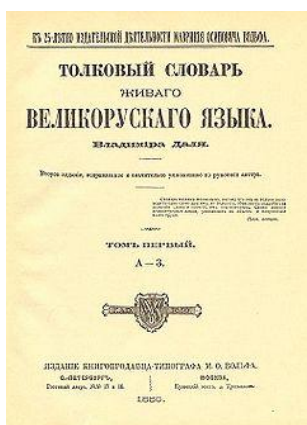




The Great Mission of Abbot Mkhitar

In their history of culture nearly all the peoples of the world have had great individuals who were exceptional in the service of preserving and enriching their native language and thus preserving their own country.

Kirril and Mefodi began that sacred cause for Slavonic people by creating the Slavonic alphabet in the 16th century, and in 1816 Vladimir Dal created the first advanced explanatory dictionary of the Russian language : "**Толковый словарь живого великорусского языка**".

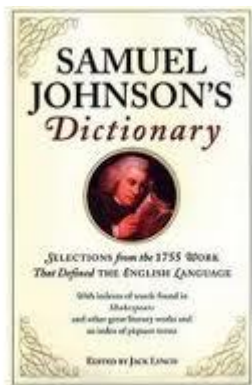


The Grimm brothers started this sacred cause for the German people fagging over the extended dictionary of the German language: "**Deutsches Wörterbuch**", during the years of 1838-1854. They did it with great diligence and the greatest responsibility. Generations of linguists enriched it by working on it for nearly 100 years, and only the edition of 1961 was considered to be complete with its 32 volumes. Now this dictionary includes 67000 columns where 330000 words are explained.



The first explanatory English dictionary was published in 1604, the author of which was Robert Cawdrey. This dictionary had only 2543 words. The first English dictionaries were not extended. Only the words which were not widely used and were complicated for the English people, were included in those dictionaries. Those dictionaries were called “Hard Word Dictionaries”.

The first extended English dictionary, “A Dictionary of the English Language”, was published in 1755. The English people owe to Samuel Johnson for his dictionary. He worked six years on it.



Yes, Samuel Johnson worked very hard for six years, but he had some previously made dictionaries, though with limited number of words: the dictionary by Thomas Elliott – 1538, the dictionary by Richard Mulcaster “The Elementarie” – 1582, the dictionary by Robert Cawdrey “The Table Alphabetical” – 1604. Taking into account what help Samuel Johnson had with these sources we can imagine the great work done by Abbot Mkhitar on St Lazar Island during 25 years (1724-1749) compiling his two-volume dictionary “Բարձրիք Հայկազգեսն Լեզունի” which had nearly 100000 words having not any Armenian previously published dictionary, not even any wordlist of the Armenian language. There was only Aristakes Grich's handwritten spelling (orthographical) dictionary with limited words, which couldn't be of any help to Mkhitar Sebastatsi. His ambitions were great. He wanted to create a dictionary which would meet the European best standards of his time. What a high flight from such a low starting position! Great Armenians resemble Mount Ararat rising abruptly up to 5000m from the lowland of Ararat Valley. Like other European peoples Armenians also could use the readymade Latin alphabet with some alterations, couldn't they? No, they couldn't as we needed a high flight; we needed our own face and soul, we wanted our each sound to have its corresponding letter without any special distinguishing signs, we needed a St Mesrop Mashtots in the 5th century.

The second important characteristic feature of great Armenian individualities is that they turn to the Armenian Language for help whenever there is a real danger of assimilation with other nations. St Mesrop Mashtots saved Armenians from assimilation with Persians, Greeks and Assyrians by creating the Armenian alphabet, translating the Holy Bible into Armenian and by opening the first Armenian schools in different Armenian residential areas.

In the XVIII century most Armenians in western Armenia had a Turkish mode of everyday life. The names of surrounding objects were more easily uttered in Turkish than in Armenian. There was a tremendous wedge thrust in the Armenian language in the Armenian soul, and at that time there came Mkhitar Sebastatsi's turn in the relay race of great Armenians: Mesrop Mashtots, Davit Anhaght, Anania Shirakatsi, Grigor Narekatsi, Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni, Nerses Shnorhali, Mkhitar Gosh and Hakob Meghapat. He took out that tremendous language wedge by using our mother tongue as a counter wedge. During his life time he published 50 Armenian books and he was the author of 14 Armenian books. Here is what Sahak Chemchemyan writes in the introductory part of his book Abbot Mkhitar's Publishing Mission : *Ու կը տեսնենք զինքը խոնարհած հայ մանուկին առջեւ, տալու անոր Արբենարանն ու Քրիստոնէականը , պատանիին դիմաց՝ տրվեցնելու Քերականն ու Զարգացելոցը , չափահասին՝ բացատրելու Մոլութիւններէ հրաժարիլն ու Առաքիւնութիւններու հետեւիլը, կու տայ ամէնուն Աստուծոյ Շունչը տպագիր, բացատրելով ամէնուն ու Մեկնելով նոյն Գիրքին մեջ պարունակուած երկնային իմաստները, կը հրահրէ ամենքը իջնել Պարտեզ հոգեւոր եւ կամ Բուրաստան, Խոկալու հասար հոն՝ Քրիստոնէական վարդապետութիւնը, թոյլ տալով մանուկներուն որ Խաղի տետրը առած՝ պօտիին ու գուարճանան կրկնելով հաւատքի մասերը. Կընծայե հուսկ հայ գիտունին՝ բոլոր գանձերը Հայկազեան բառարանին>>*

Բառգիրք Հայկազեան Լեզուի



In his above mentioned book Sahak Chemchemyan tries to describe in detail the three stages of Mkhitar Sebastatsi's creative work while compiling the first Armenian dictionary.

a) **The initial stage:** at this stage he only gave the explanations of nouns that came across in the Holy Bible.

b) **The word-stock of the ancestors' books**: at this working stage Mkhitar copied out the words that came across in the books by Khorenatsi, Narekatsi, Labronatsi, Davit Anhaght, Grigor Artsruni, Voskeberan, Agatangeghos and other historians, writers and chronologists.

c) **The word-stock of the Holy Bible** : at this final stage Mkhitar copied out all the words of the Holy Bible with explanations and quotations taken from the Bible.

Mkhitar Sebastatsi also used the multi-language Bible written in 7 languages. In this way he could compare Armenian words with the same words in different languages.

It's a great pity that Mkhitar Sebastatsi didn't see his dictionary already published. He died only three weeks before the first Armenian dictionary was published, on the 27th of April, 1749. The second volume of the dictionary was published in 1769. It was a bilingual dictionary: *old written Armenian (grabar-գրաբար) –living spoken Armenian* and *living spoken Armenian-old written Armenian (grabar)*. It had been Abbot Mkhitar's longed for dream.

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