

Celebrating the Legacy
of Five Centuries of
Armenian-Language
Book Printing, 1512-2012



A Joint Exhibit of

The Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan-Dearborn
Mardigian Library, University of Michigan-Dearborn, October 18-November 16, 2012

The Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum, Southfield
The Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum, Southfield, December 11, 2012-January 31, 2013

The Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan–Dearborn was established in 1985. Its founder and first director was Professor Dennis Papazian. The Center’s mission is to support and encourage Armenian studies, including the documentation and publication of materials in this domain. The Center attempts to accomplish its mission through the maintenance of an extensive library, supporting the research of scholars in Armenian studies, cooperation with other Armenian studies centers worldwide, academic outreach, and contact with the press and officeholders on issues concerning Armenia and the Armenians.

The Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum is located in Southfield, Michigan. It is the largest Museum of its kind outside of Armenia – with over 11,000 square feet – and includes rare books as well as artifacts collected from many parts of the world. Displayed in eight galleries are illuminated manuscripts, early printed books, paintings, inscribed rugs, textiles, sacred vessels, ancient objects, and practical and personal metal objects. Scholars throughout the world have utilized the resources of the Museum.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Robert Ajemian Foundation for sponsoring this exhibit.

Cover illustration: First Armenian Bible printed in 1666 in Amsterdam.
From the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum.

Anyone requiring accommodations under the provisions of the ADA should contact Gerald Ottenbreit at 313-593-5181 (e-mail gottenbr@umd.umich.edu) prior to visiting the exhibition at the Mardigian Library, University of Michigan–Dearborn to allow time for arrangements to be made.

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Chancellor's Statement

It is with great pride that The Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn presents this special exhibition, "Celebrating the Legacy of Five Centuries of Armenian-Language Book Printing."

On view in the Mardigian Library are works from the permanent collections of The Armenian Research Center and from the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum in Southfield. This exhibit will travel from UM-Dearborn to Southfield to be displayed at the museum from December 11, 2012, through January 31, 2013. We are delighted to welcome you to the campus for this exhibition. Students, scholars, and the public will find the exhibition to be a fine source of learning and appreciation for the work of these writers and printers.

This is the 500th anniversary of the printing of the first Armenian book. To mark this occasion, UNESCO designated Yerevan as the Book Capital of the World from April 2012-April 2013.

The history of Armenian printing is an indication of the Armenian people's ceaseless efforts to maintain contact with other cultures, to learn from them, and to participate in the advancement of knowledge and the exchange of experience and skills on a global scale.

The Armenians were among the first peoples in the Middle East to recognize the potential of printing as a means for advancing knowledge and exchange of ideas. Even though that there was no Armenian state in the sixteenth century, many Armenian craftsmen and clergy traveled to different places in Europe to print books in Armenian and then to ship them to urban centers in the Middle East where large numbers of Armenians lived. It was over 250 years after the first Armenian book that an Armenian printing press was finally established on the territory of the historic Armenian homeland. Individual Armenians were also among the first to set up printing presses in the Middle East, in places like Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) in the mid-sixteenth century and in Isfahan, less than a century later. Because of the turbulence of modern Armenian history, Armenian communities of significant size have existed outside Armenia for centuries, and Armenian books have been published in dozens of cities on six continents. This exhibition strives to illustrate that diversity.

The University is proud of the sustained contribution The Armenian Research Center has made to the cultural experience of the University of Michigan-Dearborn community, and this exhibition adds to that continuing legacy. The Center and its director, Dr. Ara Sanjian, have had an important and growing impact in the Armenian community, locally and nationally. We are particularly grateful to the dedicated circle of supporters from the community of southeast Michigan who have shown such commitment to these efforts.

The Armenian Research Center contributes to the metropolitan mission of the university by providing a bridge between the university and the vibrant Armenian community in southeast Michigan. The materials collected by the ARC are invaluable in support of research by scholars throughout the country and the world who are seeking to gain a better understanding of the Armenian genocide and the Armenian diaspora.

The University of Michigan-Dearborn takes pride in The Armenian Research Center, and the significant reputation it holds as a repository of knowledge of Armenian history and culture. We invite you to join us for other exhibitions, and to help us serve the community and the campus in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Little". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a stylized "L".

Daniel Little, *Chancellor*
University of Michigan-Dearborn

Five Centuries of Armenian Printing, 1512–2012: A Brief Outline

Text by Ara Sanjian, Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan–Dearborn

Armenia and the Armenians

The modern Republic of Armenia lies in the South Caucasus, along the southern geographical boundary between Europe and Asia, includes an area of 11,730 square miles, and borders Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Iran.

However, the territory where the Armenian people were formed thousands of years ago, that is, Historic Armenia, was much larger. It covered, in present day terms, the entire territory of the modern Republic of Armenia, northeastern Turkey (including Mt. Ararat), the northwestern corner of Iran, the western parts of Azerbaijan, and southern Georgia.

An estimated 10 million Armenians live in the world today. Of these, about three million inhabit the Republic of Armenia. The rest constitute the large Armenian Diaspora, with sizeable ethnic Armenian communities in Russia, the United States, France, Argentina, Canada, Australia and various countries in the Middle East. An estimated one million Armenians live in the United States today, including around 40,000 in the metro Detroit area.

The oldest uncontested mention of both Armenia and the Armenians in recorded history occurs toward the end of the sixth century BC. The gradual process of the making of the Armenian people had probably begun centuries earlier.

Almost all contemporary Armenians profess the Christian faith and they most proudly assert that theirs was the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as its state religion in the beginning of the fourth century AD. About 85–90 percent of Christian Armenians today are affiliated with the Armenian Church, which is autocephalous and is part of the small family of Oriental Orthodox Churches – with Copts, Syrians and Ethiopians. There are also Roman Catholic and Evangelical (or Protestant) Armenian Churches.

Armenians speak a distinct Indo-European language.

The Armenian Script and Medieval Manuscript Tradition

The monk Mesrop Mashtots created a unique alphabet for the Armenian language in the early fifth century AD, that is, about one hundred years after the formal Christianization of Armenia. This alphabet initially consisted of 36 letters; two letters were added around the time of the Crusades. This alphabet is still in use, and Mashtots remains a much revered figure among Armenians.

The creation of the Armenian alphabet precipitated a rich tradition of Armenian language translations and original works. The Bible was the first book translated into Armenian. Its translation was completed by 439 AD. This was followed by the translation of the writings of the early Church Fathers and original works penned by Armenian authors. These works were preserved, prior to the invention of printing and even sometimes after, through hand-copied manuscripts.

Despite the turbulence of Armenian history, about 25,000 complete Armenian manuscripts, written between the seventh and eighteenth centuries, have survived. Of these, around 17,000 are now stored at the Matenadaran or the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. About 2,500 of these manuscripts are illuminated.

The next two largest collections of Armenian manuscripts are found in the Library of the Armenian Catholic Mkhitarist Congregation on the isle of San Lazzaro off Venice and within the compound of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. Both collections consist of more than 4,000 complete manuscripts each.

In the United States, much smaller collections of Armenian manuscripts can be found at the University of California, Los Angeles, CA, the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum in New York, N.Y., the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, MD, the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum in Southfield, MI, and other renowned institutions.

Hakob Meghapat and the Earliest Armenian Printed Books

When Johannes Gutenberg developed the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, Armenians had long ceased having a state of their own. Their homeland was divided among rival Muslim empires, while the Church hierarchy and merchants involved in international trade acted as the people's leadership in the absence of native state structures.

Nevertheless, Armenian was one of the earliest languages in the world, in which books were printed. The Armenian alphabet was printed as a specimen as early as in 1486, while the first complete printed book in Armenian appeared in all likelihood in late 1512. This makes Armenian the seventeenth language in the world overall and only the second originating in Western Asia to be printed on the moveable type press (following Latin, German, Hebrew, Greek, Spanish, English, Italian, Czech, French, Dutch, Croatian Old Church Slavonic, Portuguese, Old Church Slavonic, Serbian Old Church Slavonic, Danish, and the Scots). To mark the 500th anniversary of this occasion, UNESCO has designated Yerevan as the 2012 World Book Capital.

Italy was the first foreign country to which German printers had taken their new invention, and by the sixteenth century, Venice had become the greatest center of printing in Europe. Eight of the seventeen Armenian titles published in the sixteenth century were printed in Venice, including the first five by Hakob Meghapat (Jacob 'Condemned for His Sins'), now acknowledged universally as the founder of Armenian printing.

Of the five or six books attributed to the press established by Meghapat, *Urbatagirk* (*The Book of Friday*) is now accepted as the oldest. It contains the confessions of Cyprien the Magus, as well as all manner of things to be avoided on Friday. It provides ways to bind and conquer the forces of darkness, which, many Armenians then believed, manifested themselves everywhere to plague lonely travelers.

Hakob's other books also cover a wide range of similar themes, like heroic folk tales, prayers, other spiritual verses, ritual instructions, astrology, medicine and popular songs, all thought to be of immediate interest and help for merchants and other travelers.

Armenian Printing in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe

After Hakob Meghapat's pioneering effort, Armenian printing progressed slowly, but steadily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Seventeen Armenian titles were printed until 1600; twenty-six, in 1600-1650; and over 135, in 1650-1700. The number of copies made for each edition also increased with the highest production run for a single edition in the seventeenth century reaching 8300 copies.

Most of this printing activity centered in Europe, with the Italian cities, particularly Venice and Rome, being the most important locations of Armenian printing in this period. However, Amsterdam and Marseille challenged their predominance after 1660.

The earliest Armenian presses functioned only for a few years; their operation was fraught with technical difficulties, financial instability, and Roman Catholic censorship. Some of the early Armenian printers descended from merchant families; others, were prominent churchmen. These printers, however, were dependent on the technical skills and professional-institutional organization of European artisans and enterprises. Financial support for these printing initiatives came from wealthy Armenian merchants active in the Diaspora. Indeed, a good part of these books – religious and lay – was intended for the consumption of Armenian merchants. Some of the books printed in Europe were also sent to the large Armenian markets in the East, particularly Constantinople, the Ottoman capital, and New Julfa, a suburb of Isfahan, the capital of Persia. The growing demand for Armenian books in the late seventeenth century eventually induced a number of non-Armenian printers and publishers to also enter the commercial market of producing Armenian-language editions.

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic Church not only censored Armenian-language and other books printed in Europe, it also used the Armenian type to preach its own doctrines among the Armenians. Indeed, Armenians became attracted to the Netherlands as a center of their printing activities because it was a Protestant country. The Armenian-language Bible was published in full for the first time in Amsterdam in 1666.

Armenian Printing in Constantinople

The constraints of Armenian history led to the initial flourishing of Armenian printing outside Historic Armenia, which was divided between the Ottoman and Persian empires during the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries.

The first Armenian printing press in Historic Armenia was actually established in 1771, over 250 years after Hakob Meghapart. However, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the first, albeit short-lived and discrete, attempts by Armenians in the East to set up printing presses if not in their own historical homeland, but at least in the urban centers of the two empires which ruled over Historic Armenia. Thus, not only was Armenian – after Hebrew – only the second Western Asian language in which a complete book was printed, Armenian craftsmen and their sponsors also played a pivotal role in bringing printing to the Ottoman and Persian empires, where the rulers frowned upon this new technology until the eighteenth century.

The first attempt to set up an Armenian press in Constantinople belongs to Abgar of Tokat, the second Armenian printer. With the approval of the Armenian patriarch, he printed six Armenian titles between 1567 and 1569. A century later, Eremia Chelebi Keomiurchian established his own printing house in Constantinople and printed two works in 1677-1678.

Armenian printing in Constantinople attained a more consistent character from 1698, when Grigor of Merzifon acquired the typefaces and part of Eremia's printing equipment and established his own press. Grigor became the first Armenian layman to make printing his sole profession and his business remained active for forty years. He also trained a generation of Armenian printers, among them Astvatsatur of Constantinople, whose family eventually operated a printing house for 150 years.

Indeed, since 1698, at least one Armenian title has been printed in Constantinople each year with only five interruptions – the years 1759, 1773, 1791, 1797 and 1916. For the first six decades of the eighteenth century, Constantinople was quasi-regularly the city where the largest number of Armenian titles was published every year, and its status

as “the World Capital of the Armenian Book” was only challenged occasionally by Venice during this period. Up to nine titles were printed annually in Constantinople throughout the eighteenth century. This rate of publication activity remained steady during the first half of the nineteenth century as well. The increase in Armenian titles printed by the Mkhitarist Congregation, however, made Constantinople cede the title of “the World Capital of the Armenian Book” to Venice for about nine decades, from the early 1760s to the mid-1840s. That said, it is important to mention that the Mkhitarist Congregation recruited most of its friars from Constantinople and other parts of the Ottoman Empire and also sold a large number of its books in Constantinople.

The Tanzimat reforms from 1839 stimulated Armenian cultural activity in Constantinople and the port city of Smyrna (now, Izmir). The number of Armenian titles printed in the Ottoman capital grew exponentially throughout the next few decades. By the mid-nineteenth century Constantinople had regained its status as “the World Capital of the Armenian Book” for a new span of 40 years. Thereafter, the fortunes of Armenian book publishing in Constantinople became hostage to political developments in the Ottoman Empire. Armenian printing stagnated during the repressive regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II, but rebounded immediately after the 1908 Revolution. It almost ground to a halt during the First World War, yet it was rejuvenated immediately after the Ottoman defeat. After Constantinople (renamed Istanbul in 1930) was integrated into the Turkish Republic established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Armenian cultural freedoms were curtailed, the total number of Armenian books published declined, although the city still remains an important center of Armenian-language book printing outside Armenia.

Armenian Printing in Venice

Venice in Italy holds a special place in Armenian printing history, and the 500th anniversary official celebrations of the first Armenian printed book were launched there in December 2011 in the presence of the President of Armenia.

Hakob Meghpart printed the first five or six Armenian titles in Venice. The second and third Armenian printers, Abgar of Tokat and Hovhannes Terzntsi, were also active in Venice in the sixteenth century. Moreover, there was renewed vigor after 1675, with even some Venetian typographers publishing Armenian books.

Nevertheless, Venice's place as one of "the World Capitals of the Armenian Book" is due to the legacy of the Armenian Catholic Abbot, Mkhitar of Sebastia, who moved his congregation to the island of San Lazzaro (Surb Ghazar, in Armenian) near the city in 1717. Since then, and almost exclusively through his efforts and those of his disciples, at least one Armenian title has been published in Venice annually, with only six exceptions during the years 1718-1758. In the early 1750s, Venice challenged Constantinople as the city where most Armenian books were printed and it soon surpassed the latter, maintaining a solid lead until the mid-1840s. Thereafter, even though the number of Armenian books printed by the Mkhitarists in Venice remained steady, and at times it even grew, it could not keep pace with the increasing number of books being published in Constantinople and other emerging centers of Armenian printing.

The Mkhitarists have published original works and translated titles in Armenian in various fields: religion; grammars of Armenian and other languages; Armenian, bilingual or trilingual dictionaries; textbooks; medieval and modern histories of Armenia and other nations; histories of Armenian literature; geography; maps; bibliographies and poetry. They have also issued a number of Armenian periodicals, the most famous being *Bazmavep* (Polyhistory), the oldest Armenian periodical still being published today. Launched in 1843, it is now a respected academic journal in Armenian Studies.

Many of these and other Mkhitarist cultural activities have been financed by Armenian merchants and philanthropists in the Diaspora.

Armenian Printing in Tiflis

Tiflis (since 1936, Tbilisi), the capital of Georgia, Armenia's northern neighbor, was annexed by Russia in 1801. Thereafter, Russia gradually conquered the Armenian-inhabited eastern parts of Transcaucasia (South Caucasus), ending in 1828. Under Russian rule, Tiflis became the administrative center of Transcaucasia, and many Armenians from other Transcaucasian regions moved there. They eventually constituted over one-third of the city's population, and many of its mayors in the late nineteenth century were native Armenians. The presence of this significant Armenian population and a wealthy Armenian class turned Tiflis into the most important Armenian cultural center in the late Russian Empire, a counterpart to Constantinople in the Ottoman realm.

The first Armenian book was printed in Tiflis in 1823. Armenian printing activity in the city grew noticeably from 1860 and increased dramatically after 1875. As Sultan Abdülhamid II curtailed Armenian cultural freedoms in the Ottoman Empire, Tiflis overtook Constantinople as "the World Capital of the Armenian Book" in the 1890s. After 1908, Armenian printing expanded again in Constantinople, and during the next decade, the two cities interchanged the honor of being "the World Capital of the Armenian Book" on a few occasions – mostly as a consequence of political upheavals in Ottoman lands.

The collapse of Russian Tsarism (1917), the establishment of independent, but short-lived Georgian and Armenian republics, and the eventual extension of Communist rule over the entire Transcaucasus limited Armenian cultural activities in Tiflis. The number of printed Armenian titles declined sharply, especially after the Transcaucasian Federation within the Soviet Union (of which Tiflis was the capital) was abolished in 1936. Many Armenian cultural figures left Tiflis for Soviet Armenia, and, in 1923, Yerevan turned into the new "World Capital of the Armenian Book."

It appears that Georgia's renewed independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) has not improved the fortunes of Armenian printing in Tbilisi to any noticeable degree, despite the fact that Armenians still constitute about seven percent of the city's population.

Other Armenian Printing Centers in Europe until the First World War

The turbulence of Armenian history dictated that no book would be printed in Historic Armenia until 1772—some 260 years after the first book was published by Hakob Meghapart. In the meantime, and up to the early 1920s, most Armenian books printed in the world appeared outside Armenia, extensively in Europe, but also in the Middle East, South Asia and North America. Stockholm, Suceava, Jassy, Djibouti and Singapore are among the surprising locations where the lone Armenian book appeared between 1512 and 1914. However, this section will focus on the more important centers of the same period.

Italy

In addition to Venice and Constantinople, Rome is the only other city in the world where Armenian books have been printed during each of the five centuries since the time of Hakob Meghapart. However, Rome never became an important center of Armenian book printing. The number of titles printed there regularly remained small, and they were associated overwhelmingly with the Roman Catholic Church. A handful of Armenian books were also printed in Livorno, Milan, and Padua in the seventeenth century.

The Low Countries

For about 60 years at the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Amsterdam was the center of Armenian printing. It attracted Armenians because the Dutch Republic, as a Protestant state, shielded them from Roman Catholic censorship. The first Armenian press in Amsterdam was established in 1660. After 1664, it was run by Archbishop Voskan Yerevantsi, who eventually accomplished the much cherished dream of printing the full Armenian Bible in 1666-1668. Voskan's press was later moved to Livorno (1669-1671) and Marseille (1672-1686). Between 1685 and 1718, a second Armenian press was set up in Amsterdam, administered this time by the Vanandetsi family of publishers. It is famous for printing the first Armenian map of the world and the first edition of the *History of Movses Khorenatsi*, "the Armenian Herodotus," both in 1695. In 1727, the Armenian typefaces of this press were bought by the Mkhitarists, who had just embarked upon their long and illustrious printing mission.

The Habsburg Empire

Armenian printing in the Habsburg Empire was totally tied to the activities of the Mkhitarist friars, who broke away from the congregation in Venice and set up a separate brotherhood in Trieste in 1772. The Trieste Mkhitarists embarked upon printing activities in 1776 and published around 80 Armenian titles until 1810. When Trieste was temporarily detached from the Habsburg Empire during the Napoleonic Wars, the Mkhitarist monks moved to Vienna, where they resumed their printing activities in 1811-1812. Thus Vienna turned into an important center of Armenian book publishing. The quantity of Armenian titles printed by the Mkhitarists in Vienna during the next century and beyond was less than their counterparts in Venice, but it included many important works in Armenian Studies. In 1887, the Vienna Mkhitarists also launched the academic journal *Handes Amsoreay*, which continues to be published today.

France

Although the first Armenian book was printed in Paris in 1633, and Voskan Yerevantsi's press operated in Marseille in 1672-1686, Armenian book publishing became a regular feature in France only in the nineteenth century. Over ten Armenian titles were printed in Paris in 1812-1828; and another 75 or so, in 1850-1866. Armenian printing also prospered briefly in Marseille after 1885, while Paris regained a permanent place among the major Armenian book-printing centers only from 1900.

England

Until 1914, Armenian printing was extremely limited in England with just over 35 titles being printed, the oldest going back to 1736. A handful of Armenian titles also appeared in Manchester and Oxford in the nineteenth century.

Malta

Malta briefly appeared among the centers of Armenian-language book printing when American missionaries set up their press there and printed nine Armenian and many more Armeno-Turkish titles between 1828 and 1831.

The Russian Empire

The first Armenian press in Russia was set up in the capital, St. Petersburg, by Grigor Khaldariants, a wealthy merchant from New Julfa, in 1781. Until his death in 1789, he printed over sixteen Armenian titles. His press was thereafter moved, first, to the Armenian settlement in Nor Nakhijevan, near Rostov-on-Don (1790-1795), and, subsequently, to Astrakhan on the Caspian shore (1796-1800). There were a number of short-lived attempts to revive Armenian book-printing in St. Petersburg in the nineteenth century, although the capital of the Romanovs did not become an important center in this domain until the mid-1870s. After the first Armenian printed book in Moscow appeared in 1819, Russia's historical capital very quickly established itself as the major center of Armenian book-printing in mainland Russia. Following the 1860s, however, Moscow's supremacy was at different times briefly challenged by Feodosiya (in Crimea, now part of the Ukraine), Nor Nakhijevan, and St. Petersburg.

Subsequent to the Russian imperial conquests in the Caucasus and Central Asia, Armenian books were also printed in Armavir, Pyatigorsk, Shamakhi, Batumi, Ashkhabad and Samarkand. In these newly acquired lands (and excluding the territory of Historic Armenia), only Baku can be described as an important center of Armenian book-publishing and that from the 1870s.

The Ottoman Empire and Post-Ottoman territories

In the Ottoman Empire, the port of Smyrna on the Aegean coast was the second most important center of Armenian book-printing after Constantinople. After an ephemeral attempt by Mahtesi Markos in 1759-1762, Armenian books were printed regularly in Smyrna from 1835. The third major center was the Armenian Convent of St. James in Jerusalem, where an Armenian printing press was established in 1833. About 25 Armenian titles were also printed in the monastery at Armash, near the town of Izmit, between 1863 and 1889; seven titles in Adapazari, in 1911-1914; and a few, in Bursa, Beirut, and Aleppo.

As modern Armenian nationalism burgeoned and became more assertive in the late nineteenth century, it clashed with the Ottoman authorities,

and, as a result, some of the Armenian printing activity of Ottoman-born Armenians was transferred to newly independent, post-Ottoman states (Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria), as well as to Cyprus and Egypt, which had been taken over by the British. In these lands, Varna, Cairo, and Alexandria were the most consistent publishing centers in the early 1900s.

Switzerland

Some of the Armenian opponents of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II established their base in Geneva, which eventually turned this Swiss city into yet another regular center of Armenian book-publishing from 1898 to 1913.

Persia

In Persia, Armenian printing was first attempted in New Julfa, the Armenian-inhabited suburb of Isfahan, in the seventeenth century. After a lull of almost two centuries, Armenian printing was re-launched on a more regular footing in New Julfa in 1877. Armenian books were also printed systematically in Tabriz from 1889 and, more intermittently, in Tehran from 1904.

India

Armenian printing first flourished in the British colony of India through the activities of a group of reform-minded Armenian merchants in Madras. About forty Armenian titles appeared in Madras between 1772 and 1818, including a number of groundbreaking political tracts and the first-ever Armenian periodical, *Azdarar*, in 1794. Thereafter, the torch of Armenian book-printing in India passed on to Calcutta (modern-day Kolkata), where the first short-lived attempt to set up an Armenian press had occurred in 1796-1797. Calcutta became a recurrent center of Armenian book printing from 1811 to 1853, and thereafter Armenian titles continued to appear there occasionally until 1888.

Printing in the Armenian Homeland up to the First World War

At the dawn of Armenian printing in the sixteenth century, the historical Armenian homeland was divided between the Persian and Ottoman empires. While Armenians were among the pioneers who established printing presses in both empires, their efforts were initially confined to major urban centers outside the Armenian-inhabited regions.

The first Armenian printing press in the Armenian homeland was set up under Catholicos Simeon I Yerevantsi in Etchmiadzin, the Holy See of the Armenian Church, then under Persian rule, in 1771. This press printed about fifteen books until Persian Armenia was conquered by Russia in 1828.

Under Russian rule, the Etchmiadzin press resumed its activity in 1833 and expanded after 1870, becoming one of the important Armenian book-publishing centers in the world. Armenian book printing also flourished in the late nineteenth century in Shushi, Alexandropol (modern-day Gyumri) and Yerevan. It was more limited in Elizavetpol or Gandzak (modern-day Ganje) and in Akhaltsikhe.

Armenian printing in the six Armenian-inhabited eastern vilayets of the Ottoman Empire and Cilicia also remained extremely infrequent. The first Armenian press in Ottoman/Western Armenia was established by the famous clergyman, Mkrtych Khrimian, in the monastery of Varag near Van in 1860. Some fifteen books were printed in Van until the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. The only other towns in these areas where the rare Armenian book was published until 1908 were Adana, Sivas, Kharpert and Trabzon. After 1908, Merzifon, Sivas, Giresun, and Antep also became centers of Armenian book publishing of limited importance.

Armenian Printing in Yerevan

The First World War caused sweeping changes and set the patterns which continue to regulate Armenian life today. In Eastern Armenia, changes were caused by the 1917 Russian Revolution, the collapse of the Tsarist imperial order, and its replacement by Soviet federalism, where Armenia became a constituent republic.

Yerevan, the capital of Soviet Armenia, now became the unchallenged "World Capital of the Armenian book," leaving both Istanbul and Tbilisi far behind. Although it was the administrative center of Eastern Armenia from the late Persian times, Yerevan had never before been an Armenian cultural center. Armenian printing began there in 1875, but, even inside the narrow confines of Eastern Armenia, Yerevan could never compete with Etchmiadzin (Vagharshapat) and was even overtaken by Alexandropol (now, Gyumri) in the 1890s.

Yerevan's fortunes improved after an independent Armenian republic emerged in 1918 and, more importantly, when it became the Soviet Armenian capital in 1920. The Soviet nationalities policy encouraged the blossoming of cultures in the national languages of the union republics, and the total number of Armenian titles printed in Yerevan jumped from about 20 in 1920 to close to 600 exactly a decade later. This preeminence has continued throughout the seventy years of Soviet rule in Armenia and during the last two decades of independence, which has followed Communism. From 1923, no other city has even remotely challenged Yerevan as the world's preeminent Armenian printing center. According to official statistics, 1370 Armenian and 266 foreign-language titles were published in Armenia in 2009, of which 1600 came out in Yerevan.

Unfortunately, the same Soviet nationalities policy, which was so beneficial to Yerevan, also caused the gradual decline and virtual demise of other established Armenian printing centers in the former Russian Empire – Moscow, Leningrad (St. Petersburg), Tbilisi, Baku, Nor Nakhijevan, Shushi, and even Alexandropol (renamed Leninakan in Soviet times). In the case of Etchmiadzin the restrictions were also precipitated by the Communist authorities' anti-religious policies, although the Holy See was allowed to have its own printing press again from 1961.

The period of independence since 1991 has not introduced any significant change in these patterns, except a revival of publishing activity occurring in Etchmiadzin.

Armenian Printing in the Post-Genocide Diaspora

In the case of the Ottoman Empire, the 1915 genocide of the Armenians and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923 put an end to all Armenian printing activity in modern Turkey, except in Istanbul.

Instead, a new global Armenian Diaspora emerged, consisting primarily of genocide survivors. Previously well-established Armenian printing centers like Venice, Vienna, Jerusalem, Paris, Boston, Cairo and Alexandria, even Istanbul, as well as New Julfa and Tabriz in Iran, now came to be seen as part of the new diasporan landscape. The same transformation can be applied as well to earlier Armenian printing centers of lesser importance – London, Geneva, Sofia, Bucharest, Athens, Nicosia, and others.

With the formation of new, post-genocide Armenian communities in the Arab countries of the Middle East and in South America, new centers of Armenian printing also emerged, notably Beirut, Aleppo, and Buenos Aires. In the second half of the twentieth century, migratory trends within the Armenian Diaspora led to the printing of Armenian-language books in Canada and Australia as well.

The rise and fall of Armenian printing activities within individual host-states of the Armenian Diaspora have also been affected by population flows within those states. For example, with the influx of Armenians living in Iran to Tehran, the latter overtook New Julfa and Tabriz, the earlier Armenian printing centers in the country, with respect to the number of Armenian books published.

Printing in Armeno-Turkish

Some books were printed in foreign languages, but in the Armenian script – mostly for Armenian readers, who had ceased using Armenian as their mother tongue and adopted the languages of their neighbors or the imperial powers under which they lived.

The first such example was an Armeno-Kipchak prayer book printed by the priest Hovhannes Karmatanents in Lvov, then part of Poland, in 1618. Kipchak was the language of the Tatars, and the Armenians for whom this book was printed had migrated to Poland from the neighboring Tatar khanate of Crimea.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a few books – again overwhelmingly religious in character – were printed in Armeno-Kurdish for Armenians living in their homeland, close to Kurds, in the Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces.

However, most books in this category are in Armeno-Turkish. The first such book was printed by Abbot Mkhitar in Venice in 1727. Thereafter, about 2,000 volumes were published in Armeno-Turkish in the next 260 years in about 50 different cities. Until the 1820s, Armeno-Turkish book-printing was carried out largely either in Constantinople or by the Mkhitarists in Venice, Trieste, and Vienna. Then, these centers were also joined by American missionaries, first in Malta and then in Smyrna. Indeed, up to the 1840s, most Armeno-Turkish printed books were either religious in character or were intended for language instruction.

From the 1850s, during the Tanzimat era, Constantinople forged ahead to be the undisputed center of Armeno-Turkish book-publishing as well. Not only did the quantity of Armeno-Turkish books printed every year increase, their topics also became varied, including translations of French and English classics. During the Abdülhamid II era, the number of Armeno-Turkish books printed also declined, and the topics they covered were restricted due to heavy censorship. However, Constantinople's leading position in this domain was not affected, as there was no challenge from Tiflis on this occasion – printing in Armeno-Turkish being almost exclusively an Ottoman Armenian tradition.

After the 1915 genocide, survivors carried the habit of printing in Armeno-Turkish to their new host cities, especially Aleppo and Beirut, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, to Cairo, Jerusalem, Buenos Aires, Marseille, New York, and Los Angeles. However, with the speaking of Turkish among the Armenians gradually dying out, the last Armeno-Turkish book was printed in Buenos Aires in 1968.

Between 1840 and 1947 about 100 periodicals also appeared in Armeno-Turkish. Some of these had parallel Armenian or Ottoman Turkish sections, and a few were Ottoman official provincial publications. Up to the First World War, more than half of these periodicals were issued in Constantinople, and a fewer number, in Adana, Antep, other Armenian-inhabited locations in the Ottoman Empire, Varna, and Egypt. In the post-genocide Diaspora, Armeno-Turkish periodicals survived until the late 1940s in Aleppo, Beirut, Jerusalem, Cairo, Marseille and the United States.

Armenian Printing in the United States

The first Armenian-language book was published in the United States in 1857. At that time, very few Armenians lived in the New World, and from 1857 to 1888, all Armenian printing activity in the USA was carried out by American missionaries from New York. About forty titles were printed in three decades, including various editions of the Bible, the New Testament, the Psalms, other religious literature, and at least four printings of the Armenian translation of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The missionaries then shipped these books to their various posts in the Ottoman Empire's Armenian-inhabited provinces.

After the beginning of Armenian mass migration to the USA in the late nineteenth century, the new migrants set up their own presses. The first was that of Haygag Eginian (Haykak Ekinian), again in New York in 1890. Books printed by Armenians covered more varied subjects. They continued to appear exclusively in New York, until Boston had its own Armenian press at the turn of the century, and quickly overtook New York as the center of Armenian printing in the USA. Boston would hold this honor for decades, although Armenian books were also printed in the twentieth century in other towns in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota. However, the difficulty of maintaining Armenian as a spoken and written language among the US-born generations resulted in these printing centers dying out within a few decades.

The situation in California is slightly different. Here, the first Armenian book was printed in Fresno in 1899. For decades, the number of books printed in California remained much less than those published in Boston. However, new migration trends after the 1960s changed the picture dramatically. The recent waves of Armenian immigrants prefer to settle in Southern California and have turned the Los Angeles area into the most important center of Armenian book printing in the USA at present.

Armenian Printing by Non-Armenian Publishers and Organizations

Armenian printing has mostly been an ethnic endeavor. Nevertheless, at few junctures since the sixteenth century, non-Armenian commercial publishers have also become involved in Armenian book-printing, albeit for relatively short periods. The first concerted such attempt occurred in Venice in the second half of the seventeenth century, when Giovanni Battista Povia, Michiel Angelo Barboni, Giacomo Moretti and Antonio Bortoli all ventured into the domain of printing and selling Armenian books.

Attempts by non-Armenian religious institutions to publish books in Armenian for proselytizing have been more focused and of longer duration. Of these the first rigorous effort was by the Roman Catholic Church as early as the late sixteenth century. After 1622, publishing Armenian books both for Roman Catholic missionaries and for Armenian Catholic converts was carried out through the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. In the eighteenth century, Armenian Catholic institutions, especially the Mkhitarists in Venice and Vienna, established their own printing presses, thus turning Armenian Catholic book-publishing into an "in-house" affair.

Protestant missionaries from the United States started publishing the Bible and other religious works in Armenian from the 1820s in Malta, Smyrna, Constantinople, New York, and later in other locations as well. These publications also helped pave the way for the formation of an Armenian Evangelical community in the mid-nineteenth century with its own printing presses.

In the early twentieth century, the Jehovah's Witnesses also began publishing Armenian books, mostly in New York. Seventh-Day Adventists and, more recently, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have also pursued the same path. However, their Armenian adherents remain very small to date and are not yet considered by other Armenians (including members of the national Church, Catholics and Evangelicals) as part of the Armenian mainstream.

Armenian book-publishing by non-Christian religious group has been minimal. The same can be said for secular ideologies, Communists excepted. Since Armenia's independence in 1991, however, international organizations and foreign embassies based in Yerevan have sponsored the publication of many Armenian books, explaining their core beliefs and expounding their activities.

Armenian Printing: Historians and Bibliographers

As the government of Armenia, together with Armenian organizations and Armenian Studies centers throughout the world, are marking the 500th anniversary of the first Armenian printed book, this quincennial should also be an opportunity to applaud the hard work of all scholars, who have been involved in documenting and researching the history of Armenian printing and the periodical press since the second half of the nineteenth century.

Among the pioneers of Armenian printing history a special place is held by Father Garegin Zarphanalian (1827-1901) and Father Arsen Ghazikian (1870-1932), both Mkhitarists from Venice, Leo (Arakel Babakhanian, 1860-1932), Teodik (Teodos Labchinchian, 1873-1928), Garegin Levonyan (1872-1940) and Rafayel Ishkhanyan (1922-1995). They were among the first to compile comprehensive bibliographies of printed Armenian books and attempt to write all-inclusive histories of Armenian printing. Dozens of other scholars, on the other hand, have focused their energies on uncovering the details of Armenian printing history in particular locations or during specific time-periods, or studying a certain genre of Armenian books. It is unfortunate that their names cannot be listed in the limited space of this booklet.

The most comprehensive effort to date to compile a full Armenian booklist has been made by bibliographers at the Armenian National Library. Four large volumes, all published in Yerevan since 1967, have tried to list all books printed between 1512 and 1920. A more limited bibliography of all Armenian books published until 1695 was compiled by Raymond H. Kévorkian (in French), and those between 1512 and 1850, by Vrej Nersessian (in English).

The cataloging and researching of the history of Armenian periodicals is an indispensable sub-field of Armenian printing history, and the contributions of Father Grigoris Galemkearian, Garegin Levonyan, Hovhannes Petrosyan, Amalya Kirakoyan and Manvel Babloyan stand out in this domain.

The most recent comprehensive bibliography of Armeno-Turkish books and periodicals was published by Hasmik Stepanyan in 2005.

Armenian Printing History: Digital Resources

The 400th anniversary of Armenian printing was celebrated with pomp and ceremony exactly one hundred years earlier, in 1911-1912, in both the Russian and Ottoman empires, where Armenians lived in large numbers. It was arguably the first nation-wide Armenian celebration of a cultural-historical landmark event in the Age of Nationalism.

The Armenian genocide and the Communist takeover in Russia just a few years later starkly changed the Armenian political landscape, but, under the conditions of Soviet-cum-independent statehood, holding anniversaries of important dates in Armenian history became commonplace in the twentieth century.

The quincennial of Armenian printing coincides with a period when publishing is moving fast into the digital age, and Armenians are trying to keep up with the changing times. A number of very significant initiatives are already underway, and the 500th anniversary celebrations may provide a new impetus to this trend.

The Hakob Meghapat project <<http://nla.am/arm/meghapat/index.htm>> is the digital version of the comprehensive bibliography of Armenian books compiled at the National Library of Armenia. In addition to the four volumes printed since 1967, the Armenian version of this website currently includes all materials printed in Armenian up to the year 1930. The English version remains confined, however, to publications until 1800.

Through the website of the National Library in Armenia <<http://nla.am/arm/>> internet users now also have free access to the digital versions of most Armenian books printed between 1512 and 1800, and many other rare books printed between 1800 and 1920. This process of digitization is ongoing, and the National Library of Armenia is trying to work with other Armenian Studies centers, including the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, to have open access, digitized versions of all early Armenian books as quickly as possible.

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