

The Right Hand of St. Gregory and other Armenian Arm Relics¹

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St. Gregory the Illuminator, who converted Armenia to Christianity early in the fourth century², is directly involved in the cult of relics on at least three accounts. First, we are told that when he came out of imprisonment after thirteen years in a deep pit, he gathered up the remains of the martyred saints Hripsimē and Gayanē and had martyria built above them³. Later, after his consecration in Caesarea of Cappadocia, he came back to Armenia with important relics. The mid-fifth century historian Agathangelos is explicit: "When he [Gregory] returned from Greek territory he brought with him some relics from the bones of the great prophet, blessed John the Baptist, and of the holy martyr of Christ, Athenogenes⁴". Furthermore, Agathangelos tells us that Gregory had shrines built for the relics, which he divided and dispersed in several localities⁵.

The third manner in which St. Gregory is intrinsically associated with the cult of relics is through his own remains. A certain mystery surrounds the death of the saint. Sometime after he converted Armenia to Christianity and spread the religion in various areas of Armenia and the Caucasus, he gave up worldly life and retreated to a mountainous hermitage to lead a solitary existence. After a certain time, some say seven years, Gregory died in solitude; the date is uncertain, but probably around 328. Later shepherds found his remains, which they buried with no pomp. After a century his bones were miraculously discovered. Movsēs of Khoren relates the episode as follows

[Saint Gregory's relics] were hidden for many years by divine providence you might say, like Moses of old [cf. Deut. 34:6], lest they become the object of a cult to the half-converted barbarian nations. But when the faith had become firmly established in these regions, after a long time Saint Gregory's relics were revealed to a certain ascetic called Garnik, who took them and buried them in the village of T'ordan⁶.

Tordan was the burial ground of the Arsacid kings of Armenia. Michel van Esbroeck, who like most western scholars is unable to accept Movsēs as a fifth century author, claims the earliest reference to the invention of the relics by Garnik is in the early seventh century Karshuni version of the *History* of Agathagelos. The discovery by Garnik is placed in the reign of Emperor Zeno (474-491)⁷. This, however, creates a major chronological problem. The later tenth century Armenian historian Yovhannēs Catholicos Draskhanakertc'i reports that the body of King Trdat, under whom St. Gregory converted Armenia to Christianity, was buried in Tordan next to St. Gregory's⁸. An Armenian source earlier than the Karshuni version of Agathagelos, Ghazar P'arpec'i, who probably wrote in the 490s, twice refers to the relics of St. Gregory. The first dates a quarter of a century before Zeno's rule: "Groups of Christ's ministers came to meet them [the naxarars], bearing with them the sign of the life-giving cross and the relics of the holy apostle-like martyr, Gregory, and singing psalms which the prophet David had composed by the grace of the holy Spirit...⁹". The context is the return to Armenia of the naxarar nobility from Persia around 450. The second episode takes place some thirty years later, during the reign of Zeno, but again in a Persian context: "Yohan the Armenian Catholicos, came out to meet them [the Armenian nobles] with the honourable sign of the cross and the holy relics of the ascetic martyr Gregory, with which he had also dispatched them all to the court [of the Persian king]¹⁰".

In another passage, Yovhannēs Draskhanakerts'i says that around 650, when Catholicos Nerses III built the massive cathedral of Zwartnots' dedicated to St. Gregory, he placed relics of the saint, which came from Tordan, under the four columns of the large circular cathedral and the saint's skull in a casket in the church to be seen by the faithful¹¹. At the end of the seventh century, there seems to be the first Byzantine invention of St. Gregory's relics¹², while during the eight-ninth century persecution of iconoclasts, the skull and other remains of

Gregory were taken to Naples¹³. However, the skull must have been taken to Rome afterward, because it was there whence it was brought to Naples in 1628 to be placed in the new monastery of San Gregorio Armeno¹⁴.

There is no absolute proof that demonstrates when any of the bones of the saint became separated as an arm relic, some speculate the ninth century. But Babgen Gulesserian in his massive history of the Cilician Catholicosate says,

[W]e do not know by whom, where, or when the dexter of Gregory was separated from his relics. Among the treasures of the Cilician kingdom along with the holy relic of the cross, the dexter of Gregory is mentioned as one of the objects used in assemblies. Contrary to the precepts of the Armenian church it was believed among unworthy candidates that who ever possessed the holy arm relic, he is the catholicos, and thus as a result of unfounded understanding, the dexter disappeared, reappeared, or others were created¹⁵.

By 1113 a hand relic may have existed, even though there is no direct reference to such an object in the sources. In that year, Davit' T'ornikian declared himself catholicos at Aght'amar on the basis of possessing the altar, veil, and staff of St. Gregory. Thus started the tradition (false as has been pointed out) that possession of Gregory's relics is a justification for catholicosal authority, because they were used as one of the justifications for the establishment of the Catholicosate of Aght'amar at Lake Van¹⁶. The thirteenth century historian Vardan in discussing this episode, did not, however, mention the right hand relic, though Mikael Ch'amch'ian in the eighteenth century lists it among the relics probably through a careless reading of a manuscript¹⁷. On the other hand, according to a colophon of 1173, the dexter of St. Gregory seems to have been at Aght'amar before it turned up late in the twelfth century in Cilicia¹⁸.

How the relic got to Cilicia or when is unclear, though some have conjectured it was stolen and brought from Aght'amar, assuming it had been there, while Catholicos Babgen Gulesserian believed it was an invention of the catholicosate after its establishment in Cilicia

early in the twelfth century¹⁹. Whatever its previous history, the dexter is mentioned several times in the encyclicals of Catholicos Nersēs Shnorhali (1163-73)²⁰. It had been brought to the catholicosal seat at Hromkla, but from there it went to the royal capital of Cilician Armenia, Sis, during the time of Catholicos Constantine II (1286-1298), though it was back in Hromkla when the city was sacked by the Mamluks of Egypt who took the holy relic to Cairo²¹. Some claim that it was ransomed by King Het'um II²², though the thirteenth century historian Stephannos Orbelian reports that the relic was taken to Egypt and disappeared²³, but he adds that miraculously in the ruins of the church of St. Gregory at Tatev monastery (to the northeast of Armenia, near the Persian frontier) they found relics of St. Gregory, including a fragment of his right arm²⁴. Later, Esayi, a priest-painter, mentions the relic in a colophon of 1394 written in Sis²⁵. But Arak'el of Tabriz, who in 1645 undertook a history of the relic of the right hand of St Gregory, cites a colophon that localized it at Holy Etchmiadzin in Vagharshapat in 1441 at the time of the transfer of the Catholicosate from Sis to Etchmiadzin, the original seat of the Armenian Church²⁶. The relic had disappeared for some years from Sis, only to be reappear shortly after the consecration of the new Cilician catholicos Karapet, even though in an encyclical of 1445 of the catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Gregory Jalalbekian, St. Gregory's arm relic is listed among ten other dexters at Etchmiadzin²⁷. It is from this moment that two right arm relics of St. Gregory survive²⁸.

From the 1434 to 1464, Catholicos Zakaria of Aght'amar, through his ceaseless activity, was a major force in national affairs. As a leader in the events surrounding the re-establishment of the catholicosate back in Etchmiadzin in 1441, he was able, with the support of the Türkmen chief Jihanshah, to assume the office of Catholicos of All Armenians and was even resident at Holy Etchmiadzin for a time.

A long and rather circumstantial colophon of 1462 describes the journey of Zakaria with the holy relic from Etchmiadzin to Aght'amar. I quote sections from his arrival in the city of Van and then onto the island.

[Zakaria] entered the city of Van with numerous bishops, vardapets, and priests and multitudes of people with horses and horsemen. The priests, who walked both in front of and behind the banner, sang sweet melodies. ...But the baron who occupied the fortress of Semiramis, that is, the citadel of Van, ... Mahmut Bek, ...wished to see the holy right hand, and he sent for it. When the great pontiff, ... entered the gate of the uppermost part of the citadel, the tyrant Mahmut Bek came out to greet him with all his chieftains and their families and with his sons. They fell down before the holy right hand and kissed it; and they offered supplications.... The multitudes of the city and of the canton arrived every day with numerous gifts and offerings, and prostrated themselves before the holy right hand and greeted the great pontiff. ... [L]ater [Zakaria] obtained ... permission to proceed to his ancestral seat at Aght'amar. ... They arrived near the coastal city of Vostan. All of its inhabitants, priests and multitudes of people of all ranks, came out to greet them with incense and candles and resounding melodies.... The ecclesiastical banner was carried in front, and the golden cross affixed on the top shone like a light.... When the alien inhabitants of Vostan witnessed this rejoicing, they were deeply aggrieved by the splendor and by the forwardness of the pontiff.... [T]hey conceived an evil plan, to plot secretly against (him).... When the brave overseer (Zakaria) learned of their wicked intent, he took the holy right hand and at dawn ... boarding (a) boat, went to his ancestral domain, the God-inhabited island of Aght'amar²⁹.

Interestingly the narrative mentions the shining of the golden crucifix but does not refer to the physical appearance of the relic of St. Gregory, which presumably did not shine. Was it encased in a silver reliquary? If and how it got back to Etchmiadzin from Aght'amar is unclear, but by the seventeenth century Etchmiadzin has the one which causes Arak'el to make his research.

The other relic of the right hand of St. Gregory, kept at the Catholicosate of Cilicia at Sis, survived both the destruction of the last Armenian kingdom in 1375 and the transfer or reestablishment of the catholicosate in Holy Etchmiadzin in 1441. In 1479, the Cilician arm relic of St. Gregory mysteriously was found at Kars Bazar about 30 kilometers from Sis and bought back from a Turk³⁰. We next hear of the dexter in 1765 when a silver chest (fig. 1) was made to house it along with the three other hand relics belonging to the Cilician See³¹.

These remained in Sis until the Armenian genocide of 1915, when all the treasures of the catholicosate were hurriedly transferred by ox cart from Sis to Aleppo while the Turks were massacring the Armenian population of Cilicia³². The ultimate chapter in the relic's tormented history occurred in Antelias, Lebanon, the final post-Genocide home of the Cilician See, at the time of the election of Zareh Payaslian as Catholicos of Cilicia in 1956. The election was bitterly contested and declared illegal by the Vazgen Catholicos of Etchmiadzin who made the voyage from Soviet Armenia to Lebanon for the election³³. During the momentous events the Cilician right arm relic disappeared and was only found a year later in Jerusalem and brought back triumphally to Lebanon by Archbishop, later Catholicos, Khoren Paronian³⁴.

The ecclesiastical authority associated with the right arm of St. Gregory, its power to confer legitimacy on the bishop or bishops who control it, explains in great part the multiplicity of this relic. But this authority and sanctity is also associated, perhaps to a lesser degree, with other Armenian hand relics. I have recorded some thirty such hand or arm reliquaries. They include three dexters of John the Baptist, the Apostle Thaddeus, the Apostle Thomas, St. James of Nisibis, St. Stephen the protomartyr, two of St. Nicholas (fig. 2), St. Barsauma the Syrian, St. Sylvester (fig. 3), Aristakes the son and successor of St. Gregory, St. Sahak, and others.

Undoubtedly, the most famous are those of St. Gregory kept by the two catholicosal sees. It is virtually impossible to know which of these is the oldest. Whether one is the true relic is also a futile question for reasons to be discussed below.

St. Gregory's right hand kept at Holy Etchmiadzin (fig. 4) is encased in a gilded arm-shaped reliquary fashioned in 1657³⁵; it is the one used to this day to bless the holy chrism in Armenia. The hand is shown making the sign of the cross (benediction or blessing) in the

eastern or Greek/Armenian manner with three figures held out (the Latins only use two fingers). A jeweled gold ring is on the thumb and a lavish band at the wrist. The forearm of the reliquary depicts, under delicately fashioned arches, scenes from St. Gregory's tortures while prisoner of King Trdat. When the hand is held over someone or simply turned toward the faithful, the sign of the cross of this most sacred relic of the Armenian Church functions as a blessing directly from God as well as protection against evil, because it is believed that Gregory and all saints ascended to heaven and are with God. Several medieval western arm relics specifically mention the term *Dextera Die*, the hand of God³⁶. A hand also serves as the iconographical representation of the Lord in scenes such as the Sacrifice of Abraham, St. John dictating his Gospel to Prochorus, or in the famous tenth century icon-like wooden Descent from the Cross called the Amenaprkich Sourp Nishan (the 'Savior of All' Holy Cross) of Havuts' Tar (fig. 5).

In contrast, the right hand reliquary of St. Gregory belonging to the Catholicosate of Cilicia, in Antelias (fig. 6), displays a different form: the hand is open, like the hand of the bishop when he baptizes or the hands of bishops when they are laid on for the consecration of bishops or a catholicos. This is also a representation of blessing rendering the power of God through the bishop or, in the case of the open hand relic, of the saint it represents. The present Cilician reliquary was fashioned in 1928 in Aleppo by the Kalemkarian brothers of Aintab at the command of Catholicos Sahak³⁷. The hand itself is rendered in a realistic fashion with all its wrinkles rather than the idealized one of Etchmiadzin. One imagines the model could have been the hand of the craftsman, or perhaps even of Catholicos Sahak. The engraving of the bust of St. Gregory (fig. 7) with all his ecclesiastical regalia is not very elegant. Its orientation is also strange, since hand relics are held upright during the blessing of the oil or in processions, the saint would appear upside down. The forearm of the relic is

in a different style from the hand and appears to be an older element reused. A church is carved on it and the legend (partially effaced) reads Holy Etchmiadzin, though the structure depicted is not a good likeness of the historic see. It is hard to tell what the original form of this reliquary was. The only representations of it prior to its restoration, but after its journey from Sis to Aleppo are two older group photos showing it with the arm relics of St. Sylvester and St. Nicholas³⁸. St. Gregory's is wrapped in a crude fabric not affording a view of the arm casing or hand of the reliquary itself (fig. 8). The protruding fingers, however, make clear that the hand was open, but somewhat different than its appearance today. The three arm relics of the Cilician Catholicosate (there is a fourth, that of St. Barsauma the Syrian kept in a small reliquary box) have been associate together since at least the mid-eighteenth century, when the special silver chest was made to house all four holy objects³⁹. What is troubling is the difference between the actual relics and their semblance in a scene portraying the blessing of the Holy Oil on the lower cover (fig. 9) of the silver repoussé binding of the famous fourteenth century Ritual manuscript of the Cilician Catholicosate, also executed in 1765 by the same artisans of the Kalemkarian family responsible for the chest. It shows the three arm relics identically rendering the sign of the cross or benediction, whereas today two of them have open hands. In the case of the dexter of St. Nicholas (fig. 2), the upper or hand part of the relic is certainly the same as when it was renovated in 1325, clear from the style of the portrait of St. Nicholas as well as the epigraphy of the dated inscription. It is not possible to spend more time on either the right hand reliquary of St. Sylvester of 1772 (fig. 3) or that of St. Nicholas, but it should be pointed out that the latter is not only the oldest surviving Armenian arm reliquary, but among the half dozen oldest examples of Armenian liturgical metal work.

Three other right hand relics of St. Gregory are known to me. One of them has just recently come to my attention in the report of a service held at the only still functioning Armenian church in central Turkey since the Genocide (there were at least 2,000 sanctuaries before the 1915 Genocide), the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator in ancient Caesarea, modern Kayseri. During a pilgrimage in 2000, His Beatitude Mesrop, Patriarch of the Armenians of Turkey, led a procession around the interior of the church bearing a relic of St. Gregory. It is a hand reliquary now kept at the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul, but there are no further details or pictures. Another dexter is found in the treasury of the Church of St. James of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. I have only a rather distant photograph of it and cannot provide its date, certainly late, but the reliquary is clearly a very plain golden arm with an open hand⁴⁰.

The fifth, and for the moment the last, arm reliquary of St. Gregory I discovered by accident two years ago during a conference in Lecce, Italy devoted to St. Gregory. The conference took place in part at the cathedral of San Gregorio Armeno in Nardo. A discussion with the resident priest resulted in the discovery of a right hand relic of St. Gregory (fig. 10) containing a piece of bone given to the church in Nardo by the cathedral of San Gregorio Armeno in Naples. It was from the abundant body relics of St. Gregory in Naples that Pope John-Paul II gave as a gift various body part relics for the dedication in 2001 of the new Cathedral of St. Gregory erected in central Erevan, the capital of Armenia, on the occasion of the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the conversion of Armenia to Christianity by St. Gregory⁴¹. The silver reliquary of Nardo is in a typically Italian/European style, in the shape of an arm with a hand that is neither open in the manner to be laid on nor showing the sign of benediction. On the palm side, the bone fragment is visible through a small glass window; its appearance does not suggest a fragment of the arm of Gregory or any

other saint, but rather a piece of a large bone freshly sawed off. The reliquary can be compared in style to another Italian arm relic, that of St. Davino Armeno, an eleventh century Armenian pilgrim who died in Lucca. The latter, in the church of San Michele in Foro in Lucca, was fashion in 1424, but has an eighteenth century base, with the thumb and index finger touching⁴². In both Nardo and Lucca, the partially open hands of these reliquaries resemble claws. Another characteristic of these Italian arm relics, shared by other western dexters, but unknown or rare in Armenia, are their massive bases, suitable to firmly rest the object vertically on an altar. In Europe, such right hand relics were often displayed during the liturgy, and common priests, who were themselves not allowed to present the benediction to the faithful at the end of a mass, a privilege reserved for bishops, would take the arm reliquary in hand and allow it to bless the parishioners.

Today cynics aware that there are right hand reliquaries of St. Gregory in both Armenian catholicosates, the Holy See in Etchmiadzin and the See of Cilicia in Antelias, sometimes ridicule the church with jokes about the two right arms of the saint. This is of course a pseudo-problem. The bones of saints were often partitioned or dispersed to various churches or high officials. Though no Armenian arm reliquaries have been disassembled to determine exactly what is inside, it is safe to say that rather than the bones of an arm or a hand, each of them probably enshrines a fragment or small piece of a bone, like that clearly visible in the Nardo dexter. It should be remembered that the fifth century history of Agathangelos clearly states that Gregory himself divided relics of saints he brought to Armenia⁴³.

A more interesting question is what is actually revered by the clergy and the community of believers in these reliquaries: the fragments of relics or the splendid golden reliquaries often studded with jewels? Or in terms of a recent study of European body

reliquaries by Cynthia Hahn: "the contained or the container"⁴⁴?" She and others have argued that bones of saints by themselves are unattractive and mean little to the worshippers, but the dazzling beauty of arm reliquaries evoke the splendor of the saint and his glorious actions. In a sense, such relics are symbols, perhaps even metaphors, suggesting in the case of hands or arms the actions, the good works, of the saint during his lifetime, including the daily conducting of the liturgical service.

In medieval Europe among reliquaries the arm relic is one of the most popular of forms; in Armenia it is the dominant one. Historically the possession of the right arm relic of St. Gregory has also represented the legitimacy of hierarchal power in the church, even though there is no canonical justification for such practice. Perhaps these arm relics served the same function for the higher clergy as relics of the True Cross did to consummate the authority of secular power especially after the final demise of Armenian royalty in the fourteenth century. Lynn Jones has recently argued⁴⁵ that the Armenian Artsruni and Bagaratid kings of the ninth to the eleventh centuries patronized relics of the True Cross, building churches and shrines for them as the Byzantine Emperors had done for the most precious relics of Christianity, which they aggressively collected in the imperial palace in Constantinople⁴⁶. Cross relics were associated with Christ and through Him God, by patronizing them, Byzantine emperors and Armenian kings received indirectly the caution and protection of God for their rule. So, too, the later catholicoi, now functioning as the highest authority in a stateless nation, by harboring the dexter of St. Gregory and similar relics, could claim to serve through the grace of God and the protection of the saints. It is no wonder that arm reliquaries of St. Gregory, dynamic insignia of religious power and authority, are today kept in safes rather than displayed in museums like those of other saints.

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Captions for legends:

- Fig. 1. Silver repoussé chest for the dexters of saints Gregory, Nicholas, Sylvester, and Barsouma. Antioch 1765. Cilician Museum, Antelias, Lebanon.
- Fig. 2. Right arm relic of St. Nicholas. Restored in 1325. Cilician Museum, Antelias, Lebanon.
- Fig. 3. Right arm relic of St. Sylvester. 1772. Cilician Museum, Antelias, Lebanon.
- Fig. 4. Right arm relic of St. Gregory. 1657. Catholicosate of All Armenians, Etchmiadzin, Armenia.
- Fig. 5. Carved wooden plaque of the Descent from the Cross, Havuts' Tar monastery. Late tenth or eleventh century. Museum of the Catholicosate of All Armenians, Etchmiadzin, Armenia.
- Fig. 6. Right arm relic of St. Gregory. Restored in 1928. Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon.
- Fig. 7. Right arm relic of St. Gregory, detail with portrait of St. Gregory. Restored in 1928. Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon.
- Fig. 8. Photograph from left to right of the relics of Saints Gregory, Sylvester, and Nicholas before restoration. Archives of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon.
- Fig. 9. Lower cover in silver repoussé of a manuscript of the Armenian Ritual book. Antioch 1765. Cilician Museum, Antelias, Lebanon.
- Fig. 10. Silver dexter of St. Gregory. Treasury of the church of San Gregorio Armeno, Nardo, Italy.

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² The story behind Armenia's conversion is found in the fifth century Armenian historian Agathangelos and an anonymous life of St. Gregory. See THOMSON (1976). Though the Armenian Church officially recognizes the year 301 for the conversion, many modern historians opt for 314. Either date gives Armenia the distinction of being the first nation to convert to Christianity. See also THOMSON (2001).

³ THOMSON (1976), pp. 297, 299.

⁴ THOMSON (1976), p. 349.

⁵ "[H]e took a part of the saints' relics in order to establish their commemorations in other places", *ibid.*, p. 355.

⁶ THOMSON (1978), p. 250; Movses Xorenac'i, II, sect. 91.

⁷ VAN ESBROECK (1971), esp. 158; see also VAN ESBROECK (1971a). DER NERSESSIAN (1973), vol. 1, p. 55, points out the possibility of some of the relics being brought to Constantinople by Zeno, quoting as her source PEETERS (1942).

⁸ MAKSOUDIAN (1987), pp. 81-2, where the story of Garnik finding the bones is also repeated.

⁹ THOMSON (1991), p. 94 [55].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238 [176]. Maghakia Ormanian in his massive church history gets around this puzzle by suggesting that when St. Gregory's body was buried at Tordan, not all the remains were placed in the tomb, but some were taken to Etchmiadzin and other places, ORMANIAN (1959), cols. 136-7.

¹¹ MAKSOUDIAN (1987), p. 102: "[H]e divided the relics of Saint Grigor and placed them under the four well-fastened pillars so that the celestial treasure might remain safe But he placed [Grigor's] venerable skull, which bore the seal of Christ, not in a niche but out in the open in a cabinet in the divine treasure so that it might give hope for the best to those who sought it and cure the sick".

¹² MARTOYAN (1998-9). The reference is on p. 671 and it quotes in extenso a colophon of 696 copied into a later manuscript and published by BOGHARIAN (1956), p. 57.

¹³ The primary source is the Life of St. Gregory as quoted in AWGERIAN (1810), vol. 1, p. 300-02; cf. MARTOYAN (1998-9), p. 527, n. 23; ORMANIAN (1959), col. 136. That relics of St. Gregory were in the church of the Holy Trinity in the Palace of Daphne in Constantinople ca. 830s seems reasonably certain, see DER NERSESSIAN (1973), p. 57, and PEETERS (1942), pp. 120-21.

¹⁴ A number of relics of St. Gregory were in fact brought from Naples to the Republic of Armenia by Pope John-Paul in 2001 on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the conversion of Armenia to Christianity and placed in the newly built Cathedral of St. Gregory in the capital Erevan.

¹⁵ GULESSERIAN (1939), col. 1275. This vast history has a special section on the history of St. Gregory's dexter and other Armenian arm relics, cols. 1269-1342.

¹⁶ Vardan says, "There were there (Aght'amar) the altar of St. Gregory, his staff and leather belt"; THOMSON (1989), p. 201.

¹⁷ CH'AMCHIAN (1786), pp. 37; the misreading was already pointed out by Ormanian in 1912, ORMANIAN (1959), col. 1351. The confusion probably comes from Thomas Artsruni (tenth century), which in listing the relics speaks of "the staff of the all-powerful right hand", THOMSON (1985), p. 373.

¹⁸ YOVSEPIAN (1951), no. 202, co. 422, manuscript formerly at Etchmiadzin, no. 137.

¹⁹ GULESSERIAN (1939), col. 1277.

²⁰ SHNORHALI (1872), pp. 2, 209, 219, 223, 225; cf. MARTOYAN (1998-9), p. 675 and notes 59-63.

²¹ Colophon of 1293, recopied in a manuscript of 1716, Jerusalem no. 2392, BOGHARIAN (1977), p. 27, col. 1.

²² The source for this is in the anonymous continuator of the thirteenth century historian Smbat Sparapet, who brought the chronology up to 1331. Text and translation in DULAURIER (1869), p. 655, "Héthoum racheta aux infidèles la dextre de saint Grégoire et toutes les reliques dont ils s'étaient emparés. Il les apporta à Sis".

²³ BROSSET (1864), vol. 1, p. 247: "Où est maintenant ... le bras droit et la crosse de St. Grégoire?"

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 267: "[N]ous trouvâmes un trésor inestimable, une divine relique de S. Grégoire-l'Illuminateur, consistant en un côté de son crane et un fragment de son bras, depose dans un petit coffer en bois, fermé et scellé d'un sceau en plomb".

²⁵ KHACH'IKYAN (1950), no. 757, p. 607, Erevan, Matenadaran, no. 3503, copied in Sis in 1394. The colophon mentions other relics, including the one of St. Nicholas, but is not specific about it being a dexter, even though the dexter of St. Nicholas, still in the treasury of the Catholicosate of Cilicia has an inscription of 1325. For the colophon see KARAPETIAN (1994), p. 301.

²⁶ Arak'el in a special monograph in his history explains that he actively researched the question of the history of the right arm of St Gregory and traveled through various regions of Armenia in search of colophons of manuscripts which refer to the dexter. Throughout he quotes in extenso manuscripts he saw and copied on the relic. Among other things he confirms that King Het'um ransomed the dexter from its captivity in Cairo. ARAK'EL (1884), chap. 50, "On the Dexter of our St. Gregory the Illuminator", pp. 319-333.

²⁷ Details in *ibid.*

²⁸ All major modern church historians have discussed this curious disappearance from Sis, appearance in Etchmiadzin at the time of the reestablishment of a catholicosate there, and finally its reappearance in Sis. These various hypotheses are based on a large number of contemporary colophons, though there is no solid information to determine if the one in Etchmiadzin was a new invention or it was that which reappeared in Sis in 1445. CH'AMCH'IAN (1786), p. 488, thought that part of the arm or hand bone was kept at Sis and part taken to Etchmiadzin. Recent discussions can be found in MARTOYAN (1998-9), pp. 25-31; in a briefer and earlier student study MERJANIAN (1998); KARAPETIAN (1994), pp. 301-308.

²⁹ ARAK'EL (1884), 323-29; partial English translation used here from SANJIAN (1969), pp. 271-76. Sanjian used as his sources for all the colophons, Levon Xach'ikyan's systematic publications of them, in this case, KHACH'IKYAN (1958), no. 221, pp. 172-177, colophon of 1462, recopied in Ardjesh, Erevan, Mat. #1771, a Menologium of 1651.

³⁰ The information comes from a colophon originally published by L. Alishan and repeated by GULESSERIAN (1939), col. 37 and discussed in detail with a better localization by KARAPETIAN (1994), p. 306.

³¹ The chest is decorated with scenes from the life of St Gregory. On the bottom is a long inscription explaining its fabrication in Antioch by Haroutiwn Ghalemk'ear(ian) in Antioch. Full inscription in GULESSERIAN (1939), cols. 511-513, and again in KARAPETIAN (1994), pp. 306-7.

³² Catholicos Sahag entrusted the transfer of all the precious liturgical objects and manuscripts from the Catholicosate in Sis to Aleppo in Syria to Khad vardapet (later archbishop and locum tenens) Adjapahian, one of a series of clerics from that same family, whose name means literally the guardian of the dexter, meaning of cross the right hand or arm of St. Gregory. Khad left a moving account of the torturous and tragic journey of 23 days by ox cart, caught up in the forced exile of tens of thousands of Armenian being shunted toward the desserts in Syria. An English translation will be found in GOLTZ and GÖLTZ (2000), pp. 10-18.

³³ Actually, a synod of bishops of the Armenian Church convoked by Catholicos Vazken in Cairo shortly after declared the election illegal. For details on the election and its immediate aftermath, see KOUYMJIAN (1961), pp. 103-4. Details can also be found in YEGHIAYAN (1975), part 5, pp. 663-728.

³⁴ The disappearance of the relic along with the chest in which it and other holy relics of the See of Cilicia were preserved was noticed in March 1956 while the Episcopal Synod was taking place in Cairo. The relic was returned to Antelias one year later in March 1957 through the mediation of Eghishe Derderian, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem under very mysterious circumstances. The popular press suggested that the relic was stolen by individuals who considered the election of Zareh Catholicos illegal and by depriving the Cilician Brotherhood of the hold relic, it would be impossible to formally consecrate the newly elected catholicos. But Zareh was consecrated catholicos in September 2, 1956 without the stolen dexter of St. Gregory the Illuminator. Details of the disappearance and return of the arm relic can be found in YEGHIAYAN (1975), pp. 701-706, and in the short booklet by Garegin Sarkissian (later Catholicos Garegin II), SARKISSIAN (1957).

³⁵ It is reproduced in color in TREASURES (1984) and dated 1657; GULESSERIAN (1939), cols. 1323-4, gives the inscription on the object as recorded in the nineteenth century by SHAKHATUNIAN (1842), vol. 1, pp. 68-9, but instead of 1657 (correctly given in the inscription) the text has 1741. This error was repeated by KARAPETIAN (1994), p. 306.

³⁶ An eleventh century reliquary arm of Basilius in Essen; HAHN (1997), p. 25 and fig. 7.

³⁷ An inscription on the inside of wrist gives this information. Goltz read 1926; I read 1928.

³⁸ Babgen Gulesserian reports that he asked Sahak Catholicos if he could take the photos of the arm relics for his history of the Cilician Catholicosate, GULESSERIAN (1939), col. 1325, with the photo of the three relics. A second photograph, *ibid.*, cols. 125-6, shows the three dexters carefully arranged must probably how they were arranged in the special chest in which they were kept.

³⁹ A very long inscription in stanzas on the bottom of the chest provides this information, GULESSERIAN (1939), col. 1324; the entire 60 line inscription can be found in KARAPETIAN (1994), pp. 306-7.

⁴⁰ I would like to thank Barlow Der Mugrdechian of Fresno, California for supplying me with a slide of it.

⁴¹ The relics were actually given to the Armenian Catholicos Karekin II Nersessian in an elaborate ceremony at St. Peter's in the Vatican in November 2002, though the Pope was in Erevan for the formal installation of the relics in September 2003.

⁴² It is on an eighteenth century base. MUTAFIAN (1999), p. 240, fig. VIII. 5.

⁴³ See note 4 above.

⁴⁴ HAHN (1997), pp. 20-31.

⁴⁵ JONES (2003).

⁴⁶ KALAVREZOU (1997).