

## THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ARMENIAN WRITING: ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED LITERATURE AS AN ASPECT OF THE DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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Writing is an important factor of inter-civilizational relations through translated, as well as original literature. Armenia's centuries-old written legacy in the treasury of world culture is very much conducive to the dialogue of civilizations which is a guarantee for the security of the world civilization.

In the history of humankind the origin and development of writing conditioned verbal preservation of spiritual values and passing them to the future generations in a written form. Written sources are of great importance in the study of history as the history of civilization, consequently "societies with writing have left far more behind them than those without" [1, pp. XIII-XV].

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century the term *civilization* has been brought into scientific use at the junction of economic, spiritual-cultural and social concepts in the general system of philosophy with reference to the certain epochs of human history [2, 3, c. 369]. The study of the main components of civilization allows us to consider the dialogue of civilizations in the context of contemporary tendencies of geopolitical processes [4, p. 57-72].

In the concept of *civilization* a paramount significance is attributed to culture as an important sphere of human activity.

Oswald Spengler: "Every Culture has its own Civilization... The Civilization is the inevitable destiny of the Culture..." [5, pp. 31-32].

Will Durant: "Civilization is social order promoting cultural creation. Four elements constitute it: economic provision, political organization, moral traditions, and the pursuit of knowledge and arts. It begins where chaos and insecurity

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end” [6, p. 1].

Arnold Toynbee: “The cultural elements are the essence of a civilization” [7, p. 1, 57].

N. V. Klyagin: “The concept of civilization may be identified with the concept of culture” [8, c. 3].

Cultures, as main components of civilizations, are bridging them owing to immanent creative principle [9, pp. 298-303]. Meanwhile, according to some modern theories of civilizations, the increase of the conflict of cultures in the modern world has a tendency of turning into the clash of civilizations [10.]. But destructive forces are derived not from cultural factor, but, on the contrary, because of its lack.

In “The Declaration of the Rights of Culture” D. S. Likhachov, considering culture as the main source of human history’s humanization, writes: “Culture is a determining condition for realization of the creative potential of an individual and society, a form of affirmation of the people’s originality and a basis of the spiritual health of the nation, a humanistic guiding line and a criterion of the development of a human being and civilization. Out of the culture the present and future of the peoples, ethnicities and states make no sense.” (Article 2.).

According to S. N. Iconnikova, only humanistic culture is able to become a foundation of ethics and morality [11]. Jagdish Chandra Kapur sees the peaceful future of the peoples through the cultural creation and cooperation along with preservation of national originality [12, p. 23], thus, considering the “Human future” as a fundamental basis for a dialogue of civilizations [13, p. 26].

Article 6 of “The Declaration of the Rights of Culture” states: “The culture of each people has the right to participate in the humanistic development of the whole mankind. Cultural cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding of the peoples of the world are a guarantee for justice and democracy, a condition preventing international and interethnic conflicts, violence and wars”. In *the cultural-historic heritage*, as “a form of reinforcing and transferring the cumulative spiritual experience of mankind” (Article 1a), writing has a crucial significance.

In the history of the development of the world’s written languages Armenian writing, being a means of creativity of the Armenian people and a guarantee of its national originality, has a certain contribution to the treasury of world culture and has been highly appreciated in Western European, as well as Russian literature and historiography.

Rev. P re Dom Augustin Calmet (1672-1757) called Armenia “Berceau de la Civilisation” [14]. In 1816 *George Gordon Byron* visited the Armenian *Congregation* of Mekhitarists, on *St. Lazarus Island* in Venice and, being inspired by Armenian culture, in particular, by its literary heritage, began to learn the Armenian language.

Lord Byron writes about Armenians and Armenia: “Whatever may have been their destiny - and it has been bitter - whatever it may be in future, their country must ever be one of the most interesting on the globe; and perhaps their language only requires to be more studied... It is a rich language... If the Scriptures are rightly understood, it was in Armenia that Paradise was placed. . . It was in Armenia that the flood first abated, and the dove alighted” [15, pp. 8, 10-12].

S. N. Glinka (1776-1847) comprehended the history of Armenia in the spirit of touching the cradle of human civilization [16, p. 77]. He writes: “According to the Biblical and folk traditions the second cradle of mankind rested on the summits of the Armenian mountains” [17, p. III].

David Marshall Lang writes in the same spirit: “The ancient land of Armenia is situated in the high mountains... Although Mesopotamia with its ancient civilizations of Sumeria and Babylon is usually considered together with Egypt as the main source of civilized life in the modern sense, Armenia too has a claim to rank as one of the cradles of human culture. To begin with, Noah's Ark is stated in the Book of Genesis to have landed on the summit of Mount Ararat, in the very centre of Armenia.... Whether or not we attribute any importance to the Book of Genesis as a historical source, none can deny the symbolic importance of its account of Noah's Ark, which is cherished by both believers and unbelievers all over the world. Again, Armenia has a claim on our attention as one of the principal homes of ancient metallurgy, beginning at least five thousand years ago. Later on, Armenia became the first extensive kingdom to adopt Christianity as a state religion pioneering a style of Church architecture which anticipates our own Western Gothic” [18, p. 9].

The roots of the origin and development of the Armenian language (as a separate branch in the Indo-European family of languages)<sup>1</sup> and writing are millennia old<sup>2</sup>.

The ancient authors (II-III centuries A.D.) have given certain information on Armenian letters. The Greek sophist and orator Lucius Flavius Philostratus (around 170-247) notes: “It is said that once a panther was caught in Pamphylie<sup>3</sup>; it had a golden collar on which had an inscription in Armenian letters: “King Arshak to

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<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the dialect break-up of the general Indo-European language is supposed to have occurred in V-IV millennia B.C. [19, v. I, p. XLVIII, v. II, pp. 865, 898, 912-913; 20, pp. 31-32].

<sup>2</sup> It is testified by pictographic writing in petroglyphs, on the walls of necropolises and on the cult ceramics (V-IV millennia B.C.) [21, p. 262], hieroglyphs [22, p. 115; 23, pp. 55-148], lexicon and grammatical forms, preserved in cuneiform sources of the epoch of the Kingdom of Van (IX-VII centuries B.C.) [24, p. 124-129] and temple literature [22, p. 176].

<sup>3</sup> It lies to the west of Cilicia.

Nysa's god" [25, p. 172, 324b 4-11]<sup>1</sup>. The Roman theologian and writer Hippolytus (III c.) mentions Armenians among peoples (Greeks, Jews, Romans and others) having their own writing [30, p. 58].

After the Armenians' conversion to Christianity by St. Grigor Lusavoritch (the Illuminator) under the aegis of the King of Great Armenia Trdat III, Christianity was proclaimed the state religion in Armenia (301 A.D.) for the first time in the world. Schools were established where the Greek and Syriac languages were taught with a purpose to teach oral translation<sup>2</sup> into Armenian both from the Bible during the church service, and documents (in foreign languages) which entered the court office.

At the end of IV century the King of Great Armenia Vramshapuh, the Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church<sup>3</sup> Sahak Partev, Mesrop Mashtots (361-440 A.D.) and Armenian bishops, according to Movses Khorenatsi (V c.), summoned a council being "anxious about the invention of Armenian letters" [22, p. 325].

An attempt to reconstruct the letters by means of the Bishop Daniel's written characters found in Mesopotamia had been in vain, because while teaching them to pupils it turned out that "those letters were insufficient to form all the syllables of the Armenian language, especially since the letters essentially proved to have been buried under other letters..." [33, p. 278].

According to the Armenian historian of V century Lazar Parbetsi, Mashtots was sure that Armenian letters existed [34, p. 30]. In the course of the search of the Armenian letters Mashtots sent one group of his pupils to Samosat, another – to Edessa in order to prepare translators of the Bible from the Greek *Septuagint* and the Syriac *Peshito* versions. The pupil of St. Mesrop Mashtots Vardapet Koryun (V century) and the Father of Armenian historiography Movses Khorenatsi wrote that the work of St. Mesrop was hallowed by God's Right Hand. According to Koryun, St. Mesrop "suffered many tribulations in order to serve his nation. And Lord the Merciful with His Holy Right Hand finally granted him that good fortune and he became the father of new and wonderful offspring – letters of the Armenian language, and

<sup>1</sup> A king by name of Arshak who reigned in Armenia long before Arshak II (350–368 A.D.) is mentioned by Tacit (55-120 A.D.) in his "Annales" [(after the Armenian king Zenon-Artashes III (18-34 A.D.) Arshak reigned in Artashat (34-35 A.D.), the son of the Parthian king Artabanus III (12-38 A.D.) [26, pp. 31-33], and by Moses Khorenatsi in his "History of Armenia"[*Arshak I*, the son of Vagharshak (the brother of the Parthian king Arshak the Great) who ascended the throne in Armenia [22, pp. 118-119]. Some mountains and cities devoted to Dionisus - the youngest of the Olympian gods [27, p. 88] were called *Nysa* [25, 28, p. 1185, 29, p. 174, 180].

<sup>2</sup> J. Marquart expressed the idea that since his young age St. Grigor Lusavoritch was familiar both with the Greek and the Armenian languages [31, p. 120].

<sup>3</sup> In the first half of I century A.D. the Armenian Apostolic Church was founded by the preaching of the Apostles St. Thaddaeus and St. Bartholomew, according to Movses Khorenatsi, at the time of Armenian King Abgar. Eusebius of Caesarea [32, p. 31, 32] and Movses Khorenatsi preserved "A letter of Abgar to the Savior" and "The reply to the letter of Abgar written by St. Thomas the Apostle according to the order of the Savior" [22, p. 149-150].

then and he quickly designed, named, determined their order and devised the syllabication". Arriving in Samosat, Mashtots (with the help of Hropanos, a calligrapher of the Greek writing) "devised all the variations of the letters..., after which he proceeded with translations, with the help of two of his pupils, Hovhan, from the province of Ekeghiats, and Hovsep from Paghnatun" [33, p. 279].

The Armenian language, owing to its millennia-old development, at the threshold of V century had reached such a perfection, that after creation of the Armenian alphabet (405 A.D.) St. Mesrop Mashtots with his pupils undertook the work of the Bible's translation from the old Greek language into the old Armenian-*grabar* language. They started the translation of the Bible from the Proverbs of Solomon, and the first translated sentence was: "To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight". Returning to Armenia, St. Mesrop Mashtots with his pupils, after the Old Testament, translated the New Testament into Armenian [22, p. 327]<sup>1</sup>.

The creation of the Armenian alphabet by St. Mesrop Mashtots signified a new stage in the history of Armenian culture. The old Armenian language was so rich, and the translated and original literary heritage so perfect that V century is considered "the Golden Age" in the history of Armenian culture. Educational life in Armenia, according to the Armenian historian Eghishe (V century A.D.), proceeded under the motto: "It is better to have blind eyes, than blind mind" [35, p. 28].

Taking into consideration the words of Koryun and Movses Khorenatsi about the divine vision of St. Mesrop Mashtots, S. Glinka noted: "St. Mesrop invented the Armenian letters as if by inspiration..." Mentioning high regard by M. La Croze (1661-1739), who called the Armenian translation of the Bible "the Queen of translations", S. Glinka noted that "undoubtedly, the power of the Armenian word also promoted the precision of the translation" [17, v. II, p. 90].

V. Brusov (1873-1924), speaking about the high level of the development of the Armenian language long before the creation of the alphabet by St. Mesrop Mashtots, writes that after the invention of the letters, fast evolution of national literature in the mother tongue "urges to suppose that it was preceded by the works of the Armenian writers not only in foreign languages. Contemporary science refuses to suppose that the same century saw both the origination of the Armenian writing and its rich flourishing expressed in a perfect translation of the Bible... followed by "the Golden Age" of the Armenian literature. That is why it is supposed that before the letters' invention, germs of the Armenian written literature existed... But all this ancient writing perished and for us Armenian literature starts not earlier than from V century A.D." [36, p. 45].

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<sup>1</sup> St. Mesrop Mashtots created alphabets also for the Georgian and Gargarian (one of the tribes of Aluank on the left bank of the Kur River) languages (22, pp. 328-329, cf. 33, pp. 285, 288).

Together with the fundamental development of the national school in Armenia the principles of the Armenian translated and original literature were founded in V century. The high level of translations was guaranteed by the efforts of the Armenian scholars who knew perfectly well their mother tongue and continued their scholastic and theological education in the Greek and other languages in famous centers of antique science and culture - Athens, Alexandria and others [37, pp. 142-143].

“The Grammar” (*Ars Grammatica*) by Dionysius Thrax, 14 works by Philo of Alexandria, “The Romance of Alexander the Great” by Pseudo-Callisthenes, “The Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching” and “Against heresies” by Irenaeus, Theon of Alexandria’s “Progymnaspata”, “Refutation of the Council of Chalcedon” by Timothy Aelurus, “The Introduction” by Porphyry, “The Categories” and “The Discourses” by Aristotle and other books were translated from Greek into Armenian [37, pp. 186-188]. Listing the translated literature alone testifies to the wide cognitive interest of Armenian philosophic and historic scientific thought to the antique heritage, and this served a basis for calling Armenian translators the representatives of the *Graecophile school* in Armenia [38]<sup>1</sup>.

The creative understanding and application of certain terms [37, p.140] and texts took place in the process of translation on the basis of the Armenian lexicon. Owing to the Armenian translations, “The Chronicle” by Eusebius Caesariensis [32, Introduction, p. xiv], “Apology for the Christian Faith” by Aristides the Athenian, 7 works by Philo of Alexandria, “The Definitions” by Hermes Trismegistus, “Concerning Free Will” by Methodius of Patar, “Panarion” by Epiphanius of Cyprus and some other works have been preserved, their old Greek originals being lost in the course of time.

In the V century, along with the translated literature, historiography and philosophy presented by the works of Agathangelos, Pavstos Buzand, Koryun, Movses Khorenatsi, Eghishe, Lazar Parbetsi, David Anhakht (the Invincible), Eznik Koghbatsi and others developed. The creative heritage of the plead of Armenian thinkers and scholars has a great significance from the viewpoint of studying the sources for the research of the history of Armenia and the Armenian people, as well as neighbouring countries and peoples.

Agathangeghos narrates the life of St. Grigor Lusavoritch and the Christening of Armenians in his book “The History of Armenia”. Koryun wrote “The Life of Mashtots” where he described the life and activities of his teacher St. Mesrop Mashtots. Pavstos Buzand in his book “The History of Armenia” narrated the history of

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<sup>1</sup>One of the beloved national-church holidays - St. Translators' Day is celebrated annually (in October) by the Armenian people in memory of the activities of the translators.

the Kingdom of Great Armenia from the first decades of IV century up to the Roman-Persian division of Armenia (the middle of the 80s of IV century).

“The History of Armenia” by Movses Khorenatsi is the crown jewel of Armenian historiography. His work consists of three parts, including history of the Armenian people from ancient times till the beginning of the 40s of V century A.D. He wrote his book with a deep knowledge of the original ethnic roots of Armenian statehood, freedom-loving spirit of the Armenian people reflecting his adherence to the national and Christian spiritual values.

Eghishe is the author of several books the most famous of which is “About Vardan and the Armenian War” (450-451 A.D.). Lazar Parbetsi also devoted his book (“History of Armenia”) to the liberation struggle of the Armenian people headed by St. Vardan Mamikonyan and then - Vahan Mamikonyan (481-484 A.D.).

Based on Armenian sources, S. Glinka, contrasting the moral grounds of the Armenians inspired by the defense of the Fatherland to the ideology of foreign conquerors, wrote: “The main aim of their (Armenians-E.D.) arming, owing to the basic spirit of their moral qualities... is the defense of the Fatherland, protection of native independence, resistance to the encroachments of the outside violence” [17, p. VII].

In the IV century there was a famous Armenian thinker, orator and pedagogue, Prohaeresius (Paruyr Haikazn) (276-367) [39, p. 480; 37, p. 25].

Philosopher and theologian Eznik Kokhbatsi, the advocate of the teachings of the Armenian Apostolic Church, in his work “Refutation of heresies”, defending the Christian faith, considers in details philosophic ideas of the antique authors, as well as analyses critically Zoroastrian religion (which the Sassanids turned into an ideological servant of their aggressive policy) and different heresies.

David Anhakht (V century A.D.) is a prominent representative of the Armenian philosophic thought. The most famous of his works is “The Definition of Philosophy”. David Anhakht, analyzing the definitions of philosophy, brought also classification of sciences: natural philosophy, mathematics, theology. He considered philosophy as the best means of the nature’s cognition, because its main goal is revelation of the ways, following which it is possible to reject evil and, through goodness, reach spiritual perfection - *virtue*. During centuries the philosophic views of David Anhakht had a fundamental significance in the development of the Armenian philosophic thought.

On the basis of the achievements of “the Golden Age”, the Armenian culture and education in Great Armenia reached new heights also in the epoch of the Kingdom of the Armenian Bagratids (885-1045) and later, and the Cilicia's Armenian statehood (the Princedom - 1080-1197, the Kingdom – 1198-1375).

In Gladzor University (1280-1340), which the contemporaries called “the

Mother of Wisdom”, “the House of Wisdom”, “the second Athens”, and Tatev University (1390-1435), continuing traditions of the preceding epochs, teaching was provided on the basis of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and dialectic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy) subjects, comprising “seven liberal arts”, which centuries earlier were systematized in the works of David Anhakht [37, p. 295].

Armenian medieval culture, accumulating the achievements of the preceding epochs, introduced new values into the treasury of national and world culture. According to V. Brusov, “Armenia is a vanguard of Europe in Asia”. This formula suggested long ago determines correctly the place of the Armenian people in our world”, because, according to the great humanist, “the historic mission of the Armenian people - prompted by the whole process of its development – is to look for and acquire the synthesis of East and West. And this aspiration for the most part was reflected in the artistic creativity of Armenia, its literature and poetry” [36, p. 27].

At the current stage of geopolitical processes, considering historical truth as a cornerstone of inter-civilizational dialogue, Vladimir Yakunin writes: “Human communities are constantly changing identities, being in permanent dynamics. The philosophy of their evolutions is determined by historical conditions under which they have been shaped. In different periods this process acquires different facets, and it is always straight and, what is more, predictable <...> It would seem wise to approach setting goals and selecting means to reach them in the process of successive approximation, by sticking to historical truth and without upsetting the unity of the universal and special in the course of discussions about the role and place of inter-civilizational dialogue in bringing together peoples and races” [12, p. 141].

The principle of the prevention of the crisis of global security is a basic one in the concept of the dialogue of civilizations<sup>1</sup>. Thus cooperation between sovereign peoples and states through the *dialogue of cultures* [40] is considered to be an important principle in the dialogue among civilizations.

In the ontological aspect, proceeding from the importance of the idea of the dialogue of civilizations, according to V. Segesvary: “An inter-civilizational dialogue has to be based on mutual understanding”, which “requires a firm commitment to one’s own civilizational values and worldview in order to appreciate differences with others. We cannot understand the fundamental order of being and the meaningful order of things in the universe without our place in them” [41, pp. 8-9].

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<sup>1</sup> Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention Project, Expert Colloquy, Dialogue serving intercultural and inter-religious communication, Strasbourg, 7 to 9 October 2002, Council of Europe, Role of Religion in the 21st Century. Prevention of Crisis among Civilizations, Contribution by Prof. Masanori Naito, Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Cultural Heritage, Youth and Sports, Directorate of Culture and Cultural and Natural Heritage, Cultural Policy and Action Department, DGIV/CULT/PREV-ICIR (2002) 4E, 3.



Philosophical comprehension of the civilizational future of the humankind is founded on the revelation and deepening the ways of the dialogue between civilizations, taking as a basis the historical experience of each people separately and the world civilization in its entity [42, pp. 7-17]. It is necessary to comprehend and realize on the international level the defense of cultural-historic heritage of each people (the monuments of architecture, the works of art, manuscripts etc.), especially, of the Armenian people in the Motherland, including its historic parts. It may become a guarantee of the security of the world civilization by means of the dialogue of civilizations.

In the system of cultural-historic heritage *writing* is an important link of the inter-civilizational relations. Armenian writing, presented by original and translated literature, in the context of historic realities, characterized by linguistic, spiritual-cultural, ethno-demographic and social and political peculiarities, has rich traditions in the development of inter-cultural relations, promoting the dialogue of civilizations.

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