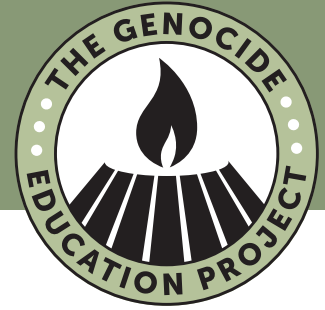


Survivor Objects and the Zeytun Gospels



YOU HAVE JUST STUDIED THE FIRST MODERN GENOCIDE — THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915.

The survivors of Ottoman Turkey’s annihilation of their nation are gone. Their children and grandchildren grapple with the burden of a genocide that is denied by the Turkish government, while trying to continue to exist as a people outside their homeland and stripped of all their ancestors’ personal and community properties built over centuries. As a part of the effort to save their culture, Armenians are trying to collect the few remaining artifacts that were taken from them during the Armenian Genocide. These are known as ‘survivor objects.’ According to UC Davis professor, Dr. Heghnar Watenpaugh:

“Artifacts that have experienced atrocities, even genocide, and survived, acquire the power to recall the horrors of the past, and to recollect the absent persons, things, and places that were lost. They symbolize violence, but also survival and resilience. Material objects that have endured looting, mutilation, displacement, and separation from the communities where they functioned as sacred relics, liturgical aids, or prized artworks form a special category.”

One such survivor object is the *Zeytun Gospels* (pronounced Záy-toon), an almost 800-year-old manuscript that survived the Armenian Genocide but was severed into two parts. Eight pages were removed and eventually ended up in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, in 1994. These are known as the Canon Tables of the *Zeytun Gospels*. In 2010, the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America sued the Getty Museum. The church argued that the museum knew these missing pages were the property of the Armenian Church and should have been returned to the church instead of purchased by the museum. The rest of the manuscript was housed at the Mashtots Institute for Ancient Manuscripts (known as the Matenadaran) in the Republic of Armenia with the agreement of the church. If it were not for the Armenian Genocide, the *Zeytun Gospels* would still have been in possession of the church.



Two pages of the Zeytun Gospels' Canon Tables

Documents

Read the excerpts below and then answer the following questions.

An Excerpt from the Second Amended Complaint of the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America against the Getty Museum

20 3. Prior to the Armenian Genocide the entire Zeyt'un Gospels was located in Zeyt'un
21 and in the joint possession of the Sourenian family and their parish church in the same
22 city – the rightful or legal owner of the Zeyt'un Gospels manuscript. The parish church
23 was under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia
24 through a direct line of elected Catholicoses from the time of Catholicos Constantine I,
25 who commissioned the Gospels, to the present Cilician Catholicos, His Holiness Aram I.
26 Through the centuries, the Zeyt'un Gospels had become a cultural treasure for the
27 Armenian Apostolic Church.

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Z. RIMBERG,
:ADER, LLP
Vicente Blvd

WESTERN PRELACY v. GETTY (Case No. BC 438824)
SECOND AMENDED COMPLAINT

An Excerpt from the Answer of the Getty Museum to Second Amended Complaint of the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America

ANSWER

12
13 2. Neither the Western Prelacy nor the Catholicosate holds title to the Canon Tables
14 of the Zeyt'un Gospel. On information and belief, sometime between its creation in the
15 Thirteenth Century and the Nineteenth Century, the entire Gospel, including the Canon Tables,
16 had become the property of a private party, possibly members of the Sourenian-Pasilosian family.
17 At no point thereafter did the Western Prelacy or the Catholicosate acquire or hold title or a right
18 of possession to the Canon Tables.

19 3. On information and belief, sometime prior to the early 1920s, by devise, gift, or
20 voluntary exchange, the Gospel became the property of Melkon Atamian. Like many Armenians
21 during this period, Melkon Atamian left Turkey. Atamian, however, could not bring the entire
22 Gospel with him. Atamian therefore removed the Gospel's Canon Tables, took the Canon Tables
23 to the United States, and entrusted the remainder of the Gospel to an American missionary by the
24 name of Lyman. Melkon Atamian and members of his family emigrated to the United States in
25 1923 and settled in Massachusetts.

Analysis

The excerpts that you just read represent different views regarding the provenance of the Canon Tables of the Zeytun Gospels. Provenance is the record of ownership of a work of art, cultural artifact or antique. In a sense, it is the history of an object.

1. Create a list of the owners of the Canon Tables of the Zeytun Gospels based on the excerpt of the Complaint filed by the Armenian Church.
2. Create a list of the owners of the Canon Tables according to the Getty Museum.
3. Compare the lists you have created. How are they different?
4. Based on the excerpt of the Armenian Church, why was the *Zeytun Gospels* removed from Turkey?
5. The removal of the *Zeytun Gospels* from Turkey is represented in a different manner in the Getty's answer. Discuss how the Getty describes the removal of the Canon Tables of the Zeytun Gospels from Turkey.
6. How are the descriptions of the removal different? The Getty's description does not include an important historical event. Include the event in your answer and how that could make a difference if you were on the jury deciding the case.
7. How does the Armenian Church view the Canon Tables of the *Zeytun Gospels*? What type of object is it to the church? What can you infer about the meaning it carries for the Armenian Church?
8. How does the Getty Museum view the Canon Tables of the *Zeytun Gospels*? How does their view differ from that of the church?
9. What do you think the Canon Tables of the *Zeytun Gospels* might mean to a descendent of an Armenian Genocide survivor?
10. The lawsuit against the Getty ended in compromise. The Armenian Church gained possession of the missing pages and then, in turn, gifted them to the Getty. The Getty now displays the pages with a corrected provenance of the manuscript. The new provenance reads:
 - 1256: Catholicos Konstandin I, died 1267
 - by 1923 – 1994: In the possession of the Atamian Family
 - 1994: Acquired by The J. Paul Getty Museum
 - 2016: Gift of The Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, by agreement

Does this revised provenance reflect both the provenance as presented by the Church and the Getty in the lawsuit?

Further Exploration and Activities

Two options for activities:

1. Zeytun posters inquiry:

The city of Zeytun has great significance in Armenian history, and it was the first city to experience mass deportations during the Armenian Genocide.

For students to have a more intimate understanding of what happened in Zeytun and the importance of the Zeytun Gospels to Armenians today, teachers can make use of an online exhibit by the Armenian National Institute. It includes 24 posters about Zeytun and its demise, that can be viewed online or printed on large-format poster paper for display. Direct students to the most relevant posters to the lesson:

https://www.armenian-genocide.org/files/first_deportation.pdf

Students can be divided into groups to examine and write a summary of one or more posters. Each group reports to the class about what they have learned from the posters. If printed posters are used, each group hangs their posters in chronological order around the room.

Ask students to reflect on Dr. Watenpaugh's definition of survivor objects (pg. 1 of this guide) and discuss why the Canon Tables of the *Zeytun Gospels* represent a survivor object given what they learned from the lawsuit and the history of Zeytun during the Armenian Genocide.

2. Comparing the Zeytun and Charsanjakh bible histories:

Ask students to watch GenEd's 5 minute video, "Rescued and Returned" and compare the Charsanjakh Gospels' provenance with that of the *Zeytun Gospels*.

<https://youtu.be/SCV1LohDLrQ>



Charsanjakh Gospels Cover



Charsanjakh Gospels Inside



Helen Parnagin

