



## MATENADARAN LIBRARY

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**MATENADARAN LIBRARY**, a general definition for the manuscript depository, archive, and library of printed books forming the basis of the scientific research institution known as Matenadaran, the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, in Yerevan, Armenia.

The word *matenadaran* stands for “a library” in Grabar (Old Armenian) and is still used in Modern Armenian to refer to the Mekhitarist manuscript depositories (libraries) in Vienna, Venice, and Jerusalem.

The Matenadaran in Yerevan is located in two adjoining buildings. One of them, designed by the Soviet Armenian architect, Mark Grigorian (1900-1987), was constructed in 1945-57 and now houses a museum with 12 exhibition halls. The manuscript depository, the library of printed books, and the archive of documents with the research departments of the Institute are located in a new building designed by Arthur Meschian that has been open to the public since 21 September 2011.

*History.* The first libraries in Armenia appeared immediately after the creation of the Armenian alphabet by [Mesrop Mashtots](#) and the Armenian Catholicos Sahak. The Matenadaran was established on the basis of the original collections of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin (Arm. Ējmiacin; see EJMIATSIN). The first reference to the library of the monastery of Etchmiadzin dates back to the 5th century, when [Łazar P'arpec'i](#), an Armenian historian, mentioned the existence of Greek works kept at Etchmiadzin (p. 196). However, after this single remark there is no mention of the further fate of



this library until the year 1441, when the Mother See of the Catholicoses of All Armenians was reestablished in Etchmiadzin. Since then, there has been no lack of information in Armenian colophons about copying and keeping manuscripts in the library of Etchmiadzin (Xaç'ikyan 1958a, pp. 154, 417; Hakobyan, pp. 93, 139, 179, 210, 279, etc.). Especially in the second half of the 17th century, the Matenadaran of Etchmiadzin was enriched with numerous manuscripts copied there and in other scriptoria and educational centers of Armenia (Xaç'ikyan, 1958b, p. 8). Like other manuscript depositories in Armenia, it was plundered several times and suffered severe losses during the wars between the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Russia.

In 1837, several Armenian clergymen (H. Šahxat'unyan, D. Šahnazaryan, S. Amatuni, G. Hovsep'yan et al.) took the initiative of sorting the manuscripts and printed books by language and subject, preparing catalogues, and enriching the library with collections from other monasteries. In 1913, on the eve of the First World War, the number of manuscripts in the library was 4,060 (Xaç'ikyan, 1958a, pp. 10-11).

The library of Etchmiadzin was nationalized by decree of the Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia issued on 17 December 1920. Later on, manuscripts from the Lazarev Institute in Moscow, the Gevork'yan Academy, and other institutions were added to the collection (Xaç'ikyan, 1958b, p. 11-12). In 1939, the collection was transferred to the Yerevan Public Library. At that time, the total number of the manuscripts was 9,382, of which 9,070 were in Armenian, 304 were in the Arabic script, 7 were in other languages, and 22 were cryptograms. On 3 March 1959, the Council of Ministers of Soviet Armenia established the Matenadaran as an institute of scientific research; it was named after Mesrop Mashtots in 1962 (Zoryan, p. 284).

*Collections of Manuscripts.* Currently, the Matenadaran houses approximately 20,550 manuscripts, of which about 14,800 are in Armenian. The major part of them (10,408 Armenian manuscripts) was studied and catalogued with short descriptions by O. Eganyan, A. Zeyt'unyan, and P. Ant'abyan in two volumes (1965 and 1970). In 1984, the publication of a detailed catalogue of the Armenian manuscripts of the Matenadaran was initiated; it is still in progress. Descriptions of 3,000 manuscripts have been published in nine volumes thus far (*Mayr C'uc'ak hayeren jeřagrac'*). The collection of Arabic-script manuscripts includes works in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. There are also manuscripts or fragments in Greek (Chétanian), Georgian, Ethiopian, Syriac,



Latin (Kiseleva), Tamil, Hebrew (Połosyan), and other languages. Three manuscripts contain texts in Middle Persian and Avestan languages (Kostikyan and Baghi).

*Persian Manuscripts.* The original core of the Persian section together with the Arabic and Turkish manuscripts consisted of 201 items in the 1880s. In 1903, this collection was enriched with 30 manuscripts from Xaç'ik Dadian, an exceptional Armenian clergyman who had acquired those manuscripts in the Armenian villages of the Qarabāg (see QARABAGH) and Iranian Azarbaijan. Another large portion of the manuscripts was collected after the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and brought to Etchmiadzin from devastated Armenian territories. Among them were 35 works written in the Arabic script (Avetisyan, Kostikyan, and Makaryan, 2016, pp. 194-95).

When the Matenadaran opened in 1959 as the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, the collection of Arabic-script manuscripts, like other collections, was enriched by the former holdings of the Myasnikyan State Public Library, the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow, and the Yerevan State University.

A number of donors, among them H. Hazaryan, V. Salat'yan, A. Ayvazyan, V. Samuelyan, H. Edgarian, A. Hovhannisian, M. Minasian, and others, increased and improved the collection from 446 volumes in 1958 (Eganyan, Zeyt'unyan and Ant'abyan, p. 190) to 2,730 at present, out of which 450 contain works in Persian described in the published catalogue (Kostikyan, 2017, p. 7). Persian manuscript fragments (41 items) are stored in a separate collection of Arabic-script manuscript fragments (612 items) (Kirakosyan). The Arabic manuscripts containing the Qur'an are described in a published catalogue (*Catalogue of the Qur'an Manuscripts*, 2016), but the entire collection of Arabic-script manuscripts has no published catalogue yet. Two albums of selected calligraphy specimens and miniature paintings prepared for publication by R. Amirbekyan (2012) and A. Tokatlian (2014) are the highlights of the collection.

Around thirty manuscripts contain chronicles and historical material, such as the *History of Waṣṣāf*, the *Zafar-nāma* of Neẓām-al-Din Šāmi, the *Hašt behešt* of Ḥakim-al-Din Edris Bedlisi, the first five volumes of Mirḳ'ānd's *Rawẓat al-ṣafā*, the first volume of Ḳ'āndamir's *Ḥabib al-siar*, the *Šaraf-nāma* of Šaraf-al-Din Khan Bedlisi, the *Tārīḳ-e 'ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* of Eskandar Beg Torkamān Monši, the *History of Nāder Šāh* by Mirzā Mahdi Khan Astarābādi, the *Tārīḳ-e Danābila* of 'Abd al-Razzāq Beg Donboli, etc. (Kostikyan, 2017, p. 8).



The oldest Persian manuscript at the Matenadaran (no. 561) is a unique 13th-century copy of the first part of Ḥakim Zojjāji's *Homāyun-nāma*, formerly kept at the Lazarev Institute in Moscow. Together with its continuation, stored in the library of Peshawar, the part kept in Matenadaran was published by 'Ali Pirniā (2004-12). Another manuscript of historical significance contains approximately 200 letters and decrees of the khans of Yerevan (Ḥosayn 'Ali, Ḡolām 'Ali, and Moḥammad) compiled in the period between 1764 and 1805 by Mirzā Moḥammad Mosallam, the chief scribe of the chancellery.

Most of the historical, poetic, and medical Persian manuscripts were previously in the possession of Armenians from Tabriz, Isfahan, Yerevan, Salmās, Marand, Ḳoy, Marāḡa, Darband, Baku, Širvān, Astrakhan (Ḥāji Tarḳān), Tbilisi, and St. Petersburg. Many pages of these manuscripts feature notes and commentaries in Armenian and demonstrate the interest of their owners in the history of Iran and its culture. Armenians would not only keep and read such manuscripts but would also bind and copy some of them (Kostikyan, 2017, pp. 7-8).

*Persian documents.* The Persian documents of the Matenadaran (about 2,200 items), dating from 1330 to the beginning of the 20th century, are stored in the archives of the Catholicosate of the Melik'-Šahnazarians (file 241), and of Avo Hovhannisian. The archive of the Catholicosate contains documents (encyclicals, correspondence, deeds of purchase, edicts, orders, etc.) in Armenian and other languages related to the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the activities of Armenian patriarchs and other high-ranking clergymen, which had been collected and stored in the depository of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

The Persian section (files 1a-h, 2a-b, 3, 4, 250) of this collection consists of decrees and orders issued by shahs and local governors, the *šari'a*-notarial documents (*mobāye'a-nāmas*, "deeds of purchase"; *mošāleḡa-nāmas*, "deeds of conveyance"; *ejāra-nāmas*, "leases"; *wašiyat-nāmas* "last testaments"; *waqf-nāmas*, "deeds for pious foundations"; *majleses*, "court examinations and verdicts"; *vekālat-nāmas*, "letters of attorney"; *maḡžars*, "records signed by witnesses"; *tamasoks*, "promissory notes"; *qabžs*, "receipts"; etc.), and correspondence. Documents that were earlier in possession of the Armenian monasteries of Tat'ev, Mułni, St. Thaddeus the Apostle in Mak'u, St. Step'annos at Darashamb, and St. T'ovma in Agulis can also be found in this archive collection.



The Melik'-Šahnazarians' archive contains the Persian documents of the noble Melik' Šahnazarian family of the Gełark'uni region of eastern Armenia acquired for a legal case mounted by Davit' Melik'-Šahnazarian. He was trying to restore his rights to his ancestral estates as Russian rule was being established in the region. The documents attached to this file are Persian decrees confirming the rights of his ancestors on their estates in the Gełark'uni region in the 17th-19th centuries.

Avo Hovhannisian's archive, although not catalogued yet, contains about 200 Persian documents related to the history of the Armenians of Iran and especially New [Julfa](#) in the 18th-19th centuries (Tajeryan et al., 2018, p. 16).

Many Persian documents played an important role in the political and socio-economic life of the Armenian people under foreign rule from the [Il-Khanid](#) period to the 19th century. Therefore, such documents had been carefully kept for centuries and used by Armenian clergymen and noblemen as arguments for protecting their rights and privileges in different governmental and judicial situations. Also, Persian documents that have recorded the relations of the catholicoses and civil leaders with the ruling powers have aroused the interest of Armenian scholars and have been extensively used in studies on the history of the Armenian people since the 18th century.

In the 18th century, Simeon Erevanc'i (1710-80), the catholicos of Etchmiadzin from 1763 to 1780, studied the Persian documents in the library of the Holy See and classified their reports referring to the estates and the rights of the Etchmiadzin Monastery in his book *Ĵambr: hishatakaran Ējmiatsni Surb At'ori ev nra harakits' vank'eri*.

In the 19th century, the study of historical Persian documents was resumed when scholars like S. Jalalyan, M. Smbatyanc', Raffi (Hakob Melik'-Hakobian), K. Ter-Mkrtč'yan, and others widely used them in research and even published some decrees in Armenian translation. Much of the credit for work in this field goes to H. P'ap'azyan. He carried out research on the historical Persian, Ottoman Turkish and Arabic documents of the Matenadaran and published 66 Persian decrees dating from 1449 to 1650 as well as 27 deeds of purchase dating from 1305 to 1592 in three volumes (P'ap'azyan, 1956-59; idem, 1968). The study of the Persian documents has continued into the beginning of the 21st century. Recent publications include 145 Persian decrees from the late [Safavid](#) period and the 18th century, as well as 25 *šari'a*-notarial documents of the 17th-18th centuries (Kostikyan, 2005, 2008; Kostikyan and Xečo, 2018).



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