

**Your Excellencies Ambassadors, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Reverend Fathers,  
Distinguished Mrs. President of the Board of the University of Amsterdam,  
Honoured Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Armenian printing is 500 years old...**

It gives me great pleasure to speak to you this afternoon, and we are here to pay tribute and honour to those who were the initiators of the Armenian book printing, who sacrificed themselves to it, put their energy, intellect, soul and money to make it happen.

The Armenian alphabet was developed in 405 by Saint Mesrop Mashtots, who, using the 36 Armenian letters, in the 5th century translated the Bible into Armenian. The same alphabet, with 3 more letters added to it in the Middle Ages, is still in use today. The following phrase translated from Solomon's Book of Proverbs is the first sentence to be written down in Armenian by Mashtots:

«Ճանաչել զիմաստութիւն եւ զիրատ, իմանալ զբանս հանճարոյ:»

“To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding.”

For many centuries the **Armenian Language, Armenian Church and Armenian Manuscripts** have served as the 3 pillars to protect the nations identity, to spread Wisdom and Instruction.

The Fourth pillar could be ascribed to Printing. Armenians were amongst the first who understood the importance of Johannes Gutenberg's invention movable type of printing. . The first 5 books in the Armenian language were printed in Venice during 1512-1513, and this was done by Hakob Meghapart (Jacob the Sinful).

After 1512, during the following 200 years Armenian printing houses were established in different cities of the world: Venice (1512), Pavia (1539), Constantinople (1567), Rome (1579), Berlin (1583), Lvov (1616), Milan (1621), Paris (1633), Amsterdam (1660), Marcel (1672), Oxford, London (1736), St. Echmiadzin (1771), Madras (1777), St. Petersburg (1781), Calcutta (1796), Tiflis (1823), Shushi(1828), Jerusalem (1833), Beirut, New York (1857), Cairo (1865), Aleppo, Baku (1872), Varna (1884) Tehran (1896), Singapore: this is not a complete list of the places where Armenian books were printed.

Amsterdam has played a significant role in the history of the Armenian book printing. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century an active and large Armenian community was already functioning in Amsterdam, with its church and school. In 1655 Catholicos of all Armenians Hakob Jughayeci, a scholar and a reformer delegated his notary and secretary Mateos Tsareci to Europe to set up Armenian press and to publish the Bible in Armenian. This person is, in fact, the founding father of the first Armenian printing house in Amsterdam. Punchcutter Christoffel van Dijck developed and produced punches and matrices for Armenian letters. The first published book was “Jesus the Son” of Nerses Shnorhali, in 1661. The first Armenian Bible was printed in Amsterdam during the years 1666-1668 by Voskan Yerevanci, who continued Mateos Tsareci's work after his death. With Voskan Yerevanci a new era started for the Armenian book printing. Books were published in thousands of copies (instead of hundreds) and were disseminated in Armenian communities in different parts of the world. Namely, in 1661 “Jesus the Son” was printed in 1200 copies. As for the Bible, its copies, according to the estimations of researchers, reached from 3000 to 5000.

**The mass production of Armenian books was the first significant achievement of Amsterdam printing. The ‘Saint Echmiadzin and Saint Sargis’ printing house, became the place where thousands of books were published, and these large quantities finally alleviated the sharp shortage of Armenian books.**

Voskan Yerevanci’s publishing activities constituted the steadiness and continuity of the Armenian book printing. In Amsterdam Voskan Yerevanci was in touch with the representatives of different nations. He became aware of the special attention paid to the Universities in Amsterdam and realized all the benefits that printing could provide in the education of the Armenian youth. That is why Voskan’s printing house started to publish secular books as well, such as: “The Grammar”, “The Alphabet”, and others. Moreover, his printing house was the first to publish the works of contemporary Armenian authors. So, he introduced a new vision in selecting the subject areas for publishing.

**The second important achievement of Amsterdam printing was that book production in different subject areas triggered the process of mass education of the Armenian youth all over the world.**

Voskan Yerevanci’s traditions were continued and expanded in Amsterdam by Vanandetsiner family (Mateos, Thomas, Ghukas, Michael), who were his students and followers. They opened the second Armenian printing house, which survived for 32 years, and produced a lot of valuable materials. For example, the first Armenian printed map - “The World Map: two hemispheres”, was published in 1695. Vanadeciner started to print books which had scholarly content. Some of those are: “The World Map: two hemispheres”, “The History of Armenia” by Movses Khorenatsi, “A manual on measures, weights, numbers and coins of the whole world” by Ghukas Vanandeci, which was another monumental work published in Amsterdam. It was of great practical importance, particularly for Armenian merchants. In 1711 this printing house published the book “The Treasury of the Aramian Language” by Skroder. This publication is particularly significant and valuable for its grammar of classical Eastern Armenian.

**So, the third important achievement of Amsterdam printing is the publication of scholarly materials in the Armenian language, which connected the Armenian people to the scientific ideas of that time.**

Other printing houses also have operated in Amsterdam, but the brief description of these two is enough to understand the invaluable role of Amsterdam in the formation of the Armenian printing.

The history of the Armenian printing has many glorious pages. Printed books in Armenian are spread in hundreds of libraries and private collections all over the world. For this we should be thankful to all those dedicated persons, who started the book printing in Venice in 1512 and transformed this process into a perfect tool in Amsterdam, which during 500 years has served for the glorious ideas: **Enlighten** and **Educate** for **Wisdom** and **Instruction**.

Honoured Guests,

May I join the participants in congratulating the organisers of the Exhibition ‘The diaspora of the Armenian book: 1512-2012’ for the tremendous amount of work which has gone into the organization of this wonderful event and wish it all success.

**Thank You.**