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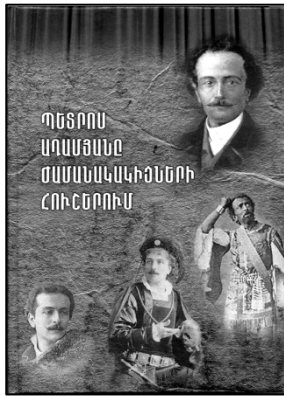
UDK 929:792(479.25) Adamian

Պետրոս Ադամյանը ժամանակակիցների հուշերում (կազմողներ՝ Ռուբեն Ջարյան և Անահիտ Բեքարյան), *Երևան, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ «Գիտություն» հրատ., 2020, 656 էջ\**:

Memories of the Contemporaries about Bedros Adamian (compiled by Rouben Zaryan and Anahit Bekaryan). Yerevan, “Gitutium” Publishing House, 2020, 656 p.

*Key words: Bedros Adamian, Rouben Zaryan, Armenian theatre, Armenian actors, Shakespeare.*

Bedros Adamian (1849–1891), genius of the Armenian stage, prematurely passed away 130 years ago in 1891, on the 4th of June, at the age of 42. He left a lasting trace with his 300 roles in the history of the Armenian culture. Adamian’s art got organically interwoven into the history of the Armenian theatre.



“In the summer of 1890, famous tragic actor Bedros Adamian toured Simferopol (A. A.). His temperament, passion, creative anxiety and authentic acting typical only of great artists impressed the audience greatly. Adamian was a great talent. Many years have passed, but the impressions of his performance still live in my memory. While watching tragic actors Rossi, Salvini, Possart on the scene I would subconsciously compare them with Adamian and he wouldn’t suffer by this comparison with other artists. He was one of the greatest talents borne by our nation<sup>1</sup>”, – Hovhannes Nalbandian, the first great Armenian violinist records, who made it to the world stage, in his autobiography in his appreciation of the acting of the great Armenian actor.

Adamian’s investment was particularly significant in the history of Shakespearean theatre. Adamian’s best Shakespearean roles were those of Othello and King Lear and his Hamlet was a masterpiece, a role which he had performed 40 times.

Adamian had conducted his own research into Shakespeare and published “Shakespeare and the sources and criticism of his Hamlet” back in 1887 in Tiflis. The actor was also a poet and a graphic artist. Among the portraits he

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\* *Ներկայացվել է 28. IV. 2021 թ., ընդունվել է տպագրության 01. VI. 2021 թ.:*

<sup>1</sup> Museum of Art and Literature, Nalbandian Archives № 1, Republic of Armenia, (a) Autobiography, 1913, p.5.

painted were those of Bishop Mambreh Markossian (one of his best portraits), and artists like Hovhannes Aivazovsky, Gevorg Chmshkian, Grigor Artsruny, and others. Adamian also painted pictures of Shakespearean characters, e.g. (“self portrait in Hamlet’s role, Ofelia, etc). His artwork also includes small-sized still-lives and under Aivazovsky’s influence he painted some seascapes.

Ararat Aghassian, the Director of the Institute of Art of NAS RA, NAS RA associate member, mentions that “Bedros Adamian’s vast legacy also includes a dozen penciled separate etchings and eau-fortes boasting impressive artwork and unique concepts”.<sup>2</sup> B. Hovakimyan’s research “Shakespearean paintings by Bedros Adamian” (1998) addresses the study of actor’s paintings and drawings. The artist was said “to have fought oblivion” both in his literary pursuits and in art (p. 228). In response to the question “why do you need to earn an artist’s reputation, when you are already a unique stage actor” he would remark in bitterness “who can tell about me to the future generations if not the faded memory of the elderly? I want to secure testimonies of the future”, – he would add touching his handwritten notebook of novels and poems or his pictures (p. 214). It was during his lifetime that two books were published about him, “Bedros Adamian: 25-year stage activities” by P. Donapetian (Constantinople, 1888) and Aram Vruyr’s Bedros Adamian (Tiflis, 1891).

The study of Bedros Adamian’s life and art has always been in the scope of interests of art critics of NAS RA Institute of Art. In the studies addressing Adamian, it is worth mentioning Rouben Zaryan’s name, a NAS RA academician, who was the former head of the Institute of Art and who authored “Adamian. His Art” (1960) and “Adamian. Life” (1961) volumes. Through his collection of Adamian-related reviews, memories, records, and correspondence published in the press, Ruben Zaryan was able to present the story of one of the world’s greatest tragic actors and also provide an analysis of his stage career. Rouben Zaryan’s two books “Adamian’s Shakespeare” first published in Russian (1964) and a year later in Armenian (1965) discuss Adamian’s interpretation of Shakespearean characters.

Garnik Stepanyan, who was first the head of the department of the theatre of NAS RA of the Institute of Art and who later assumed the position of the head of the department of Diaspora Arts in the two volumes of his substantial work “The History of Western Armenian Theatre” also addresses Bedros Adamian’s life and career. By the time of the publication of this work, he had published “Bedros Adamian: an autobiographical sketch” (1941), and Armenian and Russian monographers on Bedros Adamian (1944 and 1956).

Henrik Hovhannisyan, the head of the department of theatre of the Institute of Art of NAS RA and a NAS RA associate member, speculates on “Bedros Adamian’s life and career in his voluminous research work “The History of the Armenian Theatre. XIX century” (1996, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> A. Aghassian, Trends in Development of Armenian Painting in the XIX–XX centuries. Yerevan, 2005, p. 35.

It was in the middle of the 1980s that Rouben Zaryan decided to compile a collection entitled “Memories of the Contemporaries about Bedros Adamian” and offered Anahit Bekaryan, a young researcher from Shakespearean department to study the publications addressing Bedros Adamian in the Armenian and Russian press. To support the research, Zarian also provided A. Bekaryan with a few reviews and assigned her to work on the notes for the provided resources and to find new narratives about the famous actor. The product of their two-year joint research was an extensive collection of materials comprising about 200 type-written pages. The collection was in its development stage but the events unfolding at the end of eighties in Armenia, brought the implementation of this important project to an abrupt halt. Several decades later, in 2017, we requested that Anahit Bekaryan, senior researcher at the department of Diaspora of the Institute of Art of NAS RA should conduct research into the Shakespearean library of the institute of Art named after Rouben Zaryan. It was in this period that she came across *Bedros Adamian* file. The Institute decided to resume the study on the work that “had been destined to oblivion”. The preface to the collection reads that the book would be Anahit Bekaryan’s “humble tribute to the great actor’s memory” (p. 7).

Time revealed that the work had not been finalized yet and required a new approach, enthusiasm, energy and time. All the scrupulous work entailing the verification of sources, was completed by Anahit Bekaryan in a duly fashion. The efforts she invested in this work produced a piece that was three times as large as the initial draft and comprised literally all the publications on Bedros Adamian published in the Armenian and Russian press by the actor’s contemporaries.

It was in 2020 that by the decree of the Scientific Council of NAS RA and the Scientific Council of the Institute of Art the publishing house “Gitutyun” published the so much anticipated collection “Memories of the Contemporaries about Bedros Adamian” compiled by Rouben Zaryan and Anahit Bekaryan and edited by Henrik Hovhannisyan. The publication of the collection would not have been possible without the support of the RA Science Committee of Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport for which I would like to extend deepest gratitude to Sargis Hayotsyan, the head of the committee and Rouzan Assatryan, the chief secretary.

When considering the collection itself, it is hard to overestimate the role of the memories and the echoes of the press and the contemporaries for those researchers, who study actors. As Henrik Hovhannisyan notes in his “From the Editor” section “An actor’s art is a departing art that grows into a memory. It is timely in its arrival and creation. That art leaves its traces in reviews and memories of contemporaries. Future scholars will have to resort to these materials and faded images to build an accurate picture of the pieces that belong to the past” (p. 5). In fact, an actor’s glory is short-lived. Actors or musicians live in the memory of the audience as long as they are on stage. For that reason, collections featuring studies into performing arts are very

important for a theatre or art critic and “the present collection serves this purpose” (p. 5).

The structure of the collection is worth mentioning, too. As an opening statement for the collection, Anahit Bekaryan has chosen great Armenian novelist, and playwright Alexander Shirvanzadeh’s obituary on Bedros Adamian, which was published in 1891, on June 9 in Ardzagank (Tiflis) weekly, 5 days following the “stage giant’s death”. Shirvanzadeh writes “Adamian has left us. This tragic news like a hurricane should sweep through the news paining everyone who only once had a chance to see Adamian on stage” (p. 9). Shirvanzadeh was reasonably chosen as Adamian’s obituary writer, as he was the only Armenian writer to have been friends with the great artist for four years (by the time Adamian left the Caucasus). “When we were living in Tiflis and Baku, we would meet almost every day”, – Shirvanzadeh writes (p. 223).

The presented collection provides sufficiently rich material for its readers encouraging them to explore more about the life, activities, traits, ideas, creative insights and worries of the artis and have an accurate picture of the artist’s image.

The memories of Adamian’s contemporaries were written and published for the first time between 1885-1916. The collection covers memories of such writers as Alexander Shirvanzadeh, Hovhannes Toumanian, Raphael Batkarian, Arshak Chobanian, Leo, artists Gevork Bashinjaghian, Dickran Yesayan, stage producer Gevork Chmshkian, actors Siranoush, Azniv Hrachia, Armen Armenian, Amiran Mandinian, and many others.

A. Bekaryan has chosen to close the collection with an essay “Bedros H. Adamian, the incomparable tragic actor” by Yervand Toloyan, which was published in Constantinople in 1899 on December 30 in “Tsahgik” daily. The essay ends as follows: “He is alive for every Armenian. The cemetery of Shishly<sup>3</sup> has only his phantom. True, Adamian can’t breathe any more, his heart doesn’t beat, a man can leave this world but Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, Kin, Uriel d’Acosta won’t die. These are creations. An Armenian can’t forget you, Adamian. Especially for the aforementioned roles. This unforgettable memory I will share with my son, and my son will share it with his grandson. Rest in peace, you tragic actor, who nobody compares to. Rest in immortality and eternity” (p. 443).

The collection’s four appendices are worth a mention, too. The first appendix includes memories recorded from the testimonies of the witnesses. In the second appendix, A. Bekaryan presents the readers’ poems addressed to B. Adamian, among which are those by Hovhannes Toumanian and Yeghishe Charents. Appendix III (pp. 463–480) comprises the list of B. Adamian’s characters. The collection is concluded by Appendix! V (pp. 481–517) comprising original Russian texts about the actor written by the stage

<sup>3</sup> Armenian cemetery in Shishly district where Armenian artists are buried.

producer Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, literary critic Alexey Veselovsky, actors Ivan Berestiani, Dmitry Garin-Vinding, Nadezhda Tiraspol'skaya and others.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning Dmitry Garin-Vinding's words about the great actor "One of Peter Ieronovich's (this is how we addressed him) remarkable sides was his treatment of supporting actors. He saw people in them who shared his feelings for the sacred art that was the passion of his life. He considered them to be his key assistants on stage" (p. 503). As for Ivan Perestiani, he believed Adamian to have been the most poetic Hamlet blessed with rich fulfillment and exceptional acting (p. 517).

The collection has retained the original style of all texts and only obvious misprints have been corrected. All the topics are presented chronologically and have been retrieved from primary sources. If an author has more than one essay, the first date of its publication has been considered. References are presented in separate sections. Those references that are repeated in the collection are united under the name "General references" (GR) and respective references are made to this section, for instance, one has to check GR-15 section if a reference is made to it.

Indeed, this precious collection, which is a significant investment in Armenian theatre studies, once again proves how highly Bedros Adamian was valued by foreign, namely by Russian critics.

ANNA ASATRYAN

*Anna Assatryan – Doctor of Sciences in Arts, Professor, RA honored Worker of Arts, Deputy Director of the NAS RA Institute of Arts, Head of the Department of Music. Scientific interests: Study of Armenian music of the new and newest periods. Author of 12 monographs and over 160 articles. instart@sci.am*