

# The Censer in the Armenian Church

## Vocabulary

1. բուրվառ (poorvar) – censer: a covered incense burner swung on chains in a religious ritual
2. խոունկ (khoong) – incense: material used to produce a fragrant odor when burned, typically made from dried tree sap
3. ածուխ (adzookh) – charcoal: a dark or black porous carbon prepared from wood by charring in a kiln from which air is excluded
4. խնկաման (khungaman) – incense boat: a small metal container, which holds the supplies of incense. The boat has a small spoon inside which is used to transfer the grains of incense onto the red-hot charcoals in the censer.
5. քշոց (kushots) – flabellum: a fan made of metal, intended to keep away insects from the consecrated Body and Blood of Christ

## The Symbolism of Incense and the Armenian-Style Censer

The Armenian-style censer is designed as a dynamic icon of our lives in prayer. The burning of incense gives a visual representation of our prayers rising to heaven. As the censer swings, the burnt incense that billows from it rises straight up to the dome of the Church. It is with this understanding that we pray the words of the Psalm 141 during the Evening Hour; that “[our] prayers be as straight as incense before [the Lord], the lifting of [our] hands as an evening sacrifice.” The base of an Armenian-style censer is built as a miniature Armenian-style Church because, as the rising incense represents our prayers, so too the incense pouring forth from the body of the *poorvar* represents the prayers pouring forth from the liturgical life of the Church. Upon the chains of the censer are bells, which ring to echo the hymns sung in our liturgical services as well as the song of the angels, constantly being sung in praise of the immortal God. The censer has four chains: three in a triangular formation and one in the center. One common interpretation of this sees the three chains as representing the Holy Trinity, which is comprised of three persons, and the one center chain as representing the oneness of the God.

## Why do we burn incense?

Beyond being a symbolic representation of our prayers rising to heaven, the burning of incense connects our prayer to the Temple worship of the Old Testament. The Jewish Temple contained the Ark of the Covenant, which held the tablets of the Ten Commandments and was kept in a place called the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was a unique place where the presence of the infinite God was contained in a finite space, here on this earth. Once per year, the high priest of the Temple would enter the Holy of Holies to offer incense in the presence of the Creator of the Universe. The coming of Christ fulfilled the purpose of the Temple worship of the Old Testament, because, even more fully than in the Temple, the full presence of the infinite God was present in the person of Christ. Therefore, we use incense to show Christ as the fulfillment of the Temple worship of the Old Testament. And even more central to our Christian journey, the women who came to anoint Christ’s body early on the first day of the week brought incense with them.<sup>1</sup> Just as the oil-bearing women brought incense to discover that Christ had risen from the dead, we burn incense in anticipation of coming into the presence of the risen Lord. So whenever you see incense being burned, offer up earnest prayer to God, remember the Old Testament promises that Jesus fulfilled, and prepare yourself to be in the presence of the Christ, risen from the dead.

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark 16:1 in the Armenian translation. Instead of the word ‘incense’, other translations use the word ‘spices’ or ‘myrrh’.

## Incense in Scripture

*Exodus 30:1-10*

**30** “You shall make an altar to burn **incense** upon; of acacia wood shall you make it. **2** A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth; it shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height; its horns shall be of one piece with it. **3** And you shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides round about and its horns; and you shall make for it a molding of gold round about. **4** And two golden rings shall you make for it; under its molding on two opposite sides of it shall you make them, and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. **5** You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. **6** And you shall put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with you. **7** And Aaron shall burn fragrant **incense** on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, **8** and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall burn it, a perpetual **incense** before the Lord throughout your generations. **9** You shall offer no unholy **incense** thereon, nor burnt offering, nor cereal offering; and you shall pour no libation thereon. **10** Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year; with the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations; it is most holy to the Lord.”

*1 Chronicles 6:49*

**49** But Aaron and his sons made offerings upon the altar of burnt offering and upon the altar of **incense** for all the work of the most holy place, and to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded.

*Psalms 141*

**141** I call upon thee, O Lord; make haste to me!

Give ear to my voice, when I call to thee!

**2** Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee,  
and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!

**3** Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord,  
keep watch over the door of my lips!

**4** Incline not my heart to any evil,  
to busy myself with wicked deeds

in company with men who work iniquity;  
and let me not eat of their dainties!

**5** Let a good man strike or rebuke me in kindness,  
but let the oil of the wicked never anoint my head;  
for my prayer is continually against their wicked deeds.

**6** When they are given over to those who shall condemn  
them, then they shall learn that the word of the Lord is true.

**7** As a rock which one cleaves and shatters on the land,  
so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Sheol.



**8** But my eyes are toward thee, O Lord God;  
in thee I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless!  
**9** Keep me from the trap which they have laid for me,  
and from the snares of evildoers!  
**10** Let the wicked together fall into their own nets,  
while I escape.



*Isaiah 6:1-7*

**6** In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." **4** And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"



**6** Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."

*Malachi 1:11*

**11** For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place *incense* is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

*Mark 16:1-8*

**16** And when the sabbath was past, Mary Mag'dalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salo'me, bought *incense*, so that they might go and anoint him. **2** And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. **3** And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" **4** And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back—it was very large. **5** And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. **6** And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. **7** But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." **8** And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

❖ *Ուղիղ եղիցին աղօթք իմ որպէս խոնկ առաջիքո, Տէր,  
Համբարձումն ձեռաց իմոց պատարագ երեկոյի:*

❖ *May my prayers be as straight as incense before you, O Lord,  
the lifting of my hands as an evening sacrifice.*

# Poorvar Connect-The-Dots

.25  
.24 .26  
.23 .27  
.22  
.21 .20 .28  
.33 .29

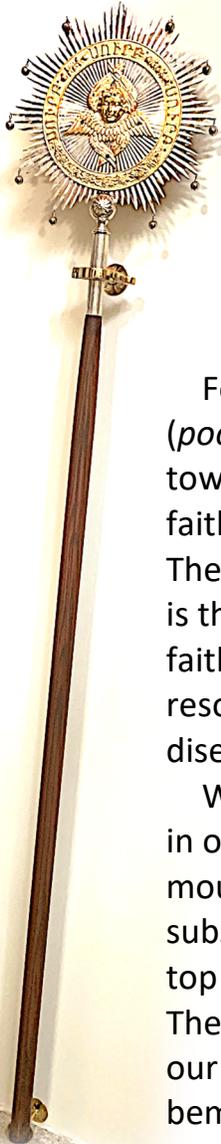
.32 .19  
.18  
.17  
.16 .15  
.31 .30  
.14  
.34  
.35 .13  
.12  
.11  
.36 .10  
.9  
.38 .37 .8 .6  
.1 .7 .5  
.2 .3 .4

## Badarak Scavenger Hunt

### Activity: Poorvar or Kushots?

Instructions: See whether the description matches the poorvar, the kushots, or both.  
You can mark your answer with 'P' for poorvar, 'K' for kushots, or 'B' for both.

1. Made of Metal: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Bells: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Shaken: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Swung: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Picture of Angel: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Built in Design of Church: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Used by both Priest and Deacon: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Used during chanting of Gospel: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Used during procession of Chalice: \_\_\_\_\_
10. 2 used during *Badarak*: \_\_\_\_\_



**Kushots**



**Poorvar**

### Quote by Vartan Areveltsi

For our hearts ought to be like a censer (*poorvar*). Its fire, the warmth of our hearts towards God. The incense, our way of life, our faith and our hope and our love as rational beings. The censer's material--bronze, gold, silver or iron—is that with which our heart is adorned: gold is faith; silver is a good way of life; brass, is resounding prayer; iron is words which cut away disease.

When one raises the incense boat, one raises the whole of creation in one's hands, as if on a tray, to the altar of sacrifice. The censer's mouth [is ours], the way upwards for the incense smoke. The four substances of our nature are the four chains holding the censer up. The top to which the chains are attached is our faculty of understanding. The inner dish is our physical nature. The ring to hold the censer by is our memory. The priest is our mind. The altar and the temple is the bema where the incense wafts. The three orders of priesthood are the nine ranks [of angels] in the heavens.