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Non-Professional Expertise: On the Early Modern Transformations in Armenian Manuscript Production Viewed from Ottoman Tokat and Crimea

Abstract

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the widespread destruction and population displacements caused by the Ottoman-Safavid wars and the Celali revolts plunged Armenian communities of Anatolia and the Caucasus into a profound crisis. The crisis extended to manuscript production, as the devastation of monastic scriptoria resulted in a severe shortage of books. Yet the same period also witnessed the proliferation and growing affluence of Armenian merchant communities, along with merchants' increasing involvement in book production. This article examines the experience of Step'anos of Tokat, a refugee priest, poet, and manuscript-maker with strong links to Tokat's trade community, to explore the social history of Armenian manuscript production and the transformation of the 'scribe' from a copyist-artisan working as part of a monastic scriptorium to a mobile expert-entrepreneur serendipitously placed in a privileged position by the crisis in book production.

Keywords: Ottoman Armenian history, manuscript cultures, scribe, merchant patronage, Armenian Tokat, Armenian Crimea, Step'anos of Tokat

1. Introduction: scribes without scriptoria

The experts whom historians of manuscript cultures encounter most often are scribes. In recent decades, thanks to the growing scholarly interest in the social histories of manuscripts, scribes and scribal cultures have received significant attention.[1] Historians of the early modern period have observed a conspicuous trend in the 'professionalization' of scribes that accompanied the rapid growth of the early modern state bureaucracies. This professionalization trend, however, did not affect all manuscript cultures equally, privileging those languages and scripts that were expedient for state building and enforcement of confessional adherence.[2] For the millennium-old Arme-

1 Bahl and Hanß 2022; growing scholarly interest in scribes and social histories of manuscript production is well illustrated by the diversity of recent and ongoing relevant projects undertaken at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at the University of Hamburg: URL: https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/research.html.

2 A relevant example of this in the Ottoman case is the replacement of the openness of the early Ottoman court under Mehmed II to the diversity of scribal cultures by the more exclusive triumvirate of *elsine-i selase* (Arabic-Persian-Turkish) at the time of the empire's

nian manuscript culture, the early modern transformation resulted in anything but the professionalization of scribes. Armenian statehood ended with the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in 1375, and the Armenian early modernity came to be defined not by the growth of centralized state institutions but rather by the violence inflicted upon Armenian communities of the Caucasus and Anatolia by the expanding early modern states – the Ottoman and the Safavid Empires – as well as the anti-state insurgency of the Celalis.[3] The violence of the Ottoman-Safavid wars and the Celali attacks resulted in innumerable deaths, the destruction of homes, churches, and scriptoria, turned hundreds of thousands of people into refugees and drove Armenian manuscript production to its *nadir*.[4] This time was hardly propitious for the professionalization of Armenian scribes. Indeed, the destruction of scriptoria and the dispersal of Armenian communities naturally led to de-professionalization in manuscript production and the rise of non-professional scribes.[5] Manuscripts were central to a wide variety of the social practices that held communities together, from liturgies and schooling to pious donations and communal poetry recitals, and as communities of Armenian refugees grew in new geographies, manuscripts must have been in high demand and short supply. A great number of manuscripts preserved from this period were copied by non-professionals for their own use, like priests copying liturgical books for their churches or students copying their own study materials.[6] The crisis in manuscript production seems, however, to have produced another type of non-professional scribes, those whom one could call 'non-professional experts.' These scribes were non-professionals in the sense that they were not established as such by any kind of formal validation or institutional affiliation and did not display perceptible professional pride or group identity. And yet, for their communities, they were experts: they possessed highly sought-after skills that they traded for financial, social, and spiritual gain. The vast majority were lower-rank clergy, urban, and working on a commission as solo entrepreneurs. And though the mentions of such scribes are ubiquitous in the colophons of early modern Armenian manuscripts, it is not easy to learn more about them. What kinds of social

expansion and confessional consolidation. On Mehmed's patronage of Greek scribes, see Raby 1983.

3 On the definition of 'Armenian early modernity' through the experience of violence and mass displacement, see Aslanian 2023, 42–75.

4 Aslanian 2023, 5–14. Dickran Kouymjian has pioneered the quantitative method for tracing diachronic fluctuations in Armenian manuscript production, drawing on evidence from surviving manuscript collections. Kouymjian 1984, 2007, 2012. His works remain a primary reference point for scholars studying Armenian manuscript production during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

5 In his introduction to the collection of seventeenth-century colophons, Hakobyan cites the example of a non-professional scribe who decided to undertake the copying of a manuscript himself because he could not afford to commission someone else to do it. Hakobyan and Hovhannisyan 1974, xviii.

6 Durand-Guédy and Paul 2023. Although it does not cover the Armenian manuscript tradition, the volume's treatment of manuscripts produced for personal use and the challenges they pose to scholars is highly relevant for the Armenian case.

backgrounds did these people have? How did they enter the trade of manuscript production? Who were their patrons and how much could they earn with their trade? Most colophons preserve very limited and fragmentary information about the scribes, and most scribes' work survives in single or at most several manuscripts. Only a handful of seventeenth-century scribes have more than ten manuscripts attributed to them.[7] This article focuses on one of them – Step'anos of Tokat (T'okhat'ets'i)[8] – a priest, poet, and expert manuscript copyist active in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, whose life trajectory, much like those of his countless contemporaries, was defined by dispossession, forced migration, and revival in a refugee community. By tracing the contours of Step'anos's life and his modest manuscript-making enterprise, this article explores how Armenian manuscript production survived at the time of crisis and dispersal and persisted through micro-enterprises of mobile copyists when traditional centralized manuscript production at monastic scriptoria waned and became increasingly insufficient for the evolving needs of new migrant communities.

2. Piecing Together a Scribe's Biography

How does one reconstruct the biography of a scribe? Almost everything we know about Step'anos's life and his book production comes from the colophons and marginal notes in the manuscripts he copied, as well as from the poems he composed. In the Armenian manuscript tradition, it was customary for scribes not only to provide basic information about the circumstances in which the book was written/copied, but also to make notes of significant (and not-so-significant) events of one's life.[9] Known as *ḫishatakarans* in Armenian or literally 'places of memory,' the colophons of Armenian manuscripts are indeed sites of private memory and microhistory, in which one can literally 'hear' the voices of scribes.[10] When taken together, the colophons of the sixteen surviving manuscripts copied or repaired by Step'anos amount to a short life account narrated by the scribe himself.[11]

7 Hakobyan and Hovhannisyan 1974, xvii.

8 The Armenian version of the toponymic surname 'of Tokat' is usually rendered as T'okhat'ets'i in secondary literature. Step'anos himself used a variety of other spellings in his colophons: most commonly T'okhat'ts'i, but also T'oghat'ts'i and Tōkhat'ts'i. For the transliteration of Armenian proper names and terms, this article follows the Library of Congress transliteration system (2023 version), which is based on the phonetic values of Classical and East Armenian. For the sake of consistency, more contextually appropriate Western Armenian phonetization is not utilized.

9 Sanjian 1969, 1–41, Zakarian 2022, 241–58; Sirinian et al. 2016.

10 In marginal notes and colophons written by Step'anos one comes across occasional vocal interjections like 'oh' and 'ah' that introduce Step'anos's complaints about the difficulty of his work.

11 The manuscripts are now preserved in four different manuscript collections: the Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (henceforth Matenadaran), the Library of Armenian Mekhitarist Congregation in San Lazzaro, Venice (henceforth Venice), the

Step‘anos was born in Tokat in 1558 and lived in the neighbourhood of Mihmad Hacib, near the Church of the Forty Martyrs – one of the largest churches of Tokat, which hosted most funeral services for Tokat’s Armenians.[12] Step‘anos got married in 1577 and become a priest in 1580, taking over the leadership of the Church of the Forty Martyrs. In 1589, he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.[13] The first evidence of Step‘anos’s activities as a book-repairer and copyist dates to the 1580s or early 1590s.[14] Step‘anos was in Tokat in the mid-1590s when Anatolia was afflicted by an animal plague, and in 1602 when Tokat was captured by the Celalis. The attackers ravaged and burned the city, having massacred a part of its population and put to flight those who survived.[15] Step‘anos himself was captured and beaten and survived only by having been mistaken for dead. With a few companions from Tokat, he fled first to Constantinople and then to Caffa in Crimea – home to a large and prosperous Armenian community.[16] From 1603 until 1621 he lived in Caffa, where from 1605 until his departure he served as the priest of the church of St. Gregory the Illuminator (Surb Lusaworich‘).[17] In 1621 he returned to Tokat, back to his native neighbourhood and the Church of the Forty Martyrs.[18] The last evidence of his activities as a scribe comes from 1622. As noted above, sixteen manuscripts known to have been copied/repaired by Step‘anos have survived: a Bible (repaired), a historical compendium (repaired and completed), a book of hymns by Nersēs Shnorhali (repaired), three collections of poetry, a Psalter, a Bible commentary, two collections of Armenian church hymns (*sharakan*), three collections of hymns recited on specific church holidays (*gandzaran*), a synaxarion, and two miscellanies.[19]

Library of Armenian Mekhitarist Congregation in Vienna (henceforth Vienna), and the Manuscript Library of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem (henceforth Jerusalem).

12 This information about the Church of the Forty Martyrs is found in Step‘anos’s lament on the destruction of Tokat, published in Khach‘atryan 1969, 146–60.

13 Jerusalem MS 3360 p. 389 reproduced in Pogharean 1990, 222. The biography and literary oeuvre of Step‘anos are also briefly surveyed in Akinean 1921, 117–37.

14 See the discussion below of Step‘anos repairing a medieval Bible, Matenadaran MS 181.

15 The destruction of Tokat is described in detail in two versified laments, by Step‘anos and his contemporary (but not his brother) Ḥakob of Tokat; both laments were published in Khach‘atryan 1969. Step‘anos’s first-person account of the events is also recorded in the colophon of a collection of church hymns (*sharakan*) he copied in 1603; the manuscript itself appears to not have survived (or its location is unknown) but the colophon was published in the journal *Ḥoys* in 1870 and reproduced in Hakobyan and Hovhannisyan in 1974. For an overview of the impact of the Celali uprisings on the Armenian communities of Anatolia and the plight of the refugees, see Shapiro 2022.

16 On the history of Armenian settlement in Caffa, see K‘ushnerean 1895, Mik‘ayelyan 1964 and Rapti 2002.

17 Venice MS 789, 202b, reproduced in Chemchemean 1995, 685.

18 Jerusalem MS 3360, p. 154, reproduced in Pogharean 1990, 221.

19 Step‘anos probably produced more books than those that have survived. For instance, in the colophon dated 1610 of the manuscript 7377 in the collection of Matenadaran, Step‘anos includes a list of books he produced after his arrival in Caffa. The list includes a lectionary (*chashots‘*) that does not appear to have survived. Matenadaran MS 7377 463a,

3. Armenian Tokat: A Commercial Hub on the Margins of the Manuscript World

Sixteenth-century Tokat, where Step'anos was born and where he learned his trade, was one of the most important Armenian settlements in Anatolia.The emergence of Armenian communities in and around Tokat dates to the medieval period, probably as early as the eleventh century, but possibly even earlier, and by the time the Ottoman administration conducted its first fiscal survey of Tokat in 1455, Armenians formed almost half of the city's population.[20] It seems, however, that only from the second half of the fifteenth century, and especially in the sixteenth century, did Tokat become a recognizable and even prestigious locus of Armenian culture, as is reflected in the perceptible rise in the number of people who wished to flaunt their links to Tokat by adding 'T'okhat'ts'i' or 'Evdokats'i' to their names. Among prominent figures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who chose to identify as T'okhat'ts'is/Evdokats'is were Karapet I Evdokats'i, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia who served as the bishop of Tokat before assuming the position of the catholicos, Abgar Dpir T'okhat'ts'i, a pioneer of Armenian printing, as well as his son Sult'anshah T'okhat'ts'i, historian Andreas Evdokats'i, poets Khach'atur T'okhat'ts'i, Minas T'okhat'ts'i, T'adēos T'okhat'ts'i, Ḥakob T'okhat'ts'i, and Ghazar T'okhat'ts'i.[21]

What made Tokat emerge as a place of significance in the sixteenth century? The answer probably lies at the intersection of geography and economic history. In contrast to more traditional centres of Armenian learning situated further east in the Ottoman-Safavid frontier zone, thanks to its safer location in central Anatolia, Tokat was spared the ravages and displacements caused by inter-imperial warfare. Yet, unlike the new diaspora hubs in western Anatolia, Tokat was already a well-established centre of Armenian culture by the sixteenth century. As noted above, Armenians made up almost half of the city's population, spread across six neighborhoods (Pazarcuk, Taşmerdiven, Tahtakale, Kaya, Tarbiye, Mihmad Hacib); Tokat served as an episcopal see, and there were eight Armenian churches in the city itself alone, with serval monasteries and churches in the nearby villages.[22] Tokat was also a centre of textile manufacturing and a bustling commercial hub at the crossroads of trade routes going to Aleppo in the south and Tabriz in the east, the Black Sea ports in the north and Constantinople in the west, and this is probably what attracted earlier waves of Armenian settlers to Tokat in the

reproduced in Hakobyan and Hovhannisyan 1974, 415. In the list of "surviving" manuscripts I include also the manuscripts that appeared in publications in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but have perished since.

20 Ivanova 2021, 139–42.

21 Selected works and brief biographies of these Tokatī poets have been published in the anthology of Armenian poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sahakyan 1986. A recent article by Cesare Santus sheds new light on the biography and printing activities of Sult'anshah of Tokat. Santus 2022.

22 For identification of Armenian settlements and shrines around Tokat, see Ivanova 2021, 115–36.

first place.[23] A vivid image of sixteenth-century Tokat as an affluent city full of busy markets and textile shops, spacious inns, public baths, and magnificent stone houses of merchants is preserved in the laments composed after the city's devastation at the hands of the Celalis by Step'anos himself and his contemporary and fellow townsman, Ḥakob T'okhat'ts'i, who fled to Poland after the attack.[24]

By the sixteenth century Tokat was certainly an important Armenian settlement and a vibrant commercial hub, but was it a centre of Armenian manuscript production? The wealth generated by Tokat's Armenian merchants and manufacturers must have nurtured a favourable environment for learning and cultural production – something to which Step'anos alludes in his poem, speaking of the city's many learned men, both among clergy and laity.[25] However, much of the evidence that could have helped reconstruct this cultural environment was likely lost during the Celali attack, when, as Step'anos laments in the same poem, Tokat's churches and homes were set on fire, and books were burned or stolen.[26] Only twelve manuscripts produced in Tokat before the Celali attack are known.[27] The earliest of these dates to 1463 and the latest to 1602–1603. The latter, a *sharaknots'* (hymnal), was begun by Step'anos's brother, who died just before the attack, and completed by Step'anos when he was already a refugee in Constantinople. The earliest known Armenian manuscript from post-Celali Tokat dates to 1616. Thus, it seems that it took almost fifteen years for the Armenian community of Tokat to recover and for manuscript production to resume. In the decades that followed, however, manuscript production in Tokat began to flourish, as evidenced by the 47 manuscripts known to have been copied there between 1616 and 1700.

The colophons of the manuscripts produced in Tokat until the end of the seventeenth century provide no evidence of monastic scriptoria operating in or around Tokat, either before or after the Celali attack. In light of this, it is unsurprising that throughout his life, Step'anos never worked as part of a scriptorium, instead always working alone or occasionally with the assistance of an apprentice. One might hypothesize – though cautiously, given that surviving manuscripts may present a distorted picture – that Step'anos was born into an environment where monastic scriptoria either did not exist or played a minor role in manuscript production. In such a context, most manuscripts would have been produced by individual, mobile copyists who not only carried out the artisanal work of manuscript-making but also sought out and negotiated commissions.

23 Şimşirgil 1995; for a history of commerce and industry in Tokat in the seventeenth century and later, see Genç 1987.

24 Khach'atryan 1969, 145–60.

25 *ibid*.

26 Khach'atryan 1969, 145–60.

27 These and the following numbers are based on the list of Tokat manuscripts included by Arshak Alpōyachean in his *Patmut'iwn Ewdokioy hayots'*, as well as an additional list compiled by the author of this article, based on manuscript catalogues published since Alpōyachean's study appeared. Alpōyachean 1952, 1568–1622.

The situation in Tokat seems to be emblematic of a larger shift in the history of Armenian manuscript production – away from institutionalized production dominated by monastic scriptoria to decentralized production by individual urban entrepreneurs.[28] The chronology and the geographic contours of this shift are yet to be investigated.[29] Studies of Armenian scriptoria have almost exclusively focused on their manuscript output, often equating the word 'scriptorium' with the manuscripts produced at a given location, and paying little attention to the social and economic history of the scriptorium as an institution.[30] Rare studies that have been more attentive to social and economic aspects of manuscript production suggest that medieval scriptoria were dynamic institutions employing a range of artisans (parchment makers, scribes, illuminators, binders, silversmiths), possibly financially independent from the monastic complexes in which they were located and often reliant on the services of intermediaries for connecting to urban/secular patronage and negotiating manuscript commissions.[31] How strong was the monopoly of monastic scriptoria over manuscript production, and when did its grip begin to loosen, opening up possibilities for independent manuscript makers? Or was the division between institutional scriptoria and individual enterprises perhaps always a part of the landscape of Armenian manuscript production that only became more pronounced in the early modern period? Answering these questions will not be possible without conducting large-scale statistical research beyond the scope of this study. On can suggest, however, that it was probably in places like Tokat, on the margins of the traditional geography of Armenian manuscript production, that the proliferation of individual non-professional manuscript makers would start earlier and gain momentum more quickly.

28 A similar shift in the history of manuscript production in Europe has been investigated in social histories such as Rouse and Rouse 2000.

29 In his study of the Armenian migration to Western Anatolia, Henry Shapiro touches briefly upon the impact of the refugee crisis on the geography of Armenian manuscript production. Shapiro (2022), 129–30.

30 This approach is exemplified, for instance, by 'Armenian Scriptoria,' (https://www.armenianscriptoria.com) a digital initiative of the Matenadaran, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, dedicated to showcasing the history and geographic spread of Armenian scriptoria. Tokat does not appear on their map, but Amasya – a nearby town with a smaller Armenian community in the early modern period – does. The website claims that 'the scriptorium of Amasia has over 700 years of history, during which a rich manuscript heritage was created testifying to the existence of once flourishing Armenian scriptorium in the city.' There is no surviving evidence, however, of the existence of a scriptorium as such in Amasya, let alone one that could claim 700 years of institutional history. This confusion seems to stem, at least in part, from an imprecise translation: the Armenian version of the website uses the terms *grch'ut'yan kentron* and *grch'ōjakh*, which translate as 'writing centre' and 'writing hearth,' respectively, and allow for broader interpretations than the word 'scriptorium' used in the English and French versions.

31 Mat'evosyan and Baloyan 2015, 332; Mat'evosyan 1990.

4. A Scriptorium unto Himself: The Education of an Independent Scribe

Working without scriptoria, independent manuscript makers like Step‘anos had to have the competency to carry out a wide range of tasks otherwise tackled by a team of narrowly specialized professionals. Although Step‘anos called himself a ‘scribe’ (*grich‘*), we learn from his colophons that he indeed did much more than just writing: sizing paper with starch and burnishing it, preparing the inks and writing implements, folding quires, laying out the page, and binding. Such applied knowledge must have been passed mainly through master-apprentice chains. Step‘anos frequently mentioned apprentices in the colophons of his manuscripts, and perhaps not coincidentally the last manuscript known to have been produced by Step‘anos, dated 1622, was a gift to his last apprentice, Ḥovsēp‘. The small pocketbook (10x15.5cm) is a miscellany containing lyrical and religious poetry, texts pertaining to a student’s education, and, among other things, a collection of detailed scribal recipes – a perfect gift from an aging master to a novice scribe. This little textbook of scribal art includes instructions for mixing gold leaf with tree sap and fish glue to produce a gold ink for luxury manuscript illumination, instructions for starching and burnishing paper and improving softness with the use of sesame oil, instructions for fixing writing mistakes, as well as recipes for making black *murakkab* ink and a number of other inks and paints.[32] A scribe was also of course expected to master the art of calligraphy. The lament Step‘anos wrote on the death of his younger brother Ḥakob, whom Step‘anos trained to be a scribe, mentions that Ḥakob had mastered all of the major Armenian scripts: *bolorgir* – a miniscule font which dominated scribal hands from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, *notrgir* – or ‘notary script,’ miniscule cursive which would become widespread in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and *erkat‘agir* – the earliest known Armenian script, which consisted of all capitals and was used primarily in books transmitting Scriptural writings, as well as the rules of *khaz*, the Armenian system of neume musical notation.[33] In addition to this, a scribe would have to learn to employ an extensive system of ligatures and abbreviations. In the miscellany gifted to his student, Step‘anos provides a list of 300 common ligatures and abbreviations.[34]

Naturally, manuscripts produced by independent scribes like Step‘anos could not compare in terms of artistic quality to the masterpieces of famous scriptoria. However, this seems to have been hardly a concern for anyone: the ‘run-of-the-mill’ manuscripts that Step‘anos produced must have been good enough for his patrons. What seems to have mattered most for the success of one’s manuscript-making enterprise was

32 MS 1455 in the collection of the Manuscript Library of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem, 2b, 195a–197b, reproduced in Pogharean 1971. On ink and paint recipes preserved in Armenian manuscripts, see Harutyunyan 1941. For studies of the tradition of medieval Armenian manuals for scribes dating back to the twelfth century, see Khach‘eryan 1962 and Abrahamyan 1973.

33 Sahakyan and Mnats‘akanyan 1986, 502. For an introduction to Armenian palaeography, see Stone et al. 2002.

34 Jerusalem MS 1455, 123b–126b, reproduced in Pogharean 1971, 140.

not artistic quality of the manuscripts one produced, but one's social connectedness, which translated into the ability to gain access to source manuscripts and to secure commissions.

5. Between the Church and the Marketplace: The Social Background of a Successful Scribe

From his birth, Step'anos was well positioned to succeed as a manuscript maker. He hailed, it seems, from a wealthy Tokat family. His father, Sargis, was not a priest since his name is mentioned in the colophons without the title *tēr* or *erēts'*; Sargis did, however, bear the title of *mghdesi*, meaning that he had completed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and so did Step'anos's mother, Chanp'asha.[35] This alone, along with the fact that Step'anos could afford to go on pilgrimage as well himself as a young man, would have been a good indication of the family's affluence. It was probably his family's affluence that made it possible for him get the education necessary to start an ecclesiastical career and to become the priest of one of the city's largest and wealthiest churches at the age of only 22.

Thanks to a somewhat awkward rhetorical device employed by Step'anos in an elegy on the death of a young daughter of his acquaintance in Caffa, we learn more about the possible origins of the family's wealth.[36] Seeking to console the grieving parents and juxtaposing Tokat and Caffa as an allegory of the earthly life and life in heaven, Step'anos enumerated in the elegy his own 'earthly' losses. We learn that in Tokat Step'anos abandoned two well-built stone houses and two pavilions (*ch'artakh'*), mattresses, rugs, carpets, and fine metalware, but also a water spring, an orchard, a bakery, and a silk-weaving workshop. When he fled to Caffa, Step'anos adds, all he could bring with him was about three kilograms of woven silk (1000 dram), a modicum of portable wealth which he then 'multiplied and enjoyed.' This short but precious note reveals that Step'anos came from a family with significant possessions in Tokat and one which must have owed at least a part of its wealth to the silk trade and manufacturing.[37] The role of Armenians in trans-imperial trade of Iran's raw silk is well established, as is the role of silk trade money in sponsoring Armenians' cultural production, so it is not surprising to see evidence of the same pattern in a commercial hub like Tokat.[38] It is likely no coincidence that, in his lament on Tokat, Step'anos – speaking with the authority of someone intimately acquainted with the subject –enumerates a rich array of textiles

35 Hakobyan and Hovhannisyan 1974. The title *mghdesi* (also spelled *meghdesi*, *mehdesi*, *mahdesi* etc.) is an Armenian derivation from the Arabic *maqdisī,* designating a person who has traveled on pilgrimage to al-Quds, Jerusalem. A thorough historical contextualization of pilgrimage practices in the Ottoman Holy Land, both among Muslims and Christians, is provided in Shafir 2020. On Armenian pilgrimage to Jerusalem and more broadly on the history of Armenians' presence in and perceptions of Jerusalem, see Stone et al. 2002.

36 Jerusalem MS 3360, p. 489, reproduced in Pogharean 1990, 223.

37 On Iranian silk arriving in Tokat, see Faroqhi 1984, 143–4.

38 Matthee 1999; Baghdiantz McCabe 1994.

produced and traded in the city: *nakhshi apurshum*, *yekt'ay*, *valay*, *tipari*, *ch'if'ay*, *t'avt'ay*, *purunchuk*, *mughattam*.[39]

That Step'anos was connected both to the ecclesiastical establishment and the merchant networks of Tokat is also not surprising. The church and the marketplace, the clergy and the *khojas (khwājas)*, as merchants were known in Armenian, were closely related through kinship, friendship, and patronage. Both Step'anos and his brother Ḥakob became priests, and Step'anos married the daughter of a priest. From Step'anos's poems and colophons containing blessings of merchant friends and patrons we learn that having their sons ordained as priests must have been a common aspiration among the merchant class, as Step'anos repeatedly wishes for their sons to become priests.[40] It seems that at least on the level of stereotypes, merchants were expected to have the same kind of cultural cultivation as members of the clergy and that they wished to be remembered not only as rich and pious, but also as well-educated and erudite men.[41] In an elegy written for his brother Ḥakob who died prematurely in 1601, Step'anos paints an idealized portrait of a well-cultivated young priest, likening him to Aristotle and Plato, to Sahak the Parthian and Mesrop Mashtots', and Moses the Grammarian. In 1611, Step'anos 'recycled' this poem to compose another elegy, this time for his friend – whom he also calls 'brother' – merchant Akhijan who was likewise of Tokat origin and ended up in Caffa. Step'anos used the same text that he had once composed for his brother making a few adjustments: he changed the part on the circumstances of the death, omitted references to church service, teaching and scribal activities, and replaced the comparison to Sahak the Parthian, Mesrop Mashtots' and Moses the Grammarian by a comparison to great historians – Africanus, Eusebius, Michael the Syrian, Samuel of Ani, as well as the seventy translators of the Bible, perhaps alluding to Akhijan's knowledge of foreign languages.[42] In a similar manner, when Step'anos praised Khoja Zak'aria, the patron of a collection of hymns (*sharakan*) he produced in 1596 in Tokat, he exalted Zak'aria's skills in (ac)counting (*gitun hashwi ew hisapi*) – probably a nod to the latter's business acumen – and compared him to King Solomon, David the Invincible, Anania of Shirak and Andreas of Byzantium.[43]

Furthermore, it seems that not only members of the clergy and merchants were connected by strong ties of friendship and kinship, but that there were people who practiced both trades at once. The addressee of the elegy in which Step'anos listed his lost properties bore the title 'Khoja Tēr,' suggesting that he was possibly both an ordained priest and a merchant. And in yet another elegy, written for a Caffa priest's son who died young, Step'anos mentions that the young man trained as a deacon before he died of a disease contracted on a long-distance trading mission.[44] Although from the notes

39 Khach'atryan 1969, 158.
40 Venice MS 49, 393b, reproduced in Chemchemean 1993, 211–2.
41 The question of Armenian merchant literacy has been recently explored by Shapiro (2021) and Aslanian (2023).
42 Tatean 1922.
43 Venice MS 491, 393b, reproduced in Chemchemean 1993, 212.
44 Sahakyan and Mnats'akanyan 1986, 519–22.

left by Step‘anos it is not clear to what extent he personally was involved in the silk business after he became a priest and how he ‘multiplied’ the money he made from the silk he brought from Tokat, it seems very likely that it was his connections to the circles of merchant elites both in Tokat and in Crimea that made his migration experience so apparently seamless.

6. Manuscripts, Mobile Scribes, and Rebuilding Communities

Drawing on autobiographical notes of Step‘anos of Tokat, this article has painted a portrait of an early modern Armenian manuscript maker: an independent tradesman, urban, mobile and well-connected within ecclesiastical and merchant networks. What kinds of books did these artisans produce and for whom? What did it mean to be a ‘scribe’ at the time of mass displacement and rebuilding of Armenian communities? To answer these questions, in what follows the article will turn from the figure of Step‘anos himself to the books he produced and explore the roles of manuscripts as social artefacts. Scholars of manuscript cultures repeatedly stress that for communities that used and preserved them, manuscripts were very rarely simply containers of text and objects of individual quiet study – rather they were polysemous objects imbued with significant power to shape and maintain social relations through communal practices and affective force.[45] This was certainly true of Armenian manuscripts, which served as liturgical objects and cherished relics, as symbols of status and wealth and vessels for transmitting tradition. The surviving manuscripts created or repaired by Step‘anos are quite representative both of the kinds of manuscripts that circulated in Armenian communities of his time and the kinds of social relations and practices they reflect. To illustrate this vision of manuscripts as community-shaping artefacts, I focus on a selection of four manuscripts ascribed to Step‘anos: a Bible, a collection of glossaries, a synaxarion, and a poetic miscellany.

7. 1580s, Tokat, a Bible Repaired: Manuscripts as Relics

The earliest mention of Step‘anos in the colophons of surviving manuscripts records him not as a scribe, but rather as the repairer of a manuscript. A brief note was added by Step‘anos on a page of a thirteen-century Gospels manuscript, stating that he rebound the book and thanking his younger brother Ḥakob for help in sizing the paper with starch.[46] The colophon is not dated, but one can place it between 1580 and 1594.[47] The work was done by Step‘anos in Tokat, for the benefit of Step‘anos’s ‘own’ Church

45 Kohs and Kienitz 2022; Ronconi and Papaioannou 2021.

46 Matenadaran MS 181, 227a. The text of the colophon is reproduced in Eganyan, Zeyt‘unyan, and Ant‘abyan 1984, 742–6.

47 In the colophon, Step‘anos mentions himself as a priest but his brother still as a deacon. From other colophons we know that Step‘anos became a priest in 1580, and Ḥakob was already a priest and no longer a deacon by 1594.

of the Forty Martyrs. The manuscript was an illuminated Bible first copied in 1295, probably at the monastery of Mlēch in Cilicia.[48]

The manuscript must have had multiple meanings for the congregation of the church. Above all, it was a liturgical object. The Bible is known in Armenian as *ast-watsashunch'* or the 'breath of God,' and the physical body of the manuscript is central to the Armenian liturgy. To use the words of a historian of the Armenian Bible, 'the manuscript has traditionally been the Armenian religious object *par excellence*, comparable to the reliquary in the Western Catholicism and the icon in the Greek Orthodox Church.'[49] In Armenian churches the Gospels are placed on the altar next to the holy cross. A priest or a deacon announces the reading from the Gospels by saying, 'God is speaking.' Words from the Gospels chanted during the liturgy signify the presence of God among the faithful. As the book is carried in processions among the faithful, they kiss it and bow to it, remaining standing until the end of the chanting.[50] Just like the icons in the Orthodox tradition, the Gospels manuscripts would be ceremoniously carried to ward off foes, and manuscripts to which miracles were attributed would be given special names such as the 'Resurrector of the Dead' or 'Savior of All.'[51] To repair a Bible thus would mean to tend to the word of God, and the honour gained through the contact with the manuscript would imbue the artisanal work with profound symbolic meaning.

The repaired Bible must also have been venerated as a token of the past. Knowledge of history, as discussed above, was clearly considered a great virtue by people like Step'anos and his patrons. And while little is known about the antiquarian interests and habits of early modern Armenians, it is worth hypothesizing that the three-centuries-old manuscript was precious to the congregation not only because of its liturgical value, but also because of its age.[52] The attribution of the manuscript to Mlēch is not certain, but had it indeed been of Cilician provenance and recognized as such in Tokat, it would provide a physical embodiment of the cherished memory of the last Armenian kingdom. Possessing such a manuscript must have been a matter of great prestige for the church, which could proudly display it or use it in festive liturgies. It seems not coincidental that the rebound Cilician Bible was one of the few books that Step'anos brought with himself when he fled from Tokat to Crimea, where the manuscript would continue its liturgical career in service of Step'anos's newly established congregation.[53] Per-

48 The place of copying of the original manuscript is not mentioned in the colophon, but the cataloguers have attributed it – with a question mark – to Mlēch, a monastery in Cilicia in the vicinity of Tarsus. A short entry on Mlēch is included in Oskean's survey of the monasteries of Cilicia, Oskean 1957, 254–9.

49 Nersessian 2001, 49.

50 Hovhanessian 2022, 423.

51 Nersessian 2001, 49.

52 On antiquarianism among Muslims in the early modern Ottoman Empire, see Shafir 2022.

53 The Bible also includes a seventeenth-century repair colophon, written by Abraham, probably one of the apprentices of Step'anos. A poem written for him by Step'anos is preserved in the colophon of MS 7021 of the Matenadaran collection. Hakobyan and Hovhannisyan

haps also not coincidentally, another book that seems to have accompanied Stap‘anos on his flight to Crimea was also an old repaired manuscript: a fourteenth-century copy of the Chronicle by twelfth-century historian Michael the Syrian.[54]

One can furthermore hypothesize that books such as these would have been revered not only as antiquities, but also as survivor objects.[55] While the term itself is modern and is used here anachronistically, such a notion was probably not strange to early modern Armenians, who keenly used personifications when speaking about books' destinies. In colophons of Armenian manuscripts, one often comes across stories of survival: books having been abducted, enslaved, and then miraculously ransomed by munificent benefactors. At the time when Armenian communities were dispersed and thousands of people turned into destitute refugees, survivor manuscripts must have acquired new, more profound meanings for refugee communities made up of people who themselves were survivors of violence.

8. 1598, Almus, Glossary Miscellany: Manuscripts as Status Symbols

In 1598, Step‘anos copied an intriguing miscellany for a certain Pōghos, a priest of the Church of the Holy Mother of God (Surb Astwatsatsin) in the village of Mukhat‘ near Almus, about fifty kilometres east of Tokat.[56] This was a manuscript meant not for a congregation but for the private use by a student or perhaps a small group of students.

The miscellany consisted of several glossaries: 'Homeric Words,' 'Words of Hebrews,' 'Words of Galen the Physician,' 'Words of Philo [of Alexandria],' a list of grammar terms, 'Words of Persian Masters,' and a list of synonyms for novices writing poetry. Such glossaries date back to the eleventh century – though they probably came into use earlier – and have been documented widely in the Armenian manuscript tradition throughout the medieval and early modern periods.[57] The selection of glossaries included in Step‘anos's miscellany represents well the broad thematic reach of the glossary genre. The largest part of the miscellany (ca. sixty folios) is taken by what is called a 'Poetic Glossary,' also known as 'Homeric Words,' a composite list of words of different origins – rare words copied from older dictionaries, words from the Holy

1974, 174–5.

54 MS 1153 in the collection of the Library of Armenian Mekhitarist Congregation, San Lazzaro, Venice, Chemchemean 1996, 41–4. Chemchemean dated the original manuscript to the thirteenth century. A marginal note from 1595 records massive animal deaths in and around Tokat, suggesting that the manuscript was in Tokat at that time. In 1605, Step‘anos repaired and completed the text of the manuscript in Caffa.

55 The use of the term 'survivor object' is inspired by Watenpaugh 2019, 19–47.

56 MS 532 in the Matenadaran collection, Eganyan et al. 2004, 1163–8. The name of the village was changed to Çevreli in the twentieth century as part of the policy of erasure of non-Turkish toponyms in Anatolia. The toponym Muhat is still recorded on the War Office Map published in 1942 and based on older Turkish maps, sheet C11 Reşadiye. On the politics of renaming in twentieth-century Anatolia, see Öktem 2008 and Nişanyan 2011.

57 Amalyan 1966, 5–15.

Scriptures, loanwords from Greek, Assyrian, Hebrew, Persian, and other languages, as well as words from dialects – meant to help in the composition of metered verse.[58] 'Words of Hebrews' is a list of Hebrew proper names from the Torah, Nevi'im, and the New Testament translated into Armenian through Greek.[59] 'Words of Philo' is a glossary of words and phrases used in Armenian translations of the philosopher Philo of Alexandria, along with some Biblical terms and other terms not found in Philo's works but related to them thematically.[60] 'Words of Galen the Physician' is a list of mainly Greek, but also some Arabic pharmaceutical terms transcribed in Armenian letters and glossed in Armenian.[61] Next comes a glossary of grammatical terms – another learning tool, thought to have been compiled by the Armenian translators and authors of commentaries on Dionysius Thrax.[62] The 'Words of Persian Masters' is at first glance the most intriguing of all of the word lists in the miscellany. Here one finds a list of mainly Middle Persian terms pertaining to Zoroastrian religion transcribed in Armenian and glossed: *vzurk* (Middle Persian *wuzurg*), *den* (Middle Persian *dēn*), *kharaman* (Middle Persian *Ahriman*) etc..[63] The list of over thirty such terms was meant to help the readers of *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, an account of the fifth-century Armenian revolt against the Zoroastrian Sassanids' suppression of Christianity, written by Yeghishe, a scholar and soldier who participated in the events. Finally, the last glossary in the mis-

58 *ibid*., 82–8.

59 *ibid*., 106–16

60 *ibid*., 71–6. On Philo in Armenian scholarly tradition and education, see Mancini Lombardi and Pontani 2011 and Vardazaryan 2020. Most of Philo's terms in the glossary were taken from *Questions and Answers on Genesis* which was commonly used as a textbook in medieval Armenian schools. Amalyan 1966, 75. The earliest manuscript containing this glossary is dated to the thirteenth century; however the glossary itself was probably older, and possibly was a product of the early medieval 'Hellenizing school' responsible for the Armenian translations of and commentaries on Philo's works (Amalyan 1966, 75). On the history and translation activities of the 'Hellenizing school,' see Muradyan 2014.

61 Greppin 1985, 5–13. Most of the Greek terms, though not all, come from Galen's *On the Nature and Powers of Simple Medications*. Like the Philo glossary, the Galen glossary, though first mentioned in an early-fourteenth-century manuscript, is thought to have originated in the period of the 'Hellenizing school' when Armenian scholars could still have been reading Galen in the original Greek.

62 Amalyan 1966, 154–66.

63 *ibid*., 101–5. Gasparyan 1963 discusses the origin and context of all of the words contained in this glossary. The glossary is consistently present in the manuscript tradition starting from the late thirteenth and the history itself from the late twelfth century. The frequent appearance of both the glossary and the history in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts suggests that the history remained popular among readers in the early modern period and, as suggested by Amalyan, was probably used in educational settings. In just one manuscript catalogue briefly consulted for this study, one comes across ten sixteenth- and seventeenth-century copies of Yeghishe's history. Eganyan, Zeyt'unyan, and Ant'abyan 1965, 1489.

cellany, a 'list of synonyms for novice poets' was a practical tool that belonged to a long tradition documented in Armenian manuscripts from the twelfth century. [64]

The miscellany copied by Step'anos in Mukhat' represents an impressive compendium of rather arcane knowledge. Is it conceivable that its commissioner, Pōghos, was well-versed in all of these fields of scholarship and ordered the manuscript for his studies? Could Mukhat' indeed once have been a centre of learning where industrious students pored over Philo, Galen and Yeghishe? In the late sixteenth century, Mukhat' was a sizable village with a mixed population of Muslims and non-Muslims. The Ottoman cadastral survey of 1574 recorded 51 Muslim and 91 non-Muslim households in Mukhat' in addition to 59 Muslim and 39 non-Muslim bachelors.[65] A mixed majority-Christian population was already documented there a century earlier, according to the first Ottoman survey conducted in 1455, and onomastic evidence suggests that its *zimmi* inhabitants were Armenians.[66] By the nineteenth century, however, Muhat was a Muslim settlement, and no local memory of its Christian past was preserved among Christian inhabitants of nearby villages and of Tokat.[67] Apart from the glossary miscellany, no manuscripts copied in Mukhat' seem to have survived. It is possible that Armenian presence in Mukhat' ended abruptly due to Celali violence, but more research in Ottoman cadastral documents would be needed to establish this with certainty. It is not to be ruled out that in the late sixteenth century, rather obscure places like Mukhat' had access to some teachers and manuscripts which enabled, however imperfectly, the transmission of intellectual tradition and the continuation of educational practices rooted in the early Middle Ages.[68] If that was indeed the case, mobile scribes like Step'anos would play a fundamental role in sustaining this fragile system through replication and circulation of rare and precious books.

What if, however, Mukhat' had little more than a church and a congregation? What if Pōghos knew little of Philo and Galen beyond their names? One can think of the glossary manuscript not as a practical learning aid, but rather as a symbolic object, an

64 Such lists normally consisted of 135–140 groups of synonyms, each of which contained from three to fifty words, including both close synonyms and broadly connected words. Amalyan 1966, 123–32.

65 BOA TD 2, 609–11. Summary descriptions of settlements in the vicinity of Tokat based on the cadastral survey BOA TD 2 have been published in Ahmet Şimşirgil's doctoral dissertation. For Muhat, see Şimşirgil 1990, 195.

66 The survey entry lists as heads of households people named Sargis, Yadgar, Kirakos, Simeon, Baronşah, Begbaron and others. BOA TT2, 610–1.

67 Neither the village nor its church/monastery are mentioned in Arshak Alpōyachean's survey of Armenian settlement and monuments in the region of Tokat; Mukhat' is also not mentioned as a Christian/Armenian settlement in oral history testimonies of the nineteenth-century Orthodox (Greek) inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. Alpōyachean 1952, 481–588. Files 1023 and 1024 of the Oral Tradition Archive, Centre for Asia Minor Studies in Athens cover the area around Reşadiye.

68 Pōghos, as we learn from the colophon of the miscellany, was close to Ḥakob Zēyt'unts'i, who served as the bishop of Tokat in the late sixteenth century. Ḥakob Zēyt'unts'i was a *vardapet* and a student of the Catholicos of Sis, Azaria Jughayets'i.

embodiment of an aspiration, a status symbol. Following John Greppin, who pondered why 'Galen dictionaries were copied and recopied right up until the 18th century, at a time when there were certainly few Armenian physicians who would appreciate the Greek original, therefore needing the *Galen Dictionary*,' one wonders: why would someone commission a miscellany consisting of arcane glossaries in the absence of an educational system that could warrant their use?[69] Greppin hypothesized that Galen glossaries might have been simply copied as 'part of a package, and perhaps a tradition' and that 'certainly they would have meant little to whomever read them.'[70] Indeed, to whoever *read* them, these and other glossaries probably meant little, and yet they probably meant a great deal to whoever had them in his (or her?) possession. Even if Step'anos understood little of what he copied and Pōghos never in fact used the glossaries, the commission of this manuscript would still make sense. It would provide Pōghos with a tangible token of belonging to an intellectual tradition, of which he knew but to which he perhaps could not fully belong because of the limitations of his own education. Having the manuscript in his possession, he could perform as an expert and display it ostentatiously to establish authority in the eyes of others. The paradoxical proliferation of glossary miscellanies like the one copied by Step'anos in unlikely locations and at the time when Armenian institutions of learning were seemingly in decline merits a systematic study. Could it be emblematic of displaced scholars clinging to an intellectual and social tradition, asserting status through possession of symbolic objects that were portable and relatively easy to replicate?

9. 1610, Caffa, *ḫaysmawurk'*: Manuscript Donations of Notables

In addition to serving as embodiments of symbolic knowledge that could mark their owners as members of the learned class, books could fulfill another important social function for their owners: they could be given to churches as pious donations. Such donations had twofold significance. The names of donors were recorded in the book, and prayers for them – along with their family members – were requested from all those who would read, copy, or use the book in the centuries to come. The donation would also be a political gesture, ingratiating the donor with the members of the clergy and strengthening their position vis-à-vis rivals within the community. Rich urban notables in whose names the donations were usually made surface in Step'anos's notes under the designation *tolvat'awork'* – an Armenian derivation from the Persian *dowlat,* a term which connoted both affluence and high social status.[71] Donations made to the church

69 Greppin 1985, 12.

70 *ibid*.

71 Ghazaryan and Avetisyan 2009, 769. The word is of Arabic origin, but it must have come into Armenia via Persian, as many other Arabic loan words present in medieval Armenian, in particular in poetry, starting in the thirteenth century. The scholarship on the entanglements of the medieval Armenian literary tradition with Persian poetry and Persianate aesthetics is extensive. For an overview discussion, see Cowe 2015.

would become part of the church's endowment or inalienable property, which could not be lawfully sold or taken away in any other manner. The endowments of churches functioned in much the same way as their Islamic counterparts, and indeed, from the late medieval period, Armenians employed the technical term *vaghm*, derived from the Arabic *waqf*, in their inscriptions and documents and turned to the courts of their Muslim rulers to register endowment transactions, especially significant donations of land and other revenue-producing properties.[72] In the context of places like early modern Tokat and Caffa, as well as in much of the Ottoman Empire and especially the west, where Armenian refugee communities were established, Armenian notables derived their wealth from trade and sometimes manufacturing, but almost certainly not from land ownership.[73] Sponsoring church repairs or paying for the construction of new churches or monastic buildings, when not proscribed by Muslim rulers, would count as the most praiseworthy act of public charity, while donating liturgical objects and books would remain a more affordable option for those unable or unwilling to spend as much. And although buying a manuscript would not entail the same expense as building or repairing a church, it must not be underestimated how expensive manuscripts were in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.[74]

In the colophon of one of the manuscripts he copied in Caffa, Step'anos provides enough information to reconstruct the social context of one such donation with some detail. The book in question is a *ḥaysmawurk'* copied and collated by Step'anos in 1610. *Ḥaysmawurk's* were liturgical compilations of lives of saints venerated by the Armenian Church arranged in chronological order to be read on the saints' feast days throughout the year.[75] Such books, initially based on similar Greek liturgical collections but gradually much expanded, have been documented in the Armenian manuscript tradition since the tenth century and remained popular throughout the early modern period and into the age of printing.[76] *Ḥaysmawurk's* must have played a significant role in forming the communal memory and mental geography in which early modern Armenians placed themselves. The stories of saints recorded in *ḥaysmawurk's*, written in accessible language and replete with vivid imagery, were read out loud and heard on a daily basis by all those who attended church services. Indeed, in one of his poems written on the occasion of a merchant's death, Step'anos compared the adversities afflicting traveling merchants to the torments of *ḥaysmawurk's'* saints, attesting to the popular appeal

72 Other spelling variants, especially from the later period, reflect Persian phonetics: *vokhf/ohf* etc. Khach'ikyan 1960, 23–30; P'ap'azyan 1971.

73 This statement is limited by the lack of relevant information. To my knowledge, there are no published studies on Armenian land ownership and land donations in the early modern Ottoman Empire.

74 Aslanian 2023, 8–9.

75 The designation *haysmawurk'* derives from the phrase '*ḥaysm awur*' meaning 'on this day' reflecting the calendar-like organization of these compilations. On the genre of *haysmawurk'* and the development of its canon, see 'Introduction' in Mathews 2014, xi–xx, and Piñon 2024.

76 Mathews 2014, xi–xx; on *ḥaysmawurk's* in print see Aslanian 2023, 262; Piñon 2024.

of *ḥaysmawurk'* narratives. During Step'anos's stay in Caffa, several new *ḥaysmawurk's* were copied for the city's churches, probably in response to the quick growth of Caffa's Armenian population produced by the arrival of Anatolian refugees.[77]

The *ḥaysmawurk'* produced by Step'anos in Caffa in 1610 was the largest book he produced during his lifetime, both in terms of its size – the book measured 43.5 cm by 28.8 cm, whereas most books copied by Step'anos were small pocketbooks measuring roughly 15 by 10 cm – and the number of folios: 650.[78] Step'anos experienced significant difficulties while copying the manuscript, having worked with three different source manuscripts, the first of which was taken away from him by the owner soon after Step'anos began his work and the second of which had incorrect order of saints' lives, causing confusion. The *ḥaysmawurk'* also contains a section completed by a different scribe – another Anatolian refugee who arrived in Crimea from a village around Sivas some ten years before Step'anos and worked in difficult conditions of an overcrowded and cold room.[79] Having bought this three-month section of an unfinished manuscript cheaply, Step'anos was able to speed up his own work. In the middle of the process, however, the commission fell through because the church that commissioned Step'anos received another complete *ḥaysmawurk'* manuscript as a donation from a certain notable.[80] At that point, Step'anos must have decided to give the manuscript as a donation in his own name to the church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, where he served as a priest. That too did not go as planned: when the manuscript was completed, Step'anos was approached by his wife, who suggested that he should find another patron for the manuscript to make a profit and allow her and their son to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. An argument ensued, but eventually Step'anos conceded. The manuscript was sold for fifty gold coins (*karmir*), thirty of which Step'anos gave his wife and son for their pilgrimage.[81] This provides a useful reference point for estimating a manuscript's relative worth: the price of it was almost twice the value of two persons' pilgrimage expenses, which in the seventeenth century must have been a complicated and expensive undertaking.[82]

The purchase was made by a merchant, Khoja Abraham of Gölcük (*Kawlchukets'i*), and his wife Sara Tolvat'khat'un, who were among the notables (*tolvat'awork'*) of Caffa. Judging from the name *Kawlchukets'i,* one can suppose that Abraham's family originated from Anatolia, probably from Gölcük, an important Armenian settlement in the region of Elazığ, but possibly even from around Tokat or Sivas, which also had

77 Jerusalem MS 3360, p. 555, reproduced in Pogharean 1990, 223.

78 Matenadaran MS 7377, Eganyan, Zeyt'unyan, and Ant'abyan 1970, 519. The claim of this being the 'largest manuscript' produced by Step'anos must be qualified by noting that not all manuscripts produced by Step'anos have survived.

79 Matenadaran MS 7377, 462a–b.

80 Matenadaran MS 7377, 463a; the text of the colophon containing this information is reproduced in Hakobyan and Hovhannisyan 1974, 415.

81 *ibid.*

82 Shafir 2020; Ervine 2002.

several settlements called Gölcük in their vicinities.[83] Khoja Abraham purchased the manuscript to give it as a pious donation to Step'anos's Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, and the colophon includes an endowment stipulation: that the book is given to the church as an 'indelible memorial [gift]' and that nobody has the authority to remove it from there. The purchase 'bought' a request for God's mercy and prayers for Abraham and his large extended family: his grandfather and father, his brother (who died at sea, probably on a trading mission), his son and the latter's children, his mother, his wife, in-laws, and all of their kinsmen. The last-minute change of patronage is reflected in the appearance of the manuscript, as Step'anos had to go through all the folios and fit in dedications to the new patrons in every place where names of previous patrons were mentioned.

10. 1605, Caffa, *tagharan*: Poetry Miscellanies as Portables Salons

Among the books copied by Step'anos was yet a different category of books, which were likewise central to social life and politics of early modern Armenian communities, but for a different reason. These books were *tagharans*, or compilations of mainly lyrical but also historical, panegyrical, and satirical poetry. Containing exemplars of poetic eloquence and wit, *tagharans* were meant to be read out loud in private gatherings and formed the cornerstone of an informal institution whose role in cultural transmission and the politics of Armenian communities was perhaps second only to the church: the *majlis*. *Majlises* were gentlemanly salons or informal gatherings of men (though women were probably also sometimes included) who met to discuss communal matters, read poetry, share food and drink, and have fun. Armenians used the loan word *majlis* in a variety of spelling variations from the thirteenth century and possibly earlier; the word was used in the seventeenth century and, in fact, still remained in use with that meaning in the early twentieth century.[84] A vivid testimony to the tradition of salons in Ottoman Tokat is found in a late seventeenth-century source, the diary of Minas of Amid, who served as the bishop of Tokat in the 1680s.[85] Brief entries in the diary reveal that several times per week, and sometimes every day of the week, the bishop attended gatherings at the homes of various notable residents of Tokat, which involved dining, coffee, wine, and a lot of 'fun,' sometimes lasting deep into the night. Direct descriptions of salon sociability like those found in Minas of Amid's diary are rare, and so far, the best evidence of the popularity of salons among early modern Armenians

83 Hakobyan, Melik'-Bakhshyan, and Barseghyan 1986, 863.

84 Ghazaryan and Avetisyan 2009, 514; Sargsyan 2013, 498.

85 The diary of Minas of Amid has not been published. The manuscript is preserved in the manuscript collection of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, MS 1316. Folios 45a–184b cover the time of his stay in Tokat. Pogharean 1969, 564–5.

is provided by *tagharan* miscellanies themselves, which are ubiquitous in Armenian manuscript collections.[86]

In 1604–1605, during his early years in Caffa, Step‘anos completed a *tagharan* that had been compiled in two stages: one forty years and the other fifteen years before he contributed to it.[87] Over four decades, the book was gradually expanded as it passed between different scribes and patrons. The first section of the manuscript (folios 1–192) was completed by a scribe named Nikoghos at the church of St. Sargis in Caffa in 1563. The scribe was probably still a novice since the first person mentioned in his colophon was his teacher, priest Mik‘ayēl. The book did not at that point have a patron, and perhaps was later sold by Nikoghos. In 1589 the book was expanded with roughly another fifty folios added by a different scribe, one deacon Ḥovhannēs on the commission of a merchant, Khoja Abraham: potentially, but not certainly, the same Khoja Abraham who was already mentioned above. By 1605 the book passed to Step‘anos, who added nearly a hundred folios sponsored by another Abraham bearing the title *khalifa*. Interpreting the title *khalifa* poses some difficulties, since it could denote a member of high clergy,[88] a teacher, or, as in Ottoman *kalfa*, a master artisan ranking below *usta*.[89]

The contents of the manuscript well represent the broad repertoire of themes and forms of poetic expression expected to be familiar to culturally cultivated Armenians of Step‘anos’s time. The manuscript contains 92 entries, including a large segment of poems on historical themes from the story of the Christianization of Armenia to the popular tale of Barlaam and Josaphat to the Crusades and the Fall of Constantinople, lyrical and religious poems, panegyrics and elegies, verses by prominent poets like Ḥovhannēs Erznkats‘i (d. 1293), Khach‘atur Kech‘aṛets‘i (d. 1331), Ḥovhannēs T‘lkurants‘i (dates of life unknown, fourteenth-fifteenth century), Aṛak‘el Baghishets‘i (d. 1454), Grigor Aght‘amarts‘i (d. ca. 1550) and by Step‘anos himself, a number of anonymous (and probably contemporary?) poems in vernacular style, and some religious poetry in Armeno-Turkish.[90] The contents of the compilation completed by Step‘anos were very similar to those of most other *tagharans* produced in his time, though no two *tagharans* were the same: each preserved a unique amalgam of literary canon and living

86 Over 200 *tagharans* are preserved in the collection of Matendaran alone and many more in other Armenian manuscript collections. Most of the surviving copies date to the early modern period. Hovsep‘yan 2013, 115.

87 Venice MS 789, Chemchemean 1995, 667–86. Step‘anos had to fill in pages in a book that was already bound, which was, according to his remarks, quite a strenuous task. Venice MS 789, 260b, reproduced in Chemchemean 1995, 685.

88 The title *khalifa* was etymologically related to the Arabic *khalīfah* used for political/religious successors of the Prophet Muhammad. This is how Armenian *catholicoi* or patriarchs were referred to in Safavid sources, and subsequently it became the title borne by high clergy. Kostikyan 2019.

89 Malkhaseants‘ 1944, 228–9. To my knowledge, there is not a systematic study of the titles used by Armenians in the early modern Ottoman world. It is very tempting to think of an artisan as the patron of the poetry collection, but the evidence is not sufficient.

90 An incomplete selection representing Step‘anos’s poetic oeuvre has been published in Sahakyan 1986.

tradition. Their voluminous contents should not belie the fact that most *tagharans* were small pocketbooks usually measuring no more than 10x15 cm.[91] The high price of paper was probably a factor in the prevalence of small-sized books, but perhaps a more important reason was that these books were made to be mobile, just like their owners.

Until very recently, *tagharans* have been studied mainly from the perspective of literary history and philology.[92] The perspective of social and cultural history, which would investigate these books' creators, patrons and consumers within a broader context of the early modern salons and consider poetry as a community-forming instrument, has only recently begun to be explored.[93] Helen Pfeifer, the author of a recent monograph on the early modern Ottoman salons, posited that 'the sociability that salons enabled was a key ingredient of the glue that held the Ottoman Empire together.'[94] Pfeifer underlined three key roles of the salons: defining the boundaries of the Ottoman elite, facilitating the circulation of culture across the empire, and providing space for political networking and informal governance.[95] It can be argued that for much the same reasons, the Armenian poetry reading gatherings and the sociability that they provided the 'glue' that held together the cultural and social domain that early modern Armenians like Step'anos inhabited. Thousands of Armenians put to flight by the violence of Ottoman-Safavid wars and Celali attacks could not bring their homes with them; the notables could not bring their salons, but they could transport their *tagharans*. The poetry contained in them would act as a community-forming instrument in two ways: first, through communality of familiar words, phrases, images, and intonations, and second, through social acts associated with poetry: not just communal readings, but also the collecting, exchanging, compiling and curating that must have been central to the creation of *tagharans*. Poet scribes like Step'anos must have been pivotal to the social life revolving around *tagharans,* since they acted both as mobile depositories of highly-prized poetic repertoires, both written and unwritten, canonical and newfangled, and as artisans who could transform fragile oral tradition into tangible and portable objects.[96] One also wonders whether the familiarity with poetic genres and images and

91 This observation is based on a brief non-systematic study of entries on *tagharan* miscellanies in the manuscript catalogues of the Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, the world's largest collection of *tagharans*.

92 Hovsep'yan 2013.

93 Michael Pifer's recent pioneering study of Hakob Meghapart's printed *tagharan* has laid a foundation for novel social history-oriented approaches to *tagharans* and to Armenian language and poetry more broadly. Pifer 2023. For an inspiring analysis of Ottoman *divan* poetry as a socially and politically embedded practice, see Aguirre-Mandujano 2020. Shapiro's discussion of the Turkophone poetry of an Armenian from the Ottoman Empire in the context of Safavid social gatherings in Tabriz, though in a somewhat later context, presents another inspiring example of poetry analysed through the prism of social and cultural history (Shapiro 2021).

94 Pfeifer 2022, 23.

95 *ibid*.

96 When speaking of a 'portable majlis' I use a term coined by Aslıhan Gürbüzel, though she employs it in a different context. Gürbüzel 2021.

the ability to converse in certain linguistic registers likewise enforced the boundaries of Armenian elites. Although in his colophons penned in Caffa Step'anos styled himself as a 'stranger (*gharip)*' and 'migrant (*pandukht*)' – itself a poetic trope well familiar to his circles – from the moment he arrived in Caffa, or elsewhere across the Armenian world, he would be quite at home in an imagined community, glued together and reified by poetry and poetry readings.[97] When Celalis ravaged Tokat, Step'anos lost his home and his pavilions where he probably used to host his *majlises,* but as long as he carried poetry with him – whether in his memory or in books – he was never truly homeless. In Armenian, just like in Arabic, the same word, *tun,* denotes both a house and a couplet of poetry. In the context of the history of displacement of Armenian communities of Anatolia, this double meaning of *tun* acquired a profound symbolic significance.

11. Conclusion

This brief examination of the life and work of an Ottoman Armenian scribe within the larger context of the transformation of Armenian manuscript production in the early modern period was inspired by the invitation of the editors of this special issue to think about expertise in terms of two contrasting and sometimes complementary modes: expertise as professionalisation and expertise as social recognition.[98] The juxtaposition of the two modes of expertise proved to be a useful model for understanding the transformations that shaped Armenian manuscript production in the early modern period. As traditional centres of manuscript production in the Ottoman-Safavid borderlands grew weaker and as Armenian communities became more dispersed geographically, an increasingly larger share of manuscript production passed into the hands of non-professionals – people who were not working at scriptoria, whose craftsmanship was mostly of lower quality and for whom the copying of manuscripts was probably one of several trades they practiced.

The portrait of one such non-professional scribe, Step'anos of Tokat, reveals an image quite different from stereotypical visions of a scribe – whether a devout, self-effacing copyist working tirelessly as part of a monastic scriptorium team,[99] or – and this is perhaps more common in the field of Ottoman history – an unassuming clerk serving state dignitaries.[100] Step'anos was a prolific scribe, and yet it seems that being

97 On the trope of *gharip* in medieval Armenian literature and its larger context of entangled Anatolian cultures, see Pifer 2014.

98 See the Introduction to this special issue, 8.

99 The image of a medieval scriptorium has been popularized by Umberto Eco in his novel *The Name of the Rose* and the subsequent TV series adaptation, an image which has been both acclaimed and challenged by historians of medieval European scriptoria. Murray 2022. In Armenia, there exists a tradition of literature romanticizing book-copyists and exalting them as proto-national heroes. See Erkanyan 2018 for a discussion of the novels of Derenik Demirchyan and Gevorg Devrikyan who have pioneered this tradition.

100 On the evolution of the social role and politics of Ottoman scribes in the early modern period, see Atiyas Tusalp 2013.

a scribe was not his primary and only engagement. Both in Tokat and in Caffa, he was above all a priest, attending to the needs of his congregation and the broader Armenian communities of his cities, and in Tokat he probably also had some involvement with his family's bakery and silk-weaving workshop. Given his privileged background, it seems that he took up manuscript copying as an additional trade partly because of the shortage of manuscripts and the practical needs of his church, and partly because it was so spiritually and socially rewarding. When Step'anos arrived as a dispossessed refugee in Crimea, the aspect of financial gain probably also acquired significant heft for him.

If expertise is to be defined through social recognition, Step'anos was certainly an expert. His expertise was vouched for by the demand for his labour, the remuneration he received, and the social dividends he won through establishing personal relations with some of the wealthiest and most powerful members of the community. It seems that despite the questionable quality of their work and their inefficiency, the non-professional scribes had a better chance at becoming 'experts' and gaining social recognition than their professional counterparts who worked in scriptoria and were not the sole and direct beneficiaries of the financial and social rewards earned by their labour.

The case of Step'anos also demonstrates that he clearly did not owe his authority to belonging to an institution, or to having trained with a famous master. On the contrary, his success lay in his ability to work independently. He lost everything, was nearly killed, had to move over a thousand kilometres away from his native town, and yet in less than a year, he was re-established and seemingly continued his business as usual. In times of dramatic upheavals and displacement, being mobile and not dependent on an institution must have been an important asset indeed. His mobility and independence would not be so much of a strength, however, had Step'anos not been simultaneously well integrated in trans-regional ecclesiastical and merchant networks and well versed in the rules of class sociability – a skill which must have become indispensable when he had to re-establish his social world in Crimea.

The fact that the social history of Armenian manuscript production has been little studied makes it difficult to put the case of non-professional scribes like Step'anos into a broader perspective. Having taken solely a qualitative approach, this article has touched upon many questions that it could not attempt to answer. When did the shift to more 'secular,' urban, and entrepreneurial book production begin? Was there a clear geographic dimension to this shift, with commercial centres like Tokat and Caffa leading the way? Or was the division between institutional scriptoria and individual enterprises always present to some degree? Did the ratios of scribes working at scriptoria vs. scribes working independently change dramatically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Tackling these questions would require building an infrastructure for systematic quantitative research, which could help trace thousands of individuals involved in Armenian manuscript production and trade over centuries and across a vast geography.[101] If pursued, such research would make an important contribution to

101 A good example of relevant initiatives that could serve as models for such an undertaking is 'the Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams' project led by researchers at Ghent University since 2010: https://www.projectdbbe.ugent.be/.

Armenian cultural history, the cultural history of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires more broadly, and the global history of manuscript production, while advancing innovative approaches in the digital humanities.[102]

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Map Great Britain. War Office. General Staff. Geographical Section. 1942. '1:200,000 Turkey.'

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