Pretoria's golden Gospel Book: a study of a luxury seventeenth-century Armenian manuscript

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A 17th century Armenian manuscript, a Gospel Book, has been in Pretoria in what is now the National Cultural History Museum since 1897 and has never been displayed or studied. It is a particularly luxuriously illustrated manuscript that was bought by Pres. Kruger and his executive committee from an Armenian fugitive. Its presence in South Africa is surprising since there has never been more than 200 Armenians in the country. The history of the manuscript is explained and the manuscript is examined in detail in the context of similar Armenian Gospel Books elsewhere in the world.
Keywords: Armenian, manuscript, Gospel Book, Gospels, President Kruger, illuminations, scribe.

Pretoria se goue Evangeliarium: 'n studie van 'n luukse Armeense manuskrip.
'n Sewentiende eeuse Armeense manuskrip, 'n Evangeliarium, is sedert 1897 in Pretoria in wat nou die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum is, en is nooit vertoon of bestudeer nie. Dit is 'n besonder luuks geillustreerde manuskrip wat deur President Kruger en sy uitvoerende komitee van 'n Armeense vlugteling gekoop is. Die teenwoordigheid daarvan in Suid-Afrika is verbasend aangesien daar nog nooit meer as 200 Armeniërs in Suid-Afrika was nie. Die geskiedenis van die manuskrip word verduidelik en die manuskrip word in besonderhede ondersoek in die verband van soortgelyke Armeense Evangeliaria elders in die wêreld.
Sleutelwoorde: Armeens, manuskrip, Evangeliarium, evangelies, President Kruger, illuminasies, skribent.

A richly illustrated 17th century Armenian manuscript, a Gospel Book, has been lying on a shelf in the Cultural History Museum in Pretoria since 1897. After it was bought by President Paul Kruger and his executive committee from an Armenian fugitive in that year (National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, Minute R. 4534/97), it has been almost totally ignored. It has never been displayed and never studied, although it has on a few occasions been briefly mentioned in popular journals.

It is a luxury manuscript. The rich colours, the quantity of gold leaf as well as the quality of the vellum and the calligraphy, mark it as a particularly well-preserved specimen of a book produced for a member of the nobility or the church and must have cost an astronomical sum (Nordenfalk 1963: 17). It is a very late manuscript, written just before the first Armenian Bible was printed in Amsterdam in 1666 (Nersessian 1987:6). Even in the eighteenth century Armenian scribes were still using the same forms and styles as in the fourteenth-century, however, because of the way in which these embellished a manuscript (Sanjian 1999: 32).

Early history

The early history of the manuscript can be traced through the long colophon written by the scribe at the end of the book. The scribe, Stephanos Ilovatsi, wrote on pages 607 to 609 that he is a philologist and a linguist and a writer of many books. He was therefore given "the honorary pearl", referring to the exemplar, to write this Gospel Book. "I have studied, I have the scholarship, and I wanted to write the four Gospels," he said (p.607).

> I studied this art with the priest (vardapet) Moses, loved by me... I first finished the writing and then painted these golden pictures of mine. I have completed everything. I have done everything. I completed it in 1661[1] and began it when Jacob (Hakop) came to the throne of Vagharshapat.[2] I started the writing of this book in order to praise Jesus Christ... I did the work for my parents and my entire family. I leave this book that is a vivid dream of mine and give it to the Church of the Holy Virgin in the capital Vagharshapat, for the illumination of the Children of the Church. I give it in memory of me and my parents, my father Vardan and mother Catharina, my brothers and sisters and others of my family alive and dead... I was brave enough to take this Evangeliary to the church and received a present from the Catholicos (pp. 608 and 609).

The colophon ends with a blessing to the reader.[3]

Because of the large expanses of unblemished and still glittering goldleaf that glistens from the many illuminations and decorations, the book can quite correctly be described as "golden".

How the manuscript came to South Africa

The presence of the two manuscripts in Pretoria is surprising, since South Africa has an Armenian population of not more than 200 that has never been substantially larger.[4] Moreover, South Africa, being far from centres of manuscript production, is not rich in early manuscript sources. Apart from the well-discussed Grey Collection there are few manuscripts from the 17th century and before in any library or museum in South Africa. The Grey Collection was a gift to the South African Library (now the National Library) in Cape Town from Sir George Grey, governor of the Cape from 1854 to 1861, when he was transferred to New Zealand, and includes 114 medieval and Renaissance manuscripts.[5] There are certainly no other early Armenian manuscripts in South Africa.

The Gospel book, together with a 15th century Armenian Hymnal.[6], was offered for sale to Dr N. Mansveldt, the then Minister of Education and director of the Pretoria Library, by Mr. Y. Agopian in 1897. Mr Agopian said that he had been a dealer in music instruments in Constantinople, and had fled after the massacres of the Armenians (National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, Minute R. 4534/97). In a letter in French of 14 March 1897, he wrote:

> I am waiting impatiently to have favourable news on the subject of my two Armenian manuscripts that have remained my only and last hope... I believe that the minimum price of £250 which I propose is not an unreasonable price and Your Excellency may even be of the opinion that only the church hymns of the 10th century (sic) has a higher value than that sum. I therefore pray, Monsieur the Minister, that you will have the extreme goodness to take into consideration my state of embarrassment to do me the big favour and to help me to obtain that sum which would make me almost forget that which has happened and so that I would have a little capital since I have to live very poorly and carry the care of my nieces who have become orphans and lost their father in the terrible massacre of Constantinople... (National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, HC824, Annexure B).

At a meeting of the Executive Committee (Uitvoerende Raad) presided over by President Kruger it was decided to buy the two 'Bibles' (Bijbels) for £120 (National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, Minute R. 4534/97).

Armenian manuscripts in general

While Armenia belonged to the world of medieval Christendom, its culture was Iranian based. It was converted early to Christianity: the conversion of King Trdat at the turn of the fourth century, 12 years before the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D., was just one step in a process that had been long under way. Armenian religious sympathies lay with Christian Byzantium while its social structures were patterned after Iranian feudalism. In this situation Christianity had a somewhat autonomous evolution. Eventually alienated from Byzantium by the council of Chalcedon, the Armenian church held tenaciously to some of the earliest traditions of the new religion and developed them along its own lines (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 1). After the fall of the Armenian kingdom in Cilicia, in 1375, the nation centered all its cultural, literary, religious and political life within the church (Gulesserian 1970: II).

The artistic evidence of Armenia is surprisingly plentiful. While other artistic traditions of the Christian east, such as the Coptic and the Syrian, faded with the rise of Islam, Armenia produced abundant works throughout the Middle Ages. Only neighbouring Georgia can be compared in quantity of artistic output. Illustrated manuscripts comprise the largest and most

impressive body of Armenian art, occupying a place of honor not unlike that of icons in the Byzantine world. Commissioned at great expense, manuscripts were preserved as precious church treasures and family heirlooms (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 1). Of these manuscripts the Gospel book is the most important (Nordenfalk 1963: 17). The four Gospels are preeminent among the books of the Bible, since they gave meaning to all the rest (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 81). Armenian manuscript production started at the beginning of the fifth century with the invention of the Armenian alphabet by St. Mashtots. From the beginning, some manuscripts were illustrated. From the tenth century on there was an uninterrupted and ever more plentiful series of illustrated works extending to the eighteenth century (Mathews 1994: 38,41). Although political independence often eluded the Armenians, and eventually invasions and deportation diminished their presence in their native homeland, their sense of national identity was always strong. Their illuminated manuscripts played a key role in preserving this cultural continuity, transmitting religious doctrine, historical record and a blaze of brilliant images (Mathews and Wieck 1994: xiii).

It is estimated that there are now 25,000 extant Armenian manuscripts, which represent only a small fraction of the codices copied throughout the centuries in the numerous scriptoria that dotted the map of historic Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. This estimate does not include fragments, the oldest of which are from the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., the folios used as endpapers in manuscript bindings, or those codices which are executed after the eighteenth century. Scriptoria, as centres of creative writing as well as of transcription, contributed significantly to the development of Armenian culture (Nersessian 2001: 34). The surviving manuscripts are scattered throughout the world in libraries, museums, and private collections. The largest repository of Armenian manuscripts is the Matenadaran (Library of Manuscripts) in Erevan with over 10,000 volumes (Sanjian 1999: vii).

Byzantine art is in large part anonymous; few painters are known by name, and if their names are known generally nothing else is known about them. By contrast, the colophons and inscriptions of Armenian manuscripts supply names, dates and places for hundreds of artists and scribes, along with copious information about the patrons who commissioned the manuscripts (Mathews and Wieck 1994: xiv and xv).

Although manuscript illumination is a crucial element in the Armenian tradition of embodying sacred texts in beautiful, authentic, and meaningful physical format, calligraphy and binding also played a role in the perfection of the codex, as did accurate copying of the text. Armenian scriptoria were concerned with both the physical beauty and the textual authenticity of the texts copied, and both painting and studies of grammar and rhetoric developed in the context of creating perfect codices. Neither the text nor the illumination took precedence. Illumination has as its most basic function the embellishment of the text, claiming for the codex a significance transcending the words contained in it (Sanjian 1999: 26).

The Pretoria Gospel Book, MS HC4068/2
Description

The leaves of Manuscript HC4068/2 are of thin, fine quality, light cream coloured vellum. It has been paginated by a modern hand in pencil and has 614 pages, front and back flyleaves included. There is, however, an error in the pagination in that there is no page 366, so that from there recto pages have uneven numbers. There is no text lost. Text commences on p. 8 and ends on p. 609. The text on page 610 has been erased. Measurements are 109 x 154 x 55mm. The text is in two columns of *bolorgir* script[7], 24 lines per page. There are section numbers in the margins against the text and concordances in the lower margins of each page.

As shown by the colophon, the entire manuscript was written at the same time. A distinguishing characteristic of the Gospel of Matthew is that all quotations are indicated by dots on the left hand side. This does not occur in the other Gospels and seemed at first sight to indicate a different scribe. It might have been a peculiarity of the exemplar that was followed by the scribe Stephanos.

Binding

The manuscript is bound in thick Morocco leather, coloured dark green and dark red and elaborately gold-tooled. It is not a typical Armenian binding but is probably contemporaneous with the manuscript. It has a *guilloche*[8] border in gold with an inner frame, also in gold, and many gold *fleurons* ″ In the centre is a triple oval design with in the middle a goldtooled stamp of Christ on a papal cross. Between the two outer frames there are rosettes and diamond shaped ornaments in gold. The back cover is the same as the front. The flat spine is red, profusely decorated in gold. (Figure 1) The title is in gold on green leather. The flyleaves are of blue, orange and yellow marbled paper, followed by darkish blue paper. No watermarks are visible. There are three blank vellum folios at the beginning, followed by a blank verso, all numbered. All the pages are gilt-edged.

Figure 1
Manuscript HC4068/2, showing the front cover (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Condition

The manuscript is in an excellent state of preservation and shows few signs of use. The miniatures are very bright and undamaged and there are no stains on the pages. The text is legible throughout. Some of the centre pages of the quires have come loose, but nothing is missing. The book has never been repaired.

History

Most Armenian manuscripts are dated and located by colophons or inscriptions (Orna and Mathews 1988: 47). MS HC4068/2 has a long colophon, referred to in the introduction to this article, on pages 607 - 609. It has no other inscriptions.

Through most of its history Armenia has been subjected to its neighbours for longer periods than it has enjoyed autonomy or independence. The disappearance of the Cilician kingdom and the split of Greater Armenia between the Turkoman dynasties and, after the sixteenth century, among the Ottomans, Safavid Persia, and ultimately Russia, marked the end of all political autonomy until the end of the twentieth century (Garso'ian 1994: 3, 18). At the end of the 1877 war with Russia, the Ottoman Empire had been seriously weakened. It blamed its disintegration on the minorities in its midst rather than as the direct result of the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876 to 1908). The Armenian population, the largest Christian minority culture in the Anatolian part of the Ottoman Empire, became the scapegoat (Kayayan 2005). During the 1890s Abdul Hamid ordered massacres against the Armenians. He was responsible for the deaths of about two hundred thousand Armenians between 1894 and 1896. The survivors were left in utter poverty (Balakian 2005: xvi and 234).

It is therefore understandable that Mr Agopian would have fled Constantinople as a result of the massacres and gone to the Transvaal with his nieces on the wave of the 'gold rush', the influx of immigrants which followed the discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1896 and preceded the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). It is also understandable that on his flight he would have taken the two manuscripts that were easy to carry, and valuable. It has not been possible to establish how Mr. Agopian had come by the two manuscripts (Steyn 2007: 311). Mathews points out that in the course of the 20th century a considerable number of Armenian manuscripts have found their way to collections in America. Guarded for centuries in the Armenian church treasuries or hidden away as family heirlooms, many manuscripts were dispersed in the mass murders and deportations of Armenians from 1894 to 1896 and again from 1915 to 1917. Whether confiscated by marauders, carried to new lands by emigrants, or sold to raise hard cash, they soon appeared on the international art market. Curators readily accepted them in public museum collections. They now constitute an artistic resource of incomparable value (Mathews and Wieck 1994: xiii).

A typed copy of an advertisement in the file concerning the sale of the manuscripts in the National Cultural History Museum gives the address of the 'Grande Magasin de Pianos et Musique', founded in 1889, as '136 Grande Rue de Pera'. The original advertisement, cut from a newspaper, had apparently accompanied Mr Agopian's letter to Dr. Mansvelt but has since been lost. If this had been Mr Agopian's shop before he had to flee after the massacres, he must have been wealthy, and it would not be surprising that he had in his possession two valuable manuscripts. Grande Rue de Pera is the former name of Istikal Street in the Pera or Beyoglu district in Istanbul. Today, Istikal Street is a pedestrian street which is approximately 3 - 4 km. long. There are many restaurants, shops, bookstores and music stores and many consular buildings. Most of the buildings in Istikal Street are from mid- to late 19th century. (http://www/ guideistanbul.net/pera.htm, accessed 2006-9-15; Steyn 2007: 310).

It was not possible to find out with any certainty what had become of Mr Agopian or his nieces. The end of the 19th century was an unsettled time in the Transvaal, followed by a war. There is nobody with the name of Agopian left in South Africa and nobody has any knowledge of the family. There is, however, a Last Will and Testament deposited in the National Archives in Pretoria, of one Ardaches Agopian 'also known as Jacob' (or Yakob), a cabinet maker, who died on 11 April 1937 in the Gracedale Nursing Home in Johannesburg, aged 61 years and 11 months.[10] One cannot say with certainty that this is the same person (Steyn 2007: 311). Rev. Eric Kayayan of Pretoria pointed out that it was a common Armenian name.[11] No trace of this Ardaches Agopian or his family could be found.

Contents

The manuscript is a copy of the Four Gospels. Its principal divisions are as follows:

Illustrations

The sumptuous illustrations of the manuscript consist of the Eusebian Prologue, Eight Canon Tables, the portraits of the four evangelists and the incipits to their gospels, 29 framed miniatures and 20 unframed vignettes depicting scenes from the life of Christ, and numerous marginal ornaments and decorative initials.

The complete list of illustrations is as follows:

The letter from Eusebius to Carpianus: pages 8 - 9.[12]

It appears on each of these facing pages between two pillars with a headpiece, similar to the Canon Tables. Page 8 has a treelike flower on the left, page 9 on the right. Half-length portraits of Eusebius and Carpianus, each holding a scroll, are in medallions on the horizontal lower beams of the headpieces that are highly decorated mainly in blue and red. There are birds in the trees and on top of the headpieces.

Canon Tables: pages 12 - 13,16 - 17, 20 - 21, 24 - 25.

The architectural framework of the Canon Tables consists of two, and in the case of the second

Canon Table, three coordinated arches, forming a short running arcade, similar to the minuscule form of the letter m (m-type). Each headpiece is supported by three columns, except in the second Canon Table, where there are four. Facing pages mirror one another only in some ways, mostly in that the carpet design of the two headpieces and the colours are similar.

Figure 2
The fourth Canon Table (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

The first canon table has on top of the headpiece two peacocks on either side of a chalice, and a palm tree on the left of the columns with two hanging bunches of grapes. The second canon table on the facing verso has a flowering tree with a bird in it. There is a bird and what might be an altar on top of the headpiece with foliage next to it. The third canon table has a tree to the left of the columns with a bird with an elongated neck next to it and another kind of bird roosting on top. There is a church with birds around it on the horizontal beam to the left of the carpet headpiece that has an elaborate tent-like structure on top. The facing fourth canon table has a flower/tree in a pot to the right of the columns and a seated goat with leaves sprouting from its head on the upper horizontal beam next to the carpet headpiece. (Figure 2) An animal being sacrificed on an altar appears on top of the headpiece. The fifth canon table has a tree with flowers to the left of the columns and a tree/flower in a pot on the upper horizontal beam to the left of the carpet headpiece. There are four birds that might be sparrows on the headpiece. The sixth canon table on the facing verso has a tree with two birds to the right of the columns and a tree/flower in a pot on the upper horizontal beam to the right of the headpiece. There are four birds on top of the carpet headpiece, two on each side of an altar with a cross *pattee*[13] on top. The seventh canon table has a tree to the left of the columns and a seated monkey that is eating something red, to the left of the carpet headpiece on the upper horizontal beam. There are four crested birds on top of the carpet headpiece. The facing eighth canon table has a palm tree with two hanging bunches of grapes to the right of the columns, similar to that in the first canon table. There is a figure formed by two birds with elongated necks on top of the upper horizontal beam to the right and six duck-like birds on top of the carpet headpiece, three on each side of a cross *pattance*[14]. All the columns and headpieces are densely decorated.

Some features of Gospel Books remained constant through the centuries with only

accidental changes, while others were reshaped extensively or simply dropped. The ten-page set of canon tables is one of the most stable features; this remained standard, with two pages for the Eusebian prologue and eight for the tables themselves, though many innovations were made in its page format and decoration (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 59). In MS HC4068/2 the canon tables, along with Eusebius' preface, are distributed on ten pages which are designed as five pairs according to the constant Armenian tradition The set begins not on a recto but on a verso so that the two pages of the Eusebian prologue face one another. Because of the artists' preference for painting on the hair side of the parchment, two blank pages intervene between every pair of table pages - an expensive procedure that doubled the amount of parchment needed to complete the set.

The basic function of the Canon Tables is as a Gospel concordance. The Armenian Canon Tables served an additional purpose, however. Armenian exegetes picture Canon Table decoration as a beautiful garden in which the reader might be cleansed of worldly impurities before entering the sacred realm of the Gospel itself. This tradition may explain not only the lush beauty of many Armenian Canon Tables, but also why Armenian Gospels were so often equipped with illuminated Canon Tables, even when the rest of the codex was not illuminated. The Canon tables carried meanings that cannot be deciphered and resided rather in the aesthetic qualities and function of the Canon Table pages. It is this open-ended character of Armenian canon tables that puts them in a class by themselves among medieval art works. The viewer must understand that the meaning is always going to elude him, always surpass what he has been able to explain. This attitude must be responsible for the enormous outpouring of artistic effort in decorating these pages. Even if he copied a design very literally the artist seems to have felt obliged to introduce at least a new colour scheme. Hence no two sets of canon tables are exactly the same (Sanjian 1991: 28; Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 175, 65).

Figure 3
The incipit page of the Gospel of Matthew with the picture of Matthew (cut off in the photograph) on the facing page (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Evangelist portraits and incipit pages

Page 32. Full- page portrait of the Evangelist Matthew as an old man, seated, and consulting a book held on his left knee. The background is architectural.

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Page 33. Facing, incipit page. Zoomorphic initial showing a man holding a draped section of the elaborately decorated carpet headpiece. This is followed by bird letters.

There is an elaborate decoration in the right margin. (Figure 3)

Page 190. Full-page portrait of the Evangelist Mark as a younger man, seated and sharpening his pen. The background is architectural, showing two towers. This portrait is the same as the one to be found in MS 80, Scheide Library, Princeton University. According to Mathews and Wieck this follows a traditional Cilician model. According to the principal colophon MS 80, a Gospel Book, was completed in the Armenian year. 1082 (= A.D. 1633). It was written at the church of the Holy Apostle in the monastery of Tat'ew in the northeastern part of Greater Armenia, near to Vagharshapat. (Mathews and Wieck 1994: 202, fig. 152; Sanjian 1976: 426 - 32). It could therefore possibly have been written from the same exemplar used by the scribe Stephanos Ilovatsi for MS HC4068/2.

Page 191. Facing, incipit page. Zoomorphic initial showing a pair of lions facing each other, followed by one line of bird letters and two lines of gold *erkgat 'agir.* The carpet headpiece is elaborately decorated and has elongated birds on top. There is an elaborate decoration in the right margin.

Page 294. Full-page portrait of the Evangelist Luke as a dark haired younger man, consulting a book. The background is architectural.

Page 295. Facing, incipit page. Zoomorphic initial showing an ox holding a book between his front hooves. This is followed by one line of bird letters and one line of gold *erkat'agir.* There is an elaborate headpiece with an elaborate decoration in the right hand margin. (Figure 4)

Figure 4
The evangelist Luke with the facing incipit page (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Page 473. Full- page portrait of an elderly, standing and gesturing Evangelist John dictating to a very young, writing Prochorus, who is seated. The background is architectural.

Page 474. Facing, incipit page. Zoomorphic initial showing an eagle holding a book in its beak. This is followed by a line of bird letters (also a fish) and one line of gold erkat'agir. The headpiece is elaborate with an elaborate decoration in the right hand margin.

The four authors are pictured on versos, as is usual, facing the beginning of their books on the opposite rectos. The initial letter on the incipit page forms the symbol of the evangelist

in each case. The portrait of John dictating to Prochorus is a less usual type in Byzantine art, which generally prefers the type of the seated "meditating" evangelist. The tradition that the fourth Gospel was dictated to Prochorus originated in the fifth-century Acts of John (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 177, 178).

The poses of Matthew, Luke and Prochorus are similar. Each holds the book on his left knee with his left hand, the right hand resting on the book as if writing, though a writing instrument is not visible. The general handling of the clothes of all the figures is similar, with a robe and a stole in a contrasting colour draped over the right thigh. The large simple massing of the architecture is the same in each picture. The standing John apparently holds a scroll in his right hand while his left hand is uplifted towards the source of divine inspiration in the form of a sun-like object with rays in the right hand corner. This source of divine inspiration is also in the pictures of Matthew and Mark, but not in that of Luke. Matthew and Prochorus do not have desks, while Mark and Luke are seated in front of tables covered with cloth. The figure types are common but the background set the Evangelists apart from standard Byzantine representations. The most common Byzantine treatment is a plain gold ground. To use a cluster of buildings is very uncommon in Byzantine art; to use such a background for John dictating to Prochorus is unknown. The usual setting for the latter is a mountainous landscape (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 178).

The prefaces identify two of the evangelists, Matthew and John, as disciples of Christ himself, of the number of the twelve apostles, while the other two are described as belonging to the next generation, disciples of Peter and Paul, who received their information from them. The point of the tradition was to find apostolic authority for all of the Gospels. The visual tradition which makes Matthew and John older men, with white hair and beards, and Mark and Luke younger, dark-haired men is followed in MS HC 4068/2. The unusual architectural backgrounds reinforces this apostolic association The clusters of buildings introduced behind the evangelists should be taken as abbreviated city-scapes, alluding to the places where the evangelists wrote: Matthew in Jerusalem, Mark in Alexandria, Luke in Antioch, and John in Ephesus. The insistence on placing John in a city rather than on the island of Patmos should be connected with the desire to associate each evangelist with one of the great apostolic sees (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 179).

Portraits of the four evangelists are by far the most common subjects in Armenian Gospel manuscripts; more so than the narrative images. So central a theme must have developed out of profound convictions about the nature of divine revelation and the authorship of the gospels (Sanjian 1991: 27 ; Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 177). In MS HC 4068/2 the scribe and artist Stephanos Ilovatsi used bright colours and gold extensively in the headpieces on the opening page of each Gospel. The luscious decoration of the headpieces should also be taken as allusions to the paradisiac content of the canon tables - abstract decoration in which to bathe one's eyes before reading the text itself. In the grand zoomorphic letter with which each gospel begins, the evangelist's symbol twists or gestures to assume the form of the letter. In all Armenian uses of the evangelist symbols the order of the symbols remained in the order: man-lion-ox-eagle. The man signifies Christ's humanity, the lion his kingship, the ox his sacrifice, and the eagle the word (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 179).

Genealogical table

Pages 34 - 35. The Genealogy of Christ, comprising 15 figures, Matthew 1:2-12. The series of figures is shown on the first two pages of the table, in the left margin of page 34 and the right margin of page 35. The accompanying text is in alternating gold and blue *erkat'agir.* There are more names on page 36 that is not illustrated. The ancestors appear in two trees framed

by bunches of fruit and green leaves. They assume uniform frontal poses, holding scrolls of authority in the left hand, the right hand resting on the scroll.

In Armenian art the Genealogy of Christ is a theme of major importance. In the Cilician period artists explored three different formats for handling this subject, one borrowed from the West and the other two apparently Armenian developments. The Western format, a Tree of Jesse, proved to be the least successful in terms of accommodating the subject, for the tree was originally developed not to illustrate the genealogy of the gospel but the text of Isaiah 11:1. The tree starts from David's father, Jesse, whereas Matthew's genealogy starts from Abraham and Luke's goes back to Adam. A second format arranged bust figures of the ancestors in medallions over the full page. The third format is the simplest and the most satisfying for the literal rendering of the text. That is the individual portrait format: each ancestor is shown in the text alongside the mention of his name (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 87). The format in MS HC4068/2 is the first, Jesse tree format, but there is no figure lying at the roots of the trees and the genealogy begins with Abraham. It is not possible to match the ancestor figures with the names.

Narrative Illustrations

The complete list of narrative illustrations is as follows:

Matthew

Page 43: Full-page miniature of The Baptism of Jesus, showing John with his right hand on the forehead of Jesus, angels to left of Jesus and a tree behind him. A dove is descending from the divine spirit in the sky (a sun-like object with rays). Matthew 3:13-17.

Page 4 7: Full-page miniature of Jesus in a boat with four fishermen. This possibly illustrates "Jesus calls Four Fishermen", Matthew 4: 18:22 .

Page 65: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing a man, wearing only a loin cloth, kneeling in front of Jesus. The Cure of the Leper, Matthew 8: 1-4.

Page 74: Framed miniature (3/4 page) showing two men with sticks kneeling in front of Jesus. Two Blind Men Receiving their Sight, Matthew 9: 27 - 31.

Page 88: Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing Jesus, one hand admonishing, and a man holding out his right hand. This might refer to Matthew 12: 9 - 14, The Man with the Withered Hand, although the hand doesn't seem to be withered.

Page 89: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus talking to a man from whose head a small devil emerges. Matthew 12:22, The Healing of the Man possessed by the Devil.

Page 118: Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing Jesus with his hands outstretched in blessing while a man with his hands stretched out in supplication is kneeling before him. A small devil is flying from the man's head. This illustrates The Cure of the Epileptic, Matthew 17: 14 - 18, although according to the narrative the father knelt and the boy was healed. The devil could therefore not have been in the father.

Page 131: Marginal decoration in the form of a temple, referring to Matthew 21:12, The Cleansing of the Temple.

Page 151: Marginal decoration in the form of a temple, referring to Matthew 24: 1-2, The Destruction of the Temple.

Mark

Page 213: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus blessing a man kneeling in front of him. A small devil is flying from the man's head. This is the same as the vignette used in Matthew on p. 118, but inverted; there used in the left margin, here in the right. If it is supposed to illustrate the same narrative, it appears in the wrong place.

Page 221: Unframed vignette in right hand margin, showing a soldier beheading John the Baptist with a sword, Mark 6. Mathews and Sanjian point out that in Armenian liturgy the Feast of the Decapitation takes its reading from Mark 6: 14 - 29, not from the passage in Matthew 14: 1-12 (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 89).

Page 233: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus standing, pointing a finger at a kneeling man.

Page 237: Framed miniature (3/4 page). The Transfiguration, Mark 9: 2 - 12. (Figure 5)

Figure 5
The Transfiguration ((Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Page 268: Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing Jesus talking to two men. Mark 11:1, "He sendeth forth two of his disciples".

Page 271: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus praying while an angel hovers above his head and three disciples are sleeping: Mark 14: 32 - 42, Jesus Prays in Gethsemane.

Page 273: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing man kneeling in front of Jesus, kissing his left hand, while the right hand of Jesus points towards him. This might refer to The Betrayal of Jesus, Mark 14:48.

Page 276. Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing a crowing cock, illustrating Peter's Denial, Mark 14: 68.

Page 281: Framed miniature (3/4 page). The Crucifixion, Mark 15. Jesus on the Cross is flanked by the Virgin Mary and a very youthful St John. Mark does not mention Mary and John at the Cross, however, although John does (John 19: 25 & 26). (Figure 6)

Page 261: Marginal decoration in the form of a temple referring to Mark 13: 1, The Destruction of the Temple.

Luke

Page 301: Framed miniature (2/3 page). The Annunciation, Luke 1:26, showing the Virgin Mary on the left and the angel Gabriel on the right with wings and in a flowing robe. There appears to be a lectern with a scroll on it between them. A dove is descending in a ring of divine light. (Figure 7)

Figure 6
The Crucifixion (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Figure 7
The Annunciation (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Page 309: Framed miniature (1/3 page). The Birth of Jesus, Luke 2: 1 - 20. The Baby Jesus is shown lying in a circle of white light. There is an angel in the right front corner, with Joseph behind it and Mary to the left. An ox and a donkey are looking on. (Figure 8)

Page 313: Small framed miniature (1/3 column). The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Luke 2: 21 - 38.

Figure 8
The birth of Jesus (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Page 322: Unframed vignette in left hand margin, showing Jesus with a man lying at his feet, a small devil departing from his head. Luke 4:33, The Man with the Unclean Spirit.

Page 326: Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing Jesus with a man kneeling in front of him. Jesus Cleansing a Leper, Luke 5:12-16.

Page 329. Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing a man on a couch with two other men in front of Jesus below an opened ceiling. Luke 5: 17-26, Jesus Healing a Palsied Man.   *Page 340:* Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing a man lying in bed with Jesus standing in front of the bed. There is a man behind the bed, another holding on to Jesus, and a third one next to him. The picture has one leg too many. Three pairs of legs are shown and one extra which cannot belong to Jesus because his feet are covered by his robe. The reason for this is that the figures are not organically constructed but almost glued together. They are standard torsos with heads, hands and feet attached. Luke 7: 11-17, Jesus Raises the Widow's Son at Nain.

Page 352: Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing a kneeling woman, touching the hem of Jesus' robe. Luke 8:43, The Woman who Touched Jesus' Garment.

Page 388: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus standing and a man kneeling with his hands clasped in prayer. Luke 11: 1-13, Jesus' Teaching on Prayer.

Page 392: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus talking and a man with his hand in a questioning gesture. Luke 11: 29 - 32, An Evil Generation Seeks a Sign. .

Page 397: Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing a man carrying a burden. This might refer to Luke 11: 46, "...ye lay men with burdens grievous to be borne."

Page 398: Small framed miniature (1/3 column). Man in front of an indistinct object that might be a candle.

Page 399: Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing a man carrying a sickle with pigs in front of him. Luke 15: 11 - 32, The Parable of the Lost Son.

Page 400: Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing two people embracing. Luke 15: 11-32,

Page 405: Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing Abraham with Lazarus on his lap and tortured souls below. Luke 16: 19-31, The Rich Man and Lazarus.

Page 408: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus teaching disciples seated in front of him.

Page 413: Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing two men under a canopy.

Page 418: Unframed vignette in right hand margin showing Jesus in front of a tree with a small man in it. Luke 19: 1, Jesus and Zaccheus.

Page 422: Framed miniature QA page) showing The Entry into Jerusalem, Luke 19: 28.

Page 431: Marginal decoration in the form of a temple with a cross pattée, similar to the cross in the canon tables. Luke 21:5-6, The Destruction of the Temple.

Page 438: Framed miniature QA page) showing the Last Supper, Luke 22.7. (Figure 9)

Figure 9
The Last Supper (Photograph: Ferdi Schenck)

Page 442: Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing Jesus with an angel hovering over him. The angel is offering him a cup which Jesus refuses. Luke 22:39, Jesus Prays in the Garden, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me".

Page 447: Small framed miniature (1/3 column) showing Jesus before a seated Pilate, Luke 23:1.

Page 450: Framed miniature QA page) showing Simon carrying the Cross, a fallen Jesus, four Roman soldiers and three bystanders. Luke 23:26.

Page 455: Framed miniature QA page) showing Jesus rising from the grave, wearing a loin cloth and holding the bannered cross, standing on his coffin. There is an angel to the right of the picture and two soldiers in Roman armour; one lying flat holding a golden ball, and another carrying a chest. Luke 24, The Resurrection.

Page 462: Full page framed miniature. The Ascension, Luke 24: 50-53.

John

Page 484: Framed miniature QA page). The Wedding at Cana. John 2:1.

Page 494: Framed miniature QA page). Jesus and the Woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, John 4:1.

Page 501: Framed miniature QA page) showing a man lying at a pool, Jesus, an angel and another man carrying a bed. John 5:1, The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda.

Page 533: Unframed vignette in left hand margin showing a man with a shepherd's crook kneeling before Jesus. Jesus is touching the man's eyes. John 9:1, Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind.

Page 540. Marginal decoration in the form of a temple, again with a cross pattée. John 10:22, Feast of the Dedication.

Page 548: Framed miniature QA page). The Raising of Lazarus, John 11: 38 - 44.

Page 559. Framed miniature QA page). The Washing of the Feet, John 13:1-11.

Page 573: Full- page miniature illustrating Pentecost showing Jesus, surrounded by the disciples, seated in two rows of six each, and the Father, wearing a gold crown, below. Tongues of fire radiating from a dove above the architectural background, descend on them. This is a particularly luxurious miniature, with all the robes luminous with gold lines.[15] The narrative of Pentecost occurs in Acts 2, not in John.

Page 601. Framed miniature QA column) showing Jesus dressed in a loin cloth, holding the bannered cross as in the miniature on p.455 (Luke). With his other hand he is holding a kneeling man's wrist. There are indistinct reclining figures in the foreground. John 20: 1-10, the Resurrection. Mathews and Wieck remark about a similarly dramatic Resurrection miniature (not shown) in the Hollywood Lectionary, that "Christ rises from the sarcophagus with enough force to stun the guards" (Mathews and Wieck 1994: 172). That also seems to be the case in both the Resurrection miniatures in MS HC 4068/2.

MS HC 4068/2 therefore has 49 miniatures and vignettes, distributed as follows:

Matthew 7, Mark 9, Luke 25, John 8. This contrasts with the method often pursued in Byzantine Gospels of illustrating Matthew fairly densely and then adding some of the missing subjects in the other Gospels. This is also in contrast to one of the most famous Armenian Evangeliary manuscripts, the Glajor Gospel (1300 -1307) in the library of the University of California, Los Angeles. The U.C.L.A. manuscript has 54 miniatures depicting scenes from the life of Christ (Matthew 18; Mark 17, Luke 10, John 9).[16] In MS HC4068, Luke has more than half of the illustrations, indicating an unusual emphasis on Luke.

The wide variety of ways of connecting the illustrations to the relevant gospel text in Armenian manuscripts is virtually unknown in the West. In Armenian gospels there are four distinct systems of intra-textual illustrations that attempt to place the miniatures beside the text they illustrate: a running narrative system, which interrupts the columns of text to inset the illustration; a frieze system, which places dense, moment-by-moment strips of scenes across the page; a marginal system, placing vignettes beside the text; and a system of "festival" images,

that is, select scenes from the Life of Christ scattered through the book (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 54, 57 and 76).

In MS HC4068 one finds a mixture of three of the systems of intra-textual illustrations. The smaller framed miniatures break the columns of text exactly where the illustrations belong in the narrative, characteristic of the running narrative system. The vignettes beside the text represent the marginal system. The sequence of smaller miniatures is sometimes interrupted by full-page illustrations, as in the festival set. Apart from the Evangelists' portraits, there are four full-page illustrations in MS HC 4068/2: The Baptism of Jesus on p. 43; Jesus Calls Four Fishermen (?) on p. 47; Ascension on p. 462 and Pentecost on p. 573. While the Baptism, Ascension and Pentecost are major events and the reason for their selection for illustration is clear (although Pentecost is narrated in Acts and not in the gospels) the reason for the selection the fourth full-page illustration is not clear. It shows Jesus in a boat with fishermen and might, because of its proximity to that passage, illustrate Matthew 4: 18 - 22, Jesus Calls Four Fishermen. It should be noted that the Crucifixion only merited a three-quarter page illustration in a page with text.

The program of illustrations constitutes a set of markers calling the reader's attention to those passages that are thought to be of greater importance and much of the possibility of interpreting these narrative images stems from the connection to the text they illustrate. Mathews and Sanjian comment that some of the most prominent miniatures coincide with some of the most important liturgical feasts (Sanjian 1999: 27; Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 78, 80 85). As shown, in MS HC4068/2 the feasts do no seem to control all the illustrations. Mathews and Sanjian (1991: 80) also point out that one has to look carefully for those features in which the iconography departs from or adds to the naked narrative of the Gospel, for these are striking signals of the intervention of the exegetical mind. These modulations of meaning are infinite, whether in the gestures, in the way figures are grouped, the way they are clothed, the colours, the scale, and even the style of the painting. The miniatures depicting the Resurrection of Christ in MS HC 4068/2 are clear instances of where the iconography departs from the narrative. Modulations of meaning are present in the way in which Christ bursts from the grave as well as in the attitudes of the Roman soldiers.

Marginal decorations

As already mentioned, MS HC4068/2 contains 27 marginal vignettes (4 in Matthew, 7 in Mark, 8 in Luke, and 1 in John) and 4 marginal decorations of a narrative nature, depicting temples (2 in Matthew, 1 in Mark and 1 in John). There are also numerous other marginal ornaments and decorative initials in various colours, consisting of arabesques, floral designs, birds and medallions. Many of the initials and the *sacra nomina* throughout the text are in gold; while ornate capitals in red, blue, gold and other colours also occur. Throughout MS HC4068/2 the pericope initials are formed by large tubular letters, mostly elongated and distorted birds. They are multi-coloured, mainly blue, red and gold., and their obvious function is to guide the reader to particular passages. However, they also have an aesthetic function. Like the Canon Tables, these structural illuminations attract the eye, providing a pause in which the beauty of the illumination refreshes the mind. They make the codex more than a text. Furthermore, they mark it as a more important, and, not coincidentally, a more expensive endeavour (Sanjian 1999: 31).

Colours

Particularly remarkable about the illustrations in MS HC4068/2 are the bold, bright colours that are always used. Large expanses of very bright and unblemished gold leaf are rarely found in Western manuscripts of the same period and earlier. This is probably due to the fact that the manuscript has not been exposed to use or study. Bright blue, red, pink, and green

colours are often used. Jesus is almost always clad in blue. Particularly noticeable in MS HC4068/2 is the quantity of bright orange used. Mathews and Sanjian point out that rich, saturated colours immediately distinguish Armenian painting from the pastel tints favoured in Byzantine painting. The basis of this difference lies in the continued use of mineral pigments in contrast to Byzantine reliance on organic substances (Mathews and Sanjian 1991: 56). Orna and Mathews point out that striking innovations appear in the work of a fifteenth-century artist, one Khatchatur of Khizan, who expanded his palette to include realgar and smalt. Realgar is an orange pigment generally found in the same ore deposits as orpiment. This pigment is rare in Armenian manuscript illumination, because the traditional method of achieving orange hues consisted of mixing vermillion with orpiment (and organic yellow pigments) and shading the resultant hue with white lead until the desired tonality was obtained. Another rare pigment used by Khatchatur was smalt, a finely ground cobalt-containing glass that produces a pale, transparent blue. Both these colours occur often in MS HC 4068/2, the transparent blue notably in the robe of Prochorus (p.476) (Orna and Mathews 1988: 52A).

Colophons and inscriptions

As shown, MS HC4068/2 has only one colophon.

The writing of colophons is a tradition that goes back to the inception of Armenian. This literary genre was an integral part of the art of manuscript production and is unparalleled in the literary traditions of other peoples. The colophons became quantitatively more abundant from the 10th century; and from the 12th century they manifest greater variety in style and content. In consequence their value as primary sources becomes more and more evident in direct proportion to their contribution to various fields of research. The Armenian term for colophon literally means 'memorial, monument'. This designation is most appropriate, for the primary purpose of the colophons was to perpetuate the memory of those who had participated in the production of the manuscripts. These colophons were written, as a rule, by the scribes upon the conclusion of a manuscript. Occasionally, they were written at the end of long sections of a text; there are also brief colophons that appear in the margins of the manuscript. Moreover, there are manuscripts that, in addition to the principal colophon written by the scribe, contain colophons written by the commissioner or sponsor, by the artist who illuminated them, as well as by the craftsman who bound them. Also, we find in many manuscripts colophons written by their subsequent recipients, the binders or restorers - all of which provide, in a sense, the "biography" of individual manuscripts. Such colophons continued to be written as late as the 17th and 18th centuries, or until such time that the manuscripts found their way to a library or museum (Sanjian 1968: 181, 194).

In providing data about the circumstances of the production of the manuscripts the authors of the colophons recorded contemporary information on a broad range of subjects. The colophons therefore emerge as important primary sources for the history not only of Armenia but also of the entire Middle East. In contrast to historical works and chronicles, the colophons were written either by eyewitnesses or individuals who lived at the time of the events they described. Hence, from the standpoint of factual authenticity and chronological accuracy, the colophons are more reliable than the works of the historians who wrote about the same events decades or even centuries later. Moreover, the colophons frequently complement information contained in the historical sources and the chronicles, and some even provide data not found in other sources (Sanjian 1968: 182, 183, 191).

With rare exceptions, the colophons were written by professional scribes whose educational training was limited and are cryptic both in style and content (Sanjian 1968: 192, 194). Scribe Stephanos Ilovatsi and his golden book are exceptions. His colophon is extensive and he was

not an ordinary scribe but, as he said "a philologist and linguist", a scholar. He gave the book to the Church of the Holy Virgin in Etchmiatsin and in turn received a present from no less a person than than the Catholicos himself. This was the Catholicos Yakob IV, the beginning of whose reign he recorded.

Conclusion

This singularly luxurious Gospel book is a rare treasure belonging to the people of South Africa. The circumstances in which it came to Pretoria make it the more noteworthy. It was brought by a man who fled from his own country to escape a massacre, and bought by Pres. Kruger and his committee at a time when they had far weightier issues to deal with, two years before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, and three years before Pres. Kruger, in turn, had to flee from his country.

In the context of Armenian Gospel Books world-wide it is a typical example, and noteworthy because of its splendour as evidenced in the number and quality of its illuminations and decorations, the quality of the calligraphy, the vellum on which it is written, and the ornate binding.

Notes

1   The date is given in the standard calendar as well as in the Armenian calendar, according to which the book was completed in the (Armenian) year 1110.

2   Vagharshapat is the other name for Etchmiatsin, the Holy See near Erevan, where the Catholicos has his headquarters. The Holy See was transferred to its original site in Vagharshapat in 1441. Vagharshapat, or Etchmiatsin, is one of the ancient capitals in Armenia. According to Matthews and Wieck (1994: 18 and 33) Yakob IV was Catholicos in Etchmiatsin from 1655 to 1682. Stephanos therefore worked on his Gospel book for 6 years. The first Armenian Bible was published in Amsterdam in 1666.

3   Stephanos Ilovatsi was probably a monk in a monastery, Ilova. Although a reference to this particular monastery could not be found, it must have been one of the monasteries around Erevan and Etchmiatchin. In the late 17th century the Khanate of Erevan had 23 men's monasteries and five for women, but by 1830 had only 10 functioning, all for men. The colophon was translated from the Armenian by Mr David Abrahamyan of Johannesburg, to whom my sincere thanks.

4   Personal communication: Philip Karakashian, chairman of the South African Armenian Society, 2006-10-02.

5   See C. Steyn (editor). 2002. The Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts in the Grey Collection of the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town. Salzburg:Universität Salzburg.

6   The Hymnal was discussed by Carol Steyn (2007: 308 - 320).

7   Three kinds of script can be distinguished in Armenian manuscripts. The first is an uncial script called *erkat'agir,* or "iron" script from the fact that in the earliest inscriptions it was chiseled into stone with an iron tool. From the eleventh century the second script, called *bolorgir* (literally "round" letters), an Armenian miniscule, was introduced. A third script, called *notragir* (also called *notrgir),* was introduced in the seventeenth century. Initial letters always remained in the old *erkat'agir* capital forms, and often the first page or pages of a book would be laid out in handsome, spacious uncials (Mathews 1994: 38).

8   An ornament formed of two or more bands intertwining in a continued series.

9   Ornaments like small flowers.

10   National Archives of South Africa, MHG 0 96943

11   Personal communication: 2006-6-20.

12   The canon tables were invented by Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260-c.340), who wrote a letter to a certain Carpianus in which he explained the arrangement.

13   A type of cross with arms that are narrow at the center and broader at the perimeter. The name comes from the fact that the shape of each arm of the cross was thought to resemble a paw (French *patte).* The heraldic *cvosspattée* was sometimes associated with a Crusader order, the Knights Templar, though it was not used

consistently. (Weinstein, http://mathworld.wolfram.com/MalteseCross.html, [accessed 21-7-2007}.

14 A version of the cross *pattée.*

15 Mathews and Wieck 1994:172, fig. 122, shows a miniature of Pentecost in a Lectionary dated

1661-87, which is remarkably similar to the one in MS HC 4068/2. The illuminator and scribe are unknown. It is now in the Western diocese of the Armenian church of North America, Hollywood.

16 Mathews and Sanjian, (1991: 78), counts 56, and Sanjian, (1999: 53) counts 55. However, the list in the latter book describes 54.

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