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## Representation of Transcendence. The Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters” from the Seventh Century CE

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# Representation of Transcendence. The Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters” from the Seventh Century CE

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**ABSTRACT** The major aim of this article is to study the Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters” by Vrt’anes K’ert’ot (approx. seventh century CE) from a religious studies’ perspective by examining the use and the role of representation (through images) in the *Letter*. The topic of representation is important both for the study of religion as well as for the history of iconoclasm and closely connected to the analytical concept of immanence/transcendence. The peculiarities of the use of representation in the *Letter* demonstrate that some aspects of the broader notion of representation must be adjusted when talking about religious representation. The approach of this article combines an in-depth investigation of the *Letter* (including an English translation in the appendix) with comparisons to different semantic layers of the modern notion of representation and the use of representation in Greek (pre-)iconoclastic sources from the same period.

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**KEY WORDS** Armenia; Caucasus; Late Antiquity; Early Christianity; Armenian Church; Eastern Christianity; immanence/transcendence; representation; images; Iconoclasm; notions

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## Introduction

The major aim of this article is to study the Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters”<sup>1</sup> from a religious studies’ perspective. While historians

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1 For the sake of brevity, the Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters” will be referred to as *Letter* throughout the rest of the article. The *Letter* is often attributed to Vrt’anes K’ert’ot and was most likely written in the seventh century CE. See below for more information on the author and the dating.

and philologists<sup>2</sup> discussed this *Letter* by focusing on the historicity and authenticity of both the text and the author, the quintessence of this article lies in identifying the role and function of religious representation (through images) in the *Letter*. The significance of religious representation itself is closely related to the larger topic of transcendence/immanence<sup>3</sup> and the question of how the transcendent can be represented by immanent means. Consequently, I also intend to relate my discussion of the *Letter* to the guiding concept of *Entangled Religions* about the transcendence/immanence distinction.

The question of divine presence *in* images or the representation *of* the divine *through* images was of great importance in Christian, pagan, and interreligious discussions (for instance, between Christians and Jews) about images and statues in (Late) Antiquity. Moreover, neoplatonic ideas (as formulated by Porphyrios, Plotinus, and others), which were very much concerned with the issue of representation,<sup>4</sup> had a huge impact not only on polytheistic thought about images but also on the Christian debates.

Besides its relevance in this historical context, the topic of representation is also of general importance for the use and role of images in religion. Following Niklas Luhmann, the attempt to gain access to transcendence via immanent means characterizes and constitutes religion.<sup>5</sup> This implies

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2 Such as Sirarpie der Nersessian (1944) or Andrea B. Schmitt (1997).

3 My use of religious transcendence is based on the reflections and concepts established by Niklas Luhmann and Thomas Luckmann (Luhmann and Kieserling 2007; Luckmann 1970).

4 Neoplatonists were highly concerned with the question of how upper spheres of the platonic model (platonic ideas) were linked to and therefore represented in the lower spheres (Remes 2014).

5 The immanence/transcendence distinction as the “guiding feature of a religious sphere as such” is also mentioned in a working paper on “Immanence/Transcendence” by Knut Martin Stünkel, developed within the research program of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg *The Dynamics in the History of Religions Between Asia and Europe*, accessible on the *Entangled Religions* website (<https://er.ceres.rub.de/index.php/ER/concepts>).

that the effort of representing (and approaching) "what is not present" (for instance, through images) is of central significance for religion in general as it offers one possibility to cope with the transcendence/immanence distinction.

By referring to both historical as well as theoretical approaches to understanding religious representation, the aim of this article is twofold. Firstly, I will examine the Armenian *Letter* with a special focus on the question of representation and its role in the author's line of argumentation (which is mostly concerned with the use of images in religious contexts) and compare the results with other texts from the same genre. Secondly, I aim to contribute to broader discussions on representation in religion and therefore to the larger question of transcendence/immanence.

The structure of this article is as follows: After a short introduction of the *Letter* and its historical background, I will focus on sentences and passages from the *Letter* related to the problem of representation through images. In a second step, I will summarize the results of these examinations by trying to extrapolate possible indicators of a more abstract idea of representation in the *Letter* and compare it to the modern notion of representation. Finally, I will compare the understanding of representation in the *Letter* to other Greek pre-iconoclastic texts concerned with the use of images<sup>6</sup> to look for possible similarities or differences.

As already mentioned above, neoplatonic ideas and thinkers were of great importance for the general Christian understanding of how images represent God and transcendence. However, one assumption made in this article is that the reduction of the late antique understanding of representation only *through* media as mere tools to reach the divine is

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6 This refers to sources predating not only the era of Byzantine Iconoclasm of the eighth and ninth centuries CE, but also works authored by Germanos of Constantinople and John Damascene.

too simplistic. One aim of this article is therefore to show the complexity of religious representation (through images), which goes beyond the assumption that images are not supposed to *be* divine but to *represent* the divine.

The examination of the *Letter* is based on my English translation of the Armenian text<sup>7</sup> added as an appendix to this article. The translation is only meant to give the reader a general impression of the text and has therefore neither extensive comments nor a critical apparatus. For a more detailed discussion of the Armenian text, I recommend the translations in the bibliography (for instance, the French translation by Sirarpie Der Nersessian).

Before starting with the first part of the article, a few words on terminology are in order. This article speaks of *representatives* when referring to the object that represents something<sup>8</sup> and not of representations (which refers to the whole process of representation, including both the signifier as well as the signified). The *represented* or the Latin expression *repraesentatum*<sup>9</sup> are used when referring to that what is being represented (by *representatives*).

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7 Following the Melk'onyan edition of the Armenian text, see Melk'onyan 1970 (also available on [www.digilib.am](http://www.digilib.am)).

8 *Representatives* are used in the sense of the Latin *repraesentans* or, in Saussure's terminology, the *signifiant*. Italics are used here to underline the difference between the *representative* and the usual meaning of the English word representative that plays an important role in the second half of this article.

9 Which, in Saussure's terminology, is the *signifié*.

## The Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters”

### General Introduction

The Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters” is one of the two earliest written testimonies in ancient Armenian (*Grabar*) that have survived and tell us about certain groups in ancient Armenia<sup>10</sup> who were opposed to the use and particularly the veneration of/through images before the eighth century CE.<sup>11</sup> The second source, which will not be discussed here, is a letter by John Mayragomec’i (seventh century CE) included in the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* by Movses Kałankatvac’i (compiled approximately in the tenth century CE; Movses Kałankatvac’i 1961).<sup>12</sup>

There have been debates regarding the date and author of the *Letter*. It is questioned whether the text can be ascribed to a person named Vrt’anes K’ert’o<sup>13</sup> and therefore dated to the beginning of the seventh century CE

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10 The modern Republic of Armenia only covers a very small part of the historical territory of ancient Armenia (A. Mahé and J.-P. Mahé 2012, 66, 586).

11 The following list offers a selection of important literature on iconoclasm in ancient Armenia: Der Nersessian 1944, 71ff.; Movses Kałankatvac’i 1961; Mathews 2008-2009; Schmidt 1997; Alexander 1978. For further bibliographic indications, see Schmidt 1997, 948n4. For more information about image worship in Armenia, see Der Nersessian 1946.

12 There is a very good discussion of this letter as well as of the person Yovhannes Mayragomec’i in Schmidt 1997, 951ff. For the vita of Yovhannes, see *ibid.*, II:953ff. Andrea B. Schmidt concludes that the letter in the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* is only a summary and a *regest* of a letter from the seventh century CE (1997, 961f.). Sirarpie der Nersessian also provides a translation and (short) discussion of the letter (1944, 71f.).

13 He is often said to be the same person as another Vrt’anes in the *Book of Letters* who was an anti-Chalcedonian vicarius of the Armenian *katholikos* in the time of the schism between the Armenian and Georgian Churches in the early seventh century CE; see Der Nersessian 1944, 58 and Samuel 1912, 275ff. For further literature on this topic and the

or not. The issue has not been entirely settled, as some scholars have expressed doubts regarding its seventh-century dating (Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 66–67).<sup>14</sup> However, most scholars date the text to the seventh century CE but still disagree on the exact timeframe—some opt for the middle of the seventh century CE (Der Nersessian 1944, 69ff.) while others prefer a dating to the late seventh century CE (Schmidt 1997, 950).<sup>15</sup> Yet, the question of the exact dating is not a major concern of this article and neither are the debates about the historicity of the person of Vrt’anes K’ert’oġ.<sup>16</sup> Due to the rather late manuscript witnesses,<sup>17</sup> the possibility of interpolations and even the hypothesis that the whole *Letter* is a later invention remain. Even though this discussion is not relevant for the topic of this article, I do not agree that the whole *Letter* and its testimony of iconoclastic groups and movements before the era of Byzantine Iconoclasm is, as Brubaker and Haldon argue, “rather dubious” (2011, 66) or an invention of the post-iconoclastic era. Rather, I follow Sirarpie Der Nersessian’s philological argument that the text seems to predate the Arabic influence on the Armenian language and can therefore convincingly be dated to the seventh century CE (1944, 74). Furthermore, the discussions and controversies about the use of images in Christian contexts can also be observed in other sources predating the period of Byzantine Iconoclasm

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discussion whether the text can be attributed to Vrt’anes K’ert’oġ or not, see Schmidt 1997, 948.

- 14 However, the assumption that the *Letter* does not precede the era of Byzantine Iconoclasm can already be found in the nineteenth century CE (Strzygowski 1891, 77).
- 15 Andrea Schmidt dates the letter by Yovhannes Mayragomec’i to 670/81 CE and convincingly argues that the *Letter* by Vrt’anes must have been written later than the one by Mayragomec’i and was maybe even based on the latter (Schmidt 1997, 960).
- 16 See footnotes above. Regarding the *Book of Letters*, see Schmidt 1993, 511–33.
- 17 For the single manuscripts and testimonies including the *Letter*, see Melk’onyan 1970 as well as the according entries on [www.digilib.am](http://www.digilib.am).

of the eighth and ninth centuries CE<sup>18</sup>, of which the *Letter* might thus only be one example.<sup>19</sup>

## Text Editions and Existing Translations

Besides a German translation by Polykarp Samuel (1912, 275–93) from the nineteenth century CE, most translations of the *Letter* into European languages date to the twentieth century CE, starting with Sirarpie Der Nersessian’s translation into French (first published in 1944 as part of her article “Une apologie des images du Septième siècle”). Her translation was based on the Venice-publication of the *Letter* (1852) as well as a manuscript from Jerusalem (Der Nersessian 1944, 58n4) and is still very influential. A couple of years later, in 1970, Erwand Mel’onyan published a translation into modern Eastern Armenian based on his edition of the ancient Armenian text.<sup>20</sup> In 2011, Armenuhi Drost-Abgarjan published a German translation of the Armenian text in the volume “Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient” (2011, 399–413)<sup>21</sup> which follows the Armenian text very closely. Her translation is based on the Mel’onyan edition of the Armenian text, too.

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18 Very often in the context of anti-Jewish polemics (Thümmel 1992, 118ff.; Der Nersessian 1944, 74ff.; Déroche 1991, 275–311).

19 For examples, see Thümmel 1992.

20 On which my translation is based as well. For another good overview of the testimonies and text edition of the *Letter*, see Drost-Abgarjan 2011, 400 and Mathews 2008–2009, 111.

21 There is also another German translation by Thümmel (1992, 150–153). However, Thümmel’s translation is not based on the Armenian text but on the French translation by Der Nersessian. Thus, I have not listed Thümmel’s translation in this brief overview as it is a derivative translation. Thomas F. Mathews also translates parts of the *Letter* into English (2008–2009).



## Content of the *Letter*

The major concern of the Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters” is the refutation of certain groups in the region of ancient Armenia and Caucasian Albania who opposed (in words and actions) the use and veneration of images in Christian churches.<sup>22</sup> Some of the groups’ members and leaders are even called by their names (§59): “But only Šmowêl and T’adêos and Esayi and their friends, who attracted many (people) to (their) side together with them, as well as yourselves.”<sup>23</sup>

In his attempt to defend the veneration and use of images in Armenian churches against the accusation of those groups, the author’s line of argumentation<sup>24</sup> can be split up into the following thematic units:

1. Opening / Introduction (§1-2)
2. Accusation and testimonies from the Old Testament (§3-16)
  - 2.1 Moses and the tent (§6-8)
  - 2.2 Solomon and the first temple (§9)
  - 2.3. Ezekiel and his vision (§10-13)
  - 2.4. Summary of passages from the Old Testament used for the defense of images (§14-16)
3. The New Testament (§17-20)
  - 3.1. Paul in Athens (§17-20)

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22 For the geographical details and more information about iconoclastic movements in Armenia, see Schmidt 1997, 955f. and Der Nersessian 1944, 69ff. The idea that those groups might have been Paulicians is mainly based on the text by Mayragomec’i; see Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 67. Regarding the Paulicians, see Garsoïan 1967.

23 “bayc’ miayn Šmowêl ew T’adêos ew Esayi ew ənkerk’ noc’a, or ew zyolovs ənd iwreans i yets kac’owc’in, orpês ew zjezd (...)” (Melk’onyan 1970, 93).

24 Consisting of roughly 2360 words. The Armenian text of the *Letter* on *digilib.am* has been subdivided into 70 paragraphs of different lengths, which I will follow in this article and my translation.

4. Church fathers (§21-37)
  - 4.1. John of Constantinople (§21-23) (John Chrysostom)
  - 4.2. Image of Christ in Edessa (§24)
  - 4.3. Bishop Severianos (§25-26)
  - 4.4. Gregory the Illuminator (§27-29)
  - 4.5. Accusation of the opponents of images (§30-32)
  - 4.6. Eusebios' Church History (§33-37)
5. Accusations and comparisons (heathen Deities) (§38-43)
  - 5.1. Aramazd (§38-40)
  - 5.2. Anahit (§41-42)
  - 5.3. Astłik and Aphrodite (§43)
6. Other comparisons / materiality (§44-51)
  - 6.1. Pigment + writing/images (§44-45)
  - 6.2. The power of material objects (§46-48)
  - 6.3. Painted book-cases and their symbolic meaning (§49)
  - 6.4. Christ on a donkey as an example of representation (§50)
  - 6.5. Summary (§51)
7. Differences between Christian and heathen images (§52-66)
  - 7.1. Problem of representation (§57-58)
  - 7.2. The Armenian king Pap and the (Greek) tradition of images in churches (§59); concrete persons opposed to the use/veneration of images in churches
  - 7.3. Testimonies from the Old and New Testament (§60-61)
  - 7.4. Purity, pigment (matter), writing, and images (§62-64)
  - 7.5. Paul and Timotheus/remembrance (§65-66)
8. End (quotes, accusation, prayer) (§67-70)

It is hardly surprising that many of the quotes and examples used for the defense of the veneration of images are taken from the Old and New Testament as well as from the church fathers (the most prominent among

them being the example of Moses and the tent; Der Nersessian 1944, 74ff.). However, there is also an ‘Armenian touch’ to the line of argumentation. For instance, Gregory the Illuminator, the founding father of the Armenian Church, is also referred to as an authority in the *Letter*. Furthermore, there are quite a few references to Armenian church history (for instance, to the negatively considered Armenian king Pap<sup>25</sup> in §59). Most scholars have focused on these allusions to the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the church fathers, therefore ascribing the text to the genre of apologetic literature on the veneration and use of images in churches (Der Nersessian 1944, 74ff.). Even though I agree that this is indeed an important and fruitful undertaking, I will neither (re-)discuss the references nor (re-)evaluate the structure or general line of argumentation in comparison to other texts on the same topic. What I would like to do in this article is to focus on the way the *Letter* deals with the problem of religious representation in the context of images.

## **Representation in the Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters”**

The problem of representation of the divine through images holds a central position in both the Christian and pagan discussions on the use and role of images in (Late) Antiquity<sup>26</sup> as well as in the general history of religion. Some of the most controversial topics of this discussion are mirrored in the following list of questions.

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25 For more information on Pap, see: P’awstos and Garsoïan 1989, 397f.

26 The importance of Byzantine Iconoclasm for this topic notwithstanding, there were already important debates about the role of representation in the use of images before the eighth and ninth centuries CE, see Prusac 2014.

- Can and should God (or: transcendence) be represented in images?
- How should God (or: transcendence) be represented in images?
- How is one supposed to approach the representation of God (or: transcendence) in the image?
- What is the ontological status of the representation? How do other competing religions deal with the problem of religious representation in images? (Lanczkowski 1980, 515–68)

In the case of polytheistic Greco-Roman antiquity, debates about the representation of deities through images or even the idea that a God could be present in an image or statue were of great importance starting as early as in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE (Xenophanes and later Plato), while reaching their climax in neoplatonic thoughts during the third to fifth centuries CE (Bremmer 2013). In particular, the neoplatonic discussions had a huge influence on early Christian thought and played a major role in the later Christian acceptance of images as media through which God could be reached (via the process of religious representation; Bremer 2014, 63ff.).

Regarding the more abstract case of religion, the paradox of rendering the transcendent immanent and therefore representing it (not only, but also through images) is something that constitutes religion while also being one of its major problems at the same time. The question of the use and the role of images in religion is one example from the overall discussion on the interrelation between (*per definitionem* not directly reachable) transcendence and its immanent representation(s) (which enable the communication with transcendence).

In the following first part of the examination, which is concerned with the use of representation in the *Letter*, my understanding of representation is rather simple. I am looking for passages that refer to a sort of (religious) *re-presentation* of something absent. It is important to note that the term "representation" does not appear in the *Letter* as a distinctive term

or lexeme. Therefore, I am mostly looking for paragraphs that address representation through context and via semantical fields related to *re-presenting* something absent.

## Examples of Representation in the *Letter*

### *First example §15*

(15) Ահա յայտ եղել, զի որ յառաջնոցն պատկերք էին, ի պատիւ եւ ի սպասաւորութիւն երկրպագութեան փառաց Աստուածութեան:

(15) See, it is clear that from early on, images existed in honor of and for the service of the veneration of the glory of the deity.<sup>27</sup>

This first example of representation found in §15 follows a series of evocations of Old Testament events (Moses and Solomon).<sup>28</sup> It is to this series of events that §15 refers via the “See, it is clear that from early on (...)”. The main argument in this paragraph is that “from early on”, images (*patkerk'*)<sup>29</sup> existed for the service of the adoration<sup>30</sup> (*erkrpagut' iwn*) of the glory of the deity (God-ness, *astuacut' iwn*) and for its honor (*patiw*).

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27 All of the following translations were made by the author; see also the appendix of this paper.

28 See an overview of the topics above and the whole text in the appendix.

29 Regarding the use of *nkar* (painting) and *patker* (image) in the *Letter*, see (among others) Mathews 2008–2009, 102f.

30 There is no differentiation between veneration and adoration in the Armenian lexic in the *Letter*, which is why I use both translations for *erkrpagut' iwn*.

In this example, we are introduced to one of the central notions of the text, namely the image (*patker*) and its role and function in a Christian context. The author's argument in this paragraph (as well as in other parts of the text) is that images do not stand for themselves but that they serve a specific purpose, namely the veneration and honor due to the deity (i.e., the Christian God of the Old and New Testament). The images are therefore not even representations (in the very literal sense of the word) of something absent, but mere media through which certain actions can be performed. This argument is a well-known topic in wider neoplatonic and Christian discussions on the religious role of images of which the *Letter* seems to be only one example among many. However, it is noteworthy that the author of the text does not simply argue that images are used "for the veneration of God", but that, instead, he writes, "for the honor and the service of the veneration of the glory of God." At first, this might appear as a stylistic variation (or exaggeration) that does not really add much to the Christian/neoplatonic ideas mentioned above but seems to be an example of the general meandering style of early Armenian writers. Yet, this culmination of attributes and paraphrases is a rhetorical technique that occurs in almost all the examples in the *Letter* that deal with the function and role of images as religious representations. In the *Letter*, the image not only refers to itself (the image does not stand for itself), but it is not even in a direct relationship with the entity it is supposed to represent. The image exists for the honor (!) and veneration of the glory (!) of God, but it neither directly represents God nor allows a direct veneration of God. In the following, I will refer to this type of representation (via intermediaries) as "second-order representation".

## *Second example §20*

(20) Եւ մեք ոչ եթէ ճշմարիտ Աստուած ասեմք զպատկերս եւ զնկարս, այլ յանուն Աստուծոյ նկարեմք որպէս երեւեցան, զոր Եսայի ասէ զծնանելն, Երեմիա՝ զընդ մարդկան շրջելն, եւ Դաւիթ՝ զչարչարանացն եւ զթաղման, եւ Եզեկիէլ եւ Ովսէ՛՝ զՅարութենէն, Դանիէլ եւ Չաքարիա՝ զերկրորդ զալստենէն, Նաւում եւ Մաղաքիա՝ զդատաստանէն, քանզի նոքա նշանակաւ պատմեցին մեզ եւ է որ եղեւ եւ է որ լինելոց է, եւ մեք զնոյն նկարեմք, զոր ի Գիրսն գրեալ է, զի եւ զիրն դեղ է եւ նիւթք պատկերաց:<sup>31</sup>

(20) And we certainly do not say that the images and pictures are [the] true God, but we paint them in the name of God as he appeared, and Isaiah said that he would be born, and Jeremiah that he would walk among men, and David [spoke] of the sufferings, and the burial, and Ezekiel and Hosea about the resurrection, and Daniel and Zechariah about the second coming, and Nahum and Malachi about the judgment, because they told us through a sign<sup>32</sup> both that which has happened and that which will happen. And we depict the same that is written in the Scriptures, because the writing is a pigment<sup>33</sup> and the material of images.

Particularly the first and the last part of this excerpt are of great interest for the question of representation. In the first sentence, the author writes:

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31 This passage is ambivalent; see Drost-Abgarjan 2011, 404n33.

32 For the use of *nšan* (sign; also used for the cross) in the *Letter*, see also §30.

33 *deł* (pigment, ink, medicin). This is a very important term in the *Letter*, mostly serving as a *tertium comparitionis* between the (material of) images and (the material of) writing. This term will be discussed further below.

"And we certainly do not say that the images and pictures are true God, but we paint them in the name of God as he appeared, (...)." <sup>34</sup> Here, the author's attempt is to defend the use of images against accusations by reassuring the reader (or the accuser) that the opposite of what he has been accused of is true. Neither the images (*patkerk'*) nor the paintings (*nkark'*) are the true God (*čšmarit astuac*). They are painted (*nkarel*) in the name (*yanun*) <sup>35</sup> of God as he appeared. <sup>36</sup> This part therefore serves as another example of the transitive nature of images in the *Letter*. The images and paintings are neither the true God nor a (direct) representation of God. They are a representation of God's appearance as Christ on earth, and therefore representations of a representation. This argument of the representation of God by Christ was a common topic in many debates about the use of images and usually served as an argument in favor of the use of images. <sup>37</sup> The topic was closely connected to questions of the nature(s) and the person of Christ, which was a highly controversial topic in many (particularly Eastern) parts of the early medieval Christian world, including the polarizing Council in Chalcedon of 451 CE. <sup>38</sup> In this passage, we thus encounter a situation where the image does not directly refer to God but to God's (human) appearance as Christ on earth, therefore serving as another example of second-order representation. Furthermore, the reference to the name of

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34 "Ew mek' oč' et'ê čšmarit Astowac asemk' zpatkers ew znkars, ayl yanun Astucoy nkaremk' orpês erewec'awn, (...)" (Melk'onyan 1970, 90).

35 Which is also an idiosyncratic expression meaning "for the sake of" or simply "for".

36 Followed by a list of events from the life of Christ on earth.

37 That the depiction of Christ due to his appearance as a human being on earth had not always been accepted but could also be used as a counterargument to the use of images can be seen in the Eusebian letter to Constantia, for instance. For the German translation, see Thümmel 1992, 48–50. Another example is Asterios of Amaseia (fourth/fifth centuries CE), who argued that it sufficed that Christ became human once and that one should therefore not imprison him again in matter (74).

38 Which the Armenian Church eventually rejected (Sarkissian 1965).



God and the assumption that it was God himself who was incarnated in the person of Christ is a great example of the authorization of the use of images, as it was God himself who enabled and allowed human beings to create representations of himself in the form of Christ.

### *Third example §21-26*

The following part is rather long, reaching from §21 to §26. It covers references to John Chrysostom (§21-23)<sup>39</sup>, the image of Christ (from the so-called Abgar legend; §24), and the Bishop Severianos (§25-26).<sup>40</sup> As the main argument focuses on the representation of emperors and Christ as a living person, I discuss this part in one go.

(21) Նաեւ վարդապետք եկեղեցոյ յիշատակեն յաղագս պատկերաց, որպէս Յոհանէս Կոստանդնուպոլսի Եպիսկոպոս յայն ճառի, որ ասէ առ լուսաւորեալսն, մի փոքր յառաջ մատուցեալ ասէ. “Չորաւրինակ պատկերք պղնձիք թագաւորականք անշունչք են եւ անզգայք , որ փախչին ի նոսա մարդիկ ապրեցուցանեն ոչ զի պղինձն է, այլ վասն զի թագաւորաց է”: (22) Եւ դու ըստ այնմ աւրինակի իմացիր, ով հերետիկոսդ: (23) Եւ դարձեալ յայն ճառի, որ ասէ. «Ոչ է պարտ անցանել զաստուածային գրով. ապա, ասէ, ոչ տեսանէք ի թագաւորական պատկերսն, զի ի վեր անդ կայ պատկերն եւ ըզթագաւորին գիր ունի գրեալ եւ ի խոնարի խարսխին գրեալ են թագաւորին նահատակութիւնք, յաղթութիւնք, իրաց ուղղութիւնք. նոյնպէս եւ ի մաշկսն է տեսանել թագաւորական պատկերն ի

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39 The famous John Chrysostom (349-407 CE). Regarding the authenticity of the quote, see Der Nersessian 1944, 60n12-13.

40 Who was a bishop in Gabala (Syria) in the fifth century CE (Der Nersessian 1944, 61n14). Regarding the occurrence of these references in other sources, see *ibid*, 78.

վերայ եւ ի ստորեւն առաքիւնութիւնք, յաղթութիւնքն ամենայն»:  
(24) Կամ զի՞նչ արդեաւք ասիցես զպատկերն Տեառն, զոր Անան՝  
հաւատարիմ թագաւորին Աբգարու, նկարեաց յանդիման Քրիստոսի,  
տեսութեամբ իսկ. զոր եւ այժմ ասեն գոլ ի մեծ եկեղեցւոջն Ուռհայի:  
(25) Եւ Սեւերիանոս եպիսկոպոս ասէ. “Չորաւրիւնակ թագաւորի  
ի բացեայ եղելոյ պատկերն նորա լնու զտեղի թագաւորին, եւ  
երկրպագանեն իշխանք եւ զտաւնս ամսոյ կատարեն. պետք  
հանդիպին եւ ռամիկք երկիրպագանեն ոչ ի տախտակն հայելով,  
այլ ի պատկեր թագաւորին, ոչ ի բնութիւն հային, այլ որ ի գրովն  
տպաւորեալ է. եւ եթէ մահկանացու թագաւորի պատկեր այնքան  
զաւրանայ, որչափ եւս առաւել անմահի թագաւորին կերպարան եւ  
պատկերն”:  
(26) Այդպէս իմա զոր ասենս, զի եւ սոքա վարդապետք  
էին եկեղեցւոյ, եւ թէ զսոքա գիրս կամիս ուսանել՝ զնոյն պատմեն:

(21) Also, the teachers of the church mention the images, as the Bishop John of Constantinople in his discourse, who spoke to the enlightened (baptized), and a little further, he says: “For example, bronze images of kings are inanimate and insensate, and people who flee to them are saved not because it is copper, but because they represent the kings.” (22) And you shall understand it according to this example, you heretic! (23) Moreover, in this discourse he says: “One should not omit the divine scripture.” Then, he says, “Don’t you see on the royal images that above there is the image and it has the script of the king’s [name] written and on the base below are written the achievements, victories, and regulations of the king. And in the same way, on parchment one can see the royal image above and below the virtues and all the victories.” (24) Or what will you even say about the image of the Lord, which Anan, a trusted man of king Abgar, painted in the presence of Christ with [his own] sight. And now they say it is in the great church

of Uḫa<sup>41</sup>. (25) And the Bishop Severianos said: “For example, when the king is away, his image fills the place of the king, and the princes worship [it] and celebrate the monthly feasts. Princes pass by and the common folk worship not by looking at the wood, but by [looking at] the image of the king, not by looking at the material, but at that which is imprinted with writing. And if an image of a mortal king is qualified so powerful, how much more is the form and the image of the immortal king.” (26) Thus, understand what they say, because they were also the teachers of the church, and if you want to study their writings, they narrate the same.

Regarding the topic of representation, this passage contains several examples as well as comparisons that allow a better understanding of the author’s view on religious representation. The first quote is taken from John Chrysostom and includes a clear-cut definition of the significance and representational power of emperor statues. It is neither the statues themselves nor their materiality<sup>42</sup> that make people seek refuge in their presence, but it is their representation of and, respectively, their reference to the emperor that grants them this ability. The quote goes even further by stating that even though the statues are dead (*inanimate* and *insensate*)<sup>43</sup>,

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41 Edessa.

42 The argument that the matter of statues and images is not essential for their use in religion can already be found among neoplatonic philosophers in (Late) Antiquity (for instance, Porphyrios) and continued to be an important argument for other Christian apologists of images as well, see Thümmel 1992, 26.

43 The characterization of images or statues as “dead” is also found in other texts and is a common topos in discussions about images, too. For instance, in his letter to Constantia, Eusebius describes the colours (*chrómata*) of an image as dead (*nekrós*) and inanimate (*ápsychos*). However, other authors, such as Basil of Caesarea in one of his letters to Gregory of Nazianzus, used the opposite term (animate, grk. *émpsychos*) in the context of images (Thümmel 1992, 54).

they still have an effect due to their power to represent the emperor. Note, however, that the verb “to represent” in the translation of §21 is only a better translation of something that would literally mean “is of/for the kings” (*t’agaworac’ ê*).

The second example, which is again taken from John Chrysostom, links the emperor’s statues and images to writing by saying that there is an inscription below the statues with the name of the emperor and his virtues and deeds, and that the same structure can be found on parchments, too. In this quote, we encounter an argument that is often used in the context of religious representation in images (in the *Letter* as well as in some of the Greek texts). The writing as well as the image serve the same purpose of representation and can either be used separately or in combination with each other (as in this example). However, writing as a form of religious representation was more accepted than images. Thus, religious representation through writing mostly functioned as an argument in favor of the representative character of images.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, it is not unique to the *Letter* that the comparison (and correlation) between the two media is made via the *tertium comparationis* of pigment (*deł*).<sup>45</sup> Yet, its frequent use in the Armenian text is remarkable, and underlines the importance of the equal treatment of writing and images in the author’s line of argumentation. A very strong example of this is found in §62–64, where the author of the

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44 Also, the representative function of writing is never put into question in the *Letter* but always taken for granted.

45 The term *deł* (pigment) plays a central role as a *tertium comparationis* between writing and images and underlines the role that materiality plays in this context. Pigment (here: ink) as a *tertium comparationis* between writing and images can also be found in John Chrysostom, for instance in his *Fragment on Abraham*: “(...) and all this what the scripture says through ink [*dia melanos*] they say through images [*di’agalmathon*]”. For the Greek text, see Thümmel 1992, 293. Pigments are also used as a *tertium comparationis* by Leontius of Cyprus; see the quote in Mathews 2008–2009, 107.

*Letter* tries to convince the reader of the pure character of *deł*. From his point of view, the use of *deł* as remedy or ingredient in certain recipes as well as its use as a basic ingredient of ink (and therefore of writing, too) makes it impossible to condemn images only because they are (also) material objects.

This part is followed by a short intermezzo about the famous Abgar legend and the Image of Christ (Illert 2007)<sup>46</sup> in Edessa that was said to have been painted in the presence of Christ (which, again, is an indicator of authorization, see also Der Nersessian 1944, 77). According to Mathew's thorough discussion, the appearance of the Abgar legend in the *Letter* is the earliest evidence of its use in a defence of images (2008–2009, 113). The Abgar legend adds two important aspects to the text's understanding of possible types of representation. It introduces, firstly, representation via proximity as well as similarity<sup>47</sup>, and secondly (although indirectly), representation in an indexical manner.<sup>48</sup> Both aspects of either direct contact (therefore creating the *representative* as a sign or testimony of a direct causal relation between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum*)

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46 Another concise overview of the emergence and the different layers of the Abgar legend from Eusebius to Evagrius can be found in Mathews 2008–2009, 113–14.

47 Which means that a *representative* can represent a *repraesentatum* due to their proximity in the process of the creation of the *representative* or similarities between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum* (for instance, by having a similar shape or, as in this example, by being created in direct view and resemblance of what is represented). An indication for this type of representation in the *Letter* is the use of *handiman* as a preposition meaning “in front of, in the presence of, before”. Therefore, again, there is no lexeme for representation in the Armenian text.

48 I use the term indexicality in the sense of *index proper* as used by Catherine Legg/Albert Atkin: “The index proper: direct, entirely unmediated causal relationship between sign and object—e.g. the weather-vane representing the direction of the wind” (Legg 2015, 8–9). An example of my use of an indexical sign in the context of images is the image of Christ on the Shroud of Turin which is thought to be the result of a direct contact between Christ and the shroud.

or a certain proximity or similarity to the *repraesentatum* during the process of the creation of the *representative* blur the boundaries between images and relics.

However, neither representation through proximity nor indexical representation nor the so-called *acheiropoieta*<sup>49</sup> play an important role in the *Letter*. The neglect of these types of representation need some future explanation, but one potential elucidation might lie in the author’s general hesitance to draw a direct line between *representatives* and the *repraesentatum*, which is something that can also be observed in other parts of the *Letter*.

The last example in this passage is taken from Bishop Severianos and illustrates several important aspects of divine images by, again, referring to emperor statues and images. In the first part of the quote from Severianos, we encounter—in the form of a concrete example—what we believe to be a core definition of representation (as well as religion): “When the king is away (*i bac’eday*), his image fills the place of the king, and the princes worship (*erkrpaganen*) [it] and celebrate the monthly feasts.” The not-present (literally: that which is ‘far away’) is replaced by a *representative* to which the actions that would normally be directed towards the *repraesentatum* are now directed towards. In this case, the relevant actions are the veneration (of the emperor) and the celebration of the monthly feasts. However, acting in front of a *representative* instead of the *repraesentatum* requires some rather counterintuitive assumptions. Even though the formerly present *repraesentatum* is replaced by a concrete object, one should not look at the now present *representative* and its materiality but at its form (image, *patker*) and the writing beneath it. By

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49 Images which were thought to come directly from the heavens and were literally assumed to be ‘not made by human hands’.

setting up these two arguments as the appropriate use of *representatives*, the author establishes the connection between the image/form (*patker*) and writing as the true essence of any type of representation.

The author concludes this part by stating that what holds true for the worldly emperor in terms of representation should be particularly true for the religious representation of God. Consequently, from the perspective of the author of the *Letter*, religious as well as worldly *representatives* function in the same way and follow the same rules and concepts.

#### *Fourth example §30*

(30) Բայց զարմանք մի այս է, որ զպատգամսն ընդունիք եւ զիշխանն հալածէք, նշանին երկիրպագանէք եւ ի թագաւորն քարածիգ լինիք, զխաչն պատուէք եւ զխաչելեալն թշնամանէք:

(30) But it is astonishing that you accept the commandments and persecute the prince, you worship the sign<sup>50</sup> and throw stones at the king, you honor the cross and insult the crucified.

This paragraph follows the passage on the representation of emperors and the honors paid to them and is of interest for several reasons. Firstly, this part includes an accusation of the groups opposed to the veneration and use of images to nevertheless accept and venerate the cross as a sign and *representative* of God. In a way, this argument anticipates the later development in certain parts of Eastern Orthodoxy after 843 CE to render

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50 For the use of sign (which is often used as a synonym for the cross) in the *Letter*, see also §20.

the veneration of images of Christ obligatory because they are just as appropriate *representatives* of Christ as is the cross (Bremer 2014, 69ff.).

Secondly, this paragraph includes a lexeme that is closely connected to representation but appears only on rare occasions in the text, namely the sign in the sense of the cross (*nšan*).<sup>51</sup> One hypothetical explanation for the unwillingness of the author to use this term in the *Letter* could be that, at least for him, images and paintings *are* signs, just as the cross is a sign, whereas the groups opposed to the use of images draw a line between signs (for instance, the cross) and images/paintings (which are not signs for them as they do not refer to anything but themselves). Therefore, the lexeme *sign* only appears when the author is directly confronted with a distinction made by his opponents. From the perspective of the author of the *Letter*, however, both the cross and the images and certain paintings count as *representatives* of God.

#### *Fifth example §44*

(44) Քանզի յեկեղեցիս Աստուծոյ տեսանեմք նկարեալ զամենայն սքանչելագործութիւնս Քրիստոսի, զոր արար, որպէս եւ ի Գիրս գրեալ է, որպէս եւ յառաջն ասացաք, զոր գուշակեցին մեզ մարգարեքն. զծնանելն ասեմ եւ զմկրտելն, զչարչարանսն, զխաչելութիւնն, զթաղումն, զյարութիւն, զհամբառնալ յերկինս. զայդ ամենայն նկարեն յեկեղեցիս, զոր Գիրք Սուրբք պատմեն, Ոչ ապաքէն դեղով գրեալ է զգիրս եւ զնոյն բան դեղովք նկարեալ է յեկեղեցիս. ի գրոցն ականջք միայն լսեն, իսկ զնկարսն աչաւք տեսանեն եւ ականջաւք լսեն եւ սրտիւք հաւատան:

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51 The term *nšan* appears in the context of texts and the Bible, in the context of the Old Testament (§20), and in the quote from Eusebios *Church History*.



(44) Because in the churches of God we see the depiction of all the miracles of Christ, which he made, as is written in the Scriptures, as we said before, about which the prophets told us. I speak of the birth, the baptism, the tortures, the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection, and the ascension into heaven. They depict all this in the churches as the Holy Scriptures describe it. Is not the scripture written with pigment, however? And with pigment, the same thing is depicted in the churches.<sup>52</sup> Only the ears hear from the books, but they see pictures with the eyes and hear with ears and with the hearts they believe.<sup>53</sup>

This paragraph is important for the question of representation due to its relation to the field of materiality and the senses. In the first part of this paragraph, the author reassures the reader that images are not depictions (*nkarel*) of Christ or God but of his miracles and deeds from his time as a human being on earth.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, this paragraph serves as yet another example of second-order representation. It is not God who is depicted in the first place but his deeds as Christ, and therefore he is depicted as a human being.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, in the first as well as in the second part of this

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52 Here, we encounter yet another example of the above-mentioned connection between writing and images via the *tertium comparationis* of *def*.

53 See also Der Nersessian 1944, 65n26. A functional equation of hearing and seeing is also found in a homily by Basileus of Caesarea, *In sanctos quadraginta martyres* (Thümmel 1992, 54; Mansi 13, 277 BC).

54 See also the discussion of §25.

55 This is an important aspect also underlined by Der Nersessian (1944, 64n25). Der Nersessian proves here the already mentioned aspect that the human form of Christ served as a legitimation for the use of images in other sources as well. For instance, in a letter by Gregory the Great (see quote by Der Nersessian): “Et nos quidem non quasi ante divinitatem ante illam prosternimur, sed illum adoramus quem per imaginem aut natum, aut passum, sed in throno sedentem recordamur. Et dum nobis ipsa pictura quasi scriptura ad memoriam Filium Dei reducit animum nostrum aut de resurrectione laetificat, aut de passione demulcet.” (Migne, P. L., LXXVII, 991). “But we do not prostrate in front of

paragraph, we find a reference to the already mentioned attempt of the author to bring together the use of images and the use of writing via the *tertium comparationis* of pigment (*def*).<sup>56</sup> By saying that both writing as well as images are based on the same material (pigment) and refer to the same events, the author uses the acceptance of writing for the legitimation of images via an implication. If one accepts the Bible or writing in general as a (potential) *representative* of God although it is made of pigment, one cannot deprive images of their representative function only because they are made of pigment.

This culminates in the argument that the use of images is just as important for the believer as the use of the (Holy) Scripture. Even though the senses used for the perception of the latter may be different than those used for images, they all serve the same purpose (Der Nersessian 1944, 65n26).

### *Sixth example §50*

(50) Այսպէս եւ Տէրն Փառաց նստեալ ի յաւանակի եւ ի մերձեւալ ի քաղաքն, ելին ընդ առաջ ծերք եւ տղայք ոստաւք ձիթենեաւք եւ ոստաւք արմաւենեաւք եւ աւրհնէին գովէին եւ երկիրպագանէին. ոչ եթէ իշոյն երկրպագանէին, այլ Քրիստոսի Որդւոյն Աստուծոյ, որ ի վերայ նորա նստեալն էր:

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it [the depiction] as we do in front of the deity, but we venerate him whom we remember through the image as being born, having suffered, and sitting on the throne. And while for us the pictures as well as the scripture lead to the remembrance of the Son of God, they rejoice our mind about the resurrection and caress it about the suffering.” See also the discussion of §25.

56 See the discussion above.

(50) In the same manner, when the Lord of Glory was sitting on a donkey and approached the city, old men and children came out to the front with branches of olive trees and branches of palm trees and they blessed, glorified, and worshipped [him]. They certainly did not worship the donkey but Christ the son of God who was sitting on it.

This passage takes up another example from the Gospels to illustrate the difference between veneration via a *representative* (towards the *repraesentatum*) and veneration (adoration) of a *representative*. The example of Christ on a donkey is very common in the context of discussions about the use of images in (pre-)iconoclastic literature (Der Nersessian 1944, 66n29)<sup>57</sup> and adds another dimension to the discussion in the *Letter* by stating that the *representative* does not necessarily have to have something in common with what it represents.<sup>58</sup> The *representative* can therefore have either the character of an indexical sign (see the discussion about the Shroud of Turin or relics), an iconic sign (resemblance and proximity; for instance, an image with an appropriate depiction of Christ as he appeared on earth), or a symbol. Regardless of whether it is a donkey, an image of Christ, or the cross, the only thing of importance for a *representative* in form of an image is that the veneration directed towards the *representative* reaches what is represented through it.

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57 The polemical question whether a Christian should venerate a donkey because Christ was sitting on it is also raised in the 40<sup>th</sup> *quaestio* of the *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem* (Thümmel 1992, 354).

58 This part therefore paradoxically introduces the idea of Peirce's symbol in form of something that we would usually call an indexical sign (because in the very moment of the event the donkey is only a sign for Christ because Christ is sitting on it). Typical for a symbol is the fact that there is no essential connection between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum* except convention or tradition. For instance, there is no relation between the word "apple" and a real apple except that the word apple is used as a designation for an apple through custom and convention.

### *Seventh example §51*

(51) Այսպէս եւ պատկերացն երկրպագանել ոչ վասն դեղոցն է, այլ վասն Զրիստոսի, յորոյ անունն նկարեցան:

(51) In the same way, the veneration of the images is not for the pigment,<sup>59</sup> but for Christ, in whose name it was depicted.

This part refers to the example in §50 and further elaborates on the above-mentioned difference between the veneration of Christ and the donkey by relating it to the function of images. Once more, the notion of pigment (*def*) is used as a *tertium comparationis*, this time via its physical nature, which makes it comparable to the donkey (both are used as [the basis of] *representatives* for the same *repraesentatum*). The donkey as well as the pigment, despite all their differences, have the same potential to be used as media to refer to Christ. This removes the above-mentioned symbolic character of the donkey (or at least the event of Christ sitting on a donkey) by reducing the whole scene to the question of the role of matter (regardless of its form or use) in the process of representation.

### *Eighth example §57*

(57) Չոր ակրիսակ եթէ գիրս ուրուք ինդրեալ յարկեղաց եւ ասիցէ զառաքեալոյ տուր, կամ թէ զԵսայի, կամ զԵրեմիա, մի՞թէ Եսայի ինքն իցէ եւ կամ առաքեալն ինքնին, ոչ ապաքէն պատգամք աստուածայինք ընդ նմին եւ բանք սոցա:

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59 Again, the word *def* (pigment) is used in the context of images.

(57) For example, if someone searched the books from the boxes and said, “Give [me] this apostle or Isaiah or else Jeremiah,” is it Isaiah himself or the apostle himself that they intend [or], in fact, the divine orders instead of them and their words?

In this paragraph, we find yet another illustration of the relationship between the *representative* and that which is being represented in form of a second-order relation. Even through the apostles, it is not possible to approach God directly but only via his commandments and orders (which are represented in the books of the prophets).

### *Ninth example §58*

(58) Եւ մեք պատկերաց նկարուք զնոսա յիշեմք եւ զառաքողսն ևոցա եւ ոչ ասեմք, թէ սա իցէ Աստուածն, այլ յիշողութիւնն Աստուծոյ եւ ծառայից ևորա:

(58) And we remember them through the paintings of (their) images and the senders of them, and we do not say that this was God, but the remembrance of God and his servants.

In the last paragraph of this chapter, another important aspect in the discussions about images<sup>60</sup> and the use of *representatives* is brought up, namely remembrance (*yišotut' iwn*).<sup>61</sup> Due to this concept's importance

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60 See also Der Nersessian 1944, 67n33. For the general importance of remembrance in the discussions about images, see: Bremer 2014, 73ff.

61 That images and representations of martyrs were used for their remembrance was a common topic often used in apologies of the use of images in pre-iconoclastic texts (Thümmel 1992, 63).

in the discussions about images in early Christianity, it is surprising that remembrance (as well as the pedagogical function of images) does not have a more prominent position in the line of argumentation of the *Letter*. The same holds true for the servants (*caṙay*), who are only barely mentioned. This could lead to the assumption that the representations of God's servants were simply not as important for the author of the *Letter* as the representation of God or Christ. In addition, the pedagogical or narrative function of images was generally much more accepted and therefore questioned less often than the veneration of/through images, which could be another reason for its neglect in the *Letter*.<sup>62</sup>

## Overview and Model of Representation

At this point, it should be clear that religious representation as a way to cope with the immanence/transcendence distinction plays a central role in the *Letter's* line of argumentation.

Before summarizing and discussing the role and meaning of representation in the *Letter*, I would first like to outline some of the layers of the modern notion of representation<sup>63</sup> to get an idea of its contemporary

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62 For instance, some of the church fathers (among them John Chrysostom or Gregory of Nyssa), who were otherwise against images and the image of Christ in particular, had less problems with narrative depictions or depictions of scenes from the Gospels (Thümmel 1992, 57).

63 As this article is mainly concerned with a special type of representation, namely religious representation through images, I do not go into the details of the notion of representation in the humanities and particularly in philosophy. Instead, I discuss and present some parts of the definition of "Repräsentation" in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, which offers a broad but not too-detailed discussion of the notion in question. For more discussions on some other layers of representation (for instance, on representations as

meaning and compare it with the implicit notion of representation in the *Letter*.

## The Modern Notion of Representation

The word *representation* is of Latin origin and had, following Eckart Scheerer (1992, 790–852), in its most ancient use (for instance, in the works of Plinius and Quintillian), a strong mental and imaginative connotation, in the sense of making something present to a reader or an auditorium (to put something in front of the reader's eyes, see Scheerer 1992, 791). Over time, the notion of representation developed a much broader semantical spectrum, including aspects<sup>64</sup> such as:

- *Representation as a mental state*, which includes representation in the antique sense as reproductions of former mental states (remembrance) or as imagination.
- *Representation in a semiotic sense* as a sign. In its semiotic function, representation often serves as a synonym for sign<sup>65</sup> and stands particularly for the *signans* in a *signans-signatum* relation.<sup>66</sup> This aspect is particularly important for the problem of the use and veneration of images, because images are often taken as typical examples of signs. Some of the major topics in the debates about

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homomorphisms and their epistemological function) which play a less important role in the context of this article, see Mormann 1997, 349–66; Tietz 2005, 555–75.

64 Again, following Eckart Scheerer.

65 See Thomas von Aquin: "(...) idem est significare quod representare (...)" (quoted in Scheerer 1992).

66 And can therefore also be divided into subcategories, for instance representation through form, connection (*Spur*, indexicality), reflection (in a mirror), etc. (see Scheerer 1992).

the religious use of images are closely connected to the semiotic function of representation (for instance, in the *Letter*).

- Lastly, there is a legal implication to representation in the sense that someone (or something) can be represented by someone (or something) else in a specific context (which is the actual meaning of the word representative when not used in the way it was defined in the beginning of this article; when referring to this kind of representation, I will speak of the *proxy function* of representation or a representative [no italics]). It is interesting to note that particularly the *proxy function* of representation seems to play an important role in religion and is therefore of great importance for both the *Letter* and the field of religious studies in general. An example of the *proxy function* of religious representation is the king as a representative of God or the pope in his function as *vicarius Christi*. The importance of the *proxy function* of representation in religion is also underlined by the fact that neither the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* nor the *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (fourth edition) include entries on representation, but both refer to what we have called the *proxy function* of representation instead (*Stellvertretung* in German).

## The Notion of Representation in the *Letter*

Returning to the text passages discussed above, I will now examine whether we can attribute each of the passages to one (or more) of these three layers of the modern notion of representation. The following table serves as an overview of the relation between the examples in the *Letter* and the three layers of representation (mental state, sign, *proxy function*).



	<b>Representation as Mental State</b>	<b>Representation as Sign</b>	<b><i>Proxy Function of Representation</i></b>
§15		X	X
§20		X	
§21			X
§23		X	
§24		X	
§25		X	X
§30		X	X
§44	X		
§50		X	
§51		X	X
§57		X	
§58		X	

In this case, the attribution of the first example (§15) already causes some problems. Where does the sentence “See, it is clear that from early on images existed in honor of and for the service of the veneration of the glory of the deity” belong? The content of this phrase makes an attribution to either signs, *proxy function*, or both reasonable, but none of these categories seems to be fully appropriate. Therefore, I would like to suggest a slight variation of our current model and particularly of the *proxy function* of representation.

The major problem of the *proxy function* of representation in the context of religion lies in its one-sidedness, of which the example of the emperor statue is a good illustration. In this example, the *proxy function* denotes a lawyer-client or king-God relation by implying that only one side is acting on behalf of the other side. The emperor statue acts on behalf of the emperor, the lawyer acts on behalf of his client, and the king acts on behalf of God. This model seems to be in full accordance with the influential

(neo-)platononic tendency to rate the material (or worldly) sphere much lower than the spiritual (or heavenly) sphere and to underline the impact of the higher spheres on the lower ones. However, the neoplatonic model is not one-sided, either, but has some inherent ideas of reversion (*epistrophê*), too (Remes 2014, 45f.).

Therefore, if we are looking for a better understanding of the role of representation in the *Letter*, we need to draw the above-mentioned one-sided relation into a more mutual one. The *proxy function* of the *representatives* in our example does not solely imply that *the representatives* act for the *repraesentatum*, but it also means that the *repraesentatum* can be reached through the *representative*. A hypothesis of this article is that it is particularly this mutual relation between a *representative* and the *repraesentatum* that is characteristic for religious representations and is also one explanation for the influence of neoplatonic ideas on the development of (early) Christian dogmatics. God (or, more generally, a type of religious transcendence) does not only act through his (its) *representatives* (as the emperor does through his statue) but can also be reached through the *representative* (in some cases, the *representative* might even be the only way to reach God/transcendence) *because* he (it) acts through his (its) *representatives*. However, this does not restrict the use of the mutual *proxy function* of representations to religion,<sup>67</sup> but whenever encountering a religious representation it is very likely to be of such type. Furthermore, the religious use of *representatives* in such a way does not necessarily mean that it is the only way to communicate with transcendence. For instance, religious phenomena and specialists such

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67 For instance, there may be cases where a subject uses the emperor statue to get in contact with the emperor.

as mystics or prophets may be used as an example of a direct connection between God/transcendence and immanence.

Finally, it is important to underline the difference between the proposed ability of *representatives* to establish a mutual relation between transcendence/God and immanence and the idea that veneration can be directed towards the *repraesentatum* via the *representative* (an idea that was already present in (neo-)platonism). Both are closely connected to each other, but the idea to make transcendence accessible via an immanent *representative* goes beyond its simple use as a sort of a gate through which veneration can be directed towards God/transcendence.

## Second-Order Representation in the *Letter*

In the last part of my article, I would like to briefly show that religious representation and the way it is used in the *Letter* has another particularity, namely that it struggles with a direct link between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum*. To cope with this sort of uneasiness, the author of the *Letter* tries to replace any direct relation with a chain of *representatives* (intermediaries) throughout the whole text, which is an effect that I would call second-order representation.

The chain of *representatives* in the process of second-order representations consists of several different intermediaries that are difficult to merge into one single category (such as a name, the prophets, virtues, miracles, abstract categories such as honor, etc.).<sup>68</sup> One explanation for the use of second-order representation could be the attempt to avoid any direct link between material *representatives* (such as images or statues)

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68 For other examples, see the discussion of §29, §21-27, §51.

and non-material transcendence/God by using mental categories such as honor or deceased martyrs. Another reason in support of this argument may be seen in the author's attempt to weaken possible accusations from hostile groups that regarded material *representatives* of God as a sacrilege.

This kind of uneasiness is not only found in the *Letter* but can also be observed in other non-Armenian sources from the era before the Byzantine Iconoclasm (eighth and ninth centuries CE). For instance, in one of the first (positive) literary references to depictions of Christ, a homily on St. Theodoros from 381 CE, Gregory of Nyssa states:

"(...) the painter of living things as well painted the blossoms of his art on a canvess [*en eikóni*], the virtues of the martyr, the persecutions, the sufferings, the animal-like shapes of the tyrants, the insults, the blazing furnace, the most blessed perfection of an athlete, the shape of the human form of the judge [*agonothétes*]<sup>69</sup> Christ (...)." <sup>70</sup>

This rather strange formulation of *the shape of the human form of the judge Christ* has been noticed by Hans Georg Thümmel as well, who writes: "Vielleicht zeigt die gewundene Ausdrucksweise eine gewisse Verlegenheit an."<sup>71</sup> (Thümmel 1992, 57, 57n107).

That the *Verlegenheit* (uneasiness, awkwardness) that Thümmel observed in this context was not only a peculiarity of one particular text on the use of images is proved by the sheer amount of second-order representations in the *Letter*. However, the question remains whether the use of second-order representation regularly occurred when religious debates touched the topic of the possible representation of God through immanent means. That second-order representation, at least in the context

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69 Which is, in this context, a referee in a contest.

70 For the Greek text, see: Thümmel 1992, 289.

71 "Maybe the twisty language indicates a certain embarrassment."

of the *Letter*, is more than an occasionally appearing stylistic slip or a coincidence can be concluded from its frequent and deliberate use.

To further investigate this hypothesis of a deliberate and systematic use of second-order representation, we must also take into account other (non-)Armenian sources to see whether any regularities appear.

## Second-Order Representation in Greek Sources

Besides the example of Gregory of Nyssa, another witness for the use of second-order representation in non-Armenian texts are the fragments of the *Logos against the Image-Makers* by Epiphanius of Cyprus (fourth/fifth centuries CE). In this treatise, Epiphanius—who argued strictly against any depiction of Christ, God, or his servants—takes up some of the arguments of the pro-image faction. Following Epiphanius, these groups denied any direct veneration or adoration of Christ/his servants through images, but underlined the second-order relation of the image to God via its main function of serving as remembrance (*mnemosyne*) and honor (*timê*) of his servants (Thümmel 1992, 298).<sup>72</sup> The function of remembrance is also used in other (Greek) apologies of images before the eighth century CE and is certainly among the most prominent arguments in support of images.<sup>73</sup>

Another good example of the use of second-order representation is a text by John of Thessaloniky about a dispute between a heathen and a Christian about the use of images. In this text, the Christian argues in response to the heathen that it is not God who is depicted in images but his

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72 The function of remembrance can be found in many apologetic texts. See, for instance, Stephanos of Bostra in Thümmel 1992, 145–146.

73 Which makes it even more remarkable that remembrance is only of minor importance in the Armenian *Letter*.

servants, i.e. Christ (in his human form) as well as angels. Both the angels and Christ are partially physical beings (at least from the author's point of view), which makes it possible to depict them in images. On the other hand, they are also both connected to the non-material realm of God and therefore serve as a typical second-order representation of God (who is not depicted but who is at the end of the reference chain between the image → Christ/his servants/angels → God) (Thümmel 1992, 112-114).

Consequently, the important and common (pre-)iconoclastic topics<sup>74</sup> of remembrance and of Christ as a human being can also be interpreted as a form of second-order representation of God. However, the use of second-order representation in the non-Armenian examples<sup>75</sup> differs in some respects from the usage in the *Letter*. For instance, some transitive functions of images, such as remembrance or the pedagogical use of images, are only rarely mentioned in the *Letter*. On the other hand, we only find very few examples in Greek sources where the direct relation between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum* is circuited in such an extreme and systematic way as in some passages in the *Letter*. On the contrary: many of the Greek sources do not seem to have any problems at all with a direct relation between the image and God.<sup>76</sup>

This result makes it difficult to speak of second-order relation as a general marker of religious representation. However, it might play an important role in certain contexts, such as when the author of an apologetic text in favor of images is still more or less directly confronted with hostile

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74 Which are both very present in the (pre-)iconoclastic discussions about images in the (Greek) sources.

75 At least those from approximately the same time and predating the era of Byzantine Iconoclasm.

76 Among them such prominent pro-image apologists as Leontios of Neaple, who spoke of a direct relation between the (veneration of an) image and God. See, for instance, Leontios treatise *Against the Jews*.

groups accusing him of representing what cannot be represented. In this case, it seems that the above-mentioned uneasiness leads to a more systematic and deliberate use of second-order representation to enable the author to soften and cautiously back up his arguments by trying to avoid any direct links between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum*.

## Conclusions

In this article, I examined the role and use of representation<sup>77</sup> in the Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters” (seventh century CE) by looking at different passages from it that were concerned with the problem of religious representation through images. The results of this examination are twofold. Firstly, there is a systematic use of the (implicit) notion of representation in the *Letter* that is closely related to the *proxy function* of representation as part of the more modern notion of representation (*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*). However, the way the *proxy function* of representation works in the *Letter* shows a more mutual relation between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum* than in other contexts, for instance in politics. One result of this observation is the hypothesis that a more mutual model of the *proxy function* of representation particularly suits the demands of religious representations by allowing the transcendent to act towards immanence while also enabling the devotee to reach transcendence through the immanent *representative* (in this example, through images).

Secondly, the close examination of the *Letter* has also revealed a certain uneasiness on part of the author when addressing the relation

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77 A notion that is not mentioned *expressis verbis*.

between the *representative* and the *repraesentatum*. Furthermore, the author drew almost no direct links between images and God but bypassed this relation via intermediaries with a transitive nature (martyrs, name, virtues, honor, etc.). A quick look at some Greek (pre-)iconoclastic sources revealed that this uneasiness can also be encountered in at least some of the Greek sources. However, the use of second-order representation in the Greek sources differs from that in the *Letter*. For instance, the pedagogical function as well as the topic of remembrance are of great importance in the Greek sources, but only to a lesser degree in the *Letter*. On the other hand, the *Letter* is much more consistent in its use of second-order representation, whereas the Greek texts also provide examples of direct connections between the *representatives* and the *repraesentatum*. A hypothetical explanation for the consequent use of second-order representation in the *Letter* was that its author might have been involved in a more direct and maybe even more violent confrontation with groups<sup>78</sup> opposed to the use of images in churches than other (non-)Armenian iconophile writers.

The use of second-order representation thus remains, at least to a certain degree, a peculiarity of the *Letter* and cannot be taken as a general marker for religious representations (through images) but only as one possible indicator among others. However, the *proxy function* of representation and its mutual character in the *Letter* are more likely generalizable since religion relies on immanent *representatives* to allow any type of contact with transcendence. This need for *representatives* is a unique characteristic of religion, because in other social fields, such as politics or the economy, it is usually at least hypothetically possible to get in direct contact with a *repraesentatum*. However, whether the mutual

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78 It should be remembered that the author even mentions the leaders of these groups by name.



*proxy function* of representation is essential for religious representation is something that must still be proven by adding other case studies. At this point, it remains a working-hypothesis, which nevertheless adds new aspects to the general discussion of representation in religion and therefore reaches beyond the peculiarities of an *Letter* from the seventh century CE.

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## **Appendix: English Translation of the Armenian Letter “On the Image-Fighters”**

### **1. Opening / Introduction (§1–2)**

(1) By the life-bringing light all the creatures were adorned, and by its ray[s] newly enlightened the heavens and the earth rejoiced, because the light of truth filled with light the whole universe, it dispersed the gloomy fog from the darkened and hardened hearts and the world was filled with the teaching that has the knowledge of God. (2) But the thinkers<sup>79</sup> of the obscure teaching, who wander in murky darkness, saying idle things, they shake, they lead astray the minds of the innocents and introduce separations to the church.

### **2. Accusation and Testimonies from the Old Testament (§3–16)**

(3) “It is not appropriate,” they say, “to make pictures (*nkars*) and images (*patkers*) in the churches.” And they bring testimony from the Old Testament about what had been said concerning the heathen idolatry and concerning what the prophets were accusers of. (4) But ours<sup>80</sup> are not the same as theirs, which are about Christ and his chosen [ones]. (5) And certainly not with the skill of words, but with the testimony of the Books we shall speak, as the historians of the commandments truly taught us.

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79 See the translation by Drost-Abgaryan who translates խորհաւոր as *Denker*.

80 Sirarpi Der Nersessian adds *images* plus an explanatory footnote.

### *2.1. Moses and the Tent (§6–8)*

(6) Because first Moses made an example of images in the tent by the commandment of God. (7) Two golden, well-formed, winged, and anthropomorphic cherubim above the atonement, in whose middle the Lord of Lords spoke; this also the apostle confirms with testimony: "The cherubim of honor, who had guard above the atonement"<sup>81</sup>, which [is] an example of great mystery. (8) And likewise, the curtain, which the Lord said was to be made with ribbons, with pictures, with ornaments arranged in various ways, which was muslin and purple, red and blue. And truly, weren't the pigments (*deřk'*) the colors of pictures of the curtain and the pictures of the curtain Cherubim?

### *2.2. Salomon and the First Temple (§9)*

(9) And likewise, Salomon made Cherubim out of wood from Cyprus in the temple and surrounded [them] with gold, and not only the Cherubim which were in the sanctuary, but also the Cherubim on the walls and on the doors and on the threshold. Moreover, he drew Cherubim and palm-trees and raised metal leaves all around<sup>82</sup> on the walls with the help of a craftsman. And God did not disapprove but he called the temple after his name.

### *2.3. Ezekiel and his Vision (§10–13)*

(10) And the prophet Ezekiel, inspired by the spirit, [who] saw the vision (*face*), not as another from the prophets nor by oracles, but by God-

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81 Ex 25, 18-22.

82 Carved.

seeing prophecy he preached and said: (11) “The Lord placed me above a very high mountain, and above it [was something] as a building of a city, he brought me inside and I saw in it a temple and in it a man who was formidable (*terrible*) and wonderful. And lightning broke out from him like [from] copper. And he was above the door and in his hand he held a cord and a pole of measure and said to me: ‘Son of man, see and understand all that is here, because I came here to explain [it] to you.’ (12) And I saw the temple painted all around, inside and outside, with Cherubim and palm-trees from the bottom to the upper part, and not only had the temple been painted, but also the side-chambers, the doors, and the table of the Lord (*altar*). (13) And there were pairs of anthropomorphic cherubim and a palm-tree in the middle of the two, which was a demonstration of his great miracles.”<sup>83</sup>

#### *2.4. Summary Old Testament (§14–16)*

(14) Now, what are you going to say about this, oh mortal, you who are sick in your mind, because you said, concerning the formation of Moses and Salomon and the Cherubim, that they are made by hand, but what will you consider this, which was demonstrated by God himself? (15) See, it is clear that from early on, images existed in honor of and for the service of the veneration of the glory of the deity.

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83 Ez 40, 2-4; Ez 41, 18-20.

### 3. The New Testament (§17–20)

#### 3.1. *Paul in Athens (§17–20)*

(17) Furthermore, in the New Testament, Paul says to the Athenians: (18) "When I was walking around and saw your worships (*cults*), I found one altar on which was written 'to the unknown God'; the one whom you worship as the 'unknown', I am talking about the same [God] to you."<sup>84</sup> (19) Was God the altar? But that they honored it in the name of God, and Paul testifies the same thing. (20) And we certainly do not say that the images and pictures are [the] true God, but we paint them in the name of God as he appeared, and Isaiah said that he would be born, and Jeremiah that he would walk among men, and David [spoke] of the sufferings, and the burial, and Ezekiel and Hosea about the resurrection, and Daniel and Zechariah about the second coming, and Nahum and Malachi about the judgment, because they told us through a sign both that which has happened and that which will happen. And we depict the same that is written in the Scriptures, because the writing is a pigment and the material of images.

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84 Acts 17, 23.



## 4. Church Fathers (§21–37)

### *4.1. John of Constantinople (§21–23) (John Chrysostom)*

(21) Also, the teachers of the church mention the images, as the Bishop John of Constantinople in his discourse, who spoke to the enlightened (baptized), and a little further, he says: “For example, bronze images of kings are inanimate and insensate, and people who flee to them are saved not because it is copper, but because they represent the kings.”

(22) And you shall understand it according to this example, you heretic!

(23) Moreover, in this discourse he says: “One should not omit the divine scripture.” Then, he says, “Don’t you see on the royal images that above there is the image and it has the script of the king’s [name] written and on the base below are written the achievements, victories, and regulations of the king. And in the same way, on parchment one can see the royal image above and below the virtues and all the victories.”

### *4.2. Image of Christ in Edessa (§24)*

(24) Or what will you even say about the image of the Lord, which Anan, a trusted man of king Abgar, painted in the presence of Christ with [his own] sight. And now they say it is in the great church of Uḫ ha<sup>85</sup>.

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85 Edessa.

#### *4.3. Bishop Severianos (§25–26)*

(25) And the Bishop Severianos said: "For example, when the king is away, his image fills the place of the king, and the princes worship [it] and celebrate the monthly feasts. Princes pass by and the common folk worship not by looking at the wood, but by [looking at] the image of the king, not by looking at the material, but at that which is imprinted with writing. And if an image of a mortal king is qualified so powerful, how much more is the form and the image of the immortal king." (26) Thus, understand what they say, because they were also the teachers of the church, and if you want to study their writings, they narrate the same.

#### *4.4. Gregory the Illuminator (§27–29)*

(27) And in the same manner says the holy Gregory, the Illuminator of the Armenians, in his prayer: "Instead of sculpted wood, he raised his cross in the middle of the universe, and because the people were used to worshipping dead images, he himself became a dead image on the cross, he died and perished, so that they should rely on worshipping the wood of the cross and that the image that is on it should have a human form in order to make the image-creator, the image-bearer, and the image-worshipper obedient towards the image of his divinity." (28) Now, if you do not believe our words, it is necessary to study the scriptures and to understand them. But you are so far from the scriptures as the heavens [are] from the earth. (29) There are numerous other testimonies from the Holy Scriptures, because everything is apparent [to him] who has sense, because the ears hear, and the mind understands, and without the eyes of mind, the eyes of the body appear blind.

#### 4.5. *Accusation of the Image-Fighters—Manicheans (§30–32)*

(30) But it is astonishing that you accept the commandments and persecute the prince, you worship the sign and throw stones at the king, you honor the cross and insult the crucified. (31) Moreover, the Manicheans and the Marcionites deem the true incarnation of the Savior as having occurred only in appearance (*as an illusion*), and when they see the images, the furious people are offended and they approach and insult [them]. (32) Even if we did not see the prophets, it was seen and studied that they cried out loud concerning the idolatry, as the heathen images (*kuṛ k' het'anosac'*) are demons, but we cannot find written anywhere that they say that the images (*patkerk'*) of the church or of the Christians are demons, but that the prophets are accusers of the [heathen] statues.

#### 4.6. *Eusebios' Church History (§33–37)*

(33) Likewise, it says in the Church History, in Eusebios the chronicler's seventh book, seventeenth discourse, regarding the wonderful signs which happened, he says, in the city of Pennada with respect to the great deeds of our savior. (34) "Since we remembered this city", he says, "it is not suitable to omit this [part] of the story, because it is necessary for the memory of those who will come after us concerning the blood-flue wife, whose gush of flowing blood came out, which we learned from the Holy Gospel, who was cured by our savior from [her] pains there in that city, who, they say, was there, and her house is still evident there and the services of mercy which became to the woman are the sign and miracle of God. Because in front of the doors of her house was, above a 'pillow stone' (*platform*), an image (*patker*) of copper of the mortal woman descending on her knees and spreading her hands in front of her, she prays according to the 'likeness'

(*it seems like she is praying*), and opposite to her is also an image (*patker*) of bronze of a man who was standing and was dressed himself in a cloak, and, presenting, he holds his hand towards the woman. And from the part of his feet higher than to the clothes grew a root, some plant which is alien from all [other] roots by its look, and it goes up as far as to the skirt of his clothes and it is medicine (*deḥ*) for all sicknesses. This statue (*andri*) is to the likeness of our savior as they say; yet it remains up to our days and we saw it with our own eyes in the time when we went to this city." (35) "But this is not as big as the fact that those among the heathens who believed in Christ painted with pigments the images of Paul and Peter and of Christ himself and they remain until today." (36) And now, didn't you see these writings, oh friend, you who are opposed to the commandments of God? (37) Friend, I say, not concerning the orthodox belief I say friend, but according to that which was heard from our Lord Jesus Christ, that: "Friend, because for what you came."<sup>86</sup>

## 5. Accusations and Comparisons (§38–43)

### 5.1. *Aramazd* (§38–40)

(38) Because if you read and do not understand, then through you will be affirmed the word of the Apostle who says: (39) "Whom the God of this universe blinded the mind with disbelief, so that to those will not shine the light of the Gospel of the graces of Christ; *etc.*"<sup>87</sup> Otherwise, if you have

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86 Mt 26,50.

87 II Corinth 4, 4.

not read, it is suitable to ask and study and know the good and the bad and to distinguish between [what is] Godly and [what is] from the demons. (40) And do you not know that in the temples of idols Ormazd is depicted (*e droshmeal*), who is Aramazd, and his fornication and sorcery, but in the churches of God we see depicted (*nkareal*)<sup>88</sup> the holy virgin and mother of God (*theotokos*) and in her arms she holds Christ [who is] at the same time her creator, son, and creator of everything.

### 5.2. *Anahit (§41-42)*

(41) Moreover, in the temples of idols [are] Anahit and her sinfulness and falseness. (42) And in the churches of Christians and in the tombs of the martyrs of God, we see depicted St. Gregory and his God-pleasing sufferings and the holy virtues and St. Stephanos the Protomartyr in the middle of the stoning and the blessed and holy women Gayane and Rhipsime together with all their companions and [their] victorious bravery likewise and other courageous, respectable and angel-like [people], which we are not able to count.

### 5.3. *Astlik and Aphrodite (§43)*

(43) In the temples of fooleries [are] Astlik and Aphrodite, whom all heathens call mother of pleasures and of drunkenness and lasciviousness, but in the churches of God are the cross of the Lord and the cross-bearing host of apostles and prophets who removed the idolatry among all and

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88 Again, a difference in the terminology is found when Vrt'anes speaks about heathen images and Christian images.

carried the veneration of God to the whole world and put to shame Satan and his armies.

## 6. Other Comparisons / Materiality (§44-51)

### *6.1. Pigment + Writing / Images (§44-45)*

(44) Because in the churches of God we see the depiction of all the miracles of Christ, which he made, as is written in the Scriptures, as we said before, about which the prophets told us. I speak of the birth, the baptism, the tortures, the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection, and the ascension into heaven. They depict all this in the churches as the Holy Scriptures describe it. Is not the scripture written with pigment, however? And with pigment, the same thing is depicted in the churches. Only the ears hear from the books, but they see pictures with the eyes and hear with ears and with the hearts they believe. (45) Now, it is clear that it is not in contrast to the Scriptures to worship images and whoever studies with inspiration comes to the truth, and the heretics are found in error, who contradict and say: "Concerning this we esteem it shameful, because they are dumb and speechless."

### *6.2. The Power of Items (Arks and the Cross) (§46-48)*

(46) Moreover, did the ark of God speak, when it destroyed the besieged Dagov and struck Azov, Geth, and Ascalon, the city of strangers, with strikes, until the inhabitants of Ascalon lamented and said: (47) "Why did

the ark of the God of Israel turn towards us to kill us and our people?"<sup>89</sup>  
(48) Did the cross of Christ speak, which revived the dead in the city and performed many miracles until our days? And it is the glory for the angels and salvation of man and terror for the demons.

### *6.3. Painted Book-Boxes (§49)*

(49) And thus, as pairs the new laws were linked together according to the old laws and they testify for us by the grace of Christ, because we see also that the boxes of books of the Gospel were painted, and they are not only built out of gold and silver but also out of bones of elephants and of red skins, and when we worship or kiss the holy Gospel, certainly are we not offering worship to the bones of an elephant or earth-color, which comes via trade from the land of the barbarians, but to the Word of the Savior which is written on the parchment.

### *6.4. Jesus on a Donkey / Veneration (§50)*

(50) In the same manner, when the Lord of Glory was sitting on a donkey and approached the city, old men and children came out to the front with branches of olive-trees and branches of palm-trees and they blessed, glorified, and worshipped [him]. They certainly did not worship the donkey but Christ the son of God who was sitting on it.

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89 1 Sam 5, 20.

### *6.5. Summary (§51)*

(51) In the same way, the veneration of the images is not for the pigment, but for Christ, in whose name it was depicted.

## 7. Differences Between Christian and Heathen Images (§52–66)

(52) And thus, what is the similarity between the divine images and the sinfulness of heathens? Concerning this the heretics fabricate stains and cause divisions for the perdition of persons and all listeners, those who will be given to and will be restored in the eternal revenges of the torments of hell, with all their accomplices and cooperators, regarding whom the blessed prophet Hosea justly and suitably said: (53) "A snare of an obstacle [is] on their paths, concerning which they planted heresy in the house of God,"<sup>90</sup> and other things as well. (54) Woe to him who gives to drink to his friend erroneous misleading. (55) And certainly they are entwined with temptations and snares of sins, to which they have moved from the right faith, and, submerged, they fell off from the right intentions. (56) But I speak and do not remain silent:

### *7.1. Problem of Representation (§57–58)*

(57) For example, if someone searched the books from the boxes and said, "Give [me] this apostle or Isaiah or else Jeremiah," is it Isaiah himself or the apostle himself that they intend [or], in fact, the divine orders instead

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90 Hosea 9,8.



of them and their words? (58) And we remember them with the paintings of (their) images and the senders of them, and we do not say that this was God, but the remembrance of God and his servants.

### *7.2. Pap and the (Greek) Tradition of Images in Churches (§59); Concrete Persons Opposed to the Use / Veneration of Images in Churches*

(59) And what is written, that Pap brought images into the churches, it is evident to all that you tell lies. Because in Armenia no one knew how to make images until now, but they brought them from the Greeks and our knowledge was from there if it hadn't been lost. And there were other kings prior to Pap and they brought images and paintings to the churches in the name of Christ, and also after Pap there were other kings in Armenia and patriarchs, as the blessed and holy Sahak and Maštoc' and Eznik and Ardsan and Koriwn and their friends, that through them the Armenian writing was presented by the Lord God, and no one from them made any word concerning the images and paintings of the church. But only Šmowêl and T'adêos and Esayi and their friends, who attracted many [people] to [their] side together with them, as well as yourselves; because although the party of heresy shines at certain times it quickly fades, because they lie. Because also the first sins were born from a lie, as in the time of Adam.

### *7.3. Old and New Testament (§60–61)*

(60) Because certainly the words are not from me, but from the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament; if you want to serve Christ, serve God and love his commandments and study the same books [of those people] whose names are written in them, and when you find them, they

will point out the true path to God. (61) And concerning the images, it will be sufficient to this point [for those] who have intelligence.

#### *7.4. Purity, Pigment (Matter), Writing and Images (§62–64)*

(62) And concerning the pigments which they say to be impure, they are reprehended by their own mouths, because the pigment of the Scriptures is vitriol and gall and gum and it [is] possible to taste them; and the matter (*niwt'n*) of pictures is milk and eggs, arsenic, lapis lazuli, rust, lime, alburia, and whatever else, and it is possible to eat them as (*for the sake of*) food and as remedy. (63) And we do not say that it is impure what God put for the beauty of the world, and we do not blame as dirty (*zazir*) that which you say a smell comes out of the pigments. (64) And if you are so pure and spiritual, then you must despise your belly and clean your intestines with boiling water in the time of prayers and only then enter the church, oh! evil and impossible evil ones, you, who sometimes accuse pigments and sometimes images and pictures and say that they are handmade and that they are not appropriate for us; also, the churches are handmade and they are called Temple of God.

#### *7.5. Paul and Timotheus / Remembrance (§65–66)*

(65) About this Paul said to Timotheus: "So that you shall know", he says, "how it is appropriate for you to go around in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and foundation of truth."<sup>91</sup> (66) Thus, what will you say about this, since this is also handmade, because through visible

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91 1 Timot 3, 15.

[things] we come to know the invisible ones, and pigments and pictures are the remembrance of God and his servants.

### *8. End (Quotes, Accusation, Prayer) (§67-70)*

(67) But as you grew proud through Satan and call yourselves holy but resemble white graves, therefore the proverb said the truth: “Don’t be too upright and too affected, so that you shall not be lead astray.”<sup>92</sup> (68) And it also says: “Evil-born people, who take themselves for righteous,”<sup>93</sup> like you who glorify yourselves and speak with an open mouth something that is not suitable. (69) We shall hasten to go to the church of Christ day and night, and always anticipate the prayers, so that we will end the times of migration. (70) And we will be allowed to see God with joyful faces during the day of judgement, so that we will be able to catch the mildness of eternity, because glory [shall be] for him in eternity, from eternity, amen.

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92 Eccl 7,17. See footnote in Drost-Abgaryan’s translation.

93 Proverbs 30, 12.