

A Jacobean Shell for Šahuk, “Servant of God”

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1 Introduction

Historical and anthropological studies on mediaeval Christian pilgrimages have revealed certain characteristics in pilgrimage customs that believers of various confessions and nations practised in anticipation of spiritual purification and salvation.¹ One of these was to carry along various gifts while undergoing the long journey. Before returning home, pilgrims would acquire *in situ* a new object in commemoration of the pilgrimage they experienced physically and spiritually along the routes to holy sites. Exceptional protective, healing, and miraculous powers were also ascribed to these emblematic objects, for they had been in contact with the holy.

In recent decades, archaeologists and art historians have also dedicated several studies to exploring items associated with the practice of mediaeval pilgrimage, closely investigating transportable, often minor objects found in many museums and collections or, where possible, at archaeological sites, which has allowed for a more contextualised approach to the subject.² The fact that many pilgrim tokens and mementos have been found in burial places demonstrates that their owners treasured these objects so much that they preferred to have them along with them even while departing from earthly life.³ Pilgrims of high social standing could afford to have items such as icons, manuscripts or decorated crosses. The Armenian queen Mariun, for example, when she went to Jerusalem in the last quarter of the 14th century, had a “holy sign” and two Gospel manuscripts with her.⁴ The material remnants of Armenian pilgrimage tradi-

1 For general studies on (Christian) pilgrimage, see Sumption 1975; Brown 1981; Turner—Turner 1978; Van Gennepe 1960; Ousterhout 1990 etc.

2 For archaeological approaches to Christian pilgrimage, see Droogan 2013; Raja—Rüpke 2015; Kristensen—Frieze 2017. For case studies on the material remnants of Christian pilgrimages, see n. 3.

3 Given that the main focus of the present paper will be on shells acquired during pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela, here I give only the examples of those pilgrims' graves, which contained shells buried together with their owners: Vallet 2008; Nagel 2008, 80–82, figs. 7ab; Ktalav 2016; Simonsen 2018.

4 Grigoryan Savary 2021, 225–230, 245–246.



FIGURES 3.1A–B Šahuk's shell, Cilician Armenia, 13th–14th cc. Inv. no. ЧМ-1317
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tion and the possible relevance of certain objects to pilgrimage practices are still largely understudied. This paper is an attempt to fill that gap and, because of the lack of previous approaches to Armenian pilgrimage art, it also faces a methodological challenge. Therefore, the reader should not be surprised that the terminology and *comparanda* used in this article will make use of Western examples and traditions, which have received more scholarly attention so far. This essay is a search for context, and I would like to dedicate it to Theo van Lint, whose work has enriched our understanding of Armenian culture and spirituality.

The late mediaeval object I will deal with is a scallop shell with a coin attached inside and with silver decorations fixed on the shell's upper part and around its edges (Figures 3.1a–b). The upper silver decoration has a holder from the back side, which allowed the item to be hung on, but also to be used as a ladle. The shell object is preserved in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg under the inventory number ЧМ-1317 and is also included in the museum's permanent exhibition, displayed at the Winter Palace, in hall 66.

I will first discuss the object's discovery and acquisition history, as well as early scholarship on it, and then analyse its epigraphic and iconographic features. The next part of the article analyses the use and function of Jacobean shells within the context of mediaeval pilgrimage practices, followed by a general reconstruction of Armenian pilgrimage accounts to Santiago de Compostela.

2 Discovery and Early Scholarship of the Berdyansk Treasure

In the early 1890s, a treasure containing various silver objects was found in the Ukrainian port city of Berdyansk, which at that time was a part of the Taurida Governorate (Таврическая губерния) in the Russian Empire.⁵ The information on the Berdyansk treasure was first published in the report of the Imperial Archaeological Commission for the year 1894, prepared by the commission's chairman Count Aleksey Bobrinsky.⁶ The report, accompanied with a black-and-white photograph of the shell, as well as with four photographs of various silver objects from the same treasure,⁷ recorded the following:

A wonderful collection of silver gilt objects of Armenian origin was found in the Berdyansk city. Namely this includes a seashell with a holder and with an Armenian inscription “Manuk, slave of God”, written on the coin attached [to the shell]; two cups; two big badges in form of rosettes; four big round badges; two badges in form of a pointed triangular; 31 oval shape and 33 round badges and fragments of an incense burner executed in the filigree method. Judging from the inscription's script, the objects were likely produced during the 11th–12th centuries.⁸

As will be seen, the reading of the Armenian inscription contained some errors, and the date of production had later to be reconsidered. In the tabular description of the same report, brief information on the Berdyansk treasure (“One big silver gilt badge and other objects of Armenian origin”) is followed with an instruction about the acquisition destination: “Assigned to the Imperial Her-

5 Bobrinsky 1896, 42–43 (Приобретение отдельных предметов древности и коллекций [Acquisition of Antiquities and Collections]), see also 1 (Производство археологических раскопок [Archaeological Excavations]). In this official report, the Berdyansk treasure is mentioned to have been found in 1894. Decades later, however, Iosif Orbeli mentioned 1892 as the year when it was accidentally discovered during field work. See Orbeli 1938, 276–277.

6 Bobrinsky 1896, 34–46, esp. 42–43, fig. 62, see also 168–169.

7 The same photographs showing five of the described silver objects were reprinted by Vasilij Latyshev in 1906. See Latyshev 1906, 52, figs. 293–297.

8 “Замѣчательная коллекція серебряныхъ позолоченныхъ вещей армянскаго происхожденія, найденныхъ въ г. Бердянскѣ, именно: морская раковина въ оправѣ, съ армянскою надписью внутри на жетонѣ, “Манукъ рабъ Божій”, 2 чашечки, 2 крупныя бляхи въ видѣ розетокъ, 4 большія круглыя бляхи, 2 бляхи въ видѣ наугольниковъ, 31 овальная и 33 круглыя бляшки и фрагментъ курильницы филигранной работы. По начертанію буквъ надписи, вещи относятся приблизительно къ XI–XII в”. See Bobrinsky 1896, 42–43.

mitage”.⁹ As instructed, the silver objects found in Berdyansk were acquired by the Hermitage Museum in 1895.¹⁰

In 1909, another black-and-white photograph of the object in question, as well as three pictures of other silverworks from the Berdyansk treasure, were published by Yakov Smirnov, another member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences. Smirnov included them in his atlas entitled *Vostočnoe serebro* (Oriental Silverwork), mostly reproducing the information that was reflected in the above-cited report.¹¹

3 Epigraphy, Dating, Iconography, and Attribution

The next scholar to pay attention to this object was Iosif Orbeli, who in 1938 clarified a few erroneous points that had previously been overlooked and proposed some original considerations. Based on stylistic and technical features of the decorated shell, Orbeli suggested a new date—late 12th–early 13th centuries.¹² He also proposed a new reading of the coin inscription: instead of “Manuk, slave of God” he suggested “Šahuk, slave of God” (*Մահուկ, թա՛ Յոճա*).¹³ Šahuk is indeed the name written on the attached coin, as can clearly be seen in modern photographs. I would, however, slightly modify Orbeli’s translation of “slave of God”, for the original Armenian inscription reads ՇԱՀՈՒԿ ԾԱՆԱՅ Ա (USՈՒԾՈՅ), a more appropriate translation of which would be “Šahuk, *servant* of God”. Between the first and last letters of this inscription, there is a separating cross, a characteristic epigraphic element of Cilician coinage, which helped Orbeli to attribute the shell ladle to Cilician Armenia.

Another inscription can be seen on the surface of the partly preserved silver gilt band, overlaid on the edges of the shell. The three-letter inscription written on the upper right side of that band reads Շահ (*Šah*), which most likely refers to the same Šahuk. If this is not an abbreviation (and indeed there is no

9 Bobrinsky 1896, 168–169.

10 Kramarovski 2019, 330.

11 Smirnov 1909, Pl. LXXVII (No. 139). For three other objects from the Berdyansk treasure, see Smirnov 1909, Pl. LXXVII (No. 140), Pl. CI (Nos. 246, 247). The last two objects are silver plates dating from the 13th–14th centuries (Hermitage Museum, Inv. ЧМ-1190 and ЧМ-1191). For their colour reproductions, see Kramarovski 2005, 235 (cat. 266); Kramarovski 2019, 423. I suppose these are the same objects described in the 1894 report as “two cups” (Bobrinsky 1896, 43). The images of other objects of the Berdyansk treasure are reproduced in Darkevich 1976, fig. 123 (1–6).

12 Orbeli 1938, 278–279.

13 Orbeli 1938, 279.

abbreviation sign in the writing of *Šah*), one can suppose that the person was known both as *Šahuk* and *Šah*. “-uk” is the diminutive suffix added to the male name *Šah* (from Persian “*šah*”, meaning “king”, a personal name in use among Armenians).¹⁴

To my knowledge, the provenance from Cilician Armenia suggested by Orbeli has been accepted by all scholars who considered this object.¹⁵ My examination of the shell ladle brings forth some more details, which confirm Orbeli’s attribution, although a date around 13th–14th centuries seems to me more plausible than late 12th–early 13th centuries.¹⁶ While the valve object itself can in a way be characterised as unique in Armenian material culture (for no other example is known so far), the epigraphy, style and execution of the attached coin in many points coincide with Cilician coinage, among which the above-mentioned use of the cross in the circular inscription. Another parallel with Cilician coins minted during the 13th–14th centuries is that the inscription is separated from the central image by a circle of dots. While the animal depicted on Cilician coins is usually a lion or a lion-like beast, the shell coin contains the image of a wild goat which looks back over its shoulder, thus reproducing the pose of the lions that appear on some Cilician coins.

Both the depiction of the goat on an Armenian coin and the uniqueness of that coin bearing the name of a certain *Šahuk* raise a series of questions, whose answers, because of the paucity of sources, will probably always remain hypothetical. One of the central questions is the identity of *Šahuk*. Orbeli had suggested that he could be “a master, a citizen, a merchant, but never a lord or a baron”, apparently considering the diminutive form of the name.¹⁷

Indeed, no ruler named *Šahuk*, at least a ruler who would have the legitimacy to mint a coin, is known so far. Another possible guess is that he was a well-to-do individual from high social rank, who ordered the royal master

14 The name *Šahuk* is absent in Hrač’eay Ačaṙean’s monumental *Dictionary of Armenian Personal Names*. Nevertheless, there are other diminutive versions of the name *Šah*, such as *Šahak*, which is testified in early mediaeval sources and later, or *Šahik*, recorded for the first time in 1041 in an inscription carved on the Holy Saviour church in Ani. See Ačaṙean 1948, 103–104 (for *Šahak*), 119–120 (for *Šahik*). For the inscription of 1041 mentioning *Šahik*, see also Orbeli 1966, 43.

15 Kakovkin 1975, 195–197; Darkevich 1976, 132; Marshak 1985, 141, 143; Kramarovski 2005, 235; Kramarovski 2019, 330. For Kramarovski’s attribution see also below.

16 My dating is thus closer to that suggested by Kakovkin and Kramarovski. Kakovkin dated the shell to the mid-13th century, while Kramarovski to the mid-13th–14th centuries. See Kakovkin 1974, n. 23; Kramarovski 2005, 235; Kramarovski 2019, 330.

17 Orbeli 1938, 280, also 281–282. It is however to be noted that, although not frequently, the diminutive names or epithets are nevertheless testified among Armenian aristocrats.

to issue an individual souvenir coin. While the available evidence seems to be silent about such practices in mediaeval Armenia, the use of royal artists' services by non-royal individuals does not appear unusual if we look at the production of other kind of objects.¹⁸ The quantity of silver used for this object and the fact that Šahuk could afford the issue of an individual coin in a royal style speak for someone who had access to the services of the royal mint. In this regard, Orbeli's suggestion that Šahuk could be a master silversmith is not unrealistic. The diminutive form of his name may further strengthen this suggestion. It appears that a certain number of mediaeval Armenian masters and architects used the diminutive form when signing their names. This was the case of architect, sculptor, and miniaturist Momik, architects Gazan, Šahik, and Grigorik (Grgorik), architect and sculptor Vec'ik, etc. It seems unlikely that they were all given diminutive names at birth. The diminutive suffix of their names could be added later in accordance with the contemporary ethics of their professional activities and religious affinities. In this sense, the double signature of Šah/Šahuk is particularly evocative: his name appears as *Šahuk* in one place and as *Šah* in another (in a less prominent place).

At any rate, the coin, probably along with other silver additions visible on the shell, was manufactured at the private initiative of Šahuk, who attached it to the scallop valve, turning it into a personalised object. His desire of being remembered through this object is reflected in the two inscriptions cited above, one of which clearly underlines his Christian piety. While on Cilician coins the circular legend naming the king is usually accompanied with a central image of the respective king, the coin in question depicts a wild goat, with which Šahuk associated himself. Even though executed in imitation of Cilician coins, the visible iconography and epigraphy of this coin suggest a non-secular context and most likely a non-commercial use. On royal coins, if there is a reference to God, then it is always associated with the sovereign's aim to highlight the idea that the acting king exercises earthly power bestowed upon him by God. Thus, the standard legend ԿԱՐՈՂՈՒԹԵԱՄԲՆ ԱՍՏՈՒԾՈՅ ("By the

18 Thus, in 1323 a certain deacon Yovanēs acquired a parchment manuscript (Hymnal, ms 367/65 of Zmmar [= BZ 367/65]), which was copied and illustrated by the royal artist Sargis Picak in the Church of the Holy Sign, in the capital of Sis (for the manuscript and its colophons, see Kēšišan 1964, 104–106; interestingly—though this might be a pure coincidence—Yovanēs asks to remember, among others, his deceased father, whose name was Šah). Picak offered his artistic services also to other non-royal individuals originating from Cilicia and Greater Armenia. If the services of the celebrated royal miniaturist were available for people who were not necessarily from the courtly *milieu*, the clients of royal silversmiths were probably also not strictly limited to the court members only.

power of God”) appears on the silver *drams*¹⁹ issued by Lewon I (r. 1198–1219), Het’um I (r. 1226–1270) and Zapēl, Smbat (r. 1196/7–1198), Kostandin (r. 1198–1199), and Lewon III (r. 1301/6–1307). Unlike these royal mints, the legend on Šahuk’s coin emphasises its owner’s religious piety, identifying him as “servant of God”.²⁰

The overall pious connotation of the object in question might be helpful to understand the choice of the wild goat and of another animal carved on the shell’s upper part. But before discussing what these beasts could have symbolised for the shell’s owner, a few words should be said about the stylistic attributions that were proposed about the silver decorations.

The metallic addition on the upper part represents a carefully executed relief-like decoration with a central image of a beast which looks back over his shoulder as does the wild goat on the attached coin. The beast looks like a lion but has the pointed skin of a leopard. In his brief mention of this object, Darkevich observed “western European influence” in the stylistic execution of the beast.²¹ More recently, Kramarovski, who attributed the shell object to Cilicia, nevertheless associated its silver decorations (especially two small almond-shaped rivets) with artistic traditions of the northern Black Sea region of the 14th century, contextualising it within the art of the Golden Horde.²² Probably taking into account this very hypothesis, on the museum’s explanatory plaque the provenance of Šahuk’s shell is given as “Cilicia, Golden Horde”.²³ The same provenance appeared also in the entries to recent exhibition catalogues, in which the shell was included.²⁴ While it is not impossible to imagine that silver decorations could have been added in a region that was part of the

19 *Dram* or *tram* is an Armenian term used for silver or gold coins. In the Cilician state these were mainly minted in silver and had a weight of about 2.9 grams. Armenian *dram* is equivalent to *dirham* in Persian and Arabic and to *drachma* in Greek and Latin. On the term *dram* / *tram*, see Bedoukian 1979, 47–48.

20 It would be highly interesting to know how the reverse of Šahuk’s coin looks like, if it were possible to temporarily separate it from the scallop shell.

21 Darkevich 1976, 132.

22 Kramarovski 2005, 236; Kramarovski 2019, 330.

23 The State Hermitage Museum (see Bibliography at the end).

24 Šahuk’s shell, apart from being included into the permanent exhibition of the Hermitage Museum, was also displayed in several temporary exhibitions, a list of which is given below:

2001. *Sokrovišča Zolotoj Ordy (The Treasures of the Golden Horde)*, 14.02–28.12.2001, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg. The catalogue of this exhibition was not available to me at the time of writing.

2005–2006. *Dschingis Khan und seine Erben: das Weltreich der Mongolen*, 16.06–25.09.2005, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 26.10–29.01.-

Golden Horde, it can equally not be excluded that this was done in Cilician Armenia (which, incidentally, during the period considered had stronger political ties with another Mongol state, the Ilkhanate of Iran, from where certain artistic and cultural interactions were stimulated). The developed tradition of silversmithing in Cilicia and the similarities of Šahuk's coin with Cilician coinage make this region a more probable candidate than the region where it was found in the 19th century.²⁵ As for widespread stylistic references, these can well be associated with objects originating not only from the Golden Horde but also with many other contemporary artefacts classified within the general phenomenon known as the *Pax Mongolica*, which was also strongly present in the Cilician kingdom and in Greater Armenia.²⁶ Šahuk's shell however, as will further be shown, offered a new reading for both the silver engravings and the coin, thus setting these additions into a new context—now as part of an object that was to express its owner's religious piety and, likely, social ranking.

What motivated Šahuk to choose a wild goat for his individual coin and a leopard/lion for the scallop shell? In many mediaeval Armenian churches, especially near the entrances or windows, one can observe depictions of wild beasts, many of which were interpreted as having protective and salvific powers. These

2006, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München. For the exhibition catalogue, see Kramarovski 2005, cat. 267.

2019, *Zolotaja Orda i Pričernomor'e: Uroki Čingisidskoj imperii (The Golden Horde and Black Sea Coast: Lessons of the Genghisid Empire)*, 03.04–06.10.2019, Hermitage—Kazan Exhibition Centre. For the exhibition catalogue, see Kramarovski 2019, 330.

25 It is not known how the treasure made its way to Berdyansk, but it is perhaps not unimportant to mention that many Cilician manuscripts and objects that were later found in various parts of the Russian Empire, including especially in Armenia, have had an itinerary similar to this: Cilicia—(Jerusalem)—Crimea—Nor Naxijewan / Rostov-on-Don—Ejmiacin—Yerevan. It is not excluded that the Berdyansk treasure too was brought along by the Cilician Armenians to Crimea, from where it could later be moved further along the coasts of the Azov Sea.

26 The renewed interest in the Mongol Empire, sparked by the modern phenomenon of globalisation, resulted not only in profound research into Mongol culture and history but also in many splendid exhibitions dedicated to material culture produced during this period. Many objects, hitherto neglected, less studied or even unknown, were brought into the open, widening our knowledge and perception of the visual and material world of the past. However, for some artefacts the attribution to the Mongol Empire (in case of Šahuk's shell to the Golden Horde) has been made with a general understanding that their production chronologically corresponded to what is known as the *Pax Mongolica*, sometimes overlooking the specific cultural-historical contexts of their production.



FIGURES 3.2A–C Western entrance of the *gavit'* of the Xoranašat Monastery, 13th century
PHOTO BY AUTHOR, SEPTEMBER 2019

functions are easier to discern especially in those depictions which are accompanied with inscriptions, for they often ask for divine protection for those named in the text. In the 13th-century Xoranašat monastery, for example, two inscriptions are written on two beast sculptures, which also serve as capitals for the western entrance of the *gavit'*²⁷ (Figure 3.2). These texts are accompanied with small crosses placed below, in that way filling in the free space remaining on the beasts' bodies. The inscriptions on the two sculpted capitals depicting a lion and a horned animal read as follows, respectively:

Ք(ՐԻՍՏՈ)Ս Ա(ՍՏՈՒԱ)Ծ ՈՂՈՐՄԻ ՎԱՆԱԿԱՆԻՆ. ԽԱՉՍ ՆՄԱՅ Է:

May Christ God have mercy on Vanakan.²⁸ This cross is for him. (Fig. 3.2a)

Ք(ՐԻՍՏՈ)Ս Ա(ՍՏՈՒԱ)Ծ ՈՂՈՐՄ/Ի ԳՐԻԳՈՐՈՅ / ԽԱՉՍ ՆՄԱՅ Է:

May Christ God have mercy on Grigor. This cross is for him. (Fig. 3.2c)²⁹

A different approach, but likely with similar protective connotation, can be seen in some animal reliefs of the 14th-century church of *Surb Astuacacin* (Holy Mother of God, known also as Belfry Church or Small Church) in Ełvard. The

27 On the protective connotation ascribed to these beasts, see Mnac'akanyan 1970, 200, also 185–202 (for more examples testified in mediaeval Armenian architecture).

28 This is the well-known theologian Vanakan vardapet, the founder of the Xoranašat monastery and of its renowned school.

29 While this second inscription is easily discernible, the first one mentioning Vanakan is now damaged (Figure 3.2a). During my visit to Xoranašat in September 2019, I could read it only partially. The rest of the inscription is completed according to Vahan Vanyan's article published in 1976, when the overall state of the monastery was still in a better condition. See Vanyan 1976, 43.



FIGURE 3.3 *Surb Astuacacin* (Holy Mother of God) Church in Elvard, 1311–1321, east façade, architect Šahik.

PHOTO BY HRAIR HAWK KHATCHERIAN, JUNE 2015

church's east façade, for example, shows a scene with a leopard seizing a goat, which is carved above the richly framed window (Figure 3.3).

Whether the goat and the leopard/lion depicted on Šahuk's shell had a similar protective role is a speculative yet not improbable hypothesis.³⁰ If we recall the non-secular details of Šahuk's coin that were discussed above, and especially the inscription representing him as “servant of God”, the pious connota-

³⁰ Many references to the symbolic presence of wild beasts can be found in mediaeval Armenian historiography. Step'anos Tarōnec'i Asolik (at the turn of the 11th c.) and Step'anos Orbelean (13th–14th cc.) write about ascetic monks who lived with wild animals, making these beasts to serve them. The theological explanation of these legendary accounts is that by their miraculous submission the beasts testify that the hermits bear in themselves the Christ, the New Adam, under whose submission God had subjected all creatures (Mahé 1993, 514, also n. 535). An association between Adam and his domination over the animals is perfectly visualised on the east façade of the 10th-century Ałt'amar church, where the bust of Adam is surrounded by sculpted beasts and accompanied with an inscription referring to Gen 2:20: ԵՒ ԿՈՉԵ/ԱՅ ԱԴԱ/Մ ԱՆՈ/ԻԱՆՍ ԱՄԵ/ՆԱՅ/Ն ԱՆԱ/ՍՆՈՑ /ԵՒ ԳԱԶԱ/ՆԱՅ—“And Adam gave names to all the animals and wild beasts” (Figure 3.4). Remarkably, the iconography of Adam could easily be confused with that of Christ if there were not the respective legend naming Adam. See Dorfmann-Lazarev 2016, 493–498; Thomson 2019, 230.



FIGURE 3.4 Adam (Gen 2:20), *Surb Xac'* (Holy Cross) Church in Alt'amar, 915–921, east façade, architect Manuēl

PHOTO BY HRAIR HAWK KHATCHERIAN, FEBRUARY 2015

tion of this object becomes more discernible. No less remarkably, all these features appear on a scallop valve—a natural object which from the 12th century on was given an emblematic status, being largely associated with pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, which I will discuss next.

4 A Jacobean Shell for Šahuk

Whether Šahuk was the initial or a later owner of the scallop shell is hard to know. The circumstances of its acquisition will probably always remain unknown, as is often the case with many mediaeval objects of this kind. What is more certain is that the use of scallop shells has a clear connotation to mediaeval pilgrimage practices and more specifically to pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. The tradition of visiting the tomb of Saint James the Apostle was formed in the 9th century after a local hermit called Pelayo had a vision about the whereabouts of the sarcophagus, which would later become the site of the chapel, the church, and then the splendid cathedral of Santiago

de Compostela.³¹ In the 12th century, when the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*³² was produced, the veneration of Saint James gained more popularity, being enriched now with rituals and miracles related to this apostle. Many Jacobean pilgrims were well aware of the miracles described in the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*, some even claimed to have experienced them on their road to Santiago and back. The creation of this influential book was accompanied by the appearance of pilgrim hospices on the routes to Santiago and, more importantly, by the construction of the famous cathedral upon the supposed sarcophagus of the apostle. These undertakings further reinforced the tradition and organisation of the pilgrimage to Santiago, making it one of the most desired pilgrimage destinations until today.

From the 12th century on, the scallop valve became the symbol of a successfully fulfilled pilgrimage to the Apostle James' tomb in Santiago.³³ Recent archaeological excavations confirm the 12th century as the *terminus post quem* for the diffusion of scallop or oyster shells as symbols of Jacobean travellers.³⁴ In the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*, there are indications of how the oyster shells would be used by the pilgrims, and what it signified as a symbol of spiritual salvation, obtained after the completion of pilgrimage.³⁵ Over time, the local authorities of Santiago started to control the shell sale along the Jacobean routes in order to prevent their unlicensed production and forgeries.³⁶ The exact place where the pilgrims could obtain their shells was also determined: in the square situated in front of the northern portal of the cathedral.³⁷ The tradition of pilgrims' shells inspired the circulation of many stories, legends and customs that were related to the symbolic correlation of Saint James and scallops (or oysters).³⁸ The scal-

31 On the formation of Saint James' cult in Galicia and on the tradition of the Jacobean pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, see Starkie 1965; Herbers 1984; Williams—Stones 1992, etc.

32 The manuscript of the Book of Saint James is also known as *Codex Calixtinus* after the name of Pope Calixtus II or simply as *Jacobus* as it appears on the manuscript's incipit page. I have consulted the following edition: Moralejo et al. 1951. For the studies on the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*, see Herbers 1984; Moisan 1992; Williams—Stones 1992, etc.

33 The two types of the scallop shells used for Jacobean pilgrimage, whose scientific names are *Pecten maximus* and *Pecten jacobaeus*, are distributed in two sea regions: "*P. maximus* distribution is limited to the northeast Atlantic, from northern Norway down to north Africa, while *P. jacobaeus* is present within the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea". See Ktalav 2016, 326, also 333.

34 Ktalav 2016, 323–338.

35 Ktalav 2016, 325 (with further references).

36 Starkie 1965, 71; Plötz 1992, 39; Ktalav 2016, 333.

37 Plötz 1992, 39. See also Starkie 1965, 70.

38 For several such legends and miracles associated with Saint James, see Starkie 1965, 70–71; Herbers 1992, 11–34; Moisan 1992, 133–145; Ktalav 2016, 325.



FIGURE 3.5 A Jacobean pilgrim, mural painting, ca. 1150, Nativity Church, Bethlehem
PHOTO BY MICHELE BACCI, JUNE 2019

lop shells, often considered by pilgrims as objects with miracle-working power, could however also have practical use. For travellers, they could secure safe passages to hospices or to the holy sites situated on the respective routes. It has also been suggested that they could be used as ladles to drink or eat from. The holder attached to pilgrims' shells was used to hang them from the travellers' clothes, huts, belts, bags, or at home as signs of accomplished pilgrimage.³⁹ In the Nativity church of Bethlehem, for instance, the mid-12th-century mural icon of Saint James the Great depicts in supplicating pose an aristocratic couple, whose bags prominently exhibit their shells (Figure 3.5).⁴⁰

In the shell of Šahuk, too, there is a holder, apparently meant to be used for one of the above-mentioned purposes, perhaps for hanging it on house walls, because it is heavier (with the presence of additional silver decorations) and larger (length 16.6 cm, width 13.3 cm, height 5.5 cm)⁴¹ than many pilgrims' shells: this makes the shell less practical for long journeys. In any event, the epigraphic material, which represents Šahuk as a "servant of God", reveals this object's connection with its owner's religious piety. If this is not a mediaeval forgery, the shell might have been acquired by Šahuk after the completion of a pilgrimage to Santiago: the owner then had it adorned with silver decorations, and added a visual sign of his identity, thus making it a personalised object.⁴² Even if not acquired in Santiago itself, it can still be associated with someone's desire to go on pilgrimage to Santiago.

A comparative regard to archaeological finds of Jacobean shells might be helpful to better understand the functional peculiarities of Šahuk's shell. In this respect, a recent study dedicated to the Jacobean badges found in the Holy Land reveals some interesting parallels. First, some of these shells were found as an accumulation, i.e. accompanied with other small objects, such as coins, crosses, or pottery.⁴³ It is not excluded that the silver objects of the Berdyansk treasure, among them the shell in question, might also have belonged to one individual. Secondly, the physical state, namely the artificial holes (usually two or three) of many pilgrims' valves found in the Holy Land and in Europe, can

39 In Nordic countries, also some of Saint Olav's pilgrims' badges and shells were used as amulets for protecting the home. See Simonsen 2018, 192.

40 Bacci 2017, 130, fig. 35; Bacci (ed.) 2021, 13, fig. 1 (for the images of both the male and female pilgrim).

41 The measurements according to Kramarovski 2005, 235.

42 It is not excluded that the shell was acquired by an elder member of Šahuk's family, from whom then it passed to Šahuk. In some Western societies, for instance, it is known that the shells acquired by Jacobean pilgrims could become a dear object also for their family members, who passed it from generation to generation. See Starkie 1965, 71.

43 Ktalav 2016, 327–333.

be comparable to the holes present on Šahuk's shell if one were to remove the silver additions. Thus, the upper two holes of Šahuk's shell, which are covered with two small rivets on each side, and the central holes, through which the back holder and coin are attached, correspond to the positions of the holes that are usually found on the badges of Jacobean pilgrims, who used the holes for attaching or hanging the shell.⁴⁴

5 Armenian Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela

From these object-centred considerations let us now turn to the historical background of mediaeval Armenian pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. The evidence narrated below is not intended as a reply to the unanswered questions concerning the history of Šahuk's shell. What I hope to do, instead, is to provide a context for the object, reconstructed through some episodes pertaining to the tradition of Armenian pilgrimage to Santiago, during which the religious travellers could have acquired objects such as the shell in question.

In the 10th century, that is only a century after Pelayo had his vision about the whereabouts of the apostle's sarcophagus, an Armenian monk called Simēon came to venerate the saint's tomb in Santiago.⁴⁵ Another pilgrim, Dawit' (later Saint Davinus of Lucca, who died in the mid-11th century and was buried in the church San Michele in Foro in Lucca, Tuscany), went to Jerusalem, Rome, then intended to visit Santiago.⁴⁶ At the end of the 11th century, an Armenian princess went on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela together with her companions.⁴⁷

Despite some obscure details of the above-mentioned accounts, they nevertheless provide an interesting context for reconstructing the origins of the

44 For photographs showing the artificial holes on Jacobean shells, see Spencer 1998, fig. 248a; Vallet 2008, fig. 6; Ktalav 2016, fig. 17.3; Simonsen 2018, fig. 68. It was suggested that the two-hole shells were hung, while the three-hole shells were to be sewn onto the pilgrim's clothes or bags. See Vallet 2008, 244.

45 Ališan 1884, 5–17; P'eč'ikean 1937, 50–52; Dédéyan 1978, 124–125; Dédéyan 1984, 23–25; Matiossian 2005, 197.

46 P'eč'ikean 1937, 52; Dédéyan 1978, 125–126; Dédéyan 1984, 25–26; Bacci 2004, 548–558; Uluhogian 2006, 29–50; Orenco 2018, 88–89.

47 Gulbenkian 1980, 173–178, 194–195 (Gulbenkian considers the princess to be daughter of the last Bagratid king). For some clarifications regarding the Armenian princess and her sojourn in Spain, see Matiossian 2005, 198–203.

Armenian tradition of Santiago pilgrimage. At the time when these pilgrims went to worship the apostle's tomb, the cathedral of Santiago and the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* were not yet created, and the cult of Saint James was still in its formative period.

After the creation of the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* in the 12th century, the cult of Saint James started to develop quickly, attracting to Santiago numerous religious travellers from all over the Christian world, including the Armenians. In the long sermon on the translation of the apostle's relics from Jerusalem to Santiago, the Armenians are listed among those nations who came to visit the apostle's tomb in Galicia.⁴⁸ This sermon composed by Pope Callixtus represents Chapter XVII of Book I of the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*. The latter also contains a so-called *Pilgrim's Guide* (Book V), which is a collection of various kinds of advice for those who undertook a pilgrimage to Santiago. Later some visitors mentioned that there existed a hospice for the Armenians in the city, for they had been coming to pilgrimage since ancient times.⁴⁹ A guesthouse called "Hospice of Jerusalem" and situated in Santiago's ancient quarter of Jewish merchants was possessed by the Armenians.⁵⁰ Some scholars of architectural history have even claimed that there are traces of Armenian influence on the early Romanesque structure of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.⁵¹ Due to the presence of an Armenian alphabet composed of 36 letters and engraved on a niche of the Church of Saint Martha in Tarascon (France), it was suggested that in the 12th century an Armenian pilgrim paused at this sanctuary on his way to Santiago.⁵²

In his mid-13th-century report addressed to king Louis IX, the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck writes in detail about an Armenian monk called Sergius, whom he met at the court of the great khan Möngke and who once asked the friar whether the Pope would "furnish him with horses as far as Santiago".⁵³

In the 14th century, the relationship between Cilician Armenia and the Iberian Peninsula was marked by a special diplomatic and religious event, when during the reigns of the Armenian king Lewon IV (r. 1321–1341) and of the king of Aragon, James II (r. 1291–1327), the relics of Saint Thecla were trans-

48 Moralejo et al. 1951, 199.

49 López Ferreiro 1898, 69–70.

50 Gulbenkian 1980, 199; Matiossian 2005, 214–215. It was also suggested that the Galician city called Arménia and mentioned in the 16th-century *Breviario Compostellano* might have been related to the Armenians. See Gulbenkian 1980, 195–196, n. 96.

51 Conant 1926, 27.

52 Dédéyan—Kévorkian 2007, 907.

53 William of Rubruck (Jackson 1990), 205–206.

ferred from Cilicia to Catalonia.⁵⁴ A few decades later, in the north-western part of the peninsula another noteworthy episode took place, this time with the participation of the last Cilician king Lewon v Lusignan (r. 1374–1375). While in Lyon, the king undertook a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, a wish which, according to his confessor-biographer Jean Dardel, he had cherished since his Mamluk captivity in Cairo.⁵⁵ In the last quarter of the 14th century, a knight called Manuël, who was active in the Armenian court until the fall of Sis and who later falsely represented himself as the messenger of king Lewon, asked for financial support from the royal treasury of the Aragonese court on the pretext of undertaking a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.⁵⁶

More detailed accounts are available from the post-mediaeval period.⁵⁷ Leaving Erznkay/Erzincan in October 1489, during the years that followed bishop Martiros Erznkac'i visited some of the most important European sanctuaries, including Santiago de Compostela, where he remained for 84 days.⁵⁸ Between 1587 and 1592, a very similar itinerary through European holy sites was taken by a monk Sargis, who might have been familiar with the travel account of Martiros Erznkac'i.⁵⁹ Arriving at Santiago, Sargis could not see the headless body of Saint James, because the door leading to the apostle's tomb was opened only once every seven years. Nevertheless, the Armenian pilgrim was filled with joy after he learned that the desirable day would arrive in eight months, so he decided to wander through sanctuaries of other cities and villages returning to Santiago eight months later. According to Sargis' account, on the day when the apostle's body was taken out, there were 4,000 priests and so many people that one could not count. They venerated the body of the saint for three days.⁶⁰ Two

54 Calzolari 2017, 137–159; Serrano Coll—Lozano López 2020, 285–310.

55 Jean Dardel (Ch.A. 1906), chapter CXL, 106. The liberation of Lewon v in 1382 was in fact possible thanks to the kings of Castile and Aragon. On Lewon's pilgrimage to Santiago, see also Sáez Pomes 1946–1947.

56 Jean Dardel (Ch.A. 1906, 99–100, on Manuël representing himself as Lewon's messenger), see also 46, 85. For further readings on Manuël's European activities during the post-kingdom period, see Grigoryan Savary 2021, 224–225.

57 Many references to Santiago de Compostela and to the tomb of the Apostle James in Galicia are to be found in Armenian historiography and literature. The presence of “many saints' bodies” in Spain, with a particular emphasis on “the body of Tēr Yakob”, is mentioned in a series of 17th-century Armenian folk songs, in which the beauty of the poet's beloved one is metaphorically compared to various cities and countries. See Mnac'akan-yan 1956, 272–288 (songs Nos 91–94). See also Matiossian 2005, 194–226, esp. 208–210 (for more references found in poetic texts).

58 P'eč'ikean 1937, 55–60.

59 Xaç'ikyan 1970, 125–148, esp. 137–145.

60 Xaç'ikyan 1970, 142, also 133 and n. 14 (for taking out the apostle's body once in seven years).

decades later, when Awgustinos Baĵec'i, an Armenian catholic priest from the village Aparaner in Ernĵak (Siwnik'), visited Santiago de Compostela, he confirmed the information that the cathedral's "Door of Mercy" was opened once every seven years.⁶¹ We know of another catholic priest from the same village, called Yovhannēs, who in the 16th century left Naxijewan and visited Santiago twice.⁶²

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, two pilgrimages to Spain were made by a hermit called Paron who led an ascetic life in the convent of Gregory the Illuminator on Mount Sepuh (near Erznkay). Paron was the teacher and caretaker of the later famous chronicler Grigor Daranałc'i. During one of his pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Paron copied a *Vark' haranc'* (*Lives of the Fathers*), which is currently manuscript No. [J] 175 of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.⁶³ In 1610, Daranałc'i added a large colophon to that manuscript, describing the pious life of his beloved teacher. It is in this colophon that we find two mentions about Paron's travels to Spain, most likely to the tomb of Saint James in Santiago, but also to the other two important sites of Christian pilgrimage, Jerusalem and Rome:

And from time to time he would go out travelling to all the pilgrimage sites: many times he went to Holy Jerusalem and twice to the great Rome to the holy apostles Peter and Paul; he also travelled to Spain and to the holy sites of our Armenia's eastern parts. After these pilgrimages he would always return to his convent.⁶⁴

Some time later, Paron repeated his long-haul journey to these places:

And he went from country to country in order to go to the great Rome and Spain and then came once more to Constantinople.⁶⁵

61 "Near the tomb there is a door called "Door of Mercy", which is opened once every seven years. Blessed are those who will be there on that day". For the original text in Armenian, see Xač'ikyan 1970, 146, n. 14.

62 Gulbenkian 1980, 201.

63 For the manuscript's description, see Bogharian 1966, 524–527.

64 Եւ ելեալ երբեմն երբեմն շրջէր յամենայն ուխտատեղիս եւ բազում անգամ ի Սուրբն յերուսաղէմ եւ երկու անգամ ի մեծն Հռովմ առ Սուրբ առաքեալս Պետրոս եւ Պօղոս եւ ի Սպանիա եւ ի մեր հայոց յարեւելից բնաւ ուխտատեղիսն եւ դարձեալ դառնայր անդրէն ի տեղի իւր մենաստանին. See Grigor Daranałc'i (Nšanean 1915), 591–599 (Appendix A), esp. 594–595.

65 ... եւ գնաց յաշխարհէ յաշխարհ ի մեծն Հռովմ եւ ի Սպանիա, եւ դարձեալ եկն ի Կոստանդնուպօլիս. Here Daranałc'i uses the form "come to Constantinople", because he

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I took a close look at a late mediaeval object, consisting of a scallop valve, adorned with silver gilt additions. Aware of the methodological difficulties of studying and explaining minor objects of this kind, I have tried to make use of the available information by describing in the first part how the shell object was discovered, acquired, studied, and exhibited, and then by proposing in the second part a reconstruction of functional and historical contexts.

The emblematic use of scallop shells from the 12th century on, as well as the epigraphic and iconographic evidence visible on this shell, allowed us to associate it with the mediaeval tradition of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Whether Šahuk was its initial owner or acquired the shell only subsequently, is not clear. It is also uncertain whether he was the person who carried the shell ladle to the Azov Sea. The sophisticated combination with his individual coin, that resembles those minted in Cilician Armenia, confirms the previous attributions to that mediaeval kingdom. Furthermore, the historical evidence gathered in this paper shows a continued interest in Santiago pilgrimage by mediaeval Armenian travellers, who could have acquired Jacobean shells during their visits to this renowned Galician site. For Armenians, as for many other pilgrims, Santiago de Compostela was an important place connected with the Apostle James, right after the Armenian cathedral of Saints James in Jerusalem, which is also associated with him. Like many Jacobean pilgrims who desired to visit both cathedrals in Santiago and in Jerusalem, Armenian believers would also have been eager to perform a double pilgrimage to the two important destinations associated with the Apostle James.

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personally met Paron in Constantinople, from where they headed together for Jerusalem. Paron stayed in the Holy City for seven years as hermit and copied the above-mentioned *Lives of the Fathers*. See Grigor Daranalc’i (Nšanean 1915), 598 (Appendix A).

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