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THE EVOLUTION OF EASTERN ARMENIAN ASHKHARHABAR ALONG THE HISTORY OF THE ARMENIAN LANGUAGE

The first half of the nineteenth century marks the beginning of the renaissance in Armenian literature as a final stage of the nation's socio-political revival which took a slow but steady course of more than a century. During this long process, the Armenian intellectuals tried in vain to create literature in classical Armenian (Grabar) and revive the language. This rich and sophisticated language of the Golden Age was intelligible only to a very small circle of intellectuals; it could not possibly serve as a means of disseminating enlightenment and educating the youth. Thus, the writers and educators reluctantly abandoned Grabar and turned to the vernacular.

"Even though the ancient Armenian language is superb in so far as its external richness, its perfection and its literary qualities are concerned, nevertheless, this language is the only prohibitive cause that the unfortunate masses until now have been deprived of the means of progress".

This was Khachatur Abovian's verdict expressed in the preface to "Nakhashavigh", the first Armenian textbook in vernacular (Ashkharhabar), which he prepared in 1839 in the hope of educating the Armenian youth in a language intelligible to them.

Many intellectuals shared Khachatur Abovian's views and felt the necessity

ty to produce literature in vernacular. But which vernacular would eventually develop into a literary language to replace the Grabar? This was difficult to answer since the spoken Armenian, due to centuries of political separation and the diversity of foreign influences, and, most important, due to the poor network of education in Armenia, had taken diverse courses of evolution, marking a drastic departure from the literary language and branching into more than forty distinct dialects.

In the movement to create literature in vernacular and to disseminate enlightenment and progressive ideas amongst Armenians, it was only natural that the writers would choose a dialect most intelligible to all and less deviated from the Grabar in terms of its syntax and grammar. It is, however, unfortunate that, due to the political separation of Armenia, this movement was launched in two separate fronts, namely, Western Armenia — subjugated by the Ottoman Sultans — and Eastern Armenia — incorporated into the Russian Empire. The eventual creation of the two literary languages — Eastern and Western Ashkharhabar — was the final product of this duolateral endeavor.

In the limited scope of this article, let us try to trace the various stages of development of Eastern Ashkharhabar — the literary language of Soviet Armenia, the Armenian community in Iran and some writers in the Diaspora.

TRACES OF EASTERN ARMENIAN ASHKHARHABAR IN THE PRE-NINETEENTH CENTURY ARMENIAN LITERATURE

The concern of being understood by the masses did not exist only among the nineteenth century writers but it also prevailed in the Middle Ages. Renowned writers like Nerses Shnorhali (11th century), Mkhitar Gosh (12th century), Vartan Aigegtsi (12-13th century) and others, besides their literary creations in Grabar, produced literature in the spoken language of their time. This vernacular, later called Middle Armenian, however, was not a uniform language; it represented a mixture of Grabar with various dialects. A study of this literature in vernacular enables us to trace the first evidence of dialectal predecessor of Eastern Ashkharhabar.

G. Vantsian attests that Vartan Gandzaketsi's (12th century) "Universal History" (*Տիեզերական Պատմութիւն*) is the first written example in which the *ում* ending — a characteristic of Eastern Ashkharhabar derived from the locative case and used for the indicative — is encountered: *ի սրտում դրի, քեզ աղօթք են անում...* (1).

"The Lamentation of the People of Julfa", by Stepan Vartabed, written in 1605 in the monastery of Nakhavka, is another good example of early Eastern Ashkharhabar.

(1) G. Vantsian, «Պատմական քերականութիւն», Tiflis, 1906, p. 27.

Ո՞ւմ աք թողման դուք, որ գնամ աք.
 էսպէս կլինի՞, որ մոռանում աք
 Բարի ձեր որդոց, թոռանց պատմեցէք՝
 էսպէս խայրենիք քանդած թողեցիք (2):

The forms խայրենիկ for հայրենիք, թողման for թողնում, աք and ամ for էք and եմ are actually unique features of the dialect of Julfa (Jugha).

Zakaria Sarkavak's inscriptions in Hovhannavank is another example of early Eastern Ashkharabar in the dialect of the Plain of Ararat.

Դիլանձու Ամրումի այգին տուինք յիշատակ սուրբ Կարապետիս, ինչ մարդ էս բանին միջումն այլեւայլ խօսք յետ եւ յառաջ բան ասայ ու կտրայ սուրբ Կարապետն իւր յիշատակն կտրայ (3):

With the increasing use of the printing press, along with many other publications, some books in Eastern Ashkharabar were also published, «Գիրք որ կոչի բանալի գիտութեան» by K. Sarafian, in 1788, in St. Petersburg, or «Ճշմարիտ իմաստութիւն» by F. Zakarian, a Persian-Armenian clergyman in the Philippines, to mention some.

Despite these attempts to promote Eastern Ashkharabar, all the pre-nineteenth century writings remained dialectal with a mixture of unusual and foreign elements and a strong influence of the grammatical and lexical patterns of Grabar. A book of grammar for Eastern Armenian Ashkharabar, published in Amsterdam in 1711, stands out as a single effort in the development and shaping of this language. When Western Armenian intellectuals like Hovhananes Kolot, Nalian, the Mkhitarists, and later Cheraz, Russianian, and others were already in a systematic and continuous endeavor to shape the dialect of Constantinople and to promote it into a literary language, no such conscious effort could be seen in the Eastern front. Each writer, for the sake of intelligibility, produced in vernacular, using the dialect most familiar to himself. Nevertheless, despite the lack of a conscious effort before the nineteenth century, the dialects of the ում branch(4) were undergoing important changes. The Grabarian elements were gradually being discarded and the characteristics of the future Eastern literary language were taking shape; for example, the prepositional prefix զ in the accusative and the enclitic ի in the ablative case was eliminated; the plural markers եր and ներ were widely used in place of the Grabar ք. Nouns were being declined by external declension — the internal

(2) Gurgen Sevak, «Ժամանակակից հայերէնի համառու պատմութիւն», Erevan, 1948, p.40.

(3) Hrachia Acharian, «Հայոց լեզուի պատմութիւն», Vol. 2, Erevan, 1951, p. 445.

(4) According to H. Acharian's classification of the Armenian dialects, the ում branch consists of seven dialects, namely, the dialects of the Plain of Ararat (Erevan), Tiflis, Gharabagh, Shamakh, the dialect of Persian-Armenians and Astrakhan, Agulis (Zogs), Djulfa. The other two branches are the կը branch consisting of 24 dialects (among them the dialect of Constantinople), and the ել branch consisting of 5 dialects (among them the dialect of Maragha). For more detailed information on the classification of dialects, see H. Acharian op. cit. pages 324-361.

declension was preserved in very few instances; the case ending *hց* was being used in ablative and *ում* in locative cases. However, the use of these elements was not consistent; even in one single text they were used interchangeably with Grabar forms. Naghash Hovnatan, despite his purely dialectal language, uses Grabar enclitics and declensions: *ԳուշանսՄՔ ԶՏԻԱՐՆԵ որ ունիՄՔ սեղան:* or *ՊարտիՄՔ ընսրել Զբարութիւն մերժել ի Մէնջ ԶՉԱՐԻՄ* (5):

Although the pre-nineteenth century writings in vernacular did not contribute much in terms of the development and shaping of a literary language, their widespread popularity (like the poems of Naghash Hovnatan and Sayat Nova) was evidence of the general tendency to prefer the vernacular to Grabar.

The difficult task of creating a uniform and disciplined literary language fell upon the shoulders of talented and daring scholars and writers of the first half of the nineteenth century.

THE DIALECT OF THE PLAIN OF ARARAT AS THE BASIS OF THE EASTERN LITERARY LANGUAGE

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Grabar was still the language of formal education, but it was a difficult and complicated medium to serve in teaching science, mathematics and other subjects in the school curriculum. The teachers, thus, were compelled to teach these subjects and even prepare textbooks in the vernacular. Moreover, students throughout the schools of Eastern Armenia brought with them their own dialects and the school environment provided an opportunity for the merger of these dialects. The outcome was a language very close to the dialect of Ararat (the language of the majority). This spoken language was more or less intelligible to all and, under the direction of the teachers, was constantly being polished and purged of foreign words. In short, it was beginning to find a sound *raison d'être*. Meanwhile, the socio-economical conditions and the fast growth of the nation's awareness bolstered the need to produce literature in an intelligible literary language.

Khachatur Abovian was the first staunch supporter of this movement. In the preface of his novel "Verk Hayastani", to justify his utilization of vernacular in a major literary work, he writes:

«...Ակոր որ ազգը էն լեզուով չի խօսում, էն լեզուն չի հասկանում, սաքի հենց բերանիցդ էլ ոսկի վէր ածիր, ում պէտք է ասես...»

He was right. What was the use of creating literary gems in Grabar when the mass of the people did not speak or even understand the language?

Abovian's stand in this movement is very unique and most interesting. He fought for the creation of literature in vernacular not for the sake of promoting a new literary language but for educating people. His intention was to

(5) In this quotation the Grabar elements are underlined.

attract people to Armenian Literature and prepare them for the final stage: the revival of Classical Armenian. Despite his conviction to educate people in an intelligible language, he did not envision the total replacement of Grabar by the Ashkharabar. In any event, due to the opposition of the clergy, his textbook, "Nakhashavigh" was banned, and eventually, his mysterious disappearance put an end to his endeavors.

Years later, his novel "Verk Haiastani" (1858) and then "Nakhashavigh" (1862) were published. By that time, the Eastern Armenian Ashkharhabar had already passed beyond its preliminary stages of development, and Abovian's views were already outdated. From the point of view of the linguistic development of the new literary language, the novel "Verk Hayastani" did not serve its purpose, but it became and will remain one of the gems of Armenian Dialectical literature.

Needless to say that in the 1830's when Kh. Abovian was active, it was still premature to envision the total replacement of Grabar by a new literary language.

Stepanos Nazarian, another advocate of the movement, in the first period of his literary career proposed a new language which was a mixture of Grabar and the dialects of the Plain of Ararat and Tiflis. This language did not gain popularity because it was artificial. Then he compromised by proposing a new literary language which was closely interwoven with Grabar and included only those dialectal forms that were in compliance with the rules of Grabar.

Rafael Patkianian, another scholar of this era criticized S. Nazarian's views advocating that Nazarian's language was artless and its grammar was contradictory to the rules of Ashkharhabar. He believed that one should write the way one speaks. Nevertheless, he was not consistent himself. The use of *է* and *ից* for ablative endings interchangeably and the archaic plural marker *ք* is common in his writings.

M. Nalbandian was on the right track from the beginning. He believed that the syntactical rules of dialects have conformity with Grabar and, moreover, dialects are not the distorted form of Grabar but the outcome of the evolution of the language, and therefore, more applicable to the modern use.

The consistent struggle of these scholars and their various experiments, as well as the experience of the Western Armenian intellectuals, brought them to realize that grammar of the future literary language had to be based upon a living dialect (a living spoken language). The adoption of the dialect of the Plain of Ararat, being the most popular and most intelligible dialect in Eastern Armenia, occurred almost automatically. This step was a turning point in the history of Eastern Ashkharabar. The selection of the dialect of Ararat endowed the vernacular literature, which was developing within the traditions of the Middle Armenian under the strong influence of the Grabar, with uniformity and provided a sound basis for its development into the future Eastern Armenian literary language.

In a short period of time, a relatively large number of writings in the

dialect of Ararat were published. The following excerpt from a book called «Համառոտ քննութիւն քրիստոնէական հաւատոյ եւ մահմետական կրօնի յաշխարհաբար շարադրեալ յումեմնէ հոգեսիրէ ի պէտո պարզամտաց» published by the Lazarian Institute is a good example of the language of these publications.

«...էնտուր համար օրէնքով յայտնի էլաւ մարդկանց թէ մեղքի տակ են մեղաց համար դատապարտած են, եւ ապա ճանաչեցին թէ որքան պէտք է որ փրկիչ գայ եւ նորանց ազատէ, փրկէ եւ մեղիցն որբէ...» (6):

The abundance of Grabarian elements are evident in the dialect of Ararat used in this writing.

Another example is a series of books of religious propaganda put out by protestant missionaries in Shushi. The title of the first volume speaks of the quality of its language: «Աւետարանի զօրութիւնը կամ մին Արար Շառայի պատմութիւնը, որ Քրիստոսի հաւատովն երանելի էլաւ»:

Many scholars including H. Acharian blamed the Eastern Ashkharabar intellectuals for short-sightedly promoting Eastern Ashkharabar when the Western Armenian literary language was already in existence and could have easily been adapted to the needs of Eastern Armenians (7). A close study of prevailing circumstances proves that in the process of the formation of Eastern Ashkharabar, influenciar factors other than the intervention of intellectuals were instrumental. In fact, these intellectuals, in their struggle to disseminate enlightenment and revive the nation, could never interfere in the course of the natural development of a common vernacular into a literary language, and introduce Western Armenian Ashkharhabar which was in those days as unintelligible and unfamiliar to the populace as Grabar itself.

THE FORMING OF THE EASTERN ASHKHARABAR LITERARY LANGUAGE

The dialect of the Plain of Ararat had many advantages; it was intelligible to most Eastern Armenians; it was phonetically closest to Grabar; it was comparatively rich in syntactic style and compound tenses of the verbs. In spite of all this, a long process of development was necessary to transform it into a literary language. This transformation occurred gradually. With each literary creation, by a consistent and sustained effort of the advocates of the cause, Eastern Ashkharabar was pushed a step closer to its perfection. However, this process was not a smooth and easy one. Many were the writers and scholars who disdained the vernacular considering it inconsistant, unpolished and un-

(6) For the quotation see S. Gh. Ghazarian, «Ժամանակակից հայոց լեզուն եւ Ռուսերէնի գերը նրա հարստացման եւ զարգացման մէջ», Erevan, 1955, p. 109.

(7) H. Acharian op. cit., volume 2, p. 497.

worthy of being used in serious literature. This was a trend continuing from the turn of the century when authors, like Harutun Alamdarian, out of necessity, ventured in writing in vernacular but strongly insisted upon the use of Grabar in their serious literary creations. This attitude towards the vernacular grew into a serious opposition when the newly formed literary language, with a rapid progress, was on the verge of replacing Grabar. A. Bagraduni, in an article in "Bazmavep" (1846, issue No. 13, p. 196), admits that Ashkharhabar is gradually spreading and endangering the position of Grabar (8).

The partisans of Grabar launched an increased opposition against the new literary language. Besides their profound veneration for Grabar as the sacred language of the Holy Scriptures and their strong determination to preserve this language as a valuable vestige of the ancient Armenian culture, they firmly criticized the new literary language. They argued that this language was poor, full of errors in terms of grammatical usage, full of foreign and purely dialectical elements and phrases, devoid of clarity, stable grammatical rules and regular syntax. This opposition, however, did not hinder the development of the new Ashkharhabar; on the contrary, it became instrumental in motivating the advocates of the new literary language to work harder to improve it and to eliminate the shortcomings.

This literary conflict between the Grabarian and Ashkharhabarian scholars, the Grabaikar (գրապայքար), was less fervent in the Eastern front. Interestingly enough, S. Gh. Ghazarian attributes this mildness to the influence of the modern Russian literature which was an outcome of a criteria adopted in the nineteenth century to let modern Russian develop based upon elements of the current, living, spoken language (9). This could be true to some extent, but an equally important reason was the fact that the literary conflict, unleashed by intellectuals like Garagashian, had already taken its toll on the Western front and was a good lesson for Eastern Armenian intellectuals. In fact, as H. Acharian asserts, the literary conflict on the Western front lasted up until the 1890's procrastinating the final institution of Western Armenian Ashkharhabar, whereas, by that time Eastern Ashkharhabar was already an established literary language (10).

THE REFINEMENT OF EASTERN ARMENIAN ASHKHARHABAR

The individual writings and the press were the best fields of experiment devoted to the refinement and enrichment of the newly established Eastern

(8) «Հայ նոր գրականութեան պատմութիւն», Erevan, 1962, Vol. 1, p. 69.

(9) S. Gh. Ghazarian, op. cit., p. 129, 138.

(10) H. Acharian, op. cit., p. 505.

Ashkharhabar. S. Nazarian's «Վարդապետութիւն կրօնի, հասարակաց հայախօսութեամբ» (1853) and «Հանդէս նոր հայախօսութեան» (1857), Camar Katiba's «Ազգային երգարան Հայոց» (1856) are examples of individual publications in that period of time. Among the periodicals, "Hussissapail", published in Moscow, played the most important role. Its publication was the result of S. Nazarian's unfatiguable efforts. Convinced of the importance of a periodical, Nazarian began appealing to the tsarist government of Russia for permission to publish a periodical. It was only in 1858 that permission was finally granted, and, from then on, during eight years of publication, "Hussissapail" became the stage for the progressive ideas of Mikayel Nalbandian, Stepanos Nazarian, and others.

M. Nalbandian, the most sagacious theoretician of Eastern Ashkharhabar in his articles advocated 1. to let the language develop in its unique way and according to its own grammatical and lexical rules without imposing the rules of Grabar on it; 2. to adopt the new borrowings from Grabar or foreign languages to the rules of the new language. Nalbandian believed that the new literary language could not immediately become the spoken language of the populace, but at least it would be intelligible to all.

S. Nazarian, aware of the insufficiency of the literary language to meet the needs of scientific works, suggested to borrow words from other languages or to make up words particularly after the Russian pattern. For instance, he translated the corresponding Russian terms for conductor and insulator and came up with փոխադրիչ and չփոխադրիչ; these words were later changed into հաղորդիչ and մէկուսիչ. With the same criteria he suggested սրորում for friction, which was also changed into չփորում later.

The language of the "Hussissapail" and the guidelines it set forth influenced writers like S. Shahaziz, Raffi and others, who in their turn contributed to the improvement and refinement of Eastern Armenian Ashkharhabar.

To give examples of some improvements and unification of grammatical usages: prior to the 1860's there was no general rule for the transliteration and declension of foreign proper nouns. For instance, the genetive case of Bulgaria appears as Բոլգարիայի in "Hussissapail", Պուկորին in "Chrakagh" and Բոլգարին in "Meghu Haiastani". Again, prior to the 1860's, under the Russian influence, some nouns, such as the names of nations, months and scientific terms, were capitalized. In the early stages of the development of Eastern Armenian Ashkharhabar the Grabar form of some pronouns and verbs were still in use. նոքա (for նրանք), մեք (for մենք), չիմք (for չէնք), իւք (for իք), իւրեանց (for իրենց), ինքեանք (for իրենք), the plural marker (for եր- or ներ), մտանել (for մտնել), շարժումն (for շարժում). Dialectical elements were also present in writings of these early stages, like the third person indicative ա for է (խօսում ա instead of խօսում է) or the suppression of ու (գնըմ ա instead of գնում է), the suppression of diphthongs like էրւած (instead of այրւած), լէն (for լայն), լիւ (for լոյն), or the demonstrative pro-

nouns էս, էն, էդ (instead of այս, այն, այդ).

The adopted criteria for the refinement of the new literary language, besides the steps mentioned above, also included 1. purging foreign words, 2. replacing purely dialectical or severely distorted words by their original form found in Grabar, 3. making up new words to meet the needs of the new world.

In this process, many words which were borrowed from Grabar assumed new meanings. The following are a few examples.

<i>Borrowed word</i>	<i>Original meaning in Grabar</i>	<i>New meaning</i>
պաստառ	dress material	screen
լուսանկար	bright, luminous	photograph
պաղպաղակ	rock crystal	ice cream
գնացք	the act of going	train

Several words were created by individual writers to convey new ideas or to translate a specific foreign word. Some of these new words were soon discarded, like լուցափայտ (matches), սառնոյշ (ice cream), etc. and others survived and found their way into literature, like երկաթուղի (railways), ջերմաչափ (thermometer), մենագրութիւն (monograph), ազգագրութիւն (ethnography), ջրածին (hydrogen), թթուածին (oxygen), մանրէ (microbe), etc. Several phrases were adopted from Grabar, like ի հարկէ, այնուամենայիւ, ամենայն հաւանականութեամբ, ի բաց առեալ, etc. (11).

By the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the archaic or purely dialectical forms were rectified, the new literary language was endowed with new words to replace the foreign ones or to convey new meanings. In R. Patkianian's «Ընդհանուր տեսութիւն արեւելահայ նոր գրական լեզուի հայոց» the new literary language had already attained a high level of improvement. Balasanian's «Քերականութիւն մայրենի լեզուի», published as early as 1874, already gives evidence to firm and consistent grammatical rules and regulations to make the new Eastern Ashkharabar compatible with the modern literary languages of the world.

Today we proudly witness the progress of the Armenian literary language in its two branches and its eloquent expression in Armenian literature. The Modern Armenian language is one. It is the result of the evolution of Grabar, as a natural process in the history of languages. Due to circumstances prevailing in the nineteenth century, the development of Modern Armenian has taken two separate courses resulting in the eastern and western branches of the Armenian literary language (12). No arbitrary imposition is able to bring these

(11) For a more complete list of above-mentioned examples see H. Acharian, op. cit., pages 478-488.

(12) The Soviet Armenian orthography, which is different from what is used in Eastern Armenian literature in the Diaspora, does not make a third literary language as some erroneously believe.

two branches together; in fact, the efforts of intellectuals, like M. Abeghian, G. Vantsian, G. Artsruni, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century grew into unwholesome disputations that were not advantageous to the evolution of the Armenian language. As we said in the beginning of this article, geographical and political factors were instrumental in the duolateral growth of our literary language. New influenciary factors in the future can bring them closer or even give birth to a new literary language endowed with the rich resources of the two.

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