

THEORY AND RATIONALITY IN ARMENIAN THOUGHT: ARSEN AYTENIAN'S ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORY OF THE ARMENIAN LANGUAGE

Father Arsen Aytenian's *Knnakan Kerakanutiun Ashkharhabar Kam Ardi Hayeren Lezvi* (Critical Grammar for the Vernacular or Modern Armenian Language) (Vienna 1866) easily ranks among the dozen most important works in the Armenian language.¹ It ought to be regarded the greatest of the intellectual accomplishments of the nineteenth century and the high watermark of the Mkhitarian contribution to Armenian civilization. Aytenian's grammar was the fulfillment of Mkhitar's dreams and hopes for the Armenian people and the Armenian language. In an era of emotionalism Aytenian produced a work of unparalleled equanimity and sensitivity. The first part of his book, the "Introduction", subtitled "The Origins, Essence, History, and Present Condition of the Modern Armenian Language" is of special interest. The second part is the grammar itself, and the third a short grammar for the classical.

Seldom has the historical method been applied to solve such a vital issue and with equally successful results. So clearly were the prob-

lems exposed and so lucidly were the solutions argued that one is awed by the refinement of Aytenian's mind and spirit. He proceeded with consistent rationality through the length of his essay and made so eloquent a defense of the utility of the vernacular that without doubt one can point to Aytenian, a monk and a scholar, as that rare and earliest specimen of the modern Armenian; secular in outlook, rational in thought, intellectual in reasoning, objective in argument, practical in resolving, unemotional yet spirited, strictly logical yet humanly sensible. He is not a westernized Armenian, but one who had thoroughly and intellectually absorbed the social objectives and moral values of the Enlightenment and its methods and was capable of applying them consciously. He was a man cast in the Dideronian mold. One of the outstanding proponents of modernization, he could with enviable exactitude distinguish the process from vulgar and superficial westernization. No one since Mesrop Mashtots had opened his ears to the voice of the Armenian people and listened with equal passion and precision. Of all the experiments made in modern times to cultivate the Armenian language and make of it a universal medium, Aytenian's was the most successful. By its success the experiment on paper transformed the language spoken on the street. Aytenian set the standard for the modern language. His literary Armenian was characterized by a lexical agility and an esthetic vitality which made of language a powerful medium of expression. Customarily the stamp of genius is required in such circumstances. Aytenian left his mark.

At the very outset Aytenian conveyed the purpose of his grammar. The times required the standardization of the literary language since the horizons of literature were expand-

¹On Aytenian see Gabriel Menevishian, *Hisnamia Hobelini Artiv Kensagrakan Aknark Ger. Arsen Arkepis-koposi Aytinian Enthanrakan Abbayi Mkhitariants Vienna Kenats ev Gordsuneutian* [On the Occasion of his Fiftieth Anniversary, Remarks on the Life and Works of His Beatitude Arsen Archbishop Aytenian General Abbot of the Vienna Mkhitarians] (Vienna 1895); A. G. Vardanian, "Arsen Aytenian (Dsnntian 140-Amiaki Artiv)" [Arsen Aytenian on the Occasion of the 140th Anniversary of his Birth], *Patma-Banasirakan Handes* [Historico-Philological Journal] (4, 1965) 177-182; Edvard Ag-hayan, *Hay Lezvabanutian Patmutiun* [History of Armenian Linguistics], vol. 1 (Erevan 1958), pp. 269-288; Nerses Akinian, *Aknark me Viennakan Mkhitarian Miananutian Grakan Gordsuneutian Vra* [A Remark on the Literary Undertaking of the Mkhitarian Congregation of Vienna] (Vienna, 1912), pp. 42-44; A. Abrahamian, "Aytenian, Arsen," *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran*, [Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia], vol. 1 (Erevan 1974), p. 352.

ing constantly.² Without rules and regulations every writer would be inventing his own language replete with individual idiosyncracies which would be perpetuated in print. This was an implicit admission on the part of Aytenian that the Mkhitarian drive for the adoption of classical Armenian as the language of literature was a social failure. The vernacular was already used widely in the press. It was high time to confront reality, for if the Mkhitarian concerns for the Armenian language truly were predicated on socially and intellectually purposeful principles, someone had to lead the congregation across the divide, all the while keeping in mind that the two camps were split along societal lines with the use of the classical defended mainly by clergymen, Catholic and Apostolic, and the vernacular by laymen. The struggle for the adoption of the vernacular constituted one of the major expressions of the secularizing trend in Armenian life, itself the sign of the emergence of a new social class, and the end of the near monopoly the church exercised in literacy and intellectual production.³ In this regard Aytenian's was a very bold gesture, bravely parting ways from the rest of the company.

Aytenian stated that his intent was to gather the meritorious rules which had gained practical currency. He had not set out to establish new rules.⁴ Here again he took an enormous step forward. With his research into modern Armenian he legitimated the contemporary tongue and validated the relevance of contemporaneity. Perhaps now a better perspective can be gained on the man who produced the first grammar for modern Armenian, Mkhitar Sebastatsi, a visionary more than a century ahead of the times. All along the solution to the question of the Armenian language rested with the elite. Their acceptance

² Arsen Aytenian, *Knnakan Kerakanutiun Ashkharhabar Kam Ardi Hayeren Lezvi* [Critical Grammar for the Vernacular or Modern Armenian Language] (Vienna 1866), p. 6.

³ See Vahé Oshakan, "Cultural and Literary Awakening of Western Armenians, 1789-1915," *Armenian Review*, 36 (3, 1983), 57-70.

⁴ Aytenian, *Knnakan Kerakanutiun*, p. 6.

or rejection of the literary values of the vernacular decided the fate of the Armenian language. The Mkhitarians could not act as the sole arbiters in this contest. By the second half of the nineteenth century the middle class had asserted itself in Armenian communal life. They fought for a National Constitution for the Armenian *millet* in the Ottoman Empire to which the Sublime Porte after many revisions finally consented in 1863. In so doing they shattered the omnipotence of the *amira* class whose alliance with the clergy and control of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople created a formidable reactionary obstacle to the modernization of Armenian culture. Aytenian identified with the new spirit and, unsolicited, emerged as one of its most fluent spokesmen.

Assertive as he was, Aytenian was also careful with the sensitivities of the literati. Nor did he wish to appear a supplanter of the existing educational system. He wrote what was required at this initial stage was not a grammar for schools but a "critical grammar" for the philologists in which all salient issues were examined.⁵ By submitting his work to the censorship of the vested authorities he hoped to avoid the charge of sedition. He did not escape so lightly.

More important from the social standpoint was the purpose of this particular proposal. By philologist [*banaser*] Aytenian was referring not to scholars alone but to men of letters. He felt that they held a certain responsibility in deciding on this issue which he alone could not assume. He also hoped that the weight of their authority would balance out the nature of his approach, that is to say his critical method. He dissected the Armenian language and revealed every part of it with the design to expose the logic of modern grammar. He maintained that the regulations selected were not subjected to the whim of personal judgment. Each was a reasoned choice integral to the whole makeup of the language. The text of his introduction was its finest sample.

⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

Legitimacy was the crux of his presentation, and only history could satisfy that requirement. He remarked that the categorizing of the Armenian language as classical or vernacular was inadequate.⁶ He felt he must overthrow this duality since it created chronological restrictions which hampered the case for the historicity of the vernacular. Mkhitar first devised this duality. He coined the term *grabar* or 'literary' as the designation for ancient Armenian.⁷ Hovhannes Erznkatsi referred to *ashkharhakan* and Vardan Areveltsi to *ashkharhoren* for the vernacular.⁸ The earliest recorded usage of *ashkharhabar*, the current term for vernacular, appeared in the pharmacological dictionary of the fifteenth-century physician Amirdovlat Amasiatsi, *Angitats Anpet Kam Bararan Bzhshkakan Niuto* (Useless to the Ignorant or a Dictionary of Medical Substances).⁹ Without disparaging Mkhitar, Aytenian had to redefine the nature of this relationship between *grabar* and *ashkharhabar*, between classical and vernacular. Aytenian needed to break down the bipolar forces and hoped to reconcile them by a historical demonstration.

He also hoped to achieve a reconciliation of a different sort. He offered that by joining the old and the new the "poverty" of the vernacular could be enriched by the classical.¹⁰ Contemporary speech lacked the vocabulary demanded by modern literary expression. Furthermore, an astounding percentage of the vocabulary in use was Turkish. Armenian synonyms, substitutes, or forgotten originals could

⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷ H. Z. Petrosian, et al, *Lezvabanakan Bararan*, [Linguistic Dictionary] (Erevan 1975), p. 76.

⁸ E. Mkrtchian, "'Ashkharhabar' Termini Masin," [About the Term 'Ashkharhabar' ("Vernacular")] *Banber Erevani Hamalsarani* [Journal of Erevan University] (3, 1979), p. 138.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 136-145; R. Ishkhanian, *Nor Grakan Hayerene XVII-XVIII Darerun* [The New Literary Armenian in the XVII-XVIIIth Centuries] (Erevan, 1979), pp. 14-16. K. J. Basmajian, *Amirdovlati Amasiatsvo Angitats Anpet Kam Bararan Bzhshkakan Niuto* [Useless to the Ignorant or a Dictionary of Medical Substances] (Vienna, 1926), p. 25.

¹⁰ Aytenian, *Knnakan Kerakanutiun*, p. 9.

be found in the classical. Aytenian's vocabulary was wholly Armenian. This was where the classicists made their true contribution. Their preparatory work exposed the vernacular to the classical and delivered it the choice and the opportunity to absorb from it all that could be used. The practice of the classical tongue was discontinued, but the endeavors of the classicists from Mkhitar Sebastatsi to Arsen Bagratuni, by an unintended course, revitalized modern Armenian.

Setting aside the boldness and originality of his conceptualization of the problem at hand, Aytenian's methodological principles however did not in any sense digress from the pedagogical and scientific concerns of the Mkhitarians. The marriage of the scientific to the service of the practical, of abstract reasoning to ordinary utility, effected by Mkhitar, once again was renewed by Aytenian. Yet this would be its last affirmation on behalf of the Armenian language. Within the ideological framework of their institution, the Mkhitarians exhausted the research on their linguistic programs. Hereafter writers and publishers, not excluding themselves, would assume a greater role in shaping the language, mostly in the periodical press. At the other end of the scale, the linguists would emerge as the students of language whose equipment was inaccessible now to the non-specialist. Aytenian hence stands forth as the last of a retinue of formidable scholars who thought and innovated in the venerated tradition of Mkhitar. He was also unique. His experiment could not be repeated. The verdict was in already.

So keen was he on methodology that Aytenian, before proceeding with the history of the Armenian language, established the governing principles of his study. History explained causation and its outline offered a blueprint for the future.¹¹ In its progress, decline, and renewal, language reflected the material, moral, and especially the intellectual, life of a people. Therefore there was a history to language itself.¹² It is interesting to note that Aytenian's

¹¹ Ibid., p. 25.

¹² Ibid., p. 26.

awareness of the historicity of language emerged from change observed in his lifetime, i. e. the remolding of the Armenian language. The increased tempo of change is a precondition to historical consciousness. Unless it is experienced firsthand it would be difficult to conceive of it. Unchanging societies develop commensurate ideologies. By expounding the virtues of vernacularism, Aytenian himself admitted he was "opening a new chapter" in Armenian national consciousness.¹³

Further evidence of change existed in the contrast between the classical and the vernacular, "antiquity versus novelty, wealth versus poverty, generality versus particularity, death versus life."¹⁴ The last description would have jolted the classicists. Aytenian went so far as to say that the classical and the vernacular were two separate languages, each with its own life story.¹⁵ Armenian was not alone in this respect. A similar evolution or devolution could be observed in the case of Latin and Greek.¹⁶ Aytenian regularly introduced the evidence of the historical development of various European languages. Again he pioneered the field of comparative linguistics in Armenian.

If change could be observed, it had to be explained. Aytenian's explanation made a quantum leap in the Armenian understanding of epistemology. With his self-conscious application of analogic reasoning, Aytenian, at this juncture, pried open a whole new vista to Armenian history, Armenian language, and the history of the Armenian language. Up to this stage in Armenian thought, the transfer of Western knowledge occurred at the informational level. Concepts were absorbed either impressionistically, as with Hovsep Gaterjian's analysis of Armenian cultural history, or in technique, as with the earlier accomplishments of the Armenian lexicographers and philologists. With Aytenian the process was carried out at the level of ideational transfer. With the stroke of the pen he grafted onto Ar-

menian thought scientific methods of analyzing language and history.

To be born, to live, to reproduce, and to die, these were the existential moments of humanity and its affairs. Language, the human medium of communication, also abided to these four moments of life, for nature did not skip any steps in its cycle.¹⁷ It was Franz Bopp who advanced the concept of language as an organic entity. August Schleicher, relying on the recently announced theory of evolution by Charles Darwin, expanded on this idea.¹⁸ Aytenian's conceptualization of the existential mutability of language was consistent therefore with the most progressive thinking in European linguistics as influenced by the latest developments in the natural sciences. The life principle by its innate and characteristic dynamism furnished the evidence of natural evolution for Aytenian. Change in language, which in its singular occurrence was unnoticeable, in its totality complied to this quadrilateral cycle. The sum of these changes was like a "rainbow" which could be refracted by philology, but only "philosophico-historical philology."¹⁹ Aytenian was redefining the discipline of Armenian philology. He stretched the limits of intellectual and scientific cognition far beyond anything imagined in Armenian thought. He accepted evolutionism, dynamism, and naturalism, within the continuum of historical time, as his guiding principles.

These were general principles. How did change specific to language occur? Here Aytenian defined one further guiding principle of a socially revolutionary character. Speaking and thinking humanity [*mardkutian*] gave shape and form to language.²⁰ Its practical and intellectual demands from language prompted the passage from one stage to the next.²¹ Arsen Bagratuni attributed the distancing of the Ar-

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁸ R. H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics* (Bloomington and London, 1967), p. 181; Maurice Leroy, *Main Trends in Modern Linguistics*, trans. Glanville Prince (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 15-16.

¹⁹ Aytenian, *Knnakan Kerakanutiun*, p. 31.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

²¹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

menian language in succeeding ages from the norm of the Golden Age to the decline in literary and educational standards. Aytenian, less a pedagogue here and more the philosopher, attributed the gradual transition to the Silver, Bronze, Iron, and even Earthen, Age to the physical disrepair of a language in its superannuation especially under unpropitious conditions. Parenthetically he added that his remarks were limited to language and not to literature. Despite the fact that he posited the concept of the impersonal or natural evolution of language, he remained confused in the distinction he wanted to introduce between language and literature. He still accepted the earlier contention as to the decline of language. Similar theories were accepted by the European linguists of the time and it satisfied the notion of the elevated intellectualism of the classical era and the proceeding decline of language by popular corruption since. Literature could be submitted to formal criticism, he added. Language, if it did evolve naturally, could not be judged for its content, since it contained only what its applicants invested in it, and that contribution was always at the functional level. Therefore any subduction or supplementation could not be qualified. Aytenian's views were flawed on this point. The flaw, however, was not an error of judgment. At the core of his argument there hid a contradiction, for if language evolved of its own nature, the role of humanity as agent of change was denied. His own social consciousness compelled him to resort to the second instance and overcome the limitations of the naturalist theory of language.

If humanity in the course of events transformed language, why was the propensity of this change always towards the vernacular, Aytenian asked. The two outstanding characteristics of the "vulgar tongue" [*ramikn*] were "simplicity and clarity" [*parzutiun ev batsahaytutiun*].²² The tendency of language to drift towards these two objectives inevitably prevailed because the colloquial was the language of the hearth [*entani*]. The classical tongue consequently would expire because it

was not spoken.²³ Only someone with exceptional skill could train himself to write in the classical, and even if he was successful in this, he would remain subject to the colloquial in ordinary speech. In such a situation the "artificial" [*arvestakan*] and the "natural" [*bnakan*] stood face to face, but the natural tongue had the advantage because of its "greater value." The utilizer of the contemporary tongue was affected by "the times" [*iur zhamanaken*] whereas the utilizer of the dead language constantly struggled against the living tongue since "the times" would be irrelevant to him.²⁴

Next to the scientific principles of evolutionism, dynamism, and naturalism, Aytenian was also guided by the ideas of social utilitarianism: practicality, relevance, contemporaneity, responsibility. Simultaneously he discarded the elitist interpretation to historical change, cultural growth and linguistic evolution. He maintained that the people, in the exercise of natural social functions, again and again asserted the fundamental characteristics of objective existence and readjusted the course of the intellectual vectors of their culture. Here in Armenian historiography was the first clear instance of the use of the concept of a generalized social force governing the course of history. In this regard Aytenian's *Critical Grammar* was more than an Enlightenment document. It was a revolutionary decree. It did not just explain or rationalize, it interpreted on the basis of conceptual principles and proposed a program of cultural self-assertion and redefinition.

Aytenian was also realistic. Armenian was in an uncertain position between a declining tongue and a new yet unfashioned language, he conceded. The new had not been raised to the standard of the literary and the old was written with difficulty, lacked vitality and was corrupted. The "living tongue" [*kendani lezu*] was now like an infant in its mother's lap. Someday it would mature and would be recognized as a "national language" [*azkin lezun*].²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

²² Ibid., p. 37.

With a protagonist and practitioner like Aytenian that day came sooner than expected, according to Kerovbe Sbenian and Hakovbos Dashian in less than a decade and a half, 1880.²⁶

With his intentions and definitions expounded, Aytenian proceeded with his analysis of the history of the Armenian language. In the beginning of the fifth century with his newly invented alphabet, Mesrop Mashtots, the onetime court secretary, recorded the speech of the Armenian royal province, Ayrarat.²⁷ Alongside the literature written in this language, according to Aytenian, there have survived from this same century texts reflecting to a considerable degree the colloquial tongue of Armenia, namely those authored by Buzandatsi and Parpetsi.²⁸ This proved for Aytenian the existence of a vernacular contemporary to the ancient literary Armenian [*hin matenagrakan hayeren*]. It also proved, he maintained, the antiquity of the vernacular presently in use.²⁹ According to Aytenian's periodization, the seventh century marked the divide between the ancient Armenian called *grabar* and the old vernacular.³⁰ The eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries had left no records but in a language which was described as a mixture of the literary and the vernacular.³¹ In this period writers began to differentiate between "grammatical" [*kertoghakan*] literature and the "folk dialect" [*geghjuk barbar*].³² In the tenth and eleventh centuries, *grabar* verily was a literary, that is to say a dead, language, and the vernacular already was recorded as a vernacular.³³ In the Cilician period, the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, the literary and the vernacular were mixed and the boundaries between the two could not

be defined clearly.³⁴ This middle Armenian [*midjin hayeren*] was the ancient or early vernacular.³⁵

Aytenian's description of the various stages to the history of the Armenian language was not all too clear. His original postulations complicated matters since he wanted to maintain the distinction between the classical and the vernacular. Instead of erasing the contrapuntal supposition to this duo, he perpetuated it by extending it into the earliest phase of recorded Armenian. He cast them as the dialectal variations of a common tongue, the standard literary form being the refined speech of the royal court, itself the language of the focal province in Armenia, and the colloquial, to which Aytenian still attached the old label of *ramkoren* ("common") but no longer carrying the deprecatory implication of earlier use. The historical equivalence of the two forms of Armenian resulted in a complication when Aytenian attempted to trace the evolution of the language since he was forced into regarding the literature of eras subsequent to the sixth century as a variegated mixture of the two dialects. He disregarded Arsen Bagratuni's periodization and its labels, though his chronology was still consistent with Bagratuni's since they were in agreement on all the turning points in the history of the Armenian people.³⁶ The periodization he proposed rested on the linguistic characteristics and not the literary values of the preserved records, and since he refrained from acting judgmental, he also created a new periodization, albeit somewhat provisionally. He did not tabulate it, but his wording is the one presently in use among linguists and is regarded the scientific view on

Old Armenian	5 th -11 th c.
Middle Armenian	12 th -14 th c.
New Armenian	15 th -19 th c.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 146, 150-151.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

³⁶ See Arsen Bagratuni, *Hayeren Kerakanutiun i Pets Zargatselots* [Armenian Grammar for the Use of the Erudite] (Venice, 1852).

²⁶ See Kerovbe Sbenian-Hakovbos Dashian, *Usumn Dasakan Hayeren Lezvi* [Study of the Classical Armenian Language] (Vienna, 1920).

²⁷ Ibid., *Knnakan Kerakanutiun*, pp. 45-56.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 62.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

³¹ Ibid., p. 130.

³² Ibid., p. 131.

³³ Ibid., p. 140.

A	Central dialect	Armenia (Van, Armenian Mesopotamia, etc.)
		The ancient vernacular [<i>nakhniats ramkoren</i>] with specific changes
B	Constantinople and Asia Minor
		A new language [<i>nor lezu</i>] most resembling <i>grabar</i> in construct and orthography
C	Western dialect	Poland and Transylvania
		The ancient vernacular [<i>hin ramkoren</i>] with corrupted pronunciation
D	Eastern dialect	Georgia, Persia, and stretches from Russia to India
		Foreign to the grammar of old and new Armenian

the subject. Once again Aytenian created a new framework for Armenian history.

The process which really transformed the language was the centuries-long migration of the Armenian people, Aytenian contended.³⁷ It resulted in the branching of the language into four dialects. They all had their origin in the old vernacular [*hin ashkharhabar*] of the Middle Ages [*midjindarian*].³⁸ Three of these dialects derived from a common source. The fourth was an independent dialect and must have derived from an older dialect which was not recorded in the ancient period. The two principal features which identified the vernacular were the *ku* (կու) particle attached to verbs and the discontinuation of the *en* (ըն) suffix and its substitution with the *e* (ը) suffix.³⁹ The verbal particle is still considered by linguists today the key for distinguishing between ancient and modern Armenian. The two tables prepared by Aytenian for listing and for describing the four dialects are combined below.⁴⁰

³⁷ Aytenian, *Knnakan Kerakanutiun*, p. 161.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 166, 219.

Besides preparing the first comparative survey in Armenian dialectology, Aytenian advanced a new conceptual outlook on the later phase of Armenian history. He treated the dispersion of the Armenian people phenomenologically as a framework for modern Armenian history. Its main characteristic was the break-up of the social, geographical, and linguistic unity of the Armenian people. And although only a portion of the Armenian population was displaced through forced migration, Aytenian ascribed to this experience universality. There were two reasons for this measure. First, it created a conceptual unity where existentially none prevailed. It also underlined the continued cultural commonalities of a fragmented society. Second, it integrated individual experience as emigrant and exile into a general pattern by implying a collective participation in the dispersion. By this measure Aytenian was also able to sustain the historical continuity essential to his argument.

The condition of the Armenian language was a scandal. Its poverty and dereliction could not be concealed. The principal obstacle to progress [*harajdadimutiun*] was the growing strength of the foreign influence imposed

by political circumstances.⁴¹ He insisted that there existed no other language which had so completely surrendered itself to foreign influence. Such insensitivity must be considered a crime. If an ethnographic survey of the Armenian language was prepared it would yield such a distasteful result that it would require conceding that this language was Armenian by grammar and Turkish by vocabulary.⁴² A language that had completely lost its native characteristics could not be liked by its speakers. It was no wonder that many Armenians preferred to rely upon foreign languages.⁴³

In Aytenian's view only a strong intervention by literature could have prevented the complete dissolution of the Armenian language.⁴⁴ The extreme danger of the situation therefore alerted and prompted a renewal. Because there were few languages which counted a comparable percentage of native elements, this vernacular was being called a "Renewed language" [*Norogial lezu*] or "Modern literary Armenian" [*Ardi gravor hayeren*].⁴⁵ The "reaction" opened the storehouses of the classical tongue with its plentitude and the classical vocabulary replaced the foreign terms.⁴⁶ Classical orthography was adopted in the face of dialectal pronunciations.⁴⁷ The classical language first filled the gaps in the vocabulary. The classical was also resorted to for solving grammatical, expressional, and literary requirements.⁴⁸ The rapid advance of the language was evident. The existent literature appeared both as the means and the result of this success. This modern Armenian was also becoming the language of ordinary speech among the educated in their households.⁴⁹ With this renewal of modern Armenian the history of the language was ended.⁵⁰

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 223.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 232-233.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 236.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 238.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 239.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 244-245.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 246.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 251.

Aytenian used the theory of the decline of language in a novel way. If he had proven the antiquity of the vernacular, he also had established its legitimacy, but that alone could not unravel the real issue at hand, the true condition of the Armenian language. The first response to the overwhelming challenge of the utterly confused state of the Armenian language was a denial, a turning back of the linguistic clock. The effort failed. This disappointment only added to the disputations. Aytenian avoided none of the issues. He poured theory over the facts and reached for the rational explanation. He combined a set of arguments in a remarkably sophisticated demonstration of the theory. Shaped by the human will, language evolved naturally, but if the community of speakers was subjected to debilitating conditions, that natural procession was disrupted. The demise of the Armenian tongue, the very confused state of the colloquial, did not result from the superseding of the vernacular over the classical. The chaos, the disfigurement, the very shame of it was a reflection of the political situation the Armenian people found themselves in. Never was the Ottoman mentioned by name, but the inroads made by Turkish in the Armenian language was described as a metaphor for the incursions and devastations of the "last few centuries." The political critique would appear obvious to any patriot of the time.

Aytenian's introduction of the political dimension to the general theory was quite daring. He repeated that change was the result of time. It was both intrinsic and natural.⁵¹ But, the Armenian language was not allowed to flourish and like its people was denied the chance for advancement.⁵² Along with political independence, the culture of the Armenian people was destined to fall captive. The severity of this fate on language reached such a point that its practitioners became its persecutors.⁵³ Perhaps this point marked Aytenian's most anguished outcry for self-awareness, for self-understanding, for a realization for the

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 256.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 257.

depth of the Armenian tragedy where a people chained in darkness by its own misery misshaped its own culture. It was an awful image to hold up to the Armenians of the mid-nineteenth century.

As a nineteenth century document Aytenian's was also a message of hope, an expression of optimism. The grief could be overcome. Aytenian offered three methods for promoting the modern Armenian language: to allow the language to proceed in its natural course without impediment; to uphold the classical as a guiding source; and to permit free and voluntary expression. There was a purpose for each method. The first was to hold and keep the new language separate from the old. The second was to provide a measure for its progress. The third was to satisfy new requirements. The first avoided constraining the language. The second tried to ennoble it. The third hoped to improve it.

Equanimous to the last, he responded to both the classicists and the vernacularists. The classicists based their argument for the elimination of the vernacular on its defects. They rejected it because it was an alien and spurious tongue. It was a corruption. It was bred as the child of slavery and misfortune. It resulted from migration. It was not the sole language used presently. It was weak and ugly, unimpressive and poor. In a word it was a black stain on the forehead of an ancient people.

Aytenian retorted that the Armenians could not censure the modern language to such a degree without reproaching their own ancestors. There could only be two reasons for painting this language in such stark colors. The first was the failure to examine accurately the nature of the vernacular. The second was holding to a defective opinion of the classical.⁵⁴ The Armenians were not the only people to face the difficulty of possessing two types of language.⁵⁵ Despite the official sponsorship of Latin as the language of the Roman Catholic Church, of the Holy Roman Empire, and of its European-wide usage as the language of science, and for all the boastful

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 283.

proclamations of Lorenzo Valla, even in Italy the classical tongue gave way to the vernacular.⁵⁶ The Armenian experiment could be compared with the present development of the Greek language which was gradually turning to its classical roots for literary inspiration.⁵⁷ Furthermore, after the experience of Hellenism [*Hellenagordsutiun*] and Latinism [*Latinakhosutiun*], in their search for a new lexicon the Armenians could not want the classical tongue disturbed a third time, now with gallicisms [*Gaghghiabanutiun*].⁵⁸ It would be a distortion of the classical to erase the vernacular, for a new nation [*nor azk*] could not rely on an old tongue.⁵⁹

To the vernacularists who complained that teaching the classical language had been a waste of time and a failure in the schools, Aytenian admitted that the problem rested with the pedagogical approach. The classical was taught without simplification. Quite evidently it was not an easy language. If the vernacular grammar was taught first, the classical could be learned much more easily. He went on to say that the classical was absolutely necessary not only for the sake of the classical, but especially for the sake of the vernacular.⁶⁰ In an effort to reconcile these differences, Aytenian proposes that the two camps could unite on some common points. The vernacular could be presented as a simplifier and a first step for advancing to the classical, and the classical could be regarded necessary for the perfection of the vernacular.⁶¹

Aytenian concluded his essay with some reflections on his own role as a grammarian and with a restatement of his purpose. He mentioned the earlier attempts made for describing and analyzing modern Armenian by Johann Joachim Schroder, Mkhitar Sebastatsi, Elias Riggs, the American missionary who wrote *A Grammar of the Modern Armenian Language as Spoken in Constantinople and*

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 284-285.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 290-291.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 296.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 297.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 312.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 320.

Asia Minor (Constantinople 1847),⁶² and M. T. Kirejjan who published his *Hayeren Kerakanutiun Ashkharhabar Lezvi Nakhakrtakan Dprotsats Hamar* ("Armenian Grammar of the Vernacular Language for Elementary Schools") in Constantinople in 1864 based on the studies of Arsen Bagratuni and Anton Garagashian.⁶³ Aytenian added that he prepared his critical grammar in response to the announcements made in the popular press that the time had arrived for the vernacular to possess a grammar. He believed he would not be unjustified in asking, since literacy had emerged as a general requirement, that the rules of grammar be familiarized, that those who did not speak Armenian learn the language, and those who did speak Armenian to use it properly. Such were his modest wishes the sum of which was the most ambitious cultural and linguistic program devised, and soon to be implemented, in all of Armenian history, the drive for mass literacy.

His very last remarks are worth noting. Only "History" could solve the problem of the Armenian language, especially "critical" history,⁶⁴ and history demonstrates the antiquity of the vernacular.⁶⁵ He concluded with the following apology. The requirement of the times induced us to assume the responsibility for making some statements on behalf of the use of a new language [*nor lezvi*] for a new world [*nor ashkharhi*].⁶⁶

It was not the least bit surprising that Aytenian, who learned his Armenian under the tutelage of both Vrtanes Chalekian and Hovsep Gaterjian, should produce the first scientific grammar for the Western, Constantinopolitan, Armenian dialect. In 1885 he issued a revised and updated edition of Chalekian's grammar for the classical Armenian. His keen sense of the reasonable and the rational, of the exact and the accurate, was honed in an environment where the commitment to science

and education was planted on the firmest foundations. His sense of the historical, on the other hand, sprang from his exposure to a set of contemporary realities, the debate over the vernacular, the social transformation of the Armenian community of Constantinople in particular, and the spread of liberal thought in the wake of the 1848 revolutions. Ghevond Hovnanian (1817–1897),⁶⁷ Gaterjian's associate, turned to the study of the old vernacular and began examining the language of sources previously ignored, the fables of Mkhitar Gosh and Vardan Areveltsi, Amirdovlat Amasiatsi's dictionary and other medical texts,⁶⁸ the poems of Vardan Haykazn, Khachatur the student of Nerses Lambronatsi, Kostandin Erznkatsi, Hovhannes Erznkatsi, Khachatur Kecharuetsi, Mkrtich Naghash, Hovhannes Tulkurantsi, and Grigor Aghtamaretsi.⁶⁹ Aytenian's legitimizing of the new discipline was an essential precondition for the study of old vernacular sources which Arsen Bagratuni and others so hastily condemned and denigrated. By their longstanding indifference to the literature of the later centuries, the Mkhitarians hampered the publication and study of old vernacular sources. Frik, perhaps the greatest of the Cilician versifiers, remained a nonentity practically into the middle of the twentieth century. Arshak Chobanian first published the ballads of Nahapet Kuchak, 1902, and Naghash Hovnatan, 1910, some of which he discovered preserved in the manuscripts of the Mkhitarian convents.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ On Ghevond Hovnanian see Nerses Akinian, *Dasakan Hayerene ev Viennakan Mkhitarian Dptotse* [Classical Armenian and the Vienna Mkhitarian School] (Vienna, 1932), pp. 313–314; Aghayan, *Lezvabanutian Patmutiun*, pp. 288–295.

⁶⁸ Ghevond Hovnanian, *Hetazotutiunk Nakhniats Ramkoreni Vra* [Researches on Old Vernacular] (Vienna, 1897).

⁶⁹ Ghevond Hovnanian, *Midjnadarian Azgayin Taghachaputiun Ramkakharn* [Medieval Armenian Prosody in Mixed Vernacular] (Vienna, 1911).

⁷⁰ Arshak Chobanian, *Naghash Hovnatan Ashughe ev Hovnatan Hovnatian Nkariche* [The Minstrel Naghash Hovnatan and the Artist Hovnatan Hovnatian] (Paris, 1910).

⁶² Ibid., p. 321–322, footnote.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 326–327.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 330.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 331.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 332.

Subsequently Nerses Akinian published his own study of the latter in 1911.⁷¹

An undercurrent flowing through the length of Aytenian's discussion was the condition of the Eastern Armenian dialect which in this same period was emerging as a literary language also. He employed Khachatur Abovian's *Verk Hayastani* (The Wounds of Armenia) (Tiflis 1858) as his principal source on the dialect.⁷² He was also current on Stepan Nazarian's publications from Moscow.⁷³ He remarked that it was not unusual for a people to inscribe in more than one literary language. Spanish was published in three variant forms, Castilian, Galician, and Catalan. He mused, perhaps the cultivation of Eastern Armenian

as a literary language eventually might lead to the unification of the various dialects.⁷⁴ In fact Stepan Palasarian (1837–1889) published the first scientific grammar for the Eastern Armenian dialect in 1870, *Endhanur Tesutiun Arevelian Nor Gravor Lezvi Hayots* (General Study of the Literary Language of Eastern Armenian) on the basis of Aytenian's grammar.⁷⁵

In 1886 Father Arsen Aytenian was elected Abbot of the Mkhitarian Order of Vienna. The following year, 1887, he founded *Handes Amsorya* (Monthly Review), the pre-eminent journal for Armenian philology, continuously published since.

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⁷¹ Nerses Akinian, *Hovnatan Naghash ev Naghash Hovnatian ev Irents Banasteghsakan ev Nkarchakan Ashkhatutiune* [Hovnatan Naghash and the Naghash Hovnatians and their Poetic and Artistic Work] (Vienna, 1911).

⁷² Aytenian, *Knnakan Kerakanutiun*, p. 235, footnote.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 258, footnote.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 324, footnote 3.

⁷⁵ Aghayan, *Lezvabanutian Patmutiun*, pp. 222–228.