

Saints Nicholas in Armenia

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The *Directory of Feasts* of the Armenian Church, the liturgical calendar known as the *Tōnac ‘oyc’*, registers two feasts for saints named “Nicholas.” The first Saturday of Advent¹ is dedicated to the commemoration “of Saints Gregory the Wonderworker [*Grigori Sk’anč’elagorcin*], Nicholas the Patriarch [*Nikolayosi hayrapetin*] and Bishop Myron [*Miwronay episcoposin*].”² The second commemoration falls just two weeks later, on the third Saturday of Advent, and is reserved for “Saint Nicholas the Wonderworking ‘Smyrnian’ Patriarch” [*Srboyn Nikolayosi Zmiwřnac ‘woy sk’anč’elagorc hayrapetin*].³ Who are these two saints named Nicholas, if indeed they refer to different persons? And if not, why do the Armenians commemorate the same saint twice, just two weeks apart, during the season of Advent?

In homage to my good friend and colleague, Reverend Professor Maxwell E. Johnson, whose numerous scholarly contributions on the origins of the liturgical year, and whose abiding

¹ Advent [*Yisnak*] begins on the Monday nearest November 18. The calendar of the Armenian Church, one of the more complex in the Christian world, is characterized by its transparent hagiopolite pedigree on the one hand, and by its overwhelming variability from year to year owing to its septenary structure, on the other hand. Charles Renoux’s manifold studies on aspects of the Armenian liturgical year are to be consulted. Cesare Tondini de Quarenghi, *Étude sur le calendrier liturgique de la nation arménienne avec le calendrier arménien de 1907* (Rome: Pustet, 1906) remains helpful. Archbishop Khajag Barsamian provides a convenient survey in English based on Tondini de Quarenghi, idem, *The Calendar of the Armenian Church* (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1995). For an English translation of the *Tōnac ‘oyc’* with generous and helpful annotations (though many are in need of updating in light of recent scholarship) see Domar: *A Compendium of the Directorium and Calendar of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church According to the Traditions of the Apostolic See of Jerusalem.*, ed. Ghevont Samoorian (n.p.: Armenian Orthodox Theological Research Institute, 2006). The best study of the topic in Armenian is R.H. Vardanyan, *Հայոց Տոնացոյցը* [The Directory of Feasts of the Armenians] (Erevan: Gitut’yun Press, 1999). A propos of the Armenian sanctoral, see especially Nicholas Adontz, “Les fêtes et les saints de l’église arménienne,” *Revue de l’Orient Chretien* 26 (1927) 74-104, 225-278; Charles Renoux, “Les fêtes et les saints de l’église arménienne de N. Adontz,” *REArm* 14 (1980) 287-305; and idem, “Les premières manifestations liturgiques du culte des saints en arménie” in *Saints et sainteté dans la liturgie*, Conférences Saint-Serge (Rome: Bibliotheca «Ephemerides Liturgicae» Collectio Subsidia 40, 1987) 291-303.

² *Տօնացոյց Հասոր առաջին յորում նշանակին տօնք, պաշք, ընթերցուածք, արարողութիւնք Հայաստանեայց սուրբ եկեղեցոյ* [Directory of Feasts Volume One in which are Designated Feasts, Fasts, Lectures, Ceremonies of the Holy Church of the Armenians], (Jerusalem: Press of the Apostolic See of Saints James, 1915) 265; henceforth, *Tōnac ‘oyc’*.

³ *Ibid.*, 271.

affection for the saints handily merit him the exalted Armenian honorific, *Tōnasēr* [Lover of Feasts],⁴ I offer this modest investigation into a curious anomaly in the liturgical calendar of the Armenian Church; an essay that illustrates once again, I hope, the urgent requisite for continued historical study of the ancient Armenian Rite, among other reasons, for the purpose of effectively pastoring God’s people in this remote corner of the Lord’s vineyard; a summons relentlessly voiced by Professor Johnson throughout his distinguished teaching and writing ministry.

Hrač‘ea Ačāryan’s exhaustive Armenian prosopographical dictionary lists 46 individuals named Nicholas (Nikołos, Nikawlayos, Niwkowlayos, Nikołayos, Nikełos, Nikol, Nikawl) who are known to the Armenians.⁵ They include five Roman Popes, two Russian czars, an Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople (1477-1489),⁶ a fifteen-year old martyr from Tigranakert (d. 1642),⁷ and another from Bursa (d. 1694);⁸ as well as the notorious Armenian Bishop Nikol T‘orosovič‘ of Lviv (1662-1690), who became Catholic, and whom Armenian historians accuse of having turned the Armenian people of Poland away from their ancestral church.⁹ The rest of the Nicholases in Ačāryan’s inventory are scribes, clergymen and patrons of letters, whose names are mentioned in passing in sundry manuscript colophons, but who are otherwise unknown. All but a few date from the thirteenth century, when, according to Ačāryan, the name “Nicholas” becomes more common in Armenian circles. Only one Nicholas in Ačāryan’s inventory is identified as a saint of the Armenian Church:

Nikołayos, the great patriarch of Miwron of the Lycians [*Miwronay Likēac‘woc‘*], whom the Armenian Church commemorates; he has odes [*ganjer*], anthems [*taler*], prayers and a hymn [*šarakan*].¹⁰

This great Nicholas, the bishop and wonderworker much loved throughout Christendom, is doubtless to be identified with the second of the two Armenian Nicholas commemorations, that on the third Saturday of Advent, which falls close to December 6, the traditional and unanimous

⁴ Detailed explanations and annotations scattered throughout the *Tōnac‘oyc‘* that assist the user in navigating the calendar’s complicated structure are often quaintly addressed to the intrepid user: “O Lover of feasts...” [Ուղ ամուսուէր...]. The editor of the modern *Directory of Feasts* was Catholicos Simēon Erewanc‘i (1710-1780). *Tōnac‘oyc‘*, 215 *et infra*.

⁵ Hrač‘ea Ačāryan, *Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան* [Dictionary of Armenian Personal Names], 5 vols. (Yerevan: State University Publisher, 1942) 4:75-80. N.b. numbers 19 and 20 in Ačāryan’s list are duplicates, *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:78.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:78-9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:79.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Ačāryan, 4:75.

date of Nicholas' death and of his commemoration in the Byzantine East¹¹ and Roman West.¹² Moreover, the same saintly thaumaturge must also be identified with "Nicholas the Patriarch," subject of the preceding feast,¹³ since the Armenians seem to know no other Nicholas worthy of veneration.

The existence of two commemorations for St. Nicholas in the Armenian sanctoral is problematic not only because of their close occurrence, but because the distinctive structure of the Armenian liturgical year only allows saints' commemorations on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; and that, only outside of fasting periods and "dominical" feasts and seasons (the octave of Theophany, Holy Week, the fifty days of Eastertide, the seven days of Pentecost, the three days of Transfiguration, the nine days of the Assumption of the Mother of God, and the septenary of the Feast of the Cross,¹⁴ and all dominical feast days).¹⁵ In sum, only around one third of the days of the year are eligible for saints commemorations. This restriction ultimately serves to reserve Sunday as the *dies dominica*, when all devotion may be focused on the divine economy of the Lord. Few, consequently, are the days in the Armenian liturgical year entirely devoted to a single saint,¹⁶ and highly privileged are those few saints who have been assigned more than one annual commemoration.¹⁷ In the case of multiple annual commemorations of a particular saint, they tend to be separated by intervals of several months. Thus the two-week span separating the two feast days for St. Nicholas is highly unusual. Before

¹¹ *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, 3 vols. (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 2:1469.

¹² *Butler's Lives of the Saints, New Full Edition*, 12 vols. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999) 12:59.

¹³ Tondini de Quarenghi asserts this unequivocally by designating the subject of the earlier commemoration as "St. Nicolas, évêque de Myre." *Idem*, 60.

¹⁴ Which is actually the ancient octave of *Encaenia*. See Michael Daniel Findikyan, "Armenian Hymns of the Holy Cross and the Jerusalem *Encaenia*," *REArm* 32 (2010) 25-58.

¹⁵ Tondini de Quarenghi, v, 2-4 et *infra*.

¹⁶ In addition to the second commemoration of St. Nicholas in Advent, the saints who merit their own, exclusive commemorations are: Saints John the Baptist, Anthony of the Desert, Vahan of Goltz, Athanasius, Gregory the Theologian, Theodore the General, Gregory the Illuminator, Prophet Zechariah, Prophet Elisha, Prophet Isaiah, Prophet Jeremiah, John Chrysostom, King Abgar, Asduacatur (a.k.a. Adeodat, Hiztibuzd) the Martyr, Stephen the First Martyr. Feasts of the Mother of God fall under the category of "dominical" [*tērunakan*] days.

¹⁷ In addition to St. Nicholas, they are: Saints Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, (Ps-)Dionysius the Areopagite, Epiphanius of Cyprus, Gregory the Illuminator, Gregory of Nazianzus, Apostle James (the Minor), John Chrysostom, John the Baptist, Lucien of Antioch, Bishop Meletius of Persia, Mesrob, Apostle Philip, Sahak Part'ew the Patriarch, Sahak the Prince and Martyr.

turning to this circumstance, however, we need to consider yet another anomaly that should strike the eye of any devotee of St. Nicholas.

What are we to make of the curious attribute *Zmiwrnac* ‘woy, “the Smyrnian,” attributed to Nicholas on the third Saturday of Advent? According to the testimony of the various *vitae*, Nicholas was born in the town of Patara in the Province of Lycia in southwestern Asia Minor.¹⁸ He later became the bishop not of “Smyrna,” but of Myra. As far as I can tell, Nicholas does not seem ever to have set foot in Smyrna, some 600 miles to the west. Without patently acknowledging any incongruity in the place of St. Nicholas’ ministry, Patriarch T‘orgom Gušakean seems to have sought to reconcile the inconsistency in his famous handbook, *Saints and Feasts*. He notes this about Nicholas’ episcopal see: “*Miwray* [Myra]... a city in *Likia* [Lycia], is near *Zmiwrin* [Smyrna].”¹⁹

As a matter of fact, medieval Armenian manuscript lectionaries, synaxaria and other liturgical texts give a number of variant designations for Nicholas’ provenance. We find several apparent variations of “Myra” in the sources: *Miwron/Miwronay*;²⁰ *Miwria/Miwrioy*;²¹ *Miwris*;²² or *Miwray*.²³ Equally well represented are references to the Wonderworker’s place of origin as

¹⁸ Patriarch T‘orgom [Gušakean], **Սուրբ և անբ Հայաստանեայց Եկեղեցւոյ** [Saints and Feasts of the Church of the Armenians], 2nd printing (Jerusalem: Saints James Press, 1957) 90; henceforth, *Saints and Feasts*.

¹⁹ Ibid. Gušakean’s popular but comprehensive guide lists only this entry for a saint named “Nicholas.” The author mentions nothing about a double commemoration for the Wonder-working bishop.

²⁰ Ms. synaxarion Erevan 1339 (16th c.), **Մայր ցուցակ Հարերէն ձեռագրաց Մաշտոցի անուան մատենադարանի** [Main Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts in the Maštoc‘ Matenadaran], A. K‘eōškerean, K. Suk‘eanean, and Y. K‘eōsēean, eds. Vol. 4 (Erevan: Nairi Press, 2008) 4:798; henceforth, *Mayr C‘uc‘ak* 4. Ačarıyan too uses this appellation. Idem, 4:75.

²¹ Ms. lectionary Venice 612 (13-14th c.), **Մայր ցուցակ Հայերէն ձեռագրաց մատենադարանին Մխիթարեանց Ի Վենետիկ** [Main Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts in the Library of the Mxit‘areans in Venice] Vol. 4, Sahak Jemjemian, ed. (Venice: St. Lazar, 1993) 4:798; henceforth, *Venetik* 4.

²² From the *vita* in the so-called Armenian Synaxarion of Tēr-Israel, which was actually compiled by one Kirakos of the East [*Arewelc‘i*], who is probably to be identified with the famous historiographer, Kirakos Ganjakec‘i (d. 1271). This concise *vita* is attributed to Gregory of Nyssa. G. Bayan, *Le Synaxaire arménien de Ter-Israel*, PO 16/1 (Brepols, 1922) 168, 170. See also Patricia Boisson-Chenorhokian, “Notes sur Kirakos Ganjakec‘i,” REArm 30 (2005-2007) 237-246 for a convincing argument supporting this attribution.

²³ *Saints and Feasts*, 90.

*Zmiwrin/Zmiwr̄noy*²⁴ or, according to a late-fourteenth century manuscript, *Zmirn/Zm̄rna*.²⁵ Just as frequently, however, the manuscripts designate the saint as merely, “Nicholas the Patriarch.”

Alas, the disparate bynames that appear to allude to the city of “Smyrna” are actually alternative appellations for one and the same “Myra,” deriving from an alternate reading of Acts 27:5 in the Armenian version. Long before the birth of the Wonder-worker, St. Paul transited at *Μύρα τῆς Λυκίας* at the outset of his fateful journey toward Rome. The Armenian text in the Zohrapean Bible has *smiwr̄a likiac‘woc‘* [Smyra/Myra of the Lycians].²⁶ An annotation indicates this significant variant: *zmiwr̄nia likac‘woc‘* or *lwkiac‘woc‘* [Myra/Smyrna of the Lycians], which even more closely resembles the various bynames for St. Nicholas in the manuscripts. Whatever the original etymological rationale for the odd Armenian rendering of the Lycian seaport town mentioned in Acts 27:5, it is evident that medieval Armenian scribes assimilated the place of Nicholas’ episcopal see to the biblical phrase that was no doubt well-known to them.

The multiplicity of variations for the name of Nicholas’ see in the manuscript tradition was likely compounded by a characteristic of Classical Armenian grammar, whereby the letter *z* (*զ*) is prefixed to words in the accusative case to indicate the definite article. This invariably causes confusion in distinguishing whether unusual proper nouns that begin with the letter *z* (*զ*) are just that, or are simply in the accusative case.

Worth noting as well in this regard is the remarkable coincidence that on the first Saturday of Advent (mentioned above), a certain Bishop *Miw̄ron* is commemorated alongside “Nicholas the Patriarch,” who hails from *Miw̄ron* according to one of the common Armenian designations of Nicholas’ episcopal see, as we have seen. Is the concurrence on this day of the proper noun *Miw̄ron* as a *both* a prosoponym *and* a toponym sheer serendipity? Or did the common name

²⁴ Ms. Hymnal Vienna 38 (19th c) f. 30v., *Յուցակ Հայերէն ձեռագրաց մատենադարանին Մխիթարեանց Ի Վիեննա* [Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts in the Library of the Mxit‘areans in Vienna], ed. Jacobus Dashian [Tašean] (Vienna, 1895) 196; henceforth, Dashian. Ms. Homiliary Vienna 224 (olim 8, 1428AD) f. 31v. Ibid., 573. Ms. Homiliary Erevan 941 (1689AD), *Մայր ցուցակ Հայերէն ձեռագրաց Մաշտոցի անուան մատենադարանի* [Main Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts in the Maštoc‘ Matenadaran], O. Eganyan, et al. eds, Vol. 3 (Erevan: Magalat‘, 2007) 3:1334-35; henceforth, *Mayr C‘uc‘ak* 3. Ms. Erevan 941 (1689AD), Ibid., 1325. Ms. Erevan 938 (17th c.) has *Nikołayosi zmiwr̄nac‘oy*, f. 250rv, Ibid., 1308.

²⁵ Ms. Lectionary Venice 602 (1349AD), *Venetik* 4:672.

²⁶ *Աստուածաշունչ մատենան Հին եւ Նոր կտակարանաց* [Divinely-Inspired Scripture of the Old and New Testaments], Yovhan Zōhrapan, ed. Reprint of the Venice, 1805 edition (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1984) 747.

somehow factor into the eventual shared commemoration of these two saints? I have found no evidence to support the latter conjecture.

One thing is certain. In faraway Armenia, the people's love and admiration for the Wonder-worker evidently did not translate into precision regarding their memory of his place of ministry.

The Armenian commemoration of St. Nicholas in early December dates only to the very end of the thirteenth century. There is no feast of anyone named "Nicholas" in *Čašoc* manuscripts copied before that time; including, notably, in the Armenian Lectionary of Jerusalem,²⁷ and the oldest "Cilician" Lectionary [*Čašoc*] (Erevan 832), whose *terminus ante quem* is 1105AD, when the physiognomy of the Armenian Lectionary changes notably due, among other factors, to the multiplication of saints' commemorations.²⁸ That sudden burgeoning cannot be unrelated to the prolific career of Catholicos Grigor II Pahlawuni (d. 1105AD), known as *Vkayasēr* [Martyrophile], who devoted much of his life to studying and translating the lives of saints.²⁹ The inclusion of Nicholas' commemoration may well be connected with the Martyrophile's work, although the precise number, identity and origin of the *vitae* translated or edited by Gregory remains unknown.³⁰ Nor is there any mention St. Nicholas in the famous Armenian Homeliary of Muš, compiled in 747AD.³¹

It should also be recalled that the earliest formal account of St. Nicholas' life was written some five hundred years after his death, by an "incompletely-identified Michael the

²⁷ Charles A. Renoux, *Le codex arménien Jérusalem 121. Édition comparée du texte et de deux autres manuscrits. Introduction, textes, traduction et notes*, PO 36/2 (Brepols, 1970) 188-192; henceforth, *Čašoc* II. Curiously, the Georgian version of the Lectionary of Jerusalem, representing liturgical practices between the fifth and eighth centuries, has a commemoration, *Patris Sabbae et sancti Nicolai* on December 5. Michel Tarchnischvili, tr., *Le grand lectionnaire de l'église de Jérusalem II* (CSCO 205 Scriptorum Iberici 14, Louvan, 1960) 55.

²⁸ Charles A. Renoux, *Le Lectionnaire de Jérusalem en arménie. Le Čašoc I: Introduction et liste des manuscrits*, PO 44/4 (Turnhout/Belgique: Brepols, 1989) 451 ff.; henceforth, *Lectionnaire I*.

²⁹ Charles A. Renoux, *Le codex arménien Jérusalem 121. Édition comparée du texte et de deux autres manuscrits. Introduction, textes, traduction et notes*, PO 35/1 (Brepols, 1969) 452-460; henceforth, *Čašoc* I. See M. Avdalbegyan, **Յայտնաւորք ժողովածուները եւ նրանց պատմագրական արժէքը** [The *Yaysmavurk*' Collections and their Historiographical Value], (Erevan, 1982) 29-37. A. Kapoïan-Kouyoujian, "Le Catholicos Grégoire II le Martyrophile (*Vkayasēr*) et ses pérégrinations" *Bazmavēp* 132 (1975) 306-325. Małak'ea Öormanian (Ormanian), **Ազգապատում** [*Azgapatum. History of a People: Passages of the Armenian Orthodox Church from the Beginning to our Times, Narrated in the Context of National Circumstances*], 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1960) I:1282, 1285-86; henceforth, *Azgapatum*.

³⁰ Renoux, *Čašoc* I, 452; *Azgapatum* I.1283.

³¹ Michel Van Esbroeck, "Description du répertoire de l'Homélie de Muš," REArm 18 (1984) 237-80.

Archimandrite” between 814 and 842.³² While no texts concerning the Wonderworker exist from before this time, the Life of St. Nicholas of Sion, a sixth-century monk named after the Wonderworker and hailing from the same town, testifies, in that era, to a well-established cult of the Wonder-working bishop, including a church dedicated to him in Myra, an annual commemoration, and many contemporary figures named Nicholas. Scholars have determined that the Life of Nicholas of Sion became an important model for the Life of the fourth-century Wonderworker.³³ Shortly after Michael the Archimandrite’s *vita* of Nicholas, another Life by a certain Methodios becomes the source for the Latin Life written by John the Deacon of Naples about the year 880. This Methodius, who has been plausibly identified as the iconodule Patriarch of Constantinople (843-847), is to be distinguished from a homonymous hagiographer, who, sometime after 860, pens an independent *vita* known as the *Encomium Methodii* that is twice as long as the work of the Patriarch, and proves very popular. This longer version was translated into several eastern languages, including Armenian.³⁴

The earliest Armenian commemoration of St. Nicholas is found in the richly-illuminated manuscript lectionary Erevan 979 dated 1286 AD.³⁵ It designates “the life and repose of the wonder-working Patriarch Nikolayos” on the 28th of the Armenian month of *Trē*, which corresponds to December 6.³⁶ Several other early manuscript lectionaries appoint the

³² Charles William Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra, Bari and Manhattan: Biography of a Legend*. (Chicago/London, 1978) 45. I resume the early history of Nicholas’ *vita* in this paragraph from Jones’ study. Jones’ erudite “biography” concerns not the historical Nicholas *per se*, but the so-called “N.,” the St. Nicholas *legenda* or mythical figure that developed in the devotional imagination of worshipping Christian communities. The definitive study of all the textual evidence is Gustav Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos: Der heilige Nikolaos in der griechischen Kirche. Texte und Untersuchungen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, Berlin, 1913, 1917). Unavailable to me, this work is said to contain all of the Greek texts of any interest, better edited than in Migne, and with a full introduction and notes. See also N. Del Re and M.C. Celletti, “Nicolas, vescovo di Mira” in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 9 (Rome, 1967) cols. 923-48. Philipp Niewöhner, “Neues zum Grab des hl. Nikolaus von Myra,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 46 (2004) 119-133 provides an archaeological study of Nicholas’ tomb in Kale/Demre, Turkey, where a church still stands. For the history of Nicholas’ cult in the West see Karl Meisen, *Nikolauskult und Nikolausbrauch im Abendlande*, *Forschungen und Volkskunde* 9-12 (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1931).

³³ Ihor Ševčenko and Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, *The Life of St. Nicholas of Sion* (Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1985).

³⁴ A philological analysis of the various Armenian *vitae* of St. Nicholas has yet to be undertaken.

³⁵ *Mayr C’uc’ak* 3:1571, cf. 1561. The manuscript includes an illumination of Nicholas on f. 417v.

³⁶ Similar to the ancient Egyptian year, the calendar in use at the dawn of Armenia’s Christianization consisted of twelve thirty-day months followed a five or six-day intercalary period. In 1116AD Yovhannēs the Deacon aligned it with the Julian calendar such that the first

commemoration of the wonder-working Patriarch either on this specific date according to its Julian designation,³⁷ or, according to its liturgical designation, the “Saturday of the third week of Advent,” which remains today one of the two St. Nicholas observations in the Armenian Church’s calendar.³⁸ Other manuscript lectionaries designate the commemoration on the “Monday of the third week of Advent,”³⁹ or, in a manuscript synaxary copied in the city of Van in 1441AD, on *K’aloc’ 3* / December 11.⁴⁰ The latter date for the commemoration will spread to a series of seventeenth-century ms. synaxaria copied in Persia in the seventeenth century.⁴¹ The variability in the dating of the feast is a sign that it was an innovation, yet to take root in the Armenian sanctoral calendar. In any case, in the 13-14th centuries we see the seeds of the second of today’s two Nicholas feasts.

As for the first one, long before becoming a feast of three Wonderworking saints, this day seems originally to have been dedicated exclusively to the third-century St. Gregory the Wonderworker. The oldest *Thaumaturge* to be commemorated as such by the Armenians, Gregory is mentioned for the first time in second-generation Armenian lectionaries. Manuscripts of this class contain the first indigenous Armenian additions and adaptations to the structure of the liturgical year vis-à-vis that adumbrated in the ancient Armenian Lectionary of Jerusalem.

day of the Armenian year, *Nawasard* 1, corresponded with August 11. A.G. Abrahamyan, *Հայոց գիր եւ գրչութիւն* [Armenian Script and (Paleo)graphy] (Erevan: Erevan State University, 1973) 100, 107, 118-119; Edouard Dulaurier, *Recherches sur la chronologie arménienne: Technique et historique*, unabridged facsimile of the Paris, 1859 edition (np: Elibron Classics, 2006) 111-115.

³⁷ Among the older ones, ms. Erevan 940 (13-14th c.), *Mayr C’uc’ak* 3:1327; ms. Venice 612 (13-14th c.), *Venetik* 4:798.

³⁸ Ms. Venice 602 (1349AD), *Venetik* 4:672; ms. Venice 606 (1425AD), *Ibid.*, 747.

³⁹ Among the older ones are Venice 603 (1356AD), *Venetik* 4.710; Erevan 982 (1460AD), *Mayr C’uc’ak* 3:1601 with an illumination on 508v.

⁴⁰ Ms. Venice 729, *Մայր ցուցակ Հայերէն ձեռագրաց մատենադարանին Մխիթարեանց ի Վենետիկ* [Main Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts in the Library of the Mxit’areans in Venice] Vol. 5, Sahak Jemjemian, ed. (Venice: St. Lazar, 1995) 108; henceforth, *Venetik* 5. A colophon from the year 1615 mentions that ms. Erevan 24 was completed on Saturday, December 9, which was the feast of St. Nicholas the Patriarch. *Մայր ցուցակ Հայերէն ձեռագրաց Մաշտոցի անուան մատենադարանի* [Main Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts in the Maštoc’ Matenadaran], O. Eganyan et al., eds, Vol. 1 (Erevan: Armenian S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, 1984) 82; henceforth, *Mayr C’uc’ak* 1.

⁴¹ For example, mss. New Julfa 241 (1630AD), 249 (1658AD); 252 (1694AD); 256 and 257 (17th c.), Smbat Tēr-Awetisean, ed. *Ցուցակ Հայերէն ձեռագրաց Նոր Զուղայի Ամենափրկիչ Վանքի* [Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts in the All Savior’s Monastery of New Julfa], Vol. 1 (Vienna: Mkhitarian Press, 1970) 375, 392, 410, 441, 456.

Their prototypes date from the fifth to the eighth centuries.⁴² St. Gregory the Wonderworker, unknown to the Armenian Lectionary of Jerusalem, appears on the Saturday before Great Lent in two medieval Armenian lectionaries from this period in the company of a number of prominent church fathers: Athanasius, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, John (Chrysostom), Cyril (of Alexandria), Proclus (of Constantinople), Irenaeus, Epiphanius of Cyprus, Ephrem, and Meletius of Antioch.⁴³ Eventually, via historical pathways that have yet to be traced, St. Gregory will migrate from the threshold of Great Lent to the cusp of Advent. The ms. Lectionary Erevan 979 (1289AD), in which we also found the oldest commemoration of St. Nicholas, assigns St. Gregory alone to November 17.⁴⁴ As late as 1425AD, ms. Venice 606 still has Gregory alone on the first Saturday of Advent, with Nicholas feted two weeks later.⁴⁵ We find Gregory and Nicholas celebrated together for the first time in ms. Venice 602, a lectionary dated 1349AD.⁴⁶ What is more remarkable is that the same manuscript also appoints the second commemoration for Nicholas two weeks later. Here, therefore, at least according to the data available in the catalogues,⁴⁷ is the earliest manuscript containing the double commemoration of the Wonderworker from Myra.

St. Miwron the Thaumaturge, a fourth-century Bishop of Crete⁴⁸ not to be confused with two other saintly Miwrons known to the Armenians,⁴⁹ joins Gregory and Nicholas only much later.

⁴² Charles Renoux, “Un bilan provisoire sur l’héritage grec du rite arménien,” *Le Museon* 116/1-2 (2003) 56-7.

⁴³ Ms. Venice 596 (olim 169, 10th-11th c.), *Venetik* 4:571; ms. Tübingen MA XIII 21 (12th c.?), cited in Charles A. Renoux, *Le lectionnaire de Jérusalem en arménie. Le Čaşoc ‘ II: Édition synoptique des plus anciens témoins*, PO 48/2 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1999) 103-159; henceforth, *Lectionnaire II*.

⁴⁴ *Mayr C’uc’ak* 3:1570. Cf. ms. Venice 612 (olim 920), dated to the 13-14th centuries. *Venetik* 4:797; Erevan 940 (13-14th centuries). *Mayr C’uc’ak* 3:1326. About a century later, another manuscript lectionary appoints his feast day on Saturday of the tenth week following the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (the Sunday nearest September 14 by Armenian Church reckoning), thus, in late November or early December. Ms. Erevan 982 (1460AD), *Mayr C’uc’ak* 3:1601.

⁴⁵ *Venetik* 4:747.

⁴⁶ *Venetik* 4:672.

⁴⁷ I have surveyed the catalogues of the most important repositories of Armenian manuscripts except for the collection of the Monastery of Saints James in Jerusalem; Archbishop Bogharian’s otherwise magisterial catalogue does not provide detailed information on the contents of manuscript lectionaries or synaxaria. *Մայր ցուցակ ձեռագրաց սրբոց Յակոբեանց* [Main Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Saints James], 11 vols., Norayr Polarean (Bogharian), ed. (Jerusalem: Saints James Press, 1966-1991).

⁴⁸ *Saints and Feasts*, 90-92.

⁴⁹ The first is a certain Miwron the Priest, a martyr of the Decian persecutions. His martyrology is found in several Armenian ms. Synaxaria, usually early in the Armenian month of Nawasard

His earliest commemoration is found in a 13-14th c. ms. Lectionary, Erevan 940, where he is commemorated alone, on Aweleac‘ 4 /August 9.⁵⁰ This will become a fairly stable date for Miwron’s feast in the manuscript tradition. While some early sources devote that day exclusively to Miwron,⁵¹ many others from the sixteenth century on place him together with St. Antoninos, a third-century martyr of Alexandria.⁵² Yet as late as the eighteenth century, numerous other manuscript Synaxaries and Lectionaries omit Miwron of Crete entirely, securing August 9 for St. Antoninos alone.⁵³ This suggests that Miwron’s devotion was not yet universal at the dawn of Catholicos Simēon Erewanc‘i’s reform of the calendar. The triple commemoration of Gregory, Nicholas and Myron, and their commemoration on the first Saturday of Advent are both phenomena unknown in any manuscript sources to my knowledge,⁵⁴ suggesting strongly that today’s Armenian commemoration of the three Wonderworkers on the first Saturday of Advent is an eighteenth-century innovation of Catholicos Simēon.

(mid-August). G. Bayan, Max de Saxe, *Le Synaxaire arménien de Ter Israel I. Mois de Navasard*. PO 5/3 (1971) 51-52. Cf. Renoux, “Les premières manifestations,” 293, 296-297. The second is an obscure figure known as Merinos or Miwronos, who is associated with St. John the Evangelist in various ms. Synaxaria. Ms. Miscellany Erevan 5 (1783AD), *Mayr C‘uc‘ak* 1:16. Cf. ms. Homiliary Erevan 941 (1689AD) *Mayr C‘uc‘ak* 3:1334; ms. Miscellany Erevan 995 (1278AD), *Ibid*, 1733.

⁵⁰ *Mayr C‘uc‘ak* 3:1322. In this manuscript, the other wonderworkers, Gregory and Nicholas each have their own commemoration, on November 17 and December 6, respectively. Cf. ms. Synaxary Vienna 1048 (1302AD). Hamazasp Oskean, *Յուզակ Հայերէն ձեռագրաց Մխիթարեան մատենադարանին ի Վիեննա Բ* [Catalogue of Armenian Manuscripts of the Mxit‘arean Library in Vienna Volume 2], Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Armenian Library (Vienna: Mxit‘arean Press, 1963) 710.

⁵¹ For example, ms. Venice 727 (1427AD), *Venetik* 5:55; and Vienna 7 (olim 4, 1439AD), Dashian, 46. As late as the sixteenth century, a ms. Synaxary, Vienna 10, still devotes the day exclusively to Miwron. Dashian, 93.

⁵² The earliest one I have uncovered is the ms. Synaxary Vienna 1035, dated 1584AD. Oskean, 632. Today St. Antoninos is commemorated on the Monday of the fifth week of Pentecost. *Saints and Feasts*, 42.

⁵³ For example, the ms. Synaxaries Nor Julfa 252 (1694AD) and Nor Julfa 256 (17th c.), Ter-Awetisean, 419, 450;

⁵⁴ An early edition of the *Tōnac‘oyc‘* printed in Venice in 1782 has the Wonderworkers Gregory and Miwron on the first Saturday of Advent, but not Nicholas. *Տօնացոյց եւ աւետարանացոյց եւ կարգաւորութիւն եւ Հրահանգ տէրունական տօնից* [Tōnac‘oyc‘ and Directory of Gospel Readings and Arrangement and Instruction on the Dominical Feasts] (Venice, 1782) 298. The addition of St. Miwron to the older commemoration of St. Gregory on that date could be under the influence of Simēon Erewanc‘i’s reform, since the Venice *Tōnac‘oyc‘* seems to contain some, though not all of his reforms. In this case, the absence of Nicholas on that date would be the result of subsequent editing, presumably to eliminate the duplication of Nicholas’ veneration. Yet lacking any supporting documentation, it is impossible to confirm this hypothesis.

Conclusion

The double commemoration of St. Nicholas in Armenia is hardly a modern lapse, but goes back over 600 years, almost to the time of the emergence of Nicholas' veneration in the Armenian calendar in the late thirteenth century. Why just a generation later, in the mid-fourteenth century, would the manuscript Lectionary Venice 602 designate two commemorations for Nicholas during Advent, just two weeks apart? The evidence suggests that the decades about the turn of the fourteenth century were a period of transformation in the Armenian sanctoral calendar. St. Gregory the Wonderworker is transferred to the beginning of Advent from his ancient position before Great Lent, and St. Nicholas is introduced into the Armenian calendar. By the arrangement of some unknown authority, a local church appointed St. Nicholas on the first Saturday of Great Lent in order to bring together the two Wonderworkers. Whether this was the original place for St. Nicholas in that community or whether the intent was to transfer him there from the third Saturday of Advent we do not know. What is certain is that both dates stuck, resulting in the double commemoration that survives to this day. The Cretan Bishop's incorporation with his wonderworking saintly colleagues, likely in the context of Catholicos Simēon's reforms, was the result of the same inclination to unite saints of the same generic category. As the register of venerable saints grows, such generic conglomeration will become a necessary and essential force driving the shape of the Armenian sanctoral calendar, the grouping of saints of a common genus on one day, one of its most distinctive features.

Furthermore, we must conclude that a "duplication" that seems exceptional today must have been anything but redundant to those communities which, especially early on, feted Nicholas twice within three weeks. The circumstance testifies to a heady time, perhaps concomitant with the appearance of his *vita* in Armenian, when St. Nicholas' devotion among the Armenians was much more fervent than it is today. The surge in Armenians named Nicholas from the thirteenth century surely attests to this,⁵⁵ as does the growing body of Armenian ecclesiastical poetry that emerges during this era.⁵⁶ A manuscript hymnal (*Šarakan*) dated 1295AD, one of the earliest

⁵⁵ See above. Another curious indicator of the Wonderworker's popularity is found in the marginalia of many manuscripts. Scribes often invoke Nicholas in the scribbles that they inevitably scratch into the base or margins of manuscript folia as pen tests, called *grč'ap'orj* in Armenian. A certain priest-scribe Lazar invokes the protective eye of the Illuminator, the Catholicos, Parsuma the Hermit and the Patriarch Nicholas "*Zmṛnoy*" in a graffito at the beginning of the ms. Miscellany Erevan 1196 (17th c.). *Mayr C'uc'ak* 4:606.

⁵⁶ To these hymns I hope to return in a future study.

surviving manuscript compendia of Armenian hymnography,⁵⁷ contains a *šarakan* in honor of St. Nicholas, a hymn that is sung to this day on the third Saturday of Advent.⁵⁸

The bodiless ones were amazed when they saw blessed Nicholas, whose conduct in the body was without compare to those possessing a body.⁵⁹ By his prayers, entreat forgiveness of sins.

Rejoice, Mother Sion, and ineffably adorn your bridal chamber, for blessed Nicholas in his body has triumphed over bodiless Beliar. By his prayers, entreat forgiveness of sins.

Imploring, we sinner entreat you, Most Holy Trinity, to forgive our sins by the supplications of Nicholas. By his prayers, entreat forgiveness of sins.

Holy lady, Mary, golden urn and ark of the covenants, who gave the gift of the Bread of life from heaven to our starving natures. Intercede always with him for the expiation of our sins.⁶⁰

Additional monuments to the erstwhile popularity of St. Nicholas in Armenia are the scattered Armenian churches named after the Wonderworker of Myra: four in Constantinople;⁶¹ active churches in the Beykoz (1776AD)⁶² and Topkapi (1630AD) districts;⁶³ and two historic

⁵⁷ The oldest ms. *Šarakans* are Bzommar 64 (1187 AD), Erevan 9838 (1193 AD) and Bzommar 59 and 60 (13-14th c.). Charles A. Renoux, “Le *Iadgari* géorgien et le *Šaraknoc* ‘arménien,’” *REArm* 24 (1993) 91. See also Renoux’s assessment of the evidence in Idem, “Un bilan provisoire sur l’héritage grec du rite arménien,” *Le Museon* 116/1-2 (2003) 61, esp. n.41. M. Keschischian, *Katalog der armenischen Handschriften in der Bibliothek des Klosters Bzommar* (Vienna, 1964) 103-104. *Յուզակ յեւագրաց Մաշտոցի անվան մատենադարանի* [Manuscript Catalogue of the Maštoc‘ Matenadaran], 2 vols., eds. O. Eganyan, A. Zeyt‘unyan, and P‘. Ant‘abyan (Erevan: Academy of Sciences of the Armenian S.S.R., 1970) I:1001. The *editio princeps* was published in Amsterdam in 1664, two years before the first printed edition of the Armenian Bible.

⁵⁸ *Hiac‘an anmarmink‘n tesanelov*. The hymn appears under the designation, “*Mankunk*‘ [Hymn for Psalm 112] for Nikolayos the Patriarch.” Venice 458 (olim 154) 1295AD. f. 312v. *Venetik* 4:42. Cf. ms. Vienna 212 of 1305AD, f. 317r. Dashian, 535. Cf. *Մատենագիրք Հայոց* [Armenian Classical Authors], 14 vols., ed. Zaven Yagavian (Antelias, Lebanon: Armenian Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2001-2008) 8.350.

⁵⁹ Possible allusion to the famous legend of St. Nicholas’ mysterious translocation from his see in Myra to Constantinople, where he appeared to Emperor Constantine adjuring him to spare the lives of three accused soldiers. As Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache wrote, “Certainly there are cases of bilocation in the history of the saints, but they are rare, and the greatest theologians disagree about them.” Eadem, *Saint Nicholas*, tr. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962) 12.

⁶⁰ My translation of the text in *Չայիքալ շարական* [*Šarakan*-Hymnal Arranged by Tone], (Jerusalem: Saints James Press, 1914) 415.

⁶¹ Cf. Dashian, 657, 912.

⁶² For a brief history of the church, as well as others in Istanbul, see Ronald T. Marchese and Marlene R. Breu, *Splendor and Pageantry: Textile Treasures from the Armenian Churches of Istanbul* (Istanbul: Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, 2010) 191, 297 *et infra*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 186, 297 *et infra*.

churches that are no longer in service or existence: in the districts of Edirnekapi (1475AD) and Yenikapi (first half 17th century);⁶⁴ at least two in Crimea:⁶⁵ in Kafa (Feodosiya) in the East,⁶⁶ and Yevpatoriya on the west coast; Amasya, Turkey;⁶⁷ Kamieniec, Poland (a.k.a. Kamenic‘; Kamenets-Podolskly);⁶⁸ Chernivtsi, Ukraine; and Jaffa, Israel,⁶⁹ among others.

The Armenians’ veneration of Nicholas, complete with its inconsistencies, anomalies and, in more recent times, decline, nevertheless represents a salient chapter in the history of this holy man’s universal—or rather, *ecumenical*—appeal. Yet it reflects at least as much about the devotional heart of the Armenian people and their ancient church. At a time when the exemplary Christian witness, human virtues, and intercessory power of the communion of saints is overlooked in the dust of this tiny, ancient church’s desperate efforts to engage its people despite their increasingly post-modern, global, materialistic and neo-nationalist proclivities, a fresh look at the saints themselves, and in particular the history of their veneration by Armenian Christians throughout the ages may uncover surprising treasures most pertinent to our trying times and circumstances. May the eternal memory of the just be blessed. Amen! Amen! Amen!⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Ibid., 298.

⁶⁵ Kafa alone was said to have “dozens” of Armenian churches. Martijn Theodoor Houtsma, ed., *E.J. Brill’s First Encyclopedia of of Islam 1913-1936* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1913-1938) 617.

⁶⁶ This church seems to have been an active scriptorium. The final colophon in a ms. philosophical compendium dated 1375 states that the manuscript was completed “in the capital city of Kafa under the roof of St. Nikōlas the Wonderworking Patriarch.” Dashian, 721. The final colophon in ms. Erevan 1182, Vardan Arewelc‘i’s *Commentary on the Psalms*, states that the manuscript was completed on Tuesday, July 21, 1610 “at Hadrian’s Gate in the eparchy of St. Nikołos Zmiwrnac‘oy [‘the Smyrnian’] Patriarch” in Kafa, Crimea. *Mayr C‘uc‘ak* 4:569-570.

⁶⁷ The ms. Vienna 312 (olim 60, 1367AD) contains this note in the final colophon: “This book of sermons was completed in the city of Amasia at the gate of St. Nikołayos Church by the hand of the pseudonymous Bishop Vasil for my delight.” Dashian, 744. Cf. Ačaryan, 4:77.

⁶⁸ The colophon of ms. Miscellany Vienna 140 states: “This *History of the Seven Philosophers* was completed on October 6 in the year 1616 in the capital city of Kamenic‘ at the gate of Holy Annunciation to the Holy Mother of God and at St. Nikōlayosi.” Dashian, 439, cf. 692. On the Armenian community there see Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 161.

⁶⁹ Ուղեցոյց սրբազան տեղեաց [*Directory of Holy Places*] (Jerusalem: Sts. James, 1910) 12.

⁷⁰ Յաւիտեանական յիշատակն արդարոցն օրհնութեամբ եղիցի. Եղիցի. եղիցի: The refrain chanted at the end of the litany of the saints during the Morning Office [*Arawōtean žam*] of the Armenian Church.