THE BIBLES IN THE DIGITAL AGE[*]

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The printing of the first Armenian Bible by Voskan Yerevantsi in Amsterdam (1666–1668) marked a milestone in Armenian cultural and printing history, elevating Armenian book production to an international level. Although early Bible printings were few, they laid the foundation for the significant growth seen in the 19th century, thanks to advances in printing technology. Each edition reflected artistic and technical innovation, underscoring the Armenian community's resilience in preserving its heritage.

Despite existing bibliographic lists, such as Armen Khachatryan's 2016 compilation of 129 Armenian and Armenogram-Turkish Bibles, discoveries continue to emerge, highlighting the field's ongoing relevance and the need for further study. The research emphasizes the importance of digitizing these works and creating a comprehensive Bible database, which would unify digital versions from libraries and private collections worldwide, ensuring broader accessibility and preservation of this rich tradition.

Առաջին հայերեն Աստվածաշնչի տպագրությունը, որը իրականացվեց Ոսկան Երևանցու կողմից Ամստերդամում (1666–1668 թթ.), նշանակալի իրադարձություն էր հայ տպագրության պատմության մեջ: Սկզբնական

շրջանում Աստվածաշնչի տպագրությունները սակավ էին, սակայն ավելի ուշ դրանց քանակն աճեց, իսկ 19-րդ դարի երկրորդ կեսին հասավ գագաթնակետին: Աստվածաշնչի յուրաքանչյուր նոր հրատարակություն արտացոլում էր տպագրության ոլորտում առկա ձեռքբերումները:

Չնայած գոյություն ունեցող մատենագիտական ցանկերին, մասնավորապես՝ Արմեն Խաչատրյանի կողմից 2016 թ. կազմած ցանկին, ուր ընդգրկվել է 129 հայերեն և հայատառ թուրքերեն Աստվածաշնչի մատենագիտական նկարագրություն, այսօր շարունակում են ի հայտ գալ նոր տպագրություններ, որոնք փաստում են ոլորտի շարունակական ուսումնասիրման անհրաժեշտությունը:

Սույն հոդվածով անդրադառնում ենք թվային դարաշրջանում Աստվածաշունչ մատյանների ուսումնասիրության հնարավորություններին՝ կարևորելով հատկապես այդ տպագիր ժառանգության թվայնացումն ու «Աստվածաշունչ» շտեմարանի ստեղծումը: Այն հնարավորություն է ընձեռում համախմբել աշխարհի տարբեր գրադարաններում և մասնավոր հավաքածուներում պահվող հայերեն և հայատառ թուրքերեն Աստվածաշունչ մատյանների թվային տարբերակները՝ ապահովելով դրանց հասանելիությունն ու պահպանումը:

Introduction:

Some events stand out in the history of Armenian printing, which changed the printing course, bringing it to a new level of perfection. The printing of the first Armenian Bible between 1666 and 1668 is a landmark event in the history of Armenian culture and printing. This effort by Voskan Yerevantsi in Amsterdam elevated Armenian printing to a new level of craftsmanship and international significance. The project lasted over two years and was finally completed in October 1668, 154 years after the beginning of Armenian printing (ԻՇԽԱՆՅԱՆ 2012, 536; ԼԵՎՈՆՅԱՆ 1958, 256). Attempts were made to print an Armenian Bible before 1666, but the efforts were successful (ԳԱԼԷՄՔԵԱ-ՐԵԱՆ 1914, 7-18).

The printing of the first Armenian Bible by Voskan Yerevantsi in 1666-1668 marked the beginning of a slow but steady increase in the printing of Armenian Bibles, with growth accelerating over time. Although the frequency of Bible printing did not increase rapidly at first - only one edition was printed in the 17th century and two in the 18th century - these early efforts laid the foundation for later developments.

By the 19th century, advancements in printing technology and the broader spread of Armenian printing houses in the Armenian communities allowed for a surge in Bible printing. This period saw unprecedented growth in Armenian Bible editions, as printers could produce books more efficiently and on a larger scale.

Each edition of the Bible stood out for its uniqueness, often reflecting the latest innovations in printing techniques, typography, and artistic design. These editions were not merely reproductions but usually carried distinctive features that made them significant as religious texts and as works of art. This evolution in Armenian Bible printing is a

testament to the resilience of the Armenian community in preserving its cultural and spiritual heritage across various regions, adapting to new technologies while maintaining a deep connection to tradition.

The study of Armenian Bible printing is a rich and evolving field, with scholars continuously discovering new Information about the content, typographical features, and historical context of these books. Despite the long history of Armenian Bible printing, many questions remain open, such as the exact number of editions printed, the locations of these printings, and the identities of the printers involved.

The answers to the above questions can be found by studying the collective bibliographic lists of Armenian books. Despite the existence of comprehensive bibliographic lists that document Armenian books, including Bible editions, discoveries continue to surface, indicating that the field is far from being fully explored. The appearance of previously unknown Armenian Bibles, which have not been included in collective bibliographic lists or have escaped researchers' attention, underscores the need for ongoing investigation into this topic.

Armen Khachatryan's 2016 bibliographic list of 129 Bibles in Armenian and Turkish with the Armenian alphabet, compiled for the 350th anniversary of the Armenian Bible, significantly contributed to Armenian book studies. His work, based on the collective biographies of Armenian books and the holdings of the National Library of Armenia, remains an indispensable resource for scholars (ԻՍԱՋԱՏՐՅԱՆ 2016, 16-35). This was a great help and support to researchers and remains a vital source. However, subsequent bibliographic research has uncovered additional Bible editions not included in the original list, expanding our understanding of the scope and diversity of Armenian Bible printings. Khachatryan's bibliography not only aids researchers in tracking down

known editions but also provides a foundation for further exploration, encouraging scholars to continue identifying and cataloging previously unknown Bible publications. This ongoing effort helps fill in the gaps in the history of Armenian Bible printing, ensuring that discoveries are incorporated into the collective understanding of this rich tradition.

Our research aims to bridge the history of Armenian Bible printing with the opportunities provided by modern digital technologies. By creating a comprehensive "Bible" database, we envision a platform that will combine digital versions of Armenian and Turkish Armenian alphabet Bible books stored in various libraries and personal collections worldwide.

"Bible" database[1]

In the era of rapid technological development, the preservation, care, and transmission of Armenian books have indeed been transformed (ԶԱՐԳԱՐՅԱՆ 2002, 168): Traditional Armenian bibliography, once dependent on printed catalogs and manual archiving, has evolved to include digital resources. This shift has enabled a broader and more flexible approach to bibliographic research, ensuring greater access and preservation of Armenian cultural heritage.

Creating the "Bible" electronic database by the National Library of Armenia is a significant initiative that reflects the ongoing efforts to preserve and promote Armenian literary and religious heritage. The project was initiated in May 2017 to commemorate the 350th anniversary of printing the first Armenian Bible. This marked a vital step in digitizing

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[1] "Bible" database
http://greenstone.flib.sci.am/gsdl/cgi-
bin/library.cgi?site=localhost&a=p&p=about&c=fslgrad-astvac&l=hy&w=utf-8
(14.06.2025)

important cultural texts and making them accessible to a broader audience. By 2019, bibliographic descriptions of 64 Bible books and digital versions were incorporated into the database. This initial phase provided a solid foundation for the future growth and development of the resource. Unfortunately, adding new entries was interrupted due to technical problems, which can often occur in large-scale projects of this nature. Maintaining and updating such databases requires ongoing technical support and resources. In 2023, the Fundamental Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia resumed efforts to replenish the database. This renewed commitment reflects a recognition of the importance of this project and the desire to enhance access to Armenian biblical literature.

The "Bible" electronic database serves as a valuable resource for researchers and scholars and stands as a testament to the evolving landscape of bibliographic research in the digital age. As it grows, it will play an essential role in safeguarding and promoting Armenian cultural heritage, ensuring these critical texts remain available for generations.

The goals of forming the database are:

1. The main goal is to unite all Bible books on one platform, completing their printing history. By combining all Bible books into one platform, researchers can access a comprehensive collection that reflects the complete history of Armenian Bible printing. The same goal could be achieved by using the tools of traditional bibliography, but as we noted, the electronic database allows for ongoing updates and additions. Traditional bibliographies can be limited by their physical format and the resources required for publication, making it difficult to incorporate new findings. In contrast, an electronic database can quickly integrate new editions, discoveries, or corrections, ensuring that the Infor-

mation remains current and relevant. As new editions emerge, traditional bibliographies can become outdated or incomplete. The electronic database can proactively address these gaps, ensuring researchers have access to the most comprehensive and accurate Information.

The history of Armenian printing indeed reflects the diaspora of the Armenian people and their efforts to maintain their cultural identity through literature, religion, and education, even outside the borders of their homeland. The establishment of printing houses in various parts of the world, especially during the 16th to 18th centuries, was crucial for preserving and disseminating Armenian texts. However, they operated independently of each other. Before the digital age, collecting Information about various printers, their locations, and the books they produced was labor-intensive. Researchers had to rely on physical archives, personal collections, and correspondence to collect data (ՈՍԿԱՆՅԱՆ 1988, VII-XXV). Due to the geographical dispersion of Armenian communities, records of printed works were often spread across different countries and libraries, making it challenging to create a comprehensive bibliography.

In the 21st century, when all major libraries in Armenia and the world have already digitized or are continuing to digitize their collections, gathering Information about Armenian printed materials has become much easier. This progress allows researchers to more effectively trace the history of Armenian printing, especially regarding Bible publications, which hold great cultural and religious significance.

For example, the Armenian bibliographers provided Information about the two Bibles printed in 1883 at the Poyachyan printing house in Istanbul, which differed in pagination, illustrating the complexity and richness of Armenian Bible publishing (ՈՍԿԱՆՅԱՆ 1999, 316). The

discovery of a third Bible printed in the same printing in the same year in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin» Vatche and Tamar Manoukian Matenadaran, with entirely different pagination, showcases the variations that can exist even within the same printing house and year (ԱԱՏՈԻԱ-ԾԱՇՈԻՆՉ 1883, 1010, 314) - another example. As a result of studies, we found editions of the Bible printed in 1860, 1896, 1905, and 1913, which were not included in existing bibliographic lists of Armenian books. There are many examples, and they all prove that the printing of Bibles had a broad geography, and we cannot consider the Information about them complete to this day.

2. Collecting and preserving Armenian and Turkish Armenian alphabet Bibles scattered worldwide is essential to avoid their loss and ensure their accessibility for future generations. This effort focuses not only on well-known Bibles but also on discovering lesser-known or forgotten editions. Studying the collections of various libraries in Armenia and worldwide to find well-known and previously unidentified Armenian and Turkish in Armenian alphabet Bible editions is an essential step toward preserving these valuable texts. The process involves thorough research, bibliographic documentation, and fixing the exact location of each discovered copy. The above examples already demonstrate the importance of this work. However, this is still not enough. The physical presence of each Armenian and Turkish in the Armenian alphabet Bible in Armenian libraries is of great importance for preservation and access. However, the challenges in acquiring these rare prints are considerable. Many of these editions are scattered worldwide in libraries, private collections, or auction houses, and they may be unique, expensive, or difficult to access. Digitization becomes an essential alternative when it is not feasible to bring physical copies of these Bibles to Armenian libraries.

High-quality digital copies can be created and stored in a "Bible" database, ensuring the contents are preserved and accessible to scholars and the public. While digital copies cannot replace physical books' tactile and historical value, they play a vital role in preserving these works' content, structure, and beauty. This approach also prevents further deterioration or loss. For example, let us present the bibliography, titled "The Armenian Book in Turkey," in 2022, a step in preserving and studying Armenian printed heritage in Turkey. This work, published by the Fundamental Scientific Library of NAS RA with support from the European Union, highlights the Armenian printed materials stored in the Istanbul Municipality Library. It should be noted that the study began in 2018, marking a pivotal moment in uncovering and preserving a largely overlooked part of Armenian history. During this process, researchers made several notable discoveries: a) the discovery of new titles. It became apparent that the library housed new names, works, and authors that had not been previously documented in existing bibliographies of Armenian printed materials. These discoveries have expanded the understanding of the scope and richness of Armenian print culture in Turkey, b) limited Information on known titles. For other works, only brief or fragmented Information was preserved. While some of these books were known to exist through secondary sources, they had not been seen physically for decades or more. This indicated that the Armenian book collection in the Istanbul Municipality Library held significant, forgotten works that were inaccessible to previous generations of scholars. While studying the Armenian print heritage at the Istanbul Municipality Library, researchers discovered 2 Armenian Bibles (1881 and 1896) and 5 Turkish Armenian alphabet Bibles (1873, 1878, 1892, 1900, and 1910). Information about these Bibles had either been completely missing or briefly recorded be-

fore this discovery. The significance of these findings lies in the fact that they provide new insights into Armenian religious publishing traditions, particularly the use of Armenian script to print Turkish-language texts - a common practice among Armenians living in Ottoman Turkey. All these rare Bibles were digitized to preserve their contents and included in an electronic database, ensuring that they are accessible to researchers and protected from potential loss. In addition to discovering new titles, considerable focus is placed on uncovering and preserving new copies of already-known names within Armenian printed heritage. This is especially significant in the case of Bible scrolls found in foreign collections. Identifying and preserving such scrolls hold national importance for Armenia, as they are crucial to safeguarding the country's rich religious and cultural history. These scrolls, often unique or rare, represent a tangible connection to Armenian heritage and are vital for scholarly research and national identity. Efforts to locate and digitize these samples, particularly in international collections, help ensure their preservation for future generations.

Even in the libraries of Armenia, new examples of Bible books continue to be discovered, further enriching the collection of already-known works. In the last two years, notable discoveries were made in the Fundamental Science Library of NAS RA, including a) a copy of the Voskan's Bible, one of the most critical early Armenian printed Bibles; b) one copy of the Bible printed in Calcutta in 1817. These samples, however, were incomplete and have not yet been given a full bibliographic description. Their discovery adds to the ongoing effort to document and preserve Armenian printed heritage and highlights the continued potential for finding historically significant works within even established collections.

3. The online platform created for the digitized collection of Armenian and Turkish in Armenian alphabet Bibles enables researchers to conduct meaningful research by providing access to these rare works. One of the key features of this platform is that it facilitates the study of substantive differences between various printings of the Bible, which is crucial for scholars. Bible printings often contain significant variations - in translation, formatting, and textual notes - that can have substantial implications for theological, historical, and linguistic studies. On the last pages of many Bibles, there are handwritten references and annotations made by previous owners or scribes. These notes are unique to each copy and provide valuable insight into the history and fate of the book, including details about its journey, ownership, and usage over time.

The platform allows researchers to compare different prints of the Bible, both across various editions and between Armenian and Turkish Armenian alphabet Bibles. This comparative capability helps scholars trace textual changes and better understand the evolution of Bible printing within the Armenian tradition.

The Voskan's Bible, published between 1666 and 1668, is an excellent example of the complexities in Armenian Bible printings. It exists in two versions, which showcase notable differences: a) one version has 834 pages, and b) the other version contains 808 pages. In the second version, "The Prayer of Manasseh King of Judah" and "The Fourth Book of Ezra" are missing (ԽԱՉԱՏՐՅԱՆ 2018, 134-165). The differences in these versions were acknowledged by scholars N. Voskanyan and K. Korkotyan back in 1966 when a microtape of the second copy, sent by Paul Zaven Ptukyan, became available to them (ՈՍԿԱՆՅԱՆ, ԿՈՐԿՈՏ-ՅԱՆ 1966, 168-175). Although they discussed these discrepancies in their article, they did not provide a separate bibliographic description

for this particular copy in their bibliography, which limits its recognition in academic circles. Through subsequent bibliographic searches, several copies of the second version of Voskan's Bible were located. Notably, relevant pages were copied from a version held by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and included in the database. This effort highlights the ongoing work to document and preserve Armenian printed heritage, ensuring that significant works like the Voskan's Bible are accurately represented and accessible for future research.

4 Digitize all prints and make them open access to everyone. This initiative is a fantastic way to preserve and share valuable cultural and historical materials, especially those stored in Armenian libraries and worldwide. All materials included in the electronic database must have digital versions. This includes both the digital versions of the Holy Books stored in Armenian libraries and the books outside Armenia, whose physical presence in Armenia is simply impossible. A bibliographic description must be attached to the digital material to make the search more flexible.

Given the rapid pace of development of information technology, which is changing the requirements, today, only scanning is no longer a primary concern. It is essential to use Optical Character Recognition tools. Unfortunately, in the case of Armenian, we face a problem because we have not yet achieved at least 99% accuracy in recognition. The library plans to collaborate with Calfa[2] to address the challenges in digitizing Armenian materials and improving search functionalities. Given the complexity of digitizing non-Latin scripts and historical documents like Armenian, this partnership could be pivotal in overcoming

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[2] https://calfa.fr/ (16.06.2025)

those barriers. In this case, it will be possible to provide the user with complete Information and easier means of searching.

5. The database enables statistical analysis. The ability to perform statistical analysis in the database on Bible printing is a powerful tool, offering valuable insights into the historical spread of Armenian Bibles. The system has search fields, which are essential to streamline the research process and help users navigate the vast database of Armenian Bible printings.

According to statistics, the Armenian Bible was printed in around 15 countries, the first of which in ranking is Turkey (69 printings). Only 1 Bible was printed in Smyrna, and the remaining were printed in Istanbul. There was one print each in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, 1666), India (Calcutta, 1817), Germany (Stuttgart, 1989), and Belarus (Minsk, 2004). The place where the Armenian 11 Bibles were printed is unknown. These books are physically missing, and their bibliographic descriptions are incomplete.

The first Turkish in the Armenian alphabet Bible was published in Turkey. The historical printing of such literature, especially spiritual and church texts like the Bible, highlights the linguistic needs of Turkish-speaking Armenians. In 1727, Mkhitar Sebastasi's book "The Door of Grammar" was published in Venice, and it also included Turkish passages with Armenian letters. In 1842, In Smyrna, some parts of the Old Testament were printed in Armenian-Turkish, and the complete Bible in Armenian-Turkish was printed in 1859. To date, we do not have a full bibliographic description of this printing of the Bible.

In 1733, Abbot Mkhitar printed the third Armenian Bible in Venice. It stands out for its high print quality and the splendor of the included images. There is evidence that in the Mkhitaryan Library in

Vienna, there is an album of pictures in which the photos in this edition of the Bible (without the original) are collected. The album consists of 157 sheets, on which there are images of different sizes with inscriptions. Unlike the pictures in the book, there are no prints on the backs of the photos collected in the album.

Let us also single out the Holy Bible printed by Hovhannes Zohrapyan in Venice in 1805. In the same year, he published the Bible in 4 separate volumes.

Two Bibles were printed in Iran, specifically in Nor Jugha (New Julfa). Armenian printing in Nor Julfa began in 1638. The first book published in this location was "The Psalter," produced in the Monastery of St. Amenaprkich in the same year, thanks to the efforts of Archbishop Khachatur Kesaratsi. In 1650, Hovhannes Jughaetsi attempted to print a Bible. However, the complete bibliographic description of this print remains unknown. Evidence of this attempt is mentioned in the work "History of Persia" by Khachatur Norjughayetsi (ՋՈՒՂԱՅԵՑԻ 1905, 121), also on page 233 of "Azdarar" printed in India (ԱԶԴԱՐԱՐ 1795, 233) about this publication mentioned Theodik, who dated the publiccation to 1650 and Garegin Galemkyaryan. Since the full bibliographic description is missing, 1650 is indicated by a question mark in bibliographic lists. The second Bible was published in 1989 in Tehran.

Summary

The "Bible" electronic database is of strategic importance in enhancing the study and accessibility of the Holy Scriptures. It offers distinct advantages over traditional bibliographic lists by being flexible, searchable, and incorporating both a bibliographic description and a digital version of each item. This makes it a highly effective tool for

scholars, students, and everyday readers who want to explore biblical texts more easily.

Created using Greenstone, an open-source software designed for building digital libraries, the database offers a user-friendly platform that is accessible to all without time or geographical limitations. One of its key contributions is its ability to serve as a repository for Armenian printed Bibles, collecting all versions on a single platform, regardless of where the physical copies are stored. This ensures that rare or otherwise inaccessible editions of the Bible are available to a global audience.

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ԱՍՏՎԱԾԱՇՈՒՆՉԸ ԹՎԱՅԻՆ ԴԱՐԱՇՐՋԱՆՈՒՄ

ՄԱՅԱ ԳՐԻԳՈՐՅԱՆ

ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Հիմնարար գիտական գրադարան
Բանասիրական գիտությունների թեկնածու

Բանալի բառեր՝ Աստվածաշունչ, հայ տպագրության պատմություն, մատենագիտություն, տեղեկատվական տեխնոլոգիաներ, էլեկտրոնային շտեմարան, թվայնացում, վիճակագրություն

«Աստվածաշունչ» էլեկտրոնային շտեմարանն ունի ռազմավարական նշանակություն՝ Սուրբ Գրքի ուսումնասիրությունն ամբողջացնելու տեսանկյունից: Ի տարբերություն ավանդական մատենագիտական ցանկերի՝ այն ճկուն է, ունի որոնման հնարավորություններ, ներառում է մատենագիտական նկարագրությունը՝ թվային տարբերակով հանդերձ: Շտեմարանը ստեղծվել է Greenstone ծրագրով, որը բաց կոդերով ծրագիր է: Այստեղ ներառված տեղեկատվությունը հասանելի է բոլորին առանց ժամանակային և աշխարհագրական սահմանափակումների: Շտեմարանը հնարավորություն է տալիս մեկ հարթակում հավաքել հայերեն տպագիր բոլոր Աստվածաշունչ մատյանները՝ անկախ նրանից, թե որտեղ է պահվում այն: Սուրբ Գիրքը հոգեհարազատ է յուրաքանչյուր քրիստոնյայի սրտին: Այն թղթային և էլեկտրոնային ձևաչափերով ընթերցողին մատուցելը ինքնին կարևոր և հրատապ հարց է, որի ուղղությամբ աշխատանքները շարունակվում են: