Beyond the Page

Royal Imagery in the Queen Keṙan Gospels and the Rhetoric of the Court in Armenian Cilicia

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Art history has largely addressed the connections between art, image, and power.¹ In all religious spheres, the representation of secular rulers is interwoven with sacredness and related to the image of the divine. Byzantine Christianity created a dual concept of earthly and heavenly courts, which was imaged in similar terms.² At the edge of medieval art history, Armenian art has contributed some particularly eloquent paradigms of royal imagery, the best known among them being the 10th-century church of the Holy Cross in Aght'amar, in the Lake Van area in present-day Turkey.³ Another famous example of Armenian art is the family portrait of King Lewon II (r. 1270–1289) with his wife and children in a Gospel book produced in 1272 (Figure. 2.1).⁴ Far from the historic lands of Armenia, Lewon reigned in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, in the heart of the Crusader world. This outstanding painting thus challenges the traditional art-historical geography of the medieval world and its established framework of centres and peripheries. In addition to the exquisite quality of the painting, this composition is particularly interesting for its relevance to broader artistic phenomena of the period – such as group portraits and the interactions between eastern and western iconographies – as well as from a

- 1 For a discussion of royal depictions since Ernst Kantorowicz and André Grabar, see Ildar Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Royal Authority in the Carolingian World* (c.751–877) (Leiden, 2008), pp. 4–8. For recent studies beyond the Middle Ages: Melissa Eppihimer, *Exemplars of Kingship: Art, Tradition, and the Legacy of the Akkadians* (Cambridge, Eng., 2019).
- 2 Henry Maguire, "The Heavenly court," in *Byzantine Court culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire, (Washington, D.C., 1997), pp. 247–58.
- 3 Lynn Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium: Aght'amar and the Visual Construction of Medieval Armenian Rulership* (Aldershot, 2007), and recently: *The Church of the Holy Cross of Alt'amar. Politics, Art, Spirituality in the kingdom of Vaspurakan*, eds. Zaroui Poghosian, and Edda vardanyan (Leiden, 2019).
- 4 Jerusalem, St-James ms 2563, 1272 AD. See the recent overview by: Cristina Maranci, *The Art of Armenia. An Introduction* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 112–14.

growing interest in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and its importance for the history of the Mediterranean and the Crusades.

1 *Ceci n'est pas un portrait*

The Gospel book with the family portrait is part of a cluster of safely dated and localized illuminated manuscripts supplementing the compelling visual evidence from icons attributed to Cyprus or to various workshops active in the Holy Land and Sinai.⁵ The monumental and extremely rich dedicatory miniature, despite the medium size of the codex, allows for various layers of reading, many of which have already been addressed in previous scholarship

- 5 The group of manuscripts has been identified as such by: Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting in the Armenia Kingdom of Cilicia* (Washington, D.C., 1993), pp. 93–125. I have further studied the group and the atelier that produced it: Ioanna Rapti, *Un atelier de cour au royaume arménien de Cilicie : traditions byzantines, innovations gothiques et échos de croisade dans la seconde moitié du XIII^e siècle* (forthcoming). The connections between this specific group and the realm of 'Crusader' art have been discussed only scantily from a rather iconographic and stylistic point of view, seldom taking into account the established dates and context of the Armenian manuscripts but rather focusing mainly on Western-Eastern dynamics at the level of scheme and style: Lucy-Anne Hunt, "A Woman's prayer to St Sergios in Latin Syria: Interpreting a Thirteenth-century icon at Mount Sinai," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 15 (1991), 96–146; Annemarie Weyl-Carr, "Icon Tact. Byzantium and the Art of Cilician Armenia," in *Treasures in Heaven. Armenian Art, Religion and Society*, eds. Thomas F. Mathews, and Roger S. Wieck, (New York, 1994), pp. 96–99, has emphasized the closeness between the manuscripts of this group and painting in the mainland; Anne Derbes and Amy Neff, have pointed out the contemporaneity of the Keřan Gospels and the high altarpiece of San Francesco at Prato in Perugia, explaining this with reference to the spread of Franciscan spirituality and influence: Anne Derbes, and Amy Neff, "Italy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Byzantine Sphere," in *Byzantium. Faith and Power*, ed. Helen Evans, (New Haven, 2004), pp. 449–61, esp. 460–61; Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land, From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005), p. 439, has more generally suggested the permeability of Crusader artists to 'Armenian iconographical ideas', while Jens Wollesen, *Acre or Cyprus? A New Approach to Crusader Painting Around 1300*, (Ars et Scientia Schriften zur Kunstwissenschaft) 5 (Berlin, 2013), p. 87, noted the very close similarities in dress between Cypriot and Cilician images. More recently, Geoffrey Meyer-Fernandez has thoroughly analysed the sartorial similarities of the patrons' garments in terms of form and style, a shared taste explained by the circulation of goods and fashions through maritime trade: Geoffrey Meyer-Fernandez, *Commanditaires et peintres à Chypre sous les Lusignan (1192–1474): images d'un royaume multiculturel* (PhD, Aix-en-Provence, 2019), pp. 252–53 and 457; he has also noted connections between Cilician imagery and painting in Cyprus and the Mediterranean under Latin rule: *ibid.*, pp. 160, 162.

on this painting.⁶ In her major study of manuscript illumination in Cilicia, Sirarpie Der Nersessian discussed the miniature in a section dedicated to portraits, in which she gathered all representations of historical figures in Cilician-Armenian manuscripts.⁷ However, the semantic scope of 'portrait' is much wider than implied in the conventional use of the term to describe likeness of individuals – often authors, rulers, or donors.⁸ The reception of the classical concept of the portrait as a device to convey the presence and memory of the portrayed extended in the sacredness of the likeness in icons; or, alternatively, in what Ernst Kitzinger called the Byzantine 'portrait mode,' which distinguishes the secular from the holy, the contemporary from the saint, and which amounts to the distinction between 'realistic' and 'typological' portraits established by André Grabar.⁹ As we shall see, the painting under discussion challenges such taxonomies of portrayal.¹⁰

- 6 Helen Evans, "Imperial Aspirations: Armenian Cilicia and Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 243–56; *eadem*, "Kings and Power Bases: Sources for Royal Portraits in Armenian Cilicia," in *From Byzantium to Iran. Armenian Studies in Honour of Nina G. Garsoian*, eds. Jean-Pierre Mahé, and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta, 1997), pp. 492–93; Antony Eastmond, "Art and Frontiers between Byzantium and the Caucasus," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art*, ed. Sarah Brooks (New York 2006), pp. 154–69, esp. p. 158, Figure. 195.
- 7 Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, pp. 154–62, esp. 156, Figure. 641. This section gathers as portraits depictions of historical figures – mainly donors and patrons but also authors such as Gregory of Narek and the painter Sargis Picak. This classification is, however, somewhat problematic, as, in spite of the careful observation of the illuminations, it privileges a formalist approach and overlooks their relation to the context of each manuscript.
- 8 Jean Wirth, "Introduction," in *Le portrait: La représentation de l'individu*, eds. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Jean-Michel Spieser, and Jean Wirth (Micrologus' Library) 17 (Florence, 2007), pp. 9–15. Irene Winter, "What/When Is a Portrait? Royal Images of the Ancient near East," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 153/3 (2009), 254–70. Michele Bacci, and Vladimir Ivanovici, "From Living to Visual Images. Paradigms of Corporeal Iconicity in Late Antiquity – Introduction," *Journal of the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art* 222 (2019): <https://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2019/0222-0229-special-issue-paradigms-of-corporeal-iconicity/0222-bacci-and-ivanovici> (Accessed: 2020 July 3).
- 9 For a discussion of Byzantine portrait process and theory, see: Gilbert Dagron, *Décrire et peindre* (Paris, 2007), p. 148; Katherine Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons. Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art* (Turnhout, 2013).
- 10 Tania Velmans, "Le portrait dans l'art des Paléologues," in *Art et Société à Byzance sous les Paléologues. Actes du colloque organisé par l'association internationale des études byzantines à Venise en septembre 1968* (Venice, 1971), pp. 193–48. In the same volume: Hans Belting, "Die Auftraggeber der Spätbyzantinischen Bildhandschrift," pp. 158–76 for a survey of the portraits in late Byzantine manuscripts including Slavonic and Georgian material; however, surprisingly, he does not include Armenian manuscripts. This early interest

The royal couple is depicted in the lower corners of the composition – Lewon at left and Keʿan at right – with symmetrical postures, kneeling with their hands raised in prayer. Between them, their children take the same posture and are grouped before their parents according to their gender. All five children are crowned with diadems and dressed in colourful robes woven or embroidered with golden threads and distinguished by their hanging sleeves, a garment favoured by Crusader aristocrats in the Levant.¹¹ The royal couple combines the most characteristic imperial insignia of the Byzantine tradition, i.e. the *loros* and the crown with hanging *prependoulia*, with silk robes and mantles lined with ermine, in keeping with a Latin aristocratic fashion favoured in both the West and the Latin East.¹² In the upper half of the composition appears a majestic Deisis, the intercessory image *par excellence* in the Byzantine tradition. In the centre, the large mandorla and the shining white garments of the enthroned Christ enhance the eschatological meaning of the subject. As the focus of the donor's piety, the Deisis may include the

in portraits from the Paleologan period eventually shifted to a more global approach concerning patterns of patronage.

- 11 A very similar type of garment, but slightly shorter, distinguishes the donor or honoree of the church of the Transfiguration at Soteira, near Famagusta, the painted decoration of which is dated c. 1280. I am grateful to Maria Parani, who is preparing a publication on this church, for sharing the photograph. For the church and the donor, see also: Meyer Fernandez, *Commanditaires et peintres à Chypre*, pp. 300–03. In a religious context, this type of slitted sleeve is also worn by the Carmelites surrounding the enthroned Virgin in an icon painted on Cyprus before 1287: Maniera Cypria. *The Cypriot Painting of the 13th century between two worlds. Exhibition catalogue, Byzantine Museum of Archbishop Makarios III Foundation*, ed. Ioannis A. Eliades (Nicosia, 2017), p. 57–59, ill. p. 63 and 8. Several secular figures in Gospel illustrations throughout the Keʿan Gospels wear this characteristic garment. Long, heavy sleeves distinguish the garments of the donors in 7th-century reliefs at Mren and Jvari and survive in the royal relief depiction of Ashot II (891–918) at Tʿbeti Cathedral: Christina Maranci, *Vigilant Powers. Three churches of Early Medieval Armenia*, (Turnhout 2015), p. 23–112 and Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park, 1998), p. 9–11. However, the connection with Cilician attire should not be considered straightforward. For a broader discussion of the origins and the transmission of this garment in the West, see: Charlotte Jirousek, *Ottoman Dress and Design in the West: A Visual History of Cultural Exchange* (Bloomington, IN, 2019), pp. 31–33.
- 12 Gustav Kühnel, *Wall Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Berlin, 1988), for the Scandinavian kings Knute and Olaf, pl. xxxii–xxxv. For example, the *Histoire universelle* (London, British Library, Add. ms 15268), the depiction of the biblical king Ninus dressed in a Byzantine-inspired *loros* under a gothic-blue mantel with ermine, or the Judith miniatures in the Arsenal Bible (Paris, BnF, Arsenal, ms 5211): Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art: the Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1099–1291* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 137, Figure. 146, and p. 107, Figure. 109.

latter's representations but the display in the Queen Keṙan Gospels provides a uniquely inventive variation.¹³

The Gospel book in question is better known as the Queen Keṙan Gospels than by its inventory number MS 2563 in the treasury of the church of the Armenian Patriarchate of Saint James, Jerusalem. However, the manuscript was not intended for the personal use of its patron Keṙan nor for the royal household but rather for the monastery of Akner, the burial place of Lewon II's grandfather, the founder of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia.¹⁴ Thus, the dedicatory painting is no mere testimony to the patron's individual piety: by staging the queen with her husband and their progeny, the image involves the entire royal family.

Moreover, although the perfectly balanced composition reflects ritual, hierarchy, and order, it does not refer to any particular royal ritual nor any particular ceremonial setting.¹⁵ It is rather a visual statement of authority and piety,

- 13 Harvard College Library, cod. gr. 3, early 12th century: Ioannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), p. 44; Giorgi Parpulov, "Psalters and Personal Piety in Byzantium," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, eds. Paul Magdalino, and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, D.C., 2010), pp. 77–106, esp. 95–96. The hypothetical but not unlikely representation of Michael VIII Paleologos, presumed to be the patron of the Deisis mosaic in the south gallery of Hagia Sophia, is supposed to have figured in the lower part of the composition. This could be an interesting parallel to the Queen Keṙan Gospels from a semantic rather than a formal perspective: Robin Cormack, "The Mother of God in the Mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople," in *Mother of God, Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Athens, 2000), pp. 107–23, esp. 120. A slightly earlier manuscript, the so-called Malat'ya Gospels, produced at the see of the Armenian catholikos at Hromkla, inventively depicts the Deisis in the last pages of the opening quire, with the dedicatory prayer set under Christ and the Virgin as a continuation of the canon tables: *Armenia Sacra*, eds. Jannick Durand, Ioanna Rapti, and Dorota Giovannoni (Paris, 2007), n° 116 (with previous bibliography). In the same manuscript, a second representation of the Deisis, formally comparable to that in the Keṙan Gospels portrait, is turned into an image of the Second Coming by means of three open sarcophagi full of naked bodies awakening for the Last Judgement. Later Armenian imagery often displays one or more donors under the radiating Cross, which signifies the Second Coming, see: Ioanna Rapti, "Le Jugement Dernier arménien: réception et évolution d'une imagerie eschatologique médiévale," *Cahiers archéologiques* 56 (2015), 95–118, esp. 114–15. Nevertheless, the beatific vision in the Queen Keṙan Gospels is unique. A later example including the donor in a beatific image is that of Andrea Dandolo in the 14th-century mosaic in the baptistery of San Marco: Stefania Gerevini, *Art as Politics in the Baptistery and Chapel of Sant'Isidoro at San Marco*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 74 (2020), 243–268, esp. 253 (with earlier bibliography).
- 14 Ioanna Rapti, "Featuring the King. Rituals of Coronation and Burial in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia," in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean. Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Maria Parani, Alexander Beihammer, and Stavroula Konstantinou (Leiden 2013), pp. 291–335, esp. 319.
- 15 Maranci, *The Art of Armenia*, p. 114.

one that fully takes up the visual strategies for staging and shaping kingship within court culture. An especially appropriate medium for containing the account of the Incarnation of the Word, the parchment provides the figures of the royal family with a special corporeality. Indeed, the image presents the royal body as both agent and object. Rays of light radiating towards the praying family, obviously following the iconography of the Pentecost, materialize the effect of their blessing by Christ's two hands. The gestures of the Virgin and the Baptist make this interaction even more dramatic; as intercessors, they introduce the supplicants' prayer, with extended hands and slightly bended knees – the latter being a quite unusual feature in the iconography of the Deisis. The rigorous geometry that governs the overall composition extends beyond the depiction of the Armenian royal family itself, with the latter's half-circular form paralleling the encircled glory of Christ, as Der Nersessian has rightly observed.¹⁶ The two circles transcend the flat surface of the page in setting into dynamic the earthly and the divine.¹⁷ The authority of kingship is transmitted from God to the king and to the latter's consort and offspring, with divine light turning the portrait into a performative investiture. Such a mathematical organization of the pictorial space of the page is rather unusual in Armenian miniature painting and betrays the painter's knowledge of the sophisticated arrangements found in Gothic manuscripts – such as the slightly earlier Psalter of Blanche of Castile – though the composition does not copy or imitate any specific model.¹⁸

With neither a starting point nor an end, the image on the page is propelled by this perpetual and timeless movement of prayer and mercy. The composition projects the actual royals beyond time and space, into a close and privileged encounter with God. The balance between the two registers rewards the royal family with the theophany of the Deisis and turns the portrayal into an epiphany. As witnesses to the heavenly glory, and honoured with immediate

¹⁶ Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, p. 156.

¹⁷ This could be the reason for the quite large scale of the king and the queen, pointed out by: Maranci, *The Art of Armenia*, p. 113, who also compared the image to the reliefs on the western façade of Aght'amar, where King Gagik is shown slightly larger than Christ. However, in the Jerusalem manuscript the portrait seems to rather distinguish two distant but related spaces in the manner of a three-dimensional architectural space. I am thankful to Sipana Tchakerian, PhD student at the University Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne, for this observation.

¹⁸ Paris, BnF, Arsenal Library, ms 1186 c. 1220–1230. Charles Bouleau, *Charpentier. La Géométrie secrète des peintres* (Paris, 1963), pp. 53–79; Marie-Hélène Gousset, "Jean Fouquet et l'art de la géométrie," in *Jean Fouquet. Peintre et enlumineur du XV^e siècle*, ed. François Avril (Paris, 2003), pp. 76–86, esp. 77–78.

intercession and the Lord's blessing, the king and his family are elevated to the special status of holy intercessors for their own entourage and subjects. The full-page painting responds to the metrical dedicatory prayer elegantly written in gilded majuscules at the conclusion of the canon tables. Given the paramount role of the Gospel book in Armenian spirituality as the medium *par excellence* for conveying individual piety and memory,¹⁹ verse and image supplement one another. Moreover, departing from the usual formulas for the commemoration of the donor's relatives, the long and detailed colophon recounts the history of the royal family, naming each member and their ancestors along with their significant deeds.²⁰ The lively figures of Lewon, Keřan, and their children thus meet the memory of their ancestors within the space of the book. Yet, there is a sharp difference between the physicality of the living family and the shadowy verbal remembrance of their venerable predecessors, indicating that the two groups belong to distinct temporalities.

The colophon-chronicle traces the roots of the royal family, clearly distinguishing the ancestry of the king and the queen from one another. This balanced structure enhances the dynastic legitimacy suggested by the harmony of the family stemming from the text: it exemplifies the *concordia* between two rival families that was ensured by the wedding of Lewon to Keřan in 1262.²¹ This pattern of internal matrimonial diplomacy had been implemented 40 years earlier, when the marriage of King Lewon's parents smoothed the conflicting ambitions of their respective families and brought peace to the country, as

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- 19 Artasřes Mat'evossian, *Hayerēn jeřagreri Yiřatakaranner. JG dar* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts. 13th century] (Yerevan, 1984), n° 330, p. 415. These two pages are visible, but only the second half is legible; in the digitized microfilm of the manuscript on the website of the Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/item/00271074190-jo/> the portrait of the royal family is dissimulated by a silk cover. See: Ioanna Rapti, "La voix des donateurs: Pages de dédicaces dans les manuscrits arméniens de Cilicie," in *Donation et donateurs dans le monde byzantin*, eds. Jean-Michel Spieser, and Elisabeth Yota (Paris 2012), pp. 309–26, esp. 321. I have noted the shift from a liturgical formula to a more personal plea. The dedicatory prayer: "My Lord Christ Saviour of the mankind / and eternal king forever / those who have been worthy anointment by you / the king Lewon and his queen Keřan / who moreover acquired this pure book / when you come in your paternal glory / receive them among those who are under your right hand. And love Het'um their child / heir to the crown of the Armenians / keep in long live / with his good brothers / and the soul of their parents and their ancestors and all their roots / receive them under your light and of your celestial brightness."
- 20 Mat'evossian, *Colophons*, n° 330, pp. 415–19; Ioanna Rapti, "Reines de Cilicie: entre héritage arménien et métamorphoses levantines," *Augusta, Regina, Basilissa*, eds. Sylvain Destephen, and François Chausson (Paris, 2018), pp. 215–38, esp. 226.
- 21 Rapti, "Reines," p. 225. This marriage is commemorated by a portrait of the couple blessed by Christ, following a widespread formula in middle Byzantine iconography.

is also stated in the manuscript's colophon.²² The memorial function of the manuscript is further underlined by its donation to the monastery that housed the tomb of the king's grandfather and namesake, Lewon I (r. 1198–1216). The monastery of Akner, whose precise location remains unknown, was a suburban foundation in the surrounds of the capital, Sis – and perhaps the Turkish name Akören may preserve some distant echo. Founded by the first Armenian king of Cilicia, Akner endowed the kingdom with a new *lieu de mémoire*, independent from the extant shrines and graves founded by the king's ancestors. Akner never became the dynastic mausoleum that it was likely meant to be, and only a few – lesser – members of the royal family were buried there.²³ However, the production of this lavishly illuminated manuscript soon after Lewon's 1270 coronation proves at least some consciousness of the monastery's dynastic significance.

The vision of Christ in his eternal glory in the Deisis meets the ultimate hope of the Christian faithful as expressed in the prayer formulas of the manuscript's colophons and dedicatory prayers. In light of its intended destination – the dynastic mausoleum of the kingdom's founder – the manuscript can be understood as a vehicle for the performative pilgrimage of the king and his family to the grave of his forefather, perpetuating their presence by his shrine.²⁴

This royal image in the Queen Keřan Gospels is unique in both Cilicia and the broader Armenian tradition. However, it is noteworthy that Lewon II is the most frequently and most innovatively portrayed Armenian king on record, as evidenced by five compelling manuscript paintings, each marking a key moment of his life: his appointment as successor; his wedding; his accession to the throne; his piety and religious leadership; and his apotheosis at the top of his genealogical tree.²⁵ Der Nersessian introduces her previously mentioned

22 Rapti, "Reines," pp. 223–24.

23 Rapti "Featuring the King," pp. 322–23.

24 This fits into the scheme proposed by John Lowden regarding royal books: the *why* of their production and their consumption (why each codex was made, why it was decorated with certain images, why it changed hands, and so forth). John Lowden, "The Image and Self-Image of the Medieval Ruler," in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne Duggan (London, 1993), pp. 213–40; John Lowden, "The Royal Manuscript as Idea and Object, Royal Manuscripts. The Genius of Illumination," in *Royal Manuscripts. The Genius of Illumination. Exhibition Catalogue, British Library*, eds. Scott McKendrick, John Lowden, and Kathleen Doyle (London, 2012), pp. 19–41. The intercessory role of the ancestors is also found in several monumental compositions in 14th-century Serbia, see: Véronique Deur-Petiteau, *Image et Pouvoir en Serbie médiévale* (PhD, Paris, EPHE, 2021).

25 The last image is in the lectionary produced for his son Het'um at his appointment as crown prince, Matenadaran 979. For an overview of the portraits: Ioanna Rapti, "Un Melismos arménien et la politique de l'image de Lewon II (1269–1289)," *Cahiers archéologiques*

essay on portraits in Cilician manuscripts with an eloquent testimony from Yovhannēs Erzenkac'i, who refers to painted portraits of the king as being for the sake of likeness. This account fits strikingly with the preserved evidence, although it is hard to assess whether the author's description corresponds to established practices or simply appeals to the classical topos of the life cycle.²⁶ To the five depictions of King Lewon II, it is tempting to add a marginal miniature in the Prince Het'um Lectionary (Yerevan, Matenadaran 979) showing a king and a bishop in conversation with three monks.²⁷ Together, these six extremely powerful images – ranging from solemn iconicity to the elaborate staging of the portrayed person in a variety of roles – are the outcome of a sophisticated visual strategy rooted in remarkable artistic skill as well as literary knowledge.²⁸ The particular court culture that developed within the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia drew from both the Armenian past and contemporary court cultures of the Mediterranean and Europe.²⁹ By the middle of the 13th century, when the earliest portrait of Lewon was produced, Armenian-Cilician kingship was endowed with quite a strong set of tools: coinage, law, chronicles, and manuscripts produced with the support of the patriarch based at Hromkla close to the enlightened religious circles of Edessa.³⁰ The earliest

50 (2002), 168–69; Levon Chookaszian, “The five portraits of king Lewon II (1270–1289) and their connections to the Art of the Mediterranean Era,” ed. Arturo Quintavalle, *Medioevo: Immagini e ideologie* (I convegni di Parma) 5 (Milan 2005), pp. 129–37.

26 Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, p. 154. For the translation of the text of Yovhannēs Erzenkac'i, see the contribution by Gohar Grigoryan Savary in this volume. It is also interesting to note that the reference to the portraits of the king comes with a comment on the Gospel verse spoken by Christ “I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (Jn. 10:14). Thus, the royal likeness implicitly becomes the means of experiencing royal authority. For the life cycle, see: Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton, 1986).

27 Irina R. Drampian, *Lectionary of King Hetum II (Armenian Illustrated Codex of 1286 A.D.)* (Yerevan, 2004), p. 144; Ioanna Rapti, “Un évêque bibliophile à la cour de Cilicie. Jean (Yovhannēs), né Baudoin, frère du roi Hét'um I,” in *Mélanges Bernard Flusin*, (Travaux et mémoires) 23/1, eds. Vincent Déroche, and André Binggeli (Paris, 2019), pp. 697–725, esp. 709, Figure. 6.

28 As Lowden observed, what seems to be a production of the king is actually a creation of the court: Lowden, “The Royal Manuscript as Idea and Object,” pp. 25–27.

29 Benjamin Bourgeois, *La Royauté: dynamiques et représentations. Royaumes de Jérusalem, de Chypre et d'Arménie cilicienne. XII^e-XIV^e siècle*, (PhD, Montpellier, 2018).

30 Timothy Greenwood, “Armenian Sources,” in *Byzantine and Crusaders in Non-Greek Sources 1025–1204*, ed. Mary Whitby (London, 2007), pp. 221–51. In this enterprise, King Het'um I's elder brother, the constable Smbat, played an important role as the author of a chronicle known by his name and as the translator of the Assises of Antioch, which would remain the main law code in Cilicia and would influence a new legal turn in Greater Armenia. See also: Robert W. Thomson, “The Crusaders through Armenian Eyes,” in *The*

among the six above-mentioned images were painted by T'oros Roslin, whose name ascribed them special value in the scholarship but, at some point, veiled the role that the Patriarchate at Hromkla may have played in shaping the culture of the Armenian court at Sis. Nevertheless, the 12th-century commentary composed by the theologian Sargis Shnorhali – referred to by Der Nersessian in her analysis of portraits – suggests at least some sensitivity to royal and imperial imagery already before the rise of the Armenian Kingdom itself.³¹ The initiative of the patron, Queen Keřan, to have the eponymous manuscript first copied and then given to a “man skilled and excellent in the art of writing to adorn it with arches and floral patterns and guild-figured splendors” must be related to the inaugural character of the project.³²

2 Visual Strategy and the Rhetoric of the Court

The ‘portrait’ of the royal family in the queen Keřan Gospels should be considered the ultimate achievement of a broader rhetoric celebrating Lewon II's kingship. To shed light on this, I shall first examine two texts produced close to the time of the manuscript and demonstrate an extant conceptual panoply of royal imagery. The texts in question are the versified chronicle of Vahram Rabuni and the homily composed by the same author for the coronation of Lewon II on the feast of the Epiphany (6 January) in the year 1270. Such an analysis across public discourse and the intimacy of the Gospel book, may offer a better understanding of the court culture of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and the concepts that underpinned its conception of royal power.

Both texts have been rather overlooked because they are not proper historical sources.³³ The chronicle has been widely accessible since its publication

Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World, eds. Angeliki Laiou, and Roy Mottahedeh (Washington, D.C., 2001), pp. 71–82, esp. 80; Azat Bozoyan, “La réception du droit franc en Arménie,” in *La Méditerranée des Arméniens*, ed. Claude Mutafian (Paris, 2014), pp. 121–32.

31 Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, p. 154.

32 Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, p. 93, locates the copyist Avetis at Sis. Only Avetis is named in the colophon, which refers in a rather vague manner to the qualified author of the ornaments and the paintings. For the translated excerpts, see: Mat'evosyan, *Colophons*, p. 416.

33 Greenwood, “Armenian sources”; Theo Maarten van Lint, “From Reciting to Writing and Interpretation: Tendencies, Themes, and Demarcations of Armenian Historical Writing,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, volume 2: 400–1400*, eds. Sarah Foot, and Chase F. Robinson (Oxford 2012), pp. 179–200.

with a French translation in 1869, along with other Armenian sources on the history of the Crusades.³⁴ The homily, on the other hand, is less known and available only in an 1876 edition.³⁵ The author and his work still await a thorough study, which is beyond the scope of the present paper. His title, *rabun* or *rabuni*, suggests that he belonged to the clergy, but it distinguishes him from a *vardapet*, the most common title for theologians in the Armenian monastic clergy. The Syriac resonance may reflect some connection to Edessa. Vahram is also known for his treatise on Aristotle's *Categories* and is considered among the last Christian followers of this philosophical tradition.³⁶ Vahram is not documented to have held any institutional function beyond being a member of the clergy, but the variety of his works likely places him in the milieu of the court, among those wise men who surrounded medieval sovereigns. Until additional light is shed on the intellectual personality of Vahram and on his authorship in their own right, his works remain representative of the literary interests and devices of the Armenian-Cilician court.

3 Experiencing History: The Versified Chronicle

The hybridity of the versified chronicle, mingling history and poetry, is perhaps one reason why it has been little acknowledged in scholarship.³⁷ However, this highly descriptive narrative should be considered a special piece of evidence

34 Vahram Rabun, *Chronique rimée des rois de la Petite Arménie* (Recueil des Historiens des Croisades Documents Arméniens) 1 (Paris, 1869), pp. 491–535. The English translation by Charles Fried Neumann, *Vahram's Chronicle of the Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia, during the time of the Crusades* (London, 1831) has been recently republished as *History of the Rubenian Dynasty*, eds. Beyon Miloyan, and Kimberley McFarlane (Sophrone, 2020).

35 Vahram Rabuni, *Levoni Ark'aji Ban Haytnut'iun Te'arn ew i yōcumn Lewoni G Ark'aji / Լեւոնի Արքայի Բան Ի Հայտնութիւն Տեառն և ի Յօժումն Լեւոնի Գ Արքայի* [Sermon on King Lewon. At the Epiphany of the Lord and the anointing of Lewon III] (Jerusalem, 1876). The ordinal III follows the dynastic order of the family, starting with Prince Lewon and not with the first anointed and crowned king.

36 Seta Dadoyan, *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World. Paradigms of Interaction. Seventh to Fourteenth Centuries*, 3 vols (New Brunswick, 2014), pp. 193–94. Peter Cowe, “Medieval Armenian Literary and Cultural Trends,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, 1, *From the Ancient Period to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Richard Hovannisian, (New York, 1991, repr. 2004), pp. 294–325, esp. 312. He considers Vahram the only important philosopher of Cilicia.

37 I have used it in this way for the study of the rituals of power, and I must confess my regret for having hastily characterized his verses as ‘insipid poetry’ (Rapti “Featuring the King,” p. 295).

for the self-representation of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and its perception of rulership and authority. Its metre is carefully structured, ending in the participle *-eal*.³⁸ The monotony of the rhyme lends itself to memorization of the content, suggesting that the chronicle was intended to be recited for entertainment during celebrations and feasts, like the contemporary *Sacred History of the Mongols*.³⁹ Thus, it may indicate that the poem addressed a broader audience than that consisting of contemporary and future learned readers, serving to convey and popularize the story of the king and the kingdom both within and beyond the court. Although it is hard to determine the impact and the reception of the versified chronicle, its production by a clergyman within the realm of the palace testifies to the permeability of Christian literature to early oral, epic and historical traditions that can be traced back to the Iranian background of the Armenian culture.⁴⁰

The chronicle is largely constructed using topoi and references to the Bible. Alternation between common and canonized information contributes to making the content intelligible to the audience and sets the backdrop for the account of the deeds of the kings of Armenia, centring around the reigning king and his ancestors. Starting with a usual statement of humility, the author continues by explaining that his narrative is the continuation of an earlier narrative verse, a task, that he says, he has been reluctant to undertake. He introduces his endeavour with a comparison with painting: just as black paint enhances the shine of gold without affecting its purity, the poem highlights

38 James Russel, "The Credal Poem Hawatov Xostovanim ("I confess in faith") of St. Nerses the Graceful," in *Redefining Christian Identity. Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta) 134, eds. Jan Jacob van Ginkel, Heleen Murre-van den Berg, and Theo Maarten van Lint (Leuven, 2005), pp. 185–236, esp. 203; an earlier versified chronicle *Vishapanutium*, composed in 1121 as a patriotic and heroic praise, was perhaps inspired by the poetic paraphrase of the Bible by the 11th-century author Gregory Magistros.

39 Theo Maarten van Lint, "The Gift of Poetry," in *Redefining Christian Identity*, eds. van Ginkel et alii, pp. 335–78, esp. 343: "mostly members of the clergy, they write in genres that emancipated from the various poetic genres used in church, although verse forms from folk poetry had been incorporated into ecclesiastical poetry as early as the 10th century in the work of Grigor Narekac'i." *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Igor Rachewiltz (Leiden, 2015). Shorter version edited by John C. Street, University of Wisconsin–Madison (Books and Monographs Book 4). <http://cedar.www.utoronto.ca/cedarbooks/4>, p. xviii–xviii: unparalleled text in Mongol historiography and likely intended for oral performances. p. xviii for the oral transmission and performance. (Accessed: 2020 June 29).

40 Theo Maarten van Lint, "From Reciting to Writing," pp. 181–82 and 196.

the glory of Lewon's II predecessor.⁴¹ The contrast between black paint and gold interestingly parallels the way colour and gold embellish the Queen Keṛan Gospels; this is not to say that the author is referring to this manuscript in particular but rather to a broader pictorial effect that must have been familiar to him and his audience.⁴² The reference to painting, though, indeed, a common topos in rhetoric, may in this case suggest some awareness of the importance of visibility and representation. The concluding verses of the chronicle recall the magnificent dedicatory image of the Queen Keṛan Gospels, as Vahram celebrates the righteous reign of Lewon II, recalling his three male children and exalting his consort.⁴³ The poet does not refer explicitly to this or any another specific illumination, however, his elaborate praise of the king creates a powerful image whose effect may parallel the visual impact of the dedicatory image.

The narrative proceeds chronologically. To introduce historical time, the author refers to the Trinity, distinguishing the revelation of the Father and the Son from the Holy Spirit that "we confess."⁴⁴ The insistence on paternal filiation departs from standard trinitarian confessions and may reflect the theological debates of the time, which reached all realms of Christianity in the East. At another level of reading, the specific reference to the Father and the Son provides an archetype for fatherhood and the transmission of kingship, corresponding to the increasing significance placed on lineage in court cultures of the time.⁴⁵

41 At the same time, the author informs the audience that his work is a commission from the king and thus positions it within the realm of the official discourse of the court. Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 494.

42 The contrast of dark and gold occurs only in details in the manuscript but meets the inlaid-looking letters of many dedicatory prayers and finds an interesting parallel in the full-page initials that open the psalms in the Melissande Psalter, which are entirely executed with black inlay on a lustrous golden background: Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders*, p. 33, Figure. 13.

43 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 532. "Following the will of God / and reigning righteously / he got three children / first Het'um the eldest / Who is devoted to the texts of wisdom / and experience in the works of wisdom / the second is called T'oros / And the third id Smbat / And he met a good wife / whose name is Keṛan / glowing with faith and / full of deeds of purity."

44 The Trinity often marks the beginning of manuscript colophons, signifying the eternal time of the Creation. Interestingly, the foundation charter edited in 1347/48 by the Serbian king Stefan Dušan for his monastery of the Holy Archangels in Prizren starts with a reference to the Trinity integrating the sovereign into the hierarchy: Deur-Petiteau, *Image et Pouvoir en Serbie médiévale*.

45 Jérôme Baschet, *Le sein du Père. Abraham et la paternité dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 2000), pp. 49–52. The importance of lineage in 13th-century court culture is exemplified by Capetian France, which traces its roots to the kings of Troy; by the Crusader Kingdom,

Historical time is defined by a clear distinction between past and present, the turn between the two being Christianity, which made all Christians the chosen people.⁴⁶ In this broad Christian framework, the focus moves quickly to the Armenians. The starting point is the exile to the lands of the Greeks, seen as the consequence of the arrival of the Turks. The story is evoked only scarcely and is not celebrated. The only significant reference is to King Gagik (d. 1020), “the seedling of the Armenian royal arborescence in Cilicia.”⁴⁷ Such a narrow timeframe, which unusual in Armenian historiography, could be explained by the poet’s assertion that he continues an earlier narrative. The emphasis on the Turkish conquests as a marker of historical time is nevertheless consistent with their special significance in Armenian historical writing. In the latter, the Turks are related to biblical prophecies and earlier apocalyptic traditions that remained influential among religious literati.⁴⁸ The past that interests Vahram and his audience is recent: a series of locations designate the landmarks of the Armenian kingdom. Authority is built across the territory through a network of places of memory, ancestry, and power. From the fortress of Vahka up on the slopes of the Taurus to the city of Anawarza in the middle of Cilician plain, the contours of this geography of power follow the progression of the establishment of the Armenians in Cilicia under the leadership of valiant princes. These places become the theatre for the deeds of the major heroic ancestors who held them.⁴⁹ From Ruben and Constantine (before 1100) to the first great conqueror T’oros I (1102–1129), Vahram continues to T’oros II, Prince of Armenia (1145–1169), whom he celebrates as an ideal ruler foreshadowing the rise of the kingdom. Victorious over the Seljuks, brave, charitable, and generous, “shining like the light of the sun, armour of truth, crown of justice”,⁵⁰

as testified by the chronicles of Outremer; and by the Kingdom of Serbia, as manifest in the sophisticated image strategies of the Nemanja dynasty.

46 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, 495 (verses 49–50).

47 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, 496 (verse 122). Indeed, Gagik (1041–1045, + c. 1073) moved to Byzantium after spending some time in Constantinople as a distinguished hostage and then exchanging his territory for lands in Cappadocia. But this happened before the capture of Ani by the Turks. Nina G. Garsoïan, “The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms in the eleventh century,” in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, ed. Richard Hovannisian (2nd ed. New York 2004), pp. 187–98, esp. 190–93; Claude Mutafian, *L’Arménie du Levant 1* (Paris, 2012), p. 50.

48 Robert W. Thomson, “The Concept of “History” in Medieval Armenian Historians,” in *Eastern Approaches*, ed. Eastmond, pp. 89–100, esp. 94–96.

49 Gérard Dédéyan, *Les Arméniens entre Grecs, Musulmans et Croisés. Étude sur les pouvoirs arméniens dans le Proche-Orient méditerranéen (1068–1150)*, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 2003), 1, pp. 392–94, 442–50.

50 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 507 (verse 585). The long verses on T’oros II (pp. 503–84) recount the prince’s captivity in Constantinople and the dramatic conspiracy of the

the prince exemplifies for Vahram a range of royal virtues drawn from religion, philosophy, and science. Moreover, the fact that the Holy Spirit is said to descend upon T'oros II conveys through a set of biblical references the idea of divine election and the sacredness of kingship.⁵¹ The prince is characterized as a dynastic archetype: his legitimacy stems from the Bagratid kingship of Gagik and, more importantly, is carried down to the current sovereign through the latter's grandfather, Lewon I (1198–1216). Vahram presents Lewon I more briefly than T'oros II yet assigns him the significant role of restoring kingship, an event portrayed as the redemption of the Armenians: "the nation of the Armenians stood up and rulership was renewed; and brought peace all over the country, like paradise it was filled with fruits."⁵² In the chronicle, Lewon I's life ends with the heroic expansion of his state over the sultanate of Rum. Vahram passes quickly over the troublesome period following Lewon I's death to the marriage of Het'um and Zabel, to whom Lewon II was born and from whom he derived his legitimacy. Similarly scant is the account of Het'um's alliance with the Seljuks, that he eventually broke in order to ally with the Mongols, whose importance for the kingdom is rather absent from the chronicle. Yet, the poet meaningfully mentions at this point in his chronicle the royal ancestry of the baron Constantine (c. 1180–1263), the father of King Het'um, providing the latter with his own royal bloodline.⁵³ The account of Het'um's accession to the throne is interestingly paired with the parable of the good shepherd, which

Byzantine emperor, who turned the Seljuks against him. For T'oros see: Mutfian, *L'Arménie du Levant*, 1, pp. 77–82. It seems that T'oros II remained faithful to Manuel Komnenos and kept his alliance with Kizil Arslan, leaving his brother Stephane the care to refrain the Turks (*ibidem*, p. 79). As with many diplomatic hostages throughout the history of Byzantium, a stay in Constantinople was excellent training for court culture and politics.

51 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 508 (verse 595). This resonates with the account (Luke 4:17) stating the presence of the Holy Spirit upon Christ and the divine charisma it conveyed, see: Thomas F. Mathews, *Armenian Gospel Iconography. The Tradition of the Glajor Gospels*, (Dumbarton Oaks Series) 29 (Washington, D.C., 1991), pp. 138–39. In the 10th-century psalter Paris, gr. 139, fol. 7v, the dove of the Holy Spirit visually embodies the divinely inspired wisdom of King David, seen as a hidden representation of Emperor Constantine VII between personifications of wisdom and prophecy. This gift for the scriptures is even more significant in that it follows an anecdote about the prince having a dream during his imprisonment in Constantinople of receiving a loaf of bread and a fish, premonitory of his future dominion over the lands and the sea of his country: Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 502 (verses 355–80). With a distant biblical reference to Joseph, wisdom and kingship are thus tied to the destiny of T'oros II, which takes a step further the dynastic history and marks a decisive turn, although T'oros II was never crowned or anointed king.

52 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 512 (verse 755).

53 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 514 (verses 805–06).

points in turn to the paradigm of David, a major archetype for the emperor since the early Middle Ages.⁵⁴ Vahram celebrates Het'um individually before dedicating a series of verses to praise his wife, Zabel. Unlike on coins, where the king is paired with his queen and, later, with the epigraphic representation of his Seljuk patron,⁵⁵ the chronicle's description glorifies the king as a perfect being in his own right, adorned with all physical and moral qualities. Through the recitation of the poem, this image would have become anchored in the listeners' minds, an experience possibly enhanced by royal ceremonial appearances as well as by other visual parallels.

The focus of the chronicle narrows as it moves towards the temporality of the author and the audience, recounting in detail events in Cilicia. Little attention is paid to neighbouring states and powers, and the Franks remain almost absent from this literary fresco, which concludes with an idealized portrayal of the king.⁵⁶ The text recounts how the paradise on earth that Cilicia had become under Lewon I was ultimately lost as a result of the sins and faults of the Armenians, explicating this with reference to the biblical story of Adam's Fall. Vahram's description of lamentation as the path to redemption and of the reward earned by suffering marks a turn in the narrative and its image of the sovereign. The imprisonment of the future king Lewon II by the Mamluks after their raid in Cilicia in 1266 is recounted at length, with an increasingly strong hagiographic overtone. The audience learns how the blessed Prince T'oros, Lewon's younger brother, was killed during the raid. The chronicle then moves into a depiction of Lewon as a blessed and venerable prince,⁵⁷ fictionalizing his time as a prisoner with the account of his pilgrimage at the Holy Sepulchre, where "he venerates the crucified Christ."⁵⁸ The narrative reaches its climax with verses praising generosity and charity,⁵⁹ before turning to exegesis, where the prince becomes the expiatory victim of the sins of his nation. The king's radiance, like a veil of sacredness, elevates him to a realm of sanctity and to the apex of his virtuous ancestors.⁶⁰ Similarly, Vahram's account of

54 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 517 (verse 870).

55 *Armenia Sacra*, eds. Durand et alii, ns. 108–09.

56 The absence of the Franks is surprising, given their strong presence in the kingdom and in the court, and might be explained by the chronicle's focus on family and lineage. Thomson has noted a similar lack of reflection on the Crusaders in the chronicle composed c. 1272 by Smbat Sparapet (the Constable), brother of King Het'um I (+1276): Thomson, "The Crusaders through Armenian Eyes," p. 80.

57 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 518 (verse 900: *erjank'ēal* and *barepašēal*).

58 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 523 (verses 1094–95).

59 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 527 (verse 1215).

60 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 532 (verse 1380).

Lewon's pilgrimage to Jerusalem recalls the popular legend of the visit the Holy Sepulchre by the protagonists of the Armenian conversion to Christianity.⁶¹ Lewon II's own adventure tale becomes a valuable counterpart to the earthly, military, and political achievements of his valiant forefathers; through his captivity and piety, he interestingly, meets the Christomimetic ideal of kingship that governs the earliest known portrait of Lewon, produced upon his appointment as a crown prince.⁶² Vahram's narrative evokes most strikingly the celebratory image of the royal family in the Queen Keřan Gospels, at its conclusion with a lauding of the king which perhaps echoes the audience's response to the ceremonial recitation of the poem:

This is the way the king on earth is
and approved by God.
May God preserve him for long days,
reigning in peace.⁶³

These or similar verses were perhaps recited at various royal appearances. As an afterward to the chronicle and its acclamatory conclusion, a few verses briefly recall Old Testament kings and prophets, situating the historical narrative within a moralized, Christian framework. The significance assigned to Old Testament paradigms is a pervasive aspect of medieval historiography and court culture broadly but has a particularly strong tradition in Armenian historical writing.⁶⁴ The appearance of these biblical models only in the afterward, despite its abundant biblical imagery and vocabulary throughout Vahram's chronicle, may mean that an emphasis on action was most suitable for the chronicle's intended audience and performative context. Nevertheless, these Old Testament models strongly resonate with the rhetorical register of another work by Vahram, namely his homily for the coronation of the king,

61 Van Lint, "From Reciting to Writing," p. 195; Zaroui Pogossian, *The Letter of Love and Concord: A Revised Diplomatic Edition with Historical and Textual Comments and English Translation* (Leiden, 2010), p. 49. For the alliance between Constantine and Tiridates as a prototype for the alliance between Cilicia and the Crusaders, see pp. 110–11.

62 This portrait is preserved in the Gospel book Matenadaran 8321, fol. 25. Rapti, *Featuring the king*, p. 310.

63 Vahram, *Chronique rimée*, p. 532.

64 Jean-Pierre Mahé, "Entre Moïse et Mahomet: réflexions sur l'historiographie arménienne," *Revue des études arméniennes* 23 (1992), 121–53; Robert W. Thomson, "The Writing of History: The Development of the Armenian and Georgian Traditions," in *Il Caucaso: cerniera di culture dal Mediterraneo IV-XI*, (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo) 43 (Spoleto, 1996), pp. 493–514.

discusses below, and which aims to celebrate the person of the king and the authority of his kingship.

4 Vision and Exegesis

The homily Vahram composed for the coronation of Lewon II serves a similar purpose with a different set of tools and a different approach. Unlike the fictional narrative of the versified chronicle, the sermon is an exegesis of the king's accession. Whereas in both texts the author employs a series of topoi, in the homily the celebration of the king's accession is largely made of prophetic quotations from the Bible that seem intended to refer to the orator's present time. Like the chronicle, the homily reflects the perception of kingship in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, as well as the kingdom's own self-perception, through a wide range of comparisons, analogies, and literary images that are worth being examined alongside the pictorial representations in the intimate space of sacred books.

The oration begins with a introduction to the feast of the Epiphany: in place of the canonical Armenian theology of the feast, Vahram focuses on the Incarnation and particularly on the earthly life of Christ, who raised humanity from sin and ignorance.⁶⁵ Similarly, Vahram's discussion of the virginal birth and the lineage of Christ does not follow the historiographic tradition relating the Armenian sovereigns to Assyrian kings with Old Testament ancestries. The genealogy of Christ is detailed and traced back to Jesse, using the words of Isaiah as both a preliminary statement and a conclusion for the exegesis of the feast of the Epiphany. The importance of the arborescence is furthermore stressed by the recurrent use of the word 'gawazan' (rod or liturgical staff), which imbues Christ's forebears with additional authority. The analogy between Christ and King Lewon is obvious given the importance also paid to the latter's lineage, which is said to "blossom out of a brave and pious root, rod and sprout of piety, to be anointed, crowned and raised to the kingship of the House of T'orgom of the nation of the Armenians."⁶⁶ The text combines biblical and historical references. The importance of the lineage parallels that in Vahram's versified chronicle and culminates in the impressive painted arborescence in the lectionary produced for Lewon's heir, the crown prince Het'um.⁶⁷ An emphasis on lineage also explains the exuberant images of the

65 Vahram, *Sermon on King Lewon*, p. 2: "He restored our body by his divine miracles."

66 Vahram, *Sermon on King Lewon*, p. 20.

67 For this composition: Ioanna Rapti, "Image et liturgie à la cour de Cilicie: le lectionnaire du prince Het'um (Matenadaran ms 979)," *Monuments Piot* 87 (2008), 105–42; Rapti,

Tree of Jesse that adorn the opening pages of Matthew's account, assigning it a secular and courtly overtone, in contemporary manuscripts produced in the realm of the court for members of the royal entourage.⁶⁸ In the sermon, contrary to the chronicle, Vahram draws models of Christian kingship both from history and from the Bible.⁶⁹ Emperors Constantine, Theodosius, and Tiridates, outstanding figures of the formative period of the Christian Empire, follow the models of piety and repentance exemplified by David and Hezekiah, whose rulership Vahram highlights as a victory over the enemies of the chosen people.⁷⁰ Constantine and Tiridates are linked by their common apostolic role as well as by their alleged alliance forged by the Armenian tradition.⁷¹ David is as much a paradigm of repentance as of victory. Hezekiah, on the other hand, in his preservation of the Temple when the Kingdom of Judah was invaded by Sennacherib, represents not proper victory but desperate resistance and inequitable strife.⁷² Neither the Queen Keṙan Gospels nor related manuscripts bear substantial evidence about how historic holy emperors like Constantine, Theodosius, and Tiridates were understood in relation to their biblical counterparts like David and Hezekiah. However, the depiction of Theodosius in the lectionary produced for Prince Het'um in 1286 suggests the relevance of this figure to the representation of historic sovereigns, enhanced by his depiction in contemporary clothing as well as by the inclusion of a dove over the gothic-style figure (Figure. 2.2).⁷³ Indeed, imagery often enlarged the semantic

"Featuring the King," pp. 315–18. See also the contribution by Edda Vardanyan in this volume.

68 Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, pp. 93–125.

69 Vahram, *Sermon on King Lewon*, p. 21: "Salomon: Listen kings you are the servants of the kingship of God; God is the great king all over earth."

70 Vahram, *Sermon on King Lewon*, pp. 39–40. These are the "four believing kings" commemorated by the Armenian church: Robert W. Thomson, "The Eastern Mediterranean in the Thirteenth Century: Identities and Allegiances. The Peripheries: Armenia," in *Identities and Allegiances in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*, eds. Judith Herrin, and Guillaume Saint-Guillain (Ashgate, 2011), pp. 196–214.

71 Robert W. Thomson, "Constantine and Trdat in Armenian Tradition," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 50, 1/3 (1997), 277–89; Pogossian, *The Letter of Love and Concord*, pp. 47–49 and 65–77. In Cilicia, this foundation myth was interpreted as a precedent or a paradigm for the alliance of the Armenian kingdom with Rome.

72 See the comparison of Manuel Komnenos to Hezekiah against Konrad/Sennacherib: Shay Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation in Byzantium* (Leiden, 2018), p. 164. Elisabeth Jeffreys suggests an apotropaic use of the biblical account by John Malalas referring to the Persian threat over Antioch: Elisabeth Jeffreys, "Old Testament 'History' and the Byzantine Chronicle," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, eds. Paul Magdalino, and Robert Nelson (Washington, D.C., 2010), pp. 153–74, esp. 172.

73 Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, p. 117.

scope of standard characters from Christian history. This can also be seen in a later Menologion, produced in 1348 in the capital of Cilicia, in which early Christian kings figure among an assembly of holy persons from different times and places, all homogenized by their standardized depiction in contemporary aristocratic dress.⁷⁴

The last part of the text takes a strong advisory turn. As the continuator of a long and rich royal lineage, the king is summoned to maintain kingship by his piety and good deeds, wisdom, and prudence.⁷⁵ The text abundantly quotes prophetic excerpts, which were familiar from liturgical readings and could resound with the efficacy of aphorisms. They also interestingly match the prophetic imagery accompanied by excerpts from the relevant books in a series of manuscripts produced in the 1260s.⁷⁶

5 Kingship and Cosmos: The World of the Court

A series of images spread through the margins of the Queen Keřan Gospels, relevant to the account of the Gospels but surprisingly original, may provide, rather than mere illustrations, a sort of *speculum principis/dominæ*.⁷⁷ The first quires, on the other hand, introduce the Gospel with solemn architectural settings adorned with emblems of power, such as capitals in the shape of lions and eagles.⁷⁸ The presence of the prophets signals the Church and its power. In court culture, prophecy is the canonized version of foretelling, a particular means of relating events across time and of understanding history. It is also an essential means of a royal epiphany: the king is anticipated, foretold, and integrated into a long historical-biblical process. At least some of the audience of the coronation would have been familiar with prophetic quotes. The variations

74 Morgan M 622, dated 1348, was produced for the archbishop of Sis and illuminated by Sargis Picak, the painter who executed royal commissions: Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, pp. 142, 151; *Treasures in Heaven. Armenian Art*, eds. Mathews, and Wieck, n. 61, pp. 191–92. See also: <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/1/122661> (accessed the 3 July 2020).

75 Vahram, *Sermon on King Lewon*, pp. 43–54.

76 *Armenia Sacra*, eds. Durand et alii n° 116 and Ioanna Rapti, “Gloses prophétiques sur l’évangile: à propos de quelques manuscrits arméniens enluminés en Cilicie dans les années 1260,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2004), 119–222.

77 The marginal miniatures have been listed in an appendix, in: Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, p. 163. A few of them have been reproduced.

78 Bezalel Narkiss, Michael E. Stone, and Avedis K. Sanjian, *Armenian Art Treasures of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 93–94.

on prophetic imagery in the manuscripts produced at Hromkla and later courtly manuscripts show a special concern to place the Armenian kingdom in the economy of the Bible and the Church. I have elsewhere suggested the transitional character of the Queen Keṙan Gospels as a turning point between the scriptorium of the Armenian Patriarchate at Hromkla and that of the court at Sis.⁷⁹ The extensive marginal program of the Queen Keṙan Gospels, into which the prophets are integrated, comprises a large number of miniatures that stem from earlier manuscripts produced by T'oros Ṛoslin and his assistants. However, alongside these images – brought into the Queen Keṙan Gospels by hands that had obviously worked at Hromkla – a series of new and innovative images throughout the Gospels parallel in many crucial ways the praise of kingship in the homily and the chronicle. Individual images of winds and planets, unusual for the illumination of a religious manuscript, appear outside the confines of any narrative setting (Figure. 2.3) and may reflect an interest in the physical world similar to that found at the courts of Sicily, Nicea, Trebizond, and Aksaray around the same time.⁸⁰ Yet, these images also resonate with metaphors for the Creation and the Fall employed in the versified chronicle, metaphors that would have been familiar beyond the learned monastic recipients of the manuscript at the royal mausoleum at Akner.

In this prestigious copy of the timeless sacred book that is the Gospels, royal authority is extended to all of creation. Through their moralizing gestures, a series of primary and lesser characters from the Gospels seem to engage with the present moment of the author and audience. Thus, the Denial of Peter becomes an opportunity to communicate an ambiguous message of admonishment, embodied by the female servant who points her finger towards the edge of the page.⁸¹ In her courtly attire and elegant features, she recalls the depiction of the queen herself in the family portrait, and, in a similar way, the depiction of the children that Jesus allowed to approach him resonates with the couple's children. The treatment of the widow offering her mite (Figure. 2.4) stems from the illustration of this lesson by T'oros Ṛoslin and his atelier in a Gospel book now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.⁸²

79 Rapti, *Un atelier de cour*.

80 *Le scienze alla corte di Federico II. Sciences at the Court of Frederick II* (Micrologus) 2 (Turnhout, 1994); Anne Tihon, "Astrological Promenade in Byzantium in the Early Palaiologan Period," in *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, eds. Paul Magdalino, and Maria Mavroudi (Geneva, 2006), pp. 67–71.

81 Rapti, "Reines," pp. 217–218.

82 Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Manuscripts in the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, D.C., 1953), p. 30, Figure. 154.

However, in the Queen Keṙan Gospels, the faithful woman is emancipated from her usual narrative framework as well as from the reserved attitude of the Freer model. Portrayed alone in the act of depositing a large coin at the Temple, the widow provides an archetype for the pious patron of the manuscript itself, Queen Keṙan – an analogy underlined by the close resemblance between their Marian-type faces. Money is in itself a thematic strand in the marginal imagery of the Queen Keṙan Gospels, though not in Vahram's panegyric chronicle and sermon. The unusual image of gold and silver coinage (Figure. 2.5), unknown in any earlier examples, might be explicable as a specific request by the patron, mediated by the illuminator.⁸³ These coins bear the name and title of King Lewon, and their radiance is materialized by small red spheres similar to those indicating the light of divine illumination above the heads of the royals in the family portrait. Despite some resemblance to the epigraphs of Islamic mints, they find no parallels on *any* coinage, Armenian or other. Challenging the limits between representation and imagination, they may point to ceremonial mints – of which there is no evidence from Lewon's reign – or may invoke the acclamations that could have accompanied the coin distributions during ceremonies of investiture. In actual coinage, Lewon II faithfully maintained the iconographic patterns established by his father and grandfather, as a means of stressing the enduring authority of the dynasty. Less explicitly than these monetary depictions, the unusual image of two swords (Figure. 2.6) – essential ceremonial accessories – may also refer to the king.⁸⁴ Lewon II's facial features in the family portrait resemble those of the healed paralytic of Bethesda (Figure. 2.7), as well as of his uncle Vasak in a portrait in the latter's eponymous Gospel book, which is closely related to this manuscript in style.⁸⁵ Marginal images enhance the programmatic character of the Queen Keṙan Gospels, which was intended not only as a pious offering but also as a statement of authority and an auspicious omen for the perpetuity of the dynasty. For the makers and the audience of the book, likeness would have been an issue of verisimilitude rather than of accuracy. Verisimilitude was achieved through visual and conceptual tools, such as the adoption of established iconographic schemes, and through a network of references

83 The Gospel verse is used as an opportunity to either warn the king against avarice or to acclaim his lack of avarice.

84 *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan Court: Offices and Ceremonies* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies) 15, eds. Ruth Macrides, Joe Munitiz, and Dimiter Angelov (Farnham, 2013), pp. 349–50.

85 Der Nersessian, *Miniature Painting*, pp. 95–114, 129–30; *Armenia. Art, Religion and Trade in the Middle Ages*, ed. Helen Evans (New York, 2018), n. 64, p. 157.

across the codex and within the 'portrait' itself. Insightfully, Vahram summons the audience of the sermon to celebrate God "who renewed today the body of our unworthiness to the likeness of his glory"⁸⁶; the coronation was thus fully integrated in the economy of salvation.

6 Case and Canon

Viewing the Queen Keṙan Gospels in light of two pieces of court literature, as proposed in the present paper, offers new evidence about how Armenian Cilicia visualized kingship and about how visual strategies developed at the higher levels of the Church and the state. Following the longstanding tradition of integrating the king into the economy of salvation through forging connections between biblical history and the present,⁸⁷ the sophisticated imagery of the manuscript was part of an apparatus of royal imagery that had been expanding since the first decades of the kingdom and even before, as Armenians established in the Taurus Mountains were shaping their power. Despite its originality, the manuscript, may reflect a codified language – both verbal and visual – conveyed by texts such as those discussed above and perhaps by other images that have not survived.⁸⁸

Royal 'portraits' placed in the intimate context of manuscripts echo an official discourse and stand, as Gilbert Dagron asserted for Byzantine portraits, at the crossroads between saying and seeing.⁸⁹ The famous royal portrait in the Queen Keṙan Gospels – the starting point for this study – exemplifies the idea of royal epiphany in an idiosyncratic way as this is encompassed in a single volume of the book of the Gospels. The royal Epiphany is experienced, like in ceremonial appearances, as a glorious manifestation of the king illuminated by

86 Vahram, *Sermon on King Lewon*, p. 3.

87 This tradition is eloquently exemplified by the 10th-century chronicle of T'uma Arcruni: *History of the House of the Artsrunik*, ed. Robert W. Thomson (Detroit 1985) and the decoration of the palace church of Aght'amar cf. *supra*, note 3.

88 Such an example is the relief above the entrance of Yilan Kale, depicting an unidentified, enthroned ruler (Rapti, "Featuring the King," Figure. 11.3). This badly damaged sculpture, the only surviving public image of a king, marks the edge of the line of power traversing Cilicia from the ports of Ayas and Msis to Sis and Vahka, which became part of the Silk Road. This obviously performative royal depiction embodying the presence of the sovereign is perhaps less isolated than it seems, another part of epigraphic, monetary, and painted royal images.

89 Dagron, *Décrire et peindre*, p. 85: "Le portrait est l'un des points de rencontre de ces deux domaines du dire et du voir."

a divine aura during the Sacred Mystery of the Eucharist for which the Gospels is the appropriate medium. Yet, the Epiphany on the page is distinguished by its atemporality and its twofold commemorative function referring to the past and the end of time. Despite the certainly limited visibility of this image in the treasury of a monastery and enshrined in a codex,⁹⁰ the presence of the royal figure is involved in a double process of sacralization: integrated into the economy of salvation embodied by the book, the image sanctifies the person of the king and conveys, through his performative presence, his authority and memory both within and beyond the kingdom. Obviously aware of the elaborate visual rhetoric of the French court at this moment,⁹¹ perhaps via their Levantine contacts, the painters of the manuscript and their advisors were also sensitive to the specific concerns of the Cilician-Armenian court. Their strategies for sacralizing kingship also find meaningful parallels in neighbouring Cyprus, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, and, despite the long distance, at the Serbian court – though the impact of each image would have depended upon its medium as well as its textual, pictorial or spatial context.⁹² Such a fusion of mental and visual images in shaping and conveying authority is thus, beyond the ‘Armenianness’ of the Queen Keřan Gospels, a broader phenomenon connecting Mediterranean court cultures throughout the long 13th century, a period driven by the ideal of sacred kingship meant to last until the end of time.

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90 John Lowden rightly draws attention to the fact that the intentionality of the illustration of a manuscript does not determine how it was used: Lowden, “The Royal Manuscript as Idea and Object,” p. 21.

91 Harvey Stahl, *Picturing Kingship: History and Painting in the Psalter of Saint Louis* (University Park, 2008), pp. 133–211.

92 For example, the church of Pelendri in Cyprus, invested by the Lusignans, or the 13th-century Arsenal Bible and the *Histoire d’Outremer*. For the Serbian kingdom: Véronique Deur-Petiteau, “Images, spatialité et cérémoniel dans le narthex des églises en Serbie médiévale,” in *Visibilité et présence de l’image dans l’espace ecclésial: Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental* (Byzantina Sorbonensia) 30, eds. Sulamith Brodbeck, and Anne-Orange Poilpré (Paris, 2018), pp. 329–54.

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Illustrations

FIGURE 2.1 Jerusalem, St. James, Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2653 alias Queen Keʿran Gospels, fol. 380 The royal family praying and Deisis

FIGURE 2.2 Yerevan, Matenadaran MS 979 alias Lectionary of prince Het'um, fol. 50v, King Theodosios

FIGURE 2.3 Jerusalem, St. James, Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2653 alias Queen Keṙan Gospels, fol. 128v, Wind

FIGURE 2.4 Jerusalem, St. James, Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2653 alias Queen Keʿran Gospels, fol. 266

FIGURE 2.5 Jerusalem, St. James, Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2653 alias Queen Keřan Gospels, fol. 249 Two coins with the name and the title of King Lewon

FIGURE 2.6 Jerusalem, St. James, Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2653 alias Queen Keʿran Gospels, fol. 272, Two swords

FIGURE 2.7 Jerusalem, St. James, Armenian Patriarchate, MS 2653 alias Queen Keran Gospels, fol. 303, The Paralytic of Bethesda