

### **95. Armenian Gospels (M. Armenian 1)**

Contents: Four Gospels, 17th century A.D.

Folios: 307; fine, beautifully prepared vellum; 13.7 x 10 cm.

Rulings: Text in two columns (each 2.8 cm wide); 20 lines per page.

Script: Neat bolorgir script.

Quiring: 2 x 2, 25 x 6. [A folio is missing between fol. 125 and fol. 126 and the last folio is stuck down on a binding page].

Binding: 20th-century rebinding, retaining the original outer brown leather stretched over the new. It is stamped with a frame of small rosettes front and back. A central cross of rosettes is added on the front, with a pattern of diagonals in the four corners. At the back is a further pattern of diagonals.

Illustration: Canon tables; Evangelist portraits; marginal illustrations. The following lists these as they occur in the text. Fols. 1v-2r: Canon tables. Fols. 3v-4r: Canon tables (colour plate 5). Fols. 5v-6v: Canon tables. Fols. 7v-8r: Canon tables. Fols. 9r-11v: concordances and prologue to St. Matthew's Gospel. Fol. 12v: St. Matthew portrait. Fol. 13r: titlepiece and opening of St. Matthew's Gospel, with Matthew's angel symbol as the opening letter. Fol. 16v: Massacre of the Innocents. Fol. 18v: Temptation of Christ. Fol. 63v: Entry into Jerusalem. Fol. 86v: Crucifixion. Fol. 90v: end of St.

Matthew's Gospel. Fols. 91r-93r: concordances and prologue to St. Mark's Gospel. Fol. 93v: St Mark portrait (plate 34). Fol. 94r: titlepiece and opening to Mark's Gospel (plate 34). Fol. 137r: Christ before Caiaphas (plate 35). Fols. 145r-148v: concordances and prologue to St. Luke's Gospel. Fol. 148v: St Luke portrait. Fol. 149r: titlepiece and opening to St. Luke's Gospel. Fol. 226r: Betrayal. Fol. 235r: end of Luke's Gospel. Fol. 236r-238r: concordances and prologue to St. John's Gospel. Fol. 238v: St. John portrait (plate 36).

Fol. 239r: titlepiece and beginning of John's Gospel (plate 36). Fol. 241v: Baptism. Fol. 275r: Raising of Lazarus. Fol. 299v: Women with the angel at the Tomb. Fol. 305v: end of St. John's Gospel.

Marginal illustrations throughout the Gospels show Christ (e.g. fol. 88r), the sanctuary of a church and bird and floral motifs. Some initial letters are decorated, coloured and gilded, while others are just in red or blue.

The illustration can be attributed to two artists. The work of the first, who undertook all but the Gospel scenes, is working within the traditional format of Armenian Gospel illustration, especially that produced during the high point of 13th-century Cilician art, and with a characteristically bright palette. This artist uses pink, orange, pale green, mid-blue, purple, red and pale green, with white highlights and gold. Reproduced here is an example of the canon tables fols. 3v-4r (colour plate 5) and the Evangelist portraits of Sts. Mark and John (plates 34, 36). The second artist's work on the Gospel scenes 'updates' the illustration with strong reference to Western art (e.g. fol. 137r, Christ before Caiaphas, here plate 35). This artist's palette adds yellow, greens and browns, giving his work an altogether more sombre feel.

The state of the manuscript is very good, excepting some damage to the Massacre of the Innocents scene.

Date and provenance: I propose a mid-17th century date with a provenance in the Crimea, on the basis of comparison with a manuscript in London, B.L. Or. 13895, produced in 1658 in Kaffa in the Crimea.<sup>46</sup>

Bibliography: D. Panosian, 'The Eight Armenian Manuscripts in the Mingana Collection of the Selly Oak Colleges Central Library, Birmingham,' *Trazarg: Year Book of Sunday Schools of the Armenian Church, Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia* (Antelias, Lebanon, Third Year, 1969), 225-28, with plates (in Armenian).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> For the London manuscript, see V. Nersessian, *Armenian Illuminated Gospel Books*, The British Library (London, 1987), 39-41 with figs. 28-29, plate XIX. Compare the canon table on fols. 3v-4r (here colour plate 5) with fig. 29. The animals and the framing device are very similar despite the fact that the decoration in the Birmingham manuscript comprises floral motifs not roundels and the animals (including the monkey on the left) do not hold candles.

<sup>47</sup> MS M. Armenian I is expected to be included in a survey of Armenian manuscripts in preparation by Rev. Dr. V. Nersessian.