



The colophons of Nersēs of Lambron bearing on the Third Crusade

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ABSTRACT

Nersēs of Lambron (d. 1198) was a prolific Armenian writer whose works contain several colophons, of which five have a bearing on the Third Crusade. While some colophons serve as prefaces to his writings, others are addenda on circumstances at the time of writing or on later events. The scant history of scholarship devoted to them reveals an unwarranted assumption that has led early scholars to conclude that Nersēs was in Jerusalem when the city fell to Saladin in 1187. The article focuses on the five colophons in chronological order, offering a literary-historical analysis. The colophons composed in quatrains are of particular interest, as are others where a continuator's hand is discernible—whether on the piety of Benedictine monks in the Holy City or on naval movements around Acre. While the study disproves the assumption that Nersēs was in Jerusalem then (or at any time), it underscores the historical significance of these colophons in reflecting Armeno-Cilician sentiments during the period—such as toward the apparently unsatisfactory outcome of the battle of Arsuf (1191). Subsequent hopes of victory and the eventual redemption of Jerusalem were hence anchored in the nascent kingdom of Cilician Armenia (1199–1375). The conclusion draws attention to the absolute necessity of scrutinizing 'eyewitness' accounts surrounding the crusades and to the need of reading the rest of Nersēs's colophons critically.

KEYWORDS

Third Crusade; Nersēs of Lambron; colophons; literary-historical analysis; ~~Third Crusade~~; Armenian sources

Introduction

Nersēs of Lambron (1153–98) was one of the more prolific medieval Armenian authors despite his short yet eventful life, sketched below. Foremost among his works, some fifty of them,¹ are lengthy commentaries on certain biblical books, including a massive commentary on the Psalms, others on the books comprising the Wisdom Literature and the Twelve Prophets. Of those on New Testament writings, his commentary on John's

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¹The complete works of Nersēs of Lambron are currently being edited at the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Mashtots' Matenadaran, Yerevan, for inclusion in the important series *Matenagirk' Hayoc'* (Armenian Classical Authors) began in 2003. For a brief survey of his writings see Nersēs Akinean, *Nersēs Lambronac'ī Ark'episkopos Tarsoni, keank'n ew grakan vastaknerē handerj azgabanut'eamb Pahlawuneac' ew Lambroni Het'meanc'* [Nersēs of Lambron, Archbishop of Tarsus: His Life and Literary Works with an Ancestral History of the Pahlavunis and the Het'umids of Lambron], *Azgayin Matenadaran* [National Library] 179 (Vienna, 1956), 131–243. For his published writings see Robert W. Thomson, *A Bibliography of Classical Armenian Literature to 1500 AD* (Turnhout, 1995), 175–8.

Revelation deserves special mention—as does his translation of the Revelation.² His non-biblical commentaries cover a range of liturgical texts including the Divine Liturgy. He is also the author of several treatises on various religious subjects in addition to translations, letters, poetic hymns and panegyrics.³ His literary achievement is truly amazing, given his duties as Archbishop of Tarsus since age twenty-three (1175/6–98) and as diplomat serving the heads of Church and State at a critical juncture in the history of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, which lasted from 1080/1199–1375, disintegrating with the rest of the crusader states.

There are some sixteen colophons by Nersēs, appended mostly to his major works. The nineteenth-century Venetian Mekhitarist scholar Lewond Ališan published eleven of them, clustering them randomly.⁴ In five of these colophons, taken up chronologically here, there are references and allusions either to the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187 or to the ensuing arrival of the Third Crusade. These five warrant a second look, for all subsequent remarks on Nersēs's colophons appear to have been influenced by Ališan's pioneering work, where there are misleading and at times conflicting remarks that have been perpetuated in various compendia, the major editions of collected colophons with those of Nersēs among them.⁵ Much as these colophons are to be appreciated as historical sources for the period, they are to be considered critically—like all other documentary sources.⁶

Ališan's early misreading, especially of the first of the five colophons detailed below (that of the year 1179, consisting of three quatrains and purportedly suggesting Nersēs's visit to Jerusalem in that year), seems to have had a lasting effect on subsequent views regarding Nersēs's colophons. Ališan's erroneous course appears to have begun with two mistakes: (1) his taking the colophon's date, 1179, as that of Nersēs's visit to Jerusalem; and (2) his glossing over the stylistic distinction between the first quatrain and the following

²*Nersēs of Lambron: Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*, trans. Robert W. Thomson, Hebrew University Armenian Studies 9 (Leuven, 2007). The commentary is based on that of Andreas Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (written late in the sixth century, amplified by Arethas Bishop of Caesarea c. 895), which Nersēs translated after learning about it on his visit to Antioch in 1176. See also *Nersēs of Lambron: Commentary on the Dormition of Saint John: Armenian Text and Annotated Translation*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson, Armenian Texts and Studies 1 (Leiden, 2017).

³For a comprehensive introduction to Nersēs, see Boghos L. Zekiyan, 'Nersēs de Lambron', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris, 1982), 11: 122–34; cf. Mesrob Ashjian, *St. Nersēs of Lambron: Champion of the Church Universal* (New York, 1993), 7–43, and Thomson, *Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*, 10–14.

⁴Lewond Ališan, *Hayapatum* [Armenian History], 2 vols. (Venice, 1901–2), 2: 430–50. These and few others are dispersed chronologically among editions of colophons (see the next note) and scattered in catalogues published by the repositories of Armenian manuscripts, on which see Bernard Coulie, 'Collections and Catalogues of Armenian Manuscripts', in *Armenian Philology in the Modern Era: From Manuscript to Digital Text*, ed. Valentina Calzolari, with the collaboration of Michael E. Stone, Handbook of Oriental Studies 23/1 (Leiden, 2014), 23–64.

⁵See especially Garegin I Kat'olikos [Yovsēp'eanc'], *Yišatakarak' jeragrac'* [Colophons of Manuscripts] (Antelias, 1951), with much reliance on Ališan; and Artašes S. Mat'evosyan, *Hayeren Jeragreri Hišatakarakanner, E–ŽB dd.* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, V–XII Centuries], *Nyut'er hay žołovrdi patmut'ean* [Themes in the History of the Armenian People] 21 (Yerevan, 1988). Mat'evosyan accounts for sixteen colophons chronologically dispersed among those by others (nos. 229, 233, 236, 239, 244, 245, 246, 263, 289, 292, 293, 300, 302, 303, 304, 305?) while omitting a significant one: the second colophon—of the year 1190—discussed in this article.

⁶Much has been written in Armenian on the significance of Armenian colophons. In Western languages, see Avedis K. Sanjian, 'The Historical Significance of the Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts', *Le Muséon* 81 (1968): 181–95; idem, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301–1480: A Source for Middle Eastern History*, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 2 (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 1–41; Michael E. Stone, 'Colophons in Armenian Manuscripts', in *Scribi e colofoni: le sottoscrizioni di copisti dalle origini all'avvento della Stampa*, ed. E. Condello and G. De Gregorio (Spoleto, 1995), 463–71, repr. in Michael E. Stone, ed., *Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha and Armenian Studies*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2006), 2: 477–85; Gérard Dédéyan, 'Les colophons de manuscrits arméniens comme sources pour l'histoire des Croisades', in *The Crusades and Their Sources: Essays Presented to Bernard Hamilton*, ed. John France and William G. Zajac (Aldershot, 1998; repr., 2016), 89–110; Anna Sirinian, 'On the Historical and Literary Value of the Colophons in Armenian Manuscripts', in *Armenian Philology in the Modern Era*, ed. Calzolari, 65–100.

two added by a later scribe, which he seems to have discerned but then dismissed, adding this note to the first quatrain: ‘This and those written beneath, he wrote joyously when translating the book’ (*Ays ew nerk’oy grealnerë girk’ë t’argmanelu aten zuart’ut’eamb grer ë*),⁷ referring to *The Rule of St. Benedict* and the validating *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great. Bishop Mkrtič’ Aławnuni of the St. James brotherhood in Jerusalem, in his alphabetical directory to former monks and distinguished Armenian pilgrims over the years, lists Nersēs among the latter, in the era of the crusades, adding that he was there not in 1179 but during Saladin’s siege of the city in 1187.⁸ In his assessment of the same colophon, the Viennese Mekhitarist scholar Nersēs Akinean, like Ališan, considered all three quatrains as belonging to Nersēs, even though he too seems to have sensed the stylistic discrepancy between them. Yet he resorts to reconciling them by adding that the author employs ‘allegorical’ language in the latter two quatrains, as if speaking from a ‘neighborly’ perspective (*aylabanakan ... ibrew drac’i xōsac ë*).⁹ Akinean goes on to draw attention to a similar perspective in the colophon of the year 1198, the last of the five colophons considered here. This too, as we shall see, is of questionable authorship.

Among the likely continuators of Nersēs’s colophons is possibly his amanuensis, the scribe Samuël of Skewra (a major monastery adjacent to Lambron, under Nersēs’s episcopal supervision), who also happens to be the author of an early biography of Nersēs (up to the year 1190), added to Nersēs’s extensive *Commentary on the Psalms* which Samuël was commissioned to copy.¹⁰ More on this early *vita* will be said in the concluding remarks, for there is a two-part colophon added to it by none other than Samuël, echoing thoughts found in certain of the colophons attributed to Nersēs and considered in this article. As we shall see, these colophons are historically significant for the light they shed on the sentiments regarding the Third Crusade (1189–92), even with Nersēs’s presence in Jerusalem during the 1187 siege being called into question—indeed ruled out. Before reviewing them chronologically, a brief review of Nersēs’s life is necessary to help place them in their literary and/or historical contexts.

A sketch of Nersēs’s life

Nersēs, whose baptismal name was Smbat, was the third of eight children born to Ōšin II, the Het’umid lord of Lambron (c. 1125–70),¹¹ an impressive castle in the Taurus Mountains, some fifty kilometers north of Tarsus (Namrun Kalesi near Çamlıyayla in Mersin Province, Turkey),¹² and Šahanduxt, daughter of Šahan Prince of Covk’ (Lake Hazar region in the Sivrice district of Elaziğ Province, Turkey), a grandson of the Pahlawuni prince and

⁷Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 440 n. 2; cf. idem, *Sissouan ou l’Arméno-Cilicie, description géographique et historique* (Venice, 1899), 92.

⁸Mkrtič’ (Episkopos) Aławnuni, *Miabanġ’ ew ayc’eluk’ hay Erusałēmi* [Members of the Brotherhood and Visitors to Armenian Jerusalem] (Jerusalem, 1929), 396–7.

⁹Akinean, *Nersēs Lambronac’i*, 37–8; cf. 184–8. To his credit, Akinean has a question mark next to a subheading of §7, ‘Nersēs in Jerusalem?’ in the book’s table of contents (p. ix), but raises no question(s) in the pages where the subject is presented (37–8). The perceived problems presented in this article are nowhere addressed.

¹⁰On this extant manuscript, produced during Nersēs’s lifetime, see below, note 70.

¹¹The Het’umids hail from Ganġak in Arcax, Eastern Armenia. Led by Ōšin I (c.1040–c.1110), they possessed the fortress in 1071/2. They were part of the Byzantine-contrived mass migration of Armenian nobility from Eastern Armenia into Cilicia in the second half of the eleventh century; see Gérard Dédéyan, ‘L’immigration arménienne en Cappadoce au XI^e siècle’, *Byzantion* 45, no. 1 (1975): 40–115.

¹²Francis C. R. Robinson and Patricia C. Hughes, ‘Lampron [*sic*]—Castle of Armenian Cilicia’, *Anatolian Studies* 19 (1969): 183–207.

savant Grigor Magistros (d. 1059).¹³ An older and a younger brother of Šahan were successive Catholicoi, heads of the Armenian Church: Grigor III (in office 1113–66) and Nersēs IV, better known as Šnorhali (‘the Gracious’, in office 1166–73). They were succeeded by a nephew, Grigor IV Tlay (‘the Youth’, in office 1173–93), a cousin of Šahanduxt.

As a votive child, Smbat was reared in ‘the admirable monasteries’ of Sev Leṛ (‘Black Mountain’) in the Amanus range, known also as ‘Mountain of Light’ (Nur Mountain, Hatay Province, south-central Turkey). There he was nurtured in the best traditions of the Church, and at age sixteen tutored at the catholicosial see of Hromklay (Qal‘at al-Rum, a fortress city on the Euphrates, west of Edessa and northeast of ‘Aintab) by his great-uncle, soon to become Catholicos Nersēs IV.¹⁴ He was much admired by his mentor, who ordained the teenage Smbat a priest, giving him his own name, Nersēs, and acquainted him early on with his ecumenical endeavors involving both the Roman Church and the Byzantine Church—while Šnorhali himself was still assisting his elder brother and predecessor Grigor III.

Following in his great uncle’s footsteps, the young Nersēs was destined to become a theologian, hymnographer, poet, and statesman. He refused to serve as abbot anywhere—lest he be considered higher than his elderly teachers whom he loved ardently, especially Abbot Yovhannēs, his spiritual mentor at the Monastery of Saṛru. However, Šnorhali’s successor and kin, Grigor IV, prevailed upon the young monk to return to Hromklay, where he was privileged to associate with the great teachers of the time. In his first year there, he wrote the metrical ‘Panegyric on St. Nersēs Šnorhali’ and translated works of St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444); and in the following year he was consecrated as archbishop of Tarsus, the revered birthplace of the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), an office he held until his untimely death (1175–98).

On a journey to Antioch in 1176, when he was twenty-three years old, he became acquainted with Benedictine monks in that crusader principality, especially those on the cape of Ras al-Khanzir (Arabic distortion of Greek *Rhosikos*, Latin *Cap Rhossicus*), and was greatly impressed by their discipline and liturgy. This led him to translate *The Rule of St. Benedict* at the Monastery of St. Paul in Antioch, which drew him to be further interested in the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604),¹⁵ thus introducing Western spirituality into his Eastern tradition.¹⁶

Given his knowledge of Greek and Latin, Nersēs was not only a well qualified translator of ancient texts but also an eligible ambassador to Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (r. 1155–

¹³On whom, and for a family tree, see Abraham Terian, *Magnalia Dei: Biblical History in Epic Verse by Grigor Magistros: Critical Text with Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Hebrew University Armenian Studies 14 (Leuven, 2012), 6–10, 173.

¹⁴We learn from Nersēs’s biography of the year 1190 by his pupil and scribe Samuēl of Skewṛia, appended to the *Commentary on the Psalms*, that Šahanduxt made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1169, after leaving the young Smbat (Nersēs) ‘at the feet’ of her uncle. Aṭawnuni, disregarding the latter point, refers to her pilgrimage under Nersēs’s name, in the same entry, thus adding to the impression about Nersēs’s being in Jerusalem perhaps also at an earlier date: Aṭawnuni, *Miabank’ ew ayč’eluk’*, 397.

¹⁵Book II of the *Dialogues* is all about the life of St. Benedict (c.480–c.547). Nersēs details his interest in Western spirituality in a colophon of the year 1179, recalling his visit to Antioch possibly in 1176 and his positive impressions about the Benedictines (Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 437–40 [no. 5]; Yovsēp’eanc’, *Yiřatakaranak’*, 477–80 [no. 218]; Mat’evosyan, *Hiřatakaraner*, 226–8 [no. 244]); more on this colophon, below.

¹⁶Nersēs’s admiration for the Franks has its precedent in the presentation of the Franks as Romans and their ‘apocalyptic’ return to power in the region as of the First Crusade, as seen by Eastern Christians tired of Byzantine hegemony. See Christopher MacEvitt, ‘True Romans: Remembering the Crusades among Eastern Christians’, *Journal of Medieval History* 40 (2014): 260–75; cf. Robert W. Thomson, ‘The Crusades Through Armenian Eyes’, in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington, DC, 2001), 71–82.

90) and later to Emperor Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195–1203). This was the time when the Rubenid Prince Levon II of Cilician Armenia (known as Leo or Leon in Western sources) was aspiring to kingship and, hoping to obtain a crown from Pope Clement III (1187–91), he promised to draw the Armenian Church closer to the Church of Rome and to render help to the Third Crusade.¹⁷ He had Nersēs reluctantly mediate the rapprochement with the Roman Church¹⁸ and to head a delegation to meet the bearer of the promised crown, Barbarossa himself, upon his arrival at the Armenian frontier. Upon reaching the meeting place near Seleucia in Isauria (Arm. Selevkia; Silifke in south-central Mersin Province, Turkey), Nersēs and the delegation headed by him learned of the emperor's drowning in the Calycadnus (Saleph) river on 10 June 1190. Notwithstanding the consequently delayed coronation,¹⁹ Levon—who had extended his holdings to the Mediterranean—seems to have aided with provisions the German army, regardless of its waning discipline, and to have helped all along the crusade.²⁰ Nersēs died on 14 July 1198 and was copiously eulogized by two of his pupils: Grigor of Skewra, who succeeded him as prior (d. c.1230),²¹ and Xaç'atur of Skewra, a devoted copyist of Nersēs's works.²²

The colophons in question

1. Colophon of the year 1179 to the translation of *The Rule of St. Benedict* and the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great

In this 1179 colophon Nersēs recounts his 1176 journey to Antioch, where he became acquainted with the Benedictine monks on the cape near the city. The encounter led

¹⁷Since it was customary to receive the crown from either an emperor or the pope, Leo wrote to the pope and to the emperor asking that he be crowned king while the emperor was in the East. Both recipients of Levon's letters agreed, and a crown was promised by Frederick I Barbarossa. Since the First Crusade, realizing the importance of the Armenian dominance in Cilicia, the papacy had attempted to impose doctrinal and liturgical unity with the Armenian Church, and this was its opportunity. On the crisis created by Levon's royal ambitions, see Abraham Terian, 'Church-State Relations at the Dawn of Kingship in Cilician Armenia', *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 13 (2003–2004): 5–17.

¹⁸See Isabelle Augé, 'Papauté, Latins d'Orient et Croisés sous le regard de l'archevêque de Tarse, Nersēs Lambronatsi', in *La Papauté et les croisades / The Papacy and the Crusades*, ed. Michel Balard (London, 2011), 217–27; cf. Isabelle Augé, *Églises en dialogue: Arméniens et Byzantins dans la seconde moitié du XIIe siècle* (Louvain, 2011), and Abraham Terian, 'To Byzantium with Love: The Overtures of Saint Nerses the Gracious', in *Armenian Cilicia*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian, UCLA Armenian Culture and History Series: Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces 7 (Costa Mesa, CA, 2008), 131–51.

¹⁹As a consolation to Levon, Bishop Hermann of Münster handed the Latin text of the coronation ritual to Nersēs to translate in the meantime (see Nersēs's colophon of the year 1190, translated below). The coronation of Levon took place eventually, on 6 January 1199, with a second crown sent to him perhaps earlier by the Byzantine Emperor, Alexios III. For more, see Ani Atamian Bournoutian, 'Cilician Armenia', in *The Armenian People: From Ancient to Modern Times*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, 2 vols. (New York, 1997), 1: 273–91 (280–3), and also Vahe T'orosyan, 'Kilikiayi Hayoc' t'agawor Lewon Mecagorci t'agadman xndri šurj' [On the Problem Surrounding the Coronation of Levon the Great King of Cilician Armenia], *Ējmiacin* 73, no. 12 (2016): 84–112.

²⁰Leonice M. Alishan (Lewond Ališan), *Léon le Magnifique, premier roi de Sissouan ou de l'Arménocilie*, trans. George Bayan (Venice, 1888), 96–119; Jacob G. Ghazarian, *The Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia during the Crusades: The Integration of Cilician Armenians with the Latins, 1080–1393*, *Caucasus World* 27 (Richmond, 2000), 122–8, 143–6. It is conceivable that a substantial part of the 'turcopole' cavalry, the Levantine recruits of mounted archers, were provided by Levon, who had cultivated a special relationship with the Knights Hospitaller and Guy de Lusignan.

²¹*Nerboean i Sbrbn Nersēs Lambronac'i* [Encomium on Saint Nersēs of Lambron], Sop'erk' Haykakank' [Armenian Writings] 15 (Venice, 1854); also in Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 414–26.

²²For his eulogy in verse, see Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 450–4; for a French translation, idem, *Sissouan ou l'Arménocilie*, 100–3; cf. (anon.) 'Ołbk' i Tēr Nersēs Arhiepiškopos Tarsoni, asac'eal Xaç'atur paštōnei norin ašakerti' [Eulogy on Lord Nersēs Archbishop of Tarsus, Recited by His Pupil Xaç'atur], *Bazmavēp* 32 (1874): 242–3; and Ep'rem Pōlosean, 'Xaç'atur ašakerti Ołb i Nersēs Lambronac'i' [Eulogy on Nersēs of Lambron by the Pupil Xaç'atur], *Handēs Amsōreay* 68 (1954): 251–6.

him to translate *The Rule of St. Benedict* followed by Pope Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* in which he commends St. Benedict. The colophon is replete with admiration and praise of the religious Franks and concludes with a quatrain in monorhyme (-an), with eight syllables per line:

I, Nersēs, lowly and unworthy servant,
Translator with love of this sacred history,
With those who owing to it rejoice in the Spirit,
I pray for the forgiveness that sets free.

Ներսէս սրբուպ եւ անարժան
Սուրբ պատմութեանս սիրով թարգման,
Յորոց՝ սովաւ հոգևով ցնծան՝
Հայցեմ ներումըն թողութեան:²³

In Ališan's edition of Nersēs's colophon, followed by Yovsēp'eanc', this quatrain composed before the Third Crusade appears with two others as a seamless whole (even though the added quatrains are in twelve syllables per line and end with a different monorhyme (-a / -ay, the final 'y' being mute)), but not so in Mat'evosyan's edition where they are omitted and with good reason. These are worth translating, for in the third quatrain the continuator—not Nersēs—refers to having been in Jerusalem and being impressed by the Benedictines there no less than Nersēs had been during his time in and around Antioch:

You (better) believe this faithful witness²⁴
And write with love the wonders he recounts.
For on this day I put on (my garment) as when approaching God²⁵
With faith that binds me to Him more than to any nation that exists.

When I went to Jerusalem, the holy city,
I saw the fruit of their love—which I couldn't attain—
Brought about by the fervor of their Western saints;
That they bear such marvelous fruit, I was not surprised.

Հաւատարիմ այս վրկայիս դու հաւատա՛
Եւ ըզնշանքըս գոր պատմե՛ սիրով գրրեա՛ .
Զի եւ այսաւր մերձ ի յԱստուած զայս ըզգեստեա<յ>
Հաւատովք ընդ նա կապեալ քան զազգս որ կայ:

Երուսաղէմ ի սուրբ քաղաքն յոր ընթացայ՝
Տեսի պըտուղ սիրոյ սոցին, յոր ոչ հասայ .
Որով ջեռեալ որք յարեւմուտըս Սուրբք նոցա՝
Թէ տան պտուղ զայս սքանչելիսս՝ ոչ զարմացայ:

That each of the added quatrains belongs to a different continuator is readily recognizable in Matenadaran MS 4947, a miscellany dated to the thirteenth century, on which Mat'evosyan bases his edition of the colophon (with an extended note at the end). The

²³Full text of the colophon in Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 437–40, at 440 (no. 5); cf. Yovsēp'eanc', *Yiṣatakarak'*, 477–80, at 480 (no. 218). Mat'evosyan, adhering to Matenadaran MS 4947 (fols. 1r–2v, including Nersēs's preface to his translation of Benedict's *Rules* and Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*) and discerning a continuator's hand at this juncture, deletes the next two quatrains in *Hiṣatakaraner*, 226–8, at 228 and n. 1 (no. 244).

²⁴Ališan rightly surmises that the 'witness' here is Pope Gregory the Great, his bearing witness to the sanctity of Benedict (*Hayapatum*, 2: 440 n. 3).

²⁵Allusion to the parable 'The Man Not Wearing the Required Wedding Garment' (Matthew 22.11–13), illustrative of the Last Judgment. By this, the continuator implies that he is to be as truthful in his statement as when approaching God on Judgment Day.

scribe Nersisuk at Hr'omklay was commissioned to copy the miscellany—which begins with the above cited title by Nersēs and his introduction ending with the colophonic quatrain—for Bishop Yovhannēs Ark'ayēbayr (d. 1289), a brother of King Het'um I of Cilician Armenia (r. 1226–70). After copying the quatrain by Nersēs, the scribe informs that the second quatrain is by Yovhannēs and the third is his own. Apparently moved by Nersēs's commendation of the Western saints, Benedict and Pope Gregory the Great, the blatantly Latinophile Het'umid bishop Yovhannēs added a quatrain of his own, and so did the scribe Nersisuk who had been to Jerusalem and had observed the Westerners' piety there as Nersēs had in Antioch.

The identification of Bishop Yovhannēs Ark'ayēbayr as a continuator of Nersēs's colophon here is crucial, for we encounter him again as a likely borrower and continuator of another disputed colophon (the third one, below).

2. Colophon of the year 1190 to the translation of the Latin *Ordinatio*

Nersēs's fascination with Western spirituality demonstrated in his translation of the Benedictine *Rule*, led him to translate also the Latin liturgical rites, a compilation also containing the Roman Ordinal (similar to the Greek *Euchologion* and the Armenian *Maštoc'*). To this translation, begun in 1185 and completed not long thereafter, Nersēs added his translation of the Roman coronation rite in 1190, the Latin text of which he received from Bishop Hermann of Münster—a ranking member of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa's entourage—as a consolation to Prince Levon, whose coronation as king of Cilician Armenia had to wait because of the emperor's drowning.²⁶

The colophon begins with reference to the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin and to the papal summons to rescue the city, and constitutes a summary of Barbarossa's advance since he set out on 11 May 1189, including his several crossings and victories across the Byzantine empire, down to his accidental death and the ensuing disappointment it brought to the Cilician Armenians.

Thereafter, in the year 626 (*sic*, read 636 = 1187), because of our sins the holy city Jerusalem was taken by the Ishmaelite king Yusuf,²⁷ by whom ministers (of Christ) and troops were scattered over the sea—hither and thither. But the Patriarch of Rome²⁸ stirred kings and princes, troops and citizens of diverse nations to come in this direction for the deliverance of the sacred sites. And with utmost willingness they lifted the cross of Christ and came with great effort.

²⁶Lewond Ališan, *Sisuan, hamgrut'iwn Haykakan Kilikioy ew Lewon Mecagorc* [Sisuan: A Compendium on Armenian Cilicia and Levon the Magnificent] (Venice, 1885), 447–9; Armenian text of the Latin coronation rite, at 472–5 (apparatus). Cf. idem, *Léon le Magnifique*, 107–8. See also Derenik Davt'yan, 'T'agadrut'yan cesē Hayoc Ekelec'um' [The Coronation Rite in the Armenian Church], Vardapetakan thesis, Gēworgean Hogewor Ćemaran, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, 2001, 75–91 (recension A); 92–105 (recension B). For yet another, shorter liturgy that nonetheless seems to combine elements from an earlier Armenian coronation rite and from the preceding, see Davt'yan, *T'agadrut'yan cesē*, 65–9 (recension A); 70–72 (recension B). The main manuscripts are cited by Davt'yan. On the prominence of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia and the significance of the coronation rite, see 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*, ed. Alexander Beihammer et al., Comparative Perspectives Series: The Medieval Mediterranean 98 (Leiden, 2013), 291–335.

²⁷Armenian 'Yovsēp', simply the first name of Yusuf ibn Ayyub ibn Shadi, better known as Salah-ad-Din (Saladin).

²⁸Either Pope Gregory VIII who initiated the Third Crusade during his brief papacy (1187) or his successor, Pope Clement III (1187–91) who engineered it. As in the next two colophons, the author uses the title *Hayrapet* for the bishop of Rome, a title reserved for the head of the Armenian Church and corresponding to 'patriarch' in the Eastern Churches (see below, notes 47 and 56). Such use of the title is not atypical during the dominance of the Latinophile Het'umids. Cf. the ascription 'patriarch of Rome' in the extended colophon by Samuēl of Skewra to Nersēs's *Commentary on the Psalms* (quoted below, in the concluding remarks).

With them came Frederick, the king of the Germans who was the Emperor of (the Holy) Rom (an Empire). This one did not come by sea but took the land route. With countless troops, he entered Hungary and having arrived in Macedonia, spent the winter in Philipopolis and on the feast of Passover crossed the sea from Odessa. And having inflicted heavy blows on countless armies of the Turkmen encampments in tents, he reached the vicinity of the city of Selevkia. Upon hearing this, Grigorios our catholicos and Levon our ruling prince, under whose control Selevkia was, hastened through us to welcome him with great joy as the savior of these lands. However, because of the weight of our sins, the Emperor's course of life was cut short. For he wanted to bathe himself in the river of Selevkia, and being unable to resist the currents because of his advanced age, he drowned. And in sorrow we met with the bishops who followed his son and the troops, (and) returned to Tarsus.

Իսկ յետ այսր ի թվիս ՌԻԶ (1177; read ՌԼԶ, 1187), ըստ մեղաց մերոց առաւ սուրբ քաղաքն Երուսաղեմ ի իրամայելացոց թագաւորէն Յովսէփայ, և որ ի նմանէ սպասաւորք և զաւրք ցիր և ցան եղեն յայսկոյս ծովու և յայն: Իսկ հայրապետն Հռովմայ շարժեաց զթագաւորս և զիշխանս և զաւրս և զքաղաքացիս զանազան ազգաց զալ յայսկոյս ի փրկութիւն սուրբ տեղեացն, և ամենեքեան յաւժարութեամբ բարձին զհաչըն Քրիստոսի և եկին մեծաւ աշխատութեամբ. ընդ որս և եկն թագաւորն Ալամանաց Փիլտիիք [sic], որ էր ինքնակալ Հռոմայ և մեծ քան զամենայն թագաւորս, և սա ոչ ծովով, այլ ընդ ցամաքն արար ճանապարհ, անթիւ զաւրաք եմուտ յՈւ ծովով, և եկեալ ձմեռեաց ի Մակեդոնիայ ի Փիլիպպայսկայս, և ի տաւնի պասեքէն անց ընդ ծովն Ալիտիսոյ, և ծանր տարժանմամբ հերձեալ զբանակս անթիւս խորանարակ Թուրքմանացն, էջ զաւրաքն հուպ քաղաքին Մելեֆկի Սաւրացոց [sic; read Սաւրացոց], զոր լուեալ կաթողիկոսն մեր Գրիգորիոս և իշխողն Լեւոն, որոյ տերութեամբ էր Մելեֆկիս, փութացան մերք հանդերձ ընդ առաջ նորս մեծաւ ուրախութեամբ իբրեւ փրկչի այս աշխարհացս. այլ մեղաց մեր ծանրութիւն կարճեաց զընթացս արքային, զի յանձս գետոյն Մելեֆկիոյ ախորժեաց լուանալ, և ծերութեամբն ոչ կարաց ընդդէմ կալ յորձանացս, հեղձաւ: Իսկ մեր տրտմութեամբ պատահեալ եպիսկոպոսացն, որք գային ըզկնի և որոյն նորին և զաւրացն, դարձաք ի Տարսուն:²⁹

3. Colophon of the year 1191 composed in verse and found in a Bible manuscript dated to 1270

The colophon is actually a poem in fourteen quatrains which, like the single quatrain in the 1179 colophon by Nersēs, maintain the monorhyme (–an) and the dominant eight syllables per line. It appears to have been composed early in 1191, possibly before the outcome at Arsuf in the autumn, according to internal evidence: the fourth date suggested in the poem (1191, implied in §13; earlier dates are found in §2, 1187; §10, 1189; and §12, 1190). Its earliest extant text is found in a Bible manuscript of the year 1270 (Matenadaran MS 345, fol. 557r), copied in Cilicia by Bishop Barsēf by Bishop Yovhannēs Arkʿayelbayr (brother of King Hetʿum I of Cilician Armenia), a named continuator of the first colophon cited above.³⁰ Although the origin of the poem is uncertain, its marked similarities to the style of the single quatrain in the 1179 colophon, its content, and the dates suggested therein

²⁹Text in Yovsēpʿeancʿ, *Yiṣatakarankʿ*, 535–40, at 537–8 (no. 243), based on Matenadaran MS 3211, a Great Euchologion dated to the seventeenth century, fols. 158v–159r (described in *Mayr cʿucʿak hayerēn jeiragracʿ Maṣtocʿi Anuan Matenadaranani* [General Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts of the Mashtots Matenadaran], ed. Önnik Eganyan et al., ongoing multivolume series [Yerevan, 1984–], 10: 923–4); cf. Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 443–6, at 444–5 (no. 8). Ališan rightly observes that Nersēs's earlier translation of the Latin rites did not include the much guarded text of the coronation rite (*ibid.*, 446 n. 3). Perhaps inadvertently, the colophon is not found in Matʿevosyan's edition.

³⁰Detailed description of the manuscript and complete texts of the unique parts of its contents—including the poem considered here and two others—are found in *Mayr cʿucʿak hayerēn jeiragracʿ Maṣtocʿi Anuan Matenadaranani*, 2: 117–34.

(1187–91) make the ascription to Nersēs very likely, as Yovsēp‘eanc’ and Mat‘evosyan have it in their compendia.³¹ One other factor possibly influencing the ascription to Nersēs is that he also has a *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, completed in 1180, according to his colophon of that year.³² However, the Matenadaran manuscript contains two similar poems (fols. 179r and 338v), each consisting of three quatrains and with identical syllable count and identical monorhyme; and both have additions in verse, in altered rhyme and morphing into petitions by their respective scribe(s)—just like the addition to the poem (provided here without the addition), a fourteen-line appendage (fol. 570v) which both editors leave out—so also Ališan, who ascribes the poem to King Het‘um II (r. intermittently, 1289–1303, d. 1307), an implausible ascription.³³

On morphological grounds it could be argued that the poems as found in the 1270 Bible appear to have been borrowed from an earlier manuscript, and only the petitions could have been added by the scribe Barseł or by the recipient Yovhannēs, who also took part in copying the manuscript, including this very poem.³⁴ The first poem follows the book of Ruth and the second Esther, and they draw their inspiration from the respective books just as the poem quoted below follows the Prophets and draws its inspiration from the oracles pronounced against Jerusalem and Judah before and during the Assyrian and Babylonian advances. The author seems to have projected these divine threats of biblical times into his own time, with Jerusalem having fallen to Saladin’s forces. The mention of ‘the prophets’ at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end (§§1, 7, 14) provides a sort of chiasmic structure while forming a literary *inclusio*.

In view of the evidence provided above, Nersēs’s authorship of the poem seems plausible. The author’s pious reflections aside, the poem is replete with references to historical figures, the leaders of the Third Crusade. He alludes to the diverse troops’ arrival in Acre by sea, the fight for its capture, and consequent deaths, as of ‘the second year’ (1189) and moving on into ‘the fourth year’ (1191). The poem ends with hope of deliverance. It is provided here in its entirety, with annotation accompanying the translation.

1.

The threats made by the prophets
when Jerusalem sinned,
were inflicted once more, upon us
in these bitter days of our time.³⁵

2.

For in the year six-hundred

³¹Yovsēp‘eanc’, *Yiřatakarak’*, 569–72 (no. 256), dates the poem to 1193. Mat‘evosyan, *Hiřatakarakanner*, 249–50 (no. 263), dates it to 1187, and without division into quatrains—based on Matenadaran MS 345, Bible dated to 1270, fol. 557r–v (*Mayr c’uc’ak hayerēn jeragrac’ Mařtoč’j Anuan Matenadarani*, 2: 126–7).

³²Text in Mat‘evosyan, *Hiřatakarakanner*, 230 (no. 246); based on Jerusalem St. James MS 313 (*Mayr c’uc’ak jeragrac’ Srboc’ Yakobeanč’* [Grand Catalogue of St. James Manuscripts], ed. Norayr Polarean (Bogharian), 11 vols. [Jerusalem, 1966–1991], 2: 169).

³³*Hayapatum*, 2: 100–2. Het‘um II was born in 1266, while the earliest extant textual evidence for the poem is from 1270. Moreover, Ališan miscalculates the years of the Armenian era given in the first quatrain, arriving at 1287 instead of 1187 (2: 102).

³⁴He also copied the *Ecclesiasticus* of Ben Sira (fols. 475v–486r) and supplied nearly all the marginal corrections.

³⁵As if the biblical oracles against Jerusalem and Judah prior to the exile, seen as divine wrath for sins committed (e.g., Isaiah 1–5, 29, 39; Jeremiah 2–35, 39; Ezekiel 4–5, 8–11, 15–16, 22–24), portend future calamities in Jerusalem; cf. Matthew 24–25 and parallels.

and thirty-six of the Armenian era,³⁶
at the end of the ninetieth year
of Roman dominance,³⁷

3.
Yusuf,³⁸ Moslem³⁹ sovereign
of the nation called Turkmen,⁴⁰
coming from Egypt, ruled
as far as Babel (and) Assyria.⁴¹

4.
He dared to cross over
the fair Christian boundary.
Our rulers were defeated,
having succumbed to sin.⁴²

5.
The City of the Lord was captured,
Jerusalem with its surroundings.
The blood of the residents there
flowed like water in the streets.⁴³

6.
The fallen corpses were not buried,⁴⁴
the holy sanctuaries were pulled down;
neighbors made us a laughingstock,⁴⁵
and the (prophetic) threats were fulfilled.

7.
But the good news given in response
by the prophets speaking for God,
was echoed to us from the West instead,
(where) Peter (was), in great Rome.⁴⁶

8.
When the sad news of wailing reached there,
they raised a lament (and) sat to mourn.
Receiving a command from the Patriarch,⁴⁷

³⁶Corresponding to 1187 (636 + 551, when the Armenian Era was introduced), the year of the battle of Hattin and the end of the Latin (crusader) kingdom of Jerusalem.

³⁷A round figure since the founding of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099.

³⁸Armenian 'Yovsēp', as in the previous colophon.

³⁹Lit., 'Ishmaelite', a commonplace designation in Armenian medieval sources for Moslems in general.

⁴⁰A rather odd designation of the various ethnicities united under Saladin.

⁴¹At the height of his power, Saladin also ruled over the whole Arabian Peninsula, parts of western North Africa, and Nubia.

⁴²Commonplace explanation—ever since biblical times—for calamities in life and in history.

⁴³Cf. Ezekiel 28.23 (said of Sidon).

⁴⁴Echoing Psalm 79.3; cf. the colophon of the year 1198 to the *Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*, where this verse is quoted.

⁴⁵Echoing Psalm 123.4; cf. Jeremiah 20.7; Lamentation 3.14, 63.

⁴⁶Mirroring a traditional Christian perception of the Apostles, of whom Peter was the representative according to the Synoptic Gospels, whereby they are seen as successors of the Hebrew Prophets in the scope of redemption.

⁴⁷As in the preceding and following colophons (see above, note 28, and below, notes 56 and 73), either Pope Gregory VIII who initiated the Third Crusade during his brief Papacy (1187) or his successor, Pope Clement III (1187–91) who mobilized it by sending Josias, archbishop of Tyre, to persuade Henry II of England (r. 1154–89) and Philip II of France (r. 1180–1223) to take charge.

They lifted the cross and hither they poured.⁴⁸

9.

Various nations provided the force:
thousands upon thousands of troops in unison
came sailing across the sea
(and) in Ptolemais they garrisoned.⁴⁹

10.

They dug (foundations) and fortified,
and are there this second year,⁵⁰
undaunted by the battle
and death (that leads) to two divisions.⁵¹

11.

Other Crusaders quickly went
to Jerusalem which is above,⁵²
and their brothers who were left here
were never tired of waging the war.

12.

The Roman Emperor, who was German,
with many died in this hope;
but the rest did not stop,
and many came across the sea.

13.

Now Philip the Emperor of the Franks⁵³
and his English counterpart
under the yoke of the Lord's work, did arrive;
they reached us in the fourth year.⁵⁴

14.

With them we wait for salvation
and for God to help us;
for the prophets' word comes (true) again
(when) we are found worthy to revel (in it).⁵⁵
Amen.

1.

Չոր մարգարէքս սպառնացան

⁴⁸The eastern Mediterranean is the general destination inferred here, from the port city of Tarsus to the Syro-Palestinian coast—Acre in particular. Tarsus, like the ports of Cyprus, would have been a natural calling port on the way to Acre. Cf. 'in this direction' in the preceding colophon of the year 1190.

⁴⁹Acre, so named by Ptolemy Philadelphus II of Egypt (r. 285–246 BC) after conquering the city, renamed Acre by the Franks, for St Jean d'Acre, in 1104.

⁵⁰Conceivably the year 1189, marking the beginning of the siege of Acre (August 1189–July 1191), before the arrival of Philip on 20 April and Richard on 8 June 1191. On the military history of the siege, see John D. Hosler, *The Siege of Acre, 1189–1191: Saladin, Richard the Lionheart, and the Battle that Decided the Third Crusade* (New Haven, 2018).

⁵¹To the Last Judgment following death; the separation of the righteous and the wicked, 'the sheep and the goats'; Matthew 25.31–46.

⁵²The heavenly Jerusalem, Galatians 4.26; Hebrews 12.22; Revelation 3.12; 21.2, 10.

⁵³Philip II, who joined forces with Richard the Lionheart.

⁵⁴The unspecified arrival place could be taken either broadly, as the northeastern Mediterranean, or narrowly, referring to ports under Armenian control, including Tarsus, the metropolis of which Nersès was the archbishop at an early age. From there the final destination, Acre, was some 300 miles by sea. The fourth year, conceivably the spring or summer of 1191, since the author is silent about the ensuing crusader victory at Arsuf in the autumn.

⁵⁵The poem seems to predate the defeat of Saladin by Richard the Lionheart at Arsuf, on 7 September 1191.

Երուսաղէմի յորժամ մեղան,
Առ մեզ կրկին ի յանկ ելան,
Ի դառն աւուրքս՝ որ այժմ հասան:

2.
Զի ի վեցհարիւրս Հայոց թուական՝
Յերեսուն և վեց նորին շրջան,
Եւ յիննսուն ամին լրման
Հռովմայեցւոցն իշխանութեան,

3.
Յովսէփ արքայ Իսմայէլեան՝
Որք Թուրքիման ազգք կոչեցան,
յԵգուպտոսէ գալով իշխան՝
Մինչ ի Բաբել, յԱտրեստան:

4.
Զգեաց նա ձեռն յանդգնութեան
Ի նուրբ սահման Քրիստոնութեան,
Քանզի մեղաւքն կորացան
Եւ մեր իշխանքն յաղթեցան:

5.
Գերեաց զքաղաքն աստուածական՝
զԵրուսաղէմ և զիւրն սահման.
Արին բնակչացն՝ որ անդ գտան
Իբր զջուր ի գռեհս հեղան:

6.
Մարմինքն անկեալ ոչ թաղեցան
Եւ սուրբ տաճարքն խրթնեցան.
Դրացիքն զմեզ ծիծաղեցան
Եւ սպառնալիքս կատարեցան:

7.
Իսկ զաւետիս դարձին որ տան,
Աստ մարգարէքս աստուածաբան
յԱրեւմտից հնչէ մեզ ձայն,
Պետրոս ի Հռովմ մեծն փոխան:

8.
Զի անդ ողբոցս հասեալ գուժկան՝
Կական բարձեալ ի սուգ նստան,
Ի հայրապետէն առին հրաման
Զխաչն բարձին և աստ հեղան:

9.
Գռռի տուեալ ազգք զանագան,
Բիւրք բիւրոց զաւրք միաբան,
Առագաստեալ ընդ ծովն գան՝
Ի Պտղոմիդեայ զետեղեցան:

10.
Փոսս հատին և ամրացան
Եւ անդր կան այս երկրորդ ամ,
Ի պատերազմէն անխափան
Եւ մահ ի դասս յերկոսեան:

11.

Այլ Խաչընգալքն փութով զնան
 յԵրուսաղէմն վերնական
 Եւ նոցին եղբարքն որ աստ մնան
 Զմարտն դրդել ոչ ձանձրացան:

12.

Հոովմայ արքա, որ Ալաման,
 Բերրուք ի յայս յոյսս մեռան,
 Մակայն մնացեալքն ոչ կասեցան,
 Եւ բազում ընդ ծովն գան:

13.

Այժմ Փռանգաց Փիլիպ արքայն,
 Եւ Ընգլիզացն նմին նման,
 Լծեալ ի գործ Տեռոն հասան,
 Եկին առ մեզ ի չոր<որ>դս ամ:

14.

Մոքաւք սպասեմքք փրկութեան
 Եւ Աստուծոյ մեր ազնութեան,
 Զի զմարգարէիցս դարձին զբան,
 Վայելելոյ գտցուք արժան:
 Ամէն:

Apart from referencing the three kings who led the Third Crusade, of whom only Philip II of France is named and the others simply called ‘his English counterpart’ and ‘the Roman Emperor, who was German’ and who ‘with many died in this hope’ (§§12–13), the author is silent about their military engagement and concludes with a note on the anticipated deliverance—in keeping with the prophetic theme of restoration (§14). In all likelihood, he wrote the poem in the spring of 1191, ‘in the fourth year’ (§13), conceivably before the battle of Arsuf. Conversely, the author viewed the battle inconclusive for the redemption of Jerusalem from Saladin’s hold, in keeping with the implication of the fifth colophon, below.

4. Colophon of the year 1192 to the *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* completed in 1177

The colophon, appended to the manuscript some fifteen years after its completion, is preliminary to an incident Nersēs goes on to tell, about what happened on his way to a meeting in Hromklay, the see of the Catholicosate, to which he was bidden in 1189 by Prince Levon II (later King Levon I, r. 1199–1220): namely, how his company was attacked on the way by Turkish and Kurdish bandits who murdered some and stole the only copy of his *Commentary*, and how in the marketplace of an adjacent town it was purchased by clergy who restored it to him—to his great delight after prolonged sorrow.

During this time, in the year 636 (1187), the holy city Jerusalem was snatched by the Turkic nation, and the clergy with the rulers who served at the sacred sites were taken captive. When this report reached the West, all nations with their kings and princes mobilized (and) came to this land upon the command of the Patriarch of Rome.⁵⁶ And while countless

⁵⁶On the use of the title *Hayrapet* (‘patriarch’) for the bishop of Rome, see above, note 28.

thongs came streaming over the sea by boats bound to Ptolemais in the year 638 (1189), our Prince Levon bade us to our Holy Catholicos, Lord Grigor (IV), to his see called Hromklay on the Euphrates.

Եւ ի սյն ժամանակս ի թուականութեանս ՈւՋին (636/1187) յափշտակեցաւ սուրբ քաղաքն Երուսաղէմ ի Թուրքաց ազգէ, և եկեղեցականքն և իշխանք որք սպասաւորէին սուրբ տեղեացն՝ զերեցան. Եւ համբաւս այս հասեալ յարեւմուտս՝ զքնաւ ազգսն թագաւորաւք և իշխանաւք՝ ըստ հրամանի Հռովմայ հայրապետին շարժեալ զալ յայս աշխարհ: Եւ մինչ նոքա հեղուին անթիւ բազմութիւնք նաւաւք ի ծովէ անտի ի Պտղոմիտեայ, ի թուականութեան ի ՈւԼԸ (638/1189), յղեաց իշխողս մեր մեծ Լեւոն զմեզ՝ առ կաթողիիկոսն սուրբ Տէր Գրիգոր յաթոռն հայրապետական՝ որ կոչի Հռովմի-կլայ ի վերայ Եփրատայ:⁵⁷

The exegetical identification of ‘this land’ in the middle of the quotation is ‘the East,’ the coastal cities of the eastern Mediterranean, ‘Ptolemais’ (Acre) in particular.

5. Colophon of the year 1198 to the *Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John* completed in 1179

The colophon quoted below is a later addition to a lengthy introduction in which Nersēs details his efforts, beginning in 1176 at Antioch, to acquire a commentary to help him better understand John’s *Revelation*.⁵⁸ At the Benedictine abbey of St. Paul he was introduced to an early Lombard version of the *Commentary* by Andreas of Caesarea (d. 614), a widely used text as its Georgian and Slavonic translations indicate, yet unknown to Nersēs. However, he was able to obtain a Greek manuscript of Andreas’s *Commentary*, the version amplified by Arethas of Caesarea (d. c.945), from a monk named Basil in the nearby monastery of Bet’ias. This he translated into Armenian in 1178 with the help of Constantine, the Armenian metropolitan of Hierapolis (Mabbug) who was more fluent in Greek than Nersēs. It became the basis of Nersēs’s adapted *Commentary* completed at Hromklay in 1179 with a retranslation of *The Revelation of Saint John*.⁵⁹ Through his translation and *Commentary* Nersēs was first to legitimize—with the blessing of Catholicos Grigor IV Tlay—the official use of the *Revelation of Saint John* in the Armenian Church, albeit short of its integration into the Armenian canon of the Bible or inclusion in the *Lectionary*.

The below quoted lines, written some twenty years after the completion of the *Commentary* and without citing the circumstances for the addition, allude to the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 and conclude with a statement on the coronation of Levon as the first king of Cilician Armenia by the end of the Armenian year 647 (on 6 January 1199, to be exact).⁶⁰

⁵⁷Text in Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 430–1 (no. 1); Yovsēp’eanç’ simply refers to the date of the manuscript’s restoration to Nersēs, *Yiṣatakaranġ’*, 557–8 (no. 249).

⁵⁸Text in Mat’evosyan, *Hiṣatakaraner*, 301–2 (no. 300), from Matenadaran MS 10480 dated to 1286, where later on the author refers to events of 1187 and 1198 (424v–425r); cf. Ališan, *Hayapatum*, 2: 432–4 (no. 3); Yovsēp’eanç’, *Yiṣatakaranġ’*, 623–4 (no. 283).

⁵⁹*Nerses of Lambron: Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*, trans. Thomson, 16–19; cf. Robert W. Thomson, ‘Saint Nersēs of Lambron and the Book of Revelation’, in *Between Paris and Fresno: Armenian Studies in Honor of Dickran Kouymjian*, ed. Barlow Der Mugrdchian, Armenian Studies Series 13 (Costa Mesa, CA, 2008), 199–218.

⁶⁰The Julian year was 31 January 1198–30 January 1199. Cilician chroniclers and less known clerics in colophons mentioning their presence at the coronation, concur on this date. Rare exceptions—subject to scribal errors—are Vardan Arewelc’i (d. 1271) and Smbat Sparapet (d. 1276); the former dates it to 1197, and the latter to 1198. See Robert W. Thomson, ‘The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc’i’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 125–226, at 211–12 and n. 1. However, Smbat, a brother of King Het’um I of Cilician Armenia (r. 1226–70) and a primary Armenian source on the history of the crusades, names Step’anos, the successor of Nersēs, as the archbishop of Tarsus at Levon’s

But Nersēs died on 14 July 1198, before the historic event. The colophon seems to imply that not long before his death Nersēs came to see these later events as fulfillment of certain prophecies in the Apocalypse. The authenticity of the colophon is to be doubted on other grounds as well. The concluding statement on the ecclesiastical position of the author is uncalled for by someone of Nersēs's familiar stature and long-held office, besides the known fact that Nersēs was unenthusiastic about Levon's leadership especially on account of the prince's inadvisable and overreaching meddling in church affairs—as one gathers from Nersēs's blunt letter to Levon written in c.1195.⁶¹

For the holy, God-trodden city of Jerusalem, which was also the pupil of our eyes,⁶² has been snatched away from the service of the Christians by the sword of the Ishmaelites in 636 of the Armenian era [1187]. Over it many streams of blood had flown from the many nations of the Latins, who in many companies aboard ships propelled by sails, and with firm faith and dauntless courage, arrived in Palestine. There they were reduced to corpses around the city according to the Psalm: 'And there was no one to bury, and we remained a reproach to our neighbors' [79.3–4] until the culmination of the year 647 [1198].⁶³ In that year was raised to greater honor the king of the Armenians Levon, from the Rubenians, pious and victorious through God. The renown of his valor moved the great emperor of Old Rome, Henry,⁶⁴ and of New Rome, Alexios,⁶⁵ who crowned him with precious gems in the church of Tarsus, which is pastored by my unworthiness.

Քան զի ակն էր և աչաց մերոց սուրբ աստուածակոխ քաղաքն Երուսաղէմ, յափշտակեցաւ ի սպասաւորութենէ Քրիստոնէից արով Իսմաէլացոցն, ի ՈւԶ (1187) թինն Հայոց, ի վերա՝> որոյ բազում արեանց հեղմունք եղև Լատինաց<ւ>ոց բազմացել ազգաց, որք դաս դաս առագաստեալ նաւաք և քաջապինդ հաւատով և սրտաջան արութեամբ հասին ի Պաղեստին, և անդ դիակնացեալք, շուրջ զքաղաքան ըստ երգոյն, «Եւ ոչ ոք էր, որ թաղէր, և մեք մնացաք նախատինս դրացեաց մե<րոց» մին>չէ ի լրումն թուիս Ոմէ (1198), յորում ամի վերապատուեցաւ թագաւոր Հայոց Լեւոն, որ յՌոբինեանց բարեպաշտ և յաղթաւ Աստուծով: Որոյ հոչակ արութեանն շարժեաց զմեծ ինքնակալն հին Հռոմա<ւ>՝ զՀեռի և զնոր Հռոմա<ւ>՝ զԱլէքս, որ պսակեցին զսա քարամբ պատուական<աւք>, յեկեղեցի Տարսոնի, որ իմ անարժանութեամբ հով<ու>ի:⁶⁶

crowning; see Sirarpie Der Nersessian, 'The Armenian Chronicle of the Constable Smpad [sic] or of the "Royal Historian"', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959): 141–168, esp. 150–5 on the years 1187–93; cf. Vazgen A. Hakobyan, ed., *Manr žamānakagrut'yunner, XIII–XVIII cent.* [Minor Chronicles, XIII–XVIII Centuries], 2 vols. (Yerevan, 1951–6), 1: 51–2. The major disagreement among medieval writers is on the order of the Latin and Armenian coronation rites. For a survey of the incongruities, see T'orosyan, 'Kilikiaiy Hayoc' t'agawor Lewon Mecagorci t'agadzman xndri šurj', 84–112.

⁶¹Nerses von Lambron, *Die Ungeduld der Liebe: zur Situation der christlichen Kirchen: Synodalrede zu Hromkla (1179); Brief an König Lewon II (1195)*, ed. and trans. Iso Baumer, Sophia 36 (Trier, 2013), 132–66. Text in *Atenabanut'wn ew t'ult' ew čarik'* [Synodal Oration, Epistle, and Discourses] (Venice, 1838), 203–42; for a study, see Grigor A. Hakobyan, 'Nerses Lambronac'u T'ult' ar Levon Ark'ayn Hayoc' namakē' [The Letter of Nersēs of Lambron: 'Epistle to Levon the Sovereign of Armenia'], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'yunneri* [Herald of the Social Sciences] 31, no. 10 (1970): 73–80.

⁶²An evident mistranslation by Thomson; lit., 'it was the pupil of our eyes' (*akn ēr ew ačac' meroc'*); cf. Zechariah 2.8, 'In pursuit of his glory, he sent me against the nations plundering you, for whoever touches you touches the pupil of his eye.'

⁶³Cf. the allusion to this Psalm above, at note 44.

⁶⁴Henry VI (r. 1191–7), eldest son and successor of Barbarossa, who sent a crown for Levon's coronation.

⁶⁵Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195–1203), not to be outdone by Henry VI and the papacy, also sent Levon a crown—possibly earlier than the Roman.

⁶⁶Text in Mat'evosyan, *Hišatakaraner*, 302 (no. 300; based on Matenadaran MS 10480, dated to 1286, fols. 424v–425r); cf. Yovsēp'eanc', *Yišatakaranē*, 623–4 (no. 283; based on St. James MS 1930, dated to 1323, fol. 424r–v); and Ališan, *Haya-patum*, 2: 432–4 (no. 3). Ališan hardly ever specifies his local manuscripts; his text agrees with that of Yovsēp'eanc'.

Unfortunately, in his introduction to Nersēs's *Commentary*, Thomson not only takes the colophon at face value but also follows the corrupt variant reading of the first line—following the text edited by Yovsēp'eanc': *aknerew ač'ac' meroc'* ('visibly to our eyes'; so also the reading of Ališan's text) instead of the preferred reading *akn ēr ew ač'ac' meroc'* ('was also the pupil of our eyes'), descriptive of Jerusalem in Zechariah 2:8.⁶⁷ He thus sustains—albeit inadvertently—the error of placing Nersēs in Jerusalem in 1187. Nonetheless, Thomson is to be commended for observing Nersēs's spiritual concerns and allusions to contemporary sentiments in the *Commentary*.⁶⁸

It is quite noticeable here, in the only quotation clearly postdating the battle of Arsuf, that for whoever authored these lines the Third Crusade amounted to nothing; that the awaited deliverance—as far as the author is concerned—finds its initial fulfillment in the rise of the kingdom of Cilician Armenia, with the twofold crowning of Levon (with crowns sent respectively by the emperors of Old and New Rome). Indeed, the colophon concludes with four lines of prayer for the newly anointed king: 'May Christ our God grant us through him long days of celebrated victory; and upon his departure to the hereafter, may He make him reign and dwell with the saintly kings in the luminous altars. And glory to Him forever. Amen.'

General observations and concluding remarks

One cannot help but take note here of the necessity for critical assessment of eyewitness accounts on the crusades,⁶⁹ especially in colophons. There can be no doubt that opinions in past scholarship that place Nersēs in Jerusalem in 1187 derive from uncritical and conflated reading of the colophons quoted above. Surely, not all colophons bearing his name and others attributed to him are genuinely his, and the possibility of a continuator's hand is to be suspected even among those that bear his name. It was not uncommon for scribes to copy earlier colophons found in their exemplars; indeed, this was their opportunity to expand on it or add a colophon of their own, and at times to grant a would-be-owner of the manuscript to have a say—as seen in manuscripts copied for Bishop Yovhannēs Ark'ayelbayr (mentioned in conjunction with the first and third colophons cited above).

Colophons by Nersēs's amanuensis, Samuēl of Skewra, call for special attention; for in them one may discern the hand of a scribe prone to taking liberties, his manner of adding even to his own colophons. One such compounded colophon

⁶⁷*Nerses of Lambron: Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*, trans. Thomson, 5–6: 'For visibly to our eyes the holy city of Jerusalem where God has trodden has been ravished from the service of the Christians by the sword of the Ishmaelites in 636 [1187] of the Armenian era. Over it, many torrents of blood were shed of the many nations of the Latins, who had set sail in many companies in ships, and with firm faith and courageous valour arrived in Palestine. There they were struck down as corpses around the city according to the Psalm: "And there was no one who buried [them]," and we remained "an offence to our neighbours" until the completion of the year 647 [1198]. In that year was raised to greater honour the king of the Armenians Leon, from the Rubenids, pious and victorious through God. The fame of his valour moved the great emperor of Old Rome, Henry, and of New Rome, Alexios, who crowned him with precious gems in the church of Tarsus, which is tended by my unworthiness.'

⁶⁸*Nerses of Lambron: Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John*, trans. Thomson, 29–33. See also Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, 'Robert W. Thomson, *Nerses of Lambron. Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John* (Comprehensive Review)', *Le Muséon* 122 (2009): 231–6.

⁶⁹Marcus Bull, *Eyewitness and Crusade Narrative: Perception and Narration in Accounts of the Second, Third and Fourth Crusades*, *Crusading in Context* (Woodbridge, 2020); see also Benjamin Z. Kedar, 'The *Tractatus de locis et statu sancte terre ierosolimitane*', in *The Crusades and Their Sources*, ed. France and Zajac, 111–33, demonstrating the misuse of the *Tractatus*.

of the year 1190, to Nersēs's *Commentary on the Psalms*, is worth noting.⁷⁰ In it he first provides the equivalent of a dynastic history of the Het'umids and then a vita, the life of Nersēs up to that year, our primary source on him till then. Samuēl goes on to append a two-part colophon to the latter.⁷¹ In the first part he tells how he was commissioned by Nersēs to copy the *Commentary*, for fear that the massive autograph of the work begun in 1178 and completed in 1181 could be stolen (like the *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, noted in the fourth colophon above). After placing an 'Amen' next to the year of fulfilling his task (1190) and wishing blessings upon readers, Samuēl begins the second part:

At this time the holy city Jerusalem was captured by Yusuf, who ruled over Egypt and Arabia and Damascus, in the year 637 (1188).⁷² And by the decree of the Patriarch of Rome,⁷³ many kings and princes mobilized with countless troops from the West. So they come⁷⁴ bearing the cross of Christ to deliver the sacred sites. And for these three years⁷⁵ God's will delays the deliverance, and so they still linger around Ptolemais (Acre).

Յայսմ ժամանակի յափշտակեցաւ սուրբ քաղաքն Երուսաղէմ ի Յովսէփայ՝ որ տիրէր Եգիպտոսի և Արաբիոյ և Դամասկոսի, ի թուիս ՈՒԷ (1188, here I follow the reading of Samuēl's manuscript of 1190), և շարժեցան հրամանաւն հայրապետին Հռոմայ թագաւորք և իշխանք բազումք, և անթիւ զարաւք յարեւմտից, և զան կրելով զխաչն Քրիստոսի առ ի փրկել զսուրբ տէղիսն: Եւ այս ամբ երեք յապաղէ կամքն Աստուծոյ զփրկութիւն, և դեգերին տակաւին առընթեր Պտղովմիդայ:

Resounding echoes of the above colophons are heard clearly in these lines penned at the same time as when the second of the above quoted colophons was written by Nersēs—before the battle of Arsuf. Curiously, Samuēl continued to copy manuscripts after Nersēs's death, as if still being commissioned by him, as we see in a miscellany of the years 1199–1202, now in the St. James collection in Jerusalem (MS 326).⁷⁶ That there was a remarkable legacy of Nersēs at the scriptorium of Skewra cannot be doubted. In the Jerusalem manuscript we find Samuēl and his brother Yovhannēs with another scribe, Vahram, both pupils of Nersēs, adding lines of their own composition into the miscellany completed in 1202. They punctuate the manuscript—apparently begun

⁷⁰The manuscript, copied during Nersēs's lifetime and the archetype of all extant copies of the *Commentary*, is in the collection of the Venetian Mekhitarists (MS 1134); see *Mayr c'uc'ak hayērēn jēragrac' matenadaranin Mxit'areanc' i Venetik* [Grand Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the Library of the Mekhitarists in Venice], ed. Barseł Sargisean, Grigor Sargsean, and Sahak Čemčemean, 8 vols. (Venice, 1914–98), 6: 871–6, esp. 874–6 for the colophon (fol. 663v) and the vita (fols. 663v–666r).

⁷¹*Yovsēp'eanc', Yišatakarak',* 539–52 (nos. 244 and 245), rightly separates the vita (no. 245) from the following two-part colophon (no. 244, where the year of Jerusalem's fall is ՈՒԷ [1176], an obvious corruption), albeit by transposing them; whereas Mat'evosyan, *Hišatakaraner*, 255–61, at 260 (no. 270; where the year of Jerusalem's fall is ՈՒԷ [1178], another obvious corruption), fuses the vita and the two-part colophon into a single narrative, following Matenadaran MS 1526, copied in Yovhannavank' in 1293–4, fols. 853r–857v (at 857r); see *Mayr c'uc'ak hayērēn jēragrac' Maštoc' i Anuan Matenadaran*, 5: 323–30.

⁷²The manuscripts have varying dates due to early scribal error(s); here I follow the 1190 archetype, penned by Samuēl.

⁷³On the use of the title *Hayrapet* ('patriarch') for the bishop of Rome, see above, note 28.

⁷⁴Arm. *gan*, a continuous present tense.

⁷⁵Culminating in 1190—the year of the colophon.

⁷⁶St. James MS 326, a miscellany of the years 1199–1202, the major part of which (fols. 278r–385v) is a translation of Ephrem's *memre* on Nicomedia, of which some survive in Syriac (Bogharian, *Mayr c'uc'ak jēragrac' Srboc' Yakobeanc'*, 2: 196–9). For the Armenian translation see Charles Renoux, ed., *Memre sur Nicomédie: Fragments de l'original syriaque et de la version arménienne. Introduction et notes*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 172–3 (37/2–3) (Turnhout, 1975).

prior to Nersēs's death—with a number of subsequent colophons invoking him as though he were its living recipient.⁷⁷

The number of manuscripts containing works by Nersēs which were copied at Skewrā further attests to this legacy, as does also the number of manuscripts executed there for him.⁷⁸ The earliest of the latter kind, a Gospel manuscript and the oldest extant copy of *Matean Olbergut'ean*, the celebrated prayer book by Gregory of Narek (d. 1003),⁷⁹ were both penned and illustrated for Nersēs in 1173 by the scribe Grigor of Mlič (d. 1215). The Gospel colophon strongly underscores Nersēs's prominence in this monastery adjacent to Lambron: 'in his private hermitage called Skewrā' (*yiwr sephakan anapatn Skewray anun koč'ec'eał*).⁸⁰ The living memory of the legendary prior continued to be freely embellished there by his pupils, who were engaged in copying his works—among others—in the scriptorium founded by him.⁸¹ Nersēs's legacy, however, was not limited to the monastery under the patronage of the House of Lambron; he also belonged to the hierarchical see of Hromklay, where too his works were being copied long after his death, and later on in the capital Sis (near today's town of Kozan in the Adana Province of Turkey).

One further remark ought to be made, on the relative absence of any direct reference to the battle of Arsuf, as noted in the remarks on the third and fifth colophons quoted above. More than for our author, for his likely continuator(s) the redemption of Jerusalem seems to await the rise of the kingdom of Cilician Armenia under the leadership of Prince/King Levon. That this was a rife view is attested in other colophons of the period,⁸² a sentiment stemming from Levon's military successes coupled with his long wait for coronation with the promised Western crown. The view was further conditioned by the disappointment and delay caused by the drowning of Barbarossa who was bearing such a crown for Levon.

⁷⁷See the colophons cited by Bogharian, *Mayr c'uc'ak jeřagrac' S'rboc' Yakobeanč'*, 2: 196–9; e.g., fols. 284v, 295v, 304r, 321v, 327v, 349v, all in pages written by Yovhannēs.

⁷⁸See Hasmik Badalyan, 'Skeviayi vankē 12–14-rd darrerum ev mez hasac jeřagrakan žaranguť'unē' [The Monastery of Skewrā during the 12th–14th c. and the Heritage of Manuscripts that Has Come Down to Us], *Ėjmiacin* 57, no. 4 (2001): 81–91, accounting for 75 such manuscripts. For a detailed history of the literary life there, see Ališan, *Sisuan*, 86–107.

⁷⁹For an English translation, see Abraham Terian, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, 2021).

⁸⁰Badalyan, 'Skeviayi vankē', 81, 87. The Gospel, described by Garegin Sruanjteanc', *T'oros Albar, Hayastani čambord* [Brother T'oros: Traveler in Armenia], 2 vols. (Constantinople, 1879–84), 2: 442–4, was lost during the Armenian genocide of 1915; the prayer book is kept at the Matenadaran in Yerevan (MS 1568). Nersēs's two colophons of the year 1197 were written in conjunction with his visit to Constantinople as ambassador of the catholicos and of the future king (Mat'evosyan, *Hišatakaraner*, 292), one appended to his *Commentary on Proverbs* (no. 292), which he compared with other commentaries on Proverbs and Job at the patriarchal library, and the other appended to his notes on Armenian Christology formulated during previous dialogues with the Byzantines (no. 293). These were written when in poor health and with hands trembling. In them he refers to Skewrā as his comfortable home, and Tarsus just a place to visit.

⁸¹Among other pupils, with writings about their beloved prior and archbishop, are Xač'atur and Grigor of Skewrā; Akinean, *Nersēs Lambronaci*, 5–7, 70–4. It is important to note that Nersēs of Lambron had a nephew (sister's son) by the name Nersēs of Lambron and also a cleric, who owned a copy of the *Commentary on the Psalms* penned for him in 1204 by Xač'atur, in which the nephew has a colophon in addition to one by his maternal uncle—not found in the 1190 manuscript. This lost documentary witness from 1204 was the exemplar of Matenadaran MS 990 dated to 1675 (see fols. 730r–v, 745r–746r [*Mayr c'uc'ak hayerēn jeřagrac' Maštoc'i Anuan Matenadarani*, 3: 1639–40]; cf. Matenadaran MS 2613, dated to 1681–2, fols. 681r–682r [*Mayr c'uc'ak hayerēn jeřagrac' Maštoc'i Anuan Matenadarani*, 8: 718]), for a similar sequence of colophons by Nersēs and his nephew). The scriptorium was burnt down by Turkomans in 1275; Badalyan, 'Skeviayi vankē', 84.

⁸²See, e.g., Mat'evosyan, *Hišatakaraner*, 267–8 (no. 275), 296 (no. 295), the first written in Skewrā in 1192 and the second in Halbat (northeastern Armenia) in 1198; both seem to consider the Third Crusade a failure.

Finally, it remains to conclude with qualified certainty that Nersēs of Lambron had not been to Jerusalem and has no eyewitness account of the events surrounding the fall of the city to Saladin and its aftermath. Among the colophons rightly or wrongly attributed to him, those that refer to Saladin and the crusades, Jerusalem and Acre, at best reflect the Armeno-Cilician popular sentiments regarding the Third Crusade. Clearly, the present study of the five colophons underlines the necessity of equally critical assessment of the rest of Nersēs's colophons, with an eye for additions by continuators—foremost of whom seem to have been contemporaneous scribes at Skewra.

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