

The abecedarian poems of the late medieval Armenian tradition

This paper is a preliminary study of abecedarian or alphabetical poems, with an emphasis on the poetry of the 12th-16th centuries. These are poems the stanzas of which start with the letters of the Armenian script in sequence and are, therefore, usually made up of thirty-six lines, couplets or stanzas of varying length. The purpose is to see whether, apart from mnemonic purposes, there are any specific aspects of religious, mystical, moral or other significance to such use of the alphabet. The background will be the veneration accorded to the Armenian alphabet and the circumstances surrounding its invention followed by a preliminary study of such poems created by Nerses Shnorhali and a few later, less significant authors of the 'late medieval' or rather the early modern era.

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