

# History of the Armenian typography on the Former Polish Lands

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## Հայկական գրատպության պատմությունը Լեհաստանի պատմական տարածքներում

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**Ամփոփագիր.** Հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է հայկական գրատպության պատմությունը Լեհաստանի պատմական տարածքներում՝ կենտրոնանալով 1616 թվականին Լվովում հիմնված առաջին հայկական տպագրատան ստեղծման և զարգացման վրա: Ներկայացվում են տպագրատան գործունեությունը, վաղ հայկական գրքերի տպագրությունը, որոնք հաճախ հազվագյուտ էին, սահմանափակ թվով և շրջանառվում էին որոշակի համայնքներում, ինչպես նաև այդ հրատարակությունների ճակատագրերը դարերի ընթացքում: Հատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում Լվովի տպագրատան հիմնադիր Հովհաննես Քարմատանենցին, որի գործունեությունը կարևոր շրջադարձ է հայկական մշակութային պատմության մեջ: Քարմատանենցը ոչ միայն առաջին հայկական տպագրիչն էր Լեհաստանում, այլ նաև չորրորդը՝ աշխարհում: Հոդվածում ընդգծվում է նրա ավանդի հայկական գրական և կրոնական տեքստերի պահպանման և տարածման գործում՝ դրանք տեղադրելով վաղ նոր ժամանակների եվրոպական տպագրության ընդլայնված համատեքստում: Գրքերի, արխիվային փաստաթղթերի և պատմական վկայությունների վերլուծությամբ հետազոտությունը լուսաբանում է ինչպես վաղ հայկական տպագրության տեխնիկական կողմերը, այնպես էլ դրա մշակութային և սոցիալական նշանակությունը: Այս ուսումնասիրությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ հայկական գրատպությունը Լեհաստանի պատմական տարածքներում ծառայել է կարևոր միջոց մշակութային փոխանակման, ինքնության ձևավորման և հայկական ժառանգության պահպանման համար Կենտրոնական և Արևելյան Եվրոպայում բացելով նոր հեռանկարներ վաղ տպագրության տարանջրային պատմության ուսումնասիրության համար:

**Հանգուցաբառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝** Հայկական գրատպություն, հայկական տպագրություն, Լվով, Հովհաննես Քարմատանենց, հայկական գրքեր, վաղ նոր ժամանակների տպագրություն, գրքի պատմություն, հայկական մշակութային ժառանգություն

## История армянского книгопечатания на исторических землях Польши

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**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена истории армянской типографии на исторических польских землях, с акцентом на создание и развитие первой армянской типографии во Львове в 1616 году. Рассматриваются деятельность типографии, выпуск ранних армянских книг, которые нередко были редкими, ограниченными по числу экземпляров и распространялись в узких сообществах, а также разнообразные судьбы этих изданий на протяжении веков. Особое внимание уделяется Ованнесу Карматаненцу, основателю львовской типографии, чья деятельность стала значимым событием в истории армянской культуры. Карматаненц был не только первым армянским книгопечатником в Польше, но и четвертым в мире. В статье подчеркивается его вклад в сохранение и распространение армянских литературных и религиозных текстов, рассматриваемых в широком контексте ранней европейской типографии. На основе анализа сохранившихся книг и исторических источников исследование освещает как технические аспекты ранней армянской типографии, так и её культурное и социальное значение. Работа демонстрирует, что армянская печать на польских землях служила важным инструментом культурного обмена, формирования идентичности и сохранения армянского наследия в

Центральной и Восточной Европе, открывая новые перспективы в изучении транснациональной истории ранней печати.

**Ключевые слова и словосочетания:** армянская типография, армянское книгопечатание, Львов, Ованнес Карматаненц, армянские книги, книгопечатание раннего Нового времени, история книги, армянское культурное наследие

## Introduction

The Armenian handwritten book, whose tradition originated in the fifth century, reached the lands of Ruthenia together with the first wave of Armenian immigrants in the second half of the eleventh century, following the conquest of Armenia by the Seljuq Turks. Among the early settlers were not only warriors, artisans, and merchants, but also representatives of other professions – physicians, clergymen, and scholars – who brought with them from their homeland, alongside other cultural treasures, manuscripts written in the Armenian language. These handwritten books played a crucial role in preserving religious, literary, and educational traditions within the Armenian communities that gradually took root in the Polish lands.

The most ancient Armenian handwritten monuments found in these lands (for example, the famous *Skevra Gospel*, written in Cilicia in 1197), were brought here either at the time of their creation or sometime thereafter<sup>1</sup> [10, pp. 293-295]. In the following centuries, increasingly abundant evidence appears concerning Armenian manuscript books, which were usually preserved as separate collections in churches, primarily within larger Armenian colonies. The medieval Polish scholar Mathias de Myechow, in his *Treatise on the Two Sarmatians* (first published in 1517), which contains the earliest printed reference to Armenians, notes the presence of valuable church books in the colonies [19, p. 151]. In 1564, Cardinal F. J. Commendone, a prominent figure of the Catholic Church, examined Armenian handwritten liturgical books during his stay in Lviv [18, p. 204]. In 1566, B. Herbst, a Polish preacher and propagator of the idea of union between the Eastern Churches and Rome, arrived in Lviv and visited the Armenian Cathedral for missionary purposes. There he became acquainted with an extensive collection of Armenian handwritten books. In his account of the journey to Ukraine, Herbst listed the Armenian manuscripts he considered most valuable, mentioning both the writings of the Church Fathers and liturgical books [1, p. 374]. By the end of the sixteenth century, references appear to another collection of Armenian handwritten books, this time in private ownership. In 1596, the Italian diplomat and

secretary of the papal embassy, B. Vannozi of Pistoia, who had arrived in Poland, visited the Polish magnate and Chancellor Jan Zamoyski in his newly founded town of Zamość. During his visit, Vannozi examined the Chancellor's library and drew attention to a collection of rare Armenian manuscripts [12, pp. 264-265]. A study of the surviving records of several dozen Armenian manuscripts created on the territory of the former Polish lands and now scattered across libraries worldwide indicates that there was a considerable number of copyists active in Lviv and Kamenets [3; 9, pp. 80-114]. The art of calligraphic book production flourished in Lviv during the 1560s and 1570s, demonstrating a high level of artistic and technical skill. Indeed, this manuscript tradition appears to have competed quite successfully with the nascent Armenian printing industry, which at that time was taking its first, tentative steps.

## Hovhannes Karmatanents' press

The widespread triumph of the printed book across Eastern and Western Europe inevitably influenced the book culture of Armenian colonies in the Polish Commonwealth. The establishment of the Armenian printing house in Lviv in 1616 stands as clear evidence of these emerging trends. Little is known about the founder of the Lviv Armenian printing house, Hovhannes Karmatanents, or about the printing house itself. Although the existence of an Armenian printing house in Lviv during the first half of the seventeenth century is frequently mentioned in works on the history of Armenian colonies or Armenian printing, these references ultimately rest on a small number of facts. Most of the available information derives from the first discoveries of Lviv Armenian press monuments at the end of the eighteenth century. The history of these discoveries has been thoroughly analyzed by J. R. Dashkevich in a series of scholarly articles [16].

Hovhannes Karmatanents, a priest from Greater Armenia, Bitlis, came to Lviv with the goal of establishing an Armenian printing house. He already possessed some knowledge of typography and most likely acquired his printing skills in Istanbul. The graphic design of his first book, the *Psalter* of 1616, adorned with marginal illustrations in the style typical of Armenian manuscripts, reflects an orientation toward Eastern rather than Western (Rome, Venice) approaches to Armenian typography. In contrast to the Armenian printing houses of Western Europe, which relatively early

<sup>1</sup> Z. Obertynsky believes that the *Skevr Gospel* appeared in Crimea no later than in the XIV century.

lost their distinctive oriental features, the Lviv press retained these Eastern artistic characteristics.

It is easy to understand why Hovhannes chose Lviv as the site for his printing house. Beyond being the most prominent Armenian cultural center in the region, Lviv offered the support of both the local Armenian merchant elite and the Armenian church hierarchy. Since 1574, the city had maintained certain typographic traditions, and it is likely that the local Armenian community was familiar with them. Hovhannes may therefore have hoped to find skilled assistants for this challenging undertaking [14, pp. 206-207].

In his article “*The First Armenian Book Printer in Ukraine: Hovhannes Karmatanyants*” (rus. *Первый армянский книгопечатник на Украине Ованнес Карматапянци*), Dashkevich identifies 1616 as the year the printing house was founded, marked by the publication of the *Psalter of David* (arm. *Սաղմոսի ի Դաւիթ*), which made Lviv the fourth city in the world to print books in the Armenian language [13, p. 1131]. Preparatory work for the Lviv Armenian printing house likely began as early as 1615, including the acquisition of equipment, the purchase of paper, the preparation of texts for publication, and the complex process of designing and casting fonts. Analysis of this preparatory phase suggests that Hovhannes and his unknown assistants faced considerable difficulties in producing the typefaces. Although a number of skilled jewelers were active in seventeenth-century Lviv and participated in type production, they proved somewhat clumsy in this specialized work. The typography of Hovhannes’ press displayed several distinctive features, which make Lviv editions easily distinguishable from other Armenian publications of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the same time, it is clear that these fonts were not obtained from an existing Armenian printing house, but were created on-site specifically for the press’s printing purposes.

The book contains not only the *Psalms of David* but also a variety of prayers in *grabar*. It should be emphasized that the *Psalter* was not intended solely as a liturgical text. In many parochial Armenian schools operating in Poland during this period, the *Psalter* served as one of the principal textbooks.

Dashkevich notes that the difficulty of studying the activities of the Lviv Armenian printing house is not limited to the lack of archival sources shedding light on the personality of Hovhannes. Indeed, very few editions produced by the Lviv press have survived. The second book, possibly printed in Lviv and conventionally known as the *Medical Aid* or *Magic Book* (arm. *Բժշկարան*), has not survived to the present day. It

was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the Armenian historian S. Gyuver-Adonts, examining the incomplete original, suggested that it had been printed in Lviv [4, p. 136]. The book was later destroyed in a fire at the Mkhitarist library on the island of St. Lazarus in Venice, leaving the question of its Lviv origin unresolved.

The third edition produced by Hovhannes, the *Prayer Book* (arm. *Աղոթագիրք*), dated 1618, became accessible to scholars only relatively recently, thanks to the research of the Hungarian Armenologist E. Schutz [2, p. 182] who located the book in the library of Leiden University. It is known that a significant portion of Armenians who had lived in Crimea and later moved to urban centers used the spoken Armenian-Kipchak language<sup>2</sup> in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Poland. Hovhannes specifically intended this publication for that community. To date, it remains the only book in the world published in this language. Its contents include numerous prayers and several psalms that were widely used in religious practice. The book was likely distributed in Armenian colonies across Ukraine, Poland, and Moldova where Armenian-Kipchak served as a spoken language.

The history of printing in Lviv during the seventeenth century is often regarded as one of the more obscure episodes in Armenian printing. Of all the books produced by the press between 1616 and 1618, only two have survived to the present day. Until recently, virtually all information about their printer, Hovhannes Karmatanyants, was limited to the brief remarks he left about himself in a dedicatory entry in one of the published works<sup>3</sup> [6, pp. 66-67]. These facts have been repeated in numerous scholarly works without significant modification [5, pp. 9-10]. It might have seemed that the enigma of this remarkable figure, who played a crucial role in the history of Armenian printing, would remain unsolved. However, many years of research conducted by Dashkevich have uncovered numerous details of Karmatanyants’ biography.

First, Dashkevich discusses certain aspects of Karmatanyants’ life and biography in his article and provides preliminary remarks concerning the name under which Hovhannes Karmatanyants appears in medieval Lviv documents [13, p. 1126]. In his publications, the printer referred to himself as Ter

<sup>2</sup> Armenian-Kipchak refers to a Turkic (Kipchak) language used by Armenian communities in Eastern Europe in the 16th–17th centuries, written in the Armenian script and employed primarily for religious, legal, and everyday texts.

<sup>3</sup> Colophon to “The *Psalter*” was reprinted several times partially or fully - in ancient Armenian language as well as in translation.

Hovhannes Karmatanents. In the report of Armenian typography in the seventeenth century<sup>4</sup>, as well as in later reports, Dashkevich suggests that, by analogy with similar cases, Hovhannes Karmatanents – son of Murat, whose name is recorded in the colophon – should be sought in archival documents primarily under the name Ivan Muratovich [17, p. 314]. This is how patronymic surnames were formed among Ukrainian Armenians – derived from the name of a father or grandfather – following Armenian naming customs of the period and adapted to the Ukrainian form of the surname using suffixes such as *-ovich* or *-evich*.

Another hypothesis is that Hovhannes' father was known as Murat Kerimovich. It is relatively straightforward to see that the surname Kerimovich in the seventeenth century corresponds to the form Karmatanents. In his *Chronology or Church Analysis*, S. Roshka, referring to the Lviv bishop Suffragan Ivan Kerimovich, identifies him as Hovhannes Karmatanenets<sup>5</sup> [2, p. 182].

In Lviv, Armenians typically formed their surnames from their father's name; however, occasionally, perhaps to emphasize family traditions, they also used a surname derived from their grandfather's name alongside the patronymic. "Since they do not have generic names, Armenians form them from godfathers' or grandfathers' names," noted Louis-Marie Pidou de Saint Olon, a French orientalist and rector of the Armenian Collegium of the Teatin Order in Lviv in the 1860s [11, p. 21].

Thus, in addition to the surname Muratovich, Hovhannes may also have borne the surname of his father, Kerimovich, as confirmed by historical sources. This genealogical analysis finally resolves any remaining doubts regarding the identification of Hovhannes Karmatanents with Ivan Muratovich, enabling several dozen archival documents to illuminate his life and activities.

Beyond this, all general information concerning Armenian book printing in Lviv between 1616 and 1630, and about its founder Hovhannes Karmatanents, remains limited to the details outlined above.

It can be concluded that financial difficulties, followed by the death of Hovhannes, were the primary reasons for the cessation of the Lviv Armenian printing house's activities. The three aforementioned books remain the only known editions produced by Lviv Armenians in the first half of the seventeenth century.

However, no evidence has been found to suggest that Armenian typography in Lviv continued after the death of Hovhannes. Internal strife within the Armenian colonies during the 1630s–1660s, caused by disputes over the union of the Armenian Church with the Roman Church, occurred against the backdrop of complex international relations and the sweeping upheavals of the Ukrainian War of Independence. Undoubtedly, these circumstances did not favor the resumption of Armenian printing. Earlier assumptions by researchers, including the Armenian historian S. Baronch and the Ukrainian historian B. Yanush, that Hovhannes' printing house in Lviv continued to exist – albeit inactive – after the release of several books, and that its typefaces were sold in the early nineteenth century to the Lviv typographer Josef Schneider [7, pp. 191; 8, pp. 39]. appear, in light of the evidence presented by Dashkevich, to be incorrect.

In the second half of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries, Armenian printing in Lviv remained limited to projects and plans. There is no evidence to support the existence of active Armenian printing in the city during this period. While abbreviated texts of some Armenian dramas were published in Lviv in 1668–1669, they appeared not in Armenian but in Polish; these editions have been preserved in the Library of the Ossolinski National Institute in Wrocław. Similarly, the Armenian Collegium in Lviv, which had been established in 1664, did not publish religious texts or dictionaries in classical Armenian [15, p. 237].

By the mid-1660s, when the question of reviving Armenian book printing in Lviv arose, no traces of Hovhannes' printing house remained. It may have been destroyed in one of the city's fires or otherwise lost during the turbulent tenure of Archbishop Torosovich. The possibility that the printing house was relocated from Lviv cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, when a new Armenian printing house was established in 1645 in Suceava—a major cultural center of the Moldovan Armenians who maintained close and constant ties with Lviv – it could justifiably be regarded as the successor to Hovhannes Karmatanents' press.

Against this backdrop, the figure of the outstanding Armenian cultural personality Hovhannes Karmatanents emerges prominently. He was not only the first representative of Armenian book printing in Poland, but also the fourth in the world. The publication of the world's only printed book in the Armenian-Kipchak language is likewise associated with his name. His efforts to introduce Armenian culture to the most advanced means of disseminating the written word of his

<sup>4</sup> The report was presented at the scientific conference dedicated to the 450th anniversary of Armenian printing held on December 25<sup>th</sup>, Matenadaran, 1962.

<sup>5</sup> First, the indication was paid attention by Hungarian Armenologist E. Schutz.

time through printing are deserving of recognition. Karmatanents' name holds a distinguished place in the history of book printing in Poland, as it already does in the broader history of Armenian culture.

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