

THREE ARMENIAN TILES FROM KÜTAHYA TO JERUSALEM

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We often hear about Ottoman Iznik pottery, but tend to forget another Ottoman production, that of Kütahya, which is just as enjoyable and which reached its pinnacle during the 18th century.

The recent reappearance, four years ago, of an early 18th century Kütahya tile with Three Holy Hierarchs (fig. 1) originating from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James in Jerusalem made me look into the history of Kütahya pottery, and more particularly into this series of tiles¹, which were originally commissioned for the Holy Sepulchre, but then set instead in the Armenian Cathedral of St James, in Jerusalem.

Kütahya pottery has been completely overshadowed for years by Iznik ware, despite the fact that there are quite a few pieces of Kütahya ware in Western collections. For example, in France there are over ninety pieces in the Sèvres Museum² and another ten tiles and thirty objects in the Louvre Museum, Paris. In England, according to a recent article by Yolande Crowe³, there are over seventy pieces at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. This is in addition to the private European collections, such as the Keir Collection, or the Brocklebank Collection at Magdalen College, Oxford.

Another two tiles of the same origin as the Three Holy Hierarchs (fig. 1) are now kept in the Sèvres Museum near Paris (fig. 2, 3). These three tiles are historically important as they are part of a group of fifty or so pictorial tiles of Biblical subjects from the Old and the New Testament, commissioned from the Kütahya Armenian workshops in Ottoman Turkey around 1718 by Abraham Vardapet and illustrated by a painter called T'oros.

The tiles arrived in Jerusalem in 1719 and were originally intended to decorate the Holy Sepulchre, thus indicating the role of the Armenian community in the Holy Land at the beginning of the 18th century. For some unknown reason, the tiles were not put in the Holy Sepulchre but ended up about ten years later adorning the walls of the Armenian Cathedral of St. James. They were then set out of order among more than ten thousand decorative blue-and-white tiles of many different patterns.

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- (1) This was the subject of the article: L. SOUSTIEL, "Kütahya-Jérusalem. Pérégrinations de trois carreaux arméniens", *Sèvres. Revue de la Société des Amis du musée national de Céramique*, n° 18 (2009), p. 57-67.
 - (2) I thank Eric Moinet, Directeur du Département du Patrimoine et des Collections at the Sèvres - Cité de la Céramique, and Suzanne Babey, who is studying these pieces, for this information.
 - (3) Y. CROWE, "Kütahya ceramics and international Armenian trade networks", *V&A Online Journal*, Issue No. 3 (Spring 2011), p. 1-8.

The commission of these tiles and the importance of the Armenian community at that time have been fully discussed and published by John Carswell and Charles Dowsett in 1972 in an outstanding two-volume monograph on the subject⁴. It is the publication of this work which validated Kütahya's position as an important centre for pottery production during the Ottoman Empire.

Kütahya is a historical city, located in Central Anatolia, two hundred kilometres South-East of Istanbul as the crow flies, or three hundred and fifty kilometres away by road. It was an important centre of Christianity during the Byzantine period and was the seat of the archbishop. This cosmopolitan city hosted several different religious communities, among them Armenians. There is written evidence of Armenian potters settled in Kütahya from the 15th century, and excavations conducted by Faruk Şahin in the late 1970's of kilns in Kütahya, as well as the discovery of shards, are evidence of the production of wares from the 15th century onwards⁵. It is now accepted that pottery was also produced in Kütahya in the 16th century. This frit body pottery looked very similar to Iznik pottery – a frit ware with white body, composed of silica, clay and glass frit, covered with a colourless glaze – but was slightly different technically.

To corroborate this idea, two recent scientific analyses using non-destructive on-site Raman spectroscopy techniques – one led by a team of scientists from the French CNRS, Laboratoire, Dynamique, Interactions et Réactivité (LADIR) in Paris, and the other by two scientists of the Istanbul Technical University, Department of Metallurgy and Materials Engineering⁶ – provide evidence of differences between Kütahya and Iznik ware (different Raman signatures of silicate glazes), and confirm the existence of a distinct Kütahya production from the 16th century onwards. Thanks to these new studies, a technical differentiation between Iznik and Kütahya Ottoman pottery can be made, as the two Turkish scholars do in their introduction, that, although “Ceramics produced between the 15th century Ottoman Empire and 17th century are known ‘Iznik’ ceramics, in the Ottoman sources, the term *Iznik* ceramics was used more as a trade name than as a provenance”.

In the early 18th century, the city's progression towards greater autonomy, allowed it to undertake a significant artistic development and gain a monopoly in the manufacture of tiles intended for the most prestigious commissions, while at the same time, a hundred and thirty kilometres to the North-West, the Iznik kilns were about to close down for good.

This paper is not going to discuss Kütahya pottery production, but will instead examine the iconography of these three tiles. Incidentally, they are the only three pieces of this series known to be outside the Armenian monastery of Jerusalem. The two Sèvres tiles entered the French national collections in April 1879, bought from the famous French collector Albert Goupil (1840-1884), while the long journey made by the Three Holy Hierarchs tile is more uncertain. It joined the collection of Jacques Matossian (Alexandria, 1894-Paris, 1963) in Cairo in the first half of the 20th century⁷ and arrived in Paris at the latest in the early 1960's⁸.

This series of tiles is not only of major historical importance, but it is also of great artistic interest.

The most important historical point is that this series of pictorial tiles is dated. Indeed, there is a continuous historical inscription in Armenian script on most of the tiles, and the date 1168 (inc. Sept. 1718 A.D.) is mentioned on some of them. The name of the artist, T'oros, who painted the tiles, is known because he signed two bowls which were also commissioned by Abraham Vardapet at the same time from the same workshop, and he is quoted on one of the tiles set inside St. James⁹.

- (4) J. CARSWELL & C. J. F. DOWSETT, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James, Jerusalem*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972, vol. I, and J. CARSWELL, vol. II; 2nd ed.: Armenian Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, The Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Lebanon, Antelias, 2005, vol. I & II reunited.
- (5) F. ŞAHİN, “Kütahya'da Çini-Keramik Sanatı ve Tarihinin yeni Buluntular açısından değerlendirilmesi”, *Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı IX-X*, Sanat Tarihi Enstitüsü 1979-1980, İstanbul, 1981, p. 259-286.
- (6) Ph. COLOMBAN, R. de LAVEAUCOUPET and V. MILANDE, “On-site Raman spectroscopic analysis of Kütahya fritwares”, *Journal of Raman Spectroscopy*, 36 (2005), p. 857-863; G. SIMSEK & A.E. GECKINLI, “An assessment study of tiles from Topkapi Palace Museum with Energy-dispersive X-ray and Raman spectrometers”, *Journal of Raman Spectroscopy*, 43 (2012), p. 917-927.
- (7) D. KOUYMJIAN, “The problem of the zoomorphic figure in the iconography of Armenian Pentecost: a preliminary report”, *Atti del Primo Simposio Internazionale di Arte Armena-1975*, Venezia-S. Lazzaro, 1978, p. 406, footnote 11.
- (8) It was exhibited in Paris in 1964: L. SOUSTIEL, *Florilège d'Orient. Objets d'art de l'Islam. Hommage à Joseph et Jean Soustiel*, Aix-en-Provence, Roxelane (ed.), 2008, 2nd page illustration.
- (9) J. CARSWELL & C.J.F. DOWSETT, *op. cit.* [n. 4], I, p. 14 and p. 50-51, n° C 1.

The main artistic interest of this group of tiles is that their manufacture marks a transitional period in Kütahya ceramic production. In fact these frit wares are the first to feature a yellow underglaze – called Naples Yellow, a PbSb2O7-PbSnO4 pyrochlore solid solution more or less Fe/Zn/Si substituted¹⁰ – on such a large scale, and the fact that they are dated helps us to pinpoint the appearance of this new colour, which is therefore dated to about 1718.

Moreover, these tiles allow us to understand more about the migration of Christian Armenian potters from Safavid Persia to Ottoman Turkey in the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as the relationship between Kütahya potters and the Armenian community from New Julfa near Ispahan in Persia, through trade networks, and their role in the transfer of technology and iconography¹¹.

The first tile is the one depicting the Visitation (fig. 2), now in the Sèvres Museum. It is fragmentary, slightly larger than half a tile. In the centre, Mary is wearing a blue robe, embracing her cousin Elisabeth, dressed in a green robe. A man is standing back, holding a pointed staff. All the figures have haloes around their heads.

The tile is framed with two inscriptions in Armenian script. The upper line, in *erkathagir* (or uncials) and in minuscule script *bolorgir*, gives the name of the scene: “The Visitation of Mary and Elisabeth”. The lower one in *bolorgir* is the beginning of a longer inscription running over five tiles, which marks the beginning of the inscription process of the tiles donated to the Holy Sepulchre¹². This inscription is therefore of crucial historical significance in understanding this group of tiles.

The Museum Register stated that the man is Joseph, but this is unlikely, as he is standing behind Elisabeth. Moreover, the Sacred Scriptures do not mention Joseph when Mary goes to visit her cousin. It is certainly Elisabeth's husband the priest Zacharias who became mute because he didn't believe the promise of the Archangel Gabriel who declared that his spouse would become pregnant. So he remained silent until the birth of John the Baptist. This is why he is standing behind her, voiceless. However, Joseph may have been included in the scene, as it is customary in the East to see a woman travelling with a man. If he were to be illustrated on this tile, he would be standing on the missing part of the tile on the left, behind Mary.

Zacharias is leaning on a T-shaped handled stick. The crozier (*gawazan*) is traditional of the Christian clergy, and in Armenia is seen in several shapes according to the rank of the clergyman¹³. There are several examples in Armenian miniatures. A portrait of Hovhannes Mrkuz (fig. 4)¹⁴ illustrating a Commentary of the Canticle of Canticles represents him holding such a stick in his left hand. The Canon Table of the Gospel of Haghbat dated 1211 (Erevan, Matenadaran, n° 6288, fol. 8v-9) illustrates on the top right corner the superior of the monastery of Haghbat, in North-Eastern Armenia, holding a similar long staff¹⁵. Saints could also be represented with T-shaped sticks, as is St. John in an Armenian manuscript copied in 1294, or St. Anthony in a manuscript copied in Caffa in 1430¹⁶.

The Visitation scenes in Armenian art do not include Zacharias before the 17th century. In the older representations, frequent in the 11th century and more seldom afterwards, Mary and Elisabeth were accompanied by a servant, or were on their own as recounted in the New Testament. A miniature of the Gospel of 1332 from the monastery of Sourkhat in Crimea (Matenadaran, n° 7664) shows the two cousins alone¹⁷. The apparition of Zacharias is due to Western influences from European engravings. These images travelled Eastwards thanks to links that Westerners had with Armenian Merchants based in New Julfa or settled in the Ottoman Empire. Zacharias is portrayed on a Visitation scene from a manuscript dated 1607¹⁸, where Joseph is also present. T'oros, the painter of the tiles who had settled in Kütahya, must have taken inspiration from a European engraving to illuminate his subject.

(10) I thank Philippe Colomban, from the LADIR, Director of Research, CNRS, for this information.

(11) Y. CROWE, *loc. cit.* [n. 3], p.1-2/8.

(12) J. CARSWELL & C.J.F. DOWSETT, *op. cit.* [n. 4], p. 46, n° B 22.

(13) D. KOUYMJIAN in J. DURAND (ed.), *Armenia Sacra*, exhibition catalogue, Louvre Museum, Paris, Somogy, 2007, p. 418, n° 189.

(14) Published in A. TOKATLIAN, *Kalantars. Les seigneurs arméniens dans la Perse safavide*, Paris, Geuthner, 2009, p. 76, ill. 36.

(15) S. DER NERSESSIAN, *L'art arménien*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 212, n° 164.

(16) H. HAKOBYAN, *Armenian miniatures* (in Armenian), Erevan, Vaspurakan, 1978, pl. 8; B. NARKISS and M. STONE (ed.), *Armenian art treasures of Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 1979, p. 97. I thank Bernard Outtier, Director of Research, CNRS, for these references.

(17) L. A. DOURNOVO, *Miniatures arméniennes*, Paris, Cercle d'art, 1960, p. 155.

(18) A. GUEVORKIAN, *Bibliographie des enlumineurs arméniens des IX^e-XIX^e siècles* (in Armenian), Cairo, 1998, p. 402 (mss Erevan, Matenadaran 6785, f. 2r).

The second tile is the one with the Three Holy Hierarchs (fig. 1). This tile, which is of exceptional pictorial quality, is of the greatest iconographic importance as it depicts Armenia's conversion to Christianity. It shows St. Gregory the Illuminator enthroned between St. Basil of Caesarea and St. John Chrysostom, under a triple arcade. Below, two figures are kneeling: one with a crowned animal head depicts King Trdat III in the shape of a boar, and the other one is a woman crowned as well, with folded arms. They are bordered by two inscriptions in Armenian *bolgîr* script which give on the upper line the names of the three Saints. The lower line is part of the longer inscription starting on the Visitation tile (fig. 2) and this sequence gives the Armenian date 1168 (inc. 23 Sept. 1718 A.D), thus making this tile historically significant.

The iconography of this tile is exceedingly interesting because in Eastern Christianity the Three Holy Hierarchs are St. Basil the Great of Caesarea, St. Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus and St. John Chrysostom. They are rapidly portrayed together and they appear on icons from the 14th century onwards, as for instance on a 19th century Russian icon from the MuCEM¹⁹ (fig. 5). The term Hierarch (from the Greek *hieros*, sacred, and *arkhê*, ruler) relates to a person who occupies a position of authority in a religious hierarchy, and so designates the highest dignitaries of the Orthodox Church. The three Doctors mentioned above were highly influential bishops of the early church and played a crucial role in Christian theology. They are therefore considered as the Holy Fathers of the Church, or Holy Hierarchs. But the real founder of the Armenian Church is St. Gregory the Illuminator. On this tile, St. Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus is replaced instead by St. Gregory the Illuminator. The inversion of the two Gregories here emphasises the individuality of the Armenian Church compared to the Orthodox one, as explained by Bernard Outtier in an article relating to this tile²⁰. St. Gregory is in the centre of the tile and appears larger than the other two because he is the key figure. Indeed, he is the one who converted the Armenian King Trdat III to Christianity, thus converting the whole country.

The story of conversion of Armenia to Christianity is summarised on this tile. According to the story, Trdat III (294-324) was ruling in Armenia thanks to Emperor Diocletian. There was a young man in Trdat's Kingdom called Gregory who was Christian and refused to make pagan sacrifices, so the king tortured him, but he survived. Later, Gregory was denounced as being the son of the murderer of King Trdat's father, so Trdat threw him in a well with reptiles, where he remained for thirteen years. In the meantime, Diocletian fell in love with a Christian novice girl called Hripsime, who fled from him to Armenia with her friends. Trdat saw her and in turn fell in love with her, but she refused him and got martyred with her friends. For doing so, Trdat was punished by God and three days later was transformed into a boar. His sister dreamt that only Gregory could save him. So they went to get Gregory out of his well, although he was believed to be dead. He prayed, and King Trdat returned back to his human appearance, and was then baptised by Gregory. The entire pagan Armenian population was converted and that is how Armenia became the first official Christian nation in the world.

The second iconographic significance of this tile is the representation of King Trdat in the form of a boar. In Armenian art, the zoomorphic figure exists and is associated with pagan people. Trdat was still a pagan when he metamorphosed into a boar, and he has been represented as a dog-headed figure on a series of stone stelae dating from the 5th to the 7th centuries. Only very few of these four-sided stelae remain to this day²¹. A zoomorphic figure also occurs in scenes of Pentecost on Armenian manuscripts from the 13th century onwards, as illustrated on a Lectionary of the year 1457²² or on a Gospel from the 14th century now in Jerusalem²³. It is interesting to notice that these zoomorphic figures only appear on Armenian Pentecost and not in the Byzantine or the Western tradition. The problem of this dog-headed figure or cynocephalus has been discussed by Dickran Kouymjian in an article in 1978²⁴ and he suggests that there is an association between the theme of Pentecost – which is the miracle that prepared the way for conversion of the pagan people – and the conversion of pagan Trdat which is the most important event in Armenian Christianity. However, the symbol of Trdat as a boar is not found on any other representation for over ten centuries: from the stone stelae of the 7th century onwards, it re-appears only once, and it is on this very tile dated 1718²⁵.

The third iconographic significance of this tile is the crowned female figure kneeling on the right. There have been questions about her identity. John Carswell and Charles Dowsett, as well as Bernard Outtier suggested that it could be St. Hripsime in prayer²⁶. This is the most obvious suggestion and there are indeed representations of Hripsime wearing a crown standing next to St. Gregory and the king Trdat, such as on a banner dated 1441²⁷. But on this banner, the three figures are hieratic, treated as three major figures of Armenian history, without any reference to the story of conversion. It is a different type of iconography than that on the tile, more formal and less narrative. Dickran Kouymjian instead suggests that this lady is Khosrovidukht, the sister of King Trdat because she is the one who suggested that Gregory was still alive as she saw him in a dream, and that he could save her brother. She was a princess so was entitled to wear a crown. Moreover, Hripsime was already dead when Trdat was transformed into a boar, so the suggestion of his sister is more likely.

The sophisticated drawing of this tile brings together the whole story of Armenia converting to Christianity, and it is amazing to see how the painter T'oros managed to synthesize it with such fineness on such a small surface.

The third tile is the one of St. Stephen (fig. 3), also in the Sèvres Museum. At first sight, this tile looks slightly different from the other two (it is twice as narrow as the others, the colours are more faded, the drawing is not as fine...). However, this tile was purchased together with the Visitation one in 1879. Recently, they have been scientifically examined by Philippe Colomban using the non-destructive on-site Raman spectroscopic analysis²⁸, and it appears that both tiles belong to the same group. They may not have been painted by the same artist, but the theme of St. Stephen relates to the 1718 commission by Abraham Vardapet for Jerusalem.

The haloed Saint is portrayed as a young beardless man with a tonsure. He is wearing a deacon's vestments and a long stole on his shoulder. He swings a censer on one hand and holds a model of a church (the Anastasis) on the other, which are his main attributes: St. Stephen was the first deacon of Christian history, and the first Christian martyr, the "protomartyr" who was stoned to death in 34-35 A.D, as illustrated on a Hymnody dated 1678²⁹. The Anastasis ("Resurrection" in Greek) is often represented symbolically as a domed building, as painted on a miniature³⁰. St. Stephen is associated with the Resurrection because he is the "protomartyr", and the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is also called the Church of the Resurrection. The Anastasis he is holding here is a reduced model of the Holy Sepulchre, not only because of the meaning of "Anastasis", but also because the Holy Sepulchre was the place where all these tiles were originally intended to be laid.

Reduced models of the Holy Sepulchre did exist in the late 17th and 18th centuries in the Holy Land. The Holy Sepulchre, being one of the most important shrines in Christianity, a place of special pilgrimage, was believed to house Jesus' tomb. Models in olive-wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ebony and ivory, were therefore made in Bethlehem under Franciscan supervision so that they could be bought by pilgrims or offered to diplomats as a souvenir of their journey. Some of these wooden models still survive, such as the "Pearson model" recently purchased by the MuCEM to be exhibited in Marseilles³¹, or another three in the British Museum, two of them bequeathed by Sir Hans Sloane (fig. 6).

In the Museum Register, the subject of the tile was not properly identified, but John Carswell and Charles Dowsett correctly suggested St. Stephen after comparison with a tile in St. James' Cathedral showing St. Stephen between the deacons Abisalom and Titos³² (fig. 7). On that tile, Stephen is illustrated with its attributes (the censer and the Church), and the three figures are framed with two inscriptions: the top one gives their name while the bottom one is part of the long historical inscription in which the sentence just precedes the one on the Three Holy Hierarchs tile.

(19) Published in E. GIRARD, "Les icônes du musée de l'Homme au musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée", *Patrimoine. Revue de l'INP*, 2008.

(20) B. OUTTIER, « Iconographie », in L. SOUSTIEL, *op. cit.* [n. 8], p. 25.

(21) D. KOUYMJIAN, *loc. cit.* [n. 7], fig. 9 and S. DER NERSESSIAN, *op. cit.* [n. 15], p. 60, fig. 39-41.

(22) S. DER NERSESSIAN and A. MEKHITARIAN, *Miniatures Arméniennes d'Ispahan*, 1986, p. 157, fig. 91.

(23) S. DER NERSESSIAN, *op. cit.* [n. 15], p. 221, n° 172.

(24) D. KOUYMJIAN, *loc. cit.* [n. 7].

(25) I thank Dr. Dickran Kouymjian for this information.

(26) J. CARSWELL & C. J. F. DOWSETT, *op. cit.* [n. 4], I, p. 49, B 26; B. OUTTIER, « Iconographie », in L. SOUSTIEL, *op. cit.* [n. 8], p. 25.

(27) S. DER NERSESSIAN, *op. cit.* [n. 15], p. 224, n° 173.

(28) Ph. COLOMBAN, R. de LAVEAUCOUPET and V. MILANDE, *loc. cit.* [n. 6], p. 857-863.

(29) S. DER NERSESSIAN, *Armenian Manuscripts in the Walters Art Gallery*, Baltimore, 1973, n° 438 pl. 232.

(30) S. DER NERSESSIAN and A. MEKHITARIAN, *op. cit.* [n. 22], p. 170, fig. 103.

(31) For a study of the "Pearson model", see the article by Emilie GIRARD, "Acquisition par le MuCEM d'un ensemble de maquettes de lieux de pèlerinage de Terre sainte", *La revue des musées de France / Revue du Louvre*, 2012-1, February 2012, p. 59-69, and p. 64 for a list of these models kept in other museums.

(32) J. CARSWELL & C.J.F. DOWSETT, *op. cit.* [n. 4], I, p. 48, B 25, and pl. 9.

To conclude, it is fascinating to note the profusion of iconographic elements on these three tiles. The Kütahya painters clearly had a deep knowledge and understanding of Christian iconography, not only Armenian but also Western. This supposes that there was a real industry established in Kütahya making tiles and objects, along with organised workshops and skilled painters free to create. This is corroborated by the recent scientific Raman analysis of Kütahya tiles which revealed a varied production of many different workshops, each having their own technical practices. This autonomy of production is very different from the controlled Ottoman court Iznik workshops.

There is definitely scope for deeper studies on this amazing group of pictorial tiles and much is to be learned from studying them.



Fig. 1. Tile with the Three Holy Hierarchs
Turkey, Kütahya, dated in the Armenian year 1168 (A.D. 1718/1719)
Private collection
18 cm square; Th. 9 cm
© Editions Roxelane, Aix-en-Provence.

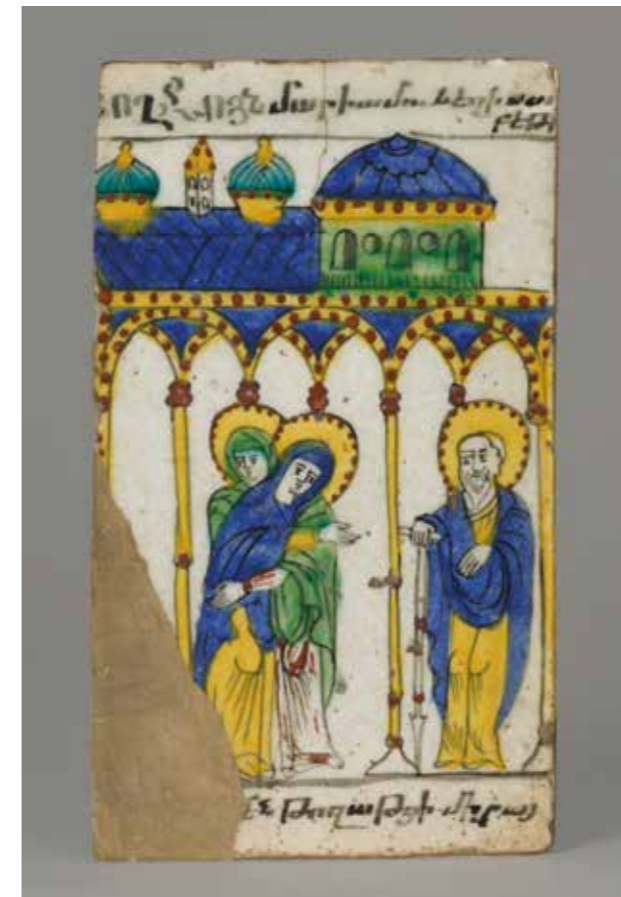


Fig. 2. Tile of the Visitation. Turkey, Kütahya, 1718-1719. Sèvres, Cité de la céramique (MNC 7460-1) H. 18 cm; W. 10.5 cm; Th. 9 cm.
© RMN-Grand Palais (Sèvres, Cité de la céramique)/ Martine Beck-Coppola.

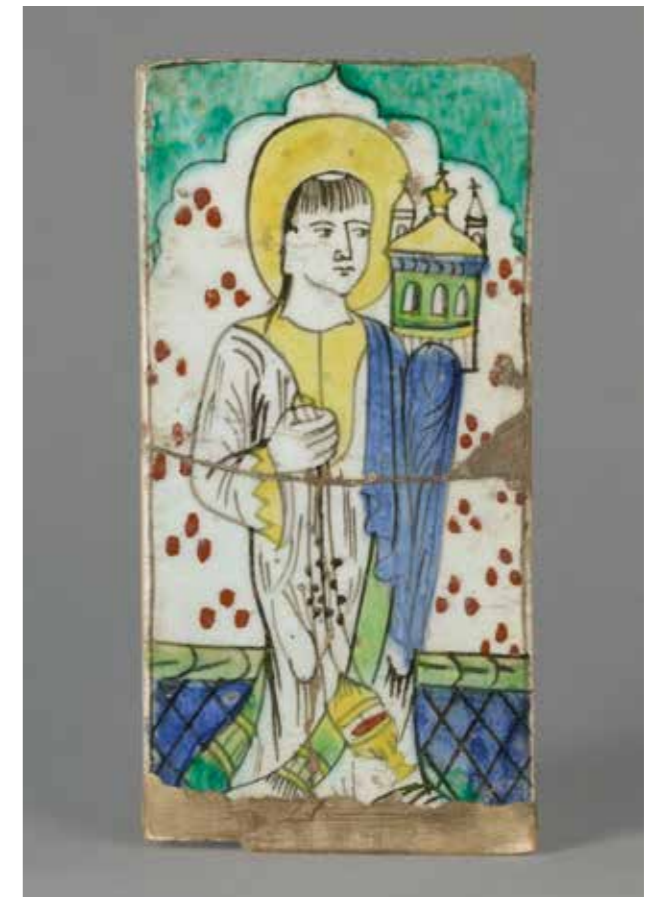


Fig. 3. Tile of St. Stephen. Turkey, Kütahya, 1718-1719. Sèvres, Cité de la céramique (MNC 7460-2) H. 17.5 cm; W. 8.7 cm; Th. 9 cm.
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Fig. 4. A portrait of priest Hovhannes Mrkuz
Armenia, dated 1713
Matenadaran, Erevan (Ms. 1111, f. 1v.)
© Armen Tokatlian, Paris.

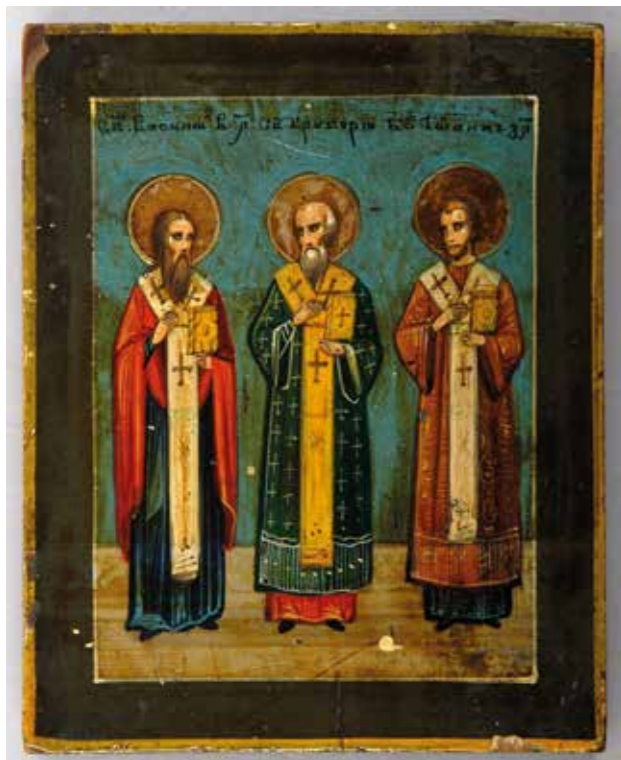


Fig. 5. Icon with St. Basil, St. Gregory and St. John
Russia, 19th century
Paris, Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) (DMH 1994.43.2)
H. 13 cm; W. 11 cm
© MuCEM, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Christophe Fouin.



Fig. 6. Model of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre
Bethlehem, Jordan or Lebanon, before 1753
London, The British Museum, Sloane Bequest, 1753 (OA 10338)
L. 42 cm (North-South); W. 36.5 cm (East-West); H. 23 cm
© The Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 7. Tile of St. Stephen with the deacons Abisolom and Titos
Turkey, Kütahya, 1718-1719
Armenian Cathedral of St. James's, Jerusalem, Chapel of the Apostles
18 cm square
© The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

OTTOMAN MOTIFS IN CHRISTIAN ART IN THE BALKANS (16th-17th CENTURIES): MANUSCRIPTS AND METALWORK

Lilyana STANKOVA

The present exposé is meant to express my observations on some innovative tendencies in the decorative practices in the Christian orthodox during 16th-17th centuries which are due to the local contact with the ottoman visual culture. As part of the heterogeneous Ottoman Empire, the Balkan people were in direct contact with the material culture coming from the regions of Asia Minor and the Middle East. Commercial relations across the Black Sea also help to enhance the artistic exchange. Daily contact with the local visual culture of the Muslim population resulted in a number of changes in the artistic production of the Christians. The process of "orientalization" is remarked in the decorative practice in the manuscript production, liturgical vessels, liturgical textiles, icon and mural ornaments from the beginning of the 16th century onwards.¹ In addition to the research on the development of the Orthodox ornament, the studies of the various monuments of the Christian art can enrich our knowledge about the dissemination of the Ottoman aesthetic trends in the Balkans during the 16th-17th centuries.

The contacts between art of Byzantium and South Slavonic world with that of the Muslim East are recorded since the early Middle Ages. Quite often Islamic art is a source for enrichment of the repertoire of motifs and their stylization which stimulated renewals of Byzantine ornament.² I would like to emphasize that I shall not discuss the Islamization of Chris-

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