VARDAN DEVRIKYAN

TRANSFIIGURATION AND THE FEAST OF VARDAVAR

"Mashtotsyan Matenadaran" serial publication



"FRIENDS OF MATENADARAN"
BENEVOLENT FOUNDATION

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TRANSFIGURATION AND THE FEAST OF VARDAVAR



"MAGALAT"
publishing house

Yerevan 2006

The book is printed by the decision of the scientific council of the Matenadaran named after MESROP MASHTOTS

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The book is printed with the assurance of
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Doctor Prof. of Philological Sciences
and
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Doctor Prof. of Art History

The book is printed with the support of the
Ministry of Culture and Youth of the Republic of Armenia
and
"Friends of Matenadaran" Benevolent foundation

The book is dedicated to the iconography of the paintings of Christ's Transfiguration elucidating its allegorical meanings and pointing out the sources and commentaries on which the iconography of this motif is based.

ISBN 99930-67-15-6

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The feast of Vardavar

Traditional Churches celebrate the feast of Transfiguration on August 6. Originally, the Armenian Church also celebrated this feast on August 6, and in the Synaxary, which represents the feasts and saints' commemoration days of the Church, the Transfiguration is mentioned on August 6.

However, beginning from the V-VI centuries, the feast of Transfiguration underwent two major changes. It was also called Vardavar and instead of being celebrated on August 6, it began to be celebrated on the 14th Sunday subsequent to the Easter, i.e. 98 days after the Easter. Therefore, being related with the Easter it has mobility of 35 days and is celebrated between June 28 and August 1.

Vardavar is one of the five major feasts of the Armenian Church. The Armenian Church destined three days for the feast of Transfiguration or Vardavar. On Saturday, after the vespers, the eve of the feast is celebrated, thus announcing the beginning of the feast, because according to the Church calendar, the day begins after the vespers. For this reason, the feast of Transfiguration begins after the Saturday vespers.

On Sunday, festive Divine Liturgy is celebrated and on Monday, it is a memorial day. In the Armenian Church, all the Mondays following the five major feasts are memorial days.

On the feast of Vardavar, people sprinkle water on each other and set doves fly, and according to the national-ecclesiastical tradition, these customs keep the memory of the Flood. It is said that Noah established the feast of Vardavar after leaving the ark that had stopped on Mount Ararat. In the memory of the Flood, he commended to sprinkle water on each other and set doves fly, which symbolizes the dove that brought an olive leaf in her beak, thus announcing that the waters were abated from off the earth (Genesis 8:8-12).

National celebrations of Vardavar were performed in the open air. For this reason, Transfiguration, one of the five major feasts, most of all is compared with the feast of tabernacles (Leviticus 23: 33-44, Numbers 29:12-40).

The term Vardavar is composed of the words "vard" (rose) and "var" (bright), therefore, Vardavar means brightness of a rose or a bright, shining rose.

This ancient feast that keeps the memory of the Flood, has got a new Christian reinterpretation and is related to the

Transfiguration of Christ in the following way. According to the Armenian Church Fathers and especially to St. Grigor Tatevatsi (1345-1409), the feast of Transfiguration is called Vardavar, because the brightness of a rose is hidden in its bud, and likewise Jesus kept hidden the light of His Divine glory in His body prior to His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Afterwards, He revealed and showed it in all its brightness on Mount Tabor.

Since Vardavar is related with rose and water, at the Divine Liturgy on the feast of Transfiguration one of the deacons immersed a bunch of roses into the water and sprinkled the faithful, when they approached to kiss the Gospel and take communion.

In the world literature and art, rose is one of the symbols of love. In the same way, the feast of Vardavar was regarded a day of love and betrothal. On its eve, boys and girls made fires at night and spent the night by organizing song contests around them. The losers were supposed to treat fruits and sweets.

In summer, on the feast of Vardavar lovers were betrothed, and in autumn they got married. Generally, Vardavar first of all was the feast of youth.

Vardavar was also a feast for pilgrimages. The main shrine was the Monastery of St. Karapet of Moush, which bore the name of John the Baptist and was in the province of Taron. In all the regions, people organized pilgrimages to those churches and monasteries that were named after John the Baptist.

According to an Armenian custom, during pilgrimages sacrifice (matagh) was offered, and for this reason, offering sacrifice was popular on the feast of Vardavar. All the inhabitants of the region made donations for offering the sacrifice.

The feast of Vardavar coincides with the gathering in the harvest, and being related with flowers and plants, it is as a gift presented to the harvest for its abundance. For this reason, according to a nice national tradition, people took ears of corn to Church asking priests to bless them, so that the fields could be protected from hail and locusts. On the same purpose, people used to knit the ears of wheat like a cross on the feast of Vardavar.

According to the tradition, Yeghishe, a 5th century historian, wrote the prayer that is read in the Church on the feast of Vardavar. It states, "O Lord, bless the harvest of this year and defend from all the perils, and may Your Right Hand, O Lord, protect us for the whole year".

This brightness of the popular feast of Vardavar has been also conveyed to the medieval Armenian miniatures of Transfiguration.

In this brochure, we have tried to give iconographical analysis of Vardavar paintings basing on the interpretations of the Armenian and Universal Church Fathers, as well as on the art literature dedicated to this theme.

Similarly, we have made parallels between the historical development of this painting and its progress in the general Christian art, beginning with the mosaic of St. Apollinare Church of Ravenna through to the famous "Transfiguration" of Raphael.

In this work with the example of one thematic painting, we aim in showing the peculiarities of the Armenian art within the framework of general Christian art.

Transfiguration



GOSPEL, 1268, Hromkla
Illuminator – Toros Rosslin
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 10675, 128v)

TRANSFIGURATION
GOSPEL ACCOUNT

Jesus showed His divine power by making the water wine in the marriage of Cana and showed His glory and light through Transfiguration on Mount Tabor symbolizing that by following Him humanity will regain those luminous clothes that lost on the account of Adam's sin.

Matthew, Mark and John the Evangelists write about Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-13, Mark 9: 1-12, Lk. 9: 28-36). In the Gospel, it is stated that Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and brought them up into a high mountain, and was transfigured before them. As Matthew the Evangelist writes, His face did shine as the sun, and his rai-

ment was white as the light. At that time, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with Him. Shocked by this scene Peter said: "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias". While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him". And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead".

GENERAL ICONOGRAPHY

According to the Gospel text, Christ is depicted in the middle of the Transfiguration scene, Moses and Elijah are on His right and left sides, and Peter, James and John are on the slope of the mountain. The luminous cloud is represented through mandorla, where Christ stands (sometimes together with Moses and Elijah) and the Father's voice is represented through the hand of God, which descends from the semicircle of heaven.

Since Transfiguration also symbolizes human beings' regaining of the luminous clothes of paradise, likewise the earth represents here the regained paradisial graciousness, which is symbolized by the plants depicted in the Transfiguration scene.



GOSPEL XVII century
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin,
manuscript N 60, 4v)

THE ANCIENT KNOWN REPRESENTATION OF TRANSFIGURATION

One of the ancient representations of Transfiguration or perhaps the most ancient one is the altar mosaic of St. Apollinare Church (c. 549) of Ravenna. Here a symbolic way of representation is preferred. The Savior is depicted through the cross, surrounded with a glory of shining stars and stands in a medallion.

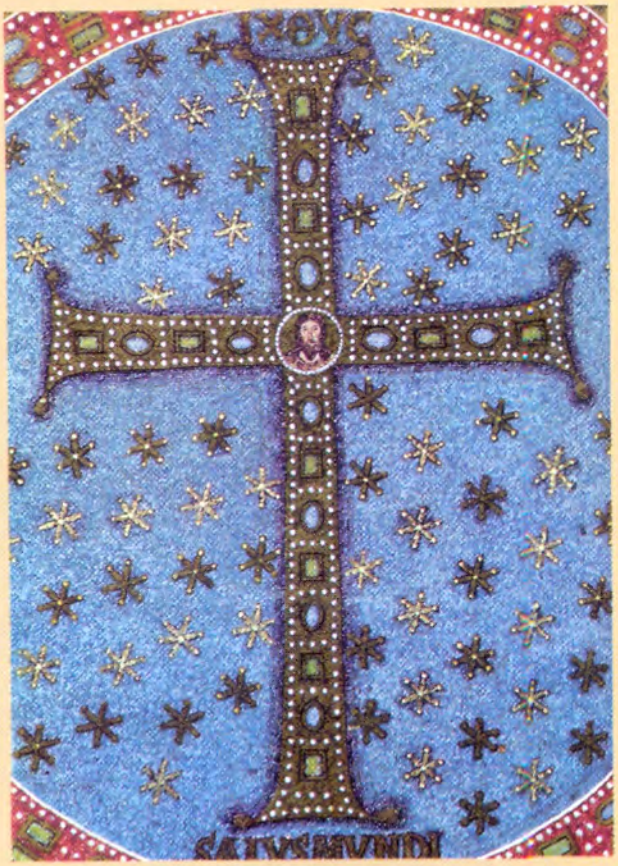
According to the words: "I am Alpha and Omega" A and W are written on either side of the cross symbolizing Christ as the beginning and the end.

Above the cross, "ΙΧΘΥΣ" (fish) is written. At the early stage of Christianity, it symbolized Christ and Christianity. The Apostles, who were fishers, after having been called to ministry, became fishers of souls, and the fish symbolized Christians converted by the Apostles.

The first Christians represented the word "ΙΧΘΥΣ" in Greek with the following acrostic interpretation:

Ιησους – **Jesus**
Χριστος - **Christ**
Θεον – **God's**
Υιος - **Son**
Σωτερ – **Savior**

Just for this reason, the first Christians depicted fish as a symbol of Christianity. And as the Transfiguration is represented here with a symbolic interpretation, above the cross "ΙΧΘΥΣ"



Cross surrounded by stars and bearing inscriptions "Ichthys" and "Light of the World"

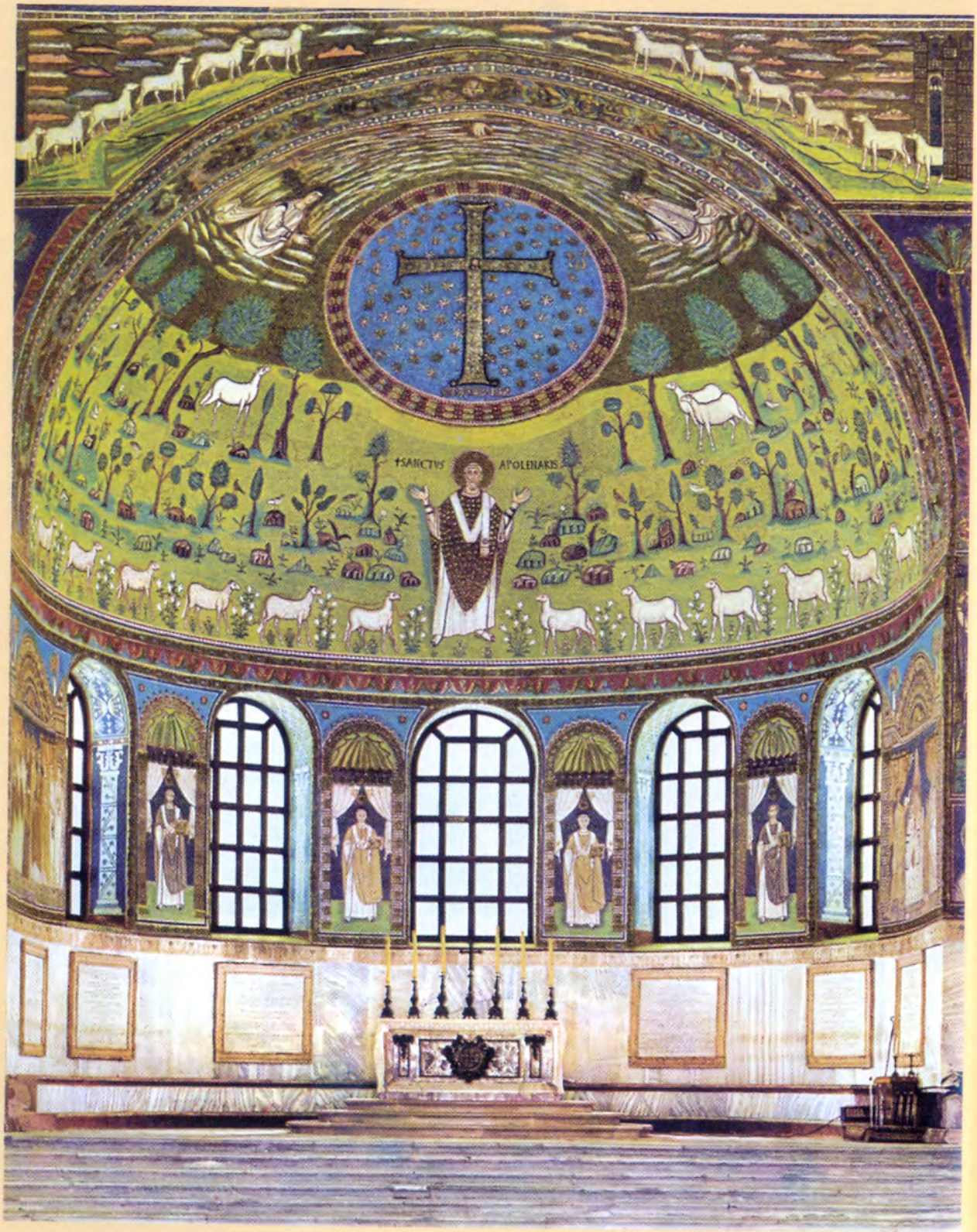
is written instead of Christ representing the Savior.

Bellow the cross "salus mundi" – salvation of the world is written. The hand of God, which descends from the cloud above the cross stands for God and the divine voice, and on the right and left of the cross Elijah and Moses are standing, who are hovering towards the cross. Apostles Peter, James and John are symbolized by three lambs bellow the cross.

Bellow the lambs, on the mountain foot, St. Apollinare as an orant is depicted, who is said to have been a disciple of Peter and to have been one of the first martyrs of Christianity. He is depicted in this scene because that Church bears his name and his bones are preserved bellow, in front of his icon.



St. Apollinare



TRANSFIGURATION,
Altar mosaic of St. Apollinare Church of Classe,
Ravenna, IV century



TRANSFIGURATION,
Mosaic of St. Catherine Monastery of Sinai,
VII century

There are twelve lambs on either side of St. Apollinare. As G. Schiller, an expert of Christian iconography mentions, the lambs signify the local Christian community asking its saint to intercede for it[1]. On the triumphal arch above, the twelve lambs that proceed from the gates of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, symbolize the twelve apostles.

In this Transfiguration scene evergreen trees: laurel, olive tree, pine tree, cypress are depicted, which according to V. Lazarev, symbolize St. Apollinare's eternal life[2]. It is noteworthy that, in all likelihood, these plants also symbolize the graciousness of paradise, like those of the Transfiguration scene in exegetic literature, on which we will reflect later.

The mosaic of St. Catherine monastery traces back to the VII-VIII centuries (Fig. 2), where the Transfiguration scene appears in thematic-historical interpretation and in entirely shaped iconographic canons.

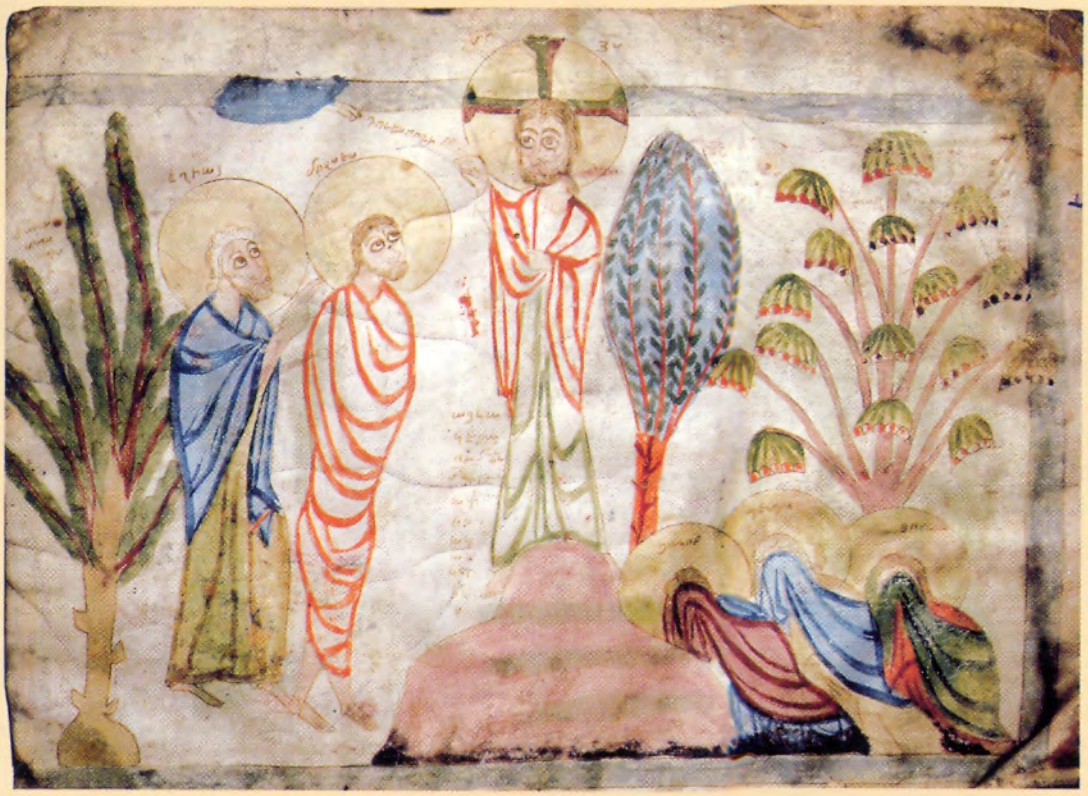
TRANSFIGURATION IN THE ARMENIAN MINIATURE OF THE X-XI CENTURIES

The most ancient Armenian Gospels and Gospel fragments preserved to our days trace back to the VII-VIII centuries. However, Transfiguration scenes appear in the X-XI century Gospels. Those Gospels, which have exact dates and which include the Transfiguration scene, trace back to the XI century, and two other miniatures refer to the X century, due to manuscript data.

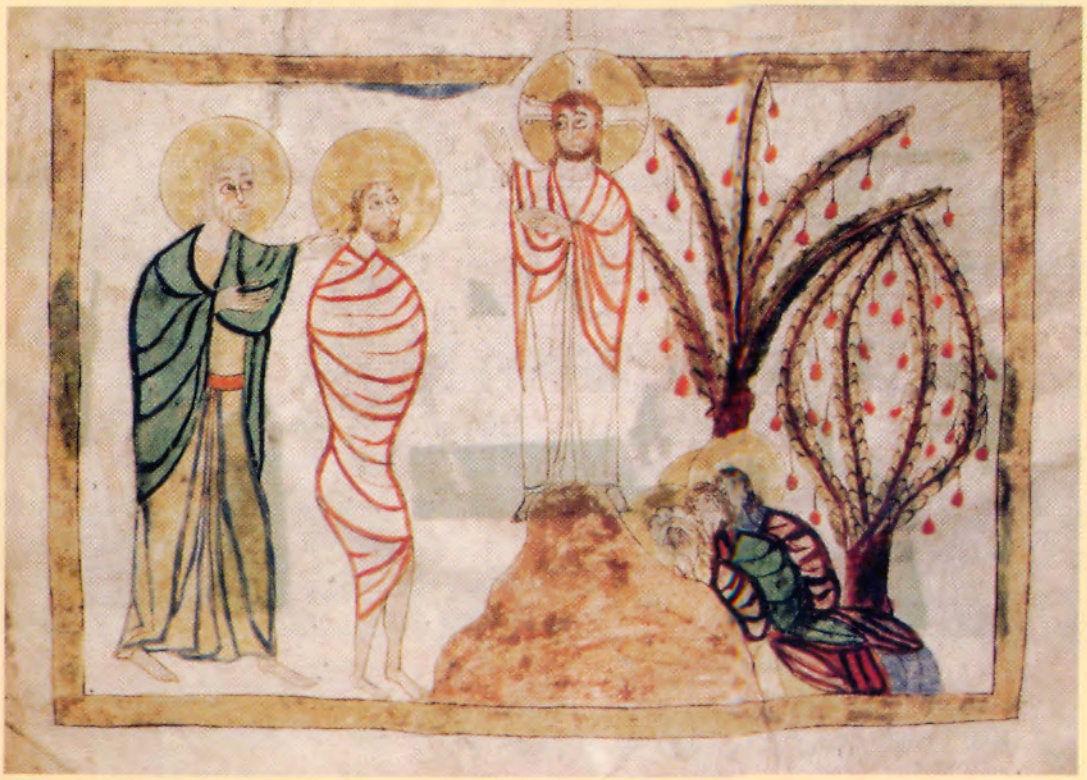
The most ancient Armenian paintings known to us in the series of Transfiguration miniatures, in all likelihood, are the miniatures of the Tsughrut Gospel and the Gospel of His Holiness Vasken I of blessed memory. The memorandum of the Tsughrut Gospel says that it was written in 994 by John (Hovhannes) the Scribe. However, as N. Kotanjian, an art historian states, the miniatures of this manuscript are divided into two groups. The miniatures belonging to the first group were part of this Gospel from the very beginning and, in all likelihood, were made by John the Scribe. The miniatures of the second group, along with those of the Transfiguration, were attached to the above-mentioned manuscript during further recompilation[3].

The miniatures of this second group, according to N. Kotanjian, form a generalization with miniatures created on those motifs and included in manuscript

1. Schiller G., Iconography of Christian art, London, 1971, p. 148
2. See V. N. Lazarev, History of Byzantine Painting, Moscow, 1986, p. 46 (В. Н. Лазарев, История Византийской живописи, Москва)
3. See N. Kotanjian, The Tsughrut Gospel, Armenia and the Christian East, Conference materials, Yerevan, 2000, p. 303 (Н. Котанджян, Цугрутское Евангелие)



TSUGHRUT GOSPEL, X century



GOSPEL, 1038, Taron
Scribe – Evagrius
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 6201, 6a)

N 6201 of the Matenadaran (manuscript library) of Yerevan. The examination of the Transfiguration scene included in the Gospel of Tsughrut and in the Gospel written in 1038, as well as their comparison with many other paintings having those motifs, testify that the miniature of the Tsughrut Gospel represents the phase of development of this motif's iconography preceding the XI century not only in Armenia, but also in Christian East.

Among the X-XI century manuscripts known to us, the Transfiguration has an asymmetric compositional structure only in the Gospel of Tsughrut, Gospel of Vasken I (X century) and in the Gospel written in 1038 testifying about the archaism of these paintings and their prototypes[4]:

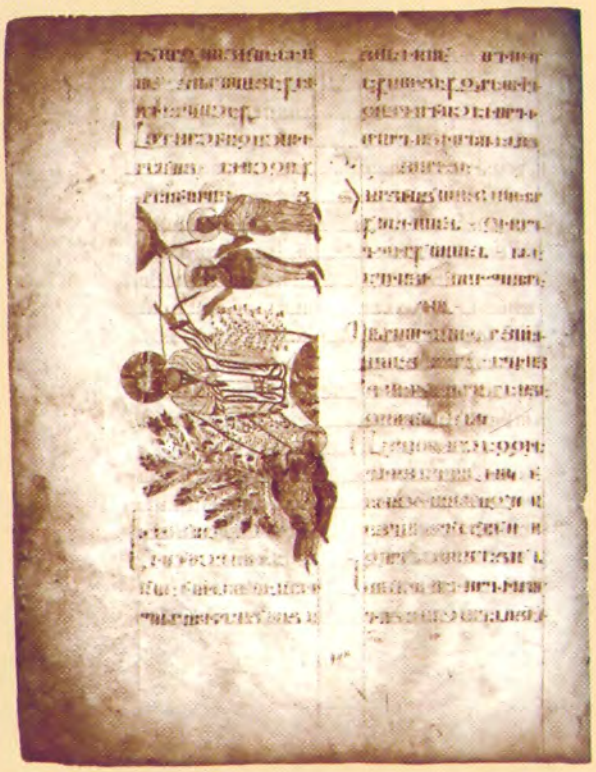
In contrast to the generally accepted canon, in which Moses and Elijah stand on Christ's right and left sides, and Peter, John and James stand bellow, in these miniatures Moses and Elijah stand on Christ's left side and the Apostles – on the right side. However, in the Gospel of Vasken I, the apostles stand on the right side, and Moses and Elijah – on the left side.

These three miniatures are distinguished with depictions of plants, which rather dominate in the Tsughrut Gospel. Perhaps it is conditioned with the ancient perception of the symbolic relation between the regaining of the luminous clothes and the earthly flourishing of paradisial graciousness through the Transfiguration.

However, the Tsughrut Gospel has an important token of ancientness, which appears only in this manuscript.

Generally, in Eastern and Byzantine iconography the behavior of the three apostles in the Transfiguration scene is represented according to their individual reactions towards that event. However, in the Tsughrut Gospel the three apostles do not just cover their eyes from the light, but for more emphasizing the impression they are depicted covered their eyes with a mantle.

As we have mentioned, this Transfiguration miniature of the Tsughrut Gospel was attached to this manuscript during further recompilation.



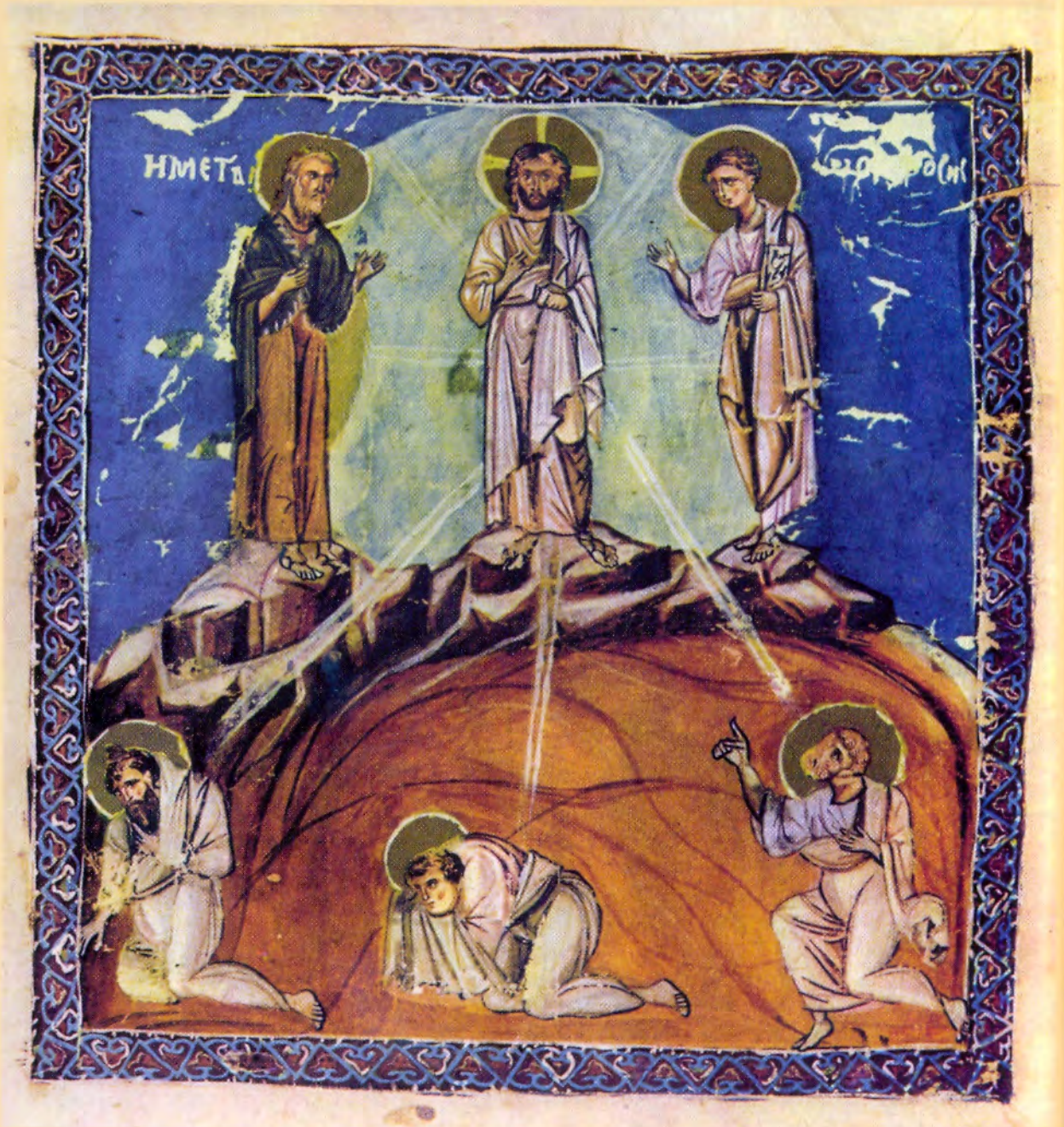
GOSPEL OF VASKEN I, X century
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 10870, 44v)

4. Both in this case and generally it will be possible to make general conclusions about iconographic different peculiarities of the Lord's other paintings only when the miniatures of Armenian manuscript collections preserved in world great manuscript repositories are published with respective thematic classification.

And the ancientness of this miniature becomes more emphasized when it is compared with other paintings having this type of iconography.

In manuscript N 21 of the St. Petersburg public library, which was written in the IX century, only one of the disciples covers his eyes[5].

K. Weitzman, however, can see a connection between this manuscript of St. Petersburg and the famous Drabizon Gospel preserved in the



DRABIZON GOSPEL, X century,
(Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice, manuscript N 1400 /108/)

5. See N. Kotanjian, The Tsughrut Gospel, p. 304, see also C. Morpy, Notes on East Christian miniatures, „The Art Bulletin" 1929, March, fig 103 (Н. Котанджян, Цугрутское Евангелие)

Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice, in the Transfiguration miniature of which Apostle John also covers his face with a mantle. Since this motive is not characteristic to the Byzantine iconography and the St. Petersburg manuscript is also from Drabizon, Weitzman thinks that quite probably one can suppose that depicting the apostles with their eyes covered with a mantle is a local characteristic of Asia Minor[6].

As N. Pokrovsky states, the motive to depict the face covered with a mantle appears also in the mosaic of SS. Nereo and Achilleo Church in Rome dating from the VIII-IX cies[7].

In miniatures of Rome, dating from the VIII-IX centuries, the three apostles are portrayed with their eyes covered with mantle. However, in the IX century Greek Gospel, only one of the apostles covers his eyes with mantle.

According to H.M. Janashian, the Drabizon Gospel due both to its *erkatagir* (uncial script



GOSPEL, 1316, Village Hazarakn (Berkri)
Scribe – Hakob Hovsian
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 4818, 3v)



GOSPEL, 1294, Monastery of Ter Husik's Son (Arkelan)
Illuminator – Khatcher
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 4814, 2v)

6. See N. Kotanjian, ibid, p.308.
7. N. Pokrovsky, Gospel in the Monuments of Iconography, St. Petersburg, 1892, p. 202 (Н. Покровский, Евангелие в памятниках иконографии, С. Петербург)



GOSPEL, 1454, Ardjesh, Lim
Illuminator – Minas
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 6570, 5v)

with large characters) style and to the fact that "it does not have some fragments and lections, which are missing in ancient Gospels"[8], refers to the X century. In the Transfiguration scene of this Gospel, only Apostle John covered his eyes with mantle. It is not accidental that only John did so. John as the youngest and the Lord's beloved and devoted disciple is usually depicted in a more sensitive behavior. Even in the main canon, he is depicted with the face covered with his hand or hands. So, the scene, in which the three apostles cover their faces with mantle in the paintings of the X-XI centuries, leads to the covering only John's eyes in this way, and already in the Gospel of 1038 it is represented in the form of covering the faces of three apostles only with hands. However, in manuscripts written in the second half of the XI century and the subsequent period, this motive does not appear any more, and the three apostles are portrayed in different behaviors.

As in the X-XI centuries, one could not find a Transfiguration painting, where the apostles are portrayed covered their faces with mantle or with their clothes generally, it is possible to suppose that this miniature of the Tsughrut Gospel or its prototype was created not later than in the IX century.

As a reflection of an iconographic ancient tradition, the asymmetric composition of the Transfiguration and the motive of covering the faces of three apostles with hands are found also in manuscripts N 4814 and N 4818 of Matenadaran, which were respectively written in 1294 and 1316. In the Gospel illuminated by Minas in 1454, John again covers his face with his sleeve.

8. Armenian Miniature, compiled by H.M. Janashian, vol. I, Venice, 1966, p. 28 (in Armenian)

GOD'S HAND AND THE BRIGHT CLOUD

The Gospel according to Matthew says that at the Transfiguration "a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him".

In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, a XIII century author, interprets this verse saying that God appears everywhere in clouds according to the following words, "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Psalm 97:2)[9].

The divine voice both in the scenes of baptism and in those of Transfiguration is represented through God's hand. As N. Pokrovsky writes, the divine voice, as well as God's presence is generally expressed through God's hand, which descends from a segment-shaped cloud[10].

For making the painting more expressive, it is often written next to God's hand "This is my beloved Son".

As we have seen, God's hand was already represented in the mosaic of Ravenna, the most ancient Transfiguration painting, as well as in ancient Armenian miniatures, beginning with the Tsughrut Gospel.

The bright could is portrayed either in blue as the sky or in gold symbolizing divine light and glory.

The luminous cloud is usually represented in a mandorla or in a larger circle, trying to clarify whether only Jesus is represented surrounded with a cloud



GOSPEL, 1604, Khizan
Illuminator – Martiros Khizanetsi and his son Grigoris
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 6093, 11v)

or Moses and Elijah as well. The Gospel says that a cloud overshadowed them; therefore, it surrounded also Moses and Elijah.

In miniatures of the Tsughrut Gospel and in the Gospel of 1038 the cloud is not depicted, instead it exists in Drabizon Gospel (XI century), as well as in other Transfiguration miniatures of the XI century, where Moses and Elijah are represented in the cloud together with Christ.

Transfiguration miniatures of Gospel N 3624 (1041) of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Gospels N 3784 (1057) and N 974 (XI century) of

9. Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Constantinople, 1825, p. 364 (in Armenian)
10. See N. Pokrovsky, Gospel in the Monuments of Iconography, p. 202 (Н. Покровский, Евангелие в памятниках иконографии)



GOSPEL, XI century
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 974, 1v)



GOSPEL, 1057, Melitene
Scibe – Presbyter Thomas
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 3784, 7v)

Matenadaran form a unique iconographic group, which seems to have derived from the same prototype.

In these three miniatures, Transfiguration is represented along with the scene of Lazarus' resurrection, which is explained by the following three stages of expressing Christ's divinity through the Lord's representations: during baptism the divinity was verified by the Father's voice, during Transfiguration the divine glory was revealed by the light, and through Lazarus' resurrection divine power was revealed. In the above-mentioned three miniatures, Moses and Elijah also stand in a circle, which symbolizes the cloud.

It is noteworthy that there is a situational generalization between miniatures of Baptism and Transfiguration. In both cases Christ is standing, in both cases God's voice that sounds from heaven, says, "This is my beloved Son", which in both paintings is expressed through God's hand that descends from the cloud with the above-mentioned words of God next to it.

For making more striking the parallel to the baptism in the copied Gospel of Gladzor of 1307, Toros of Taron depicted a dove representing the Holy Spirit on the mandorla, which made more complete the parallel between Baptism and



GOSPEL, Gladzor, written till 1307
Illuminator – Toros Taronatsi
(Library of the University of California, manuscript N 170/ 466, 4a/)



GOSPEL, 1452, Seri Monastery (Moks)
Illuminator – Mkrtich
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 9841, 5a)



GOSPEL, 1602
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin,
manuscript N 131, 5v)

Transfiguration.

The parallel examination of Transfiguration paintings shows that in the course of time in subsequent miniatures Moses and Elijah gradually "go far" from the mandorla, which symbolizes the cloud. In Gospel N 974 and in the Gospel of Mughni (N 7736, XI century) they are already depicted on the border of the mandorla, and in miniatures of succeeding centuries, they are mainly represented beyond the mandorla or standing closely next to it, which to some extent signifies the stretching of the cloud over them; or only Christ is represented in mandorla.

During Transfiguration, Apostle Peter told Jesus: "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias". And according to these words, Jesus, Moses and Elijah are represented on three tabernacle-shaped altars.

Hovhannes Yerznkatsi in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew writes that the mystery of the Holy Trinity was expressed in Peter's words, who recognized the Trinity in



GOSPEL, XV century
Seribe-Hovhannes
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 5511, 3v)



GOSPEL, 1315, Khordiants Monastery
Illuminator – Markare
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 2930, 6v)



NEW TESTAMENT, 1302, 1406 Siunik
Illuminator – Momik
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 6972, 5v)

the vision - The Father manifest by His voice, the Son by his Transfiguration and the Holy Spirit by the luminous cloud. As Hovhannes Yerznkatsi beautifully writes, the luminous cloud symbolizes the Holy Spirit, which is the true light that enlightens every man coming into this world[11].

As A. Sanjian, who has made a detailed art examination of Gladzor Gospel states, the illuminator, by depicting a dove over the mandorla, wanted to represent the mandorla as a symbol of the cloud and therefore, of the Holy Spirit[12].

Sometimes the cloud is represented not in general features as a blue or gold mandorla, but as just clouds.

The miniature of the Gospel illuminated by Momik, in which Christ is depicted in clouds, is also remarkable for the fact that here Christ is not bearded, according to the perception that in Transfiguration light Christ could be seen without beard[13].

11. See Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 365 (in Armenian)
12. See Matthews T.F. & A.K. Sanjian, Armenian Gospel Iconography: The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel, Washington, 1991. About the Gladzor Gospel, see also T. Matthews & Taylor, The Armenian Gospels of Gladzor, Los Angeles, 2001, p. 119.
13. See A. N. Avetisyan, Gladzor School of Armenian Miniatures, Yerevan, 1971, p. 64 (in Armenian)

LIGHT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew, Mark and Luke the Evangelists represent Christ's Transfiguration in the following way:

Matthew: "And He was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (17:2).

Mark: "And he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them" (9:2-3).

Luke: "And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering" (9:29).

According to these descriptions, Christ is mainly represented in white and luminous clothes and with rays of light that radiated from Him. Referring to the commentaries of the Church Fathers, H. Kyoseyan writes, "The light that is uncreated by its nature, was the expression of divine glory or divinity"[14].

Ephrem the Syrian, one of the IV century Church Fathers, explains the following way why Jesus showed His divine glory before Crucifixion: By transfiguring Jesus showed His kingdom of glory prior to His death through crucifixion; He showed His power prior to being bound; prior to being spat in his face and buffeted, He radiated the light of His glory on that face; He showed His honor prior to being dishonored and He appeared in luminous clothes prior to being stripped on the cross[15].

When Moses received the Ten Commandments from the Lord on Mount Sinai, his face began radiating light out of the divine light: "And the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone". Ephrem the Syrian, differentiating this light as proceeding from the true divine light that radiated from Jesus, writes that by making radiate light even from His clothes Jesus showed His disciples that the divine light radiated from His whole body, and it was not the case of Moses, when only his face was covered with that light. The divine glory derived from Jesus Himself and He is the source of that glory[16].

Sarkis Kund, a XII century Armenian author, making parallels between Transfiguration and Resurrection, writes that Jesus was transfigured before His crucifixion so that people could know that He who made His body so luminous was He who later gave resurrection to His body[17].

Sarkis Vardapet also states that Jesus showed His divine glory through Transfiguration before being dishonored[18].

Hovhannes Yerznkatsi explains the following way the phenomenon of revealing the divine glory before crucifixion: Christ showed the light of His glory prior to His crucifixion so that after resurrection no one could say that He received that light of glory as an appre-

14. H. Kyoseyan, Fragments of Theology of the Armenian Medieval Art, Holy Etchmiadzin, 1995, p. 26 (in Armenian)
15. Literature of St. Ephrem, vol. IV, Homilies and Prayers, Venice, 1836, p. 64 (in Armenian)
16. Ibid, p. 65
17. Sarkis Kund, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, by Bishop Yeznik Petrossian, Holy Etchmiadzin, 2005, p. 226 (in Armenian)
18. Ibid., p. 229

ciation to His sufferings[19].

If in the general representation of Transfiguration scene, the Holy Trinity is expressed by God's hand, luminous cloud (the Holy Spirit) and Christ Himself, in the main Transfiguration episode it is represented by shades of colors and light, as well as by shapes. Hence, Christ is represented standing on the central hill, in the mandorla and light is radiating from Him.

The idea of Trinity is expressed here in the following way:

1. By tonal triple gradation of mandorla colors,



GOSPEL, 1619 Constantinople
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin, manuscript N 462, 5v)

19. Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Constantinople, 1825, p. 358: about the existing perceptions about the nature of Transfiguration in Armenian and generally in Christian literature see H. Kyoseyan, the above-mentioned work, p. 26-30 (in Armenian)

2. Each of the rays of light, radiating from Christ towards the apostles and prophets, is represented with three beams,



GOSPEL, 1329, Ortubazar
Illuminator – Clerk Avag
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7650, 16v)



GOSPEL, 1337, Sultania, Tabriz
Scribe, illuminator, binder – Avag, see fig. 32
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 212, 58v)



GOSPEL, XVII century
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin,
manuscript N 213, 8v)



GOSPEL, 1653
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin,
manuscript N 266, 5v)



GOSPEL, 1641 Kiotahia
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin,
manuscript N 461, 11v)

3. Three lines, having the same color of light as the mandorla, spread over the apostles (over their nimbus). Each of these three rays in its turn is often tripartite.



GOSPEL, 1590, Vaspourakan
Scribe – Hovhannes, see fig. 16, 17, 28, 31, 33
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 5027, 6v)

4. Three such lines descend toward the mandorla from above, and again three lines stretch towards the apostles bellow the mandorla, representing both the heavenly Trinity and the spread of the light of the Trinity in the world.



GOSPEL, XIV century
Illuminator – Hovhannes
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7645, 122a)



TRANSFIGURATION, Icon, Theophan Grec, end of the XIV century



GOSPEL, XIV century
Illuminator – Sarkis Pidzak, see fig. 18
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 318, 48a)



GOSPEL, XIII century
Illuminator – Avetik
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7644, 71v)

5. The Holy Trinity is represented with triangle-shaped lozenges around Christ inside the mandorla, which already represent this perception in some symbolic geometric insights.

These iconographic perceptions are characteristic to the Christian art in general and to the Byzantine art in particular. Reflecting on their symbolism Schiller writes that such combination of colors and lines in the mandorla signifies the revelation of the Trinity in the light of the Transfiguration[20].

As we can see in the miniature of the Gospel of Vasken I, God's hand stands not in the middle, but above the prophets' heads. Two rays directly descend on Moses and Elijah; two more rays descend on Jesus. Three rays radiate from Jesus towards the disciples and one – towards Moses' nimbus.

It is worth mentioning that this idea was already expressed in the Armenian commentary literature as early as in the VII century. The work "On the mystery of Vardavar" (folk name of the feast of Transfiguration), which is traditionally ascribed to Movses Khorenatsi, now philologists ascribe not to Khorenatsi, but to Movses Kertogh, who lived in the VII century. In this work, it is written about the Transfiguration light: "One ray

20. Schiller, the above-mentioned work, p. 149:

of light with triple brightness, today on Mount Tabor the only Begotten radiated the entire light of Trinity through Himself"[21].

It is written in medieval commentaries that Christ's Transfiguration fulfilled the following words of the prophets Malachi, Habakkuk and Isaiah:

"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2).

"And his brightness was as the light" (Hab. 3:4).

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee (Isa. 60: 1):

MOUNT TABOR OF TRANSFIGURATION

The biblical text does not name the mountain where the Transfiguration took place. Matthew and Mark write "a high mountain", and Luke – just mountain. Some commentators, taking into consideration that the height of Hermon is 3.000 meters, as well as the fact that Jesus often passed by this mountain while moving from place to place, suppose that Transfiguration took place on Mount Hermon.

However, Church tradition says that it took place on Mount Tabor. As early as in the V century Yeghishe stated in his homily dedicated to the Transfiguration: "Mount Tabor rejoices today"[22].

Having in mind the account that God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai and Moses' face was covered with light, Moses Kertogh wrote in the VII century: "Mount Tabor became a new Sinai, a sacred mountain and a luminous place where God lived kindled with fire and in a cloud"[23].

In accordance with Peter's words to make three tabernacles for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, Moses and Elijah are often represented in tabernacle-shaped outlines. Likewise, Mount Tabor is often depicted with three peaks, Christ is standing on the central high peak and the other two seem to bow down to Christ. In memory of these tabernacles, three chapels were erected on Mount Tabor already in the IV-V centuries[24].



GOSPEL, 1323, Gladzor
Illuminator – Toros Taronatsi
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 6289, 112v)

21. Armenian Classical Authors, vol. IV, VII cent., Antelias, Lebanon, 2005, p. 433 (in Armenian)
22. Literature of our holy father Yeghishe Vardapet, Venice, 1859, p. 213 (in Armenian)
23. Armenian Classical Authors, vol. IV, p. 432 (in Armenian)
24. Literature of our holy father Yeghishe Vardapet, Venice, 1859, p. 237 (in Armenian)

In the V century Yeghishe made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, saw these chapels and commemorated them in his homily dedicated to the Transfiguration, saying that in the place where the Lord had been transfigured, three churches were erected, which had their own priests. Those priests, staying away from physical desires, devotedly accomplished their ministry in the Church. According to Yeghishe, these tree chapels were erected in accordance with Peter's words to make three tabernacles.

According to medieval commentators, Christ's Transfiguration fulfilled the following words of Prophet David "Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name" (Psalms 89:12).

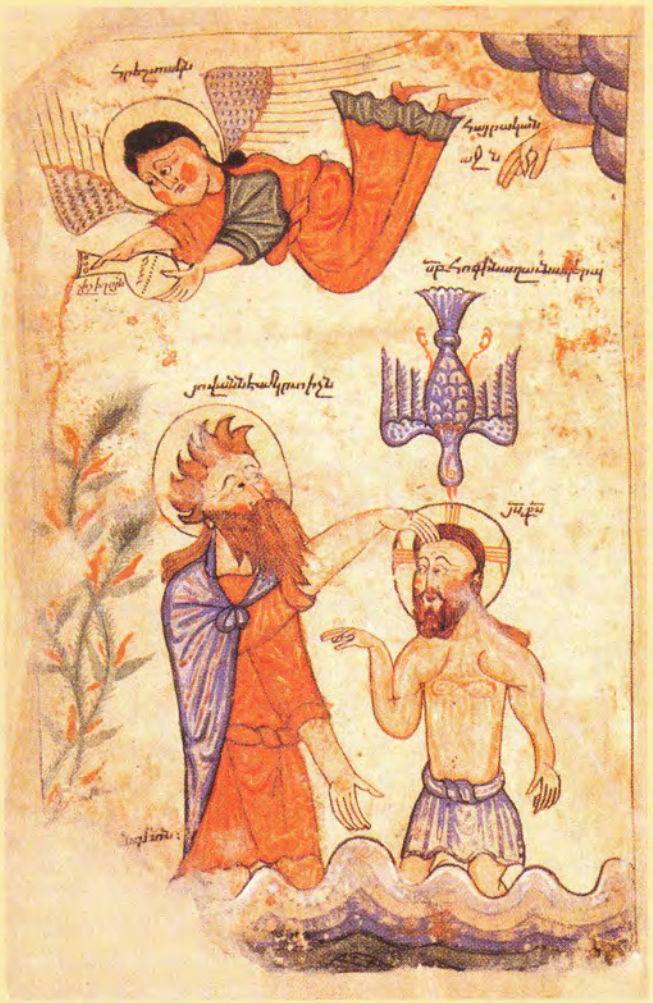
MOSES AND ELIJAH

The Evangelists write that Moses and Elijah appeared at the Transfiguration, but they do not describe how they looked like at that moment. In response to the question how the apostles could know that Moses and Elijah were standing on either side of Jesus, medieval commentators state that they recognized them by their appearance. Miniaturists also represented Moses and Elijah according to the iconography based upon respective passages of the Old Testament and their commentaries.

Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, too, asking the question how the apostles could know that Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus, writes, "It was known that Elijah had been bearded and dressed in a sheepskin



GOSPEL, 1501, Village Aghverts, Tatev
Scribe – Hieromonk Hayrapet
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7782, 4a)



GOSPEL, 1419, Tsipna Monastery
Scribe – Grigor Vardapet
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 3714, 5v)

mantle[25]. With this definition, Yerznkatsi wanted to state that Elijah had rumpled hair, beard and sheepskin mantle.

Before going up into heaven by a chariot of fire Elijah left that mantle to his disciple Elisha, which symbolizes that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha (2 Kings 2:11-15).

The same way Grigor Tatevatsi writes that Elijah was recognized by his sheepskin clothes[26]. According to this and such commentaries, Elijah is depicted with rumpled hair, beard and sheepskin mantle peculiar to a hermit. Since John the Baptist was said to be Elijah, he was also represented with the same appearance of a hermit in baptism miniatures. About the parallel between Elijah and John, which found its reflection in their iconography as well, Hovhannes Yerznkatsi writes that dwelling in the desert John the Baptist lived the same life as Elijah and wore such a sheepskin mantle[27]. According to the Bible, Elijah is always represented as an old man, sometimes with a book in his hand, which signifies that he was a prophet.

Though the Old Testament says that "Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died" (Deuteronomy 34:7), he is usually represented as a youngster. In miniatures where Moses is depicted as a youngster, his cheeks are accentuated with redness and as if, they radiate with brightness. The reason for this representation is the words that though he died when he was 120 years old, "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deuteronomy 34:7). Yeghishe writes, "His old age did not abate the freshness of his face, nor diseases corrupted his body"[28]. Grigor Tatevatsi writes that the apostles knew from the Old Testament books that Moses' face had been covered with light, and when he appeared to the Lord with a luminous face, they recognized

25. Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 362 (in Armenian)
26. Grigor Tatevatsi, Book of Homilies, which is called Winter Volume, Constantinople, 1741, p. 483 (in Armenian)
27. Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 369 (in Armenian)
28. Literature of our holy father Yeghishe Vardapet, Venice, 1859, p. 234 (in Armenian)



GOSPEL, 1297, Ardjesh
Illuminator –Astvatsatour, see fig. 23
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 4867, 2v)



GOSPEL, 1330
Illuminator – Deacon Kirakos
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 2929, 7a)

him by his face[29]. These words of Grigor Tatevatsi are the generalization to the generally accepted iconographic canon of depicting Moses. About the fact that Moses was not bearded Grigor Tatevatsi writes. "Moses' face had lack of hairs"[30].

Moses is depicted bright and energetic, sometimes with his face covered with a veil, "And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. And when the children of Israel saw the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid, he put a veil on his face. And every time Moses' face shone while he talked with the Lord" (Exodus 34:29-35). For this reason, in Transfiguration scene he is often depicted with two tables of the Ten Commandments or a book (which is their symbol) in his hand.

Grigor Tatevatsi writes about depicting the tables in his hand: "There were tables in Moses' hands, which contained God's commandments"[31].

In miniatures, Moses is often represented not only with a book or tables of Commandments, but also with a scroll, as their symbol, on which it is written

29. Grigor Tatevatsi, Winter Volume, p. 483 (in Armenian)
30. Ibid., p. 494
31. Ibid., p. 483



GOSPEL, 1402, Khizan
Scribe, Illuminator – Priest Hovhannes, see fig. 19, 26
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 5562, 7a)



GOSPEL, 1430, Hosrov Monastery
Scribe, Illuminator – Hieromonk Vardan
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 4827, 3v)



GOSPEL, 1331, Lesser Urs
Scribe – Presbyter Astvatsatour
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 4906, 2v)



GOSPEL, 1043, 1391, Aghtamar
Illuminator – Tserun
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 8772, 6v)



GOSPEL, 1397, Khizan
Scribe – Restakes (Hrstakes)
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7629, 3a)

"Ten Commandments".

In another group of miniatures it is written on the tables in Moses' hands: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

In a series of miniatures, in particular in those of the early period, Moses is depicted covered with a shroud symbolizing that he has come from the world of the dead.

N. Pokrovsky, referring to the following work of John Chrysostom "Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew", writes that this iconography is anchored on the tradition mentioned by Chrysostom. According to it, the angels took Moses out of the coffin and brought Elijah from heaven representing the worlds of the dead and the quick, which according to Chrysostom, signifies that Christ has power both over the life and over the death and that afterwards Moses should communicate the good news of the Savior's Advent to the dead, and Elijah – to the quick[32].

In this same period, Ephrem the Syrian wrote in a similar way. Though he did not commemorate the account of taking Moses out of the coffin, he gave the same explanation as Chrysostom, saying that God was the creator of heaven and earth, the Lord of the quick and the dead. Therefore, He ordered and brought down Elijah from heaven and took Moses out of the tomb[33].

Elijah is said to have been brought from the world of the quick, because he



GOSPEL, 1294,
Monastery of Ter Husik's Son (Arkelan)
Illuminator – Khatcher
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 4814, 2v)

was taken from the desert to heaven by a chariot of fire, according to 2 Kings 2, and is alive there in his body.

We can find the spiritual-artistic wonderful explanation of Chrysostom about the revelation of Moses and Elijah in the following verses of Movses Kertogh, where he called Prophet Moses "prototype of sun's mirror" and "first exposure of unapproachable light", because prior to the Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor Moses' face shone with divine light. Since this light did not radiate from the prophet, but it was the reflection of the divine light, therefore, Moses is compared with a mirror, which reflected

32. See N. Pokrovsky, Gospel in the Monuments of Iconography, p. 201, as well as John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Moscow, 1839, vol. II, p. 457 (Н. Покровский, Евангелие в памятниках иконографии, И. Златоуст, Беседы на Евангелию Матфея, Москва)

33. Literature of St. Ephrem, vol. IV, p. 63 (in Armenian)

back the light"[34].

Chrysostom's above-mentioned account is reflected in the following verses of Grigor Tatevatsi that since Moses had been raised from the dead and came out of the tomb, there was earth on him, so he was recognized at once, because no one else had come from there. And Elijah that had come down from heaven was recognized by the heavenly glow of his face[35].

Grigor Tatevatsi expands the explanation of the question why Moses and Elijah appeared at the Transfiguration. If the commentators of the early period stated that they had appeared so that Elijah could bring good news to the quick and Moses - to the dead, Grigor Tatevatsi included also disciples in this explanation, and giving another interpretation to Elijah's apparition wrote that Elijah had descended from heaven so that he could communicate good news about the Savoir to the angels, Moses – to the dead and the three apostles – to the quick[36].

There is also another explanation for Elijah's apparition: before going up to Mount Tabor and being transfigured, Jesus asked His disciples what people said who He was. And they said, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets" (Mt. 16:14). And as Ephrem the Syrian writes, Jesus took the disciples to the mountain to show that He was not Elijah, but He had power over Elijah[37].

Hovhannes Yerznkatsi also expressed the same idea[38].

The apparition of Moses and Elijah together has another mystery. Moses and Elijah symbolize the beginning and fulfillment of Israel: Moses as a legislator and founder, and Elijah, who will come in the fullness of times, according to the following words of Prophet Malachi: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (Malachi 4:4-6).

Moses also signifies the law and Elijah – prophecies, and Christ brought them to show that He was the fulfillment of the law and prophecies.

And finally, their apparition has yet another meaning: both the body of Elijah and the body of Moses were unseen for people – Elijah was transferred to heaven and Moses was buried in a place shown by God and according to the Old Testament "No man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day" (Deut. 34:6). And Jesus showed those hidden ones to His apostles revealing that there was nothing hidden for Him.

At the same time, Moses and Elijah are witnesses testifying about Christ's divinity. As the disciples recognized

34. Armenian Classical Authors, vol. IV, p. 432 (in Armenian)
35. Grigor Tatevatsi, Winter Volume, p. 483 (in Armenian)
36. Ibid., p. 489
37. Literature of St. Ephrem, vol. IV, p. 63 (in Armenian)
38. Hovhannes Yerznkatsi, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, p. 360 (in Armenian)

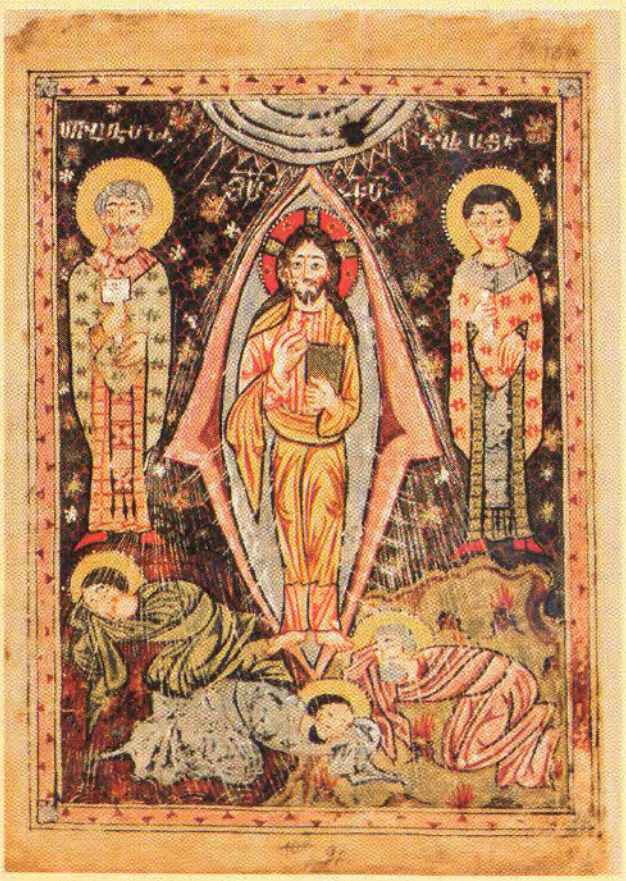
Transfiguration



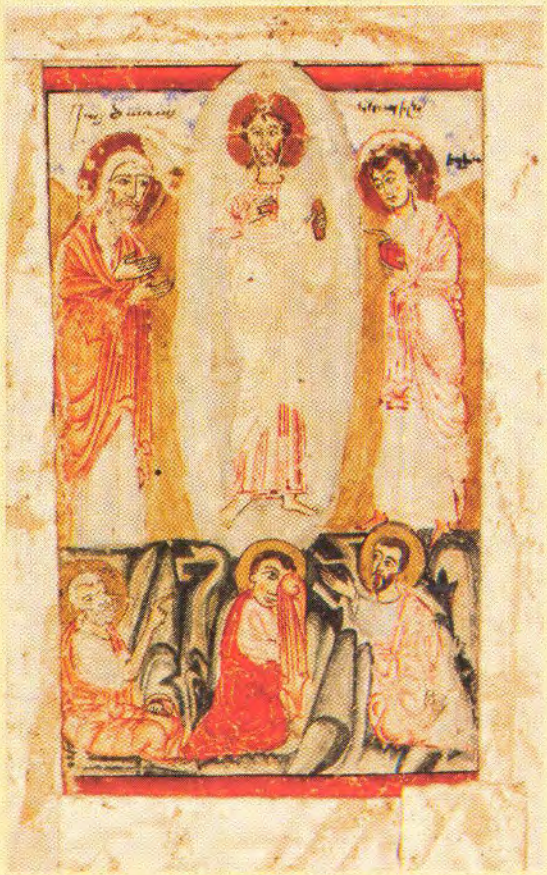
GOSPEL, XI century
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 974, 1v)



GOSPEL, 1057, Melitene
Scibe – Presbyter Thomas
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 3784, 7v)



GOSPEL, XIV century
Scribe, Illuminator – Priest Grigor (Tatevatsi)
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 6305, 108a)



GOSPEL, 1454, Ardjesh, Lim
Illuminator – Minas
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 6570, 5v)

them by their appearance and characteristics, likewise Moses and Elijah witnessed about Jesus' divinity asserting that He was the very same Lord whom they had seen face to face, one in the vision of the burning, but not consumed bush, the other in the whispering breeze (3 Kings 9:12)[39].

In a series of Armenian miniatures, especially those of the early period, not only Moses and Elijah are reversed, but also surprisingly, their appearances are interchanged. This iconographic tradition was so lively that Elijah was represented on the right side as a youngster not only in the XI century manuscripts N 974 and N 3784 (1057), but also in the XIV century manuscripts N 6305 and N 6570 (1454).

In all these miniatures, it is written "Elijah" above his head and Moses' name above his head. As we have already mentioned, in a series of miniatures Moses is represented in a shroud symbolizing that he came from the world of the dead. In manuscript N 4818 copied in 1316, as a result of the reversal of Moses and Elijah, the latter is represented in a shroud and it is written above his head "Elijah in a shroud".

It is noteworthy that though this manuscript dates from the XIV century, it includes all the peculiarities of the iconography of the XI century and earlier period. This is one of the rare manu-

GOSPEL, 1316, Village Hazarakn (Berkri)
Scribe – Hakob Hovsian
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 4818, 3v)



39. See Matthews T.F. & A.K. Sanjian, Armenian Gospel Iconography: The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel, Washington, 1991.

scripts known to us, in which Christ is portrayed with a staff as a good shepherd. Moses and Elijah do not stand on either side of Jesus, but they stand on His left, and the apostles – on His right, yet they should stand on the mountain foot, bellow Christ, on the right and left sides and in the center. Here even the iconography of the mountain is not formed. It has one top and spreads down in an undulated way from right and left sides of Jesus. The fact that the three apostles cover their eyes with hands alludes to its ancientness, as it is in the manuscript written in 1038.

Here even the cloud and God's hand that descends from it are asymmetric, portrayed at the same distance from Jesus and Moses.

The reason for these iconographic peculiarities and asymmetries is not the lack of skillfulness, but they rather testify about a unique prototype of this manuscript, which is also asserted by other miniatures of the Lord in this Gospel, and preserve a series of surprising archaic iconographic aspects.

THREE APOSTLES

Bellow Christ, on the mountain foot, the apostles are represented astonished and confused by the Transfiguration.

Matthew writes that at the Transfiguration, the apostles "fell on their face, and were sore afraid" and Mark writes, "They were sore afraid". However, Luke writes "there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud".

In Christian East, according to the words of Mathew and Mark, the three apostles are represented equally scared and in a similar state. It has found its literary expression in the Armenian medieval literature.

Yeghishe writes in his homily dedicated to the Transfiguration that the apostles fell dismayed to the ground by the radiance of the divine light[40].

The same way it is expressed in an Armenian medieval works named "gandz": "They were shivering with fear of death, fell down and were looking at the ground"[41].

The Byzantine tradition, however, represents them reacting differently to

GOSPEL, 1315, Khordiants Monastery
Illuminator – Markare
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 2930, 6v)



40. Literature of our holy father Yeghishe Vardapet, p. 217 (in Armenian)
41. Matenadaran of Yerevan, manuscript N 424, 186b



TRANSFIGURATION,
Mosaic, XIV century,
Thessaloniki,
Church of Holy Apostles

the Transfiguration revealing differences of their behaviors by representing peculiarities of their nature and age experience.

Since the Armenian art equally had relations with the cultures of both Christian East and Byzantium, therefore these two iconographic versions were also reflected in Armenian manuscripts.

In her precious study dedicated to the Armenian miniatures of the XI century, Tatyana Izmailova, an expert of the Armenian art, indicates an eastern influence on two miniatures of manuscript N 974 and manuscript N 1041 of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, stating that two of the apostles, Peter and John, are portrayed with the same face. There is no difference between their behaviors, and being face to face they are as if communicating with each other with their gestures and mimicry. However, James is portrayed prostrated and leaned on two hands against the ground[42].

Portrayal of the three apostles in a similar way is more evidently expressed in the Gospel of Malatia written in 1057.

As a subsequent phase to the development of the apostles' iconography in the Transfiguration scene, Izmailova indicates the Gospel of Mughny.

Beginning with the XI century, James is portrayed leaning on one hand against the ground

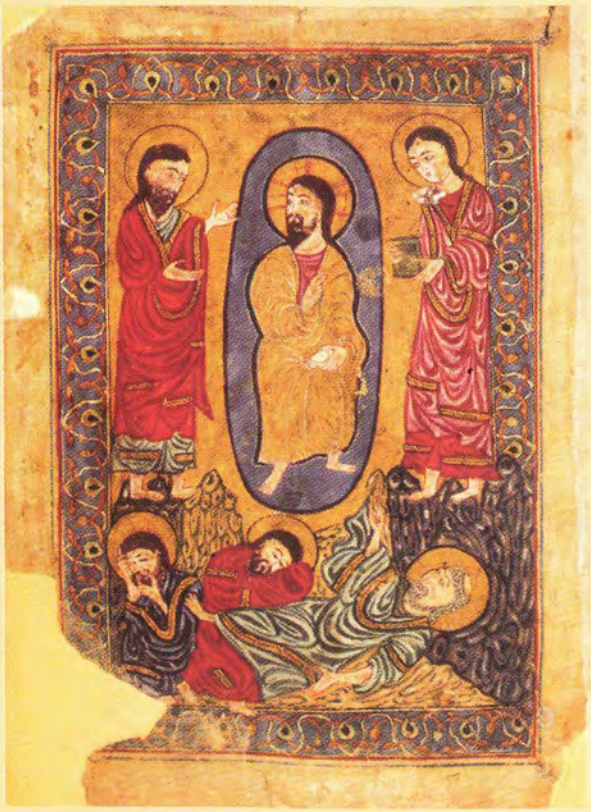
42. See T.A. Izmailova, Armenian Miniature of the XI century, Moscow, 1979, p. 77 (Т.А. Измайлова, Армянская минятюра XI века, Москва)



GOSPEL, 1478,
Village of Brnashen, Province of Mokats
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin,
manuscript N 518 6a)



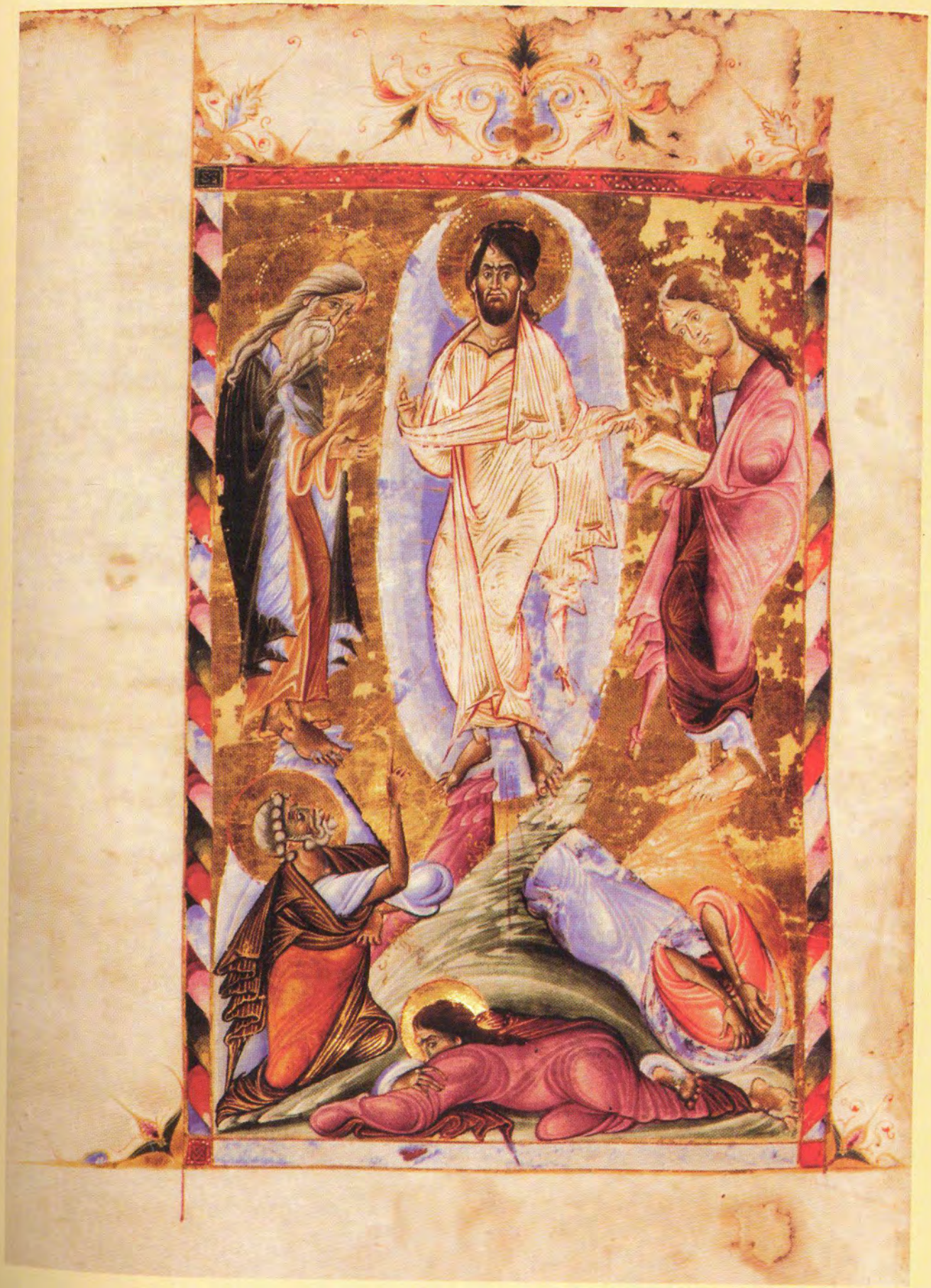
GOSPEL, 1507, Vandir Congregation
Scribe – Hieromonk Grigor
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 5215, 5v)



GOSPEL, 1356-1357, Sultania
Illuminator – Mekhitar Anetsi
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7740, 5v)



GOSPEL, XV century
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7625, 4a)



GOSPEL, 1287, Akner Monastery
Illuminator - Toros Rosslin, see fig. 37
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 187, 132v)



GOSPEL, 1332, Surkhat
Scribe, Illuminator – Grigor Sukiasants
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7664)



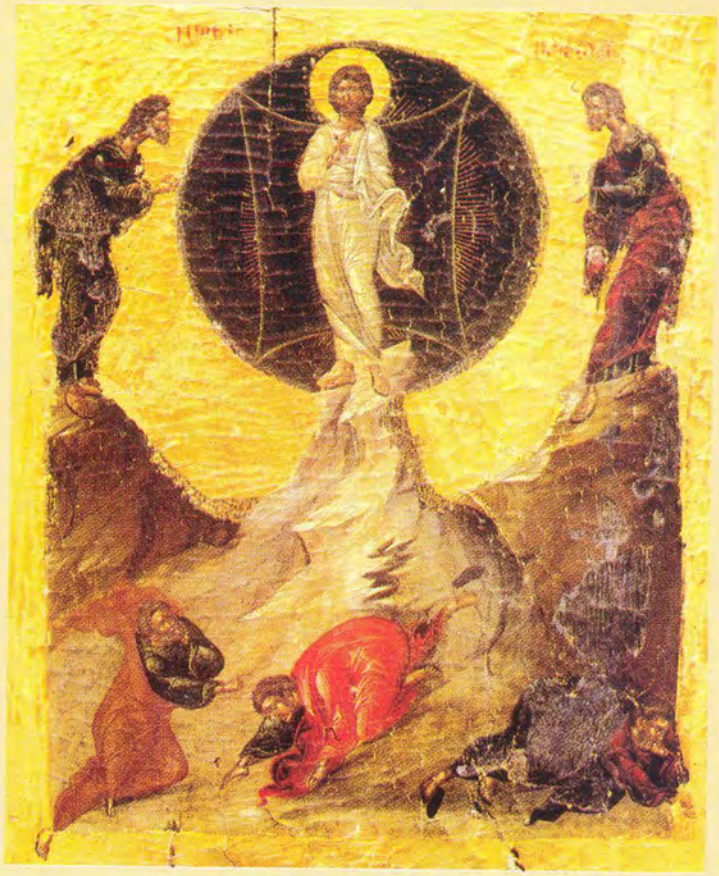
GOSPEL, 1520, Van
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin,
manuscript N 27, 3b)



TRANSFIGURATION,
Icon, XVI century, 1st half,
Church of Aghios Sozomenos, Galatia



GOSPEL, 1563, Gandzasar
(Manuscript library of Holy Etchmiadzin, manuscript N 463, 5v)



TRANSFIGURATION, Icon, 1544,
Monastery of St. Neophytes, Cyprus

and the other hand is laid over his eyes to cover them from the radiating light. Sometimes James is represented standing backward to the light and as if, he wants to go down the mountain without covering his eyes from the light. James is represented exactly this way in the Gospel of Mughny. He has raised his hand, but has not covered his eyes.

Referring to Peter's half-turned pose Izmailova indicates that it is the reflection of his previous archaic sitting pose.

The same refers to John. He bowed without prostrating and leaned his face on his hands[43].

In the XII-XIII centuries, however, the scene depicting the apostles was clearly formed, where each of them, as we have mentioned before, is represented in a behavior peculiar to his age and temperament.

Peter, though astonished and astound by this unusual Transfiguration, did not lose his self-control as the rock of the fate, firm and solid, prostrated but gazing at Jesus that was talking with Moses and Elijah. As he was the eldest among the apostles, he is always portrayed with a white beard, usually covering his face with a hand, but his eyes stared at the Lord with surprising and admiring self-control.

Sensitive and zealous John was shocked by that event, fell to the

43. Ibid., p. 174



GOSPEL, XI century, 1679
Scribe – Hovhannes, Bishop Barsegh
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 7736, 15a)



GOSPEL, 1419, Tsipna Monastery
Scribe – Grigor Vardapet
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 3714, 5v)

ground and covered his eyes being not able to bear the blinding light. For stressing more the impression, he is often portrayed upside down, holding his head with his hands and covering his face.

Middle-aged James with his quiet temperament has an intermediate place between Peter and John. He is shocked by that event; he is prostrated and even seems that he will fall to the ground, but at the same time, he strives to see what is going on there, on the mountain. He leaned on one hand against the ground and covered his eyes from the light with the other hand. This intermediate state is also expressed by closing one eye and looking with the other, which is a sign of both confusion and self-control[44].

If the upper part of the Transfiguration scene with God's hand, the Holy Spirit and Christ has general features with the scene of baptism, the lower part with confused apostles that leaned against the mountain slope reminds us about the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the apostles were sleeping on the mountain slope. The apostles' behavior in falling asleep expresses these peculiarities related to their age and behavior often accompanied with exciting and beautiful examples taken from human life. In this regard, it is typical to represent John, who was the youngest among them, covered with a cloth, which signifies his young age and to some extent, helplessness in the face of the general representation of the other apostles. In the Transfiguration scene, his confusion is often expressed with such childish helplessness.

About the gathering of the prophets and apostles on Mount Tabor Ephrem the Syrian writes that Mount Tabor symbolizes the Church. On this mountain, Jesus united the two Testaments, which the Church adopted, teaching us that the Lord has granted us with these two Testaments[45].

44. See N. Pokrovsky, Gospel in the Monuments of Iconography, p. 202 (Н.Покровский, Евангелие въ памятниках иконографии)
45. Literature of St. Ephrem, vol. IV, p. 66 (in Armenian)



GLADZOR GOSPEL,
(Library of the University of California,
manuscript N 170/466/)

FROM TOROS ROSSLIN THROUGH TO RAPHAEL

Toros Rosslin's art (XIII century) became the compositional generalization of the input and artistic pinnacle of the Armenian miniature. This is also proved by his Transfiguration miniatures. The Transfiguration scene appears in three of the manuscripts illuminated by Rosslin and preserved to our days. The two miniatures to be represented bellow not only show his compositional skillfulness, but also his stylistic multiformity, when the same motif within the framework of the same iconographic canon, is represented with two different solutions of colors and figures.

According to the words of the Evangelists, in two miniatures, Christ is dressed in very white clothes and the radiating red color on it represents cloth plaits, to some extent, giving an impression of a marble statue.

In the Gospel of Lady Keran, Christ is portrayed in a gold mandorla, which symbolizes the divine light and glory. Rosslin also followed those iconographic types, in which a ray of divine light descends from heaven towards the mandorla signifying the inseparable and united Holy Trinity.

Two rays burst forth from the mandorla over Moses and Elijah, and three rays – bellow, over the apostles. The three rays symbolize the Trinity both in heaven and on the earth.

If the divine glory is expressed by gold light, then the sky – by blue color. The whole circle has blue bands signifying the fulfillment of this heavenly mystery on the earth. However, the core blue descends through to the mountain, which is the place of man's encounter with God and where the heavenly blue ends and the earth starts.

As we have mentioned, according to the biblical words that the freshness of Moses' face was not abated, miniaturists portrayed Moses with red cheeks. However, Rosslin going from separate details to the generalization of the miniature represented Moses with a luminous face instead of portraying him with red cheeks.

In accordance with this generalization, the apostles' behaviors are not represented by their poses, confused faces, but by differences of their looks and features, who have almost the same poses. Their eyes become even more expressive influenced by the gold light spreading from the mandorla.

Sergey Averintsev, in his article entitled "Gold in the System of Symbols in the Early Byzantine Culture" writes about the divine light commemorated in the Bible and in different works of the ancient period through to the medieval hagiographic literature. He states that on one hand light is a clarity that opens the world for observing and recognition, and which contributes to the understanding of mysteries, in accordance with the following words addressed to Jesus' disciples, "Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while your have the



GOSPEL OF LADY KERAN, 1265, Hromkla
(Manuscript library of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem
Manuscript N 1965, 140v)

light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light" (John 12:35-36). On the other hand, light also inspires and astonishes, excites the soul and blinds the eyes, as it was the case with Moses, when the divine light appeared to him on Mount Sinai. "And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel" (Exodus 24:17).

That radiance of the light is frightful, like fire and thunder, and can blind, as it blinded Saul, who was to become the apostle of the gentiles (Acts 22.11).

Averintsev describes that the awe and fear towards God, as well enjoyment do not oppose to, but they complete each other according to the following words of the psalm[46], "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling (Psalms 2:11).

In Rosslin's both miniatures, one can find the combined expression of admiration and astonishment on the apostles' faces.

In the Gospel of Malatia, Christ is already portrayed in a blue mandorla, and the heavenly space – in gold. If in the previous miniature, the blue color reached the mountain, here also the space going up to the mountain is gold.

In the Gospel of Lady Keran, Christ looks at the observer of this miniature and thanks to it Christ's standing in the middle of the painting is rather stressed, not only in its compositional, but also in its notional sense.

The Evangelists write that at the Transfiguration Moses and Elijah were speaking with Christ. In order to relate Christ with Moses and Elijah who were standing on His either side and to represent their conversation, in medieval iconography Christ was portrayed as turned by three fourth to Moses and looking at Elijah.

As Sirarpy Ter-Nersissian mentions, this iconographic type was already obvious in the Transfiguration fresco of St. Catherine Monastery of Sinai, which however, is more outstandingly expressed in the Armenian art[47].

In the Armenian miniature, this iconographic type that emerged in the XI century, reached the climax of its expressiveness just in Rosslin's Transfiguration miniature in the Gospel of Malatia.

According to Irina Drambyan, the representation of their synchronous conversation by portraying Christ turned to Moses and looking at Elijah is more stressed thanks to the poses of the apostles that react to that con-

46. See S.S. Averintsev, Gold in the System of Symbols in the Early Byzantine Culture in the book "Byzantium. Southern Slavs and Ancient Russia, Western Europe, Moscow, 1973, p. 47 (С.С. Аверинцев, Золото в системе символов ранневизантийской культуры (Византия. Южные славяне и древняя Русь, Западная Европа, Москва)
47. See Der Nersessian S., Miniature Painting, p. 58



GOSPEL, 1268, Hromkla
Illuminator – Toros Rosslin
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 10675, 128v)

versation[48].

In the Gospel of Malatia Jesus looks not only at Elijah, but also at Apostle Peter, in all likelihood expressing that scene of the Transfiguration, where the apostle told Jesus "Lord, it is good for us to be here".

Rosslin expressed John's youngest age by portraying him lying with childish helplessness.

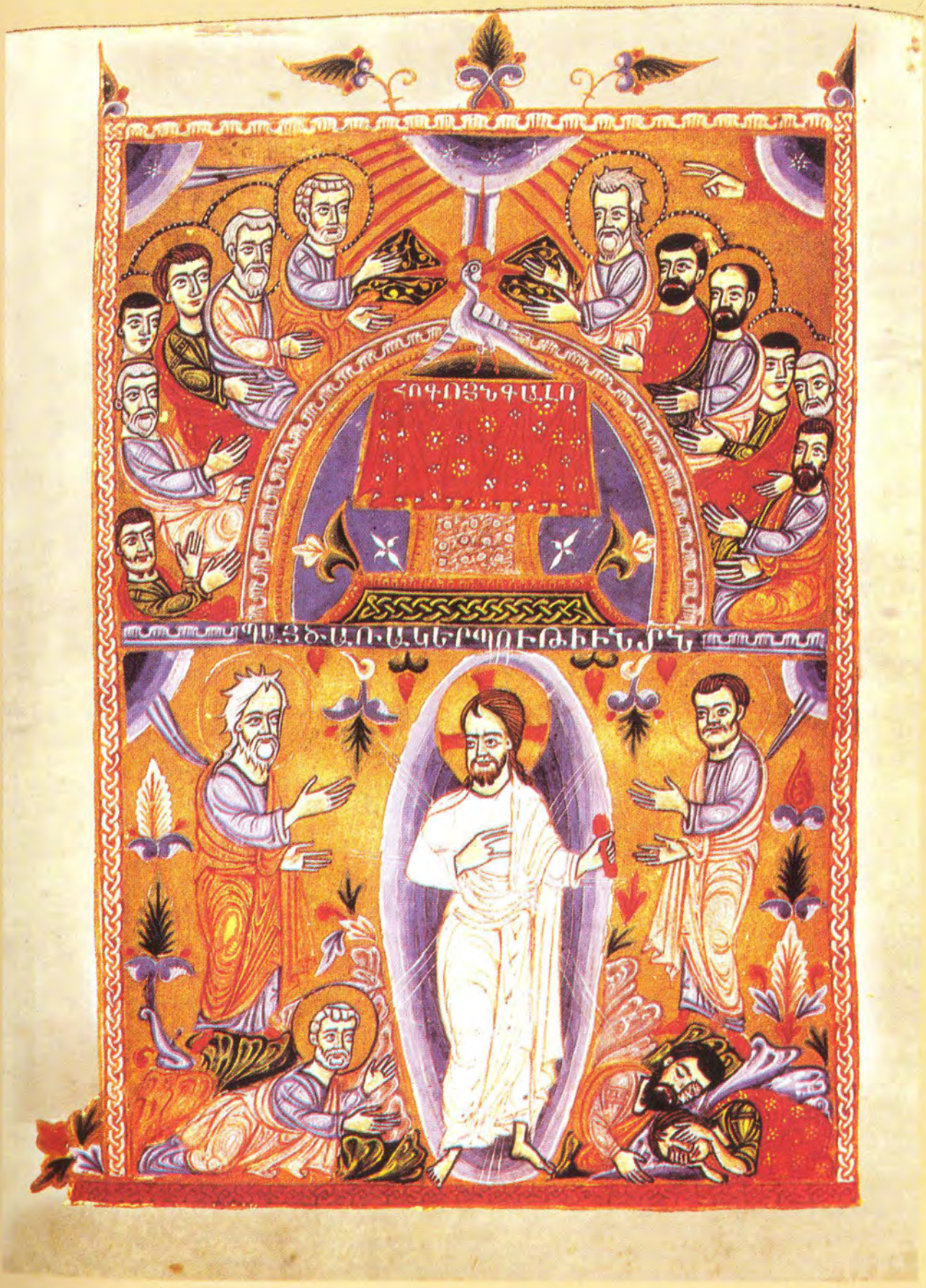
The second famous painter of the Armenian miniature of Cilicia is Sarkis Pidzak (XIV century). He has also represented the Transfiguration with gold and blue colors.

Frequently, different scenes depicting the Lord are portrayed together, which mainly represent subsequent events, such as Annunciation-Nativity, Baptism-Transfiguration, Lazarus' resurrection and entry into Jerusalem.

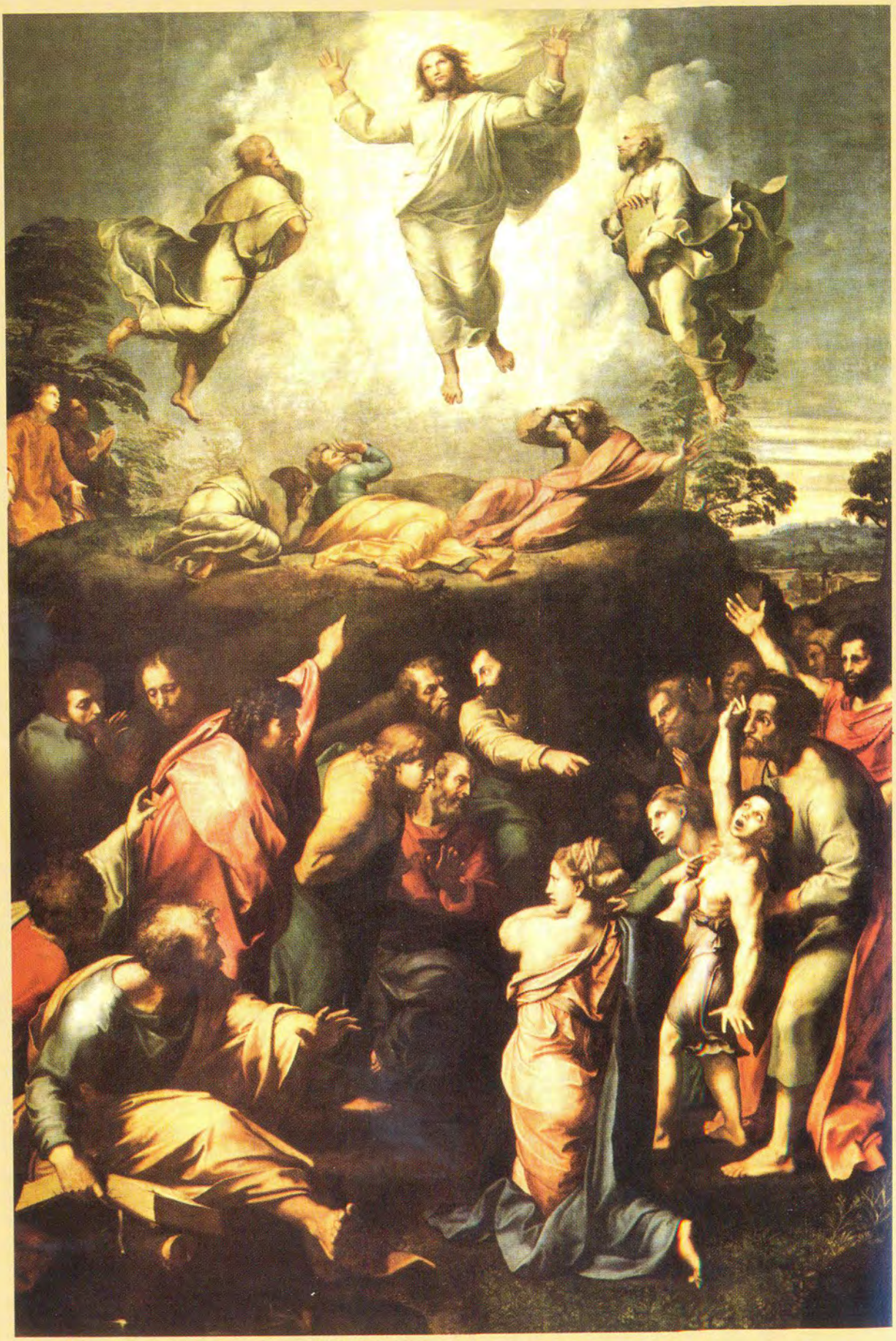
The next couple of miniatures are formed on the basis of notional generality. According to this very principle, Sarkis Pidzak represented Pentecost and Transfiguration next to each other. Though Transfiguration should be followed by Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and afterwards Pentecost, Pitsak represented Pentecost in the upper part of the painting, and Transfiguration – in the lower part.

This circumstance, in all likelihood,

48. See I.R. Drambyan, Toros Rosslin, Yerevan, 2000, p. 118 (И.Р. Драмбян, Торос Рослин, Ереван)



GOSPEL, 1336, Sis
Scribe, Illuminator – Priest Sarkis (Pidzak)
(Matenadaran, manuscript N 5786, 265v)



Rafael, TRANSFIGURATION

has the following two reasons:

The Christian Church was established by the descent of the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost, and in this scene of Pentecost the Upper Room was depicted as a church with an altar and it is written Pentecost on it. And it would not be respectable to depict the church in the lower part and Mount Tabor – in the upper part.

It is expedient, in regard to the general composition of this painting. At the Pentecost "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and the Holy Spirit sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:2-3).

In a similar way, at the Transfiguration God's voice sounded from heaven and the Holy Spirit came as a cloud, and the light radiating from Christ spread towards Moses, Elijah and the apostles.

Sarkis Pidzak has represented this thematic generalization in an iconographic form. According to the generally accepted canon, on right and left sides of the Pentecost scene of this miniature the apostles stand, over whom tongues like as of fire are descending from the central upper part of the miniature, from a semi-circle symbolizing the heaven.

In the lower part of the central semi-circle, the dove-shaped Holy Spirit stands on the altar. The altar, symbolizing the Church in its turn, is a semi-circle that opens over the Transfiguration and descends towards



Christ. So, this light, through this vertical central axis, spreads from upwards to downwards, to the transfigured Christ, and in a similar way, in the upper part the Holy Spirit is descending over the apostles standing on right and left sides. In the lower part, the light radiating from Christ, with the same symmetry, spreads over Elijah and Apostle Peter standing bellow him on the left side and spreads over Moses and Apostles James and John - standing bellow him on the right side.

This long way to represent the iconographic canon within the framework of new artistic mentality and perception reached its unsurpassed culmination in Raphael's (1483-1520) famous work "Transfiguration". It was destined for the high altar of the

Church in Norbon, Italy, and being a Church icon, naturally, it should be created within the limits of traditional iconography.

This work of Raphael and the "Last Supper" fresco of Leonardo are incomparable examples of the iconographic canon, not in the pictorial sense, but in the sense of expressing its spiritual mystery with artistic generalized abstractness.

In Raphael's work, everything is both traditional and quite new. According to the generally accepted tradition, in its upper central part Christ is standing surrounded by divine light, which is portrayed not in the mandorla, but as a bright cloud, in accordance with the apostles' description. However, the main luminous part of the cloud symbolizing the pure divine light has a mandorla shape, too. This pure light spreads and gradually faints, combining with the earth, like in Rosslin's miniatures, when the light reached the top of the mountain. However, Christ is not standing on the top of the mountain, but is radiating light and hovering in the sky, as a "numinous apparition of a corporeally sensuous character", according to Schiller's definition[49].

Likewise, Alexander Altaev writes. "Christ is above, in wonderful bright clouds. There appear Christ's radiating face and white clothes in this sea of light. Light is radiating from His whole face. Being beyond the earth, He has not lost His body, however, He has obtained immateriality, which conveys supernatural beauty to Him"[50].

With such an interpretation of Raphael's painting, both Resurrection and Ascension are represented in the Transfiguration scene, respectively through the light of resurrection and the hovering in the sky.

Jesus does not lean against the mountain in the Gospel of Keran, either. Here He seems to have already left the earth, which explains the special brightness of mandorla and the mysterious blue color surrounding it.

According to the generally accepted iconographical canon, Moses and Elijah should stand on right and left sides of Christ. Moses is holding the tables of law in his hand and Elijah is wearing his sheepskin mantle. Raphael even depicted the knots to tie the mantle. Moses and Elijah, though in the lower part, are also hovering in the sky symbolizing the fact that they, too, have been recently called by the Lord.

It is characteristic for the Transfiguration scene to have palm trees depicted on the top of Mount Tabor and other plants - on its slope, which symbolizes the regaining of paradisial graciousness through Transfiguration.

Raphael, by nature, remained loyal also to one more requirement of the canon by representing Transfiguration in the general context of the land-

49. Schiller G, Iconography of Christian Art, p. 152.
50. See A. Altaev, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Rafael; Minsk 1988, p. 472 (Алтаев Ал., Леонардо, Микеланджело, Рафаэль, Минск)

scape, in which two trees, like palm trees, rise on the mountaintop.

Representing Christ hovering in the sky Raphael in a similar way raised the three apostles by one level depicting them on the mountaintop.

Though the painter has not followed the generally accepted subsequence of the apostles, he has remained loyal to the principle to depict each of them in respective behavior. Here also the most sensitive is John standing on the right side of the painting. Peter, who is the eldest and has a firm posture, is standing in the center, and at last, confused and middle-aged James is standing on the left side.

On the left side of the painting, a little bit lower than the mountaintop, Raphael depicted two more figures. Though this addition has nothing to do with the generally accepted iconography, it is directly related with the feast of Transfiguration, because here Raphael represented SS. Felicissimus and Agapitus, whose memory the Western Church commemorates on August 6, on the feast of Transfiguration.

The Evangelists write that when Jesus came down the mountain, he saw the other nine apostles with a crowd. Matthew writes that "when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him" (Matthew 17:14-16). And Mark represents the following way the supplication of the child's father, "Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not" (Mk. 9:17-18). Luke describes that account similarly (9:40).

Then the Evangelists write that "Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour".

Raphael combined this Gospel account with the Transfiguration. According to the generally accepted iconographical structure, Jesus, Moses and Elijah should be depicted in the upper field of the painting, but in Raphael's work the upper field of the painting is dedicated to the Transfiguration and the lower field – to the account of the lunatic child. So, the upper field signifies the divine and the lower field – the earthly spheres creating a stressed contrast. Above inaccessible mysteries and secrets are analyzed and bellow there appears the helplessness of the sick child's parents.

However, there are two subsequent accounts, where Christ is the central figure, but He is in the upper part and therefore the eyes and hands of the father, who is imploring for his child's health, of the apostles and other people are directed towards the Lord who is in heaven.



As Alexander Maykapar writes, this work of Raphael seems to be the pictorial reproduction of the Gospel account by Luke, in which lunatic's father asked Jesus for his child's healing[51].

N. Pokrovsky writes about this creative motif of Raphael, which combined the account of the epileptic child's healing with the Transfiguration. He states that it is based on the contrast of the upper and lower parts of the painting: "Above, blinding splendor, glory, apparition of those who abide in heaven and conversation about highest mysteries; bellow, pain and suffering, worldly troubles and human helplessness in the face of that trouble. The observer first of all casts a glance to that part of the painting, then looks up and the feeling of human helplessness that arises from looking at that part of the painting, converts to perfect tranquility while contemplating His glory, who is able not only to cure all the physical and spiritual pains, but also to pull up the evil by the root"[52].

This painting of Raphael caused

51. See A. Maykapar, New Testament in the Art, Moscow, 1998, p. 163 (А. Майкапар, Новый завет в искусстве, Москва)
52. See N. Pokrovsky, Gospel in the Monuments of Iconography, p. 204 (Н. Покровский, Евангелие в памятниках иконографии)

different interpretations contradicting each other. Its critics say that Raphael could not manage to create unity and harmony between upper and lower parts of the painting. They considered as deficiency this purposeful contrast between the heavenly and the earthly. As V. Grashchenkov writes, the upper and lower parts of the painting do not form a compositional integrity, and Raphael could not manage to represent in entirety his two types of composition about the ideal - the heavenly, and the earthly - historical[53].

However, at the end of the XVIII century Goethe, as if preventing all the further critics of this painting of Raphael, wrote, "How can one separate the upper and lower parts? The two are one: bellow, suffering, need, above effective power, succor. Each bearing on the other, both interacting with one another"[54].

600 years before Goethe's words, Vardapet Barsegh Jon of the Armenian Church in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark expressed the same idea in the interpretation of the account about the healing of the lunatic child: "Above, highest mysteries, bellow, troubles of life. Above, the Father's voice sounds and bellow, the Son persecutes devils"[55]:

According to Raphael, one of the greatest titans of Renaissance, bellow there is suffering and need, above, in the luminous clouds of the sky stands He, who is the hope of those, who are bellow, in pain.

It is noteworthy at the same time, that the reason for the contrast between two parts of the painting is the fact that Raphael could not complete the painting that had begun in 1517. After his death Giulio Romani and Penni, his two disciples and collaborators completed the painting. For this reason, differences of compositional styles and temperaments of the painters of the upper and lower parts of the painting are added to the contrast caused by the motif.

The painting, especially Jesus' image, to some extent, remained incomplete after being finished, and the reason for this incompleteness was not only the sudden death of the painter, but the fact that it also had its inner mystery. In a similar way, Leonardo's "Last Supper" remained incomplete, in which the figures of Jesus and Judas were not completed.

Perhaps, even such great figures are incapable or they considered themselves incapable to represent God's inaccessible mysteries in compositional complete forms.

According to the tradition, Raphael's coffin was put in front of the incomplete painting of Transfiguration. People hearing about Raphael's death, told that his second life was beginning with that death, and that life began surrounded by Transfiguration lights.

53. See V.N. Grashchenkov, Rafael; Moscow, 1975, p. 190, (В.Н. Гращенков, Рафаэль, Москва)
54. See Goethe, "Italian Journey", Collected Works, vol. 9, Moscow, 1980, p. 198 (Гете, Из „Итальянского путешествия", Собрание сочинений, том девятий, Москва)
55. Vardapet Barsegh Jon, Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Constantinople, 1826, p. 8 (in Armenian)

VARDAN GEVORG DEVRIKYAN

TRANSFIGURATION AND THE FEAST OF VARDAVAR

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The book has been published in "Tigran Mets" publishing house

Ա. Ուրեմն՝ ասում ես, որ ամեն մարդ իր ուզածն անելու ազատություն ունի, ոչ ոքի չի հետաքրքրում, թե ուրիշն ինչ է անում, ինչ է մտածում, ինչ է ուզում։ Ամեն մարդ ինքն իր տերն է, ինքն իր աստվածն է, ինքն իր օրենքը։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան սուրբ չէ, ոչ մի բան անձեռնմխելի չէ, ոչ մի բան հարգելի չէ։ Ամեն ինչ կարելի է ծաղրել, ամեն ինչ կարելի է ոտնահարել։ Ամեն ինչ կարելի է ծաղկացնել, ամեն ինչ կարելի է ոչնչացնել։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միացնել, ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միջև եղած անդունդը լցնել։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միջև եղած թշնամանքը հաշտեցնել։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միջև եղած ատելությունը վերացնել։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միջև եղած ատելությունը սիրո փոխել։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միջև եղած ատելությունը խաղաղության փոխել։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միջև եղած ատելությունը ներման փոխել։ Ուրեմն ոչ մի բան չկա, որ կարողանա մարդկանց միջև եղած ատելությունը սիրո փոխել։

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