

KHODORCHUR: LOST PARADISE

MEMORIES OF A LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Fr. Harutiun Hulunian
and Fr. Madtéos Hajian

Translated by Vatche Ghazarian
Edited by Aram Arkun and Victoria Rowe
Foreword by Hovann H. Simonian

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*Memories of a Land
and Its People*

**Fr. Harutiun Hulunian
and Fr. Madtéos Hajian**

Translated from the Armenian
by Vatche Ghazarian

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New Material by
Vartan Gianighian, Hagop Hachikian and Bert Vaux

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the General Abbot of Mekhitarist Congregation of Vienna, whose
encouragement made the original Armenian publication possible.

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Front cover image is of Matilda, daughter of Vartan of the Uzunians of Sunints, attired for a Khodorchur dance group preformance. Tiflis circa 1925.

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Thanks go to the Mekhitarists in Vienna, Abbot Paul Kodjanian for his advocacy, and Fr. Narek Dadourian for locating and scanning original photographs from the monastery archives. Fr. Raphael Andonian greatly facilitated this communication effort. Throughout the project, Marc Mamigonian, of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, helped with contact information, as did Cathy Minassian. For the use of specific maps, much appreciation is extended to Rouben Galichian, Robert H. Hewsen, and Arakel Almasian. Melik Baghdasaryan, Armen Gevorgyan, and Ashot Vardapetyan forwarded old photographs. Others who offered help and encouragement were: Gary Lind-Sinanian and Howayda Abu Affan of the Armenian Library and Museum of America, Ara Ghazarians of the Armenian Cultural Foundation, Alisa Adamian of the Armenian National Library (Yerevan), Ella Keshishian, sisters Sonia Yergatian and Tania Machikhelian, Mary Habosian, Karen (Ken) Uzunian, Jasmine Dum-Tragut, Olga Pelensky, Shushan Teager, and Janet Cook. And major thanks to Marsbed Hablanian who conceived of this translation in memory of his father and grandparents, and his brother Goriun.

Gina Ann Hablanian
Managing Editor

TRANSLATION NOTES

Khodorchur: Lost Paradise, Memories of a Land and its People describes the geography, customs, culture, and history of a cluster of Armenian villages south of the Pontus Mountains. The current Turkish name for this highland area is Sirakonaklar (row of mansions); the closest major cities to it are Rize and Trabzon on the Black Sea, and Ispir and Erzurum inland. On a clear day, one can see both the Black Sea and Mount Ararat from atop Kachkar, the highest peak located in the region.

Based on decades of data gathered by two native sons of the region, both clergymen, the book chronicles Khodorchur and its people in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The tragic history of the population ends with the genocide of the Armenians during World War I.

To date, this book is the most extensive coverage of Khodorchur in existence. As this area is generally not well known or documented, the current translation is a valuable addition to the knowledge base of Armenian populations in Eastern Anatolia. This edition takes on further significance with recent studies of the Muslim descendants of Armenians of Hamshen, who lived immediately north of Khodorchur and spoke a closely related dialect.

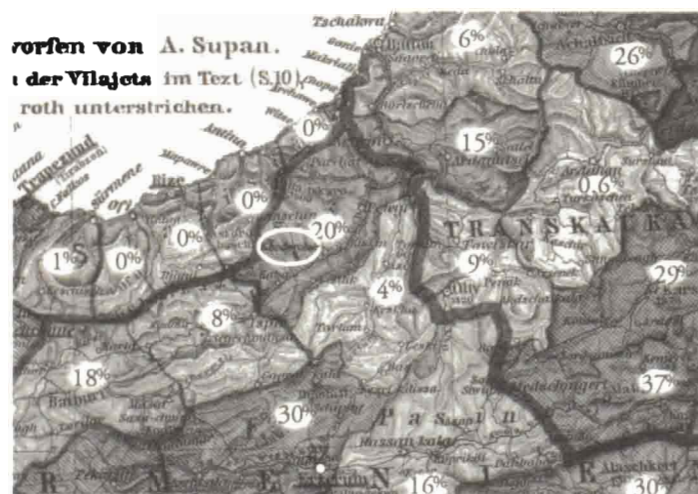
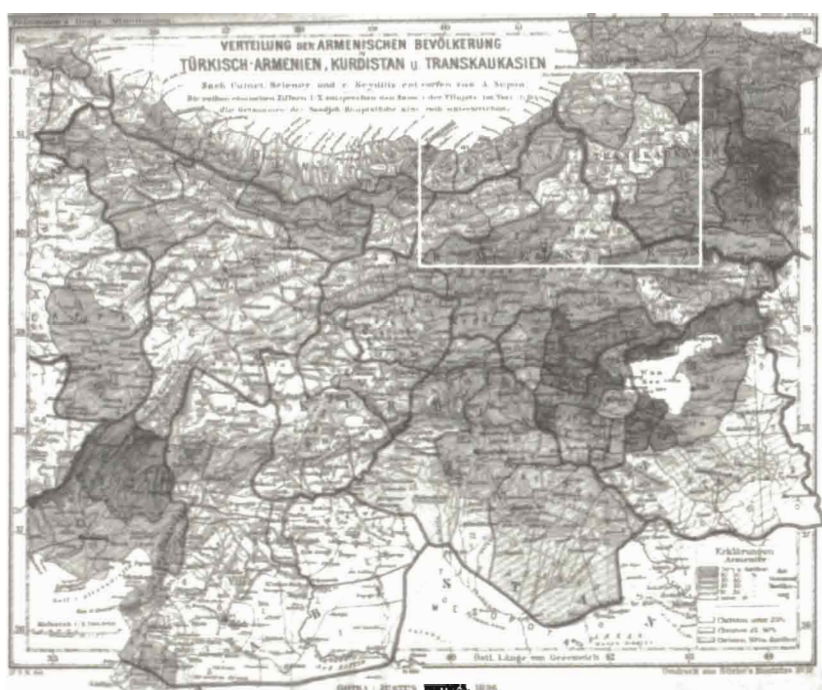
This English edition is a direct translation of the Armenian original. It also includes a new explanatory foreword, new maps and photographs, an updated analysis of the dialect, as well as a chapter on recent travel to the area.

In addition, the text provides updated and relevant information via annotated footnotes. To aid readers, certain contemporary Turkish place names are inserted after their original Armenian ones, where appropriate; and a brief index concludes the enhancements. With the exception of three chapters, the transliteration used is a simplified version of the system developed by the Library of Congress for Western Armenian, omitting certain diacritical marks. Chapters 44 and 45 use the standard Library of Congress system for Western Armenian, while Chapter 46 uses the International Phonetic Alphabet in the text along

with the Eastern Armenian version of the Library of Congress system for its bibliography. Names and toponyms with previously extant versions or transliterations in English have been used when suitable instead of their transliterated Library of Congress equivalents for this volume.

Note that the original title of the Armenian book, published in Vienna in 1964 by the Mekhitarist (Mechitarist) Press, reads in English translation, "Memorial Album of Khodorchur," a *hushamadean*. The English edition includes "Lost Paradise" -- *paradise* was a term often used by the survivors to describe their mountainous homeland with its hills, valleys, streams, and joyful people.

G. A. H



FOREWORD

The various ethnographic maps of Asia Minor and the Caucasus produced during the latter decades of the nineteenth century all displayed the same configuration. Imagining the region as a circle whose center would be the point where the borders of Iraq, Iran and Turkey meet, with a radius extending some six hundred kilometers, starting from the point on the circle where the modern city of Malatya is located and covering the region in a clockwise movement, one would see the following pattern in the distribution of the Armenian population. Darker or stronger tones in the colors attributed to Armenians on these maps attested to a higher percentage of Armenians – slightly less than a majority according to some of the maps, a clear majority according to others – in the regions around Mush and Lake Van, in the historic Armenian provinces of Duruperan and Vasburagan. These colors became gradually lighter, thus showing a lower percentage of Armenians in the large region running from north of the basin of Lake Van up to the Russian border and even beyond that border, including districts such as Khnus, Bayazit, Alashkert, Karin (Erzerum), Sber (İspir), Papert (Bayburt) or Tortum, as well as the northern (Ardahan, Digor) and western (Olti) parts of the Russian province of Kars. It was only from the southern and eastern districts of Kars on, and extending into the Russian provinces of Yerevan and Tiflis, that the colors representing Armenians recovered a stronger tone, reflecting the Armenian majority in these regions.

The presence of this belt of land with a relatively low percentage of Armenians was primarily a consequence of the large-scale Armenian migration out of this region and into territories newly conquered by Russia following the Russo-Turkish War in 1828-29. A concomitant explanation is the Islamicization process that had affected the region in preceding centuries, in particular the districts located to the north and east of Erzerum, i.e., the Armenian historical province of Dayk and the neighboring canton of Sber. Yet, within this belt marked by light tones, ethnographic maps showed one district where the color attributed to Armenians retained its vigor. That was the district of Gisgim (Kiskim), located to the northwest of the province of Erzerum, immediately to the south of the Pontic Alps, which separate the Armenian Plateau from the

Black Sea region. Much like the rest of Dayk to which it belonged, the territory of the Gisgim district was largely devoid of Armenians as a consequence of forcible Islamicization. Yet, some thirty to forty percent of the population of the district was composed of Armenians, most of whom inhabited the valley of Khodorchur and the smaller neighboring valley of Mokhrigud, in the westernmost part of Gisgim.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Khodorchur thus stood as a small, yet precious relic of the large Armenian population once inhabiting the broader region. It was surrounded by districts in which the Armenian population had been starkly reduced as a consequence of outmigration, by other districts that had seen their Armenian population dwindle or disappear altogether as a result of conversion to Islam, and by a third category of territories that had been affected by both migration and conversion. The small valleys of Khodorchur and Mokhrigud constituted the last remnants of the historic Armenian province of Dayk, home in medieval times to such prestigious dynasties as the Mamigonian and the Pakraduni.

What could explain the survival of Khodorchur? How did Khodorchur Armenians avoid Islamicization? Why didn't they move to the Russian Empire after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29? One could pertinently surmise that the persistence of Khodorchur Armenians in the Christian faith was linked to their belonging to the Catholic Church. For, aside from being virtually the last Christians of the region, the inhabitants of Khodorchur had one more peculiarity, as all of them, unlike the majority of Armenians who belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church, were Catholics. It was probably by becoming Catholic during the seventeenth century, and thus acquiring the status of *Frengi* (or *Fi-rengi*, i.e. Frank) with the concomitant protection it implied under the wing of Catholic powers such as France, that the Armenians of Khodorchur and those of a few villages of Gisgim and Tortum had avoided forced conversion to Islam.

Why Khodorchur inhabitants chose to remain in their homeland rather than migrate to Russia after the 1828-29 Russo-Turkish War is probably a more difficult question to answer. Again the Catholicism of the population could be invoked as an explanatory factor, as perhaps Catholic Armenians had no desire to find themselves under the rule of Orthodox Russia. That argument, however, does not hold, as many Armenian Catholic villagers from the region of Karin (Erzerum) moved to Russia. Perhaps the answer to that question could be found in the strong community spirit and solidarity existing in Khodorchur, and the fear of seeing the community dislocated and solidarity lost, were the homeland to be abandoned.

It is indeed through their high level of community spirit and the accom-

panying solidarity that Khodorchur inhabitants were the most remarkable. The pride and admiration of the authors of the *Hushamadean* with regards to these qualities of their compatriots are displayed in the somewhat idealized sentence at the beginning of the section on social relations and societal life: “The words *mine* and *yours* seemed to have not existed in Khodorchur. Everybody lived as good neighbor and in fraternal harmony.” The renown of Khodorchur Armenians extended well beyond the frontiers of their native region. In a conference given in March 1879 at the Association of Artisans of Tiflis, Krikor Ardzruni, the famous editor of the newspaper *Mshak*, described Khodorchur as a “small republic” and lauded its affluence and social spirit. Similarly, Khodorchur inhabitants had not gone unnoticed to Frenchman Vital Cuinet, author of a monumental multi-volume work on Asiatic Turkey, who underlined and praised their amenity and simplicity of manners.

The affluence possessed by Khodorchur Armenians, as mentioned by Ardzruni, was all the more remarkable given the original poverty of the region. The district, with a soil rocky in some areas and composed of marshes in others, lacked sizable expanses of arable land, so that local agricultural production satisfied only half of the population’s food consumption. Khodorchur inhabitants compensated for the lack of fertility of their homeland through labor migration; they sent most of their men to Erzerum, Trebizond, Istanbul and, from the middle of the nineteenth century on, to Russia. With the money earned abroad, Khodorchur Armenians built beautiful mansions, which inspired the modern name of the area, Sirakonak, or Sirakonaklar (i.e., “row of mansions”). This prosperity also benefitted the port of Rize and the rural districts neighboring Khodorchur, from Hemshin to Ispir and Tortum, for which the Armenian-Catholic enclave constituted a market for their agricultural production. Many men from neighboring districts also came to Khodorchur to work as farm and construction laborers. To this day, almost a century after their disappearance, Khodorchur Armenians remain an object of admiration in the eyes of their Muslim neighbors.

Aside from farm workers, the wealth acquired by the men of Khodorchur in Russia unfortunately attracted another category of Laz or Turks from neighboring districts, namely bandits, who targeted the population of Khodorchur in the second half of the nineteenth century. One such individual was Dursun Toyloghli (Tüylüoğlu in modern Turkish orthography) from Bash Hemshin, who terrorized Khodorchur from the late 1870s on. Not satisfied with occasional plunder and violence, he decided in 1886 to make his status permanent by having the population acknowledge him as their bey and pay him the corresponding feudal dues. Khodorchur was saved from this scourge only thanks

to the courage and sharpshooting of one of its sons, Kerovpé Vosgian, a young man from Khodorchur working as a baker in Tiflis. Kerovpé, having heard of Toyloghli's exactions, decided to return to his homeland to rid it of the bandit's presence. Confronting the criminal and his band alone, Kerovpé managed to kill Toyloghli and several of his accomplices before being fatally wounded by the shots he received in return. In 1890, much havoc was caused following an attack by Laz robbers, who came from the other side of the Barkhar (now Barhal) mountains. After two decades of relative calm, a new wave of attacks took place in 1911-12, in which bandits from Hemshin – hence, converted Armenians – played a prominent role.

As for thousands of Armenian communities throughout the Ottoman Empire, World War I and the ensuing genocide sounded the death knell for Khodorchur and its inhabitants. In the summer of 1914, warning came to Khodorchur Armenians from one of their trusted Muslim friends, Abdullah Efendi from Hemshin. Abdullah Efendi warned Khodorchur inhabitants of impending government plans to harm Armenians and urged them to leave for Russia. Unfortunately, his advice was not heeded. The sheer horror which befell Khodorchur Armenians is described in detail in the *Hushamadean* and does not need to be repeated in this preface. Suffice it to say that the quasi-totality of the population of Khodorchur was killed during the Genocide, with barely a few dozen individuals managing to survive. The property of Khodorchur Armenians deported in 1915 went to neighboring Muslims, some of whom resettled in Khodorchur. Indeed, developments in Hemshin during World War I confirmed trends set in earlier decades, with the deportation of Khodorchur Armenians providing a renewed opportunity for a number of Muslim neighbors – Turks, Laz or converted Armenians – to attack and rob their Armenian neighbors and take over their property.

The final page of Armenian Khodorchur history took place in the early months of 1916, when Khodorchur was occupied by Russian troops, encouraging a few survivors, as well as Khodorchur Armenian expatriates to return home. In January 1918, in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the Russian army, these few survivors and returnees found themselves attacked by Muslim mobs. Taking refuge in the medieval fortress of Mokhrigud, Khodorchur Armenians offered a four-month long courageous and stubborn resistance, in spite of being numerically overwhelmed and outgunned, thus writing with that act of heroism the final page of their history.

While many youth from Khodorchur headed east to Russia in search of work, a few of their compatriots went westwards, to Venice or Vienna, to enroll in the seminaries of the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarist congregation, join-

ing the Mekhitarist congregation after graduation and ordination. The Vienna branch of the Mekhitarist congregation attracted Khodorchur students more than the Venice branch, making the Vienna Mekhitarist monastery a focal point for clerics from Khodorchur. A number of Khodorchur natives who became members of the Mekhitarist congregation, such as Fathers Hagovpos Dashian and Hamazasb Vosgian, distinguished themselves by the brilliant scholarship they produced. Another Khodorchur son, Monsignor Mesrob Habozian, became Abbot General of the Vienna branch of the Mekhitarist congregation and reached the rank of archbishop.

One characteristic of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide during their decades in exile was the publication of books about their towns or regions of origin. By doing so, they intended to preserve the memory of the latter from complete forgetfulness, which would inevitably reign after the last survivors who remembered life in the homeland had passed away. Authors of these volumes and the compatriotic associations which often supported them hoped that the memory of their villages of origin would not die if they were inscribed in the pages of the books which they hence aptly titled *hushamadean* (memorial in Armenian) books.

With a few exceptions, such as Arshag Alboyadjian, the authors of memorial books were often amateur scholars, something which was reflected in the works they produced. In the case of Khodorchur, however, the presence of clerics from Khodorchur origin in Vienna meant that there was an available pool of accomplished, professional scholars who could produce a *hushamadean* volume on Khodorchur of high standard when the time would come. And indeed, this is what happened; Father Harutiun Hulunian undertook the completion of the memorial volume on Khodorchur, using in part material prepared by another Mekhitarist Father, Madtéos Hadjian, who was martyred in 1915, and by other Mekhitarist fathers who were natives of Khodorchur.

It is primarily the translation of this memorial book on Khodorchur, published in Vienna in 1964, which is being presented in this volume. This translation is itself the brainchild of the love and dedication of a sister and brother, Gina and Marsbed Hablanian, for the lost homeland of their parents. It was an honor and a pleasure for me to be invited by them to author this preface.

Hovann Simonian
Lausanne, 2012

PREFACE

This publication is comprised of the writings on Khodorchur of two fathers of the Mekhitarist Order—Rev. Fr. Harutiun Hulanian and Rev. Fr. Madtéos Hajian—who were natives of the region.

Fr. Hulanian focused on the topography, customs, and history of the region when he began writing in 1908. The reverend father had been granted an opportunity to revisit his birthplace in 1913. At that time he was able to traverse the mountains and valleys and examine the churches and shrines of Khodorchur from a new perspective. He communicated with local inhabitants, and saw and heard many interesting and unique sights and stories. He then corrected, expanded, and enriched the first draft of his work, which he had brought with him. Perhaps in order to be understood clearly by the inhabitants, he wrote in a simple style and language. Therefore, his style, which we have chosen to preserve here, relies on present-tense storytelling and description.

He took his work on the region with him, always refining it, both when he went to Gherla [today in Romania] for a new assignment, and then later when he came to Vienna. The genocidal events of 1915 compelled him to add a new, sad chapter on Khodorchur's deportation. In order to gather additional information on those bloody and heartbreaking events, he engaged in frequent correspondence with compatriots who resided in Russia, particularly those who had witnessed and survived the deportation. Based on these accounts he added two more chapters; The Inhabitants of Khodorchur in the Spring of 1915, and Khodorchur's Clans. In the latter, he listed the first and last names of the members of each family (husband, wife, and children, with their ages in 1918, and whether or not they had been deported). As an addendum, he inserted a few poems written by Khodorchur natives, most of which relate to the "Medz Yeghern" [literally, the Great Crime, a term which refers to the Armenian Genocide]. He also prepared the Expanded Dictionary of Khodorchur's Dialect, using Fr. Hajian's dictionary and writings as sources.

Before Fr. Hulanian began writing his work on Khodorchur, Fr. Madtéos Hajian, who had been dispatched to his birthplace in 1899, and where he remained for a number of years, had published a number of works on the district. These works are: *Yerker, aragner, hanelugner, terahawadutiwnner Khodorchroy* [Songs, Fables, Riddles, and Superstitions of Khodorchur] (Tiflis, 1904); *Hin*

awantagan hékeatner Khodorchroy [Ancient Traditional Tales of Khodorchur] (Vienna, 1907), and *Dagharan hokewor Khodorchroy zhoghovrt. chermerantagan yerkeru* [The Religious Songbook of Khodorchur's Popular Spiritual Songs] (Vienna, 1908). He also prepared *Hamarod keraganutiwn yew parakirk Khodorchuri kawaraparpari* [A Brief Grammar and Dictionary of Khodorchur's Dialect], which Rev. Fr. Hagopos Dashian intended to publish, along with supplements and a study. However, Fr. Hajian was deported and martyred before this work could be published, and Fr. Dashian was unable to complete this work due to ill health. Therefore, in order to make this work available, we have included it here.

The photos of places reproduced in this book were taken by Fr. Dashian in 1912. The photographs of individuals were gathered subsequently by Fr. Hulunian and others interested in the project.

In the course of printing this book, we chose to abridge Fr. Hulunian's text, leaving out the list of clans, the new poems, and the expanded dictionary. We have introduced a few additions, and altered the language and style slightly. As for Fr. Hajian's abridged dictionary, we have introduced some additional words gathered from various sources.

The printing of this book was almost completed when we received from Rev. Fr. Krikor Gergerian a copy of the document entitled "Report on the Region of Khodorchur, prepared by the Dayk Union's Committee on the Search for Refugees." The original is deposited in the Armenian General Benevolent Union's Nubarian Library in Paris. We have added Fr. Gergerian's report as an addendum and we wish to extend our gratitude to him, and to the librarian, A.[rmenag] Salmasian [sic—Salmaslian], who kindly compared the copy with the original text. We feel compelled to mention that the lists of deportees compiled by Fr. Hulunian deviated in some instances from the report, due to differences in the accounts of correspondents and witnesses.

It was the ardent wish of the deceased fathers to see this work published during their lifetimes. Many Khodorchur natives wished the same. Circumstances, however, were not favorable. May this memorial to Khodorchur, the cradle and final resting place of our ancestors, located between seven mountains, forge the will of the Khodorchur people to lead the new generation toward a bright future... This is the bequest of the martyred people.

Fr. Hamazasb Vosgian
Vienna, 1964

TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

| <i>Vernacular</i> | <i>Romanization</i> | <i>Vernacular</i> | <i>Romanization</i> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Upper case letters</i> | | <i>Lower case letters</i> | |
| Ա | A | ա | a |
| Բ | B [P] (see Note 1) | բ | b [p] (see Note 1) |
| Գ | G [K] (see Note 1) | գ | g [k] (see Note 1) |
| Դ | D [T] (see Note 1) | դ | d [t] (see Note 1) |
| Ե | E | ե | e |
| Զ | { Y (see Note 2) | զ | { y (see Note 2) |
| Ը | Z | զ | z |
| Թ | Է | ե | ē |
| Ժ | Ը | ը | ē |
| Ի | Թ | թ | t' |
| Լ | Zh (see Note 3) | ժ | zh (see Note 3) |
| Խ | Լ | խ | i |
| Ծ | L | լ | l |
| Կ | Kh | կ | kh |
| Դ | Ts [Dz] (see Notes 1, 3) | ծ | ts [dz] (see Notes 1, 3) |
| Զ | K [G] (see Note 1) | կ | k [g] (see Note 1) |
| Ը | H | հ | h |
| Թ | Dz [Ts] (see Notes 1, 3) | ծ | dz [ts] (see Notes 1, 3) |
| Ժ | Gh (see Note 3) | ղ | gh (see Note 3) |
| Ի | Ch [J] (see Note 1) | ճ | ch [j] (see Note 1) |
| Լ | M | մ | m |
| Խ | Y | յ | y |
| Ծ | { H (see Note 4) | ժ | { h (see Note 4) |
| Կ | N | կ | n |
| Ը | Sh (see Note 3) | ժ | sh (see Note 3) |
| Թ | O | ո | o |
| Ժ | Ch' | չ | ch' |
| Ի | P [B] (see Note 1) | պ | p [b] (see Note 1) |
| Լ | J [Ch] (see Note 1) | ջ | j [ch] (see Note 1) |

| | | | |
|----|--------------------|----|--------------------|
| Ռ | Ṙ | ռ | ṛ |
| Ս | S | ս | s |
| Վ | V | վ | v |
| Տ | T [D] (see Note 1) | տ | t [d] (see Note 1) |
| Ր | R | ր | r |
| Ց | Ts' | ց | ts' |
| Խ | W | ւ | w |
| Ու | U | ու | u |
| Փ | P' | փ | p' |
| Ք | K' | ք | k' |
| Էւ | Ew (see Note 5) | ևւ | ew (see Note 5) |
| Էվ | Ev (see Note 6) | ևվ | ev (see Note 6) |
| Օ | Ö | օ | ö |
| Ֆ | F | ֆ | f |

Notes

1. The table is based on the phonetic values of Classical and East Armenian. The variant phonetic values of West Armenian are included in brackets but are intended solely for use in preparing references from West Armenian forms of name when this may be desirable.
2. This value is used only when the letter is in initial position of a name and followed by a vowel, in Classical orthography.
3. The soft sign (prime) is placed between the two letters representing two different sounds when the combination might otherwise be read as a digraph (e.g., Ղզնունի *D'znun*).
4. This value is used only when the letter is in initial position of a word or of a stem in a compound, in Classical orthography.
5. Romanization for letters in Classical orthography, sometimes appears as և.
6. Romanization for letters in Reformed orthography, sometimes appears as և.

Modifications

The Western Armenian variants were used in the standard Library of Congress table presented above. The primary modifications to this system introduced in this volume include removing the diacritical marks for the transliterations of the following Armenian letters: Ղ Ձ Ռ Փ Ք Օ; substitution of Ė for Ê; substitution of Vo for Ո when at the start of a word or syllable; addition of a secondary transliteration to Խ of 'u'; and addition of a secondary transliteration to Ու of 'v'.