



CHAPTER SIX

THE INTRUSION OF EAST ASIAN IMAGERY IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ARMENIA: POLITICAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE ALONG THE SILK ROAD

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The *pax mongolica* of the thirteenth century instituted after the conquests of Genghis Khan reopened the Silk Road and provided a locus for the exchange—or, better, the importation into the imagination of medieval Armenia—of a number of notions and artistic expressions from China.¹ This chapter is devoted to a close analysis of this cultural contact with East Asia by examining in depth a number of oriental motifs only casually described in earlier literature. At a conference in 1977, I gave a paper entitled “Far Eastern Influences in Armenian Miniature Painting in the Mongol Period.”² It focused on a pair of Armenian miniatures with Chinese-type decorative elements (see color figs. 6.1, 6.2). The principal conclusions were two: (1) Chinese motifs were integrated into Armenian art by the 1280s in an aesthetically satisfying way, and (2) Armenian artists incorporated both motifs and stylistic aspects of Chinese and Chinese-inspired Mongol art prior to the neighboring Muslim tradition and independent of it. As an addendum, I suggested that East Asian works of art may have been partly responsible for a pronounced stylistic change in Cilician painting of the late thirteenth century.³

¹ A part of the research and the illustrative material was realized thanks to successive grants from the Bertha and John Garabedian Charitable Foundation of Fresno, California.

² This paper was part of a panel on “Patronage and Symbolism in Medieval Armenian Art,” sponsored by the Society for Armenian Studies during the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in New York. It was distributed in mimeographed form. Certain points provoked a lively debate.

³ In the mimeographed version of 1977, 7–9; in the published, Kouymjian 1986: 461–468.

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An expanded study of 1986⁴ incorporated new material: late-thirteenth-century Islamic miniatures⁵ and another Armenian illumination (color fig. 6.3). Among the themes treated in the article were the use of Chinese elements in Islamic art of the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods; the Armenian-Mongol alliance; visits of Armenian aristocracy to the Mongol and Ilkhanid courts and the exchange of gifts; Cilician ports as the major trading centers for East–West commerce; Chinese objects that might have served as the models for the motifs; the date of the Mongol summer palace of Takht-i Sulaymān, in Iran, and its tiles;⁶ the stylistic consequences of Chinese art on Armenian painting, especially landscapes;⁷ and the effects of all of this on post-1300 manuscript illustration.

In June 2003, I gave a paper entitled “Chinese Motifs in Thirteenth-Century Armenian Art: The Mongol Connection” at an international symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in conjunction with the exhibition *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353*.⁸ In it, new material was presented, including minor motifs in two additional Armenian manuscripts; Chinese and Central Asian silks, which had been more

⁴ Kouymjian 1986.

⁵ The 1977 version referred to the *Manāfi‘ al-hayawān* executed in Marāgha in the 1290s (Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. no. 500, fol. 55) as showing the first trace of Chinese influence in Islamic painting. Miniatures from the manuscript have been widely reproduced; see, for example, Pope 1945, esp. pl. 114; Gray 1961: 22, 24; and Komaroff and Carboni 2002: 142, fig. 169. However, Marianne Shreve Simpson, in a private communication, pointed out earlier traces in a manuscript dated 1290 of the *History of the World Conqueror* of ‘Aṭā Malik al-Juwaynī, now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan no. 205, fols. 1–2. This two-page frontispiece is seemingly the earliest example of Islamic painting with Chinese influences (cloud bands, garments, horse trappings). The manuscript was executed in Ilkhanid court circles in 689 H / 1290 CE; ‘Aṭā Malik al-Juwaynī was an important court official. Juwaynī 1912–37, part I, already reproduces the frontispiece between pages xx–xxi; cf. Ettinghausen 1959: 44–65, figs. 1–2; Komaroff and Carboni 2002: 173, fig. 201. The original version of this paper (1977) had a rather long discussion of the evolution of Chinese elements in Islamic manuscript illumination from the very late thirteenth to the sixteenth century.

⁶ Takht-i Sulaymān was not discussed at all in the 1977 paper, but covered in detail in Kouymjian 1986: 444–456.

⁷ This latter section was expanded Kouymjian 1986: 461–468, and several illustrations were added.

⁸ The exhibit was organized by Linda Komaroff of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Stefano Carboni of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where it originated. Since published, Kouymjian 2006: pl. 23–25; fig. 58–67.

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aggressively studied since my earlier research in the 1970s and 1980s; a reexamination of Islamic art in the Ilkhanid period; and the possible meaning of East Asian motifs in art commissioned by Armenian royalty in the late thirteenth century.

In the thirteenth century, Armenians were living under two quite separate regimes. In the historic homelands to the northeast (known as “Armenia” from the first millennium), the area just south of the Caucasus between the Black Sea and Lake Urmia, independence had been lost and Armenians found themselves ruled by successive Selçuq, Mongol, and Turkmen dynasties. To the southwest in Cilicia, on the Mediterranean coast, a new Armenian political entity was established in the late eleventh century, to become an ally of the Crusaders and a fully recognized kingdom in 1198. Cilician Armenia was among the first Christian states to establish diplomatic relations with the Great Mongols in their capital Khara Khorum (Karakorum or Qara Qorum). By the mid-thirteenth century, what might be called an Armenian-Mongol treaty was concluded, though the contracting parties were hardly equal in terms of their relative power or influence; this agreement should probably be seen as a benign Mongol dominion over the Armenian state.

During the following half-century, a limited number of East Asian motifs penetrated Armenian miniature painting. Some came directly from the Mongol court in Khara Khorum, the capital city founded in the Orkhon valley in 1220, and others by way of the Mongols of Iran, the Ilkhans, after they took firm possession of the Near East from roughly 1260 on.⁹ Two instances of this visual exchange are considered below, one quite palpable, with clear visual representations, the other conjectural.

Direct Borrowing of Chinese Artistic Motifs

By the 1280s, artists working under the patronage of the Cilician Armenian aristocracy used very clear Chinese motifs: Chinese dragons, phoenixes, and lions are the most obvious ones, clearly recognizable and quite distinct from such animals as they are known in European or Near Eastern art. In the second half of the thirteenth century, the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia had friendly relations with

⁹ For a more detailed discussion, see Kouymjian 1986 and Kouymjian 2006.





the Mongols, concluding an alliance several times renewed.¹⁰ From the successive journeys of Smbat, the Constable of Armenia, in 1247–1250,¹¹ and then of his brother King Het'um in 1253–1255,¹² to the death of Ilkhan Ghāzān in 1304, Armenian princes and kings traveled to the Great Mongol court at Khara Khorum or to the various residences of the Ilkhans of Iran,¹³ especially under Hülegü (1256–1265), his son Abakha (1265–1282) and grandson Arghūn (1284–1291).

The Chinese motifs are confined entirely to a series of animal representations in Cilician Armenian illuminated manuscripts, the most important of which is a luxurious Lectionary, now in Erevan, commissioned in 1286 by Prince Het'um, the son of King Levon II who became king three years later.¹⁴ His father, and especially his mother Keran, had been famous as patrons of the arts since the 1260s, as is clear from donor portraits in two Gospels, both now in Jerusalem, one of 1262¹⁵ and the other of 1272, in which Prince Het'um is held by his father (color fig. 6.4).¹⁶ The Lectionary was executed in court circles in Cilicia, where, thanks to the wealth acquired from East–West trade along the Silk Road, Armenian aristocracy and the upper clergy, often also from the royal family, encouraged the arts through their patronage.

The Chinese elements are contained almost entirely on two highly decorated chapter headings in a manuscript with hundreds of illuminations: decorated headpieces, full page and marginal miniatures. The first of these (see color fig. 6.1) shows two pairs of lions, upright and crouching, around the bust of Christ Emmanuel, above which

¹⁰ On Armenian-Mongol relations, see Galstyan 1964: 91–105, no. 1 (in Armenian); Der Nersessian 1962; Boase 1978: 25–29; Mutafian 1988, vol. 1: 423–429; and Mutafian 1993: 54–61.

¹¹ On Smbat's journey, see Richard 1986.

¹² On the famous journey of Smbat's brother King Het'um, see Kirakos Ganjakec'i 1961: 364–372, and the translation of this section with commentary, Boyle 1964: 175–189.

¹³ The most convenient treatment of the Ilkhanids is still found in Boyle 1968.

¹⁴ Erevan, Matenadaran, Repository of Ancient Manuscripts (henceforth abbreviated as "M"), M979, fols. 293 and 334, as is visible on the folios, though they are listed as fols. 295 and 335 in Der Nersessian 1993: figs. 516–517 (in color); the volumes were published posthumously.

¹⁵ Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, J2660, Gospels, 1262, fol. 228. Portrait of Prince Levon and his wife Keran; Der Nersessian 1993: fig. 64.

¹⁶ Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, J2563, Keran Gospels, Sis, 1272, fol. 380. Portrait of Queen Keran and King Levon II with their children (our color fig. 6.4).

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are a number of birds, two in flight, and the Buddhist Wheel of the Law.¹⁷ The rest of the profuse decoration is devoid of East Asian elements. The lions protect Christ in their Buddhist role as guardians of sacred images. The second folio (see color fig. 6.2) appears much later in the lectionary.¹⁸ In the spandrels on each side of a trilobed arch, Chinese dragons and phoenixes face each other. In ancient China these motifs represented the emperor and the empress.¹⁹ The Mongol rulers of China, the emperors of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), continued the tradition. The emperor himself sat on a dragon throne and wore robes with dragons, as seen in a detail of a large Yuan mandala in the Metropolitan Museum in New York showing two donor emperors.²⁰ As a complement, the phoenix represented the empress. Phoenixes and empresses entertained a close relationship in Taoism. In the paradise of Mount Kunlun, Chinese artists often depicted the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu) flying on the back of a phoenix. The Sovereign of the Clouds of Dawn (Bixia yuanjun) wore a headdress that contained seven phoenixes.²¹ The crown of the Yuan empress bore the fabled bird, the *fenghuang*, which

¹⁷ Erevan, M979, fol. 293, lection for 6 April, the Annunciation to the Virgin; Kouymjian 1986: 421–425, figs. 2a–2e (details); color reproduction in Der Nersessian 1993: fig. 516; color reproduction, Kouymjian 2006: pl. 23. Earlier literature and reproductions: Sakisian 1940: fig. 38; Dournovo 1952: 126–127, an album in Russian and Armenian with color plates; Dournovo 1961, a reduced album with color plates in English and French versions; Dournovo and Drampyan 1967–69: pl. 43; Azaryan 1964: fig. 134; Der Nersessian 1969: fig. 22, reprinted in Der Nersessian 1973: fig. 261; Beckwith 1970: 139, pl. 259; Der Nersessian 1978: 155, fig. 116.

¹⁸ Erevan, M979, fol. 334, readings for the feast of the Transfiguration (Vardavar in Armenian); Kouymjian 1986: 437–433, figs. 3a–3d (with details); color illustrations in Dournovo 1952: pl. 35; Korkhmazian et al. 1984: fig. 119; Der Nersessian 1993: fig. 517; see also Azaryan 1964: fig. 134; Kouymjian 2006: pl. 24; see also Azaryan 1964: fig. 134.

¹⁹ See the general discussion of the importance and meaning of these symbols for the Chinese in Tomoko 2002: 96–97: “The dragon and phoenix are considered good omens and are two of the oldest and most popular mythical animals in Chinese culture. More importantly, both were symbols of sovereignty in China”; Kouymjian 1986: 431.

²⁰ Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA), purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift (1992.54), silk *kesi*, 245.5 x 209 cm.: Komaroff and Carboni 2002: 108–109, no. 185, figs. 125–126; Watt and Wardwell 1997: 95–99, no. 25.

²¹ I would like to thank Philippe Forêt for this information.

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is not really a phoenix but has been assimilated to the animal of Greek mythology since early times.²²

In the top center of the Armenian headpiece (see color fig. 6.2), flanked by a pair of Wheels of the Law, is a single, almost heraldic Chinese phoenix. Its coloring is the same as the others in this piece. It is positioned nearly identically to phoenixes described as “soaring” on Jin-dynasty (1115–1234) silks, as in one from the Cleveland Museum (color fig. 6.5).²³ The entire form is rendered extremely gracefully with well-understood proportions. In China the phoenix (like the dragon) was one of the four animals representing the cardinal directions. It ruled over the southern parts of heaven and, therefore represented warmth, summer, the sun, and was said to appear to glorify a successful ruler and a peaceful reign.²⁴

A single Chinese dragon (see color fig. 6.3) is also found in a portrait of Archbishop John, Het‘um II’s great uncle and the brother of the first King Het‘um, in a Gospel commissioned by the clergyman in 1289.²⁵ But here we have a faithful representation of a piece of golden Chinese silk, which serves as his tunic or is sewn onto it. Its coiled position is strikingly close to surviving dragons on Chinese silks of the Jin and Yuan dynasties (color fig. 6.6).²⁶

The integration of Chinese elements also took place in Islamic art in the Ilkhanid period, but somewhat later, though certainly in a

²² The dragon and phoenix motifs were already used in the Han dynasty and reached their highest point of popularity in Chinese art under the Song (960–1279).

²³ Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund (1994.292), tabby, brocade, gold thread on a blue green ground with rows of phoenixes facing right and left, Watt and Wardwell 1997: 118–119, no. 31; Komaroff and Carboni 2002: 197: no. 180, fig. 207. Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Art Textile Alliance (1994.27), tabby, brocade, Watt and Wardwell 1997: 120–121, no. 32.

²⁴ *Editors’ Note.* *Feng* means “male phoenix,” while *huang* means “female phoenix.” *Fenghuang* is the phoenix that manifests him/herself when a *shengren*, a Taoist immortal, comes to this world. A *fenghuang* is therefore a good omen and symbolizes harmony.

²⁵ Erevan, M197, fol. 141v, not executed at the monastery of Akner as believed by some authorities; see Der Nersessian, 1993: 96–97; Kouymjian 1986: 418–419, figs. 1a–1b (detail of dragon); color reproductions in Mutafian 1993: 55; Der Nersessian 1993: fig. 645.

²⁶ New York, MMA, 1989–205, 74.5 x 33.2 cm; first published in Watt and Wardwell 1997: 116–117, no. 30; Komaroff and Carboni 2002: 174, cat. no. 181, fig. 202; Cleveland Museum of Art (Edward I. Whittemore Fund, 1995–73), 20 cm, square, with alternating rows of roundels with phoenixes (only partially visible on the fragment) and dragons; Watt and Wardwell 1997: 153, no. 42; Komaroff and Carboni 2002: 176, cat. no. 183, fig. 206.

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more enduring and pervasive way. Contemporary to the Armenian miniatures are the tiles uncovered during the excavations at the summer palace of the Ilkhans, Takht-i Sulaymān, not far from Sultaniyya, probably built and decorated in the 1270s under the orders of Abakha Khān.²⁷ Tiles in various shapes and sizes contain Chinese dragons and phoenixes, but the most impressive are the large luster ones (color fig. 6.7a). The animals, as in the Armenian examples, are borrowed directly from Chinese art. Only later in the fourteenth century and afterward were these motifs Iranized in works such as the Great Mongol *Shāhnāma* of the 1330s.²⁸ The influence of Chinese landscape painting was to be a permanent factor in Islamic art, especially in the subsequent Timurid and Safavid dynasty, when Chinese animals and landscape elements, such as cloud treatment, become common elements in painting and ceramics. However, in the Takht-i Sulaymān examples, the dragon and phoenix never appear together on the same tile as in the Armenian headpiece, though on the walls of the great reception hall they were juxtaposed.

In Chinese art, the motif of the confrontation between the dragon and phoenix, associated with emperor and empress, became popular in the Ming dynasty (1368–1641) and afterward on all sorts of luxury items. It appears to be unknown in Chinese or Mongol art prior to the late fourteenth century. Thus the confronted dragons and phoenixes painted in the Armenian lectionary a full century earlier are enigmatic. It is hard to imagine that a highly skilled Armenian artist—working in the royal workshop and thus theoretically in contact with members of the ruling family who had been to the court of the great khans in Central Asia—could have invented representation of these fabulous animals together, and apparently in conflict, before the Chinese themselves brought them together. In any case, special-

²⁷ The closest in my feeling are on the large luster tiles, both dragons and phoenixes, but never together on the same tile, and for the phoenix the eight-pointed star tiles in Iajvardina; Komaroff and Carboni 2002: no. 99, fig. 97 dragon from the MMA, no. 100, fig. 100, phoenix from the Victoria and Albert Museum, no. 84, fig. 101, star tiles from Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington DC, or the phoenix on a hexagonal tile from Berlin, Komaroff and Carboni 2002: no. 103, figs. 92, 95. Cf. for these same or similar phoenix and dragon tiles from Takht-i Sulaymān, Kouymjian 1986: fig. 10–14.

²⁸ Formerly known as the Demotte *Shāhnāma*, now dispersed in various collections. Most of the important miniatures were brought together in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibit of 2002–2003, see Komaroff and Carboni 2002: passim.

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ists in the field have pointed out that they know of no occurrence of the theme in Yuan art or earlier.²⁹ I was forced to conclude that the confronted dragons and phoenixes painted in the Armenian lectionary are puzzling.

On February 2, 2005, Lukas Nickel sent me an email from London announcing the discovery of what I now call the missing link. A bronze mirror found in a late Liao-dynasty (907–1125) tomb clearly shows the motif. Nickel reports, “Tomb M10, belonging to Zhang Kuangzheng, died 1058 and buried in 1093 (strange difference, but noted as such). . . . The tomb is among a group of tombs of the same time, in Xuanhua, Hebei province.”³⁰ The accompanying illustration (a line drawing, fig. 6.7b) that Nickel sent shows a dragon with three claws and a phoenix with five long trailers facing each other at some distance and hovering around a round object, no doubt meant to be a pearl. In the field are cloud bands. The mirror phoenix (fig. 6.7b) resembles the one above the trilobed arch of the Armenian headpiece (see color fig. 6.2) much more than it resembles those confronting the dragons (also in color fig. 6.2), where they are much reduced in form to accommodate the very limited space in the spandrels. Nickel cautions, however, that “the Liao were by no means Chinese, so if they started this tradition, I would not expect it to be Chinese, but influenced by [a] Central Asian, steppe or more western tradition.”

Perhaps more important for the tenor of this study and those preceding it is an assumption I made that the phoenix and dragon, inspired by Chinese artistic representations, were shown in conflict in the Armenian miniature (see color fig. 6.2). Yolanda Crowe (email of August 2, 2004) was the first to caution me that though the dragon may look fierce to Western eyes, in China he was regarded as an auspicious symbol: “The problem arises when we think that we are looking at two beasts in combat. That is our non-Chinese reaction.

²⁹ Linda Komaroff, curator of Islamic Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and an authority on art in the Mongol courts of Iran and China, did not know of any example of the dragon-phoenix motif in the Yuan period. Yolanda Crowe, an independent scholar on Islamic and Chinese art in Geneva and London, confirmed the lack of examples with the animals together in struggle. Lukas Nickel (formerly research assistant at the chair of East Asian Art History at the University of Zurich, now at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London) knew of no examples of the dragon-phoenix motif in Chinese art before the Ming dynasty.

³⁰ *Excavation Report Xuanhua* 2001, vol. 1: 49.

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Fig. 6.7b. Bronze mirror with dragon and phoenix. Xuanhua, Hebei, China, tomb M10, pre-1093. *Excavation Report Xuanhua 2001*, vol. 1: 49.

In fact dragon and phoenix are not in combat in a Chinese context.” Linda Komaroff (email of February 18, 2005) affirmed the notion and suggested that the dragon and phoenix “should be viewed as complementary opposites like *yin* and *yang*.” Lukas Nickel commented (email of March 9, 2005), “Judging from my experience I would be most surprised if the meaning were conflict. The Chinese quest for harmony in everything connected to tombs would suggest that the balance between both powers should matter, not conflict.”

There is still the question of how these Chinese creatures were brought together in a headpiece of the Armenian lectionary of 1286. Was it due simply to the fertile imagination of an artist, who saw them represented separately in imported silks or even together in

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separate bands, like a number of well-known Yuan silks? Personally, I think not. The artist, I believe, knew that the phoenix represented the empress and the dragon the emperor—in his context, the queen and king of Armenia. If my suggestion presented elsewhere³¹ has merit—namely, that the lion–Christ Emmanuel headpiece (see color fig. 6.1) represented King Levon, Het‘um’s father, and the phoenix–dragon one dominated by an heraldic phoenix (color fig. 6.2) stood for his consort Queen Keran, Het‘um’s mother—then the combining of the two creatures was not accidental but a conscious depiction of harmony in the Cilician royal household.

Taken together, the small menagerie of Chinese animals in three Armenian miniature paintings (see color figs. 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3) demonstrates how elegantly Armenian artists were able to integrate artistic motifs of high symbolic importance from a land at the other end of the Silk Road. Despite the problem of a concrete antecedent for the dragon-phoenix motif, the models for these paintings came either through the exchange of gifts,³² mentioned regularly in the sources, between Armenian royalty and Mongol and Ilkhan rulers, or through the extensive trade with China and Central Asia conducted through Cilician ports primarily by Italians.³³ I have argued elsewhere that the impact of Chinese art on Armenia during the Mongol period extended beyond the faithful reproduction of distinctive animal motifs to a new treatment of space in painting.³⁴ In a series of manuscripts dating to the 1270s and 1280s, including miniatures in the *Lectionary of Het‘um II* and the *Gospels of Bishop John*, the traditional single plain flatness common to Armenian and east Christian art, including Byzantine painting, was replaced by a genuine interest in revealing perspective and space through techniques learned from Chinese landscape painting, including jagged mountains and gnarled trees that push against borders, varied and receding ground lines indicated by clumps of vegetation, and motion down steep inclines.

This assimilation of Chinese motifs was seamless in the Armenian examples, but unlike the parallel and enduring influence in Islamic

³¹ Kouymjian 2006: 321.

³² On the exchange of gifts and visits between the Armenian royalty and Mongol rulers, see Kouymjian 1986: 453–456.

³³ For a discussion of commerce between the kingdom of Cilician Armenia and East Asia, see Kouymjian 1986: 449–453.

³⁴ Kouymjian 1986: 461–468 and figs. 19–22.

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art, it was very short-lived. After 1300 these strange animals, and the experiments with space, disappear completely from Armenian painting, which slowly declines from the heights of the late thirteenth century due to the gradual weakening of the Armenia kingdom and the end of the Mongol-Armenian alliance after the Ilkhans definitively converted to Islam in the time of Ilkhan Ghāzān Khan (1295–1304). Without Mongol support Armenians could not survive the Mamluk onslaught from Egypt, which put an end to the Cilician kingdom in 1375.

Illustration of the Alexander Romance

More problematic is the influence of East Asia on the legendary *Alexander Romance*. Though the Armenian translation of the Pseudo-Callisthenes was made in the late fifth century, it was only at the end of the thirteenth and the first years of the fourteenth century that there was a major revival of interest in it.³⁵ The oldest illustrated Armenian *Alexander*, a magnificent manuscript now in the Mekhitarist Monastery in Venice,³⁶ suggests, I think, that the new interest in Alexander as a world conqueror is directly related to the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century. Armenia and its northern neighbor Georgia were directly affected by the earliest Western invasions of Genghis Khan. As mentioned above, within a generation of the great khan's death, the kingdom of Armenia had concluded an alliance with the Mongols, and King Het'um made the first visit of any Christian monarch to the Mongol court. By the third quarter of the thirteenth century, half a dozen Armenian historical sources—the most important of which are Vardan, Kirakos, Grigor of Akner, and Smbat Sparapet³⁷—speak at length about the Mongols. It is precisely in this context, around the year 1300, that this first and most lavishly illustrated Armenian manuscript of the *Alexander Romance* was executed. The most densely illustrated Byzantine *Alexander* also now

³⁵ For an English translation of the Armenian version of the *Alexander Romance* with a discussion of the text, see Wolohojian 1969. On the art and iconography of the illustrations of the Armenian version, see most recently Kouymjian 1999 and Kouymjian, forthcoming.

³⁶ See now the facsimile edition and commentary, Traina 2003.

³⁷ Details on texts and translations of these historians can be found in Thomson 1995.

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in Venice, was copied and painted slightly later in the mid-fourteenth century, from an earlier but lost Byzantine model of the late thirteenth century.³⁸ And the great revival of interest in the Persian epic *Shāhnāma*, which includes the exploits of Alexander, occurred under the Ilkhans in 1330s and after. I do not believe the revival of interest in Alexander as displayed by manuscripts from the Armenian, Persian-Islamic, and Byzantine traditions in the same late-thirteenth/early-fourteenth century is a coincidence.

There is no one-to-one correspondence between any of these manuscripts or artistic traditions. The turbans evident throughout the Armenian and Byzantine illuminations point to an Eastern influence, in some respects perfectly natural since much of the *Alexander Romance* is devoted to his conquest of Iran and the areas beyond. Yet the very choice of Alexander as the archetype conqueror suggests an historical moment when a parallel world conquest was the reality. There are also broad themes in these three manuscript traditions that suggest interrelationships. I choose as examples three scenes with a strikingly similar feeling in each of these manuscript traditions:

(1) Burial scenes in which the coffin of the king or hero is carried high overhead, a representation that is foreign to standard Christian iconography: the burial of Persian King Darius with Alexander helping bear the coffin from the Armenian *Alexander Romance* in Venice of ca. 1300 (color fig. 6.8); the bier of Rostam and Zavāra from the Great Mongol *Shāhnāma* of ca. 1330 (color fig. 6.9); the funeral of King Philip of Macedonia from the Byzantine *Alexander Romance* in the Hellenic Institute in Venice of the mid-fourteenth century (color fig. 6.10).

(2) The engagement of the cavalry of opposing armies is rendered with a similar rhythm of armed soldiers and horses in all three manuscripts.³⁹

(3) The pose of the seated or enthroned rulers, principally Alexander, has a common look or feeling. The ruler is usually shown frontally seated on a throne with feet and knees spread apart in the Armenian

³⁸ Xyngopoulos 1966. More recently, a facsimile edition has been published in Greek by Trahoulias 1997, with a translation of the captions into English and modern Greek.

³⁹ Armenian example, the V424, fols. 89v–90; Great Mongol *Shāhnāma*, Iskandar Killing the Fur of Hind, the Keir Collection, Komaroff and Carboni 2002: fig. 36; Hellenic Institute, Venice, *Alexander Romance*, for example fol. 177, see Xyngopoulos 1966: pl. 112.

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(color fig. 6.11) and Ilkhanid (color fig. 6.12) examples, and more rigidly seated, with knees together, in the Byzantine manuscript.⁴⁰ The seated position of the emperor, common in early Byzantine art, gives way, more often than not, to formal portraits of the standing monarch in both Byzantine and Armenian art of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴¹ Stylistic effects are also shared by these traditions: namely, the omnipresence of turbaned figures in all three codices and horses and banquet scenes, which share a likeness.

This interaction has yet to be thoroughly studied to see whether what appears to be similar cannot be explained in other ways. Whether these likenesses are due primarily to the Silk Road is not clear. However, in the Mongol period they seem directly related to the great conquest, which brought the East Asian world of China to the Islamic and Christian Near East. One *can* imagine that without the Mongol conquest Chinese artistic elements might have still made their way into Armenia and the Islamic heartlands through commerce and travel. But without the Mongol control of the entire Silk Road, it is much harder to imagine that symbols like the dragon and phoenix could have taken on the meaning of ruling power and authority in their borrowed environments, as in the Armenian examples.

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⁴⁰ In the Hellenic Institute Byzantine manuscript, though the seated ruler (scores of examples) looks stiffer than in the Armenian or Persian examples, the throne, the crown, the attendants, and surroundings have an affinity with the contemporary Armenian and Ilkhanid examples. In all three manuscripts under consideration, Alexander and other rulers are also shown standing, sometimes in formal situations.

⁴¹ Contemporary examples include, for the Armenian, the figures of Prince Levon and his wife Keran as cited in note 15 above and as in our color fig. 6.4, of 1262 and 1272, respectively; for the Byzantine, the Chrysobull of Alexis III Komnenos, 1374, Mount Athos, Monastery of Dionysion, Evans 2004: 260, fig. 9.2.

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Fig. 6.1. Headpiece with Christ Emmanuel and Chinese animals, detail. Erevan, Matenadaran, M979, Lectionary of Het'um II, 1286, fol. 284. Photo Matenadaran.



Fig. 6.2. Headpiece with dragon and phoenix motif, detail. Erevan, Matenadaran, M979, Lectionary of Het'um II, 1286, fol. 334. Photo Matenadaran.



Fig. 6.3. Archbishop John, brother of King Het'um, ordination scene. Erevan, Matenadaran, M197, Gospels, 1289, fol. 341v. Photo Matenadaran.



Fig. 6.4. Portrait of Queen Keran and King Levon II with their children. Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, J2563, Keran Gospels, Sis, 1272, fol. 380. Der Nersessian 1993: fig. 641.



Fig. 6.5. Silk tabby, brocade, gold thread with rows of rising phoenixes, Jin dynasty (1115–1234). Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund (1994.292). Watt and Wardwell 1997: 118–119, no. 31.



Fig. 6.6. Chinese silk with coiled dragons in roundels, Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). Cleveland Museum of Art, Edward I. Whittemore Fund, 1995–1973. Komaroff and Carboni 2002: fig. 206.



Fig. 6.7a. Frieze tile with dragon. London, Victoria and Albert Museum (541–1900), Takht-i Sulaymān, 1270s. Komaroff and Carboni 2002: fig. 100.



Fig. 6.8. Alexander carrying the bier of Darius. Venice, Mekhitarist Brotherhood, San Lazzaro, V424, *History of Alexander the Great*, ca. 1300, fol. 73v. Mekhitarist Brotherhood, Venice.



Fig. 6.9. Rustam's and Zavara's bier. Boston, Museum of Fine Art, no. 22.393 (single page), Great Mongol *Shāhnāma*, 1330s. Komaroff and Carboni 2002: fig. 124.



Fig. 6.10. Funeral and burial of King Philip. Venice, Hellenic Institute, no. 5, fol. 30, *Romance of Alexander*, mid-fourteenth century. Xyngopoulos 1966: pl. II.



Fig. 6.11. The ambassadors of King Darius before Alexander. Venice, Mekhitarist Brotherhood, San Lazzaro, V424, *History of Alexander the Great*, ca. 1300, fol. 30. Photo Mekhitarist Brotherhood, Venice.



Fig. 6.12. Alexander enthroned. Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. 7096, Great Mongol *Shāhnāma*, 1330s, single page. Komaroff and Carboni 2002: fig. 51.