

Armenian Language

Currently, the world's 7.9 billion people speak more than 3,000 languages, not counting dialects. In the past, there were about 4,000 more languages now forgotten. About 2/3 of the world's population speaks the 13 most common languages.

For a language, the key achievement is its ability to become a world one - the lingua franca. Since the end of the 20th century, this status belongs to English, which is an international language. Inscriptions in English can be found in airports, train stations, on labels, in fact, anywhere in the world.

Throughout history, languages have penetrated each other, and words have spread to certain territories along with religion, new technologies, native speakers - conquerors, merchants, and, in the modern world, global entertainment.

The rugged landscapes of Asia Minor and Transcaucasia contributed to great ethnolinguistic diversity. After the conquest of Asia Minor by the Roman Empire, the interior peninsula regions were Romanized (non-Latin writings were transcribed using the expanded Latin alphabet), and the coastal regions were Hellenized (widespread of the ancient Greek language and culture). In the era of the Byzantine Empire, Greek impact increased. Today, Latin and Italian are completely different languages, just like ancient and modern Greek.

After the conquest of the eastern part of Asia Minor by Parthia and then the Sassanids, Persian influence began, which continued for many centuries, from 250 BC to 650 AD.

According to Armenian myth, “the Armenian language was formed thousands of years before the birth of Christ in the Armenian Highlands” and belongs to a special branch of the Indo-European languages. Armenian writing uses the alphabet created and perfectly adapted to the Armenian language back in the 5th century by Mesrop Mashtots. Armenian is the native language of approximately 8-9 million people living in 116 countries from the Caucasus to North America. The largest Armenian diasporas are concentrated in the USA, Russia, France, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Argentina. Interestingly, only 200 Armenians live in China and about 300 in India (an Armenian church was built in Agra in 1562). Almost 40 % of the world's population is concentrated in these two countries. The population of Armenia is only 2.9 million while the Armenian diaspora in Russia is over 2 million. In the words of Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to unofficial data, there are more Armenians in Russia than in Armenia.

Now Armenian is adopted as the state language in the Republic of Armenia.

Armenian is one of the official languages in the autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan, occupying territories in northern Iraq. As a national minority language, Armenian is adopted in Iraq, Lebanon, and Ukraine.

In the United States, the Armenian language has official status in Glendale (pop. 192,000), California. In this city, a third of the population is ethnic Armenians. In Glendale, you can officially apply in Armenian to the authorities or the police and even pass a driver's license exam.

After a brief overview of languages, let us get back to the creation of Armenian. The author of the Armenian alphabet Mesrop Mashtots was an educated person - he spoke Greek (the dead ancient Greek language of the Indo-European group), Syrian (the dead language of the Aramaic group), and Persian (the dead Middle Persian language of the Indo-European group). In his youth, he served as a scrivener at the court of the governor of the province of Armenia, later converted to Christianity and became a preacher.

By the end of the 4th century, most of the province of Armenia was part of the Sasanian (Persian) Empire, and the western part was captured by Byzantium. The governor and the Catholicos of the province, clearly related to the Parthians, came to believe that a new nation should be formed, glued from the fragments of the disappeared Parthians. Herewith, several dozen tribes and clans, who had their languages, lived in the territory of the province and therefore, multiethnic inhabitants of the region did not understand each other. The dialects of some large clans (Arsacids, Mamikonian, Bagratuni, Artsruni, etc) were close. But they had another problem. Some dialect speakers were Christians, and some were Zoroastrians. A new nation could only be formed by uniting them around the Church. To do this, the common alphabet and the Bible in a common language were required, and paganism had to be eradicated.

The governor and the Catholicos entrusted this work to Mesrop Mashtots. After some time, Mesrop presented his project of newly created Armenian language to Catholicos Isaac Partev (grandson of Gregory the Illuminator) and governor Vramshapuh.

The governor of the province of Armenia Vramshapuh provided Mesrop Mashtots with Daniel's Script to take as a basis.

Daniel's Script is an ancient alphabet, discovered at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century by Bishop Daniel. This alphabet was brought to the province around 404.

This is the standpoint of Armenian historians and linguists.

In fact, everything was different.

Firstly, Partev means Parthian. Isaac Partev's grandfather was Grigory Partev, an illuminator and the first Catholicos of the province of Armenia. Governor Vramshapuh was also from the Parthian Arsacid Dynasty.

Secondly, no details about Daniel's Script have been preserved. According to a myth, it was an 'ancient Armenian alphabet' found by Syrian Bishop Daniel. The primary source proving the existence of Armenian was a joint invention of Mashtots, the governor, and the Catholicos of the province of Armenia.

The next alphabet scam was invented after that Script turned out not to be so reliable. Mesrop Mashtots and Catholicos Isaac the Parthian were forced to refuse 'Daniel's Script' due to its "incompleteness to describe the entire phonetics of the Armenian language." Mesrop then went to northern Mesopotamia. By 406, he completed creating a new alphabet.

In his work, the disciple and colleague of Mashtots Koryun repeatedly calls Daniel's alphabet 'suddenly found,' and notes that "this script was buried in another language writing and (then) resurrected." Since Daniel was a Syrian, the alphabet he created was based on Syriac or other Semitic writing. "For about two years, in the province of Armenia, teaching was performed and books were translated using Daniel's alphabet." Daniel was the Bishop of Taron (now the Mush region, Turkey). He preached Christianity in the Sasanian Empire. His popularity was very great, and some nakharars proposed to the governor of the province of Armenia, Tiran (338-350), to appoint him the Catholicos of the province. But Tiran supported Zoroastrianism, and by his order, Catholicos Housik, the son of Gregory the Illuminator, and Bishop Daniel were killed.

Many scientists refer to Koryun to prove the existence of Daniel's, i.e., 'ancient Armenian' alphabet, in which, allegedly for two years, instruction was provided in schools. It was the first attempt to create a new language. Had Housik and Daniil continued the work they started, then, probably, the language would have a different name, not Armenian.

Biographical data on Koryun (380-450) are close to nonexistent, and some scholars consider him a hoax, a phantom invented by Movses Khorenatsi (410-490). There is also no reliable information on the life of the 'father of Armenian historiography' Movses Khorenatsi, however, some scientists attribute the years of his life to not the 5th century but the period between the 7th-9th centuries.

By the beginning of the IV century, in the province of Armenia, two nakharar (feudal) clans came forward and entered into a confrontation. These were the Artsruni and Mamikonian clans. The Artsruni sought to dethrone the governor related to the Arsacids and return Zoroastrianism. They sympathized with the Sasanian Persians. The Mamikonian, on the other hand, were related to the Catholicos and supported the Arsacids.

After 387, most of the province of Armenia was ruled by the Sassanids, however, this did not prevent the rapid spread of Christianity. Supported by Byzantium, it penetrated deeper and deeper into the Sasanian Empire. In this way, Byzantium planned to destroy the Sassanids. In 404, a special Church Council was convened. All the bishops of the province of Armenia arrived at the Vagharshapat (the city of Vagharshapat in Armenia, now Etchmiadzin) Synod. The Church decided to create a new language and alphabet and translate liturgical books. The main goals were:

- liquidating the impact of the Greek and Syrian churches;
- rejecting Syriac, Greek, and Persian writings;
- creating a new language;
- translating the Bible and other religious and historical books;
- opening schools, teaching people a new language;
- eradicating paganism and multiethnicity;
- forming a new nation called 'Armenians' based on the toponym 'Armenia';
- creating history for the new Armenians.

The governor of the province of Armenia, Vramshapuh, supported the church since he also foresaw the close end of the Parthian Dynasty (428). Vramshapuh became the governor of the province of Armenia in 389, when his brother Khosrov IV was summoned to the Persian court and imprisoned for his sympathy for Byzantium. In 414, Vramshapuh died, and the Sasanian Shah released Khosrow IV and appointed him governor.

Having received support and financial assistance from the governor and the Catholicos, Mesrop Mashtots gathered a group of people (according to the available data, one hundred or more), spent several years searching, and worked in the libraries of the Hellenistic educational centers of Samosata (now Samsat, Adiyaman region, Turkey), Nisibin (Nusaybin, Mardin region, Turkey), etc.

In 406, Mesrop goes to one of the largest educational and scientific centers of the time - Edessa (now the city of Sanliurfa, Turkey) and begins searching in the Edessa book depository. Here he studies the alphabets of different languages, their structures, forms of letters, and principles of writing. Mesrop divides his students and companions into two groups: some remain in Edessa to study Syriac writing, and others go to Samosata to study Greek writing. Mesrop meets the Bishop of Amida (now the city of Diyarbakir, Turkey) Acathius and the Bishop of Edessa Pakida, asking them for help in creating a suitable alphabet.

In 407, after a long work in Edessa, Mashtots created a new alphabet consisting of 36 letters, used also as numbers. Each phoneme was linked to a specific letter, which facilitated reading and writing.

When creating a new alphabet, Mesrop used Greek, Pahlavi (Middle Persian), Aramaic, and some other writing systems. He placed the letters in direct correspondence with the letters of the Greek alphabet. Then he went to Samosata, where he refined the face of the Armenian letters together with the Greek scrivener and calligrapher Ropanos (Rufinus). Here, all the letter faces - light and bold, short and long, separate and double were finally defined. Mashtots, two of his disciples, and Ropanos started translating the Bible using the new alphabet.

Thus, the alphabet invented by Mesrop Mashtots consisted of 36 letters (7 vowels and 29 consonants). At the turn of the 7th-8th centuries, two more letters were added, and later, another one. Currently, the Armenian alphabet consists of 39 letters.

Linguists who support the belonging of Armenian to the Indo-European family of languages agree that this language is a separate branch within the group. According to one of the first Armenologists and Iranists in Europe, Austrian linguist Friedrich Muller (1834-1898), the Armenian language definitely belonged to the Iranian group.

Note that Phoenician writing is one of the first phonetic writing systems testified in human history. It emerged around the 15th century BC and became the ancestor of most modern alphabetic and some other writing systems. Aramaic was created based on the Phoenician alphabet. It originated in the territory of present-day Syria in the 13th century BC. Nomadic tribes of that region spoke it. They had never united into a common nation, but the language behaved quite expansively due to their nomadic lifestyle. Already by the 6th century BC, it became the lingua franca and extruded the Akkadian language from Assyria and Babylon. The Aramaic language was also distributed in Israel and Palestine. To this day, the Israelis use modified Aramaic. Syriac is also a dead Aramaic language. Since the 1st century, it has been used as a literary and liturgical tool in the Christian community of the Middle East. As a colloquial language, it was replaced by Arabic by the end of the 8th century, but as a literary language, it was used until the 14th century. The Syrian language was based on the Aramaic dialect of Edessa, which was an important commercial and political center, where Mesrop created the Armenian alphabet.

For several centuries, Syriac was the written language of people living in an area from the Mediterranean to Persia. In the Byzantine Empire, it was the second important language after Greek, and in the Sasanian State, it occupied a prominent place as a written language. Syriac was also the most important language in the

province of Armenia. It is no coincidence that the Aramaic alphabet and the Greek writing system were chosen as prototypes for the new Armenian script.

When comparing Armenian letters with Aramaic (and Phoenician) ones, 17 of 28 Aramaic letters are identical, 7 ones are similar, and only 4 differ. Probably, Mesrop Mashtots tried to introduce a difference in the Armenian alphabet through these 4 letters.

Other alphabetic writing systems developed for Christian scripts took the Greek one as a model. According to this principle, Mesrop assigned the phonetically corresponding sound of the Armenian language to each symbol of the Greek alphabet. Since the Armenian language differs from Greek by a large number of consonant phonemes (sounds), new symbols were added to denote the specifically Armenian sounds. In the province of Armenia, there were several dozen different languages, and determining the phonetic forms for a common literary language was required.

The Parthian language was the official language of both the Kingdom of Parthia and the Satrapy of Armenia. Parthian writing was developed from Aramaic one. It also contained many Aramaic words. In colloquial speech, along with Parthian, there were Siro-Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew, and many other different dialects of these languages.

The Parthian language significantly affected Armenian. Many ancient Parthian words have been preserved, now only in Armenian. Parthian borrowings appear both in everyday Armenian vocabulary (nouns, adjectives, adverbs, nominal verbs) and in the administrative and religious lexicon. The language the Armenians spoke from the 5th to the 11th and from the 11th to the 17th centuries, now no one speaks; it has been replaced by modern Armenian (Ashkharabar). Most Armenian names are of Parthian origin: Karen, Suren, Arshak, Artak, Migran, Tigran, Nvard, Vardan, Varuzhan, Meruzhan, Vagarsh, Bagrat, Bagram, Shavarsh, Ashkhen, etc.

Parthian (Arsacid Pahlavi or Pahlavang) is a dead Iranian language of the northwestern group, common in the region of Parthia (now Khorasan). It was the official language of the Arsacid Empire and the early Sassanids from 248 BC to 224 AD. After 224, it continued to be the spoken language in the provinces of Armenia, Iberia, and Caucasian Albania.

There were several official written languages in the territory of the Arsacids. The Greek language was widely used. It was, first of all, the language of cities and commerce, but it was also spoken in the Parthian environment, where the passion for Greek theater was widespread. Semitic languages also played an important role in the life of the Parthian State. The written language of the Parthian chanceries, created based on the Aramaic alphabet, consisted of Aramaic words by over half,

which, however, were supposed to be read in Parthian (the Nisa archive documents, and some other ones and inscriptions were written in this way).

In 1948, for the first time, during the excavations performed by the South-Turkmenistan archaeological complex expedition at the site of New Nisa Fortress (not far from Ashgabat, Turkmenistan), several crocks with Aramaic inscriptions were found.

It is unlikely that the Parthians had their written literature. However, the Parthian period saw the flourishing of the art of Iranian singer-storytellers (goshans), whose verbal poems were recorded later, under the Sassanids, and came down to us in the poetic interpretation by Ferdowsi.

Armenian philologist Hrachia Acharyan drew up an etymological dictionary of the Armenian language, containing 11,000 underlying words. Of them, the Indo-European underlying words make up only 8-9%, borrowed words – 36%, and indefinite words – 55%.

A significant number of indefinite underlying words indicates the genetic relationship of Armenian with the dead Parthian-Persian language.

Scholars also agree that about 30-40% of Armenian words are of Iranian origin, primarily from Parthian or Middle Persian.

The history of the literary or written Armenian language is divided into 3 periods:

- Ancient Armenian (Grabar) - 5th - 11th centuries;
- Middle Armenian - 11th - 17th centuries;
- Modern Armenian (Ashkharabar) - from the 17th century to the present day.

Grabar initially developed based on one or more of the closest dialects that arose from a common colloquial basis. Simultaneously with the literary language, dialects also existed, characterized by differences in mainly the phonetic system and commonality, manifested in the grammatical structure. Grabar differs greatly from Ashkharabar. Many Armenians virtually do not understand Grabar, although some words are familiar to them. Grabar and Ashkharabar differ like Azeri and Uzbek or Turkmen and Kazakh.

Before Armenian writing was created, Christian worship in the province of Armenia was officiated in two languages: Greek and Siro-Aramaic. The existence of several dozen pagan tribes and clans speaking different languages and dialects hindered the spread of Christianity and made it difficult for ordinary people to understand the foundations of faith.

Isaac Partev was the grandson of the propagator of Christianity in the province of Armenia - the first Catholicos Grigor Lusavorich (Illuminator). As known, Grigor was of Parthian origin, he was a cousin of the governor from the Parthian Arsacid (Arshakuni) Dynasty, and after the establishment of the power of the Sassanids, all the Parthian knyazes were granted the right to move to the province of Armenia to their close relatives.

Christianity turned out to be the only drive contributing to the self-assertion of the Parthian culture. Christianity allowed the Parthians to fight against the Sassanids. To do this, the fragments of the Parthians had to create a new nation and a new language. They also needed the Holy Scripture in their language to strengthen their faith.

Upon arranging schools in the part of the province of Armenia, ruled by the Persians, Isaac and Mashtots moved to the Byzantine part (in 387, the province of Armenia was divided between the Byzantines and the Sassanids). Having received permission and financial assistance from the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius the Younger and the Archbishop of Constantinople, Saint Atticus, and with the support of Saint Acathius of Melitene, Isaac and Mashtots proceeded to open schools in the Byzantine part of the province of Armenia.

In 428, the nakharars went to Persian King Bahram V (420-438) and accused their governor and the Catholicos of going over to the Greeks. Artashes was removed from the governorship, and Isaac from the Catholicos chair. They were arrested and imprisoned. Thereupon, representatives of not the Parthians but the Sassanids were appointed marzpan.

In 435, the Bishops' Council of the Church of the Province of Armenia, headed by Isaac, applied to the Primate of the Constantinople Church, Saint Proclus, for the clarification of the subtleties of the Christological dogma. Saint Acathius of Melitene kept correspondence with Isaac and Mashtots as well. During this period, already having the Greek original of the Holy Scripture, Isaac and Mashtots with their disciples commenced editing the Armenian translation of the Bible, originally made from the Syriac Peshitto. The new Armenian translation of the Bible, edited based on the Greek text, became the officially adopted text of the Holy Scripture for the Church of the province of Armenia.

Thereupon, Christian worship in the province of Armenia was performed in the new Armenian language as teaching in schools did. More and more Zoroastrians converted to Christianity. A new nation was being formed, but hundreds of years were still needed to complete this process.

When disengaged from the Greeks, Armenian theologians forgot how to understand the Greek language. In 491, the Vagharshapat Council became a

historical fault line between the Greek Orthodox and Armenian-Gregorian confessions for ages.

To Christianize all the tribes and clans of the province of Armenia, the fragments of the Parthians first intended to use the Aramaic language but then changed their minds and decided to create a new alphabet and a new language. The new language was in fact a mix of Perso-Parthian and Siro-Aramaic. a new Armenian people was also formed based on this language.

The assimilation of words, expressions, or meanings of one language by another, i.e. borrowing had lasted for many centuries, and it was natural.

E.g., there are many Arabic, Persian, and international words in the Azerbaijani language.

Along with Persian words, the Armenian language currently contains many Turkisms.

Reference

The founder of the new Armenian literature and literary language, Khachatur Abovyan (1809-1848) often noted that “In colloquial speech, our people use not only individual words but entire sentences in Azerbaijani.” He also pointed out that “Our language consists of Turkic words by at least 50%...”

If the Turks and Azerbaijanis were the eternal enemies of the Armenians, then how could the Armenian people be forced to take Turkic names, sing Azerbaijani songs, and perform Turkish and Azerbaijani dances. The enmity between nations is instilled. Who stands behind this: Armenian nationalist Dashnaks, the Armenian diaspora, Russia, France, the USA, or Iran?