

Christina Maranci & Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Manuscripts of the David and Jemima Jeselsohn Collection*, The Hebrew University Magnes Press Jerusalem, 2024

The discovery, cataloguing, description, and scholarly use of Armenian manuscripts scattered around the world are often regarded as one of the primary objectives of Armenian codicology. This volume, published in 2024 and compiled by Michael E. Stone and Christina Maranci, once again draws attention to this matter. A significant work has indeed been produced, describing and analysing five Armenian manuscripts, both complete and incomplete. It includes a foreword, a preface, an introduction outlining the history and guiding ideas of the work, a transliteration table, lists containing images, necessary sections for descriptions and references, an extensive bibliography, and all of the manuscripts' colophons. However, a work of this size would also benefit from indexes, which are lacking in the book.

The manuscripts in question are part of the private collection known as the "David and Jemima Jeselsohn Collection of Books and Manuscripts", which is housed in Zürich, Switzerland. It is listed as a private collection in Zurich and registered under the name Jeselsohn in the following catalogue: Bernard Coulie, *Armenian Manuscripts, Catalogues, Collections, Libraries*, 2nd revised edition, Turnhout, Brepols, 2020, pp. 404–405. This collection, which originated in 1970 (p. XIX), includes ancient and medieval art objects from the Near East and the Holy Land. From 2008 onwards, Armenian manuscripts have also been added to the collection. Professor Michael E. Stone, Emeritus Professor of Armenian Studies and Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University, has studied the texts, translating them into English and providing descriptions of the manuscripts. Professor Christina Maranci, Professor of Armenian Art at Harvard University, has analysed the miniatures. Each manuscript is an extremely valuable example of Armenian manuscript art, notable for its miniatures and paleography.

Manuscript **JM34** is a Miscellany of homilies and hagiography that exemplifies the traditional artistic and literary style of Cilicia. Furthermore, the authors' comprehensive and expert study reveals that the codex was copied and illuminated in Drazark in 1353 by the renowned Cilician artist Sargis Pitsak. However, on the basis of the date of a later colophon, it was for a long time erroneously considered a sixteenth-century manuscript (dated 1535), as listed by Sotheby's (p. XXI).

Manuscript **JM35** is a Mashtots' (Ritual) that was copied in Jerusalem in 1586. The cover of the manuscript is beautifully embellished with silver crosses and nails.

The seventeenth-century manuscript, **JM24**, was purchased in Vienna. Consisting of only one folio (526 of the original manuscript), it features exceptional handwriting and a splendid miniature. The folio contains a passage of the Gospel of John. As Stone explains, only complete Bibles could be copied in this size and number of folios, and with such beautiful handwriting. Therefore, this folio is considered to be part of a Bible rather than a Gospel. Through an analysis, he supposes that the original manuscript could have been copied in a scriptorium in Nor Jugha (New Julfa). He draws attention to the text's European numbering in the inner margin and the Armenian letter "ֆ-f", an abbreviation of "ֆրանկաց-*frankats'*" ("of the Franks"), which may have resulted from the influence of Catholic missionaries active in Nor Jugha in the mid-seventeenth century (p. 235). Some years ago, Michael and Nira Stone had already examined the writing and miniature characteristics of this manuscript in a joint article entitled "A handsome Armenian Gospel leaf", which was published in the *Revue des Études Arméniennes* 2011 (pp. 239–50) and is included in this book.

Manuscript **JM21** (1695) comprises the Gospels. It was copied and illuminated in Nor Jugha.

Manuscript **JM22** (seventeenth century) also contains the Gospels. They were copied in *bolorgir* ("rounded minuscule") script. By thorough examination, Maranci demonstrates that the manuscript's miniature art reflects the traditions of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Constantinople (p. 306). The influence of European printed books on the school of Constantinople during this period is evident (p. 310), which provides a compelling case for further examination and comparison of this codex with others.

The fact that many excellent Armenian manuscripts can be found in private collections is proven once again by these five examples.

Manuscript **JM21** from Nor Jugha is of particular interest to us. The "History of the Manuscript" section of the book provides details regarding its previous owners. We know that the first owner, who obtained it in Hamadan, Iran, in 1879, was named J. Basset (p. 291). While studying manuscripts in Iran, I examined a variety of sources, including the catalogue of Tabriz compiled by Hrachya Acharyan (Vienna, 1910). I discovered that Armenian manuscripts, particularly those of great paleographic and artistic value, had either belonged to or attracted the attention of local missionaries. They may also have used them as pedagogical tools. In 1879, Basset, the purchaser of the manuscript, was a well-known missionary in Hamadan. Consequently, these examples could make a significant contribution to research on this topic and provide a solid basis for arguments. The manuscript was also owned by the renowned Armenian collector Harutyun Hazaryan. As previously mentioned, private collections contain priceless and unique specimens. This fact further establishes the need for catalogues such as this one, which list private holdings of Armenian manuscripts.

In the late 1800s, extensive catalogues were compiled for major collections, and smaller or private collections also produced their own catalogues. Naturally, for a

century or more, descriptive concepts have evolved and been refined, and the scholarly perspective on the subject has also changed. The authors of this publication have thoroughly studied the Armenian manuscripts in order to comply with contemporary standards of description, rather than merely establishing the facts. They have not missed any information or detail. Among other things, the colophons are presented in full and in chronological order. Although modern rules of punctuation and capitalisation could have been applied in the transcriptions of the texts and colophons (since such rules were not standardised in Armenian manuscripts), it has generally been preferred to reflect the sources exactly. While this approach is open to debate, it provides a solid and precise basis for further research.

The manuscripts are not described according to the methods used in the Grand Catalogue of the Matenadaran. The latter comprises thirty points and is based on an updated version of the methodology and questionnaire developed by Yakovbos Tashean. However, the book's authors have adopted a different methodology, dividing the description into the following sections: external attributes, contents, miniatures, colophons, and history of the manuscript. Avedis K. Sanjian's catalogue of Armenian manuscripts in the USA (1976) was compiled by a similar approach. This narrative style and set of principles have given the authors the flexibility to examine each manuscript's unique features in depth and address scholarly issues comprehensively. The sections of the description are arranged according to the given manuscript's specific requirements and features. As a result, those sections differ from manuscript to manuscript. For example, JM34 has a small section entitled "Corrections" (p. 7), where it is stated that the manuscript contains marginal corrections indicating text verification during the copying process. In the Grand Catalogue of the Matenadaran, this kind of information is provided in the form of notes and comments rather than in a dedicated section.

The section on the covers of the complete manuscripts constitutes separate research. The ivory plaque on the front cover of manuscript JM34 (dated 1353) features a depiction of the Transfiguration, which is examined in detail on pages 9–12. Such analysis is not typical of traditional descriptions. Also, there are noteworthy and instructive observations regarding the metal cover of manuscript JM22. On the basis of details such as the Cyrillic script "TIK" on the cover, the authors deduce that the cover was crafted by Moscow artisans (p. 298). In the following section on the history of the manuscript, they suppose that in 1869, the year of its rebinding, it was in Moscow (p. 374). The Russian pencil and purple ink inscriptions in the manuscript, the Cyrillic script on the cover and other details lend further credence to this hypothesis.

Meanwhile, a donative inscription on the metal spine of the manuscript (p. 300) suggests that it was kept in Tiflis. The individuals mentioned in the inscription, Zak'aria Grigorean Rostomeants' and his father confessor Grigor K'ahanay Tēr Barsgheants', were Armenians residing in Tiflis. Since during the second half of the nineteenth century Tiflis was the political and administrative centre of Tsarist Russia in the Caucasus, this information, in my view, could also help to resolve the issue with the Russian inscriptions.


Furthermore, the study presents an analysis of parchment fragments written in *erkat'agir* (uncial script) and later used as guard-leaves in codices (JM34 and JM35). The fragment of JM34 is compared with the text from Zohrabean's Bible. There are two varieties of *erkat'agir* that differ from each other in form. They were supposedly used in different periods. Therefore, perhaps it might be possible to give an approximate date for each fragment. The one in JM34 is in angular *erkat'agir* (pp. 14–16) and may date to the eleventh century, whereas the fragment of JM35 (pp. 172, 174), in round uncial script, is possibly from the tenth century.

As already mentioned above, Maranci and Stone have adopted new methods and approaches. For example, scholars usually overlook the order in which copied texts appear in manuscripts, especially biblical or liturgical books, because that order is often ritualistic. However, miscellanies contain a variety of content and authors, so this issue presents itself differently there than in other manuscripts. Hence, it is equally essential to understand the guiding ideas behind the selection of the material, as well as the process and order of copying. Stone has examined manuscript JM34 from this point of view. In his analysis of the arrangement and sequence of the texts, he indicates (p. 18) that, in this collection, they are set out in chronological order according to the events in Christ's life (it is interesting to note that miniature depictions of these events are usually arranged in manuscripts and analysed by art historians in the same manner). This approach considers both the circumstances of a manuscript's origin and the subject matter of medieval texts, setting a methodological standard for further research, particularly manuscript descriptions.

Maranci, while defining the influences and interbreeding of different traditions in a manuscript and carefully addressing the schools of Nor Jugha and Constantinople, has viewed each item and its details distinctly. It is important to consider how the text and the miniature interact. For instance, "the Magi from the East" (p. 252) in the text explains why in manuscript JM21 the magi are painted as arriving from the East. Next, the Annunciation scene in the same manuscript is next analysed in the context of an apocryphal text: a passage from the Armenian Infancy Gospel (p. 251). The scholar focuses on a miniature (or any feature within a miniature) in accordance with its place and role in the manuscript. For example, she draws attention to the fact that Saint Teodoros, who is depicted in a margin of manuscript JM34 shows his own name with his sword's edge (pp. 90–91). The same method is applied regarding the position of St. Mary of Egypt's hands: Mary points to the Armenian letter Ք (K') with her hands. Maranci notes that Ք is the first letter of Christ's name (Քրիստոս in Armenian) and the last letter of the Old Armenian alphabet (p. 101). One could assume that the image symbolises Mary's devotion to Christ. This way of interpretation is interesting in itself and opens up new possibilities for further research.

The book contains high-quality images and provides readers with a wealth of information. It is the first in-depth study of these manuscripts and a comprehensive catalogue. Additionally, one may find here all the colophons accompanied by precise interpretations, clarifications, and corrections of some errors found in the texts.

Most importantly, this publication includes Stone's English translations alongside the source material. In conclusion, I can state with certainty that, thanks to its academic merits, this remarkable book has come to enrich the treasury of the valuable studies dedicated to Armenian manuscripts.

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