The Enigma of the Armenian Alphabet

By Igor Grigorian

Mesrop Mashtots. Painting by Hrachia Rukhkian

Foreword.

There are dozens, if not hundreds of alphabets in the world. Some have passed in the annals of history, some are still used in all spheres of human activity. Using a writing system people usually do not pay attention to how the letters were designed, what meaning was originally imbedded in the writing system, what evolution did the alphabet went through before it became what it is nowadays, why the letters were arranged in the way they were. It is very difficult to answer these questions because of antiquity of the writing system creation. But the human mind piercing the mysteries of the Universe, creating more and more sophisticated tools for research (which are all of current interests) and making quick breakthrough, at some point could not ignore monumental works of a written culture. Large number of scientists are involved in physics, chemistry, natural science, etc., but only a few are following the history of a writing culture, as it is located on the junction of history, archeology and linguistics. Being not of actual interest writing systems keep their mysteries for a much longer period of time (centuries, to say the least).

The Armenian alphabet, one of the oldest alphabet in the world, kept his secrets for almost two millennia. The theory of origin of the Indo-Europeans stipulated by V. Ivanov and T. Gamkrelidze interest to the Armenian language and its writing system underwent a significant boost.

The history of writing strongly reflects the development of the language, history of the given people and its culture.

Development of the language.

The scientists traditionally point out four types of writing: pictographical, ideographic, syllabic and letter-sound one, although there may not be strict borders between them. In some cases a writing system could stay unchanged for a very long period of time (as hieroglyphs in Chinese), or may be borrowed from a more advance, developed lan-

Examples of hierogliphs evolving into ideographic writing

Hierogliph	Hierogliphs from Syunik (15-50 thousand years)	Sumerian Hieroglyphs (5.500 years)	Egyptian Hierogliphs (5.500 years)	Ideographic (Middle Ages)
Sun				
Sunrise				
East				
West				

Figure 1

guage and adopted to the native language (as the Greeks adopting Phoenician alphabet and enhancing it with letters for vowels for the first time in history, or the Europeans borrowing Latin and adapting it to their writing needs).

Armenia, being at the intersection of major political and cultural events, saw all kinds of writing systems; from pictographs to hieroglyphs to cuneiforms to alphabet (Figure 1 - Examples of hieroglyphs and ideographic writing). It borrowed the Assyrian cuneiforms and modernized them (Urartian period), then used Greek alphabet after the conquests by Alexander the Macedonian (so called Hellenic period). Syrian language was also widely used in Armenia.

Figure 2 - Evolution of the alphabet

Historical conditions.

In order to understand the underlying meaning of creation of the national alphabet, one needs to understand the historical events that were happening at the end of 4th and beginning of the 5th century. This period was extremely difficult for Armenia; Armenia was located between two extremely powerful empires - the Eastern-Roman Empire and Persia. When in the 3rd century Sassanids replaced Arsacid dynasty in Persia, the former wanted to pursue a religious reform which would include Armenia. Being at the edge of loosing its independence and division between Persia and the Eastern Roman Empire only deepened the problem. No matter what the legends tell about why Christianity was adopted in Armenia (King Tiridates being sick, Gregory being relieved from the underground prison and curing the king) the adoption of Christianity as a state religion sounds like an answer

Figure 3 - Movses Khorenatsi

to the Persian religious reform and expansion. Nakharars (princes of Armenia) were at war with each other, and the Armenian branch of the Arsacid dynasty was trying to regain independence, and the only force that the king could get support from at the time was the church. The church could become a middleman between the princes and unite the people.

Besides the political and ideological necessity there existed another reason, the translation of the Bible. As Christianity came to Armenia through Mesopotamia, was cosmopolitan in nature for the whole century, and was adopted by the King's order the Church had no need for national writing system. Religious texts were written and the liturgies were conducted in Syrian and Greek languages, and the main part of the population did not understand preaching and sermons and was gradually falling back to old beliefs, Mazdeism and Paganism. After the division of Armenia between Persia and Eastern Roman Empire in 387AD the nationalization of

Christianity became an obvious necessity to evolve as a consolidating power in the society, hence it was necessary to have a national writing system.

Was there a writing system before?

Per Armenian historian Koriun (who was Mashtots' disciple) a Syrian bishop Daniel found an ancient alphabet which he (and the Orthodox Encyclopedia confirms this) considered to be the ancient Armenian writing. An existence of the Daniel's writing system proves that there was a writing system in Armenia before Mashtots. Several other arguments compliment this theory.

First of all, ancient Armenian pantheon of Gods had a deity called Tir who was a messenger of Aramazd. He was a fortune-teller and a guide of the dead person's soul. He also acted as a scribe to the gods, and when someone was born he would write their name into the Book of Life; and on the forehead he would imprint the newborn's fate, predetermining the given lifespan. He keenly observed everyone and entered all their sins and good deeds into special folio, to read them during the final judgement. If the agony of dying lasted a long time and the soul could not part with the body easily, it was common to take the pillow from beneath the head of the dying person and open wide all the windows and doors, so Tir could enter freely into the home and take the soul into his bosom and leave. Another name for Tir was Grogh (Գրող, meaning "writer" or "scribe"). Just as the English curse 'to hell with you', up until now Armenians curse by sending to someone to Tir: "Grogh kez tani!" (in Armenian: Գրողը քեզ տանի, meaning "scribe take you!") or "Groghu tsots" (Գրողու ծոց, "in embrace of the scribe"). Many centuries passed and the word "Grogh" came to simply mean "writer". As a god of writing, his existence might well be taken as evidence

that an Armenian alphabet existed in pagan times, contradicting traditional Christian Armenian history which puts the invention of the alphabet in the 400s by St. Mesrob Mashtots. How could a people without writing system worship such a deity?!

In the Hellenic period Tir was identified with the Greek god Apollo (Fig. 3) and the Zoroastrian god Tishtrya (Tir in Middle and Modern Persian).

2nd, the beauty of the Armenian literary language and that of translation in the 5th century. Such a perfection could not have been achieved in a few decades.

3rd, high level of the Armenian culture and language which cannot be compared to that of primeval people without a writing system. Researchers consider that the Armenians had a developed oral literature which was on par with literary (bookish) one.

So who was Mesrop Mashtots?

Our main knowledge about Mesrop Mashtots comes from *Life of Mashtots* by Koriun, one of his favorite disciples, as well as from *History of Armenia* by Movses Khorenatsi (Moses of Khoren, Fig. 5), the Father of the Armenian history.
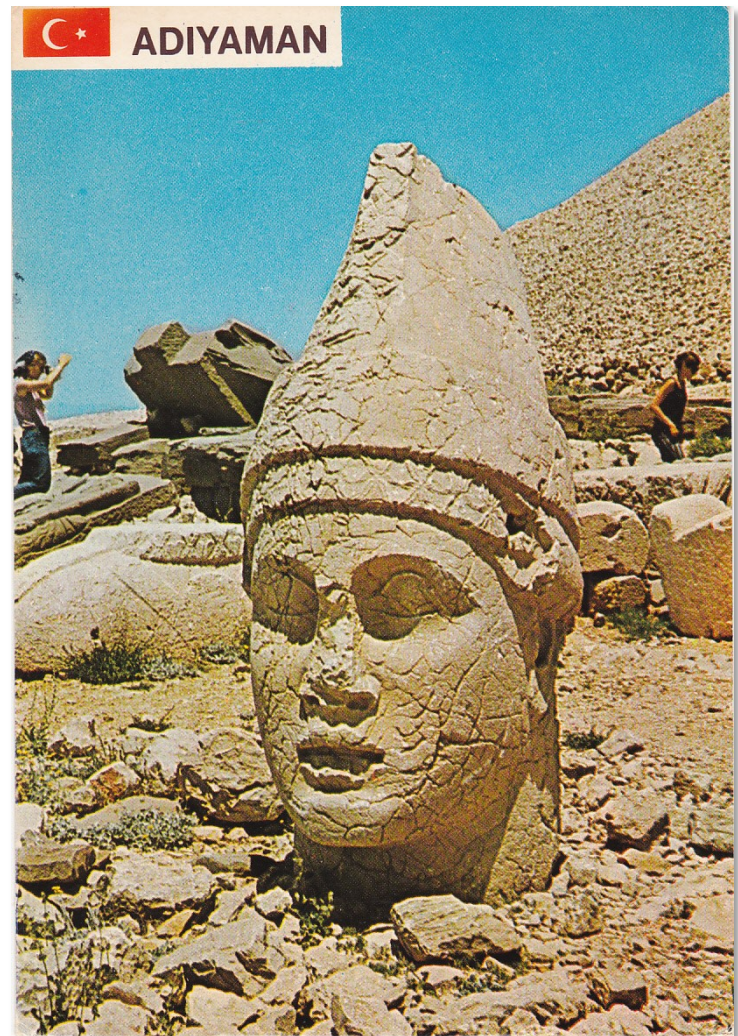
We learn from them that Mashtots was born in

Figure 4 - Tir (Apollo) statue from Mount Nemrut

Figure 5 - Movses Khorenatsi

Hatsekats village of the Taron region, in a family of a noble person named Vardan. Ghevond Alishan (Fig. 6), another notable historian,

Figure 6 - Ghevond Alishan

derives his name from the original spelling, Mazhdots, which he speculated, had sacred origin. It is also theorized that the root –mazd

– could be seen in such names as Aramazd and Mazhdan (with later dropping "d" (Mazhan was the name of a high priest). As the children of the priests of old religion were sent into Christian church servitude it is possible that his family also belonged to the cast of priests.

Figure 7 - Map of the region. The blue arrow points to Taron, birth place of Mesrop, the red arrow points to Goghtn

Ghazar Parpetsi recounts that in the period preceding the creation of the alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots the royal correspondence was in Greek and Syriac, and the church ceremonies and the readings of the Bible, in Syriac: *Learning the Greek alphabet from his childhood, Mashtots was in military service in the court of the Armenian king, Khosrov and was enlisted in the group of the royal scribes as at that time the royal scribes wrote king's orders and decrees in Syriac and Greek… Church ceremonies and readings of the Holy Bible in the monasteries and churches of Armenia had been done in Syriac, which was not comprehensible or useful to the inhabitants of such a big country… For a long time blessed man, Mashtots was thinking about it and crying by himself; indeed, there had to be the letters of the Armenian language.*

The Creation.

Mesrop Mashtots already realized the necessity of creating a national script. And not only he. Hearing his thoughts Catholicos Sahak Partev (Fig. 8) summons an assembly so high priests could approve the idea of creating Armenian alphabet. For a long time they discussed the idea, and then informed King Vramshapuh about their efforts. The king informed them that while in Mesopotamia he

encountered a priest by name Abel who told him that a Syrian Bishop Daniel had accidentally found an alphabet of the Armenian language. Immediately, a messenger was sent to Bishop Daniel to acquire the script and bring it back. Upon receipt, Mesrop started educating a group of pupils but soon realized that the alphabet was short of his expectations and the scripts were set aside.

First of all, there has been a never-ceasing debate about the phrase *accidentally found*. Were the letters from an long-forgotten Armenian script, or did Bishop Daniel confused them with an old Aramaic one? Hrachia Acharian, a prominent Armenian linguist, lexicographer, etymologist and philologist, considered them to be an old Aramaic script that was not used anymore in the 4th-5th centuries.

In his monograph *The Armenian People From Ancient to Modern Times, Volume I: The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century. — Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. — T. I. — C. 202* Richard Hovannisian comments that *Daniel's system — no trace of which has survived — was inadequate to cope with the richer consonantal structure of Armenian; nor could it render vowels*.

With the support of Catholicos Sahak Partev and blessing by the King Vramshapuh, accompanied by a group of researchers Mashtots hit the road to Mesopotamia, He studied letter outlines and systems of other scripts, and began his monumental work of creation.

Most of the language systems Mesrop Mashtots studied did not accommodate all sounds of the Armenian language. Aramaic and Syrian alphabets

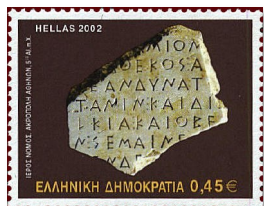Figure 8 - Sahak Partev and Mesrop Mashtots on a maximum card

(Fig. 9) had 22 letters, classic Greek (Fig. 10) - 24, classic Latin (Fig. 11) - 23.

Mashtots had a difficult task; he wanted to have a letter for each sound of the Armenian language. So in 405-406 AD he completed his labors and created 36-letter Armenian alphabet, finalizing phonetic and orthographical norms of the language. Please note that three more letters were added much later (in 12th century) bringing the count to 39.

Not finding anything additional from Bishop Daniel Mesrop continues his travel to Edessa. Most probably, the Edessian library contained ancient sources on writing systems, principals of their construction. His search for the principal and graphical design Mesrop accomplishes his task and creates Armenian alphabet based not only on ancient mystical principals of alphabet creation, but modifying them. As a result, he creates a unique alpha-

Figure 9 - Syrian letters

Figure 10 - Greek letters

Figure 11 - Latin letters

bet from not only from the point of view of graphics, but phonetics as well, which is acknowledged by many scientists. Even the time had no effect on it as it exists for more than 1500 years without any changes.

The final stage of the creation Khorenatsi describes that *he sees a vision not in his sleep or a dream in reality but in his heart; prespiritual eyes seeing a hand writing upon a stone, and the stone kept the writing, as if it were tracks in the snow. Not only did he see itm but all circumstances gathered in his mind as if in a vessel*. This is a perfect description of a moment of insight which corresponds to a creative discovery which happens at the moment of highest level of mental tension. Another excellent example of such an event is the discovery of the periodic table by Mendeleev, who saw it in his dream. S. Babayan in his work *Principles of Order of the Armenian Alphabet* shares an important though to reflect upon - if Mashtots made a discovery (which we do not have any doubts in), than, as with the case of the periodic table, it is necessary to have a principal tying all letters in a logical system. It is not possible to discover a combination of random signs, as well as such a task does not require a prolonged period of time. More, this principle, however individual subjective at might be should correspond to the principals of construction of ancient alphabets, and, therefore, reflect objective evolution of the writing in general and alphabets in particular.

Per Koriun, accomplishing the task of organizing the letters and naming them, Mashtots continued his journey to Samosata, where he found a calligrapher in Greek writing named Ropanos, and with the help of the latter Mashtots draw the final appearance of the distinctions between letters, narrow and wide, short and long, individual and double lines.

His next task was to translate the Bible into the Armenian. With two of his disciples he started with the Book of Proverbs, and the first sentence translated was Ճանաչել իմաստութիւնն ու խրատը, իմանալ հանճարի խոսքերը (*for gaining wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight*).

When the news of Mashtots returning with the new writing reached the King and the Catholicos they gathered many nakharars (princes) and met him on the banks of Araxes river.
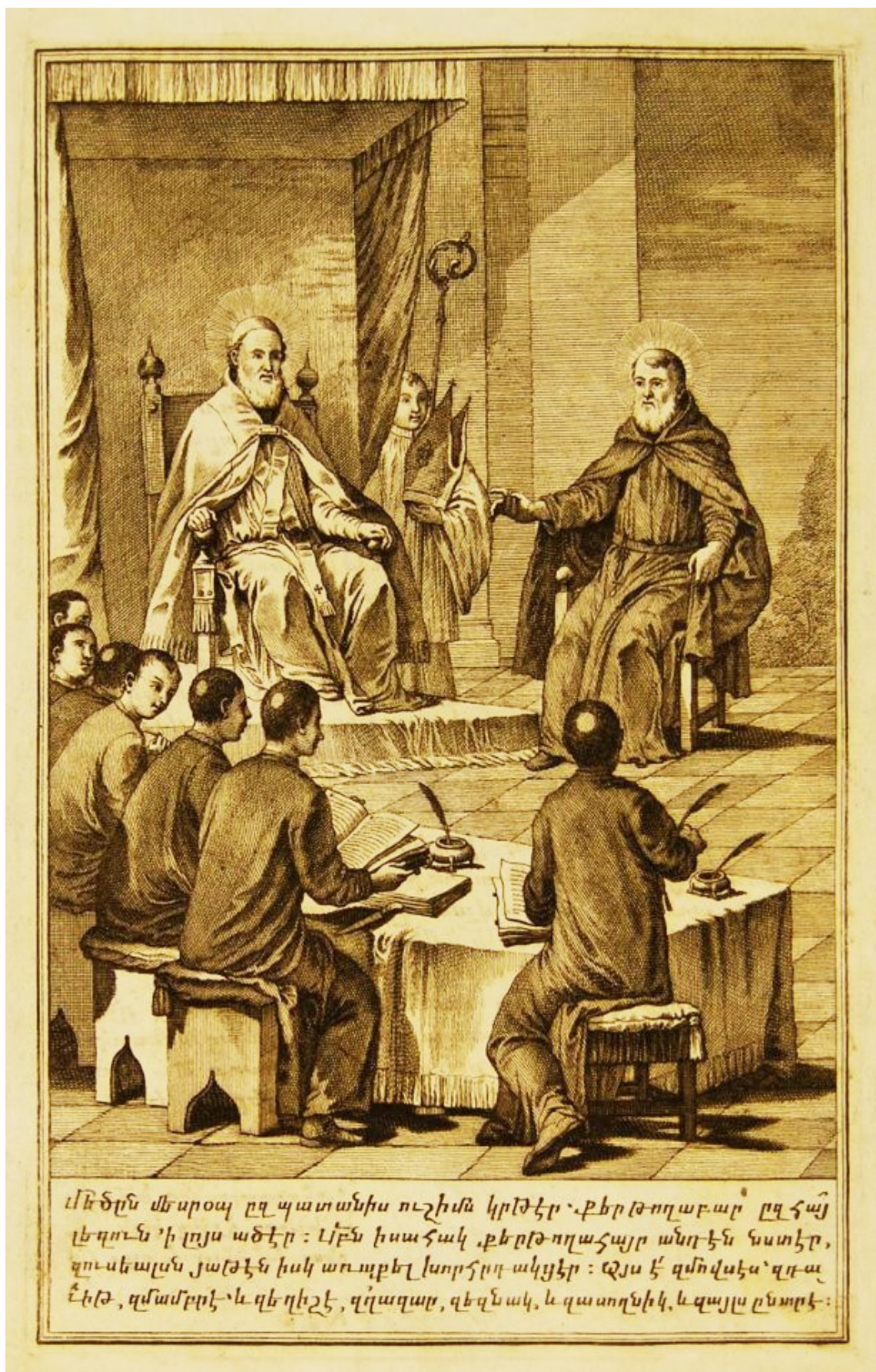
Immediately upon return Mashtots established schools where teaching was conducted in the Armenian language. Together with Sahak Partev Mashtots continued translating religious and philosophical works, later involving on this task his brightest disciples (Koriun, Eznik, Hovsep Paghnatsi, Hovhan Ekeghetsatsi, Fig. 12), creating a so called school of translators. He also continued his preaching all over Armenia.

Mesrop Mashtots died on February 17, 440 leaving an unsurpassed legacy in the history of Armenia.

The translators of the Holy Bible were canonized

ԹԱՐԳՄԱՆԻՉՔ Ս. ԳՐՈՑ — Ս. ՍԱՀԱԿ, Ս. ՄԵՍՐՈՊ, ԵՒ ԱՇԱԿԵՐՏՉ ԻՐԵԱՆՑ. ԵՋՆԻԿ, ԿՈՐԻՒՆ, ՅՈՎՍԷՓ ՊԱՂՆԱՑԻ, ՅՈՎՀԱՆ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԱՑԻ:

Figure 12 - The Disciples and translators

մեծ Մաշտոց եւ պատանիս ուշիմն կրթէր․ քերթողաբար՝ լд հայ
լեզուն ՚ի լոյս ածէր ։ Սբն խաշ<ակ․ քերթողաչայր անեէն Սատեր,
գուսեալան յաժէէն իսկ աոաբել խորչրդ ակէէր ։ Այս է գմնվսեա․ գր-ա
էիթ, գմամբ-րէ․ եւ դե-ղիշէ, գղագար, գեզնակ, եւ պատոդնիկ, եւ գա-յս ընտրե ։

The Great Mashtots was teaching the younger carefully, and naturally the Armenian language came to life.
St. Partev the creator used to sit there, giving the pupils his prophetic advise. Here are the selected few:
Movses, David, Mambre, Egihshe, Ghazar, Eznik, Asognnik. *18th century engraving.*

by the Armenian church. Celebration the feast of Holy Translator's Day commemorates the people, who created the Armenian alphabet and became the founders of Armenian literature, written language and schools (Fig. 13 - from left to right: St. Gregory of Narek (Grigor Narekatsi), St. Movses Khorenatsi, St. Mesrop Mashtots, St. Sahak Partev, St. Eghishe, St. David Invincible (David Unhakht), St. Nerses IV Gracious (Nerses Shonrh-

Figure 13 - The Holy Translators canonized by the church

Translators and interpreters in Armenia annually celebrate their processional day on the second Saturday in October, that is known as **Թարգմանչաց (**Targmanchats or Holy Translator's Day). This is an official observance, that was created by the Armenian Apostolic Church in order to honor a group of literary figures, who translated the Bible into Armenian language.

Translators' Day has been widely commemorated in Armenia. The opening ceremony takes place in Oshakan, where Mesrop Mashtots (the creator of the Armenian alphabet) is buried and the monument to the Armenian alphabet has been erected (Fig. 14). During this celebration the authors of the best translations are awarded a special prize named after E. Charents.

The basic books of Christian doctrine, the Old and New Testaments and the works of ancient philosophers were translated into Armenian; original treatises on philosophy and history were written, religious poetry flourished. Some of the ancient Greek originals of Armenian translations no longer exist; scholars are familiar with these works only through their Armenian translations

Figure 14 - Statue of Mesrop Mashtots and letter khachkars in Oshakan

Peculiarities of the Armenian Alphabet

There is no doubt that at the time of creation the Armenian alphabet was a revolutionary one. The existence of national writing helped consolidate the Armenian people who was under the threat of being aabsorbed by Byzantium in the West and Persian Empire in the East.

Dr. Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev in his works points out that the Armenian alphabet was purely phonetic, which means that it was much easier for native speakers to learn to read and write than speakers of other languages whose native writing systems have been evolving for thousands of years and were much more complicated.

Ancient Armenian manuscripts are also noted for their reach decorations, are full of miniatures and thoroughly drawn letters. Armenian religious art is mostly symbolic, and the letters play a significant role. For example, very often the drop cap is drawn in a form of a flower, bird, or another animal. In reality, letters drawn in a shape of birds represent a special type of art, known as **Թռչնագիր** (Trchnagir, bird letters, Fig. 15).

Another armenologist, S.M. Babayan in his work

Figure 15 - Examples of the bird letters

Principals of Order of the Armenian Alphabet states that *the mechanism, algorithm of the letter signs creation is not very complicated… but the ideology, meaning imbedded in the signs, individu-*

ally or in aggregate, is complex altogether.

S. Babayn in his work mentioned earlier notes that all the letters of the Mashtots alphabet are strictly regular, built according to certain principles, both graphic and philosophical. Mashtots also gave names to the letters, as the Greeks did, and the Phoenicians before them. However, his names of letters are one-syllable, unlike the two-syllable Greek ones. Babayan notes *that the Armenian alphabet is ordered according to the Greek, that is, those twenty-two letters of the Armenian alphabet, which have a Greek equivalent, are ordered in the same way. The remaining fourteen letters Mashtots inserted between the first ones*, which agrees with the pattern suggested by a Moscow philologist S. Mouraviev in his work *Secret of Mesrop Mashtots*.

Let's not forget the first Armenian script used only capital letters and was later called **Երկաթագիր**) Yerkatagir, iron writing) which allowed Mashtots to graphically represent every sound of the language by distinct letters. These most ancient shapes of the Armenian letters were discussed in the work *The Armenian Letters* of the greatest ArArmenian linguist Hrachia Acharian.

S. Babayan wrote his work as a polemics with S. Mouraviev, agreeing with some of his assumptions and conclusions, strongly disagreeing with others. To not bother the reader with the differences of opinions we shall omit those and concentrate only on thoughts necessary to understand the order of the Mesropian alphabet.

Both Mouraviev and Babayn agree that the Armenian alphabet is ordered according to the Greek alphabet, that is 22 letters of the Armenian alphabet that have equivalent in Greek, are ordered in the analogical way. The other 14 letters Mashtots inserted among them.

Mashtots also considered the way letters are perceived by humans. Upon analyzing the structure of the Armenian letters S. Babayan came to the conclusion that number of rounded parts in the letters corresponds to the number of rectangular ones.

Babayan's detailed analyses showed that all 36

Ի - primary element **I**

Լ, Վ - primary element **Լ**

Ե, Կ, Ն - primary element **Ս**

Բ, Ը, Ր, - primary element **Ր**

Գ, Դ, Ղ, Պ - primary element **Ղ**

ժ - primary element **J**

Ա, Մ, Ս - primary element **Ս**

Թ, Ո, Ո - primary element **Ո**

Է, Բ, Խ, Ի, Հ, Ծ, Չ - primary element **✚**

Ջ, Ճ, Փ, Ձ, Ց, Յ, Ձ, Ֆ - primary element **O**

Fig. 16 - Tables of primary (top) and secondary (below) elements

For clarity, we write down the groups of main elements one under the other in ascending order of their number:
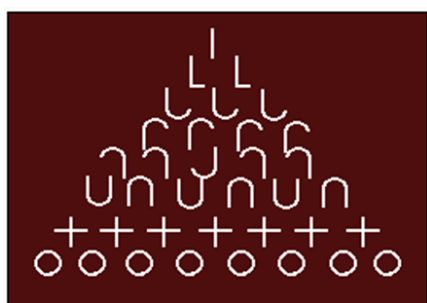
Taking into account the secondary elements, our triangle takes the following form:

Mesropian letters consist of two types of elements, primary and secondary. Per Babayan, each group of primary elements in the triangle symbolizes eight philosophical categories developed by Aristotle and known to Mesrop Mashtots. They are: place, position, quantity, possession, quality, relation, essence and time, to which Mashtots accordingly correlated the groups of basic elements in the triangle (from top to bottom).

Five secondary elements symbolize the philosophical elements - earth, water, air, fire and ether. The first four lines are taken from the ancient hieroglyph denoting the World Tree (Fig. 17) - the oldest cosmological model, according to which the
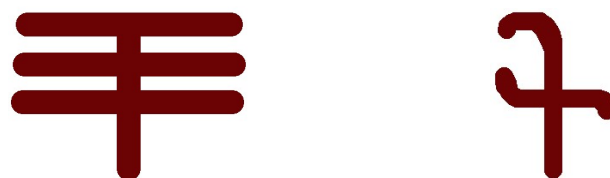
Fig. 17 - World Tree (left) and Prosphora (right) Hieroglyphs

world consists of three layers: air, earth, and water, which are supported by a column of fire.

The sign for the fifth element (ether) was taken by Mashtots apparently from the Armenian hieroglyph, which, according to H. Acharian, means **նշխար** (prosphora, Fig. 17). In letters, it takes on various positions, which confirms its name (ether in Greek means "eternally running").

Babayan notes that *the principle of constructing the Mesropian alphabet is that the alphabetic characters consist of two heterogeneous elements. Moreover, the letters themselves are formed: 1) by a simple connection of these elements (in the first six groups of our triangle), 2) by such a connection in which one (or both) of the connecting elements is rotated around its center, which we observe in some letters of the last two triangle groups. In addition, in the last two groups some of the main elements are slightly truncated.*

These methods of connecting elements are associated with a complex philosophical outlook which is not presented here not to complicate reader's understanding of the basics of the Armenian alphabet.

One more thing. The reader might be aware of the magical meaning of the number seven. So Mashtots puts letter Է in seventh position to symbolize essence attributing sound Ը (which was logically supposed to be in that place to a position eight.

Another though presented by Lia Avetisian, a publicist writer. The *Armenian alphabet is a hierarchical system, where each letter not only has its own sequence, but, what is important and unique, marks the areas of knowledge, differentiates them by levels and sectors.* All 144,000 root words and their derivatives in the Armenian language can be easily distributed according to this principle. The very same system of the alphabet is built as a scale of values as the Divine Essence decreases from the first letter to the last.

Let's look at shape and importance of few letters.

The first letter of the alphabet is letter Ա (A). It looks like a little person hands up to the sky. This letter symbolizes the Devine Beginning, and with that letter start such words as Արարիչ (Ararich - the Creator), Ար (Ar - the name of the ancient main Armenian deity), Աստված (**Astvats** - God), as well as celestial bodies, such as **Արեգակ** (Aregak - Sun), **Աստղ** (Astgh - star), etc.

The second letter - Բ (B) - looks like an open mouth for chatter. Words associated with speech and sounds begin with it: **բառ** (bar -word, **բարբառ** (barbar—dialect), **բերան** (բերան - mouth), etc.
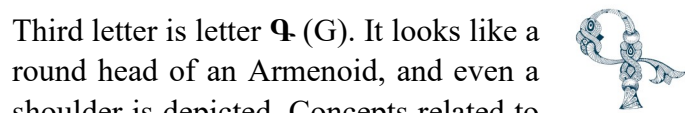
Third letter is letter Գ (G). It looks like a round head of an Armenoid, and even a shoulder is depicted. Concepts related to intelligence also begin with this letter in Armenian writing: **գիր** (gir - writing), **գյուտ** (güt - discovery), **գիրք** (girk - a book) as well as the compound word **գաղափար** (gakhapar - idea), which literally means the *secret in the palm of [the Ruler] Ar*. The name of the generator of ideas begins with it - **գլուխ** (glukh - head).

It is now clear that letter Գ **(գիր)** could only be the third letter of the alphabet following the pattern God-Word-Writing (**Արարիչ-Բառ-Գիր**).

As opposed to the English expression *from A to Z*

(which in reality only means the beginning and the end of the alphabet), the Armenian alphabet carries the entire dialectical unity of the universe, from personifying God (**Արարիչ**) as the ideal of harmony to complete chaos (**Քաոս**). This is not just the beginning and end of the alphabet; it is the beginning of beginnings and the end of time, systematically embedded in the Armenian alphabet.
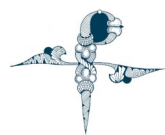
Mysteries behind the Armenian Alphabet

Although it is still debated, whether founder of the Armenian alphabet Mesrop Mashtots created or reconstructed the alphabet in 405 AD, the fact of the matter is, the alphabet has several features which cannot be explained from the point of view of the then-current science and linguistics.

Atomic Weight of the metals?!

One of these mysterious characteristics is correspondence of various names of metals to their numbers organized by Mendeleev (Fig. 18) in its periodic table (Fig. 19) in 1869, over 14 centuries later.
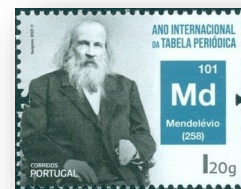

Fig. 18 - Mendeleyev

Fig. 19 - Periodic Table of Elements

Take a word for a metal known from ancient times, find consecutive numbers of its letters in the alphabet, add them together and see what happens (seven metals were identified).

In Armenian **GOLD is ՈՍԿԻ**, **AURUM in Latin. #79** in the Periodic Table of Elements.

#24	#29	#15	#11

Add the numbers (24+29+15+11=79) and you get number for gold in the Periodic Table.
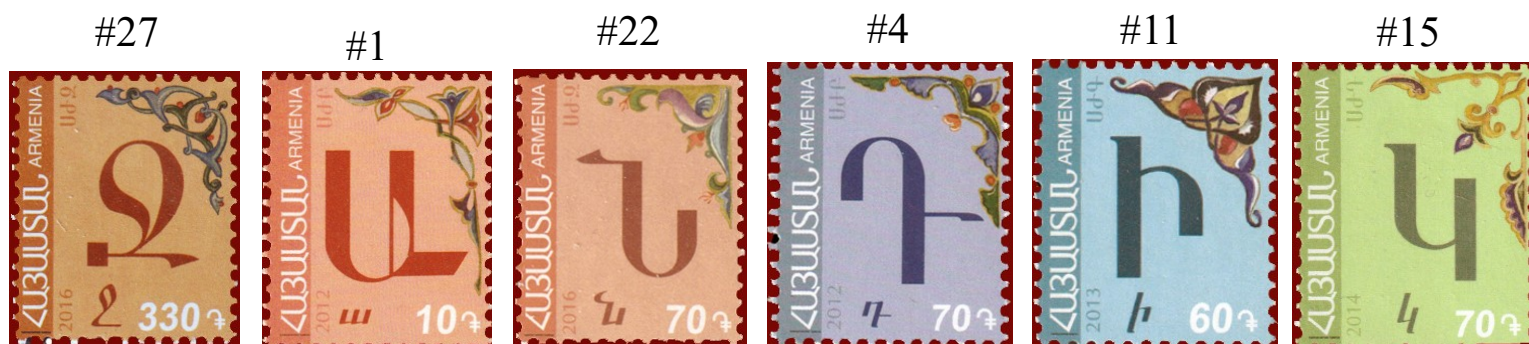
Same is true for:

SILVER (ԱՐԾ, ARGENTUM, #47)	**COPPER (ՄԵԴ, CUPRUM, #29)**
#1 #32 #14	#20 #5 #4

LEAD (ԱՐՃԻՃ, PLUMBUM, #82)

#1	#32	#19	#11	#19

MERCURY (ԶԱՆԴԻԿ, HYDRARGYRUM, #80)

#27	#1	#22	#4	#11	#15

IRON (ԱԼ,ՔԱԹ, FERRUM, #80)

#1 #12 #3 #1 #9

TIN (ԿԼԱԵԿ, STANNUM, #50)

#15 #12 #1 #7 #15
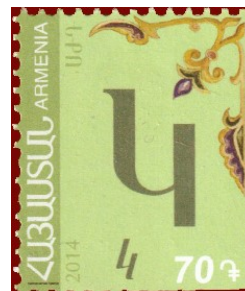
Why only seven metals? These metals were identified by humans in antiquity and found their use at that time; the metals from which the modern world was forged.

So, even though the 7 elements were known at the time when Mashtots completed his work, there is no way he could have known the periodic table or the atomic structure of chemical elements.

Let us also remember that that they were associated with one of the seven then-known celestial bodies which were in their turn associated with the seven days of the week.

Gold - Sun - Sunday

Silver - Moon - Monday

Iron - Mars - Tuesday

Mercury - Mercury - Wednesday

Tin - Jupiter - Thursday

Copper - Venus - Friday

Lead - Saturn - Saturday

So did he actually receive a divine vision, or is there another less spiritual explanation? I will let you contemplate on this.

Numbers

Ancestral Armenians had refined knowledge of astronomy and geometry, so the rendition below will not come as surprised to you.

First, let us remember that original alphabet created by Mesrop Mashtots contained only 36 letters. Two letters were added in the 12th century to represent foreign sounds, and one ligature apotheosized to the rank of letter. It holds many astonishing hidden features. So much so that one would almost have to conclude that it was indeed either comprised by divine intervention or Mashtots together with Sahak were linguistic geniuses far ahead of their time.

The alphabet was also a numerical system used for math calculations and recording calendar dates. If arranged in four columns of nine letters by their order in the alphabet the letters represented not only their numerical values, but they also differ in decimals; first column represented single digits, second the tens, third the hundreds and the fourth the thousands

Ա 1	Ժ 10	Ճ 100	Ռ 1000
Բ 2	Ի 20	Մ 200	Ս 2000
Գ 3	Լ 30	Յ 300	Վ 3000
Դ 4	Խ 40	Ն 400	Տ 4000
Ե 5	Ծ 50	Շ 500	Ր 5000
Զ 6	Կ 60	Ո 600	Ց 6000
Է 7	Հ 70	Չ 700	Ու 7000
Ը 8	Ձ 80	Պ 800	Փ 8000
Թ 9	Ղ 90	Ջ 900	Ք 9000

Dates

So how the dates were written?

After the Byzantium calendar was exhausted the Armenian calendar was introduced on July 11, 552. It was used in the middle ages, until the Gregorian calendar was adopted. Usually, during that era the date would be written in one to four letters preceded by two letters, Թ·Վ, often with a line over these letters (Fig. 1) translated *t'vin* or *in the year*. For example, year 765 would be written as Թ·Վ ՉԿԵ.

Fig. 20

Now, let us not forget that to translate then-written dates into standard years we would have to add 551 to the date. For example, the year when Ani was

declared capital of Armenia would be written like this: Թ·Վ ՆԺ (400+10), but to correspond to the standard years we would have to add 551 to the above letters/numbers and we will receive year 961 which history books considers the date of declaration.

While talking about the Armenian calendar it is worth mentioning that it is based on 365 days a year (although the real time of Earth orbiting Sun is 365.25 days). The correspondence between it and both the solar year and the Julian calendar slowly drifted over time, shifting across a year of the Julian calendar once in 1,461 calendar years. So the Armenian year 1462 (first year of the second cycle) started on July 11 Julian or July 24 Gregorian calendar in the year 2012.

Sacred Geometry

There are several geometrical secrets hidden in the Armenian alphabet. We are going to look only at two of them.
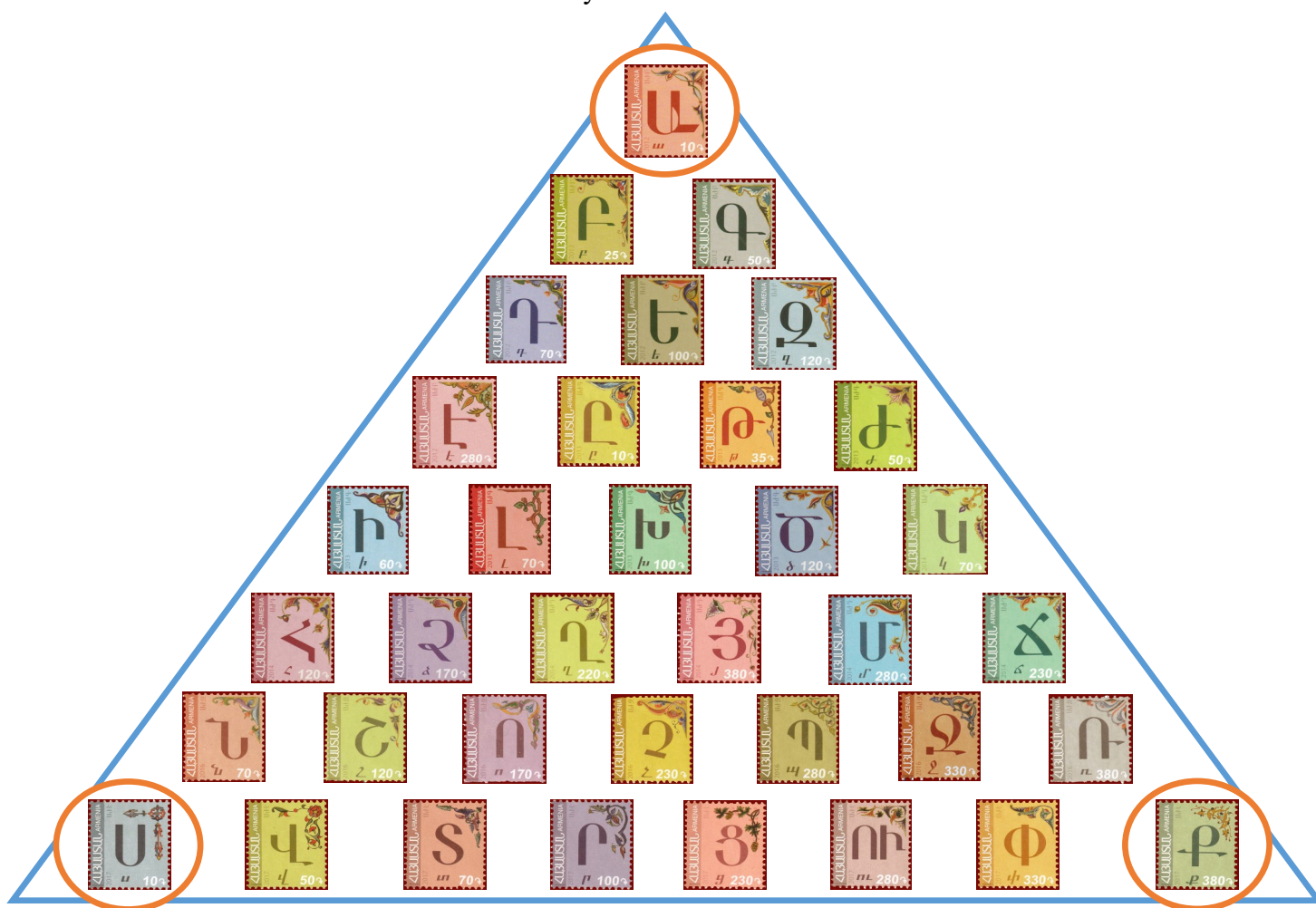
Let's note that the first letter of the Armenian alphabet is Ա (A). It stands for Աստված (pronounced *Astvats*, God in Armenian). The last letter of the alphabet is Ք (K) which in this case stands for Քրիստոս (pronounced *Kristos*, Christ in Armenian). Something is missing in this picture. Oh, yes, the Holy Spirit. And we find it if we arrange the alphabet in an equilateral triangle, last row left letter is Ս that stands for Սուրբ Հոգի (pronounced Sourb Hogi, Holy Spirit in Armenian). Thus, the three letters that are in the three corners of the triangle (marked with red circle) describe Trinity, The God (Astvats), the Son (Kristos) and Holy Spirit (Sourb Hogi).

Let's arrange the alphabet into an octagram. Notice the letters outside the black square? Read them from left to right clockwise. You see the letters Հ, Ա, Յ, Ք? Հայք (Hayk), right? The original Armenian name of their country!
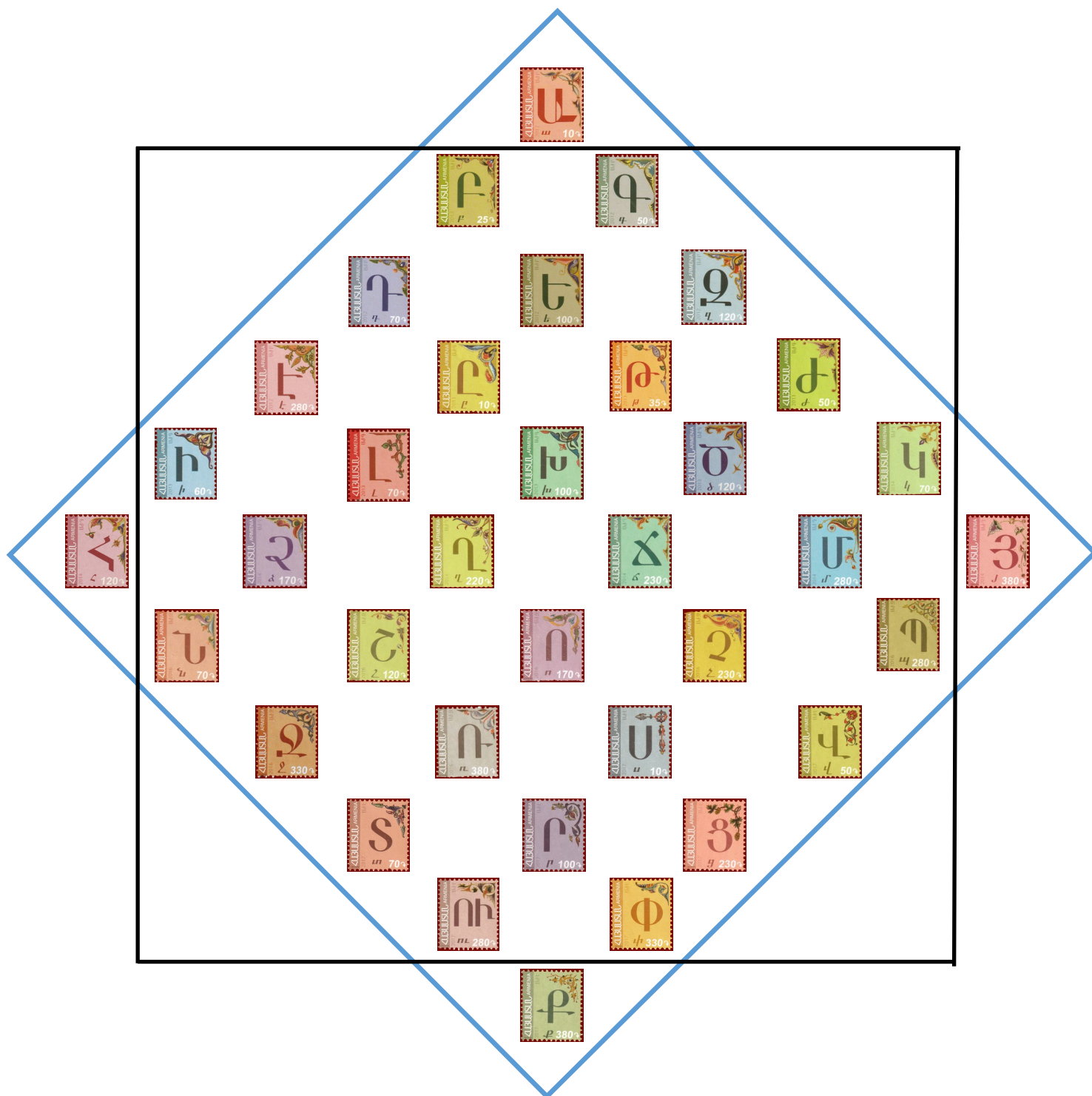
One other thing you may have noticed. Letters in the Armenian alphabet are arranged uniquely, completely differently from Latin or Greek. Regardless of how this came about, there is no doubt that the Armenian alphabet is a piece of historic art, arranged by a true visionary polymath way ahead of his time.

Armenian Alphabet on a 1680 publication. Leipzig, Germany.

The Armenian alphabet according to Dutch engraver Jan Luyken , 1690

The Riddle of Armenian Letters on the Bavarian Fresco

The grandiose and largest-in-the-world fresco by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo decorates the lobby of the Bavarian Bishops' Palace in Wurzburg. It features mythological creatures, ancient gods, nymphs, naiads, inhabitants of exotic countries, other figures fluttering among the clouds in a light dizzying flight, and… Armenian letters carved into a stone plate.

Fig. 21 - Wurzburg Palace Facade

The aristocrats of Malta and Italy greatly demanded historical and mythological subjects, on the basis of which Tiepolo created the first sketches. But the popular secular subject did not satisfy the bishop, so he asked to add stories from the history of Christianity.

As a result, Asia, where Jesus was born and the oldest alphabets appeared, was represented on the fresco as the cradle of Christianity. Two pilgrims, who had bowed in a greeting to Europe in the sketch, bowed before the cross, on which Jesus was crucified, in the final variant of the fresco.

The symbolic meaning of almost all the figures depicted on the fresco is quite clear. But it still is surprising to see an old man with a torch in his hand sitting on a plate with letters, which have been hardly known in Europe. But a person familiar with the Armenian alphabet can easily recognize Armenian letters among them.

Many people had such questions, but only two centuries after the creation of the fresco, German sci-

Fig. 22 - The interior stairs
and view of the ceiling

Fig. 23 - Fragment of the painting with the Armenian letters.

entists started to discuss the Armenian component in Tiepolo's work.

It turned out that the artist was connected to it indirectly. The fact is that in the forties of the 18th century, the beloved disciple of the great Venetian, Francesco Zunio, (1708 – 1787) spent considerable time in the monastery of the Mekhitarists on the island of Saint Lazarus in Venice.

There, he created altar images of the Holy Fathers of the Armenian Church. Among them was a magnificent picture of the baptism of King Trdat III by St. Gregory the Illuminator and the canonical portrayal of Mesrop Mashtots with the Armenian alphabet.

Perhaps, in the guise of an old man with a torch in his hand on a fresco in Treppenhaus, Mashtots appears before us. As for the letters themselves, there are forty-three on the fresco of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, seven more than Mashtots had created.

Some of them are not complete, are inverted, or are similar to consonant Latin or Greek letters. But, undoubtedly, most are the letters of the Armenian alphabet.

Perhaps, depicting the Armenian letters and their creator, Tiepolo paid tribute to the people who first adopted Christianity. And in the letters themselves, some secret message has been encrypted, which is quite in the spirit of the Baroque era. But all those riddles are yet unanswered.

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Celebrating the 1600th Anniversary of the creation of the Armenian alphabet.
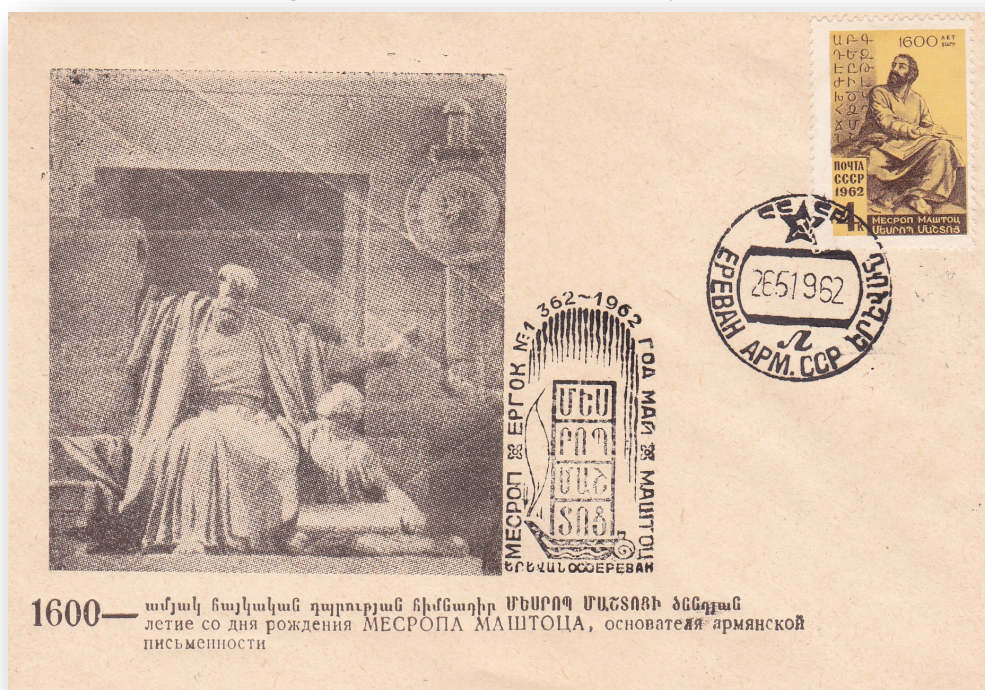
1962 Soviet Era FDC with Mesrop Mashtots stamp.

Maximum Card designed and created by ARPA member Armen Hovsepian.

1962 USSR Stamp

1962 FDC cachet color varieties.

Examples of Maximum Cards prepared by Maximaphilia Co.
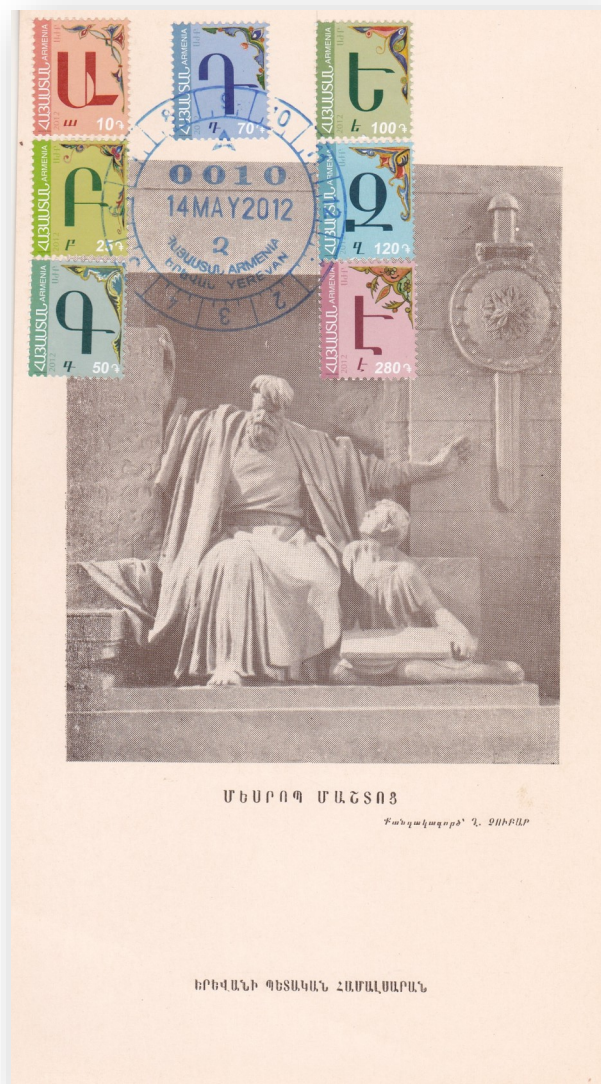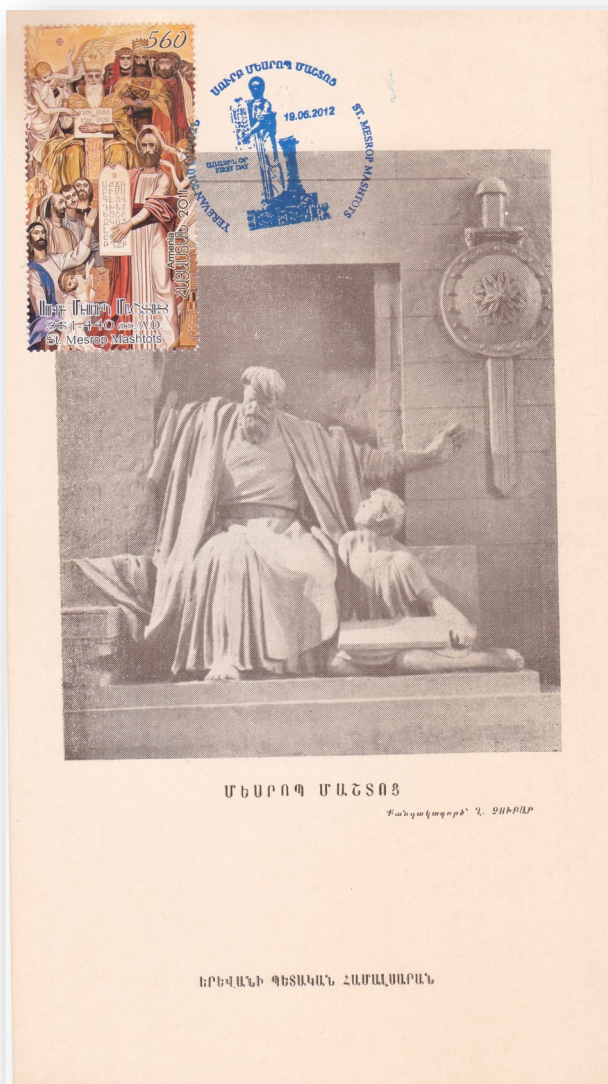
Stamp of Armenia, 2005

Mesrop Mashtots and complete Armenian Alphabet

Examples of First Day Covers

Non-traditional Maximum Cards prepared on a flyer printed by Yerevan State University
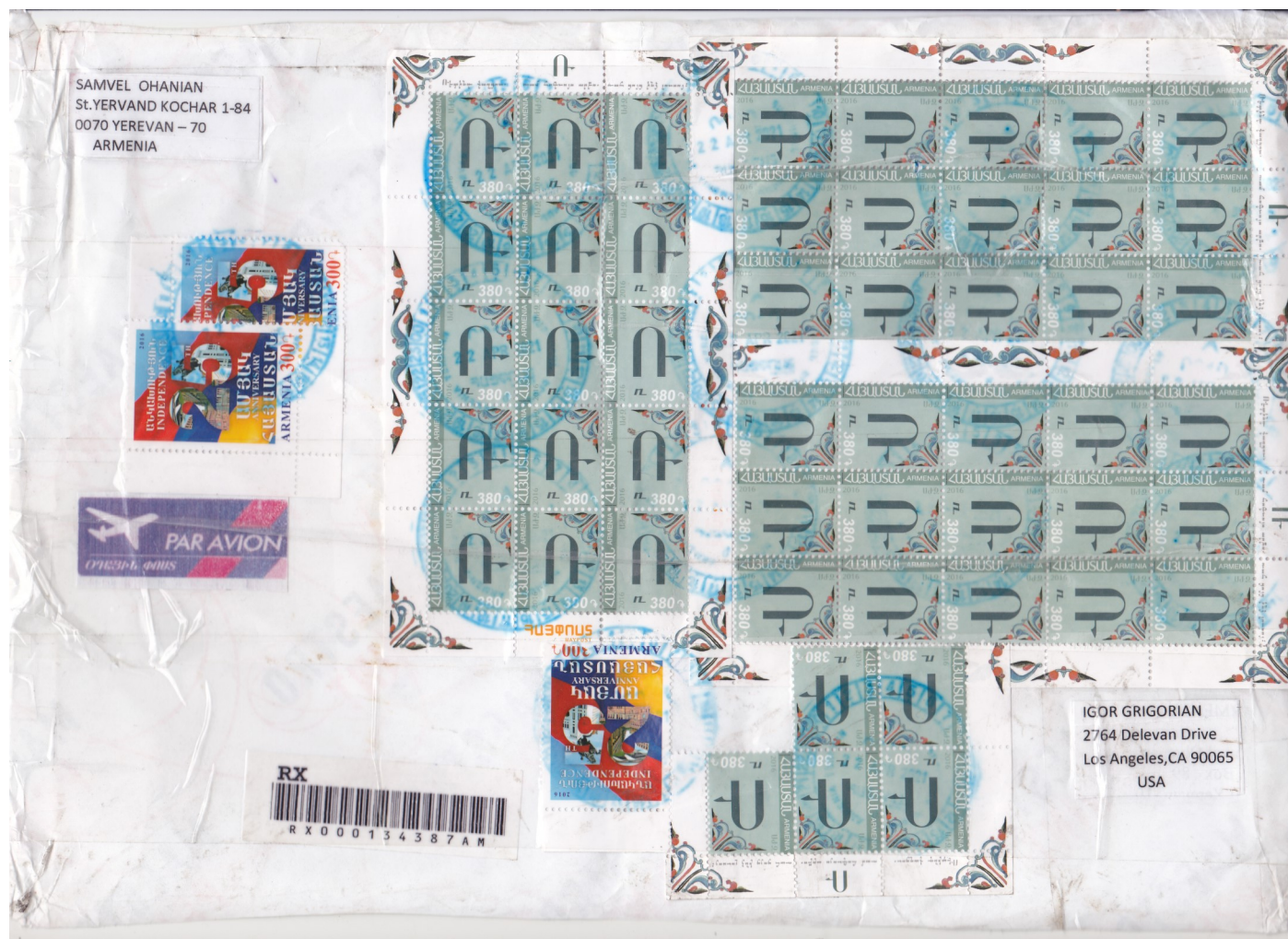

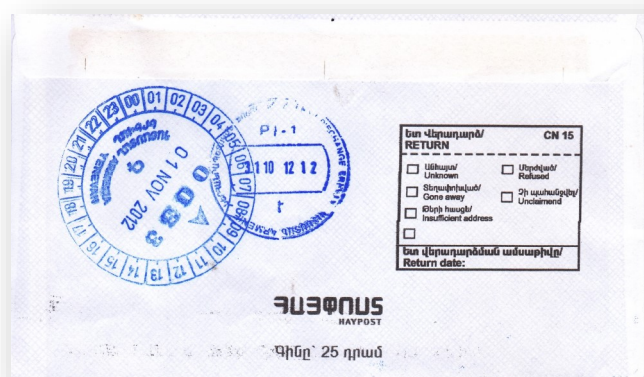*Mesrop Mashtots on Armenia 2011 Souvenir Sheet*

Letter mailed in 2017 from Yerevan, Armenia to Los Angeles, CA.

Stamps used spell my name in Armenian letters..

Packages and letters mailed using different letter stamps.

Mikayel Avetisyan
Mamikonyants 47/1- 10
Yerevan 0051
Armenia

Igor G Grigorian
526 Glenwood Rd
Glendale CA 91202-1592
United States

R
RR140882403AM

*Registered letter sent intra-city in 2017
addressed to the National Archives.*

Monuments to Mesrop Mashtots and the Armenian Alphabet worldwide

Oshakan, Armenia . Mesrop Mashtots statue and grave

Oshakan, Armenia

Oshakan, Armenia. Stelae. Architect - Jim Torosian

Ashtarak, Armenia. Armenian Alphabet Memorial

Moscow, Russia. At Surb Khach Church

Barnaul, Russia

Yalta, Crimea, Russia

Nor-Luys, Sochi, Russia

Zaporozhye, Ukraine - under the wall of the Armenian Apostolic Church
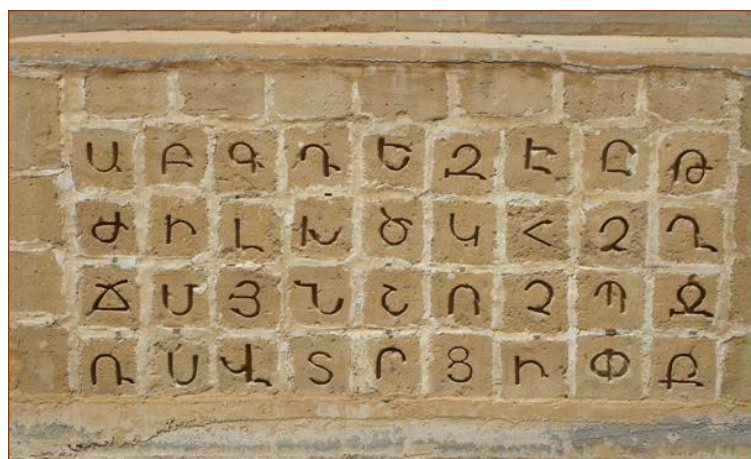
Cleveland, Ohio - Armenian Art Park

Providence, Rod Island, USA

Alfortville, France, St. Mesrop School

San Paulo, Brazil, courtyard of St. Hovhannes Mkrtich church

Cypress, Melkonian Educational Institute

Auckland, New Zealand