

Post-Byzantine Armenian Bookbinding and Its Relationship to the Greek Tradition

DICKRAN KOUYMJIAN

The choice of addressing Armenian bookbinding after the fifteenth century is due to a misunderstanding on my part of the period to be considered by this conference; I had thought it was entirely devoted to the post-Byzantine period. This confusion has allowed me to address what one might call late Armenian bookbinding, especially the very productive seventeenth century, for which there has been no general study.¹ Though Constantinople had fallen to the Turks in 1453, Armenia was not conquered until the eastern campaigns of Selim the Grim in 1514-1516. Due to these Safavid-Ottoman wars, which began at the inception of the sixteenth century and continued intermittently until nearly the mid-seventeenth century, the sixteenth century shows a net regression in Armenian manuscript production, especially in the first half of the century.² The progression in production, however, is regular after 1550, with a slight dip from 1600-1610 as a result of the Jelali movement in the Ottoman Empire, followed by a dramatic rise in manuscript production until the end of the seventeenth century after which there is a rapid decline.³

1. The following are the most important previous studies on Armenian manuscript bindings: Sylvia Merian, *The Structure of Armenian Bookbinding and Its Relation to Near Eastern Bookmaking Traditions*, Doctoral Thesis, Columbia University 1993; Garegin Yovsep'ean, *A Page from the History of Armenian Art and Culture*, Aleppo 1930 (in Armenian); Babgen Arak'elyan, *Kazmeri zardarman arveste mijnadaryan Hayastanum*, (The Art of Bookbinding Decoration in Medieval Armenia), *Banber Matenadarani* 4 (1958), 183-203, with 15 illustrations. Abbreviations for manuscripts: M=Matenadaran, Erevan; V=Vencie, Mekhitarist collection; J=Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate.

2. Details can be found in D. Kouymjian, *Sous le joug des Turcomans et des Turcs ottomans (XVe-XVIe siècles)*, *Histoire des Arméniens*, Gérard Dédéyan (ed.), Toulouse 1982, 341-376, and *idem*, *Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom (1375) to the Forced Emigration under Shah Abas (1604)*, *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, Richard Hovannisian (ed.), New York 1997, vol. 2, 1-50, reprinted as a booklet, Fresno 1998, see especially 8-20.

3. For statistics of Armenian manuscript production see D. Kouymjian, *Dated Armenian Manuscripts as a Statistical Tool for Armenian History*, *Medieval Armenian Culture*, T. Samuelian and M. Stone (eds.), University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies vol. 6, Chico CA 1983, 425-439.

Traditional Armenian bindings were fashioned well into the eighteenth century and even occasionally in the early nineteenth century, even in distant Armenian diaspora communities. Even though the physical technique of traditional Armenian bookbinding – the sewing of quires and headbands, the method of attaching the boards, the application of leather covers, and the use of linings – remained unchanged until late, eventually to be replaced at the end of the eighteenth century and after by western bookbinding fashions, the decoration of leather bindings from specific regions undergoes a radical change or changes in the seventeenth century.

Armenian manuscript production finally gave way to the printed book, but only at the end of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, more than 200 years after Armenian books were first issued in Venice (1511-2). Even though the Bible in Armenian was printed in Amsterdam in 1666, it was simply too expensive an item with some 200 engravings to be bought by anyone but rich merchants. Even so, it was not the Bible which was the essential liturgical book, but the Gospels, the most used and sought after text of the clergy. When Gospel books were printed in large quantities and successive editions, first in Venice starting in the 1680s and then in Constantinople in 1710 and after, their copying by the clergy dramatically dropped; by 1760 the copying of Gospels, Hymnals, and Bibles had virtually stopped.⁴ If manuscripts were still copied in the late eighteenth century and even in the nineteenth century, they were done so not out of necessity, but either as a pious act, an attribute associated with the work of scribes, especially amateurs, or in the case of Gospels and ritual books for the aesthetic quality and luxury of multicolored illuminations absent in the printed volumes. Nevertheless, the hand written book tradition continued everywhere until the First World War; thousands of Armenian manuscripts from the eighteenth, the nineteenth, and the early twentieth centuries are kept in the most important repositories in Armenia and elsewhere. These are often one of a kind items, dictionaries, grammars, glossaries, travel accounts, contemporary histories, commercial registers, journals, practical guides, biographies, and copies of older texts as yet unpublished made by hand for or by scholars for their own research. Few of these are illuminated. Kurt Weitzmann remarked forty years ago when speaking about late post-Byzantine Greek manuscript painting: though some miniatures are executed with considerable skill, “book illumination has ceased to be a living and leading art”.⁵ This applies equally well to late Armenian manuscript production.

Let us review the similarities and differences between Armenian and Byzantine manuscript production. Both were involved in the dramatic fourth century development of the codex, the Byzantines more directly as inheritors of the Roman Empire, the Armenians only producing

4. See the graph comparing the number of titles of printed books year by year plotted against the number of manuscript Gospels, Bibles, New Testaments in Kouymjian, *Dated Armenian Manuscripts as a Statistical Tool for Armenian History*, 434, fig. II.

5. K. Weitzmann, *Manuscripts, Byzantine Art an European Art*, catalogue of a Council of Europe exhibition, Athens 1964, 294.

their own books after the invention of the alphabet in 405. We know of no attested use of scrolls or papyri in Armenia (though clay seals that might have been attached to rolls have been found in pre-Christian excavations), so rather than a transition from roll to codex, Armenia knows only the book with folded pages. Furthermore, in terms of ordinary as opposed to luxury bindings, both traditions seem to have been influenced by the Coptic manner of leather binding of codices, Armenia perhaps through the intermediary of Syria and Byzantium. Leather covered boards were the standard for both schools, rather than leather over papyrus filling as in early Coptic bindings or over carton as in Islam or flexible vellum as sometimes found in the West. In both variants the text block and the size of the covered boards are the same, no overlapping or “squares” as in European bindings. Both traditions used a raised, embroidered headband at both ends, which required that manuscripts be stored lying flat rather than upright (fig. 1). However, there were differences as pointed out first, rather hastily, by Berthe Van Regemorter and more thoroughly by Sylvia Merian.⁶ Armenian binders always, or at least from the twelfth century onwards, used supported stitching to sew together the quires of a manuscript as did European binders, perhaps because of a European influence,⁷ whereas in the Greek or other Middle East traditions, the quires were sewn to each other. The boards of Armenian bindings were usually much thinner than Byzantine ones, usually 2-5 millimeters; they were also placed with grain running horizontally, while the Greeks and other east Mediterranean craftsmen placed them vertically. The method of attaching the text block to the leather covered boards was also different. Armenians always covered the inside front and back boards with a cloth lining double of some distinction (fig. 2); Byzantine binders left the wood naked showing the holes and strings used to fasten the binding to the text; Islamic bindings used a thin piece of leather as lining.⁸ Both Greeks and Armenians decorated the leather with blind tooling, using a variety of stamping tools, but Armenians never used stamping irons with animals or heraldic designs as did the Byzantines. Stamps or designs were not applied, however, to the spine of a binding, which was only decorated with thin vertical fillets. Furthermore, Armenian leather bindings usually had a flap precisely the size of the gutter or fore-edge attached to the lower cover forming a box-like container (fig. 3); unlike the Islamic envelop flap, it never reached

6. Berthe van Regemorter, *La reliure arménienne*, *Bazmavép* (1953), nos. 8-10, 200-204; a few of her observations were partly corrected in *eadem*, *La reliure byzantine*, *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art*, XXXVI/1-4 (1967), 99-162; Merian, *The Structure of Armenian Bookbinding*; Sylvie Merian, *From Venice to Isfahan and Back: The Making of an Armenian Manuscript in Early 18th-Century Persia*, *The Complete Binder: Studies in Book Making and Conservation in Honour of Roger Powell*, John L. Sharpe (ed.), Turnhout 1996, 280-291.

7. Sylvie Merian suggests that this happened through Crusader influence during the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. See, *Cilicia as the Locus of European Influence on Armenian Medieval Book Production*, *Armenian Review* 45, no. 4/180 (1992, issued 1995), 61-72.

8. I know of a single Armenian manuscript with a leather lining, M5617, a miscellany of religious texts copied in 1176 but with a much later sixteenth or seventeenth century binding.



Fig. 1

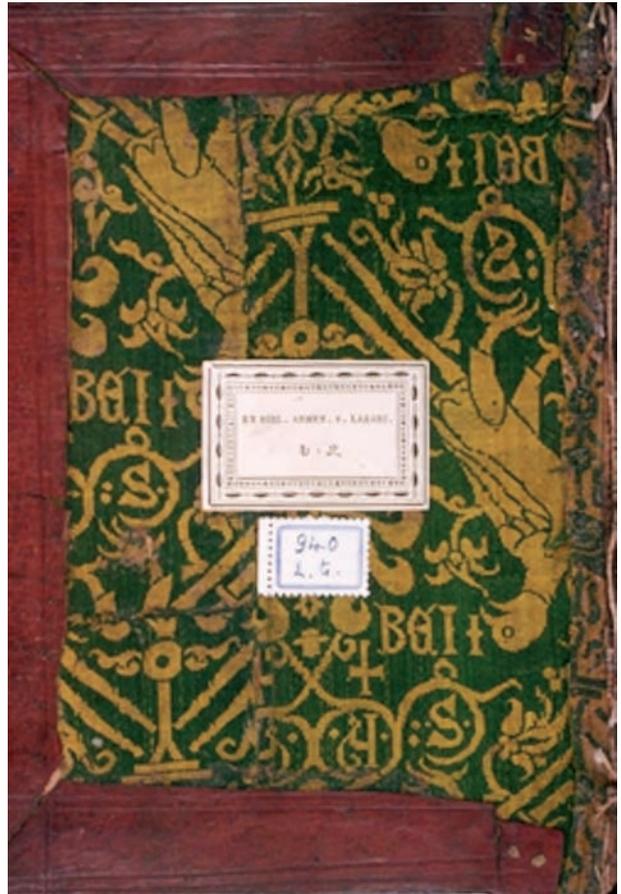


Fig. 2

over the upper cover. On many covers in Greater Armenia from the fifteenth to the first years of the seventeenth century, binders reinforced the designs of the tooled decoration with rounded metal studs (fig. 4a, b); these also might have served to protect the covers of the book, which were kept lying flat, from wear.⁹

The basic design of Armenian bindings differed dramatically and consistently from those of the Empire to its west. Perhaps this is in part due to the rarity of secular manuscripts, Christian texts, but especially the Gospel book, accounting for the majority of surviving Armenian manuscripts up to 1500. The principal decorations on Gospel bindings are on the upper cover a braided cross on a stepped pedestal (fig. 5), sometimes called a Calvary cross, enclosed in a rectangular braided or guilloche frame and on the lower cover a vertical rectangle made of

9. The technical questions are nicely summarized by Sylvie Merian in Th.F. Mathews and R.S. Wieck, (eds.), *Treasures from Heaven, Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, New York 1994; Bindings, 130-134.

dense braided or rope work within the same guilloche frame (fig. 6).¹⁰ These designs underline the central theme of the Christian message, Crucifixion on the upper cover and Resurrection on the lower. I have discussed elsewhere the interpretation of this abstract rectangle on the lower cover as the Resurrection, representing the empty tomb of the risen Christ.¹¹ Often on bindings other than the Gospels – hymnals, rituals, and secular texts – one or both of these motifs are replaced by an elaborate geometric rosette (intersecting triangles or squares with corners joined by arcs producing a lobbed figure) in the central field



Fig. 3

(fig. 7).¹² They are formed with intersecting squares and triangles, the corners of which are joined by arcs to give rosette designs of eight, six, or four petals; these are sometimes found on Gospel covers.¹³

The braided cross-braided rectangle motifs have a long life on Armenian Gospel bindings. The paired motifs seem to be the oldest decoration found on surviving Armenian manuscript bindings, going back perhaps as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries,¹⁴ but almost cer-

10. There are some variants of these motifs made entirely with stamping tools rather than the rope braid, for example, M4214, works of Gregory of Skevra of 1298 with a rebinding of 1604; M979. Lectionary of Het'um II, 1286 with rebinding of 1694, using rosette stamps; M355, Gospels of 1280, rebound in the late seventeenth century by Bishop P'ilipos; M5708, Gospels of 1325, but with a later rebinding. For the abandonment of the braided cross and rectangle design in certain regions in the seventeenth century see below.

11. D. Kouymjian, *The Decoration of Medieval Armenian Manuscript Bindings*, *Colloque international. La reliure médiévale*, (Paris, Institut de France, 22-24 mai 2003) (in press). See also D. Kouymjian, *Inscribed Armenian Manuscript Bindings: A Preliminary General Survey*, *Armenian Texts, Tasks and Tools*. Papers of the Association Internationale des Etudes Arméniennes: Workshop on Priorities, Problems and Techniques of Text Editions, H.J. Lehmann and J.J.S. Weitenberg (eds.), Aarhus 1993, 103, note 13.

12. Similar designs, ultimately of Coptic origin, but reinforced by Islamic decoration, are found in Mudejar and other traditions. For example, a seven lobbed or petalled geometric figure on a fifteenth century Spanish binding, Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, Inc. 1228, printed book of 1480, *Les reliures médiévales de la Bibliothèque Mazarine*, exhibition catalogue, Paris 2003, no. 17. Armenian examples are always with an even number of petals or lobes, 8, 6, or 4.

13. For example: V141/102, Gospels, seventeenth century, with stepped cross on the upper cover and an eight-petalled rosette on the lower; M9841, Gospels of 1452, rebound by P'ilipos in 1586, lower cover with eight-petalled rosette; V862, Gospels of 1599 and M285, Gospels of 1221 with a later rebinding, both with four lobbed geometric rosettes on the lower covers.

14. Arakelian, *The Art of Bookbinding Decoration in Medieval Armenia*, 185, lists three manuscripts, which he claims have eleventh century bindings from the Matenadaran in Erevan: M4804, Gospels of 1018, but with a



Fig. 4a

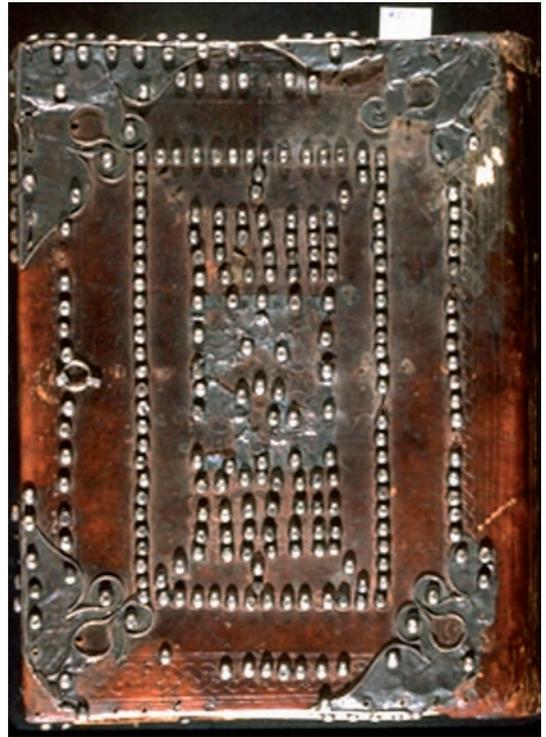


Fig. 4b



Fig. 5

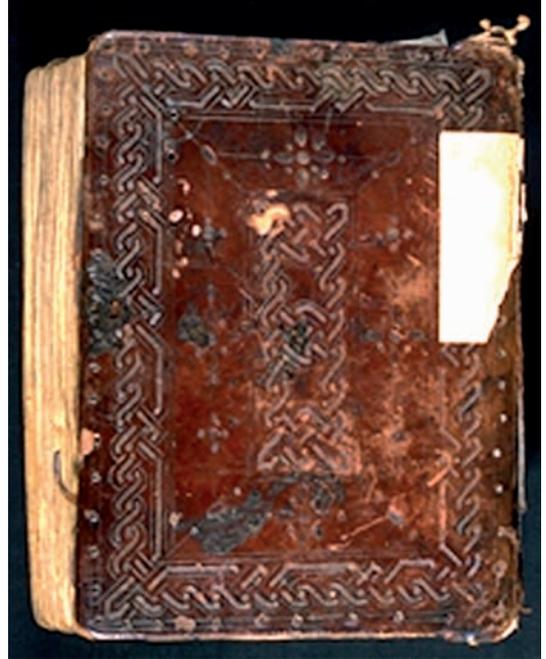


Fig. 6

tainly from the thirteenth century to at least 1694. All but a handful of the 50 or so bindings with this combination I have photographed are Gospels.¹⁵ In the eighteenth century, the scenes of Crucifixion and Resurrection get translated on to silver binding plaques (fig. 8) used on both manuscripts and printed books, but the rectangle representing Resurrection is by then misunderstood by many binders. It disappears on silver works and is replaced by a European influenced iconography of the Resurrection, usually Christ bearing a staff and ascending from above the tomb (fig. 9). In these silver bindings, the braided cross also gives way to a Crucifixion proper: Christ on the cross. There are many examples of anomalous combinations on leather bindings: braided cross on lower cover, rectangle on upper; braided rectangle on both covers; cross and geometricized rosette, geometric motifs on both covers (usually non-Gospel texts). On silver bindings, the pair Crucifixion-Resurrection is not always used even for Gospels, but other narrative scenes are common, Presentation of the Magi, Presentation in the Temple, Ascension, etc., on one or both covers.



Fig. 7

Establishing a chronology of designs on leather bindings is hindered by the perpetual problem of dating. As in the Byzantine and other traditions, manuscripts were regularly rebound. Of course we are more fortunate when working with Armenian manuscripts because of the strong colophon tradition with memorials often, but not always, mentioning later binders. These are usually dated. Nevertheless, we are sometimes left with a dated text of say the twelfth or thirteenth century with leather covers clearly much later in style, yet without further internal evidence. The binding must be dated by its design and tooling, but because so few Armenian bindings have been published we lack the necessary comparative data to make informed date attributions, and in many monasteries archaic traditions were very strong thus inducing chronological errors. On the other hand there is, luckily, a series of inscribed and dated leather bindings, which leaves no doubt about the moment of their creation. With a few exceptions

binding that is much later, M3793, Gospels of 1053, but with a later binder's colophon of 1587, M275, Gospels of 1071-1079, but with a colophon of restoration of 1220, yet even a thirteenth century date is hard to accept for this binding. On the other hand, Arakelian in his fig. 2, p. 187, reproduces a marginal drawing in the Gospels of 1033, M283, fol. 172v, which shows a braided cross on a pedestal much like the crosses on the earliest bindings. A similar polychrome braided cross on a pedestal within a partially braided frame serves as a full-page miniature in the Gospels of 1064, J1924, fol. 8.

15. The others are a Bible, New Testament, Psalter, Prayerbook, Hymnal, Ritual from the collections of the Matenadaran, Erevan, the Prelacy Museum, New Julfa, Isfahan, and the Mekhitarist Library, San Lazzaro, Venice. The examples from firmly dated Gospels run from 1356 (is the binding from this date?) to as late as 1656, with a jump to 1694, however, my sampling is far from balanced and not even properly random.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

these are all from a specific locality and limited to a short period from the 1650s to the 1730s. They will be discussed below. Silver bindings from all periods are also usually dated, and though they help us understand the evolution of the structure and sewing of the codex, they are of less use for the history of leather bindings.

In general one can say that Armenian decoration went its separate way in bindings and was hardly touched by the Byzantine tradition, quite different from the strong influence of

Byzantine art and iconography on the illuminations in these same manuscripts. But before discussing the late evolution of the decoration of Armenian bindings, this conference is the perfect occasion to present a few isolated features that are directly related to Byzantine book-binding. Icons were not a part of the Armenian artistic tradition. Thus, to find an icon-like painting on the cover of a late seventeenth century Armenian Gospel manuscript in the Venice Mekhitarist collection (fig. 10) is quite remarkable, especially since it is painted directly onto leather that had already been blind tooled.¹⁶ I suspect it is due to Greek influence, even though the iconography of the Crucifixion is probably copied after European models of the time, with, for example, a single nail used to fasten both feet to the cross.¹⁷ There is a painted binding on a provincial mid-Byzantine Lectionary in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library with the Crucifixion and the symbols of the Evangelists in the four corners, but lacking the Virgin and John as in the Armenian example.¹⁸

16. Venice, V1580/183, Four Gospels, dated to the seventeenth century, upper cover; Barsegh Sargisian, *Master Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts of the Mekhitarist Library in Venice*, vol. I, Venice 1914, no. 183, without colophons. Though Sargisian dates the manuscript to the seventeenth-eighteenth century, Sahak Djemdjemian, in his tables of concordance between the old manuscript numbers of the Mekhitarist collection and the printed catalogue numbers, gives the date as seventeenth century, vol. VI, Venice 1996.

17. Sirarpie Der Nersessian commenting on a miniature of the same period and similar disposition in a Hymnal (FGA 37.19, f. 154v) copied in 1652 in Agulis observes, "[T]he intrusion of western European iconography can be detected in the Crucifixion, where Christ's feet are nailed with a single nail instead of two", *Armenian Manuscripts in the Freer Gallery of Art*, Washington 1963, 86, fig. 300.

18. Cambridge, MA, Andover-Harvard Theological Lib., Codex Z243, G. Vikan, *Illuminated Greek Manuscripts from American Collections. An Exhibition in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Princeton 1973, no. 61, 204-5. Vikan dates the work to the sixteenth century. One must add that apparently painted Byzantine bindings are not so rare in the

There is also a very small group of Armenian bindings from the second quarter of the eighteenth century decorated with three or four concentric rectangles filled with continuous floral scrolls, the inner most band sometimes inscribed with a dated inscription, as in an example dated 1724 (fig. 11a, b); in the small central field is a western inspired Crucifixion stamp.¹⁹ Such Armenian bindings are similar in design to nos. 9-11 in the study of Federici and Houlis on Byzantine bindings in the Vatican collection.²⁰ Similar concentric rectangle decorations are also known in early Latin bindings.²¹ Just how or why this style was adopted in New Julfa, far removed from the Greek world of the Mediterranean, is not clear; perhaps through Amsterdam, since the Dutch influence on the Armenians of Iran was strong in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, witness the first printed Bible in Armenian in Amsterdam in 1666.²² One should also mention a series of late bindings from several locales with simple intersecting diagonal, horizontal, and vertical fillets, much like Byzantine bindings in Federici and Houlis and van Regemorter (fig. 12);²³ Babgen Arakelian has associated these simple patterns with binders from the Armenian colony in the Crimea, but they can be found in late bindings from several regions. The simple decoration is also well attested in the earliest western bindings of the ninth to the eleventh centuries.²⁴

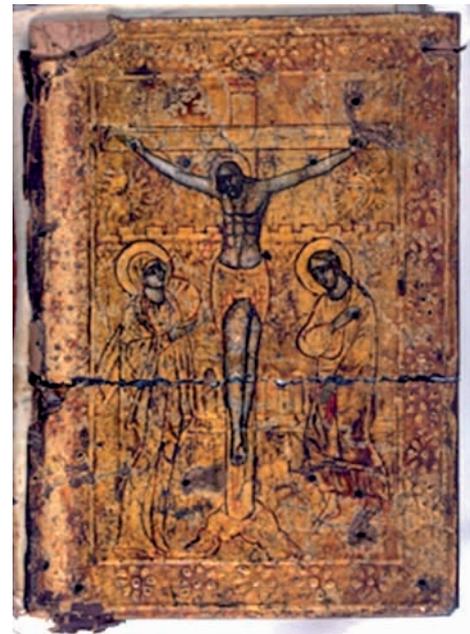


Fig. 10

Greek realm since a paper in this conference seems to be devoted to them: Anastasia Lazaridou, *Hand-painted Bindings of the Post-Byzantine Period*.

19. New Julfa, Isfahan, Armenian Prelacy, NJ452, Sermons of Gregory of Tat'ev, sixteenth or seventeenth century; colophon missing, but binding inscription offers date 1725 and patron's name, the monk A'anes. See also, D. Kouymjian, *The New Julfa Style of Armenian Manuscript Binding*, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 8 (1995, pub. 1997), 16, fig. 2.

20. C. Federici and K. Houlis, *Legature Bizantine Vaticane*, Rome 1988, fig. 37; illustrated examples, pls. III, VI, XIII. Of course the Greek examples are not inscribed; see also the earlier van Regemorter, *La reliure byzantine*, type a. on pl. XII.

21. An example of about 1200 on the lower cover of a Gospel in the Bibliothèque Mazarine, ms 142, *Les reliures médiévales de la Bibliothèque Mazarine*, no. 7.

22. On early Armenian printing including the various volumes issued in Amsterdam see, R. Kévorkian, *Catalogue des Incunables arméniens (1511/1695) ou chronique de l'imprimerie arménienne*, Geneva 1986.

23. Federici and Houlis, *Legature Bizantine Vaticane*, fig. 37, types 3 to 8, pl. XIX; Van Regemorter, *La reliure byzantine*, pls. XVI-XVII.

24. J. Vezin, *Le décor des reliures de cuir pendant le haut Moyen Age*, *Bulletin du bibliophile*, no. I (Paris 1989), 16-33, fig. 3, Paris, BnF, Lat. 12051, after 950 A.D.; fig. 5 Göttweig 22, tenth-eleventh century.



Fig. 11a



Fig. 11b



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Yet these are isolated examples of direct affinities with both the Byzantine and earlier European decorative system. The mass of Armenian leather covers, even in the post-Byzantine period, demonstrate a clear and immediately recognizable native approach to decoration, even if motifs and stamping tools are occasionally copied from the European traditions, especially in the case of New Julfa bindings. What is most interesting in the internal development of the Armenian style or styles is the dramatic change in design in the post-Byzantine period, especially in the seventeenth century and especially in Armenian diaspora colonies.

The most important of which were those of the Crimea, dating back to migrations from the former Bagratid capital Ani in the thirteenth century,²⁵ New Julfa, the Armenian suburb of the Safavid capital Isfahan, where the victims of the forced migration of Shah Abbas from Julfa on the Arax in 1604-5 were settled, and Constantinople in the late seventeenth, but especially the eighteenth century and after, when the old Armenian community was reinforced by waves of immigrants fleeing historic Armenia during the century and a half of Safavid-Ottoman wars.²⁶ In addition to these more famous centers, later Armenian bookbindings were fashioned in all the major centers of historic Armenia for manuscripts but also for printed volumes. There is a radical break in the main centers in the seventeenth century and after with traditional blind tooled designs of Armenian bindings; the braided cross on a pedestal and the braided rectangle are virtually abandoned as primary motifs of Gospels and Bibles for entirely new ones.

The most characteristic regional style is found at New Julfa a few decades after the founding in 1605. The leather used is lighter in color than the dark hued bindings of the earlier period in Greater Armenia or Cilicia. New stamping tools are employed, often western in style and historiated, principally Christ on the cross and the Virgin. About the mid-seventeenth century, a very elaborately blind stamped design is created (fig. 13) with, on the upper cover, a crucifix stamp sometimes with other figures within a circle from which radiate tongues of flame. In a study devoted to this type, I have coined the term "sunburst" to describe it. On the lower cover, there is a stamp of the Virgin within a similar circle with star designs replacing the flames of Christ (fig. 13), which I call a "star burst".²⁷ Finally, a great number of these bindings are inscribed, in most cases with the date of execution.²⁸ Almost all the inscriptions are

25. Though the illuminations of Armenian manuscripts from the Crimea have been well studied, no special article has been devoted to bindings. A useful but partial enumeration of dated Armenian manuscripts from the Crimea lists 103 items dating from 1324 to 1714 with more than half from the fourteenth century; Nira Stone, *The Kaffa Lives of the Desert Fathers. A Study in Armenian Manuscript Illumination*, Louvain 1997, 191-93.

26. Historical, social, and economic analyses can be found in Kouymjian, *Sous le joug des Turcs ottomans et des Turcs ottomans (XVe-XVIe siècles)*, and *idem*, *Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom (1375)*.

27. Kouymjian, *The New Julfa Style of Armenian Manuscript Binding*, 13-36.

28. The dated New Julfa bindings in my inventory are from 1658 to 1751, with a straggler of 1895. Among my list of 120 inscribed bindings dated from 1565 to 1895, 87 are from New Julfa and 82 of them date from 1658 to 1751.



Fig. 14

Resurrection motifs for very elaborate Biblical scenes often enclosed in frames with busts of the apostles and prophets. Thus far twenty such covers are recorded dating from 1653 to 1704, plus another from 1741.³¹ The binder-silversmiths' names are clearly indicated along with date in the inscriptions of these silver plaques; these names suggest that they were members of several families of craftsmen who probably immigrated from New Julfa-Iran to Caesarea in the first half of the seventeenth century.³²

rendered in large majuscules with stamping tools either fashioned from moveable type or specially made by the same dye makers responsible for the fashioning of the fonts for the Armenian printing establishment set up by the prelate of New Julfa, Khatchatur of Caesarea. From 1638 to 1650 seven titles were issued by this pioneering effort; three additional works were published in 1687-1688. I suspect the tools used to blind stamp the inscriptions were recuperated from type fonts no longer being used after 1650, harmonizing well chronologically with the first recorded inscription of 1658.²⁹

Another important regional group of seventeenth century or later bindings are a number of silver covers fashioned by Armenian jewelers in Caesarea/Kayseri (fig. 14).³⁰ The carefully fashioned and rather large silver covers eschew the usual Crucifixion-

29. These were the first books printed in any language in Iran. The venture was started by Khatchatur Vardapet Kesarac'i, Armenian Prelate of New Julfa (1620-1646). Khatchatur even manufactured his own paper.

30. Due to the western immigration of Armenians during the Ottoman-Safavid wars, Caesarea received a major infusion of Armenians from the east. By the end of the sixteenth century, nearly 50% of the population in the inner walled city was Armenian; Kouymjian, *Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom*, 28-29.

31. A number of studies have been devoted to them, the most recent provides the earlier bibliography: A. Malkhasian, *From the History of the Bookbinding Art of the Armenians of Caesarea*, *Etchmiadzin* 5-6 (1996) 174-190 (in Armenian); see also Sylvie Merian's section on silver bindings with excellent reproductions in Mathews and Wieck, *Treasures from Heaven*, 16-22. Another binding dated 1709 (my reading) should be added to the list; it was published by Frédéric Macler, *Documents d'art arméniens*, Paris 1924, fig. 260, on a Gospel book. Macler read the inscription as 1701, Merian in *Treasures from Heaven*, 151, read 1661 or 1701; the item is missing from Malkhasian's list.

32. Malkhasian, *From the History of the Bookbinding Art of the Armenians of Caesarea*, 186-190.



Fig. 15

As indicated above the Armenian colony of the Crimea was active in copying manuscripts; Kafa bindings (fig. 13) on the whole appear much less complicated than either the traditional bindings from Armenia or those of New Julfa. The designs are made mostly with fillets forming diamond patterns, with a sparse use of stamps; sometimes the lines are made with small oval stamps instead of simple lines. The other major center, Constantinople, the most important Armenian diaspora community in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seems not to have produced a distinctive style in leather bindings. By that time, standardized western binding techniques had replaced conventional Armenian ones, especially for the covers of printed books, which often came ready bound from European centers of Armenian printing.

There were holdouts here and there; occasionally one finds a traditionally bound and decorated Armenian book or manuscript in the early nineteenth century (fig. 15).³³ Fine binding continued until the twentieth century, however, it was almost always with silver plaques. Liturgical books, whether manuscript or now more frequently printed ones, still valued items especially when used during liturgical services, or as in the case of the Gospels, displayed on the altar, had silver covers, often gilded (fig. 16a, b). Scores of these from the nineteenth century survive in patriarchal collections in Etchmiadzin, Antelias, Jerusalem, Venice, and Vienna. This phenomenon was the same in all Orthodox and

33. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, Armenian MS 41, dated 1823, the upper cover is blind tooled with triple fillets forming lozenges with a large clover like motif in the center made from a tear shaped tool used four times.

*Fig. 16a**Fig. 16b*

Catholic Churches in the East and the West. The tradition continues today: fancy silver bindings as well as other liturgical objects necessary for Sunday services are purchased from specialized international companies, usually now by internet, and because in most cases these are Greek Orthodox suppliers, a Greek connection in the Armenian binding tradition continues.³⁴

34. For instance Eastern Christian Supply Company, <http://www.easternchristian.com/>.