Matenadaran
MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ARMENIAN STUDIES

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Newly Discovered Miniature Fragments of the "Etchmiadzin Gospel Group"*

▼ **ABSTRACT** The study of fragments attached to later manuscripts often brings to light the early stage of Armenian miniature art and creates a basis for new research. Of the over 11,000 Armenian manuscripts kept in the Matenadaran, more than 2,200 contain older fragments used as guard-leaves, of which around 300 are illuminated. Most miniatures are marginal, but there are also fragments containing early examples of Canon Tables and headpieces, as well as portraits of the Evangelists, saints, and military commanders. Rare examples of scenes from the Life of Christ have also been found.

No comprehensive study concerning the reuse of Armenian manuscript fragments as guard-leaves has been carried out. This paper discusses the fragments attached to mss. M5027, M9310, M49, and M2818. It will raise new questions and offer new insights into the history of Armenian miniature art.

My goal is to identify, through a comparative analysis, the probable place and time of the creation of these various fragments and form a better idea of the early stage of the development of Armenian miniature art (9ᵗʰ–11ᵗʰ centuries).

▼ **KEYWORDS** Etchmiadzin Gospel, Queen Mlk'ē Gospel, Lazaryan Gospel, Matenadaran, Mekhitarist Congregation, Siwnik', manuscript fragments, Canon Tables.

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1. Introduction

This paper will examine several fragments attached to mss. M5027, M9310, M49, and M2818. These guard-leaves are compared with similar examples on which we have more detailed information. Though the small number of the surviving early manuscripts does not allow a comprehensive study, it is possible to conjecture, on the basis of better known examples, when and where these fragments were written and illustrated. The task to identify the scribes and painters of the fragments is more difficult.

The study was aided by the Codex Etchmiadzin (M2374, dated 989), a manuscript which bears remarkable resemblance to the fragments we examine, as well as several early manuscripts that resemble the aforementioned codex in style. They will henceforth be referred to as the "Etchmiadzin Gospel group".

It is impossible to make any judgement on the earliest stage of Armenian miniature art, for no manuscripts created in the first centuries after the invention of the Armenian alphabet in the early 400s have survived. The first examples are from either the late 6th or early 7th century (Der-Nersessian 1973b, 527). These are fragments attached to the Codex Etchmiadzin, whereas the first illuminated manuscript whose exact year of creation is known is the Lazaryan Gospel (M6200, dated 887).

2. Early Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts (9th–12th Centuries)

Having looked through the manuscript catalogues of the Matenadaran, the Mekhitarist congregations of Venice and Vienna, Sts. James Cathedral in Jerusalem, as well as those of Bzommar, Antelias, and New Julfa, which possess smaller collections, we can say that the number of Armenian manuscripts from the 9th–12th centuries surpasses 200, 50 of which, however, are not illuminated. Bearing in mind that this is not an accurate picture, we may note that the majority of these manuscripts are from the 12th century. Merely 4 of them (of which only 2 have miniatures) date from the 9th century. There are 10 illuminated manuscripts from the 10th century and a comparatively large number, 18, from the 11th century. As to the size of the codices, the largest ones are those from the 11th century, with an average of 39×30 cm, while the manuscripts from the 10th century are on average 32×24 cm. In later centuries, the codices diminish in size.[1]

The era of Arab rule (8th–9th centuries) had a negative impact on Armenian manuscript art, and the number of manuscripts from this epoch is rather small. In all likelihood, most fragments that are attached to later codices and do not have an exact date belong to this period. An excellent example is the Gospel of Queen Mlkʿē (Venice, ms. 1144/86, see Sargisean 1914, 374–392), possibly dated to 862, which seems to be a product of the royal school of manuscript copying and was created

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1 Arpine Simonyan, a researcher at the Matenadaran, has measured the size of the early manuscripts and catalogued the results.

according to the tastes of the kings and nobles of the time (Der-Nersessian 1947, 269). After Gagik I Artsruni had become king of the Armenian region of Vaspurakan in 908, he or his wife Mlk'ē gave this Gospel as a gift to the Holy Cross monastery of Varag. As long as it was kept there (until the beginning of the 13th century), it may have served as an exemplar for various other Gospel illuminations.

We can supplement the scant information regarding the early stage of Armenian miniature art with the help of the fragments that were reused as guard-leaves.[2] Among those depicting the Life of Christ, there are instances of miniatures being cut out from earlier manuscripts and attached to the covers of later ones. There is also one such manuscript where the Crucifixion is painted directly onto the cover.

Long ago, Alexander Svirin noted that most of the fragments used as guard-leaves belong to older manuscripts – not only Armenian, but also Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, and Slavonic ones (Svirin 1939, 14).[3] According to Astghik Gevorgyan (1998, 65–70), only a few of those fragments kept in the Matenadaran are illuminated[4] (barely over 10, all of which are pieces of 10th or 11th century manuscripts attached to later ones from the 13th–17th centuries). In her book dedicated to Armenian miniature art of the 11th century, Tatiana Izmaylova mentions three manuscripts from the Matenadaran that contain older fragments as guard-leaves, M10147, M963, and M4435 (Izmaylova 1979, 208–214).

Thus, the known specimens of the 9th–10th centuries are supplemented with guard-leaves that shed light on Armenian miniature art of that time (as well as of later centuries, which is another matter). The picture will be more complete if we add the more than 2,000 separate fragments to the guard-leaves. It is natural to suppose that the school of miniature painting, which created the Codex Etchmiadzin, must have produced other similar examples. Undoubtedly, already in the 9th–10th centuries, a cultural tradition had been established in Armenia, on the basis of which the Codex Etchmiadzin and other related manuscripts were created.

3. The "Etchmiadzin Gospel Group"

Two specimens display the most similarity to the Codex Etchmiadzin: M9430, two folios registered as a separate manuscript, and the guard-leaves of M5027 (Fig. 1a–d[5]), which bear a striking resemblance not only to the Codex Etchmiadzin but also to the Gospel of Queen Mlk'ē. Other examples that have features in common with the former are some newly discovered fragments attached to mss. M49 (Fig. 3a–b),

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2 I am grateful to the late Dr. Gēorg Tēr-Vardanean, at whose suggestion I started this study of the illuminated fragments of the Matenadaran.

3 See also Chétanian 2008, 69–187, Kisileva 1980, 3, 44–109, Vardazaryan 2012, 141–143, and Poghosyan 2015, 211–217.

4 For a study on specific illuminated fragments, namely those attached to M8287, see Izmaylova and Gevorgyan 1973, 256–262.

5 All the fragments, except those attached to M5027, are paginated separately from the manuscripts themselves and numbered Ա, Բ, Գ etc. In our numbering, Ա=1, Բ=2, Գ=3 and so on.

M2818 (Fig. 4a–d), and M9310 (Fig. 2a–c) as guard-leaves. The last of them also shows interesting parallels with ms. J2555, which has acquired the name "Second Codex Etchmiadzin" (Narkiss 1980, 30–32).

For a comparative study, I have chosen these recently uncovered fragments and the known early manuscripts, taking into consideration their textual, stylistic, and iconographic aspects. For example, the Canon Table on one of the fragments attached to M5027 has been compared to the Canon Tables of the Codex Etchmiadzin and M9430.

There are other 10th-century manuscripts that have similarities with the Codex Etchmiadzin in style and iconography, providing one a sense of the style of lesser-known scriptoria. A perfect example is the Tʻargmanchʻatsʻ (Translators') Gospel kept in Baltimore (ms. Walters 537, dated 966, see Der-Nersessian 1973a, 1–5) and W697 kept in Vienna (probably 10th century). However, the Canon Tables in the last two manuscripts have lost certain architectural features and become more decorative.

As for J2555, though it has similarities with the Codex Etchmiadzin, there are also striking differences between the two manuscripts. J2562 (Four Gospels, 10th or 11th century) too should be classified as related to this group. It contains four Canon Tables, a tempietto, and portraits of the Evangelists.

Considering the great distances between scriptoria, it is an impossible task to restore the complete picture of Armenian miniature art in the 10th–11th centuries (Izmaylova 1979, 18). However, a detailed comparative study of the available examples and fragments will allow us to form a better idea of this early period of manuscript illumination.

The fragments that have come down to us stand witness to the wanton destruction of Armenian cultural heritage by various invaders. For example, Stepʻannos Ōrbelean (1250–1303) writes that in 1170, during the capture of Baghaberd by the Seljuks, many items of church property from the Tatʻev and other monasteries, gold and silver objects, crosses etc. together with 10,000 manuscripts were "taken captive and dispersed over the earth" (Stepʻannos Ōrbelean 1910, 335–336). We can assume that much of the loot was destroyed, and perhaps some of the fragments in question had been part of those manuscripts.

4. Description and Comparative Analysis of the Manuscript Fragments

4.1. The Guard-Leaves of M5027

M5027 was probably copied in Vaspurakan in 1590 by the scribes Ohanēs Sretsʻi, Yovhannēs, and Mkhitʻar (?). The recipient is Yakob Kronawor. Two fragments of one folio with illustrations on both sides are sewn to this codex as guard-leaves, one to the front and one to the back (Fig. 1a–d). Two Canon Tables are depicted on them, cut off at the bottom, with the remainder (the lower part of the pillars with the bases) sewn to the back of the codex. Both Canon Tables are two-arched, each consisting

of three five-row semi-arches. The arches are painted with narrow red and yellow stripes, with a wider green space between them on 1v adorned with yellow geometric and vegetal patterns.

Two-arched Canon Tables are common in early manuscripts – such an image can be seen not only in the Codex Etchmiadzin but also in the Lazaryan Gospel. In the fragment of M5027, there is a bird on top of each arch. The upper edge of the folio together with a part of the birds' necks (and heads in the case of 1r) is cut off, and there are vegetal motifs between the birds and on their sides. On 1v, a bird can also be seen sitting on a stylised branch to the left of the two arches (the right side of the arches together with the branch and the bird is cut off). Each pair of lunettes of the Canon Tables is of the same reddish purple hue. The capitals, with volutes and abaci, are also identical to each other. The pillars of the Canon Tables seem to be of marble, and they stand on three-stepped bases (Fig. 1b and d). The arches of the first Canon Table (1r) are very similar in decoration to those of Canon X in the Codex Etchmiadzin (see Table I). The arches of the second one (1v) have similarities with the tempietto of the same codex in the floral pattern and the headpiece. According to Astghik Gevorgyan (who refers to the opinion of Artashes Matevosyan), both the penmanship and the ink colour of the Eusebian Canons on these fragments suggest the hand of Yovhannēs, the scribe of the Codex Etchmiadzin (Gevorgyan 1998, 67). However, a comparative analysis, particularly an in depth comparison of the letter shapes, which I conducted in collaboration with the late Gēorg Tēr-Vardanean, showed that the scribes are different. The study on the paints I intend to carry out next will provide a more comprehensive answer to this question.

The fragments in question also have obvious similarities to M9430, which actually consists of two folios (with three Canon Tables and a tempietto on them) but is registered as a separate manuscript (see Table I). However, the fragments of M5027 and M9430 cannot belong to one manuscript, for they contain the same Eusebian Canons. The tempietto of M9430 resembles that of the Codex Etchmiadzin in both decoration and style. On its arch, a bluish floral motif can be seen. It also appears, in dark green, on the arches of the verso. The birds, too, are coloured dark green on both pages. Similar birds can be seen on the fragments attached to M5027. The fragments of M9430 and M5027 have almost identical bird illustrations and vegetal designs. The outlines of the capitals on the fragments of M9430 are thicker, and the hand of the painter more confident. It is difficult to determine whether they are a product of the same school or painted by the same person, but one thing is clear: both belong to the so-called "Etchmiadzin Gospel group".

The marble pillars on the guard-leaf of M5027, together with their capitals and bases, are identical to those of the Codex Etchmiadzin and M9430. The two-arched form of the Canon Tables is the same too, though here one pair is coloured red and the other purple, which reminds us of the lunettes of the Canon Tables in the Queen Mlkʿē Gospel (see Table I).

The bird illustrations also share a few similarities in style. Here, too, the arches are decorated with vegetal and geometric patterns, although they do not repeat the decoration of the arches in M9430 and the Codex Etchmiadzin. The decoration of the

first Canon Table of M5027 is identical to that of the Codex Etchmiadzin, but here the painter's hand feels less confident.

These fragments share similarities not only with the Codex Etchmiadzin but also with the Gospel of Queen Mlk'ē – especially one element in the arches of the fragment of M5027, the colourful lunettes, one filled with red and the other, most likely, purple, though we cannot say exactly, since the colours are extremely faded and, at spots, wiped off. The similar lunettes in the Gospel of Queen Mlk'ē are coloured orange.

When comparing these images, one cannot overlook the inscription on the colourful arches. It is obvious that in the Gospel of Queen Mlk'ē, these letters (the canon number etc.) were added after the colouring of the lunette, while on our fragment, as it seems, they were written before that, because the background of the letters is not coloured. There are also similarities in the floral patterns of the same Canon.

There is a piece of information that may help us identify the place where this fragment was created. According to Levon Chookaszian, the commissioners of the Queen Mlk'ē Gospel were the Bagratunis, since Gagik I Artsruni was married to the daughter of Smbat Bagratuni's brother Shapuh. It means that the codex, a product of the Ani school, could have been taken to Vaspurakan from Bagratuni lands (Chookaszian 1994–1995, 310–313). Thus, there is a possibility (unsupported by sufficient evidence) that the complete manuscript of the fragment we examine was created in Ani, and the lunettes were painted according to the example of the Queen Mlk'ē Gospel or the tradition of that region. We can further suppose that the manuscript of our fragment was created before the Codex Etchmiadzin, in the 9th century, on the basis of an earlier manuscript, which could have served as an archetype for the Codex Etchmiadzin as well.

4.2. The Guard-Leaves of M9310

Two illuminated folios (plus two folios of text) are attached to M9310 as guard-leaves (Fig. 2a–d); the lower right corners of the illuminated folios are torn. The codex was created in 1579 in the village Yghuērts of the historical Siwnik' region. It was copied and illuminated by the priest Israyēl and his student Isayi Trapizonts'i for the monk Yovhannēs.

The guard-leaves are attached to the front of the manuscript. The arch of the first Canon Table (1r) consists of six wide and narrow stripes in red, yellow, blue, and green. There is an equal-armed cross (heavily damaged) on the lunette with a two-layered circle around it. Below the circle, on both sides, there are two small arches with an equal-armed cross in each, outlined in black and filled in with red. Each of the small arches is formed of three stripes, red, yellow, and black. The black ones consist of small triangles. There is a light ochre waving line on the dark green wide semi-circle of the arch. This line against the green background has assumed a more complicated design on the lunette, to the left and right of the central cross. The same waving pattern can also be seen on the pillars. Their dark blue-green hue is faded but on the first two pillars light ochre and red waving lines are clearly seen. The pillars,

which are neither too long nor too narrow, rest on stepped bases. The bottom steps are cut off. The capitals of the columns, with volutes and abaci, are drawn with red lines and contain dotted patterns. The yellow of their interiors is faded in parts.

Above the arch of the first Canon Table (Canons I and II), there are two roosters and a stylised vegetal motif in their midst, all badly damaged. The roosters are blue and green, with partially red necks. Green is the dominant colour of this Canon Table.

Altogether the Canon Tables are four in number (1r, 1v, 2r, 2v: Canons I–II, III–IV, V, VI–VII), followed by the first page of the Gospel of John, with a headpiece on it (3r). On the verso of the page, a medium-sized red circle is painted, with the letter Բ (2) in it. The Canon Tables are followed by the Gospel of John, which means that the fragments were sewn together randomly, and preference was given to the ones which were better preserved. The next folio also contains a part of the Gospel of John (Dr–v). All the edges of both illuminated folios and the lower margin of folios 3–4 (together with a part of the text) are cut off.

The Canon Tables on 1v and 2r are similar to each other in decoration. Their pillars, coloured dark blue and with zigzagging yellow lines on them, are narrower than those of 1r. What catches the eye most on these Canon Tables is the repeating butterfly-shaped turquoise vegetal pattern along the arch. In the centre of the lunettes of the Canon Tables, there is a cross in yellow, with its bottom arm longer than the others. Below the cross, on the left and right, there are two small arches with gratings inside each. On 1v, two roosters are sitting on the arch, and on Br, two peacocks. The design of the Canon Table on 2v, with two peacocks sitting atop arches ornamented with waving and zigzagging lines, is quite similar to the previous ones. One distinction is the dominant light green coloration of the arch, lunette, and pillars.

On the left side of the upper margin of the opening page of the Gospel of John, there is a letter inside a brown circle, smaller than the one on the verso of the page. Such circles appear frequently in 10th–11th century manuscripts. One's attention is drawn to the decoration of the headpiece on the upper right side of the page: a rectangle in a blue frame and colored green. Inside it, there are two horseshoe-shaped small arches framed in red and colored yellow. This is one of the oldest examples of title pages known to us. The title is written in the left arch: "ԱՒԵՏա(sic!)ՐԱՆ ԸՍՏ ՑՈՎՀԱՆՆՈՒ" [Gospel according to John], and the right one contains a red cross. The symbol of the Evangelist is missing.

An example of a decorated headpiece, in the shape of a longish rectangle, can be seen in the Vehapʻaṙ Gospel (MS M10780, probably, 10th–11th centuries). It has floral patterns on both sides, against a simple blue background. Interestingly, decorated headpieces mainly appear starting from the second half of the 11th century. These are longish rectangles, with floral or animal motifs, a cross on the top, and the symbol of the Evangelist as the initial letter.

An interesting form of cross appears inside the arches of two fragments attached to M9310. The bottom arm is longer than the others, and there are triangular protrusions on the edges of the arms. Other examples that have a similar design are the equal-armed crosses on the small arches of the first Canon Table and the cross on the headpiece of the Gospel of John. It is worth noting that the crosses of this

manuscript differ from those of the Codex Etchmiadzin and J2555, but there is an interesting similarity between the pillar designs of M9310 and J2555 (as well as of W697; see Table I).

The crosses on the fragments of M9310 recall similar ones in Coptic manuscripts. This shape can also be seen in manuscripts No 586 and 516 of the Morgan Library, New York, but with more stylised cross-arms (Leroy 1974, 2–3).

The waving line on the arch of the first Canon Table also appears, for instance, in the Greek manuscript no. 847 kept in the Nationalbibliothek of Vienna, dated to the 6th century and attached to a contemporary Latin manuscript (see Table I). The same line can also be seen on the pillars of this manuscript. Besides that, there are zigzag patterns on different parts of the pillars (Nordenfalk 1938, 57, Taf. 40-46), which occur in our first Canon Table as well. This design also appears on the pillars of the fifth Canon Table of the Rabbula Gospels (Nordenfalk 1938, 139).

Another feature that stands out in our fragments is the stylised butterfly-shaped vegetal pattern on the arches of two Canon Tables (1v and 2r). It can be found both in Armenian and Latin manuscripts. The motifs on the arch of the tempietto of W697 (Buschhausen 1981, Fol. 6r) bear some resemblance to our pattern (see Table I). It also appears in the Canon Tables of W697, along with a zigzag motif in several spots. This design can also be seen on the arch of the Latin manuscript no. 256 (8th century) kept in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Zimmermann 1916, Pl. 11–12, see Table I).

On the basis of these observations, we can suppose that the "mother" manuscript of the fragments attached to M9310 was copied in the 9th century. Its painter was familiar with either Greek examples or Armenian manuscripts reflecting the Greek tradition.

Also, as pointed out above, there are some similarities between our fragments and the "Second Codex Etchmiadzin" kept in Jerusalem (J2555), the Canon Tables and some illustrations of which, according to Mesrop Tēr-Movsisean, follow the Greek tradition – this is attested to both by the style of the pillars of the Canon Tables and by the Greek inscription on one of the miniatures (Tēr-Movsisean 1908, 105).

As to the provenance of our fragments, let us turn now to the codex to which the fragments are attached. It has been mentioned above that M9310 was copied in Yghuērts. Stepʻannos Ōrbelean writes: "Being aware of the vanity of this transitory life, he set up a memorial to himself … and gifted two villages to [the church of] Saint Grigor, which the great Pʻilippē had built in the district of Haband, namely, Aghuerts and Yubakankhoṛ. He himself wrote an ineradicable and immortal memorial in the year 392 of the Armenian Era [A.D. 943]…" (Stepʻannos Ōrbelean 2015, 141).

Thus, we learn that Prince Pʻilippē, son of Vasak, gifted those two villages to Saint Grigor, the main church of the Monastery of Tatʻev. Taking into consideration the stylistic similarities between the fragments of M9310 and the Codex Etchmiadzin, we should not exclude the possibility that the former were copied and illuminated in one of the scriptoria of Siwnikʻ, and the latter was an archetype for the copyist/painter. Later on, the fragments were sewn to a manuscript created in the same area. This conjecture is further supported by the fact that the district of Bgheno, where the

Codex Etchmiadzin was copied, is believed to have been situated on the right bank of the river Vorotan where the Monastery of Tatev is (which later sources, too, mention either in the district of Haband or Tsghuk). Another piece of evidence is that Stepʿanos Ōrbelean refers to a Bgheno fortress and a Bghean village in the district of Tsghuk, as well as a village called Boghyan in the Haband district (Barkhudaryan 1958, 46).

4.3. The Guard-Leaves of M49

There are two more manuscripts that contain older fragments belonging to the "Etchmiadzin Gospel group". One of them is M49 (works by Dionysius the Areopagite). It is copied in Gladzor (?) and dated 1282 (Fig. 3a–b).

One of the two fragments of the same folio is attached to the front, and the other, to the back of this codex, with a Canon Table on each side. The upper halves of the arches and pillars are on the first fragment, and the lower halves, on the second (1r–2v, 1v–2r). Both Canon Tables are two-arched and consist of 6–7 rows. The colours of the first one are badly faded. There is a floral motif between the arches, and the pillars stand on three-layered bases, two of the layers being red, and the middle one uncoloured. The pillars, decorated with red and green waving patterns, are of medium width and have Corinthian-like capitals with quasi-Ionic volutes and abaci on the top. It is evident that the other Canon Table, though poorly preserved, does not differ much from the first one. Overall, the illustrations are not sufficiently clear. The colours, amongst which red is the most frequently used, are unmixed. There are red wave-like patterns along the arches. The impressive size of the fragments suggests that they were cut out from a large manuscript.

The codex to which the fragments are attached was proofread by Esayi Nchʿetsʿi, the head of the University of Gladzor, and we cannot rule out that it might have been copied in Gladzor. Furthermore, the similarities of the guard-leaves with the Codex Etchmiadzin might indicate that the fragments, too, were created in a scriptorium in Siwnikʿ, according to established traditions.

4.4. The Guard-Leaves of M2818

In this group, there is a manuscript of special interest, M2818, which contains remarkable fragments (3r–4v) attached to it as guard-leaves (Fig. 4a–d). It is difficult to find out when and where these fragments were copied and illustrated, for there is no other example of this kind known to us. M2818 is a Gospel from the 16th century. The fragments attached to it represent four beautifully drawn Canon Tables that are outstanding for the intricacy of their vegetal and, particularly, geometric motifs and patterns. Unfortunately, the bottoms of the Canon Tables are cut off, and the lower parts of the pillars together with the bases are missing.

A splendid Canon Table is painted on the recto of the first old guard-leaf (3r, Canons VII–VIII). The Canon Table has two arches, each consisting of three semi-circular layers which stand out for their fascinating geometric decoration. The upper

one is formed of colourful triangular patterns against a dark blue background, the second one, of a sequence of light brown triangles, and the third one, of five green and brown small semi-circles with a pair of two smaller arches inside them. Between the small arches there is a repeating red three-leafed motif, perhaps a lily flower.

The triangle patterns which frequently occur in the Christian tradition have taken interesting forms in Armenian manuscripts. For comparison with this Canon Table, we can take the Annunciation in M4818, where the Holy Virgin sits on a stepped throne, the several rows of which are filled with triangles. The frame surrounding this scene is also filled with triangular motifs.

On the arches of our Canon Table, two roosters sit in the middle, opposite each other, and a crane (?) stands on each projecting end of the red decorated architrave on the top of the pillars (the right end together with body of the bird is cut off). The capitals have a rectangular shape, and the pillars consist of two-coloured (brown and green, green and red, dark and light brown, brown and green, brown and red) triangles. The architrave ends, as it seems, with a snake's head. A similar image can also be seen in M3784. It is worth noting that Asatur Mnats'akanyan links such images of snake-heads to totemic ideas, regarding the snake as a guardian animal (Mnats'akanyan 1955, 390).

The second Canon Table on the verso of the folio (3v) is interesting for its specific design, the symbolism of which will be discussed below. The upper part of the fragment represents seven big round red frames filled with lighter red (the first one on the left is almost wholly cut off together with the margin). A two-sided motif, with three red petals on both sides (one on the top, within a yellow arch, and the other under the red frame), is drawn across the upper part of the red frame. The big arches of the Canon Tables consist of two wide layers, brown and ochre. The capitals are adorned on both sides with acanthus-like leaves, and there are interweaving lines of different colours on the pillars.

According to Asatur Mnats'akanyan, the yellow architrave stretched across the arches generally signifies soil. As for the red round figures above the arches, he rightly considers these to be pomegranates that are in the process of sprouting. This whole scene, in his view, symbolizes spring (Mnats'akanyan 1955, 119).

The symbolism of the pomegranate can also be seen in Armenian commentaries on Canon Tables, where, however, the main symbol is the pomegranate tree instead of the fruit. The trees are depicted with three branches sprouted in one bundle: the Old Testament and the Ark of Moses pointing to the New Testament and enclosing the sweetness of the fruit inside the bitter peel (see Ghazaryan 2004, 260). Perhaps the pomegranate replaced the Tree of Life. After entering the Christian tradition from folkloric beliefs, it was depicted mainly in Canon Tables.

On the third fragment (4r), we see six birds above the Canon Table, and beneath them, a row of pomegranates (altogether 14). Between each pair, there is a small cross within an arched frame, resembling a *khach'k'ar* (cross-stone). The left and right pillars of the Canon Table are decorated with dark brown lily-like figures (the decoration of the central pillar is faded and unclear). In the centre of the arches, we see the blue "mother" lily, turned upside down and with a triangular shape. This,

to my ken, is a unique image. The symbolism of the lily also appears in Armenian commentaries on Canon Tables.

For instance, Stepʻannos Siwnetsʻi (8th century) speaks of a blooming lily in the fifth Canon Table – an opening bud surrounded by flowering branches (see Ghazaryan 2004, 39). According to the commentaries on Canon Tables, the lily symbolizes the ancestors of Christ, but in the Christian tradition, it is also a symbol of the innocence and purity of the Virgin Mary.

The verso of the second fragment is no less special than the recto. On the top of the Canon Table, we see a row of semi-circular or crescent-like red figures, with small blue spheres inside red-yellow circles in the middle and on the edges of them. It is interesting that a smaller and differently coloured version of this pattern appears on the tempietto of the Codex Etchmiadzin, as well as on the arch of Canon I of W697 and on the west wall of the Cathedral of Talin (the patterns of the last two are more like acanthus leaves). Another parallel can be found on folio 10r of ms. LOB5111 (7th century), kept in the British Museum (see Nordenfalk 1938, Taf. 1).

One layer of the arches is decorated with original dark and light blue rectangular patterns. The capitals, too, are rectangular and stepped, and the pillars are decorated with two interweaving thick lines (green and black), resembling vine stems.

Though the margins and, as noted above, the lower parts of these folios are cut off, yet the large arches and pillars make us assume that they belonged to a big manuscript (perhaps from the 10th century). It has already been mentioned that these fragments stand out for the unusual decoration of Canon Tables. After penetrating Christian culture from ancient times, the imagery of those fragments found its place in the illumination of the Gospels and took on a new symbolism. However, there is no definitive explanation for those symbols. Over the centuries, they have taken on multifarious meanings, so it is difficult to draw clear conclusions.

As Asatur Mnatsʻakanyan notes (Mnatsʻakanyan 1955, 119), the commissioner of the "mother" manuscript of our fragments possibly tried to express the idea of growth and permanence of his family through the imagery of those Canon Tables.

5. Conclusions

This paper is an attempt at a comparative analysis of miniatures, in particular, Canon Tables preserved in recently discovered fragments and surviving early manuscripts that were copied and illuminated in different scriptoria. I have also tried, when possible, to conjecture as to the place and time of the creation of those illuminated fragments. On the basis of stylistic and iconographic similarities between the newly found fragments and some of the oldest extant manuscripts, I have proposed a conventional family of manuscripts called the "Etchmiadzin Gospel group". Nevertheless, due to a lack of evidence, it has been impossible to identify the painters or scribes of these fragments.

Interestingly, some experts in Canon Tables have not discussed their symbolism, believing that the only purpose of illumination was aesthetic. However, the

decoration of Canon Tables doubtlessly includes symbols that were used for communicating certain ideas. This is corroborated by Armenian commentaries on the Canon Tables that have come down to us. At the same time, the illuminated fragments in question suggest that there is no self-evident interpretation of miniatures, and it always depends on the personal approach of the painter and commissioner of a given manuscript. Accordingly, we could say that in the Armenian tradition certain means to interpret the symbols were developed. Some scholars (Buschhausen 1976, 17–19; Wessel 1978, 928–963) have touched upon this subject but quite superficially. Carl Nordenfalk thought that the purpose of decorated Canon Tables was to endow manuscripts with beauty and solemnity (Nordenfalk 1938, 125). On the contrary, Thomas Mathews and Avedis Sanjian stress the importance of interpreting the symbolism of Canon Tables (Mathews and Sanjian, 166–176).

It has been concluded that the structure and imagery of the Canon Tables in the miniature art of different nations followed a standard pattern that is best preserved in the Codex Etchmiadzin (see Ghazaryan 2004, 34). Armenian scribes and painters were probably familiar with contemporary Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopian (especially the Abba Garima Gospels), and Byzantine examples. Yet they developed a unique Armenian tradition, which is remarkably represented in the Canon Tables discussed in the present paper. The supposed influence on the Armenian miniatures has been exaggerated, but this issue needs further study.

Although it is not known when and where these fragments were illuminated, there is some basis that can help us discern, roughly, the region and time period in which they were created. It is possible that the Canon Tables were painted in Siwnikʻ or Ani, the centre of the Bagratuni Kingdom. There are no surviving illuminated manuscripts from the early period of Ani, but we can find interesting details in the Canon Tables of the Gospel of Haghpat (M6288, dated 1211), particularly on folios 12v, 13r, and 14v. Some specific details of the imagery, such as the pomegranates on the headpieces, the motifs surrounding them, the triangular and acanthus patterns on the architrave, the stepped pillar bases of one of the Canon Tables, suggest that the painter Margarē could have been familiar with the Codex Etchmiadzin or another manuscript belonging to that family.
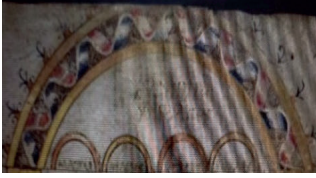
Table I: A Comparison of Miniature Fragments

M5027, Gospel, fr. 1r

M2374, Etchmiadzin Gospel, fr. 5r

M9430, Gospel, fr. 2r
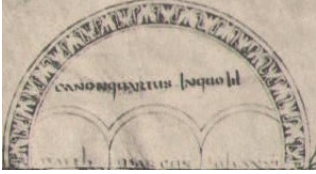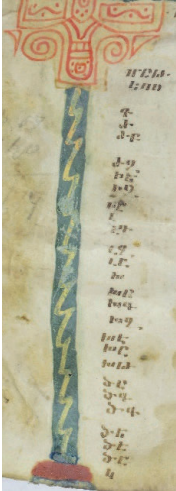
M5027, Gospel, fr. 1v	M5027, fr. detail	V1144/86, Gospel of Queen Mlkē, fr. detail
M9310, fr. detail	No. 847, Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, fr. detail	
M9310, fr. detail	No. 256, Bibliothèque nationale de France, detail	W697, Mekhitarist Congregation of Vienna, fr. detail
M 9310, fr. detail	J2555, Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, fr. detail	W697, Mekhitarist Congregation of Vienna, fr. detail

Fig. 1a–b: M5027, fr. 1v and 268r

Thanks to Hrayr Hawk Khacherian for the photos.

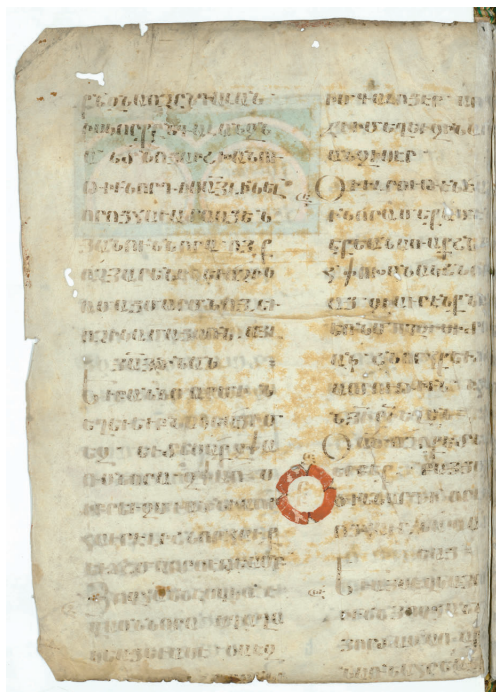Fig. 1c–d: M5027, fr. 1r and 268v

Fig. 2a

Fig. 2b

Fig. 2c

Fig. 2d

Fig. 2e
Fig. 2a-e: M9310, fr. 1r–3v

Fig. 3a-b: M49, fr. 1v–2r

Fig. 4a

Fig. 4b

Fig. 4c

Fig. 4d

Fig. 4a–d: M 2818, fr. 3r–4v

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