A trilingual Armenian pharmaceutical lexicon

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The Armenians, whose written literature begins in 405 AD with the translation of the Bible, were diligent compilers of word lists. With only few exceptions, this occupation began in the Middle Armenian period, following 900 AD. Then the Classical language was becoming distant from the standard speech and dictionaries pertinent to the vocabulary of the earlier texts became of value. Men of compulsive disposition began to collect that vocabulary and arrange those words in alphabetical order. In addition, bi- and trilingual lexicons were formed, as well as lexicons to particular aspects of the Bible. Some of these lexicons were lengthy, taking as many as 150 leaves; others were very short, taking only a single leaf. None of these single lexicons was bound as a separatum: rather, they were bound with many other lexicons and word lists to form separate volumes. And though I know of no single text that was prepared by two separate hands, with great frequency we find a variety of hands for different texts all bound within the same codex.

There have been various studies surveying Middle Armenian lexicography as a whole, and the best of these is by H.M. Amalyan, who wrote Lexicographical Monuments of Medieval Armenia1. This work, in two volumes, carefully surveys and describes all Armenian manuscripts that categorize material alphabetically. The first volume deals with texts from the fifth through the fifteenth century, and the second volume deals with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though Armenian books were printed from type by 15112, the tradition of manuscript continued solidly into the eighteenth century.

The greatest of these medieval lexicons was the Պավարիկ' Հայոց (Bargirk' Hayoc ['Dictionary of Armenian'])3. It has more than ten thousand entries, arranged alphabetically and though including some common words, it for the most part tends to leave out core vocabulary. Part of the material is of non-standard dialect, as revealed by the glosses. For instance, the common word for 'garden' or 'vineyard' is, in the literary language, աղու (aygi), in the Bargirk' Hayoc it is accurately glossed as աղ կամ քայս (igi kam bal ['igi or bal']), bal being Turkish bağ, and igi (for aygi) showing features common to some of the Armenian dialects which bordered on the Azeri speaking area4.

Numerous other word lists have never been published or edited. There is a specialized lexicon to the tenth century poet Narekatsi who used obscure words, frequently hapaxlegomena, lifted from the earliest Classical Armenian texts5; and a lexicon to Vardan, the popular Middle Armenian recorder of fables, whose vocabulary was obscure to many. Other dictionaries serve a religious purpose. There is a catechetical text, very brief, that is frequently included within a lexicographical codex, called Ծանոթ անվանույթ զարմական (Vasn amane hreštakac ['Concerning the names of the angels'])6. And though it is clear that the Hebrew Bible was not consulted when the Armenian Bible was translated7, later a list was made of all the Hebrew proper names in the Bible, accompanied by their translation. This text, called Պառ Առանքեր (Bag Ebravoc'worc ['Vocabulary of the Hebrews'])7, lists Biblical Hebrew proper names in alphabetical order, with a gloss: Adam, էրկիք կամ կուզ (Erkiq: երկիք կամ կուզ ['Adam; earth or virgin'])

There are also bi- and trilingual lexicons. The best known and largest is the Բազերիկ-Հայոց Եթարարան (Turk'eren-Hayeren Bararan, ['Turkish-Armenian lexicon'])8, which records vocabulary from Turkish, with an Armenian gloss. This dictionary is particularly valuable since, from its 2100 words, it often gives vocabulary elsewhere unknown, and reconfirms the extent of Arabic and Persian infiltration into 17th-century Turkish9.

Besides the Armenian-Armenian lexicons, and general lexicons to foreign vocabulary, there are also word lists to specialized vocabulary. The most common of this species are pharmaceutical lexicons and the most famous of these is the so-called 'Galen Dictionary', the Պայր Կանհաճեր, (Bark' Galianos)i, a lexicon that cites plant names, used for pharmaceutical purposes, principally from Galen's Simples10. In addition to the five hundred or so Greek pharmaceutical terms12, written in Armenian script, there are, quite mysteriously, about fifty Arabic terms of the same sort, also written in Armenian script, and so glossed14. The bulk of the material in the dictionary is believed to stem from the sixth century, the 'Hellenizing' period of Armenian literature, when a great number of Greek texts were translated almost literally into Armenian15. The Arabic words, as well as the non-pharmaceutical vocabulary, were added later, a fact determined by variations in spelling and type of vocabulary.

An unedited trilingual pharmaceutical dictionary, which is the principal subject of this paper, exists in


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fourteen manuscript examples held in the Yerevan Matenadaran, and other copies known (but which I have not seen) in the Armenian monastic holdings in Jerusalem, Venice and Vienna. The average size of those manuscripts known to me is 15 x 10 cm; they are written on paper, and bound in leather, frequently with a blind decoration. Some pages are blank, resulting from the fact that the bound volume is an amalgu of various hands, and not written consecutively. This particular word list begins, in each of the fourteen manuscripts that I have seen, with the statement Թուտդ ինման զորություն, դառնում է զանգակատուն և նորակեցման միջոցով. 'Translation of names' of plants, which wise men have chosen and arranged, from other languages into our own.' Following this there are approximately two hundred entries, Arabic or Greek words written in Armenian script, followed immediately by the Armenian gloss. Thus the entries, following the title, appear as blocks of two or three lines: the first being the foreign word, the next its Armenian gloss միրգախուղ։ ազանը, ազադորախուղ։ աչկամանը, զերկածաղը, etc. Prepared in a coherent form the entries would appear as follows:

1. արգել (ahbul = Ar. مَغَلِّي) 'sabin, Juniperus sabina L.' տաճար (crinit: 'fruit of the sabin').

2. արդար (advar = Ar. الْدَّار) 'house, Andropogon Schoenanthus L.' կայան (matamirk 'id.').

3. ազարդրախուղ (azadraxt = Ar. [azadur] ազան) 'type of lilac, Melia Azadiracht L.' թուտդար (jantari 'Oriental plane tree, Platanus orientalis L.' [='ազարդրախուղ] [jantari]).

4. ատրանյան (atranjan = Ar. تَرِكِي) 'lemon-balm, Melissa officinalis L.' տույտ (jagiot 'chick plant').

5. արը (alcohol = Ar. أَلْكُحُول) 'alcohol' կարգավոր (giyo petd 'fruit of the juniper, Juniperus communis L.').

6. արտեմիսիա (altemisia = Gk. ἀρτέμισια 'wormwood') առացի կարգավոր (spitak kndruk 'white frankincense, Boswellia carterii Birdw.').

From this sample it appears that the glossary is a continuation problem with every lexical manuscript, the initial Greek word, or, less frequently, the Armenian word is unclear. In certain instances neither word can be recognized. The same difficulty is apparent in this trilingual pharmaceutical lexicon. And though we can sensibly reconstruct one poorly copied word on the strength of a recognizable other member, there is no hope when both words are badly distorted. But this pharmaceutical lexicon will benefit us, none the less by providing precise glosses for technical words hitherto known inexact, and when fully edited by giving us further insights into the influence of Arab medicine on late medieval Armenian culture.

Notes


3. Both the dialects of Agulis (spoken in Soviet Azerbaijan north of Tabriz) and the dialect of New Julfa (Nor Jula, spoken in Isfahan) show this same reduction of diphthongs. The New Julfa dialect, though now far from the Azeri speaking area, was once spoken in contemporary Julfa, on the border of Soviet Nahchivan and Persian Azerbaijan. The Armenian population there was forcibly moved to Isfahan by Shah Abbas I, in 1604.

4. The most thorough work on early Armenian printed manuscripts, in its printed version, almost 350 pages, and in manuscript, approximately 140 leaves. There are thirteen copies of the manuscript in the Matenadaran, all copied in the seventeenth century.
Bible into their own language, and thus achieve independence.


10 A typical entry would be μακάριος...μακάριος, ὡν ὅρκα (κακάρινα, λαμβαν...κακάρινα, μι λίνα). The two initial words would be glossed as 'anxious,' with reference to Per. ἁμαρτεία, ἁμαρτεία (khatir- ‘mind’), and Per. ἁμαρτεία (moodle ‘remaining’).


13 There also are, bafflingly, names of birds and animals that have nothing to do with pharmaceutical vocabulary; how they came to be added to the lexicon is wholly a mystery. For a discussion see John A. C. Greppin, 'The Armenians and the Greek Geoponica.' Byzantion 57/1, 1987. 46-55.

14 The Arabic words were apparently added later, for their orthography, compared with the earliest Greek entries, has not been particularly corrupted, implying fewer recopyings.

15 Here one thinks of the translations of Philo the Hebrew, and the various Armenian renditions of Plato and Aristotle. The force of Greek was so strong in these translations that even Greek prepositions came over whole into the Armenian texts.
Armenian trilingual pharmaceutical dictionary. MS Yerevan, Matenaderan Nr. 534, ff. 266b-267a

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