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## **AN ARMENIAN MANUSCRIPT IN JAPAN**

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Although there are few distinguished research works related to Armenian studies in Japan, Armenian philology remains unexplored in the Japanese academic world.<sup>1</sup> However, there is opportunity for further development of philological studies, especially paleography,

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<sup>1</sup> The Armenian language has been attracting the attention of Japanese linguists who work on comparative Indo-European linguistics. There are grammar books and textbooks written in Japanese. One of the most distinguishing examples is Shinichi Chigusa, *The Grammar of Classical Armenian Language (Koten Arumeniako Bumpo)*, Tokyo, 2001. The research project on church architecture in Armenia and other Caucasian and Anatolian regions organized by Shiro Sasano, honorary professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, made significant achievements. Dr. Sasano has also published a beautiful photo book of the Armenian church architecture; Shiro Sasano, *Pilgrimage to Armenia (Arumenia Junrei)*, Tokyo, 2019.

History is the most active field related to Armenian studies in Japan. I should mention Takayuki Yoshimura, who is the leading scholar in modern history of Armenia; Masayuki Ueno, the author of a number of articles and book chapters both in Japanese and English about the history of the Armenian community in Ottoman Empire; and Kosuke Nakada, a Byzantinist who studies Armenian sources and focuses on relations between the Byzantium and the Armenian Kingdom during the Bagratid era.

because of the strong interest in handwritten materials in both Japan and Armenia.

As a philologist who works on medieval Armenian literature and manuscripts, I must admit that I am particularly attached to handwritten materials. This attachment is not only due to my personal taste but also to the cultural background of Japanese society, where handwriting has traditionally been considered as a necessary skill in public education and official services. In Japan and most parts of East Asia where Chinese characters have been used in their written languages, handwriting is an important skill for learned people. People from these countries were required to write precisely and beautifully. Although such tradition is now fading in Japan, Japanese primary schools still have calligraphy, which teaches students how to write with traditional equipment such as brush and ink, as a compulsory subject. In 2019, when the new era name was adopted as a result of the enthronement of the new emperor, many Japanese people excitedly watched the new era name, written in traditional way, being shown at the press conference.

There is an episode which shows the importance of handwriting skills in Japan. When I was a graduate student, I had a part-time job at the Armenian Embassy in Japan. Embassies often receive invitations and greetings from the Japanese Imperial Court. Having received one of such letters, a diplomat from Armenia was surprised by the address and name in the letter, which was beautifully handwritten with brush and ink. He was further astonished when I explained that the Japanese government employs national public officers who are specially tasked to write special documents and letters. The diplomat half-seriously asked if I, as a taxpayer, was satisfied that a certain amount of the tax I pay is devoted to beautiful superscriptions on letters. Personally, I am completely satisfied with paying tax for this purpose, but this episode made me aware that such particular reverence for handwriting is not a common world standard.

On the other hand, manuscripts occupy an important place in Armenian culture. Needless to say, the Armenian script invented by Mesrop Mashtots is one of the symbols that represent the national identity of the Armenian people. In Yerevan, it must be hard to find a person who does not know where the Matenadaran is. I am sure that if you randomly ask someone walking on the streets in Tokyo about the location of the National Archives of Japan, you can never have an answer.

Indeed, love and devotion for preserving manuscripts are long-surviving traditions in Armenian culture. I noticed this aspect of Armenian culture while I was working on my PhD study on Nersēs Šnorhali, the famous Armenian Catholicos in the twelfth century and one of the most prolific writers in medieval Armenian literature. One of the colophons of manuscripts he wrote showed one example of how Armenian people preserved manuscripts as their most important property.

*Յետ յորունց ստացաւդաց և զիս յիշեսցիք ի Քրիստոս,  
զՆերսէս անարժան, զոլով եպիսկոպոս, և եղբայր կաթողի-  
կոսին Հայոց տեառն Գրիգորի, որ ստացաւ զսա զնիւք յաւարէն  
Յունաց ի վանորէից Հայոց, յորժամ ել թագաւորն Հոռոմոց  
յաշխարհն Կիւլիկեցոց, և առ զնա յիշխանէն Լևոնայ, որ էր  
հայ ըստ ազգի և հաւատոյ:*

After many owners (of this manuscript), please remember me in (the name of) Christ, Nersēs, the worthless one who is a bishop, and my brother Lord Grigor Catholicos, who acquired this (manuscript) with expense from Greeks who robbed it from (one of) Armenian monasteries, when the King of Romans came to the land of Cilicia and

took it from lord (*išxan*) Lewon, who is Armenian by his origin and faith. It occurred in the year 685 (1137).<sup>2</sup>

As seen, manuscripts were often looted by plunderers during wartime. It was considered a duty not only by ecclesiastical but also secular leaders to redeem those 'captured' manuscripts at their own expense. Many similar examples can be found in colophons of medieval Armenian manuscripts.<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to the efforts of Armenians who preserved and saved their cultural properties for generations, rich Armenian manuscript collections can be found both inside and outside of Armenia. Even in Japan, there exists one Armenian manuscript, which has been out of the attention of armenologists so far. It was brought to Japan by Akira Nakanishi (1928–1994), a Japanese who was known for his love for handwritten materials. He collected handwritten and printed materials in various languages from all over the world in his lifetime, and his collection was donated to the National Museum of Ethnology (Osaka, Japan) after his death. The Nakanishi Collection contains manuscripts, documents, and printed books written in 95 languages, including Armenian materials: seven printed books, three newspaper articles, one handwritten document, and one old manuscript dated 1662. It is a miscellany of biblical stories and excerpts from other texts with beautiful illustrations.<sup>4</sup> The manuscript was purchased by Nakanishi at

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<sup>2</sup> The text is from the colophon on Matenadaran MS4149. See Հայերեն ձեռագրերի հիշատակարաններ, աշխատասիրությանը Մաթևոսյանի Ա. Ս., Երևան, էջ 162.

<sup>3</sup> Other examples of “redeeming” books in medieval Armenian colophons were shown by David Zakarian in his online seminar at the Middle Eastern Center and Oriental Institute on 16 Feb. 2021. See Zakarian D., *Redeeming Books: Christian-Muslim Relations through the Colophons of Medieval Armenian Manuscripts*, 02.08.2022, <https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/events/mec-oi-redeeming-books-christian-muslim-relations-through-colophons-medieval-armenian>.

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see Database of Nakanishi Collection (in Japanese), 3 Aug. 2022, <https://htq.minpaku.ac.jp/databases/nakanishi/mojishu.jsp>.

an antiquarian bookshop in New York with a written expert opinion by a famous Armenian art historian Sirarpie Der-Nersessian. According to her statement, it is a rare example of a manuscript with illustrations produced in Hamadan.<sup>5</sup>

This valuable material has remained unexplored for decades because of the lack of philologists with knowledge of Armenian paleography. In 2016, Dr. Hidemi Takahashi, a Syriacologist from the University of Tokyo, rediscovered this Armenian manuscript from the Nakanishi Collection along with Syriac manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Finally, it has come under the investigation of an armenologist. I have just started to investigate this manuscript.

This Armenian manuscript has an interesting history. It was produced in Hamadan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and somehow brought to the United States. It came to Japan because of the love and enthusiasm of a Japanese collector and now is being investigated by a Japanese researcher. This is a valuable material in many senses. It contains various kinds of texts that attract philologists who work on medieval and early modern Armenian literature. As it is a rare example produced in Hamadan, it can be an interesting historical source for historians who study Armenian communities in Iran. Its beautiful artwork is worth being investigated by art historians. Therefore, I am seeking research funding for this project to enable me to collaborate with Armenian scholars. I hope that the love and respect for the tradition of handwriting connect the two peoples and strengthen their relations.

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<sup>5</sup> Nakanishi Collection MS C942365518, National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku), Osaka, Japan.

<sup>6</sup> Takahashi H., *Syriac Manuscripts in the Nakanishi Collection*, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan”, in: S. Brelaud, J. Daccache, M. Debié, M. Farina, F. Ruani and É. Villey (eds.), *Le calame et le ciseau: colophons syriaques offerts à Françoise Briquel Chatonnet*, Paris, 2021, pp. 255–276.

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## ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ՁԵՌԱԳԻՐԸ ՃԱՊՈՆԻԱՅՈՒՄ

### ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

**Հիմնաբառեր՝** բանասիրություն, պալեոգրաֆիա, ձեռագրեր, միջնադարյան հայ գրականություն, հայագիտություն, հայագիտությունը Ճապոնիայում, Ճապոնիայի ազգաբանության ազգային թանգարան, Նականիշիի հավաքածու, Ներսես Շնորհալի

Այս հոդվածը ներկայացնում է հեղինակի ընթացիկ հետազոտական նախագիծը Ճապոնիայի Օսակա քաղաքի Ազգաբանության ազգային թանգարանում գտնվող հայկական ձեռագրի վերաբերյալ: Թեև այս նյութը երկար տարիներ գտնվում է Ճապոնիայում, սակայն չի ուսումնասիրվել հայագետների բացակայության պատճառով: Այն կարող է նոր համագործակցության սկիզբ դառնալ Ճապոնացի և հայ գիտնականների միջև: