



## A Culture of the Book

“Mashdots’ real achievement was to create a culture that became a repository for both Eastern and Western traditions, that was cosmopolitan, but had a strong anchor of its own. He made Armenia a culture of the book, a ‘bibliocracy’, and that has been their (Armenians’) key to survival, because you can carry a book into exile, but you can’t carry mountains and trees.”

*James Robert Russell: Professor of Armenian Studies at Harvard University*

VOL. 1 NO. 8 | OCT. 2007

SOURP HAGOP ARMENIAN CHURCH'S MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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## Holy Translators: 13<sup>th</sup> october

In the month of October the Armenian Church commemorates the feast of the Holy Translators.

These are the fathers of the Armenian Church, who, immediately after the creation of the Armenian alphabet, started the translation of the Bible, religious and other texts from Greek and Assyrian into Armenian, and/or have produced their own writings.

The most important figures of this



group of holy men are:

- **St. Mesrob Mashdots**, who created the alphabet and contributed to the translation of the Bible
  - **Yeghishe Badmich**, who wrote a history of the battle of Vartanants and biblical commentaries
  - **Movses of Khoren**, the father of Armenian historiography
  - **Tavit the Invincible**, who translated works of Greek philosophy
  - **St Gregory of Narek**, who has written a religious jewel: the prayerbook “Madian Voghperkoutyan”, known today also as “Nareg”
  - **St. Nerses Shnorali**, who has written prayers, hymns and theological encyclicals.
- The last two have lived consecutively in the 10th and 12th century.

## Bible and Identity

In 301, when Armenia became Christian, it was only natural that Armenians wanted to pray in Armenian. After about a century, Mesrob Mashdots and Sahag Barteved had the wisdom to see the urgency of creating the Armenian alphabet: the Bible had to be accessible to their people in Armenian, God had to talk to their people in Armenian.

The crucial step of creating the Armenian alphabet in 404/5 provided a

solid foundation to Armenian religious and national identity. It eventually gave the Armenians cultural/religious independence and shelter from the invasion of megacultures.

James R. Russel writes: “Within a century, Armenians had a library of classical and Christian learning and were able to build their own literary tradition. As a result, they became independent and almost self-sufficient, and they became impervious to attempts by Rome to Hellenize them or attempts by the Sassanian empire to re-impose Persian culture on them.”

## The Armenian Bible

- The Bible is called “Asdvadzashounch” in Armenian, which literally means “Breath of God”.
- The Armenian translation of the Bible in the 5th century has been known as the “Queen of Translations”, because of its accuracy and perfect style.

*The first verse of the Bible translated into Armenian is from the book of Proverbs 1:2:*

**For learning about wisdom and instruction, or understanding words of insight...**

*(Janachel zimasdutyun yev uzkhhrad, imanal uzpans hanjaro...)*

## Editorial

In the past few weeks, the international media’s attention was caught by a recently published book entitled “Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light”. This is a collection of letters in which Mother Teresa expresses her doubts and struggles in her life of faith to her colleagues and superiors.

Yet her lifelong devotion to the poor, the sick and the dying, in the name of Christ, was a sure sign that her life of faith was practically rooted in Christ.

As the first Christian nation, and as 20th century’s first Genocide survivors who lived through doubt, abandonment and questioning in face of suffering, we understand her dilemma.

Questioning is a healthy part of Christian life. It engages our intellect into real spiritual issues. Its role is to balance our life of faith.

### Did you know that?

- Although Armenians, who converted to Christianity in 301, had their own spoken language, they relied on Greek and Assyrian languages for writing until the creation of their own alphabet.
- As a result of the major translations and interpretations following the creation of the alphabet, Armenia witnessed a Golden Age in the 5th century.
- The old literary Armenian language is called “crapar”, and the present Armenian language is called “ashkharapar”, which means language of the people.
- In the 1960s, Anthropologist Margaret Mead suggested that the Armenian language be used as «international language».



## Towards the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sourp Hagop Community

In the periodical of the S. Hagop Church “Lrakagh” (first year 1960, 2nd issue Nov.), the editor writes: “It is impossible to measure the priceless legacy that started with the creation of the alphabet.

... We owe the unique survival of our nation for thousands of years to our alphabet, to our language and to our culture”.

### HYMNE DES SAINTS TRADUCTEURS

Admirablement et avec une grâce  
merveilleuse,  
Ils ont traduit les vérités du Non-créé,  
Fondant sur Terre la Parole Vivante,  
la Bible,  
Pour faire paître l'ouaille  
du nouvel Israël :  
Louons Dieu par nos chants  
harmonieux.

Ils ont appelé la gloire de la grandeur  
terrestre obscurité,  
et parce qu'ils ont fait confiance à leurs  
espoirs dans le Marié Immortel,  
Ils sont devenus dignes  
de la sagesse inexprimable :  
Louons Dieu par nos chants  
harmonieux.

Avec la sagesse du Père, le pouvoir de  
l'Être Non-Créé,  
Ils ont fortifié le trône de St. Gregoire  
avec la traduction écrite de la Bible:  
Louons Dieu par nos chants  
harmonieux.

### HYMN OF THE HOLY TRANSLATORS

With heavenly graces and beautifully,  
they translated the truths of  
the Uncreated,  
by founding on Earth the Living Word,  
the Bible,  
to pastor the flock of New Israel:  
Let us praise God with harmonious  
singing.

The glory of the earthly greatness  
they called darkness,  
and because they trusted their hopes  
on the Immortal Groom,  
They became worthy of  
the Ineffable wisdom:  
Let us praise God with harmonious  
singing.

With the wisdom of the Father,  
the might of the Uncreated Being,  
They fortified the throne of St. Gregory  
with written translation of the Bible:  
Let us praise God with harmonious  
singing.

### ՇԱՐԱԿԱՆ ՍՈՒՐԲ ԹԱՐԳՄԱՆԻԶՆԵՐՈՒ

Անոնք Անեղին ճշմարտությունները  
երկնատուր շնորհով գեղեցկորեն  
թարգմանեցին՝  
Երկրի վրայ Կենդանի Գիրը՝  
Աստուածաշունչը հաստատելով,  
Որպեսզի Նոր Իսրայելի հուղը  
հովուեն.  
Քաղցրահունչ երգեցողությամբ  
զԱստուած գովենք:

Անոնք երկրաւոր մեծութեան  
փառքը խաւար կոչեցին,  
Եւ որովհետեւ Անմահ Փեսային  
ապաւինելով յուսացին՝  
Անճառ իմաստութեան արժանի  
եղան.  
Քաղցրահունչ երգեցողությամբ  
զԱստուած գովենք:

Անոնք Հօր Իմաստութեան՝ Անեղ  
Էին զօրութեամբ  
Ս. Գրիգորի Աթոռը գրաւոր  
թարգմանութեամբ ամրացուցին.  
Քաղցրահունչ երգեցողությամբ  
զԱստուած գովենք:

## Ա Ն Դ Ր Ա Դ Ա Ր Ձ

Պոլսահայ ժամանակակից բանաստեղծներէն Զահրատի գրությունները սկիզբէն զարմացուցած են զիս իրենց իմաստաւոր մանկունակութեամբ եւ խորահաս պարզութեամբ:

Այնքա՛ն անպաճոյճ, բայց գեղեցիկ ու նշանակալից բանաստեղծութիւն մըն է իր «Մեսրոպաբոյր»ը: Հայ գիրերուն աստուածաբանութիւնն է անիկա, այլեւ գեղագիտութիւնը, անոնց հոգեւոր եւ իմացական ճառագայթումին խոստովանութիւնը, անոնց վկայաբանութիւնը, անոնց էգոյաբանութիւնը (écologie), անոնց կենսաստեղծ եւ լոյս ու ազատութիւն արարող զօրութեան քարոզութիւնն է անիկա: Եւ այս ամէնը 63 բառերով...:

Քեզի գործ. գտի՛ր զայն եւ կարդա՛:

ԳՔ