



MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN SCULPTURE AT THE CROSSROADS OF ARTISTIC TRADITIONS

Online Workshop

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Հայկական
ուսումնասիրությունների
միջազգային ընկերակցություն
Association International
des Études Arméniennes

Organizers: Zaruhi Hakobyan, Lilit Mikayelyan

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Reading Into the Asymmetrical Peculiarities of Portal Decoration at Divriği

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The Oil Lamp Motif and Divine Luminosity: Tracing Suhrawardi in Medieval Ahlat

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6. Vlad Bedros (National University of Arts, Bucharest)
The Lamb of God Between the Armenian Carved Decoration from Crimea and the Moldavian Wall Paintings During the Late Fifteenth Century



ABSTRACTS

Zaruhi Hakobyan

Yerevan State University
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The Scene of the Baptism of Christ in Early Medieval Sculpture of Armenia

The monuments of medieval Armenia and the southern Caucasus in general have preserved many interesting iconographic types characteristic of early Christian art. Among the popular themes of early medieval sculpture in Armenia, the scene of the Baptism of Christ stands out, being also known from the catacomb painting of the 2nd and 4th centuries. We can see the Baptism scene not only in one of the earliest Armenian miniatures from the Echmiadzin Gospel (6th to 7th centuries) but also in some Armenian reliefs of the 7th century, which have not been examined from the point of view of iconography yet. The scene of the Baptism of Christ can be seen on three early Armenian stelae as well as on the fragment of a slab from an altar barrier. Among them is the base of a stele from Mren, known only by an archival photo. Two other compositions, known from the stelae of Odzun and Brdadzor, are distinguished by the image of a column crowned with a cross in the Jordan River; on the relief of Odzun, there is also a snake image. Another version of the Baptism scene can be found on the fragment of a slab from an altar barrier from Akori, where John the Baptist holds an ampulla. Some parallels to the mentioned compositions in Armenian reliefs give reason to speak of different iconographic types of the Baptism scene in the early Christian period: these types have been preserved on examples of early Armenian sculpture.

The Sculptural Images of Kings Smbat I and Gagik I and the Representation of Power in Bagratid Armenia

The sculptural images of Smbat II (978-990) and his brother Gagik I (990-1018) Bagratuni are rare examples of royal portraits created in the second half of the 10th century and at the beginning of the 11th century. The representation of their royal status features the presentation of the church model, turban, and mantles worn over tunics distinguished by pendant sleeves. The most prominent part of the king's costume is the turban embellished with a *tiraz*, a band of cloth with an inscription naming the ruler primarily used to distinguish the power of the senior Bagratuni king from that of his royal kinsmen. The turban and *tiraz* are well-known in the Eastern Christian, Byzantine, and Islamic worlds, where they signify the high rank of the wearer.

In the sculptural images of the Bagratuni kings, the turban and *tiraz* that bears the inscribed title *šahanšah* indicate the king's royal rank and emphasize the Armenian nature of the Bagratunis' kingship.

Ekaterina Loshkareva

Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning of
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On the Question of the Building Date of the Narthex of St. Gregory the Illuminator's Church of Tigran Honents in Ani: The Use of a Profiled Ornament Consisting of Geometric Teeth in the Zakharid Era

The report provides a comparative analysis of profile ornamental ribbons with geometric teeth from monuments of the 12th to 13th centuries. All the specimens have been classified according to territorial and cultural characteristics (Armenia and Seljuk Anatolia), and according to the structural principles of the ornament. The study has revealed the features of the motif in question in each of these cultures. It was also possible to identify the earliest examples of the use of an ornament with geometric teeth in monuments of this era built by architects from Ahlat. Thanks to a statistical comparison of the construction dates of monuments with this motif, the period of its active use by architects in both Armenian and Seljuk buildings — between 1220 and 1230 — has been identified. This period coincides with the residence in Ahlat of Tamta, the daughter of Ivane Zakarian, as the influential wife of the city ruler. This fact allows us to put forward a hypothesis according to which, the architect of the narthex of the church of Tigran Honents was from Ahlat. Besides discussing the penetration of the geometric ornament into the architectural repertoire of Armenian buildings, we are also providing

examples of illuminated manuscripts in which it is found. The issue of connecting the dating of the narthex with data from the inscription on the eastern facade of the church of Tigran Honents is separately considered. This study has led us to the assumption that the narthex was built in the period between 1215 and 1225.

Oya Pancaroğlu
Boğaziçi University

Reading Into the Asymmetrical Peculiarities of Portal Decoration at Divriği

The portals of the Mosque and Hospital Complex of Divriği, dated 1228-29, are renowned for the density and intensity of their stone-carved decoration. Both the main (north) portal of the Mosque and the single portal of the Hospital present motifs that are part of highly unusual designs for which meaningful comparanda do not easily come to mind. A peculiarity of the main mosque portal especially consists of subtle asymmetries embedded into the design. Both inscriptional and ornamental, these asymmetric elements appear to resonate with meaning within a Solomonic framework of interpretation for which both portals provide some justification.

Anahit Galstyan
University of California, Santa Barbara

The Oil Lamp Motif and Divine Luminosity: Tracing Suhrawardi in Medieval Ahlat

The current paper examines the symbolism of light within the funerary stelae of Muslim communities in pre-modern Ahlat, focusing on how light-related motifs, particularly the depiction of oil lamps, were employed to express beliefs about death and the afterlife. Rather than relying on the more general and abstract associations with the Qur'anic Light Verse that have often been suggested in previous scholarship, I propose that the oil lamp motif found on these gravestones indicates a more direct engagement with Shihab ad-Din Yahya ibn Habash al-Suhrawardi's *Philosophy of Illumination*, which conceptualized God as the "Light of Lights" and emphasized the soul's journey towards divine luminosity. By examining gravestones from the Ahlat cemetery, I discuss how this motif potentially indicates early manifestations of Suhrawardi's philosophical influence, thus also highlighting the complex processes of identity formation in this region. Ultimately, this study seeks to explore one of the many factors that played a role in shaping the funerary landscape of medieval Ahlat, emphasizing the convergence of artistic, religious, and philosophical currents that defined the region's material culture.

The Lamb of God Between the Armenian Carved Decoration from Crimea and the Moldavian Wall Paintings During the Late Fifteenth Century

My paper aims to challenge the common belief that the iconography of the Lamb of God transmitted to Moldavia via the Late Gothic art of the neighbouring Catholic areas. Instead, I argue that this theme could have been brought into the repertoire of the Moldavian post-Byzantine imagery by local Armenian communities. I will present the complicated confessional background of the Armenian presence in the late medieval principality of Moldavia and suggest that the Lamb of God stands as an iconographic motif that circulates between the artistic traditions of Apostolic Armenians in Crimea and Chalcedonian monastic communities in Moldavia.

