

## THE ARMENIAN-HUNGARIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE OTTOMAN BOOK-PRINTING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 18TH CENTURY

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It is well known that after invading Constantinople and making it his capital city the Ottoman emperor Mehmed Fatih went for help to non-Muslims – Greeks, Jews, Armenians and other peoples of his empire to make the city appropriate for Muslim power. He brought to the city numerous craftsmen and reorganized Constantinople into Istanbul, a city of mosques and palaces.

At the beginning of the 18th century the Ottoman Empire suffered a period of hard economic and political crisis. It was a backward feudal country with decaying military-*len* system and elements of decentralization. The country was also isolated in the international arena after the defeat in the war against the Sacred League.

Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire was still a strong and powerful state, and one of the main reasons for that, according to the American scholar Stanford Shaw, was the great number of professional officials of middle and low ranks, who did the main part of administrative work despite the incompetency and corruption of those who held higher positions in the state<sup>1</sup>. Among those officials we can highlight the future grand vizier Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirli who was Armenian by origin.<sup>2</sup> The period of his ruling was called “Laledevri” or the «Age of Tulips». It was also the period of the Ottoman Turkey's westernization. Ibrahim pasha was grand vizier during 12 years – from 1718 up to 1730. In fact he singlehandedly manages the internal and foreign affairs of the Empire because Ahmed III was not interested in them at all. The personality of grand vizier had some effect on the Ottoman history of that period. Ibrahim pasha seems not to succeed in his economic policy, but he greatly participated in the flourishing of the Ottoman culture. In 1725 there was created a special commission which began to translate the works of Arab and Persian historians into the Turkish language.

But the main event in the Turkish culture of that period was the foundation of Turkish book-printing.

At the beginning of the 18th century there were several dozens of printing houses in the Ottoman Turkey. They were founded by Jews, Armenians and Greeks. The Ottomans were introduced to the book printing long before the first book in Turkish was published. In Hungary book printing began in 1473, and in 1512 the first Armenian book was printed in Venice. As we can see, in both cases it was before the Ottoman

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<sup>1</sup> Shaw 1975: 280.

<sup>2</sup> Schefer 1894: XXXI.

occupation of Constantinople. The peoples of central and south-eastern Europe began book-printing at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

On the Ottoman territory first printing house was founded in 1483 by Jews. Within the period of 1512-1528 more printing houses were founded in Istanbul only by Jews<sup>3</sup>.

In the sixteenth century Armenian book printing began to develop in Istanbul. The first Armenian printing house was founded here by Abgar from Tokat in 1567. Prominent Armenian scholars Arshak Alpoyadjyan and Hrachya Acharyan wrote that there was an Armenian printing house before Abgar's coming to Constantinople<sup>4</sup>, but we didn't succeed in finding their source of information. Since then up to 1922 the amount of books, newspapers and journals in Armenian and Armenian-lettered Turkish is about 6000<sup>5</sup>. But the Armenians were not satisfied only by developing their own people's culture, at the same time they also contributed to that of the Ottoman Turkey<sup>6</sup>.

The first Greek printing house was founded in Istanbul in 1627 by the monk Nikodemos Metaksas, who brought the necessary equipment from London. As Ubcini wrote, in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Greek and Armenian printing worked in Istanbul at full speed<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, non-Muslims had founded book-printing on the territory of the empire long before, and at the beginning of the 18th century the craft of book-printing, engraving, font casting, setting and publishing were on rather high level. Thanks to them the book printing became a widespread and well-known craft.

But why didn't the Ottomans themselves accept the book-printing for a long time? There were several objective and subjective reasons for that.

Some scholars write that Bayazid II and later Selim I signed *fermans* (the word means 'order' in Turkish) about forbidding book printing in the Ottoman Turkey<sup>8</sup>, but the orders were obviously about the printing in the Turkish language. The Ottoman government had only two strict rules about printing: they should not be in Turkish, Arabic or Persian and they should not print things that could invoke to any kind of disobedience in the empire.

In spite of the first rule, Turkish intellectuals had the opportunity to read books in Persian and Arabic printed in Europe. The first Quran was printed in 1542, and a book on Turkish grammar in 1612. The Ottoman sultans especially forbade the import of Quran, and Mehmed IV, for example, ordered to drown all the samples of Quran, brought to Istanbul by an Englishman. The same sultan ordered to drown the Arabic font, sent to him from Venice.

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<sup>3</sup> Zheltyakov 1972: 13.

<sup>4</sup> Korkotyan 1964: 7.

<sup>5</sup> Tughlajyan 1985: 102.

<sup>6</sup> Tughlajyan 1985: 100.

<sup>7</sup> Zheltyakov 1972: 14.

<sup>8</sup> Zheltyakov 1972:15.

In fact, the reasons for not accepting the book printing were in the domination of the feudal-despotic reality, common cultural backwardness of the country, the population's illiteracy. Muslim clergy was a serious factor too. They were against every innovation, which could somehow reduce their influence on the Muslim population.

There was also a whole class of people, who were against the book printing: the *hattats* or scribes. In the 18th century there were no less than 15 thousand of them only in Istanbul. They were closely connected with Muslim clergymen, because their main job was the copying religious books. The book printing would take their job and craft. Besides that, the printed book could not be so beautifully decorated as the one written and drawn by hand. Handwritten books were often considered as works of art.

However, the political reality of that period made the Ottoman politicians to look more carefully on the political structure, scientific and technical achievements and culture of European countries and Russia. The advanced and educated figures of the time and Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirli among them began to understand the fruitlessness of the hostile attitude towards the non-Muslim world. The relations with European countries were improved, many European scientists, artists and writers were invited to the Ottoman court more often.

On 7 October, 1720 the Ottoman embassy went to France. In addition to the official mission Ibrahim pasha ordered the head of the delegation to «learn about the tools of civilization and education of France and to inform about those which can be applied in the Ottoman Empire»<sup>9</sup>. The delegation stayed in France for a long period (some authors say a year, others – nearly 4), and though it didn't succeed in its main mission, everybody was pleased with the reception and honor given by the French court and officials. Besides, the delegation got closely acquainted with the French political structure and social life, its scientific, technical and cultural organizations and offices, some branches of industry and particularly with activities the printing houses of Paris. Mehmed effendi, the head of the embassy had written down every detail of his journey, and soon everybody in the Ottoman court could read his report or *sefaretname*.

All these had a noticeable resonance in the Ottoman society. Mehmed efendi had brought some plans and drawings according to which Ottomans began to build palaces, houses and country cottages. It also contained a detailed report about the book-printing advantages.

Another important document of the time was the so-called "Lyahika", which was published by a Turkish historian F. Unat<sup>10</sup>. The author(s) of the document is (are) unknown. F. Unat thought the author was Ibrahim Myuteferrika because it has much in common with the text of Muteferrika's book, which was published in 1732 and soon became famous not only in the Ottoman Empire, but also in abroad. In "Lyahika" the author gives reasons for reforms in the Ottoman army.

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<sup>9</sup> Vitol 1987: 76.

<sup>10</sup> See in Unat 1968.

The whole internal situation in the Ottoman Empire of the time was favorable for the start of the Turkish book printing. Sultan Ahmed III, his mother and grand vizier Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirlı patronized not only traditional art crafts poets and chronologists, but also the spread of knowledge in science, mathematics, astronomy, etc.

Ibrahim pasha also helped to found six big libraries in Istanbul. Each sultan beginning from Ahmed III built special places for books usually beside mosques. In the 18th century there were established 40 libraries only in Istanbul<sup>11</sup>.

Intending to promote the spread of knowledge and education Ibrahim pasha create a special commission consisting of 25 well educated people to translate into Turkish or Arabic a number of books in history, mathematics, medicine, etc.

Thus, in the first decades of the 18th century we can see some changes in the Ottoman cultural life which brought to book printing in the Turkish language.

The establishment of the first printing house in the Turkish language is connected with the name of Ibrahim Myuteferrica, Hungarian by origin. He was born in 1674 in Koloshvara, Transylvania. He was very successful in learning. In 1692 or 93 he was taken prisoner by Turks, then adopted Islam, which let him to continue his studies and improve the Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages. Before that he had already known Greek, Latin and Hungarian. In 1711 he wrote «Risale-i Islamie» («Tractate about Islam»). For his unusual cleverness, intellect, good education and knowledge of 6 languages he became close to many state officials and was especially accepted and patronized by Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirlı.

So Ibrahim Myuteferrika began his preparations of Turkish book printing in 1719, when he published and showed the grand vizier the maps of the sea of Marmara. In 1724 he prepared and printed the map of the Black Sea. In the same year an Ottoman politician Mehmed Said effendi joined him. Together they prepared and showed the grand vizier Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirlı a note «On means of printing» in which they asked for permission to open a printing house and publish books in Turkish. They wrote that the printing of important books for the state would lead to the spread of education among Turks, that printed books are cheaper and could spread among the people more easily and they have a longer life. They also wrote that it would help to avoid mistakes which are usual in handwritten books.

Myuteferrika and Said effendi had to withstand the attacks of Muslim clergymen and *hattats*. But the grand vizier managed to get both the Sultan's *ferman* and Sheikh-ul-Islam's *fetva*. The only prohibition was the publication of religious books. On the one hand it was a concession to *hattats*, who were delighted that they would not lose their jobs. On the other hand it gave Myuteferrika an opportunity to publish more secular and scientific works of outstanding scholars.

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<sup>11</sup> Zheltyakov 1972: 19.

The printing house was settled at Myuteferrika's place in Istanbul in 1727. The part of the equipment was ordered in France, the other part was bought from local Armenian printers. The printing house had 4 presses for books and 2 for maps.

The first book came out on 31 January, 1729. It was Arabic monolingual dictionary «Vankulu Lugati», a reference book of every educated Turk or Porte official. It was published in 1000 copies, which were sold out very quickly. In 1730 the printing house published five more books.

At the end of 1730 and beginning of 1731 Istanbul was caught in fire of a riot. Ahmed III was deposed, Ibrahim pasha Nevshihirli was killed and the printing house was closed.

In 1732 Mahmud I gave permission to reopen the printing house. Myuteferrika wrote his second tractate and its publishing gave birth to a new important age in the history of the Ottoman Turkey's social-political life of the 18th century. This second tractate was called *Usul ul-hikem fi-nizam ul umam* or «The Basics of Wisdom in Peoples' Establishment».

In 1733 Ibrahim Myuteferrika began to publish series of works of Ottoman historians and he himself was involved in this undertaking.

After Ahmed III and Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirli the Ottomans lost their interest in book printing. With the death of Myuteferrika Turkish book printing was forgotten for almost half a century.

Within the 13 years of its existence Myuteferrika's printing house had published 17 works in 23 volumes in total run of 12 700 samples. Thus, the first 13 years of Turkish book printing is connected with the names of grand vizier Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirli and Ibrahim Myuteferrika. All the books were secular, they introduced Turks to history and geography of the empire as well as the achievements of Europeans in the field of mathematics, astronomy, geography, and technics.

Turkish books-printing very soon became a powerful tool for the westernization of the country.<sup>12</sup> The start of book printing was a crucial milestone in the new Turkish culture. Within the period from 1795 to 1839 when the sultan issued Tanzimat, only in the state printing houses of Istanbul 500 books were printed. But the importance of the activities of Ibrahim pasha Nevshehirli and Ibrahim Myuteferrika were estimated long after their death.

The Age of Tulips was the first, maybe not very big, but rather courageous step towards the European civilization. In Turkish book printing the influence of France and the contribution of non-Turkish people, who were closer to European culture than the Turks, was vital<sup>13</sup>.

The Ottoman Empire's non-Muslim subjects played an active role in various cultural branches not only under Ahmed II but later, too. In our other works we showed Armenians' active contribution to the 19th century Ottoman architecture, gunpowder

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<sup>12</sup> See in Vitol 1987: 93.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

production and monetary system. They also played active role in the democratic movements after Tanzimat (1839), when, for example, the monopoly of making Turkish letters for print houses was given to Armenians<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Tughlajyan 1985: 104.