

Armeno-Persian scriptural translations in the cross-cultural practices of Eastern Transcaucasia in the early 18th century

Hasmik Kirakosyan

PhD, Senior Researcher at the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts-

Matenadaran, Yerevan, RA

E-mail: hasmik.kirakosian@gmail.com

Phone: +37499201321

Abstract

In the 18th century an Armenian priest in Shamakhi-the center of historical Shirvan-translated the Gospel from Armenian to Persian and rendered it by Armenian characters. The manuscript of the Gospel (Ms 8499) is kept in the depository of the Matenadaran of Yerevan. The analyze of the Persian Gospel's manuscript in the cycle of intercultural practices conducts cultural research in the region of Eastern Transcaucasia, which, being an area of linguistic and cultural diversity, is an interesting territory from the point of view of interethnic, interlinguistic and intercultural contacts. We deal with an important linguistic phenomenon language change of ancient Armenian inhabitants of Shirvan to Persophony (Tatophony) by passing the stage of Armenian-Caucasian bilingualism. The practical application of the Persian translation of the Gospel is obvious. While the ceremonies in Armenian Church were in Classical Armenian but Armenian religious community needed Gospel written in Persian as a publicly accessible secular language. In the translation process the familiar category of text-related translation as "equivalence" defines of equal value or correspondence, the relations of the Armenian text to the target Persian text, the historical language peculiarities and narrative patterns, also. Despite of the textual and practical applications of the Gospel's translation, we can to apply it into cultural analyze:

1. The Persian translation of Gospel transmits the Christian knowledge among Persophon Armenians contributing the dominance of Christian culture in Transcaucasia.
- 2.The cultural practice of these translations located in the sphere of social action, played a vital role in Christian-Muslim intercultural contacts in Transcaucasia.

Introduction – In the 18th century Armenians living in Persianate world¹ were in the center of Muslim-Christian interactions and interrelations and in the early modern Armenian church confession-building² processes. Armenians were involved to the polemic activity: the clergy participate in theological debates with Muslim priesthood and some of them was experienced actors of interreligious disputations. Within confession-building and confrontation against Muslim conversion activities for Armenian priesthood one

¹ On the definition the "Persianate", see Green, "Introduction," 1-55.

²About confession-building processes in Armenian communities see: Ohanjanyan, "Creedal Controversies," 7-69.

of the important steps for saving the Armenian Christian identity was straighten religious knowledge and disciplining the principles of Armenian Christian religion among Armenian communities. The appropriated mechanisms of Armenian Church in confession-building and confrontation against Muslim propaganda affected literary genres included the scriptural translations, which was a part of translation project in Polemic cycles in Safavid Iran and beyond it, in 17th-18th centuries, too. For the successful confessionalization³ or confession-building the regulation of language was one of the seven prerequisites⁴ and in the Armenian tradition there was a uniqueness factor of the language. Armenian clerics polemic and literary-translational activities are beside of the Armenian language, in the different spoken languages by Armenians, as well as Persian for Persephone Armenians in Persianate world. Two codices of Persian Gospels kept in the depository of Yerevan Matenadaran witness about these developments. In the 18th century an Armenian priest *k m Ya b* (the Armenian scribe had used in the text the Persian version of his name which in Armenian is *Hakob Vardapet*) in Shamakhi-the center of historical Shirvan translated the Gospel from Armenian to Persian and rendered it by Armenian characters (MS 8479). In 1780 the other Armenian priest *Ter-Miqayel Astapatsi*, (this scribe had used only Armenian version of his name) in Gandzak (nowadays Ganja) copied this manuscript (MS 3044)⁵. In general, the creating of Persian Gospels and particularly the mentioned Armeno-Persian manuscripts had a crucial role in the preserving the Armenian Christian identity, which was deeply connected with the Armenian national and cultural identity. Armenian intellectual men were worry about Christian religious identity which was a base for national and cultural identities of Armenian community. We deal with phenomenon when Armenian population in Persianate world spoke in Persian, but was strongly connected with the Armenian Christianity as a main base of national and cultural identities⁶.

The translation of Gospels from Armenian into Persian as a practice in the social filed conducts the culture research particularly of the Eastern Transcaucasia where were written the codices.

1. The ethno-linguistic situation and cultural diversity in Eastern Transcaucasia in the 18th century and the Armenian population of the region

The Eastern Transcaucasia and mainly the region of historical and present-day Shirvan being part of Persianate world and an area of linguistic and cultural diversity, is an interesting territory from the point of view of interethnic, inter-linguistic and intercultural contacts.

³ For description of the concept of confessionalization and the resulting historiographical debates see Lotz-Heumann, "The Concept of "Confessionalization," 93-114; Ehrenpreis Lotz-Heumann, *Kontroversen*.

⁴ Lotz-Heumann, Pohlig, "Confessionalization," 40.

⁵ Kirakosyan, *The manuscripts of Armeno-Persian Gospel*, 18-43.

⁶ In the same context as straighten religious knowledge for the confrontation with Muslim propaganda were the many Persian citations of Gospels in the Armenian manuscript, for example see: MS 184, ff288v, 296v, MS 618, ff 94r-96r, MS 4618, ff 126v-127v, MS 7117, ff 145v, 147v-148r (in Armenian script), MS 7294, ff 254r – 254v, 254v- 253r, 252v-251r and etc. All these manuscripts are kept in the Matenadaran Armenian manuscripts fund.

In this region from the ancient times Iranian and Armenian ethnic elements have been in contact with the Caucasian (Lezgians, Tsakhurs, Budukhs, Qryzes, Khinalughians, Haputs) and Turkic ethnic groups. The Armenian and Caucasian cultural layers had interferences starting from the times of Caucasian Albania, which is evident especially in the formation of common Christian heritage in which prevalent Armenian positions are also the result of the political domination. The appearance of Iranian element in the region is preconditioned by the Scythian, Parthian and Sassanian Persian influences in pre-Islamic period and during the reign of *Shirvanshahs* with the Persian Islamic presence. The Turkic ethnic groups which formed today's ethnic Azerbaijanis origin, are appeared in the region since 11th century by coming of the Seljuqs. The conquest of the Seljuq Turks and the settlement of much of Anatolia, the Caucasus and the northern Iran with Turkic population had a profound impact on the culture and demography of the mentioned regions⁷.

The Persian language and cultural dominance in the early modern period in Eastern Transcaucasia have a historic-political base. The Eastern Transcaucasia was part of the *Shirvan beglarbegi* (center of Shamakhi) in the Safavid state. The political situation of the region was unstable because turned into a stage for the clash of Russian-Iranian-Ottoman military-political interests. After the decline of the Safavids in the early 18th century, Shirvan again came under Ottoman rule, but by Peter the Great's expansionist policies the Russian ambitions in Eastern Caucasia became apparent again. By the Russo-Turkish treaty of 1724 the coastal region of Baku was for the first time severed from inland Shirvan, which was left to the Turkish governor in Shamakhi. In 1734 Nader Shah captured Shamakhi and by the Russo-Persian Treaty of Gandzak of 1735, Nader's control over Darband, Baku, and the coastal lands was accepted by the Russian Empress Catherine I⁸. However, Persian influence in the eastern Caucasus receded after Nader's death in 1747, and various local princes took power there, including in Darband, Quba, Shamakhi, Baku⁹, Shakii.

Therefore, from the linguistic and ethnic points of view Eastern Transcaucasia was the contact zone in which the Persian than Northern Tati, extreme eastern dialects of Armenian, Southeast Caucasian (Daghestani) Lezgian, Udi, Tsakhur, Budukh, Qryz, especially its Haput dialect and Turkic dialect were in strong interferences and the inter-linguistic contacts in Shirvan resulted by *bilingualism*, *trilingualism* and *diglossia*¹⁰. In Shirvan, especially in its lowland parts, such Turkic-speaking tribes as *Tarakamas*, *Padars*,

⁷ Peacock, "Nomadic Society," 205.

⁸ Bosworth, "Šervān".

⁹ In 1882-1883 Samuel. G. W. Benjamin was appointed to the Legation in Iran and in the book *Persia and the Persians* (London, 1887) he told the details of the journey to the Iran. Received to Baku he wrote: "It is difficult to know where to begin in describing Baku. Perhaps it is better to speak of it first as a Persian city... The old town is almost exclusively occupied by Persians who retain their peculiar architecture, their bazaars, and their baths... Even the coat-of-arms of Persia is still seen over the entrance to the baths...", 17-18.

¹⁰ Diglossia can be observed, for example, in the case of Persephone Armenians. They speak Armenian, vernacular Persian and know literary Persian as a prestige language. So, they are bilingual in Armenian and literary Persian and diglossic in spoken and literary versions of the Persian language.

Qarapapakhs and Shahsevans started to settle permanently, following which the former colorful panorama in Shirvan was also unreached with Turcophony.

Except this, in this territory is formed with an important linguistic phenomenon as language change of ancient Armenian inhabitants of Shirvan to the Persophony (therefore Tatophony). The Persophony in Shirvan region is the result of high prestige of the Persian court in the state of Shirvanshah (Mazyadid) dynasty (8-16th cc.) of Arabic origin, which was Persuade latter and centered in Shamakhi previously. In the first stage of this process the feudal elite and medieval intellectuals were using Persian as the language of culture and literature, as well as *lingua franca* for the interethnic communication. Consequently, in the whole multicultural and multiethnic mosaics of Shirvan the Persian language finally gained special status which latter resulted to the spread of the Persephony all over the region. Parallel with this, the Armenian and Southeast Caucasian languages continued their existence, thus generating and keeping an exclusive contact zone of language interferences. The Persophony among the Armenians has distinct peculiarity which was knowing the spoken and written levels of Persian¹¹.

The codices under discussion (MS 8492, MS 3044) were written in New Persian, but the spoken Persian language should have been quite different under interferences with other spoken languages.

The above-mentioned codices MS 8492, MS 3044 of Persian Gospels rendered by Armenian script are evidences of the language-cultural diversity of the 18th century.

2. The language peculiarities of MS 8492 and MS 3044

In the linguistic context the concept of hybridity is one of the key concepts of the Gospels' language. But is questionable is this concept works as a source of innovation in the language of these translations and taken up as a positive term? It is true that the hybridity concept has begun with historical-political factors arising from the unequal power structures. The hybridity is merging with category of translation and the codices seems to be the important sources for the transnational, Armenian-Iranian, study of culture. In the Gospels' translations we see a mixing of the Persian and Armenian languages in rendering Persian by Armenian characters and using the orthographic rules of Armenian for Persian writing. For example, inserting the Armenian voiced dorso-palatale glide [y] at the final position of words after the vowels [a] and [o] according to the Classical Armenian orthographic rules, or the case of consonants' transcription when the scribes used three level consonants' system of Armenian¹², etc.

Examination of the grammatical and vocabulary issues of the original texts reveals that even when taking into consideration the possible syntactic shift, the influence of Armenian is evident on the language of the Persian texts written in Armenian characters. Specifically, many of the Persian sentences and expressions are the *clichés* of the Armenian corresponding forms.

¹¹ About Persophone Armenian community of Shirvan see also: Kirakosyan, "The Persophonie," 83-93.

¹² See Kirakosian, "The Orthographic Rules," 295-331

Armenian vocabulary units are recorded, borrowed from Persian. However, in the texts, they are written with Armenian phonetics in mind. For instance, *dêv* – Arm. “demon, evil spirit”, cf. Modern Persian *d v* “demon, evil spirit”, *he* – Arm. “nothing”, cf. Modern Persian *h* “nothing”, etc. There are lexical units in the texts, formed with a structural copy of Armenian words and are not used in Persian. Some examples of these are *šaraydê/šaradê* – “rural town”, *b dast datan/dast datan* – “to betray”, *šarnvisi* – “census of the population”. The analysis of the vocabulary of MS 8492, MS 3044 has singled out a group of words that were part of the Iranian vocabulary of Persian but are not in use now: *šowanday* – “Baptist”, *gowštamand/gowštaymant/gowštaymandi* – “corpse, body”, *ark aši* – “earthcake”, *lap ay* – “wave”, etc.

3. The transmit of Christian knowledge among Persephone Armenians through the Persian translation of Gospel contributing the presence of Christian culture in Transcaucasia

In the formation of Christian heritage in historical Shirvan region Armenians have prevalent positions and the Matenadaran Gospel’s codices offer chance to show the processes of transfer of the Christian knowledge through the translation. The translation is an expression of some form of power relationship, and the first instance its function was not to render the original text, but rather to communicate its message to the target culture¹³. This assumption is partly relevant for the mentioned Armeno-Persian Gospel’s codices. They are resulted in the weaker position of Armenians and the Armenian language compared to Persian in Safavid state, and one of the codices’ functions were to render the original Classical Armenian text, because the manuscripts provided the religion communication among Christian Armenians in the multiethnic environment. The formulation and choice of words in translation show the role of Christian knowledge in the ongoing processes. As was mentioned, the sentence formulations are identical with Armenian sentences which was the original text of translation. This phenomenon shows that for the Armenian Christians the scriptural texts were high sacralized and the foreign translation had to be closer to the Classical Armenian text by ignoring every presence or influence of translator¹⁴. This phenomenon is actual and reasonable for the rendering of Persian translation by Armenian characters, too, which had sacrosanct quality for Armenians and associated with Christianity. And the other important reason of using the Armenian script for rendering Persian text of Gospel was the distinguishing character of Armenian alphabet in the multiethnic Christian community which was mainly composed from Assyrians, Armenians, Georgians. So, Armenian alphabet identified the frames of Armenian Christian community.

The translators of Armeno-Persian Gospels created a text that would suit the religion climate of Armenians. We could assume that these translations circulated the religion knowledge and didn’t change it as they moved. The knowledge that circulated through this translation was not considered to be new, it was known to be old knowledge, but it moved from one language area to another. This phenomenon also a key

¹³See Brillman, “The circulation,” 161.

¹⁴ Arakel, *Belgium and Armenians*, 206-209.

point for identifying the language of original text from which the translation was done because as we know, in the early modern translation the translator could base a text on one or more translations without mentioning the source texts. Despite that the knowledge was not new but it produced in the new way or in other language and was closely linked with consumption. We see the prosecco when the old knowledge shared and circulated by translation and consumption dictated the production of the old knowledge. Here, we can assume that the Persephone Armenians were the consumers of the old religion knowledge in Persian and in the circle, they communicated with Armenian church and clerics in the confession building, with Muslim clergy in the polemics and Muslim propaganda contexts and with the all Persephone Armenian Christian communities. The Armeno-Persian Gospels codices' intended audience was the Armenian Christian community, while the Armenian clergy used them for preaching, teaching and religious commentaries. The latter indeed knew Arabic alphabet too, because the Introduction of the codices is the rendering in Armenian script of the introduction of a unified Gospel from 13th century¹⁵. In the same period, it was created multi-genre Armeno-Turkish literature but Persephone Armenians used the Armenian characters only for scriptural texts which made it available also for the whole community. The elite group was in the position to use the codices physically teaching it to others, share the knowledge which¹⁶.

Armeno-Persian Gospels' codices provided the geographical circulation of Christian knowledge among Armenian communities in whole Persianate World. Despite the after mentioned Matenadaran's manuscripts there is an information about Persian Gospel translated by Hovhanness Jughayeci or Mrkuz (d. 1715) and rendered by Armenian script. This information is included in the journal "Azgaser /Patriotic/" in 1845, N12, p. 95 printed in Calcutta India¹⁷. This manuscript and many other Armeno-Persian parts of Gospels included in Armenian manuscripts¹⁸ which are written in Armenian dwelling territories of Iran, Eastern Transcaucasia, Asia Minor show the geography of circulation of the Christian knowledge thought translation into Persian rendered in Armenian script. It has brought us to understand the role of Persian in the circulation of Christian knowledge among Armenians in general and these translations in an extended sense as a 'Christian cultural transfer'.

Conclusion: In the early modern period the Eastern Transcaucasia was characterized by ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity where the Iranians and Armenians have been in contact with the Caucasian and Turkic ethnic groups. The political-historical and cultural dominance had contributed the Persian language and cultural dominance in the region and usage of Persian as a *lingua-franca*. The occurrence of

¹⁵ *A Unified Gospel*.

¹⁶ See Brillman, "The circulation," 167.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, any other information not known about the future of this manuscript.

¹⁸ See fn. 6.

Armenian Persephone population and Armenian Church appropriated mechanisms of confession-building and confrontation against Muslim propaganda affected the Persian Christian scriptural translations in the new phase. Armenian population in Persianate world spoke in Persian, but was strongly connected with the Armenian Christianity as a main base of national and cultural identities. The Armeno-Persian Gospels codices' intended audience was the Armenian Christian community, while the Armenian clergy who indeed knew Arabic alphabet too, used them for preaching, teaching and religious commentaries. Persephone Armenians used the Armenian characters mainly for scriptural texts which made it available also for the communities in the transmission.

The Armeno-Persian Gospels' language fit in the hybridity concept which is merging with category of translation and the rendering with Armenian alphabet and using Armenian orthographic rules for the Persian writing of codices seems to be the important sources for the transnational study of culture. These codices demonstrate the transmission of Christian culture among Armenians and the role of Persian in the circulation of the Christian knowledge and culture in the Persianate world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Unified Gospel in Persian, cr. ed. intr. and ann. By M. Hassanabadi, R. Jahani and C. Jahani, english pref. by R. Crellin. *Studia Iranica Upsaliensia* 33. Uppsala, 2018.

Benjamin, S. G. W., *Persia and the Persians*. London, 1878.

Bosworth, C. E. "Šerv n", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, (February 11, 2011), edited by Ehsan Yarshater,, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1990. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/servan>

Ehrenpreis Stefan, Lotz-Heumann, Ute, *Kontroversen um die Geschichte. Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002.

Green, Nile, "Introduction: The Frontiers of the Persianate World (ca. 800-1900)," in *The Persianate World, The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, ed. By Nile Green. 1-55. University of California Press, 2019.

Kajsa Brilkman, "The circulation of knowledge in translations and compilations, A sixteenth-century example," in *Circulation of knowledge*, ed. by Johan östling, Erling Sanamo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilson Hammar Kari H. Nordberg: 160-175. Nordic Academic Press and the authors, 2018.

Kenneth J. Thomas. "Chronology of translations of the Bible." Bible III, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica IV*, edited by Ehsan Yarshater, 203-6. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1990.

Kirakosian, Hasmik, "The Orthographic Rules of the Eighteenth Century Armeno-Persian Gospels of the Matenadaran (Ms. 8492, Ms. 3044)", *Iranian Studies* 53 (1-2), (2020): 295-331

Kirakosyan, C. Hasmik. *The manuscripts of Armeno-Persian Gospel of the Matenadaran, Critical Study*. Yerevan: Matenadaran, 2020. /in Armenian/.

Kirakosyan, Hasmik, “The Persophonie among Armenians of Shirvan (18th century)”, *Scientific Artsakh*, No 4(7) (2020): 83-93. /in Armenian/

Lotz-Heumann, Ute and Pohlig, Matthias. “Confessionalization and Literature in the Empire 1555-1700”, *Central European History* 40/1 (Mar., 2007): 35-61. doi:10.1017/S0008938907000271

Lotz-Heumann, Ute. “The Concept of “Confessionalization”: A Historiographical Paradigm in Dispute.” *Memoria y Civilización* 4 (2001): 93-114

Ohanjanyan, Anna. “Creedal Controversies among Armenians in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire, Ereemia լիքիւրեան’s Polemical Writing against Sukias Prusac i.” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 27 (2020): 7-69.

Peacock, Andrew. “Nomadic Society and the Seljuq Campaigns in Caucasia.” *Iran & the Caucasus* 9, no. 2 (2005): 205–30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4030954>.

Sarowxan Arakel, *Belgium and Armenians*, Vienne, 1937.