

# On Some Murals of St. George (St. Gevorg) Church of Salmast in Iran and the Armenian Art

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**Abstract** There are numerous works of Armenian art created during centuries in Armenia and in the territories inhabited by Armenians, that were never put in scholarly circulation and stayed unknown to experts. As Armenia many times became the battlefield between different powers and was occupied by them, numerous examples of its architecture and sculpture were damaged or destroyed, illustrated manuscripts and objects of applied arts were looted and disappeared. Also, numerous wall paintings were lost forever or come down to us in fragments as numerous churches during foreign yokes were destroyed and demolished by invaders. Many examples of architecture, sculpture, khachkars and tombs were abandoned and forgotten when the Armenians left the territories in the countries where they have once established their communities.

**Keywords** Iran. Salmast. St. George church. Haftvan. Wall paintings. Adam and Eve. St. George and Dragon. Coronation of Virgin Mary and child. St. Sargis and Martiros. Last Judgement.

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## 1 Introduction

The examples of the Armenian painting that have come down to us are found mainly in illustrated manuscripts preserved in the Matenadaran collection of Yerevan and also in many libraries and museums of various countries.

Wall paintings, in comparison with miniatures, are less known and are not enough studied. The purpose of this article is to present some general observations on the wall decoration of the Armenian St. George church [fig. 1] in the village of Haftvan, a part of Salmast County, in central Salmast (located north of Urmia and south of Khoy) in the West Azerbaijan Province of Iran. This area was for many centuries inhabited also by Armenians (Shahinian 2021, 351-72, 368; Karapetyan 2019; Avedian 2021, 142). It is necessary to note that in Armenia and its neighboring territories, including Iran and also Salmast region, many churches were devoted to St. George (Avedian 2021, 132-51).



**Figure 1** Iran, Salmast, village Haftvan, St. George Church, West façade, ca. 17th c. @ SHA (Salmast Heritage Association) Archive

The exploration of the murals of the church in Haftvan is already started by various scholars but its present state is not satisfactory.

The architecture of St. George church was mainly studied by Iranian architects and restorators, but the iconography and style of the mural fragments need thorough examination. In my paper, I

discuss the wall paintings of St. George church from the point of view of the connections and artistic traditions inherited from the Armenian art of the previous centuries. This article aims to contribute to the discovery and demonstration of the possible models used by painters and study of the compositions in comparison with other surviving Armenian murals of the same epoch.

## **2 General Remarks Concerning the Interior Decoration of Armenian Sanctuaries and the Study of St. George Church**

Certain written sources and remnants of murals of the sixth and seventh centuries AD testify about the style and iconographic program which was typical for art of the Armenian painters who decorated sanctuaries (Der Nersessian 1973). During the Arab domination of Armenia in the seventh-ninth centuries AD this artistic process was interrupted. In the tenth and later centuries, the Armenian artists with some intervals continued the tradition of painting the walls of their cathedrals (Der Nersessian 1965).

There are certain murals which partly or completely survived in the buildings erected in Iran in the late medieval period. The decoration of St. George church in the village of Haftvan is exceptional among such artworks as it was already cleaned and restored (Bakhshai, Khan Mohammadi 2015).

Certain parts of the decoration of St. George church are now visible in that church which was built in the thirteenth century AD. It was rebuilt in 1649 (Shahinian 2021, fn. 3, 368) or 1652 (Shoja Del 2012) and also after the Salmast earthquake in 1930.

I do not know if the all the walls of the church were frescoed as the wall paintings of the church did not survive completely. That is why it is not possible now to have the complete comprehension concerning the all-iconographic program of decoration. Unfortunately, there was no chance for me to visit this church and explore its paintings. That's why I am very grateful to my old friend, architect Marco Brambilla, who supplied me with photographic and literal information concerning St. George church of Haftvan.

This church was first examined in 1969 by German scholar W. Kleiss (Kleiss 1969, 7-119). Later, between 1977 and 1978, an Italian team from the Politecnico di Milano with A. Alpago-Novello also visited and studied the church (Alpago Novello 1977; 1988). The Armenian researcher A. Hovian included this church in his studies<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hovian 2003; Shoja Del 2012; Malekzadeh Dilmaghani, Bakhshai, Khan Mohammadi 2015, 223-35; 2018, 138-53.

and also examined this historic site. The wall painting conservation and restoration project at St. George's Church was conducted by the West Azerbaijan Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization over two months in August and September 2014. During two months of continuous activity, the deteriorated dome windows were replaced with more durable ones. Also, the church bell tower, which had become structurally weak, was reinforced. Beside that, hidden wall paintings on two eastern columns near the altar were uncovered.

These columns, with a rectangular cube shape and a height of about five and a half meters, along with the interior surfaces of the church walls, had been covered in the past with plaster, which was poured on parts of the columns and behind the plaster there are remains of frescoes. During this process, layers of plaster covering the columns were delicately and carefully removed, revealing eight distinct murals featuring human figures, animals, plants, and geometric patterns. In the second phase of the project, which was implemented in 2018, more parts of these frescoes were revealed. Due to the work of Iranian experts, the frescoes obtained in this study phase can be divided into three parts: A) Frescoes on the body of the church columns; B) Frescoes on the southern wall of the church; C) Paintings on the northern wall of the church columns. Two of the four main rectangular columns – located on the eastern side, near the altar – preserved most of those fragments.

The remnants of murals here represent Adam and Eve, St. George and the Dragon, Virgin Mary and the child and angels who keep the crown above her head, St. Sargis and Martiros, weighting the souls (Last Judgement detail) as well as floral and geometric patterns with a central diamond motif.

## 2.1 Wall Paintings of Column 1

The representation of Adam and Eve is on the upper section of the southern side of Column 1 [fig. 2] and they are portrayed from both sides of the brownish-orange tree, and have loincloths, Eve has an apple in her hand, they are reaching out their hands to each other, touching the tree, the branches of which are spread above their heads. Adam's face is better preserved than Eve's. The snake is also depicted. The slime patterns have been drawn around them, but unfortunately, due to extensive damage, only a small part of the plant patterns remain, and for this reason, it is not possible to identify the type of patterns. The frame's edge is also decorated with floral and red flowers and green leaves around them are stylized with floral and arabesque motifs. Below the two sides of the tree are sycamore-like trees, which are also present in the lower corners of the composition.



**Figure 2** Iran, Salmast, village Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of Adam and Eva, portrayed on the southern side of Column 1, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

This subject is known already from the decoration of sculptures and wall paintings of the Holy Cross church on the Aghtamar island (now in Turkey) dated by 915-921 AD (Der Nersessian 1965, 19, 37, 43, figs 41, 47, 58). Among the oldest examples of this theme, one should mention the illustrations of the Bible of 1318 AD (Matenadaran, Ms. 206), created by Toros Taronatsi for Esayi Nchetsi, who was the rector of Gladzor university (Avetisyan 1971, 92, fig. 22; Der Nersessian 1977, 220-3, ill. 169). The same subject was registered also in the examples of later centuries, especially in the interior decoration of seventeenth-eighteenth centuries sanctuaries and also in manuscript illumination and textiles of earliest centuries or that period<sup>2</sup> (as in the mural of Salmast, Adam and Eve are portrayed with loincloths on the curtains made in India or Iran in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries; Armenian Museum of America). It is noteworthy that Adam and Eve are portrayed with loincloths in the same composition on the walls of St. Grigor church of Znaberd or Aznaberd village of Naxiĵevan, chronologically and geographically close to fresco in Salmast (Ayvazyan 1981, 146, ill. 102; Ayvazyan 1998, 67, 74, 75, fig. 44).

St. Grigor church of Naxiĵevan was rebuilt in the second half of the seventeenth century and, unfortunately, this church was demolished by the Azeris in the twentieth century. The research of this church and frescoes and their publication were done by A. Ayvazian in spite of many difficulties and restrictions made by the Azeri administration. In June-August of 1867 these wall paintings were restored and new compositions were added on the walls of church by invited painter who is supposed to be the priest Hakob Ter-Abrahamian from Astapat who was active during that period.

The comparison with other Armenian paintings showing Adam and Eve allows to conclude that the portrayal of Salmast fresco has slight differences from them.

On the lower section of the southern side of Column 1 of St. George's Church, the painting has been largely destroyed. However, based on the fragments that remain, on the margins also within a rectangular frame a rhombus in the center is represented [fig. 3], in the milieu of blue sprouts with red flowers. Inside of the rhombus, large central lozenge-shaped medallion and floral and arabesque motifs around the edges are shown.

<sup>2</sup> Hakobyan 1976; Narkiss 1979, 95-6, figs 142, 143; Thierry, Donabedian 1987, ill. 512; Kevorkian-Achdjian 1991, 143, ill. 140; Nersessian 2001, 219-20, fig. 152; and on the curtain of 1710 in London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



**Figure 3** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of Adam and Eva, below them a rhombus, portrayed on the southern side of Column 1, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

The damaged painting located on the upper section of the western facet of Column 1 is a composition showing Mary, portrayed with the child in her arms [fig. 4]. Mary seems sitting on a chair made of marble, the orange dress covering her legs can be seen under the blue mantel. The clothes of the child are represented in the same way and colors. The latter is portrayed with a halo. To the left of the Virgin one can see a branch of the rose in a vase, and below which is another branch of the rose.



**Figure 4** Iran, Salmast, village Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of Mary and child, portrayed on the western facet of Column 1, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

The two angels keep the crown above Virgin's head. It is necessary to note that Mary's Crowning is not mentioned in the Bible. It is originated from an apocryphal story attributed to Meliton, Bishop of Sardis, which was popularized in the sixth century by Gregory of Tours, and in the thirteenth century by Jacques de Voragine in the Golden Legend (Réau 1957, 621). The two angels crowning Mary appear in a miniature of the German bishop Bernward's Gospel of 1015 (Hildesheim, Treasury of

cathedral, cod. 18) (van OS 1970, 671-2).<sup>3</sup> It is one of the oldest known examples of such composition. The iconography of the Armenian wall painting is different from the versions of this subject when Mary is crowned by Christ as the Queen of Heaven or Christ and God the Father are included (van OS 1970, 673-5).

The wall painting in Salmast is related to those artifacts which show the Virgin, being crowned by one or two angels and appear in both Eastern and Western art. Among the oldest western examples is the painting of the Cologne Museum, made around 1460 by an anonymous master known as the Master of the Glorification of the Virgin (active in Cologne, second half of the fifteenth century).<sup>4</sup> The Angels here are represented between God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit while, above her, Christ is symbolized by the Lamb pouring his blood into a chalice (Réau 1957, 621).

The Armenian artefacts that have come down to us are demonstrating the same subject, showing that their authors used different versions of the iconography of the Virgin crowned by two angels. This subject was very popular, and many preserved artworks testify about that.<sup>5</sup> Noteworthy examples can be found in the silver covers of Armenian manuscripts and printed books, as well as in certain icons from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The similar but not same composition is visible on the painting of Hovnatan Hovnatanian (1730-1801) in the residence of Catholics of all Armenians (Etchmiadzin). The same iconography is shown also on a curtain of 1781 made in Tokat (Etchmiadzin, Treasury) and on a curtain of 1805 and mitre of the eighteenth century from the same collection. In this context, one should remember also the image on a textile of the eighteenth century from New Julfa in Grassi Museum (Germany). The subject was very popular among the painters of several Armenian icons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, preserved in Armenian churches of Romania, and in certain cases, it is called Mother of God, Queen of Heaven.

The comparison with the Armenian examples shows that the painting of Virgin Mary, child and angels of Salmast do not completely repeat the numerous presentations of the same subject.

It is well known that the composition with two angels keeping the crown above Virgin's head was very popular especially among

<sup>3</sup> The miniature can be viewed at the following link: [https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/zgothic/miniatur/1001-050/3other/02\\_1003.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/zgothic/miniatur/1001-050/3other/02_1003.html).

<sup>4</sup> Glorification of Mary, ca. 1470. Wallraf-Richartz Museum. Cologne. Germany - Album alb3687265. The work can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.album-online.com/detail/en/NTFiMDBjMA/master-glorification-virgin-active-cologne-second-half-15th-century-mary-alb3687265>.

<sup>5</sup> Goltz 2000, 77; Karapetyan 2023, 252; Treasures of Etchmiadzin 1984; Armenian Treasures in Romania 2020, 109, 113, 115-16, 119-20, 121, 128-9.

German and Netherlandish painters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and later on in the milieu of Italian and other western European artists. Especially remarkable are the works of German painters Stefan Lochner, Hans Memling, Albrecht Dürer and Albrecht Altdorfer who created different iconographical versions of this subject. No doubt that the Armenian artists became familiar with these iconographical compositions through print culture, in other words, from the Western printed book's illustrations. These books were appearing in Eastern European and even far Eastern countries through merchants and catholic missionaries transferring engravings of Western artists. It is noteworthy that Albrecht Dürer created three engravings on this subject around 1504 AD, 1513 AD and 1518 AD which do not repeat each other.

It is interesting to mention that, among many Armenian paintings illustrating the same theme, there is only one icon which near Virgin Mary, child and angels represents the branch of the rose in a vase from their both sides. It is a work of an unknown painter and dated by 1752 and is in private collection (Avetisyan 2015, 178, ill. 74).

In the Salmast painting a strip filled with floral ornament separates this scene from the lower composition, which features a rhombus in the center, in the milieu of blue sprouts with red flowers. The lower composition and that of Virgin Mary with child and angels are both framed with bands showing curling sprouts with red and yellow flowers. Such framing and composition of a rhombus with flowers appears also below the survived scenes on other columns. The painting on the lower section of the western side of Column 1, within a frame, is similar to the floral composition already mentioned above.

## 2.2 Wall Paintings of Column 2

In the next partly surviving painting on the upper section of the western facet of Column 2, close to the doorway, a horseman is visible [fig. 5]. He has a red mantle, green shirt and pants. He is nimbed, which indicates that here we are dealing with a saint. His horse is grey too. He carries lance and is stabbing the winged Dragon with it. Before him are shown two cypress trees.

The photographic documentation under my disposal shows that the interior of St. George church of Salmast once was decorated with several cavalier saints and some of them are in better shape so it is possible to identify them.



**Figure 5** Iran, Salmast, village Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of St. Theodore killing the dragon? portrayed on the western facet of Column 2, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

Generally speaking, the warrior horseman saints are portrayed in fourteenth-seventeenth centuries Armenian book illumination especially by the miniaturists of the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries who worked in Syunik. They are portrayed by the miniaturists of the fourteenth century, for instance by Toros Taronaci (in the Gospel of 1337, Matenadaran, Ms. No. 212). One should remember also those masters, whose activity in later periods was connected with the scriptorium of the Tat'ev monastery, for instance, in a Gospel of the fourteenth century written and probably illustrated by Grigor (Matenadaran, Ms. 6305; Mirzoyan 1987, ill. 50-2; Korkhmazian, Hakopian, Drampian 1984, 3). This theme is known from many Armenian artefacts; for instance, it appears on the silver dish of 1641 of Etchmiadzin Museum (Inv.No. 6131) (Platt 1995, S.321, Abb. 218), enamel medallion of the crown of Gregory the Chainbearer made in 1747 in Constantinople (Narkiss 1979, 143, 158, fig. 186), and was popular among many painters, as the illustrators of Armenian icons of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries in Romania, and also on Armenian curtains of 1663 of Suceava (Romania), of 1756 and of 1799 made in Tokat (Etchmiadzin, Treasury), also the others of seventeenth-nineteenth centuries in Romania, again made in Tokat, in Armenia and elsewhere (Armenian Treasures in Romania 2020, 170, 172; Treasures of Etchmiadzin 1984). This composition appears in wall paintings and icons of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries,

also with other scenes from the life of Christ, which demonstrates the interest towards this iconography. Three warrior saints are visible also on the above-mentioned curtain made in India or Iran in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries (Armenian Museum of America).

It seems to me that the above-mentioned horseman is St. Theodore killing the dragon. The military saint is considered “as ‘defender of the faith,’ and represents the triumph of good over evil in a Christian universe” (Marchese, Breu 2015, 288). St. Theodore very often is shown in Armenian art. The earliest known example of the portrayal of this saint in Armenian art appears among the reliefs of the wooden door of 1134 of Arakelots (St. Apostles) monastery in Mush. That monastery was demolished by the Turks. The door is preserved in the State Museum of History in Yerevan (Dymydyuke 2019). This saint is portrayed also in Kütahya tiles of 1719 in Armenian Cathedral of Jerusalem (Narkiss 1979, 130-1, 157, fig. 173).

The painting on the lower section of the western side of Column 2, within a frame is similar to the floral composition of the Column 1 already mentioned above.

The remnants of the painting representing two nimbed human heads and the other reminding a masque, located on the upper section of the northern side of Column 2, do not give a chance to identify the subject. The partly damaged painting on the lower section of the northern side of Column 2, within a frame, is similar to the floral composition of the Column 1 already mentioned above.

### 2.3 Wall Paintings of Column 3

The fragments of the murals on the west facet of Column 3 do not give a chance to identify the represented subject. The framed composition of a rhombus with flowers below these fragments is better preserved.

### 2.4 Wall Paintings of Column 4

On the Column 4 a horseman is portrayed [fig. 6] whose name is not written. He has a red mantle, grey shirt, blue pants and brown shoes. He is not nimbed which indicates that here we are not dealing with a saint, but probable with the donor of church. His horse is grey too. The painting on the lower section of the Column 4, within a frame is similar to the floral composition of Column 1 already mentioned above.



**Figure 6** Iran, Salmast, village Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of unknown Horseman, portrayed on the Column 4, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

## 2.5 Wall Paintings of the Right Wall

It is no doubt that on the right wall of the church, not far from the doorway of the church, we are dealing with the representation of St. George shown as a horseman stabbing the Dragon with a long spear [figs 7, 8]. The identification of this image is possible as above it is written “St. Gevorg”.



**Figure 7** Iran, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of St. George and the dragon, St. Sargis and Martiros, portrayed on the right wall, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

It is noteworthy that in the calendar of the Armenian church and in the folkloric memory of Armenians there is a group of the martyred warrior saints evolving five armed horsemen who has byzantine origin. Among them, St. Sargis is considered the most powerful and fastest guard of Armenians. The cult of St. George is traditional for all Christian people (Devrikyan 2010). Certain typological features of St. Sargis and St. George are common also for St. Theodore, St. Mercurius and St. Minas (Devrikyan 2010). The depictions of St. George killing the dragon with his spear are represented in many examples of Armenian and Georgian art (Aleksidze, Gedevanishvili 2025). This is the usual form of his images and often confused with the portrayal of St. Theodore (Marchese, Breu 2015, 199, 290, fig. 67).

St. George is depicted in Salmast church at the left side of the window which was walled up in the past. St. George in this fresco is nimbed, has a white tunic, blue shirt and blue pants, red mantle and yellow shoes. He has no shield as in some other Armenian murals, as for instance in the fresco of the Holy Mother of God in the Armenian church of Famagusta of the early fourteenth century (Kouymjian 2016, 142, fig. 12.9). In the Salmast painting St. George's brown horse tramples the Dragon who is light brown. To the left and to the right of the rider one can see the trees with red flowers.



**Figure 8** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of St. George and the dragon, St. Mercurius, portrayed on the right wall, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

There are numerous Armenian monasteries, churches, chapels, fortresses, villages, mountains and also cross-stones (*xač'k'ars*) which are named after St. George (Petrosyan 2002).

The representation of St. George and the Dragon is a subject which is already known among the wall paintings of the seventh-century AD church of Karmravor or Holy Mother in Ashtarak, in decorations of the Talin cathedral, in the sculptures of the above-mentioned Holy Cross church on Aghtamar island (Der Nersessian 1965, 19, fig. 49),

on pewter flasks of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries for storing the raki or Holy Chrism or Muron and on Kütahiya ceramic bowls of same period (K'iwrtean 1957, 110-29, figs 1, 2, 3, 10; Žamkoč'yan, Hakobyan 2001, 322-6; Vardanyan 2012, 153, fig. 53).

The iconography of the composition showing St. George in Salmast church allows me to assume that also chronologically and geographically it is close to the well-preserved wall painting illustrating the same subject in the church St. Hovhannes in Melri city dated to the seventeenth century (Avetisyan 2019; 2020).

Meanwhile the portrayal of St. George and Dragon of Salmast has slight differences from the known compositions of the same subject. As I have mentioned above, this image is depicted in St. George Church at the left side of the window which was walled up in the past. To the right of that closed window and on the same level as St. George and the Dragon is the better-preserved representation of St. Sargis and his son Martiros on the horse. There is no inscription accompanying this fresco.



**Figure 9** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of Iulianus Apostata falling from the horse, portrayed on the right wall, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

Below the image of St. George, we see the preserved part of the image of the equestrian saint St. Mercury, and to the right of him, the horse, from which only the legs of Julian the Apostate falling from it remain [figs 7-9]. The latter and military saint can be identified by

the Armenian inscriptions shown above them. Here the part of the figure of the horse is better preserved.

Coming back to the mural of St. Sargis and his son Martiros [figs 7, 10], one can see that it has come to us in better shape. St. Sargis, as a warrior who was also martyred, is, as was mentioned above, one of the most respected saints of the Armenian church (Archbishop Ashjian 2002) and also occupies an important place in the Armenian folkloric literature (Harut'yunyan 2002). There are numerous Armenian monasteries, churches, chapels, fortresses, villages, mountains (Sargsyan 2002) and also cross-stones (*xač'k'ars*) which are named after St. Sargis (Petrosyan 2002).



**Figure 10** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of St. Sargis and Martiros, portrayed on the right wall, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

The earliest known examples of this subject are shown in the wall paintings of the above-mentioned seventh-century church of Karmravor or Holy Mother in Ashtarak and those of St. Stephen church in Lmbat (seventh century) and the sculptures of the above-mentioned Holy Cross church on the Aghtamar island (Der Nersessian 1965, 19, fig. 49).

The iconography of this composition is very well known in Armenian medieval art of the later period also and is registered in medieval sculptures and miniatures (Korkhmazian 2002), in textiles, silverwork, Kütahiya ceramic bowls, and altar curtains of the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries (Treasures of Etchmiadzin 1984; Žamkoč'yan, Hakobyan 2002), as well as f.i. in Armenian churches of

Romania (Armenian Treasures in Romania 2020, 171, 176, 177). St. Sargis is nimbed, has a military costume, blue pants, red mantle and brown shoes. His son wears a not-well-visible blue dress. St. Sargis has a mace in his hand and sword attached to his belt. Martiros also is in military costume and carries a lance. The scene of the church in Salmast is chronologically and geographically close to the image of St. George on the wall painting of the already-mentioned St. Grigor church of Znaberd or Aznaberd village (Ayvazyan 1981, 115-16, ill. 104). These features are known from the representation of the same subject in that church so that this fresco deserves special attention (Ayvazyan 1981, 115-16, ill. 106). It is interesting to note in these two murals that the buckle of the belt connecting the saddle to the horse's belly has the same form.

The portrayal of St. Sargis of Salmast demonstrates slight differences in comparison to numerous compositions of the same subject but, as one can see, it is close to the mural of St. Grigor church of Znaberd or Aznaberd.

The composition below St. Sargis and Martiros is not completely survived. Only a fragment of an image of the angel and small black devil's figure and the cap of the other devil and two cypress trees and the bush with red roses are observed [fig. 9] which do let to identify the subject of the scene.

On the upper part of the left side of the window of the southern wall is represented another warrior saint stabbing some creature with a long spear [fig. 11]. This can be St. Minas who is killing the wolf according to one of the Armenian folkloric prayers (Devrikyan 2010). The head of his horse and the upper part of the horseman is not preserved and the bad quality of the photos of this composition which are at my disposal do not give a chance to comprehend the colors of the mural. The identification of this saint is corresponding to the images St. Theodore, St. George and St. Sargis who are shown in the church of Salmast.

On one of the walls of Salmast church the scene of the Weighting of souls is preserved, which is a fragment of the image of Last Judgement. The hell in mural is portrayed with black color. Here in the darkness, we see the river of fire that flows down to hell. In the stream of the infernal fire the damned cannot be seen very clearly. In the middle of the composition a big angel [fig. 12], with red wings and red shirt and pants and long, black shoes is keeping the balance and weighting the souls of the sinners while small black devils are helping him. Another much smaller angel with a nimbus next to him is conversing with a sinner.

On the left side of the scene a heavenly garden with heavenly trees with fruits symbolizes Eden. Here in the green space of heaven, the elects are represented. Next to this area, inside of the medallions are portrayed six apostles and names of some of them are written

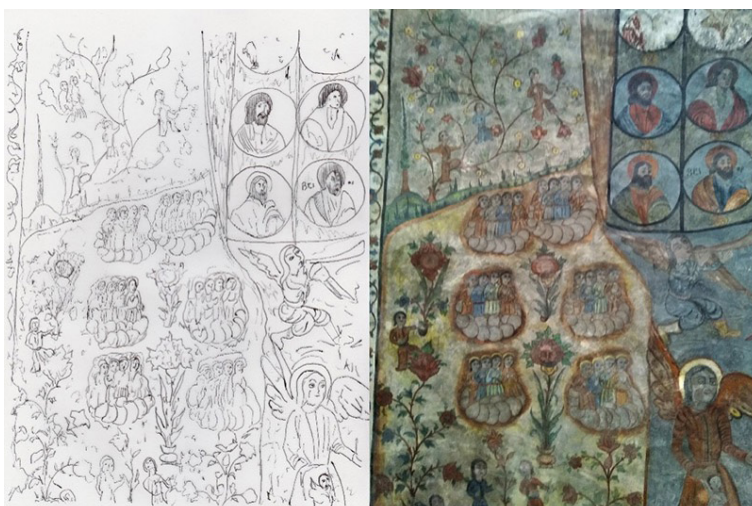
and preserved. The image of Christ in the center is not completely preserved [fig. 13]. Same is true for images of the Virgin and John the Baptist, angels and the other six apostles in medallions on the right side of composition [fig. 14].



**Figure 11** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of St. Minas stabbing the wolf, portrayed on of the left side of the window of southern wall ca. seventeenth c., @ SHA Archive



**Figure 12** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of Angel and devils (the Last Judgement), portrayed on the northern wall, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive



**Figure 13** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of Eden and the apostles (the Last Judgement), portrayed on the northern wall, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive



**Figure 14** Iran, Salmast, Haftvan, St. George Church, fresco of The Last Judgement, portrayed on the northern wall, ca. seventeenth c. @ SHA Archive

The theme of Last Judgement in Armenian art first appears in the fragments of the frescoes of St. Stephen church of Lmbat (seventh century) (Chookaszian 2021), Holy Cross Church of Aghtamar island (Der Nersessian 1965), and of Saints Peter and Paul church of Tat'ev monastery (930 AD) (Der Nersessian 1977, fig. 63, 64) and in the sculptural decorations of the Horomos Monastery forechurch (1038 AD) near Ani (Chookaszian 2021; Vardanyan 2015, 236, 255-62, 259, figs IV-1, IV-7, IV-8, IV-12, IV-15), on one of the carved plugs of the polygonal drum and among the reliefs of Bleno Noravank in Syunik of eleventh century AD (Chookaszian 2021).

The Weighting of souls as iconographical fragment in Armenian Last Judgements is very well known from the Armenian miniatures of the manuscripts of the fourteenth century created in scriptoriums of the Vaspurakan school and in other centers of the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries (Hakopian 1978, ill. 85, 87). It appears in the mural of the above-mentioned church of St. Hovhannes in Melri which is chronologically close to the Salmast frescos. Both compositions reveal other similar details too (the images of black devils etc.).

### 3 Conclusion

The study of the frescoes of St. George church in Salmast is giving additional information concerning the history of Armenian medieval wall painting and especially those which survived from seventeenth century. This paper demonstrates that the iconography of the compositions indicates the similarity with the wall paintings of certain churches erected in Naxiĵevan (destroyed by Azeris) and

Mełri created during same epoch and also with miniatures, icons, sculptures and altar curtains. It is quite possible that the painters who created the murals of Salmast were connected with the authors of compared frescoes. The study of the frescoes of St. George church and their comparison with the works of other painters of the same period demonstrates the same taste and same aesthetic orientations. The small geographical distance between Salmast, Naxiġevan and Mełri was apparently giving many chances to Armenian painters for communication and joint work. Those artists were familiar with the traditions of Armenian art and also with the works of Western arts and were following them. The murals of Salmast reveal new facts concerning Armenian and Western cross-cultural traditions and influence of print culture on those wall paintings. The study of the frescoes of St. George church is giving additional information concerning the history of those connections. It was impossible to represent in this paper all the research on peculiarities of these murals. The present study is a short, condensed communication and it may stimulate the research of Salmast frescoes by other scholars. Unfortunately, the fragments of the rest of the decoration are not enough to identify the subjects of the scenes. My research allows to conclude that St. Mercurius and other warrior saints such as St. Theodore and St. Minas were also represented in the church of Salmast. When the gypsum layers covering the other paintings will be removed it will be possible to reveal the remnants of the hidden frescoes. Hopefully the art historians of next generations will discover more information about the decoration of St. George church in Salmast.

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