THE RELIEF ON THE DOOR OF THE MSHO ARAKELOTS MONASTERY (1134) AS A SOURCE FOR STUDYING ARMS AND ARMOUR OF MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN WARRIORS

Introduction

The Bagratid Kingdom of Armenia (884/886–1045/1064) was the first independent Armenian state in the Middle Ages. Having been under the control of the Persians and Umayyad Arabs for centuries, the Royal House of Bagratid was finally able to secure their independence from Arabs at the end of the 9th century. Located at the frontier, between Eastern Roman Empire and the Muslim world, Armenia faced encroachment from both sides, but, on the other hand, adopted the best military solutions from both sides, creating its own military culture.

After the fall of the Bagratid Armenia in the middle of the 11th c., the Armenian territory was under the rule of the Seljuk Turks. One of the Turks’ principalities was founded in Western Armenia after the Battle of Manzikert (1071) and called Shah-Armenia (1100–1207), whose capital city was Ahlat, located on the north-western

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Valery Yotov from Varna Museum (Bulgaria) for his ideas and materials, which enabled me to prepare the present paper. Furthermore, I would like to thank Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for a travel grant (2018), which allowed me to find necessary books in the libraries of Armenia and helped me to finish this article.


3 Note that due to the inaccuracy of the source base, modern historians (Arsen Shahinian and Cyril Toumanoff) believe that the coronation of the first Bagratid king Ashot I could have taken place between 884 and 886. – A. ШАГИНЯН, Расформирование арабской провинции Арминия во второй половине IX века, ВСПУИ 2, 2009, p. 217–218; C. Toumanoff, Caucasia and Byzantium, T. 27, 1971, p. 123–128.

4 Some of the Armenian medieval chroniclers identified the fall of the Bagratid kingdom not with the Byzantine conquest of the Ani in 1045, but with Seljuks conquest in 1064. – Р. МАТЕВОСЯН, Падение Багратидского царства по данным армянских историков XI–XIII в., I, Стр. 10, 1988, p. 64–72.

shore of Lake Van. This Armeno-Turk kingdom promoted religion tolerance\(^6\) so the Armenians were able to develop their own culture. An example of this is the door from the Msho Arakelots monastery (11\(^{th}\) c.), which was installed in 1134, as evidenced by the inscription it bears – Ի թ Հ ՇՁԳ ԵՍ ՏՐ Թորոս և Գրիգոր և Ղուկաս ԳԾ \(^7\). The door of the church was made from walnut wood and ornamented by carvings of different geometrical shapes, images of animals and warriors. The height of the door is 2.02 m and its width is 1.42 m.

Unfortunately, during the Armenian Genocide in 1915, the monastery was partially destroyed by Turkish soldiers and subsequently abandoned. But the door was preserved and transferred by German archaeologists to Bitlis, with a view to later moving it to Berlin\(^8\). However, in 1916, when Russian troops took control of the region, Armenian historian and archaeologist Smbat Ter-Avetisian found the door in Bitlis and brought it to the Museum of the Armenian Ethnographic Association in Tbilisi. But in the winter of 1921/1922, the door was moved to the newly founded History Museum of Armenia\(^9\) in Yerevan, which rapidly became one of the symbols of Armenian Genocide\(^10\).

The aim of the article is to analyse – in the context of Church and art history – the relief in the upper part of the door, where four horsemen and one infantryman with different types of arms and armours are depicted (pic. 1)\(^11\), and to identify various types of weapons and armours thanks to comparisons with the Armenian, Eastern Roman Empire and Muslim sources.

**Analysis of historiography and sources**

The history of the Msho Arakelots door was researched by many historians\(^12\), but none of them paid attention to the weapons and armours of the warriors. Moreover, the military history of the Medieval Armenia was not the object of any historical

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\(^7\) Ս. Դադոյան, Չ. Դադոյան, ‘Հայոց կռիվների պատմություն’, Երևան 1979, p. 207.


research for a long time. A few years ago, Armenian historian Karine Voskanyan defended a dissertation on the military organization of the Bagratid era. Voskanyan partially analysed arms and armours of the Bagratid Armenia, but in her thesis she did not use almost any graphic sources, which leaves many unresolved questions about the form and functions of the weapons of that time.

On the other hand, Byzantine and Muslim arms and armours were researched by many historians (David Nicolle, John Haldon, Timothy Dawson, Ian Heath, Shihab Al-Sarraf, Piotr Grotowski, Mamuka Tsurtsumia, Ada Hoffmeyer,

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20 P. Grotowski, Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints. Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261), Leiden 2010 [= MMe, 87].
Taxiarchis Kolias, Georgios Theotokis, Raffaele D’Amato, Valery Yotov and others). Therefore, the best way to study the military equipment represented on the door is to compare it with the Eastern Roman and Muslim sources because Armenia was for a long time under the influence of these two Empires and accepted many military innovations from both sides.

Unfortunately, the situation with Armenian archaeological and written sources is challenging. Most archaeological artefacts of arms and armours from around the Bagratid era were poorly researched and dated too broadly (9th–13th c.). In the Soviet era, only several historians and archaeologists (Valentina Abrahamyan, Babken Arakelyan, T. Kolias, Byzantinische Waffen. Ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den Anfängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung, Wien 1988 [= BV, 17]. G. Theotokis, Military Technology: Production and Use of Weapons, [in:] A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204, ed. Y. Stouraitis, Boston 2018, p. 440–473.


Р. Ускераеу, Άρματα του Αυτοκράτορος της Βυζαντίας τοῦ εἰκοσατέρτου αἰώνος, Θεσσαλονίκη 1975; idem, Άρματα του Αυτοκράτορος της Βυζαντίας τοῦ εἰκοσατέρτου αἰώνος, Θεσσαλονίκη 1976, p. 273–277.
Aram Kalantaryan and others published pictures of separate archaeological findings which were located in the History Museum of Armenia. Unfortunately, almost all of these pictures presented the artefacts redrawn in two dimensions only, and were not accompanied by photographs or information about the artefacts’ measurements, materials, etc. On the other hand, Armenian written sources are less useful for the study of the material military culture because they give only general information about weapons and armour without a detailed description. Moreover, many unresolved terminological problems concerning the names of the weapons and armours have remained.

However, Armenian figurative sources were researched much better. For example, Armenian miniatures (10th–14th c.) have been thoroughly analysed by some art historians (Tetiana Izmailova, Dickrana Kouymjian, Sirarpie Der Nersessian and others). What is more, D. Kouymjian published dozens of photos of Armenian miniatures (10th–14th c.) on the website of the University of Freiberg and the University of Hamburg. Also, no less important are the reliefs on the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Aghtamar Island (915–921) (pic. 5), where some Biblical characters with arms and armours are depicted. Unfortunately,
very few historians paid special attention to the arms and armours presented on miniatures or reliefs. For the first time in Armenian historiography, weapons will not be the subject but the object of research, where – in the context of Church and art history – the issues of armament of medieval Armenian warriors will be analysed in comparison with Eastern Roman and Muslim samples, in an attempt to make this study more relevant.

Analysis of relief

The relief in the upper part of the door from the Msho Arakelots monastery can be provisionally divided into three parts: in the left part, there are two heavily armoured horsemen (azats), one of whom is trying to escape, while the other pierces him through with a sword. In the middle of the relief, there is an infantryman with a trumpet and on the right side two light horsemen are presented, one of whom is piercing through a big snake or a dragon with his spear. The height of these figures is approximately 17 cm.

Armenian historian Kamsar Avetisian thought that this relief depicts non-religious, historical scenes, but this is not completely true. Let us pay attention to the inscription on the right side of the relief, which K. Avetisian reads as [ABGORG]. He thinks that this word was randomly added in later centuries (or that the author made some mistake?) However, if the word is given an alternative reading of [SB G[E]ORG], the outcome is “St. George”, which can be accurate because under this description there is a horseman spearing a dragon.


37 A notable exception is a recent study by English scholars I. Heath and D. Nicolle, who based their visual reconstructions of the medieval Armenian warriors on the Aghtamar reliefs and other sources. See for instance: I. Heath, Armies of the Dark…, figs. 91–92, p. 100–101; D. Nicolle, Armies of the Caliphates…, plate A2, p. 45.

38 Note that some types of weapons or armours depicted are presented schematically. Therefore, only some suggestions as to how to interpret them will be offered.

39 Based on the two inscriptions on the relief (which will be discussed below) and the visual position of the figures, it could be assumed that at least two separate “scenes” were presented on the relief (in the right and left corners). Unfortunately, it cannot be stated with certainty whether the middle part of the relief (“infantryman with a trumpet”) is related to the “scenes” on the left or the right. Therefore, a third part has been posited by this study.

40 Armenian azats were equivalent to heavy armoured Byzantine cataphracts.

41 Մ. ՅԱՐՍԵՅՅԱՆ, Քուրհանավազգական, p. 207.

42 Ibidem, p. 207–208.
The Relief on the Door of the Msho Arakelots Monastery (1134)

(it is a traditional religious iconography in the Late Roman and Orthodox art)\(^{43}\). Note, for instance, similar depictions of St. George killing the dragon with his spear present in Georgian (pic. 6)\(^{44}\) and Armenian art (pic. 7)\(^{45}\).

In the left corner of the relief, there is a partial inscription but it is poorly preserved. Four letters are visible: $ST\breve{D}T\breve{S}$ [TRDT], which could mean $ST\breve{D}T[U]S$ ([TRD[A]T – Tirdates – an Armenian name)\(^{46}\). Arakel Patrick suggests that this scene was an episode from the Armenian national epic *Daredevils of Sassoun* (8\(^{th}\)–13\(^{th}\) c.), in which David, riding on a horse, is pursuing Msra-Melik, but no definitive answer is provided. Patrick also believes that these inscriptions were added later\(^{47}\).

**Left part of the relief (pic. 2)**

**Sleeve cross-guard**

Here, two men on horseback are visible, one of whom is trying to escape while the other pierces him through with a sword\(^{48}\). The sword depicted consists of the edge, grip, pommels, cross-guard and a wide part above the cross-guard, which is called sleeve (pic. 2:1). Bulgarian historian V. Yotov aptly remarked that the typology of swords is often a typology of the sword-guards\(^{49}\). Indeed, the relief includes a representation of one type of sleeve cross-guard present in Armenian art, which is not unlike the type visible on the interior fresco *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Aghtamar Church\(^{50}\).

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\(^{45}\) *Gospel*, Mekhitarian Library, Ms. 697, f. 4 v.


\(^{48}\) S. Der Nersessian thought that this is spear but it is not true – S. Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art", p. 205. However, at that time, cavalrymen preferred a cut attack rather than a thrust, as it is presented on the relief, because of the difficulty of dealing a thrusting punch while on horseback. Perhaps this is why S. Der Nersessian suggested that the relief depicts a spear.

\(^{49}\) V. Йотов, A New Byzantine..., p. 115.

\(^{50}\) I have this information courtesy of Dr D’Amato, who, having obtained the authorization from the Turkish government, will soon publish the results of this discovery.
The swords with the sleeve cross-guards are one of the “Byzantine” types of swords which were identified and researched by G. Baranov and V. Yotov. These types of cross-guards were popular in the 9th–11th c. in Eastern Europe, Balkan Peninsula and the Middle East.

Sleeve cross-guards were created in order to protect the joint between the edge and the hilt from breaking. According to another theory, the appearance of the sleeve cross-guards was connected with the way of gripping (the so-called “Italian grip”), whereby the index finger was placed on a cross-guard, which allowed more efficient fencing.

Sleeve cross-guards are divided into several types, two of which are relevant for this study, being the most similar to the one presented on the relief of the door of the Msho Arakelots monastery: they are “Galovo” and “Pliska-48”.

Specimens of “Galovo” and “Pliska-48” cross-guards were found in Bulgaria, Serbia, Ukraine, Syria, Arabian Peninsula, Egypt etc. (pic. 8–10). Moreover, two cross-guards from Syria were displayed in public only once, at an auction, where for some reason they were dated to the 12th–13th c. Their subsequent fortunes are unknown. – Г. БАРАНОВ, Византийские..., p. 255–256.

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Unfortunately, it is unclear which of these two types best match the sword depicted on the relief, because they are both similar and the sword on the relief is presented too schematically. I would like to express my gratitude to V. Yotov for useful advice.


Most of these sleeve cross-guards were described by the aforementioned historians. Therefore, only the photos of two most recent archaeological finds, which at the moment are little-known in historiography, will be presented here.
they are visible on Eastern Roman miniatures such as the one from the Theodore Gospel (1066) (pic. 11)\textsuperscript{61} and the Menologion of Basil II (end of the 10\textsuperscript{th} c.) (pic. 12, 31)\textsuperscript{62}.

It is interesting to note that the physical characteristics of the sword with a sleeve cross-guard are known thanks to archaeological discoveries. As regards the swords on pic. 9–10, the overall length of the sword is 83.4 cm (71.2 cm being the size of the blade only). The blade is 6.4 cm wide and 0.51–0.57 cm thick. The hilt is 12.3 cm long, and the cross-guard is 12.9 cm wide and 1.59 cm thick. The sleeve is 3.76 cm wide. The pommel is 3.99 cm wide, 6.06 cm long and 1.39 cm thick. The weight of the sword is approx. 1 kg\textsuperscript{63}.

Thanks to this depiction of a sleeve cross-guard in the Armenian art, it can be assumed that such types of cross-guards existed in Armenia even before (in 10\textsuperscript{th}–11\textsuperscript{th} c., based on the dating of the abovementioned archaeological finds from Eastern Europe and on the Aghtamar Church images). Furthermore, such sleeve cross-guards were likely employed in the subsequent periods (in the 12\textsuperscript{th} c.) and at other locations, including the territory of the South Caucasus region.

**Mace with spherical head**

The first warrior, who is trying to escape, is holding in his right hand a mace with a spherical head (pic. 2:2)\textsuperscript{64}. Maces were used as a heavy weapon by cavalrymen and infantrymen in order to break helmets or heavy armour\textsuperscript{65}. The mace consisted of two parts: the mace head (weighing approx. 200–300 g), and a wooden or iron stick (50–60 cm long)\textsuperscript{66}.

R. D’Amato believes that these maces were originally imported from India or Persia or had Eastern origins\textsuperscript{67}, but soon became popular in Byzantium. Arkadiusz Michalak also wrote that spherical maces (type V according to his typologization) were popular in Eastern Europe as well (Kievan Rus’ and the Baltic region)\textsuperscript{68}.

\textsuperscript{61} *Theodore Gospel*, British Library, Ms. 19352, f. 191.

\textsuperscript{62} *Menologion of Basil II*, Vatican Library, Ms. Vat. gr. 1613, f. 135. Note that under the typology of Byzantine swords suggested by T. Dawson (which was based on the miniatures of Basil’s Menologion), the sleeve cross-guard was presented under number 2. – T. Dawson, *Byzantine Cavalryman*…, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{63} I. Norman, *A Likely…* Other uncovered swords and sleeve cross-guards have similar characteristics. The only difference is that some sleeve cross-guards were broader (13–15 cm). – Г. Баранов, *Византийские…*, p. 255–256, 274–280.

\textsuperscript{64} The round head maces could be plain, toothed, spiked or flanged. Presented on the relief is the plain (spherical) type of round head maces. Also, polygonal head maces existed in Armenia.

\textsuperscript{65} D. Nicolle, *The Military…*, p. 68.


\textsuperscript{67} R. D’Amato, *Σιδηροράβδιον…*, p. 32–33.

\textsuperscript{68} A. Michalak, *Wpływy wschodnie czy południowe? Z badań nad pochodzeniem buław średniowiecznych na ziemiach polskich*, ВНУЛП 571, 2006, p. 57–59, 64. Note that in the most famous
The same types of maces were found in Bulgaria and dated to 10th–11th c. (pic. 13, 14a, 14b); on miniatures in the Homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (879–883) (pic. 15), Oppianus Cynegetica (11th c.) (pic. 16) and even on Armenian miniatures (10th–11th c.) (pic. 17.1). Moreover, many depictions of round headed maces dated to 7th–11th c. were found in the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Syria). As can be seen, the plain (spherical) type of round head maces was simple in production and popular over a large area in different times, so nothing particular can be said about the origin of spherical maces and no connections established between specimens from Eastern Europe and Byzantium-Armenia, although the decoration of the Bulgarian maces is clearly of Eastern Roman origins. A relatively simple shape of spherical maces can suggest that they were produced in local workshops (by casting or forging), in different cultural regions, independently of each other. For example, there are similar maces among archaeological finds from the times of Ancient Armenia (pic. 18).

**Armour**

Both warriors in the left corner are armoured (pic. 2). Visible on the bodies of the warriors is what seems to be a chain mail, which looks like a sweeter with long sleeves. Also, on the chest and lower torso, small iron or bronze rectangular plates...
laced into horizontal rows are presented. This may be a lamellar armour, which only covered the torso and was worn on the chain mail. It was one of the best types of armour in Byzantium and Arab Caliphate at that time.

In a number of cases, it is rather difficult to tell the difference between lamellar and scale armour, especially when analysing graphic sources. Lamellar armour consists of rectangular plates, linked with one another first in horizontal rows, then vertically by means of thongs passed through holes. No less popular was the scale armour, which was different in that its plates had mainly an oval form and were attached to each other and to the backing of the cloth or leather, in overlapping rows (like fish scale). The weight of the scale and lamellar armour was almost the same. A complete set of armour 1–1.5 mm thick weighs 14–16 kg. It is 1.5–2 times as heavy as mail. Of course, the above-mentioned types of armours were very expensive, so only honoured warriors (called azats) could afford them. The disadvantage of the scale armour was that the plates were raised while the rider was on a horse, which made him vulnerable to spear attacks, especially from below.

From the end of the 10th c., craftsmen started using rivets (instead of laces) for fastening plates, which greatly simplified their production and improved the impact resistance of the lamellae. This fact was mentioned by Armenian historian Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi (10th c.). Subsequently, in 921, king of Egrisi [Abkhazia] gave [king of Armenia] Ashot II [914–928/929] much assistance, and gathered numerous forces with winged steeds, iron-studded armour [in Russian translation: в скрепленных железными гвоздями нагрудниках], and fearful helmets, iron-studded breastplates and strong shields. Most often, lamellar plates on the sleeves were much larger than in the region of the torso, because the warrior had to bend and move constantly, and the small size of the plates would not hinder

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80 Gospel № 141/102, Mekhitarists Library (Venice), fol. 77 r; Theodore Gospel, Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate, Ms. 1796, fol. 88.
82 Some military units were dressed in the clothes of the same colour (e.g. in 988, a unit of Kars king Abas was dressed in “red uniforms”). – Եվսոբուայի պատմություն, trans. Н. Эмина, Москва 2011, p. 182.
84 Եվսոբուայի պատմություն, trans. Н. Эмина, Москва 2011, p. 182.
85 Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc’i’s, History of Armenia, K. Maksoudian, Atlanta 1987.
his movement (e.g. the Hovhannis Protospatharius presents the Gospel to the Virgin miniature in the Adrianople Gospel (1007) (pic. 19)\textsuperscript{87}.

Additionally, visible on the riders’ arms are some rings, possibly a mail armour, which consisted of small metal rings, linked together in a pattern, to form a mesh. In my opinion, the warriors wore a mail armour under the lamellar armour. A combination of the mail and lamellar armour can be found on Goliath’s relief from Aghtamar Island (pic. 5)\textsuperscript{88}.

As can be seen, the infantryman and the two horsemen on the right side of the relief are represented without any armour, only in tunics/garments. I believe that the majority of warriors (ordinary soldiers) and militia used popular and cheap leather armour which had less protective properties than metal.

Obviously, only noblemen (azats) had good armours (lamellar, scale or mail), but even these were not an ideal protection against arrows, because the latter could hit the little junctions between the plates. For example, when the Seljuk Turks first came to Armenia in 1016, they fought a battle against Vaspurakan king Senekerim Artsruni (1003–1021). Matthew of Edessa (12\textsuperscript{th} c.) described this battle in the following way\textsuperscript{89}: the foreigners [Seljuks] struck and wounded with their arrows many Armenian troops. Now when Shapuh [Armenian commander] saw this, he said to David [son of Senekerim]: “King, turn back from the enemy, because most of our troops have been wounded by arrows. Let us go and prepare [armoured] garments to resist the arrows which we see them fighting with”\textsuperscript{90}.

\textsuperscript{87} Gospel of Adrianopolis, Mekhitarists Library, Ms. 887, fol. 8.

\textsuperscript{88} It needs to be noticed that Goliath’s lamellar is presented schematically, because the row of lamellar plates and strips of leather (with holes) are presented separately while they should be overlapping. Probably the master would have liked to depict a banded lamellar but did it schematically. In a banded lamellar, the band is clearly visible because the edge of the leather covering the front of the upper plate forms the upper line of the band, and the piece of leather lining in the lower plate creates the lower line of the band. This leather band was placed between the rows, separating the plates and neutralizing the scissors effect caused by their movement, which may cut the thongs – M. Tsurtsuma, The Evolution ..., p. 71–74; T. Dawson, Banded ..., p. 16. However, R. D’Amato believes that the lamellae in this armour do not overlap but are fixed to the leather side by side. He thinks that the colour is now missing and it cannot be determined if the laces were represented on the surface. The lines are those of the leather band placed between the rows, separating the plates and neutralizing the scissors effect caused by their movement, which may cut the thongs. Goliath’s lamellar armour does not have a narrow band of leather placed between the plates but a wide leather band fully lining the plates. Such armour is more flexible horizontally and is easy to make, and it is simplified further by riveting the plates on to the leather (instead of fixing them by means of thongs only). In fact, the four holes in each petal correspond to riveting holes. Idea courtesy of R. D’Amato.

\textsuperscript{89} Իսկ այլազգիքն նետաձգութեամբ զբազումս ի զօրացն Հայոց վիրաւորէին խոցելով։ Եւ տեսեալ զայն ամենայն Շապուհ՝ ասէր ցԴաւիթ։ “Դարձիր, թագաւոր, յերեսաց թշնամեացս վասն զի ի նետիցս վիրաւորեալ եղեն մեծ մասն զօրացս գնասցուք եւ ընդդէմ այսմ զինուցս զոր տեսանեմք առ այլազգիսդ, ա՛յլ զգեստ պատրաստեսցուք ընդդէմ նետիցդ。” – ՄԱՏԹԷՈՍ %20ՈՒՌՀԱՅԵՑԻ/library/684 [30 IV 2019].

\textsuperscript{90} Armenia and the Crusades, Ten to Twelfth Centuries. The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa, 1.1, № 44–45, trans. A. Dostourian, Lanham 1993. For more information about Matthew of Edessa’s
Stirrups

Each equestrian is represented with stirrups (pic. 2:3), which significantly enhance the rider’s stability, facilitating a more effective delivery of missiles (arrows or javelins) from the horseback, lance charges and close-quarter combat with swords, maces, axes, etc.91 Stirrups were known in the Eastern Roman Empire92 and Sassanid Iran93 from 6th–7th c., and in Armenia as well94.

The stirrups visible on the relief have a triangular form with oval bows. Similar stirrups are presented in the Homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (pic. 22, 33–34)95, in Georgian art96 and on St. Sargis’s relief from The Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Aghtamar Island (pic. 23), which, however, are more rounded and more similar to the actual archaeological specimens of the 10th–11th century from Hungary (see below).

V. Yotov created a typology of Hungarian stirrups (10th–11th c.), which were also popular in the Roman Empire and, probably, in Armenia too97. Some of them look similar to the stirrups presented on the door of the Msho Arakelots church but, unfortunately, no definitive statements can be made because of the schematic representation of the stirrups on the relief and lack of photographic publications of stirrups found in the territory of Armenia.

Middle part of the relief

Trumpet

In the middle of the relief, there is an infantryman without any weapons and armours but with a military trumpet (pic. 3). It is the first depiction of the trumpet in Armenian art, representing an Eastern Roman tuba, which can be compared with the pictures from Madrid Skylitzes (12th c.) (pic. 24)98 and the Homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus (879–883) (pic. 25)99.

Moreover, the trumpet was often mentioned in Armenian written sources. For example, Tovma Artsruni (10th c.), describing the battle between Abbasid army
under the command of general Bugha against Vaspurakan’s troops ruled by ishkhan (king) Ashot Artsruni (approx. 852), wrote: Banners and pennants fluttered, trumpets sounded, lys rang, drums buzzed… Everybody shouted, preparing themselves for battle. Just like flags or banners, it was one of the most necessary items in any contemporary army, which helped a general organize the troops and give different orders during the battle.

Right side of the relief

Round shield

In the right corner of the relief, two cavalrymen without any armour, instead only dressed in (padded?) tunics (having the shape of a cavalry Iranian coat), are represented. The only defensive weapon which can be seen on this relief is a round shield with a floral ornament (pic. 4).

There are many depictions of round shields with different ornaments in Armenian art. Some of them symbolized the warrior’s affiliation to some regiment or clan, or were just an ornament, as in the case of the miniatures from the Taron Gospel (11th c.) (pic. 26), the Vehapar Gospel (10th–11th c.) (pic. 27), the Kars Gospel (1029–1064) (pic. 28) or Goliath’s relief from Aghtamar Island (pic. 5). Also, on the miniature from the Tsgrut Gospel (974) (pic. 29), some rings are visible on one of the shields, which could mean that the shield was metal-coated.

On the basis of the depictions in figurative sources, it can be assumed that simple (plain) round shields were the most popular in Armenia. However, convex round shields were also widespread, but they were rarely represented on figurative sources because of the complex nature of painting volumetric figures. For

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100 Despite the fact that it is a description of the Abbasid army, the same armament could have existed in Armenia (also because the Armenian chronicler knows these armaments and armour).
103 For more information on the subject, see A. Büchler, Horns and Trumpets in Byzantium: Images and Texts, HBSJ 12, 1, 2002, p. 23–59.
104 Taron Gospel, Matenadaran Library, Ms. 6201, f. 8.
105 Vehapar Gospel, Matenadaran Library, Ms. 10780, f. 71.
106 Kars Gospel, Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate, Ms. 2556, fol. 127. – S. Der Nersessian, L’Évangile…, p. 92–93, fig. 10.
107 И. ОРБЕЛИ, Избранные…, p. 96.

instance, a miniature called *The resurrection of Christ* (12th c.) (pic. 20)\(^{109}\) from the Mekhitarists Library (Venice) features convex shields which are represented beside plain round shields. Moreover, on this miniature, a long kite-shaped shield is also depicted, which was generally regarded as a European development for cavalry. However, D. Nicolle thinks that kite-shaped shield may have appeared in the Middle East as an infantry shield even before it was adopted by equestrians in Western Europe and Kievan Rus\(^{110}\).

Shields could be hanged by long or short leather straps attached to the back. The short strap was used to hold the shield, and the long one to hang it over the shoulder or neck when it was not in use. Perhaps the shield depicted on the relief did not have a handle, usually attached to the forearm, which allowed the rider to use both hands at the same time, providing sufficient protection to the left side of the torso, the region most exposed during melee combat\(^{111}\).

Shields were made from wood and sometimes covered with metal plates\(^{112}\) and could have an umbo (a metal boss nailed at the centre of the shield designed to deflect blows and as reinforcement of the shield). According to J. Haldon, in the 9th–10th c., the average diameter of the Byzantine large round shield for infantryman was 75 cm, and for the horseman – 65 cm, together with the umbo\(^{113}\).

One known mention of the umbo is made in the chronicle of Movses Kaghankatsi (7th/10th c.). Describing the battle between Armenian lord Djuansher and his murderer called Varazo in 681 AD, the chronicler wrote: …*Djuansher took out his sword [սուսեր] and attacked Varazo, but the weapon stuck in the golden umbo of the opponent’s shield [եվ զվահանն վոսկեխնձոր] and the lord could not pull out his sword [գուրգ]…*\(^{114}\)

The remains of a wooden shield with an iron umbo and metal framework were found at the site of the Amberd castle (pic. 30)\(^{115}\). Unfortunately, the exact dating of these archaeological features cannot be determined (9th–13th c. (?)), and due to a bad state of preservation, it is difficult to make any informed assumptions about them.

\(^{109}\) Gospel № 141/102, fol. 77 r.

\(^{110}\) A kite-shaped shield is also depicted on a Fatimid plate (10–11 c.), which was found in Armenia. – D. Nicolle, *The Armies…*, p. 19, 30.


\(^{114}\) Մ. ՈՎՍԵՍ ՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՅԱՆ, Պատմութիւն Աղուանից աշխարհի, ed. Շ. ՍՄԲԱՏՅԱՆ, Երևան 1984, p. 117.

\(^{115}\) Ս. ՀԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՅԱՆ, Անբերդ…, pic. 54.
Scabbard with chape

Visible behind the shield is a part of a straight scabbard, which (pic. 4:4) was worn suspended from a sword belt or from the shoulder belt called baldric. Most commonly, scabbards were made from metal, leather or wood covered with fabric. At the end of this scabbard, there is a chape in the form of the letter U (pic. 4:5), which was popular in Byzantium. V. Yotov thinks that this chape looks similar to the metal chapes (10.5 cm long, 5.5 cm wide) unearthed in Bulgaria and dated to the second half of the 11th c.

Moreover, this form is also depicted on miniatures from the Taron Gospel (pic. 26), the Tsgrut Gospel (pic. 29) and the Menologion of Basil II (pic. 31). Thanks to this comparison, it can be theoretically assumed that such metal chapes were in use in the 11th–12th c. in Byzantium and Armenia (and perhaps across a larger area).

Spear or sceptre

The rightmost equestrian is holding a schematically represented stick with a sort of a head, which looks like a spear (pic. 4:6). However, Armenian historian Avetisian Kamsar thought that this horseman is an Armenian lord, an ish-khan (իշխան), who is holding a sceptre (իշխանական գավազան – ishkhan’s sceptre), which was a symbol of power. The other cavalryman on the left side (St. George) holds only a long spear, with which he attacks the dragon. Although these weapons are presented too schematically, it is clear that the spear of the horseman is a long cavalry spear or a kontos (kontarion, pic. 6–7, 22–24, 33–34), popular in Armenia and Byzantium between the 7th and the 12th centuries AD, which was about 2.7 m long for cavalrymen and 4.5 m for infantrymen.

References:
118 Г. Баранов, Византийские…, p. 258.
119 V. Yotov is preparing an article about these chapes.
120 Taron Gospel, Matenadaran Library, Ms. 6201, f. 7 v.
121 Tsgrut Gospel (Tsgrut village, Armenia), f. 9. – Н. Котанджян, Цгрутское…, p. 81.
122 This type of chape was presented on different miniatures in the Menologion of Basil II – 0070, 0094, 0104, 0121, 0131, 0136, 0139, 0144, 0172, 0181, 0187, 0188, 0195, 0206, 0211, 0216 etc. For more information, see Г. Баранов, Византийские…, p. 258.
123 ՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ…, p. 207.
125 T. Dawson, Byzantine Cavalryman…, p. 61.
126 Idem, Byzantine Infantryman…, p. 27.
The kontarion was kept with one hand under an armpit, similarly to the knightly lance in Western Europe. This way of holding the lance was known in Byzantium from the 11th–12th c. It was one of the most effective methods because only one hand was used to hold a heavy kontarion and to perform a powerful lance charge while the other hand was used for manoeuvring the horse. Such an attack could only be carried out by keeping the cavalryman steady on his horse by means of stirrups and a raised saddlebow.127

Helmets

All the horsemen are represented in helmets or headgears. V. Abramian thinks that these helmets have a conical-hemispherical shape128 and, as can be seen, a mail, leather or scale aventail or coif was attached to them in order to protect the neck.129 R. D’Amato wrote an excellent work on Byzantine helmets in the 9th–12th c., trying to create a detailed typology based on the technology of manufacturing, materials used and forms of helmets: conical, hemispherical, ridge, Phrygian-shaped, pointed, round off piece of banded construction, brimmed, mask-visor, and related headgears like the “skaplion” etc.130 Unfortunately, this typology cannot be used effectively in the present study because the helmets depicted on the reliefs are presented too schematically to allow reaching any substantial conclusions. However, based on Armenian figurative sources (10th–12th c.), it can be assumed that in Armenia there existed conical-hemispherical helmets (e.g. Goliath’s relief from Aghtamar Island131, pic. 5) and conical-pointed helmets (Miniature from the Kars Gospel, pic. 28132; Gospel 141 from Mekhitarists Library, pic. 20133; the Theodore Gospel, 12th c., pic. 21)134. Also, the chronicle of Matthew of Edessa (13th c.) offers a description of the battle between Armenian lord Vasak and an Ethiopian from Daylamites, where the author

128 В. ԱԲՐԱՄՅԱՆ, Միջնադարյան…, p. 72, 96.
129 Բ. ԱՌԱՔԵԼՅԱՆ, Քաղաքները…, p. 143–145.
131 British historian D. Nicolle thought that Goliath was wearing a metal coif. – D. NICOLLE, The Military…, p. 218–220. On the other hand, J. Davies believed that it is a pointed helmet. – J. DAVIES, Medieval…, p. 55.
132 S. Der Nersessian, L’Evangile…, p. 92–93, fig. 10.
133 Gospel № 141/102, fol. 77 r; S. Der Nersessian, Miniature…, p. 22–23, 26.
134 Theodore Gospel, Jerusalem Armenian Patriarchate, Ms. 1796, fol. 88.
mentioned a ridge helmet\textsuperscript{135}: *Vasak with a steel sword struck the crest of his [opponent’s] helmet and sliced that brave Qipchak [Ethiop] into two parts*\textsuperscript{136}. Theoretically, the helmet presented on the miniature from the Lviv Gospel (1198–1199) (pic. 32)\textsuperscript{137} looks like a ridge (consisting of two parts), derived from the late Roman typology\textsuperscript{138}. It is difficult to say anything more about the methods of producing helmets (i.e. whether one, two or more metal pieces were used) because no Armenian helmets from that time have been recovered.

**Conclusions**

Thanks to a comparative analysis, we proved that medieval figurative sources can be considered an accurate source for studying the medieval military history. Strong evidence for this is the presence of numerous specific military details on the relief studied. Also, this idea can be supported by referring to Armenian written sources (e.g. Stepanos Orbelian, 13\textsuperscript{th} c.). Describing Liparit Orbelian’s armour from the battle against Seljuk Turks in 1049, the chronicler mentions almost all types of arms and armours which are presented on relief\textsuperscript{139}. *Thus armed, he [Liparit] mounted his Arabian steed. He threw aside his shield with its gold designs and, taking a flexible javelin in his powerful left hand and a broad two-edged steel sword in his right hand, with his formidable axe/mace(?) like a blacksmith’s mallet or a rock cutter’s sledgehammer hanging at his side. [Liparit] bravely crossed the line of fighters, from one side to the other. His golden breastplate and helmet glittered like the sun*\textsuperscript{140}.

Thanks to military history, we can learn more about the scenes and motifs presented on miniatures, reliefs etc. and vice versa – figurative sources could show us different types of weapons, which can be compared with the ones mentioned or represented in the well-known Byzantine or Muslim sources. This is possible because, located between two civilizations (Byzantium and Muslim), Armenians adopted the best military solutions from both sides, creating their own culture.

\textsuperscript{135} Եւ այնպես զինեալ զինքըն հեծեալ ի տաճիկ երիվարն, և ընկենոյր զոսկենկար վահանն ի թիկունսն, և զճաւճ նիզակիկն յահեակ բազուկն, և զլայն պողովտիկ շմշիրն երկբերանի ի յաջ ձեռինն և զվաղրն ահագին ի ներքոյ բարձիցն իբր զուռն դարբնաց և կամ զսակր կտցաւոր քարահատաց: Անցեալ ի մէջ ռազմաւոր հանդիսին արշաւէր սիգալով յայսկոյս և յանկոյս և զճավճ նիզակիկն յահեակ բազուկն, և զլայն պողովտիկ շմշիրն երկբերանի ի յաջ ձեռին

\textsuperscript{136} Армения и Crusades…, 1.1, № 13–14.

\textsuperscript{137} Lviv Gospel, National Library of Poland, Rps 8101 IIIS, 63 v.

\textsuperscript{138} R. D’Amato, Old…, p. 86sqq.

\textsuperscript{139} Ս."Tro" Օրբելյան, Պատմութիւն նահանգին Սիսական, Թիֆլիս 1910, p. 375.

I believe that this study offers further research perspectives in terms of a deeper archaeological and graphic analysis of the sources, which will allow a comprehensive reconstruction of the equipment of the Medieval Armenian soldier.

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The Relief on the Door of the Msho Arakelots Monastery (1134)...


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Abstract. Byzantium's arms and armours were researched by many historians. For that reason, the military history of the medieval Roman Empire enjoyed a dominant position in medieval historiography, with the consequence that very often the military history of small nations (under Roman influences) was written from the perspective of the Eastern Romans historians.

The aim of the paper is to change this perspective and give the subject of the medieval Armenian military the attention it deserves. The idea is to perform an analysis of the relief on the Door of the Msho Arakelots monastery, where four equestrians and one infantryman are depicted, and to compare it with other Armenian, Byzantine and Muslim sources.

In this relief, a spherical mace head and a sword with sleeve cross-guard are represented, suggesting many parallels with East-Roman archaeological and figurative sources. No less important is the depiction of the military trumpet because it is the first image of this object in Armenian art, which can be compared with pictures from the Madrid Skylitzes (13th c.). In addition, the only defensive weapon which is presented in this relief is a round shield with a floral ornament. There are many depictions of round shields in Armenian miniatures and reliefs from 10th–11th c. Moreover, this relief is one of the few where stirrups and the chape of a scabbard are shown. These elements represent an important piece of information because these pictures can be compared with actual archaeological East-Roman artefacts to reconstruct their real look.

The conclusions are that the majority of Armenian weapons bear similarities to Byzantine ones but no less important are the Muslim influences, which have been found in some cases. Located between two civilizations (Byzantium and the Muslim Potentates), Armenians adopted the best solutions of their military technologies, creating their own culture. Moreover, thanks to this comparative analysis, further support will be given to the idea that medieval figurative sources are more or less accurate material for studying medieval military history.

Keywords: Armenia, Bagratids, Msho Arakelots, relief, military history, sleeve cross-guard, Byzantine Empire, Muslim world, weapon, armour.
ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Relief on the door of Msho Arakelots monastery (1134). Author’s photo [30 IX 2019].

Fig. 2–3. Relief on the door of Msho Arakelots monastery (1134). Author’s photo [30 IX 2019].
Fig. 4. Relief on the door of Msho Arakelots monastery (1134). *Author's photo* [30 IX 2019].

Fig. 5. Goliath’s relief from The Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Aghtamar island (915–921, modern Turkey) (in situ). *Author’s photo* [20 VIII 2019].

Fig. 6. Relief “St. George and St. Theodore slaying dragons” from the Church in Martvili, 7th–8th c. (Georgia). – Г. Атанасов, Св. Ѓорѓи Победоносец. Култ и образ в Православния Изток през средновековието, Варна 2001, рис. 244.
Fig. 7. Fragment of the miniature “St. Sargius” (10th c.) – Gospel, Mekhitarian Library (Vienna), Ms. 697, f. 4v, https://mycms-vs04.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/sfb950/content/IAA/browseColl.xml [30 IV 2019].


Fig. 12. Miniature “The Martyrdom of St. Arethas” (end of 10th c.) where sword with sleeve cross-guard is depicted. – Menologion of Basil II, Vatican library, Ms. Vat. gr. 1613, f. 135, https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1613 [30 IV 2019].
Fig. 14. (A and B) Iron, spherical mace heads (11th–12th c.). Vatevi Collection, Bulgaria. – S. Popov, The maces from the present Bulgarian lands (10th–17th c.), Sofia 2015, p. 130–131. Photo courtesy of S. Popov.
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Fig. 15. Miniature “Good Samaritan stripped and beaten by three robbers” (Middle part), (879–883). – Homilies of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, National library of France, gr. 510, f. 300 (143), https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84522082/f542.planchecontact [12 IX 2019].
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Fig. 17. Miniature “Judas Kiss” (1057). Author’s photo [30 IX 2019].
Fig. 18. I. The mace from former Echmiadzin museum (History museum of Armenia); II. The mace from Shengavit (History museum of Armenia) (3–1 millennium BC).

Fig. 19. Miniature “Hovhannis Protospatharius presents the Gospel to the Virgin” (1007) – Gospel of Adrianopolis, Mekhitarists library (Venice), Ms. 887, fol. 8, https://mycms-vs04.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/sfb950/content/IAA/browseColl.xml [30 IV 2019].

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Fig. 23. St. Sargis’s relief from The Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Aghtamar island (915–921, modern Turkey) (in situ). Author’s photo [20 VIII 2019].

Fig. 26. Fragment of the miniature “Crucifixion” (11th c.). Author’s photo [30 IX 2019].

Fig. 27. Fragment of the miniature “Judas Kiss” (10th–11th c.). Author’s photo [30 IX 2019].
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