

## Review Essay

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# Women, Identity, and Power: A Review Essay of Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World*\*

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**Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). ISBN 978-1-107-16756-8.**

### Abstract

*This article, a response to Antony Eastmond's monograph Tamta's World, pays particular attention to women's history and identity at the intersection of cultural and religious interactions in medieval Georgia, Armenia, and Anatolia. It highlights the importance of the women in T'amt'a's family—her mother and aunts—in shaping her identity, despite Eastmond's emphasis on the agency of men in this process. I argue that the lives and self-representation of these women were far more relevant to T'amt'a than the numerous examples from various parts of the Islamic world that Eastmond provides would suggest. The article critically examines the notion of "fluid identities" as applied to the medieval evidence. It does so by considering previous research that has rejected the historicity of Zak'arid/Mxargrzeni princes' Kurdish origin. Furthermore, it outlines the divergent Armenian and Georgian historiographical traditions on the naming of this dynasty, reveals their sources, and underscores that genealogical constructions and the choice of dynastic monikers were strategies of legitimation. The visual evidence likewise requires nuanced interpretation, as I demonstrate in treating the Axtala Monastery's frescoes. I conclude by emphasizing that research aimed at bridging different disciplines, like Eastmond's, is essential but highly challenging. Its challenges may be partially offset through collaborative efforts among specialists.*

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### General Remarks

*Tamta's World* is an imaginative reconstruction of the turbulent, fascinating story and the historical context of a thirteenth-century Armenian noblewoman's—T'amt'a's—life.<sup>1</sup> Eastmond takes the reader through the various circumstances that forced T'amt'a to move in 1210 from her native lands in the north of historical Armenia (the Province of Lori) to a city on the northwestern coast of Lake Van, Xlat' (Akhlāt in Eastmond), which was then under Ayyubid rule.<sup>2</sup> From there she traveled to Jazīra and Syria, where she may have sojourned for a brief period of time. Soon going back to Xlat', she lived in and ruled over the city on behalf of her husband, al-Ashraf (d. 1254). A dramatic encounter with Jalāl al-Dīn Khwārazmshāh in 1230 likely forced her to return to her paternal family at some point in late 1230s. Subsequently, T'amt'a may have been forced to undertake a long journey to the Mongol court in Qaraqorum, where she resided as a hostage for nine years before she was granted permission to return once more to Xlat' in 1245. She was appointed the city's ruler, this time in her own name, but subject to Mongol overlordship. T'amt'a probably died in Xlat' in the mid-1250s.

Already the bare geography of T'amt'a's movements is extraordinary by any standard. The various peoples, religions, cultures, and languages that she encountered mark her life as anything but dull. Yet it would be reductive to describe the book's scope as merely a reconstruction of T'amt'a's life, in which the city of Xlat' serves as the "other main actor" (p. 124). Instead, Eastmond uses the very brief and fragmentary notices on this noblewoman in contemporary Armenian,<sup>3</sup> Georgian, Persian, and Arabic sources as triggers for delving into various aspects of courtly life and ruling practices; religion and interreligious contact and conflict; and pious foundations, their significance for the display of power, and the role of women as patrons, among others. Eastmond pays particular attention to visual and material culture, such as the urban environment and the landscape, including various types of buildings and their architectural features. Nor does he neglect trade, politics, or war, exploring their interreligious dimensions. The geographical sweep of the book is impressive: it covers portions of the Eurasian and African continents, stretching from the southern foothills of the Caucasus Mountains further south- and westward, through Anatolia and

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1. The scholarly transcription of her name, following the conventional system of Hübschmann-Meillet-Benveniste (HMB), is T'amt'a. Eastmond has opted for a simplified spelling—Tamta—for this name as well as other proper names, as he explains on p. xxii. In this review, all Armenian proper names are transcribed according to HMB (adopted by *Revue des études arméniennes*), Georgian names according to *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes*, and Arabic, Persian, and Turkish names according to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed. After the first mention of each name, I indicate in parentheses the transliteration used by Eastmond. Any direct quotations from Eastmond reproduce his spelling. This paper is based mainly on Armenian and some Georgian sources. Within each of these traditions there are different dating systems. In order to avoid multiple conversions between these and other chronological conventions, this article will provide only CE dates.

2. The city is called Akhlāt/Khilaṭ in Islamic sources and Khilat/Khliat in Byzantine ones. In view of the diversity of spellings, Eastmond opts for Akhlāt throughout the book.

3. Armenian sources are the most detailed on T'amt'a. Of prime importance is Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *Patmut' iwn hayoc'* [History of the Armenians], ed. K. Melik'-Ohanjanyan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1961), finished ca. 1265. Kirakos is one of the few authors to mention T'amt'a by name.

Mesopotamia to Egypt, and eastward to the Mongol steppes, with the Great Khan's court in Qaraqorum at their center. Eastmond's aim is to recreate T'amt'a's world on the basis of all possible external evidence that has reached us. In the process, he masterfully transforms T'amt'a and Xlat' to anything but a mere "footnote in history" (p. 391). Ultimately, he makes a strong case for placing Armenian and Georgian medieval history within a multicultural and multireligious landscape as the most fruitful interpretative framework.

T'amt'a's odyssey started in 1210, when her father, Iwanē, of the Zak'arid/Mxargrzelis family (Ivane Mqargrdzeli) was taken prisoner by an Ayyubid guard during his unsuccessful siege of Xlat' (pp. 3–7). Iwanē was a leading member of a new but powerful Armenian military nobility of Zak'arid lineage (I return to these denominations below) who pursued a brilliant military-political career at the Georgian court, then at the apogee of its power. To regain his freedom, Iwanē used T'amt'a as a diplomatic commodity, giving her in marriage to the Ayyubid ruler of Xlat', al-Awḥad, the nephew of the famous Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Al-Awḥad's death only a few months later meant that his wives passed to his brother al-Ashraf, a much more ambitious ruler. As the wife of al-Ashraf, T'amt'a is thought to have remained in Xlat' until ca. 1237, with a possible short stay in Syria. Her husband was absent from Xlat' most of the time, since his political interests lay elsewhere, in Jazīra. While in Xlat', T'amt'a used her position to benefit the Christian inhabitants of the city as well as those of the historical region of Tarōn to the west. Sources credit her for having created propitious conditions for pilgrims passing through the territories around Xlat' and through Tarōn on their way to Jerusalem (p. 8). The Armenian historian Kirakos Ganjakec'i states that these policies were especially beneficial for Georgian Christians, which could equally denote ethnic Georgian Christians and Armenian Chalcedonians. Kirakos calls T'amt'a the "lord of the city [of Xlat']."<sup>4</sup>

After a forced and short-lived marriage to Jalāl al-Dīn Khwārazmshāh (ca. 1230), T'amt'a likely returned to her homeland, which was ruled by her brother Awag at the time. She witnessed the Mongol campaigns and conquest of these territories from 1236 onward, which had a profound effect on the power balance between Armenian military elites and the Georgian court. Awag now acted on his own behalf rather than as a representative of the Georgian kingdom, directly negotiating for peace with the Mongols through his complete submission. Thereupon T'amt'a became once more a valuable diplomatic tool, possibly undertaking a voyage to Qaraqorum and remaining there as a hostage to ensure Awag's loyalty to the Mongols. Her return to Xlat' around 1245 as the ruler of the city under the Mongols brought her life full circle. She probably died and was buried in Xlat', though there is no explicit evidence of this.

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4. Kirakos, *Patmut' iwn hayoc'*, 292. Kirakos uses the word *tēr*, literally "lord," rather than its feminine counterpart *tikin* ("lady"). There has been no study of the significance of gendered uses of this title in T'amt'a's time. Nevertheless, this period witnessed important transformations in traditional social structures, land tenure practices, and titles. These topics are discussed in S. La Porta, "The Kingdom and the Sultanate Were Conjoined': Legitimizing Land and Power in Armenia during the 12<sup>th</sup> and Early 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *Revue des études arméniennes* 34 (2012): 73–118. One may speculate that *tēr* had stronger legal and political connotations than did *tikin*, which may have constituted an honorary title. Admittedly, the issue requires further research.

Given the paucity of direct information on T'amt'a, the various chapters of the book are digressions on themes that help us imagine her world. Eastmond explores such topics as the theory and practice of marriage at the Ayyubid court and other contemporary Muslim societies; public works, such as pious foundations established by high-standing wives or widows among the Ayyubids, Saljuqs, and Armenians; rivalry among women at court and in the harem; and the various options available to them for exerting influence or creating a public image, not least through the management of taxation. Eastmond then evokes the physical features that characterized T'amt'a's world, from palaces and objects therein to cityscapes. This portrait is based on other medieval Anatolian cities and palaces, which, for Eastmond, provide parallels to the now lost premodern structures of Xlat'. He thus explores the ways in which different ethnic and religious groups lived and displayed symbols of their faith within these other cities' internal topography and on their very walls. But the methodological soundness of this procedure is questionable.

Overall, Eastmond's reconstruction sets out two lines of argumentation that contribute to the study of medieval Georgia, Armenia, and Anatolia. First, he masterfully describes the multicultural landscape of these territories. They were inhabited or invaded by peoples speaking a multiplicity of languages, confessing different faiths, and organized according to varied social structures. Such diversity translated into intense interactions in the social, artistic, military, and religious spheres but could also give rise to conflict. It also meant, at least among military elites, the formation of multifaceted or even fluid identities with numerous shared features and a common language of rulership. The subject of identity politics is thus one of Eastmond's central themes. Second, he highlights the place of women in this world. He emphasizes the impact of patriarchal societies on the formation and transformations of women's identities. He forcefully argues that women's identities were largely imposed upon them by men, and he explores the impact of such gender dynamics on women's history. I believe, however, that both of these key themes—identity formation and women's agency within it—require more nuanced interpretations.

The individual topics and specific persons as well as single objects, buildings, and cities explored in this book are mostly well known, and many are well researched. Thus, Eastmond's purpose is not to break new ground but rather to bring this wealth of material together in a comparative perspective. His emphasis on visual culture and the material heritage is especially noteworthy. Such a painstaking collection of information in one book provides an overall vision and brings to life a vibrant but also violent world, one of close interaction among peoples of different faiths, languages, and social structures. This view helps us imagine how a woman like T'amt'a managed to survive and rule as she moved through these different social, cultural, and linguistic environments. Needless to say, her world was a male-dominated world, which makes T'amt'a all the more interesting as a historical figure. Whether these encounters resulted in "shifting identities" or even imposed "different identities" on T'amt'a is a subject I will explore below.

Because of the diversity of the material covered in the book, *Tamta's World* appears to be aimed at a broad readership, including scholars engaged in a variety of disciplines. Its fluid and clear style of writing is likely to attract also interested readers outside of scholarly circles. The courage to tackle such vast material, bridging multiple academic

fields and bringing scholarly traditions into conversation with each other, is praiseworthy. Projects with such ambitious sweep open up new vistas of research by juxtaposing multiple perspectives on the same problem. Yet the great breadth of the book is also what leaves several critical questions unanswered. Precisely because of its wide-ranging scope, it is perhaps inevitable that specialists in various more specific fields may find some of the author's interpretations of complex problems and unresolved hypotheses, as well as his use and presentation of certain sources, less convincing. Still, it is yet another merit of the book to have raised these questions, which then stimulate more specialized discussion. I will explore some of these questions below.

### **Remarks of an Armenologist**

In his acknowledgements (p. xx), Eastmond recognizes the challenges of conducting research into T'amt'a's world caused by the variety of languages used in the primary sources and the near-impossibility of mastering them all. One could hardly disagree. Yet in view of the central subject matter—T'amt'a—and the available sources on her, knowledge of Arabic and Armenian, in particular, would seem indispensable, not only because of the importance of direct access to all available primary material, but also because the acquisition of these languages would also entail a thorough training in the relevant historiography (and, not least, in the fields' historiographic problems). Given my own specialization, I do not feel competent to analyze the author's use of sources in Arabic or Persian. My remarks are focused on the area I know and can judge best, namely, medieval Armenian history and the relevant sources, but I will also make a limited foray into the Georgian material when necessary. Through these reflections, some of which challenge Eastmond's overarching conclusions as well as his specific interpretations, I hope to emphasize the diversity of the Armenian sources, the importance of using them in full in order to appreciate the multiplicity of points of view, and the new interpretative possibilities these sources offer for attempts to reconstruct Christian-Muslim interactions in medieval Anatolia.

### **Shifting Identities and Methodological Concerns**

As mentioned earlier, identity, and women's identity in particular, is a key concept in the book, viewed through the lens of T'amt'a's experiences. Indeed, we are informed already in the book's first pages that, through her life story and encounters with different peoples and languages, T'amt'a's "identity changed in consequence" (p. 2), and that "as her life was subject to such change and fluctuation, the transformations of her identity are central" (p. 20). Eastmond also duly notes that we will never be able to reach "T'amt'a's internal character and personality" but can explore only its "outward display" (p. 15). Various examples of individuals and groups whose identities were expressed in ways that seem ambiguous or fluid are cited in an effort to imagine how T'amt'a's own identity might have been transformed. The starting point for these transformations is her family. Eastmond reminds us that the family had a history of identity changes prior to and during T'amt'a's own lifetime. Thus, the Zak'arids, who were "of Kurdish origin," became Armenianized a few generations before T'amt'a, adopting the non-Chalcedonian form of Armenian Christianity

and the language. T'amt'a's father, Iwanē, then converted to the Chalcedonian confession of the Georgian (and Byzantine) Church as he pursued a military career at the court of the Georgian queen Tamar (r. 1184–1210). His elder brother Zak'arē (Zakare in Eastmond), however, remained in the fold of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In the twelfth century and the first three decades of the thirteenth, the Kingdom of Georgia was the strongest Christian state in the region, one that often portrayed itself as the protector of all the Christians in the face of the conquests and rule of various Islamic dynasties in historical Armenia and Anatolia. Zak'arē's and Iwanē's flexible religious strategy ensured the appeal of the brothers to their (Chalcedonian) Georgian and (non-Chalcedonian) Armenian subjects. This appeal was particularly vital for the command of their mixed Armeno-Georgian military forces. In their core territories—the border area of Armenian-Georgian settlements—there was also an important Armenian Chalcedonian community, which Iwanē may have wished to strengthen (pp. 21–65). Considering the fluidity of the brothers and those they ruled, Eastmond calls for abandoning “any simple ‘national’ categorisation” (p. 27).

It is beyond question that any discussion of medieval identities must be free of anachronistic notions and “national categorisation” based on the modern concept of a nation-state. I could not agree more with Eastmond on this point. At the same time, however, when challenging this outdated scholarly paradigm, which was, at any rate, the result of intellectual developments in a post-Enlightenment European context, the availability, complexity, and agenda of the sources should be given due credit. Although in some cases “changing identities” or at least shifts in their public display may be possible to trace, in others we should apply more caution in drawing conclusions. I will first make a few general methodological remarks before embarking on a more detailed analysis of certain specific cases presented by Eastmond as evidence of “fluid identities” in order to point out some of the inherent source-critical and historiographic problems. Naturally, it is not possible to discuss every single example offered by Eastmond. I focus on those that are directly relevant to the central topic of the book—T'amt'a's life—and on which my familiarity with the problems at hand allows me to make critical remarks.

To break free of a “national” or “nationalistic” outlook when analyzing medieval sources, Eastmond draws on two theoretical works: B. Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and A. Smith's “National Identities: Modern and Medieval” (p. 22).<sup>5</sup> Yet Anderson's book, as popular as it has been, is relevant to the process and methods of identity construction (or imagination, if one wishes) of only *some* nations in the modern era. Beyond the merits of his paradigm, which has been questioned on various grounds,<sup>6</sup> Anderson's model relies on an entirely different and much vaster set of sources, not to speak of the hardly comparable material and technological context of the period it tackles (nineteenth and twentieth centuries), than what is available to scholars who deal with the thirteenth

5. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); A. D. Smith, “National Identities: Modern and Medieval,” in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Johnson, A. V. Murray, and S. Forde, 21–46 (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1995).

6. For a recent criticism of the use of this model for understanding medieval concepts of “nation,” particularly the “Roman” identity in Byzantium, see, for example, A. Kaldellis, “The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach,” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 27 (2017): 200–201.

century. Anderson's treatment of the "Middle Ages" itself is so fragmentary, superficial, and stereotypical that his paradigm's utility for a medieval historian seems as questionable as that of paradigms based on concepts of a nation-state.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Smith's oft-cited article's definition of a "nation" has been subject to criticism for its inapplicability to medieval societies.<sup>8</sup> A recent and even more thorough critique of Smith from an Islamicist's point of view—by J. Bray in a talk given in June 2016—emphasized the unreliability of Smith's model when brought to bear on medieval Islamic sources.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, this analysis was not available to Eastmond. But one hopes that every scholar would apply his or her critical judgment in evaluating the utility of a theoretical framework to be applied to the available source material.

Various studies by N. Garsoïan and B. L. Zekiyan, two of the few but illustrious contemporary scholars who have carried out extensive research on the premodern understanding and formation of Armenian identity, are regrettably absent from Eastmond's book. Garsoïan has focused mainly on Late Antiquity. However, her methodological considerations on the facets of Armenian identity and the tension between modern scholarly discourse limited by a "national" view and the available evidence would have added depth to Eastmond's own analysis.<sup>10</sup> Zekiyan, too, has explored the multiple components of medieval Armenian identity, emphasizing its "polyvalence." Particularly valuable given Eastmond's subject matter would have been two of Zekiyan's works that focus precisely on the Zak'arids/Mxargzelis, while his more recent magisterial treatment of the theme of cultural interactions in "Subcaucasia" represents a milestone in research on Armenian

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7. See, for example, Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15–17, where the author uses such problematic (and unexplained) concepts as the "unselfconscious coherence" that characterized (presumably) the European Middle Ages. For a more sustained discussion of Anderson, see Kaldellis, "Social Scope," and the bibliography cited there.

8. R. Davies, "Nations and National Identities in the Medieval World: An Apologia," *Journal of Belgian History* 34 (2004): 567–579.

9. J. Bray, "Vexed Questions" (paper presented at the conference "And You Shall Be unto Me a Kingdom of Priests, a Holy Nation": Chosen Peoples from the Bible to Daesh," University of Oxford, June 20, 2016). Bray's talk is available as a podcast at <http://torch.ox.ac.uk/role-religion-identity>.

10. N. Garsoïan, "Reality and Myth in Armenian History," in *The East and the Meaning of History: Proceedings of the International Conference, Rome, 23–27 November 1992*, ed. G. Garbini and B. Scarcia Amoretti, 117–145 (Rome: Bardi, 1994); eadem, "Notes préliminaires sur l'anthroponymie arménienne du Moyen Âge," in *L'anthroponymie: Document de l'histoire sociale des mondes méditerranéens médiévaux*, ed. M. Bourin, J.-M. Martin, and F. Menant, 227–39 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1996); eadem, "The Two Voices of Armenian Medieval Historiography: The Iranian Index," *Studia Iranica* 25 (1996): 7–43; eadem, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. H. Ahrweiler and A. Laiou, 53–124 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998). These articles have been reprinted in N. Garsoïan, *Church and Culture in Early Medieval Armenia* (Ashgate: Variorum, 1999), as nos. XII, IX, XI, and XIII, respectively. See also N. Garsoïan, "Evolution et crise dans l'historiographie récente de l'Arménie médiévale," *Revue du monde arménien moderne et contemporain* 6 (2001): 7–27, reprinted in N. Garsoïan, *Studies on the Formation of Christian Armenia* (Ashgate: Variorum, 2010), no. I, and eadem, "Mer hofer," in *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Mahé*, ed. A. Mardirossian, A. Ouzounian, and C. Zuckerman, 369–76 (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2014).

identity and should have been consulted for the methodological tools it proposes.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Zekiyān has long called for distinguishing the various facets that made up the identity of medieval personages, including ethnicity, state, religion, and class, and for revealing the combinations and displays of these facets in different contexts. By way of example, such a nuanced understanding is necessary when one wishes to evaluate the function of the art sponsored by the Zak'arids and the message it conveyed, as well as the type of identity (ethnic? state-related? religious?) it represented.<sup>12</sup> Even if Eastmond had disagreed with Garsoiān's or Zekiyān's views, it would have been important to engage with previous scholarship that has treated the very same subjects and one of the most fundamental concepts of the book—identity.<sup>13</sup>

### Identity Transformations and Women in T'amt'a's Family

It is appropriate to start my exploration of the specific themes evoked in *Tamta's World* with its protagonist, the amazing T'amt'a. Although the main purpose of the book is to follow T'amt'a and try to see the world through her eyes, the lack of any direct information on her compels Eastmond to dedicate numerous pages, perhaps too many, to the reconstruction of the context of her life on the basis of possible parallel cases. The descriptions of marital practices, the activities of other high-standing Christian or Muslim wives (particularly their sponsorship of pious foundations), and the ways in which such women could wield power are meant to hint at the social environment in which T'amt'a may have lived and acted. Accompanied by ample visual material, the descriptions are a feast for the eyes, but frequently it feels as though we lose sight of T'amt'a herself. One is not always sure to what extent the various examples are applicable to or useful for understanding the main protagonist of the book. Meanwhile, other, in my view crucial material is absent.

The transformations of T'amt'a's identity run through the book as one of its leitmotifs. In order to understand them, one has to form an idea of their different stages, including T'amt'a's origins. Here Eastmond insists on the role of Iwanē in shaping his daughter's identity: "Tamta's identity before her first marriage was intimately bound up with that of her father" (p. 27). Given the absence of T'amt'a's name in any inscriptions left by Iwanē and her anonymity before her marriage, he concludes: "This invisibility, this dependence on the father, ensures that we are right to think of Tamta as sharing her father's identity

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11. B. L. Zekiyān, "Prémises pour une méthodologie critique dans les études arméno-géorgienne," *Bazmavēp* 139 (1981): 460–469, and idem, "Le croisement des cultures dans les régions limitrophe de Géorgie, d'Arménie et de Byzance," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 25, no. 3 (1986): 81–96. For more general remarks, see his "Lo studio delle interazioni politiche e culturali tra le popolazioni della Subcaucasia: Alcuni problemi di metodologia e di fondo in prospettiva sincronica e diacronica," in *Il Caucaso: Cerniera fra culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (secoli IV–XI), 1:427–481 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1996)*, and the various chapters in his *L'Armenia e gli armeni. Polis lacerata e patria spirituale: La sfida di una sopravvivenza (Milan: Guerrini e associati, 2000)*.

12. Zekiyān, "Le croisement des cultures," 89.

13. The continued importance of this subject is attested by more recent publications. A new collected volume, unfortunately not yet available to Eastmond, is particularly noteworthy: K. Babayan and M. Pifer, eds., *An Armenian Mediterranean: Words and Worlds in Motion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).



during this first stage of her life” (p. 84). Men’s role in the evolution of T’amt’a’s identity is stressed also after her marriage: “When Tamta transferred from her father’s family to that of her new husband, she was forced to become part of a new family with a new identity” (p. 84); “to the core of being an Armenian-Georgian noblewoman she added the role of wife of an Ayyubid prince” (p. 172). Likewise, as Eastmond recounts the hypothetical physical structures of a palace in which T’amt’a may have lived, he argues that “the design and decoration of palaces suggest that her identity continued to be framed through the men who controlled her, just as it had been by her father before her marriage” (p. 264). These conclusions can be accepted only partially given the precious little evidence we possess. The sources also allow alternative readings and interpretations.

Eastmond emphasizes throughout the book that T’amt’a lived in a world in which gender lines were clearly drawn. If so, it would be unusual for a father who was away on military campaigns a great deal of time to develop such an intimate relationship with his daughter as to shape her identity in that most delicate period of personality formation: childhood and adolescence. Eastmond dedicates pages to the certainly interesting lives of other individual women at various Muslim courts from Cairo to Mosul to Tokat, but it is surprising that barely a line alludes to T’amt’a’s mother or to other women of her family. Nor does he say anything about the activities or role of women among the Georgian nobility or at court beyond the exceptional cases of the queens Tamar and Rusudan and the latter’s daughter Tamar. The second Tamar converted to Islam and appears as Gurji Khātūn in the sources.

T’amt’a’s mother Xošak’ (Khoshak) appears very briefly on p. 2 and then not again until p. 324. Although surely the information available on her in the sources is slimmer than that available on her husband, this fact should not discourage us from trying to form an image of her. She is far from invisible. It is reasonable to assume that Xošak’ was T’amt’a’s earliest model of behavior and probably taught her daughter rulership skills for her future life as a high-standing wife with at least some local power, and it is thus worth looking at what we know about Xošak’.

Eastmond remarks that the thirteenth-century monastic teacher, historian, and intellectual Vardan Arewelc’i briefly mentions Xošak’ in polemical contexts. He first blames her for having instigated Zak’arē’s son’s conversion to “the Chalcedonian heresy.” Vardan then accuses her of a bizarre blasphemous act: she burned a dog to eradicate a newly emerging cult of the priest Parkešt (pp. 324–325).<sup>14</sup> Certainly, Vardan’s anti-Chalcedonian sentiments are evident. At the same time, his accusations cannot be taken as only expressions of misogyny. That it was Iwanē’s wife who was held responsible for the religious orientation of Zak’arē’s (her brother-in-law’s) son implies, at least, that women’s agency in such matters was credible to Vardan’s readers, even if not endorsed by all of them. As long as this is not simply a narrative device to clear Iwanē’s name, we may assume that Xošak’ had just as much if not more say in the religious education and orientation of her daughter T’amt’a.

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14. Vardan Vardapet, *Hawak’umn patmut’ean* [Historical Compilation] (Venice: Mechitarist Press, 1862), 140 and 143.

Eastmond also includes a good summary of women's political involvement at the Mongol court, as well as of the participation of high-standing women in the new political chessboard (pp. 378–380). It would be pertinent to add that T'amt'a's mother, too, was part of that world. Indeed, she acted as a mediator between her son (T'amt'a's brother) Awag and the Mongol commander Č'alatay (Chayatay). According to Kirakos Ganjakec'i, at a feast with his friends-in-arms, Awag, perhaps having drunk more than his fair share, boasted about rebelling against the Mongols. When the gossip reached Č'alatay, he prepared for a punishing action. The situation was saved by Awag's mother, who "went to them and pledged for the faithfulness of her son." After due punishment and payment "for their heads," the Mongols left Awag alone.<sup>15</sup> This episode reveals a strong and willful woman acting as a high-profile ambassador to the representative of a new "foreign" power, something that was not as unusual as it appears at first sight.<sup>16</sup>

Xošak's assertive personality and claims to power are evident also in earlier sources, such as inscriptions. As Eastmond rightly notes, inscriptions are one form of "outward display of . . . personality" (p. 15). Xošak' was hardly unique, in view of the importance of medieval Armenian women throughout the centuries as donors and founders of monasteries and churches, immortalizing their names on such buildings rather than merely representing the male power to which they were subjected.<sup>17</sup> In one inscription from Širakawan, slightly northeast of Ani, dated to 1229, Xošak' declares herself "the queen of the Georgians and the Armenians," while in another one from 1232 she appears as "the overseer of the Georgians and the Armenians and their queen."<sup>18</sup> Such audacious language vis-à-vis the Georgian court reflects the Zak'arids' independent-minded policy, which they pursued cautiously by various means throughout their rule in Armenia, but with greater confidence toward the end of Queen Tamar's rule and after her death.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Xošak's inscriptions echo pretensions to autonomy articulated in language that emphasizes female power: she claims to be a "queen." And there is another inscription in Širakawan from 1228 in which Xošak' is celebrated for exempting Širakawan's population from a certain tax. This tax break was obtained by the head of the community, Gurgēn, whose position appears subordinate to Xošak's, underscoring the priority of class over gender hierarchies.<sup>20</sup>

15. Kirakos, *Patmut' iwn hayoc'*, 319–320.

16. For other examples from an earlier period, see A. Vacca, "Conflict and Community in the Medieval Caucasus," *Al-Ušūr al-Wuštā* 25 (2017): 66–112.

17. For early evidence of female patronage and agency, see T. Greenwood, "A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 27–91, esp. 68–69. For a late ninth/early tenth century case study, see Z. Pogossian, "The Foundation of the Monastery of Sevan: A Case Study on Monasteries, Economy and Political Power in IX–X Century Armenia," in *Le valli dei monaci: Atti del III convegno internazionale di studio "De Re Monastica," Roma-Subiaco, 17–19 maggio, 2010*, ed. L. Ermini Pani, 1:181–215 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2012).

18. Լ. Ալիճան, *Տիրակ* (Venice: Mechitarist Press, 1881), 10.

19. La Porta, "Kingdom and Sultanate," 92–95, 100–102, 105, 108. These centrifugal tendencies became more accentuated in Queen Tamar's final years and after her death in 1210.

20. L. Xaç'ikyan, "XIV–XV dareri haykakan giwłakan hamaynk'i masin" [On the Armenian village community

Xošak's name is recorded also in the monastery of Keč'arīs in northern Armenia, in an inscription on the western façade of the main church. She is listed after her husband, Iwanē, the latter's nephew Šahnšah (Zak'arē's son, whom she "converted"), and her own son Awag, but she is given the title "patron." The same title is repeated (in the variant "paron") on the southern wall of the same church.<sup>21</sup> Although we may note that Xošak's identity in these inscriptions was bound to her function as a mother, we may also argue that, given the wording of the inscription, she was important for Awag and Awag's own identity. The latter defined himself not only through his father but also through his mother. It is probably not by chance that Zak'arē's son Šahnšah appears immediately after his uncle Iwanē, while the latter's son Awag is the third in line. Could we conclude that the presence of his self-confident mother's name buttressed his otherwise not very prominent position? These suggestions are hypothetical, and the inscriptions certainly need further analysis in light of kinship structures within these families.

However, as far as T'amt'a is concerned, this evidence is essential. If we are to think that the intriguing experiences of Shajar al-Durr in Cairo (pp. 117–121, 184, and elsewhere) and of Māhparī Khātūn in Anatolia (pp. 197–205 and elsewhere) can give us clues to T'amt'a's behavior and the challenges she faced, we are certainly entitled to postulate that her own mother was far more relevant. She must have had a direct influence on T'amt'a's ideas of gendered power structures and the display of her own standing in the relevant hierarchies. Both textual and epigraphic sources converge in depicting Xošak' as a leading figure in her own right who knew how to convey her claims in appropriate language. It would be odd if she did not pass on this wisdom to her daughter or educate her in the same spirit.

T'amt'a had also some formidable paternal aunts, through whom the brothers Zak'arē and Iwanē established a whole network of connections both with newly emerging nobility made up of military men with no celebrated lineages and with "old blood."<sup>22</sup> T'amt'a's case as a diplomatic bride was by no means unique in the Zak'arid family. Moreover, a strong bond between women and their mothers and paternal aunts may be gleaned from an inscription commissioned in 1185 by Mariam, the daughter of the Bagratid king of Lōri-Tašir, Kiwrikē II, for her mother and paternal aunt.<sup>23</sup> These women were active one generation before T'amt'a and in the same region in which she grew up. Incidentally, one of T'amt'a's aunts

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in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries], *Patmabanasirakan handes* 1 (1958): 110–34, reprinted in idem, *Ašxatut'yunner* [Opera], 2: 274–295 (Erevan: Gandzasar, 1999), 275.

21. H. Eliazaryan, "Keč'arisi vank'ə ev nra vimagir arjanagrut'yunnerə" [The Monastery of Keč'arīs and Its Inscriptions], *Ējmiacin* 11 (1955): 45.

22. This process was masterfully described almost a century ago by G. Hovsep'yan [Yovsēp'ean], *Xalbakyan' kam Pšoşyan' hayoc' patmut'yan meĵ: Patma-hnagitakan usumnasirut'yun I*. [Xalbakyan's or Pšoşyan's in Armenian History: A Historical-Archaeological Study I] (Vałaršapat [Ējmiacin]: Pethrat, 1928), esp. 13–26. See also La Porta "Kingdom and Sultanate," 88.

23. For details, see S. La Porta, "Lineage, Legitimacy, and Loyalty in Post-Seljuk Armenia: A Reassessment of the Sources of the Failed Ōrbēlean Revolt against King Giorgi III of Georgia," *Revue des études arméniennes* 31 (2008–9): 133–34. See also the genealogical tables in C. Toumanoff, *Les dynasties de la Caucasic chrétienne de l'Antiquité jusqu'au XIXe siècle: Tables généalogiques et chronologiques* (Rome: n.p., 1990), 294–301; all of T'amt'a's aunts are listed on p. 295.

married into the Kiwrikid family, as we shall see, and a process of intra-family transmission of pious behavior and its norms is not to be discounted.

Eastmond mentions two of T'amt'a's aunts without identifying their relationship to her (pp. 216–217). One is Xorišah (Khorishah), who founded the monastery of Ganjasar together with her son, Hasan Ĵalal Dawla, in 1216 (the building was completed in 1238). Eastmond cites her as one of the people who benefited from T'amt'a's efforts to facilitate pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When imagining “T'amt'a's world,” we may well suppose that Xorišah even visited her niece on one of her three journeys to the Holy City.<sup>24</sup> The other aunt mentioned by Eastmond is Vaneni (or Nana), whom he qualifies as “possibly a relative of Zakare and Ivane” (p. 191). In fact she was their sister.<sup>25</sup> She was married to the last Kiwrikid (Bagratid) king of Lori, Abas II. Eastmond discusses the bridge she built over the Debed River to commemorate her husband and highlights the importance of such constructions as part of the “good works” that married (or widowed) women undertook. Yet the bridge displayed more than one layer and nuance of power. Indeed, Vaneni claimed the royal prerogatives of her husband for herself, too, since, according to the *Book of Judgments* of Mxit'ar Goš, a prominent monastic intellectual and jurist with close ties to the Zak'arids, the construction of bridges was the “prerogative of kings.”<sup>26</sup> Was Vaneni affirming her role as a “queen” even after her husband's death? Were such notions of rulership as a wife and a widow passed on to the younger members of the family, such as T'amt'a? As with many similar questions posed throughout the pages of the book, we are as yet not in a position to provide definitive answers. However, the available material indicates that the effort to uncover them will surely be repaid.

Another of T'amt'a's aunts, Dop', was so influential that the entire dynasty issuing from her marriage to Hasan, a ruler from the historical region of Arc'ax, took her name and was known as Dop'eank'. One modern historian goes as far as calling her the “founding mother” of the dynasty.<sup>27</sup> The historian Kirakos Ganjakec'i calls their son Grigor “son of Dop'” rather than “son of Hasan.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, although Eastmond may be right that in some cases women's identities were “completely transformed through marriage” (p. 92), in others the reverse was true. Women not only maintained a strong attachment to their pre-marriage identities

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24. Eastmond's statement (p. 217) that these three pilgrimages took place between 1216 and 1238 must be corrected. This assumption is based on an erroneous translation of an inscription on the two sides of the northern window in the main church of the Ganjasar monastery. Instead of “[she] went three times to Jerusalem,” the relevant words should be translated as “she went for the third time to Jerusalem.” Thus, we know the date of Xorišah's last visit to Jerusalem—between 1216 and 1238—but not the dates of the previous two.

25. This relationship is attested in her inscription on a *xač'k'ar* (cross-stone) near the Sanahin bridge, which she built over the Debed River. See K. Łafadaryan, *Sanahni vank'ə ev nra arjanagrut'yunnerə* [The Monastery of Sanahin and Its Inscriptions] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1957), 185–186; Hovsep'yan, *Xalbakjans*, 15; Toumanoff, *Les dynasties*, 295; La Porta, “Kingdom and Sultanate,” 94–95.

26. Mxit'ar Goš, *Girk' datastani* [Book of Judgments], ed. X. T'orosyan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1975), 29; English translation by R. W. Thomson, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk'] of Mxit'ar Goš* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

27. Hovsep'yan, *Xalbakjans*, 16.

28. Kirakos, *Patmut'iwn hayoc'*, 280.

but also transmitted them together with their name to generations to come. It appears that in the fluid thirteenth-century social context the preeminence of a given lineage was of key importance in identity formation. It could challenge or even supersede gender hierarchies and expectations. Indeed, Dop', who was married to a presumably promising military man with no important lineage, passed on *her* name to her offspring.

Like Vaneni, T'amt'a's last aunt, Nerjīs, also married a representative of the old nobility who claimed Mamikonid descent.<sup>29</sup> She bore no children and became an ascetic. In this role she “nourished” a number of monks and female attendants (perhaps nuns), who left Nerjīs's name, with expressions of gratitude, on their own gravestones. She is given the title “patron” in a number of inscriptions, including on her own grave, where her brothers Zak'arē and Iwanē appear with the identical title and nothing more.<sup>30</sup>

What does all of the above tell us about T'amt'a, the women of her time, and her own marriages and rulership of Xlat'? We can draw one sure conclusion. She must have witnessed and presumably absorbed lessons and behavioral patterns from the variegated experiences of the women in her family. As the daughter of one of the leading nobles of the time, T'amt'a must have been prepared for a marriage to seal one alliance or another. She probably expected to become a high-profile wife one day, just like her mother and aunts. The possibility of marriage to a non-Christian was certainly not excluded. For example, a second cousin of hers named Xawrās was married twice. From a colophon in the celebrated *Bagnayr Gospels* we learn that Xawrās commissioned the codex together with his second wife, Zmruxt, who was “Tačik by race.” The colophon also records the name of Xawrās's deceased first wife, Xut'lu Xat'un, who was “Persian by race.” Both labels were used to denote Muslims in medieval Armenian sources, rather than reflecting ethnic belonging.<sup>31</sup> Presumably, both women converted to Christianity after their marriage to Xawrās, given that Xawrās and Zmruxt eventually commissioned a Gospel manuscript that commemorated Xut'lu Xat'un. It is likely that girls—whether Muslim or Christian, of whatever denomination or ethnicity—were taught early on how to behave also on such occasions, adapting the public display of their identity to the circumstances.

When T'amt'a was given in marriage in exchange for her father's liberation she was probably no longer a tender adolescent. Eastmond assumes that she must have been thirteen or over in 1210, basing himself on Byzantine marriage laws and practices (p. 3). One wonders why he did not consult the Armenian *Book of Canons* or the already mentioned *Book of Judgments* of Mxit'ar Goš as a source of normative practice or theory on marriage among the Armenians. The latter source would have been especially pertinent, since it was finished only a couple of decades before T'amt'a's marriage in one of the monasteries of

29. Hovsep'yan, *Xalbakjans*, 15–16.

30. Łafadaryan, *Sanahni vank'ə*, 171. See also S. Avagyan and H. Ĵanp'oladyan, eds., *Divan hay vimagrut'yan*, vol. 6, *Iĵevani šrĵan* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum, vol. 6, Iĵevan Region], (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1977), 83; and S. Barxudaryan, ed., *Divan hay vimagrut'yan*, vol. 10, *Širaki marz* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum, vol. 10, Širak Region] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 2017), 53.

31. Information and sources in K. Mat'evosyan and S. Boloyan, “The Scriptorium of Hořomos Monastery,” in *Hořomos Monastery: Art and History*, ed. E. Vardanyan, 325–59 (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2015), 334.

T'amt'a's homeland, Lori. In any case, this was not the first time a marriage was planned for T'amt'a. According to the historian Step'anos Ōrbēlean (end of the thirteenth/beginning of the fourteenth century), whose own family had had a conflicted history with the Zak'arids, Iwanē had proposed an alliance between the two families to be sealed through the marriage of T'amt'a and Liparit Ōrbēlean around 1203.<sup>32</sup> The latter was the only surviving heir of the Ōrbēleans in Armenia at the time. The plan was never fulfilled, because Liparit chose a different wife. But this information implies that T'amt'a had reached the age of thirteen already in 1203, and by 1210 she must have been rather more mature. I believe that such details are not unimportant in reconstructing T'amt'a's life, her world, and the transformations of her identity. Indeed, leaving her father's home (and identity?) at the age of twenty or more would mean traveling with a heavier baggage of cultural and religious imprinting than if she departed as a teenager.

Certainly, to survive a life lived in such diverse contexts, T'amt'a had to adapt. But what is the basis for insisting that she had to transform her identity in the process? From the scant notices in the sources, even considering all their biases, it appears that T'amt'a maintained a strong connection to her roots and her Christian identity. Indeed, she used her role as the wife of consecutive Ayyubid rulers to benefit Christians in Xlat' and beyond it, in the region of Tarōn, where the majority were Armenians. Eastmond notes Kirakos Ganjakec'i's contention that Georgian Christians, particularly pilgrims to Jerusalem, benefited even more from T'amt'a's interventions. This suggests that T'amt'a was, in a way, an ally of her father, and her choices buttressed his policies and position at the Georgian court. It is thus problematic to correlate the experiences and changes of identity of other originally Christian wives of Muslim potentates in the region with T'amt'a's possible identity transformations.

For various reasons—and Eastmond enumerates a few rather plausible ones—T'amt'a followed a different path from that, for example, of the Georgian queen Rusudan's daughter Tamar, who married the Saljuq sultan Kaykhusraw II (1237–1246). Tamar converted to Islam and is known as Gurji Khātūn (Gürcü Hatun) in Islamic sources. She became a patron of the celebrated Sufi intellectual, mystic, and poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. Gurji Khātūn's devotional practices show significant mingling of Christian and Muslim religious elements, attesting to a vibrant environment of exchange and interactions in medieval Anatolia (pp. 225–228). The religious development of Māhparī Khātūn occurred along similar lines. Originally an Armenian Christian, she converted to Islam upon her marriage to the sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn

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32. Manandyan dates the liberation of Liparit Ōrbēlean to the time immediately after Zak'arē and Iwanē's conquest of Dwin in 1203: H. Manandyan, *Erker* [Opera], vol. 3 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1977), 143 and 163. The failed marriage plan is mentioned in Step'anos Ōrbēlean, *Patmut' iwn Nahangin Sisakan* [History of the Region of Sisakan] (Tiflis: Ałaneanc' Press, 1910), 396. In this edition the text reads erroneously "Iwanē's sister T'amt'i," but such a sister is otherwise not known. Moreover, Liparit is described as a young boy, whereas a sister of Iwanē must have been much older. The modern Armenian translation, which is based on a comparison of two published versions and one manuscript of this *History*, in fact corrects "sister" to "daughter." S. Ōrbelyan, *Syunik' i patmut' yun* [History of Syunik'], trans. A. Abrahamyan (Erevan: Sovetakan Groġ, 1986), 319. On the conflict between the Zak'arid and Ōrbēlean families, see La Porta, "Lineage, Legitimacy and Loyalty."

Kayqubād I (1219–1237).<sup>33</sup> By contrast, T'amt'a's first husband, al-Awḥad, is said to have built a church for her (p. 133). We may speculate that this indicates a respect for (or indifference to?) her identity and an admission that he would not expect or require her to change it.

Similarly, although the practice of establishing and supporting pious foundations among high-standing Ayyubid and Saljuq women provides a fascinating backdrop for T'amt'a's own activities, her mother and her aunts surely gave her first-hand examples of or even instructions for such work. They must have also taught her her first lessons in how a woman could survive and rule in their turbulent world. We may wonder, with Eastmond, whether T'amt'a painted a portrait of herself in one of Xlat's churches following the example of Queen Tamar of Georgia (p. 121), or whether she left her name in inscriptions on the walls following the example of her mother, aunts, and numerous other elite Armenian women throughout the centuries. Perhaps she did both. The lack of archaeological data from Xlat precludes not only an accurate appraisal of its urban structure, but also of T'amt'a's impact on the cityscape, despite Eastmond's efforts to fill this gap by appealing to the features of other Anatolian cities.

### **Kurdish Zak'arids vs Kurdish Ayyubids and "Fluid" Identities**

In his monograph, Eastmond often joins the key term "identity" to the notion of "fluidity." The "fluidity" of identities, however, is a concept inspired by a contemporary context and concerns, our fast-paced world, and the possibility of tracing how movements between cultures, countries, languages, and religions—for whatever reason or purpose—impact individuals and groups, including their identities. We are in a position to evaluate such fluidity thanks to the overabundance of information. But this is hardly the case with medieval sources, which are more limited in terms of both quantity and quality. In the next three sections I assess the basis on which Eastmond postulates the "fluid identity" of the other important actors in his book—members of T'amt'a's family, the Zak'arids. In doing so, I hope to point out the dangers of imposing notions taken from the contemporary globalized world on the medieval source evidence, as well as to highlight the methodological pitfalls of such an exercise. The discussion above sought to make it clear that in the case of women, individual situations could be complex and diverse, and not always fit for generalization. In some cases we may detect strong cultural consistency and attachment to "one's roots," whereas in others profound transformations of identity may have taken place. I argue below that the same attention to detail and context is required when studying multiple identities regardless of the gender of the individuals involved.

Eastmond starts his discussion of the "fluidity" of Zak'arid identity (p. 21) by referring to the family's presumed Kurdish origins. At some point they then morphed into "Armenians" and, at least in the case of Iwanē, to "Georgian Chalcedonians." There is certainly a neat

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33. P. Blessing, "Women Patrons in Medieval Anatolia and a Discussion of Māhbarī Khātūn's Mosque Complex in Kayseri," *Türk Tarih Kurumu Belleten* 78, no. 282 (2014): 475–526; S. Yalman, "The 'Dual Identity' of Mahperi Khatun: Piety, Patronage and Marriage across Frontiers in Seljuk Anatolia," in *Architecture and Landscape in Medieval Anatolia, 1100–1500*, ed. P. Blessing and R. Goshgarian, 224–252 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

symmetry in Eastmond's statement that "[t]he common Caucasian, Kurdish roots of the Ayyubids and the Mqargrdzelis underline the capacity of medieval people to reinvent themselves: two families from the same region rising to power in different states, using different languages and professing different religions" (p. 81). However, as Margaryan has convincingly argued, the Zak'arid claim to "Kurdish" origins, mentioned by Kirakos Ganjakec'i and repeated by Vardan Arewelc'i and uncritically accepted by many modern scholars, was one of the strategies of legitimation that the Zak'arids adopted in the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Reported by a historian positively biased toward the Zak'arids, the myth of a Kurdish origin was aimed at bestowing a luster of antiquity and "exoticism" on the family. Moreover, in describing this primordial exotic origin, Kirakos followed the narrative strategy and was inspired by the very wording of Movsēs Xorenac'i. The latter had been enshrined as the "father of Armenian historiography" by Kirakos's time.

Margaryan's painstaking analysis of the possible context of such a Kurdish migration to northern Armenia, of the "memory" of this event (or rather its invention), and of the linguistic and conceptual problems in Kirakos's passage describing these "Kurds" has further strengthened the conclusion that the claimed genealogy is unreliable from a historical point of view and must be treated as fictitious.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, in Zak'arid inscriptions, many of which predate Kirakos Ganjakec'i's *History*, a different strategy of legitimation and search for origins is also visible, one tied to the "glorious" old Armenian royal dynasties of the Arçrunids and the Bagratids. These, too, were tendentious claims, as Margaryan has demonstrated. Therefore, due caution must be exercised when positing a "fluid identity" for the Zak'arids on the basis of their transformation from "Kurds" to "Armenians" and then comparing and contrasting their experiences with those of the coeval Ayyubids. Another example of Zak'arid claims to an ancient genealogy as a legitimation strategy is encapsulated in the family's Georgian moniker, Mxargrzeli, to which I turn next.

### Zak'arid or Mxargrzeli?

To emphasize the Zak'arids' simultaneous engagement in the Georgian and Armenian "worlds," Eastmond explores various aspects of their identity and points out that its inherent complexities have been insufficiently recognized in modern scholarship:

The conflicting claims of the brothers, as vassals in Georgia but as independent kings in their own lands, are reflected in the modern disagreement about their family's name: Mqargrdzeli in medieval Georgian sources, Zakarian in modern Armenian histories. No

34. Kirakos, *Patmut'awn hayoc'*, 162.

35. H. Margaryan, "Zak'aryanneri cagman avandut'yunə miñnadaryan hay patmagrut'yan mej" [The Tradition on the Origin of the Zak'arids in Medieval Armenian Historiography], *Patmabanasirakan handes 2-3* (1992): 139–52, esp. 164–173 on the family's "Kurdish" origins; and idem, "Zak'aryanneri cagumə" [The Origin of the Zak'arids], *Patmabanasirakan handes 1-2* (1994): 156–75. For a French version of his work, see H. Margarian, "Autour des hypothèses de l'origine Kurde de la maison princière arménienne des Zakarids," *Iran and the Caucasus* 1 (1997): 24–44. Margaryan's findings are brilliantly summarized with further in-depth analysis of the function of such fictitious genealogies in La Porta, "Kingdom and Sultanate," 77–81, 92–94. Surprisingly, although this article seems to be known to Eastmond, he apparently did not take its contents fully into consideration.



compromise seems possible in the modern histories of Georgia and Armenia. Although most of the evidence I draw on about the brothers comes from the modern-day territory of Armenia, I have used their Georgian surname in this account in order to hint at their ambivalent position within Armenia and to stress the way they lie outside any simple “national” categorisation. (p. 27)

Eastmond thus argues forcefully that the discussion of Zak'arid/Mxargrzeni identity has been distorted by the prism of national or nationalistic thinking. However, the actual situation of the secondary literature is far more complex than the above quotation concedes. First, it is curious that Eastmond contrasts “medieval Georgian sources” with “modern Armenian histories” and then posits divergent views in “modern histories of Georgia and Armenia.” Beyond the differences in language, perspective, and specific names employed in Georgian versus Armenian sources, the sources themselves are not homogenous. They vary in nature, weight, and credibility.

In the secondary literature, too, scholars' approach to the family is far from monolithic. Zekiyan, for example, uses the appellation “la dynastie des ErKaynabazukk' ou Mxargrdzeli.”<sup>36</sup> In a general, collected volume *Histoire du peuple arménien*, Dédéyan refers to the Zak'arids as “une grande famille féodale arménienne (peut-être d'ascendance kurde), celle des Mekhargrdzéli.”<sup>37</sup> More than a century ago, presumably at the height of the spread and popularity of national and nationalistic sentiments, Šahnazareanc' had similarly no qualms in discussing the meaning and origin of the name Mxargrzeni, with no hint of polemic.<sup>38</sup> The relevant volume in one of the most standard reference works, *History of the Armenian People*, published by the Armenian Academy of Sciences in the 1970s, includes quotations from the Georgian *Kartlis Cxovreba*, transliterating the name as “Mxargrjeli” in reference to Sargis, Zak'arē, and Iwanē.<sup>39</sup> It would be tedious to list all of the modern (Armenian) scholars who acknowledge and employ both names—Mxargrzeni and Zak'arid. The concept “Armenian” itself is as complex today as it was in the thirteenth century, if not more so. Consequently, there is presumably room to argue that Zekiyan's, Dédéyan's, and others' studies also constitute “modern Armenian histories.” I leave it to Georgianists to

36. Zekiyan, “Le croisement des cultures,” 93. “ErKaynabazukk'” is the Armenian version of the nickname “long-armed,” which is the meaning of the Georgian name “Mxargrzeni.” I discuss the origin of the name below.

37. G. Dédéyan, ed., *Histoire du peuple arménien* (Toulouse: Édition Privat, 2007), 329. The Kurdish origin of the Zak'arids is debated, as discussed above.

38. A. S. Šahnazareanc', “Zak'arean (ErKaynabazuk) tohmi cağumə, galt'ə dēpi Joraget ew naxordnerə: ŽA/ŽB dar” [The origin of the Zak'arid (long-armed) dynasty, [its] emigration to Joraget, and [its] forefathers: Eleventh–twelfth centuries], in *Sołakat': S. Ėjmiacni Hayagitakan Žołovacu* [Sołakat': Collection of [works] on Armenian studies of St. Ėjmiacin], book 1, 66–83 (Vałaršapat/Ėjmiacin: Holy Ėjmiacin Publishing, 1913). For a synopsis of genealogical information on the Zak'arids based on the historiographic and epigraphic evidence available to Šahnazareanc', see p. 75. Šahnazareanc' noted that the name Mxargrzeni was translated into Russian as “Dolgorukij” and had been employed since the seventeenth century. He further explained that a more accurate translation of the term from Georgian to Armenian would be “erkarat'ikunk' kam erkar us,” that is, “long-shouldered.” The Armenian and Georgian names are both calques from the original Greek; see below.

39. C. Ałayan et al., eds., *Hay Žołovrdi patmut'yun* [History of the Armenian People], vol. 3 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1976), 530.

accept or refute Eastmond's evaluation of the reluctance of "modern Georgian histories" to employ the name Zak'arid, as opposed to Mxargrzeni, and its possible reasons.

The sources themselves appear to contain and justify the use of both names, Mxargrzeni and Zak'arid. In Armenian history, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were characterized by tectonic shifts in the structure and the very identity of noble dynasties (traditionally called *naxarars* in the sources, a term that may no longer be applicable for this period) that had dominated the territories inhabited by the Armenians up until the mid-eleventh century.<sup>40</sup> The Zak'arids were newcomers on the scene and could boast no ancient lineage or old name compared to such illustrious but no longer politically viable lines as the royal Bagratids or Arscunids, for instance. Hence, they adopted different strategies of legitimation, such as tracing their line of descent to a (real) ancestor (e.g., Zak'arē or Awag-Sargis) to showcase the dynasty's longevity, listing various honorific military titles conferred on them by the Georgian court to emphasize their preeminence, and creating myths of distant and exotic origins—Kurdish or ancient Persian—to extend their ancestry even further back in history, to the quasi-mythical past of the Achaemenids.<sup>41</sup> Of course, these strategies of legitimation were neither new nor specific to the Zak'arids: the Bagratids, for example, claimed Jewish origins, an assertion that no researcher today would accept as a historical fact.<sup>42</sup> An illustrious seventh-century Bagratid figure, Smbat, proclaimed his (non-Chalcedonian) orthodoxy and support of the Armenian Church while at the same time proudly carrying the Iranian title—*Xosrov Š[n]um*, the "Joy of Xosrov"—bestowed on him by the Zoroastrian King of Kings.<sup>43</sup>

Let us return to the Zak'arids. Kirakos Ganjakec'i, who is our best informant, traces the ancestry of Zak'arē and Iwanē to their grandfather Zak'arē/Zak'aria (I will refer to him as Zak'arē I to avoid confusion).<sup>44</sup> Kirakos's friend and study companion Vardan Arewelc'i, who for this portion of his own *Historical Compilation* relies heavily on Kirakos, mentions Zak'arē I's father, Awag-Sargis, in an effort to trace the family's genealogy further into the past. Of course, the fame and fortunes of the Zak'arids were built by Awag-Sargis's grandson Sargis II (the son of Zak'arē I) and the latter's two sons, the celebrated Zak'arē II, often mentioned with the epithet Great, and Iwanē, at the service of the Georgian king Giorgi III

40. R. Bedrosyan, "Armenia during the Seljuk and Mongol Periods," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1, *The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. R. Hovannisian, 241–71 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004); La Porta, "Kingdom and Sultanate," 74–77.

41. Margaryan, "Zak'aryanneri cagumə."

42. Movsēs Xorenac'i, *Patmut'iwn hayoc'* [History of the Armenians], ed. M. Abelean and S. Yarus'iwnean (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1991), 68 (book 1, chap. 22).

43. Sebēos, *Patmut'iwn* [History], ed. G. Abgaryan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1979), 101–3.

44. Kirakos, *Patmut'iwn hayoc'*, 162. Eastmond (p. 19) is surprised at the multiple orthographies of the name Zak'arē/Zak'aria/Zaxaria, particularly in inscriptions. However, this is a common feature not only of inscriptions (and not only with regard to Zak'arē) but also of manuscripts, and no particular significance can be attached to it, unless clearly argued.

(1156–1184) and his daughter, the formidable queen Tamar.<sup>45</sup> The historian Vardan calls Sargis II “Sargis Zak’arean.”<sup>46</sup> The use of the appellation “Zak’arean” in modern Armenian historiography follows this tradition and may be justified as being based on the name of Zak’arē and Iwanē’s grandfather, but with convenient reference also to Zak’arē II, “the Great,” paying tribute to his exalted status in medieval Armenian historiography.

The Georgian appellation Mxargrzeni is also well attested, but in Georgian sources, such as the relevant portions of *Kartlis Cxovreba*, the *Life of Queen Tamar*, and other later narratives.<sup>47</sup> As Margaryan has demonstrated, this designation was based on yet another of the family’s origin legends, transmitted in Georgian by the *First Chronicle of Queen Tamar*. Its author claims that Zak’arē was a kinsman of the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes I (465–425 BCE). The latter appears as “Erkaynajern” (“long-handed”) or “Erkaynabazuk” (“long-armed”) in Armenian sources predating the thirteenth century.<sup>48</sup> For example, the tenth-century historian Step’anōs Tarōnec’i (Asolik) mentions Artaxerxes once as Erkaynajern and another time as Erkaynabazuk. The names are Armenian calques for the Greek Makrocheir (Latin: Longimanus). This nickname originated in classical sources and was transmitted through Late Antique authors, such as the fifth-century Armenian translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Chronicle*, which employs the form Erkaynabazuk.<sup>49</sup> The corresponding Georgian calque is Mxargrzeni, which served to substantiate the family’s claim to an ancient royal Iranian pedigree. Georgian sources may have either relied on knowledge of earlier Armenian traditions or tapped directly into Greek sources (perhaps in Georgian translation).

As Eastmond rightly mentions (p. 19), no medieval Armenian narrative sources employ the name Mxargrzeni. It is not clear why this is so, nor does Eastmond discuss it. Not only the Armenian historians but also the inscriptions commissioned by the Zak’arids generally refrain from using the name Mxargrzeni as a dynastic self-appellation, though they have no

45. We may observe the repetitive onomasticon, particularly the names Sargis, Zak’arē, Iwanē, and Awag, as another strategy of creating a sense of continuity and, thus, of lineage in the early generations of the Zak’arids.

46. Vardan, *Hawak’umn patmut’ean*, 127. A brief, schematic presentation of the earliest Zak’arids’ genealogy may be found in Šahnazareanc’, “Zak’arean (Erkaynabazuk) tohmi cagumə,” 68, and in Margaryan, “Zak’aryanneri cagumə,” 165. Margaryan notes the confusion and inconsistency of the Armenian sources, indicating that by the time the Zak’arids began to pass down a deliberate genealogical construction, precise memory of anything beyond the third generation had already been lost. The most extended family tree, though not without some problems, has been drawn up by Toumanoff: C. Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l’histoire de la Caucasic chrétienne (Arménie-Géorgie-Albanie)* (Rome: Edizioni Aquila, 1976), 290–301 (including the family’s Gageli branch), and idem, *Les dynasties*, 294–301. See also La Porta, “Kingdom and Sultanate,” 77–78.

47. *Kartlis Cxovreba* names the male members of the Mxargrzeni family. I have consulted the Georgian sources in translation: *Histoire de la Géorgie depuis l’Antiquité jusqu’au XIXe siècle*, trans. M. Brosset (St. Petersburg: Imprimerie de l’Académie impériale des sciences, 1849); *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, trans. R. Metreveli, S. Jones, et al. (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014). For the *Life of Tamar* I have used the Russian translation: *Žizn’ C’aric’y Caric’ Tamar* [Life of the Queen of Queens Tamar], trans. V. D. Dondua, comm. Berdznishvili (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1985).

48. Margaryan, “Zak’aryanneri cagumə,” 163, with further references to the relevant Armenian and Georgian sources.

49. La Porta, “Kingdom and Sultanate,” 79; *The “Universal History” of Step’anos Tarōnec’i*, trans. T. Greenwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 40, 107, 116.

qualms about proclaiming the family's Georgian court titles. Among the dozens of extant inscriptions by the Zak'arids, there are four exceptions to this silence; however, these reveal a very different perspective. Chronologically the earliest and the most important is an inscription by Zak'arē II on the interior of the western wall of his church in Ani, in which he calls himself the "son of the great prince of princes, *amirspasalar, Mxargrceli Sargis*." Yet when listing his own appellatives, he uses the terms "*mandator't uxuc'ēs, amispasalar, šahnšah Zak'arē*," listing his titles without availing himself of the moniker Mxargrzelī.<sup>50</sup> Three other inscriptions use the Armenian transcription of "Mxargrjel/Mxargrcel," but they refer to the *personal* name of Zak'arē's grandson. Mxargrjel does not signify a dynastic marker in these inscriptions. Rather, it seems that it was taken as the title of Sargis II and then became a personal name, a process attested on other occasions, too.<sup>51</sup>

In sum, the difference in the Armenian and Georgian historiographic conventions for naming a family that belonged to both worlds is not a mere product of nationalistic sentiments. Although such sentiments may well have inspired some scholars, they are not necessarily uniform. Both appellations stem from the relevant sources transmitted in the two languages, and one may compare this usage to the similar case of *die Staufer* versus *gli Svevi* in reference to one and the same medieval family in German and Italian historiography, respectively. Whether modern scholars opt for Zak'arid or Mxargrzelī, they inevitably imply one or the other perspective on the family's origins or origin myths or, if one wishes, one or another form of bias. Indeed, Eastmond's choice of consistently applying the "surname" Mxargrzelī is no more neutral than using the name Zak'arid would be.<sup>52</sup> Even the notion of a "surname" for a medieval dynasty is questionable, and the term "moniker" seems more appropriate in this case.

In view of the above discussion, Eastmond's approach of adopting the name "Tamta Mqargrdzeli" throughout his book is less than satisfactory. First, and most importantly, this name never appears in the sources. Second, it is unclear whether the moniker, with its obvious military implications, was ever applied to any female member of the family. Third, the use of the "name and last name" format leaves the impression that despite her three marriages, her extensive travels, and her many presumed shifts of identity during her long and eventful life, T'amt'a maintained a monolithic attachment to her paternal line of

50. H. Orbeli, ed., *Divan hay vimagrut'yan*, vol. 1, *Ani k'alak'* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum, vol. 1, The City of Ani] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1966), 58.

51. Barxudaryan, *Širaki marz*, 66, on an inscription dated to 1222 on the western arm of the cross-in-square Church of St. Gēorg in Art'ik; 108, on a fallen slab currently preserved in the Regional Museum of Širak in Gumry (both in the Republic of Armenia). The third inscription is from Hałbat and is published in K. Łafadaryan, *Hałbat: Čartarapetakan karuc'vack'nerə ew vimakan arjanagrut'yunnerə* [Hałbat: Architectural Constructions and Epigraphic Inscriptions] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1963), 171. There are other attested cases in which a title becomes a first name. For example, *šah[ə]nšah* ("king of kings"), employed by the Bagratids as a title, became a personal name among the Zak'arids: Zak'arē's son (T'amt'a's cousin) was named Šahnšah.

52. To overcome this impasse, the art historian Lidov ecumenically notes that "one branch of the family bore the name Mkhargrdzeli," which is only partially true, as discussed above. See A. Lidov, *Rospisi monastyrja Axtala: Istorija, ikonografija, mastera / The Wall Paintings of Akhtala Monastery: History, Iconography, Masters* (Moscow: Dmitry Pozharsky University, 2014), 34, 340. The book, published in both Russian and English, is available online at <http://hierotopy.ru/contents/AhtalaBookAll2014.pdf>.

descent. The notion of “fluid identities” upheld throughout the book is hardly reconcilable with such solidity and constancy. Moreover, Eastmond provides a negative assessment of T’amt’a’s relationship with her family, particularly with her father, Iwanē. The latter appears to have used his daughter as a diplomatic tool to advance his own military and political goals, not unlike other potentates of his time.<sup>53</sup> Although I do not necessarily share his evaluation, Eastmond’s assumption that the relationship was unpleasant would have provided another reason to avoid using an appellation not attested in the medieval sources.

### Fluid Identities and Further Source-Critical Problems

According to Eastmond, the conversion of Iwanē, T’amt’a’s father, to Chalcedonian Orthodoxy was an expression *par excellence* of his “fluid” identity. Iwanē’s construction of the Church of the Mother of God, perhaps replacing a preexisting structure, as his “mausoleum church at Akhtala” (p. 28) was consequently one of the most important public statements of his new faith.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the theological message that may be deduced from its architectural features, its external decorations, and the fresco cycle in its interior are of paramount importance for getting as close as possible to Iwanē’s personal beliefs. Eastmond highlights the blending of Georgian, Byzantine, and Armenian cultural elements and theological ideas, heavily emphasizing Iwanē’s efforts at “Georgianization.” These interminglings are extremely intricate, something that stands out even in Eastmond’s brief, perhaps too brief, descriptions.<sup>55</sup> But as in his treatment of the written sources discussed above, so in the analysis of the visual material of Axt’ala Eastmond overlooks some important circumstances that lie at the intersection of art, theology, and key concepts in *Religionsgeschichte*. Let me provide some examples that illustrate the need to add further nuance to Eastmond’s assumptions and conclusions.

Eastmond makes a good case that the external sculptural decoration of the east façade of the main church in Axt’ala fits contemporary Georgian style and tastes much more closely than it does any other models, to the point that “as much as stones could speak, those at Akhtala shouted out for the triumph of Georgian Chalcedonian orthodoxy” (p. 34). Yet inside the church, a central scene, immediately below a disproportionately large Virgin Enthroned, is the Communion of the Apostles, which runs along the whole apse.<sup>56</sup> I am not sure whether “the scene subtly emphasises ... the converts’ desire to adhere to trends from the centre of the Orthodox world,” or whether it also, in a different way, “shouted out the triumph of of... [Byzantine?] Orthodoxy.” Given such a central position, the scene was

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53. To mention two examples, Eastmond describes her as “a bargaining chip in the ransom negotiations for her father” (p. 2) and underscores “how little regard for Tamta the rest of her family ever publicly displayed” (p. 343).

54. The name Axt’ala is attested only in the fifteenth century; until the fourteenth century, the settlement was referred to by its Armenian name, *Plñjahank’* (lit. “copper mines”). A. Lidov, “Plindzaxank-Axtala, istorija monastyrja, ktitor i datirovka rospisi” [Plindaxank-Axtala, the History of the Monastery, Its Founder, and the Dating of Its Wall Paintings], in *Armenia and the Christian Orient, 266–278* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences “Gitut’yun” Press, 2000), 270.

55. A more detailed analysis may be found in Lidov’s bilingual *Wall Paintings*.

56. See the relevant illustrations in Lidov, *Wall Paintings*, 63, 68–69, 250–258.

hardly a subtlety, and as Lidov has argued, the entire program of the apse “adhere[s] to the strictest Byzantine models... [and] was not at all characteristic of contemporary Georgian churches.”<sup>57</sup>

Eastmond, too, duly notes that the scene was not a common one in contemporary Georgian churches and that the painters “had to look further west to Byzantium” for inspiration (p. 43). He, too, brings forth the only other contemporary Georgian parallel, at Q’inc’visi, but fails to specify that there the scene is depicted not in the center of the apse but on the wall of the bema.<sup>58</sup> Lidov, on the other hand, whose study on Axt’ala is the most detailed to date, remarks that the same compositional choice—the Communion of the Apostles—and the same location within the space of the church as in Axt’ala may be observed in five other churches that have been classified as “Armenian Chalcedonian.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the elements of fluidity and the interpenetration of different pictorial and sculptural traditions in the Church of Axt’ala appear to be rather more complex than Eastmond allows.

Eastmond is unsure of the utility of the category “Armenian Chalcedonians” as theorized by Marr and Arutyunova-Fidanyan, since it would denote “a distinct confessional group” with a high level of self-consciousness and cohesion (p. 45). He questions these characteristics, since, according to him, the thirteenth-century conversions were driven also by “cynical motives: to seek promotion at the Georgian court” (p. 46). This may be true for such high-standing figures as Iwanē, but even so, the sincerity of a conversion is one thing, the public display of that conversion through the deliberate choice of certain themes and iconographic programs quite another. This distinction would be especially important if Iwanē wished to appeal to an already existing community of Chalcedonian Armenians *and* Georgians at the same time. We may thus wonder whether Iwanē really set out to “attempt to forge a clearer Georgian identity among worshippers” (p. 41). It may instead be the case that the older interpretation of Iwanē as seeking to strengthen a Chalcedonian Armenian community that had a tendency to distinguish itself from Georgian models by appealing to Byzantine ones still holds a grain of truth, regardless of the sincerity of the conversions.<sup>60</sup> This possibility would also imply that Iwanē was enacting a carefully thought-out policy toward the various constituencies whose support he needed for controlling the territories he conquered. Indeed, the depiction of the Communion of Apostles with its accompanying Greek inscription (on which see below) in the central register of the apse seems to indicate that Iwanē was engaged in a careful balancing act between different priorities and perhaps chose not to favor one group too much over the other when commissioning the decorations of his church.

The sophisticated art-historical evidence and the theological message of Axt’ala’s wall paintings go beyond this one scene, of course. They cannot all be explored here, but a few

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57. *Ibid.*, 62, 362.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. More detailed consideration of the Axt’ala paintings in relation to the juridical status of the Armenian Chalcedonian Church may be found in Lidov, *Wall Paintings*, 63–64, 362–363.

further points will highlight the necessity of paying sufficient attention to the intricacies at hand.

I find Eastmond's discussion of the inscription accompanying the scene of the Communion of the Apostles so laconic as to be confusing at best and misleading at worst. Eastmond indicates that the inscription is in Greek, and he reads it as saying, "This is my blood."<sup>61</sup> He observes that the citation is "unusual" but that it "stress[es] this element of liturgy," without specifying *what* element in the liturgy is being considered. We are then provided with a parallel example from a very different context: "The blood is similarly stressed in the image of the Crucifixion in the Red Gospels, highlighting the different interpretations the [Armenian and Georgian] Churches had of the mixing of wine and water in the Eucharist" (p. 43).<sup>62</sup> Eastmond makes no further comments regarding, for example, the implications of these differences, the usage of each church, and their divergences. He simply goes on to speculate on how the image and its inscription might have been perceived by the congregation.

Even a reader who is well versed in medieval Armeno-Georgian (and Armeno-Byzantine) polemical literature has a hard time following the logic of these statements and understanding the message of this specific inscription in Axt'ala and the kind of parallel that the Red Gospels yield. Despite the very different medium and audience of a church fresco compared to the more private view that a manuscript affords, did they both assume a clearly Chalcedonian position on a specific liturgical practice, namely, the mixing of water with wine in the Eucharistic chalice? This seems to be the unstated argument, especially since Eastmond affirms elsewhere that the Red Gospels were "probably made for a Chalcedonian (i.e. Georgian Christian) patron" (p. 38). Furthermore, he diminishes the importance of the theological message of the inscription in Axt'ala by stating that "[t]hese fine theological differences may have been lost on many of the congregation" (p. 43). However, this interpretation cannot be accepted and requires revision, particularly if the congregation was composed of monks. Eastmond should also have clarified whether it is possible to decipher what the frescoes and the accompanying inscription wished to convey or which liturgical tradition they upheld.

The uniquely Armenian liturgical praxis of not mixing water with wine during the Eucharistic celebration was one of the major causes of the endless discussions and polemic that raged between the Armenian and Imperial (Byzantine) as well as the Armenian and Georgian Churches over centuries.<sup>63</sup> The difference in praxis was also raised in negotiations

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61. The allusion is to Matt. 26:28. Lidov specifies that the inscription appears along the rim of the Eucharistic chalice and, again, above the entire composition, but that it does not reproduce Matthew verbatim. Lidov, *Wall Paintings*, 69–70, 375–376.

62. The Red Gospels, also called the Ganjasar Gospels, is a thirteenth-century manuscript currently held in the University of Chicago Library, Goodspeed ms 949. It can be viewed online at <http://goodspeed.lib.uchicago.edu/ms/index.php?doc=0949>.

63. Among the many studies on this issue, see B. L. Zekiyan, "La rupture entre l'Église géorgienne et arménienne au début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue des études arméniennes* 16 (1982): 155–174, and N. Garsoïan, "Le vin pur du chalice dans l'Église arménienne," in *Pratiques de l'eucharistie dans les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident (Antiquité et Moyen-Âges)*, vol. 1, *L'institution*, ed. N. Bériou, B. Caseau, and D. Rigau, 249–271 (Paris: Institut

over a possible church union between Armenian and Roman churchmen since the twelfth century. It is unthinkable that monks or even common people who lived in a region with a mixed population and were aware of different liturgical usages would miss such an unmistakable reference to the divergent traditions. Miaphysite Armenian theologians had interpreted the liturgical peculiarity in a Christological sense since the sixth century. For them, the use of unmixed wine symbolized Christ's pure blood, on the one hand, and his one nature, on the other.<sup>64</sup> It is thus highly intriguing that a Greek inscription in an unapologetically Chalcedonian church would emphasize a verse about Christ's blood in a Eucharistic context, with no hint of water or mixture. Did it endorse the Armenian Church's contested usage of pure wine as a symbol of Christ's blood? This is hardly conceivable. Was it then a deliberately ambiguous reference? A more circumstantial interpretation of the scene and its inscriptions would be a fascinating topic of research, especially in view of the many other "Armenianizing" elements in the decorations of the Axt'ala church that Lidov has pointed out.<sup>65</sup> In his analysis of the scene, Eastmond should have at least clarified what the verse could imply regarding Armenian or Georgian liturgical usages.

The miniature of the Red Gospels, presented by Eastmond as a parallel case, has a very different iconographic scene and is not comparable to the frescoes of Axt'ala. In the Crucifixion scene on fol. 6v, it appears that blood and water issue from Christ's rib and flow into what may have been intended as a Eucharistic cup.<sup>66</sup> Presumably, this was a symbolic reference to the mixing of water and wine during the Eucharist and thus endorsed a Chalcedonian tradition. I have not viewed the image *in situ*, and the digital reproduction, especially the blue color of the water in contrast to the red of the blood, is not as clearly visible as one would wish. My analysis is consequently tentative. Nevertheless, the issuing of blood *and* water from Christ's rib when he was on the cross was not in itself debated in the Armenian theological tradition. Rather, Armenian theologians insisted on the interpretation of the blood as referring to the (pure) Eucharistic wine and the water as symbolizing the water of baptism.

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d'études augustiniennes/Brepols, 2009); reprinted in eadem, *Studies on the Formation of Christian Armenia* (Ashgate: Variorum, 2010), no. XI.

64. On the basis of John 19:34, medieval Armenian theologians argued that blood issuing from Christ's rib prefigured the Eucharistic (pure) wine, whereas water signified baptism. For discussion, see the sources cited in the previous note as well as P. Cowe, "An Armenian Job Fragment from Sinai and Its Implications," *Oriens Christianus* 76 (1992): 123–157, and idem, "Armenian Christology in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with Particular Reference to the Contribution of Yovhan Ōjnec'ī and Xosrovik T'argmanič'," *Journal of Theological Studies* 55, no. 1 (2004): 30–54.

65. Lidov interprets this inscription as a rejection of a Roman liturgical usage introduced in the Armenian Church in Cilician Armenia, namely, the taking of only the host during the communion, and as an endorsement of the Byzantine Orthodox practice of taking both the bread and the wine. Lidov, *Wall Paintings*, 376. This subject, however, is not an important theme in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Armenian theological discussions, whereas the use of mixed versus unmixed wine is one of the most prominent. It is thus in this direction that I believe research may yield interesting results.

66. This image can be viewed at <http://goodspeed.lib.uchicago.edu/view/index.php?doc=0949&obj=016>.



The “Chalcedonian” nature of the Red Gospels has been questioned on the basis of its trilingual inscription.<sup>67</sup> More importantly, the unanswered questions regarding the commissioner(s), scribes, miniaturists, and time periods involved in the creation of this manuscript are in need of more thorough investigation before any conclusions may be drawn. As Yovsēp‘ean’s pioneering study of this manuscript in 1940 indicated, the codex is composed of three distinct parts, written in three different hands and illuminated by at least two other miniaturists. The text of the Gospels, with ornamental headpieces and marginal decorations, was likely copied earlier. To this, folios with full-page miniatures by two different artists were later added. Furthermore, canon tables were traced by yet another hand than those that produced dominical scenes. In addition, the tables were executed on parchment of different quality, according to Yovsēp‘ean.<sup>68</sup> Given the multilayered process of the manuscript’s production, making any comments on the Christological orientation of the manuscript’s commissioner (and was there only one commissioner?) appears premature. Similarly, a better-informed analysis of the fresco cycle of Axt‘ala may lead to very different conclusions, highlighting a much more complex religious/confessional situation.

An overly zealous desire to affirm the hegemony of Georgian or Georgianizing tendencies in the decorations of Axt‘ala leads Eastmond to yet another curious conclusion. He reveals that paintings of “particularly celebrated Georgian saints” were executed “to either side of the west door, a location where everyone leaving the church must see them” (p. 43). He then compares this placement to the “less prominent” position of two saints “particularly venerated in Armenia, Sts. Gregory the Illuminator and Jacob of Nisibis,” because they appear “among the sixteen Church Fathers in the lowest register of the apse of the church. Uniform in dress and appearance with the other Church Fathers, and hidden from view behind the templon screen...” (p. 45). But the implied contrast completely overlooks the so-called sacred hierarchy within a holy site. In a number of religious traditions it is the “Holy of Holies” that is concealed from general view and accorded the greatest awe and veneration. In a Christian context, the location in the center of the apse is anything but “less prominent.” On the contrary, it is where the culmination of the liturgical service—the Eucharist—takes place, accessible only to the few who administer it, a fact that heightens its mystical significance. Here, too, one is bound rather to agree with Lidov: “The choice of the holy bishops in the altar apse also reveals the intentions of those behind the programme. In one of the most prestigious locations, to the right of the synthronon in the centre of the first tier, we find Gregory the Illuminator.”<sup>69</sup> Lidov goes on to emphasize the importance

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67. I. Rapti, “Art chrétien en Anatolie Turque au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Les Évangiles rouges de Chicago (University Library, Goodspeed 949),” in *Mélanges Catherine Jolivet-Lévy*, ed. S. Brodbeck et al., 473–98 (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2016), has interesting reflections on this matter despite the curiously anachronistic title of the article.

68. G. Yovsēp‘ean, “Mi jeragir Awetaran” [A Gospel manuscript], *Hayastaneayc’ ekelec’i* 1, no. 11 (1940): 15–29, reprinted in idem, *Nyut’er ew usumnasirut’iwnner hay arvesti ew mšakuyt’i patmut’yan* [Materials and research on Armenian art and culture], book 2, 45–59 (New York: n.p., 1943), and in idem, *Nyut’er ew usumnasirut’iwnner hay arvesti patmut’yan* [Materials and Research on Armenian Art History], 2:108–115 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1987).

69. Lidov, *Wall Paintings*, 79, 81, illustrations at 265, quotation from 373.

of the cult of St. Gregory the Illuminator among Armenians of various confessions, both Chalcedonian and not. These nuances are, unfortunately, missing from Eastmond's discussion of Axt'ala's fresco cycle.

Eastmond also points out various architectural and topographic features of the Axt'ala monastic complex that were created deliberately to emphasize visually its different theological orientation compared to the nearby non-Chalcedonian Armenian monasteries. One of these features was the arrangement of the buildings. In Axt'ala the main church built by Iwanē stood alone in the center of the complex, in contrast to the more clustered arrangement of ancillary buildings around the main church typical of Armenian monasteries in the region (p. 30). In order to support this point, Eastmond would have been well advised to provide the ground plan of Axt'ala, as he did for Gošavank' (p. 32) and Hařičavank' (p. 49), including the date of the construction of various buildings within the complex. Since these were built at different points in time, Eastmond would have made a more convincing case had he considered how such deliberate choices in the arrangement of the buildings could be sustained or developed over the medium to long term.

The above discussion shows that in employing art-historical and architectural evidence as indicators of cultural interaction, just as in the use of written sources, one must pay due attention to the various details that make up the whole picture. The exploration of seemingly contradictory elements cannot be left to overly succinct descriptions that blur these elements' most substantial features. Consequently, a reliable comparative approach requires knowledge and application of methodologies not only from the field of art history but also, for example, from theology and the history of interactions among the various relevant groups. Only then can we appreciate the full range of issues that were at stake and defined cultural interactions and entanglements, particularly those crossing ethnic and religious boundaries.

### **Parvus error in principio ...**

I would like to round off this essay with some minor critical remarks. Although the presence of certain errors or the presentation of some not unanimously accepted hypotheses (such as the "Kurdish origin" of the Zak'arids) as established facts may seem inconsequential to the overall argument of the book, they can give rise to ambiguities and, possibly, further hypotheses, particularly among nonspecialist readers. As Doctor Angelicus admonished centuries ago: "Parvus error in principio magnus est in fine."<sup>70</sup>

Eastmond's citations of primary sources are not always clear, especially when more than one edition or translation of a work is included in the bibliography but the footnotes contain only the name of the author or the title without further details. For example, if one wishes to consult the references to *Kartlis Cxovreba* (first cited on p. 3, n. 7) or Step'anos Ōrbēlean (first cited on p. 37, n. 22), one cannot be sure which edition Eastmond is citing, since the bibliography contains three items under "Kartlis Tshkovreba" and two under "Stepanos Orbelian" (both on p. 397).

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70. "A small mistake in the beginning is a big one in the end". Thomas Aquinas, "Prooemium," in *De ente et essentia*, consulted at <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/oe.html>.

Armenologists will experience some cognitive dissonance when reading the caption of an illustration from the famous *Halbat Gospels* (p. 52, fig. 17, and the color plate between pp. 132 and 133). The figure on the lower left with fish appears as “Sahak,” instead of the name reported in the manuscript, the rather nonbiblical Šeranik. The confusion is likely due to a transposition of the commissioner’s name, which was indeed Sahak. On the other hand, Šeranik was probably the same person as a homonymous soldier recorded in one of the inscriptions of Ani. This illustration is noteworthy, since it represents a unique feature of the *Halbat Gospels*, in which numerous depictions of daily life have made their way even into dominical scenes.<sup>71</sup>

I wonder if it is wise to use a nineteenth-century engraving of walls or a gate in Konya (p. 148, fig. 43; p. 151, fig. 46) to draw conclusions about the use of *spolia* in their thirteenth-century reconstruction. One would wish to be better informed of the context of the engraving and the reliability of such a visual source. On a different occasion, Eastmond does not fail to note that even photographs and their “staging” require a critical eye before they can be used as sources (pp. 158–59, figs. 50 and 51).

When discussing war and relics as booty during the Mongol campaigns in Anatolia and the participation of Armenians in these campaigns, Eastmond makes an unclear remark with regard to the “island monastery of Aghtamar [which] was known as the seat of St. Bartholomew” (p. 374). It might be useful for non-specialists to explain the implications of this reference. Eastmond probably wished to indicate that the Catholicosate of Ałt’amar (which lasted from 1113 to 1895) claimed to represent the true center of the Armenian Church as the heir to Apostle Bartholomew’s seat. A few words on the centrality of Apostle Bartholomew in buttressing the apostolic claims of the Armenian Church—not only the “island monastery of Aghtamar”—would have significantly clarified the importance of his relics and of their transfer to the monastery of *Halbat*.<sup>72</sup>

The book closes with a note on the importance of conducting studies that cross “modern political and academic frontiers” (p. 393) and briefly touches on the possible biases and problems involved in doing so. This is a conviction that I fully share, but I insist that such research be done with a thorough knowledge of the disciplines that one wishes to bridge. Eastmond then asserts that “Armenians are... reluctant to place their culture within a broader framework of Islamic/Turkish culture,” a statement whose terms contradict his very premises and aspirations. It is anachronistic to apply the blanket term “Turkish culture” to the medieval Turkic peoples that inhabited Anatolia, and it does not do justice to the diversity that Eastmond sets out to highlight in his book. If we are to abandon categorizations that emerged from outdated notions of nation-states, as Eastmond persuasively advocates throughout the book, why subsume the great variety and vibrancy

71. K. Mat’evosyan, *Halbati avetaranə: Anii manrankarč’ut’yan ezaki nmuš* [The *Halbat Gospels*: A Unique Example of Miniature Illumination from Ani] (Erevan: Nairi, 2012), 12–25, and idem, “The History of the Monastery of Hořomos,” in *Hořomos Monastery: Art and History*, ed. E. Vardanyan, 17–53 (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2015), 44.

72. On this subject, see, most recently, V. Calzolari, *Les Apôtres Thaddée et Barthélemy: Aux origines du christianisme arménien* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

of Turkic cultures in medieval Anatolia under the label “Islamic/Turkish,” which echoes a twentieth-century political formation—the nation-state?

Moreover, Eastmond’s statement also neglects the legacy of numerous noteworthy scholars. I would like to mention just one prominent historian who was far from a marginal figure: Levon Xaç’ikēan, the director of the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran, Erevan) from 1954 until his death in 1982. A cursory look at the titles in his *Opera*, collected in a three-volume publication, is enough to highlight his engagement with the history of medieval Anatolia and the different peoples that inhabited it, as well as the place of the Armenians therein and their multifaceted interactions with Turkic and other peoples throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>73</sup>

To support the thesis of “Armenian exceptionalism,” Eastmond cites two exhibitions dedicated to Byzantine art and contrasts the unwillingness of Armenian lenders to participate in them with such lenders’ interest in exhibitions dedicated entirely to Armenian art and culture. Even leaving aside the supposition that it would be logical to expect more Armenian lenders and objects to be present in an exhibition that focuses on Armenian rather than Byzantine art, I am not sure how Armenian participation or lack thereof in Byzantine art exhibitions illuminates tendencies in the study of Armenian history outside the “framework of Islamic/Turkish culture.” Eastmond should have provided further remarks to clarify his criticism.

### Concluding Thoughts

As the saying goes, “the devil is in the details,” and it is not the details that make Eastmond’s book interesting. Rather, it is his courage not to be boggled by them and to look beyond them, to outline the big picture and try to make sense of a world in which, despite difference and conflict, peoples, goods, and ideas moved and enriched each other. This vision the book manages to convey with great force, but the precise delineation of the various movements with their complexities and a rigorous analysis of the sources remains to be done.

Despite its shortcomings, Eastmond’s monograph is an important contribution to the study of multicultural interactions in a part of the world that is usually not explored from this perspective. Viewed as marginal from the centers of the great empires, the homeland of T’amt’a in northern Armenia and her new base in Xlat’ on the shores of Lake Van were, nevertheless, part of an interconnected world with specific local configurations. Bridging these two dimensions requires a scholar to overcome research paradigms tied to “national histories” or specific academic disciplines. This is an arduous task and admittedly difficult to complete by one individual. Eastmond’s willingness to face a challenge of this magnitude is commendable. The monograph marks an important step in raising greater awareness about the untapped potential of research on entangled histories, and it will certainly encourage specialists in various relevant fields to develop this approach further.

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73. L. Xaç’ikēan, *Ašxatut’yunner* [Opera], 3 vols. (Erevan: Gandzasar, 1995–2008).

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