

The Oracles in an 11th-Century Armenian Manuscript (Yerevan, Matenadaran, No. 9650)


▼ **ABSTRACT** The Graz Armenian palimpsest (University Library no. 2058/2, a Georgian manuscript of the 10th century with an underlying Armenian text from around the year 800) contains 279 oracle sayings together with the text of the Gospel of John. Its readable part (229 oracles) was published in 2015. The present article offers the oracles of another Armenian manuscript which is kept at the Matenadaran in Yerevan: M9650, dating from the 11th century. Here again, the oracles are added to the verses of the Gospel of John. Having their place in the margins and sometimes in wonderfully designed cartouches, they are arranged in a unique way. We don't know a similar page layout elsewhere. The Syriac corpus of the same genre offers the oracles embedded in the text of John (London, British Library, add. 17,119, 6th/7th centuries). We give here the Armenian text of the oracles found in M9650, an English translation, and a first comparison with the oracles of the Graz palimpsest. Juxtaposing the two texts, we find total uniformity on the one hand and considerable variation in the wording, the formation of text sections and their sequence on the other.

▼ **KEYWORDS** Matenadaran, manuscripts, oracles, Syriac parallels, Gospel of John, divination, palimpsests.

▼ **ISSUE** Volume 1.1 (June 2024)

1. Introduction

About thirty years ago, my respected colleague Bernard Outtier hinted at an Armenian manuscript kept in the Matenadaran, the Research Institute of Ancient

Erich Renhart  0000-0002-8457-7960 • VESTIGIA – Manuscript Research Centre, University of Graz, Graz, Austria (Email: erich.renhart@uni-graz.at)

Cite this article: Erich Renhart, 'The Oracles in an 11th-Century Armenian Manuscript (Yerevan, Matenadaran, No. 9650)', *Matenadaran: Medieval and Early Modern Armenian Studies (MEMAS)*, 1.1 (June 2024), 59–78

<<https://dx.doi.org/10.1484/J.MEMAS.5.142262>>

DOI: 10.1484/J.MEMAS.5.142262

This is an open access article made available under a [CC BY-NC 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).
© 2024, Brepols Publishers n.v. Published by Brepols Publishers.

Manuscripts in Yerevan: M9650, which contains a series of oracles¹ (hereafter **M**, see Outtier 1993, 181–184). Having worked over years on the Graz palimpsest (Graz, University Library, ms. 2058/2, hereafter **G**, see Renhart 2015 and 2022) with similar oracles, I am now considering **M** for comparison. So far, these two manuscripts are the only ones known worldwide to contain oracles along with the Gospel of John in Armenian. Whereas the Graz palimpsest oracles were published some years ago (Renhart 2015, 115–143), those from **M** remain unpublished. The present article offers a first reading of those curious oracle sayings and gives some preliminary observations by comparing the two series of Armenian oracles with each other. In some instances we will have a look at a similar Syriac version of oracles taken from a very early manuscript kept in the British Library (London, BL, Add. 17,119, dated 6th to 7th centuries, hereafter **S** (see Childers 2020, 97–154).

2. The Manuscript

M is described in the short catalogue (*Catalogue* 1970, 968) as “Gospel of John”, dating from the 11th century. The cataloguers added that it also contains oracles (բախտագուշակ). The writing material is parchment, the dimensions of the book are 19 x 13,7 cm. Lacking its initial part, the manuscript is acephalous: fol. 1r starts with Jn 7,52, and the book lacks its end. The biblical text breaks off on fol. 60v in the midst of the verse Jn, 19,17 (hence, two and a half chapters are actually missing). The quire structure appears to be disturbed.² There is one folio missing between fol. 3v (Jn 8,28, oracle no. 116) and fol. 4r (Jn 8,41b, oracle no. 120). Much more text is lacking after fol. 22v (Jn 10,22a, oracle no. 157) and fol. 23r (Jn 12,18b, oracle no. 176). Hence we have the remnants of a book in front of us — we will see that it was never completed as a tool for divinatory practices.

Which category can we assign to the book that is biblical on the one hand and oracular on the other? Clearly, **M** does not show any traces that would indicate a liturgical use. A close view on the main text, though incomplete, reveals that we are confronted with an unabridged biblical text, which is enriched *in margine* by oracles and corresponding numbers. Jeff W. Childers coined the genre as “Divining Gospel book”.³

3. The Text Components

As in the Graz palimpsest, the text of **M** is made of three components:

-
- 1 The subject of our article is referred to in literature as “oracles” or “sortes”. We have used these terms synonymously, preferring them to “predictions” or “divinations”, which rather describe the process of fortune telling.
 - 2 A closer codicological investigation to uncover the book’s original quire structure is needed.
 - 3 See his programmatic book title and discussion in Childers 2020, 51f.

(a) The text body being the Gospel of John, (b) the section numbers, and in association with them (c), the oracle sayings. These elements are stereotypic, appearing throughout except on those pages towards the end of the book, which are not completed. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the oracles were added to the text columns after the copying of the biblical text: nearing the end of the book, we see section numbers in the margins but no oracles added (fol. 46r, no. 226; fol. 50r, no. 237; and fol. 50v, no. 238). Some of the oracles seem to have been added by a second hand or at another time, later than the first hand or at least using a quill different from that of the main text. On the last ten folios, we find neither section numbers nor oracles.

The page layout is of some interest, since so far we do not have knowledge of a similar arrangement elsewhere. The Gospel text is written in one column – a neat slanted *erkat'agir* on 15 lines per page.⁴ At the beginning of every textual unit we find a current number *in margine*, of course, these too in majuscule and having the sign *patiw* above and below them (Gippert 2023, 117). The *oracles* corresponding to the numbers are given two places, immediately next to the numbers within a kind of ornate cartouche and/or at the bottom of the page sometimes framed by rows of dots. Thus, the oracles are not embedded in the current of the Gospel text as in **S**.⁵ Furthermore, the design differs from that in **G**, which has no marginal texts or signs whatsoever. The copyist applied the time-honoured *erkat'agir* (uncial/majuscule) for the Gospel text and the upcoming *bolorgir* (minuscule) mixed with *erkat'agir* for the oracles.

4. The Use of the Book

One of the key terms to understand the purpose of the book is թարգմանութիւն (“translation”, but here it rather means “interpretation”). The term appears not in **M** but in **G** and repeatedly in **S** together with the oracles. There is no unanimity of how to understand this term (Childers 2020, 155–175). Anyhow, what we can state is that “the Divining Gospel required someone not only to work its mechanism but also to interpret its results, doing so with the concrete questions of a living soul in view” (Childers 2020, 175).

We conceive the Divining Gospel Book **M** as an interactive tool bringing together the *client* having a specific query or matter in mind and the *diviner* who is able to give spiritual guide and answer by using the *book* with its biblical passages and the oracles. Unfortunately, we do not know the method (e.g. using a wheel with numbers, dices or anything else) by which an appropriate number was selected to apply the oracle in order to give an answer or advice.

⁴ The prick marks are clearly visible.

⁵ For an overview of the layout-schemata see Childers 2020, 60–69.

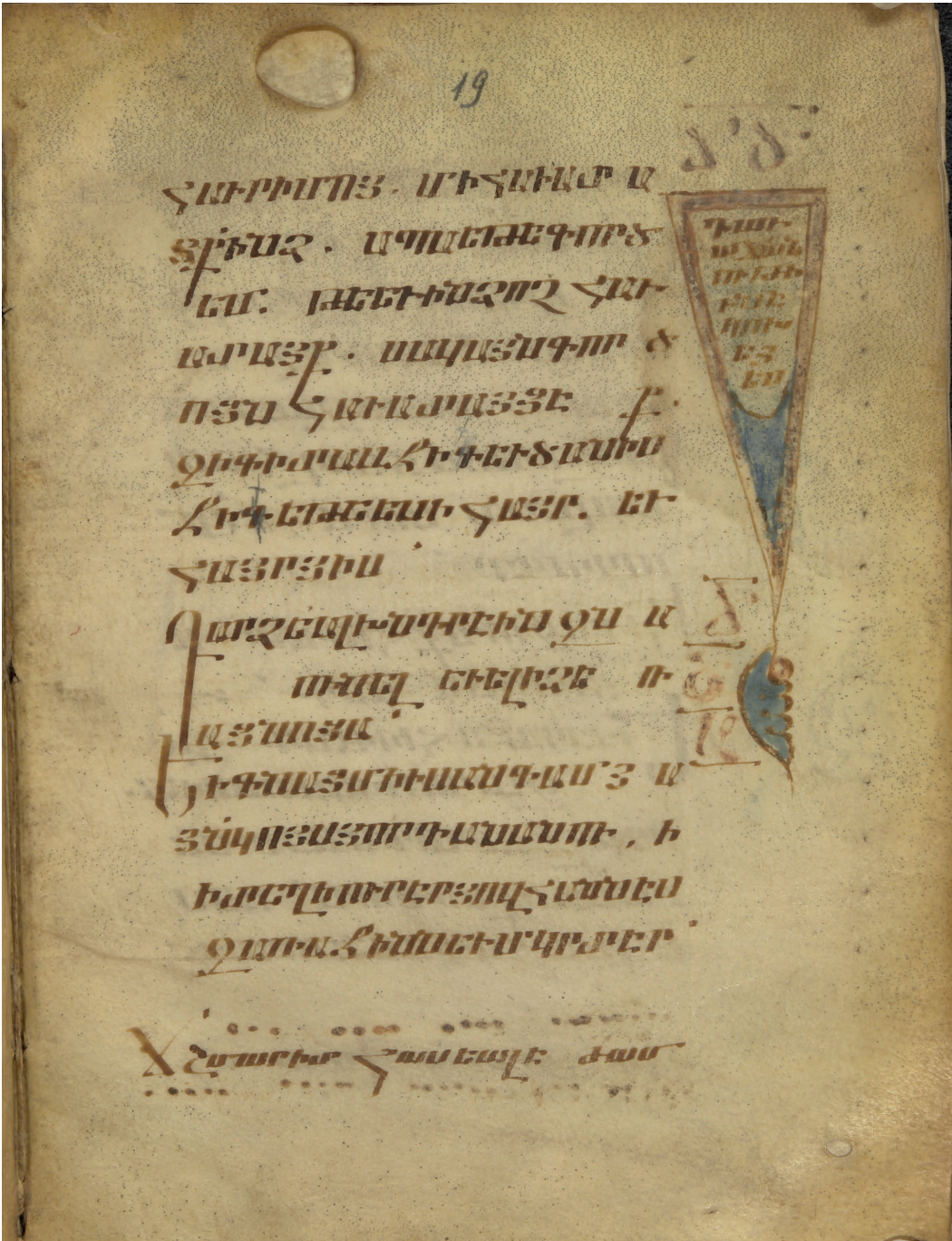


Fig. 1: M, fol. 19r: Jn 10,37–38, sections ՃԾ [150] and ՃԾԱ [151] with the corresponding oracles in the margins and at the bottom of the page. Credit: Department of Digitisation, Matenadaran, Yerevan

5. Edition of the Oracles in M

Our edition gives all necessary data that are to be found in **M**, which would allow a further study of the quite vast⁶ corpus of oracles in connection with the Gospel of John, namely, the Armenian text with an English translation, the section or oracle numbers, and the biblical sections to which the oracles refer to. References are added where the wording of the Syriac witness is close to that of our Armenian oracles.

5.1. A Note on the Translation

The style of our oracles may be considered lapidary. They are very short, some of them comprising only two or three words (in **G** we meet a few oracles with even one single word). The oracles are of utmost vagueness. Having this quality, they are applicable to many different situations and questions. Their shortness, their lack of context, and their imperative character make it difficult to translate these horoscope-like texts.

Some interpreters tried to find allusions in the biblical texts to which those oracles are attached (see Childers 2020, 177–202⁷). Alas, this works only in a few cases, and the allusions do not appear to be always clear and convincing. Additionally, we are facing the methodologic questions that (a) one and the same text is tied to different biblical quotes, (b) the wording of the oracle sometimes changes in the manuscripts, though referring to the same passage of John, and (c) the volume of the biblical context is not in all cases the same due to the differences between the pericopes.

We are inclined to understand թարգմանություն not in the sense of: *the oracle interprets the biblical text*, but rather in the sense of: *the oracle helps interpreting the client's query, and the biblical reference is the authorisation for the whole process*. However, we cannot exclude that some oracles are attached to a certain verse of John because it contains an alluding catch-word or idea. In any case, our translation should not be affected by this.

5.2. Punctuation and Grammatical Tense

We have already noted that it is quite difficult to translate such oracles, since we are missing the context and there is no specificity in wording. Besides that, the oracles were obviously not written by a very literate person. Some notes might explain how we have proceeded with *punctuation* and *grammatical tense*.

⁶ Cf. the numbers of oracles: 279 extant (originally 318) Armenian in **G**; 316 Latin in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 11553; originally 308 Syriac in **S**; 102 readable Armenian in **M**.

⁷ Ch. 7: "Oracles of Biblical Interpretation: Examining the Relationship between Divination, John's Gospel, and the User".

We can observe the following forms of punctuation in **M**:

- no sign at all after the text (e.g. fol. 5v, 8v, 15r, 19r, 45r...),
- a dot *supra lineam* (*mijaket*) (e.g. fol. 2v, 3r, 3v, 7r, 7v, 16v...),
- a double dot (*verjaket*) followed by a horizontal line (e.g. fol. 5r, 6v, 9r, 36v...), which can be understood as part of the decoration as well.

There is much inconsistency in the use of punctuation at the end of the short phrases. Since in many cases it is not clear whether the signs belong to the decoration or not, we have not rendered them in the Armenian text. Also, we have not identified any instance for the use of an accent (*shesht*) or any other sign to indicate exclamation or the like.

As for the grammatical tense, most of the *sortes* in **M** have a verb (except fol. 5v, no. 124, fol. 6r, no. 125, and fol. 173, no. 146). Several of these clauses are imperative. Others are phrased in the present tense, though all these answers seem to point at anything with importance in future. Since divination means giving an answer or advice for the time ahead, we have thought it reasonable to render most of those oracles in the future tense.⁸

Table I: The Oracles⁹

FOLIO NUMBER	ORACLE	TRANSLATION / NOTE	SECTION NUMBER	JOHN
1r	Մի սուտ վկայեր	Do not bear false witness (cf. Childers 2020, 124 ¹⁰)!	ՃԸ 108	7,52
1r	Բարի խաղաղութիւն լինի	There will be good repose.	ՃԹ 109	8,12
1v	Լինի քեզ բարի	It will be good for you (cf. Childers 2020, 124 ¹¹).	ՃԺ 110	8,13–14
1v	Չոր կամիս առնել մի առներ	Do not do what you want to do!	ՃԺԱ 111	8,15–18
2r	Անհնար լինել մի աշխատիր	Do not make efforts, [since] it is impossible!	ՃԺԲ 112	8,19
2v	Ոչ է ժամանակ ձեռնարկելոյ	It is not the time to undertake that. (cf. Childers 2020, 125 ¹²).	ՃԺԳ 113	8,20

8 In the corpus of *sortes* translated from Syriac into English, Childers also renders them frequently in the future tense.

9 The author is very grateful to Gohar Muradyan and Aram Topchyan for discussing the English version of the oracles with him.

10 “Do not give false testimony.” (ad Jn 7,72, no. 117).

11 “This matter will turn out well.” (ad Jn 8,12, no. 118). The Armenian can also be translated: “Something good will happen to you”.

12 “It is not time to begin.” (ad Jn 8,20, no. 122). The Armenian can also be translated: “It is not time to undertake anything”.

FOLIO NUMBER	ORACLE	TRANSLATION / NOTE	SECTION NUMBER	JOHN
2v	Գտանի գոր կամիս	What you want, will be found (cf. Childers 2020, 125 ¹³).	ՃԺԴ 114	8,21
3r	Թող գայդ եւ յայլ ձեռնարկէ	Leave that and undertake something else (cf. Childers 2020, 125 ¹⁴)!	ՃԺԵ 115	8,22–24
3v	Անգոսնիլ ունիս գողշ կաց	You'll be neglected, be careful.	ՃԺԶ 116	8,25–28a
4r	...	Note: <i>Text unreadable</i>	ՃԻ 120	8,41b–42
4r	Մի առներ գիրսդ գայդ	Don't do these things (cf. Childers 2020, 127 ¹⁵)!	ՃԻԱ 121	8,43–44
4v	Ապաշխարեայ եւ լինի գոր կամիս	Repent and what you want will happen!	ՃԻԲ 122	8,45–47
5r	Մի յամառիբ ի սիրոյդ	Do not remain obstinate in your love!	ՃԻԳ 123	8,48–50
5v	Փառք եւ խնդութիւն	Glory and joy.	ՃԻԴ 124	8,51–53
6r	Բարի եւ խաղաղութիւն	Goodness and peace.	ՃԻԵ 125	8,54–55
6v	Իրք եղնն եւ խասեցան	Things have happened and been spoken (cf. Childers 2020, 127 ¹⁶).	ՃԻԶ 126	8,56–57
6v	Ապրիս ի վշտացդ	You will be saved from sorrows (cf. Childers 2020, 127 ¹⁷).	ՃԻԷ 127	8,58–59
7r	Ծածկեայ գործ յայտնին	Clandestine work(s) will be revealed (cf. Childers 2020, 128 ¹⁸).	ՃԻԸ 128	9,1–5
7v	Բարոյ պատահիս այր դու	You, man, will encounter good (cf. Childers 2020, 128 ¹⁹)!	ՃԻԹ 129	9,6–7
8r	...	Note: <i>Text unreadable</i>	ՃԼ 130	9,8–10
8r	Չոր խնդրես գտանես	You will find what you look for (cf. Childers 2020, 128 ²⁰).	ՃԼԱ 131 ²¹	9,11–12
8v	Արայ գոր կամիսդ	Do what you want!	ՃԼԱ 131 [= 132]	9,13–15

13 “This thing will not be found.” (ad Jn 8,21, no. 123).

14 “Forgo this matter and begin another.” (ad Jn 8,22–24, no. 124).

15 “Do not do this matter.” (ad Jn 8, 43–44b, no. 133).

16 “This matter will turn out and it has been spoken.” (ad Jn 8,56–58, no. 138).

17 “Your matter will be saved from danger.” (ad Jn 8,59, no. 139).

18 “The hidden matter will be revealed.” (ad Jn 9,4–7, no. 141).

19 “You will receive favor.” (ad Jn 9,8–9b, no. 142).

20 “This matter that is sought will be found.” (ad Jn 9,9c–12a, no. 143).

21 There is a confusion in the numbering of the oracles: no. 131 figures two times, no. 133 is omitted.

FOLIO NUMBER	ORACLE	TRANSLATION / NOTE	SECTION NUMBER	JOHN
9r	Հաւատաք բարոյ հանդիպիս	Believe, you will meet something good!	ՃԼԲ 132 [= 133]	9,16–17
9v	Մի լինիր անհաստատ	Don't be inconstant (cf. Childers 2020, 128 ²²)!	ՃԼԳ 134	9,18–22
10v	Ի բաց թող մի հակառակիր	Leave hold of, do not oppose!	ՃԼԵ 135	9,23–29
11v	Ճշմարիտ այս լինի	This will become true.	ՃԼԶ 136	9,30–33
12r	Յայտնի այս լինի	This will become evident.	ՃԼԷ 137	9,34–35
12v	Յոր ոչն յուսան լինին	What they don't hope will happen.	ՃԼԸ 138	9,36–38
12v	Աղաւթեայ եւ լինի	Pray and it will be!	ՃԼԹ 139	9,39–41
13r	Երթ զկնի	Follow!	ՃԽ 140	10,1–5
14r	Զգուշութեամբ լինի	It will be with wariness.	ՃԽԱ 141	10,6–10
14v	Մի արհամարհեր զհանդերձեպան	Do not neglect what is coming!	ՃԽԲ 142	10,11–14
15r	Բոլոր անձամբ մերժեցիր յիրացոյ	Wholeheartedly reject those things (cf. Childers 2020, 130 ²³)!	ՃԽԳ 143	10,15–16
15v	Անհնարին ոչ լինի այդ	That will not be impossible (cf. Childers 2020, 130).	ՃԽԴ 144	10,17–21
16v	Ուշիմ կաց յարնել (sic) զիրադ	Be careful when doing those things!	ՃԽԵ 145	10,22–25
17r	Ամրական հաղորդութիւն	A firm communion.	ՃԽԶ 146	10,26–30
17v	Հակառակութիւն յուժանի	Opposition will be resolved.	ՃԽԷ 147	10,31
18r	Պատմեալոյ քեզ հաստատուն է	What is told to you is certain.	ՃԽԸ 148	10,32–33
18v	Ակնկալ լինին իրքոյ քո	The things you awaited will happen.	ՃԽԹ 149	10,34–36
19r	Դաւանանութիւն է կոխեցես	It is deceit, crush it!	ՃԾ 150	10,37–38
19r	Ճշմարիտ հասեալ է ժամ	The true hour has come.	ՃԾԱ 151	10,39–42
19v	Յոր յուսաս լինի	What you hope will happen.	ՃԾԲ 152	11,1–2
20r	Հաւատայ եւ լինի	Believe and it will happen.	ՃԾԳ 153	11,3–7
20v	Մի մերժիր յիրացոյ	Don't deny these matters!	ՃԾԴ 154	11,8–10

²² “Do not be faithless.” (ad Jn 9,12c–16, no. 144).

²³ “With all your soul approach the matter that (comes) from all your heart, and do not doubt it.” (ad Jn 10,17–18b, no. 155).

FOLIO NUMBER	ORACLE	TRANSLATION / NOTE	SECTION NUMBER	JOHN
21r	Յանակնկալութենէ խնդացես	You will rejoice at the unexpectedness.	ՃԾԵ 155	11,11–15
22r	Մի անյոյս լինիր յիրացոյ	Do not be hopeless in these matters.	ՃԾԶ 156	11,16–19
22v	Յոյս բարի եւ շահ քեզ յա[ստուծոյ]	Good hope and gain for you from God!	ՃԾԷ 157	11,20–22a
23r	Մեծ փառք գաւն քեզ	Great glory comes to you.	ՃՀԷ 177	12,20–25a
24r	Դու առնուս փառս մեծ	You will gain great glory (cf. Childers 2020, 135 ²⁴).	ՃՀԸ 178	12,25b–26
24v		Note: <i>No text, only number</i>	ՃՀԹ 179	12,27–29
25r	Վկայեմ շնորի այդ որ տուեալ է քեզ յա[ստուծոյ]	I attest this grace which is given to you by God.	ՃԶ 180	12,30–34
26r	Արայ զիրսոյ	Do those things (cf. Childers 2020, 136 ²⁵)!	ՃԶԱ 181	12,35–37
26v	Ծածկեալ իրք յայտնի	Clandestine things will be manifest.	ՃԶԲ 182	12,38–40
27r	Մարդահաճոյութիւն է իրքոյ	This thing is flattery.	ՃԶԳ 183	12,41–45
27v	Ապրիս ի թշնամեաց	You will be saved from enemies.	ՃԶԴ 184	12,46–47
28r	Լինի գոր կամիս	What you want will happen.	ՃԶԵ 185	12,48–50
28v	Ի բարի ինչ ձեռնարկես	You are undertaking something for good.	ՃԶԶ 186	13,1–4
29r	Յայլ խորհուրդ փոխիս	You are switching to another plan/idea.	ՃԶԷ 187	13,5–7
29v	Մի ասեր գայդ ումեր	Do not tell this to anyone (cf. Childers 2020, 137 ²⁶).	ՃԶԸ 188	13,8–11
30r	Անակնկալ իրք լինի	Something unforeseen will happen.	ՃԶԹ 189	13,12–15
31r	Մի ընդունիր գոր ինչ ասեն քեզ	Do not accept what they tell you.	ՃԶՐ 190	13,16–19
31v	Մի ումեր ասես գայդ բանդ	Do not say this word to anybody.	ՃԶՊ 191	13,20–21

24 “You will not get glory; it turns.” (ad Jn 12,24–26, no. 192).

25 “Do the matter quickly so that you will not lose it.” (ad Jn 12,31–34, no. 194).

26 “Do not tell this (matter) to anyone.” (ad Jn 13,4–7, no. 202).

FOLIO NUMBER	ORACLE	TRANSLATION / NOTE	SECTION NUMBER	JOHN
31v	...	Note: <i>Text unreadable</i>	ՃՂԲ 192	13,22–24
32r	Նենգաւոր է ի բաց կաց ի նմանէ	He is fraudulent, stand apart from him.	ՃՂԳ 193	13,25–29
32v	Պատրաստեայ քեզ յառաջ քան ձեռնարկանէն	Prepare yourself before undertaking something (cf. Childers 2020, 138 ²⁷).	ՃՂԴ 194	13,30
33r	Ի նեղութենէ խնդութեան հասանես	From this trouble you will gain joy (cf. Childers 2020, 138 ²⁸).	ՃՂԵ 195	13,31–32
33r	Իրքս հակառակութիւն ունի	This matter is contradictory.	ՃՂԶ 196	13,33–36r
33v	Պարտ է քեզ բարեկամ լինել	You need to be a friend.	ՃՂԷ 197	13,36v–37
34r	Մի տրտմիր վասն իրացդ	Do not grieve because of these matters.	ՃՂԸ 198	13,38–14,4
34v	Խնդայ ունիս	You will have joy (cf. Childers 2020, 139 ²⁹).	ՃՂԹ 199	14,5–8
35r	Ուղղէ զիրսդ	Amend the matter (cf. Childers 2020, 140 ³⁰)!	Մ 200	14,9–12a
35v	Բարի լինի քեզ յիրացդ	Something good for you will emerge from this matter.	ՄԱ 201	14,12b–14
36r	Մի անհաւանիր այլ հաւատայ	Do not disagree but believe!	ՄԲ 202	14,15–17
36v	Դեռ չէ ժամանակ	The time has not yet come.	ՄԳ 203	14,18–19
36v	Զոր ինչ խնդրես գտանես	You'll find what you are looking for.	ՄԴ 204	14,20–22
37r	Թող զայդ իրսդ եւ յայլ ձեռնարկէ	Abandon that and undertake something else!	ՄԵ 205	14,23–26
37v	Իսաղաղ արայ զիրսդ	Do those things calmly.	ՄԶ 206	14,27–28
38r	Լո[ւր] բարի գայ	Good news is coming (cf. Childers 2020, 140 ³¹). Note: <i>Partly unreadable</i>	ՄԷ 207	14,29–15,2
38v	Արայ գոր կամիսդ	Do what you want!	ՄԸ 208	15,3–5
39r	Բարի են իրքդ	Matters stand well.	ՄԹ 209	15,6–8

27 “Before you begin, prepare.” (ad Jn 13,26–27, no. 209).

28 “From scarcity, glory.” (ad Jn 13,28–29, no. 210).

29 “A gift will come, and joy.” (ad Jn 13,38–14,1, no. 214).

30 “Correct your matter and it will turn out.” (ad Jn 14,5–7, no. 216).

31 “Good news and profit come from a foreign country.” (ad Jn 14,21, no. 221).

FOLIO NUMBER	ORACLE	TRANSLATION / NOTE	SECTION NUMBER	JOHN
39v	Բարի է խորհուրդդ արայ	This idea is good, do it!	ՄԺ 210	15,9–12
40r	Թէ հաւատաս կենդանանաս	If you believe, you will revive.	ՄԺԱ 211	15,13–15
40v	Չոր խնդրես գտանես	You will find what you look for (cf. Childers 2020, 141 ³²).	ՄԺԲ 212	15,16
41r	Հրաժարեայ յիրէդ	Abstain from it!	ՄԺԳ 213	15,17–19
41r	Խորհուրդ մեծապէս լինի	It is a great idea/advice.	ՄԺԴ 214	15,20–21
41v	Հաւատալի են բանդ	The words are credible.	ՄԺԵ 215	15,22
42r	Չիրսդ խնդրեայ	Search for that thing! Note: <i>Number unreadable</i>	[ՄԺԶ] 216	15,23–25
42r	Ի նեղութենէդ խնդութիւն լինի քեզ	From this trouble you will have joy.	ՄԺԷ 217	15,26
42v	Յաւտարութենէ բարի գրոյց գայ	From a foreign land comes good news (cf. Childers 2020, 142 ³³).	ՄԺԸ 218	16,1–5a
43r	Կրկին անգամ փորձեսցի այս	This shall be tried again.	ՄԺԹ 219	16,5b–8
43v	Բանք աւտար հասանին առ քեզ	Alien words reach you.	ՄԻ 220	16,9–16
44v	Երիցս փորձեսցես	You should try three times.	ՄԻԱ 221	16,17–18
44v	Ի տրտմութեն (sic) քեզ խնդութիւն	You will have joy from sorrow.	ՄԻԲ 222	16,19–20
45r	Իրքդ քեզ տուեալ են եւ ոչ այլում	These things are given to you and not to anyone else.	ՄԻԳ 223	16,21
45v	Չոր խնդրես լինի	What you look for will happen.	ՄԻԴ 224	16,22–23a
45v	Ամենեցուն յայտնի լինի	It will be manifest for everybody (cf. Childers 2020, 143 ³⁴).	ՄԻԵ 225	16,23b–24
46r		Note: <i>No text, only number</i>	ՄԻԶ 226	16,25
46r	Ճշմարիտ են ասացեալդ	What you said is true (cf. Childers 2020, 143 ³⁵).	ՄԻԷ 227	16,26–28
46v	Բաժինք լինի	There will be a share (cf. Childers 2020, 144 ³⁶).	ՄԻԸ 228	16,29–32

32 “What you seek will happen for you.” (ad Jn 15,13–15, no. 229).

33 “From a foreign country comes a good matter.” (ad Jn 16,2b–6, no. 235).

34 “... This matter will be revealed.” (ad Jn 16,23b–25a, no. 242).

35 “Speak a true word.” (ad Jn 16,26–28, no. 244).

36 “There is division/doubt in the matter.” (ad Jn 16,29–30, no. 245).

FOLIO NUMBER	ORACLE	TRANSLATION / NOTE	SECTION NUMBER	JOHN
47r	Բարի խորհրդակից ունիս արայ	You have a good advisor, do it!	ՄԻԹ 229	16,33
47v	Որում ցանկաս լինի	What you desire will happen (cf. Childers 2020, 144 ³⁷).	ՄԼ 230	17,1–2
47v	Ծահ մեծ գայ քեզ	Great gain comes to you (cf. Childers 2020, 144 ³⁸).	ՄԼԱ 231	17,3–6
48r	Գործը ա[ստուծո]վ լինի	This affair will be accomplished with the help of God (cf. Childers 2020, 145 ³⁹).	ՄԼԲ 232	17,7–8
48v	Հաստատեայ զքեզ ոչ լինի	Make yourself sure, it will not happen (cf. Childers 2020, 145 ⁴⁰)!	ՄԼԳ 233	17,9– 11a
49r	Հանդերձ փառաւք լինի	It will happen with glory.	ՄԼԴ 234	17,11b– 13
49v	Այլ իրք լինի	Something else will happen (cf. Childers 2020, 145 ⁴¹).	ՄԼԵ 235	17,14– 15
49v	Փառք բարձրագոյն գայ քեզ	Greatest glory will come to you (cf. Childers 2020, 146 ⁴²).	ՄԼԶ 236	17,16– 19
50r		Note: <i>No text, only number</i>	ՄԼԷ 237	17,20– 22
50v		Note: <i>No text, only number</i>	ՄԼԸ 238	17,23–...

Index of Words

ակնկալ 149
 աղաւթեմ 139
 ամենայն 225
 ամրական 146
 այդ 121, 144, 188, 191
 այլ 115, 187, 202, 205, 223, 235
 այս 136, 137, 219
 այր 129
 անակնկալ 189
 անակնկալութիւն 155

37 “What you desire will be yours.” (ad Jn 17,1–2, no. 248).

38 “Great profit will come to you.” (ad Jn 17,3, no. 249).

39 “This will come from God.” (ad Jn 17,4–7, no. 250).

40 “It is sure and it will not be settled.” (ad Jn 17,8–10a, no. 251).

41 “Another matter will turn out that is better than it.” (ad Jn 17,13–15, no. 254).

42 “Exalted glory that will come.” (ad Jn 17,15–21a?, no. 255).

անգամ 219
 անգոսնեմ 116
 անհաստատ 134
 անհաւանիմ 202
 անհնար 112
 անհնարին 144
 անձն 143
 անյոյս 156
 աշխատիմ 112
 ապաշխարեմ 122
 ապրիմ 127, 184
 առ 220
 առնեմ 111 (bis), 121, 131, 181, 206, 208, 210, 229
 առնում 178
 ասեմ 188, 190, 191, 227
 աստուած 157, 180, 232
 արհամարհեմ 142
 ատար 220
 ատարութիւն 218
 բաժին 228
 բան 191, 215, 220
 բարեկամ 197
 բարի 109, 110, 125, 129, 132, 186, 201, 207, 209, 210, 218, 229
 բարձր 236
 բաց 135, 193
 բոլոր 143
 գամ 177, 207, 218, 236
 գործ 128, 232
 գտանեմ 114, 131, 204, 212
 դաւանանութիւն 150
 դեռ 203
 դու 129, 148, 149, 157, 177, 178, 180, 190, 194, 197, 201, 217, 220, 222, 223, 231, 236
 եղանիմ 126
 եմ 113, 148, 150, 193, 197, 203, 209, 210, 215, 227
 երթամ 140
 երիցս 221
 զգոյշ կամ 116
 զգուշութիւն 141
 զկնի 140
 զրոյց 218
 ընդունիմ 190
 թե 211
 թշնամի 184
 թողում 115, 135, 205

ծածկեն 128, 182
 ժամ 151
 ժամանակ 113, 203
 ինչ 186, 190, 204
 իր 121, 126, 143, 145, 149, 154, 156, 181, 182, 183, 189, 196, 198, 200, 201, 205, 206,
 209, 213, 216, 223, 235
 լինիմ 109, 110, 112, 122, 134, 136, 137, 138, 139, 141, 144, 149, 152, 153, 156, 185,
 189, 197, 201, 214, 217, 224, 225, 228, 230, 232, 233, 234, 235
 լուծանիմ 147
 լուր 207
 խաղաղ 206
 խաղաղություն 109, 125
 հաղորդություն 146
 խաւսեն 126
 խնդամ 155, 199
 խնդություն 124, 195, 217, 222
 խնդրեն 131, 204, 212, 216, 224
 խորհուրդ 187, 210, 214
 խորհրդակից 229
 կամ 145, 193, 231
 կամիմ 111, 114, 122, 131, 185, 208
 կենդանանամ 211
 կոխեն 150
 կրկին 219
 հակառակություն 147, 196
 հակառակիմ 135
 հանդերձ 234
 հանդերձեալք 142
 հանդիպիմ 132
 հասանեն 151, 195, 220
 հաստատեն 233
 հաստատուն 148
 հաւատալի 215
 հաւատամ 132, 153, 202, 211
 հրաժարեն 213
 ձեռնարկեն 113, 115, 186, 194, 205
 ճշմարիտ 136, 151, 227
 մարդահանճոյություն 183
 մեծ 177, 178, 231
 մեծապէս 214
 մերժեն 143, 154
 մի 108, 111, 112, 121, 123, 134, 135, 142, 154, 156, 188, 190, 191, 198, 202
 յամառեն 123
 յայտնեն 128, 137, 182, 225

յառաջ քան 194
 յառնենմ 145
 յոյս 157
 յուսամ 138, 152
 նեղութիւն 195, 217
 նենգաւոր 193
 նման 193
 շահ 157, 231
 շնորհ 180
 ոչ 113, 138, 144, 223, 233
 որ 111, 114, 122, 131, 132, 138, 152, 180, 185, 190, 204, 208, 212, 224
 ուղղենմ 200
 ունիմ 116, 196, 199, 229
 ուշիմ 145
 որք 188, 191
 պատահիմ 129
 պատմենմ 148
 պատրաստենմ 194
 պարտ 197
 սէր 123
 սուտ 108
 վասն 198
 վիշտ 127
 վկայենմ 108, 180
 տամ 180, 223
 տրտմիմ 198
 տրտմութիւն 222
 ցանկամ 230
 փառք 124, 177, 178, 234, 236
 փոխիմ 187
 փորձենմ 219, 221

6. Preliminary Observations

6.1. Comparison of M and G

M offers a phalanx of 102 oracles that can be compared with those of **G**. Thus, it contributes considerably to the corpus of such odd sayings. We must be aware that there might be some three to four centuries of difference between our two text witnesses, the only ones so far known within the Armenian tradition tied to the text of John.

Methodologically, we cannot give a comprehensive comparison here. What we present is rather a paradigmatic probe. A broad and in-depth study⁴³ of the material is reserved for the book-length edition of **G**, which is not expected to come forth before three or four years. Our presentation picks out (*a*) three single oracles followed by (*b*) a package group of eight consecutive oracles (sigla: Jn = Gospel of John; no. = section/oracle number).

a *Oracles no. 108, 156, and 157*

Table II

Jn 7,52	M , fol. 1r	no. 108	Մի սուտ վկայեր
Jn 7,52	G , fol. 127v	no. 123	Մի սուտ վկայիցես ⁴⁴

Jn 11,16–19	M , fol. 22r	no. 156	Մի անյոյս լինիր յիրացոյ
Jn 11,16–19	G , fol. 242v	no. 177	Մի անյոյս լինիր յիրացոյ

Jn 11,20–22a	M , fol. 22v	no. 157	Յոյս բարի եւ շահ քեզ յաստոււածոյ
Jn 11,20–22	G , fol. 242r	no. 178	Բարի յոյս

No. 108, the very first oracle in **M**, is connected with Jn 7,52. This is just the same connection as we find in **G**, and even the wording of the saying is close to identical (except for the verb, which has an imperative form in the Yerevan text and a subjunctive form in the Graz text). What is obviously different is the section or oracle number. With regard to the initial saying we should state that the number of oracles differ in the two manuscripts, the Graz manuscript offering significantly more oracles than the Yerevan manuscript: up to Jn 7,52 the score is 123 vs 108.

No. 156 of **M** is congruent with the parallel of **G** in wording and with regard to the biblical passage to which it is attached.

The immediately ensuing no. 157, however, shows a twofold variation: the oracle in **M** appears to be considerably extended, and the volume of the biblical text to which it is tied differs slightly from that of **G**.

⁴³ This study will also consider the Syriac and other traditions for comparison in a systematic way.

⁴⁴ Quasi identical with Jn 7,52, no. 117 in **S** (Childers 2020, 124: “Do not give false testimony.”).

Thus, comparing our witnesses, we encounter identity and divergence in immediate context.

b *Oracles no. 177 to 185*

Table III

Jn 12,20–25a	M , fol. 23r	no. 177	Մեծ փառք գան քեզ
Jn 12,20–23	G , fol. 171r	no. 200	Մեծապէս փառք գան քեզ

Jn 12,25b–26	M , fol. 24r	no. 178	Դու առնուս փառս մեծ
Jn 12,24–26	G , fol. 204v	no. 201	Դու առնուս զփառսդ

Jn 12,27–29	M , fol. 24v	no. 179	–
Jn 12,27–30	G , fol. 204r	no. 202	Մեծ փառք լինին

Jn 12,30–34	M , fol. 25r	no. 180	Վկայեմ շնորհ այդ որ տուեալ է քեզ յաստուծոյ
Joh 12,31–34	G , fol. 257v	no. 203	Մեծ փառք լինին

Jn 12,35–37	M , fol. 26r	no. 181	Արայ զիրսդ
Jn 12,35–36a	G , fol. 257r	no. 204	վաղվաղակի արա զիրսդ

Jn 12, 38–40	M , fol. 26v	no. 182	Ծածկեալ իրք
Jn 12,36b-38	G , fol. 168v	no. 205	Ծածկեալ իրք յայտնին

–	–	–	–
Jn 12,39–40	G , fol. 168r	no. 206	Փրկութիւն բարի

Jn 12,41–45	M , fol. 27r	no. 183	Մարդահանդույութիւն է յիրքդ
Jn 12,41–43	G , fol. 221v	no. 207	Մարդահանդույութիւն է յիրսդ

Jn 12,46–47	M , fol. 27v	no. 184	Ապրին ի թշնամեաց
Jn 12,44–47	G , fol. 221r	no. 208	Ապրին իրքդ

Jn 12,48–50	M , fol. 28r	no. 185	Լինի գոր կամիս
Jn 12,48–50	G , fol. 256v	no. 209	Լինին իրքդ քո

This sequence of oracles provides the following insight:

- Whereas the extent of biblical text is identical in both text witnesses (Jn 12,20 to 12,50), the number of oracles attributed is different. Even if we concede that the copyist has not recorded the oracle text for Jn 12,27–29 erroneously (only the number “179” is given), there remains the fact that what we find in **G** no. 206, is totally absent from **M**. Jn 12,38–40 has two oracles in **G** and just one in **M**. This example indicates why the numbers of oracles deviate from each other, the Graz manuscript being more richly endowed with oracles.
- The wording of the oracle texts oscillates from *identical* (nos. 183 and 207) to *slightly modified* (nos. 177 and 200, or nos. 178 and 201) and to *completely different* (nos. 180 and 203).
- Altogether, it is clear that the two manuscripts have a common stratum, despite greater or lesser differences in wording, between the pericopes (the extents of the biblical texts to which the oracles are attached), and between the oracle numbers. Obviously, during the transmission of the corpus of oracles there was some freedom in adding, repeating, or omitting some sayings. And we take it for granted that textual modifications and adaptations had to be carried out according to the requirements of divination in connection with an authoritative, sc. biblical, text.

6.2. A Note on the Relationship between the Armenian and the Syriac Oracles

We added the text of the Syriac oracles to the footnotes when (a) their wording and (b) the biblical reference appeared to be close or comparable. It becomes immediately evident that there is some kind of closeness between the Syriac and the

Armenian witnesses. Again we find identity, close similarity (e.g. no. 108) as well as divergence (e.g. nos. 114 and 144, with contradictory expressions). Though there are deviations in the structure, i.e. in the sequence of numbering, we can still perceive a common stratum behind our corpuses of oracles. This will be the object of further studies.

7. Conclusion and Perspectives

It seems that the book in the given form never came into use. We may derive this conclusion from a number of observations:

- The book as such is a torso. To make it work *in praxi* it would be vital for divining to operate the book with the complete Gospel text and a full series of numbered oracles. Otherwise, choosing the number would already be a game of chance, which would not guarantee results (= answers).
- Apart from the book's fragmentary nature, we can state that it was never completed: oracles are missing on the last ten pages from Jn 17,16–19 onwards.
- The erroneous numbering (numbers are used twice, others are omitted) has not been corrected.
- The book does not show traces of frequent use or textual amendments.

Most probably, the oracles emerged from pre-Christian practices and became enulturated into the new religion by a link to a biblical text. But it was the Christian tradition that through ecclesiastical pressure suppressed and marginalized the practices connected with the use of books considered to be superstitious. **M** is the comparatively late witness to a book genre which was in vogue in antiquity. There are vestiges of divinatory biblical texts extant in the Mediterranean world in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac etc. Albeit lacunary, **M** offers a second substantial corpus of oracles in Armenian, which is most valuable for further scholarly attention.

Future study will deepen the observations made here by a comprehensive comparative analysis of **G**, **M**, and **S**. This will include a closer linguistic analysis as well.

Another target could be the oracles in M₄₀₆₆ (circa 1283) and ms. Jerusalem, Sts. James Monastery no. 2371 (17th century). The oracles featuring there are tied to sections of the Book of Psalms.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Gospel text of John in **M** bears traces of antiquity and might be of importance: the *adultera*-pericope (Jn 7,53–8,11, see fol. 1r) is not yet inserted into the text corpus.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For the Armenian tradition of this pericope, see Herklotz 1927.

References

- Childers, Jeff W. 2020. *Divining Gospel. Oracles of Interpretation in a Syriac Manuscript of John* (Manuscripta biblica 4). Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter.
- Gippert, Jost. 2023. “The Textual Heritage of Caucasian Albanian”. In *Caucasian Albania: An International Handbook*, ed. Jost Gippert and Jasmine Dum-Tragut. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 95–166.
- Herklotz, Franz. 1927. “Zur Textgeschichte von Joh. 7,53–8,11 (Erzählung von der Ehebrecherin) bei den Armeniern”. *Handēs amsōreay* 41 (11–12), 623–642. <https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/305327/edition/280213/content>
- Catalogue*. 1970. *Յոցուկ ձեռագրաց Մաշտոցի անվան Մատենադարանի* [*Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts of the Mashtots Matenadaran*], ed. O. Eganyan, A. Zeytunyan, P. Antabyan, vol. 2. Yerevan: Publishing House of the Armenian Academy of Sciences. <https://www.matenadaran.am/ftp/Hamarot/Dzeragrats-1.pdf>
- Outtier, Bernard. 1993. “Réponses oraculaires dans des manuscrits bibliques caucasiens”. In *Armenia and the Bible. Papers Presented to the International Symposium Held at Heidelberg (16–19 July, 1990)*, 181–184. Atlanta: Scholars.
- Renhart, Erich. 2015. *Ein spätantikes Los-Buch. Die Handschrift 2058/2 der Universitätsbibliothek Graz – ein armenisches Palimpsest*. Graz: Unipress. <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/obvugroa/download/pdf/8142551?originalFilename=true>
- . 2022. “Review of Childers 2020”. *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 117 (4–5), 377–380. <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/olzg-2022-0114/html>
- . 2022. “The Sinaitic Palimpsest of Graz University Library (Ms. 2058/2)”. *Digital Kartvelology* 1, 50–62. <https://adh.ge/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/kartvelologia-2022.pdf>