



Along the Paths of the Spiritual Map

ARMENIAN MANUSCRIPT ART

Introduction

The exhibition features 11 manuscript codices of diverse content, dating from the 9th to the 18th centuries, as well as three phylacteries (amulet scrolls).

Through the displayed artifacts and accompanying texts, visitors gain insight into various aspects of Armenian culture, including its history, belief systems, diaspora settlements, and the creation and illumination of manuscript codices in Armenian scriptoria.

The selection includes one Bible and seven Gospel books. The illuminated pages of the Gospels offer visitors a glimpse into the rich traditions of Armenian miniature painting, representing the schools of Cilicia, Utik, New Julfa, Vaspurakan, and Crimea. They also showcase the artistry of prominent illuminators such as Toros Roslin, Hakob Jughayetsi, Markos the Painter, and others. Each manuscript has been carefully selected for its unique content, artistic features, and historical value.

The exhibition includes a rare item from the Matenadaran's manuscript collection—an 18th-century manuscript, uniquely preserved as the only known Armenian translation from Spanish.

A manuscript that has undergone a distinctive restoration process is also included. Originally, its illuminations were created by combining several illustrations into composite images. Through the meticulous work of a specialist from the Matenadaran's Restoration Department, the illuminations were separated and restored as individual pages using Japanese paper. Alongside the restored manuscript, a specially designed poster presents its original appearance prior to restoration.



Gospel

Hromkla (A.), 1266, Vaspurakan

(B.), 14th century

Miniaturist: Toros Roslin (A.)

Receiver: Hetum I (A.)

MATENADARAN

Gospel

Hromkla, 1249

Scribe and Miniaturist: Kirakos

Receiver: Catholicos Constantine I
(1255)

Binding: 1255

MATENADARAN

Gospel

Cyprus, 1287

Scribe: Khachatur the Priest

MATENADARAN

Gospel (Also called Shukhonts Gospel)

New Julfa

Scribe: Barsegh the Religionist

MATENADARAN

Another manuscript on display is a palimpsest from the earliest period of the Matenadaran's collection, dating to the 8th–9th centuries, with its visible text written in 1649. A palimpsest is a manuscript in which a later text was written over an earlier one, after the original text had been erased—often by washing or scraping the parchment—due to the high cost of writing materials in antiquity. Palimpsests are invaluable sources for recovering lost texts and earlier versions of known works. In this exhibition, visitors have the rare opportunity to observe both textual layers simultaneously with the naked eye.

Among the exhibits, phylacteries (amulet scrolls) hold a special significance. Typically ribbon-like in form, they contain prayers, biblical passages, and protective formulas, and were believed to safeguard their bearers from misfortune.

The selection of three manuscripts is also based on their exceptional bindings. To highlight this aspect, the manuscripts will be displayed in a way that allows visitors to view both the bindings and the illuminated pages simultaneously.

Armenia: the land of the spiritual paths

*To Know Wisdom and Instruction,
to Understand Words of Insight.*

The first Armenian written sentence from the Book of Proverbs, attributed to King Solomon in the Bible (Prov. 1:2)

At the height of its ancient power during the reign of Tigran the Great (1st century BCE), Armenia emerged as a major regional empire stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea — a historical memory that continues to resonate in Armenian cultural consciousness.



Gospel

Khoranashat Monastery (Utik), 1224

MATENADARAN

In 301 CE, Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion, a defining moment that profoundly influenced its spiritual life, art, architecture, and literary tradition. This early Christian heritage is reflected in the country's remarkable monastic complexes, churches, and cross-stones (*khachkars*), which blend architectural ingenuity with symbolic artistry. The creation of the Armenian alphabet in the early 5th century by Mesrop Mashtots marked another pivotal milestone, laying the foundation for a rich written culture that enabled the preservation of both original works and translations of major texts from Greek, Syriac, and other traditions.

This written tradition reached one of its highest spiritual and literary expressions in the work of Gregory of Narek (10th century), whose *Book of Lamentations* stands as a masterpiece of Christian mysticism and universal human reflection. In recognition of the profound theological, poetic, and spiritual depth of his work, Pope Francis proclaimed Gregory of Narek a Doctor of the Universal

Church in 2015, affirming his significance far beyond Armenian culture and situating him within the shared intellectual heritage of humanity.

Armenian culture is distinguished by its enduring traditions of manuscript production, monumental architecture, miniature painting, metalwork, carpet weaving, and music. Medieval monasteries functioned not only as religious centers but also as hubs of learning, where theology, philosophy, medicine, history, and the sciences were studied, copied, and transmitted across generations. Illuminated manuscripts from various Armenian scriptoria reveal not only profound devotion but also evidence of complex artistic processes — from the preparation of materials to the careful transmission of iconographic traditions. Armenian *khachkars*, inscribed stone steles adorned with intricate crosses, demonstrate a uniquely Armenian approach to sacred art and have been recognized by UNESCO for their cultural significance.



Bible

Constantinople,
1654-1660

Scribe: Tamur

Aknetzi the Reader

Miniaturist:

Markos Patkerahan
(the Iconographer)

MATENADARAN

The spiritual depth preserved in medieval manuscripts also found powerful expression in Armenian music. Komitas Vardapet (1869–1935), the founder of modern Armenian classical music, drew directly from medieval notation, liturgical chant, and manuscript traditions, transforming ancient spiritual melodies into a modern musical language while preserving their original essence. In the 20th century, the world-renowned composer Aram Khachaturian brought Armenian musical tradition to the global stage, incorporating characteristic modal structures, rhythmic vitality, and melodic patterns derived from Armenian folk music into his symphonic and ballet works. Even in Aivazovsky's tempestuous art, one can sense the human turmoil and emotional intensity echoed in medieval sacred hymns.

Throughout its history, Armenia has faced invasions, foreign rule, forced migrations, and other tragic upheavals. Yet its cultural legacy has been carefully preserved and shared through a widespread diaspora, enriching global intellectual, artistic, and commercial life while remaining deeply connected to the historical homeland. Armenian merchants and intellectuals established vibrant communities across Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, fostering enduring cultural exchanges. Within this broader framework, Armenian–Spanish relations developed through long-distance trade, ecclesiastical and scholarly exchanges, and, notably, through late medieval diplomatic contacts. A symbolic episode of these relations occurred in 1383, when King John I of Castile granted the exiled Armenian king Leo V of Cilicia the lifetime lordship of Madrid, Andújar, and Villa Real, providing him with revenues and protection following the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. Although limited in duration and political scope, this gesture reflects the recognition of Armenian royal authority in medieval Europe and forms an early historical link between Armenia and the Iberian world.

Today, the Republic of Armenia continues to build on its rich cultural and intellectual heritage while embracing modernity and innovation.

This exhibition invites viewers to appreciate Armenia not simply as a nation or territory, but as a cultural heritage shaped by its faith, language, and creativity — a legacy whose achievements continue to resonate within the broader history of humanity.

“Matenadaran” Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts

The “Matenadaran” Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan, Armenia, is the largest repository of Armenian manuscripts in the world and one of the most important manuscript centers of international significance. Housing nearly 23,000 Armenian and foreign-language manuscripts, as well as extensive archival and printed collections, the Matenadaran serves simultaneously as a repository, research institute, library, restoration center, and museum.

The Armenian manuscript collection reflects almost all fields of medieval and early modern intellectual life, including theology, history, philosophy, law, medicine, geography, mathematics, astronomy, music, and the natural sciences. An important part of this heritage consists of translated literature, begun immediately after the creation of the Armenian alphabet in the 5th century. Thanks to Armenian translations preserved at the Matenadaran, several works by classical and late antique authors—such as Eusebius of Caesarea, Philo of Alexandria, and Ephrem the Syrian—have survived exclusively or most fully in Armenian, giving the collection exceptional value for global scholarship.

Armenian manuscripts are internationally renowned for their miniature painting, a central feature of Armenian manuscript culture, which evolved through various regional schools, each marked by distinctive stylistic features and iconographic traditions. The significance of this diversity reflects the vast geography of Armenian written heritage: these manuscripts were produced across multiple centers of learning and artistic activity within historic Armenia and beyond, and today they are preserved in libraries and museums around the world, demonstrating both the geographic and intellectual breadth of Armenian culture and its enduring global influence.

Alongside Armenian manuscripts, the Matenadaran preserves an outstanding foreign-language collection of around 4,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, Syriac, Greek, Latin, Georgian, Ethiopic, Church Slavonic, French, and other languages. Of special importance are Armenian-script texts in foreign languages, a unique phenomenon reflecting the multicultural environments in which Armenian communities lived and wrote.



Mesrop Mashtots Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts

Equally rare and remarkable is the Matenadaran's archival collection, comprising nearly 500,000 documents dating from the 14th to the 21st centuries, including the oldest corpus of Armenian archival materials, preserved in the Catholicosal (Patriarchal) Archive.

Since 1997, the Matenadaran's collection has been included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register, confirming its role as a guardian of humanity's written heritage. Among the items recognized is the 12th-century *Lawcode* of the renowned scholar, priest, and statesman Mkhitar Gosh, inscribed in 2025, one of the earliest comprehensive codifications of Armenian law and a testament to its universal cultural and historical significance.

The Matenadaran's structure integrates scholarly research, conservation and restoration, digitization, publishing, and museum activities, ensuring that these treasures are accessible to both researchers and the public.

The exhibition at the National Library of Spain, presenting fourteen selected exhibits from the Matenadaran, highlights the universal value of Armenian manuscript culture and its connections with world civilization. The idea of organizing this exhibition emerged following the visit of Mrs. Zhanna Andriasyan, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia, to the National Library of Spain, opening a new chapter of institutional cooperation and cultural dialogue. This exhibition enriches a tradition of Matenadaran exhibitions abroad, which have brought Armenian cultural heritage to global audiences, including the 2015 exhibition at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the 2018 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the 2024 exhibition at the Doge's Palace in Venice. These exhibitions present the Matenadaran's collections not only as a national treasure but as a vital part of the shared cultural memory of humanity.

BIBLE

Constantinople, 1654-1660,

Scribe: Tamur Aknetsi the Reader

Miniaturist: Markos Patkerahan (the Iconographer)

MATENADARAN

The presence of Armenians in Constantinople dates back to the Byzantine period, but it became more widespread in the 15th century. In 1461, the Armenian Patriarchate was established, becoming the central institution of communal life.

By the 17th century, Constantinople had emerged as an important center of Armenian miniature painting. Manuscripts produced here are distinguished by the lively movement of their figures, expressive faces, and depictions of everyday life. This innovative approach set the Constantinople school apart from the rigidly conventional iconography of previous centuries. Armenian miniature painting in Constantinople thus became a unique bridge between medieval and early modern art.

Markos Patekhan was one of the most prominent masters of the school. His works are notable for their domestic motifs, portraits, subtle color schemes, and richly decorated ornaments.

THE GATEWAY TO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Manila, 1755

Scribe and translator from Armenian into Spanish: Zakaria, son of Ter Martiros Jughayetsi

MATENADARAN

The displayed manuscript was created in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. Its place of origin makes it a truly exceptional case.

The Gateway to the Kingdom is a manuscript translation from Armenian into Spanish, rendered and personally copied

by Zakaria, son of Ter Martiros Jughayetsi, who came from one of the prominent merchant families of New Julfa (Iran). Armenian merchants played an important role in Manila during the 17th–18th centuries, when the city served as a key commercial hub between China, India, and Mexico.

This work is of a religious and educational nature: it is regarded as a Christian moral anthology that presents to the reader the rules of spiritual life and the idea of entering the Kingdom through the “gate” of faith. It was created with the aim of bringing members of the community closer to church teaching.

The content of the book is largely based on the Holy Bible and the teachings of the Church Fathers.

This manuscript is a unique testimony that in the 18th century Armenians in the Philippines were engaged not only in trade but also in cultural and spiritual life. It reflects the wide geographical scope of the Armenian diaspora’s cultural heritage, extending even to the most distant settlements.

The colophon reads:

Translated from the Spanish language into our Armenian vernacular, for the reading and benefit of the Armenian faithful people, adorned and enriched with spiritual virtues. With the diligence of Zakaria, son of Ter Martiros Jughayetsi of Isfahan, now called Brother Francisco, a monk of the Holy Franciscan Order, known as the “Descalzos de San Francisco.” Written in the year of the Savior 1755, in the capital city of Manila. May all be to the glory of our Lord God.

GOSPEL

Khoranashat Monastery (Utik), 1224

MATENADARAN

Khoranashat Monastery was one of the most important educational and cultural centers of medieval Armenia in the early 13th century. Translation and natural sciences schools operated within the monastery. A number of manuscripts produced there are preserved at the Matenadaran. Khoranashat maintained close ties with the scriptoria of Tatev, Gandzasar, and Dadivank, thanks to which its manuscripts reflect the distinctive artistic influences of the region.

In the manuscripts of Khoranashat, the impact of Cilician miniature painting intertwines with local motifs of Utik. The precise symmetry of the ornaments and the bold contrasts of color testify to the formation of an independent artistic school.

On display is a Gospel copied in Khoranashat in 1224, a symbolic example of medieval Armenian miniature painting. The manuscript is distinguished by the portraits of the Evangelists, depicted seated at their writing desks. Their strict and static figures are characteristic of 13th-century Armenian art. The text is written in *erkatagir* (iron script) with exceptional accuracy and care, attesting to the scribe's mastery.

This Gospel is not only a sacred book but also a unique cultural testimony, reflecting the faith and artistry of medieval Armenia.

GOSPEL

Hromkla (A.), 1266, Vaspurakan (B.), 14th century

Miniaturist: Toros Roslin (A.)

Receiver: Hetum I (A.)

MATENADARAN

This Gospel was created in 1266 in Hromkla, during the period of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, and is considered one of the masterpieces of medieval Armenian miniature painting. The painter was Toros Roslin, one of the most renowned representatives of Cilician miniature painting, and the receiver was King Hetum I.

The miniatures of this Gospel stand out for their vivid colors and gilded ornamentation. The depictions of the Evangelists and saints are dynamic, with expressive and emotional faces that immediately convey the historical and spiritual meaning. The scenes from the life of Christ are rendered with remarkable detail. The compositional solutions reflect both Roslin's distinctive style and the synthesis of Armenian medieval artistic tradition with Byzantine and Western European influences. The text, written in precise *erkat'agir* (iron script), is perfectly harmonized with the illuminations, attesting to the high mastery of the scribe and the painter.

The art of Toros Roslin, which raised Cilician miniature painting to one of the high points of medieval Armenian culture, is distinguished by vivid colors, delicate details, and vibrant imagery. The faces of his figures often convey a wide spectrum of emotions—from grief to glory. This expressive quality is characteristic of Roslin and sets him apart from earlier painters.

HISTORY OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT OF MACEDONIA

Rome, 16th century

Scribe: Bishop Zakaria

Miniaturists: Bishop Zakaria and Hakob Jughayetsi

MATENADARAN

This manuscript was created in Rome in the 16th century. Armenian scribes and painters in Rome produced manuscripts that bore both the traditions of Armenian art and the influence of the Italian cultural environment. The scribe and painters of this manuscript were Bishop Zakaria and Hakob Jughayetsi, whose work reflects the mastery and artistry of the time, closely tied to Armenian spiritual and scholarly culture.

The text of the manuscript recounts the life of Alexander the Great, with detailed descriptions and historical references that allow the reader to envision the events and figures of the era. The illustrations often highlight Alexander's heroic moments—his battles, victories, and legendary encounters. The figures are rendered dynamically, with expressive faces that convey a vivid sense of movement and action.

The illustrations are executed in bright and rich colors—red, blue, green, and gold. The figures are dynamic, with expressive and emotional faces. The ornamental designs are marked by precise lines and are harmoniously integrated with the text, reflecting the high mastery and creative approach of the scribes and painters.

DZERATS MASHTOTS

Yeghivank (district of Berkri)

Scribe: Petros the Monk

Binder: Avetis the Priest (1426)

Palimpsest: epistles of Paul the Apostle, 8th-9th centuries

MATENADARAN

Mashtots

Mashtots is one of the principal liturgical books of the Armenian Church, containing the canons and order of ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies. It was compiled in the 5th century by the order and initiative of Catholicos Sahak Partev and was originally named the List of Blessings.

According to the historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi, in the 9th century, Catholicos Mashtots Yeghivardetsi revised the “List of Blessings”, compiling the liturgical book known as the Mashtots Ritual. This ecclesiastical compendium included rites pertaining to the pivotal moments of human life — baptism, matrimony, and burial — as well as ceremonies associated with agriculture, such as blessings of seed, harvest, wells, and fields. Additionally, it contained a variety of spiritual and devotional services, including the Blessing of Water, Blessing of Grapes, House Blessing, and the consecration of offerings and bread. The Mashtots Ritual also outlined the ordination rites for clergy of various ranks, the anointment ceremony for kings, the blessing of Holy Chrism (Myron), and other sacred ceremonies.

Recently, it has become customary to classify the Mashtots Ritual into three distinct types: the Small or Hand Mashtots, which contains the rites performed by a priest; the Mother Mashtots, which includes the rites conducted by a bishop; and the Father Mashtots, encompassing the rites reserved for the Catholicos, such as the blessing of the Holy Chrism (Myron), episcopal ordinations, royal coronations, and the anointing of the Catholicos himself.

GOSPEL

Kaffa (Crimea), 1684

Scribe and Miniaturist: Nikoghayos Melanavor

MATENADARAN

Armenians settled in Crimea from early times, dating back to the Middle Ages. Particularly in Kaffa and other cities, Armenians had organized communities with churches, monasteries, and schools. In the 14th–17th centuries, Kaffa became not only a center of trade but also a hub of literary and cultural activity. Here, Armenians established scriptoria where manuscripts of both religious and secular content were produced. Amid foreign peoples, Armenian art developed on the basis of centuries-old national traditions, as well as through exchanges with the local artistic and cultural traditions. In terms of population, Crimea brought together Greeks, Italians, Jews, Armenians, and Tatars. Naturally, this cultural diversity found its reflection in the manuscripts created there.

In shaping the displayed binding, the master followed motifs characteristic of Christian iconography, selecting not only forms with shared symbolic meaning but also key episodes from the life of Christ. This approach is typical of medieval Armenian bookbinding art, where the artist or binder intertwined personal vision with the traditional ecclesiastical and theological symbolism.

It is notable that this binding features five scenes from the Cycle of the Lord. The Cycle of the Lord holds a special place in medieval Armenian art. The sequence of these scenes is viewed as a visual summary of the stages of Christ's life, and their inclusion in the design of the binding served not only an aesthetic purpose but also conveyed a spiritual message to the faithful.

In a broader context, such examples attest to the distinctive character of medieval Armenian bookbinding art. It was

not merely a practical element ensuring the physical protection of the manuscript, but also an independent artistic domain that united iconographic symbolism with aesthetic innovation. The inclusion of the Christological cycle in this binding is one of the finest expressions of this tendency.

GOSPEL (ALSO CALLED SHUKHONTS GOSPEL)

New Julfa

Scribe: Barsegh the Religionist

MATENADARAN

New Julfa is one of the most significant Armenian diasporan communities, formed in Safavid Persia at the beginning of the 17th century. Its cultural heritage is of great importance for both Armenian and world history.

As a result of the large-scale deportation organized by Shah Abbas I (1587–1629) in 1604 (the forced migration of Julfa), the inhabitants of Old Julfa, located on the banks of the Araxes River, were relocated to Isfahan (Iran). A new district was built for them, which was named New Julfa.

In a short period of time, New Julfa became the spiritual, cultural, and economic center of the Armenian colony. Churches (the most notable being the Holy Savior Cathedral), schools, and educational institutions were established there. The Armenian merchants of New Julfa became key intermediaries in international trade, connecting Persia with India, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe.

The art of manuscript copying also flourished in New Julfa: hundreds of manuscripts were written and illuminated. In the 17th century, the scriptorium of New Julfa developed distinctive stylistic features shaped by the combination of Armenian and European traditions and the influence of the Persian environment.

The exhibited piece is a “miraculous” or “intercessory” Gospel, copied in 1669 at the Holy Savior Monastery of New Julfa by the scribe Barsegh.

“Miracle-working” / “Intercessory” Tradition

“Miracle-working” or “intercessory” manuscripts hold a special place in Armenian ecclesiastical and communal life. Over the centuries, these manuscripts came to be attributed not only liturgical importance but also spiritual and mediatory significance. They stand out not so much for their external decoration as for the beliefs that formed around them. Communities trusted that such a manuscript carried a special divine power.

These manuscripts were believed to possess healing and protective qualities. The faithful believed — and continue to believe — that the book could miraculously save one from illness, disaster, or other trials. The presence of such a manuscript in a church or community was perceived as a sign of heavenly blessing. Oaths, vows, and sometimes even communal decisions were made before them, with the conviction that the book would serve as a spiritual witness.

On feast days, “intercessory” Gospels are taken out of the Matenadaran or church treasury and carried to pilgrimage sites, where they are presented for public veneration. They have often been associated with specific places or families, whose names they have consequently borne.

Reason for the Name Shukhonts

This manuscript is known as the Shukhonts Gospel, a name that derives from the *Shukhonts* family/clan, which is historically associated with the manuscript. In Armenian, the suffix “-onts” indicates belonging to a particular family or lineage. Thus, “Shukhonts Gospel” means the Gospel of the Shukhonts family.

GOSPEL

Cyprus, 1287

Scribe: Khachatur the Priest

MATENADARAN

The Armenian presence in Cyprus dates back to the 11th century, and by the second half of the 13th century, the island had already become one of the main centers of the Armenian diaspora. The Armenians who settled here mostly came from Cilicia and various regions of the Near East, bringing with them rich cultural and religious traditions. The Armenian Church, as well as the established scriptoria, played a crucial role in preserving the community's identity and ensuring the continuity of its cultural heritage.

Cyprus's becoming a center of the Armenian diaspora was influenced by several factors. First and foremost, political and military pressures—such as the invasions of the Seljuks, Mongols, and Mamluks—compelled a significant portion of the Armenian population to seek safer environments. In addition, the island's geographic position in the eastern Mediterranean created favorable conditions for trade and communication, making Cyprus an attractive destination. Finally, the patronage of the Crusader states, particularly the Lusignan rulers, along with the privileges granted to the Armenian community, ensured the stability and growth of the Armenian presence on the island.

The scribe of this manuscript is Khachatur the Priest, who, as noted in the colophon, was not only a skilled calligrapher but also a clergyman. This indicates that the creation of the manuscript had a dual purpose: on one hand, as a literary and religious work, and on the other, as an act of ecclesiastical service.

This manuscript testifies to the literary and religious life that developed in Cyprus. It also demonstrates how Armenian Gospels continued to be produced outside the homeland at

the end of the 13th century. In the medieval period, Cyprus was a crossroads of various cultures, and therefore the manuscript's artistic and linguistic features may reflect these multilayered influences.

GOSPEL

Hromkla, 1249

Scribe and Miniaturist: Kirakos

Receiver: Catholicos Constantine I (1255)

Binding: 1255

MATENADARAN

In the 1240s–1250s, Hromkla was one of the most active spiritual and cultural centers of Cilician Armenia. As the seat of the Catholicosate, Hromkla fostered the development of translation and scribal activities. This Gospel was produced within that environment and, in 1255, was presented to Catholicos Constantine of Bardzrberd, who, during his tenure, paid great attention to the art of the book and the enrichment of church libraries.

In his manuscripts the scribe and painter Kirakos demonstrates both traditional Armenian forms—such as flat color fields, prominent figures, and strict architectural designs—and influences from Byzantine and Latin miniature painting.

The binding

The binding created in 1255 is an important part of the manuscript.

It was executed on a high-quality wooden base covered with leather. The exterior was decorated with metal plates and cross-shaped domed motifs. Such ornamentation not only protected the book but also symbolized its sacred and political significance. It is possible that precious stones or cross-shaped embellishments adorned the binding,

emphasizing the manuscript's ceremonial character as a Gospel dedicated to the Catholicos.

This manuscript attests to the activity of the scribal school of Hromkla. Moreover, its association with Catholicos Constantine of Bardzrberd indicates not only its liturgical significance but also its political and patriarchal value.

GOSPEL

Yeghegis, , 1306

Scribe and Miniaturist: Sargis the Monk

MATENADARAN

In the 13th–14th centuries, Yeghégis (in the province of Syunik) was one of the centers of the Orbelian princes. Under their patronage, ecclesiastical and cultural centers flourished in the region.

The manuscript shows that at the beginning of the 14th century, scribal activity continued to flourish in the provinces of Syunik. Thanks to the patronage of the Orbelian princes, Yeghégis became a vibrant cultural center, where not only manuscripts were produced but also distinctive styles of miniature painting developed.

Sargis the Monk acted both as a scribe and as a miniaturist. This was a characteristic phenomenon in rural and regional scribal traditions, where a single master often carried out the entire process of producing a manuscript.

The 1306 Gospel of Yeghegis features an extensive colophon as well as numerous subsequent marginal notes. According to these records, after 1918 the manuscript was taken to Tabriz and sold. It was at this time that the Gospel was disbound and its miniatures damaged. The presence of a Persian seal on several pages suggests that in 1931 permission was obtained to take the Gospel out of Iran. In the 1940s,

the manuscript was located in New York, and in 1972 in San Francisco, after which it was donated to the Matenadaran.

Every manuscript transferred to the Matenadaran undergoes professional treatment by the Restoration Department before being included in scholarly research. This process includes the disinfection of the manuscript, repair of damages caused by external factors, as well as comprehensive restoration of structural and material impairments resulting from fungal or insect infestations. The Matenadaran's Restoration Department has more than six decades of professional experience, consistently combining domestic and international expertise. It ensures the proper generational transfer of knowledge among restorers while integrating traditional techniques with innovative approaches.

As in similar institutions worldwide, the preservation of manuscript collections at the Matenadaran is carried out using traditional methods, following the guidelines and standards established by the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O.).

This restored exhibit stands as a testament to the Matenadaran's unique role and unwavering commitment to preserving cultural heritage and ensuring its continuity.

Duration of the restoration: 1.5 year

- Separation of illuminations
- Stabilization of paint
- Separation of attached fragments
- Braiding of the headband
- Restoration of the binding

Conservator-restorer: Artur Petrosyan, 2021

HMAYIL

Manuscript scroll amulet (phylactery), 18th century

Scribe and Miniaturist: Manuel

MATENADARAN

HMAYIL

Manuscript scroll amulet (phylactery), 1734

Kezliv (Crimea)

Scribe and Miniaturist: Ter Ezekiel the Mahtesi

MATENADARAN

HMAYIL

Manuscript scroll amulet (phylactery), 1551

MATENADARAN

Hmayils, or amulets, represent a distinctive form of the written heritage of medieval Armenian culture, embodying both religious and folk belief systems. Typically composed of prayers, biblical passages, psalms, as well as various magical formulas and protective symbols, these manuscripts served as talismans intended to safeguard their bearer from misfortune, illness, evil spirits, and diverse harmful influences. Considered tangible manifestations of protective power, *hmayils* were often worn on the body or kept within the household to shield the family and property from malevolent forces.

They were often adorned with miniatures depicting sacred scenes, images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints, or angels. In certain cases, one also encounters scenes related to healing, featuring symbolic iconography associated with the treatment or prevention of illnesses. Other *hmayils* include representations of the subjugation or banishment of evil spirits, where images and written formulas are interwoven to create a unique spiritual and magical system of protection.

The study of *hmayils* is significant not only from the perspective of medieval art and manuscript culture, but also as material evidence of Armenian beliefs, spirituality, and everyday life. They reveal the worldview of medieval society, while simultaneously illustrating the interaction between popular and ecclesiastical traditions.

Along the Paths of the Spiritual Map

ARMENIAN MANUSCRIPT ART

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CONSERVATION

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Restoration Department, Matenadaran Institute
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Mesrop Mashtots Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts

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