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BABAIAN ANI
MAMIGONIAN MARC A.

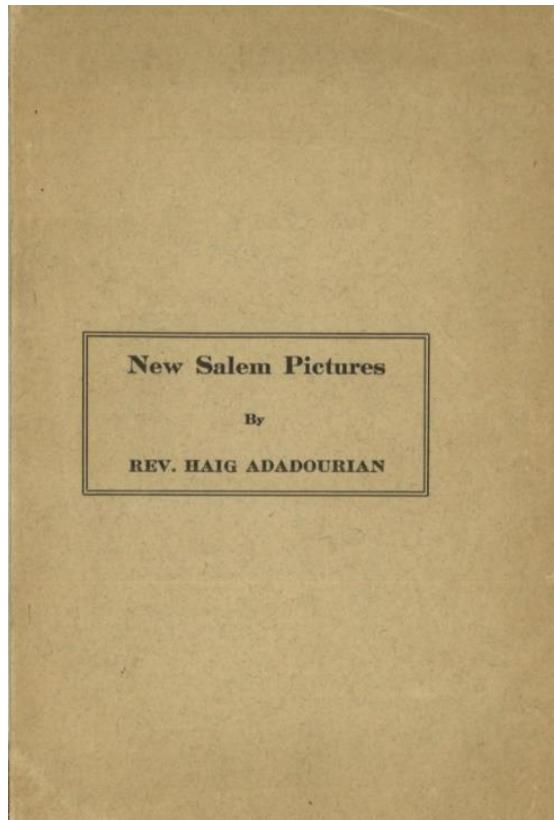
National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR)

**THE FIRST ARMENIAN PRINTED BIBLE OF VOSKAN
YEREVANTS‘I AT NAASR’S MARDIGIAN LIBRARY**

Բանալի բառեր՝ Ուկան Երևանցի, հայկական առաջին տպագիր Աստվածաշունչ, Հայկ Ադադուրյան:

Keywords: Voskan Yerevants‘i, the first Armenian printed Bible, Haig Adadourian.

One day, this past September (2024), our library received a letter asking if we were interested in an old family Bible. Given our limited space, we only accept books on a selective basis, so we asked for a photo of the book. We received a photo of the cover only, with a beautiful old handwritten note attached, reading: “The first printed edition of the Armenian Bible (Job-Rev.) Printed in Amsterdam, (Holland) Oct. 13, 1668. Used many years as Church Bible, in the Gregorian Armenian Church, Aintab, Turkey.”



New Salem Pictures (1913) by Rev. Haig Adadourian

This photo sparked a strong intuition that this might be a book we had long dreamed of adding to our collection. Less than a week later, we received the Bible. The moment we saw it in person was indescribable: it was exactly the book we had long hoped for: the first Armenian Bible printed by Voskan Yerevants‘i in Amsterdam more than 350 years ago. Accompanying this treasure was another book written by the Bible’s previous owner, Rev. Haig Adadourian, titled *New Salem Pictures* (1913).

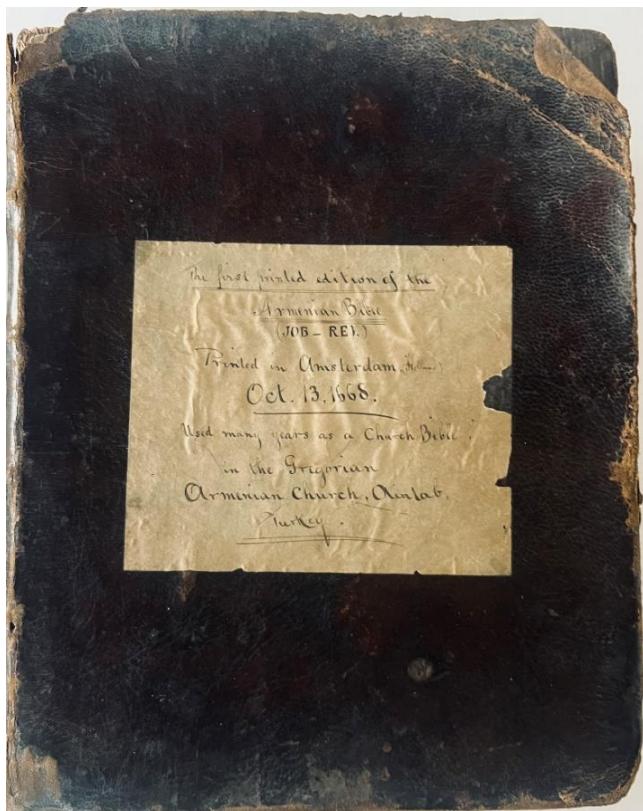
This is the story of the 300-year journey of a remarkable book to our library.

Title: Աստվածաշնչ = Astuatsashunch' [Bible]

Printed by: Ոսկան Երևանցի = Oskan Erewants'i

Publication Information: յԱմստերդամ: Սրբոյն Էջմիածնի և Սրբոյն Սարգսի Զօրավարի = yAmstēdam: Srboyn Ējmiatsni ew Srboyn Sargsi Zōravari [Amsterdam, St. Etchmiadzin and St. Sargis Zoravar], 1666-1668

NAASR Mardigian Library, Gift of Robert Albiol



Cover of the Voskan Yerevants'i now in NAASR's Mardigian Library



First page of the NAASR copy of the Bible printed by Voskan Yerevants‘i, showing the opening of the Book of Job. The volume shows its age and the long journey it has made, but also the care that has been taken to preserve it for more than 350 years

About the Bible's Owners

Robert Albiol, the great-grandson of Rev. Haig Adadourian (1870 Adana—1950 Malden, MA), contacted NAASR about our library becoming the home for his family's Bible. According to Mr. Albiol, his great-grandfather, Reverend Aintabli Adadour (1805-1887), was the first Armenian to be ordained as a Protestant minister. Mr. Albiol wrote to us:

"His son, Haig, came to the US, trained in Pennsylvania and had ministries in Martha's Vineyard and Manomet, MA. Haig was instrumental in establishing Armenian churches in Oxnard, CA, and Buenos Aires, Argentina. Between 1900 and 1920 he worked endlessly to raise the immigration quotas in order to allow more Armenian refugees into the U.S., Canada and Argentina. There were accounts of him attending meetings in the White House to lobby on behalf of the Armenians. He sponsored numerous immigrants."

We have found substantial information supporting Mr. Albiol's family history. The Rev. Edward G. Porter of Boston, speaking in 1898 to the Second Congregational Church in Manomet, Mass., where Haig Adadourian was then the minister, stated:

"I congratulate you heartily on your minister. ... I knew him long before you did. Eleven years ago I was visiting Aintab as a trustee of the Central Turkey College, where he was studying. At Adana I saw his venerable father, Aintabli Adadour, one of the first band of preachers ordained by the pioneer missionaries of the American Board in that country. He had successful pastorates at Urfa, Diarbekir, Kessab, Tarsus, and Adana; and after fifty years of faithful service he surrendered his prophet's mantle to his son, who has been led by unexpected circumstances to pursue his vocation here among the sons of the Pilgrims" [Proceedings, 1899, 34].

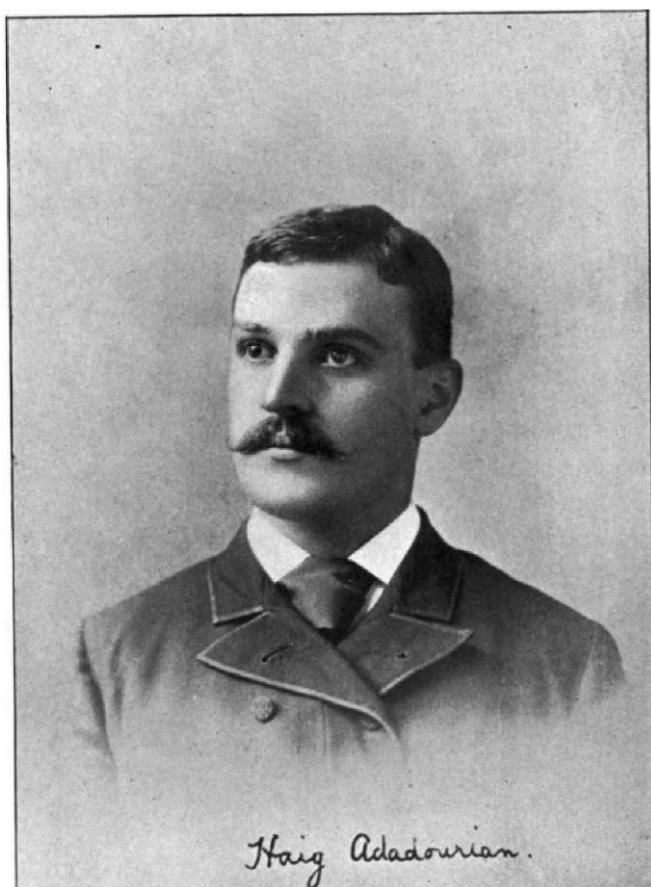


Photo of Haig Adadourian, from Proceedings of the One Hundred and Sixtieth Anniversary Celebration of the Second Congregational Church in Plymouth (Manomet) Mass. (1899)

Haig Adadourian was born in Adana in 1870, was a graduate of the Protestant-run Central Turkey College in Aintab and came to the U.S. around 1889. He graduated from the Hartford Theological Seminary and was naturalized in Malden, Mass., in 1895. From 1897-1904 and again in 1916-1923 he was Pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Manomet. He also served as minister in Orleans and New Salem as well as West Tisbury on Martha's Vineyard (all in Massachusetts), and seems to have become something of a local historian, writing about Manomet as well as other communities. He also wrote on Armenian subjects: for example, in the first issue of *The Armenia Herald* (December, 1917), his article titled "The Armenian coat of Arms and the Truths It Displays" was featured. He is said to have been an accomplished linguist, "speaking four languages and reading six more".

Following his second term in Manomet, Rev. Adadourian and his wife moved to San Diego, Calif. Details about his activities in California have proven hard to find, although he can be found in Pasadena City Directory in 1929 and was at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Fresno in 1941. In the 1930s he spent time in Brazil and South America, evidently on church business. He returned to Massachusetts and lived in Malden until his death in 1950. Imagine the more than three-and-a-half-century-long journey of this volume of the first printed Armenian Bible from its origins in Amsterdam in 1668, to Adana, Aintab, New England, perhaps South America, Washington, D.C., and finally to Belmont, Massachusetts.

About Voskan Yerevants'i and The First Printed Armenian Bible

The transition from hand-copied manuscripts to the printed Bible for the Armenian Church was challenging. The Church faced many difficulties, including resistance, concerns over altering the text, and the need to balance tradition with technological progress. Voskan Yerevants'i (New Julfa, 1614-Marseille, 1674), is a figure of enormous importance in the history of Armenian printing, renowned especially for creating the first printed Armenian Bible. The printing of this Bible took place in Amsterdam, starting on March 11, 1666, and lasted two years and seven months, until October 13, 1668.



Portrait of Voskan Yerevants'i by A. Gasparyan, from Oskan Erevants'i: Patmavep 1638–1674 by Hovhannes Ghukasyan (1962)

Voskan's was not the first effort to print the Bible in Armenian. Rather, “the first attempts date to the 1630s, when Armenians in Etchmiadzin and New Julfa sent requests to the Pope to have the Bible printed in Rome. The Catholic Church, however, judging [that] the Armenian text the Bible [did] not conform to the Vulgate and fearing that elements inadmissible to the Church of Rome might make their way into print, refused to grant permission. A second attempt, this time in 1650 in New Julfa, was made by Hovhannēs Jughayetsi, a pupil of Kach‘atur Kesaratsi who had earlier been sent to Livorno to learn the art of printing. However, this failed as well” [Uluhogian, Zekian, Karapetian, 2011, 283]. Thus, Voskan’s successful attempt was the culmination of decades of aspirations and efforts by numerous individuals.

Sebouh Aslanian writes that Voskan’s parents “hailed from the city of Yerevan” (hence, “Yerevants’i”) and “were among the many Armenians either fleeing the *celali* uprisings or deported from their hometown and resettled in New Julfa by Shah ‘Abbas I in 1604-1605.” As for Voskan himself, he was “perhaps the quintessentially mobile Armenian subject of the early modern period. His mobility began early and took him across a great part of the early modern Armenian diaspora” [Aslanian, 2023, 164].

Although he was educated at Etchmiadzin, Voskan converted to Catholicism. When he traveled to Livorno in 1663 to pursue printing the Bible, he writes, “I found no one there who was helpful to me, on account of which I left there and went to Rome with the purpose of at least finding some success there. But there, too, there was no consolation or succor for me because of the opposition of many, both those from our nation as well as those from their (Catholic officials’ in Rome?) religious orders, which is tiresome to recount one after another” [Aslanian, 2023, 165].

Voskan’s brother, Avetis Ghlichents’i Yerevants’i (Աւետիս Ղլիշենցի Երևանցի), assisted Voskan and obtained a printing press from Matteos Tsarets’i (Մատթեոս Շարադի) (1590-1661) which was named Surb Ējmiatsin ew Surb Sargis Zoravar. (Voskan had been abbot of St. Sargis monastery in Ushi and was educated and served at Etchmiadzin.) “The printing office was to take its name from the two monasteries for fifty-seven years as it moved from city to city and changed managers and orientation” [Lane, 2012, 78].

Eventually, Voskan secured financial support from several Julfan Armenian merchants, and relocated to Amsterdam by 1664. Voskan’s press printed 12 books during his years in Amsterdam (1666-1669), including “the first Armenian Bible in 1666-1668 and the first book in vernacular Armenian, a treatise on mathematics for the use of Armenian merchants … It was also the first Armenian press to publish in significant numbers works of a ‘secular’ nature, including Arakel of Tabriz’s *Book of Histories* (Amsterdam, 1669)” [Aslanian, 2023, 170].

Voskan’s Biblical text was “based on the manuscript of the Bible of Het‘um. However, as he himself admitted, under pressure from the Catholic inquisitions, he edited the Armenian in several points, ‘correcting’ it and harmonizing it with the Vulgate [the approved Latin translation of the Bible]. In spite of these revisions, the edition nevertheless sparked criticism regarding the orthodoxy of its text” [Uluhogian, Zekian, Karapetian, 2011, 283].

The Bible was printed in two volumes, in two distinct versions. The first version has 1,462 pages (volume I 628, volume II 834 pages) and the second has 1,436 pages (volume I 628, volume II 808 pages), in a two-column double pagination. The illustrations and beautiful calligraphies make this Bible not only a religious work, but also a cultural treasure. It is a masterpiece that continued the grandeur of illustrated manuscripts. The first volume begins with Genesis and ends with the Third Book of Maccabees, and the second volume begins with the Book of Job and ends with the Book of Revelation, as well as other supplemental material, including the colophon.



Portraits of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John



From the Gospel According to St. Matthew, with images of the Nativity

The discrepancy between the two versions of the second volume seems first to have been noticed by the well-known numismatist Dr. Paul Z. Bedoukian. “Comparing the two Voskanian Bibles he had; he found that one was 26 pages shorter than the other. Probably unable to find the answer to the question, he copied his ‘deficient’ copy on microfilm and sent it to the Armenian Book Bibliography Department of the Public Library (now the National Library of Armenia) for study” [Khachatryan, 2018, 143].¹

Indeed, we consulted Bedoukian’s copies of the Bible, now at the Armenian Museum of America, to compare them with our just-acquired copy. It was exciting to see the various versions, including two bound copies of the combined volumes with beautiful leather covers. We thank our colleagues at the Museum for providing the opportunity to compare and study these remarkable books.

Various sources inform us that Voskan’s Bible had a large print run – as high as 5,000 copies. However, it seems that this second version was printed in smaller numbers. According to Armen Khachatryan, “Compared to the first large-scale printing of the Bible, the second was so small that traces are barely visible today. One of the reasons for the small print run was that it was carried out in extremely secret conditions, and copies were donated only to a few prominent individuals … and to the episcopal Sees of the Armenian Apostolic Church” [Khachatryan, 2018, 147].

The second version omits the *Prayer of King Manasseh of Judea* and *Fourth Book of Esdras*. According to the Rev. Fr. Krikor Vardapet Maksoudian, “It’s difficult to explain why the Prayer of

¹ About Bedoukian see also K’narik Korkotyan and Ninel Oskanyan, “Hayeren Astvatsashnch’i Arajin Tpagrut‘iwnē ev Nra Tarberakē” = Քնարիկ Կորկոտյան, Նինել Օսկանյան, Հայերեն Աստվածաշնչի Արարին Սպազրությունը եւ Նրա Տարբերակը = The first printed Bible in Armenian and its versions, Եյմաւտին, vol. 23, no.11-12, Nov.-Dec. 1966.

Manasseh and Fourth Esdras do not appear in your edition. I have noticed that in early Armenian printed books copies of the same edition of a book may differ from each other in so far as textual material (words, sentences and even paragraphs) and designs are concerned. This says something about the complicated and difficult process that early printing required. The Prayer of Manasseh, though apocryphal, is included in the Armenian Book of Common Prayer or Zhamagirk. It is recited during Lent. From the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, I learn that this prayer has appeared as an appendix in printed Vulgates since the time of Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605), which is half a century earlier than the Oskan Bible. This raises some doubt about Catholic censorship.”



Opening of the Gospel According to St. Mark

There is no information in the colophon about the engravings used in the Bible. Many of them have the initials of the artists, who are now recognized as Christoffel Van Sichem the Elder (CV), Christoffel Van Sichem the Younger (CVS), Albrecht Durer (AD), Hendrick Goltzuis (HC), and Maarten van Heemskerck (MHemfr). The two volumes contain a total of 160 engravings, which were “not been specially created for the edition of the Bible”; instead, the printers purchased “woodcuts of the European masters and have adapted them to the Bible” [Gharibian, Yenokyan, 2018, 22]².

Today, centuries later, looking back at this treasure, one can imagine what a difficult path it has taken, from Voskan’s dream of seeing the Bible printed in Armenian to making it a reality, the difficulties of the technology, securing authority to publish the Bible in Armenian in a European country, engraving the letters and images, developing the transition from manuscript to print, and editing the text.

Yerevants’i’s Bible became a paradigm for future Bibles in Armenian, including the Bibles of Constantinople (1705), Venice (1733), Saint Petersburg (1818), and Kolkata-Serampore (1817).

² For a complete list of the artists whose work appears in the Bible see pp. 486-496.

The Bible of 1666-68 was far from Voskan’s only important contribution to Armenian printing. Although it is difficult to determine a definitive list of the books he printed before his death in 1674, or of the Surb Ējmiatsin ew Surb Sargis Zoravar print house as a whole until it ceased operating in 1718, Voskan was very active and left a rich legacy. Among his other landmark publications is the *Book of History (Girk ‘Patmuteants’)* by Arakel of Tabriz, the first work by an Armenian historian published in the lifetime of the author and a work of inestimable importance. NAASR’s library holds a precious copy of this book that belonged to historian George Bournoutian, who translated it into English.

Voskan Yerevants’i’s life was marked by significant challenges, a path often walked by those who dare to think and act beyond the confines of their community. Despite his remarkable contributions, he and his close collaborators were not without opponents, critics, and detractors. While our intention was not to provide a detailed biography, we believe it is important to offer a glimpse into his life to better understand his journey. Four centuries later, Voskan’s story inspires us to see him as a heroic figure whose legacy endures. It is our hope that scholars will continue to explore his life and work and shed further light on this amazing figure.

ԱՍՓՈՓՈՒՄ

2024 թվականի սեպտեմբերին NAASR Մարտիկյան գրադարանը ձեռք բերեց առաջին տպագիր հայերեն Աստվածաշնչի երկրորդ հատորը, որը տպագրվել է Ուկան Երևանցու կողմից Ամստերդամում՝ 1668 թվականին: Այս օրինակը մեծ արժեք ունեցող ընտանեկան հավաքածուի Աստվածաշունչ էր. այն պատկանել է և գրադարանին է նվիրաբերվել Ոռբերտ Ալբոնի կողմից, որը Հայկ Աղաղուրյանի՝ նշանավոր հայ բողոքական հոգևորականի ծոռն է: Վերջինիս կյանքի վերաբերյալ մեզ հայտնի տվյալներն արդեն իսկ վկայում են, որ այս Աստվածաշունչը մինչև NAASR-ում իր մշտական հանգրվանը գտնելը անցել է հարուստ ու բովանդակալից ձանապարհ:

Ուկան Երևանցու Աստվածաշունչը հայ գրքամշակույթի պատմության մեջ հանդես է գալիս որպես տպագրական գլուխգործոց, սակայն դրա ստեղծման բազմաթիվ հանգամանքներ դեռևս մնում են մասնակիորեն չուտումնասիրված: Այս շքեղ հատորը՝ իր նրբածաշակ գեղագիտական արժանիքներով, միայն կրոնական գիրք չէ, այլև մշակութային բացառիկ գանձ: Դրա հրատարակության պատմությունը, Ուկան Երևանցու կյանքն ու կենսագրությունը, նրա ստեղծած մյուս գործերը, ինչպես նաև այն նկարիչներն ու վարպետները, որոնք մասնակցել են այս հրատարակության ստեղծմանը, կարիք ունեն ավելի խորքային և հիմնարար գիտական ուսումնասիրության:

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