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Armenian sites on the Manar al-Athar Digital Photo-archive

With the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the ERC project Monumental Art of the Christian and Early Islamic East: Cultural Identities and Classical Heritage (director Dr Judith McKenzie), I was able to attend the the 2nd Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Researchers 'New Research on Ancient Armenia' workshop organised by Prof. Valentina Calzolari (University of Geneva), Dr Irene Tinti (University of Geneva), Dr Federico Alpi (Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII, Bologna) and Ms Sara Scarpellini (University of Geneva). The workshop was held from 31 May to 1 June 2019 at the Département MESLO (Département des langues et des littératures méditerranéennes, slaves et orientales) in Geneva, Switzerland.

My contribution to the workshop was a 20-minute presentation about the Manar al-Athar photo-archive project and the sites visited during my recent trip to Armenian sites in eastern Turkey. The presentation was divided in three sections.

In the first section I discussed the primary aim of the the Manar al-Athar photo-archive project, which is to create an open-access photographic record of the areas of the former Roman Empire that later came under Islamic rule. I discussed the tailored methodological approach that the Manar al-Athar photo-archive project uses to document historical sites and present them online (the contributors, the types of photographs, the emphasis, the process of editing and labelling). I emphasised the heritage preservation role of the project, namely the provision of a large quantity of high-quality photographs of sites which are not easily accessible, and which are prone to degradation and neglect. This is the situation with the Armenian sites in eastern Turkey. The presentation was accompanied by slides with text and screenshots of the Manar al-Athar website.

The second section of the presentation discussed sites in present-day Armenia published on the Manar al-Athar website. There are approximately 4000 photographs of Armenian ecclesiastical sites available online via www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk, providing a photographic record for 34 sites. I showed a map with the location of the sites, and two examples of the Armenian churches from Armenia – Tegher Monastery (13 c.) and Zvartnots (7 c.). I also included details about the trips on which the photographs were taken and a list of contributors.

The third section discussed the ecclesiastical sites that were photographed during a recent trip to eastern Turkey funded by Manar al-Athar (University of Oxford), Oxford University Byzantine Society and Nubar Pasha Fund (Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford). These included Kars (Church of the Holy Apostles - Karsi Surb Arakelots' yekeghets'i, The Virgin Mary Church - Surb Asdvadzadzin), Digor (Khtzkonk Monastery – Church of Saint Sargis (Surb Sargis)), Ani (the Cathedral of Ani, the Citadel churches – the Palace Church, the 'Child Princess' Church, the Hexagonal Church, and the Maiden Castle, King Gagik's Church of Saint Gregory, the 'Georgian' Church, the Church of Saint Gregory of the Abughamir Family, the Church of the Redeemer – Surp Amenap'rkitch, the Church of St Gregory of Tigran Honents, the Church of the Holy Apostles – Surp Arak'elots, the Monastery of the Hripsimian Virgins – Bekhents Monastery), Kozluca (the Monastery of Bagnayr – Surp

Astuacacin Church and the Hexagonal Church), Dogruyol (the Armenian/Georgian Church), Kümbetli (Kümbet Kilise), Yağikesen (Karmir Vank/Kizil Kilise), Oğuzlu (Oğuzlu Village Church) and Çengelli (Lenamori (Georgian?) or Eghegnamor Monastery). For almost every church I included the main picture of the whole building, and up to four photographs of the details (façade, interior). Once again, I included a map of the sites to illustrate the area covered.

I concluded that Manar al-Athar project aims to reach the sites, document their present state, document as much details as possible, conduct research and preserve them digitally and online.

The talk was dedicated to Dr Judith McKenzie.