

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MODERN ARMENIAN LITERATURE

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HISTORY AT A GLANCE (1828-1920)

Date	Event
1828-1829	Incorporation of Eastern Armenia to the Russian Empire
1877-1878	Russo-Turkish war / Treaty of Berlin
1905-1907	Armeno-Tatar conflict
1914-1916	World War I; Volunteer movement
1915-1917	Armenian Genocide
1918-1920	Republic of Armenia

EASTERN ARMENIAN MODERNITY (1850-1920)

-- Cultural-social (1828-1880)

- Expansion of bourgeoisie
- Partnership of Russian state and Armenian Church:
Bolojenia (1836)
- Advocacy for Modern Armenian

-- Political (1880-1915)

- Formation of political parties
- Development of the Armenian Question
- Social-political struggle in Russia

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EASTERN ARMENIAN MODERNITY (1850-1920)

- Secularization
 - Literature closer to people (novel, theater)
 - Development of school network
 - University education in Russia (Dorpat, etc.)
 - Development of press



EASTERN ARMENIAN MODERNITY (1850-1920)

- Modernizing impact of Russian conquest of Eastern Armenia
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- Imposition of Modern Armenian over Classical Armenian as medium of expression of the society
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- Eastern Armenian literature*



EVOLUTION OF EASTERN ARMENIAN LITERATURE (1850-1920)

- 1840-1885: Awakening (Զարթոնք, *Zar-tonk*) of national awareness
- 1885-1900: Impact of Russian liberalization (Alexander II) and political movements.
- 1900-1920: Efforts towards art.



AUTHORS OF THE ZARTONK PERIOD

- Khachatur Abovian (1809-1848)
- Stepanos Nazariants (1812-1879), Mikayel Nalbandian (1829-1866)
- Gabriel Sundukian (1825-1912)
- Raffi (1835-1888)



ZARTONK: SOME FEATURES

- Development of journalism and language
- “First citizen, then poet”
- Liberalism
- Evocation of the past



KHACHATUR ABOVIAN (1809-1848)

- *Wounds of Armenia* (1841, posthumously published; introduction translated into English), founding novel of Western Armenian, but written in the dialect of his village.
- Initiator of the “circle of Dorpat”
- Clash with the Russian government and the Church (cause of his disappearance).



KHACHATUR ABOVIAN, “WOUNDS OF ARMENIA” (1841)

- «Էս միջոցումը Աստուած ինձ մէկ քանի **երեխէք** Էլ հասցրեց, որ պետք Է կարդացնէի: Սիրտս ուզում Էր՝ պատռի, որ Էս **երեխէքանց** ձեռքն Էլ՝ ինչ Յայի գիրք տալիս Էի, չէին հասկանում: Ռուսի, **Նեմեցի**, **Ֆրանսուզի լեզվումը** ինչ բան որ կարդում Էին, նրանց անմեղ հոգուն Էլ Էին՝ Էնպէս բաներ **դիր գալիս**: Ուզում Էի շատ անգամ մագերս պոկեմ որ Էս օտար **լեզուքը** անելի Էին սիրում, **քանց** մերը: Բայց պատճառը շատ բնական Էր. Էն **լեզվըներումը** նրանք կարդում Էին երեւելի մարդկանց **գործքերը**, նրանց արածներն ու ասածները, նրանք կարդում Էին Է՛ն բաները՝ որ **մարդի** սիրտ կարող Է **գրաւիլ, չունքի** սրտի բաներ Էին՝ ո՞վ չի **սիրիլ**: Ո՞վ **չի՛ ուզիլ լսիլ՝** թէ սերը, բարեկամութիւնը, հայրենասիրութիւնը, ծնողը, զաւակը, մահը, կռիւը ի՞նչ **զատ** են, բայց մեր **լեզվումը՝** թէ Էսպէս բաներ **ըլին՝** թո՛ղ՝ աչքս հանեն: Էլ **ընչո՞վ Էրեխին** քո լեզուն **սիրիլ տասս**»:



KHACHATUR ABOVIAN, “WOUNDS OF ARMENIA” (1841)

- “During this period, God blessed me with children I was called upon to educate. My heart would tear apart when I would hand them an Armenian book, only to find out that they could not understand it. Books in Russian, German or French were more pleasing to their innocent souls. Often I wanted to pull out my hair, seeing how much more they loved those foreign languages than our own. But the reason was obvious. In those languages they could read about the works of famous people, about their words as well as their deeds. They could read about things that captivate the human heart. Who doesn’t love the things of the heart? Who doesn’t want to hear about love, friendship, patriotism, parenthood, childhood, death, and war? May I go blind, if anyone could find such writings in our language. Yet how else can one foster the love of one’s own language in the child?” (translated by Vahe Baladuni and John Gery)



STEPANOS NAZARIANTS (1812-1879)

MIKAYEL NALBANDIAN (1829-1866)

- Nazariants: member of the circle of Dorpat, professor in Moscow.
- Nalbandian: local studies in Nor-Nakhichevan.
- Nazariants influences Nalbandian in the use of Modern Armenian.
- They start together *Hiusisapayl* (1858-1864), but part ways around 1860.
- Nalbandian wrote political tracts and a few poems. The most famous: “Freedom” and “The Song of the Italian Girl” (*Mer hairenik*).



GABRIEL SUNDUKIAN (1825-1912)

- Founder of Armenian theater.
- Author of many comedies and dramas about daily life.
- Written in dialect of Tiflis
- Most famous play: *Pepo*.



RAFFI (1835-1888)

- First relevant Armenian novelist.
- Author of important historical and political novels: *Jelaleddin* (1878), *The Fool* (1881), *Sparks* (1883-1887), *Samuel* (1888) (the first two translated into English).
- Very influential among the youth. Very read until today.



REALISTS

- Shirvanzade (1858-1935)
- Nar-Dos (1867-1933)
- Hovhannes Tumanian (1869-1923)



REALISTS: SOME FEATURES

- Literary profile of Eastern Armenian language
- Development of the novel and theater
- Preaching of national liberation
- Criticism of negative values
- Journalism as public service



SHIRVANZADE (1858-1935)

- Novelist and playwright (the second important name in Armenian theater after Sundukian).
- Most important works: *Chaos, For the Sake of Honor* (he turned into a play; translated into English; first feature film in Armenian), *Evil Spirit* (he also turned it into a play; translated into English)
- Depiction of classes and family issues.
- Popular until today



NAR-DOS (1867-1933)

- Another important novelist.
- Most important novels: *The Killed Dove* (1898) and *The Death* (1912).
- More moralist than Shirvanzade.



HOVHANNES TUMANIAN (1869-1923)

- “Poet of All Armenians.”
- Utilized in abundance popular motifs in his poetry and short stories. He wrote his most important works before 1900 (translated into English). More philosophical afterwards.
- Founded an important literary group, *Vernadun* (Վերնաստուն, “Attic”). He later founded and presided the Caucasian Society of Armenian Writers.
- Very popular.



ESTHETICISTS

- Avetis Aharonian (1866-1948)
- Avetik Isahakian (1875-1957)
- Vahan Terian (1885-1920)
- Kostan Zarian (1885-1969)



ESTHETICISTS: SOME FEATURES

- Poetry becomes art.
- Revolutionary vision
- Lively journalism



AVETIS AHARONIAN (1866-1948)

- “The Singer of Armenian Sadness”
- Writer and political activist.
- Story writer and novelist. Emotional tone. Stories about the plight of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.
- Most important works: *On the Path of Freedom* and *My Book* (memoir).
- Signed the Treaty of Sevres (1920).



AVETIK ISAHAKIAN (1875-1957)

- Like Tumanian, uses popular motifs extensively.
- More esthetic and philosophical preoccupations.
- Most celebrated work: *Abu Lala Mahari* (poem, 1911, translated into English).



VAHAN TERIAN (1885-1920)

- A real aestheticist poet.
- Main work: *Poetry* (1912) (translated into English).
- Died of tuberculosis



VAHAN TERIAN, “ESTONIAN SONG” (1906)

Երբ կը յոգնես, կը գազազես աշխարհից
Դարձիր իմ մօտ, վերադարձիր դու նորից.-
Ցաւած սիրտըս միայն քեզնով է շնչել,
Չի կամենալ նա վերստին քեզ տանջել:

Եթէ բախտն ու վայելքները քեզ ժպտան
Օտար մարդիկ քեզ սիրաբար ողջոյն տան
Գուցէ ես լամ բախտիդ համար, իմ անգին
Սակայն դարձիր, վերադարձիր դու կրկին:

Եթէ հեռում ճակատագիրն անհոգի
Միրտըդ մատնէ անկարեկից տանջանքի
Օ, գիտեցիր, իմ հոգին էլ կը ցաւի
Անմխիթար մորմոքումից քո ցաւի...



VAHAN TERIAN, “ESTONIAN SONG” (1906)

When you're sated, weighted down and tired of fate,
you can always turn, turn back again,
to the heart, like yours, that's racked with pain
but where the wall still echo with your name.

When good fortune brightens up your road with light,
and clinging strangers spring up left and right,
someone will be happy but ware of fickle fame,
still hoping that you turn, return again.

But if fate hardens your heart and turns your head
so you cannot feel delight and you forget
what it is to love, someone will mourn your loss,
but can do nothing more. Do not return. You're lost.

(translated by Diana Der Hovannesian)



KOSTAN ZARIAN (1885-1969)

- Poet, novelist, and memoir writer.
- He wrote in Eastern Armenian, but lived essentially in Western Armenian environment.
- Defies the division of Western/Eastern.
- His most important works: *The Wanderer and His Road* (1926-1928), *The Bride of Dadrakom* (1930), *The Ship on the Mountain* (1943).



KOSTAN ZARIAN, "THE WANDERER AND HIS ROAD" (1926-1928)

Դաժան բան է փրցնել գրքի էջեր, որոնց մէջ մենք մեզ հետ ենք խօսել:
Աւելի դաժան է ստիպուած լինել բացատրութիւններ տալ: Ճրագը
բռնել ու մեր գիտակցութեան վրայ անձանօթի ստուերը պատկեցնել:
Եւ ինչո՞ւ:

Ամէն մի խորհող հայ՝ մրրկահար այս դարու ալիքների կատարին՝
նմանում է յուսահատ ռադիօ կայանին, որ անյայտ
տարածութիւններին պատգամներ է դրկում, բայց ոչ մի պատասխան
չի ստանում:

Մտքերի ելեկտրական կայծկլտումը կորչում է մրափող խիղճերի
թանձր խաւարում:

Ամէն ինչ սոսկալիօրէն լռել է:



KOSTAN ZARIAN, "THE WANDERER AND HIS ROAD" (1926-1928)

It is a difficult thing to pluck pages from a book wherein we speak with ourselves. It is even more difficult to be compelled to give explanations. To hold the lamp in our hands and let the shadow of a stranger fall on our consciousness. And why?

Every thinking Armenian is like a radio station in the middle of a storm sending messages to distant places and receiving no answer.

The electrical spark of thoughts is lost in the dense darkness of sleeping consciences.

A horrible silence surrounds him (translated by Ara Baliozian)

