

# GENIUS WITH WORDS

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By Levon Sharoyan, Aleppo

Translation by Vahe Apelian ([See the below Note](#))

Among the many prominent individuals named Hagop is Hagop Martayan, also known as Hagop (Agop) Dilaçar. He was an eminent linguist and one of the main architects of the modern written Turkish language.



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Martayan's reputation as an expert linguist became so widely known that the founder and the first president of Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, personally invited him to attend the First Turkish Language Congress on Sept. 22, 1932. Atatürk presided over the congress in his drive to overhaul the written Turkish language. Martayan accepted the invitation and from that point until his death he devoted his life to the Turkish language.

He was appointed main advisor and the secretary-general of the newly-formed Turkish Language Association in Ankara. From 1936 to 1950 he lectured at the University of Ankara. Later he was appointed editor-in-chief of the Turkish Encyclopedia.

Atatürk was so impressed by Martayan's linguistic expertise that he suggested the surname Dilaçar for him. It means someone who opens a language. Hagop accepted the name and henceforth in Turkish circles he became known as Dilaçar. Nevertheless, he retained his baptismal family name and used it in his writings. Martayan also kept his close ties to his ethnic Armenian culture which he loved and appreciated dearly.

Hagop Martayan-Dilaçar lived in Ankara but continued to maintain his ties with the Istanbul Armenian community. In the '50s he often contributed articles to the Istanbul-based "Marmara" Armenian newspaper glorifying important Armenian historical events. He declared 1951 the 1,500 anniversary of the Vartanian War, holy year (**Սուրբ Տարի**). On that occasion he wrote many articles in the newspaper about the protracted war between Armenia and Persia and had it published as a booklet.

To have a better perspective of the scope and breath of his knowledge of Armenian literature it's worth noting the titles of some of the articles he wrote in "Marmara" in that period: "The 80<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary of Hantes Amsoria" (**Հանդես Ամսորեայ-ի 80-ամեակը**), "The 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Armenian Printing in Istanbul" (**400-ամեակ պղտախայ տպագրութեան**), "Our First Universities" (**Մեր առաջին համալսարանները**), "Armenian Language Expert Teachers" (**Հայկաբան Ուսուցիչները**), "The Armenian Through Centuries" (**Հայերենը դարերն ի վար**), "Our Western Armenian" (**Մեր արեւմտահայերենը**), "The Verb and its Times" (**Բայը եւ իր ժամանակները**), "To Know Wisdom and Instruction" (**Ճանաչել զիմաստութիւնս եւ զիտաւտ**) and many more.

Martayan-Dilaçar made his deep appreciation and love of the Armenian language and literature amply evident in the early 1960s when he started publishing in "Marmara" articles under the general header "A Panoramic View of Armenian Culture" (**Համայնապատկեր հայ մշակոյթի**). It was an extensive and in-depth study that appeared daily in the newspaper consecutively for seven to eight years, for some 1,500 days. This exhaustive study was assembled and published in three volumes many years after his death. Those who have perused these volumes remain at awe of his encyclopedic knowledge of Armenian culture.



Rober Haddedjian, playwright and the long-time editor-in-chief of "Marmara", who was a confidant and friend of the eminent linguist, bears witness to Hagop Martayan-Dilaçar's love of Armenian culture. The eminent linguist and his wife Meline' lived in Ankara isolated from the Armenian community. However, they felt a strong need to associate with Armenians and to speak Armenian. They sent their son, Vahe, to Istanbul to attend the Mekhitarian School to receive an Armenian education and to continue to maintain his ties with his people.

When Haddedjian visited them in Ankara for the very first time, he was in awe of his massive library of thousands of volumes, encyclopedias and dictionaries. He was a living encyclopedia himself, a modern-day living computer where by pressing a button one would get encyclopedic information with figures and dates.

In the 1960s Martayan-Dilaçar often visited Istanbul and liked to meet young Armenian writers who would remain mesmerized by his encyclopedic knowledge. The Armenian culture held no secrets hidden from him.

Last but not the least, Hagop was very proud of his baptismal name. He had a palm-size notebook

where on each page he inscribed his name in the native characters of many languages, dead or living. Haddedjian said that with that booklet he paid homage to his parents and made amply evident of his encyclopedic knowledge of languages living and dead. He called his booklet Hagopbadoum (ՀԱԿՈՐԱՊԱՏՈՒՄ).

In spite of his contributions to the modern Turkish language and to Armenian culture, a small but vocal group of Turks and Armenians despised him. He seemed to have been caught in the middle and aroused the suspicions of both parties.

First the Turks: As the editor-in-chief of the "Turkish Encyclopedia", Martayan-Dilaçar wrote countless entries. When it came to the letter E, he wrote about the Armenians under "Ermenlir" (Turkish for Armenian) header as any objective academician would have done. However, the government-appointed censors refused to include it in the encyclopedia. Instead, they delegated someone else with the task of preparing the entry about Armenians. Martayan-Dilaçar took offense and regarded it a personal affront, a treacherous deed. He was greatly saddened.

The Armenians: When he was publishing his exhaustive study of the Armenian culture in "Marmara" in the 1960s, another Armenian newspaper--"Jamanag" (Ժամանակ)--in Istanbul argued with him over an obscure academic debate as to whether the Armenian word "կափարիչ" (lid) Martayan-Dilaçar had used could be used for cover of a book instead of the commonly used Armenian word for it, կողք (go'ghq). In spite of all the evidence the linguist produced to justify its use, his opponent continued his relentless objection and turned it into a personal attack. The episode so angered and outraged him that he stopped contributing to "Marmara" and ceased writing in Armenian.

Hagop Martayan-Dilicar passed away in 1979.

### Note:

1. Levon Sharoyan--ԼԵՆՆ ՇԱՌՈՅԵԱՆ--is an author. He lives in Aleppo with his wife and their two daughters. posted the attached in the Aleppo Armenian Facebook Group in four segments. He graciously gave me permission to translate it. Vahe H. Apelian.
2. Սրբոցն Յակոբայ Մծբնայ Հայրապետին (St. James of Nisbis) is celebrated the second week of December.
3. "Marmara" (Մարմարա) is an Armenian-language daily newspaper which has been published since August 1940 in Istanbul. Its editor is Robert Haddedjian.
4. "Hantes Amsorya" is a cultural periodical that is published by the Mekhitarian Congregation of Venice.
5. Rober Haddecian (also spelled and pronounced as Haddedjian) (Ռոպեր Հատտեճեան) (born 1926) in Istanbul and also known as Rober Haddeler, is a writer, playwright, and since 1967 editor-in-chief of "Marmara".

6. Levon Sharoyan posted the pictures of Hagop Martayan-Dilaçar along with the article he posted in the Aleppo Armenians Facebook group. He has downloaded the pictures from Google.

7. Hrach Kalsahakian took the picture of Hagop Martayan-Dilaçar's gravesite during a visit to Istanbul. He posted it in Aleppo Armenians Facebook Group. He wrote: "*The picture is from Shishli (Şişli in Turkish) Armenian Cemetery, the main cemetery of the Armenians on the European side of Istanbul. As an Armenian, he had no other place to be buried. The tomb is part of Pantheon of Intellectuals and Artists (Պանթեոն Մտավորականներու եւ Արուեստագետներու).*"

It's worth noting that the Armenian cemetery of Istanbul on the Asian side, the Pangaltı Armenian Cemetery, originally belonged to the Sourp Hagop Armenian Hospital. It was demolished in the '30s and replaced by big hotels and the Taksim Gezi Park where the recent demonstrators took place.

