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Armenian-language old prints in Polish libraries

Any piece of literature, which is presented in the form of a book, a poem, or any other form, constitutes a key value when it comes to transferring information. Thus, literature has been an invaluable source of information for many centuries. Parallel to the historical development of society, the “book” has performed the complex function of passing on the achievements, stories and historical events of a given period to future generations, which has made it possible to assess the past and come to many important interpretations. This phenomenon is of great importance when we refer to the history of Armenian literature. Over the different eras, the Armenian nation has held onto the roots of salvation for survival, and the “book” or writing has contributed to their nation-saving mission, preserving historical facts and scientific achievements.

The most significant event in Armenian cultural life in the 16th century was the beginning of Armenian printing. The most fascinating time in the history of old Armenian books is roughly the 300 years between 1512 and 1800. Books published before 1500 or (1525) are called lullabies (Latin – *incunabula*) or diapers¹, and those published until 1800 are called old/ancient books².

In the 16th and 17th centuries, it was impossible to establish a printing house in Armenia. The unstable status of the country, the recurrent conflicts in Armenian lands, and the large distance from Europe’s established capitals ruled out the formation of printing in Armenia at the time. Therefore, the first Armenian book was printed in Venice in 1512, starting the history of typography 250 years before printing occurred in Armenia.

1 It is a document printed between 1454 and December 31, 1500. When Gutenberg invented movable type in 1454, the first book was printed with this method (the Gutenberg Bible or 42 lines). After that the book started to become popular, allowing access to more readers, encouraging the creation of universities, and facilitating the dissemination of knowledge and the advent of the Renaissance. “Codex.” *Differences: Facsimile, Codex, Manuscript, Incunabula, Old Book*, [on-line:] <https://vgesa.com/differences-facsimile-codex-incunabula.htm> – 2.02.2021.

2 They are documents printed from January 1, 1501. There is a subcategory for the ancient printed, called post-incunabula, created mainly (but not only) for printed books in countries where the press came too late, which consists of books that maintain the characteristics of the incunabula printed closer to the origins of printing. Ibidem.

The Armenian language was one of the earliest languages used in book printing. This makes Armenian the seventeenth language in the world overall and only the second originating in Western Asia to be printed on the moveable type press (following Latin, German, Hebrew, Greek, Spanish, English, Italian, Czech, French, Dutch, Croatian Old Church Slavonic, Portuguese, Old Church Slavonic, Serbian Old Church Slavonic, Danish and Scottish).

There are books that educate people, raise them, bend their will, keep and protect them. A. Isahakyan [Arm. Գրքեր կան՝ ժողովուրդներ են դաստիարակում, բարձրացնում, կրում նրանց կամքը, պահում-պաշտպանում: Ա. Իսահակյան] (Author's translation)

The aforementioned citation may be applied to old prints; they have allowed Armenians residing on the lands of the First Republic of Poland to maintain their religious, cultural and linguistic identity for centuries. Accordingly, for centuries, books have accompanied their life in the diaspora, becoming part of their national tradition and cultural heritage. The stories in these volumes were diverse, just as their readers' fates were complex and sometimes dramatic. Today, only a few of these books – a total of 55 copies – have survived in libraries in contemporary Poland [The Foundation of Culture and Heritage of Polish Armenians (31 positions), the National Osslinski Institute in Wroclaw (17 positions), the Princes Czartoryski Library (4 positions), the Jagiellonian library (1 position), the Wawel Royal Castle Library (1 position), the National Library (1 position)], but they attest to the wealth of the libraries where they were once housed, which include Armenian Parish in Stanislawow (original repository of Foundation's collections), the Ossolineum in Lviv (original repository of collections from the Ossolineum in Wroclaw), etc.

Thematic range of the catalogued books:

Religious (general)	17
Breviary	6
Prayer book	5
Calendar	4
Commentary	3
Dictionary	3
Lectionary	2
Hymnary	2
Psalter	2
Hagiography	2
Philosophy	2
Alphabet	1
Fable	1
Tipbook	1
Rhetoric	1
New Testament	1
Bible	1
Gospel	1
Total	55

Most of the catalogued books are of a religious character. In particular, these are breviaries, prayer books, calendars, comments, lectionaries, hymnaries, psalms, Hagiographies (lives of saints), a Bible, a Gospel, a New Testament, a Tipbook (a book of tips on liturgy) and an alphabet with prayers. Seventeen books contain various texts relating to religious matters, which are difficult to classify into a specific category. Just a few books have non-religious content; these include dictionaries, philosophical considerations, Armenian fables, and a rhetoric textbook.

We should note, that the subject division used by bibliography authors is relative because the basis for the division is often the title, which does not always correspond to the content of the published book. Secondly, because character cannot be determined uniquely for many books, we can classify them as both secular and religious (for example, psalms, hymns, etc.). Thirdly, the number of theological books is incomparably high among the catalogue positions (as well as in all the ancient literature), which is explained by the fact that in the 17th and 18th centuries, both in Armenia and especially in the Armenian colonies, the struggle of Monophysites and anti-Monophysites intensified and each of the struggling parties was pushing to prove the truth of its principles by publishing such books.

The majority of these books were written in Grabar, which is an ancient Armenian language³, and more often so-called *Latinized Armenian* (the term used to refer to Grabar, abundantly enriched with Latin words and expressions by Catholic preachers). Considering that the printing houses founded by Catholic preachers in Venice, Rome, Paris, Amsterdam and Constantinople printed a large number of the books in the catalogue, more than half (35), and the users of Latinized Armenian and their descendants wrote and translated them, we can infer that these books were written in that language.

The works of foreign (European) artists, as well as the works of Armenian publishers, inspired the artistic design of the book. Publishers who worked as painters,

3 The written period of the development of the Armenian language begins in 405, which is divided into three sub-periods: *Ancient Armenian*, known in linguistics as Grabar, was formed based on the dialects of Turuberan, Bardzr Hayk and Ayrarat. Covers the period from the 5th to 11th centuries. However, Grabar was a colloquial language until about the 9th century. Grabar has gone through three stages of development 1) Classical or early ancient Grabar, known as Mesropian, Golden Age Armenian (5th century); 2) post-classical or late ancient Armenian, also known as post-Mesropian Armenian (6th–7th centuries); 3) Early Middle Ages (8th–11th centuries). During this period, the linguistic changes became so numerous that they gave grounds to speak about the new literary language, Middle Armenian, from the 12th century. Middle Armenian (12th–17th centuries) underwent two sub-periods of development: 1) Early Middle or Cilician Normalization Period (12th–14th centuries); 2) Late Middle or sub-period of passing to New Armenian (15th–16th centuries). Middle Armenian is not only the literary language of that period but also the spoken language of the people. As a literary language, Middle Armenian was not standardized and did not have a stable norm.

New Armenian or *ashxarhabar* (secular language) (from the 17th century to the present day) has gone through three sub-periods of development: 1) Early ashxarhabar (from the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century); 2) Late ashxarhabar (mid-19th century to 1920), 3) Modern Armenian (from 1920 to the present day). Հ. Աճառյան, *Հայոց լեզվի պատմություն*, մաս Բ, Երևան 1951, էջ 226–254 [H. Acharian, *History of Armenian language*].

engravers, and book designers produced Armenian books from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. Armenian painters expertly adapted national contributions of manuscript art to printed book painting while preserving the distinctive colour of design and ornamentation. The books created during this time differ with rich, meticulously printed graphics and embellishments, as well as theme illustrations with an Armenian national character.

By the end of the 18th century, the art of Armenian printed books had reached a new level in Armenia and Armenian colonies around the world. We should emphasize that not only Armenians published old Armenian illustrated books, but many foreign publishers and Armenologists did as well, including Giovanni Battista Povid, Giacomo Moretti, Michelangelo Barboni and Anthony Bortoli.

As mentioned earlier, past invasions and foreign occupations of Armenia, the country's precarious political condition, and the division of Armenia between Turkey and Persia (later between Turkey and Russia) all contributed to many Armenians fleeing their homeland and establishing small colonies overseas. During the Middle Ages and up to the 18th century, they played an active role in international trade. Many of them achieved great success in their host countries and contributed to their arts, social and economic life.

Armenian communities in these countries largely contributed to the development of Armenian printing by establishing, supporting and patronizing publishing centres. Thanks to their efforts, Armenian book publishing progressed in Europe long before it had a chance to occur in Armenia.

The catalogued positions come from the following Armenian publishing centres: Venice (5 press houses – 24 positions)⁴, Rome (1 press house – 7 positions), Amsterdam (3 press houses – 6 positions), Constantinople (6 press houses – 11 positions)⁵, Marseilles (1 press house – 1 position), Paris (2 press houses – 2 positions), and Petersburg (1 press house – 1 position).

In the history of Armenian printing houses, we may identify two characteristics that are shared by the cities that host them. To begin with a few exceptions, most Armenian printers were literate members of the clerical order of the Armenian Church, and as ardent patriots, they were doing their best to improve Armenian printing.

Secondly, they usually set up their presses in European port cities where there was already a strong population of port Armenians. The selection of port locations was influenced by several factors. As global economic crossroads and technological innovation hubs, port cities provided access to paper makers, font casters, engravers, compositors and press operators. Furthermore, the willingness of local Armenians to patronize new printing houses meant that these places already had a diaspora community infrastructure, such as churches and other community institutions. Perhaps most importantly, port cities provided printers with relatively inexpensive and efficient transportation. As noted by Aslanyan, being located in a port city meant that a printer could load his newly created commodity (books) and have it delivered to the nearby markets of consumption because transportation

4 One position – without mentioning the press.

5 Two positions – without mentioning the press.

by water was nearly always cheaper, safer, and faster than transit by land⁶. Another notable fact is that in the 16th and 17th centuries, port Armenians frequently supported priests' printing operations, often rescuing the press houses from confiscation.

However, it is worth noting that, contrary to expectations, none of the old prints currently stored in Poland were published in the territories of the First Republic of Poland. After getting acquainted with the history of the Lviv printing house and the fate of only a few surviving books, this fact becomes quite clear and understandable. Therefore, it is worth looking into the history of Armenian typography on the Polish lands.

The most ancient Armenian handwritten documents found in these lands (for example, the famous Skevra Gospel, written in Cilicia in 1197) were brought to Poland either at the time of their writing or later⁷. The medieval Polish scholar Mathias de Myechow, in his "Treatise on the Two Sarmatians" (first published in 1517), which contains the first printed mention of Armenians, notes the presence of valuable church books in the colonies⁸.

In 1564, a prominent figure of the Catholic Church, Cardinal F.J. Commendone, examined the Armenian handwritten liturgical books during his stay in Lviv⁹. In 1566, B. Herbst, a Polish preacher and propagandist for the ideas of the union of the Eastern churches with Rome, arrived in Lviv and visited the Lviv Armenian Cathedral for a missionary purpose; here, he got acquainted with a comprehensive collection of handwritten books. Describing his trip to Ukraine, Herbst listed what he considered the most valuable Armenian handwritten books that he saw in Lviv; he mentioned both the writings of the church fathers and liturgical books¹⁰. By the end of the 16th century, there was a reference to another collection of Armenian handwritten books, which was privately owned: the Italian diplomat, secretary of the papal embassy, B. Vanossi from Pistoia, arrived in Poland in 1596 and visited the Polish magnate Chancellor Jan Zamoyski in his newly built town of Zamość where he examined the Chancellor's library and drew attention to the collection of rare Armenian manuscripts¹¹. A study of the memorable records of several dozen Armenian manuscripts created on the territory of former Poland and scattered at present

6 S. Aslanian, *Port Cities and Printers: Reflections on Early Modern Global Armenian Print Culture*, "Book History" 2014, vol. 17, p. 58.

7 Z. Obertynsky believes that the Skevr Gospel appeared in Crimea no later than in the XIV century. Z. Obertynski, *W sprawie ofiarodawcy ormiańskiego ewangeliarza z XII wieku*, „Biuletyn Historii Sztuki i Kultury”, t. 2, Warszawa 1933–1934, s. 293–295.

8 Mathias de Myechow, *Tractatus de duabus Sarmattis, Asiana et Europeana, et de contentis in ipsis*, Augustae Vindet Corum, 1518, p. 151.

9 M. Gratiani, *La vie du cardinal Jean Francois Commendon, divisee en quatre livres*, Paris 1671, p. 204.

10 B. Herbst, *A Christian decent answer to these confessions, which under the title of Brothers of the Order of Christ is recently published [Chrześcijańska porządna odpowiedź na te konfesję, która pod tytułem Braci Zakonu Chrystusowego niedawno jest wydana]*, Krakow 1567, p. 374.

11 B. Vannozi, *Relacja*, [in:] *A collection of historical memoirs about old Poland...*, t. 2, Warsaw 1822, pp. 264–265.

in libraries around the world indicates that there were a significant number of copyists of handwritten books in Lviv and Kamenets¹². The great art of artistic calligraphic book correspondence flourished in Lviv in the 60s and 70s of the 16th century and, apparently, quite successfully competed with the Armenian printing industry, which then made its first, very unconfident steps.

The victorious campaign of the printed book across the countries of Eastern and Western Europe could not but affect the book culture of the Armenian colonies in the Polish Commonwealth. The establishment of the Armenian printing house in Lviv in 1616 was the best evidence of the new trends. There is little information about the founder of this printing house, Hovhannes Karmatanents, and about the printing house itself; and although many works devoted to the history of the Armenian colonies or the history of Armenian printing systematically repeat information about the existence of an Armenian printing house in Lviv in the first half of the 17th century, all these testimonies boil down to a small number of facts related to the first discoveries of monuments of the Lviv Armenian press made at the end of the 18th century. J. R. Dashkevich, in a series of scientific articles, describes the history of the Lviv printing house¹³, leading to the following considerations.

It is quite understandable why Hovhannes chose Lviv as the place for founding his printing house. Apart from the fact that Lviv was the most prominent Armenian cultural centre, Hovhannes could count on a sympathetic approach to his intentions, both from the local Armenian merchant elite and from the Armenian church hierarchy. Beginning in 1574, Lviv was a city with certain typographic traditions, and in all likelihood, the local Armenians were familiar with them, so maybe Hovhannes hoped to find assistants for this difficult initiative¹⁴.

In his article “The first Armenian book printer in Ukraine Hovhannes Karmatanyants” (Rus. *Первый армянский книгопечатник на Украине Ованнес Карматанянц*), Dashkevich mentions 1616 as a starting date of the printing house with the first publication of “Psalter of David” (arm. Սաղմոս ի Դաւիթ), making Lviv the fourth city in the world printing Armenian-language books¹⁵. The book includes not only the Psalms of David but also various prayers in Grabar. It must be emphasized that the psalter was not exclusively a church edition. In many Armenian schools of the parochial type that existed in that specific period in Poland and Ukraine, the psalter was one of the main textbooks.

12 See Հ. Անասյան, *Հայկազան մատենագիտություն, ժԸ դդ.* հ.1, Երևան, 1963 [H. Anasyan, *Armenian Bibliography in 18 c.*, vol. 1, Yerevan 1963]; Review of surviving illustrated Armenian manuscripts by T. Mankovsky in his major work *Sztuka Ormian lwowskich*, pp. 80–114). T. Mankovsky, *Sztuka Ormian lwowskich*, Krakow 1934, pp. 80–114.

13 Я. Дашкевич, *Вірмени в Україні: дорогами тисячоліть. Збірник наукових праць*, Видавництво Львівського музею історії релігії “Логос”, Львів 2012 [Ya. Dashkevich, *Armenians in Ukraine: roads of millennia*].

14 About possible contacts with Lviv Armenians and the first printer Ivan Federov see: Н. Кривонос, *К истории книжной культуры армянской колонии во Львове в 16–17 вв.*, т. 22, Москва 1971, с. 206–207 [N. Krivonos, *On the history of book culture of the Armenian colony in Lviv in the 16th–17th centuries*].

15 Я. Дашкевич, *Первый армянский книгопечатник на Украине Ованнес Карматанянц*, [у:] *Вірмени в Україні: дорогами тисячоліть...*, p. 1131 [Ya. Dashkevich, *The first Armenian book printer in Ukraine Hovhannes Karmatanyants*].

Probably, some preparatory works started in 1615. For these, it was necessary to obtain equipment, purchase paper, prepare texts for publications and start the difficult process required for preparing the fonts. Analysis of this preparation phase indicates that he and his unknown assistants encountered great difficulties during the production of typefaces. Although quite a lot of skilled jewellers who took part in the production of typefaces worked in Lviv in the 17th century, they turned out to be somewhat awkward. Hovhannes' typography had several features, making Lviv editions distinguished from other Armenian editions of the 16th and 17th centuries. At the same time, we can state with all certainty that these fonts were not borrowed from some Armenian printing house, but were made on-site.

The difficulty of studying the activities of the Lviv Armenian printing house is not limited only to the fact that, until recently, the researchers had no archival sources at their disposal that would shed light on the personality of Hovhannes. The fact is that very few editions of the Lviv printing house have survived. The second book, possibly printed in Lviv, conventionally called the "Medical Aid" or the "Magic Book" (arm. Բժշկարան), has not surfaced at all. It was as late as the end of the 18th century that an Armenian researcher, historian S. Gyuver-Agonts, using the original book and taking into consideration its incompleteness, considered it to be printed in Lviv¹⁶ after having studied it. The book was destroyed in a fire in the Mekhitarist library on the island of St. Lazarus in Venice.

When it comes to the third edition of Hovhannes – the Prayer Book (Arm. Աղոթագիրք), dated 1618, scientists were able to access it quite recently, thanks to the research of the Hungarian Armenologist E. Schutz¹⁷, who found this book in the Leiden University Library. A significant number of the Armenians who lived in Crimea and moved to cities used the spoken Armenian-Kipchak language in 16th and 17th century Poland. Hovhannes intended his publication specifically for this group of local Armenians. Ultimately, this is the only book in the world published in this language. It contained many prayers and some psalms best known in religious practice. The book could be distributed in those Armenian colonies of Ukraine, Poland and Moldova, where Armenian-Kipchak was a spoken language.

The history of printing in Lviv in the 17th century is considered one of the dark moments in the history of Armenian printing: only two Armenian books out of all the books printed in 1616–1618 have survived to this day; until recently, all information about their printer – Hovhannes Karmatanents – was limited to the few words that he said about himself in a memorable entry in one of the published books¹⁸. Many scientific works repeat this data without any changes¹⁹. It would seem that the riddle

16 Գյուվեր – Ագոնց, Աշխարհագրութիւն չորից մասանց աշխարհի, հատ. Բ, Վենետիկ, 1802. _ էջ 136 [Gyuver-Agonts, *Geography of the four parts of the world*, vol. B, Venice 1802, p. 136]; E. Schutz, *An Armeno-Kipchak Print from Lviv*, "Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae" 1961, vol. 13, fasc. 1–2, p. 182.

17 Ibidem.

18 Colophon to "The Psalter" was reprinted several times partially or fully – in ancient Armenian language as well as in translation. See Գ. Չարբանալյան, Պատմություն հայկական տպագրության սկզբնավորութենէն մինչ առ մեզ, Վենետիկ, 1895, էջ 66–67 [G. Zarbhanalyan, *History of the origin of Armenian printing up to now*, Venice 1895, p. 66–67].

19 A fairly complete list of Lviv publications is given in the book Հայ հնատիպ գրքի մատենագիտական ցուցակ. 1512–1800, Երևան, 1963, pp. 9–10 [*Bibliographic list of ancient Armenian books. 1512–1800*, Yerevan 1963, pp. 9–10].

of the great man who played a crucial role in the history of printing will remain an unsolved mystery.

It can be considered that financial difficulties, and then the death of Hovhannes, were the main reasons for the termination of activities at the Lviv Armenian printing house. The above-mentioned three books are the only editions printed by Lviv Armenians in the first half of the 17th century known so far.

However, it has not been possible to find any evidence that the Armenian typography continued after the death of Hovhannes. Internal strife engulfed the Armenian colonies in the mid-17th century due to the problems of uniting the Armenian Church with the Roman Church and complex international relations, against the background of which the War of Independence in Ukraine swept through the nation like a powerful wave. Undoubtedly, the war did not contribute to the resumption of Armenian printing. The Armenian historian S. Baronch and the Ukrainian historian B. Yanush earlier assumed, that after the release of several books, the printing house of Hovhannes was still in Lviv and its fonts were sold in the early 19th century to the Lviv typographer Josef Schneider²⁰. However, in the light of other facts presented by Dashkevich this does not sound true.

The Armenian printing business in the second half of the 17th and early 18th centuries, in particular in Lviv, did not go beyond projects and plans. Abbreviated texts of some Armenian dramas were published in Lviv in 1668–1669 but in Polish rather than Armenian. These editions have been preserved until now in the Library of the Ossolinski National Institute in Wrocław. The Armenian collegium in Lviv, which existed since 1664, also did not publish, for example, religious literature or dictionaries in the ancient Armenian language²¹.

In the 1660s, when they raised the question of resuming Armenian book printing in Lviv, there were no traces of Hovhannes's printing house. Perhaps it was destroyed during one of the city fires, or in another way during the ruinous rule of Archbishop Mikolay Torosovich. The possibility that they moved the printing house from Lviv is not excluded. Moreover, when in 1645, a new Armenian printing house appeared in the city of Suceava, located on the Ukrainian lands, a large cultural centre of Moldovan Armenians who maintained constant close ties with Lviv, it could rightfully consider itself the successor of the printing house of Hovhannes Karmatanents' press.

Against this background, the image of the outstanding Armenian cultural figure Hovhannes Karmatanents, who is the first representative of Armenian book printing in Poland and Ukraine, stands out quite significantly. The publication of the world's only printed book in the Armenian-Kipchak language is associated with Hovhannes's name. His attempt to accustom the Armenian culture to the most progressive method of spreading the "written word" for that time through printing deserves recognition, to say the least. The name of Karmatanenets occupies a fitting place in the history of book printing in Ukraine and Poland, as it has already done in the history of Armenian culture.

20 S. Barącz, *Rys dziejów ormiańskich*, Tarnopol 1809, s. 191; B. Janusz, *O potrzebie założenia we Lwowie Ormiańskiego Muzeum diecezjalnego*, [w:] *Pamiętnik V zjazdu delegatów Związku Muzeów w Polsce*, Kraków 1980, p. 39.

21 Such statement we read in the article by В. Шевчук, *Из истории преподавания армянского языка на Украине*, *Պատմա քաղաքագիտական հանդես* 1968, no. 1, s. 237 (V. Shevchuk, *From the history of teaching Armenian language in Ukraine*).

- Անասյան Հ., Հայկական մատենագիտություն, ժԸ դդ. հ.1, Երևան, 1963 [H. Anasyan, *Armenian Bibliography in 18 c.*, vol. 1, Yerevan 1963].
- Գ. Ջարբհանայան, Պատմություն հայկական տպագրության սկզբնավորութենէն մինչ առ մեզ, Վենետիկ, 1895, էջ 66–67 (Zarbhanalyan G., *History of the origin of Armenian printing up to now*, Venice 1895).
- Գյուլլեր_Ագոնց, Աշխարհագրութիւն չորից մասանց աշխարհի, հատ. Բ, Վենետիկ, 1802. _ էջ 136 (Gyuver-Agonts, *Geography of the four parts of the world*, vol. B, Venice 1802).
- Հայ հնատիպ գրքի մատենագիտական ցուցակ. 1512–1800, Երևան, 1963 [*Bibliographic list of ancient Armenian books. 1512–1800*, Yerevan 1963].

Abstract

Literacy and literature have allowed the Armenians living in the First Republic of Poland to maintain their religious, cultural and linguistic identity for many centuries. Thus, books have always accompanied them throughout the diaspora, becoming part of their national tradition and cultural heritage. The stories of these volumes were as varied and complex, and sometimes as dramatic as the fortunes of their readers. To this day, not many of these books have survived in Polish libraries (55 in total), but these contribute to the richness of the libraries in which they were once stored. Part of the heritage has been preserved outside the borders of today's Poland; another part has been lost or has been destroyed. Those preserved in Polish collections have not been previously studied, but they offer the opportunity to enrich the understanding of the specificity of both the Armenian heritage in the field of written culture and the perspective of Polish-Armenian cultural ties. This gap in research has shaped the main goal of this project, which is to identify and catalogue Armenian old prints, which are currently housed in Polish libraries and constitute a substantive amount of material for research and analysis.

Keywords: Polish Armenians, writing, old prints, culture, national identity

Ormiańskojęzyczne starodruki w polskich bibliotekach

Streszczenie

Umiejętność czytania i pisanie oraz literatura przez wiele wieków pozwalały Ormianom zamieszkującym I Rzeczpospolitą zachować tożsamość religijną, kulturową i językową. Tym samym książki zawsze towarzyszyły im w diasporze, stając się częścią ich tradycji narodowej i dziedzictwa kulturowego. Historie zawarte w tych dziełach były tak różnorodne i złożone, a niekiedy tak dramatyczne jak losy ich czytelników. Do dziś w polskich bibliotekach zachowało się niewiele z tych książek (w sumie 55), ale stanowią one o bogactwie kolekcji, w których były niegdyś przechowywane. Część tego dziedzictwa znalazła się poza granicami dzisiejszej Polski, część zaginęła lub uległa zniszczeniu. Te zachowane w polskich zbiorach nie były wcześniej badane, a dają możliwość wzbogacenia rozumienia specyfiki zarówno ormiańskiego dziedzictwa w zakresie kultury piśmienniczej, jak i perspektywy polsko-ormiańskiej więzi kulturowych. Ta luka w badaniach wyznaczyła główny cel niniejszego projektu, którym jest identyfikacja i skatalogowanie ormiańskich starodruków, znajdujących się obecnie w polskich bibliotekach i stanowiących istotny materiał do badań i analiz.

Słowa kluczowe: Ormianie polscy, piśmiennictwo, starodruki, kultura, tożsamość narodowa