

# PREPARATION WORKS AND PRINTING OF THE FIRST ARMENIAN PUBLICATION OF THE BIBLE

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***Dedicated to the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the  
first Armenian publication of the Bible***

## **Life and Education**

Voskan Vardapet Yerevantsi was born in 1614 in Nor Jugha (New Julfa).<sup>1</sup> He was named Yerevantsi because of his parents being from Yerevan, who had moved to Persia as a result of the deportation by Shah Abbas (reigned 1584-1629) in 1605.

Voskan is a descendent of a Ghlichents family of the Yerevantsis (Yerevanians), and his brother Avetis was named Ghlichents. The parents of Avetis and Voskan were Toros and Gohar<sup>2</sup>. Voskan was the eldest among the brothers. Avetis and Voskan had two more brothers - Hovhanness who, like Avetis, was a merchant, another brother Mirzayan and a sister Hurusine.

The main sources for Voskan's biography are the colophons of the manuscripts copied and books printed by him, as well as the 57<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the *History* of Arakel Davrizhetsi printed by Voskan. This chapter was written by Voskan and ascribed to Davrizhetsi, that is why it is written in the third person, as if narrating Voskan's biography in the author's name.

The narration in the third person starts with the words: "He was an Armenian by nationality..." written in capital letters, while the rest of the text is written in normal letters. The use of such writing style in faraway Holland seems to emphasize further the origin of the Armenian typographer.

Voskan wrote that during the deportation organized by Shah Abbas, after being deported from the country, his parents together with the rest of the inhabitants of Yerevan were taken to Isfahan. Reaching maturity they got married. Voskan wrote he was born in January 1614.

Voskan received his initial education from the priests in New Julfa. From childhood, he dreamed of entering the monastery and studying at the school founded by Khachatur Kesaratsi in the Monastery of All Saviour in New Julfa.

While studying at Kesaratsi's school, Voskan reads the "Psalter" and "Sharaknots" together with Isaiah's Prophecies and Papers of the Apostle Paul.

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<sup>1</sup> Devrikyan V., Voskan Vardapet Yerevantsi (Life and Typographic Activity), Yerevan, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ներսես Շնորհալի, Յիսուս Որդի, Ամստերդամ, 1660-61, էջ 612.

After Movses III Tatevatsi became Catholicos (1629-1632) Voskan went to Holy Etchmiadzin, studied in the school opened by Vardapet Melikset Vzhanezi in Yerevan, then returned to Isfahan.

After the decease of Catholicos Movses, Philippos Aghbaketsi I (1632-1655) ascended the throne; he asked in a letter Khachatur Kesaratsi to sent Voskan to St. Etchmiadzin. Arriving to Etchmiadzin, Voskan befriended a Latin preacher Paolo Piromalli.

In 1632, Piromalli was sent to Armenia to teach at Armenian Catholic gymnasium in Nakhijevan. In Armenia, he made good friends with Armenian clergymen, so that they permitted him to preach from the pulpits of the Armenian churches.

Piromalli improved his knowledge on Classical Armenian by taking classes from Voskan since he did not know Classical Armenian well. In his turn, Voskan learnt Latin from Piromalli and he first translated a manual on Latin grammar, and later, imitating the latter wrote an Armenian concise grammar.

In addition, Piromalli taught Voskan logic, philosophy, metaphysics, theology, geometry and astronomy. Receiving relevant knowledge, he became one of the most advanced monks at the Holy See. However, the Catholicos and the clergy of the monastery started treating him with suspicion for his partnership with the Latin clergyman.

Not discouraged by unfriendly atmosphere, Voskan went on translating prayers and *The Elements of Philosophy* from Latin.

In 1637, in his report addressed to the Pope of Rome Urban VIII, Piromalli described in details the period of his life in Etchmiadzin. He mentioned that in the beginning he was warmly accepted by Catholicos Philippos who named him "the light of his eyes"<sup>3</sup>. Catholicos Philippos had even spoken about his willingness to ordain him a bishop. However, the situation changed shortly. The elder brethren of the monastery told the Catholicos that Piromalli had come to convert them to Catholicism, after which the Catholicos changed his attitude toward him.

Piromalli together with Voskan went to Lviv. Piromalli left Lviv for Rome, and Vardapet Voskan went back to Holy Etchmiadzin, where he took different offices in the Church. He became the abbot of St. Sarkis Monastery of Ushee situated on the slopes of Mount Aragats. He was ordained bishop in Holy Etchmiadzin in 1650s.

Continuing to advance his knowledge, he used to copy manuscripts and do translations from Latin.

### **Matteos Tsaretsi and the initiation of the Armenian printing in Amsterdam**

After ascending the throne in 1655, Catholicos Hakob IV Jughayetsi pursued the idea of establishing a new printing house in Europe, especially in Italy. To this end, as well as for realizing the printing of the Bible, he sent to Rome Deacon Matteos Tsaretsi, the clerk of Catholicos Philippos. It's worth mentioning that the majority of Armenian typographers were also scribes versed in the art of manuscript writing, the traditions of

<sup>3</sup> Կարապետ եպիսկոպոս Ամատունի, Ոսկան վրդ. Երևանցի և իր ժամանակը, Ս. Ղազար, 1975, էջ 52:

which they handed down to the Armenian printed book. Thus, it is not accidental that Catholicos Hakob sent the clerk of his predecessor for organizing the book printing in Rome, since he would have already mastered the art of writing.

Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsi was a bibliophile, but he was displeased with the letters used by Khachatur Kesaratsi in New Julfa and by those of Hovhannes Ankyuratsi. So he decided to have new typefaces of Armenian letters created and was searching for a relevant person whom he could send to Europe with this purpose. Since Deacon Matteos Tsaretsi, who had served at Catholicos Philippos as a notary, was in Etchmiadzin during that period, the selection fell on him and he was sent to Europe. M. Chamchean writes about Tsaretsi's visit to Venice and Rome. On arriving to Venice, Tsaretsi did not find a good master who could create new Armenian letter fonts, thus he was preparing to continue traveling to Rome. But, there was a plague epidemic in Rome at that time and Deacon Matteos Tsaretsi had to postpone his visit to Rome for 14 months.

Vatican was willing to keep the monopoly of Armenian typography under its rule and to ban the publication of any book that would contradict the confessional doctrine of Rome. With that aim, the Italian typefounders were prohibited to design molds for Armenian typefaces without the decree of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide.

The fact is also proved by the colophon of Tsaretsi written at the end of the book "Jesus Son." It may sound strange, but according to Tsaretsi, he was not able to find good typefounders in Rome as well.

However, the real reason becomes apparent after reading the next sentence informing that he had been slandered in the eyes of high dignitaries. Who were those high dignitaries, and what malign speeches were told by the quarrelsome opponents becomes apparent from the following sentence. It appeared that the Congregation de Propaganda Fide ordered to impede Tsaretsi's plan and not to allow acquiring new Armenian typefaces. Thus, typefounders in Rome were prohibited to prepare new Armenian typefaces<sup>4</sup>.

Before Matteos Tsaretsi, in the 1640s Hovhannes Vardapet Jughayetsi and Hovhannes Ankyuratsi had also addressed with the issue of Armenian typography to Rome and achieved certain results.

Hovhannes Jughayetsi was the disciple of Khachatur Vardapet Kesaratsi and had contributed to the establishment of Armenian printing house in New Julfa. By the order of Kesaratsi, he travelled to Italy to master the art of printing and bring typefaces and printing tools to New Julfa. Jughayetsi went to Italy in 1639 and returned in 1645. Though experiencing great hardship, he succeeded in getting typefaces and together with them, he returned to New Julfa bringing with him printing tools and 1000 copies of "Psalter" printed in Leghorn.

Hovhannes Ankyuratsi being one of the censors of the Armenian books printed in Italy, had more achievements. He succeeded in gaining Armenian typefaces from the

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<sup>4</sup> Ներսես Շնորհալի, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

publishing house of the Propaganda Fide in Rome and, by its permission he printed the "Psalter" and Nerses Shnorhali's "Jesus Son" in Venice in 1642-1643.

Arriving to Rome Tsaretsi stayed at the house of S. Zakaria Akam, an Armenian confessor and inquisitor, who had graduated from the Urban College in Rome. By the support of Zakaria, Tsaretsi composed a petition addressed to the Congregation de Propaganda Fide. S. Chemchemean writes that although the letter has not been preserved in the Vatican archives, however, the report of the Congregation based on it is extant. It reads that an Armenian was willing to publish Armenian books in Rome at his own expense, first the Bible, starting from the New Testament, after making the edition acceptable for Rome. To reach this goal, he was ready to cast the matrixes from the already existing molds at his own expense. Following the discussion of the issue, no decision was made.

During the session of the Congregation held on the next day, July 30, it was decided to accelerate the issue of editing of the Armenian text of the Bible according to the Latin canon as well as to cast new typefaces using the existing molds, by attributing the application of the typefaces exclusively to the Urban printing house in Rome, without a permission to take them out of there<sup>5</sup>.

In November, 1657 Tsaretsi addressed a new letter, but with a much more modest request, i.e. to get permission to print Armenian books that have already been published in Armenian in Venice, being authorized by Rome. Not to cast any suspicion on his willingness to acquire those fonts in order to use them later in other publications, Tsaretsi stated that the molds prepared at his own expense can be used for printing books in the printing house of the Propaganda Fide.

Among the books to be published, he mentioned the "Psalter" and "Jesus Son" that have been already published in Italy for several times. As a result of the counsel held on January 15, 1658, Tsaretsi was advised to present those books for censoring<sup>6</sup>.

As a last chance to implement his mission, Tsaretsi decided to apply to the Pope Paul IV. Concerning his travel to Venice and Rome, he wrote that he was sent by the Catholicos to publish the Holy Bible in Armenian and other books as well as to order new typefaces to take them back to his homeland. Not able to implement his plan in Venice, he arrived to Rome being sure that there "he will be able to find skilful masters, printers and designers for the above-mentioned typefaces"<sup>7</sup>.

From this letter, it becomes therewith clear that the next assemblies permitted Tsaretsi to print any book in Rome, but it was prohibited to take the typefaces out of Rome. Clerk Matteos assured that the typefaces would be used to print books spreading the catholic doctrine. That letter stayed unanswered, and disappointed Tsaretsi headed to Holland.

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<sup>5</sup> Ճեմհեմեան Հ. Ս., Հայկական տպագրությունը և Հռոմը, Վենետիկ, 1989, էջ 81:

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

### **Tsaretsi's Printing Activity in Amsterdam**

In the colophon to “Jesus Son,” Tsaretsi described in details that after his arrival to Amsterdam he undertook actions to prepare typefaces. There, without difficulties he managed to find skilful masters to mold typefaces.

As described by Tsaretsi, he worked uninterruptedly nights and days for a period of four years and eight months, to finally prepare the typefaces necessary for starting the publication work<sup>8</sup>.

In the colophon of the “Psalter” Karapet Andrianatsi writes that the samples of the typefaces, i.e., the forms as well as a copy of “Psalter” was provided to Voskan by the Catholicos Movses<sup>9</sup>. This proves that already before the Catholicoses Hakob and Philippos, Catholicos Movses was also concerned with the idea of establishing a printing house either in Europe or at the Holy See. During the rule of Catholicos Philippos, the idea was partially implemented by the establishment of the printing house in New Julfa by Khachatur Kesaratsi. The printing house operated in 1638-1642.

The main patrons of the Armenian typography were the merchants from New Julfa and they were mainly supporting publication of those books for which permission from Rome was received. The reason is that the majority of those merchants had adopted Catholicism in order to facilitate their trading in Europe without any obstacle. A typical example is the Shahrimeans family who had achieved significant prosperity in Venice. The leaders of the Dominican and other Catholic congregations in Isfahan in their letters addressed to Rome and Venice were supporting those traders. That's why the latter avoided situations that could harm their relations with Rome.

The second reason was the Polish Armenians; this was a core issue for many circles of Armenian clerics and intellectuals. Following the separation of Polish-Armenian Diocese from St. Etchmiadzin, the assimilation process of Polish-Armenians grew rapidly. In such situation, an important role in preserving the national self-consciousness and attachment to the origins was attributed to Armenian books.

On November 27, 1658 Tsaretsin contracted Christopher von Dinkin to design Armenian typefaces: 170 “paternal” forms<sup>10</sup> and 240 matrixes<sup>11</sup>.

In Amsterdam Tsaretsi managed to realize his actions by borrowing money. Avetis Khlichents who continued Tsaretsi's colophon in “Jesus Son” wrote that the printing house had a bare (lit. “dry”) debt in the amount of 1000 *marchils*<sup>12</sup>. By saying “dry” he meant the capital amount of the debt to which interests were added as well. Avetis returned the “dry” debt together with all the accumulated interests.

<sup>8</sup> Ներսես Շնորհալի, op. cit., p. 602.

<sup>9</sup> Սաղմոսարան, Ամստերդամ, 1661-1662, էջ 4:

<sup>10</sup> A technical term designating a component of the detachable from which is plugged in the matrix.

<sup>11</sup> Լեո, Հայկական տպագրություն, Երկերի ժողովածու 10 հատորով, հտ. 5, Երևան, 1968, էջ 228:

<sup>12</sup> European silver coin which in different countries had variety: florin, lakri, svile, msketi etc. (~ 24,6-24,9 gr.), see Հովհաննես Տեր-Դավթյանի Հաշվեմատյանը, խմբ. Լ. Խաչիկյան և Հ. Փափազյան, Երևան, 1984, էջ 393.

Avetis also wrote in the colophon of the “Psalter” that he encouraged clerk Matteos to present the printing house to the Monasteries of St. Etchmiadzin and of St. Sargis. While on his deathbed, Matteos called Avetis and asked him to give the debt of 715 marchils that he had to return to the creditors.

Tsaretsi told Avetis that they would print 2000 copies of the “Psalter” and 1200 copies of “Jesus Son” and the profit from the sale would be shared between them. Having experience in communicating with numerous Armenian merchants during those years, Tsaretsi tried to attract Avetis by such a suggestion. However, Voskan’s brother, Avetis was not guided by profits and benefits. He declared that once the printing house is presented to the Monasteries of St. Etchmiadzin and of St. Sargis, he will then become a partner to Tsaretsi and pay the debts. Presenting and giving the printing house the name *St. Etchmiadzin and St. Sargis* meant that when it starts earning incomes, the profits should be equally allocated between two monasteries. After the death of the two brothers, the property the printing house the names would become under possession of the two monasteries.

Matteos gladly accepted the suggestion since all his hardships had the only goal, for St. Etchmiadzin to possess a printing house. He personally was sent to Europe by the order of the Catholicos with that goal, that’s why by accepting Avetis’ suggestion he drew up a will according to which the printing house should later become the property of the monasteries.

Tsaretsi writes that the typesetters were from Holland and they “were not familiar with our letters and language”. Being alone and unhealthy, he conducted the proofreading with difficulty. Then he asked to remember all his relatives by naming all of them separately in the colophon. Tsaretsi’s colophon ends by listing the names of his relatives, and immediately the part written by Avetis follows, that starts the sentence with small letter as follows: “Matteos wrote this colophon with his hand before his death”. Stylistically, even in terms of orthography, these two colophons are incomparable. Tsaretsi wrote in the literary Armenian of his time, while Avetis wrote in “merchant” Armenian.

Avetis writes that “Jesus Son” has 38 quires, i.e. sheets, and that following the publication of quire 24, Matteos died on January 22, 1660, at 11 p.m. He also adds that after Tsaretsi’s death he became an orphaned in Amsterdam since there was no other proofreader except for him.

During that period, the ship from Amsterdam to Smyrna sailed off where Avetis’ merchandise was embarked on. Avetis, however, stayed in Amsterdam to finish the proofreading of the rest 14 sheets. He placed the original book on one side, the composed type on the other and compared the latter with the original, correcting the mistakes. The proofreading was conducted from March 25, 1661 to May 27.

Avetis humbly apologizes for putting his name in the colophon, since he supported both the proofreading process and provided money for printing the book. He also

emphasizes that without him it would be unclear who would own the publishing house at the end.

He also writes that after completing the book he was planning to publish the Bible, but Tsaretsi died and did not manage to order typefaces necessary for publishing. During Tsaretsi's lifetime 60 matrixes were prepared, but 200 more typefaces were needed. Expenses for the latter were covered by Avetis.

The following example shows what sanctity was the book for the Armenians and what an honor it was to be mentioned in a book's colophon. Avetis asks to recall Grigor, a merchant from Yerevan in the colophon. Avetis owed money to him and Grigor told him that the debt would be given for publishing needs and instead his name to be written in the colophon. Thus, Avetis mentioned his name there.

### **The printing art of the first edition in Amsterdam**

Matteos the Scribe wrote that the publication of the "Jesus Son" was an experiment, which also proved that his main goal was the publication of the Bible. This intention is also confirmed by the diversity of the typefaces ordered by Tsaretsi.

He ordered three different types of fonts, each of them having three sizes: large, medium and small. The type designer, however, was overwhelmed by orders of locals and only managed to prepare *bolorgir* (a style of minuscule writing) with its three sizes before Tsaretsi's death.

On the typefaces used by Tsaretsi in publishing the "Jesus Son" Ishkhanyan writes: "The book is set up in large (12-14 points) "boloragir" and capital letters (20 points)"<sup>13</sup>.

The publication of the "Jesus Son" in Amsterdam was the third in turn. The first publication was done by Hovhannes Ankyuratsi in Venice in 1643, the second one – in 1660 by an Italian publisher Joan (Giovanni) Battista Bovis.

In line with the traditions of Armenian manuscript writing, a number of the works of Nerses Shnorhali were copied either as separate books or were included as a separate group entitled "Jesus Son" in collections of works. The name is derived from the first writing of the mentioned group, in which the first line starts with the words "Jesus Son" (pic. 1). Then, the whole poem was entitled by this name. "Jesus Son" is a retelling of the New and Old Testaments in verse and presents the Bible according to the canonical interpretation of the Armenian medieval Church (pic. 2 a. b.).

The publications made in 1643 and 1660 have five engravings. However, the publication printed in Amsterdam has 99 engravings, which is unprecedented in the Armenian books printed so far. Most probably those engravings were acquired not only for the publication of the "Jesus Son", but also for the Bible, since all the engravings depicted scenes of the Scripture, mainly the Old Testament, which might be explained by the following circumstance. Tsaretsi started acquiring engravings from Dutch masters according to the order of the books of the Bible, that is why, starting from the

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<sup>13</sup> Իշխանյան Ռ., Հայ գրքի պատմություն, Երևան, 1977, էջ 418:

middle of the “Jesus Son” there are no illustrations except for one image of the “Crucifixion” which is placed in the beginning of the last chapter, “Passion”.

This fact also testifies that the above-mentioned edition was a trial publication of the Bible which should be followed by the publication of the “Psalter” with the same goal. Before that, however, Avetis who after Tsaretsi’s death became alone, managed to print a short “Prayer-book” in August, 1661.

#### **Karapet Vardapet Andrianatsi and the Publication of the “Psalter” (1661-1662)**

After buying the printing house of Tsaretsi, Avetis wrote a letter to his brother to come and manage the printing house<sup>14</sup>.

Chamchean writes that before leaving for Amsterdam, Voskan Vardapet sent there his disciple Karapet Vardapet<sup>15</sup>.

Matteos Tsaretsi died on January 22, 1661, while the publication of the “Psalter”, the preface of which was written by Karapet Vardapet, started on December 13, 1661. Thus, Andreanapolsetsi arrived to Amsterdam during the same period.

It had been planned by Matteos Tsaretsi to print the “Psalter” after the publication of the “Jesus Son”. As we could see, he had told about this to Avetis as well. The order of printing the books, at first the “Jesus Son”, then the “Psalter” was profoundly well-grounded.

It was not accidental that the Armenian publication of the Bible in 1666 was preceded by three publications of the “Jesus Son” in the course of two decades, while the “Psalter” was published by almost all the printing houses that existed before.

On the issue of the first Armenian publishers starting their activity with the mandatory printing of the “Psalter,” R. Ishkhanyan writes: “In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it becomes clear that the first and the most important issue, similar to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, was the Armenian Bible. It seems that from Hakob Meghapart to Voskan Yerevantsi all efforts of Armenian printers were directed to publish the complete Bible and the publications of its part, the “Psalter,” were just trials on the way of realizing that great and difficult publication in 1666-1668”<sup>16</sup>.

Before Voskan Yerevantsi, the person who stood close to realizing the publication of the Bible was Hovhannes Ankyuratsi who supposed that Rome would finally permit him to publish it.

Convinced that he was also not destined to be granted permission to publish the Armenian Bible, unlike his predecessors, Ankyuratsi undertook a unique action and printed the “Jesus Son”. Being a poetic retelling of the New and Old Testaments, in fact, it presents the Bible in accordance with the medieval Armenian ecclesiastic canonical interpretations.

<sup>14</sup> Առաքել Դավրիժեցի, Գիրք պատմութեանց, Ամստերդամ, 1669, էջ 635:

<sup>15</sup> Չամչեան Մ., Պատմութիւն Հայոց, հ. Գ, Վենետիկ, 1786, էջ 659:

<sup>16</sup> Իշխանյան Ռ., *op. cit.*, pp. 339-340.



Thus its publication is justified as a trial version of printing the Bible, since it is its short retelling. That was the reason that following the publication of the “Jesus Son”, Avetis Khlichents and Karapet Vardapet undertook the publication of the “Psalter”.

The title pages of both the “Jesus Son” and “Psalter” contain the same engravings. Whereas, in the mandorla held by two angels of the former book, the title, “Jesus Son” was written, the same space of the current publication remained blank. The title was written between the two columns.

Shortly after the Preface, on the next page, Prophet David with a lyre in his hands was depicted (pc. 3). Since the Psalms of David were predictions of the birth of Christ and the episode of his life, then, in some cases, the psalms were arranged with evangelical images, though the psalms of David form part of the Old Testament written before the birth of Christ. Thus, it emphasized even more the prophetic nature of the Psalms, for which King David was named not only Psalmist, but also prophet.

The “Psalter” had around 150 engravings, which surpassed the number of engravings of the “Jesus Son” (99 engraving) and was considered unprecedented for that time. The “Psalter” was later surpassed by Voskan’s Bible with 160 engravings, and remained unsurpassed even after the publication of the monumental masterpiece in the series of early printed Armenian books, the Bible published by Mkhitar Sebastatsi.

In the colophon of the “Psalter”, Karapet Vardapet mentioned three principles of placing the engravings in the book.

The first principle was the placing of the engravings in accordance with the titles of the Psalms. The second - they were coordinated with specific Psalms or their chapters. Therefore, in case of the first two principles, the placing of the engravings was conditioned by the meaning of the text and its symbolic value. The third principle – they followed the traditions of the European book design by placing the engravings on exact positions in which they appeared in Latin editions.

As to the number of printed copies, two different numbers are mentioned in the colophon. According to Avetis, Tsaretsi told him to make 2000 copies, but at the end of the colophon it is written that 2700 copies were printed.

In the colophon, Karapet Vardapet provides important information on the publication of the “Psalter”. Apologizing for the errors in the book, he continues that he was not familiar with the art of printing and the Dutch language, and the printers did not know Armenian. Avetis helped him in communicating with them. It is most unlikely that Avetis could manage to learn Dutch language during the period of his printing activities. Most probably, he had learnt it when engaged in trading activities, during which he met Matteos Tsaretsi.

Avetis supported Karapet Vardapet in both communicating with the employees of the printing house and during the proofreading of the “Psalter”, which proves that the publication of the two previous books helped Avetis to master his proofreading skills.

### **“Psalter” (1664). The last pre-Voskan publication in Amsterdam**

Following the publication of the “Prayer-book” in February 1663, Karapet Vardapet did not undertake new publication for that year. Voskan, who already reached Europe and took up the rights of the printing house from his brother, as stated by himself in the colophon of “Sharaknots” (a collection of Armenian church canticles), gave order to Karapet Vardapet to act individually in the frame of his capacities until Voskan reaches Amsterdam. During that period, Avetis ordered to prepare matrixes for *khaz* (Armenian musical neumes) with the use of which he published the “Sharaknots” and the “Psalter”<sup>17</sup> several times.

In the colophon of the previous publication of the “Psalter” in 1661, Karapet Vardapet requests to remember the Dutchman Jan Jannes, i.e. Hovahannes, who learnt to read and write Armenian and was responsible for setting up Armenian books. Within a two years period, Jannes managed to get fluent in Armenian to an extent that Karapet was writing about him in the same manner as he did before about Armenians working in the printing house.

Colophons of old Armenian books provide interesting information about the places where they were printed. Here, it is said that during the book publication (completed on August 2), terrible plague ravaged the city and within a week 795 people died.

At the end of the colophon, Karapet Vardapet consigns the name of one of the devoted traders to the art of printing, Mahtesi (gone to pilgrimage to Jerusalem) Abdullah from Shamb, who bequeathed his wealth to the printing house and the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. The fact of mentioning of a benefactor in almost every publication shows that among Armenian colonies at that time the importance of the Armenian printing house in Amsterdam was highly praised.

### **Headed to Leghorn (Livorno) and Rome**

As it was mentioned earlier, after the death of Matteos Tsaretsi, Avetis wrote a letter to his brother Voskan asking him to come and manage the printing house. Chamchean writes that Voskan showed the letter to Hakob IV Jughayetsi who expressed his gladness and ordered Voskan to go to Amsterdam to realize the publication of the Bible<sup>18</sup>.

In his biography, Voskan writes that he was sent to Europe by the order of Catholicos Hakob<sup>19</sup>. In the colophon of “Sharaknots”, Voskan also clearly writes that he traveled to Leghorn by the order of the Catholicos<sup>20</sup>. The same is mentioned in the colophon of the Bible as well<sup>21</sup>.

Referring to European sources, Bishop Karapet Amatuni writes that during the church council held in Etchmiadzin in 1662, it was decided to send Voskan Vardapet to

<sup>17</sup> Շարակնոց, Ամստերդամ, 1664-1665, էջ 778:

<sup>18</sup> Չամչեան Մ., op. cit., vol. III., p. 659.

<sup>19</sup> Առաքել Դավրիժեցի, Գիրք պատմութեանց, էջ 659:

<sup>20</sup> Շարակնոց, էջ 779:

<sup>21</sup> Աստվածաշունչ, Ամստերդամ, 1666-1668, էջ 833:

Europe to realize the publication of the Bible and continue Tsaretsi's work in Amsterdam<sup>22</sup>.

On June 6, 1662, Voskan was still in St. Etchmiadzin. On that day the archbishop of Heliopolis Francisco Palu on his way to China was in St. Etchmiadzin and one of the bishops receiving him at the entrance of the patriarchate residence was Voskan<sup>23</sup>. Later he wrote about Voskan as a faithful catholic, probably meaning that he mastered Latin, Italian and western ecclesiastical literature.

After sending Karapet Andrianatsi to Amsterdam, completing his works in St. Etchmiadzin and passing on the position of the abbot of the St. Sargis Monastery in Ushi, Voskan takes up the journey to Europe by again travelling through marine route from Smyrna. In the colophon of the

S. Chemchemean writes about the arrival of Voskan Vardapet to Livorno as follows: "In the beginning of 1663, Voskan took a journey from Smyrna to Leghorn tightly holding in his hands the Bible of Hetum with the aim to realize the new publication"<sup>24</sup>.

In the colophon of the "Sharaknots" Voskan Vardapet noted that he met with his brother in Leghorn and documented the transfer of the property of the printing house to him.

Though Hakob IV Jughayetsi had sent a letter addressed to the Armenians in Livorno to help him, however, Voskan Vardapet didn't find necessary help there and like his predecessors directed his steps to Rome.

Based on Vatican archive documents, S. Chemchemean writes that Voskan reached Rome in September 1663. During the assembly of the Propaganda de Fide it was mentioned that several days ago Bishop Voskan arrived to Rome. The fact of informing the Congregation about his arrival certifies the authority of the Armenian cleric and the attention of Rome to the relations with the Armenian Church and the Armenian typography. Testimonies in favour to Voskan were also provided by Clemens Galanus, who had been conducting missionary activities both in the East, particularly in Armenia for a long time and spoke fluent Armenian.

After three months of his stay in Rome, Voskan sends a petition to the Congregation of Propaganda de Fide, saying: "Bishop Voskan of the St. Sargis church of Greater Armenia, on behalf of his Catholicos, addresses Your Excellency with a request to approve the publication of the New Testament in favour of his nation. By the order of the Catholicos, Bishop Voskan has completely compared it with the Latin text and presented to the censors. Voskan Vardapet humbly requests Your Excellency to console and grant approval to the request of the mentioned Catholicos"<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Կարապետ եպս. Ամատունի, Ոսկան վարդապետ և իր ժամանակը, էջ 146:

<sup>23</sup> Պէրպլերեան Հ., Էջմիածնի վանքը, 1662-ին, "Հասկ" 1950, N. 8-10, էջ 272-273:

<sup>24</sup> Ճեմճեմեան Հ. Ս., op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

In the letter, there is no mention of Voskan's travel to Europe for the publication of the complete Bible and managing the printing house in Amsterdam. If Voskan would have written about his visit to "heretic" Holland, he would endanger the implementation of the plan to publish the Bible from its very beginning. Not mentioning his visit to Amsterdam Voskan testifies that he either had hopes to publish the Bible by the approval of Rome or wanted to move the printing house to Italy to make the operation of the latter acceptable for Rome. S. Chemchemean also writes that reasoning the fact, Voskan did not mention about his intentions to travel to Europe: "Voskan was wise enough to conceal his final goal".

The Congregation of Propaganda de Fide provides the same response as to other Armenian printers earlier, which, in practice, was an inapplicable agreement. The response reads that the Congregation agrees to publish the New Testament in Armenian; however, there are no specialists for Armenian language to censor and approve the Armenian translation of the book<sup>26</sup>.

Voskan Vardapet stayed in Rome until November 6, 1664. After one year and two months of his stay, he again returned to Leghorn, then to Amsterdam to realize the words of Hovhannes Ankyuratsi, who said late in 1642, that if Rome would not permit the publication of the Bible in Armenian, then the Armenian edition should be published in the "heretic" Holland.

### **The first publication of Voskan's Armenian printing house in Amsterdam**

Arriving to Leghorn from Smyrna, Voskan Vardapet wrote a letter to Karapet Andrianatsi to operate the printing house the best of his ability until he reaches Amsterdam.

Parallel to the publication of the "Psalter", Andrianatsi prepared the *khaz* fonts necessary for the "Sharaknots" and started its publication. Voskan reached Amsterdam when the publication of the canon On Ascension was going on.

In the colophon of the "Sharaknots", Voskan writes that for the publication of the Bible he ordered preparation of a new type of cursive (*notrgir*) and when ready he used it to set up the canon of the Martyrs. In the colophon of the Bible he also mentions that he ordered a type of "notrgir" font that was used in setting up the final part of the "Sharaknots". He writes that preparing those new fonts took four months.

Voskan justifies the need for the new typefaces by the fact that the fonts of Tsaretsi were large. If he had used them when publishing the Bible, the book would have been larger in size.

As stated on the title page, the publication of the "Sharaknots" was launched on August 14, 1664, on the second day of the feast of Assumption of the Virgin Mary and completed on November 1, 1665.

The "Sharaknots" is a collection of spiritual songs called *sharakan*. Sharakans are placed in it not by the order of authors, but according to the feasts of Armenian Church

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<sup>26</sup> Կարապետ եպս. Ամատունի, op. cit., p. 150.

dedicated to the various events of the Old and New Testaments, as well as of the Universal and Armenian Church life.

The canon for each feast is composed of sharakans dedicated to a certain feast. Some canon is anticipated by engravings thematically corresponding to the given feast.

Armenian printers were taking European engravings and adapting them to the Armenian themes where possible, since preparation of the engraving on national ecclesiastic themes would be too expensive. That is the reason that illustrations are mainly made on the feasts of scriptural and general ecclesiastic themes (pic. 4ab).

Since the “Jesus Son” was dedicated to the Old and New Testaments, some parts of the engravings used in the book were also placed in “Sharaknots”, later the Bible. “Sharaknots” has 99 engravings. They are placed in the beginning of the canons following the principle of thematic and symbolic relevance. For instance, relevant thematic engravings are placed in case of the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Candlemas, and Antony the Eremite. However, since the Shrovetide was not directly connected to any of the themes, but rather it symbolized the happy life in paradise, in the beginning of the canon Adam and Eve in paradise were depicted.

Beneath every engraving, there is a small inscription in verse that interprets the spiritual conception of a given feast.

The following Sunday after the Shrovetide is called the Expulsion and reads about the expulsion from paradise. On the engraving of the given canon the moment when Adam and Eve eat the fruit of paradise and are expelled from it is shown.

Voskan also followed the tradition of the Armenian manuscript writing in such a difficult issue as it was with the science of old Armenian musical notation system called “Khazagrutyun.”

Preparation of matrixes for *khaz* signs was very difficult, but more difficult was the exact conversion of the signs from manuscript texts to printed books, especially considering the decline of the art of *khaz* writing, which started from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Bible, 1666-1668, 1470 pages in two columns**

The first publication of the Armenian Bible evokes admiration and amazement by its size, quality and art of printing, as well as the tremendous textual work undertaken. Every attempt to transmit a manuscript text or a collection into a printed book is connected not only with printing or technical difficulties, but also creates certain difficulties regarding the text itself, since the inner division of the text has also semantic significance that requires relevant approach in the process of transmitting it from the manuscript version into a printed book.

The above mentioned is true when observing the Bible with its quite complicated structure, since it is composed of the Old and New Testaments, and each in its turn, is composed of a number of books with respective chapter and verse divisions, numbering, preambles and concordances.

The transition from manuscript copies of the Bible to a printed version created the necessity of developing new printing principles and publishing a text which,

corresponding to the Armenian canon of the Bible, at the same time, would be in harmony with the Latin ecclesiastical editions. This relation is mentioned on the title page as following: “in the order of our ancestors” and “with chapter and verse divisions in accordance with the Latins”.

Summarizing all the problems it can be concluded that the main textological difficulties surmounted by Voskan were the following:

A. The selection of the Armenian relevant manuscript or manuscripts of the Bible and their comparison with the Vulgate.

B. The decision on the sequence of the books of the Bible by combining the Armenian canon and the Vulgate.

C. Determining the canonical, secondary and non-canonical books of the Bible. Consequently deciding which books should be included in the main text and which placed at the end of the book as appendices.

D. Making the chapter division of each book, dividing the chapters into verses and numbering them, taking into consideration the differences conditioned by the presence or absence of this or that passage in the Armenian or Latin texts, which confused the whole system of verse numbering of a given chapter.

E. Composing the concordances and placing them in the margins indicating in which book of the Bible the given line, paragraph or chapter has a thematic, semantic or symbolical parallel.

All those issues, including those concerning the placement of the Books existing in the Armenian translation, but absent in the Vulgate, as well as the translation of the Books absent in the Armenian version are discussed in details by Voskan Vardapet in the “Preface” addressed to Hakob IV Jughayetsi, in the appeal to the reader and in the colophon as well.

Strangely enough, Voskan does not write a word about the manuscript or manuscripts that served bases for publishing the Bible. He does not address this issue either when speaking about the publication of the Bible in his biography inserted into Davrizhetsi’s “Book of Histories”<sup>27</sup>.

M. Chamchean when providing a detailed description of the publication of the Bible, again, gives no information on the manuscript, which served the base for printing the book<sup>28</sup>.

Luckily, two facts helped the scholars to find the manuscript used by Voskan and compare it with the printed copy. In the colophon of the New Testament published in 1668, Voskan writes that the Bible of the King Hethum II (1289-1301) served as a base for the publication of the current book. The second fact is that at the end of the printed Bible, Voskan included an untitled poem of King Hethum. These two facts formed a base to conclude that Voskan used the written Bible of King Hethum (pic. 5).

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<sup>27</sup> See Առաքել Դավրիժեցի, Գիրք պատմութեանց, էջ 635-636:

<sup>28</sup> Չամչեան Մ., op. cit., vol. III, p. 621, 659-660:

After selecting this manuscript, Voskan had also printed its colophon in verse, copied from the archetype. The scribes of medieval manuscripts, too, when copying texts often also copied the colophons accompanying them.

A two-stage scrupulous comparison of the Hethum's "Royal" Bible (kept in Matenadaran, № 180) and the Voskan's printed Bible was done by S. Kolanjyan. This comparison is two-stage since Kolanjyan compared not only the texts of the Bible, but also the later marginalia in the manuscript and showed that they found place in Voskan's publication as well<sup>29</sup>. He concluded that these are Voskan's editorial notes in the margins of the manuscript, which were typeset while printing the book together with the additional corrections.

The margins of the manuscript also contain notes in red ink that refer to the time when the manuscript was written: "1<sup>st</sup> of the Francs," "2<sup>nd</sup> of the Francs" or "the Francs' number of this chapter 24", etc. Kolanjyan writes about these notes: "It is most probable that the mentioned chapter numbering and notes in red ink belong to the commissioner of the manuscript, i.e. Hethum II who was studying sacred books at a Franciscan monastery in the year the manuscript was completed (1295). Thus, when searching an archetype for his printed book, Voskan considered the mentioned manuscript most suitable, since it was not only a royal manuscript of the Bible, but also was one of the samples of exquisite handwriting and almost perfect content. In addition, as already mentioned, the manuscript also included chapter numbering typical to the Latin Vulgate, something that Voskan had to include in his printed Bible by the order of Catholicos Hakob IV. In the manuscript, a number of later revisions and additions are visible, that were also included in Voskan's publication".

The name of the scribe of the manuscript is Stepanos, the commissioner is King Hethum. Due to the fact that since 1656 Hethum's *Bible* was preserved at Hovhannavank, near the monastery of St. Sargis in Ushi, Voskan had the opportunity to study both this manuscript and the Bible of Ghukas Vardapet Kharberdtsi or the manuscript of Valakatsi, which was also kept at Hovhannavank (currently manuscript № 201 of Matenadaran).

The fact that Voskan used the Bible of the King Hethum brought to Hovhannavank in 1656 as a base for his printed Bible, proves that the manuscript edited by Voskan and Piromalli in 1642 could not be used for that purpose, rather it could have been compared with Hethum's Bible after 1656.

In regards to the interventions made by Voskan to the text, it is necessary to mention that in such cases too he tried to remain loyal to the Armenian tradition. He did not reduce the words, sentences or paragraphs absent from the Vulgate, but rather he preserved the Armenian text with notes about their absence in the Vulgate, placing them in parenthesis. Moreover, to make the section numbering in the Armenian text

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<sup>29</sup> Քոլանջյան Ս., Հեթում Բ-ի ձեռագիր Աստվածաշունչը և Ոսկանյան հրատարակությունը, Էջմիածին, 1966, դեկտեմբեր, էջ 103:

match those in the Vulgate, he did not number the parts placed in parenthesis, thus the verse numbering in the Armenian corresponds to that in the Latin text.

The parts absent in the Armenian text and added by Voskan are inserted without parenthesis and any other sign, by making the Armenian text closer to the Vulgate.

In the section of the New Testament of the Hethum's Bible there are no marginalia, since Voskan had entirely copied the New Testament and later made some notes in his copied sample, thus keeping intact the New Testament section of this magnificent manuscript.

The number of printed copies, 5000, also was unprecedented for that time.

The 159 engravings or the majority of them found in Voskan's Bible were obtained by Matteos Tsaretsi, since similar images were also found in Shnorhali's "Jesus Son" and "Sharaknots".

H. Kyurtean presented arguments to prove that all those engravings can be found in the Bible printed in 1657 in Holland and their author is priest Christoffel Van Sichem<sup>30</sup>. As he notes, the majority of the engravings have been copied from images of renowned European engravers. Sichem marked his own works with the initials CvS, while there are initials of other painters, AD in case of Albrecht Durer, HG for Hendrik Goltzius, etc.

Voskan used the engraving without any amendment that is why the names of the Evangelists are written in Latin.

As Kyurtean notes, the Dutch engraver numbered the engravings with Latin characters: A, B, C, D, etc., and placed their captions under the corresponding letters at the end of the book. Since the Armenian book has no such a list, thus the letters on the images indicate nothing.

G. Levonyan writes about the book's title page (pic. 6) the following: "The title page has rather large frame composed of four etchings. Two human figures representing the symbols of faith and hope are placed in the center of ornamental engravings on the right and the left"<sup>31</sup>.

Six engravings representing the six days of the Creation are placed in the beginning of the Book of Genesis (pc. 7). The books of Genesis and Exodus have more illustrations than the others, as they are rich with events and episodes.

In the beginning of almost all the books, there is an engraving that summarizes the content and the mystical meaning of the book.

As opposed to the Hethum's manuscript, the printed version has no marginal ornaments. Perhaps, Voskan tried to avoid the excessive use of ornaments and ornamented letters preferring to apply the principles of European book printing.

The Old Testament is immediately followed by the New Testament, where the images are placed mainly in four Gospels. On the left page of the Mathew's Gospel the

<sup>30</sup> Քյուրտեան Հ., Ոսկանի աստվածաշնչային փայտափորագրեալ պատկերները, Սիոն, Երուսաղեմ, 1966, փետրվար-մարտ, էջ 105:

<sup>31</sup> Լևոնյան Գ., Հայ գիրքը և տպագրական արվեստը, Երևան, 1958, էջ 105:



four evangelists are placed. Inside the engravings, the names of the Evangelists are written in Latin, and the names in Armenian are placed below the frames of the images.

In the beginning of Mathew's Gospel on the upper part of the page where a magnificent semi-arch (*khoran*) is usually painted in Armenian manuscripts, here is a frame in similar style, with the image of the Jesse Tree according to the prophecy of Isaiah: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse." Prophet David was of Jesse's lineage and this genealogy reaches Christ.

Since the Gospel of Mark starts with the story of the Baptism, thus a scene of baptism is depicted in the beginning of the Gospel. As characteristic of the Gospel of Luke the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple is regarded, so the Gospel starts with a corresponding image. In the beginning of the Gospel of John, instead of thematic images, the image of the Evangelist is placed.

The design of Voskan's Bible follows the medieval symbolic tradition and is built according to the graphic interpretation of the Holy Bible.

From the distance of 350 years, the Bible still continues to admire and amaze the reader how it became possible to realize such a monumental publication in such difficult circumstances. As characterized by Leo: "It was the first time that the printing world raised the fact that Armenians too are capable of realizing large publications with long and difficult works"<sup>32</sup>.

The publication of the Bible by Mkhitar of Sebastia in 1733 became the unsurpassed peak of the history of the Armenian antique books.

During the publication of the Bible, Mkhitar applied the typefaces used in the printing house of Archimandrite Voskan. Using the original typefaces brought from Amsterdam, lead typefaces were molded for the publication of the Bible.

The Venice publication of the Bible has 156 engravings, and the Amsterdam publication – 160.

Depictions of the Venice publication thematically go in parallel with the depictions of the Amsterdam publication.

Beginning with the pictures portraying the creation in six days located at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, one can note three regularities.

First, Mkhitar tried to have the depiction copies of the Amsterdam publication engraved in most of the pictures.

Second, depictions copied by the engraver from Venice had much higher quality, as well as delicate and expressive outlines.

Third, in all those cases, when the Venice publication does not have the copies of the Amsterdam depictions, the theme and plot of its new depictions nevertheless correspond to respective ones of the Amsterdam publication and are located at the same places in the Bible text.

As the selection of depictions was not a mere issue of design and beautiful decoration, but rather a full interpretative project, therefore we can definitely say that the

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<sup>32</sup> Ltn, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 231.

selection of pictures with respective themes and their placement in the book was made by Abbot Mkhitar. He also authored the iconographical composition of the depictions that were missing in the Bible published by Voskan.

The Venice publication has the scene of the expulsion from the paradise, which is missing in Voskan's publication.

On the next page in both publications the scene, in which Cain kills Abel is portrayed.

The entering of Noah's family and a pair of every kind of animal into the ark is depicted by the difference between the above-mentioned symbolic approaches. The Amsterdam publication portrays Noah's three sons with vestments, which remind of the Dutch vestments of the time. Here the painter did not try to convey the spirit of the biblical period, when the world, corrupted with sins, would remain under the flood waters. Mkhitar's publication has the opposite approach, in which the entering of Noah together with his wife and representatives of the animal world into the ark is depicted, and the overall scene bears the seal of the Antediluvian (Pre-Flood) period.

Voskan's publication portrays the building of the Tower of Babel with a ruined tower; however, Mkhitar's publication depicts a skyward tower without the upper part, which the builders could not manage to finish, because God ruined the tower.

The engraving of Noah's sacrifice in Abbot Mkhitar's publication of the Bible in 1733 is an outstanding example of interpreting European iconographical traditions of scenes, in which Noah makes a sacrifice, with a national-ecclesiastical tradition in the Armenian milieu.

Colors and outlines of the engraving go down the peak of Mount Ararat and become the sacrifice altar similar to a chapel in Ararat valley, in the place of which, according to Armenian medieval literary sources, the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin is said to have been built later.

The Venice publication includes also the scene of Abraham's hospitality, which is missing in the Amsterdam publication and that is conditioned by the difference of interpretative approaches. Abraham's hospitality has a huge meaning for traditional Churches, because it introduces the Holy Trinity in the Old Testament.

Voskan's publication portrays Isaac's sacrifice with Sichern's engraving, which bears the sign of the Dutch master. The angel covered with clouds did not let Abraham sacrifice his son. Isaac is not depicted. Mkhitar offers quite different depiction and interpretation. Isaac is on the table as an oblation, and the angel descending from heaven did not let Abraham sacrifice Isaac.

The depiction placed at the beginning of Exodus is different in both publications; however, both of them portray the same scene. The Venice publication in this case, too, is much richer and has much higher quality as to the scope of the scene and the mastery of its execution. The main protagonist of the book of Exodus is Moses, who by God's order led the Jews out of the Egyptian captivity to the Promised Land; therefore, the first depiction out of those placed at the beginning of this book portrays the scene, in

which Moses was saved from the pharaoh's order to kill all the newborn boys by being put in a basket on the river, and the second one portrays the scene, in which God speaks to Moses from a burning bush, it was on fire, but it was not burning up.

The Venice publication has two episodes for the scene, in which Moses in the basket was put on the river. The first one portrays the newborn being put on the river, the second one portrays the moment, when the pharaoh's maids found him and gave to the pharaoh's sister. In spite of small dimensions of the depiction, the engraver managed to express the excitement and emotions of participants in those events.

The Amsterdam publication placed only one depiction at the beginning of the book of Job. Job is depicted covered with wounds according to the Bible story and manuscript traditions.

The Venice publication places two depictions at the beginning of the book of Job and thanks to them, his story presents the sufferings he endured. In the first picture, in the sky, over the clouds God is portrayed sitting on the throne and surrounded by angelic orders. Below Job is glorifying the Lord. In the other corner of the picture, devil is depicted with black outlines, who addresses to God for permission to tempt Job. The second picture conforms to the picture of the Amsterdam publication; however, it is more beautiful and rich in scenes. Unlike naked Job covered with wounds, here he is portrayed half-naked, glorifying God. From heaven God gives strength to him (pic. 8).

Nine beatitudes are presented with unique artistic solutions. One can come across this creative idea in Voskan's publication, but it is expressed more evidently and beautifully in the publication of Abbot Mkhitar.

In the lower central part of the picture, Christ is portrayed and in both sides – the disciples. Christ extended His hands with eloquent expressiveness as if saying "Blessed are the poor, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers" (Mt. 5.3-12).

Nine beatitudes are portrayed with nine lines going up to heaven and with nine people on each line as personification of nine beatitudes on the way to heaven.

Comparison of Gospel depictions in Voskan's and Mkhitar's publications reveals an interesting regularity. Voskan's publication, as a result of the influence of protestant Holland, has more pictures with themes of homilies and parables, while the Venice publication has more pictures portraying miracles and healings (pic. 9). The latter can be seen also in Voskan's publication, for example, the healing of the demon possessed. In both publications, though expressed with different depictions, Christ calmly pacifies the demon possessed.

The difference of approaches is also noticeable in pictures of the Last Supper. The Amsterdam publication has thematic pictures in Gospels: Christ blesses the bread and wine. In the Venice publication, one can observe the influence of the Italian Renaissance and Leonardo's famous work. Here the moment is portrayed, when the disciples react to Christ's words "One of you will betray me" (Mt. 26.21).

In both publications, the depiction portraying the return of the prodigal son is an evident expression of the difference of approaches in artistic sense. Since the Middle Ages, the son's repentance has been portrayed. The father, having mercy on his son, went ahead, hugged and kissed him.

The picture of the Amsterdam publication has the spirit of Rembrandt as to its compositional structure.

Perhaps it is a coincidence, but it is symbolic that Rembrandt created his painting in 1668 and the same year the printing of the Gospel of Luke in Voskan's publication of the Bible was completed.

Sources about the history of the Armenian community of Holland state that Rembrandt lived in a district next to the Armenian street. The icon of taking down Christ from the cross is placed on the main altar of the Armenian Church of Amsterdam, which is considered either a copy of the painter's work of the same name of the same period, or another version of the same work made by Rembrandt himself.

Compositionally, the similarity is obvious between the engraving portraying the return of the prodigal son in Voskan's publication of the Bible and Rembrandt's painting created with the same style.

In Voskan's publication, the father bowed down and lowered his head to the level of his son. In the Venice publication of 1733, the son's repentance is already portrayed more expressively, than the father's bending. The father is not portrayed equal to him, but rather bowed towards him.

The differences between two depictions portraying the scene of prayer in Gethsemane are rather conditioned by the difference of symbolic mindsets.

The Amsterdam publication has more narrative and descriptive nature peculiar to the protestant style. A night landscape is portrayed: smoke is rising from garrets of houses; the moon is depicted on the sky. Such a scene does not create the impression of a dreadful night of betrayal.

Like the night scene, here three sleeping apostles are much more highlighted, than Christ's prayer and the angel's support.

The depiction of the Venice publication has another interpretation. Sleeping apostles are portrayed in the background. The village landscape is missing. The main focus is on the acceptance of the bitter cup. In the center, praying Christ is portrayed, to Whom the angel, having descended from heaven, gives the bitter cup. Afar soldiers led by Judas are seen, who notify about the beginning of the night of betrayal and passions.

At the end of the Bible colophon, Abbot Mkhitar writes that the cost of the Bible was doubly expensive because of the high quality paper and engravings used for the publication. However, taking into account the expenses, he did his best to provide finest depictions for the Bible publication.

Archimandrite Voskan and Abbot Mkhitar did not spare efforts for providing publications that were on par with the European typography and Bible publications of the time, confirming the fact that in spite of political unfortunate conditions and hardships in Armenia, the Armenian nation continued to keep in step with pan-European values.

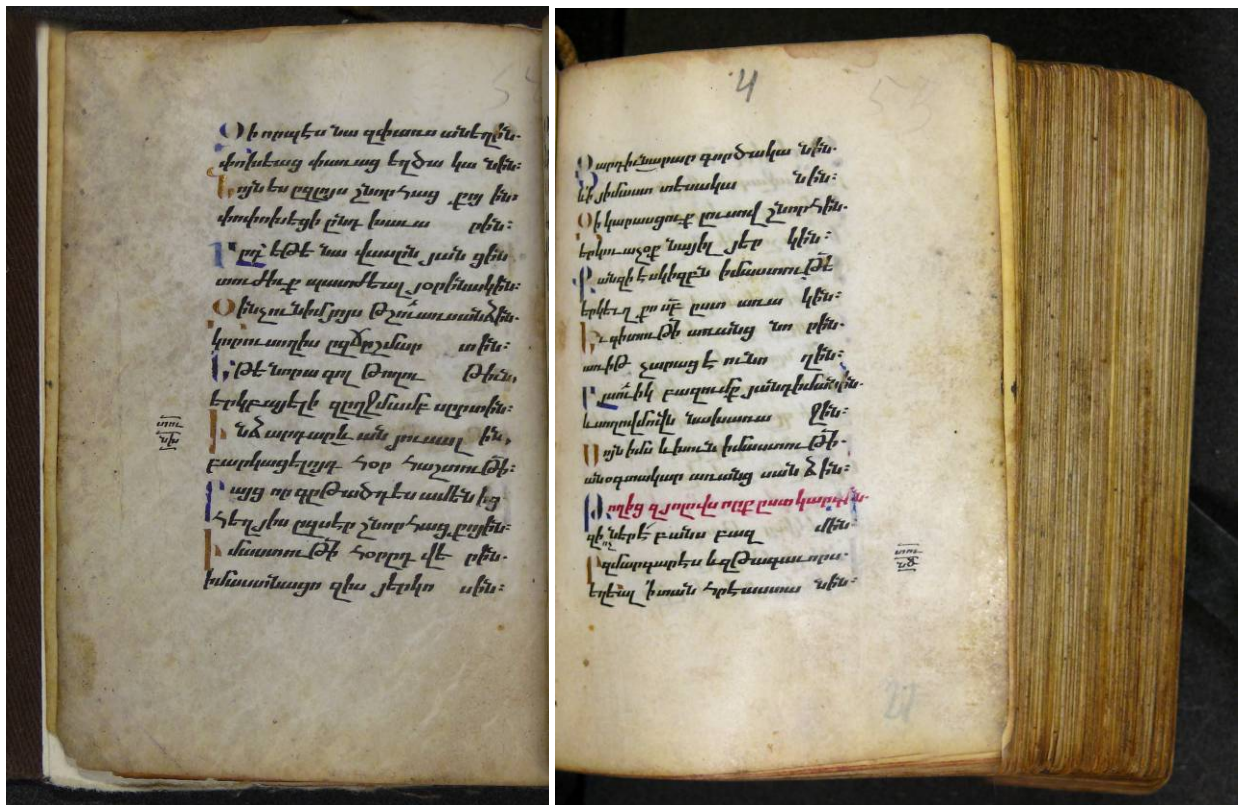
***Translated from Armenian by L. Verdyan***



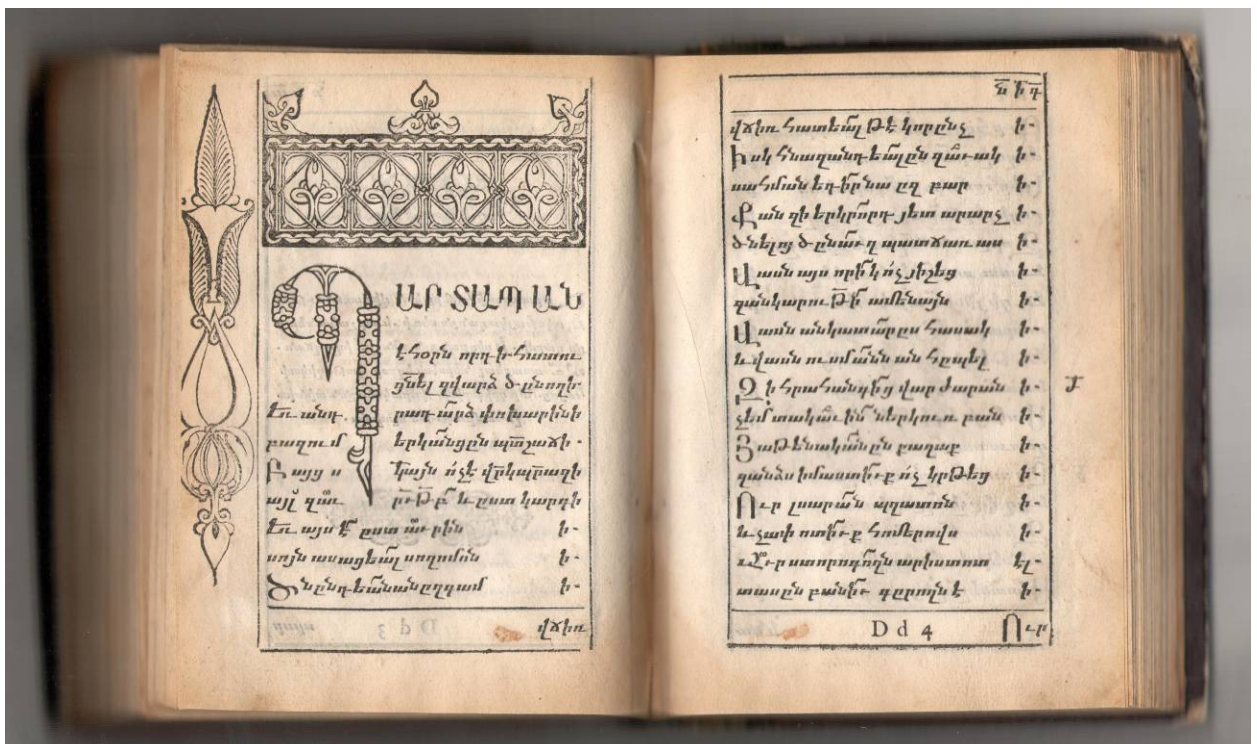


1. The beginning of Nerses Shnohali's poem *Jesus Son* in the Amsterdam 1660-61 edition





2. a. Ms of Mashtots Matenadaran № 1064, fols. 3v-4r  
Nerses Shnohali's poem *Jesus Son*,  
copied by Voskan Vardapet



b. A page from the poem *Jesus Son* with the detached rhyme ի (i)



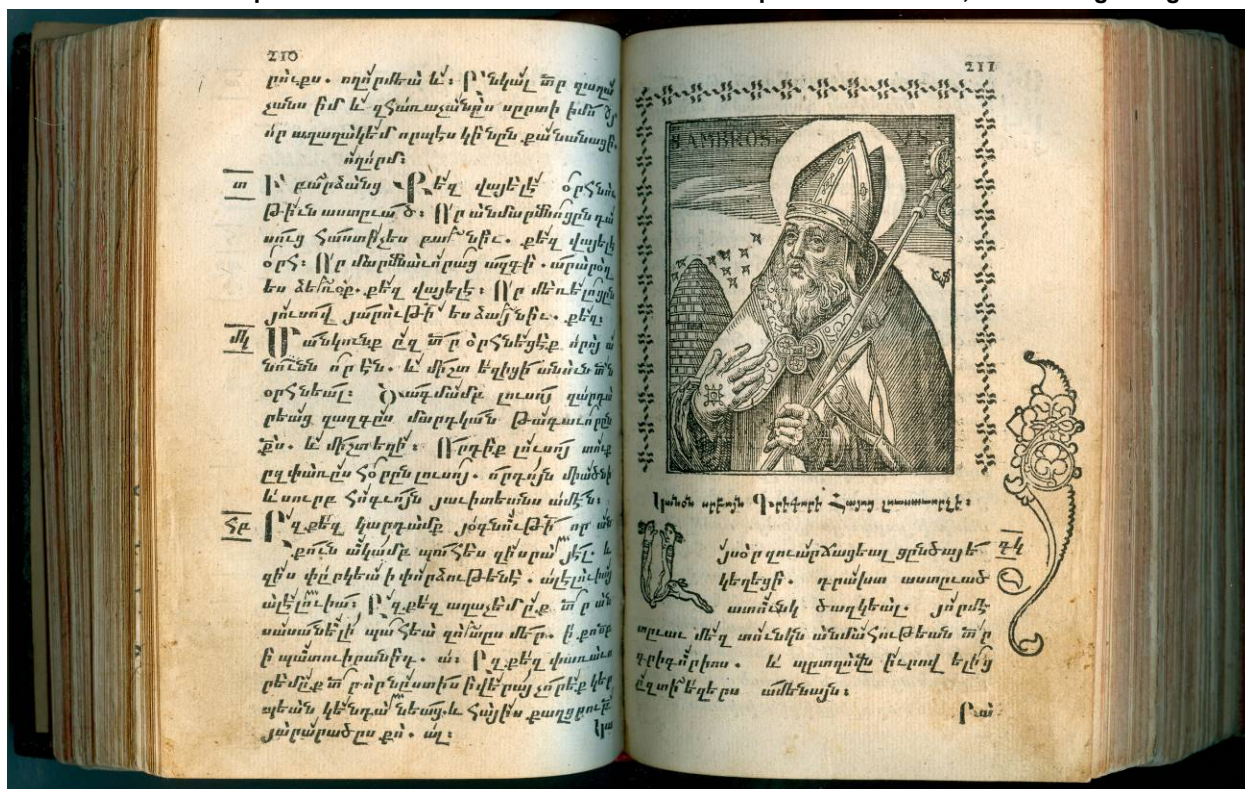


3. The beginning of the first psalm from the *Psalter* printed in 1661-62 with the image of Prophet David





4 a. Canon of Apostles Peter and Paul from the *Sharaknots* printed in 1664-65, with an engraving



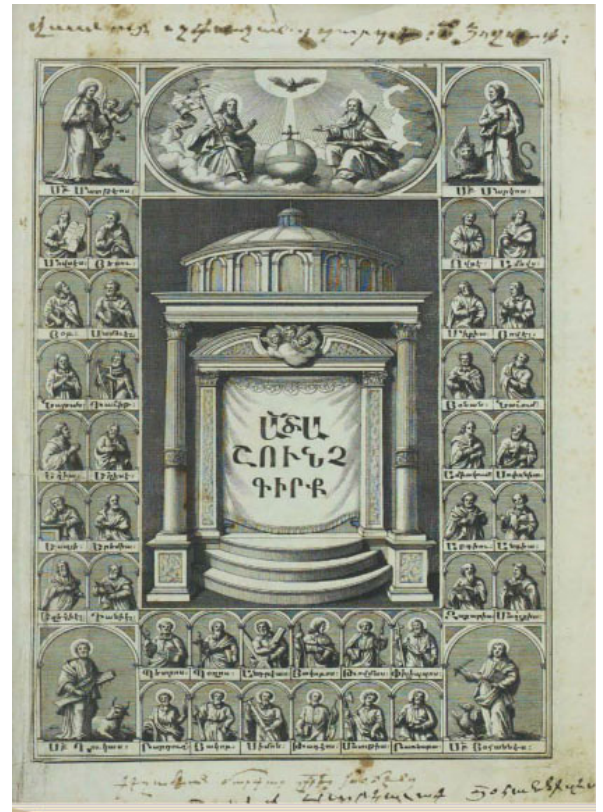
**b. Canon “Descent into the dungeon” with the image of Gregory the Illuminator**





5. Ms of Mashtots Matenadaran № 180, fol. 164r  
Beginning of the book of Deuteronomy from king Hetum's Bible





### 6 Title pages of Voskan's Bible



7. Six engravings depicting the six days of the Creation in the beginning of the book of *Genesis*





## 8. Beginning of the Book of Job in the 1666 and 1733 publications



### 9. Beginning of the Gospel of Matthew with the images of four Evangelists and the depiction of Christ's genealogy