armenian mathematician and geographer. As a unit, the *dahekan* is expressed as being equivalent to 24 carats about 4.53 grams. See H. A. Manandian *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, trans. Nina G. Garsoïan (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, Armenian Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1965), 117.

⁹³ Matthew of Edessa, *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, 104, section 23. The year of Tūrlil's death is 1063. Tūrlil is the uncle of Alp Arslan, not his brother.

kingdom up to 1063/64, after which “Gagik abandoned Kars and went over to the Romans”; (2) there was the use of envoys as political conduits to deliver diplomatic messages and perhaps news on geo-political conflicts and situations in the region; and (3) there was contact between King Gagik-Abas and Alp Arslan on a few occasions where gift-exchange and *xenia* were practiced. Some questions come to mind based on this passage: What type of situation would have prompted the need for the sultan to request obeisance from the king in the first place? Is the king’s political maneuvering in response to the Sultan on this particular occasion a reflection of his political *savoir-faire*?

Sometime in 1064, before the Seljuks captured Kars from the Byzantines, Gagik-Abas relinquished his kingdom to the Byzantines in a possible negotiated transfer of lands.⁹⁴ He migrated with his family and entourage to the region of Tzmadanados in Cappadocia.⁹⁵ King Gagik-Abas continued his social pursuits in the new imperial domains at Tzmadanados,⁹⁶ until his death in 1069.⁹⁷

Eleventh-century Byzantine policy toward the Armenians as untrustworthy subjects and heretical Christians affected the Armenian Church with attempts by

⁹⁴ Nina Garosian, “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire,” in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, eds. Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998), 116, footnote 233.

⁹⁵ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 109.

⁹⁶ Matthew of Edessa, *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, 104, section 23. Dostourian translates that emperor Ducas gave Tzamandos (Dzamndaw) to Gagik. Dostourian indicates in his footnote that Vardan Vardapet mentions three other towns given to Gagik-Abas by the Byzantines, to include Larissa, Amasia and Comana. Also see Robert Thomson, trans., *The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i*, offprint from Dumbarton Oaks Papers, No. 43, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989), 195, no. 58, footnote 98. Thomson translates Vardan who writes “Now the king of Kars, Gagik son of Abas, distraught by fear of the Turks, gave his patrimony to the Greeks...he received Camadav, Laria, Amasya, Komana, and a hundred suburbs (*prastin*), which are villages.”

⁹⁷ Garsoian, “The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms,” 192. Garosian discusses the discrepancy of the year of King Gagik’s death. She maintains that the year was 1069, as indicated by Armenian historical sources, and not the year 1080. See Garosian, “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire,” 120, footnote 243.

the Greeks to persecute or convert it to Byzantine orthodoxy. Such persecution extended to heavily taxing the Armenian Church, depriving it of its wealth, and keeping positions of church leadership vacant or closely supervised. After the *kat'olikos* Khachik of Ani, then of Cilicia⁹⁸ (1054-1060), was transported to a monastery in the mountains of Thavplour where he stayed until his death, the office of the *kat'olike* remained vacant for five years. At the urging of several influential Armenians close to Byzantine court authorities, the Emperor Constantine X Ducas allowed Armenian Church leaders to conduct a new election. A synod met in 1065 at Tzamandos during the time of King Gagik-Abas.⁹⁹ It is at this time when King Gagik-Abas, obtained the *kat'olike* for the son of the Armenian intellectual, Grigor Magistros, who was elected in Cappadocia under the king's protection.¹⁰⁰

It has been suggested that the circumstances of obtaining the *kat'olike* for Grigor II was negotiated when the king surrendered Kars to the empire,¹⁰¹ which works within the timetable of relinquishing Kars and the election of the *kat'olikos*. It is also important to note that Gregory (Grigor) Magistros served in the imperial administration. Gregory Pahlavuni, prince of Bdjni, more commonly known by his Byzantine title as Gregory *Magistros*, was a man who was held in high regard

⁹⁸ Charles A. Frazee, "The Christian Church in Cilician Armenia: Its Relations with Rome and Constantinople to 1198," *Church History*, 45:2 (Jun., 1976):168. The province of Cilicia was a small settlement since the tenth century. When area of Cilicia was regained in 964 by the Byzantines, the province had large unpopulated areas. This is the geographic location where the Byzantines assigned lands to the Armenians and appointed Armenian nobility to govern the area.

⁹⁹ Frazee, "The Christian Church in Cilician Armenia," 167.

¹⁰⁰ Garosian, "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms," 197.

¹⁰¹ Garosian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," 114, footnote 226.

concerning matters of scholarship.¹⁰² Historical documents indicate that he praised Gagik-Abas for his intellectual pursuits and he counseled the king to sponsor academic activities at his court.¹⁰³ Gregory's son, the new *Kat'olikos* Grigor Vkayasēr (1065-1105), held the patriarchal throne as Grigor II for nearly 40 years after his appointment.¹⁰⁴ The *kat'olikos* was expected to follow the will of Constantinople and to bring the Armenians within the fold of Byzantine political sovereignty. Unfortunately, the Greek patriarch John VIII and other church officials in Constantinople continually beleaguered the new *kat'olikos*.¹⁰⁵ Unable to handle the situation, Grigor II resigned and retired to a monastery in 1071, appointing his chief confidant the Bishop George of Lori as *kat'olikos*. When the news of the Battle of Manzikert reached him, he assumed the *kat'olike* again and actively initiated a policy to "enlist Christian leaders throughout the Mediterranean world to form a common front against the inroads of the Turks."¹⁰⁶

Queen Goranduxt

Apart from the partial colophon on the reverse of the portrait painting, there is no mention of queen Goranduxt in historical sources. The dearth of historical information available to us regarding the queen does not negate her relevance in the affairs of her kingdom. If she is considered within the context of other

¹⁰² Robert Thomson, "Armenian Literary Culture," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 234. Nina Garosian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," 114. Krikor H. Maksoudian, "Gagik of Kars" in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 340. Maksoudian also states that the king had medical texts translated from Arabic into Armenian.

¹⁰³ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 109.

¹⁰⁴ Thomson, "Armenian Literary Culture," 234.

¹⁰⁵ Frazee, "The Christian Church in Cilician Armenia," 167.

¹⁰⁶ Frazee, "The Christian Church in Cilician Armenia," 168.

contemporary Armenian noble females, her role in court affairs, the church, and the upbringing and education of her daughter may have been notable.

There are several historical examples of early Armenian medieval noble women's involvement in affairs of church and state. These include the daughter of Ašot I, princess Mariam, who commissioned the construction of several churches, assigned priests to the one she had built at Šoghavank', and directed the translation of a commentary written by the Syrian deacon Nana on the Gospel according to St. John.¹⁰⁷ In the tenth century, there is Princess Sophia, wife of Smbat, Prince of Siunik, who was patron of the church at Gndevank'.¹⁰⁸ At Ani in 1001, Queen Katramide, wife of Gagik I, completed the construction of the cathedral upon the death of the king.¹⁰⁹ It is historically noted that Queen Khosrovanuš, wife of King Ašot III, was an exceptional patron of monasteries. She was responsible for the Church of the Redeemer at Sanahin in 966, and the Church of the Holy Sign at Halbat in 976-991, which was built for the salvation of her sons, Gurgēn and Smbat, whose portraits are carved in high relief on the church.¹¹⁰ Based on these contemporary sources of Armenian noble mothers who dedicated sculptures and paintings to their offspring, can it be reasonably assumed that queen Goranduxt may have been somewhat equivalent in her magnanimity to her daughter in other ways? To date, there are no surviving historical documents that attest to her socio-political accomplishments.

¹⁰⁷ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 98.

¹⁰⁹ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 99.

¹¹⁰ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 100.

Princess Marem

The documentation of the life of Princess Marem, daughter of King Gagik-Abas, is limited to a painting and very little in historical sources. There is no information in the partial colophon indicating her age at the time the portrait was painted. However, from her appearance within the context of the composition, she may have been between twelve and fourteen years of age, presumably the marrying age of women in medieval society.¹¹¹ Her physical appearance and the compositional relationship to her parents is all that is provided by the painting.

She resurfaces in historical documents when there is mention of her in sources describing a “Greek woman whose name was Mâryâm (i.e., Gagik-Abas’ daughter Marem/Maria)”¹¹² who was the “mistress of the citadel of Tzamandos before Romanos IV set out for Mantzikert”¹¹³ (which would be prior to 1071). Later, there is mention of her name on a partly legible seal¹¹⁴ bearing the title of *kouropalatissa*.¹¹⁵ While the year of her death is not known, it is apparent from

¹¹¹ Fr. Krikor H. Maksoudian, “The Religion of Armenia,” in *Treasures in Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), 35, mentions that the marrying age in medieval Armenia was around fourteen to fifteen years old. He does not indicate whether these ages specifically refer to the males or females in Armenian medieval society.

¹¹² Garosian, “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire,” 120, footnote 243. It is interesting to note the word “mistress” and curious to note whether the original word used by Bar Hebraeus in *Chronography* had any social significance regarding her status in the medieval world.

¹¹³ Garosian, “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire,” 120, footnote 243.

¹¹⁴ Garosian, “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire,” 120, footnote 243. Generally, seals were used throughout the empire as both a lock to the document, letter, or package upon which it closed and as the signature of the sender. Seals were used in official capacity to convey legal authority or as an element of a personal signature, in which case, any iconographic design would be individually unique. For lead seals see Ioli Kalavrezou et al., *Byzantine Women and Their World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 64.

¹¹⁵ Garosian, “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire,” 112. *Kouropalates* is a title bestowed upon members of the imperial family and important generals. The title *Kouropalatissa* is defined as the wife of a *Kouropalates*. The title from the Latin means “in charge of the palace” and it was a title of dignity awarded during the time of Justinian. After the eleventh century, the title of *Kouropalates* was frequently awarded to vassal rulers of Armenia and Caucasian Georgia. See

this bit of information that she ruled at Tzamandos after her father's death in 1069.¹¹⁶ It is unclear as to how she obtained the Byzantine honorific of *kouropalatissa*.¹¹⁷ The title was conferred primarily on members of the imperial family and later on foreign princes (Armenian, Georgian, etc.). The significance of the title slowly declined in the eleventh century, and it lost its value considerably by the twelfth century when the dignity of the *protokouropalates* was introduced.¹¹⁸ It is also not clear from the literature how or when an Armenian royal woman would obtain such a title and what it implies by its definition, as the wife of a *kouropalates*.¹¹⁹

Table 2 summarizes known events during the last twenty years of the king's reign at Kars. As more historical information is uncovered, perhaps we can have a better understanding between the king and his relationship with other political figures. This may shed more light on his motivations and intentions during the years after 1045.

Socio-Political and Economic Setting

The last section of this chapter highlights the socio-political and economic setting of the period. It was mentioned earlier that the sixth-century geographical partitions divided traditional Armenian lands between the Byzantines and Persians, thus extending western powers and social edicts further east into lands

Alexander Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. 2, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1991), 1157.

¹¹⁶ Garosian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," 112.

¹¹⁷ I note here a comment made by Garosian who indicates that in *Dynasties*, Cyril Toumanoff does not assign a Byzantine title to Marem, see "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," 112, footnote no. 217.

¹¹⁸ Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1157.

¹¹⁹ There is no mention in historical sources of a marriage for Marem. This does not necessarily mean that one could not have taken place between her and a petty nobleman.

Table 2. Major historical information on King Gagik-Abas and his family. The chart also provides some specific events pertaining to Kars and Ani.

Year	Event
1029	Gagik-Abas begins his reign at Kars
1045	Gagik-Abas was given the title <i>šahanšah</i> ; Fall of Ani
1048	Attack on Kars by Ibrāhīm Inal
1054	Devastating attack of Kars by Tuḡrīl-Beg
1056	Tuḡrīl-Beg appointed sultan
1063	Death of Tuḡrīl-Beg and accession of Alp Arslan
1063/64	Chronicled event by Matthew of Edessa of the exchange between King Gagik-Abas and Alp Arslan
1064	Annexation of Ani to Byzantines; Fall of Ani to Seljuks
1064	Annexation of Kars by Byzantines
1065	Fall of Kars to Seljuks
1065	Gagik-Abas obtained the kat'olikate for Grigor V kayasēr (1065-1105)
1069	Gagik-Abas dies in Tzamandos
c.1071	Mention of Marem (daughter of Gagik-Abas) in an historical source and on a partial Byzantine seal
1071	Capture of Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes by Alp Arslan at Manzikert
1080	Scholars indicate that there was no further mention in historical sources of any dynasts who migrated from Greater Armenia

that had previously been under Persian influence.¹²⁰ These geographical changes resulted in legislation that dramatically altered the “fundamental Armenian social and ecclesiastical institutions”¹²¹ in those areas of Armenia under Byzantine suzerainty. Civilian reforms were imposed in the imperial Armenian territories where new provinces were created to replace administrative districts.¹²² The administrative reorganization under Justinian’s sixth-century reforms, along with changes to laws of succession and marriage, sought to erode the traditional rights of the Armenian princes. The institutions that were under attack by the Byzantines were, for the most part, sustained well and strengthened as a “national consciousness” in Persarmenia during the fifth to the mid-seventh centuries. Despite revolts in response to Sasanian domination and religious persecution, the social structure of the *naxarars* remained relatively intact in Persarmenia. This sense of national consciousness became quite critical for the survival of Armenia during the Arab invasions beginning in the mid-seventh century.¹²³

Under traditional medieval Armenian law, the legal status of a person and possessions and its transmission was based on the patriarchal family and the system of classes. The patriarchal structure as an institution was applied to all Armenian social strata. Male descendents of the same ancestor lived in the same house with their spouse, children, and any unmarried sisters or daughters. The head of the family was typically the eldest male member. He was responsible for

¹²⁰ Robert W. Thomson, “Eastern Neighbours: Armenia (400-600),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 159.

¹²¹ Nina Garosian, “The Marzpanate,” in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. I The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 115.

¹²² Garosian, “The Marzpanate,” 105.

¹²³ Garosian, “The Marzpanate,” 115.

the family possessions and earnings, which collectively belonged to the patriarchal family *tun* (noble house). The upper social class of dynastic princes and nobles, operating under the hierarchical title of administering the collective *tun*, defended collective goals by exercising on their lands the prerogatives of the family, including the participation in any military effort required in defense.¹²⁴ The patriarch was not the owner but the responsible guardian, who would divide responsibilities among the other men of the family. His wife had a parallel hierarchical role in heading the female members in the household. The wife of the oldest brother had the most control over household responsibilities. Duties concerning the dispensing of food required an agreement with the matriarch.¹²⁵

An interior and exterior Armenian family social structure was defined so that the interior family consisted of the father, mother, sons, and close family members who were destined to stay at home.¹²⁶ During the medieval period, the future prospects of a daughter at *adolescentia*¹²⁷ were limited. Although remaining unmarried was a possibility for her, it was not the desired option. The main life options limited to daughters, not just in Armenia but in the early

¹²⁴ Jean-Pierre Mahé, "Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle," *Travaux et mémoires*, Vol. 13 (Paris: Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2000), 691-693.

¹²⁵ Mahé, "Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle," 689-690. Specifically Mahé writes, "Le droit arménien traditionnel repose sur deux principes qui conditionnent étroitement le statut des personnes, la possession et la transmissions biens: la grande famille (*gerdastan*) patriarcale et le système des classes."

¹²⁶ Mahé, "Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle," 690.

¹²⁷ *Adolescentia* was the life phase during which courtship and marriage took place. In general, the ages for medieval courtship and marriage were around 12 for girls and 14 for boys. See Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 327.

medieval world in general, were marriage and a religious vocation,¹²⁸ where the social ideal was marriage with children. Medieval female destiny was inextricably bound to marriage and childbearing, so that, upon a marital union, a girl directly moved from her father's house to her husband's house.¹²⁹

In the Armenian medieval tradition, daughters were not intended to stay with the nuclear family. Rather, they were supposed to enter into another family through marriage.¹³⁰ For a married woman who was living with her husband's family, the terms of the relationship in the marital alliance were complex and more structured than for the husband's relationship with her family. To the female who entered the family by marriage, the exterior family structure consisted of members of her husband's family as well as the husband's siblings and their respective spouses. Children born from the union belonged to the *tun* of the husband. However, the brothers of the mother (maternal uncles) had specific obligations of affection, protection and education toward their nephews.¹³¹

The upper social class of dynastic princes and nobles operated under the hierarchical title of administering the collective *tun*, and defending collective goals by exercising on their lands the prerogatives of the family, including the participation in any military effort required in defense.¹³² In princely families

¹²⁸ Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 327. Schaus also includes domestic and household management to the list of main options.

¹²⁹ Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, An Encyclopedia*, 327. Also see Susie Hoogasian Villa and Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *Armenian Village Life Before 1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 96.

¹³⁰ In Marilyn Yalom's *A History of the Wife* (New York: HarperCollins 2001), 43, she indicates that in the ancient Greco-Roman social system "a marriageable woman was a human commodity, to be transferred from her father's home to her husband's, where she assumed the latter's name and was subject to his control. Over time the Roman notion of a bride's consent gained legal and social weight."

¹³¹ Mahé, "Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle," 690.

¹³² Mahé, "Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle," 691-693.

where power struggles abounded, the social structure did not allow for the confiscation of the inalienable rights of the collective without the death of all those family members entitled to those rights, including entitled children.¹³³

Social structure during the apogee of the Bagratuni period reinstituted the relationship pattern between the king and his vassals once practiced in Armenia prior to the mid-fifth century. Aside from the breakdown of the collective *tun* as a result of the system of *apanages* to junior members of the family, social strata of the noble classes, lower nobles, clergy and others stayed consistent during the Armenian Bagratuni royal years.¹³⁴ However, the influx of Muslim settlements resulting from the creation of emirates in the ninth and tenth centuries changed the demography of the area. While Armenians were in the majority until the mid-eleventh century, there were several cities that had Muslim overlordship despite the overwhelmingly Armenian population. Cities in traditional Armenian areas became heavily concentrated with a Muslim population. Arab Muslims were the settlers in the early periods; later Kurdish Muslims replaced Arab emirates. The powerful Kurdish Šaddhids later gained political advantage in the area, bringing to it an Iranian ethnic element in the late tenth century.¹³⁵

Females Heirs and the Politics of Marital Alliances

Marriage alliances among Armenian ruling families helped propel and sustain the dominant status of the noble house, *tun*,¹³⁶ and at times account for

¹³³ Mahé, “Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle,” 690.

¹³⁴ Garsoian, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” 176.

¹³⁵ Garsoian, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” 177.

¹³⁶ Garosian, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” 146.

their survival during turbulent periods.¹³⁷ This was the case of Ašot Bagratuni “the Great” (Ašot I). The rise of Ašot in the ninth century to assume his father’s title and leadership role was supported by a series of marital alliances. The alliances that linked him to other ruling families in Armenia strengthened his dominant position with the *tun*. His daughters, Mariam and Sop’i, married Vasak Gabuř, prince of Gełarkunik’, and Grigor-Derenik Arcruni of Vaspurakan; Ašot’s sister was the wife of Bagarat I Bagratuni, prince of Iberia. Later, one of his granddaughters would wed the powerful Arcruni prince, Gagik Apumruan, regent of Vaspurakan for Grigor-Derenik’s minor son.¹³⁸ These marital alliances gave him power within the branches of the Bagratuni *tun* as well as dominant status to intervene in the affairs of other principalities.¹³⁹

Historically, the Bagratunis’ general politics embraced those of their eastern suzerains, first the Sasanians, then following the Arab invasions in the mid-seventh century, the Arab caliphate. Therefore it is not surprising to find that not all medieval Muslim-Armenian interactions were hostile. Intermarriages created political alliances between emirs and Armenian royalty. These include marital alliances between the Zurarid emirate within both the Bagratuni and Arcruni families prior to the 852 insurrection against the Arabs.¹⁴⁰ Among other examples, historian Vladimir Minorsky mentions the marriage of the emir of Dvin in 813, Jahhāf al-Sulami, to an Armenian princess, and also the marriage of his

¹³⁷ Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 7 and 17.

¹³⁸ Garosian, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” 146.

¹³⁹ Garosian, “The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia,” 146.

¹⁴⁰ Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 7, for a summary indicating the extent of Arab-Armenian interactions and intermarriages.

nephew Sawāda to an Armenian.¹⁴¹ Later we see intermarriages between Kurdish emirs and Armenian royal women.

There are passages in Armenian historical writings that show the use of daughters as political dynastic assurances. When the last Mihranid presiding prince of Albania¹⁴² was murdered in 822, the prince's widow took her surviving daughter, Spram, to the castle of Xač'ēn for safety. Not long after their flight she married her daughter to Atrnerseh, a Siwnik prince. Atrnerseh took the title Prince of Gardman and Albania after marrying the daughter of the last ruler of Albania, who was also the heiress of the last prince of Gardman.¹⁴³ Then there is the example of King Sennacherib of Dizak, of the House of Aranšahik, who survived the eleventh-century annexations and Turkish conquests. Living in Arc'ax, at the time of the Seljuk invasion, the king saved his principality in Dizak-Baġ' by "accepting the overlordship of Alp Arslan's son, Sultan Malik Shah."¹⁴⁴ Sultan Malik Shah had adopted a policy of maintaining local Christian rules in Caucasia in return for submission and payment of taxes. When King Sennacherib made obeisance to the Sultan, he promised the hand of his daughter to the Sultan's favorite slave, Č'ort'man. The King's daughter was expected to be Č'ort'man's bride, once he was freed and raised to high rank. When the king returned to Dizak-Baġ', he refused to give away his daughter, whereupon in 1103, Č'ort'man

¹⁴¹ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 117.

¹⁴² Albania (*Ahuank/ Ağvank'*) refers to the Caucasian Albanians of the historical region of the eastern Caucasus, north of the Kur River, which is where modern Azerbaijan lies. In the early sixth century, the Persians put an end to the Albanian monarchy. The country was later ruled by local princes, as an oligarchy of these princes headed by the Mihranid prince of Gardman. After the Arab invasions, the last prince of the presiding family was assassinated in 822, and the Albanian polity disintegrated.

¹⁴³ Robert H. Hewsen, "The Kingdom of Arc'ax," in *Medieval Armenian Culture*, eds., Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), 48.

¹⁴⁴ Hewsen, "The Kingdom of Arc'ax," 46.

attacked his territory with Kurdish infantry, taking over the citadel and massacring the population including the king.¹⁴⁵ Another example includes the merger of Armenian principalities, Dizak and Xaç'ēn.¹⁴⁶ King Gregory IV of Dizak married his daughter Kata to Hasan the Great, Prince of Xaç'ēn. Later in the early thirteenth century, when Hasan's grandson, Hasan II, married the daughter of the last king of Dizak-Balk', the two states were bound by the marital alliance and Hasan II took the title King of Arc'ax and of Balk'.¹⁴⁷

With the slow erosion of Armenian noble families and their domination of lands in Greater Armenia, it is important to note that by the eleventh century, within the milieu of the multi-cultural area of Greater Armenia and its environs, there were Armenians from artisans to military men converting voluntarily to Islam for survival and economic reasons. Inter-marriage between the Turkish and Armenian upper classes also contributed to such conversions.¹⁴⁸ An increasing intermingling of cultures and institutions, including intermarriages, occurred in the late eleventh century and early twelfth centuries between the Armenians and Muslim lords.¹⁴⁹ As Minorsky indicates, medieval Muslim-Christian marriages were quite frequent in Transcaucasia. There are many historic examples of marital unions between Georgian and Armenian princesses to Seljuks, Šarvān-šāhs, Šaddādids, etc. There is also historical documentation that indicates the readiness

¹⁴⁵ Hewsen, "The Kingdom of Arc'ax," 46.

¹⁴⁶ These two medieval Armenian principalities were located in the territory of historical Artsakh, which is present-day Nagorno-Karabakh.

¹⁴⁷ Hewsen, "The Kingdom of Arc'ax," 47.

¹⁴⁸ George A. Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 107-108.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Bedrosian, "Armenia During the Seljuk and Mongol Periods," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 249.

of Muslim male suitors to abandon their father's faith in order to marry Christian royal women.¹⁵⁰

Later in the thirteenth century, it was not unusual to find a number of independent emirs¹⁵¹ and Turkish sultans in Anatolia of Armenian descent.¹⁵² One can see the intermingling of cultures when reviewing the lives of the Zakarian¹⁵³ brothers, who according to Vardan's *Historical Compilation*, were Armenian princes Zak'arē and Ivanē of Mesopotamian Kurdish origin in command of the Georgian military under Queen T'amar.¹⁵⁴ The family came to join the Armenian kings of Tashir, where they were converted to the Armenian creed. Ivanē called himself a Bagratid, suggesting that his mother was an Armenian princess.¹⁵⁵ There is also historical mention of political marital alliances of the sisters of Zak'arē and Ivanē into new and old *naxarar* families, where one of these marriages resulted in a major land dowry.¹⁵⁶

While examples of female rulership in Armenia are limited, in the absence of a male heir we find some evidence of the female heir as the progeny who continued the royal line. However, the examples outside of Byzantium are rare.

¹⁵⁰ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 134-135. Interests of medieval Muslims and Christians were quite intertwined. In Ani and Dwin, churches and mosques stood together in the same cities without experiencing much repercussion to their integrity. There were also cases of apostasy among Christian nobility as well as Muslim sons of emirs becoming Christian monks.

¹⁵¹ Bournoutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People*, 107-108.

¹⁵² Bedrosian, "Armenia During the Seljuk and Mongol Periods," 252.

¹⁵³ The Zakarian brothers were referred to Mkhargrdzeli in Georgian.

¹⁵⁴ Vardan Arewelc'i, *The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i*, Robert W. Thomson's translation states the following, "In the days of those times lived the glorious princes Zak'arē and Ivanē, sons of Sargis, son of Varham, son of Zak'arē, son of Sargis, of Kurdish origin."

¹⁵⁵ Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History*, 102.

¹⁵⁶ Bedrosian, "Armenia During the Seljuk and Mongol Periods," 254. One of the sisters, Dopī, was "married to Hasan, prince of the old nakharardom of Artsakh in eastern Armenia, receiving as dowry a large area on the southern shore of Lake Sevan and the Sotk district in Siunik. Her descendants are known as the Dopiank."

In thirteenth-century Cilician Armenia, at his death, King Levon I of Cilicia named his only child Zabel¹⁵⁷ as his heir. Her marriage to a Hetumid noble eventually led to Hetumid rule in Cilicia.¹⁵⁸ In the late eleventh to twelfth centuries, Georgian Bagratids emerged as a dynastic power. Under the reign of Queen T'amar, 1184-1213, the only heir of King George III, she led the way as an exemplary female leader who made great territorial gains from the Turks of Greater Armenia by employing the generals Zak'arē and Ivanē Zakarian/Mkhargrdzeli.¹⁵⁹ Despite problems early in her reign, it is only in the case of Queen T'amar where a country flourished under female rulership in the Christian East outside of Byzantium. Nevertheless, the gender of a leader was still an issue. Eastmond's treatment on Queen T'amar describes the attitudes of the time, which imposed expectations and limitations on the actions and behavior of women throughout the area. He indicates that queens held an exceptional position within society; however, there were limits to their role in state affairs. Many used their unique position in diplomatic ways to deliver gifts to other leaders or to negotiate on behalf of their husbands or sons.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Robert Thomson, trans., *The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i*, offprint from *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No. 43, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989), 213, no. 84, Vardan writes, "His only daughter, Elisabet' by name, who was called Zabel in the French tongue, took the crown."

¹⁵⁸ Ani Atamian Bournoutian, "Cilician Armenia," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Vol. 1 The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 285.

¹⁵⁹ Bedrosian, "Armenia During the Seljuk and Mongol Periods," 253. The Zakarian brothers served the Georgian court in a military capacity and Armenian lands recaptured from the Turks paid taxes to the Zakardis, who in turn paid taxes to the Georgian Bagratid dynasty.

¹⁶⁰ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 95. George Bournoutian wrote about how the caliph was befriended by the Arcrunis of Vaspurakan, who sent gifts delivered by their noble mother, Hrip'sime, who apparently succeeded in halting the Arab invasion of her domains. Also see Greenwood, "A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions," 69-71.

Dowries and Female Inheritance

One of the most important forms of medieval family succession to social position and property was inheritance.¹⁶¹ *The Epic Histories* provides information on rules of inheritance from the time of the Aršakuni dynastic family in the fifth century. Here early examples of the inheritance of land possessions were in descending order from the eldest male. If the eldest male forfeited his rights, then the possessions returned to the *tun* to be passed down to the next oldest single male heir within the extended noble family. However, in the absence of a male, the nearest married female heir would acquire the possessions long enough to transmit them to her husband's *tun*.¹⁶² As medieval examples, it is noted that in 1019, the death of King Vasak VI meant the demise of the senior male line of western Siwnik'.¹⁶³ The king's only heir daughter Kotramide, who had been married to King Gagik I of Ani at the time, inherited the bulk of her father's domains. Under Armenian tradition, this inheritance was transferred to her husband.¹⁶⁴

The collective political changes of the fifth century, which eradicated "native autonomy and privileges,"¹⁶⁵ made changes to the marriage and succession practices under the Armenian system.¹⁶⁶ Conflicting with the fundamental social traditions under the Armenian *naxarar* system, over time the

¹⁶¹ Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, An Encyclopedia*, 404.

¹⁶² Garsoïan, "The Aršakuni Dynasty," 78.

¹⁶³ Garsoian, "The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni," 137. She states that while the history of Siwnik' is difficult to trace prior to the ninth century, the lands of Vasak prince of Siwnik' after his death in 821, were divided between his two sons, Sahak, Prince of western Siwnik' and P'ilippos, Prince of eastern Siwnik.

¹⁶⁴ Hewsen, "The Kingdom of Arc'ax," 45.

¹⁶⁵ Garosïan, "The Marzpanate," 106.

¹⁶⁶ Mahé, "Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle," 694.

Roman laws of inheritance led to the systematic fragmentation of the great territorial units that had been the economic base of *naxarar* power. Also under the Roman system, daughters were allowed to inherit as well as sons, and they were allowed to receive dowries at marriage.¹⁶⁷

In time, customary laws such as inheritance and other areas of communal life¹⁶⁸ that had been defined by oral tradition were compiled by Mxit'ar Goš in the late twelfth century.¹⁶⁹ While the Armenian Church administered ecclesiastical affairs without interruption under foreign domination, Armenian communities, particularly those under Muslim control, found serious drawbacks in sorting out disputes without local lords to legislate along traditional Armenian lines.¹⁷⁰ This problem intensified in the eleventh century, and by the second half of the century after many Armenian lords had lost their hereditary lands, control of central northern Armenia was in the hands of the Georgians, and further east the emirs of Ganjak ruled over a significant Armenian population. In the absence of a legal code, disputes had to be adjudicated in Muslim courts. To prevent the continuation of this practice, Mxit'ar Goš compiled the *Lawcode* based on Armenian practice.¹⁷¹ It is from this code of laws that we learn a little more about the inheritance rules for daughters. They could inherit in the absence of sons, even if the parents' inheritance passed to another family, and when sons and daughters

¹⁶⁷ Garosian, "The Marzpanate," 107.

¹⁶⁸ Mxit'ar Goš, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk] of Mxit'ar Goš*, trans. Robert Thomson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 15.

¹⁶⁹ Goš began his work in 1184. Thomson says that Mxit'ar Goš wanted to create a written legal code not as much for Greek or Georgian Christian courts, which were not accessible for a majority of Armenians, but for the Muslim courts. See *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk] of Mxit'ar Goš*, 20.

¹⁷⁰ Goš, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk] of Mxit'ar Goš*, 14.

¹⁷¹ Goš, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk] of Mxit'ar Goš*, 14.

were both present, the inheritance was equally divided.¹⁷² We know little of the specifics concerning the dowries of brides in medieval Armenia, except that they were a matter of official consideration when dividing patrimony between brothers. Mxit'ar Goš states the following: “when brothers make a distribution among themselves and divide the patrimony, first let them identify the dowries of the brides and give them to each, and then [divide] for themselves the patrimony.”¹⁷³ Based on the *Lawcode*, we see the importance of the dowry.

Women in medieval Armenia lived in a dotal society as did other women in Central and Southwest Asian societies. In medieval times, the dowry¹⁷⁴ was a tool with which to transfer wealth from the family of the bride to the groom. It was an economic system relied upon to distribute family wealth to the younger generation.¹⁷⁵ The dowry consisted of goods (such as textiles), money, or estates that the woman would bring to her husband in marriage. This differed from the trousseau,¹⁷⁶ which consisted of the bride's portable or displayable belongings.¹⁷⁷ Traditionally, the dowry was provided by the bride's family to the groom as a fund to support the new household. During marriage, ownership and control of the

¹⁷² Goš, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk] of Mxit'ar Goš*, 53; also see page 184 for chapters 102, 103, 104, and 180.

¹⁷³ Goš, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk] of Mxit'ar Goš*, 14, 264 (Chapter 218).

¹⁷⁴ Forbes Hamish, e-mail message to author May 18, 2007, regarding dowries and inheritance in traditional systems in rural Greece. Hamish clarifies that the terms “early inheritance” or “dowry” defined similar practicalities socially. He indicates that if female children were stipulated to have an equal share in patrimony, then much of what they would get would come to them upon marriage. The defining questions for traditional systems are: who owns the dowry (property) after marriage? Does the woman retain legal ownership of the dowry that she brings to the marriage, or does this transfer to the husband?

¹⁷⁵ Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, An Encyclopedia*, 229.

¹⁷⁶ Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, “The Tradition of the Bridal Trousseau,” *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, ed. Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood (Oxford University Press, 2010), 430.

¹⁷⁷ Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, An Encyclopedia*, 801.

dowry were in the hands of the husband.¹⁷⁸ Marital arrangements in the regions of Central and West Asia followed similar lines of traditional customs despite the religious and ethnic background of the people involved. Except in relation to ecclesiastical and religious ceremonies, secular preparation of the marital union was similar whether the family was Christian, Jewish, or Muslim.

In the middle Byzantine period, like other medieval women, marriage was the institution for which young girls were groomed. Marital arrangements were made at a young age. Betrothals were possible at the age of seven, and marriages were arranged after the age of 13, where actual ceremonies could take place when a young girl was of the age of 14 or 15. Without much choice in selecting their future husband, marital matters were a matter of family strategy within the restrictions of civil and ecclesiastical laws.¹⁷⁹ From the eleventh century onward, one way that the aristocracy in Byzantium would secure their political position was through marriage alliances. A good example of successful and successive marital arrangements among family members was the alliance of the Komnenoi and Doukai families.¹⁸⁰

What is noteworthy in middle Byzantine noble society is that “power, property and prestige”¹⁸¹ were carried down through the female line. As part of a dotal society, where the female brought property into the household, the noble Byzantine woman would receive her share of the family property at the time of her marriage in the form of a dowry. The dowry would belong to her in full

¹⁷⁸ Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, An Encyclopedia*, 802.

¹⁷⁹ Angeliki E. Laiou, “Women in the History of Byzantium,” in *Byzantine Women and Their World*, ed. Ioli Kalavrezou (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 27-28.

¹⁸⁰ Laiou, “Women in the History of Byzantium,” 29.

¹⁸¹ Laiou, “Women in the History of Byzantium,” 27-28.

ownership even though her husband had the right to administer it and it could not be sold except under the most severe of economic circumstances.¹⁸² Textiles also played a major role in a Byzantine woman's dowry. Not only for the wealth that it had, but to also demonstrate the bride's skill as an expert weaver, a highly regarded attribute for medieval women.¹⁸³

We also find that in medieval Central and West Asian society, the marriage and the wedding ceremony was a major event in the life of the woman. Here textiles played an important part in the area of marriage negotiations and wedding festivities. Textiles were investments, indicators of wealth and skill, valued gifts, functional objects, and, in certain cases, talismans.¹⁸⁴ After the initial marriage agreement, the family of the groom and the family of the bride would acquaint themselves with an exchange of gifts that included textiles. Both bride and groom received their respective garments, notably silk fabrics and clothing embellished with metallic threads. In marital assigns, textiles were not only considered part of the dowry and as gifts between the families, but were a major part of the bride's trousseau. Preparation for marriage began early, when elder women worked on the young girl's wedding trousseau. Along with the bride's personal possessions, her trousseau also included textile goods for the home in the form of carpets, covers, and hangings. As part of the marital process, the bride's skills in embroidering, sewing, and weaving were judged by family members of the groom who were allowed to view her trousseau.¹⁸⁵ This was important in a time where

¹⁸² Laiou, "Women in the History of Byzantium," 27-28.

¹⁸³ Laiou, "Women in the History of Byzantium," 26-27. Also see Molly Fulghum Heintz "The Art and Craft of Earning a Living," in *Byzantine Women and Their World*, ed. Ioli Kalavrezou (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 139-143.

¹⁸⁴ Vogelsang-Eastwood, "The Tradition of the Bridal Trousseau," 430.

¹⁸⁵ Vogelsang-Eastwood, "The Tradition of the Bridal Trousseau," 430.

the production of cloth was highly regarded and where textiles held an important role in the economics and social life of a family.¹⁸⁶

Under the medieval Armenian marriage system, once a marital alliance was agreed upon, delegates of the families would initiate conversation about the giving of gifts. However, the gifts did not constitute purchasing the bride but were more like the penal compensation in the Caucasian context of avoiding blood vengeance in the taking of the bride without a planned arrangement or agreement to its effect. The bride possessed a dowry consisting of jewelry and furniture, and eventually the revenue from houses or land property, on the condition that it would remain with her without going to the *tun* of her husband.¹⁸⁷

Textiles as Social Wealth

Throughout history prior to industrialized fabrication and commercialization of textiles, cloth has been imbued with a vital command upon economics, societal organization, and politics. The decorative range and versatility achieved in patterned weaving, embroidery, staining, dyeing, or painting cloth provided it with a “limitless potential for communication”¹⁸⁸ between and among social groups. It can be safely said that cloth communicated ideological values and claims, where “complex moral and ethical issues of dominance and autonomy, [and] opulence” was expressed through fabric type and design.¹⁸⁹ Gifts of clothing and cloth were traditional means of transferring

¹⁸⁶ Hamish, e-mail message to author May 18, 2007. Textiles were exceptionally valuable in pre-Industrial Revolution times, when it was highly likely that a young noble woman came to her marriage with extraordinary wealth in textiles.

¹⁸⁷ Mahé, “Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle,” 694.

¹⁸⁸ Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience* (Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 1.

¹⁸⁹ Weiner and Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience*, 1.

wealth and embodying family identity and ancestral authority. When cloth was worn or displayed in an emblematic way, it denoted “variations in age, sex, rank, status, and group affiliation.”¹⁹⁰

A wealth of documentary information regarding the value of textiles in medieval Mediterranean is found in what is referred to as the Cairo Geniza.¹⁹¹ Here fine clothing was a considerable part of a family’s investment that would be transmitted from parents to children and it was readily liquid at a moment’s notice,¹⁹² far easier than real estate.¹⁹³ Information found in the Geniza indicates that much of the furniture in a household consisted of textile furnishings, such as carpets, couches, cushions, canopies and draperies.¹⁹⁴ The Geniza records document the use of gold¹⁹⁵ for decorating fabrics both for clothing and for furnishing. This was particularly popular in the medieval Muslim world.¹⁹⁶

Despite early Islam’s aversion to sumptuous garments, the Muslim aristocracy indulged itself with garments made from luxurious fabrics, such as

¹⁹⁰ Weiner and Schneider, *Cloth and Human Experience*, 1.

¹⁹¹ The Cairo Geniza is a collection of over a quarter of million Jewish manuscript fragments found in the Geniza of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo, Egypt. The work of scholar Shelomo Dov Goitein provides a composite portrait of individuals and the medieval Mediterranean Jewish community in Cairo from their letters, contracts, and other documents regarding economic, institutional, and social affairs.

¹⁹² S. D. Goitein, “The Main Industries of the Mediterranean Area as Reflected in the Records of the Cairo Geniza,” *Journal of the Economics and Social History of the Orient*, 4:2 (Aug., 1961):172.

¹⁹³ Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 50.

¹⁹⁴ Goitein, “The Main Industries of the Mediterranean Area as Reflected in the Records of the Cairo Geniza,” 172.

¹⁹⁵ Two techniques were employed for this effect. Fabric gilded on the surface and fabric embroidered with gold thread. R.B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles, Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest* (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1972), 33, indicates that “neither Armenian nor Maisānī fabrics were ever interwoven with gold.”

¹⁹⁶ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 61.

silk, brocade, and satin.¹⁹⁷ The Umayyad caliphs and their courtiers typically wore clothing made of luxurious fabrics.¹⁹⁸ The ‘Abbasid dynasty ushered in conditions favorable to a new fashion incorporating three vestimentary systems, the Arab, the Irano-Turkic, and the Hellenistic Mediterranean. These changes were brought about by several factors: an increasing population of non-Arab Muslims; the decline of Arab social superiority; the founding of a new capital at Baghdad (located near the old Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon); and the emergence of the Persian secretarial class and growth of Arab and *mawālī* and non-Muslim aristocrats as cultural trend setters.¹⁹⁹ Persian cultural influences were more pronounced under the ‘Abbasids, and Persian clothing, such as the *khafṭān*, were introduced in the early ninth century.²⁰⁰ The fusion of vestimentary systems, that is Arabian styles fused with western fashions from Hellenistic Mediterranean prototypes and eastern styles based on Iranian, Turkish, and Inner Asian styles, began as early as the Umayyad period, then gained momentum under the ‘Abbasids. Later, these styles fused with Central Asian fashions with the oncoming of the Turkish military dynasties.²⁰¹

Fine clothing was an integral and observable component of medieval vestimentary system in traditional ceremonies among the Byzantine, Armenian, and Arabic-speaking societies.²⁰² Titles and honors and gifts were periodically

¹⁹⁷ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 31.

¹⁹⁸ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 33.

¹⁹⁹ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 41.

²⁰⁰ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 47.

²⁰¹ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 62-63.

²⁰² Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 50. See Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, for an extensive treatment on the subject of Armenian vestimentary ceremonies during the Arçruni and Armenian Bagratuni period.

bestowed on Armenian rulers by the ‘Abbasid court as well as the Byzantine court, all encompassing sumptuous goods, including robes fashioned with gold. Gold-embroidered robes, along with other opulent items, were part of formal political gifts exchanged between the Armenian kings and the caliphate.²⁰³

Under the ‘Abbasids, court dress was based on Persian models, where dress protocol was emphasized through color and costume dress. Adding to the traditional official black robe and black turban, the caliphs at court wore red boots, which was the symbol of royalty during the Sasanian period. Special court dress was required by those who had to appear before the caliph, who himself would be seated on a raised throne on a dais completely covered with either *armanī*, which was fine Armenian red wool, or *khazz*-silk.²⁰⁴ The custom of bestowing robes of honor (*khil’a*) under the ‘Abbasids was nearly a daily occurrence. Anyone the government desired to favor, such as a vizier or provincial governor, was presented with the *khil’a* as part of the investiture practice.²⁰⁵

Fabrics known as *tirāz* ranged from embroidered bands with writing²⁰⁶ to elaborately embroidered robes. *Tirāz* designs were either woven into the textile directly or applied later as embroidery, appliqués, paint or print.²⁰⁷ *Tirāz*

²⁰³ See Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 20, for exchange between (residential Muslim governor) Yusuf and Smbat I. As a side, Smbat I was known as Smbat the Martyr of the Bagratuni dynasty. He reigned from 890–912. It was from his martyrdom at the hands of Yusuf that the Bagratunis raised the secular authority of their *tun* to a spiritual level. See Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 30.

²⁰⁴ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 48. In R.B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles, Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest*, (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1972), 14, *khazz-raḡm* is said to be one of the products of Armenia.

²⁰⁵ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 42–43.

²⁰⁶ *Tirāz* is mentioned in Chapter 3 as an identified design of the royal robes and furnishings in the royal family portrait. The three classic forms of Arabic calligraphy common to *tirāz* embellishments include *kufic*, *naskh*, and *thuluth*.

²⁰⁷ Margaret Anne Deppe, “Tiraz: Textiles and Dress with Inscriptions in Central and Southwest Asia,” in *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, ed. Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood (Oxford University Press, 2010), 104.

garments were presented as gestures of royal patronage, and as part of diplomatic gifts. The derivation of the *tirāz* system was likely a fusion of the Persian application of royal insignia on garments and the Byzantine state factory, which were taken over by the Umayyads to meet their needs.²⁰⁸ Specially designed name or signatory inscriptions (‘*alāmāt*’) would be inscribed in the borders of garments designed for the appropriate wear and would be made of silk, brocade or *ibrīsm*-silk (long-fibered silk).²⁰⁹ The thriving international trade in the Black Sea during the late tenth century established Kars as a major commercial center²¹⁰ known for its *ibrīsm*-silk.²¹¹

It is well documented that there was a great demand for Armenian-made textile goods in the Islamic world.²¹² Aside from their political and ceremonial function, textiles and clothing had an economic importance in medieval commerce. Historian S. D. Goitein points out that “comparable to the place of steel and other metals in modern economy, textiles represented the major industry of mediaeval times in the Mediterranean area,”²¹³ where high prices were paid for single selected pieces.²¹⁴ Textiles were comparable to medieval currency, so that

²⁰⁸ Stillman, *Arab Dress*, 40-41. In Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles* (pp. 8-9), he indicates that there are claims that the *tirāz* came from the Persians, while others believe the origin came from the Coptic-Byzantine factories in Egypt before the Muslim conquest, which is supported by the archaeological discovery of cloth fragments with inscribed place-names. However, he indicates that the Persian state factory system called *tirāz* under the Sasanians spread its network over the middle and eastern parts of the Islamic world.

²⁰⁹ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 7.

²¹⁰ Manandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, 145.

²¹¹ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 73.

²¹² See Chapter VI in Serjeant’s *Islamic Textiles*.

²¹³ Goitein, “The Main Industries of the Mediterranean Area as Reflected in the Records of the Cairo Geniza,” 172.

²¹⁴ Goitein, “The Main Industries of the Mediterranean Area as Reflected in the Records of the Cairo Geniza,” 172. In *Arab Dress*, 48, Stillman describes the high prices paid for fine garments for men in ninth century Iraq, and its increase in cost from two centuries earlier. As an example, the average cost of a

they were accepted as tax payments to Arab overlords. Arabic scholar R. B. Serjeant notes that Transoxania paid a tribute to the Arabs that included silks and garments.²¹⁵ Material goods weaved in Armenia, as found listed in historical transactions, were used as a form of tribute to be paid to the caliph. Taxes and goods to be taken to Baghdad in the reign of Ma'mūn²¹⁶ listed in a work entitled the *Djirāb al-Dawla* included twenty large carpets in relief (*busuṭ mahfūra*) to be sent by Armenia.²¹⁷ Documents show that the Caliph Amīn had Armenian cushions (*mirfaḳa*). Cushions made of Armenian materials were found in the court of al-Rashid (786-809), where accounts also state that the best and most expensive drapery was the one made of crimson Armenian goat hair.²¹⁸ Armenian goods were also desired by others in the Islamic court. *Khaisurān*, the wife of the late eighth-century 'Abbasid ruler al-Mahdī, owned large Armenian carpets (*bisāṭ*) and cushions (*numruk*).²¹⁹ Within the wardrobe of medieval Islamic legist, Abū Yūsuf, it was found after his death that he had left two hundred pairs of *khazz*-silk pantaloons, each with its own Armenian trouserband (*tikka*).²²⁰

R.B. Serjeant notes that Armenia was among a group of provinces where fabrics, along with weavers, dyers, and embroiderers, were exported to Islamic countries.²²¹ The most valued of textile goods were flowered silks, gold-

qamīs cost about two dinars. For purposes of comparison, a laborer at the time earned between a ½ to 1 ½ dinars per month.

²¹⁵ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 10.

²¹⁶ Early ninth-century caliph.

²¹⁷ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 10.

²¹⁸ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 60.

²¹⁹ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 61.

²²⁰ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 35-36; 61-62.

²²¹ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 60.

embroidered garments, and those woolen and silk textiles dyed crimson with the Armenian cochineal, *vortan*,²²² called *kirmiz* by Arab sources.²²³ *Kirmiz* was used to dye cloth a rich red-violet hue that was particularly desired by the Christian and non-Christian affluent. The city of Artashat was home to this dye, so much so that the city was referred to in Arab sources as *Karya-al-Kirmiz*, the village of the *Kirmiz*.²²⁴ Armenian curtains were listed by one Arab author who documented the kinds of textiles (and their place of origin) used to lavishly decorate the palace of al-Muḩtadir when he received the Byzantine ambassador in 917.²²⁵ The contemporary Arab geographer, Ibn Hawkal, detailed the superiority of Armenian textile goods. He said:

From Dabil are exported goat-hair [cashmere] textiles and [ordinary] woolens such as, for example, rugs, pillows, cushions, saddle blankets, laces for trousers and other textiles of the same type which are of Armenian manufacture and dyed with *kirmiz*. This is a red dye for goat-hair textiles and for wool. It is obtained from a worm which weaves around itself as the silkworm encloses himself in a cocoon of raw silk. They also produce there patterned silks of which many similar are found in the Byzantine empire, although they are imported from Armenia. And among the goods called Armenian are found women's cloaks, cushions, rugs, tapestries, narrow rugs, round cushions, sofa pillows and saddle blankets. These tapestries are not equaled in any part of the universe in any fashion or in any technique.²²⁶

High quality textile goods were readily accessible to Armenian nobility and clergy. Luxurious garments and tapestries were used by Armenians in the decoration of the cathedrals at Argina and at Ani, the garments that were given as

²²² H. Kurdian, "Kirmiz", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 61:2 (Jun., 1941):106.

²²³ Garsoġian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 184.

²²⁴ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 109.

²²⁵ Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles*, 22.

²²⁶ Garosġian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 183-184. Dabil refers to Dwin.

royal gifts, and perhaps the royal garments seen in portrait paintings.²²⁷

Fragments of preserved silk cloth as the bindings of manuscripts speak to the richly designed silk that Armenian nobles imported. The designs of preserved silks demonstrate the medieval use of animal and bird motifs along with palmettes, heart-shaped floral, and rosettes interspersed with medallions.²²⁸ These are all common motifs in Eastern princely court dress. Der Nersessian suggests that Armenian weavers copied Iranian Muslim models to supply design work for the highly developed weaving industry in Armenia.²²⁹

Diplomatic gift-giving of clothing was a method to secure one's position with another political power. When Smbat I "the Martyr" presented gifts to establish friendly ties with the Byzantine emperor Leo VI, he was rewarded in return with weapons, ornaments, bejeweled cups, goblets, and robes with gold.²³⁰ Later these gifts would be provided to placate the *ostikan* Afshin when he advanced into Armenia with his army.²³¹ Earlier we saw that the clothing worn by King Gagik-Abas of Kars may have been a gift from the caliph or one of his emirs, or those he received from sultan Alp Arslan.²³²

Given the extent of textiles and detailed patterns represented in the royal family portrait painting, there is significance to the representation of the magnificent array of cloth in the image, from the diverse interior fabrics to the

²²⁷ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms," 184.

²²⁸ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 109.

²²⁹ Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 109.

²³⁰ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 151.

²³¹ Garosian, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 152.

²³² Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, 109. Also see Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, 50.

highly decorative silk cloth with gold threads.²³³ Most notable is the use of gold or golden designs and silk in Queen Goranduxt's veil and dress,²³⁴ the predominance of red, presumably *kirmiz* red, and the elephant motif carpet draped over the dais-throne of the royal family.

This chapter allowed me to demonstrate the grave military and political situation under which the Bagratuni dynasties existed. Their survival in Greater Armenia was threatened by invaders and usurpers as well as by major military campaigns by the superpowers of their day. Here I provide the major historical changes to social conditions that altered ancient Armenian traditions and ways of life, which were later institutionalized in the medieval period. To better support my iconographic assumptions regarding the royal portrait, I consider extant historical information regarding the king and members of his family, the social state of medieval Armenian noble women, and the role of textiles in medieval economic society. From this information, I try to show the overall political climate to which King Gagik-Abas may have been responding when he commissioned the family portrait. It was a time when he would have been concerned with succession and highly likely to have made a determined effort to continue the existence of the family by way of his daughter, his only heir. Equally, we know that textiles had a significant economic role within medieval society and the security of wealth. Finally, noble children in medieval times were conduits of family wealth and prestige, for daughters, this meant bringing to a

²³³ Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556," *REArm* 18 (1984): 90. This information is interesting since Serjeant states that Armenian fabrics did not have interwoven gold. Is the indication that gold was used in the description of the garments in the painting in error, or are the fabrics that are defined by Der Nersessian as having gold or golden designs either gilded or not Armenian-made?

²³⁴ Der Nersessian, *L'Évangile Du Roi Gagik De Kars: Jerusalem, No. 2556*, 90; and Garsoïan, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," 184.

marriage, one of her few social options, a dowry and the fluid wealth contained within the dowry.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Modern scholars can study medieval Armenia through contemporary texts, monumental inscriptions, and colophons in codices. Another opportunity to learn more about the past is through paintings, sculptures, and reliefs. Given that medieval art is intrinsically linked to cultural events, religious philosophies, and social issues, miniature portrait paintings of nobles need to be studied within their historical context. The difficulty in this type of endeavor is that there is often an absence of textual information to explain the purpose of the art. This is the case with the royal family portrait of King Gagik-Abas. While the miniature portrait remarkably has survived the tumultuous history of Armenia up to modern times, the number of unknowns has added more mystery to the painting: the artist of the royal miniature portrait is unidentified; the type of manuscript that once housed the miniature leaf is in question; the identity of portrait's patron is not known; and there is no substantial textual information contained in the fragmentary colophon on the reverse of the portrait. While providing royal names of the figures depicted, the Christian dedicatory message of the colophon provides little to elucidate the intentions behind the portrait. Unlike other Byzantine and Armenian portrait miniatures, there is no overt Christian iconography in the family portrait of King Gagik to coincide with the colophon or legible inscriptions within the image. There is no visual representation or covert depiction of prayer, religious codex, or devotional physical postures traditionally associated with donor portraits.

To interpret the image, I had to make certain reasonable leaps between the iconography of the portrait and the socio-historical milieu of the family. The queries regarding the portrait with which I navigated my analytical roadmap were as follows: *How did centuries of power play of the empires in the area eventually*

modify and shape the dynamics of the political, cultural, and religious milieu inherited by the eleventh-century Bagratuni family? Did the fall of the great medieval city of Ani, the capital of the Bagratuni dynasts in the early eleventh century, affect the socio-political decision-making by the royal family in the smaller kingdom of Kars? How did contemporary events and trends occurring during the king's reign of Kars influence the decisions made by the royal family? Was the miniature a part of a manuscript commissioned for private or public use? Who was the intended viewer of the manuscript and the miniature portrait? Why was the portrait of the family represented the way that it was? Unfortunately, many of the questions that led my investigation remain unanswered. Given the visual evidence and historical information before me, including contemporary comparative cultural imagery, in this final chapter of my thesis I conclude with what I can plausibly interpret about the family portrait.

The medieval royal miniature portrait of King Gagik-Abas, Queen Goranduxt, and Princess Maren offers scholars an intriguing painting to analyze. It proffers rich pictorial evidence as to how this family wanted itself perceived for an intended purpose. I attempted to demonstrate stylistic and iconographic differences between the imagery of the royal miniature and other medieval Armenian and Byzantine portrait paintings. The family portrait has iconographic parallels to an Eastern topos of princely enthronement and textile décor, where the opulent textiles represented in the painting are predominately patterned after Near Eastern designs. Ancient Persian textile designs were culturally adapted by Byzantine and Armenian royals, as well as integrated into Islamic courtly regalia. The composition and iconography of the family portrait accentuates the following: (a) a rich display of sumptuous textiles, (b) Princess Maren as the central figure, (c) a connection between the princess, her mother, and wealth of textiles, (d) a

connection between the princess, her father, and dynastic lineage, and (e) an interior setting that seems courtly “domestic” rather than religious or ceremonial.

While I am compelled by the argument that indicators of rank and status in the composition between the king and princess reveal an overarching visual intent to validate the succession of the Bagratuni dynastic line, I do not believe that the sole purpose of the image was to advance Marem as successor. Given the historical milieu, the probability of such an event coming to pass seems low. My reasoning is based on comments made by Eastmond in his study of royal imagery in medieval Georgia and the gender-based difficulties that the Queen T’amar had to confront during her early years, even when Georgia had a strong foothold in contemporary regional geo-politics. I have taken into consideration the historic backdrop and the gradual loss of kingdoms in Greater Armenia. When reviewing the circumstances of T’amar and Marem, there are several facts to consider: T’amar was a twelfth-century princess, the daughter and only heir of King Giorgi II of the Georgian Bagrationis; Marem was an eleventh-century princess, the daughter and only heir of King Gagik-Abas of the Armenian Bagratunis. We see that Queen T’amar was co-ruler prior to her father’s death. There is no indication that Marem was co-ruler during the reign of her father, unless the royal portrait implies such a position. Historical circumstances during Queen T’amar’s time were not comparable to the time of Princess Marem. Georgia had advanced its military society by the twelfth century. Due to the strength of the Georgian army, Queen T’amar was able to make major territorial gains and rule as a successful suzerain over large areas of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Arab and Seljuk territories. However, her claim to rule was not without internal protest. Eastmond makes an important point when he says that the attitudes to “gender difference imposed expectations and limitations on the actions and behavior of women

throughout the Christian East.”¹ While queens held a critical role within medieval Near Eastern society, there remained certain boundaries with respect to their actions. In this respect, the suggestion of dynastic succession in the royal portrait may only be symbolic, perhaps lending to the idea of merging the Bagratuni royal lineage to another noble family.

The Armenian kingdoms of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries were under threat from marauding factions of the Seljuk Turks, who were emerging as the new power base in the region. Two major attacks of the Kars kingdom have been historically documented. From 1054 to 1064, ten years passed from the last attack to the king’s decision to leave Kars to the Byzantines. Within these ten years, is it not conceivable that the kingdom could have economically recovered from the devastation they experienced during the last historically recorded raid in 1054? The Byzantines took advantage of the Turkic situation along its borderlands and persistently attempted to annex these eastern lands from Armenian nobles in exchange for their relocation into central Byzantium. King Gagik-Abas of Kars was the last of the Armenian Bagratuni nobles to succumb to the annexation process. He relinquished his kingdom to the Byzantine emperor in 1064, nearly twenty years after the fall of Ani, the main Bagratuni kingdom, and he migrated with his family and followers to lands that may have been negotiated in exchange for attaining certain religious-political influence within the Byzantine court. We are aware that after the king and his family settled in Tzamandos he retained his political authority in the area with the election of a new *kat’olikos*.

What we know of the king historically is that he was in contact with Sultan Alp Arslan, perhaps on more than one occasion; he was cultured and educated in

¹ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 95.

Western matters; and he was a ruler of an affluent kingdom. Envoys and couriers existed; communication could not have been lacking. The king must have been aware of the unstable political conditions and questionable loyalties that led to the downfall of the main kingdom of Ani. Kurdish emirs were gaining power in the area of former Bagratuni lands, and the Seljuk military forces were successfully advancing. Surely the king was aware of the contemporary political situation in the region, contemplating his alternatives. Given the political uncertainty of the region, is it not plausible that the king was engaged in some social and political maneuvering to ensure the perpetuation of the Bagratuni family and its survival?

There is no information regarding the king's years at Tzamandos or his death other than a date. There is no existing documentation about the queen. There is little information about the princess. Marem's name survives in scant historical records in Byzantium as being the mistress of the land given to her father, with no indication of her rank or status other than a Greek title of *kouropalatissa*. It is purported that her name appears on a partial seal, which may indicate her activity in noble circles at the citadel at Tzamandos. There is no historical indication that she married, having her lineage continue in the noble Armenian families that rose to prominence in Cilicia. The title *kouropalatissa* may provide answers in this respect, but there is no corroboration as to what having this title meant at the time. Then again, unless a marriage concerned royal ascension to a major prince, how important were these types of events to contemporary historians to document?

Hand gestures play an interesting part in the painting. I showed how there may be various gestures of prayer. In a time and place where prayer was an all-encompassing aspect of medieval life, it seems reasonable to assume that there were variants on the standard iconography of entreaties to God. Hence, the hand

positions of King Gagik and Queen Goranduxt, while comparable to the *deësis* gesture, may not necessarily be similar in traditional meaning since their hands are not directed toward an enthroned Christ. All three figures in the royal family painting are frontal and their respective hand gestures seem to serve as some form of supplication that we as modern viewers are unaware, perhaps piety, similar to what Eastmond notes for the portrait of Saint Katherine in Vardzia (Figure 39).

I also showed that secular medieval imagery existed to project power and rule in royal paintings, even if within religious settings. Studies by Jones and Eastmond supported the concept that images of nobles operated as symbols and ideals for a calculated contextual purpose on the part of the rulers. Pertaining to the royal miniature, there is the reasonable likelihood that the missing portion of the miniature folio includes religious imagery. However, the possible existence of an upper register in the painting with the Hand of God blessing the seated family (located in the lower register) and the use of haloes around the heads of the figures would not negate the overall secularized message. Is it not possible that religious allusions among predominately secular iconography simply alluded to divine protection and blessings to support a material message of the endeavor at hand?

From the evidence I amassed in this paper, my interpretation of the image focuses on the role of the queen in relation to the princess and their connection to textile wealth. Based on the compositional closeness or proximity of the queen to her daughter, the identical decoration of the kerchief (piece of cloth) in the queen's hand comparable to her veil, and the sumptuous textile décor, the image is one that indicates dynastic wealth. In turn, the imagery nicely dovetails with the social implications of a young noble female heir living in a Near Eastern medieval dotal society. In a time period when socio-political tensions existed between Armenian nobility and the imperialism of the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic 'Abbasid

Caliphate, as well as military struggles with the Seljuk sultanate and Kurdish emirs, King Gagik-Abas was left in a social situation where he needed to validate the family dynasty to others and secure its future existence in the region. His daughter had a limited array of life choices in medieval society. A plausible scenario that harmonizes well with the textiles in the image is one of marital union and the demonstration of dowry wealth.

Making any further assumptions would be futile at this point since not enough historical documentation is available for me to continue my line of argument. However, it is my hope that my interpretation of the painting opens up further inquiry and renewed search for new archaeological and historical documentation. The royal miniature family portrait of King Gagik-Abas of Kars is a fascinating painting that I believe alludes to an area of social history not preserved in extant medieval Armenian pictorial sources.

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APPENDIX



Figure A1: Image and chart of interpretations

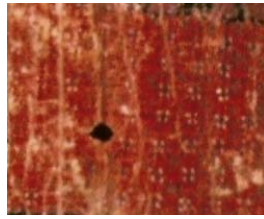
The alphanumerical notions on miniature painting are in reference to the textile and non-textile details explained below.

The interpretative information provided below is limited to the writings of five scholars who conducted an iconographic study of the miniature portrait and to whose articles I had access. While there are other scholars who have studied the miniature portrait, with the assistance of translators, I have limited the information that follows to the following researchers: Bishop Nšanēan (translated from Armenian), Sirarpie Der Nersessian (translated from French), Thomas Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalakis, Lynn Jones, and Marielle Martiniani-Reber (translated from French).



Fruit Bowl and Lion to the left of king (F, L)

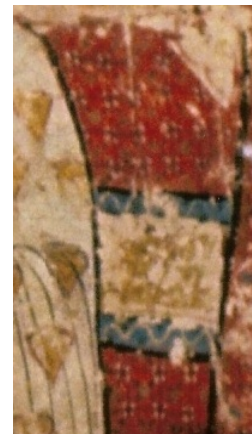
Nšanean	States that there are two bowls of fruit equal size and varying color fruit painted similar to apples and pears and that the fruit basket on the king's side is larger than the one on the queen's side.
Der Nersessian	Not Discussed
Mathews and Daskalakis	Indicates that bowls of fruit are part of luxurious environments in Islamic painting. Remarks that the lion throne is the "rampant lions facing outwards" and they may be "imaged to guard the divan." Says that there is an association of lions with rulers and particularly their use with thrones is a tradition of long-standing in the Near East. Writes that the Islamic world assimilated the lion imagery and transformed it. Uses examples such as the eighth-century villa of Khirbat al-Mafjar where there is a statue of a prince who is placed on a pedestal on the back of a pair of lions. Relative to Gagik's portrait, the representation of lions chained to the throne of a ruler can be found on a silver plate in the Hermitage Museum. The ruler, who is thought to be an early Ghaznavid king of around 1000, sits cross-legged on a divan and the lions appear below at either side facing outwards.
Jones	Indicates that the royal family is seated on a cushioned platform throne supported by the figures of lions similar to those found in contemporary representations of Arab rulers, and bowls of fruit are placed to either side of the throne.
Martiniani-Reber	Not discussed.



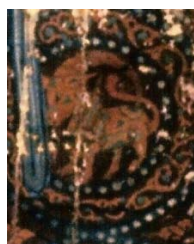
Divan (T1)



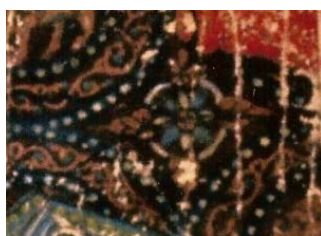
Shown behind king and under throw

Shown with *Tiraz* (T10)

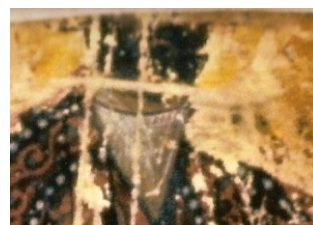
Nšanean	Mentions the cylinder-like pillows on the divan to either side of the royal coup.
Der Nersessian	Makes remark that it is a red cloth with a geometric design.
Mathews and Daskalakis	Not discussed.
Jones	Indicates that the cushions behind the three figures are covered with a brilliant red textile which is embellished with <i>tiraz</i> , bands of cloth inscribed with honorifics and distributed by Islamic courts in acknowledgement of rank and status.
Martiniani-Reber	Not discussed.



T2



T3



T4

Nšanear	Points out that the king is wearing a royal robe, decorated with red, blue, purple colors. On each of his shoulders, from his shoulder to his chest, two long square white decorative [bands with gold thread design?]. Inside the square there are gold plated decorations. On the front of the robe, on the chest and stomach area, there are two decorative animals in roundels that look like baby sheep although in the other circle, the front legs look like lion's paws.
Der Nersessian	States that the coat has broad sleeves and is tight at the waist; it is cut in imperial purple silk with design which is richer than the one in the carpet. There are ibex (?) standing up in profile inside the medallion with double pearled circles, also there are smaller circles which are cut <i>par des feuilles</i> in the shape of a cross, garnished with lozenges are put in between the medallion. The bottom of the cloth is open and the pleats expose the king's leg.
Mathews and Daskalakis	Says that the creature motif is a stag or unicorn in pearled roundels and that it is a common symbol of virility.
Jones	Indicates that the king is dressed in a purple and blue tunic decorated with pearls arranged in medallions, each of which contains at its centre the image of a horned ibex carrying a three-lobed leaf in its mouth. The tunic's upper arms are further embellished with gold, the lower edge of the king's trousers and one brown-shod foot.
Martiniani-Reber	States that the king is wearing a coat with knotted medallion, pearled medallion in which you find inscribed ibex (<i>bouquetin</i>). Says that the motif lozenge of <i>ecoincons</i> and the center is composed of rosette. The coat has bands of <i>tiraz</i> with kufic.



Princess shawl and dress (T5 and T6)

Nšanear	Indicates that the princess has two rows of thin pearls. Her hands are open, with her palms facing out and close to her chest. She is wearing red, blue, black “baree-kod” coat. The shawl “bad ou jadz” goes from her head covering her shoulders up to her elbows. On her shoulders include square decorative elements like the king’s.
Der Nersessian	Not discussed.
Mathews and Daskalakis	States that the princess wears a palmette-patterned garment and wears <i>tiraz</i> bands on her upper arms (similar to the ones shown on the king’s garment).
Jones	Remarks made about the red tunic include that it is adorned with blue-grey palmettes, and her shoulders are draped with a short blue scarf decorated with <i>tiraz</i> .
Martiniani-Reber	Says that the <i>jeune fille</i> also wears a coat with puffy sleeves with bands of <i>tiraz</i> . The ornament is made of large palmettes in the shape [<i>de pique</i>] and are blue with red background.



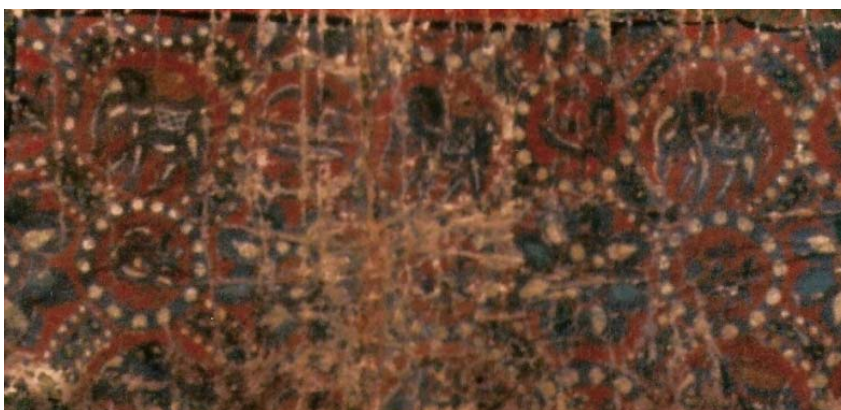
Queen's Veil (T7)

Nšanean	Mentions that from her head down up to the top of the sofa is a white shawl. On it is either heart-shapes or almond-shapes with red and gold-plated decoration. The bottom edges of the shawl are decorated with red, blue, and gold-plated colors.
Der Nersessian	Says that the white veil which covers the queen's shoulders is scattered with golden designs in the shape of a heart, and bordered by two red bands and by one "mauve" band.
Mathews and Daskalakis	Indicates that the queen's garments also include a veil with golden hearts that cascades from her shoulders. Discusses the image of hearts as another popular motif in early Islamic arts of Nishapur and Samarra.
Jones	Not discussed.
Martiniani-Reber	States that the queen has a white veil decorated with golden heart-shaped leaves draped over her shoulders, and white cuffs embroidered with gold emerge from her tunic.



Queen Goranduxt Dress (T8)

Nšanean	Notes that the queen has a <i>baree-kod</i> with red and green decoration (with gold thread design).
Der Nersessian	Says that the queen wears a dress of red silk, decorated with birds which are encircled and those circles of birds are surrounded with four geometric designs, each of them is formed by two octagons overlapped to give a polygonal motif with 16 sides.
Mathews and Daskalakis	Indicates the design is of birds in eight-pointed stars.
Jones	Mentions that the queen wears a crimson tunic patterned with greenish-gold alternating motifs of birds inside eight-pointed stars and floral polygons.
Martiniani-Reber	States that the clothing of the queen shows medallions and inside these medallions is flower-shaped or most probably [simurghs] that is green with red background color.



Throw (T9)

Nšanean	Mentions the round circles and drawings of elephants, leaves and other designs on the throw that hangs from the cushion.
Der Nersessian	Says that a <i>tapis pourpre</i> of rich design on sofa has a principle design in four big pearled medallions encircling a central medallion in which there are elephants (vertically) and flowers (horizontally). The small medallion, which has birds inside, alternates with the larger medallion. The color has faded of the two vertical bands which interrupt the ornament of the rug and maybe there were some inscriptions like the ones in kufic characters that one hardly distinguishes on the <i>tiraz</i> of the sleeves of the royal coat.
Mathews and Daskalakis	Mentions the pearled roundels encircling elephants and compares it to famous Louvre elephant silk that was produced in Khorasan around 950. Says it is the royal animal of the ancient Persian monarchy.
Jones	States that the throne, which is covered with a textile richly decorated with pearl-edged medallions, contains the figures of elephants.
Martiniani-Reber	Makes note that the carpet (in reference to T9) has a resemblance of its decorum and color with an actual silk fabric of which several fragments have been dispersed in various collections. The large piece belongs to the Cooper Hewitt National Design of New York. The cloth has been well studied in the catalogue in <i>The Glory of Byzantium</i> (New York 1997) pp. 414-416, and that the rapprochement with the miniature of the <i>Gospel of Gagik of Kars</i> has been established. The winged horses of simurghs and the elephants are inside the medallion with pearl roundels: 28 pearls for each pearled roundels (width of medallions 2 cm) and the total height of the pearled medallion is 17 cm.



Detail of pearl necklace strands and hair styles; close-up of faces



Detail of hand kerchief and bracelet (?)

Nšanean	Says that the princess's neck is encircled with two rows of thin pearls, and in her right hand, she holds something which he can not decipher. Her left hand is open and on her chest.
Der Nersessian	Says that the princess wears a triple collar of pearls and has a handkerchief in her right hand.
Mathews and Daskalakis	Indicates that both women wear string of pearls and that pearls, which are harvested in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, are prized among Muslim rulers. The pearl motif indicates a symbol of purity as well as medicinal antidotes to palpitations of the heart and melancholy.
Jones	States that the princess and her mother share the same hairstyle of long braids. Makes note of the traces of a gold background halo surrounding each of the heads of the three family members. Indicates that the queen wears a blue and red bracelet on her left wrist and three strands of pearls encircle her neck. Comments that the princess also has three strands of pearls encircling her neck.
Martiniani-Reber	Not discussed.

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