

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MODERN ARMENIAN LITERATURE

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TWO-SESSION PLAN

Date	Subject
November 9	From the beginnings to mid-19 th century
November 9	Western Armenian literature (1850-1920)
November 9	Eastern Armenian literature (1850-1920)
November 16	Diasporan literature
November 16	Soviet and post-Soviet literature

ARMENIAN LITERATURE = ARMENIAN LANGUAGE

Language	Literature
Ancient (գրաբար – krapar / grabar)	Ancient
Ancient (գրաբար – krapar / grabar) and Medieval (ռամկօրէն – ramgoren)	Medieval
“Civil Armenian” (քաղաքացիական հայերէն – kaghakatsiagan hayeren/ + dialects	Early Modern
Modern (աշխարհաբար – ashkharhapar)	Modern / Contemporary



LINGUISTIC, POLITICAL, AND GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISION

Modern Armenian	Western Armenian	Eastern Armenian
1850-1923	Ottoman Empire ("Western Armenia")	Russian Empire ("Eastern Armenia")
1923-1991	Turkey (Istanbul) / "Old" Diaspora	Soviet Union / Iran
1991	Turkey (Istanbul) / "Old" Diaspora	Armenia / Gharabagh / Iran / "New Diaspora"



CLASSICAL ARMENIAN

(Գրաբար – krapar)

- Common Indo-European language spoken in an area of Europe or Asia.
- One of its dialects: Armeno-Greek-Persian. Its speakers walked out from their homeland around 3000 B.C.
- The dialect divided into three different languages (Armenian, Greek, and Persian) around 2000 BC. Classical Armenian was born.
- Classical Armenian was written down in the 5th century A.D., after the invention of the Armenian alphabet.
- *Krapar* was a written *and* spoken language until the 11th century. It remained as a written language until the 19th century. Today it is only used by the Armenian Church.



ANCIENT ARMENIAN LITERATURE

Oral literature (previous to 5 th century A.D.)	Oral literature (after 5 th century A.D.)
Mythological texts (song of Vahagn)	“The Persian War” (<i>Buzandaran</i>)
Epic texts (cycle of Artashes and Artavazd)	“David of Sassoun”
Fragments preserved in works of Christian writers	



CHRISTIANISM AND ARMENIAN ALPHABET

- Ca. 301: Armenia becomes the first state that recognizes Christianity as official religion (St. Gregory the Illuminator and Terdat III).
- Ca. 405: Mesrop Mashtots creates the Armenian alphabet.
- 435: The Armenian translation of the Bible is finished.
- 451: Battle of Avarair.
- 484: Treaty of Nevarsak.



HISTORY AT A GLANCE

(5th-11th centuries)

Date	Political situation
428-640	Loss of independence. Persian domination
640-885	Arab domination
885-1045	Kingdom of Armenia (Bagratuni dynasty)



AUTHORS OF THE 5TH CENTURY (Ոսկեդար – Golden Age)

- “Agatangelos”: conversion of Armenia
- “Pavstos Buzand”: 4th century history
- Koriun: biography of Mesrop Mashtots
- Yeznik Koghbatsi: religious polemics
- Yeghishe: history of Vardan Mamikonian
- Movses Khorenatsi: general history of Armenia
- Ghazar Parpetsi: history of Vahan Mamikonian



AUTHORS OF THE POST-GOLDEN AGE PERIOD

- David the Invincible (5th-6th century, philosopher)
- Hovhannes Odznetsi and Stepanos Siunetsi (7th-8th centuries, theologians).
- Ghevont (historian, 8th century)
- Movses Kaghankatvatsi (historian, 10th century)
- Hovhannes Catholicos and Asoghik (historians, 10th century)
- Grigor Narekatsi (poet, theologian, 10th century)



CURIOSITIES OF THE POST-GOLDEN AGE PERIOD

- Davtak Kertogh (7th century) writes the first poem with a non-religious subject: “Lament for the death of great prince Djevanshir”
- Khosrovidukht (8th century), sister of martyr Vahan Goghtnatsi, writes a *sharakan* (liturgical hymn) devoted to him. First known poetess.
- Grigor Magistros (11th century) introduces the use of rhyme in poetry.



AFTER KRAPAR

- After 10th century A.D., *krapar* was not a spoken language anymore.
- People started to speak a more colloquial language, called *ramgoren* “vulgar”
- The colloquial language was used in many books from 11th-15th centuries.
- Many other books continued to be written in *krapar*.



HISTORY AT A GLANCE

(11th -19th century)

Date	Political situation
1045-1064	Byzantine domination in Armenia
1064-ca. 1200	Seljuqid Turk domination in Armenia
1080-1375	Armenian state of Cilicia
1236-1387	Mongol domination in Armenia
15 th century	Turkmen domination
1502-1828	Persian (Eastern Armenia) and Ottoman (Western Armenia) domination
1828	Persians replaced by Russians

AUTHORS OF THE SILVER AGE PERIOD (11th-13th c.)

- Hovhannes Imastaser (philosopher, 11th century)
- Nerses Shnorhali and Nerses Lambronatsi, theologians (ecumenism, 12th century)
- Mkhitar Gosh, jurist (first Armenian law code, 12th century)
- Mkhitar Heratsi, physician (first Armenian book of medicine, in colloquial language, 12th century)
- Kirakos Gandzaketsi (historian, 13th century)
- Vardan Aygektsi (fablist, 13th century)



MEDIEVAL POETRY (14th-18th CENTURIES)

- Hovhannes Erznkatsi (1230-1293)
- Frik (ca. 1230-ca. 1310)
- Constantin Erznkatsi (1250 – ca. 1314-1328)
- Hovhannes Tlkurantsi (14th-15th century)
- Mkrtych Naghash (1390-1475)
- *Hayren* (themes: love, emigration, advice), written in Middle Armenian, 13th-16th century (ascribed to “Nahapet Kuchak”)
- Naghash Hovnatan (1661-1722)
- Sayat-Nova (1722-1795)

EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1)

- Armenian printing (first book: Hakob Meghapart, Ուրբաթագիրք/ *Urbatagirk*, Venice, 1512)
- Armenian capital (New Julfa, 17th century): from Persia to Philippines and from India to Spain, Mexico, and Peru.
- “Marriage” of Armenian printing and capital: the example of Համաստարած աշխարհացոյց (*Hamadaradz ashkharhatsuyts*, “*Universal Atlas*,” 1695).
- First printed history: Arakel Tavrijetsi (1669)



EARLY MODERN PERIOD (2)

- Mekhitarist Congregation (1701): close link to Europe. Venice and Vienna. Ecumenical view. Extensive publishing in the fields of language, medieval literature, history, translation.
- Political writing: Madras group (Որոգայթ փսնաց/*Vorogait parats* [“Snare of Glory”], project of a Constitution for a republic, 1773/1788-89)
- Armenian press (Ազդարար/*Azdarar*, Calcutta, 1794)



CIVIL ARMENIAN

- In the early modern era (17th-18th century), books in the colloquial language of the time started to come out.
- That language was called “civil Armenian” (քաղաքացիական հայերէն, *kaghakatsiagan hayeren*). It was neither *krapar* nor the *ramgoren* of the Middle Ages.
- It combined elements of what today we recognize as Western and Eastern Armenian. As Early Modern Armenian, it was the equivalent of Shakespeare’s language (Early Modern English).
- It is quite understandable by an Armenian speaker today.



MODERN ARMENIAN

- The unified Civil Armenian was displaced by a two-branched Modern Armenian (*ashkharhapar*), based on the dialects of Constantinople and the Ararat plain.
- In the 19th century, *ashkharhapar* took the place of *krapar* as written language.
- It is the language we speak today, divided in two branches: Western Armenian (spoken in most of the Diaspora) and Eastern Armenia (Republic of Armenia, Artsakh, former Soviet Union, Iran, migrants of Armenia in the Diaspora).



MODERN ARMENIAN LANGUAGE
(*ashkharhapar*)

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MODERN ARMENIAN
LITERATURE

