

THE ARMENIAN NEUME SYSTEM OF NOTATION

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ROBERT AT'AYAN

Translation & Introduction by

V. N. NERSESSIAN

Յարեւելեան Գի : Յարեւելեան Գի :

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Robert At'ayan

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ղատեաց զազգս մարդկան մահ

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230 ըչյ

*From Grigor Gapasak'alian, 'Grk'oyk or kochi Nuagaran'
(Constantinople, 1794, pp. 230-231)*

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Phonetic transcription of the Armenian alphabet
used in the English translations

Աւ	a	ԅյ	y, h
Բբ	b	Նն	n
Գգ	g	Շշ	sh
Դդ	d	Ոո	o, vo
Եե	e, ye	Ճճ	ch'
Զզ	z	Պպ	p
Էէ	e, ē	Ջջ	j
Ըը	ə	Ռր	r
Թթ	t'	Սս	s
Ժժ	zh	Վվ	v
Իի	i	Տտ	t
Լլ	l	Րր	r
Խխ	kh	Ցց	ts'
Մմ	ts	Խւ	w, v
Կկ	k	Փփ	p'
Հհ	h	Քք	k'
Ձձ	dz	Օօ	ō
Ղղ	gh	Ֆֆ	f
Ջճ	ch	Ու	ou, v
Մմ	m	և	ew, ev, yev

ROBERT AT'AYAN

Robert Arshaki At'ayan was born in Tehran in 1915, son of the writer and translator Arshak Gevorg At'ayan (1877-1938). His family emigrated to Armenia in 1922. During the Stalin era of repressions, his father was wrongfully tried and executed in 1938, and was exonerated posthumously in 1955.

Young Robert studied music at the Erevan Conservatory. He graduated in 1941 and began teaching in the same institution from 1944. In 1962 he became director of the institute and professor in 1977. His doctoral research on Armenian khaz notation, prepared under the supervision of Professor K'. K'oushnaryan, was published in 1959.

His publications include *A Manual of Armenian Notation* (1950), *Armenian Khaz Notation* (1959), and *The Collected Works of Komitas* (vols 1-6; 1960-88). He also authored numerous articles, a selection of which (written in German) were included in *Essays on Armenian Music* (London, 1978), as well as several entries in the sixth edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

A composer in his own right, Robert wrote several pieces for chamber and other instrumental music.

He died on March 4th, 1994.

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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

This book is an investigation of the Armenian khaz notation system. The scope of the research is not to solve all the problems related to the khaz system but to communicate the fruits of research on the main historical and theoretical aspects of the system based on original sources.

The origins and development of the system are outlined in the context of the history of Armenian sacred and secular musical traditions. The Mashtots' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) in Erevan has more than 1,000 complete musical manuscripts, numerous fragments and other original sources with musical contents which furnish valuable information on early and medieval Armenian music. The preliminary research conducted on varied sources, in particular the *Sharaknots'*, *Khazgirk'*, *Ch'ashots'*, *Gandzaran* and *Tagharan* (Hymnals, Khaz-Books, Lectionary, Canticles and Chants), has allowed the author to form a general picture of the development of the khaz system, while a number of important manuscripts were identified and made the focus of study. A number of Georgian manuscripts in the State National Museum of Georgia were also consulted for comparative analysis.

The musicological studies of western scholars have been considered in detail and re-evaluated. In reassessing their findings, a number of their hypotheses have been questioned and rejected, such as the view that Armenian notation used in the 12th century was borrowed from other medieval notation systems. The author also rejects the observations of western scholars on the intonation value of the khaz signs.

From among Armenian scholars, Robert At'ayan analyses the research of Eghia Tntesian and Komitas on whose work he relies heavily. Tntesian's monograph (1834-81) *Nkaragir ergots'* *Hayastaneayts's* (*The nature of Armenian songs*) and Komitas' (1869-

1935) *Hay ekeghets'akan erazhshtout'youn* (Armenian church music) and his other studies are comprehensively evaluated. Special attention is given to a letter written by Komitas to the editor of the journal *Tach'ar*, published under the title 'Sharakani khazeri nshanakout'younə' ('The meanings of the Sharakan khazes').

With the exception of the above authors, At'ayan confines himself to original research. In discovering new manuscript sources in the holdings of the Matenadaran, illuminating not only their general but also musical paleographic features, he constructs a fresh interpretation of the history of khazes and their characteristic features. Through discovering and establishing the connection of these notated songs with the orally transmitted versions as recorded by N. T'ashch'ian in the last century, he establishes the principles of the system. Furthermore, At'ayan goes on to prove beyond doubt that the Armenian khaz system was employed in the Middle Ages not only for sacred but also secular music.

The bulk of the research was carried out in 1948. In 1954, At'ayan defended his thesis at the Armenian Academy of Sciences for candidature. On that occasion a summary of his research was published in Russian and, in 1959, the same work with slight alterations was published in Erevan under the editorship of the late Academician Professor L. S. Khachikyan. In view of the extremely scarce amount of information and research on Armenian khaz notation system in musicological circles, At'ayan was only too happy to respond to a request from the newly founded Institute of Armenian Music in London and agreed for his work to be translated into English.

For this English version, minor editorial changes have been made. After chapter 4, the section dealing with the works of Sp. Melik'yan and two other Soviet Armenian authors — H. Hovhannisyan and V. Samvelyan — have been excluded. At'ayan's own intention to add to this study his article on 'Grigor Gapasak'alyan ev khazagrout'younə' ('Grigor Gapasak'alian and khaz notation') has not been considered necessary since the study was published separately in the journal *Banber Matenadarani* 5 (1960). Since the publication of this monograph, another Armenian musicologist, N. T'ahmizyan, has published substantial research on the subject of khazes. In all his studies T'ahmizyan follows the

PREFACE

guidelines that At'ayan laid down, and his articles are listed in the bibliography, readily available for readers to consult.

The author of this book demonstrates throughout his conviction that the illumination of the many aspects of ancient Armenian music (such as the subject of khazes) has special bearing on the wider research carried out on medieval music of the Christian Middle East and of Christian music in the Early and Middle Periods.

In the previously published volume *Essays on Armenian Music*, three articles by At'ayan in German were included. Two of these — 'Professional Armenian vocal music' and 'Polyphonic elements in Armenian folk music' — have been added here in their English translation.

The notes have been edited to cover research since the publication of the work in 1959. The bibliography is restricted to works mentioned in the notes. For completeness, most up-to-date scholarly works of immediate relevance are cited. The first three chapters of this translation were checked and approved by the author.

REVD DR V. NERSESSIAN
Feast of Giwt Khatch
25 October 1998

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THE ARMENIAN NEUME
SYSTEM OF NOTATION

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THE KHAZ SYSTEM OF PROSODY

The Armenian khaz notation consists of two independent systems: prosodic and musical. Despite the fact that the prosody sign system has had its special sphere of application, in relation to mainly speech intonations, nevertheless, when unravelling the primary problems of the musical khaz system, it becomes necessary to consider too its prosody system for the following reasons.

Firstly, musical intonation by its origin and historical development is very closely related to speech intonation. The artistic expressions of speech intonation, its meaning and emotion comprise one of the characteristic features of melody. A melody, being the most important expression of the musical mind, is continuously enriched with new forms for the realisation of speech intonation borrowed from the spoken language. At the same time, the recitative in its turn comes often very close to the actual music which is the melody.

The relationship between musical intonations and speech naturally also affects the sphere of their fixation. This is expressed through that link that originated through the system of notation and intonation — and then through the centuries of constant development, social attitudes towards music and declamatory speech have also changed. As a result, each individual new approach to recitation or singing of the same text imparts different meanings at different periods. This approach has, in some cases, been generalised while in others it is psychologically given differentiated interpretation or connotation. This phenomenon has also had its reflection in the manner in which music was notated or the spoken word was written. In the Armenian case, this precise factor has

stipulated a similar development in the musical and prosody system, creating two systems and giving the appearance of parallel systems. Thus, in view of the existence of such an interrelationship, the study of the prosody system assists in tracing the historical development and an understanding of the essence of this musical system. It is therefore essential to outline the origins, development and nature of prosody signs.

The prosody system has been studied by almost all scholars engaged in the study of the Armenian notation system. All have stressed the link that exists between the two systems. The majority of these have started their study of the khaz system with this study of prosody signs, while others have been satisfied with the study of the former alone.

There has been sufficient substantiated opinion on these prosody signs because, besides the existing manuscripts containing such signs, there also exist written sources on the subject. These are primary manuscript sources on Armenian grammar of such authors among others like Movses K'ert'ogh, David 'The Philosopher', Step'anos Syounets'i, Hamam Arewelts'i, Grigor Magistros, Vardan, Hovhannes Erznkats'i, Esayi Nchets'i. In the works of these authors there are specific chapters devoted to prosody signs. These chapters have served as the basis for all current interpretations concerning the prosody system. Since these primary sources have already been exhaustively analysed it is therefore unnecessary to reconsider all their conclusions here individually. Instead, it will suffice to reiterate concisely the findings and conclusions of some of the prominent linguists who have researched the subject.

From the ancient Grammars or from studies on them, we know that the term *aroganel* means 'to read' or 'to recite' in such an expressive way so that the reading is not only beautiful but will also convey to the listener whether the reading contains "a command, supplication, humour, question or refusal." To help the reader to express the above requirements, the various demands of prosody were integrated and expressed within the text by the use of distinct signs. There are ten such signs, which are called *shesht*, *bout'*, *parouyk*, *sough*, *erkar*, *t'av*, *sosk*, *apat'arts*, *[y]ent'amna* and *storat*. These signs are categorised into four groups: *olorak*, *amanak*, *hagag*

and *kirk'*. The meanings of each of these categories according to the ancient grammarians may be explained in modern musicological terms as follows:

Olorak (which according to the ancient grammarians corresponds to the Greek term *tonos*) signifies the alternating pitch of voice speech or recitation.

Amanak (corresponds to Greek *khronos*) relates to the extension and shortening of syllables (vowels), i.e. alterations in duration.

Hagag (corresponds to Greek *pneuma*) relates to the rough and soft renderings of sounds (consonants), and correspondingly controls breath movement as well as movement of the lips and tongue during pronunciation.

Kirk' (corresponds to Greek *pathi*) indicates the single or composite pronunciation of adjacent words and the abbreviation of particular vowels for the purpose of harmony.

The individual khaz signs that make up this four categories of prosody signs are explained in the following manner:

1. *Olorak* (tone) contains three signs: *shesht*, *bout'* and *parouyk*
 - a) *shesht* (accent) indicates the rising voice or a high sharp voice.
 - b) *bout'* (gravis) has the opposite function to *shesht* and indicates a low and calm voice.
 - c) *parouyk* (circumflexus) indicates the combination of the functions of the above two signs: the raising (sharpening) of a voice and the lowering (levelling) of the voice.

Normally there is an indication as to which type of words, vowels or syllables bear the signs *shesht*, *bout'* or *parouyk*. For instance, the vowels *a*, *e*, *i* are considered as bearing the *shesht* sign. The vowels *ɚ*, *o*, *w* carry *bout'*, and *ē*, *o* have *parouyk*. The double sounds *ai*, *ēi*, *ei*, *oi* and other diphthongs have *parouyk* occasionally. But as to what degree *shesht*, *bout'* and *parouyk* raise or lower the voice the grammars contain no specific indication.

2. *Amanak* (tense)

This category consists of two signs: *sough* and *erkar*.

a) *Sough* (brevis) indicates the short vowels and syllables. The naturally short vowels are *e*, *o*, *w* plus all those syllables ending in vowels which are not diphthongs and not followed by a consonant.

b) *Erkar* (longus) stands for long syllables. The naturally long syllables are *ē* and *o* vowels as well as doubled sounds, and those syllables in which the vowel is followed by two or more consonants. The vowels *a*, *ə*, *i* are considered double-*amanak*, since these can appear both as short and long vowels.

3. *Hagag*

The signs of the *hagag* are: *t'av* and *sosk*.

a) the sign *t'av* (spiritus asper) indicates a dense, rich, 'big' pronunciation of consonants, as for instance the letters *t'*, *p'* and *k'*.

b) *sosk* (spiritus lenis) denotes the smooth, sleek pronunciation of consonants, e.g. *t*, *p*, *k*.

The sign *t'av* also denotes the letter *w* when it should be pronounced separately, as in the word *kak'aw*.

4. *Kirk'* (effect)

This category comprises of three signs: *apat'arts*, *ent'amna*, *storat*.

a) *Apat'arts'* (apostrophe) is placed on the prefix *i* to disjoin it from the word following and also on the vowel *a* when its pronunciation should be deleted for the purpose of harmony. It is for this reason that this sign is also called *aybat'arts'*.

b) The *ent'amna* (hyphen) indicates that two adjoining words form a single word, and therefore they should be pronounced together.

c) *Storat* (diastole, comma) is used to indicate the reverse, i.e. that the two closely associated words should be considered as two separate words, and, therefore, should be pronounced separately.

THE KHAZ SYSTEM OF PROSODY

A summary of the prosody signs and their terms is as follows:

<i>shesht</i>	⚡	or	↗	<i>t'av</i>	↖	or	↗
<i>bout'</i>	↘			<i>sosk</i>	↗		
<i>parouyk</i>	↪			<i>apat'arts'</i>	⋯?⋯		
<i>sough</i>	○			<i>ent'amna</i>	⋯☺⋯		
<i>erkar</i>	~			<i>storat</i>	⋯⋮⋯		

This is the actual nature of the prosody sign system, as defined in ancient classical Armenian grammars. But it should also be noted that some of these signs — for instance *shesht*, *parouyk*, *ent'amna* — have a variety of other, specialized uses. For instance, *shesht* has three connotations: *hakashesht* — when it is placed on the last syllable of the word; *harashesht* — when it stresses the last but one syllable; and *nakhaharashesht* — when it indicates that the third syllable from the end should be stressed. In a similar fashion *parouyk* can be *hangaparouyk*, *haraparouyk* and *nakhaharaparouyk*.

In accepting this system of ten signs as described in the classical Armenian grammars as the prosody system of the Armenian language, many authors have instantly spotted the relationship of this system with that of the Greek system, or at least showing a very close similarity. For instance, O. Fleischer in his study makes the following conclusion:

With the investigation of this notation and prosody sign system one is immediately struck by the fact of the close resemblance this system displays to that of the Greek. The aspect which is most striking is the presence of parallels in the two systems, particularly in their divisions, in the form of the signs, in the names and meanings of the signs. All the prosody signs of the Greek system have their equivalents in the Armenian system.¹

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Fleischer constructs a comparative chart in which the number of the prosody signs, their divisions into four categories, the names and meanings of these categories, the individual names of the signs and their definitions according to the Armenian grammarians practically correspond to the Greek system. It is this conclusion which convinced many scholars in this field to draw the hypothesis that the Armenian system of prosody signs originated from the Greek. This same hypothesis is repeated by Melik'yan, who wrote that "our [i.e. Armenian] prosody khazes were initially Greek and were introduced to us either from Greece or from the Greek colonies."²

In this particular field of study, however, the evidence of the ancient Armenian manuscripts forces a reconsideration of this view, provoking the following questions: Is this commonly held view accurate? Are the similarities of the Armenian prosody signs as outlined in the Armenian grammars with the Greek sufficient to conclude that the Armenian derives from the Greek, or is it the Greek system itself?

An accurate answer to this question is vital if we are also to avoid the misconception that the origins of the Armenian khaz notation system to that of the Greek. In his study devoted to the Armenian khaz system of notation, Melik'yan writes:

The musical khazes have also Greek origin, and were introduced into Armenia either from Greece or through the Greek colonies of Asia Minor [since] the principal element of the musical khaz is the prosody signs . . . and it is accepted that our prosody signs were borrowed from the Greek.³

To analyse the validity of the above opinions, it is essential first to assess the Armenian grammar manuals, which preserve information on the prosody signs, and secondly, to study examples of prosody signs in ancient Armenian manuscripts and to discover to what extent their application agrees with the definitions found in grammars. As regards primary sources on the prosody signs, specialists in Armenian studies agree that grammatical and philosophical works emerged with the literary activity of the

Hellenophile School of translators in the second half of the fifth century with the translation of the *Ars Grammatica* of Dionysius of Thrace. Until the late Middle Ages Armenian grammarians were engaged in writing commentaries on the *Ars Grammatica* and in the process were constantly drawing on Greek commentaries.⁴ Comparative study of the texts reveal that the section on the prosody signs quoted in Armenian grammars and particularly the sections dealing with the interpretation of the signs derives from the *Ars Grammatica* and thus the Armenian grammarians almost totally ignored the characteristic features of the Armenian language.

By way of demonstration let us consider the application of the sign *shesht*. It is indisputable that in the Armenian language the accent is always placed on the last syllable in the word, independent of the fact as to what type of vowels occur in the word, to what part of speech it belongs, in what declension or conjugation (with the exception of the vowel *ə* in the accusative case which does not carry an accent). What function then did *harashesht* and *nakhaharashesht* hold in the Armenian prosody system?

This particular aspect of accentuation is best illustrated by the study of a grammatical fragment frequently found in Armenian manuscripts under the title ‘A’roğanout‘ean patariks, zor gti’ (‘A fragment on prosody which I have discovered’). In this fragment examples of words with the accent on the last syllable (*hankashesht*) are all taken as expected from Armenian. But when it begins to consider the function of the signs *harashesht* and *nakhaharashesht* (i.e. accent on the second and third syllable from the end) then the examples cited are not Armenian words but Greek proper nouns (*Petros, Markos, Dikghikon, Ant’rawpe*, etc). This is also natural — in spite of the view of Syounets‘i, who in his *Commentary* states that “all names that contain in their penultimate syllable the vowels *zayb, zetch* or *zin* (i.e. *a, e, i*) all are called *harashebst*,” and despite there being in Armenian many such words. Nevertheless, the examples given are taken from Greek, since in Armenian the second last or third last syllables with the vowels *a, e, i* never have accents placed over them. It is clear therefore, that the terms *hankashesht, harashesht, and nakhaharashesht* are the literal translations of the Greek terms *oksiton, paroksiton* and *proparoksiton* and have no function in the Armenian language.

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It is also clear that Armenian by its character does not possess long and short vowels. But, in reality, in the Armenian prosodic system, the functions of *erkar* and *sough* are related primarily to the ‘naturally long’ and ‘naturally short’ vowels.

Such discrepancies found in the ancient Armenian grammars between the definition of the prosodic signs and the rules of the Armenian language, represent clear evidence that the system, as transposed from Greek to Armenian, failed to suit the needs of the Armenian language. Therefore, any similarity of the Armenian prosodic signs with the Greek should in no way cause surprise. The real question, therefore, that should be asked is: was the Greek system of prosodic signs employed in Armenian and, if used, when and how?

A precise answer to this may only be arrived at by studying all the Armenian manuscripts that preserve the prosodic signs. Since manuscripts of Armenian grammars date back to the sixth century, and while we possess no manuscript of such early date containing the prosody system, it is wise to first consider the existing historical data.

Already quoted are the conclusions drawn by Melik'yan to the effect that the Armenian prosodic system was brought over from Greece and is Greek. To validate his conclusion and to determine a date of application, he relies on the following historical evidence:

a) The fifth century historian Ghazar P'arpets'i in his *History of the Armenians*, when narrating an account of the activities of Sahak Part'ew, describes him as follows: “. . . who surpassed in erudition the majority of Greek scholars, being thoroughly versed in the prosodic letters and rhetorical exposition, and who was seen to be even more knowledgeable in the philosophical sciences” (Section I, 10). Melik'yan concludes that this evidence proves that both St Sahak and the writer Ghazar P'arpets'i were familiar with prosodic signs (*ergoghakan tarits'*) in the fifth century.

b) Aristakes Grich, a scribe of a colophon (Matenadaran MS. No. 2370, fol. 66b), speaks of the “thrice-blessed great

translator” who, among other virtues, was also “well-versed in the *perch’k’erakan gtsits’* [eloquent-grammatical signs].” According to Melik’yan the term used is also a reference to the availability of the prosody system of signs in Armenia.⁵

On the basis of this historical data, Melik’yan reaches the conclusion that the prosody system of signs was introduced into Armenia by the major translators in the fifth century. It is clear that very soon after the invention of the Armenian alphabet (406 AD), St Mesrop Mashtots’ and St Sahak Part’ew, alongside original works written in Armenian, initiated a programme of translations which played a significant role in broadening the scope of the Armenian mind and in enriching the Armenian language.

Through translations Armenian society inherited all the important achievements of ancient philosophy, the natural sciences, Christian theology, medieval literature, medicine and the liturgical books of Greek and Syriac. Therefore, if we accept that Ghazar P’arpets’i’s mention of the “singer’s letters” or Aristakes’s “eloquent grammatical signs” were references to prosody signs, it is not also implausible that as early as in the fifth century these khazes were introduced into Armenian from Greece and hence were of Greek origin.

But where are these Greek khazes, purported to have been brought into Armenia by the translators, and what happened to them? Melik’yan makes the observation that in one of the earliest surviving dated manuscripts of the Four Gospels (887 AD) there are no prosody signs, while some of the signs found in later manuscripts bear no resemblance at all to the Greek system. Melik’yan explains these apparent contradictions by arguing that until the “eighth, ninth and even the beginning of the tenth century the knowledge and use of the khazes was the privilege of Hellenophile monks, bishops and catholicoses” who, in the early centuries, did not notate every manuscript with khazes of the prosody system, as was the practice in the 12th century.

Melik’yan also makes the point that some of the signs borrowed from Greek grammars were found to be unusable for the Armenian language and were discarded early on.⁶ Of these two explanations the first is totally unconvincing. If it is the case, as suggested by

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Melik'yan, that from the "fifth century liturgical books were being feverishly notated with khaz signs" until the tenth century, for over 500 years it could hardly have remained the privilege of a select group of practitioners. It is also inconceivable that the system would not have been employed in the principal scripture of the church — the Four Gospels — which throughout the subsequent centuries was one of the main bearers of the prosody.

As to his second explanation, although basically correct it is however inconclusive in its present form. In fact, it is not that few unused signs were discarded but that the whole prosody system of signs rendered into Armenian from the Greek between the fifth and seventh centuries were in practical terms never utilised and did not fit the Armenian language. So, in some way, Melik'yan's explanation is vaild as evidence in favour of demonstrating not the Greek but non-Greek origin of the Armenian khazes. The earliest Armenian manuscripts that include prosody khazes enable us to demonstrate that the system incorporated in the text is not the system described by the Hellenophile grammarians in their Commentaries.

The rest of this chapter shall be devoted to the study and description of the prosody system employed in ancient Armenian manuscripts. On the basis of analysis carried out on these manuscripts, an attmpt will be made to date the application of the syyem, its essence and also its relation to the Greek prosody and its links with musical khaz signs.

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Reflecting on the use of prosody signs in ancient Armenian manuscripts that have survived it is not expedient at this juncture to provide a chart of the signs and their meanings, as has been the usual treatment of the subject to date. As the manuscripts reveal, the Armenian prosody system has gone through a long process of development and therefore it is essential first to study the process through its long course of formation and development.

One should therefore begin with a study of the prosody signs and the problem of their date of application. It has been stated earlier that the principal text to which the prosody signs were

applied was the Gospels, and that the copy of the Gospels copied in 887 AD (Mat. MS. No. 6200) does not contain prosody khazes, only articulation or punctuation signs. The question that arises is whether it is possible to reach a conclusion on the date of the use of the prosody system on the evidence of this manuscript alone. It is sufficient to familiarise oneself with the evidence of a number of other Gospel manuscripts to be convinced that this is not a possibility, as shown by the following chart of some of the manuscripts:

No. 6202	AD 909	no khazes
No. 8906	AD 988	no khazes
No. 2374	AD 989	no khazes
No. 283	AD 1033	no khazes
No. 6201	AD 1038	khazes
No. 3723	AD 1045	no khazes
No. 3793	AD 1053	no khazes
No. 3784	AD 1057	khazes
No. 311	AD 1066	khazes
No. 288	AD 1099	khazes
No. 832	AD 1154	no khazes, etc.

If one supposes that manuscripts containing khazes copied in the 10th and 11th centuries have not survived — and in the Matenadaran collection there are no manuscripts containing khazes belonging to the 12th century — in such a hypothetical situation would it be wise to conclude that the system of prosody signs was employed from the 13th century? Of course not. In the same way, the fact that the Gospel dated 887 contains no khazes is not conclusive evidence that the system did not exist in the ninth century in the same way as the presence of the khazes in the 989 manuscript is not proof for the beginning of the application of the prosody system.⁷

What criterion should one employ to determine the date of the application of the prosody system? The presence or absence of the prosody signs in manuscripts should not be overlooked, but it should also be recognised that the problem cannot be resolved solely by this criterion.

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More crucial to the study of the origin and development of khaz musical signs and prosody signs are the fragments of ancient Armenian manuscripts, most of which have been unavailable to scholars. Viewed along with the complete manuscripts, these fragments help to complete a picture of the use of khazes in the early stages of their formation, enabling us to follow the process of their genesis and progress.

The precise dates of the majority of ancient fragments with prosody signs are unknown and, in most cases, difficult to determine. During the course of this research, using the cooperation of a number of specialists in general paleography, all the fragments and flyleaves in the collections of the Matenadaran have been studied, with the conclusion that a good proportion of these were copied between the ninth and tenth centuries.⁸

The earliest fragments, whose dates can only be conjectured, do not as a rule contain signs while in the case of those fragments tentatively dated as being copied in the tenth century or the early ninth century, the examples that contain no signs are far greater in proportion to those that do contain signs. From all this, the first tentative supposition that may be drawn regarding the date of the prosody system is that it was in use from the beginning of the ninth century and perhaps eighth century.⁹ This percept can be substantiated by the comparative study of the signs found in these fragments in later dated manuscripts, which unambiguously imply that the prosody signs employed in the fragments of the ninth and tenth century represent the formative period of the system.

In the Matenadaran collections the earliest fragments with prosody khaz signs are Nos. 1433, 463, 387, 94 and 4 and also the fly-leaves of manuscript No. 1570. From a palaeographic point of view all these fragments belong to the ninth and tenth centuries, or written before the tenth century. These fragments in comparison with manuscripts of later period contain very little designated syllables, and even then only one sign is employed in spite of the fact that the same syllable in later manuscripts were notated with several prosody signs. The recurring sign in the fragments is the sign *erkar*. It is safe to suggest that *erkar* is the first among the prosody signs as employed in the earliest known manuscripts.

In order to determine the function or meaning of a sign in the