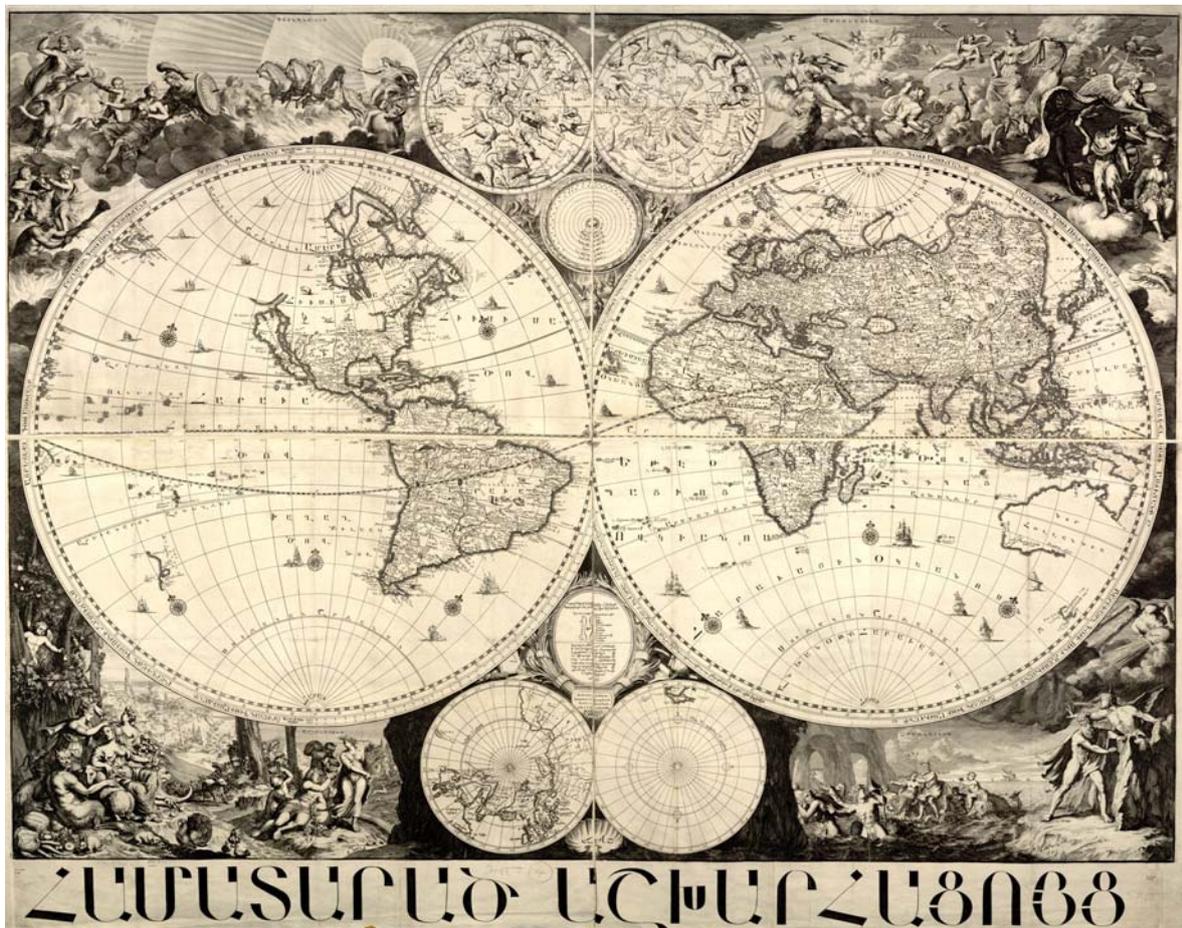


# THE OLDEST ARMENIAN LANGUAGE MAP

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Until some 18 years ago, the oldest original Armenian language map was considered to be Vanandeci's Hamataradz Ashxarhacuyc - World Mirror - printed in Amsterdam in 1695. This is a beautifully executed European style world map, commissioned and printed by Armenians, but engraved by the Dutch Schoenebek brothers. As you see it has all the attributes and decorations of the western world maps of the day and is not really an Armenian map, but a Western map with Armenian inscriptions.



Vanadetzi's World map in Armenian, Amsterdam, 1695.

See the two images for comparison. One being the Armenian map and the other a famous Dutch map.

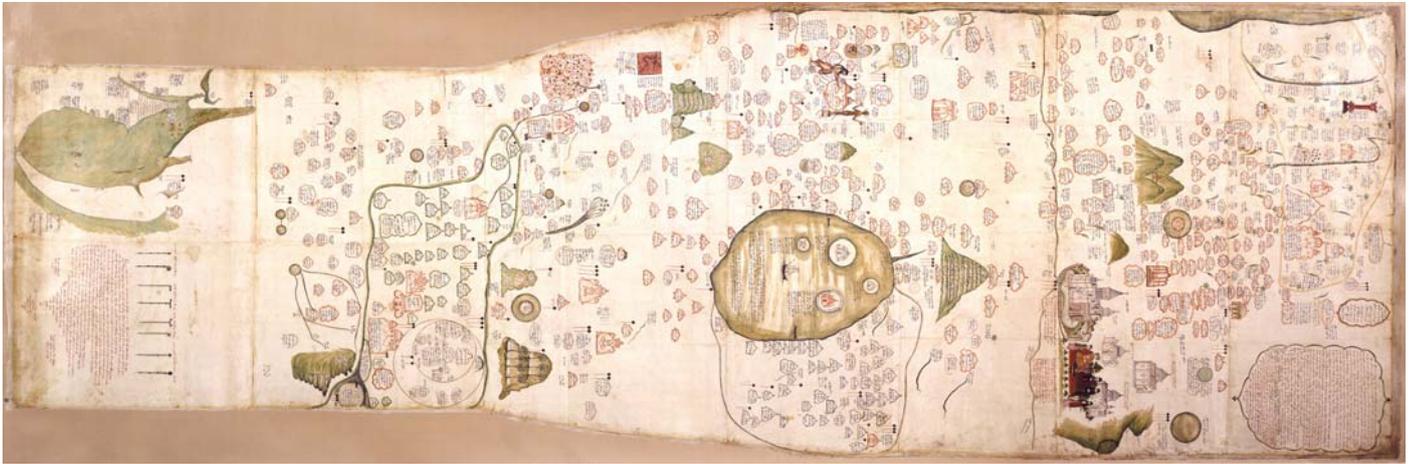


Detail of the World map by Vanandetzi, 1695



Bleau's map of the same area, from his World Map of 1670s.

But in 1991 things changed. In that year the Univ. of Bologna was organizing an exhibition of old maps, where Prof. Gabriella Ulohogian, to her amazement found a large MS map prepared in Armenian. The map shows important religious centres of Armenia and was prepared by Yeremia Chelebi Keomurjian in Constantinople in 1691.



Keomurjian's 1691 manuscript map of the Armenian churches.

Among the manuscripts of The Matenadaran collection in Yerevan, there are many illustrated works on astrology and astronomy as well as some on geography, including the famous "Ashkharhatsuytz" but virtually nothing contains a map, save for a few sketches and astrological diagrams.

However, there is one exception to the general lack of maps in Matenadaran. This is MS 1242, a collection of eighteen unrelated essays on religious, moral, mathematical and astronomical subjects dating mainly from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries written on paper. There are 205 numbered leaves, each measuring about 16.5 by 12.5 centimetres.

Folio 131v contains a table of angles of the elevation of the solar orbit. The facing page, folio 132r, bears the circular world map. On the verso of the map page (fol. 132v) is the beginning of an article on mathematical riddles.

The map has no obvious relation to anything else in the volume. This map is believed to be the oldest Armenian language map in existence. Its presence in the manuscript raises questions about how such an essentially non-Armenian-style map came to be made by an Armenian. Considering that this is the only T-O type map bearing Armenian inscriptions known to exist, **its importance should be recognized.**

## The Map

First let us look at a typical TO map. These are circular in shape, oriented with east at the top, where, on many TO maps Paradise is located. The main features of the TO map are shown by the letter T and O. The O represents the circular of globe shaped world, surrounded by the “All Encompassing Ocean” and arms of the T are the waters dividing the known world into the three continents of Asia, Europe and Africa. The vertical stem being the Mediterranean Sea dividing Africa from Europe, the right arm of the T is the Nile dividing Africa from Asia and the left arm is the river Tanais (Don) running between Europe and Asia. The T

East at the TOP and Jerusalem in the centre

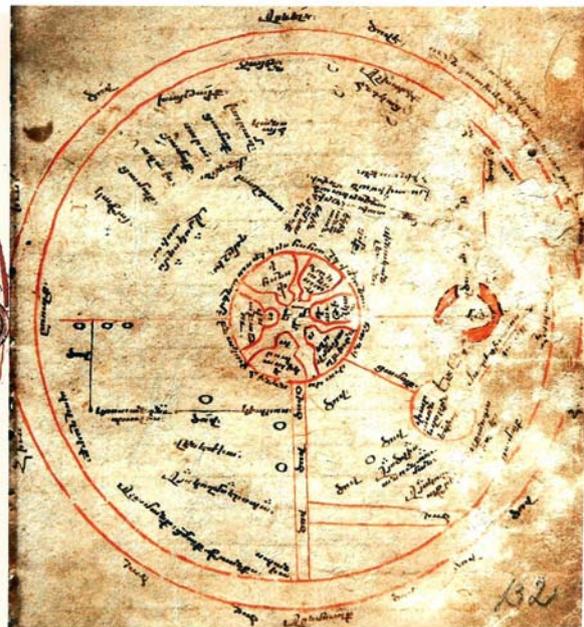
The Red Sea painted red



One of the Western T-O maps of 13<sup>th</sup> century.

East at the TOP and Jerusalem in the centre

The Red Sea painted red



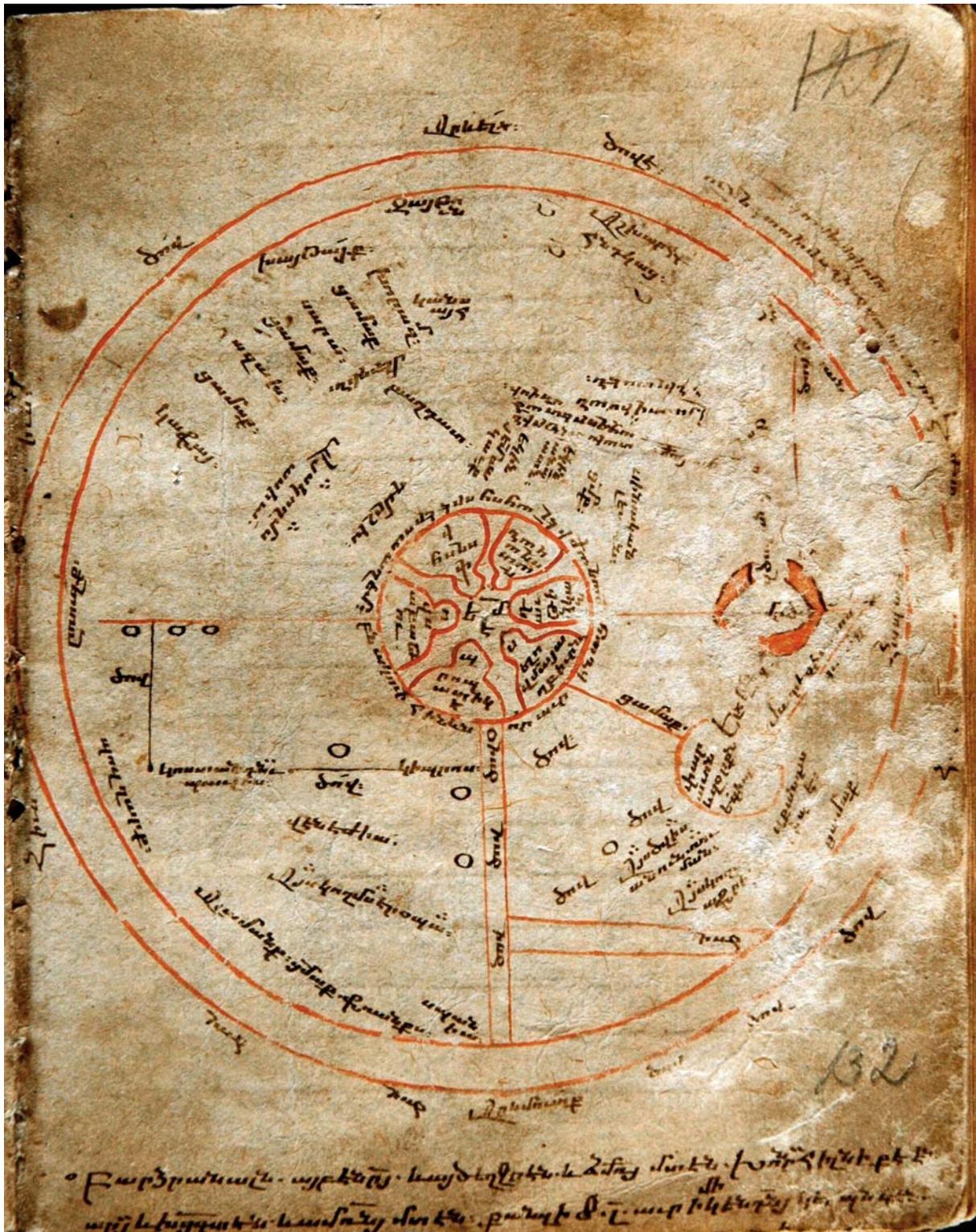
The ONLY Armenian T-O map of 13-14<sup>th</sup> century

The comparison of the a western T-O map and the Armenian map.

These are other important features in a typical TO map, namely, Jerusalem, normally shown as the centre of the World, the Red Sea – coloured red and some other biblical features, such as the parting of the Red Sea, the rivers of Paradise and the Pharaohs etc.

Now let us look at the Armenian TO map.

The map on folio 132r can be described as of the T-O type, but its construction has been modified. The two circles, drawn in red are the “O” measuring 12.5 cm and 11.3 cm in diameter respectively, with the size of the larger circle being dictated by the width of the page. The horizontal arms of the letter T (stretching



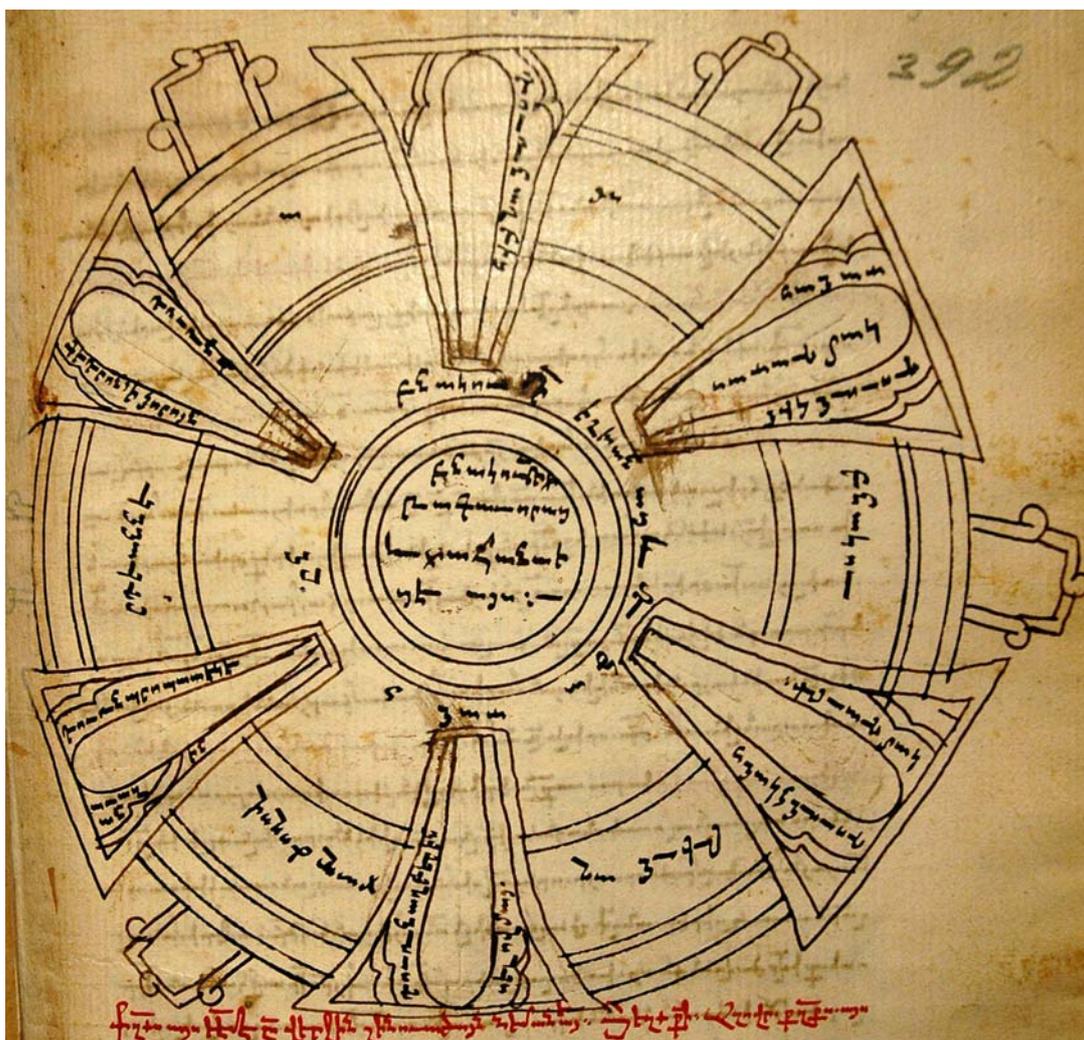
The Armenian language T-O map from MS 1242 in Matenadaran, Yerevan.

north and south from Jerusalem at the centre) are not representing the rivers Tanais (Don) and Nile, as in conventional T-O maps. This is done by single red line demarcating Asia from Europe and from Africa. Only the northern end of the single red line might be considered to represent the river Tanais, the traditional divide between Europe and Asia. Two vertical parallel red lines

represent the unnamed Mediterranean Sea that separates Africa and Europe. In accordance with the Western Christian T-O maps, the Armenian map is oriented with east at the top.

Also as in many maps of the T-O genre, the centre is occupied by the Holy City of Jerusalem, which is shown with its six gates, each inscribed with its name in Armenian. The circular legend around the city reads 'The city of Jerusalem populated in ancient and recent times by the Israelites'. The considerable prominence given to Jerusalem can be explained by the fact that the Armenian Church had, and still has, close ties with the Holy City and is one of the four custodians of the Holy Places, with a church, seminary and religious order active since the fifth century.<sup>1</sup>

In both shape and arrangement, the city sign is akin to that on the Hereford *mappamundi* (c.1290), although it lacks the enclosing crenellated walls of the Hereford map sign. It also resembles the plan of Jerusalem in another Armenian manuscript in the Matenadaran, the much later MS 1770.<sup>2</sup>



The plan of Jerusalem from the MS 1770 manuscript in Matenadaran, Yerevan.

Although made in geographically widely separate locations, a common source or tradition may be suspected for the Hereford, Ebstorf, Vercelli, Psalter and other medieval world maps, especially were the Armenian map to prove to have been made around the end of the thirteenth century, which would place all these maps to within one hundred to one hundred fifty years of each other. The city plan in the sixteenth century MS 1770 also would seem to have been derived from the same common source or tradition.

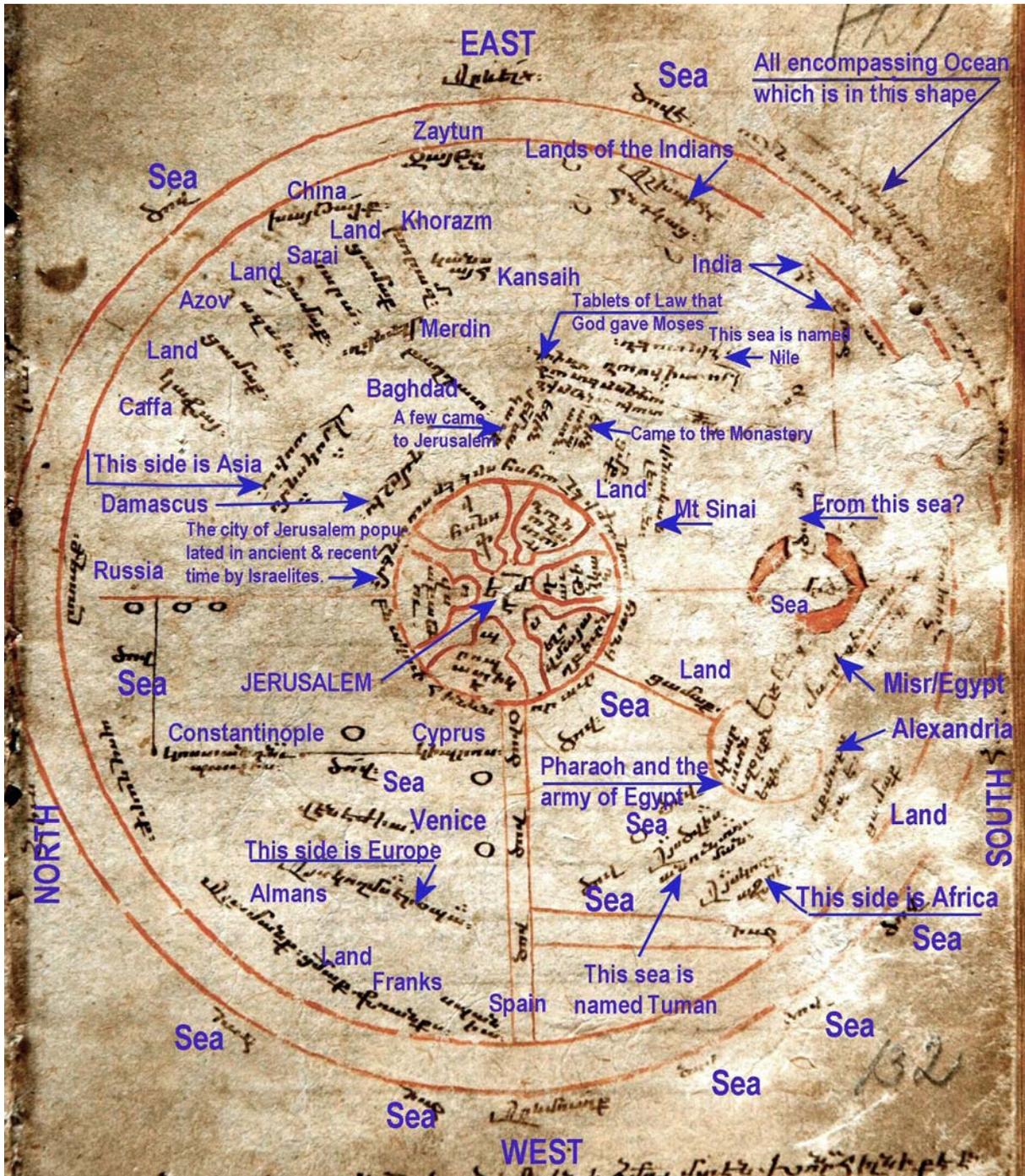
In addition to Jerusalem, twenty-seven place-names are found on the map. Additionally a number of descriptive legends are inscribed outside and inside the map proper. Outside the double-circle frame of the map are the names of the four cardinal directions *Hyūsis*, *Hārāv*, *Ārevelq* and *Ārevmūtq*, and the word *Dzov* (Sea) is written seven times. The significance of the two circles is made clear by the note, also on the outside, ‘The all encompassing ocean, which is in this shape’. The term ‘Sea’, it should be noted, as used on the Armenian T-O map, refers any substantial body of water, whether it be an ocean, sea, lake or river. Similarly the term ‘Land’ does not denote a territory as such, but is placed wherever there is a significant gap between neighbouring toponyms.

The Mediterranean, which is identified only by the word ‘Sea’ contains four circular islands represented by small black circles. One circle, well to the north of the parallel lines is labelled *Kipros* (Cyprus). The other three are unnamed.

The inscription to the left of the stem of the T, reads *Āys koghms Eropā* (This side is Europe). Around the periphery are the names of three nations, those of the *Būlghārq* (Bulgars), *Ālāmānq* (Germans) and *Frānks* (Franks), and one country, *Spāniā* (Spain). Further in from the Ocean two cities are named, *Kostāndnūpolis* (Constantinople) and *Venejia* (Venice). The choice of these two cities within Europe is unlikely to have been accidental. Venice was an important entrepôt for Armenian merchants, and Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire, was the most important religious and political centre outside Jerusalem.

The legend at the right of the T reads *Āys koghms Āfrikā* (This side is Africa). On the other (eastern) side of the legend indicating Africa a large red circle contains the legend *Pārāvon yev zōrqn Yēgiptosi* (Pharaoh and the army of Egypt). To the right of this is the city of Alexandria (named *Skāndāriā*).

The Red Sea (*[Kārmir] dzov*; only the word sea is legible on the map) is shown as a bold open circle on the borders of Africa and Asia. It is outlined in black, coloured solidly in red and interrupted as if to indicate the traditional crossing of the Israelites as they fled from Egypt. Southeast of this sea the inscription reads *Misr-Yēgiptos*.



The Armenian T-O map with English translation of its legends.

Directly south of the Red Sea, near the shores of the surrounding Ocean, lies Ethiopia, named *Hāpāsh*. The Nile is placed well inside Asia, where a vertical (east–west) red line running from close to the eastern Ocean towards the Red Sea bears the legend *Āys dzovis ānūn Nīl āsen* (This Sea is named Nile).

The division between Europe and Asia, normally marked with the horizontal crossbar of the T here is demarcated with a single red line and is more complex. Two black lines, drawn at right angles to each other and to the red lines of the continental division and the Mediterranean, indicate the Aegean and Black Seas.

A gap in the horizontal line for the Aegean, filled with the name *Kostāndnūpolis* (Constantinople), seems to imply that the line also represents the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus.

North of Constantinople, the vertical black line, inscribed only as ‘Sea’, represents the Black Sea. The northern extremity of the red line dividing Europe and Asia, beyond the eastern end of the Black Sea, must also stand for the Sea of Azov (for which there is no place-name) and the river Tanais. Three unnamed islands are shown in this area, all at the eastern end of the Black Sea.

In keeping with T-O maps in general, the greater part of the Armenian map is allocated to Asia, inscribed *Āys kōghms Āsiā* (This side is Asia). In the north, following the curve of the encircling Ocean, and on the borders of Europe and Asia, is written *Rūsqa* (Russia). East of Russia a series of place-names is inscribed at right angles to the circle: *Kāfā* (Theodosia), *Tzāmāq* (Land), *Āzāch* (the city of Azov), *Tzāmāq* (Land), *Sārā* (Sarai), *Tzāmāq* (Land), *Khorāzm* (Oxiana) and finally, placed horizontally near the top of the map *Kānsāih* (Khansai, a trading city in China).<sup>3</sup> By adding the word ‘Land’ between the toponyms, the mapmaker has tried to show that although these towns are widely separated and distant from each other, they constitute a chain of cities along a route that can only be the Silk Road.

In the east, in the upper part of the map close to the Ocean are the names *Khāytāi* (China) and *Zāytun* (Zaytun), another Chinese trading port city.<sup>4</sup> Then comes *Āshkhārq Hndkātz* (Lands of the Indians), followed well to the southeast by *Hndkāstān* (Hindustan or India). In the Middle Ages, the designation ‘India’ was used loosely to refer to the lands east of Persia, Media and the Middle East. So here ‘Lands of the Indians’ most probably refer to the northern and western neighbours of India, such as Persia and its neighbouring countries, while *Hndkāstān* denotes India proper.

The presence of these toponyms in the area between Europe and China bears witness to the importance of these towns and provinces in trade and commerce between East and West and is perhaps indicative of the period of the map’s creation. It may also be that this is the earliest Christian map on which the toponyms Caffa, Azov, Sarai, Zaytun and Khansai are found.<sup>5</sup> Finally, towards the centre of the map we see the cities of *Merdin* (Mardin), *Bāghdāt* (Baghdad) and *Dmshkh* (Damascus), all of which were important trading centres, connected with the Silk Route.

### ***Dating the Map***

The dating of this map has been controversial. The geographer Mkrdich

Khachaturian's suggestion that the map dates from 1206 is unlikely to be correct (1976).<sup>6</sup> His conjecture was based on the assumption that all the toponyms on the map are contemporary with the time of its creation. Furthermore he claimed that since Mardin appears prominently on the map, it must have been made before the conquest of that city by the Arabs, in the early thirteenth century. These are doubtful lines of argument; information took time to be disseminated, and maps were only slowly updated. Moreover, in the case of the Western *mappaemundi* the very essence of the map was the inclusion of old (historical as well as biblical) information together with contemporary places and events. It was usual for medieval maps, in short, to depict conditions in existence some time before their creation. But no map can contain information resulting from the future events.

The Armenian map contains the city of *Sārā* (Sarai), a city founded only in the 1240s by Batu Khan, the grandson of Mongol leader Gangiz Khan, who took over the territory of southern Russia and its Turkic speaking peoples during the early thirteenth century, hence it could not have been made prior to this date.

The Flemish Franciscan William de Rubruck (1220–1293), who in 1253 travelled to the region, stated that [Sarai] Batu was one of the most important cities of the region.<sup>7</sup> This posed a problem for Khachaturian, however, and he therefore had to insist that the toponym *Sārā* related not to Sarai-Batu but to some other location, perhaps a putative island in the Caspian Sea, even though the Caspian is neither mentioned on the map nor has it ever had an inhabited island named *Sārā*.

It has been proposed that the map was made in the Cilician Kingdom of Armenia during the Crusades, unfortunately not specifying which Crusade. As for palaeography, the script used on the map is very similar to that in a manuscript produced in Caffa in 1445 (Matenadaran, MS 8963), which is another collection of astrological and scientific subjects, with diagrams and calendars.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the toponyms shown on the map, the question arises why would a Cilician-Armenian mapmaker include the names of cities along the distant northern Silk Road on his map, instead of the toponyms found in his locality. Therefore I think that this argument also lacks proper foundation.

Caffa, the first town listed in the row of toponyms along the north-eastern periphery of the map, was only a small Crimean seaside town until the thirteenth century. Only after the Genoese merchants had leased it from the Mongols, was it transformed into a flourishing commercial centre, trading with the East and rivalling the Venetian-controlled city of Tanais on the Sea of Azov. The earliest mention of Caffa in Armenian literature dates from the middle of

the thirteenth century. By the middle of the fourteenth century—by when numerous monastic scriptoria were in operation—a large proportion of Caffa’s population of 70,000 was Armenian.<sup>9</sup>

The presence of the name Caffa on the map is a strong indication that the map was made during the city’s heyday, namely in the fourteenth century. Such a date would fit the suggestion that the Armenian mapmaker, who was most likely to have been a monk, either saw or was told about contemporary Italian T-O maps in Caffa, a city not only administered by the Genoese, but also to all intents and purposes functioning as an Italian city, and one of the most suitably located Armenian communities for intellectual as well as commercial contact with the West.<sup>10</sup>

Since, in my view, the map has to postdate both the establishment of Sarai-Batu and Sarai-Berke (New Sarai, established 1257–1266) and the time when Caffa became an important conurbation, it cannot be dated to earlier than the third quarter of the thirteenth century. Hovhannes Hovhannisian, the other Armenian geographer who also had studied the map (1954), argues that the presence of the commercial centres of Khorazm (Oxiana) and Sarai are indicative of the period when the Mongols had close connections with Khorazm (that is, from the 1240s to the 1360s), and this explains the rationale behind his dating the map to as late as 1360.<sup>11</sup> In my view, the most creditable hypothesis is that the map was created between the late-thirteenth and mid-fourteenth centuries, or even slightly later, which is in line with Hovhannisian’s proposal.

### *Some Curious Aspects of the Map*

While the majority of T-O maps produced in the Christian West depict Armenia, Mount Ararat and Noah’s Ark, the Armenian mapmaker has chosen not to mention any of these Armenian features on his. Other biblical events and places are shown on the map, however: Jerusalem, the giving of the Tablets of the Law to Moses, Mount Sinai and the Red Sea.<sup>12</sup> In addition, two legends in Palestine read *Yekin ānāpātn* (Came to the monastery) and *Yekin Ye[rūsāghe]m sākāvq* (A few came to Je[rusale]m).

Monasteries are mentioned on very few Western maps. While the Hereford *mappamundi* (c.1290) and the Sawley map (1180) each show a monastic establishment, the references to these have been placed on the banks of the Nile. The Armenian language has several different words that mean ‘monastery’, among them *vānq*, *menāstān* and *ānānpāt*. Significantly, in the present context, the usual meaning of the last is ‘desert’. The monastery on the Armenian map is not named but is defined as *ānānpāt*, which suggests a conscious choice, since on the Hereford map the whole legend reads *Monasteria Sancti Antonii in*

*deserto*.<sup>13</sup> Since the two Western maps and the Armenian map seem to have been made within one hundred and one hundred fifty years of each other, we can see the reference on the respective maps as further confirmation of the possibility of a common source.

In the end, the absence of reference on the Armenian map to Armenia itself or to any of its immediate neighbours, such as Persia and Assyria, is more puzzling. It can plausibly be deduced, that the author was familiar with Central Asia since current trends in commercial and political relations are well represented by the depiction of the Silk Road cities and major trading centres such as Baghdad, Damascus, Constantinople and Venice. It may also be suggested that the mapmaker was a native of the region, very likely from fourteenth-century Caffa, then one of the most important Armenian cultural centres and the source of a large number of manuscripts of that date. Arguably, the lack of any references to Armenia itself could be attributed to the fact that he lived far from his homeland and felt no particular affinity with it.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> It may be worth bearing in mind that for the first four centuries of Christianity it was predominantly an Asiatic and North African religion, and that the Christian world was not divided into a Latin West and a predominantly Byzantine East until after the Council of Ephesus in 431. Christianity had reached Armenia through the preaching of the Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus. It became the state religion in 301, after the conversion of King Tigran III, which makes the Armenian Church one of the oldest Christian entities. Armenian Christianity's ties with the Latin churches were severed in 554 over irreconcilable doctrinal differences.

<sup>2</sup> MS 1770 dates from 1589. It contains a collection of religious, geographical, astronomical and historical works. In section 11, containing a text related to the Old Testament, there is circular plan of the city of Jerusalem (fol. 392r), which is similar to the plan of the same city drawn in the centre of the world map of MS 1242.

<sup>3</sup> Caffa is today the Ukrainian city of Feodosia in the Crimean Peninsula. Sarai refers to the capital of the Mongols; it is either Sarai-Batu (Old Sarai), built in 1240s, or Sarai-Berke (New Sarai), dating from around 1260. These cities were located in the region of Astrakhan, northwest of the Caspian Sea. The fourteenth century Arab traveller Ibn-Battuta (1304–1368/9) described the port of Khansai (Khansa in Arabic), located not far from Zaytun, another city on the map, as the largest metropolis in China (Ibn-Battuta, *Rehle* [Travelogue], translated into Farsi and annotated by Muhammed-Ali Movahhed; 2 vols. (Tehran, Sepehr-Naghsh Publishers, 1990), vol. 2, ch. 29: 202–3).

<sup>4</sup> Zaytun was the Arabic name given to the port of Quanzhou or Tseu-Tung in the province of Fujian, China. In the Middle Ages it was an important trading centre for Arabs and Persians. According to Ibn-Battuta, this was the 'largest port [he] had ever seen, which could easily accommodate more than 100 large Chinese junks' (Ibn-Battuta, *Rehle*, (see note 11), vol. 2,

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ch. 29: 290–295). The port was located across the sea from the island of Formosa. The thirteenth-century traveller Marco Polo mentions *Zai-tun* and *Kin-sai* as being important cities, trading with Japan (*Zippangu*), as well as with the Arabs and Persians (Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, William Marsden translator and editor (Garden City, NY, Doubleday & Co., 1948), bk. 2, ch. LXXVII: 245–247, and bk. 3, ch. IV, 258).

<sup>5</sup> Zaytun and Khansai appear on the Catalan Atlas of 1375 as *Ciutat de Zaytun* and *Ciutat de Cansay*, respectively; Fra Mauro's map of 1460 contains these toponyms as *Çayton* and *Chansay*.

<sup>6</sup> Mkrdich M. Khachaturian, 'Medieval oval map in Armenian', in *History of Science and Natural Sciences in Armenia* (Yerevan, Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1976), vol. 6: 213–39 (in Armenian).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow, James MacLehouse, 1903), vol. 1: 271–76.

<sup>8</sup> One of the pages of this manuscript can be seen in Michael E. Stone, Dickran Kouymjian and Henning Lehmann, *Album of Armenian Palæography* (Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2002), pl. 140.

<sup>9</sup> *Soviet Armenian Encyclopaedia* (Yerevan, 1978), 4: 170 (in Armenian).

<sup>10</sup> Vartges A. Mikayelyan, *Armenian–Italian Connections: Genoese Documents about Armenians of Crimea* (Yerevan, Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1974), 21–32 (in Armenian).

<sup>11</sup> Hovhanness Hovhannisian, 'Armenian manuscript map of the world', in *University Scientific Papers* 43:1 (Yerevan, 1954): 81–93 (in Armenian).

<sup>12</sup> The legend to the southeast of Palestine, between Mount Sinai and the Nile reads *Tākhtāk orinātz zōr yet[ur] ā[stuā]tz Mōvs[es]i*, which translates 'Tablets of law that God gave Moses'. The toponym for Mount Sinai reads *Sinākān lēārn*.

<sup>13</sup> The monastery of St Anthony cited in Scott D. Westrem, *The Hereford Map* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2001), 129, ref. 289, and on the Sawley *Imago Mundi* manuscript map (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 66: 2).