Shaping Readerly Taste
Paratextuality in the Publishing Mission of Mxit'ar of Sebastia

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Abstract   Making use of theoretical insights from 'history of the book' scholarship, this paper examines the way in which Mxit'ar of Sebastia made use of paratexts (title pages, frontispieces, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, illustrations, headings, epilogues, appendices, etc.) in his 'publishing mission' (to use Sahak Čemčemean's appelation) to shape readerly taste and influence the way in which his books were read, received, and interpreted. Through introductory poems, illustrations, and playful word games, he presented himself as a second Maštoc' and his own students like the famous fifth-century disciples of that *vardapet*, who were meant to transmit and create in the same Armenian Christian literary tradition, under the aegis of the Roman Catholic Church.

Keywords   Mxit'ar of Sebastia. Mxit'arist congregation. Paratextuality. History of the book. Reader response.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Mxit'ar's Publishing Mission. – 3 Paratextuality. – 4 Paratextuality in Mxit'ar's Publishing Mission. – 5 Conclusion.

1   Introduction

For we have published and are publishing so many books not to earn money, but simply for the benefit of our people. Among these publications, the deficit of those books which are not able to carry their own cost will be made up for by the books which bring in a little extra.[1]

Even at first glance, it is clearly visible that Mxit'ar sought neither glory nor material profit; his sole ideal was to come to the help of each child of his people, to teach them their mother tongue, to educate their souls, to lead each of them to eternal truths. "*The enlightenment of this nation*" – a phrase, which we often encounter in the writings of Abbot Mxit'ar; indeed, Mxit'ar fervently yearned to see his nation awakened from their sleep; with clamoring voice, he wanted to teach and to preach to them that there is a life adorned with wisdom and anointed with divine light.[2]

These two quotations, the first from a letter of Mxit'ar of Sebastia (1675-1749) written near the end of his life (April 22, 1748) and the second from the late vardapet of the Venetian Mekhitarist Congregation, Sahak Čemčemean, encapsulate what Čemčemean himself termed Abbot Mxit'ar's 'publishing mission' (Čemčemean 1980). From 1700 until the year of his death in 1749, Mxit'ar oversaw the publication of fifty-five volumes – 19,300 pages in total – of which fourteen were

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[1] "Վասնզի մեք զայսքան գրեանս տպագրեցաք եւ տպագրեմք ո՛չ վասն շահելոյ զդրամս, այլ պարզապէս վասն օգտի ազգիս մերոյ. ի մէջ որոց տպագրեցելոց այնք գրեանք որք իւրեանց զգինս ո՛չ կարեն հանել, ի յայնց գրեանց որք փոքր ինչ աւելի հանեն, լնանիցի վասն նոցին։ Մխիթար Աբբայ՝ Վենետիկէն, 22 Ապրիլ 1748, առ Պր. Անդրէաս, Իզմիր" (Čemčemean 1980, 318).

[2] "Առաջին իսկ ակնարկով՝ շատ յստակ կը տեսնուի որ Մխիթար չէ փնտռած ո՛չ փառք եւ ո՛չ նիւթական շահ. իր միակ տեսլականն եղած է հասնիլ իր ազգին զաւակներէն իւրաքանչիւրին օգնութեան, սորվեցնել անոնց՝ մայրենի լեզուն, կրթել անոնց հոգիները, առաջնորդել ամէնքը լաւիտենական ճշմարտութիւններուն: *Լուսաւորութիւն Ազգիս*, ահա՝ զոյգ բառեր՝ որոնց ստեպ կը հանդիպինք Մխիթար Աբբահօր գրութիւններուն մէջ. արդարեւ, Մխիթար ջերմօրէն կը տենչայ տեսնել իր ազգը՝ քունէն սթափած, կ'ուզէ բարձրաղաղակ սորվեցնել ու քարոզել անոր՝ թէ կայ կեանք մը իմաստնազեղ եւ աստուածային լոյսով օծուն" (Čemčemean 1980, 5).

written by himself (Čemčemean 1980, 334).[3] As becomes clear from a survey of these volumes (see Appendix 1), the vast majority had a spiritual or religious focus (91%). This is evident from the very first publication he oversaw, a reissuing of the Classical Armenian translation of the famous medieval Latin devotional work, *De Imitatione Christi* (*Յաղագս համահետևելմանն Քրիստոսի*) by Thomas à Kempis, published in October 1700,[4] the year before he founded his Armenian Catholic monastic order in Constantinople/Istanbul (Čemčemean 1980, 9-11). The explicitly spiritual/religious focus of Mxit'ar's publishing mission has been overshadowed in modern scholarship by the fact that some of the most enduring and influential contributions he made were those books which had an educational focus on language, especially the grammars of Classical Armenian[5] and modern Armenian (written in Armeno-Turkish),[6] and his *magnum opus*, a two-volume dictionary,[7] whose first volume's publication was not completed until two months after Mxit'ar's death (the second volume seeing the light twenty years later in 1769, after being brought to completion by his students in the Congregation).[8] This dictionary was the prototype for what has remained the standard Classical Armenian dictionary up until the present day, namely the *Նոր բառգիրք հայկազեան լեզուի* (Awetik'ean, Siwrmēlean, Awgerean 1836-37). The above works were foundational in the process of nineteenth-century nation-building and thus have garnered outsized attention from scholars, even though they comprised only a small percentage of Mxit'ar's publications.

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[3]   A slightly different figure (57 volumes) is given in Ter-Vardanian 2004.

[4]   The first edition was published in 1674. A digitised copy of Mxit'ar's 1700 publication, along with most other Armenian printed books between 1512-1920 may be accessed at the website of the National Library of Armenia (https://nla.am/). Much of the important bibliographic information is accessible in Oskanyan, Korkotyan, Savalyan 1988.

[5]   The Classical Armenian grammar, entitled *Քերականութիւն գրաբարի լեզուի հայկազեան սեռի* (Grammar of the Classical Language of the Armenian Nation) was published in 1730.

[6]   On this grammar, entitled *Դուռն քերականութեան աշխարհաբառ լեզուին Հայոց* (Gate to the Grammar of the Vernacular Language of the Armenians), see Aslanian 2016.

[7]   On the grammars and the dictionary of 1749 (*Բառգիրք հայկազեան լեզուի* [Dictionary of the Armenian Language]), see Čemčemean 1980, 81-4, 125-8, 221-47.

[8]   In making Appendix 1, which comprises a complete list of the publications undertaken by Mxit'ar during his lifetime categorised chronologically according to year of publication, I relied mostly on Čemčemean 1980, as well as the digital library of the National Library of Armenia (itself based on Oskanyan, Korkotyan, Savalyan 1988). I have classified the books into those that contained spiritual/religious subject matter and those that had an educational/linguistic purpose. 50 out of the 55 volumes (91%) had a spiritual focus (broadly defined), while 6 out of the 55 volumes (11%) were language-oriented (there being one case of overlap, accounting for the percentages not adding up to 100: this was the 1725 *Գիրք քրիստոնէականի վարդապետութեան ընդ որում դնի եւ այբբենարան* (Christian Doctrine and Alphabet Primer), whose first 74 pages was comprised of an 'Alphabet Primer', followed by the book of Christian doctrine (Catechism) in the vernacular language. On this book, see Čemčemean 1980, 84-8.

Taken together, the two types of publications he oversaw, spiritual and linguistic, comprise the twin foci not only of Mxit'ar's publishing mission, but of his life mission, and they were interconnected: to work for the enlightenment (spiritual, religious and intellectual) of the Armenian people, through educational efforts aimed at increasing literacy among the Armenians,[9] with a goal towards raising them to fluency in the classical, literary language (*grabar*), purified by Mxit'ar and through his congregation's philological endeavors, so that they would be able to access the spiritual writings composed in the literary Armenian language and produce writings of their own within this same literary tradition.

In this short contribution related to the publishing mission of Mxit'ar of Sebastia, I will focus on the relationship between Mxit'ar in the roles of author, composer, and publisher of texts and his readers. My focus will be on elucidating some paratextual methods he employed – that is, liminal devices and conventions within a book, such as the use of title pages, prefaces, images, and other introductory matter – as a way of creating and shaping readerly taste.[10] Whether in the role of author, composer, or overseer of the publication of 55 volumes, Mxit'ar employed a range of paratextual methods that served to guide and shape the way his books were to be read, and thereby helped him to create and sustain a readership that responded to his volumes in the way he desired: as pious Armenian Catholics. This worked to support both his publishing mission and his general life mission of enlightening the Armenian people spiritually and intellectually, much as St. Mesrop had before him with his own circle of disciples, a correspondence that Mxit'ar himself promoted through paratextual devices, as it will be demonstrated below.

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[9] One of the difficulties encountered in understanding Mxit'ar's literary project is the demographic details about his readers. How many people were literate in the places where his books circulated? His books circulated mostly among the clerical and monastic classes, many of whom were his own students or missionaries of the Congregation, but how many non-clerical readers used Mxit'arist books? And how was the reading done? Privately and on an individual basis or in public, aloud in groups? Would literate priests read to non-literate laymen? Much research still needs to be done on these issues, and we are hampered by a scarcity of surviving information on reading habits and literacy levels among Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in this time period. The question of literacy, who could read (and at what level of fluency) at different periods of time is one of the most basic, but also one of the most difficult questions to answer in scholarship on history of the book. On this, see Davidson 1988.

[10] A lengthier definition and discussion of paratextuality is provided below.

2 Mxit'ar's Publishing Mission

The historian Leo (Arak'el Babaxanean) was one of the first to draw attention to the significance of Mxit'ar's publishing activities in the early part of the last century (Leo 1901).[11] In light of its great intellectual, literary and publishing production, Leo referred to the monastic island of San Lazzaro as մի փոքրիկ, մանրանկարչական Հայաստան [...] գրքերի հայրենիք (a small, miniature Armenia [...] a homeland of books; Leo 1973, 503). In his magisterial study of Mxit'ar's publishing mission, Čemčemean (1980) researched the letters and diaries of Mxit'ar as well as archival records of the Congregation to reconstruct the circumstances surrounding the preparation, printing, and distribution of the volumes Mxit'ar published throughout his lifetime.[12] Čemčemean provides information about the costs involved with the publication, the publishers, as well as the ways the books were sold and distributed by Armenian book peddlers and missionaries.

From Čemčemean's study, three major insights can be drawn which are relevant for this paper. First, Mxit'ar had a clearly defined publishing mission, whose primary motive was not profit, but enlightenment – spiritual and linguistic – of his people. This is evident in the two quotes that open this study. Since unlike other printers and publishers, profit was not Mxit'ar's primary motive, his decision-making in terms of which books to publish was different than publishers who were first and foremost businessmen with profit as their primary motive.[13] Of course, the two motives were intertwined,

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[11] Scholarship on Armenian book printing, including Mxit'ar's publications, has continued in the works of many Armenian scholars in the (Soviet then Independent) Republic of Armenia, as well as in the Diaspora, notably by Garegin Levonyan, Rafael Išxanyan, Sahak Čemčemean, Sebouh Aslanian, and Meružan Karapetyan. See Aslanian 2013, 31-40 for an overview of scholarship and bibliography on the historiography of the Armenian book.

[12] Mxit'ar did not in fact publish the books himself, because the Congregation did not obtain their own printing press until 1789. Instead, various local Venetian printers were in charge of the publication of Armenian books and others that used non-Latin scripts. The most important such figure for present purposes was Antonio Bortoli, who published the majority of the Armenian books for Mxit'ar. Bortoli had obtained a monopoly from the Most Serene Republic for the right to publish books in Armenian and Greek languages, and maintained this right within his family for most of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, to avoid the cumbersome locution "Mxit'ar had (the book) published", for ease, I often say "Mxit'ar published", understanding that Mxit'ar was unable to publish his own books in Venice, but rather had to outsource them to local Venetian printers like Bortoli. On this topic, see Kévorkian 1989, 31; Čemčemean 1980, 109-22; Aslanian 2013, 46.

[13] I do not mean to suggest that Mxit'ar was not a savvy businessman or careful with his finances, which he indeed was, as is made evidently clear by the careful inspection Čemčemean has done of his personal ledgers, letters as well as the chronicles of the Congregation, which carefully chart the income and expenditures relating to books and publishing (Čemčemean 1980, 89-99). Profits from book production were of course an

since the money from the proceeds of book sales would go back into supporting the community and the publishing program. At the center of Mxit'ar's publishing mission was the diffusion of his spiritual and linguistic educational program, and – as he states in the quotation that opens this paper – sometimes a certain book would still be published that might not pay for itself, because its spiritual benefit outweighed the financial deficit it might incur. Over time, its financial deficit could be made up for by better-selling books or other means of income. Mxit'ar had this luxury because his Congregation and their publishing efforts were the beneficiaries of wealthy "port Armenians" (to use Sebouh D. Aslanian's felicitous term), whose donations supported the Congregation and its book production.[14]

The second insight is that, as a result of his clearly-defined publishing ideology, Mxit'ar was interested in his own publishing mission, and not that of others. The high print quality of Mxit'ar's publications, in addition to his renown as a master writer and editor of the Armenian literary language, made him famous as a printer and editor of Armenian books during his life, and throughout his lifetime he received requests to edit and print books for others; however, he almost always refused, giving as the reason the fact that he did not even have enough time to prepare the books that he himself wanted to publish.[15] In only two instances did Mxit'ar publish a book on behalf of someone else, and that only because – being books of a spiritual or pious

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important source of income for the community: Mxit'ar himself indicated in his personal papers regarding his publishing endeavours that although his first motive was "the illumination of our people", the second motive was "to establish some source of income for our community". The passage comes from the first of the main principles that Mxit'ar laid down to explain the rationale and guidelines for the publishing of books, collated from the archives of Mxit'ar by Čemčemean. The passage in full reads: Թէութիւն ասցիկ գրեանց նախկին եւ նախապետական է այս զի զումարն գրեանց, որք են տեսականի տպարանին՝ ոչ նուազիցի, այլ մանաւանդ աճեսցի, առ այս նախապետական վախճան, զի լուսաւորութիւն ազգին մերոյ լինիցի. եւ առ այս երկրորդական վախճան, զի եկամուտ ինչ յայսմանէ հասարակութեան մերոյ հաստատեսցի (The condition of these books is first and foremost that the amount of books sent to the printer would not decrease but rather increase, for this *chief purpose*: that the *enlightenment of our nation* would occur. And for this *secondary purpose*: that *a little income from these (books) for our community* would be solidified) (Čemčemean 1980, 93).

14   On this, see Aslanian 2013, 53-68. A series of studies by Sebouh D. Aslanian (2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2016) has demonstrated the interconnected web that linked together port cities, port Armenians, and printers. Not only was printing largely undertaken in port cities, but readership demographics were dominated by Armenians who lived in port cities, a class of which (mostly merchant port Armenians) were largely responsible for financially bankrolling printing enterprises. A monograph is forthcoming (Aslanian 2023).

15   Some of these examples, along with discourse in letters between people wanting him to print and edit books for them can be found throughout Čemčemean's work, especially Čemčemean 1980, 50-9, 188-95, 252-9.

nature – they aligned with his own publishing mission.[16] This underscores the point that he had a clearly-defined mission to which he always remained committed, and he placed that agenda even over the profit he could have made from printing the books of others.

The third observation is that reader-response, whether in the form of positive or negative reception of Mxitʻarʼs publications (he received in fact an overwhelmingly positive reception for the majority of the volumes he published), did not have a major impact on Mxitʻarʼs own publishing decisions, although it did come into play for his successors. By examining the letter exchanges between the Congregation and its missionaries and book peddlers who distributed its books as far away as India, Aslanian (2013) has shown how reader-response and a change in taste towards more secular reading materials among a class of primarily merchant readers contributed to shaping the publication decisions of the Congregation after Mxitʻarʼs lifetime, who modified their publication production from strictly spiritual (and linguistic) materials to genres more appealing to a lay audience, such as historical and geographical books. However, reader-response seems to have had little impact on the publishing mission of Mxitʻar himself. Mxitʻar himself seems not to have been so interested in reader's own desires as he was determined to create the appropriate desire in his readers. We see this manifested in a few different ways. First, there were certain publications that Mxitʻar projected would not make a profit or sell well, but he continued to print them anyway, trusting in other books to make up for their liability, as evident in the quote with which this study opens. Secondly, even positive reception did not have a major impact on Mxitʻar. For example, early in his publishing career, after his anthology of Albert's writings (1715) was received by the Armenian bishop of Mardin, the bishop wrote to Mxitʻar to exhort him not to desist in his publishing work, because of its potential to provide so much spiritual benefit for the Armenian people. In his reply, Mxitʻar told the bishop, in a rather perfunctory manner, not to worry, because in fact he had already published more books of a similar type (they were the *Գիրք մոլութեանց* [Book of Vices, 1720] and the *Գիրք առաքինութեանց* [Book of Virtues, 1721]), and was already committed to trying whenever possible to publish books that aimed at enlightening the Armenian people.[17] Such an

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16   The first is a book entitled *Գիրք յորում ընդերի վիանդերձելոյ կենէ* (Book About the Life to Come), published in 1731, and the second, entitled *Կանոնք եւ ներողութիւնք* (Regulations and Pardons), published in 1748. The details surrounding the circumstances of their printing are detailed in Čemčemean 1980, 129-33, 208-10.

17   The extract in question from Mxitʻar is the following: Դարձեալ տեղութիւն քո որ այնքան գնծացեալ էր ի վերայ Ալպերտոին, ահա Առաքինութեանց եւ Մոլութեանց գրեանքն եւս տպեցան, զորս տեսանելոց եւ առաւել ուրախանալոց ես, եւ զանամ միշտ զի եթէ ժամանակ եւ պարապութիւն զտանիցեմ, նաեւ այլ գրեանք ի լոյս ածիցին, առ ի օգուտ եւ

exchange suggests that positive reader-response merely confirmed what Mxitʻar was already going to be doing anyway, and therefore did not have a major meaningful impact on his own choices. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, is the fact that the overwhelmingly positive reviews of Mxitʻar's 1727 catechism in the vernacular language (*ašxarhabar*) did not influence him to publish more books in the vernacular, despite the fact that this likely would have had overwhelmingly positive reception among his readership – the vernacular catechism itself was much more popular than the one printed in the Classical language (*grabar*).[18] Mxitʻar did not continue to publish in the vernacular because he was committed to the classical literary idiom, which from its inception had been the language of the Armenian Church and its spiritual classics.

All of the above suggests that Mxitʻar was less interested in responding to reader's desires than he was in creating readerly taste, in creating a readerly market for the books he published, a community of readers who would consume (and later produce, in the case of his students at the Congregation) books of a spiritual nature, composed in the Classical idiom. Toward this end, Mxitʻar employed a variety of paratextual methods in the production of his books, which aimed to shape a readerly taste that aligned with his publishing mission.

ի լուսաւորութիւն մերազնեաց։ Մխիթար Սեբաստացի Նամականի, 144, Մխիթար Աբբայ՝ վենետիկէն, 3 Յուլիս 1722, առ Տէր Մարտիրոս Արբեպիսկոպոսի Թուխմանեան, Մերտին ('Since your lordship had so greatly rejoiced over the Albert, know that the books of Vices and Virtues were also published, which you are to see and become more glad. And I always endeavour, if I ever find time and leisure, that yet other books be published, for the benefit and enlightenment of our compatriots. Abbot Mxitʻar from Venice, 3 July 1722, to Tēr Martiros Arkʻepiskopos Tʻuxmanean, Mardin'). This exchange is discussed in Čemčemean 1980, 33-4.

18 Among other evidence for the popularity of the catechism in the vernacular language is the fact that the first printing of 1500 copies was used up in a very short time, leading to a reprinting only five years later, this time of 2,000 copies. On the publication and reception of these two books, see Čemčemean 1980, 74-80, 84-8, 136-41.

3   Paratextuality

In 'history of the book' scholarship[19] and critical literary theory, paratextuality refers to the way title pages, frontispieces, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, footnotes, illustrations, headings, intertitles, epilogues, appendices, and the like, work on the perceptions of readers in order to guide their approach to, reading of, and reception of a text, i.e. to influence reader-response (Darnton 2007, 506). French literary scholar and structural theorist Gérard Genette was the first to call such devices a work's 'paratext' (Genette 1981; 1987). He devoted a monograph to the topic (Genette 1987), providing a synchronic inventory of the various types of paratextual devices, and defining and discussing their function in shaping a text's reading, reception, and interpretation, complete with illustrative examples spanning three millenia of western literature, from Homer to Proust, albeit with a focus on French literature. The term paratext aptly denotes the way such liminal devices and conventions encircle, frame, and present the text to a reader, in other words, their role in mediating between text and reader.[20] They are, as the French title of Genette's book (*Seuils*) indicates, 'thresholds' or vestibules that offer the would-be reader the opportunity to decide to move onwards and read the book, or step back and put it down, while at the same

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[19]   Following the *Annales* school of historiography, 'history of the book' scholarship investigates all aspects of book production (authors and authorship; publishers and all the business aspects and materials involved in publishing; printers, their methods and tools; the commercial aspects of shippers, distributors, and booksellers; the world and ways of readers and book consumption; etc.) in an effort to gauge the effect of the printed book on the texture and *mentalité* of culture at large. The volume that opened this field of study, by examining how print culture shaped society at large, was Febvre, Martin 1958. For a helpful discussion of the impact of this book and the field of scholarship it inspired in its aftermath, see Davidson 1988; Grafton 2002; Darnton 1982; 2007.

[20]   Although not always noted in scholarly literature on paratextuality, Genette's conception of 'paratexts' actually includes two sub-categories, 'peritext' and 'epitext', distinguished from one another by their location in relation to the text they serve. Peritexts (title pages, prefaces, images, headings, etc.) are located within a book, while epitexts (advertisements, authorial correspondence or interviews, etc.) are located outside of it: "A paratextual element, at least if it consists of a message that has taken on material form, necessarily has a *location* that can be situated in relation to the location of the text itself: around the text and either within the same volume or at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance. Within the same volume are such elements as the title or the preface and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes. I will give the name *peritext* to this first spatial category [...]. The distanced elements are all those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others). This second category is what, for lack of a better word, I call *epitext* [...]. As must henceforth go without saying, peritext and epitext completely and entirely share the spatial field of the paratext. In other words, for those who are keen on formulae, *paratext = peritext + epitext*" (Genette [1997] 1987, 4-5).

time guiding his or her posture into an attitude that is proper for entering into the structure that is the book (Genette [En. transl. 1997] 1987, 1-2). This threshold is *authorial* in that it is connected to the author; it is the author's most immediate, albeit implicit, way of influencing the reader, of guiding his or her interpretation, of attempting to ensure that the reception of the text aligns with the author's intention. It is significant for our purposes here then, because it is one of the most immediate means whereby an author or publisher such as Mxit'ar was able to wield his *author*ity in relation to his readers, to influence their reading and reception of his books. As such, it can offer valuable insight into Mxit'ar's intention for the texts he authored, composed, and published.

4 Paratextuality in Mxit'ar's Publishing Mission

In this study, I have chosen a few representative examples of paratexts from Mxit'ar's books, including one example each of an introductory poem, illustration, and a 'playful' image or game. Thus one can observe the range of paratextual techniques that Mxit'ar employed, each of which can contribute valuable hermeneutical insights both into Mxit'ar's own attitudes toward his texts, in other words, his intention with how the text was to be read, received, and interpreted, as well as how his original readers (here, primarily I have in mind Mxit'ar's students at the congregation, and secondarily any of his contemporaries and immediate successors who read from his published volumes, including those to whom the books were sold, especially in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere in the Near East) may have felt in relation to the text, how their response and reception was guided by his paratextual devices. Such information is especially valuable for early modern printed books like Mxit'ar's, since we tend to lack such information from other sources outside the text (including both epitextual sources from the author, and written or recorded responses from readers).

The first two examples are taken from the same book, Mxit'ar's 1730 Classical Armenian grammar, authored by himself, and entitled *Քերականութիւն գրաբարի լեզուի հայկազեան սեռի* (Grammar of the Classical Language of the Armenian Nation). As the frontispiece indicates, its intended readership was first and foremost those youths who newly came to the Congregation, and set out at an early age on the grammatical study of the Classical language, and secondarily for any others who had the desire to take up study of the Clas-

sical language, by means of Mxit'ar's grammar.[21] In regards to the physical appearance of this volume, Čemčemean (1980, 125) writes:

> Տպագրական եւ զեղարուեստական տեսակէտով՝ Մխիթարի ցարդ հրատարակածներէն ամենակատարեալն է այս հատորը:

> From a typographical and artistic viewpoint, this was the most perfect volume of Mxit'ar's publications to date.

It is therefore unsurprising that in such a volume – where such care was put into the typographical layout – that we find carefully constructed paratextual devices. After the frontispiece, there is a decorative page, adorned with a border of crosses, stars and ornate lines [fig. 1]. Within the border is a central cross on a decorative pedestal, and around the arms of the cross are the Congregation's motto: *O.K.V.A. Ordegir Kusin, Vardapet Apašxarut'ean* (Adopted child of the Virgin, Doctor of Repentance). Underneath the pedestal is a short four-line poem, which reads:

> Նախ քան ըզգոյ քո բերական
> Ըզխաչն արա քեզ յենարան
> Չի մի՛ ուսումըն գիտնական,
> Արիթ լիցի քեզ փքացման:[22]

This short poem is composed of four octosyllabic lines, each of which ends with a trisyllabic word, creating a syllabic line structure of 5 + 3. Each final trisyllabic word ends with the same syllable: -ան (-*an*), resulting in identical meter and the same end rhyme for all four lines. After reading it once or twice aloud, it is almost difficult not to remember it, due to its simplicity, symmetry and catchy alliterative meter and rhyme scheme. Alliteration of the sound /k^h/ prevails (7 times in the four lines), especially pronounced for speakers of Western Armenian – as the Mxit'arist monks were – since the letters ք and բ correspond to the same /k^h/ phoneme in Western Armenian. The choice of this sound is particularly relevant as the letter ք begins the word for 'grammar' in Armenian (*k'erakanut'iwn*) and the title of the present volume. Standing then as a kind of introit to the study of the grammar of Classical Armenian, it confronts the student at the

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21 This is indicated on the frontispiece, underneath the title and author: Ի վարժումն նորամանուց աշակերտաց դասատան իւրոյ: Եւ ի յոգուտ այլոց ամենից՝ որք ունին զխափաք, ի զալիթս իմաստից՝ Դրամբ Քերականութե[ան] մտանելոյ (For the training of newly entered pupils in our study house. And for the benefit of all others who have the desire to enter the vestibule of meaning through the Gate of Grammar).

22 'Before your grammatical life, | Make the cross your support; | Lest scholarly study become| For you an occasion of pride'.

outset with a very clear message: linguistic study is not an end in itself, but is ancillary to the life of faith. The student is warned at the outset not to make his learning a reason to boast and therefore fall prey to the sin of pride. The student's identity as a Mxit'arist Armenian Catholic is visually illustrated by the cross and Congregation's initials above the poem, and is verbally engraved into his mind with this concise, memorable poem – even before he begins his scholarly studies. The student is in a sense branded, and the purpose and place of his grammatical study is clarified from the outset. This paratextual device then guides his approach to grammatical study, situating it in relation to a higher, more strictly spiritual goal.

On page four of this same volume – after a short preface, and opposite to the beginning of the Grammar proper – is a beautiful copper-plate image, depicting Catholicos Sahak and Saint Mesrop, inventor of the Armenian alphabet **[fig. 2]**.[23] Mesrop is teaching, while Sahak looks on from an episcopal throne. Before them are seated at a long table in learning posture (taking notes with books opened before them) the famous disciples of Mesrop: Movsēs Xorenac'i, Dawit' Anyałt', Mambrē Vercanoł, Ełišē, Łazar P'arpec'i, Eznik Kołbac'i, and Asołnik, all considered authors of the fifth century and pupils of St. Mesrop. The caption below the image, the first four lines of which scan as poetry of rhyming twelve syllabic lines, reads as follows:

Մեծըն մեսրոպ ըզպատանիս ուշիմն կրթէր.
Քերթողաբար ըզհայ լեզուն 'ի լոյս ածէր:
Ս[ուր]քն իսահակ քերթողահայր անդէն նստէր,
զուսեալսն յաթէն իսկ առաքել խորհիրդակցեր:
Այս է զմնվսեա՝ զդալիթ, զմամբրէ՝ եւ զեղիշէ, զղազար, զեզնակ, եւ զասոդնիկ, եւ զայլս ընտրէ:[24]

This stately image communicates on different levels simultaneously: first, the students of the text are visually reminded that they are setting out to learn the language of these giants of Armenian Christian literature. After their study of the classical grammar, they will be able to commune with these authors by reading their works. Secondly, and more powerfully, a strong parallel is drawn between the situation of the fifth-century circle of St. Mesrop and his students, with the eighteenth-century setting of Mxit'ar and his own students. The tonsured hair, dress, and young age of the students pictured, their feather pens

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23   A brief discussion of this image, along with the image's reproduction, may also be found in Nichanian, Sordet 2012, 56-8.

24   'The great Mesrop educating the intelligent youths, | Grammatically leading the Armenian language into the light. | St. Sahak, the father of Armenian writers is seated there, | Conferring about sending the students to Athens. | There are present: Movsēs, Dawit', Mambrē, Ełišē, Łazar, Eznik, and Asołnik, as well as the others he chose'.

and books, the furnishings of the room in which they are sitting, all evoke an eighteenth-century setting in a Mxit'arist classroom much more so than a fifth-century scene. The students of Mxit'ar's grammar then are identified with the students of Mesrop, which tells them that they are not just to be passive learners and readers of this language, but themselves agents of spiritual, cultural, and literary production, like the fifth-century writers pictured. At the same time of course this aligns Mesrop, their teacher, with Mxit'ar himself, the students' teacher. Meanwhile, the figure of Catholicos Sahak, seated on his episcopal throne, conjures up more an image of an eighteenth-century Roman pope due to the style of his mitre and vestments, than it does an Armenian Catholicos, whether past or contemporary to Mxit'ar's time. Hence, as the figure looks on and oversees the work of the teacher with his pupils, the readers are reminded of their Congregation's existence under the aegis of the Roman Catholic Church.

The correlation between the two settings is unmistakable: the one eighteenth century, the other fifth century. The image thus implicitly conveys the goals that Mxit'ar had for himself and his Congregation: to be in continuity, in fact to duplicate, or enact again the mission of St. Mesrop and his disciples, who shared the same goal of the spiritual enlightenment of the Armenian people by means of translation and diffusion of the Christian tradition through literary production in the Classical Armenian language. Through these paratextual methods, the students who use this book are guided at the outset in the way that they are to interpret themselves, the book, and the role it is to have in their life: to prepare them to be like Mesrop's students; and the uses to which they will put the knowledge gained from the book: the reading and production of Christian literature in the Classical Armenian language, like Mesrop's students carried on and enhanced the work of Mesrop.

Another paratextual method discussed in 'history of the book' scholarship is the use of games, riddles, codes, or other strategies by means of which the reader is compelled to engage more actively with the text than would occur through normal, discursive reading (Darnton 2007, 506). Through such devices, the reader is able to create his or her own meaning, discover a meaning the author intends one to discover, or some combination thereof. Mxit'ar also employs paratextual devices of this type. In one of his early volumes, *Գիրք առաքինութեանց* (Book of Virtues, 1721), following the *Բան առ ընթերցողս* (Word to the Reader), there is a 'crossword' (*xač'bar̄*) **[fig. 3]**. However, rather than leave readers of the crossword to create their own meaning (and perhaps risk a misreading), Mxit'ar provides the key to the crossword on the opposite page. Reading in four different directions from the central letter *Xē* positioned in the middle of the crossword, one can find the following four versified sentences, of eight syllables each, composed in a very compressed manner:

Խաչանման կեան, եւ սիրեմ զայն	Crosslike life, I indeed love it
Խաչն այն եկ մեզ անսամ իրեան	The cross that came to us, I submit to it
Խաչն լիս մանեակմ եւ զենարան	The cross, to me a necklace and altar
Խաչեայ անկիւնս մեզ մենարան	This cross-shaped angle, to us a cell

However, Mxit'ar does not stop with giving the key, but continues with further explication. After each verse, he explains the poetically compressed passage in discursive prose, thereby giving a detailed interpretation of each verse, in order to avoid any confusion or misreading that might obtain were the reader to be left to his or her own interpretive devices.[25]

Besides communicating a pious, Christian message to the readers at the outset of the book they are to read, which puts them in the right frame of mind for the spiritual topic of the book itself, the crossword and explanation has a powerful performative function. The readers of the text are confronted with the crossword, which it is apparently assumed they will not be able to decipher, at least not in its full complexity, on their own. Thus, the author reveals the 'key' (*banali*) to them, showing them how to decipher the crossword and read the four verses through different directions of reading along the cross. Next, each verse is explicated to elaborate its meaning, which in each case has a pious, Christian message. Through the successive unfolding of meaning and explanation, the author's *authorial* position is reinforced, as the one who is in a position to explain what the reader cannot figure out on his own, thereby earning respect and trust in the eyes of the reader. This puts the reader in a posture of deference towards the author, as one who should be listened to in his discourse on topics that are outside of the reader's grasp. This is a desirable relationship to establish for an author such as Mxit'ar, whose text, in this case – like so many others – is a pious book that is meant to teach and impress a way of living and thinking upon his readers, one that is imbibed with the inculcation of Christian virtues. Mxit'ar thus instills an attitude of openness and deference in his readers, before they even come to reading the actual text of his book.

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25 To show how these prose portions explicate the poetic text, here is the Armenian text with translation for the first two. Corresponding to the verse Խաչանման կեան, եւ սիրեմ զայն (Crosslike life, I indeed love it), is the following explanation: Իբրու թէ ասէ. զկեանն զայն սիրեմ. որ է նման խաչին Ք[րիստո]սի. ի ձեռն այնպիսեաց չարչարանաց, որ իցէ վ[աս]ն սիրոյն Ք[րիստո]սի, եւ վասն նորին ճշմարտութե[ան] (Which is to say: I love that life which is similar to the cross of Christ; by means of the kind of suffering on behalf of Christ, and on behalf of his truth). Corresponding to the verse: Խաչն այն եկ մեզ անսամ իրեան (The cross that came to us, I submit to it) is the explanation: Իբրու թէ ասէ. սիրեցեալ խաչն այն եկն, եւ եհաս ի վերայ մեր. եւ պարտիմ անսալ. այսինքն հնազանդիլ նմա. եւ ընդգրկել նմա (Which is to say: The beloved cross which came, and arrived unto us, and [to which] I ought to obey; that is, to submit to it; and to embrace it).

5   Conclusion

Building on previous scholarship on Mxit'ar's publishing mission and utilising conceptual insights from 'history of the book' scholarship, I have shown how Mxit'ar marshalled various paratextual means to influence the reception of his books. Through the use of introductory poems, illustrations and engaging games, Mxit'ar worked on the perceptions of his reader, even before they came to the actual text of the volume itself, which served to guide their reading of the text in a way that suited his ideological agenda. This had at least three practical goals: first, ensuring that their intellectual study remained ancillary and subservient to their higher, spiritual mission; second, communicating to them their position both as Armenian Catholic monks and also as those who have inherited and will continue Mesrop and his circle's fifth-century mission; third, imposing a certain posture of deference toward the authority of Mxit'ar. All three of these effects fostered the production of a readerly taste that aligned with Mxit'ar's mission. There are other paratextual data in Mxit'ar's publications, which lie open to consideration for future studies – both in the categories explored here, as well as ones that have fallen outside the scope of the present study. Paratextual means whose exploration might prove particularly fruitful are: (a) illustrations and engravings (many of Mxit'ar's volumes contain wood-cut or copper engravings, some of them used from the publications of previous volumes, but many of them designed specially for the decoration of his own volumes – these latter, of course, hold more promise); (b) 'Prefaces' and 'Word to the Reader' sections, with which Mxit'ar began many of his volumes, affording him the opportunity to address the reader directly and explain the purpose of the book and how it ought to be read; (c) frontispieces, the first text (often adorned with an image) that the reader's eye met upon opening the book – a particularly important place, since this was the first impression the author was able to make upon his reader; and (d) the occasional poems that he himself composed for some of his published volumes, which tended to be inserted either just before or just after the text of the book began. It is hoped that this article has demonstrated how examining Mxit'ar's employment of various paratextual devices can help build upon our understanding of the relationship that existed between Mxit'ar as author and publisher of texts and his readers, and how Mxit'ar wielded all means at his disposal to promote his publishing mission.

Appendix 1. List of Books whose Publication Mxit'ar of Sebastia Oversaw[26]

No.	Title (Armenian)	Title (English)	Date of publication	Place of publication	Type[i]
1	*Յաղագս համահետեւմանն Քրիստոսի*	On the Imitation of Christ	1700	Constantinople	S/R
2	*Համառօտ մեկնութիւն երգոյ երգոցն սողոմնի*	Brief Commentary on the Song of Songs of Solomon	1701	Constantinople	S/R
3	*Գիրք մեկնութեան յայտնութեանն սրբոյ Յոհաննու Աւետարանչի*	Commentary on the Revelation of Saint John the Evangelist	1701	Constantinople	S/R
4	*Գիրք մտածական աղօթից, բանալի ջերմեռանդակերպ*	Book of Contemplative Prayer, Key to Fervour	1701	Constantinople	S/R
5[1]	*Խոկումն վարուց*	Meditation on Behaviour	1705	Constantinople	S/R
6	*Համառօտութիւն աստուածաբանութեան երանելւոյն Մեծին Ալբերտի*	Summary of the Theology of the Blessed Albert the Great	1715	Venice	S/R
7	*Կրթութիւն աղօթից*	Instruction for Prayer	1718	Venice	S/R
8	*Ricorso*	Appeal	1718	Rome	S/R
9 / 10	*Պարտէզ հոգեւոր / Խոկումն քրիստոնէական*	Spiritual Garden / Christian Meditation	1719	Venice	S/R; S/R
11	*Նոր կտակարան*	New Testament	1720	Venice	S/R
12	*Աւետարան*	Gospel	1720	Venice	S/R
13	*Գիրք մոլութեանց*	Book of Vices	1720	Venice	S/R
14	*Գիրք առաքինութեանց*	Book of Virtues	1721	Venice	S/R
15	*Գիրք որ կոչի աղբիւր բարի*	Fount of Goodness	1722	Venice	S/R
16	*Գիրք կոչեցեալ հոգեւորական պատերազմ*	Spiritual Warfare	1723	Venice	S/R
17	*Պատմագիրք հոգւոց հաւատացեալ ննջեցելոյ*	History of Believing Departed Souls	1724	Venice	S/R
18	*Գիրք քրիստոնէականի վարդապետութեան ընդ որում դնի եւ այբբենարան*	Christian Doctrine and Alphabet Primer	1725	Venice	S/R; E/L
19	*Վարք երանելւոյն սրբոյ Յովաննիսին Աստուծոյ*	Life of the Blessed Saint John of God	1726	Venice	S/R
20	*Դուռն քերականութեան աշխարհաբառ լեզուին հայոց*	Gate to the Grammar of the Vernacular Language of the Armenians	1727	Venice	E/L

26   This table is based primarily on Čemčemean 1980. A slightly larger number of volumes (57 instead of 55) is given in Ter-Vardanian 2004.

No.	Title (Armenian)	Title (English)	Date of publication	Place of publication	Type[i]
21	Գիրք քրիստոնէականի վարդապետութեան շարադրեցեալ աշխարհաբառու լեզուաւ եւ Տաղարան	Book of Christian Doctrine in the Vernacular and Book of Taɫs (Odes)	1727	Venice	S/R
22	Դաշտիկ ծաղկալի	The Flowery Meadow	1727	Venice	S/R
23	Դրախտ հոգւոյ	The Paradise of the Soul	1729	Venice	S/R
24	Քերականութիւն գրաբառի լեզուի հայկազեան սեռի	Grammar of the Classical Language of the Armenian Nation	1730	Venice	E/L
25	Հարցումն բերթողական եւ պատասխանի զքերականութենէ եւ զմասանց նորին	Versified Question and Answer Book about Grammar and its Parts	1730	Venice	E/L
26	Գիրք յորում ընծերի գիանդերձելոյ կենէ	Book About the Life to Come	1731	Venice	S/R
27	Յարացոյց ճշմարտի ապաշխարողի	Guide for the True Penitent	1731	Venice	S/R
28	Գիրք քրիստոնէականի վարդապետութեան	Book of Christian Doctrine	1732	Venice	S/R
29	Խոկումն քրիստոնէական	Christian Meditation	1732	Venice	S/R
30	Գիրք սրբոյ աւետարանի	Book of the Holy Gospel	1732	Venice	S/R
31	Սաղմոս Դաւիթ որ եւ կոչի սաղմոսարան	Psalms of David, that is called 'Psalter'	1733	Venice	S/R
32	Տօմար կարճառօտ	Abbreviated Calendar	1733	Venice	S/R
33	Գիրք առակաց սաղօմօնի	Proverbs of Solomon	1734	Venice	S/R
34	Տետրակ ամենասուրբ ռոզարի այսինքն վարդարանի	Booklet of the All-Holy Rosary	1735	Venice	S/R
35	Աստուածաշունչ	Bible	1733-36	Venice	S/R
36	Մեկնութիւն գրոց ժողովողի	Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes	1736	Venice	S/R
37	Քրիստոնէական վարդապետութիւն	Christian Doctrine	1737	Venice	S/R
38	Գիրք Թօմայի Գեմբացւոյ (Յաղագս համահետեւեսմանն Քրիստոսի)	Thomas à Kempis (On the Imitation of Christ)	1737	Venice	S/R
39	Պարտէզ հոգեւոր	Spiritual Garden	1738	Venice	S/R
40	Մեկնութիւն աւետարանին Մատթէոսի	Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew	1737-39	Venice	S/R
41	Նոր կտակառան	New Testament	1739-41	Venice	S/R
42	Խորհրդատետր	Sacramentary	1741	Venice	S/R
43	Բուրաստան աղօթից	Anthology of Prayers	1741	Venice	S/R

No.	Title (Armenian)	Title (English)	Date of publication	Place of publication	Type[i]
44 / 45 / 46	Կրթութիւն կատարելութեան եւ Քրիստոնէականի առաքինութեան Հատոր Ա / Բ / Գ	Manual for Perfection and Religious Virtues Volume 1 / 2 / 3	1741-42	Venice	S/R; S/R; S/R
47	Սաղմոս Դաւթի որ եւ կոչի սաղմոսարան	Psalms of David, that is called 'Psalter'	1742	Venice	S/R
48	Կարգաւորութին հասարակաց աղօթից (ժամագիրք)	Arrangement of the Common Prayers (Breviary)	1742	Venice	S/R
49	Այբբենարան	Alphabet Primer	1744	Venice	E/L
50	Սկզբունք եւ ուսուցմունք կեևի քրիստոնէականի	Principles and Teachings of the Christian Life	1744	Venice	S/R
51	Սաղմոս Դաւթի որ եւ կոչի սաղմոսարան	Psalms of David, that is called 'Psalter'	1747	Venice	S/R
52	Տօմար կարճառօտ	Abbreviated Calendar	1747	Venice	S/R
53	Կանոնք եւ ներողութինք	Regulations and Pardons	1748	Venice	S/R
54	Վարք սրբոյն Գրիգորի Լուսաւորչին	Life of Saint Gregory the Illuminator	1749	Venice	S/R
55	Բառգիրք հայկազեան լեզուի	Dictionary of the Armenian Language	1744-49	Venice	E/L

1 For 'Type' of book, I have classified Mxitʻar's publications into the following categories: a) S/R to designate books of a 'Spiritual/Religious' nature, including theological, biblical, etc. b) E/L to designate books of an Instructional nature, whose focus was on language. (Note: calendrical materials are classified under S/R, because they occupy themselves with the church calendars and feasts of the Roman Catholic Church and Armenian Apostolic Church, which in this period not only had different feasts, but used different calendars, in the case of the latter Church, it employed the Gregorian calendar, and in the case of the former, it was based on the Julian calendar.) The (Armenian) titles, dates, and place for the publications are taken from Čemčemean 1980.

2 There is some doubt as to whether this volume should in fact be included as a publication of Mxitʻar's. See Čemčemean 1980, 16-18.

Appendix 2: Pages from Mxit'ar's Volumes Illustrating Paratextuality

Figure 1 Decorative page with poem. Source: Mxit'ar of Sebastia 1730, 2. Photo by Author from the volume in the library of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Vienna

Figure 2 Sahak, Mesrop and Students. Source: Mxit'ar of Sebastia 1730, 4.
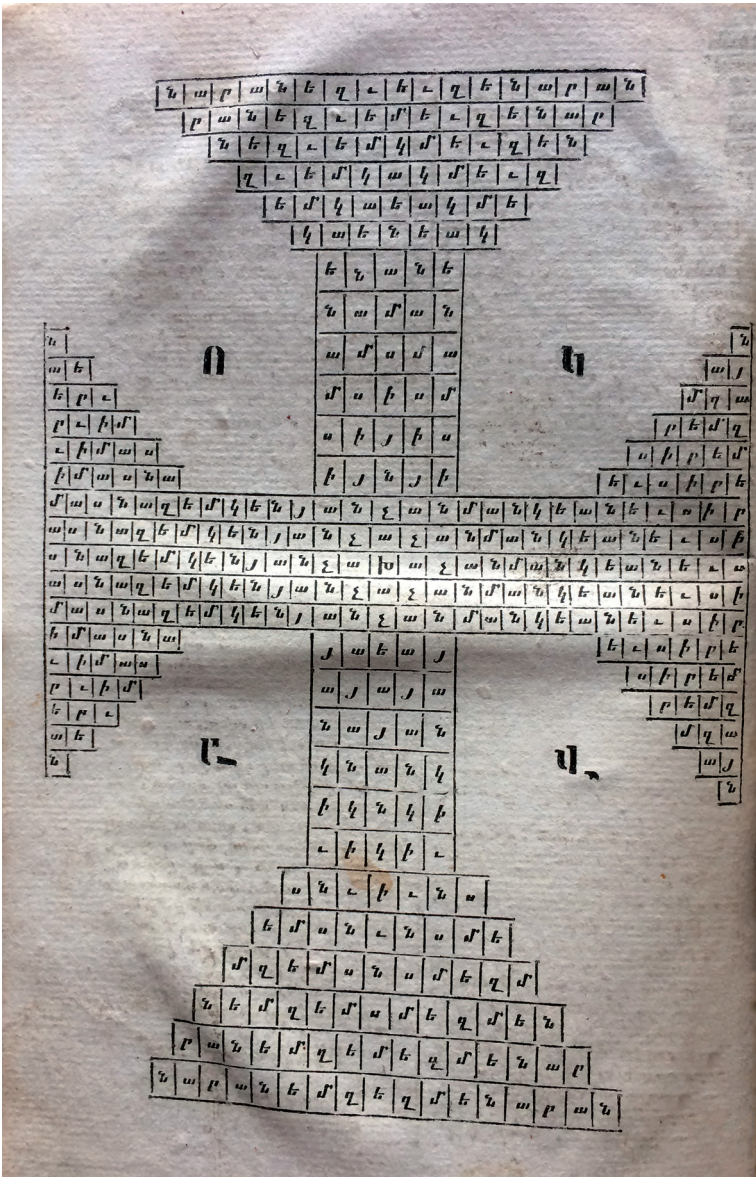Photo by Author from the volume in the library of the Mekhitarist Congregation
in Vienna

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