

## On Turkish in Armenian Script

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**Abstract.** Armenians had intensive cultural relations with Seljuk and Ottoman Turks in Anatolia. As a result of those cultural relations they produced Turkish works by using Armenian script in Anatolia and later in the cities of the Ottoman State such as Istanbul, Jerusalem, Sofia, etc. This movement continued until 1968. Armenians, through these relations continuing for centuries adopted Turkish, published Turkish works in every field while conserving their own alphabet in novels, newspapers, magazines, religious texts, technical works, etc., spoke Turkish in their homes, and prayed in Turkish in their churches.

In this paper, the phases and factors that led the formation of Turkish in Armenian script, Turkish works in Armenian script and their function in Turkish-Armenian relations, as well as its importance in Turkish will be examined.

**JEL Codes:** C10, C19.

**Key Words:** Armenian, Turkish, Armenian script, Cultural relations, Bilingualism.

### 1. Turkish-Armenian cultural relations during the Ottoman period

The Armenian works, which were written during the Seljuks' period, show the existence of friendship and cultural relations between the Turks and the Armenians (Andreasyan 1950; Urfalı Mateos 952-1136). Cahen, who gives detailed and impartial information about Anatolia in the pre-Ottoman period, says the following about Turkish-Armenian relations: "Les relations entre Turcs et Arméniens se présentent un peu différemment des relations entre Turcs et Grecs. Bien qu'il y ait des Arméniens à Qunya. Presque toujours ils se conduisent en loyaux sujets et, se sentant convenablement traités, déplorent la mort des souverains. Là encore, il ne faut pas reporter sur le passé les sentiments qui ont pu rester d'un passé plus récent" (1988, 171).

Turkish-Armenian relations which existed in the Seljuks' period continued with an increasing rate in every field during the Ottoman period.

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Even from the Byzantine period, Armenians had scattered to different parts of Anatolia. Simeon depicts this situation in the following way: “There is not even a single city, or village, or a farm from Moldavia to Istanbul and city of Venetia which is greater than the whole Anatolia where Armenians do not exist” (1608-1619, 21-22). Throughout the centuries, the relations between the two nations increased so much that lifestyles, except the church and mosque, including traditions, clothing, weddings, festivals and funerals became similar. A Turk who still lives Anatolian village life, or knows it well, may think that his own village life is depicted while reading Armenian tales. Kankal uses Armenian sources to depict the joint Ottoman-Armenian life in this way: “None has met a fight which took place between Turks and Armenians in stories or novels. On the contrary, there are so many examples showing how the two societies were in a harmony, how close they were, how they co-operated during funerals and difficult situations” (2003, 99). Moreover, both Armenians and Turks happened to share some of the prayers for health, wealth, and (the symbol of) protection from the evil eye. Similarly, both sides happened to go to Christian and Muslim clergymen for prayers. A great part of the impartial researchers, observers and travelers state that Armenians lived with Turks in such peace and fraternity that they were called ‘Christian Turks’ (Göyünç 1983; Morgan 1919; Simeon 1608-1619). Moltke’s observations at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century offer a nice example on this subject: “Es ist sehr interessant, einen Blick in die Häuslichkeit einer armenischen Familie zu tun. Diese Armenier kann man in der Tat christliche Türken nennen, so ganz haben sie die Sitten und selbst die Sprache jener herrschenden Nation angenommen, während die Griechen weit mehr ihre Eigentümlichkeiten bewahrten. Die Religion erlaubt ihnen als Christen natürlich nur eine Frau; aber diese ist fast ebenso unsichtbar wie die Türkinnen. Wenn die Armenierinnen auf der Straße erscheinen, sieht man ebenfalls nur die Augen und den oberen Teil der Nase unverschleiert. Sie bringen Dir die Pfeife, reichen den Kaffee und bleiben mit verschränkten Händen vor Dir stehen, bis Du sie aufforderst, sich zu setzen” (1835-1839, 123-124).

After the conquest of Istanbul, the Armenian patriarchate was established in addition to the Orthodox patriarchate. Like the other nations under the Ottoman rule, Armenians were provided with freedom of language and religion. Mehmet II brought many Armenians families to Istanbul from Bursa and Crimea and the Ottoman dynasty until Abdulhamit II offered them complete / the utmost protection and privileges (Morgan 1919, 245-246). Armenians were a privileged nation in the Ottoman State and possessed all kinds of religious, cultural, and social rights; they had their own legal system,

they could choose their rulers, and they were entirely free and autonomous in education: They were almost a state within a state; the 1863 Armenian Regulations is the most obvious evidence of this (Artinian 2004; Şafak 2003, 189-220).

Throughout history, every nation has produced oral literature before producing written works; epics are the most important of these. Turkish and Armenian epics have many points in common (Türkmen 1992, 2-3). The mutual development of language relations between the two nations must, without doubt, have taken place long before the formation of Turkish works in Armenian script. Many Armenians produced Turkish poetry or prose in Arabic script. Köprülü, who gives the first and still the most extensive information about this subject, says: "Most of the Armenian ashuq wrote poems in Turkish, Persian, and Kurdish; moreover, many of the well-known bards of the Turks and the Kurds are Armenian. These, without doubt, exported a lot of things from their own national characteristics, and Christian elements to Islamic poems" (1986, 244). Interaction between neighboring languages is mutual: Every part of the Armenian language has also been under the influence of the Turkish language (Dankoff 1995; Eren 1995; Kut 1985; 2003; Seyidov 1976).

## **2. The Formation of Armenian Turkish under the Ottoman rule**

The fact that Armenians adopted the language of Christian Kipchak-Turks in Crimea and of Muslim Turks in Anatolia, and that they even accepted Turkish as the language of prayer, is generally not known by the Armenians or the Turks. The fact that Armenians spoke Turkish, and published Turkish works is not a process that started with the Republic. The most plausible reason for the Armenians' good command of Turkish and their usage of it not only as a lingua franca, but also as a mother tongue is that they had very close relations with the Turks.

Armenians knew both their own language, and other regional languages like Arabic, Persian, Kurdish, and Syrian, as well as the Ottoman language which was the more formal language; both due to the fact that they lived in different parts of Anatolian, and that they actively participated in the social fields of education, arts, trade, etc. Of course, not all of the Armenians could be said to have had an excellent command of those languages. However, a great number of Armenians under the Ottoman rule were bilingual or multilingual.

Armenians who lived in big cities during the Ottoman period and who actively took part in culture, trade, civil life, and even in administration (to a limited extent) used Turkish, which was the formal language of communication and publishing. As many travelers and observers have stated, Armenians had a good command of Turkish. As for the reason why Armenians knew Turkish better in contrast to the other non-Turkish elements, we can follow Simeon, who stated that they were scattered throughout the empire, even in the Byzantine period, and they actively took part in the commercial, economic, and educational life of the country.

How did the Turks see the Armenian language and culture? On this subject, the following remarks of the Armenian clergyman, traveler and historian, Simeon, can be quoted: “Turks are very nice and humanistic, and they like Armenians very much and they call them Christian, not infidel” (1608-1619, 146). In addition to mutual friendly relations, there were people among the Turkish intellectuals, traders, and common people who lived together with Armenians and knew Armenian. Arıkan, who wrote what he himself experienced and observed in Darende and Sivas between 1910 and 1920, can be quoted: “All of the Armenians spoke Turkish but it was understood that they were Armenian from the first word they spoke. There were a lot of Turks understanding Armenian, but few of them could speak. Families with their children ate together, spent funny winter nights. Armenian and Turkish were mixed together” (2001, 120).

In fact, Ottoman Turks tended to learn foreign languages because they were confronted with different languages and cultures. This phenomenon can be seen in most nations that live together. In addition to the fact that there were Armenians who knew Kurdish, Arabic and even Syrian in addition to Turkish, there were people among Arabs or Kurds who knew Armenian besides their mother tongue and Turkish; bilingualism or trilingualism still continues in some parts of Turkey, and in countries like Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Prose and poetic works were prepared to teach Turkish-Armenian. One verse in one of the Armenian-Turkish poetic dictionaries says: “Mancuk oğlan kızdır axcık ustaya varbed dēnūr / Kardaş axbar oldı ise mar dērler mādere”, (Dankoff et al. 1996, 5), oğlan in Turkish and mancuk in Armenian mean “boy”; similarly kız, axcık “girl”; usta, varbed “master”; kardaş, axbar “brother / sister”, māder, mar “mother.” Besides, Ottoman citizens from Turkish or other ethnic origins could attend Armenian schools. Moreover, some Ottoman intellectuals learned the Armenian alphabet in order to benefit from Turkish works in Armenian script (And 1972, 36).

### 3. Appearance of Turkish works in Armenian script

Turkish works in Armenian script do not only consist of this example. As it is known, again under Turkish rule, the Greeks in Ottoman period produced Turkish works in Greek script; the dominant property of the Greeks was that they knew Turkish instead of Greek. “Turks living in Crete published works in Greek in Arabic script”<sup>1</sup>. The Turks, who were brought from Greece to Turkey, in the 1923 exchange, spoke Greek to each other; there were even some Turks who could not speak Turkish. The Armenians of the Hemşin region, who have maintained a more introverted life in comparison with the Armenians in big cities, have preserved their mother tongue – Armenian - up to now, even though they are Muslims (Bläsing 1992). As seen in history and today, people prefer the language with which they can communicate most easily and which is most common in trade, education, and publication.

The Armenian alphabet has been used in Anatolia since the 5<sup>th</sup> century till now without undergoing any significant change. In Anatolia, also starting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Turkish works in Armenian script were written (Koptaş 2003; Koz 1994; Kut 1985; Pamukciyan 2002; Schütz 1998; Seyidov 1976). The appearance of Turkish works in Armenian script is the last phase of a phenomenon that started centuries before.

In the Ottoman State, Greeks, Armenians and the Jews were first to use the printing-press. In the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, books in Arabic, Persian and Turkish in Arabic script were published. However, Ottomans started to use printing-press in 1729 (Gerçek 1939).

The first Armenian printing office was opened in Istanbul in 1567 and six books were published during the two following years; the first printed Turkish work in Armenian script was published in 1727 (Koptaş 2003; Stepanyan 1985). This also shows that the Armenians started the new movement of enlightenment and education among the eastern nations and that they used all the possible means for the sake of this new tendency (Inançalp 1996, 201-202).

Writing and printing Turkish works in Armenian script was not a new event starting with the Ottomans in Armenian history. Armenians in Crimea also formed Kipchak works by using Armenian script. The transition of the Armenians who were brought from Crimea to Istanbul, Turkish was not hard

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because, as stated above, they already knew the Crimean Kipchak Turkic, they even wrote works in that language (Rona-Tas 1998, 135).

It is seen that among the eastern nations Armenians were first to start a movement similar to the European Renaissance and give importance to reading-writing among their nation (including small villages and printing-publishing activities). Mikhiterian, an Armenian Christian clergyman from Sivas, contributed to the acceleration of this activity by setting up a printing-press in Italy. Second printing-office was established in Vienna. In these printing-offices, thousands of works in French, English, Armenian, etc. were published and sent to Armenians in Ottoman State and in other countries. A great part of those printed works were undoubtedly Turkish works printed in Armenian script.

In the Ottoman Turkish language written in Arabic script there are 33 letters, and both handwriting and printed script are written in four ways. This being the case, there are nearly 125 different forms of writing in the Ottoman Turkish. On the other hand, the Armenian alphabet is composed of 41 letters (Pamukciyan 2002, 255). An Armenian and even a Turk can learn Armenian script in a very short period. The teaching, writing and printing of the Armenian script is easier when compared to Arabic (Kayseryan 1314 / 1896; Muhtar 1333 / 1917). The ordering and printing of the Armenian script are economical from these points of view.

In order to write and set up Ottoman in Arabic script properly, one has to know the basic rules of Arabic and Persian grammars, for words in the Ottoman Turkish, based on Arabic and Persian, are generally written as they are in their original root languages. On the other hand, it is not indispensable to know Arabic and Persian to write in the Armenian alphabet; knowing Turkish is enough.

During the Ottoman period a great part of the printing-offices belonged to the Armenians. Gaspıralı depicts that period, in an article which appeared in the Terdjiman newspaper in 1895, as follows: "O Turks, what is this position we are in? We publish "a religious handbook" in Tibilisi, at Karakashian printing-office; "Koeroghlu" in Baku, at Adamian printing-office; "poetry of elegy" in Karabagh, at Vanilian printing-office" (Kırımer 1996, 189). In these printing-offices, in addition to Armenian, works in Ottoman, Arabic and Persian were printed. In a printing-office where Armenian works could be printed, there was no need for extra knowledge, expenditure, learning, tools, etc. to print Turkish works in Armenian script.

Turkish works in Armenian script continued to be published until 1968. This shows that, even after the emigration, the publication of Turkish works in Armenian script by Armenians without Turkey continued (Kutalmış 2003).

There is also a national aspect to the issue. Turkish works in Armenian script are only aimed at Armenians. Moreover, although the language of these works is Turkish, Armenian scripts remind the Armenians of their religions, no matter what their sect is. And, even if they do not know their mother tongue, it reminds them that they are Armenian; it stands as a means of refreshing their national sentiments. During the Ottoman rule this right was not only given to the Armenians as a favor and tolerance, but also to the Greeks, Jews, Kurds, Arabs etc. as a human right and it was part of the state policy of Turks in the Ottoman period.

#### **4. Turkish works in Armenian script**

The printed works are books, like novels, the Bible, stories, newspapers, and magazines. The main newspapers were *Djerîde-i Havâdis*, *Djerîde-i Sharqiyya*, *Medjmû'a-i Akhbâr*, *Mansûma-i Efkyâr*, *Taqvîm-i Vaqâyi'*, *Terdjîmân-i Efkyâr*, etc. which were published starting from 1839 (Koloğlu 1985). Moreover, as seen in the example of *Hüdavendigar*, there were Turkish works published both in Arabic and Armenian scripts. The names of the Turkish works printed in the Armenian script are listed in the works published in Koptaş 2003, Levonyan 1934, Pamukciyan 2002, and Stepanyan 1985.

Turkish works in Armenian script show the level that Turkish-Armenian language relations have reached. These are evidence for the Turkish-Armenian friendship that existed in history. Turkish works in Armenian script were written by Armenians' own will and efforts. Armenians, throughout their intensive Turkish relations with Turks have adopted Turkish, published Turkish works while protecting their own alphabet and writing whatever they wanted, spoke Turkish in their homes, and prayed in Turkish in their churches.

These books, newspapers, and magazines, in addition to being indispensable documents and archives belonging to the period, present events that occurred at that period (wars, treaties, cultural events, research articles,

news etc.) to the reader in the original form. These works were not only printed in Istanbul, but also in the centers of the empires such as Izmir, Bursa, Jerusalem, Sofia, etc.; there are even some published in Venetia, Paris, Budapest, Rome and Vienna. These works have a very significant place in solving the historical and current problems concerning the two nations.

Armenian script is more suitable for the voice structure of Turkish than Arabic script. This means a lot for the Turkish language. Ottoman written in Arabic script is insufficient in showing the vowels. This makes learning, reading, and examining Turkish in Arabic script more difficult. Therefore, the issue of Arabic script and alphabet among Turkish nations became one of the most debated issues of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Turkish written in Armenian script reflects the pronunciation forms in the same way as the current Latin alphabet, and reflects more in comparison to Arabic script. However, it is compulsory to state that three kinds of spelling are seen in Turkish texts in Armenian script: 1. Some words are directly equivalent to Turkish in Arabic script; in other words, the transcription of the Arabic script is made, although Turks originally wrote these words in Persian and Arabic. 2. They reflect common pronunciation. 3. They record some words according to their Armenian pronunciation.

Turkish has been written in different alphabets such as Köktürk, Uyghur, Arabic and Latin throughout different periods of history. Turkish can be most easily and truly written in the Armenian alphabet system in terms of protecting voice values. For instance, as Deny mentions on this subject: “Ce sont les caractères arméniens qui s’adaptent le mieux à la prononciation du turk, mieux même que les caractères latins ou russes des transcriptions, dont ont usé les turcologues” (1955, 17). This, without doubt, has a great importance for the solution of the voice problem of historical Turkish, of which a very small part has been published.

People who produce Turkish works in Armenian script are people who grow up among Turks and, to a great extent, speak Turkish as their mother tongue. Even when it is clear that their mother tongue is not Turkish while they speak, the reflections of this in their writing are quite rare and only when it comes to their own religion or culture do we see differences between Armenian and Ottoman Turkish.

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