

Emma Chookaszian

**The Image of the Virgin of Mercy in the Armenian Art of 13th century in Comparison
with the Western Icons
The Origins of This Iconography**

The western influence on the culture and art was getting stronger in Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in the 13th c., which had a large sea-shore, oriented towards Europe and was playing an important role in the Mediterranean trade. The influence was strengthening also in the Armenian Church and the Armenian kings were becoming more and more oriented towards Roman Church. The majority of the Armenian manuscript books from the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th c. reveal a specific so-called "Italo-Byzantine" style. This text comments on two full-page miniatures from these manuscripts representing the Virgin of Mercy with the members of the royal families kneeling in front of her. One depicts Marshal Oshin, his two elder sons, Constatin and Hethoum, kneeling before Madonna, and a bishop. Madonna is holding her cloak over the royal family's members as a sign of patronage and protection. Great Armenian scholar Sirarpie Der Nersessian drew attention to the intriguing similarities between this Armenian miniature and a small painting by Duccio di Boninsegna. Duccio's work, *Madonna of the Franciscans* is dated in 1280 while the Armenian miniature dates in 1274. Der Nersessian believed that the Franciscans introduced to a Cilician artist the compositional type (Madonna della Misericordia/ Virgin of Mercy) which later enjoyed great success in the West. Another miniature from the same period (ca. 1270) also represents Virgin of Mercy and belongs to the Prince Vasak Gospel which is now kept in Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Christ is depicted receiving an homage from the donators, while Virgin Mary is interceding for them by protecting them under her cloak. The colophon above reads: "It's the Prince Vasak the brother of the King of Armenia who received this saint manuscript book and in presence of God his children Constantine and Hethoum whom Christ the God receives in his love by the intercession of his saint mother". Prince Vasak was king Hethoum I's brother and was the lord of Dchandchi. Cilicia was a Kingdom with close relations with the Levant as well as with Europe, with the Byzantine and with the Frankish world. Whether the features of these works were result of the direct influences of the Western masterpieces, or were simply taken within the wider context of the Byzantine or Mediterranean art, is a question which still needs to be answered.