

ԲԱՆԱՍԻՐԱԿԱՆ**THE GENRE OF THE GRAՂAJK' IN ARMENIAN MANUSCRIPTS****Abstract**

This article presents the main characteristics and peculiarities of an Armenian medieval literary genre, the *graՂajk'* which is found in Armenian manuscripts. Occurring in either prose or verse form, this genre has a number of stable features: they are short works, with a specific set of themes, addressees, and particularities in their usage of certain common words and phrases. *GraՂajk's* were aimed to be placed before (and attached to) pastoral decrees or letters (*kondaks*), addressed to the Catholicos, a priest, a scribe, a philosopher, a layman, or others. The genre of *graՂajk'* has a number of further commonalities with another medieval literary genre – the colophon.

1. Introduction

The Armenian literary tradition is well preserved thanks to a large number of manuscripts stored in the Matenadaran – Institute named after Saint Mesrop Mashtots' in Yerevan, which has the greatest collection, as well as in the Monastery of St. James under the auspices of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, in the Mekhitarist Congregations of Vienna and Venice, to name but a few.¹ Among many other things, these manuscripts attest to a distinctive genre in medieval Armenian literature which is often referred to as *graՂajk'*, the general name for short anonymous texts. In this regard it is worth noting that in the past the *graՂajk'* used to be considered a subgenre;² however, as a medieval literary type with its clear artistic, thematic, and structural features and style, in the present writer's opinion it should be classified as an individual genre.³

GraՂajk's are relatively short works containing anything between several lines or several pages⁴ of thematically similar texts. They were composed as prefaces, to be attached to the beginning of letters, papers, proclamations, colophons and other writings. *GraՂajk's* can usually be found in groups with one common title, for example, in manuscript M 8030 (1341), under the general title *GraՂaj (sic)*, there are *graՂajk's* addressed to a priest (4 *graՂajk's*), a bishop (2), a landlord (1), a merchant (1) a baron and a rider (1).⁵

These texts are usually anonymous, but surprisingly the authors of some *graՂajk's* are known. The 13th-century poet Yovhannēs Erznkats'i, for example wrote *graՂajk's*, which can be

¹ See Abrahamyan, 1973, 7-8, Coulie, 2014, Coulie, 2020.

² See Dolukhanyan, 2012, 101.

³ This article also adds and corrects one of our previous articles based on new facts: See Khach'atryan, 2018.

⁴ See MS M 8294 (17th century), 104v-107r.

⁵ MS M 8030, f. 422v-424r. All manuscripts are cited according to the system adopted by the *Association internationale des études arméniennes* (see Coulie, 2014).

found in manuscript M 652 (15th century).⁶

The present, introductory paper will briefly describe the genre and its main features so as to make a wider audience, and especially those readers that cannot read modern Armenian, aware of its existence. Therefore, an in-depth analysis and problematization do not fall within the scope of this contribution.

2. The Characteristics of the Genre of *Grarajk*⁷

Like all other genres of medieval Armenian literature, *grarajk*'s have stable features and qualities.

The first recognisable feature of *grarajk*'s is their theme: *they* are addressed to individuals playing certain roles in society, e.g. the Catholicos, a priest, a king, a soldier, a scribe and other figures of authority or repute. They contain mainly expressions of homage and praise: many epithets and comparisons can be found in *grarajk*'s which were used to enhance the aesthetic qualities of the text. The following example is a short *grarajk*' dedicated to a philosopher:

Փիլիսոփայի

Աստուածային ձեռքին օծեալ եւ նորին իմաստութեամբ լցեալ երգարան ամենահանճար Հոգոյն, քաղցրաբարբառ եւ բարեհամբաւ, քաղցր յիշումն մտաց իմոց, սիրելի եղբայր եւ տէր ով որ է⁷:

For the philosopher

A Songbook of the wisest Spirit, blessed by God and filled with His wisdom, honey-tongued, with a good reputation, with a sweet memory in my thoughts, beloved brother and lord **whoever he is** (= the name of the addressee).

The second important characteristic consists of certain peculiar usages of otherwise common words or phrases in this genre. Since the *grarajk*' is a kind of preamble for another text (letters, *kondaks*, edicts, etc.), its authors often use relative expressions or formulae instead of the real names of the addressees, containing indefinite and relative constructions such as այսինչը “so-and-so”, այս անուն “this name”, անուն որ է “his name is”, ով որ է “whoever he is...”, ով որ լինի “whoever he be”, ֆլան “flan” (or ֆիլան), meaning “such and such a person” (Malxaseants⁸, 1945, 625). In other instances, they just have a spare place left for the name. The names of the addressees were supposed to be added by the user of the *grarajk*'.

The former practice, attested in the text quoted above, can also be found in the following example:

Եպիսկոպոսէ մեղադրանք

Պարոն խոնայ ով որ է առաքինի,
Բոլոր հաւատք գործիք բարի,
Մեծահամբաւ ի յաշխարհի,
Որ այլ չկայ բեզ նմանի...⁸

⁶ MS M 652, f. 75v-77v: «Ազգմունք նորին Յոհաննու Ըզրնկեցոյ (= Երզնկացոյ) ասացեալ է» (“Notices written by Yovhannēs Erznkats‘i’): the following general title contains three *grarajk*'s.

⁷ MS M 3072 (17th century), f. 304v.

⁸ Ibid., f. 307v.

Accusation by the bishop

Mr. **Whoever he is** virtuous *khōchay* (merchant)

All your deeds are good with great faith,
With a great reputation in the world
And there is no one like you.

Whilst such expressions are typical of the genre of *grarajk*, they do not in themselves constitute a singular defining element of the genre, since such formulae occasionally occur in colophons⁹ and poems as well. For example:

Ո՛վ (այս անուն) դու իմ որդեակ,
Բարձրուղէ եւ գերունակ,
Ուրախաւար սիրո բաժակ,
Քո ծընողաց սիրուն զաւակ¹⁰:

O, (**this name**), you are my son,
Tall and excellent,
A cup full of joy and love,
A beautiful child of your parents.

Grarajk's can be written in either verse or prose. The *grarajk* found in manuscript M 597 (y. 1737), for example, is dedicated to loved ones, and is composed in prose. For example:

Շարադրանք ի վերայ սիրելեաց
Նուաստագոյն ծառայ Քրիստոսի այս անուն, ժամանեցի բազմակարօտ ըղծիւ, բարեւ
յոյժ յոյժ եւ համբոյր սրբասէր, առ սիրելոյն իմոյ ի Քրիստոս, եղբօրդ իմոյ նազելոյ այս անուն...¹¹

Composition about loved ones

By (**this name**) the hindermost servant of Christ, let it reach with great desire, with a warm greeting and a virtuous kiss my beloved and excellent brother in Christ (**this name**)...

Interestingly, this is actually an independent text rather than being attached to a different one.

Those authors who are accustomed to writing poems often chose the verse form instead, making the text more aesthetically pleasing and picturesque, so that the beginning of the letter would be more emotional, informative and accurate. For the most part, *grarajk*'s in verse are monorhymed. Consider, for example, the following *grarajk* dedicated to a layman:

Աշխարհականի
Ո՛վ եղբայր իմ սիրական,

⁹ MS M 2335 (1476, 15th century), f. 181r (see. Mat'evosyan, 1988, XVIII, Harut'yunyan, 2016b, 49-50), MS M 3461, f. 43r. Colophons usually include real names (see Harut'yunyan, 2016b, 47-72), while generic expressions like "this name" were merely placeholders to be substituted later by the scribe.

¹⁰ See Harut'yunyan, 2016a, 218.

¹¹ MS M 597, f. 216r-217v.

Տեսլեամբ պայծառ ես գովական,
 Որդիք ունիս դու անմահան,
 Ժառանգ լինին նոքա ի տան...¹²

For a layman

O my beloved brother,
 you are so beautiful in your appearance,
 you have incomparable sons,
 they are the heirs of your house.

Some versified *grarajk*'s contain initial acrostics, which form the name of the author, e.g. «Ի ԹՈՒՄԱՅԷ Ա.» (FROM TUMA)¹³ or «ԳՐԻԳՈՐ» (GRIGOR):

Գովեալ գլուխ Արշակունի, քանոն ոգոյ բանականի,
 Րամեալ ազգիս մեր Աբեթի, Լուսաւորչին ըստ Գրիգորի,
 Ի յարմատոյ Լուսաւորչին, համանման միշտ անթերի,
 Գանձ հոգեւոր մեզ կենդանի, ջահըդ լուսոյ եաւթնարփի են:
 Ով սրբազան հայր հրաշալի, նման թոռանց Լուսաւորչի,
 Րամեալ լըման փոքրիկ հօտի, հուլիւղ |99ր| քաջ յետ Քրիստոսի...¹⁴

Praiseworthy leader Arshakuni, balanced with a rational spirit,
 Gathering our nation of Jabet, like Grigor Lusaworich',
 From the tribe of Lusaworich', like him always perfect,
 A living spiritual treasure for us, your torch of light is of seven suns,
 O wonderful Holy Father, like the grandchildren of Lusaworich',
 Collecting your little flock, brave pastor after Christ...

The genres of *grarajk*'s and colophon have certain commonalities, as already pointed out above.¹⁵ Most manuscripts have colophons, which constitute a separate literary genre in medieval Armenian literature. Colophons are of great historical value, since they contain information about manuscripts, medieval writing centers, miniature and other schools, about the political, cultural, social life of the Armenian people, and historical events.¹⁶ Usually, colophons were written at the end of a manuscript. They may, however, also occasionally be found at the end of long sections of a text or appear on the margins. The first Armenian colophons were likely written in the 5th century.¹⁷ In the early Middle Ages, manuscript colophons were relatively short texts, containing only a few lines; in the course of time, however, they grew ever longer. As Avedis Sanjian noted (Sanjian, 1969, VII):

¹² MS M 3072, f. 313r.

¹³ MS M 8294, f. 94r-96r.

¹⁴ Ibid., f. 98v-99r.:

¹⁵ See Khach'atryan, 2019.

¹⁶ See Sirinian, Buzi, Shurgaia, 2016.

¹⁷ See Mat'evosyan, 1988, V-XXV, 1-9.

The authors of the Armenian colophons developed a unique tradition in that they did not confine themselves to brief statements concerning the circumstances of the production of individual manuscripts. In the process of providing these essential data they also recorded contemporary information on a broad range of subjects which are of great interest to Armenological research. They also provided eyewitness or contemporary accounts of historical events which transpired during the production of the manuscripts.

Like *grarajk*'s, colophons may be written in prose or verse, and most colophons in verse exhibit end rhymes¹⁸ and have acrostics, usually spelling out the name of the author of the colophon, the name of the scribe¹⁹ or of the recipient, *e. g.* the colophon found in manuscript M 8570 (1338, «ՎԱՀԱՆԻ»), “By Vahan”).²⁰

Colophons commonly start with a *փառք*, that is a segment dealing with the glorification of the Trinity; this segment, it would appear, is a *Grarajk*' or a preface to the main text of the colophon. The *փառք* was often copied verbatim from the colophons of other manuscripts and consists largely of formulae (see Sirinian, 2014, 75-85). In this part, the scribe expresses his gratitude to God for having successfully completed the manuscript. It usually contains one of the following expressions: «Փառք ամենասուրբ երրորդութեանն» (“Glory to the Most Holy Trinity...”), «Շնորհիւ Աստուծոյ սկսայ եւ ողորմութեամբ նորին կատարեցաւ» (“By the grace of God I have begun and through His mercy [this copy] was completed”) as shown exemplarily in the *փառք* of colophons of manuscripts M 7851 (1691) and M 8088 (1684).²¹ On these *փառք* segments, the Armenian codicologist A. Mat'evosyan wrote: “With a combination of ‘glories’, it is sometimes possible to reveal the kinship of the colophons, and therefore, the kinship of the manuscripts. They include pictorial thoughts, parabolic speech, aesthetic comparisons, apocryphal interpretations, rarely used words, etc.” (Mat'evosyan, 1984, 10).

Since the *grarajk*' is usually fixed at the beginning of a letter, and over time is assimilated into the latter, it is usually deprived of its status as a separate genre (see above) and consequently considered to be merely a part of the letter. The colophon, by contrast, is usually considered an independent genre, though it never appears separately from the manuscript. With these facts in mind, it appears that both genres are not independent: the colophon is an integral part of the manuscript, and the *grarajk*' is an integral part of the letter. *Grarajk*'s were formed during the development of colophons memoirs, so both exhibit various formal, artistic, stylistic and even partly thematic commonalities. In the end, both *grarajk*'s and colophons are types of letter: they differ in that colophons address only the unknown reader, whereas *grarajk*'s usually address specific people – Catholicoses, kings, bishops, priests, soldiers, scribes, etc.

According to the catalogues of Armenian manuscripts²², over 130 Armenian manuscripts contain *grarajk*'s from the 13th-18th centuries.

¹⁸ Colophon by the scribe: see MS M 1153 (1659), f. 310r.

¹⁹ Colophon by the scribe: see MS M 3688 (1647), f. 205r.

²⁰ MS M 8570, f. 1v.

²¹ MSS M 7851, f. 251r, M 8088, f. 238r.

²² <http://serials.flib.sci.am/matenagitutyun/test/index.html>

3. Conclusion

To summarise, between the 13th and 18th centuries, the new (albeit not independent) genre of *grarajk* was formed and developed in Armenian manuscripts, enriching medieval Armenian literature.

Grarajk's are relatively short works written in either verse or prose. They can be addressed to the Catholicos, a king, a soldier, a scribe, a priest, a philosopher, a layman, and other persons, but the addressees are usually referred by generic expressions rather than by their real names.

The genre displays some parallels and interrelations with colophons, but at the same time retains unique features that require further research. Notably, a detailed analysis of all texts is necessary to find out if they first appeared in the 13th century, or rather existed in an earlier period, and to detect the peculiarities of their development over the centuries.

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