

# OLD ARMENIAN BOOKS IN THE ROYAL LIBRARY OF COPENHAGEN

Henning Lehmann

Distinguished colleagues. Ladies and Gentlemen!

I should like to introduce my report about old Armenian books in the Royal Library of Copenhagen through a couple of factual remarks about its background. As is well-known, in 2012 the 500 years anniversary of the first book printed in Armenian was celebrated all over the world. In Copenhagen - inspired by the Armenian Ambassador to Denmark, H.E. Hrachya Aghajanyan - the Royal Library took part in this world-wide activity. The Royal Library chose to do so through an exhibition of Armenian books printed in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries to be found in the Library's own collections.

Therefore, the Copenhagen exhibition of the summer of 2012 showed 19 Armenian books in all. After the exhibition I was asked to write an article in the scholarly yearbook of the library (published in Danish) about the 19 books. What follows will be a summary of the article and an accentuation of some of its main elements. First of all I should like to distribute a list of the 19 books. I should also be happy to leave one copy of my article. It is to some extent aimed at Danish readers; in this copy, however, an English translation has been added. In the context of a librarians' meeting it might be appropriate to add, that the Royal Library, of course, like libraries all over the world, has been active in the processes of digitalizing and putting into service the possibilities of modern information technologies, and so, in principle at least, it was decided, that whenever, in 2012 and 2013, I had given my description of the books (in the chronological order of their years of publishing), the library would take them through the procedures of photographing and digitalizing. I am not a librarian, nor, indeed, technically trained, and I have not in detail acquainted myself with the processes that followed after my work. It seems, that particular organizational or librarian facts have caused that the books have not all immediately been made accessible in digital form. I am not, however, the person to whom questions about that part of the procedures and techniques and librarian decisions should be addressed!

Before turning to my comments on the Copenhagen collection it might be natural to give one remark on the academic history of Denmark. The oldest university of Denmark, that of Copenhagen, was founded in 1479. During its first centuries, and even to-day, it has had no established tradition of Armenian studies, so it is impossible to point to such a factor as the main reason behind the existence of the Copenhagen collection, which - obviously - cannot claim to have been founded on an academic, armenological basis.

Therefore it is necessary to look for other reasons in order to explain the presence of the Armenian books in the Danish capital. I shall return to one of the very practical factors, viz. the activities of fairly well-to-do Danish book collectors of the 18th century, but also briefly hint at a couple of academic figures that are relevant for sketching the outline of the collection, viz. Theodore Petraeus, Danish armenologist of the 17th century, and

Friedrich Mӓnter, bishop, church historian, and orientalist of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Here I shall mainly concentrate on three points:

1. I shall give a few comments on what may - very briefly - be called the Armenian context of the publication of the books, as they now appear to us. Some of the questions raised and answers given here will indeed be well-known to Armenian book historians; in some cases, however, the Copenhagen collection may add a few interesting data.
2. My second group of observations will deal with questions of editors, students, and owners of the books, where in some cases the Copenhagen copy of a certain book may give interesting sidelights, not only on Armenian studies of the time, but on relations between Armenian and Western institutions and authorities, and even on Armenians dealing with their own history and their approach to contemporary problems.
3. Finally, as the third and fairly brief group of observations I shall point at certain details, some of them of a technical kind, some of them about problems of dating or about Armenian customs as to book edition or about the position of merchant families and printing houses.

To illustrate the Armenian context we may look at the first two pages of the oldest book, i.e. the Armenian psalter, printed in Venice in 1565 (book No. 1). Here we find two remarkable engravings of the principal character on the Armenian side, viz. Abgar Tokhatetsi, first humbly asking Pope Pius IV (who is surrounded by some of the most important cardinals) for permission to establish a printing press for the purpose of printing the book in question, or, maybe, Armenian books more generally speaking; and on the next page Abgar repeats his humble gesture, now to the Doge of Venice.

To my mind the most important fact forming the background of these scenes, is that Abgar was sent to Rome by the Armenian Catholicos of \_djmiacin, Mikayel Sebastatsi.

About a hundred years later, it was again an Armenian Catholicos, now Yakob IV, who caused a printing house to be established in Amsterdam, not least in order to have, finally, a full Armenian Bible made available, produced through the new technique, that of book printing.

In other words, a fundamental observation is, that the leading figures in the Armenian Church were aware of the new possibilities and the necessity of using them, not necessarily to supplant the old technique of handwriting, but to exploit the new technique in order to supply clergy and lay people with copies of the most important books, esp. such books as were in frequent, maybe daily, use in churches or elsewhere, and I think it may be true to maintain that among churches of the East, the Armenian Church played a pioneering role in this cultural respect.

This observation immediately calls for two or three additional remarks; first: to an Armenian Catholicos of the 16th and 17th centuries, the first Western authority to turn to in order to be able to master a new Western technique, would naturally be the Vatican. But, however open and welcoming and obliging the pope and his cardinals may have been (which is obviously the message of the first picture), the Roman Church also saw the possibilities of extending its influence in the East, an endeavour which was all the more

relevant considering the fact that through reformation movements the influence of the pope was, just at that time, being curtailed in northern and western parts of Europe.

Seen in this light book No. 2, chronologically speaking, is highly important, being an Armenian translation from Latin of the documents dealing with Pope Gregory XIII's calendar reform. To my mind it is remarkable that this translation was printed as early as in the second year after the reform, the year of which is 1582.

I shall not go into any detail about the history of how the Armenians got their first printed bible, the Oskan Bible, all the less so, since the Royal Library of Copenhagen does not have a copy of this bible, printed in Amsterdam in the 1660s. Even then it is natural to make a few observations related to the processes leading to this important publication. Later on I shall return to some of the discussions that followed.

The crucial problem met by the Armenians in the West, when preparing an edition of their bible, was the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church, that its Latin Bible, the Vulgate, was the authoritative bible text. And this was a point, that was placed as a high ranking item on the agenda of Rome, not least because of the demand of the reformed churches in northern and western Europe to have bibles in their vernacular languages based on the Hebrew and Greek originals of the Old and New Testament.

Seen from inside the Vatican the most important event - or rather chain of events - was the Council of Trent, which, in fact, had three sessions - from the 1540s till the 1560s. I cannot here go into the internal problems of the Catholic Church as to the combination of the understanding of authority and the establishment of a satisfactory text - culminating first in the *Sixtina* of 1590, which, because of textual errors, had to be replaced by the *Clementina* of 1592.

In brief, it may be true to say that the Roman Catholic Church of the first important decades of Armenian initiatives of printing and publishing was an institution showing more than one face, which may have caused particular difficulties for those negotiating "the Roman case" over against representatives of a differing bible text, the representatives of which showed the utmost reverence for their text, viz. the old Armenian Bible of the 5th century.

For the Armenians, of course, considered a proper and right publishing of the Bible to be a printed edition of the classical Armenian version made by the Holy Translators, and it is usually considered a necessary step, to some extent caused by the conflict hinted at, that, finally, the Oskan Bible was printed outside the Roman sphere of influence, viz. in Amsterdam, i.e. in an important city in a reformed country. On the other hand Oskan and his collaborators and successors in more than one point paid respect to the Vulgate - too much so, according to some observers, as we shall see in a moment.

Before leaving the questions of theology and authority, not least in judging and handling the biblical texts, it might be relevant to ask: don't the many editions of one biblical text, the Psalms of David (no less than 4 out of the 19 books), surprisingly blur the picture of the obstinacy of the Romans. Two things should at least be taken into account. First: the Psalter had so to speak a life of its own, not only as part of the bible, but as an important book, both in the liturgy of the churches and for purposes concerned with individual piety and edification. Thus it was a book much needed, as were the Hymn-book

(the Երարակո՛ւ, book No. 4) and the Breviary (books Nos. 16-17). Second: in the Vulgate the Psalms are transmitted in two different versions, one of which is designated “according to the Hebrews”. So here, two different readings are so to speak already “authorized” by a tradition inside the Roman Church.

One important element - outside the field of church history - should be taken into account, viz. that 17th century Amsterdam was a flourishing city of trade; quite a few Armenian merchants were therefore active here, considering Amsterdam the northwestern end of the trade route, which had its eastern beginning in New Julfa (Isphahan) - or maybe even further east; and a thriving Armenian congregation had emerged in Amsterdam. In a short while we shall see that the Amsterdam Armenians were also aware of political realities of northern and western Europe.

In fact, the great number of Armenian books produced were - seen from Amsterdam or Marseille or Livorno or Venice - intended for export, mainly to the harbour of Smyrna, from where the books were distributed into the Armenian inland.

Having taken as our starting point initiatives by the \_djmiacin Catholicossate and responses by authorities of the Roman Church, it might be natural next to point to the importance of the Armenian Patriarch in Constantinople for some of the books printed in that city, where on the other hand, around 1700, his counterpart and adversaries would often be Roman Catholic missionaries, not least from the Society of the Jesuits. The most important Constantinople profile to be met with in the 19 books of Copenhagen is Yakob Nalean, patriarch around the middle of the 18th century and author of book No. 19, the Commentary on Gregory Narekatsi’s *Prayers*, published in 1745 (or 1748).

It could be added that just at the beginning of the 18th century the Ottoman Sultan seems to have seen his advantage in showing a certain liberality in relation to permitting Christian books to be printed, maybe in the hope of nourishing the conflict between the Apostolic and the Romanizing Armenians of Constantinople.

The edition of Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, Constantinople 1700 (book No. 12), e.g., is due, no doubt, to a Roman interest in spreading Catholic devotional literature, whereas Gregory Narekatsi’s *Prayers* (book No. 17) is published in 1701 by the printing house of Astowacatur Dpir, one of the famous printers on the “Apostolic Armenian” side. Indeed, Gregory’s *Prayers* had been published more than once during the centuries; in Copenhagen only the 1701 Constantinople edition is present.

About the fourth Constantinople book (No.18: John Chrysostom’s *Homilies on the Gospel of John*) the idea has been forwarded that the printed version may be a counter-stroke to Roman missionary initiatives as those just referred to. John Chrysostom, of course, was one of the Greek fathers of the Old Church very early translated into Armenian and transmitted in a great number of manuscripts over the centuries and can therefore be considered as belonging to the classical treasure house of Armenian devotion and theology.

Individuals outside the circle of ecclesiastical office-holders could be active, too. E.g. important members of the Sherimanean family of merchants are responsible for the initiative of printing the collections of sermons in books Nos. 14 and 15. The Sherimaneans are usually referred to as being Roman Catholic, strongly influenced by the Jesuits. To

my mind it is the more interesting that they took the initiative of publishing sermons by Dominican brethren of the 15th century (book No. 15: the homilies by Bartholomew and Peter Aragon). Would they emphasize that what we might call “Armenian Catholicism” was an old and well-established phenomenon, not only linked with Jesuit activities of their own time, the 17th-18th centuries? Step‘anos Step‘anian, the author of book No. 14, belonged to the Armenian diaspora of Poland.

Before turning from those responsible for the very publication of the books, it might be worthwhile mentioning that the highly interesting volume by Arak‘el from Tabriz on Armenian history of his own time (book No. 9) was instigated by Oskan, and one short remark at least should underline that in all Armenian quarters there was an interest in publishing “classics” of Armenian literature, not only Gregory Narekatsi, but also Movses Khorenatsi (cf. books Nos. 8 and 11) and Nerses J̄nnohali (book No. 3).

Now I turn to what might be called the secondary gallery of persons, whose traces can be seen, sometimes just faintly, the gallery of owners, readers, commentators, and researchers.

It might be worth mentioning that only one of the 19 books was donated directly to the Royal Library - or at that time more correctly: “the King’s library”. This is true about one of the copies of the 1664 Psalter (book No. 5), which was donated in 1666 by Theodore Petraeus to Frederik III, the Danish king, thanking him for support.

The second copy of this book, now in Copenhagen (book No. 6), was first donated to another princely addressee, the Elector of Brandenburg, Friedrich Wilhelm. Here a very fine, printed text of dedication is signed by Karapet Vartabed, head of the Armenian congregation in Amsterdam and editorially responsible for this Psalter. This inscription shows that the Armenians of Amsterdam (as hinted at above) were well aware of the importance of other rulers and potentates in Europe than the Roman pope.

There is no obvious explanation why this book is now in Copenhagen. The same negative statement may be given for a number of the books. However, in some cases there are traces of former owners, such as e.g. George Whiston, the English editor of Movses Khorenatsi’s *History*, and Charles J̄tienne Jordan, active in Berlin in the early decades of the 18th century.

From later decades of the 18th century we know of certain very active book collectors in Copenhagen. Count Otto Thott, not least - or his agents - were famous - or dreaded - all over Europe for their activities in relation to book auctions. After Thott’s death the Royal Library bought a fairly great number of his books. As, however, Thott usually placed no owner’s stamp in his books, their provenance is difficult to trace.

Let me round off this part of my presentation through referring to one of the users of one of the books. I am referring to the 1695 first edition of Movses Khorenatsi’s *History of the Armenians* (book No. 11). In the Copenhagen copy are added on the first pages a fairly great number of variant readings to be found in a Lipsian manuscript; and this collation is made by the famous armenologist Maturin Veyssi re de la Croze, French-reformed librarian in Berlin in the early decades of the 18th century. He was the author of the designation “queen of versions” for the old Armenian Bible, and he was one of the critics of, what he considered to be Oskan’s much too humble attitude to the Romans - and

their Vulgate. Therefore, presumably, his collation indirectly reveals a criticism of the editors of the 1695 Movses, the Amsterdam Vanandec'i printers, for not having chosen the best possible manuscript material as basis for their text, having e.g. omitted the Lipsian manuscript.

(In my article I add some further observations on the Movses-reception of the early 18th century, both in the West and in the East. Here I shall not go into that matter, but turn to my concluding remarks.)

Of course, any collection of books, large or small, invites to consider a number of subjects, such as e.g. the history of illustrations, bindings, printing houses etc. In some cases also insights into the history of Armenian language can be obtained. I must leave out my observations on such matters, including the ascertainment of the value of the colophons, which have taken over a number of characteristics of the colophons of Armenian manuscripts, and are, indeed, often important for establishing the actual date of the finishing of the printing proces.

As mentioned it might be worthwhile to refer to two Danish academics, Theodore Petraeus (of the 17th century) as donator of book No. 5, the Armenian Psalter, to the Danish king, and bishop Friedrich Mønter, who acquired in 1812 the old Armenian grammar (book No. 7). As I shall comment on these two figures later on this week at the conference of the AIEA, I shall leave out any further explanation about the two orientalists here - and just conclude, modestly, about the Danish side of my topic: As mentioned already, the 19 books do not testify to a continued and glorious Danish armenological tradition. Be that as it may, I hope the presentation of the books have illustrated some of the lines of connection between Armenia and various centres of the West and some of the remarkable Armenian contributions to the history of the printed book, and the inclusion by Danish book collectors of such treasures in their libraries, and I thank you for your attention.