

THE ARMENIAN FOUR GOSPELS OF 966 - ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE FOREIGN LANGUAGE MANUSCRIPTS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ST. ST CYRIL AND METHODIUS NATIONAL LIBRARY

Keywords: SS Cyril and Methodius National Library, Bulgarian Historical Archives, Armenian church in Sofia, Armenian manuscript tradition, Four Gospels, foreign language manuscripts, inscriptions, man of letters, parchment, palimpsest.

In the collection “Greek and other foreign language manuscripts” of the National Library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” is preserved one of the most valuable manuscripts related to the ecclesiastical and cultural history of Armenia and Bulgaria - an Armenian Four Gospels created in 966.



Fig. 1 Armenian Four Gospels and its decoration

Already in 1879, the Sofia Public Library was established, which was assigned the duty to collect, preserve and protect the manuscript, old printed and archival heritage that had survived until the Liberation of Bulgaria. This was also proclaimed in a special law, which determined the obligation of the Sofia Library, housed at the time in the same place as the Public Archaeological Museum. Already in the first years after the establishment of the library, the Ministry of Public Education sent its experts and voluntary collaborators to search for valuable books, manuscripts, archives, which then entered the library's collections. In this way, the state program for collecting, preserving, protecting and popularizing the valuable manuscripts, printed books, periodicals, archival documents used over the centuries on the Bulgarian lands is implemented.

During the time of the Minister of Public Education, Georgi Zhivkov, and the Director of the Sofia Public Library, Vasil Stoyanov, in 1892. actions were taken to save manuscripts, Greek and Slavic old printed

books from one of the great spiritual centers - the Bachkovo Monastery "Assumption of the Virgin Mary". In November 1892. the Ministry of Public Education sends to the Sofia Public Library 26 copies of old handwritten and printed books, mainly in Greek, forwarded by the Plovdiv District Governor. There under No. 25 is written "an ecclesiastical Armenian book written on parchment". This list also includes a Georgian copy from the 18th century. of the typicon of the Bachkovo monastery, composed by Grigoriy Bakuriani, who was an Armenian by origin, but a Chalcedonian belonging to the Georgian creed.

The Assumption Monastery is located near the village of Bachkovo, near the town of Stanimaka (now Asenovgrad) and is one of the three stauropygial monasteries in Bulgaria. The spiritual center was founded in 1083. by the brothers Grigoriy and Abazii Bakuriani (Pakuriani). Gregory Bakuriani was the great domestic of the western troops of the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus. The monastery statute (typicon), drawn up by the order of the founder, has been preserved in copies in Greek and Georgian. According to him, the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, including the Metropolitan of Philipopol (Plovdiv), have no rights to interfere in the affairs of the monastery, and access to it is closed to Greek monks, and the founders prescribed that the monastery should be an independent religious institution, providing it with economic and business base for independent functioning. Bachkovo developed initially as a center of Georgian monasticism. In the 11th-12th century, the monastery was an Iberian religious and cultural center, and among the monks, apart from Georgians, there were also Armenians. Towards the end of the 11th century a literary school was formed there, known in the sources as Petritsonska - a name originating from the original name of the neighboring fortress Petrich. Through the translation activity of the scribes working in the monastery, the connections between medieval Georgia and Byzantium were established.

Regardless of the rules of the monastery, since the end of the XVI century the Bachkovo Monastery is under the rule of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Greek clergy defined the status of this stauropygial monastery under Greek influence. In 1801 however, hieromonk Makarius was confirmed as abbot not by the Patriarch of Constantinople (in Istanbul), but by the Metropolitan of Plovdiv - "according to the long-established custom".

The presence of Bulgarian monks is evidenced by consecration and donation inscriptions from their relatives and fellow citizens, written on icons, on old printed Greek and Slavic books, as well as on several Slavic manuscripts. However, by 1869 a school was opened in the monastery where children from the surrounding villages learn Greek. Only at the end of 1894. at the request of the monks, the monastery passed under the authority of the Bulgarian Exarchate. It was decided to send monks from the Rila Monastery as the largest spiritual and ecclesiastical center for the creation of the Bulgarian monastic brotherhood in Bachkovo.

There are some assumptions as to the way and cause of the Armenian Four Gospel of 966. to be brought to Bulgaria and to Bachkovo. It may have been brought by a cleric or a secular person, probably an Armenian Chalcedonite in the second half of the 14th century, before the complete conquest of the Bulgarian lands by the Ottomans, and the manuscript was miraculously preserved during the decline of the Bachkovo Monastery in the 15th-16th centuries. Another possibility is not ruled out - that it was brought here in the 17th-18th century, when Armenian immigrant groups settled in Bulgaria, fleeing from Armenia due to the cruel living conditions after the long-term wars between Turkey and Persia (Iran), as well as the disorders, made of some of the Kurdish tribes. The third possibility is that the manuscript was a gift from an Armenian-Chalcedonite, but belonging to the Greek church when the monastery passed into Greek hands during the Ottoman rule. Probably due to the popularity of the center, the Armenian Four Gospels ended up in the Bachkovo Monastery, and it is not excluded that there was also a liturgical use there.

The manuscript contains I+267 sheets of parchment with sheet dimensions of 285 x 235 mm. The script is large correct uncial of the man of letters Presbyter Kyrakos, and the text is in two columns of 17 lines per page. At the bottom of the pages, letter designations are preserved, which are in connection with the text of the gospels. The spelling is the usual one for the Old Armenian language - grabar. In the middle of the 14th century (1346) Deacon Hovanes supplemented the manuscript with the Gospel of John and renewed the book damaged by long use.

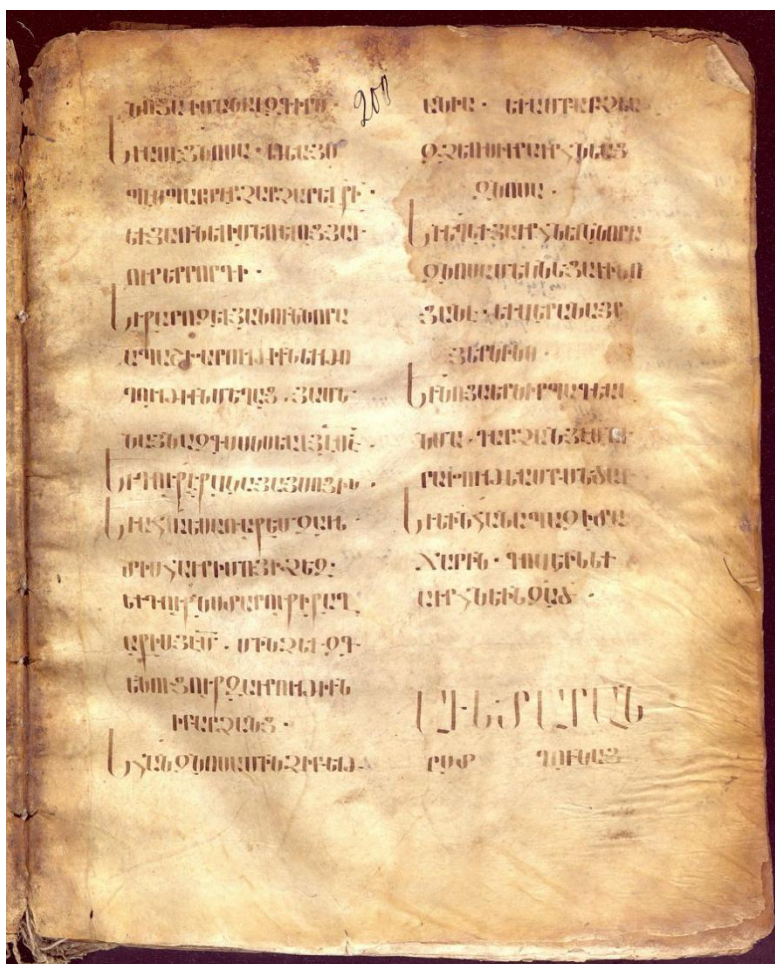


Fig. 2 The beginning of the inscription of Kyrakos, the man of letters from 966.

Leaves 264-266 are palimpsests, the lower text probably from an older Armenian tetraevangelion.

There is no decoration in the original (earlier) part. In the sheets with tables of the Eusebius columns added later at the beginning of the manuscript, there are band-shaped headpieces with vegetal ornamentation, consisting of an Acanthus leaf, a flower, a rhombus and other geometric figures, in pale colors - rose-red, black and dark violet, probably by the hand of Deacon Hovanes. The binding of the manuscript is authentic from the time of its renewal in the mid-14th century - made of wooden covers wrapped in ornamented leather and is probably the work of Deacon Hovanes [Гилигян, 1992, 411-412].

The note of the scribe Kyrakos is on l. 200 r- 200v:

“.... Thanks to the almighty Lord God, the holy gospel was completed in the year 415 of the Armenian calendar [415+551=966]. ...Remember his doer Kyriakos...”.

In 1346 was renewed and supplemented with the text of the Gospel by St. Ap. John. This fact is evidenced by the note of the Armenian copyist Hovanes Vartapet, preserved on l. 264r -265v:

“... at the behest of the honorable man of God Khosrow Shah renewed [the gospel] and may God restore his youth. Amen.

During difficult and bitter times [this renewal] took place, when the great capital Theotopolis (now Erzerum, in the past in Armenian - Karin) became a desert due to the extermination of people and livestock by Agarian and Tatar tribes. The same thing happened in the eastern lands, in the kingdom of the Georgians...

.....

So, the last renewal of the holy gospel took place in the year 795 according to the Armenian calendar [795+551=1346], in the Kakhtik region, in the impregnable fortress of Baberd (Armenian Babert, Turkish Bayburt - a fortress that arose in the 5th century when as a province was within the borders of Great Armenia) by the hand of the sinful Deacon Hovanes, painter and binder, in the temple of the Holy Mother of God and the Holy Archangels, during the guardian of the Armenians Father Mukhitar and during the high priesthood over this region Father Sahak and Father Stepanos, during the reign of the Armenian king Kostand and the rule of Hrat in Byzantium...” [Гилигян, 1992, 412-413].

This manuscript was first described by Prof. Benyo Tsonev [Цонев, 1910, 517], one of Bulgaria's great experts in the field of the history of the Bulgarian language, Slavic manuscripts and Bulgarian old printed books, author of the first and second volumes of the Inventory of Slavic Manuscripts of the Sofia National Library. In the first volume, under No. 580 (163), the scholar describes the monument as "four gospels in Armenian from the 13th century." A passage from the note of Deacon Hovanes (John) was also published, and the text was translated by the priest of the Sofia Armenian Church, Mesrob Der Mesrobyan.

In the Bulgarian Historical Archive, one of the specialized departments of the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius", an important archival fund No. 35²⁰ [Обзор, 1966, 29-47] is kept, which includes documents related to the history of the National Library from its founding to the present day, as well as documentation related to the organization, completion, acquisition and inventory of the library book property - printed books, Slavic, Greek and other foreign language manuscripts, Arabic handwritten and printed books, Ottoman archives, archives of actors of the Bulgarian revival, of writers and public figures who lived and worked for newly liberated Bulgaria and other valuable receipts in the funds of the National library. There I came across two documents related to the promotion of the Armenian Four Gospels as one of the earliest dated and valuable manuscripts from the collections of the National Library in Sofia.

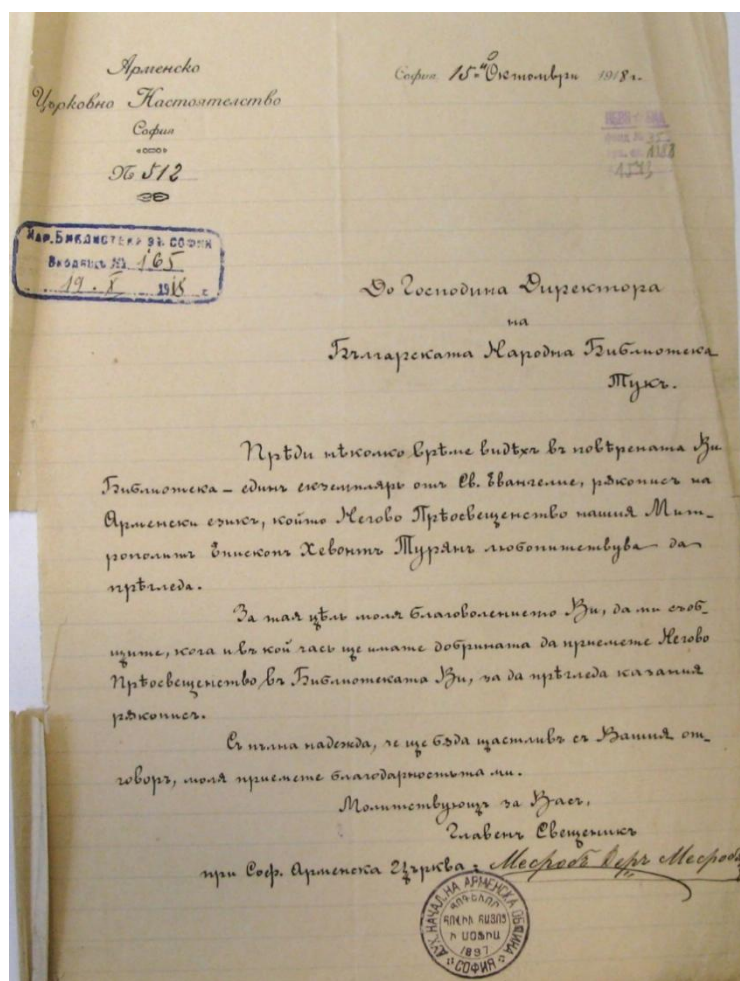


Fig. 3 The letter from the head priest of the Sofia Armenian Church Mesrob Der Mesrobyan (Bulgarian Historical Archives, fund 35, arch. unit 1188, fol.1543).

The first document is dated October 19, 1918. – a letter from the head priest of the Sofia Armenian Church Mesrob Der Mesrobyan to the director of the library with a request to allow the Armenian Metropolitan Bishop Hevont Turyan to familiarize himself with the original of the Four Gospels, which are valuable to

²⁰ Documents from 1879-1944 are included here.

Armenians. On the same day, the affirmative answer of the then deputy director of the Library, Stiliyan Chilingirov, was sent to the Armenian Church Board.

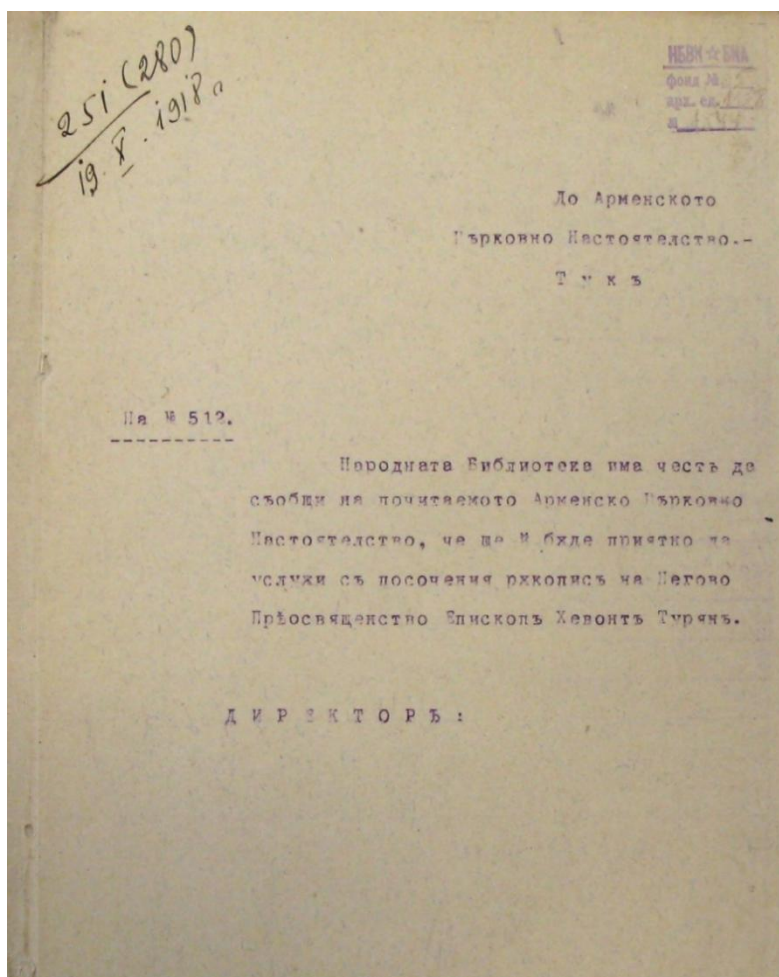


Fig. 4 The answer of the Deputy Director of the Library Stiliyan Chilingirov, to the Armenian Church Board. (Bulgarian Historical Archives, fund 35, arch. unit 1188, fol.1544).

More than half a century later, Dr. Manyo Stoyanov published a catalog of Greek and other foreign language manuscripts, which included the description of the Armenian Four Gospels, also dated here from the 13th century [Стоянов, 1973, 187]. Only in 1992 an article was published by the researcher of Armenian history in Bulgaria, Agop Giligyan [Гилигян, 1992, 411-420] in which information about the manuscript and facts from the Armenian general and cultural history in the Middle Ages and the era of the 17-18 centuries are revealed in detail.

The interest in this valuable manuscript from the collection of the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" does not stop and therefore it has been digitized in its entirety and is included in the Digital Library (<https://www.nationallibrary.bg/www/дигитална-библиотека/славянски-и-други-ръкописи/>) on the site of the National Library with the shelf mark НБКМ Arm.1, which enables researchers to have remote access to study various aspects of the early literary history of Armenia.

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է Սուրբեր Կյուրեղի և Մեթոդիոսի անվան Բուլղարիայի ազգային գրադարանում պահվող ձեռագրերի հավաքածուի ամենավաղ թվագրված գրքի՝ 966 թվականի հայկական քառավետարանների համառոտ նկարագրությունը: Ձեռագիրը հանդիսանում է արժեքավոր ժառանգություն բուլղարական և հայկական մշակութային պատմության համար:

Համառոտ անդրադարձ է կատարվում Ասենովգրադի շրջանի Բաշկովո գյուղի մոտ գտնվող Վերափոխման վանքի պատմությունը, որտեղ հայկական քառավետարանը բերվել է հավանաբար 14-րդ դարի երկրորդ կեսին, կամ, ըստ մեկ այլ վարկածի, 17-18 դդ.: Ներկայացված են նաև Բուլղարիայի հայ համայնքի շահերը վկայող փաստաթղթեր, որոնք հայտնաբերվել են Բուլղարիայի ազգային գրադարանի հավաքածուի ձեռագրերի ցուցակագրումից հետո:

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