

IGOR DORFMAN-LAZAREV

KINGSHIP AND HOSPITALITY IN THE  
ICONOGRAPHY OF THE PALATINE CHURCH AT  
ALT'AMAR

ESTRATTO

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MEMORIALI



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# Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa



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G. Cracco, G. Dagron†, C. Ossola  
F. A. Pennacchietti, M. Rosa, B. Stock



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GIORGIO CRACCO - GILBERT DAGRON† - CARLO OSSOLA  
FABRIZIO A. PENNACCHIETTI - MARIO ROSA - BRIAN STOCK

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KINGSHIP AND HOSPITALITY  
IN THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE PALATINE CHURCH  
AT ALT'AMAR \*

The abundance of iconographic representations and decorative elements sets the church of the Holy Cross – on the island of Alt'amar in Lake Van – apart from all other religious buildings of Armenia. Erected by king Gagik Arcruni between 915 and 921, carved or painted on each of its walls, this palatine church is also the single example of a church covered with reliefs anywhere in the Christian world before the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>1</sup> As was fitting for a royal undertaking, Gagik intended to create a work of art whose like had never been seen before, unique and incomparable.<sup>2</sup> And as such is this monument described by the anonymous Continuator to Thomas Arcruni's *History*, writing under Gagik's patronage.<sup>3</sup> In its decoration the king and his artists min-

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\* I owe great thanks to Charles J.S. Lock of the University of Copenhagen for his un-failing advice, both scholarly and stylistic.

<sup>1</sup> S. DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 11; during the first half of the eleventh century churches with carvings on their outer walls appeared in the North-Eastern Pyrenees: É. MÂLE, *L'art religieux du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France. Étude sur les origines de l'iconographie du Moyen-Âge*, Paris, A. Colin, 1947, pp. 1-44.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. B. BRENNK, *Committenza e retorica*, in *Arti e storia nel Medioevo*, II (*Del costruire: tecniche, artisti, artigiani, committenti*), a cura di E. Castelnuovo et al., Torino, G. Einaudi, 2003, pp. 3-42; ID., *Il concetto del soffitto arabo della Cappella Palatina nel Palazzo dei Normanni di Palermo*, in *Narrazione, exempla, retorica. Studi sull'iconografia dei soffitti dipinti nel Medioevo Mediterraneo*, a cura di L. Buttà, Palermo, Caracol, 2013, pp. 9-39, here on pp. 9-12.

<sup>3</sup> CONTINUATOR TO T'OVMA ARCRUNI, *Յաղագս շինութեանն Աղթամարայ* [*Concerning the Edification of Alt'amar*] and *Յաղագս շինութեան գերապայծառ և պանծալի սուրբ եկեղեցւոյն, որ յԱղթամար քաղաքի* [*Concerning the Building of the Holy Church, Most Magnificent and Worth Lauds, Which is in the City of Alt'amar*], ed. G. Tēr-Vardanean, in *Մատենագիրք Հայոց* [*Library of Armenian Literature*], XI (*Tenth Century; Historiography*), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2010, pp. 287-292, here on p. 287; R. THOMSON, *Architectural Symbolism in Classical Armenian Literature*, «The Journal of Theological Studies», New Series, XXX, 1979, pp. 102-114, here on p. 102; see below in this article, section III.

gled ideas of different provenance. The particular attention paid by them to the outer walls of the building is indicative of the importance accorded to external observers, including those who would not enter the church.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, some light can be shed on Gagik's design and the iconographic programme of the church if we take into consideration different distances and angles from which this building can be viewed, as well as the various categories of observers. We shall examine a number of representations carved on the outer walls – animals, the medallion with Adam at the centre of the east façade, the enigmatic royal figure set above Adam, the king of Nineveh on the left side of the south elevation – and, on the interior walls, the fresco of Christ in the apse of the sanctuary. In analysing the theological and political ideas that they express, we shall pay particular attention to Armenian sources of the ninth to the tenth centuries, to the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* and a number of extra-canonical sources preserved in Syriac and Armenian, as well as to a series of figurative witnesses and analogies from East and West.

### I. Gagik Arcruni the Theologian

In an earlier study, I have discussed the 'Letter of Gagik, the Armenian King of Vaspurakan, to the Greek Emperor Roman, Concerning the Faith' preserved in the *Book of Letters*, the Armenian collection of official correspondence relating to doctrinal matters.<sup>5</sup> It is the only text in Gagik's own hand that is known to us. Although written about fifteen years after the church's construction, this *Letter* acquaints us with the religious ideas that had inspired the king, thus helping us not only to depict his portrait but also to understand better the figurative language of his palatine church.

In spite of the later title under which it has been transmitted, Gagik's *Letter* was despatched not directly to the Emperor but to the Patriarch of Constantinople, who appears from the opening lines as Gagik's first

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<sup>4</sup> Cfr. F. GANDOLFO, *La facciata scolpita*, in *L'arte medievale nel contesto (300-1300). Funzioni, iconografia, tecniche*, a cura di P. Piva, Milano, Jaca Book, 2006, pp. 79-103; see also W. SAUERLÄNDER, *Façade ou façades romaines?*, in Id., *Romanesque Art. Problems and Monuments*, I, London, Pindar Press, 2004, pp. 36-55.

<sup>5</sup> I. DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Christ in Armenian Tradition: Doctrine, Apocrypha, Art (Sixth-Tenth Centuries)*, «The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies» (monographic issue), Leuven, Peeters, 2016, pp. 315-331.

addressee.<sup>6</sup> Of the four figures who occupied the patriarchal throne during the reign of Romanos I Lakapenos (Lekapenos), 920-944, Gagik probably addressed himself to the last, Theophylaktos (933-956), Romanos's son. Indeed, the author declares that by writing to the Patriarch he appeals, at the same time, to the Emperor,<sup>7</sup> whereas twice in the letter the Emperor is mentioned in the first place, his title being followed by the mention of the direct addressee.<sup>8</sup> Whilst writing to the highest ecclesiastical authority in the Byzantine Church, Gagik could explicitly accord priority to the Emperor only if he was aware of the young age of the patriarch, born in 913, and of his proximity to the Emperor.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, on one of these occasions, whilst mentioning the Emperor in singular, he speaks of 'patriarchs' in the plural, when he assures 'this pious Emperor and these holy Patriarchs' (*առ բարեպաշտ թագաւորի և առ սուրբ հայրապետսդ*) that he remains 'faithful to the bonds of friendship and to his duties as a servant'.<sup>10</sup> This may be a reference to the four Patriarchs who succeeded in Constantinople within a brief span of time. Besides, we know that Theophylaktos discussed questions of liturgy with oriental patriarchs, whereas mentions of Theophylaktos in Arabic sources attest to his fame in the East.<sup>11</sup> In the light of these considerations, Theophylaktos appears as Gagik's most plausible addressee.

The background to this letter must have been the victorious campaigns led between 931 and 936 in the Euphrates valley and in Armenia by two Byzantine commanders of Armenian origin, John Kurkuas and Melias, and supported by Gagik and other Armenian princes. During Theophylaktos's patriarchate, in particular, the definitive seizure of the fortress of Melitene, in 934, and the destruction of the fortress of Sa-

<sup>6</sup> GAGIK ARCRUNI, *Թուղթ Գագիկայ, Վասպուրականի Հայոց թագաւորի, առ կայսրն յունաց Ռոմանոս, վասն հաւատոյ* [Letter of Gagik, the Armenian King of Vaspurakan, to the Greek Emperor Roman, Concerning the Faith], eds. Y. K'ēosēan et al., in *Library of Armenian Literature, X (Tenth Century)*, Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2009, pp. 795-799, here on p. 795, §§ 1, 2.

<sup>7</sup> GAGIK ARCRUNI, *Letter of Gagik*, cit., p. 795, § 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, p. 795, § 3; p. 799, § 59.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. M. ŌRMANEAN, *Ազգապատում* [National History], I, Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2001, § 743, coll. 1078-1079.

<sup>10</sup> GAGIK ARCRUNI, *Letter of Gagik*, cit., p. 799, § 59 (reading confirmed by the two editions of the *Book of Letters*, in *Գիրք թղթոց* [Book of Letters], ed. Y. Izmirianc', Tbilisi, Rōtineanc' and Šarajē, 1901, p. 301; *Գիրք թղթոց*, ed. N. Polarean, Jerusalem, Patriarchate of Saint Jacob, 1994, p. 549).

<sup>11</sup> *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Zweite Abteilung (867-1025)*, VI, Hrsg. F. Winkelmanns et al., Berlin, W. de Gruyter, 2013, pp. 565-570.



mosata, in 936, placed important areas inhabited by Armenians under Byzantine administration and facilitated the Empire's expansion beyond the Euphrates.<sup>12</sup> By presenting the Armenian faith to the guardian of the doctrinal purity of the Imperial Church in an irenic way, Gagik certainly hoped to find in the Patriarch the best ambassador to the Emperor. Gagik must have hoped to influence Romanos's Armenian policy which, during these years, was acquiring a growing importance. Gagik's letter, therefore, should be dated by a time close to these two victories, conceivably following them.

Gagik declares that he approached Armenian prelates (*սուսջնորդք*) about the causes of the schism; they provided him with an ample collection of patristic writings regarding the divergences between the Armenian Church's creed and that of the fourth and the sixth councils. The king contends that he exposes to his addressees these divergences not with polemical aims but in order 'to examine and to understand the schism that has become entrenched [...] between our two peoples', in hopes that it may be overcome and, thus, that the communion between the two Churches may be restored.<sup>13</sup>

Gagik's references to his colloquies with Armenian theologians show that he not only possessed a detailed knowledge of the Armenian doctrine but that he was also informed, in an impartial way, of Byzantine theological arguments: «I asked again our doctors: "Why do you prescribe [the addition] *Thou who hath been crucified for our sake* in the thrice-holy laud? Would not you like, perchance, to associate the Cross to the Holy Trinity, for which [reason] the Greek sages deservedly avoid and reject us?"».<sup>14</sup> Gagik refers here to the ancient liturgical hymn *Tris-*

<sup>12</sup> GEORGIUS MONACHUS [CONTINUATUS], *De Constantino Porphyrogenneto et Romano Lacapeno*, § 35, in *Theophanes continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius monachus* (CSHB; 33), Hrsg. I. Bekker, Bonn, E. Weber, 1838, pp. 907-908; СТЕП'АНОС ТАРАВНЕЦ'І АСОЛІК, *Պատմութիւն տիեզերական* [Universal History], ed. G. Manukean, in *Library of Armenian Literature*, XV/2 (Tenth Century), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2012, pp. 639-832, here on p. 754, chap. 7, § 57; VARDAN AREWELC'Ī, *Հաւարումն պատմութեան Վարդանայ Վարդապետի* (Historiographical Compilation of Vardan Vardapet), ed. L. Alışan, Venice, San Lazzaro, 1862, p. 88; A.A. VASILIEV and M. CANARD, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II/1, Bruxelles, Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales, 1968, pp. 153, 266-273, 277; A. TER-GHEWONDYAN, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, Lisboa, Fundação C. Gulbenkian, 1976, pp. 77-83; K.N. JUZBAŞJAN, *Армянские государства эпохи багратидов и Византия: IX-XI вв.* [Armenian States of the Bagratid Era and Byzantium: Ninth-Eleventh Centuries], Moscow, Nauka, 1988, pp. 115-116, 269-271; B. MARTIN-HISARD, *Constantinople et les archontes du monde caucasien dans le Livre des cérémonies*, II, 48, «Travaux et Mémoires», XIII, 2000, pp. 359-530, here on pp. 380, 388-390, note 226.

<sup>13</sup> GAGIK ARCRUNI, *Letter of Gagik*, cit., p. 795, § 8; p. 799, § 59; p. 798, § 48.

<sup>14</sup> *Ivi*, p. 796, § 17.

agion, 'Holy God, holy Mighty, holy Immortal': whilst the Armenians, following a tradition rooted in Syria and Egypt, recited it addressing themselves to Christ, in most of the Byzantine liturgical usages this hymn was directed to the Trinity. Because Byzantines were often unaware of this divergence in address, the clause in question gave them grounds to accuse the Armenian Church of 'theopaschism'.<sup>15</sup>

Gagik thus displays a considerable openness; whilst remaining loyal to his Church, he shows himself able to understand the reasons of its detractors. His disposition of mind may not be unrelated to the Armenian-Byzantine Council of Širakawan convened in 862, after several years of an unprecedented Byzantine advance on the Arab front.<sup>16</sup> That event had not achieved a reunion of the two Churches, yet it formulated an agreement which stipulated reciprocal tolerance of the representatives of two divergent confessional groups, thus allowing for peaceful co-existence of both Orthodox and non-Chalcedonian Christians in the Byzantine-Armenian borderlands. The settlement achieved in Širakawan was apparently intended to prevent the emigration of Armenians from the territories conquered by the Byzantines: they would no longer need to fear religious persecution. It might also have been designed to provide a basis for military collaboration between the Byzantines and the Armenians.<sup>17</sup> About seventy years later, Gagik's concerns were probably analogous to these.

The acts of the Council of Širakawan<sup>18</sup> display a number of affinities with Gagik's *Letter*. Thus, on the one hand, Canon 9 promulgated by the Council upholds the soundness of the Armenian addition to the *Trisagion*;<sup>19</sup> on the other hand, with a view to achieving agreement with

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<sup>15</sup> On the original meaning of this hymn and the ancient traces of its Christological interpretation, also perceptible in Byzantine liturgical tradition, see: V.S. JANERAS, *Les Byzantins et le trishagion christologique*, in *Miscellanea liturgica in onore di sua eminenza il cardinale Giacomo Lercaro*, II, Roma, Desclée, 1967, pp. 469-499, here on pp. 489-497; E. KLUM-BÖHMNER, *Das Trishagion als Versöhnungsformel der Christenheit. Kontroverstheologie im V. und VI. Jahrhundert*, München, Oldenbourg, 1979, pp. 60-69; S.P. BROCK, *The Thrice-Holy Hymn in the Liturgy*, «Sobornost», VII, 1985, pp. 24-34, here on pp. 28-30; P. PLANK, *Das Trishagion: Gotteslob der Engel und Zankapfel der Menschen*, «Kirche im Osten. Studien zur osteuropäischen Kirchengeschichte und Kirchenkunde», XXXV, 1992, pp. 111-126, here on pp. 121-126.

<sup>16</sup> I. DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Arméniens et Byzantins à l'époque de Photius: Deux débats théologiques après le Triomphe de l'orthodoxie* (CSCO 609; Subsidia, tom. 117), Leuven, Peeters, 2004, pp. 61-63.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 235-238.

<sup>18</sup> For a new critical edition of the canons, see: DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Christ in Armenian Tradition*, cit., pp. 307-312.

<sup>19</sup> DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Arméniens et Byzantins à l'époque de Photius*, cit., pp. 138-149, 215.

the Byzantine party, neither the *Discourse* pronounced by the Armenian bishop Vahan at the Council, nor any of its Canons, includes the miaphysite formula 'one incarnate nature of God the Word'. In his *Letter*, Gagik demonstrates an attitude consistent with these two points.

Gagik reports his counsellors' answer regarding their reasons for rejecting the doctrine of the fathers of the Fourth Council: 'We have found their teaching to be contrary to the three councils' (*ընդդէմ երկից ժողովոցն գտաք զվարդապետութիւնն նոցա*).<sup>20</sup> This objection may be compared with those Canons of the Council of Širakawan, which regulated the relation between the first three Œcumenical Councils, accepted by both the Armenian and the Byzantine Churches, and the four subsequent Councils recognised only by the Church of the Empire. Canons 13 and 14, in particular, subordinate the attitude towards the four latest Byzantine Councils to one's conscience. Without condemning the doctrines held by the Byzantine Church, Canon 13 stipulates:

If anyone should consider (*գիտիցէ*) the Council of Chalcedon or those following it contrary or adverse (*հակառակ եւ կամ դիմամարտ*) to the apostolic or [to the] prophetic defined legacy, or to the tradition of the three holy Councils, and either for the sake of pleasing men or out of the love of possessions should not anathematise it, may [such a one] be anathema.<sup>21</sup>

Without abolishing the schism, the council of Širakawan implied that conflicting doctrines and traditions could be openly discussed, whereas the juxtaposition of theological formulæ required a considerable intellectual flexibility and presupposed, in particular, a capacity of distancing oneself from one's own tradition without renouncing it. Gagik's letter reflects such an intellectual environment as that inaugurated by the Council of Širakawan. The mental disposition, to which both the acts of the council of Širakawan and Gagik's *Letter* give voice, would endure in Armenia in the centuries to come. This we learn from Nersēs Šnorhali's writings and especially from his exchange with the Byzantine theologian Theorianos, between 1165 and 1172, as well as from later Armenian authors.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> GAGIK ARCRUNI, *Letter of Gagik*, cit., pp. 795-796, § 9.

<sup>21</sup> DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Christ in Armenian Tradition*, cit., p. 311.

<sup>22</sup> B.L. ZEKIYAN, *St Nersēs Šnorhali en dialogue avec les Grecs: un prophète de l'œcuménisme au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in *Armenian Studies – Études arméniennes In Memoriam Haiğ Berbérian*, dir. D. Kouymjian, Lisboa, Fundação C. Gulbenkian, 1986, pp. 861-883, here on pp. 871-873.

T.F. Mathews has pointed to the eclectic style in the illumination of a manuscript surviving from Gagik's time and to its painter's acquaintance with the larger art world of the Mediterranean basin: this manuscript, known as the Gospels of Queen Mlk'ē (*San Lazzaro* 1144), contains a colophon according to which it was donated directly by King Gagik Arcruni to the church of the Holy Cross in the monastery of Varag, although another colophon associates this donation with Gagik's wife, Queen Mlk'ē.<sup>23</sup> The eclectic character of the palatine church's iconography, as well as its capacity to initiate a dialogue with external observers (not necessarily either Armenian or Byzantine), which will be discussed in sections III-VI, spring from that intellectual environment.

## II. Adam's Fall According to Gagik and Thomas Arcruni

One notion in Gagik's theology is of special importance for us. With a reference to Irenæus of Lyon's 'Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching', which has reached us in an Armenian translation, Gagik writes that 'We would not have a share in incorruptibility (*անսպակահանութիւն*), had not Christ come to us'.<sup>24</sup> In Irenæus's passage to which Gagik refers, the concept of incorruptibility is explained as the deliverance from the death inherited by humankind from Adam.<sup>25</sup> According to this surviving translation of the *Demonstration*, Irenæus also maintains that in order to rescue the captive patriarchs from Satan, Christ assumed the humanity which Adam had had before the fall.<sup>26</sup> In an unemphatic way, Gagik thus maintains – against Byzantine teaching – the incorruptibility of Christ's body. This doctrine had been introduced into Armenia in the middle of the sixth century by West-Syriac missionaries. In a time and a place close to Gagik, Gregory of Narek (945?-1010), in his 'Discourse of

<sup>23</sup> Th.F. MATHEWS, *The Classic Phase of Bagratid and Artsruni Illumination. The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, in *Treasures in Heaven. Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Th.F. Mathews et al., New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994, pp. 54-65, here on pp. 57-60; cfr. p. 58: «It is almost as if the artist were proud of his familiarity with this disparate material and wanted to display his erudition by including as much of it as possible».

<sup>24</sup> GAGIK ARCRUNI, *Letter of Gagik*, cit., p. 796, § 11; cfr. IRENÆUS OF LYONS, *The Proof of the Apostolic Teaching with Seven Fragments*, eds. K. Ter-Mekerttschian et al., in *Patrologia Orientalis*, XII, 1919, pp. 659-744, here on p. 683, § 31, ll. 9-14.

<sup>25</sup> IRENÆUS OF LYONS, *The Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*, cit., p. 683, § 31, ll. 14-18; cfr. also GAGIK ARCRUNI, *Letter of Gagik*, cit., p. 796, § 12.

<sup>26</sup> IRENÆUS OF LYONS, *The Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*, cit., p. 684, § 31, ll. 1-3.

Exhortation' affirms, concerning the Incarnation that took place in the Virgin's womb, that 'the Maker of all [things] melted this nature [i.e. the fallen nature of humankind] into its original incorruptibility' [i.e. into its primordial, Adamic, prelapsarian form] (*ձուլեաց Ամենարուեստն վերստին զբնութիւնս յառաջին անապականութիւնն*).<sup>27</sup>

The idea of incorruptibility thus places Christology in the Biblical, i.e. narrative, perspective of the creation of man, his fall and his deliverance therefrom: according to the book of Wisdom, 'God created man for incorruptibility (ἐπ' ἀφθαρσίᾳ; *յանեղծութիւն*), made him to be an image of his own nature' (*Wisdom* 2. 23), whereas in the following verse this incorruptibility is opposed to man's mortality after his fall: 'Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world' (*Wis.* 2. 24). In a number of apocryphal texts preserved in Syriac and in Armenian, the corruption is to be overcome in the end of time (*IV Ezra* 6. 28; 7. 96, 113; 8. 53; *II Baruch* 21. 19).<sup>28</sup>

In his *History of the House of the Arcrunik*' (plural for the family name Arcruni), finished soon after 904, a writer belonging to the same family as Gagik, Thomas Arcruni, whose main purpose is to indicate the genealogy and nature of the ancestors of the Arcrunik', speaks of the world's corruption after Adam's fall in a long passage devoted to Noah's ark. He expands, notably, on *Genesis* 6. 11-13 where the earth's antediluvian 'corruption' is associated, according to the Armenian Bible, with 'injustice':

The Lord God watched the earth; and lo, it was corrupted (*սպականեալ*); for all flesh had corrupted (*սպականեաց*) its paths on earth (*Gen.* 6. 5, 11-12), no longer expressing thoughts of rational beings, but wandering like wild herds in disorder and all kinds of dissoluteness, taking refuge in [their] strength of limb and unbridled in boasting of the strength of their arm. [...] So he commanded the just one (*արդարն*) to construct the ark as a prediction of the perdition of the impious (*Gen.* 6. 9,14ff). [...] Now Philo says that out of re-

<sup>27</sup> GRIGOR NAREKAC'Ī, *Բան խրատու վասն ուղիղ հաւատոյ և մաքուր վարուց անաբիւութեան* [*Discourse of Exhortation Concerning Orthodox Faith and the Virtue of Pure Life*], ed. H. Mirzoyan, in *Library of Armenian Literature*, XII (Tenth century; Grigor Narekac'i), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2008, pp. 1022-1084, here on p. 1027, Ը 45; cfr. I. DORFMANN-LAZAREV, «Manto terrestre dell'immagine solare»: Note sul linguaggio cristologico di Gregorio di Narek, in *Saint Grégoire de Narek: théologien et mystique* (OCA; vol. 275), dir. J.-P. Mahé et al., Roma, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2006, pp. 113-138, here on pp. 130-132; the authenticity of the *Discourse of Exhortation* was reasserted by the late Hrač'ea T'AMRAZIAN, *Գրիգոր Նարեկացին և նորպլատոնականութիւնը* [*Gregory of Narek and Neo-Platonism*], Yerevan, Nairi, 2004, pp. 76-91.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. M.E. STONE, *Fourth Ezra. A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990, pp. 85-86 (§ 11), 65-66 (n. 33), 287 (§ 53).

spect for [his] piety, Sem took the bones of Adam, as the father of all (*Հայր Հասարակաց*), [and] placed them in the ark. [...] And after the fulfilment of the divine command, the billowing waters brought the ark from the East to the middle of the earth; it came to rest on the mountains of Korduk'. [...] Philo says that Sem took the bones of Adam on a beast of burden and carried them to the land of his inheritance.<sup>29</sup>

### III. Noah's Ark in Lake Van

The tradition recorded by Thomas about the bones of Adam that were taken into the ark does not in fact derive from Philo; it is known from Syriac and Armenian apocryphal sources which we shall examine here. The link between the first human being, Noah's ark and the eschatological Saviour restoring man's 'incorruptibility' is illustrated in the iconographic programme of the church at Ałt'amar. In order to appreciate this, we should first consider several formal features of this monument, as well as its topographical setting. The journey from the southern shore of the lake to the island of Ałt'amar took approximately an hour.<sup>30</sup> Whilst the opposite shore of the lake often remains unseen, the islet appears to be immersed in a high sea;<sup>31</sup> the colour and the flavour of the transparent water of the lake enhance this impression.<sup>32</sup> As a traveller was approaching the church, he would notice numerous heads of the animals protruding from its walls: an association with Noah's ark would, therefore, arise in his mind quite naturally.<sup>33</sup>

To this, the following remark may also be added: drawing closer to the church, the traveller would also observe the friezes sculpted under-

<sup>29</sup> T'OVMA ARCRUNI, *Պատմութիւն տանն Արծրունեաց* [History of the House of the Arcruni], ed. G. Tēr-Vardanean, in *Library of Armenian Literature*, XI/1 (Tenth Century; Historiography), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2010, book one: p. 61 § 84 – p. 62 § 86; p. 63 § 103; p. 64 § 108; p. 64 § 112; translation (with minor modifications), is taken from R.W. THOMSON, *Thomas Artsruni. History of the House of the Artsrunik*, Detroit, Caravan Books, 1991, pp. 78-81.

<sup>30</sup> E. LALAYEAN, *Վասպուրականի նշանաւոր վանքեր. Ա. Աղթամարի Սուրբ Խաչ վանքը* [Notable Monasteries of Vaspurakan. I. Monastery of the Holy Cross at Ałt'amar], «Azgagrakan Handēs», XX, 1910, pp. 197-212, here on p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> See PLATE 1 in this volume.

<sup>32</sup> See PLATE 2.

<sup>33</sup> Today, the features of the animals' heads are largely obliterated, some of the figures being completely mutilated, so that a contemporary visitor is deprived of that immediacy of impression.



neath the eaves, which form two girdles encircling both the walls (with the exception of the north and the south walls of the east branch of the cruciform building) and the drum: they are composed of images of animals interspersed (under the conical roof of the dome and under the roofs of the west, the south and the north elevations) with human heads, which are sometimes, remarkably, disposed in couples:<sup>34</sup> clambering up, as it were, from inside the building and squeezing themselves through the slits between the walls and the roof, they create the effect of an enclosed space densely populated with animals and people. Are they a trace of an original design meant to assimilate the church to Noah's ark in an even more explicit way?<sup>35</sup> This hypothesis should not be discounted.

Likening the Church to Noah's ark was an ancient analogy familiar in Armenia as elsewhere. Catholicos John of Ōjun (717-728) proposed a threefold division of the church into sanctuary, nave and narthex at the image of Noah's ark with its 'three storeys' (*Gen.* 6. 16), comparing the faithful who enter a church to the living creatures saved in the ark.<sup>36</sup> A comparison between Noah's ark and a church was also elaborated by Gregory of Narek in his *Book of Lamentations* (chapter 75, § 10).<sup>37</sup> Importantly, Noah's ark was not only an ecclesiastical symbol, but could also be understood as an image of the new kingdom of Vaspurakan, the kernel of a new Armenian independence. Later, moreover, the island of Ałt'amar would become a refuge of the Catholicos: after the earthquakes of 863 and 893, which had destroyed the ancient see of Duin, the Catholicos had no fixed residence.

According to the Continuator to Thomas of Arcruni, 'When [Gagik] observed by his most valiant mind the amenity of this site and realised that it was a *refuge for the country* against the incursions of enemies, he undertook to raise it into a formidable and marvellous place, [able to evoke] astonishment' (*քաջակորով գիտութեամբ նայեցեալ ի տեղւոյն*

<sup>34</sup> See PLATES 3 and 4.

<sup>35</sup> It should be noticed in this respect that according to Thomas Arcruni, much more people entered the ark than is indicated in *Genesis*: T'OVMA ARCRUNI, *History of the House of the Arcruni*, cit., book one, p. 63 §§ 96-97; cfr. also IOANNIS MALALAS, *Chronographia*, Hrsg. I. Thurn, Berlin, W. de Gruyter, 2000, book one, § 4, pp. 6-7, ll. 73-85.

<sup>36</sup> YOVHAN OJNEC'I, *Ճատ երկրորդ «Յեկեղեցի»* [*Second Sermon «Concerning the Church»*], ed. Y. K'ēsēean, in *Library of Armenian Literature, IV (Eighth Century; Annex)*, Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2007, pp. 95-104, here on 98 (§§ 45-46); THOMSON, *Architectural Symbolism*, cit., p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> GRIGOR NAREKAC'I, *Մատեան ողբերգութեան* [*Book of Lamentations*], eds. P. Xač'atryan et al., Yerevan, Academy of Sciences, 1985, pp. 549-553; THOMSON, *Architectural Symbolism*, cit., p. 112.

գբաւսանս եւ ծանուցեալ զնա ապաստան լինել աշխարհի ի հինից թշնամեաց՝ ձեռն արկէ հիմնարկել զնա ահեղ իմն եւ զարմանալի հիացմամբ :).<sup>38</sup> Remarkably, the intrinsic quality of the islet as a ‘refuge’ is associated in these lines with the astonishment caused by the royal constructions. We shall discuss these features of Gagik’s constructions on the island in section VI.

We have seen that Thomas identifies the site of the ark’s resting with the Korduk’ (Gordyaeon) chain which, stretching south of Lake Van, separates Armenia from Mesopotamia. In the light of his words, Gagik’s palatine church was built close to what Thomas calls the ‘middle of the earth’ (միջոց աշխարհի). The church, which through its imagery and its setting represents a model of Noah’s ark at the moment when the flood was receding, makes of Alt’amar – and, indeed, of the new kingdom – a site of relief in the sacred topography of the region.<sup>39</sup>

The Arcrunik’ originated from a region close to the Korduk’ mountains (the heart of today’s Kurdistan): their native district of Ałbak (Syr. Albaq) is situated among the northern springs of the River Great Zab, halfway between the lakes of Van and Urmia, where the route from the Van region to Adiabene and, further, to Mesopotamia passes via Adamakert and Akanis. The region was exposed to Syriac traditions of Bet-Bəgaš and Dasen: all along the Great Zab and, to a lesser extent, along its northern tributaries were scattered East-Syrian villages.<sup>40</sup> An East-Syrian population was also distributed around Lake Van, under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishops of Xlat’ (today’s Ahlat) on the northern shore of the lake.<sup>41</sup> Because the Arcrunik’ claimed Assyrian descent, Gagik could be particularly sensitive to ancient traditions preserved in Syriac sources; some of these will be discussed below.

<sup>38</sup> CONTINUATOR TO T’OVMA ARCRUNI, *Concerning the Edification of Alt’amar*, cit., p. 287, § 3; see also DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght’amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. J.-P. MAHÉ, *À la conquête du centre. Géographie et révélation dans le Caucase chrétien*, «Cahiers de l’Institut du Proche-Orient Ancien du Collège de France», I, 2009, pp. 179-195, here on pp. 183-190; DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Christ in Armenian Tradition*, cit., pp. 217-223.

<sup>40</sup> J.-M. FIEY, *Proto-histoire chrétienne du Hakkari turc*, «L’Orient Syrien», IX, 1964, pp. 443-472, here on pp. 443 (n. 2), 446-451, 463, 469-470; the map of this region during a later period is reconstructed by D. WILMSHURST, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913*, Leuven, Peeters, 2000, map. 6 «East Syrian Villages in the Hakkārī Region»; in the seventeenth century, East-Syrian populations was present in the cities of Van, Xlat’, Ostan and Xošab: *ivi*, p. 310; cfr. also N. GARSOÏAN, *L’Église arménienne et le Grand schisme d’Orient*, Leuven, Peeters, 1999, pp. 198-200, 231, 234-237.

<sup>41</sup> J.-M. FIEY, *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus: Répertoire des diocèses syriaques orientaux et occidentaux*, Beirut/Stuttgart, F. Steiner, 1993, pp. 47-48, 53, 58-59.



The tradition locating the Biblical Ararat in the mountains of Korduk<sup>42</sup> was transmitted not only in early Syriac sources, but was also known to the fifth-century author of the *Buzandaran*. The latter claimed that Jacob of Nisibis († 388) had reached the mountains of Korduk<sup>43</sup> where he was shown by an angel the remains of ‘the saving ark built by Noah, for it reposed on that mountain’; this mountain is named by the author as Sararad and as *Sararatean leaʿnn* (‘The Sararatean Mountain’). The toponym Sararad/Sararat derives, doubtless, from the Biblical name ‘Ararat’.<sup>42</sup> Allusions to Noah’s ark that we observe in the church at Aht<sup>44</sup> amar thus support the hypothesis of S. Der Nersessian who proposed that the standing figure that flanks the window of the east façade of the church from the right should be identified as Jacob of Nisibis.<sup>43</sup>

In considering the effect of the images carved on the outer walls, the diversity of guests of the palace and of the palatine church has to be borne in mind. More than any other region of Armenia, Vaspurakan lay close to lands with dense Muslim population; numerous Muslims, of long date or recently converted, were also amongst Gagik’s subjects. During the ninth century, marked by the fragmentation of the Caliphate and by the shrinking political authority of Islam in Armenia, a number of Arab lords converted to Christianity; some of them even became integrated in Armenian nobility, notably into the Arcruni family.<sup>44</sup> Striving to consolidate his rule, Gagik could not overlook in his undertakings Muslims, both those residing inside his realm and those outside. It is telling in this regard that the association between the church at Aht<sup>44</sup> amar and Noah’s ark would have arisen not only in the minds of Christians but also in those of Muslim travellers, for the Koran designates Noah (Nūḥ), God’s harbinger and the first prophet of penitence, as the builder of the ark (see esp. Q 11. 39-44; 23. 27-30). According to the Koran Noah’s ark descended in the Korduk<sup>44</sup> mountains, precisely on Mount Djudi

<sup>42</sup> P<sup>42</sup> AVSTOS BUZAND, *Պատմութիւն Հայոց* [*Armenian History*], in *Library of Armenian Literature*, I (*Fifth Century*), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2003, pp. 273-428, here on pp. 287-288 (III.X.3-10); GARSOÏAN, *L’Église arménienne*, cit., 1999, pp. 25-26, nn. 94, 95; see also *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch*, ed. E.G. Clarke, New Jersey, Ktav, 1984, p. 9 (on Gen. 8.4); M.E. STONE, *Mount Ararat and the Ark*, in *Noah and His Book(s)*, eds. M.E. Stone et al., Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2010, pp. 307-316, here on pp. 309-311.

<sup>43</sup> DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght<sup>43</sup> amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., p. 21; *Aght<sup>43</sup> amar* (Documenti di architettura armena; 8), a cura di S. Der-Nersessian et al., Milano, Edizioni Ares, 1974, pp. 70-71, «Prospetto est», D/5, pp. 74-75, pl. 44; see PLATE 5.

<sup>44</sup> TER-GHEWONDYAN, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, cit., pp. 48, 63.

(Q 11. 46) which is located c. 100 km south from the southern shore of Lake Van. An East-Syrian monastery associated with Noah's ark once stood on the summit of Mount Djudi; it was later replaced by a Muslim shrine. Until recent time this site attracted not only Muslim but also Christian and Jewish pilgrims.<sup>45</sup>

No depiction of Noah is to be found on the walls of the church. However, this does not invalidate our hypothesis, but suggests rather that this building needs to be interpreted over several stages. A visitor drawing near the building is offered a singular image as the key for the interpretation of numerous figures of animals carved on the walls or projecting therefrom. This image is the figure of Adam. According to Thomas Arcruni, as we have seen, Adam's bones were taken into the ark. The most important ancient tradition to make this claim is the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (whose known recensions date to the sixth century, but whose constitutive elements are much older) which speaks of Lamech commanding Noah to take Adam's body to the ark, whereby 'Noah entered and put Adam's body in the middle of the ark' (ܟܕܝܘܥܝܢ ܩܘܕܫܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ); later we are also told that Adam's body was placed there, 'for all the mysteries of the Church were represented therein' (ܡܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ) and, more specifically, that 'Adam's body was placed in the middle [of the ark] as a bema' (ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܥܕܢ).<sup>46</sup> Adam's presence within the ark is thus endowed with a sacramental meaning.

An Armenian document has preserved a crucial detail regarding this tradition. A text about Noah's fourth son, named there Maniton,<sup>47</sup> reaffirms that Noah indeed kept Adam's bones in the ark, but also adds: 'Maniton asked his father for Adam's bones, which they had in the ark' (Մանիտոն խնդրեաց ի հաւրէ իւրմէ յոսկերաց[ն]<sup>48</sup> Ադամա, զորս

<sup>45</sup> E. MARTIN, *The Literary Presentation of Noah in the Qur'ān*, in *Noah and His Book(s)*, cit., pp. 253-275: 265-267; G.L. BELL, *Amurath to Amurath*, London, Macmillan, 1924<sup>2</sup>, pp. 292-295.

<sup>46</sup> *The Cave of Treasures*, East-Syriac recension, chapp. XVII. 21, XVIII. 3, 6, in *La Caverne des trésors. Les deux recensions syriaques*, dir. Su-Min Ri (CSCO 486; Syri 207), Leuven, Peeters, 1987, pp. 136, 138, 140; translation: *ivi* (CSCO 487; Syri 208), p. 52; see also ΕΡΙΦΑΝΙΟΥΣ OF SALAMIS (attributed to), *Homily IV*, in Id., *Ἰστορίαι* [*Homilies*], ed. H. K'yoseyan, Edjmiatzin, Press of the Catholicate, 2013, pp. 110-118, here on pp. 110-111.

<sup>47</sup> According to the version reproduced in Ms *Matenadaran* 10200 (copied between 1624 and 1666), fol. 302r. According to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, after the flood Noah restored Adam's altar; *Targum*, cit., p. 9 (on Gen. 8.20).

<sup>48</sup> According to the seventeenth-century Ms *Matenadaran* 5912, pp. 122-123: յոսկերացն.

ունէիւ ի տապալիւ); whereupon, after receiving from Noah Adam's shinbones, Maniton settled in the west.<sup>49</sup> From the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and a number of other sources we know that Noah beget his fourth son (the original form of whose name must have been Yon-[i]ton) after the flood.<sup>50</sup> The ark, therefore, not only carried through the flood 'two of every living being' in order 'to keep them alive' (*Gen.* 6. 19-20), as the seeds of a new world, but also made it possible to maintain a bond with the origins of the universe, for the first human being, according to apocryphal books of Adam, had been promised redemption.<sup>51</sup> Only when Noah's later son, who could not have direct memory of the antediluvian world, had received Adam's bones, did he undertake to build a new world.<sup>52</sup> Here, as well as in Vaspurakan, the memory of the first human being, and of his expectation of redemption, lies at the foundation of the new realm.

In Lake Van, Adam appears at the centre of the east façade of the church as the helmsman of a boat heading towards the rising sun. A witness of the beginnings of the universe, he also presents all the living beings named by him and saved in the ark to the Son of man who shall come as the Sun, 'out of the east' (*Mal.* 3. 20; *Mt.* 24. 27). The medallion with Adam is the largest of all those carved on the walls of the church; unlike any other, it is not a component of any of the decorative regis-

<sup>49</sup> M.E. STONE, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve*, Leiden, Brill, 1996, pp. 116-117.

<sup>50</sup> S. GERO, *The Legend of the Fourth Son of Noah*, «The Harvard Theological Review», LXXIII, 1980, pp. 321-330, here on pp. 323-325 and nn. 13, 17, 32.

<sup>51</sup> On Adam's exoneration and restoration in the primary books of Adam and Eve, see M.E. STONE, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1999, pp. 19, 71, 76-84, 89-90; cfr. also D.A. BERTRAND, *Le destin «post mortem» des protoplastes selon la Vie grecque d'Adam et Ève*, in *La littérature intertestamentaire: colloque de Strasbourg (17-19 octobre 1983)*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1985, pp. 109-118, here on pp. 116-117; M.D. HOOKER, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 115. This is not the only instance where the iconographic programme of this church is influenced by apocrypha; on the story of Jonah, see DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., 1965, p. 23; also Thomas Arcruni, the chronicler of the Arcruni family, was interested in post-Biblical apocrypha: see R.W. Thomson, in THOMAS ARTSRUNI, *History of the House of the Artsrunik*, cit., p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> According to other apocryphal sources, Adam was also a detainer of God's writ announcing the future advent of a Saviour who would take Adam's form. Thanks to this writ, transmitted through generations, the three Magi could recognise the promised Saviour in the new-born Jesus and thus become the Messiah's witnesses: I. DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *The Cave of the Nativity Revisited: Memory of the Primaeval Beings in the Armenian Lord's Infancy and Cognate Sources*, in *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Mahé (Travaux et Mémoires; XVIII)*, dir. A. Mardrossian et al., Paris, Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2014, pp. 285-334, here on pp. 298-309, 313-319, 326-333; Id., *Christ in Armenian Tradition*, cit., pp. 352-353.

ters engirdling the building, but itself represents a semantic centre of the façade, set above its large central window and framed on both sides by protruding heads of animals.<sup>53</sup> The central position of Adam's image – on the 'reverse' of the wall of the sanctuary – echoes the location of Adam's bones in the ark, according to the *Cave of Treasures*.

#### IV. Adam as King

Adam's right hand is raised in a gesture of pointing, stressed also by the exceptional length of his forefinger; the quotation from *Genesis* 2. 20 – 'and Adam gave names to all cattle and to every beast of the field' – beside the medallion characterises him specifically as the giver of names to the living creatures. However, the medallion encircling Adam's bust separates it from the narrative space, not allowing us to regard it as an illustration of an event in *Genesis*. The quotation from *Genesis* does not indicate that we see here Adam in Paradise,<sup>54</sup> but declares the inalienable dignity of the first human being (cfr. *Wis.* 10. 1-2) who, from the outset, has been called to have dominion over all creatures and who, as such, prefigures Christ: Adam maintains that dignity after the fall. This may be supported by a number of extra-canonical and apocryphal sources (*Book of Jubilees*, *IV Ezra*, *II Baruch*, *I Henoch*, *II Henoch* and *The Cave of Treasures*), as well as by early patristic writings and by Armenian authors.<sup>55</sup>

X. Muratova has aptly noticed that giving names to the animals is one of the events of *Genesis* least depicted in mediæval art whose iconographic focus was on the creation and fall of the first human beings.<sup>56</sup> In the three documented fifth-century mosaics from Syria we see Adam as a young beardless figure; on the floor of the church known as 'Michaelion' in Hauarte near Apamea (c. 486-487) he reigns, before the fall, in Para-

<sup>53</sup> I.A. ORBELI, *Памятники армянского зодчества на острове Ахтамар* [*Monuments of Armenian Architecture on the Island of Ahtamar*], in ИДЕМ, *Избранные труды в двух томах*, I (Из истории культуры и искусства Армении X-XIII вв.), Moscow, Nauka, 1968, pp. 17-204, here on p. 111; see PLATE 6.

<sup>54</sup> This has been proposed by DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., pp. 20-21.

<sup>55</sup> The relevance of these sources for the interpretation of the medallion with Adam is discussed in DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Christ in Armenian Tradition*, cit., pp. 332-347.

<sup>56</sup> X. MURATOVA, «Adam donne leurs noms aux animaux». *L'iconographie de la scène dans l'art du Moyen Âge: les manuscrits des bestiaires enluminés du XII<sup>e</sup> et du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, «Studi medievali», XVIII, 1977, pp. 933-960+11 pl., here on p. 933.

dise, surrounded by animals. The fragmentary images from Hama and the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen must reflect an analogous conception.<sup>57</sup> A Carolingian manuscript of the eighth-ninth century (*Vat. Lat.* 645, fol. 66), probably originating from the north-east of France, shows Adam as a beardless youth, enthroned; this miniature is found in a compilation of texts concerned with the calendar and astronomy: placed in the hub of a rose of winds, where he is surrounded by animals and birds arranged in the rose's inner circle and by personifications of winds in the outer circle, the newly created Adam symbolises the ontological, atemporal centre of the universe and its natural elements.<sup>58</sup> In Greek psalters of the ninth-thirteenth centuries, the eighth psalm (*Ps.* 8. 6-8)<sup>59</sup> is sometimes accompanied by miniatures of a young, beardless Adam giving names to animals, thus presenting this event as the true measure of human dignity.<sup>60</sup>

In Alt'amar we encounter different iconography: here Adam is not merely the point of departure in the history of the universe, but is its enduring witness, and not only by means of an implicit reference to Noah's

<sup>57</sup> M.T. CANIVET and P. CANIVET, *La mosaïque d'Adam dans l'église syrienne de Hūarte (V<sup>e</sup> s.)*, «Cahiers archéologiques», XXIV, 1975, pp. 46-69; P. CANIVET and M.T. CANIVET, *Hūarte. Sanctuaire chrétien d'Apamène (IV<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> s.)*, I, Paris, P. Guethner, 1987, pp. 213-215, ill. 67, 70; *ivi*, II, ill. CXVI-CXIX; P. DONCEEL-VOÛTE, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban. Décor, archéologie et liturgie*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Institut supérieur d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art, 1988, pp. 102-115, figg. 71, 78, 79, pl. hors-texte 5; F. BISCONTI, *Un fenomeno di continuità iconografica: Orfeo citaredo, Davide salmista, Cristo Pastore, Adamo e gli animali*, «Augustinianum», XXVIII, 1988, pp. 429-436; J.-M. THIERRY, *Monuments arméniens du Vaspurakan*, Paris, Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1989, pp. 278, 284; see PLATE 7.

<sup>58</sup> H. OTTE and E. AUS'M WEERTH, *Zwei frühmittelalterliche Windrosen*, «Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte», VIII, 1894, pp. 293-307, here on pp. 297-299, pl. IV; MURATOVA, «Adam donne leurs noms aux animaux», *cit.*, p. 947, pl. VII; M.-Th. D'ALVERNY, *L'homme comme symbole. Le microcosme*, in *Simboli e simbologia nell'alto medioevo* («Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo»; Spoleto), XXIII, 1976, pp. 123-183+7 pl., here on p. 144; such representations may be juxtaposed with the image of man who, through the successive stages of his life, is conceived as a microcosm; such a representation we find on a fresco in the twelfth/thirteenth-century crypt in the cathedral of Anagni: M. BAGNOLI, *Le fonti e i documenti per l'indagine iconografica*, in *Un universo di simboli. Gli affreschi della cripta nella cattedrale di Anagni*, a cura di G. Giammaria, Roma, Viella, 2001, pp. 71-86, esp. pp. 83-86; L. CAPPELLETTI, *Gli affreschi della cripta anagnina. Iconologia*, Roma, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002, p. 73.

<sup>59</sup> «For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

<sup>60</sup> Cfr. the manuscript of 1066 copied by the painter Theodore from Caesarea in Cappadocia (*British Museum, Add.* 19 352, fol. 6v), in S. DER NERSESSIAN, *L'illustration des psautiers grecs du Moyen Âge*, II, Paris, Klincksieck, 1970, pl. 7 (fig. 13), p. 19; and the manuscript of the end of the tenth – beginning of the eleventh century (*British Museum, Add.* 40 731, fol. 16r), in S. DUFRENE, *L'illustration des psautiers grecs du Moyen Âge*, I, Paris, Klincksieck, 1966, pl. 48, pp. 54-55.

ark transporting his remains, but also directly, through the representation of Adam's age: the long pointed beard<sup>61</sup> of Adam in the medallion diverges, tellingly, from Adam's short beard in the scene of the fall, on the north elevation. It is also different from the two carved images of a bearded Christ (one on the west façade<sup>62</sup> and the other, on the south elevation,<sup>63</sup> left of the bell tower), as well as from Christ in the fresco above the altar.<sup>64</sup> In the medallion, Adam's elongated face tapers to the chin, his sunken cheeks and beetling eyebrows contrast with the depiction of Adam in the scene of the fall. These traits must allude to Adam's protracted ascetic endeavour undertaken, according to apocryphal books of Adam and Eve widely spread in Armenia,<sup>65</sup> after the fall and to the time gone by since his creation. Adam's lower eyelids are pronouncedly arched, whereas the pupils are attached to the upper eyelids: the latter feature, though common to Central-Asian and Fatimid art,<sup>66</sup> produces in our context the effect of an elder's weakened sight. Adam is thus presented as a being coeval with the Universe, of whose old age at the time of the Messiah's revelation we read in the Fourth book of Ezra (5. 55; 14. 10) and the Second book of Baruch (56. 3; 85. 10).<sup>67</sup> Bearing on his face a trace of human history, Adam represents an anticipatory image of Christ.

Unlike at Hauarte, at Aht'amar Adam's representation does not cover a floor, trodden by feet, but occupies one of the most solemn positions, elevating it to the rank of a sacred image. The *Cave of Treasures* speaks of the royal investiture and of the enthronement of Adam at God's hands; after receiving from Adam their names, all the living creatures, according to the *Cave of Treasures*, honour him as their king.<sup>68</sup> In section III we

<sup>61</sup> After the restoration works carried out in 2005-2006, Adam's beard results slightly shortened, if compared to Roberto Sellito's photograph in S. DER-NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., pp. 70-71, «Prospetto est», p. 76, pl. 45.

<sup>62</sup> See PLATE 8.

<sup>63</sup> See PLATE 9.

<sup>64</sup> See PLATE 10.

<sup>65</sup> STONE, *A Synopsis*, cit., pp. 8-10, pericope 4, vv. 6.1-8.3.

<sup>66</sup> See E.J. GRUBE, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo and their Relation to the Artistic Traditions of the Muslim World and the Middle Ages*, in *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, eds. E.J. Grube et al., Genova, Bruschetti, 2005, pp. 15-34, here on p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Thus, in II Baruch 56.3 Baruch's vision is explained by an angel as a revelation of 'the length of the world (ܠܠܘܟܝܢ ܡܘܨܝܘܪܝܢ), that which the Almighty created when he purposed to create the world', i.e. as a symbol of the long history of the universe elapsed since its beginning; see *Apocalypse of Baruch*, ed. S. Dederling, in *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version*, IV.3 (*Apocalypse of Baruch; 4 Esdras*), Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1973, pp. 28-41.

<sup>68</sup> *The Cave of Treasures*, West-Syriac recension, chap. II, §§ 16-24, in *La Caverne des trés-*



saw that the allusion to Noah's ark made of the island of Alt'amar a site of relief in the sacred topography. The *Cave of Treasures* also identifies the site of Adam's royal investiture with the site where Christ's cross was to be erected. Consequently, the dedication of this church to the Holy Cross explains how its iconographic programme could allot such an important place to Adam in its conceptualising of space. Through its references to Golgotha and Jerusalem, the church stretches a thread between the islet of Alt'amar, remote from the ancient hearths of Christendom, and the navel of the earth.<sup>69</sup>

A number of Armenian sources accept Adam's royal dignity, and Stephen of Siwnik' (c. 685-735) describes the human being created by God as a 'royal image' (*Թագաւորական պատկեր*).<sup>70</sup> A number of Armenian texts affirm, furthermore, that by naming the living creatures Adam became an agent in the creation of the world.<sup>71</sup> An Armenian homily *On the Prologue to the Genesis of the Creatures* ascribed to Epiphanius of Salamis (367-403) speaks of the animals, brought by God the Word to Adam, prostrating before him as before their king. But while prostrating before the one who is the Lord's image, or an icon, they adore not Adam but his prototype.<sup>72</sup> The medallion may thus be regarded as an *imago clipeata* of the lord of the animal world, who prefigures the incarnate Word.

The ideas about Adam's sublime dignity remained alive in Armenia in Gagik's time. Two tenth-century writers, Tiranun vardapet and Timothy vardapet, assert that in giving names to the cattle, Adam was

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sors (CSCO 486; Syri 207), cit., pp. 17, 19, 21; translation: *La Caverne des trésors* (CSCO 487; Syri 208), cit., p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Cfr. Th. GASTER, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament*, II, Gloucester (Mass.), P. Smith, 1981, p. 428, § 113; P. KOCHANEK, *Die Vorstellung vom Norden und der Eurozentrismus. Eine Auswertung der patristischen und mittelalterlichen Literatur*, Mainz, P. von Zabern, 2004, pp. 27-33; MAHÉ, *À la conquête du centre*, cit., pp. 179-195; DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *The Cave of the Nativity Revisited*, cit., pp. 290-298.

<sup>70</sup> STEP'ANOS SIWNEC'I, *Պատճառ աղաթիցն* [On the Reasons of Prayers], eds. R. Lazarean et al., in *Library of Armenian Literature*, VI (Eighth Century; *Յուզերուած*), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2007, pp. 478-486, here on p. 480, chap. 3, § 1; M.E. STONE, *Adam and Eve in the Armenian Tradition. Fifth through Seventeenth Century*, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2013, p. 322, § 7.

<sup>71</sup> Commentary on *Genesis* attributed to Ephrem of Nisibis, in *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 572; Armeniaci 23), ed. E.G. Mathews, Leuven, Peeters, 1998, p. 15-16; ELIŠĚ, *Մեկնութիւն Արարածոց* [Commentary on Genesis], eds. L. Xaç'ikyan et al., Yerevan, Magalat', 2004, p. 241.

<sup>72</sup> EPIPHANIUS OF SALAMIS (attributed to), *Ի սկզբնագիր Մննդոց արարածոց* [On the Prologue to the Genesis of the Creatures], in Id., *Ճանք*, cit., pp. 60-77, here on pp. 71-74.

honoured to become his Creator's companion.<sup>73</sup> Timothy vardapet affirms – following very closely the Commentary on *Genesis* attributed to Ephrem of Nisibis (c. 306-373), preserved in Armenian,<sup>74</sup> – that Adam rules over the animals after an image of his Creator who, whilst shaping him, assumed human form. The gift of speech, which allowed Adam to endow the animals with names, also enables him to become the guide of all the creatures under his dominion:<sup>75</sup>

On the sixth [day] he made Adam according to the types of lordship (*հշխատութիւն*), for as God's lordship [extends] over everything, so [does] also Adam's rulership (*տէրութիւն*). The word [of God] then explains: 'Rule' (*Տիրեցէք*), says [the word], 'over the fishes of the sea and [over] the fowls of the sky' (*Gen.* 1. 28).<sup>76</sup> In the Concordance of the Gospel it is said: 'whilst creating the world God put on the form of a human being';<sup>77</sup> he made him [i.e. Adam] according to that [same] image. Therefore, [the words] 'man [created] in [God's] image' (*Gen.* 1. 26-27) mean [that God created Adam] 'according to [his] sovereignty' (*անձնիշխատութիւն*), or that he created [him] sinless, or else, such as he would [later] make as [his] Son. [The words] 'Let us make man in [our] image' (*Gen.* 1. 26) show that [man has been created] not similar to the rest of creatures, but with a certain mystery which indicates [man's] dignity; furthermore, [these words] also [show that God] created man [such that] man's form appears as [that of] a king (*թագաւոր*). [But] first, a kingdom (*թագաւորութիւն*) must have come into existence, as the mind [which] reigns (*թագաւորի*) in you [as in its kingdom].<sup>78</sup> Therefore, he made [man] endowed

<sup>73</sup> TIRANUN VARDAPET, *Պատասխանի Հարցմանց Թագաւորացն Աղուանից Ատրնէրսեհի և Փիպէի* [*Response to the Questions of the Kings of Aluania Atrnersch and P'ipē*], ed. A. Bozoyan, in *Library of Armenian Literature*, X (Tenth Century), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2009, pp. 957-996, here on pp. 959-960, § 8; TIMOT'ĒOS VARDAPET, *Յառաջարան Համառատի Մննդոց* [*Concise Prologue to Genesis*], ed. Y. K'eosēan, in *Library of Armenian Literature*, X (Tenth Century), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2009, pp. 904-920, here on p. 920, § 273; M.E. STONE, *Adam's Naming of the Animals: Naming or Creation?*, in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, eds. S. La Porta et al., Leiden, Brill, 2007, pp. 69-80, here on pp. 69-70, 74; STONE, *Adam and Eve in the Armenian Tradition*, cit., pp. 23, 246-247, 391 (§ 4), 393 (§ 3).

<sup>74</sup> This means that the Commentary ascribed to Ephrem had already been translated by the tenth century, and not in the late eleventh-early twelfth c., as has been proposed by E.G. MATHEWS (*MATHEWS, The Armenian Commentary on Genesis*, cit., pp. L-LI).

<sup>75</sup> The passage quoted below is taken from: TIMOT'ĒOS VARDAPET, *Concise Prologue to Genesis*, cit., p. 916b, § 192.

<sup>76</sup> Cfr. MATHEWS, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis*, cit., p. 9, l. 19 – p. 10, l. 3.

<sup>77</sup> I have been unable to identify this idea, which is also reflected in the iconography of the drum, in SAINT ÉPHEM, *Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant. version arménienne*, dir. L. Leloir, Leuven, Peeters, 1953.

<sup>78</sup> Here Timothy significantly abridges Ephrem's argument: cfr. MATHEWS, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis*, cit., p. 10, ll. 7-9.



with speech, a chief (*գլուխ*) and a principal (*առաջնորդ*) over those who are without speech,<sup>79</sup> and through the wisdom of his sovereignty he also became the guide (*վարիչ*) of all [creatures], and was named 'the creature of God's hands' (*Is. 64. 7*) because of man's indescribable glory.<sup>80</sup>

Juxtaposing the Commentary attributed to Ephrem with Timothy's is instructive: one of the features that distinguishes the tenth-century Armenian writer from Ephrem is that speaking of Adam's dignity Timothy three times invokes the language of kingship, derived from the stem *թագաւոր*, literally the 'crowned one': Adam's form is that of a king who reigns in the midst of the other creatures as in his kingdom. This language has to reflect the new political realities of Timothy's contemporary Armenia, i.e. the restoration of Armenian kingship first in the north and then in the south of the country. It suggests that in tenth-century Armenia the figure of the first human being was present as a type of kingship and as the model for a king.

#### IV<sup>a</sup>. Note on Armenian Anthropology. Excursus

The authors of the iconographic programme of the church at Alt'amar may have been further inspired to accord such a prominent place to Adam because in Armenian tradition a more cheerful understanding of anthropology prevailed. We have observed that one of the meanings seen by Timothy vardapet in the expression 'God's image' in the account of *Genesis* 1. 26-28 is man's 'sovereignty' (*անձնիշխանութիւն*). In his apologetic treatise written c. 437, Eznik of Kolb, one of Maštoc's direct disciples – venerated in Armenia as one of the 'Holy Translators' – defends man's free will. This is a polemic on three fronts: against Mazdean cosmology, which recognised two irreconcilable spiritual and moral forces active in the Universe; against the idea of strict predestination professed by the Zurvanite sect of Zoroastrianism; and against the dualism of the Manichees. Eznik affirms two fundamental gifts with which the first human being was endowed, sovereignty (*անձնիշխանութիւն* < *αὐτεξουσία*) and freedom (*ազատութիւն*), the two qualities which have – according to Eznik – also been inherited by all of Adam's descendants. Receiving the gift of sovereignty, man is free to choose whom to serve; God wished to honour man in such a way that he 'bestowed upon him the sovereignty of being capable [of doing]

<sup>79</sup> *Ivi*, p. 10, ll. 4-5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ivi*, p. 10, ll. 10-11; cfr. also B. OUTTIER, *Le cycle d'Adam à Alt'amar et la version arménienne du commentaire de s. Ephrem sur la Genèse*, «Revue des Études Arméniennes», Nouvelle série XVIII, 1984, pp. 589-592, here on pp. 590-591.

good things' (*առ լաւութեանցն խելամուտ լինելո[ւ] զանձնիշխանութիւնն պարգեւեաց նմա*), and although man is capable of doing whatever he wishes, yet he is solicited by his Creator to turn his sovereignty to good;<sup>81</sup> the angel who would eventually go astray was created for man's sake, so that man's sovereignty might become evident; in his prescience, God created that angel so that 'men, once they become experienced [in doing] good things', may fight against Satan and prevail over him (*յորժամ լաւութեանցն հմուտ լինիցին, յաղթեսցեն նմա*).<sup>82</sup>

Armenian anthropological ideas, especially the understanding of Adam's naming of the living creatures and, more generally, of human speech, were also shaped by the influence of the *Definitions* addressed by the mythical Hermes Trismegistos to his disciple Asklepios (first c. BC - first c. AD); these were translated into Armenian in the second half of the sixth century.<sup>83</sup> Tellingly, Hermes's optimistic view of man reveals several parallels with the Epistle of James.<sup>84</sup> According to Hermes, man is the only being endowed with both intellect and discourse; 'intelligent' and 'meditative' discourse is at once man's creation and God's salvific gift.<sup>85</sup> Man is also endowed with free will; he *creates* salvific discourse and is divinised through his active acquaintance of and his engagement with the world; the world exists for the sake of man, just as man exists for the sake of God: man abides in the world as a 'free living being'. Man thus exercises his dominion over the world through being its observer and interpreter; he is called to act in the world, thus transforming it by his action and by his interpretation confers meaning on it. As such, man occupies the key position in the universe wherein he plays the role of mediator between God and the natural world entrusted to him; 'everything [exists] for the sake of man', and man, for the sake of God (*Definitions* VI.1; VIII.6; IX.1). Hermes

<sup>81</sup> EZNIK KOLBAC'Ī, *Եղծ աղանդոց* [*Confutation of Sects*], ed. M. Minasean, in *Library of Armenian Literature*, I (Fifth Century), Antelias, Press of the Catholicate, 2003, pp. 433-512, here on p. 442b, §§ 10-11. In the same sense, cfr. also the peculiarities of the Armenian version of the Fourth Book of Ezra (*IV Ezra* was translated into Armenian during the first decades of the existence of the Armenian alphabet) observed by M.E. STONE, *A Textual Commentary on the Armenian Version of IV Ezra*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1990, pp. xv-xx.

<sup>82</sup> EZNIK KOLBAC'Ī, *Confutation of Sects*, cit., p. 446, §§ 5, 7-8.

<sup>83</sup> For the critical edition, translation and commentary of the *Definitions*, see J.-P. MAHÉ, *Hermès en Haute Egypte: les textes hermétiques de Nag Hammadi et leurs parallèles grecs et latins*, II (*Le fragment du Discours parfait et les Définitions hermétiques arméniennes*), Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1982, pp. 358-405; to be complemented by J. PARAMELLE and J.-P. MAHÉ, *Nouveaux parallèles grecs aux Définitions hermétiques arméniennes*, «Revue des Études Arméniennes», XXII, 1990-91, pp. 115-134.

<sup>84</sup> MAHÉ, *Hermès en Haute Egypte*, cit., II, p. 454; A. LÖW, *Hermes Trismegistos als Zeuge der Wahrheit. Die christliche Hermetikrezeption von Athenagoras bis Laktanz*, Berlin, Philo, 2002, p. 17, note 60; W.L. KNOX, *The Epistle of St. James*, «The Journal of Theological Studies», Old Series, XLVI, 1945, pp. 14-16.

<sup>85</sup> Cfr. also J.-P. MAHÉ, *Hermès en Haute Egypte*, cit., II, p. 298.

also affirms a kinship between God and man (IX.6); 'What[ever] God makes, he makes for the sake of man' (VIII.2); it is solely man 'to whom God listens' and, in order to talk to man, God changes his form and 'becomes man' (IX.6).<sup>86</sup>

These ideas must have been alive in Armenia when Timothy vardapet wrote that man had been created in a way 'not similar to the rest of creatures, but with a certain mystery indicating [man's] dignity', i.e. at the image of 'God's sovereignty', and that, insofar as he was endowed with speech, man could become the head of all living creatures. Having in mind Adam's gift of speech, Thomas Arcruni characterises Noah's contemporaries as unable to 'express thoughts of rational beings' (*ոչ ևս գրանականաց բերելով խորհուրդս*). As men who had forsaken the gift of reason and sunk to the level of beasts, the generation of Noah was condemned to be destroyed in the flood.

#### V. Adam and the King Raising a Goblet

In section III we noticed that the association of the church with the ark of Noah may have been directed at Muslim passers-by. This seems also to be the case with the representation of Adam: in Islam Muhammad is acknowledged as the last prophet, while the first prophet of monotheism is declared to be Adam.<sup>87</sup> The Koran also traces a parallel between Adam and 'Īsā (i.e. Jesus) in the advent of each into the world (Q 3. 59) and speaks of Adam teaching the names of all beings to the angels (Q 2. 33). Furthermore, the action of giving names is presented in the Koran as Adam's triumph over the angels who had opposed God's creation of man (Q 2. 30-34).<sup>88</sup> This understanding of the figure of Adam is developed further in the Sunna.<sup>89</sup> A number of *aḥādīth*, which follow and respond to contacts with the Jewish-Christian tradition, affirm, in contrast to the radical transcendence of the Koran's God, that Adam was created in the image/form (*ṣūra*) of God, impressed particularly upon the countenance of the first human being.<sup>90</sup> According to an-

<sup>86</sup> I. DORFMANN-LAZAREV, *Silence, Intellect and Discourse in the Quest for the True Teaching: Reflections on Hermes Trismegistos's 'Definitions'*, in *Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World through the Word*, eds. A. Pabst et al., Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 176-184, here on pp. 178-181.

<sup>87</sup> C. SCHÖCK, *Adam im Islam. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna*, Berlin, K. Schwarz, 1993, pp. 133-200; F. EIBLER, *Adam und Eva im Islam*, in *Adam und Eva in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, Hrsg. Ch. Böttrich et al., Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011, pp. 138-199.

<sup>88</sup> Cfr. also Q 7. 11; 15. 29-30; 17. 61; 18. 50; 20. 116; 38. 72-73.

<sup>89</sup> SCHÖCK, *Adam im Islam*, cit., pp. 87-88.

<sup>90</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 69-72.

other tradition, by giving names to the creatures, Adam communicated to them their actual existence; thus, the animals began to eat no sooner than, and only after, they had received their names.<sup>91</sup> Importantly, after Adam's sin, a beard grows on his face.<sup>92</sup> Also the conviviality of the animals represented on the east façade would be recognised not only by Christians but also by Muslims: according to one *ḥadīth*, when 'Īsā will return to the world, the lions shall pasture together with the camels.<sup>93</sup>

The gravest accusation with which the Koran charges the Christians is the distortion of pure monotheism which was taught by God to humankind through Adam, and ever since;<sup>94</sup> the image of Adam, the first monotheist according to the Koran, would have presented the church to Muslim observers as a sanctuary of the unique God. By the face of a bearded Adam, depicted as the lord of an appeased world of animals, the authors of the iconographic programme may have intended to arouse empathy in Muslim observers. The Koran speaks about a unique source of revelations received by the Muslims and by the 'Detainers of the Book'; it even calls upon Muslims to discuss religious matters with them in friendly terms (Q 29. 46). In the second decade of the tenth century the island of Alt'amar was far removed from a constraining Islamic authority; as such the site could encourage Muslim guests – comprising those recently converted to Islam, whose religious identity was not stable – to accept the invitation implicit on the walls of the church.

Adam's image must be considered in connection with the figure set immediately above it, which is incorporated into the vine frieze: a king raising with his right hand a goblet.<sup>95</sup> The vine shoot encircles this figure almost entirely, thus outlining another medallion; flanked by the figures of two attendants, it hints at a semantic link between him and the *imago clipeata* of Adam flanked by two heads of animals. Although the wine frieze has a more mundane character than the rest of the representations found on the façade, a certain religious meaning may also have

<sup>91</sup> Ivi, p. 87.

<sup>92</sup> Ivi, pp. 121-122.

<sup>93</sup> F. EIBLER, *Jesuslogien aus arabisch-islamischer Literatur*, in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, I (Evangelien und Verwandtes), Hrsg. Ch. Marksches et al., Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, pp. 193-208, here on p. 193, n. 9.

<sup>94</sup> See especially the following suras: Q 2. 75; 3. 62, 64; 4. 171; 5. 17, 72-77, 116-117; 6. 101, 163; 7. 172-173; 9. 29-32; 10. 18, 28-29, 66; 16. 86; 17. 111; 18. 4-5; 19. 35; 23. 91-92; 25. 2; 112. 3.

<sup>95</sup> See PLATE 11.

been attached to it.<sup>96</sup> Whilst with his right hand the king of the east façade raises a goblet, with his left he reaches to a grape hanging from the vine, which may allude to the vineyard planted by Noah after the flood (*Gen.* 9. 20). Because this image is depicted on the exterior wall of the sanctuary, a Eucharistic undertone may be registered in the wine (*Jn.* 15. 5) and the goblet, which may be interpreted as a liturgical chalice. The location of this image, its halo proper to a saintly figure and the prominence of wine lead us to reject K. Otto-Dorn's and M.Ş. İpşiroğlu's hypothesis identifying it with the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (908-932).<sup>97</sup>

The facial features of the kingly figure are not dissimilar from the depiction of King Gagik offering a model of the church to Christ, which we find on the west façade of the building, even though Gagik there wears an Umayyad crown, different from the crown of the king with a goblet;<sup>98</sup> both figures are haloed. Nothing indicates unambiguously, however, that this is Gagik. Probably the artists were intentionally vague: they offer us not a portrait of a concrete historical figure or a Biblical personage but a reflection on the image of a king and on the idea of the restored Armenian kingship of Vaspurakan. By touching a bunch of grapes and by raising the fruit of the vine the king appears as the unifying link of the frieze that engirdles the entire building and that contains, in its southern section (behind the belfry), an image of two men treading grapes. The king is thus represented as a good householder supervising the labour in his vineyard and as a generous host inviting his guests to enjoy of its fruits which, in the context of a church's decoration, possess obvious symbolic and sacramental meaning. Interlaced with the vine, the animals and birds give expression to the king's dominion over the wonders of creation,<sup>99</sup> echoing, at the same time, the dominion of Adam.

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<sup>96</sup> Assessing the mediaeval Armenian book illumination, Th.F. Mathews has observed that, in contrast both to the Byzantine and the Islamic tradition, its corpus is overwhelmingly religious: 'the art of the Armenian manuscript is totally occupied with the realms of faith'; see Th.F. MATHEWS, *The Art of the Armenian Manuscript*, in *Treasures in Heaven*, cit., pp. 38-53, here on p. 42; whereas speaking of the frescoes and the sculptures in the church at Ałt'amar, J.-M. Thierry notes that 'c'est un raccourci de la Bible qu'on a sous les yeux', in THIERRY, *Monuments arméniens du Vaspurakan*, cit. p. 139.

<sup>97</sup> K. OTTO-DORN, *Türkisch-Islamisches Bildgut in den Figurenreliefs von Achtamar*, «Anatolia» («Anadolu»), VI, 1961, pp. 1-69, here on pp. 18-19; Mazhar Ş. İPŞİROĞLU, *Die Kirche von Achtamar: Bauplastik im Leben des Lichtes*, Berlin, F. Kupferberg, 1963, p. 60; S. DER NERSESSIAN, *L'art arménien*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 247, n. 7.

<sup>98</sup> ORBELI, *Monuments of Armenian Architecture*, cit., pp. 156-157; J.-M. THIERRY, *Monuments arméniens du Vaspurakan*, cit., p. 277.

<sup>99</sup> Cfr. J. JOHNS, *Le pitture del soffitto della Cappella Palatina*, in *La Cappella Palatina*

VI. *The King Raising a Goblet and the King of Nineveh*

The posture of the royal figure with a goblet is almost identical to that adopted by the king of Nineveh in the cycle of Jonah on the south elevation; the crown of the former seems to be an accurate sketch of the latter's.<sup>100</sup> The king of Nineveh, who admonished his Assyrian contemporaries before the impending doom, must have been conceived of as Gagik's prototype, since the Arcrunik' claimed Assyrian descent, even recognising in King Sennacherib the founder of the Arcruni house.<sup>101</sup> According to the book of Jonah 3. 6-9, the king commanded not only men but also, tellingly, 'beasts, herds and flocks'; indeed, on the south elevation we find four reliefs of animals set directly above the cycle of Jonah. It is thus suggested that Adam's dominion over the living creatures is the archetype of any kingship.

Those details of Jonah's story which are carved on the wall would also have been familiar to Muslim observers: Yūnus, according to the Koran, was God's prophet, messenger and chastising voice, to whom God's revelation was sent (Q 4. 161); fleeing on a ship which was overloaded, he was swallowed by a fish and cast ashore, whereupon a plant sprouted above him, sheltering the prophet in its shade; in the Koran Yūnus's delivery from the fish's belly is regarded as an image of the believers' salvation (Q 37. 139-148; 21. 87-88).<sup>102</sup>

Both the king surrounded by the vine shoot and the king of Nineveh are seated on cushions, with their legs folded laterally, i.e. adopting an 'oriental sedentary position'; in the former case, the figure's right foot slightly juts out. Ałt'amar is not the only site attesting to the spread of such a posture in Armenian art: on a miniature found in the manuscript of c. 1050,<sup>103</sup> King Gagik-Abas of Kars, his wife and daughter are all three

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a Palermo. *Saggi*, a cura di B. Brenk, Modena, F.C. Panini, 2010, pp. 387-407, here on pp. 397-403.

<sup>100</sup> Cfr. C. JOLIVET-LÉVY, *Présence et figures du souverain à Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople et à l'église de la Sainte-Croix d'Aghtamar*, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire, Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1997, pp. 231-246, p. 242; see PLATE 12.

<sup>101</sup> T'OVMA ARCRUNI, *History of the House of the Arcruni*, cit., book one, p. 65 § 116, *passim*; cfr. C. JOLIVET, *L'idéologie princière dans les sculptures d'Aghtamar*, in *Հայ արվեստին նվիրված միջազգային երկրորդ սիմպոզիում (Second International Symposium Dedicated to Armenian Art)*, III (Mediæval Art), Yerevan, Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1981, pp. 86-94, here on p. 88.

<sup>102</sup> See *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam*, dir. R.G. Khoury, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1978, pp. 223-237.

<sup>103</sup> Ms. *Jerusalem*, St James 2556, fol. 135bis.



shown seated in such a way on a divan.<sup>104</sup> Sitting on a cushion, without any chair underneath, was not common in ancient Persian or Mesopotamian art and may derive from Central-Asian patterns. Depictions of a human figure seated on a carpet, a cushion or a low stool, with legs folded laterally – thus forming two right angles to the trunk – and with the head facing forward were widespread over the expanses of the Iranian world and Central Asia long before the advent of Islam, and were transmitted to different cultures across religious boundaries.<sup>105</sup>

Because this pictorial motif is of crucial importance for our argument, we here offer an overview of some of its most significant examples. On coins of 120-150 AD from Bactria, kings of the east-Iranian dynasty of Kushan are engraved wearing a headgear and seated frontally, sometimes on cushions laid on floor; occasionally they are bearded, but their heads, unlike the two kings at Al'tamar, are usually turned aside; E. Herzfeld derived this type from the Græco-Bactrian school of painting.<sup>106</sup> A figure of a man seated frontally in an oriental fashion, with his right foot jutting out, his head turned aside and his left hand raising a goblet in front of his breast, is to be found on a fifth-century painted ceramic vase from Merv (Marv).<sup>107</sup> An analogous posture is adopted by the figures on post-Sasanian representations of the middle of the seventh century from Persia, whence it was to pass into Islamic art.<sup>108</sup> On a post-Sasanian silver plate we find a figure of a man seated in an oriental way on a carpet; bearded, crowned and haloed, he looks forward and with his right hand raises a goblet on the level of his breast, whilst his left hand is leaning upon his hip; as on the painted ceramic from Merv, it is the figure's left foot that juts out. He is flanked by two attendants and two musicians.<sup>109</sup> In a painting of the middle of the ninth century found

<sup>104</sup> See *Treasures in Heaven*, cit., pl. 7.

<sup>105</sup> E. HERZFELD, *Die Malereien von Samarra*, Berlin, D. Reimer, 1927, p. 38; GRUBE, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 18; contra OTTO-DORN, *Türkisch-Islamisches Bildgut*, cit., pp. 3-4, n. 3.

<sup>106</sup> HERZFELD, *Die Malereien von Samarra*, cit., pp. 41-42, il. 25.4.

<sup>107</sup> *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 117, ill. 15.6; GRUBE, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>108</sup> HERZFELD, *Die Malereien von Samarra*, cit., pp. 4-5.

<sup>109</sup> From the former collection of the Counts Stroganov, Rome (now preserved in the Hermitage Museum, Petersburg), reproduced in HERZFELD, *Die Malereien von Samarra*, cit., pp. 43-44, ill. 26.6, p. 28; ВАХРАМИ, *A Gold Medal*, cit., pp. 14-15; K.V. TREVER, *Новое «сасанидское» блюдо Эрмитажа [New «Sasanian» Saucer from Hermitage]*, in *Исследования по истории культуры народов Востока. Сборник в честь академика И. А. Орбелш*, ed. V.V. Struve, Moscow, Academy of Sciences, 1960, pp. 256-293, here on p. 259, fig. 3; p. 260, fig. 5; see PLATE 13.

on a wall of a private house in Samarra on the middle Tigris (which was the Abbasid capital from 836 to 892), we find a composition of two men seated at a banquet; they are turned to each other in three-quarter profile. The left figure, now destroyed,<sup>110</sup> was bearded, and a golden goblet was posed by his left knee. Such a posture was not exclusive for men, and figures of women musicians seated in a similar way have also been found in Samarra.<sup>111</sup> Representations similar to the two kings at Alt'amar could thus evoke different lands lying to the east and the southeast of Armenia; such representations were produced both in official and private contexts, depicted both men and women, though chiefly rulers and their court, and were predominantly associated with leisure (e.g. hunting) and with feasting accompanied by wine and music.

Such representations reflect a ritualised banquet deriving from ancient Iranian court ceremonies, when a king or a wealthy person would be accompanied by a *nadīm*, a drinking companion and an attendant, to whom the task of entertaining his suzerain was assigned. Transmitted to Islam via the Sasanian court,<sup>112</sup> figures of *nudamā'* (pl. of *nadīm*) are to be found in the ninth-century wall painting from a hammam in Fuṣṭāṭ and on a tenth-/eleventh-century painted ceramic from Egypt.<sup>113</sup> Similar images were frequently depicted at the Abbasid court.<sup>114</sup> A frontal representation of a male figure with a container in the form of a glass in his right hand, seated with his soles joined together on a low stool and flanked by two attendants, is engraved on a silver memorial medallion of Caliph al-Muḫtadir and, with a goblet, on a medallion depicting Bakhtiyār 'Izz al-Dawla, an emir of Daylamite stock, who ruled Iraq between 959/60 and 977.<sup>115</sup> An analogous representation, also with a goblet and flanked by two attendants, is to be found in a gypsum carving

<sup>110</sup> HERZFELD, *Die Malereien von Samarra*, cit., p. 39, ill. 23 (Haus XIII, Zimmer 12).

<sup>111</sup> *Ivi*, p. 28, ill. 13, pll. XII-XIV.

<sup>112</sup> GRUBE, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 18; J. JOHNS, *Le pitture del soffitto della Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 398; *Id.*, in *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo. Schede*, a cura di B. Brenk, cit., pp. 557-559, § 485.

<sup>113</sup> *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 118, ill. 16.3 and 16.4; GRUBE, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>114</sup> *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 139, ill. 27.6 and 27.8; see also M. BAHRAMI, *A Gold Medal in the Freer Gallery of Art*, in *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, eds. G.C. Miles et al., Locust Valley (New York), J.J. Augustin, 1952, pp. 5-20, here on pp. 6-7, 9-10, 17-18, pl. I.1a.

<sup>115</sup> The first, in the *Münzkabinett*, Berlin, and the second, in Reşat bey's Collection in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, in İ. ARTUK, *Abbasiler devrinde sikke [Coins of the Abbasid Period]*, «Belleten», XXIV, 1960, pp. 25-40, here on pp. 35, 42, pl. II.1-2.



of the Seljukian Sultan Toghriġ bey (1040-1063) enthroned.<sup>116</sup> İ. Artuk has interpreted the goblet in the Sultan's hand as a 'symbol of his sovereignty',<sup>117</sup> yet in the case of the two medallions the context of a banquet is undoubtable, for on the reverse side of each a figure seated in a similar posture plays a saz.

From Fatimid Cairo this iconography reached Norman Sicily.<sup>118</sup> Crowned figures<sup>119</sup> and figures of *nudamā'*<sup>120</sup> seated frontally, with their legs folded – their soles being joined in front of them – and with a goblet raised in the right hand, form a recurrent image painted on the ceiling (completed by c. 1143) of the nave in the palatine chapel of St Peter, erected by king Roger II (1130-1154) in Palermo.<sup>121</sup> While respecting the design of a Catholic ruler, this building synthesises traditions deriving from three different cultural and religious worlds: the nave, notably, has the form of a Latin basilica, is covered with mosaics inspired by Byzantine art and is crowned by a wooden ceiling worked in the Islamic decorative tradition of *muġarnas*. Wine was an essential part of such banquets and, as at Aġt'amar, on the ceiling in the *Cappella Palatina* we find a painting of two men treading grapes.<sup>122</sup> More than two centuries after Gagik, Norman Palermo affords the most conspicuous example outside Armenia of the integration of the theme of an oriental banquet within an ecclesiastical context. These and numerous other instances from the Near East and Central Asia suggest that the kingly figure encircled by a vine shoot in Aġt'amar implies a distinctly festive undertone.

Under the rule of Islam, monasteries and church estates had often become places where Muslims sought recreation. This aspect of social life is reflected in Arabic collections of anecdotes, composed between the ninth and the eleventh century. Such 'Books of Monasteries' came to form its own genre, although little of this literature survives. Monasteries attracted Muslim visitors by their pleasant setting, and especially when they were situated near water, where travellers could spend their time in leisure. The fundamental principle of hospitality – which also

<sup>116</sup> ARTUK, *Coins of the Abbasid Period*, cit., pp. 36, 43, pl. III. 2; see also p. 37, pl. III.1.

<sup>117</sup> *Ivi*, p. 36.

<sup>118</sup> GRUBE, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>119</sup> *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo. Atlante II*, cit., pll. 514, 515, 853, 854, 959.

<sup>120</sup> *Ivi*, pll. 483, 485, 506, 507, 595, 618, 622, 635, 665, 672, 673, 679, 693, 703, 748, 796, 848, 860, 894, 911, 912, 1159.

<sup>121</sup> See PLATE 14.

<sup>122</sup> *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo. Atlante II*, cit., pl. 550.

allowed foreign Christian travellers to sojourn in Muslim lands – transformed monasteries and church estates into extraterritorial spaces where the laws of Islam were suspended and where Muslims might engage in activities precluded in their daily life. Thus, we know that Muslim visitors appreciated the beauty of Christian liturgies and, enjoying the hospitality of the monks, would taste wine;<sup>123</sup> travelling governors and other dignitaries could even sojourn in a monastery for several months. The church at Ałt'amar could become one of such favourite destinations: situated on an island, it provided the traveller with the discretion necessary to allow transgressions, while its exuberant sculptural decoration answered the expectations of travellers in search of the 'wonders of the world'. It is certainly not by chance that in the Arabic *Book of the Lands*, originally written c. 902/903 by the Iranian geographer ibn al-Faḳīh al-Hamadhānī and surviving in a revised, abridged version of c. 1022, the 'Lake of Xlat' is included amongst the 'marvels of Armenia':<sup>124</sup> clearly, Lake Van attracted Muslim travellers.

The reliefs of the two kings at Ałt'amar, as well as the miniature of King Gagik-Abas's family, reflect a general receptivity of Armenian figurative art to foreign manners and motifs,<sup>125</sup> but they also reveal a clear political purpose. Someone who was not habituated since childhood to remain seated in an oriental fashion, would never be at ease in this position for long; we may doubt that an Armenian king was seated customarily in such a way, yet he sought to present himself not only to the Armenians of Vaspurakan but also to its Muslim population in the posture appropriate to its ruler.<sup>126</sup> A royal figure, revealing familiar oriental features and alluding to wine, was also an implicit invitation encouraging Muslim guests to linger in this remote island. The medallion with a bearded Adam surrounded by appeased beasts, the royal figure with a goblet and the cycle of Jonah carved on the outer walls of the church: all

<sup>123</sup> Cfr. AL-SHĀBUSHĪ (975/6-c. 990), *Couvent de Darmālis*, in *Communautés chrétiennes en pays d'Islam du début du VII<sup>e</sup> au milieu du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, dir. A.-M. Eddé et al., Paris, Société d'enseignement supérieur, 1997, p. 204; G. TROUPEAU, *Les couvents chrétiens dans la littérature arabe*, «La Nouvelle Revue du Caire», I, 1975, pp. 265-279.

<sup>124</sup> IBN AL-FAQĪH AL-HAMADHĀNĪ, *Kitāb al-buldān* (excerpts), translated and commented in J. LAURENT and M. CANARD, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu'en 886*, Lisboa, Fundação C. Gulbenkian, 1980, pp. 503-512, here on p. 509.

<sup>125</sup> Cfr. MATHEWS, *The Art of the Armenian Manuscript*, cit., pp. 51-52.

<sup>126</sup> Cfr. J. Johns's reflections on the 'cultural appropriation' intended to improve the image of a Christian ruler in Norman Sicily: J. JOHNS, *Iscrizioni arabe nella Cappella Palatina*, in *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo*. Saggi, cit., pp. 353-386, here on p. 360.

three reflect in different ways Gagik's awareness that the stability of his kingdom depended on establishing peace with his Muslim subjects and with the Islamic states adjoining his own.<sup>127</sup>

## VII. *Adam and Christ*

By his features, Adam resembles Christ in the two carved images mentioned in section IV<sup>128</sup> and on the fresco painted above the altar:<sup>129</sup> the frontal gaze, the long hair with central parting, which fall on the shoulders, the beard and the hand raised (pointing to the animals, in Adam's case; and blessing, in that of Christ). These features and gestures underline the parallel between the first man, τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος (*Rom.* 5. 14), and the eschatological Saviour. Unlike the depiction of the naked Adam in the scene of the fall, on the north elevation, in the medallion Adam is clad: also this feature evokes his similitude with Christ.<sup>130</sup> The long hair and the long pointed beard, in particular – longer than Christ's beard – single out Adam from all other figures, conferring on this portrait a special dignity.<sup>131</sup>

Adam's centrality in the artistic conception of the church, as well as the juxtaposition of Adam with Christ, is emphasised by the frescoes within the drum, which are dedicated to the story of Creation.<sup>132</sup> J.G.

<sup>127</sup> The presence on the walls of this church of images intended to arouse empathy in Muslim observers may, probably, explain why this church has not been vandalised.

<sup>128</sup> DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., p. 20; see the iconographical plans and reproductions in *Aghtamar: a Jewel of Medieval Armenian Architecture*, eds. A. Sarafian et al., London/Istanbul, Gomidas Institute/Birzamanlar Yayıncılık, 2010, pp. 107 (N° 17), 110 (N° 3), 121 (ill. 11), 124-125 (ill. 14 and 15), 133 (ill. 23); see PLATES 8 and 9.

<sup>129</sup> ORBELL, *Monuments of Armenian Architecture*, cit., p. 111; DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., p. 20; J.G. DAVIES, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture. The Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar*, Londres, Pindar Press, 1991, p. 143; see PLATE 10.

<sup>130</sup> MURATOVA, «Adam donne leurs noms aux animaux», cit., pp. 944-946, n. 40.

<sup>131</sup> Cfr. A. EFFENBERGER, *Die Darstellung des Alters in Werken der spätantiken und frühbyzantinischen Kunst*, in *Alterbildnisse in der abendländischen Skulptur*, Hrsg. Ch. Brockhaus et al., Duisburg, Wilhelm Lehbruck Museum, 1996, pp. 132-135, here on pp. 132, 134; B. BRENK, *Zur Problem des Alterbildnisses in der spätantik-frühbyzantinischen Kunst*, «Arte Medievale», II, 2003, pp. 9-16, here on p. 10.

<sup>132</sup> DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., p. 37; Th. MATHEWS, *The Genesis Frescoes of Alt'amar*, «Revue des Études Arméniennes», XVI, 1982, pp. 245-257, here on pp. 247, 252-257; cfr. the reproduction of the frescos, in N. THIERRY, *Le cycle de la création et de la faute d'Adam à Alt'amar*, «Revue des Études Arméniennes», XVII, 1983, pp. 289-329, here on pp. 312-317, 321-322, figg. 1-11, 15-16; E. VARDANYAN, *Décor sculpté de l'église de la Sainte-Croix d'Alt'amar: les sujets bibliques de la frise de la vigne*, in *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Mahé*, cit., pp. 707-736, here on p. 734.

Davies has aptly stressed that because the principal windows are situated around the drum, it is to these that 'the eyes are lifted immediately upon entrance into the church';<sup>133</sup> the beholder's 'gaze rises to the source of light' next to which it discovers frescoes with the first human beings.<sup>134</sup> Originally, the story of Adam and Eve covered all the interior of the drum, thus stressing the centrality of the first human being in the iconographical conception of the church.<sup>135</sup> Precisely in the east segment of the drum, i.e. that appearing first to the visitors, we find an image of God the Son creating Adam (east-north-east), another one with Adam in the Garden (where his features resemble the relief on the north wall), and Adam receiving from God the Son dominion over all living beings in the Garden (east-south-east).

The medallion with Adam is found above the window of the east façade, while on the 'obverse' of this wall – i.e. on the surface of the apse of the sanctuary – the corresponding position above this window is occupied by a fresco of Christ flanked by two winged angels wearing sandals.<sup>136</sup> Both images, of Adam and of Christ, are thus set above the only opening through which rays of light penetrate the sanctuary and illuminate the altar.<sup>137</sup> According to S. Der Nersessian, the resemblances between the reliefs and the frescoes of the interior (although the image in the apsis only became visible after the white stucco had been removed from it in 2005) indicate that both are the work of the same artistic school; both belong to one iconographic programme.<sup>138</sup>

On the fresco, Christ is not seated on a throne, as was more customary for the programmes of the apses of sanctuaries, but all three figures – Christ and the two angels – are shown standing against a blue background, without any support beneath their feet; only an elongated cushion may be seen behind Christ's feet. The two angels point to

<sup>133</sup> See PLATE 15.

<sup>134</sup> DAVIES, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture*, cit., pp. 11-12; cfr. also S. MANUKJAN, *Сложение системы росписей армянского храма* [Formation of the Principles of Wall Painting in Armenian Churches], in *Second International Symposium*, cit., pp. 173-181, here on p. 175.

<sup>135</sup> DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., p. 37; MATHEWS, *The Genesis Frescoes of Aht'amar*, cit., pp. 247, 252-257.

<sup>136</sup> See PLATE 10.

<sup>137</sup> Cfr. MANUKJAN, *Formation of the Principles of Wall Painting*, cit., pp. 175-176.

<sup>138</sup> DER NERSESSIAN, *Aght'amar. Church of the Holy Cross*, cit., p. 36; see ills. 12-14; other instances of correspondence between the exterior and the interior iconography have been proposed by DAVIES, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture*, cit., pp. 176-178.

Christ as to the heavenly Lord. This painting may be compared with the tradition attested in Armenia in the high middle ages: in the cathedrals of Mren (630-640) and T'alin (688-690) and in the churches of Lmbat (beginning of the seventh century) and Koš (seventh century), the conch of the sanctuary carried a fresco of a theophany. In Lmbat, however, where a fuller fragment of painting survives than elsewhere, Christ is enthroned.<sup>139</sup> Yet in the conch of the apse of the church at Añuč (664-668), opposite the south-western slope of Mt Aragac, Christ stands on a podium, holding in his left hand a parchment with a citation from *John* 14. 21; a figure of an angel may be reconstructed standing to his right.<sup>140</sup> This is, probably, the closest parallel in early Armenian art to the apse of the church at Ałt'amar.

Although such depictions had ancient roots, even outside Armenia only a few examples survive.<sup>141</sup> We may first cite the left apse of the church of *Santa Costanza*, Rome, dated to the later part of Constantine's reign,<sup>142</sup> although it was not the apse of the church's sanctuary: the haloed figure of a young and beardless Christ with long hair is represented there standing, with his right hand raised in an oratorical gesture and his left hand holding an open scroll in which we read 'Dominus legem dat'. He transmits this scroll of the (New) Law to Peter; Paul, acclaiming Christ, occupies a symmetrical position at Christ's right; all three figures wear sandals.

We may also consider the apses with similar programmes in the churches of *Sant Andrea Catabarbara*, Rome (c. 470-480),<sup>143</sup> where Christ stands on a rock, of *Santi Cosma e Damiano*, Rome (526-530) with Christ standing amidst clouds,<sup>144</sup> and of *San Michele in Africisco*, Ravenna (545 AD).<sup>145</sup> In the Ravenna mosaic, now recomposed in the *Museum für spätantike und byzantinische Kunst*, Berlin, a haloed figure of a young

<sup>139</sup> MANUKJAN, *Formation of the Principles of Wall Painting*, cit., pp. 173-174; DER NERSESSIAN, *L'art arménien*, cit., p. 69, ill. 46.

<sup>140</sup> L.A. DURNOVO, *Стенная живопись в Аруче (Талиш)* [Wall Painting in Añuč], «Izvestija Akademii Nauk ArmSSR», I, 1952, pp. 49-66, here on p. 64; DER NERSESSIAN, *L'art arménien*, cit., p. 70, ill. 47.

<sup>141</sup> Cfr. J.-M. SPEISER, *The Representation of Christ in the Apses of Early Christian Churches*, «Gesta», XXXVII, 1998, pp. 63-77, here on p. 64, fig. 1.

<sup>142</sup> Ch. IHM, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom 4. Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 1992<sup>2</sup>, pp. 33-34, 127-129, pl. v.1.

<sup>143</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 28-30, 154-155, pl. viii.1.

<sup>144</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 128, 137-138, pl. xii.2.

<sup>145</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 30-31, 161-163, pl. viii.2.



1



2

Fig. 1. View of the island of Alt'amar from the south.

Fig. 2. View of the island of Alt'amar from the northeast.





3



4

Fig. 3. Alt'amar, church of the Holy Cross: eaves of the west elevation.

Fig. 4. Church of the Holy Cross, Alt'amar: eaves of the north elevation.

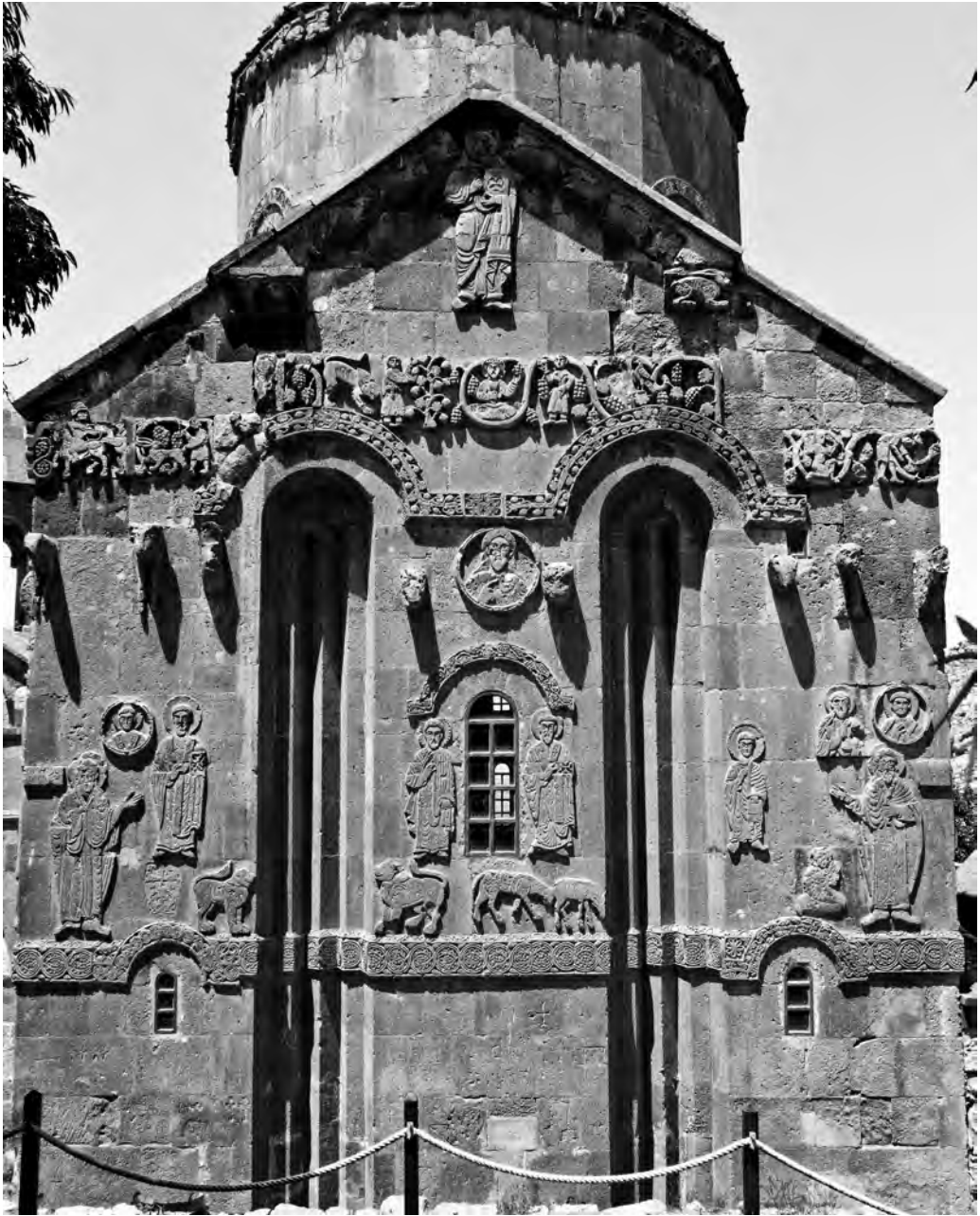


Fig. 5. Church of the Holy Cross, Alt'amar: east façade, general view.





6

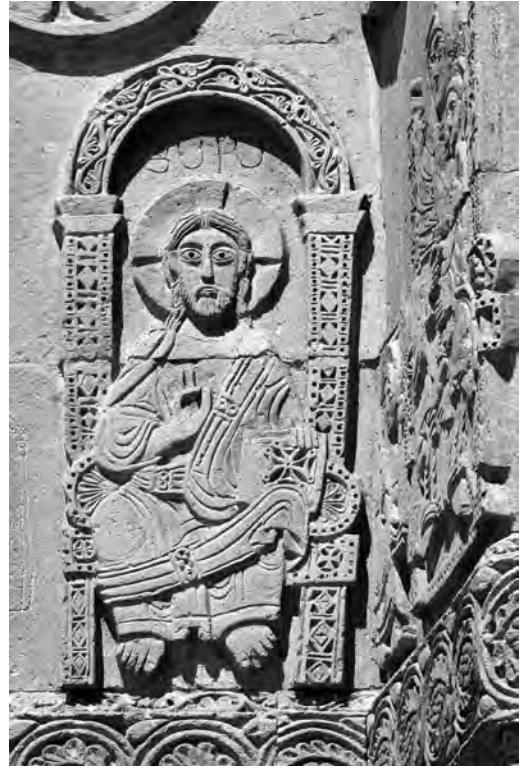


7

Fig. 6. Church of the Holy Cross, Alt'amar: east façade, medallion with Adam flanked by two heads of animals. Fig. 7. Huarte (Syria), floor mosaic in the church *Michaelion*: Adam reigning in Paradise.



8



9



10

Fig. 8. Church of the Holy Cross (Alt'amar), west façade: relief of Christ. Fig. 9. Church of the Holy Cross (Alt'amar), south elevation: relief of Christ. Fig. 10. Church of the Holy Cross (Alt'amar), apse of the sanctuary: fresco of Christ.



Fig. 11. Church of the Holy Cross (Alt'amar), east façade: medallion with Adam and the king raising a goblet in the vine frieze. Fig. 12. Church of the Holy Cross (Alt'amar), south elevation: cycle of Jonah.

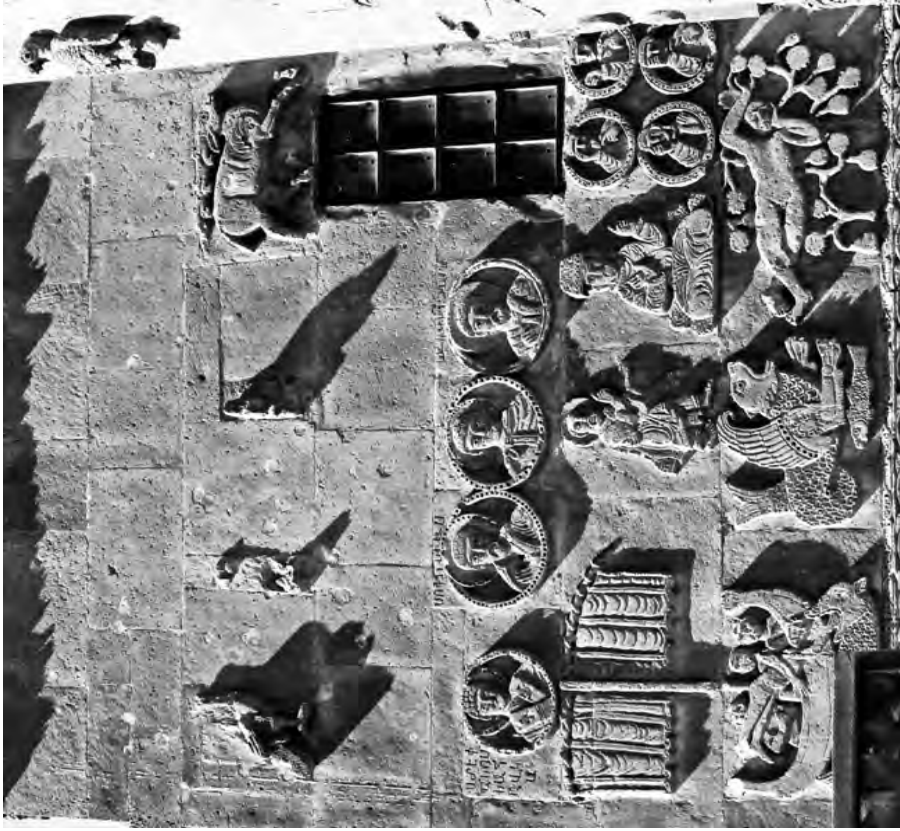
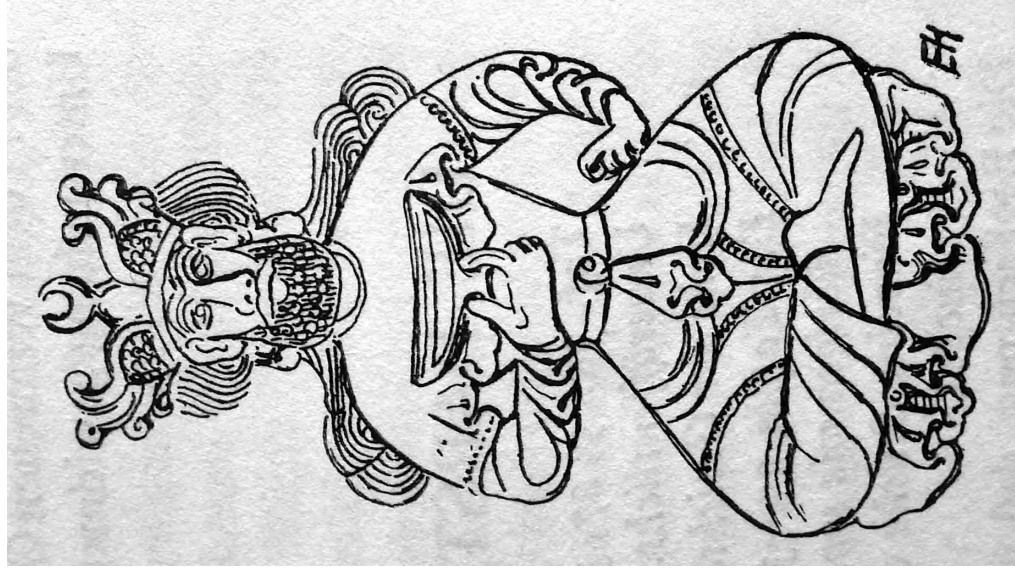


Fig. 12. Church



13



14

Fig. 13. Merv (Turkmenistan), wall painting of Sasanian period: royal figure in an 'oriental sedentary position'.  
 Fig. 14. Cappella palatina, Palermo (Sicily), ceiling of the main nave: royal figure in an 'oriental sedentary position'.



Fig. 15. Church of the Holy Cross (Alt'amar), sanctuary.



beardless Christ holds a crozier in his raised right hand and in his left hand an open codex of the Gospel of John, in which we recognise the citations from *John* 14. 9 and 10. 30 (texts indicative of the anti-Arian scope of the image). Christ is flanked by two archangels standing as his guardians (this is the oldest known representation of angels in an apse); all three figures wear sandals and stand on a hilly meadow.<sup>146</sup> Since the apsidal arch carries the representations of seven angels with horns, Ch. Ihm has suggested that the extant mosaic was a part of the vision of a triumphant Christ, the one 'who shall reign for ever and ever' (*Apo.* 11. 15), in a larger scene of the eschatological judgement.<sup>147</sup> The fresco of Christ as the heavenly Lord at Ałt'amar thus stands closer to this image than to the *Santa Costanza* which belongs rather to the old Roman theme of *Traditio legis*.

If we return to the South Caucasus, another parallel to Ałt'amar may be found in the conch of the apse of the sanctuary in the Georgian church of Cromi (Tsromi), on the uppermost bow of the river Kura, built between 626 and 634. In Jakov Smirnov's reconstruction of this mosaic we distinguish a haloed figure of the bearded Christ standing on a podium, with his right hand raised in an oratorical or blessing gesture and with his left hand holding an open scroll with quotations from *Jn.* 8. 12 and 11. 25. He is adored by two figures standing on either side, whose identity is not easy to establish (Peter and Paul or, rather, two archangels as was supposed by Dmitrij Gordeev, the first modern author to leave a description of this monument?). It may thus represent a development of the same theme of *Traditio legis* that we have encountered in the *Santa Costanza*.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> SPEISER, *The Representation of Christ*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>147</sup> 'And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of this world is become [the kingdom] of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever'. Although the book of the Revelation of John does not appear in Armenian Biblical manuscripts until the twelfth century, there are literary clues that point to the acquaintance with the Apocalypse in Armenia since the tenth century at the latest.

<sup>148</sup> D.P. GORDEEV, *Краткий отчет о командировках в Кахию и Горийский уезд летом 1917 г.* [*Short Report on the Expeditions to Kakheti and to the Gori District in Summer 1917*], «Izvestija Kavkazskago Otdela Moskovskago Arxeologičeskago Obščestva», V, 1919, pp. 1-36, here on pp. 31-34; J.I. SMIRNOV, *Цромская мозаика* [*The Cromi Mosaic*], Tbilisi, Metexi, 1935, p. 6; Š. AMIRANAŠVILI, *История грузинской монументальной живописи* [*History of Georgian Monumental Painting*], Tbilisi, Saxelgami, 1957, pp. 23-29; IHM, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei*, cit., pp. 38-39, 191-192, fig. 7; J. LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Monumental Painting*, in *Art and Architecture in Medieval Georgia*, eds. A. Alpago-Novello et al., Louvain-la-Neuve, Institut Supérieur d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art, 1980, pp. 85-134, here on p. 88.



The examples reviewed here suggest that the iconography of the apse in Alt'amar is highly uncommon. Should Ch. Ihm's hypothesis of an eschatological scene in the apse of the *S. Michele in Africisco* be correct, the Ravenna mosaic would be the closest parallel to this fresco, not least because the latter is represented on the reverse side of an eschatological image of Adam. Other figures of the east façade enhance its eschatological undertone: together with Adam, all the 'creatures' (*αἰμαρῶδες*) carved on this façade 'expect earnestly', according to *Rom.* 8. 19-22, to be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption' (*δουλοῦντι τῆς φθορᾶς*). The heads of a lion and a calf, which frame Adam's image, show the animals which shall pasture together, while the leopard and the goat sculpted above the window indicate the animals that shall lie down together in the days of the Messiah (*Is.* 11. 6-7; cfr. 65. 25; *Ps.-Mt.* 18. 2-19. 2). These and other animals sculpted on this facade echo the prophecies about God's future alliance with wild beasts (*Hos.* 2. 20) which shall dwell in peace with man and shall serve him in the days of Messiah (*Mc* 1.13; *II Baruch* 73. 6<sup>a</sup>).

The *imago clipeata* of Adam is situated on the axis of symmetry of the façade; below, flanking its north and south edges, we find the images of Elijah and John the Baptist. Like Adam, they look forward, have beards and long centrally parted hair, freely falling over their shoulders and covering them almost entirely. Elijah's right hand and John's left hand are raised symmetrically in a gesture of pointing. These hands are sculpted along two diagonal axes that intersect close to the medallion with Adam. This does not mean that Elijah and John point directly to Adam, though this feature singles out all three figures, grouping them within a semantic cycle which has the form of an isosceles triangle: Elijah was God's messenger who had to return before the day of the Lord in order to prepare the way before him (*Mal.* 3. 1,22-23), while in John the realisation of that prophecy was recognised (*Mk.* 1. 2 *et par.*; 9. 11-13 *et par.*; *Mt.* 11. 10-14; *Lc.* 1. 17). Adam, Elijah and John thus represent three eras in the history of the world awaiting the coming of Christ. The façade thus reflects the history of the world since its creation and is oriented towards the eschatological fulfilment, while the obverse side of the wall depicts Christ as the king of the last days (*Mk.* 8. 38 *et par.*). While Adam gazes to the east whence the 'Sun of justice' shall rise, Christ within the church, but from almost the same point in space, casts his eyes westwards on the faithful who enter the temple and approach the altar.

Three figures carved on the walls of the church of the Holy Cross at Alt'amar – Adam the elder, the king of Nineveh and the king raising a goblet – are interrelated through numerous assonances, and each in its way articulates the idea of kingship. Adam, depicted at the centre of the east façade, is the prototype of kingship, insofar as he is invested by his Creator with the prerogative of giving names to all living beings. After receiving their names, the creatures are said to bow down before him, thus recognising his royal dignity.

After Adam's fall, the peace of Paradise was broken, and the beasts renounced their obedience to man.<sup>149</sup> Adam's face on the east façade is strikingly different from his face in the scene of the fall: it bears traces of his ascetical endeavour, which he is said to have undertaken after the fall, and, indeed, of the old age of the universe. Adam turns to the east whence he expects the coming of promised redemption. The appeased animals surrounding Adam anticipate that eschatological pacification of Adam's dominion. This restored condition of the world is denoted in Armenian theological language by the technical term of 'incorruptibility' which we encounter in numerous Armenian theologians, and in Gagik Arcruni.

The gift of speech, allowing Adam to name the animals, was the highest gift with which he was endowed, yet when man was no longer able 'to express the thoughts of rational beings', becoming similar to the beasts, he was, according to Thomas Arcruni, condemned to destruction in the flood. The primordial dignity of the human being has not, however, been completely lost after Adam's fall, and animals later obeyed the 'just one', i.e. Noah, who assembled them in the ark. The heads of animals protruding from the walls of the church at Alt'amar, along with the building's topographical setting, suggest Noah's ark, whereas the vine frieze alludes to the vineyard planted by Noah after the flood; the church is situated near the 'middle of the earth' where, according to the historiographer of the Arcruni family, the ark came to rest after the waters receded.

Adam's bones were said to have been carried in the ark in order to be bequeathed to the postdiluvian world: Adam and his memory of promised redemption are thus to become the foundation stone of the new world. The central position of Adam's remains in the ark is reflected in

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<sup>149</sup> STONE, *A Synopsis*, cit., p. 41 ff., pericope 12 (Greek 10 / Latin 37) [cfr. *Job* 39. 9-12, 27; 40. 25-32]; B. MURMELSTEIN, *Adam, ein Beitrag zur Messiaslehre*, «Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes», XXXV, 1928, pp. 242-275, here on p. 269.

the location of the medallion with Adam in the church. The solemnity of this medallion, unparalleled in early and mediæval Christian art, elevates it to the rank of a sacred image, an *imago clipeata* of the lord of the animal world, who prefigures the incarnate Word.

Animals would also obey the king of Nineveh, who exercised Adam's prerogative in commanding them; the frontal heads of animals set above the cycle of Jonah remind us that the king of Nineveh's dignity is conceived in the image of Adam. Because the Arcrunik' claimed royal Assyrian descent, the king of Nineveh, who admonished his contemporaries before the impending doom, represents a symbolic ancestor of Gagik and his successors. Timothy vardapet provides us with evidence that during Gagik's time, the figure of the first human being was considered the type of kingship and exemplary (as well as admonitory) of the role of a king.

The particular attention paid by the artists to the outer walls of the building is indicative of the importance accorded to observers outside who might well not enter the church. These images are addressed not only to Christians but also to Muslims who could visit this remote island in search of the 'wonders of the world' and who would mainly behold the church from outside: both the bearded Adam, lord of the animal world, and the details of Jonah's life were familiar to Muslims from the Koran and the Sunna, as was, indeed, the story of Noah's ark.

The king raising a goblet of wine is linked to three aforementioned themes: through its location, right above Adam, and through the medallion-like frame, flanked by two attendants, he is associated with the first human being flanked by two animal heads. At the same time, the king with a goblet wears a crown similar to that of the king of Nineveh and is seated in a similar posture. This posture, deriving from ancient Iranian court ceremonies, would be particularly familiar to guests coming from the east, to whom it would serve as an invitation to the king's hospitable dominion: the king welcomes his guests to the vineyard planted by Noah. The king encircled by vine shoot is thus an image of a good householder and a generous host – Gagik being, doubtless, the person immediately to be identified in the figure. The ideas of hospitality and feasting conveyed by the iconography of this church are indicative of Gagik's capacity to envisage a dialogue with foreign visitors. His ability to distance himself from his own tradition without renouncing it is corroborated by his *Letter* to Constantinople. The three images discussed reflect in diverse ways Gagik's awareness that the stability of his kingdom depended on establishing the peace with his own Muslim subjects and with the neighbouring Islamic states. They also reflect the king's

and his artists' ability to invent a figurative language which could speak not only to the Armenians, but also to a much wider audience.

Bearing on his face an imprint of human history, Adam represents an anticipatory image of Christ. The juxtaposition of Adam and Christ is expressed through the similitude of their features; it is also underlined by the frescoes of the drum and by the symmetrical disposition in space of the medallion with Adam and of the fresco of Christ in the apse. On the latter, Christ is painted as the heavenly Lord surrounded by angels. The closest parallel to this fresco is to be found in the sixth-century church of *S. Michele in Africisco*, Ravenna, where it was part of the vision of the eschatological king. This fresco corroborates the eschatological meaning of the programme of the east façade of the church at Ałt'amar and, indeed, extends the idea of kingship into its true dimension.

IGOR DOREMANN-LAZAREV

ABSTRACT – The article is devoted to the activity of Gagik Arcruni, the Armenian king (908-943/44) of Vaspurakan in the southeast of historical Armenia. During his reign, between 931 and 936, the Byzantine commanders of Armenian origin, John Kurkuas and Melias, supported by Gagik and other Armenian princes, conducted victorious campaigns against Arab emirates in the Euphrates valley and in Armenia. Whilst the Byzantine army was thus approaching his kingdom, Gagik addressed a *Letter* to the Patriarch of Constantinople Theophylaktos (933-956) and to Emperor Romanos Lekapenos (920-944), which is only preserved in Armenian. This *Letter*, which sought to facilitate reunion of the two Churches, demonstrates Gagik's ability to understand the reasons of the detractors of his Church, whilst remaining loyal to it. Such an ability of distancing himself from one's own religious tradition, without renouncing it, reflects the intellectual environment inaugurated by the Armenian-Byzantine council of Širakawan (862).

This environment is also reflected in the iconography of the palatine church built by Gagik in Lake Van between 915 and 921. The Arcruni family originated from a region lying to the east of the lake, where it was exposed to ancient Christian traditions transmitted in Syriac. Therefore, the idea of kingship articulated in the iconography of this church is examined with reference to Armenian and Syriac patristic and apocryphal sources, to fifth-century mosaics from Syria and to seventh-century Armenian and Georgian frescoes and their palæo-Christian prototypes. Adam, depicted at the centre of the east façade as the Giver of names to all living beings, is the prototype of every kingship.

The eclectic character of this church's iconographic programme and the particular attention paid by the artists to the outer walls of the building are

indicative of the importance accorded to external observers. A number of its images were addressed not only to Christians but were also meant to arouse empathy in Muslim travellers. Tenth-century Arabic sources suggest that Muslims could reach this remote island in search of 'wonders of the earth' and of hospitality. Beholding the church mainly from outside, they could recognise on its walls personages and scenes familiar to them from the Koran and the Sunna. Several formal elements of the church's figurative language have, besides, parallels in ancient figurative sources of Iranian derivation, later inherited by Islamic art, which had also to be familiar to the guests coming from the east. The king with a goblet seated in an oriental way, in particular, represents a good householder and a generous host welcoming his guests to his dominion. This and other images carved on the walls of the church reflect Gagik's awareness that the stability of his kingdom depended on keeping the peace with his Muslim subjects and with the Islamic states adjoining it.

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the photographs 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 15 have been taken by Hrair Hawk Khatcherian to whom the author expresses his gratitude;

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