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GIACOMO LEOPARDI IN ARMENIAN

Unequivocally, the foundations of the first contacts between Leopardi and the Armenian world were laid in the first decades of the 19th century when in 1818, on the Island of Saint Lazarus, a figure of particular prominence in philological studies, Mekhitarist Father Giovanni Battista Aucher, published a critical edition with a new Latin translation of the *Chronicle* by Eusebius of Caesarea (Aucher, 1818). Until its publication, this book was believed to be lost. However, the Armenian translation was able to reproduce it in its entirety. This publishing event caused a great sensation and immediately highlighted the importance of the Armenian manuscript tradition. In the words of Gabriella Uluhogian,

almost nothing was then known of the fact that, thanks to the Armenian translators, from the 5th until the 7th and even 10th centuries, many Greek works which were lost had been translated into Armenian. Moreover, the translation technique kept extremely faithful to the originals, which made these translations also function as historical witnesses of the original texts (Uluhogian, 2004).

Some years after Father Aucher published the *Chronicle*, he published three treatises in Armenian by Philo of Alexandria, - *ex armena versione antiquissima* (as written on the title page), again alongside its Latin translation (Aucher, 1822).

Giacomo Leopardi was among the earliest readers of Aucher's publications. In his letter dated January 6, 1823 addressed to his brother he wrote: "I had to write an article on Aucher's recently published *Philo*" (Bolognesi, 1998, p. 4). For his philological work on the *Chronicle* of Eusebius of Caesarea and *De Providentia* of Philo of Alexandria, Giacomo Leopardi in his early twenties served from the above mentioned two texts, which now survive in full only in the ancient Armenian translations. In his introduction Leopardi writes:

Some of those many works written by Philo of Alexandria, that lack to the Westerners are preserved nowadays among Armenians who translated them in their own language at the time of Theodosius the Younger, i.e. fourteen centuries ago (Leopardi, 1845).

Leopardi, though unaware of the Armenian and using instead the Latin translations - although for the most part slavishly adhering to the

Armenian text - however, has always been a diaphragm between the critic and the Armenian original. This fact, on the one hand, explains some mistakes committed by Leopardi in his evaluations in respect to the Armenian text, on the other hand, it highlights even more the acuteness of some of his observations that, even through the intermediary Latin, were able to capture the exact characteristics of the Armenian translation with respect to the Greek text (Bolognesi, 1998, p. 6). However, with regard to the errors of the Armenian translator it should be noted that Leopardi had remarked:

But these errors are neither more serious nor more frequent than those that are present in many ancient Latin versions of Greek books made after the study of this language - that was already as familiar to ours as to the Greeks themselves - was expired with all the good doctrines (Timpanaro & Pacella, 1969).

His observations on these texts – alongside those on Cicero's *De Re Publica*, discovered in 1819 by Angelo Mai in a Vatican palimpsest – are reputed to rank among Leopardi's most important philological writings (Bolognesi, 1998; Sirinian, 2010).

After some decades the moment arrived when the Armenian world developed an interest in Leopardi and began to translate his works.

Thanks to the work of the Mekhitarist Fathers, Armenians have been given access to and are able to read in their own language not only anthologies, but even entire texts by Italian authors such as Dante, Tasso, Metastasio, Alfieri, Foscolo, Manzoni, Collodi, De Amicis, Giacosa, Vittoria Aganoor, Ada Negri, Papini, and others, from Greek authors Homer, Sophocles, Demosthenes, Euripides, Plato, of Latin authors Virgil, Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, of French authors Lamartine, Bossuet, Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Chateaubriand, Fénelon and so on (Haroutyunian 2011). Given the background we have just mapped out, it is not surprising that there has been no lack of interest in Leopardi's poetry.

Knowledge of Leopardi and his writings in Armenian began to be disseminated at the end of the 19th century.

In 1889, the Armenian poet Hovhannēs Hovhannisian translated Leopardi's «L'infinito» [Anhunə]. This is Leopardi's first translation in Modern Eastern Armenian¹.

Some years later, in 1896, the Armenian literary, political, historical

¹ Hovhannisian has most likely translated this piece of poetry from Russian, since his biography does not reveal that he knew Italian. However, he has translated from the original Homer, Schiller, Goethe, Heine, Uhland, Hugo, Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov.

and social review *Luma* based out of Tiflis, in its very first edition, published Leopardi's «All'Italia» entitled *Hayrenik'* [Fatherland] (Lēopardi, 1896). As indicated in the subtitle, this piece of poetry was translated from the intermediary Russian. Unfortunately, the review is keeping silent on the identity of the translator. But it is not excluded that the author is again Hovhannissian as this review has frequently presented his literary works and translations alongside with other Armenian famous authors as P'ōšian, Murac'an, Širwanzade and P'ap'azian.

In 1898, Armenians gave due prominence to the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Leopardi. The publishing house of San Lazzaro printed a volume of *Selected poetry of Leopardi* with Mekhitarist Father Arsēn Łazikian's translations where the latter used Classical Armenian (Grabar), employing the solemn, sophisticated style that distinguishes the Mekhitarist school (Łazikian, 1898a). At that period Łazikian often used to joke that [he] even dreamed in Grabar (Tēr-Nersēsian, 1965). Later, however, he came to the conclusion that modern Armenian had by then become a language that could be used even for the works of the great classics. During those years, modern Armenian was purified from the influences of the classical language; through his translations, Łazikian was one of its main promoters. He played a significant role in definitively affirming modern Armenian's status as a literary language, not without provoking reactions from the remaining purists.

Łazikian was one of the worthy heirs of the translation activity of Mechitarists. Indeed, the Armenians were introduced to Leopardi mainly thanks to his tireless efforts (Łazikian was also the Armenian translator of Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Horace, Dante, Tasso, Milton, Foscolo and Manzoni (Haroutyunian, 2012)).

In this volume of 69 pages, Łazikian included his Armenian translations of «All'Italia», «Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia», «Il sabato del villaggio», «Il passero solitario», «Nelle nozze della sorella Paolina», «Le ricordanze», «La vita solitaria» presenting them alongside with the original Italian on each right page. The book begins with a dedication: “To the Count Giacomo Leopardi. Mekhitarist Fathers of San Lazzaro.”

In the dedication we read:

Poiché la pietà di cittadini generosi abbella, anche agli occhi nostri, questo lido, non ermo, ma letteralmente popoloso, guardiamo con affetto ai viventi, e con ossequio ai morti che lo fanno terra gloriosa. Da innocenti petti muove la lode e l'augurio di felicità, ai presenti e ai venturi. Sugli esuli, Signor Conte, Giacomo vostro avrebbe gettata una lagrima: sui

protettori magnanimi alzato un inno, il plauso che dura, nella voce dei poeti, immortale.

Schiudendo, quanto è in noi, una porta d'oriente ai versi d'un grande maestro, ritemperiamo anche l'arte dei nostri con esempi squisiti: in uno dei suoi figli, dei più vigorosi nell'intelletto, onoriamo con reverenza l'Italia tutta, ospiti non mal graditi e pieni di riconoscenza.

Accettate, Signor Conte, questi umili saggi e leggete meglio che nei nostri versi nei nostri cuori.

From the note on the back cover, we learn that the profit from the book was designed to benefit the Armenian Orphanage founded in Recanati.

Later we'll see that Łazikian also provided the modern Western Armenian translation of Leopardi's poetry in a single volume (Łazikian, 1910a).

In 1898 the *Bazmavep*² [Bazmavēp] review also dedicated a large article to the life and literary activity of Leopardi and at the end, gave Łazikian's translation of «All'Italia» [Ał Italia] in Grabar (Łazikian, 1898b). Again in 1898, *Bazmavep* published Łazikian's translation of Leopardi's «Annotazione» on Aucher's publication of Philo (Łazikian, 1898c; Leopardi, 1845). In the introduction, Łazikian writes: "Leopardi although unaware of Armenian is making a discussion by comparing the Latin – originally translated from Armenian – to Greek" (Łazikian, 1898 c., p. 473).

The main part of Leopardi's poetry was translated into Armenian between 1904 and 1910. The *Bazmavep* review became an ideal vehicle for publishing and disseminating these translations. In 1904 Łazikian translated «Il sabato del villaggio» [Giwłakan šabat'ə] which he included in his volume of 1910 with some revisions (Łazikian, 1904; 1910a, pp. 139-141).

In 1905 he translated «Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia» [Gišerayin erg Asioy t'ap'ařařjik hovui mə] (Łazikian, 1905).

In 1906 *Bazmavep* published Łazikian's translations of «Sopra il monumento di Dante che si preparava in Firenze» [Tandēi arjanin vray, or kə patrastuēr i Firēnc'ē] (Łazikian, 1906a), «Ad Angelo Mai: quand'ebbe trovato i libri di Cicerone della Repubblica» [Ał Ančeloy May erb Kikeroni «Hasarakapetut'ean vray» grk'erə gtaw] (Łazikian, 1906b),

² *Bazmavep* may be regarded as the patriarch of the Armenian and Armenological press founded in the lagoon city in 1843. It has been published without interruption from 1843 up to the present. In the beginning it served for popular education. Later it changed into an Armenological review, and now is the organ of the Mekhitarist Academy of San Lazzaro, Venice. The transcription of the name appeared as *Pazmaveb* until 1970.

«Ginestra» [Kenistay] (Łazikian, 1906c), «Inno ai patriarchi» [Erg naha-petnerun] (Łazikian, 1906d), «L'infinito» [Anhunə] (Łazikian, 1906e), «Le ricordanze» [Hišatakner] (Łazikian, 1906f), «Bruto minore» [Brutos krtser] (Łazikian, 1906g).

The Bazmavep publications of 1907 include «Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna scolpito nel monumento sepolcrale della medesima» [Gelec'ik knoĵ mə kendanagrin vray k'andakouac noynin gerezmanakan hišatakaranin vray] (Łazikian, 1907a), «Letta la Vita di Vittorio Alfieri scritta da esso» [Viktoris Alp'iērii ink'nagir kensagrutiwnə kardalē verjə] (Łazikian, 1907b), «La sera del dí di festa» [Tōni ōruan irikunə] (Łazikian, 1907c), «Ad un vincitor di pallone» [Gundaxafi mejə halt'oli mə] (Łazikian, 1907d), «Alla luna» [Ař lusin] (Łazikian, 1907e), «Nelle nozze della sorella Paolina» [Pawlinē k'roĵs harsanik'in] (Łazikian, 1907f), «Il tramonto della Luna» [Mayramut lusni] (Łazikian, 1907g), «Ultimo canto di Saffo» [Verĵin erg Safoyi] (Łazikian, 1907h).

In 1908 the following pieces were published: «A Silvia» [Ař Siluia] (Łazikian, 1908a) which underwent some changes in the volume of 1910 (Łazikian, 1910a, pp. 117-117), «Il pensiero dominante» [Išxoł mtacumə] (Łazikian, 1908b), «Scherzo» [Katak] (Łazikian, 1908c), «La quiete dopo la tempesta» [Het mrrki parzut'iwn] (Łazikian, 1908d), «Palinodia al marchese Gino Capponi» [Hets koč'um ař margizn Činoy Gabboni] (Łazikian, 1908e).

In 1909 «Alceta» [Alkēta] was published (Łazikian, 1909) and in 1910 «Al conte Carlo Pepoli» [Ař komsn Garloy Beboli] (Łazikian, 1910b).

In 1910, after the publication of these translations in various issues of the *Bazmavep* review for six years, San Lazzaro published Łazikian's modern Western Armenian translations of Leopardi in a single volume which included, besides the above mentioned pieces, also: «Alla primavera, o delle favole antiche» [Garnan kam hin ařaspelnerun], «Il primo amore» [Afaĵin serə], «Il passero solitario» [Menakeac' citə]; «Il sogno» [Eraz], «La vita solitaria» [Menakeac' keank'ə], «Consalvo» [Gonsalvoy], «Alla sua donna» [Ir siruhwoyn], «Il risorgimento» [Harut'iwn], «Amore e morte» [Sēr ew mah], «A se stesso» [Ir anjin], «Aspasia» [Aspasia], «Sopra un bassorilievo antico sepolcrale dove una giovane morta è rappresentata in atto di partire, accommiatandosi dai suoi» [Gerezmanakan hin xorak'andaki mə vray, ur defati ōriord mə nerkayac'uac ē meknelu dirk'i mēĵ ularkuelov irennerēn].

It's worth mentioning that in the same period that Łazikian undertook translating Leopardi, he was working also on Dante's Ar-

menian translation (Łazikean, 1902; 1905), on Virgil and on Vittoria Aganoor, and in the same year of 1910 when he published Leopardi, he also published a revised edition of his translation of *Inferno* (Łazikean, 1910c), already published in 1902, Virgil's *Aeneid* (Łazikian, 1910d), and Vittoria Aganoor's *Nuove liriche* (Łazikian, 1910e).

There used to be a widely shared opinion—one that perhaps persists, almost like a stereotype passed on without any proof—that Łazikian paid more attention to the quantity than to the quality of his translations. He often struck back at this accusation, saying: “Translating is not as easy as you might think; it’s ten times harder than writing” (Łazikian, 1912).

It is true that over a period of thirty years, from 1899 to 1927, he published 30 volumes of translated poetry, adding up to 7,000 pages chosen from the greatest geniuses of world literature. They include Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Horace, Dante, Tasso, Milton, Foscolo, Leopardi, Manzoni and a few women writers such as Vittoria Aganoor and Ada Negri. This sums up to a total of about 50 volumes. Nevertheless, the style of Łazikian's translations is almost always distinguished by its carefulness, faithfulness, harmony, literary value, rich lexicon, and above all, by the extraordinary intuition that went into the choice of the texts. He had excellent literary taste and considerable linguistic prowess. Here are two opinions on his work by illustrious figures.

Writer Aršak Ch'ōpanian said:

Łazikian, who with one hand brings forward the gigantic work of the *Bibliografia armena* and with the other translates the greatest classical masterpieces skillfully and carefully, has the right to receive only thanks from us (Ch'ōpanian, 1912).

And the Italo-Armenian poet, Vittoria Aganoor, in one of her letters wrote:

Dear Father Arsenio, you are a true prodigy. How do you manage to translate with such lightning speed? I believe that there is *no one else* to compare with you! Well done, indeed! Don't overwork your enviable cerebral capacity (Haroutyunian, 2014).

With his Armenian translations of poems by the greatest authors of the world, Fr. Arsēn Łazikian was the initiator and artificer of direct communication between Armenian thought and the creative talent of the world's literary geniuses, to the extent that some consider him to be the Bagratuni³ of modern Armenian (Menaworə, 1899). The fact is, however,

³ Owing to the guidance or example of the Classicist school, started by such outstanding translators as Fr. Vrt'anēs Askērian and Fr. Elia T'ovmačian, the esthetic taste and

that Fr. Arsēn Bagratuni was an inimitable genius, considered without equal in the history of Armenian literary translations.

In 1917 there appeared another Armenian translation of Leopardi's «All'Italia» [Af Italia]. This time, the translator was Mekhitarist Father Alexis Hovsēp'ian (Hovsēp'ian, 1917). Hovsēp'ian also published an article about the famous Italian poets of the nineteenth century, where he included a passage on Leopardi's life and literary activity (Hovsēp'ian, 1917b).

In 1927, the *Bazmavep* review, while publishing Father Łazikian's translations of Giovanni Papini, published also the piece «Preghiera a Leopardi» [Ałōt'k' Lēobartii hamar] (Łazikian, 1927).

In 1937 *Bazmavep* published the article «The talent and their defects», where the author writes about Tasso, the opera singer Adelina Patti, the Czech composer Smetana, Alexandre Dumas fils, Napoleon, Beethoven and Leopardi. For Leopardi, the review states that the poet had a suspicious character and that he once even suspected that somebody had stolen his small box where he kept his old slippers (Šahpaz, 1937).

Leopardi's poetry transcends and traverses centuries, remaining constant in its intellectual and poetic value, emotional impact, and thought-provoking qualities. As such, it takes on the character of a model that continuously attracts new interest from subsequent generations. It is not surprising, then, that new Armenian translations of Leopardi appeared at the beginning of the 21st century.

In 2003, the *Astlik*⁴ review published an article on the life and

artistic awareness of an entire generation was honed and cultivated. The school reached inimitable heights with works by translators like the Hiwrmiwz brothers and, notably, the leader of the movement, Fr. Arsēn Bagratuni, the most outstanding representative of Armenian Classicism, author of the epic poem *Hayk Diwc'azn* [Hayk the Giant], which was modeled after Homer's *Iliad*. Pindar's *Olympian Odes*, Sophocles's *Electra*, *Antigone*, The *Characters* of Theophrast, *Ars Poetica* of Horace, *Orations* of Cicero, *Oraisons funèbres* of Bossuet, *Britannicus*, *Mithridate*, *Iphigénie* of Racine, *Alzire* and *Mérope* of Voltaire, of Foscolo's *Sepolcri*, of Alfieri's *Saul* and *Paradise Lost* of Milton. For a detailed study see: (Uluhogian, 2004:223-237; Mildonian, 2004). "The Bagratunian school" is also cited in an article by Emilio Teza (Teza, 1889), the well-known Italian critic and translator.

⁴ *Astlik* is the scientific journal of the School of Translation Studies (of which this author had the honor of being a student in the years of 1991-96) at the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology of the University of Yerevan. Today, the school has its own publishing house called Sahak Partev Publishers, which mainly publishes literature in translation and since 1988 has had its scientific journal *Astlik*, where they inserted all the articles on translation, not only in Armenian, but also works in other languages by various scholars of the world. Both the publishing house and the journal were founded by professor Sona Seferian, translator and scholar of Armenian trans-

activity of the poet alongside with the modern Eastern Armenian translation of «Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia» [P'ok'rasiac'i t'a-p'afakan hovvi gišerayin ergə], «L'infinito» [Anverjūt'yunə] (Step'anian, 2003) and in 2005, «Dialogo di un venditore di almanacchi e di un passeggero» [Tarec'uyc'ner vajəfołi ew anc'ordi erkxosut'yunə] (Step'anian, 2005)⁵.

In 2004 the *Grakan tert* review, based out of Yerevan, published Leopardi's aphorisms (Faymanyanyan, 2004).

In 2012, a single volume with Leopardi's «I pensieri» [Xoher] was published in Armenia (Sirunian, 2012)⁶. The publication also includes an introduction where the translator presents Leopardi's life and literary activity. The editor of the book is Karlen Yalanuzian. This is the first time that the poet's «I pensieri» are translated into Armenian.

The principle purpose of this study was to shed more light on the reception of Giacomo Leopardi's rich heritage in Armenian culture and to provide the bibliography of the Armenian translations of Leopardi's poetry. In the future, we intend to provide linguistic analyses of the translations.

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lations of Shakespeare (Seferian, 2002). Since 1997, the school also organizes the annual conference on “The art of translation” in October, and celebrates the feast of the “Holy Translators”, during which the freshmen take the oath of the Holy Translators.

⁵ The translator, Araxia Step'anian, is a Yerevan State University graduate. After further pursuing her studies in Italy, she became a professor of Italian language and currently teaches at her home university.

⁶ The translator, Anahit Sirunian, is also a Yerevan State University graduate. She continued her studies at the Universities of Venice and Trieste. Now (2013) she is a first secretary at the Embassy of Armenia to The Holy See.

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Սոնա Յարությունեան Ջակոմո Լէոպարդիի հայերէն թարգմանութիւնները

Առ ազնուափառ Կոմս Յակոբ Լէոպարդի
Մխիթարեան Հարք Ս. Ղազարու

Քանզի մարդասէր գլխովին մեծանձն քաղաքացեաց չքնաղագեղ յօրինէ, նա եւ յաշս մեր, զափունսդ զայդ՝ ոչ զամայիս, այլ զւարթագին բնակաւէտս, հայիմք խանդաղակաթ առ կենդանիս, եւ պատկառոտ մեծարանօք առ մեռեալսն, որ զմարդդ զայդ կացուցանեն փառապարգեւ: Յանմեղ կրծից բղխեն դրուատիք գովութեանց եւ մաղթանք երանութեան՝ առ որս կան եւ որ գալոցն են: Ի վտարանդիսդ՝ Ազնուափառ Կոմս, Յակոբն Ձեր ունէր հեղուլ արտօսը մի, եւ ի խնամարկուան ազնուագութիւն ամբառնալ երգ մի դրուատեաց՝ որ ի ձայնի անդ քերթողաց անմահանան յաւերժութեամբ:

Ձեռն ի գործ արարեալ արդ մերովսանն բանալ զմի ի դրանց արեւելից առաջի տողից մեծի այնորիկ վարժապետին, ճաշակս ինչ տամք եւ մերոյս արուեստի ընտիր օրինակօք. պատուելով ի միում անդ յորդուց իւրոց ի հանճարեղաց՝ զԻտալիա համօրէն, ասպընջականեալքս առ ի նմանէ հիւրասէր մեծարանօք եւ շնորհապարտքս սրտիւ:

Ընկա՛ւ, Ազնուափառ Կոմս, զգոյզն նշանակքս զայսոսիկ, եւ ընթերցիր առաւել քան ի տողս մեր՝ ի սիրտս մեր:

Ղազարեան, Հ. Արսէն (1898)

Ջակոմո Լէոպարդիի և Հայոց աշխարհի միջև առաջին շփումները եղել են ժժ. դարի սկզբներին, երբ Վենետիկի Սբ. Ղազար կղզում հանգրուանած Մխիթարեան Միաբանութեան վարդապետ Հ. Մկրտիչ Աւգերեանը 1818 թուականին պատրաստեց Եւսեբիոս Կեսարացու Քրոնիկոնի և երեք տարի անց Փիլոն Եբրայեցու Ճառերի քննական հրատարակութիւնները՝ հայերէն հին թարգմանութիւնների կողքին տալով նաև դրանց լատիներէն թարգմանութիւնները: Սոյն հրատարակութիւնները մեծ հետաքրքրութիւն առաջացրին Եւրոպայի հայրախօսական, եկեղեցական և մշակութային շրջանակների մէջ, քանի որ այս գործերի յոյն բնագրերն այլևս գոյութիւն չունէին, և դրանք պահպանուել էին հայերէն թարգմանութիւնների շնորհիւ:

Քսանամեայ Լէոպարդին Փիլոնի Յաղագս նախախնամութեան և Եւսեբիոսի Քրոնիկոն երկերի վրա կատարած բանասիրական ուսումնասիրութիւնների համար օգտուել է Աւգերեանի վերոյիշեալ երկու հրատարակութիւններից: Մի քանի տասնամեակ անց հայերը սկսեցին հետաքրքրուել Լէոպարդիի մշակութային ժառանգութեամբ և զարկ տուցին նրա ստեղծագործութիւնների թարգմանութեանը:

Սոյն յօդուածը ներկայացնում է «Լէոպարդին հայ իրականութեան մէջ» մեր ընթացիկ ուսումնասիրութեան առաջին արդիւնքները: