

*SNSF MARK16 second international conference – 2-3 June 2022, online
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Mark 16:9-20 in the Armenian Medieval Literature: A Commentary by Basil of Mashkevor

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Abstract

It is fortunate that the autograph of the only Armenian *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* by Basil of Mashkevor (1280?-1345?) is still extant and is housed at the Matenadaran-Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts. According to Basil's colophon the *Commentary* was written in 1325 in the monastery of Mashkevor in the Black Mountain, in Cilicia. Mark 16:9-20 is included in this quite extensive Exegesis (25 folios of 308).

Basil explains each verse and word of the *Gospel of Mark*, demonstrating quite a 'critical' approach to the text, comparing and juxtaposing episodes from the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, as well as referring to the apocrypha. He provides interesting examples that reflect the culture, social relationships, medicine, everyday life and moral values of his time. The explanation of some chapters and verses is followed by an "Exhortation", which represents a moral conclusion of the issues discussed.

In the verses in question Basil of Mashkevor describes Mary Magdalene's sentiments, presents intriguing reflections on why Jesus appeared first to her after he had risen, and even imagines their meeting: "Mary desired to approach and to embrace him as she did before, but [Jesus] didn't permit and said: "Don't touch me", so that she would learn that his body was not the same he had before the death, but is ethereal and sublime". The author continues to explain biblical events in light of his own historical context, emphasizing their relevance to the everyday life and deeds of a Christian.

The Commentary could be interesting from a textological perspective too. Based on it I will attempt to 'construct' the biblical text used by Basil and compare it with the other Armenian versions of Mark 16:9-20. Therefore, the paper will also briefly touch upon Mark's endings in the Armenian Church liturgy, the manuscript tradition and the illumination of Mark 16.