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THE LITERARY AND TRANSLATING ACTIVITY OF RUBEN ZARDARIAN

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Introduction

Ruben Zardarian, one of the most fascinating of the short story writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries Armenian literature, was a perfect interpreter of provincial life. Undoubtedly, he was influenced by Tlkatintsi (Hovhannes Harutiunian) – famous pedagogue, writer and leading figure in the literature of village life – even though in the following years their relationship worsened which caused psychological trauma to Zardarian¹. While studying at the “Euphrates” American Institution² Zardarian met the future poet Ruben Vorberian who recalls his friendship with Zardarian (1900, p. 116).

“Zardarian and I met during those days. He was the only child of his parents and I was an orphan. We shared our happiness and grief. We read to each other our patchy lines written in the midst of gloomy nights and were comforted. Some thought we were twins”.

Zardarian didn't continue his studies at a university level. However, he filled in this defect with self-education. He studied the world literature and through his knowledge of French he got acquainted with the European culture. In 1890 when

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¹ A journalist under the pseudonym Vahagn Shant published an article in Zhamanak, 1909, n. 302, 2 and referring to Tlkatintsi as a source mentioned as if Zardarian stole a donkey in Kharbert. Cf. **Antonian** 1950, 147; **Aznavorian** 1972, 262–263; **Karapetyan** 2005, 12.

² In 1878 American Harput Missionary College was renamed “Armenia College”. It was officially closed shortly after the founding of the Republic of Turkey and now nothing has been preserved of its buildings.

graduated from the college, he began his pedagogical and literary activity. He taught the Armenian language and literature, history and French in Kharberd and further at Mezire Central college, where he became school principal for several months. It was in that period that he joined the Armenian Revolutionary Party and used to sign his correspondence with one of his many pseudonyms, *Aslan*³. Later, when Zardarian moved to Constantinople he would continue to be in touch with his former students, receiving them every now and then at his home on Friday evenings with the intention “to open their minds” with his conversations and to nourish them with patriotic ideas⁴.

Zardarian’s political activities were for the independence of the Armenians during the Ottoman Empire. Hence, it was inevitable that the attention of the Turkish authorities would concentrate on Zardarian’s activities, and they began persecuting him. In 1903 he was imprisoned under the accusation of having helped two social democratic activists in the Hunchakian Party, Galust Andranikian and Habet Tevekelin, in an arms business in Kharberd. Some months later he was set free after being tortured, while Galust and Habet were decapitated⁵. In 1905 he was again imprisoned under the accusation of having contributed to the death attempt against the Sultan and then again was let free after two weeks.

It was without a doubt that Zardarian was on the list of untrustables for Turkish authorities, thus it was an extreme necessity for him to flee the country on the earliest occasion. He managed to escape with his family to Bulgaria and establish himself in Filibe (now Plovdiv), where he became the editor of the newspaper *Razmik* [warrior]⁶. This newspaper allowed Zardarian to begin a fruitful activity as a publicist. Far from persecutions and suppressing criticisms back home, he was able to represent the situation of Eastern and Western Armenia and express his opinion freely.

³ Zardarian used numerous pseudonyms especially during the Hamidian regime. Cf. ff. 19–28.

⁴ **Aharonian** 1959, 55.

⁵ In his memoir *Aryutzi zhaniken* [From Lion’s tusk], Zardarian invites the Armenians who’ll find themselves in Turkish prisons to be courageous, ignore torture and stay faithful to their principles. Cf. **Zardarian** 1959, 543; ff. 26.

⁶ Some sources attribute to Zardarian the foundation of the newspaper (**Teodik** 1912, 385; **Siruni** 1913, 4). However, **Saribekian** 2012, 20 considers it improbable basing on the scarce economic conditions of the writer and on Zardarian’s letter written to Vorberian (**Vorberian** 1920, 208).

“Within the past ten years no new social, administrative or economic phenomena were initiated to promote peace and work among Armenians or among all neighbors in general; no hope of reform came to correct the crooked backs. Since 1895, the red line of massacres has continued till today (1905). Prison torture, the gallows, poverty and rape were the usual conditions of our lives. After the disaster, European diplomacy made daring leaps and bounds, but then paused, pondered, counted, faked and then fell asleep behind the mountain of piled bodies,” wrote Zardarian (1905, p. 1).

Zardarian invited Vorberian, Siamanto and Varujan – all of them at that time living abroad – to collaborate with the paper. “You put there the oak of the paternal forest, let Siamanto put there his warm flame. Aihme, I can bring only the smoke,”- answered Varujan to Zardarian’s invitation from Gent on June 14, 1907 and sent his poem “Hayhoyank” [Curse] for the eventual publication⁷.

Zardarian remained as editor of *Razmik* untill 1908, i.e. until the proclamation of the Turkish Constitution. This fact aroused some hopes among the Armenians living abroad and many of them returned home. Zardarian was among them, even though he was one of those few who never expected any positive changes from the Turkish authorities toward Armenians⁸.

Further, until the foundation of *Azatomart* [Freedom battle] on June 10, 1909, Zardarian collaborated with *Zhamanak* [Time] newspaper under the editorship of Misak Gochunyan (Kasim). “With this collaboration he [Gochunyan] wanted his newspaper to be a favorite of the intellectuals,” wrote writer and critic Siruni⁹. Zardarian contributed thirty-four articles to *Zhamanak*, writing about the necessity of creating universities, the life of intellectuals in the provinces, the diplomatic games of the Russians, etc. He also made contributions with the titles “The Spirit of Domain,” “Fight for Rights” and “Salutations to the Ottoman Parliament”¹⁰.

The young Turk authorities opened a case against *Azatomart* for Zardarian’s article on “The Persian Parliament and the Armenian Deputies”. In the article the editor’s conclusion was that it was better to have open - minded non-Turkish deputies in the Parliament rather than one of Turkish ethnicity, narrow - minded,

⁷ Varujan 1987, 340.

⁸ Zardarian 1906, 1; Aznavurian 1972, 259–260.

⁹ Siruni 1925, 30.

¹⁰ Azatian 1948, 129.

without a brain, fond of religious intentions and unable to understand the essence and role of the Parliament and Constitution¹¹.

Zardarian continued his activity until 1915 when he shared the tragic fate of his teacher Tlkatintsi and many other Armenian intellectuals.

Zardarian's Literary Activity

Zardarian's literary production, disseminated mainly in the newspapers of that time, consists of editorials, tales, literary articles, short stories, prose, poetry, descriptions of village life or in Zabel Yesayan's words "expressions of customs"¹². Only in few works has he provided details from his childhood and native town, like in *Horenakan tune* [Native House] and *Poghotse* [The Street]¹³. In *Native House* the author captures the attention of his readers by two significant aspects of the province. The first is the conception of patriarchal life and the religious aspect of it, the worship of the home and ancestors, the respect for traditions. The second is emigration, a real plague for Western Armenia. Because of the uncomfortable economic conditions and the constant persecution and harassment by the Turks and the Kurds, many Armenians were forced to leave the places they were born in and live in search of work and better living conditions in Constantinople or abroad.

Zardarian began his literary carrier very young. At the age of seventeen, he described the poor state of Armenians coming from the nearest villages to beg in Kharberd¹⁴. However, he was able to publish a volume of selected works under the title of "Tsaygaluys" [Nocturnal Clarity] only twenty years later, in 1910.

In 1893 his first works were published in *Masis*¹⁵. The same year Arshak Chopanian while referring to Ruben Vorberian's selected poems "Hishatakats tzhghikner" [Flowers of Memory], expressed – though en passant – his praise of Zardarian¹⁶. Within the next couple of years Zardarian became known among literary circles by publishing his tales¹⁷.

¹¹ **Zardarian** 1909, 103.

¹² **Yesayan** 1913, 11.

¹³ **Zardarian** 1945, 47–51; 1959, 246–253.

¹⁴ **Zardarian** 1891, 7.

¹⁵ In 1893 he published in *Masis* "Ergchuhin" [The Singer], the story of a blind girl and "Vranner Mastarin shrdjane" [Tents in the region of Mastar]. Cf. **Zardarian** 1893a, 108–109; 1893b, 364–366.

¹⁶ **Chopanian** 1893, *Hayrenik*, 1925, n. 568; Zardarian was further praised by **Chopanian** 1905, 212. **Arpiarian** 1905a, 57; 1905b, 2.

¹⁷ **Zardarian** 1895a, 159–160; 1895b, 245–246.

Unfortunately this nascent success coincided with the Hamidian massacres of 1894–96, which halted the activities of intellectuals for some time and caused the closure of many periodicals and newspapers. Some writers and public activists abandoned Constantinople, while those from small towns and villages limited themselves to pedagogical activities and, as Zabel Yesayan notes, “were keeping noble silence”¹⁸.

Zardarian signed with different pseudonyms due to the severity of the Hamidian regime¹⁹. When he was the secretary of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation [A.R.F.] of Kharbert he signed the correspondences of his political party within the pages of the “Droshak” [Flag], the A.R.F. central organ as *Aslan*. He also used this pseudonym for a series of articles entitled “Inchu ev depi ur?” [Why and Towards Where] in the periodical *Razmik*²⁰. Among other pseudonyms were *Jehovah’s eye*²¹, *Babgen*²², *Zardar*²³, *Zarman*²⁴, *Ezhtahar*²⁵, *Hay Aksorakane*²⁶, *Hrach*²⁷ and *Hrachya*²⁸. Zardarian often made parallel use of these pseudonyms.

¹⁸ Yesayan 1916, 29.

¹⁹ Ter Khachaturyan 1977, 401–402.

²⁰ Aslan 1908.

²¹ He used this pseudonym since 1911 as a permanent correspondent from Constantinople for *Hayrenik* periodical of Boston. Cf. Tashdjian 1923, 15.

²² Zardarian used this pseudonym in a letter dated May 4, 1895 to Arshak Chobanian where he inserted some of his poems to be published in *Tzaghik*. However, this poems were not published under the mentioned pseudonym and appeared later with his name in the pages of *Anahit* (papers of second period) Cf. Chobanian 1911, 196.

²³ With this he signed a telegram sent to archbishop Mushegh Serobyen, president of the ceremonies for the requiem of the victims of Adana massacres. Cf. *Arevelk* periodical, 1908, n. 6856, 3

²⁴ The pseudonym was used to sign correspondences sent from Kharberd to *Hayrenik* of Boston. Most probably he used it since 1900 but it’s not known until when he continued to use that. Cf. Tashdjian 1923, 6.

²⁵ Between 1905–1909 he published some articles with this pseudonym in *Razmik* periodical, published under his editorship in Felibe as well as in *Shirak* monthly, published in Alexandria by Vahan Tekeyan and Mikayel Kyurdjyan. Cf. *Ezhtahar* 1905, 15–18, Saribekian 2012, 20.

²⁶ The pseudonym *Hay Aksorakane* (the exiled Armenian) was used in “Aryutzi zhaniken” [From Lion’s Tusk], a memoir of a prisoner, where he described his life in prison. Cf. Hay Aksorakane, 1906.

²⁷ Zardarian published with this pseudonym his “Hayreni erger” [Native Songs] and “Djakharakin kertvatze” [Winch Poem] in Chobanian’s *Anahit*. Cf. *Hrach* 1898, 1899. The pseudonym is revealed by Chobanyan, 1911, 196.

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In 1902 Zardarian was already well-known as a young writer. However, dedicating most of his time to newspaper correspondences, he didn't write much in those years and worked at intervals. Zardarian himself didn't like the idea of producing less. "I have one pain," he confessed once to K. Aharonian with regret, "that I can't do literary activity. My time is absorbed. But I am aiming at producing at least one literary piece to prove to myself that my literary skills are not dead"²⁹.

1910 became an important year for his literary activity. Zardarian published his *Tsaygaluys* [Nocturnal Clarity]. The same year he announced Arshak Chopanian about the French translation of *Tsaygaluys* asking for a piece of advice about the title "Reflects dans la Nuit" that the translators Eduard Goladjian and Grigor Yesayan were proposing. Zardarian was against this choice³⁰. In fact in 1913 the French translation came out with the revised title "Clarté Nocturne".

Zardarian's *Tsaygaluys* includes short stories, tales, bucolics, images, impressions, poetry, and all these are scattered according to the author's pleasure. Zardarian's characters are the fruit of the same environment but they are different from each other. Next to the virtues of female Armenian village characters like Horner in "Terteri harse" [The priests daughter-in-law], Mariam in "Tan sere" [Love for home], Nazeni in "Marn zmanuke mortsav" [The mother forgot the child], Zardarian presents for example in "Sev have kanchets" [The Black Hen Crowed], a title alluding to 'bad luck', a woman opposite to the existing stereotype, who is betraying her husband with his (the husband's) brother. Zardarian describes the destruction of the family. The superstitious image of the 'black hen' is also present in "Sararu tghan" [The boy of the mountains], where again the author is describing hopeless, tragic village life. Through "Put me djur" [A drop of water] – a touching story about an ignorant superstitious grandmother and her little orphan grandchild fasting for six days – the author is presenting the degradation dominating in the Armenian villages.

The short stories "Shun men al pakas" [A dog lesser] and "Tseghin zavake" [The Son of the Nation], written abroad, are without Turkish censure. In "A dog lesser" Zardarian presents the image of deep national sorrow while in "The Son of the Nation", he describes the early massacres of 1895 in Kharberd, where the poor Armenians of the forgotten corners didn't want to betray their centuries-long

²⁸ The pseudonym is mentioned by **Teodik** 1919, 14 and **Lazyan** 1945, 210.

²⁹ **Aharonian** 1958, 55–63.

³⁰ **Zardarian** 1913, XI.

religious tradition and preferred to be killed, like Vardan, the main character of the story, who in answer to the Turkish officer's order to say a *selevet* [a prayer], says: "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Zardarian was highly praised by the intellectuals of his time. On May 5, 1913, during the closing speech on Zardarian's *Tsaygaluys* at Yesayan Students' Union in the Pera district of Istanbul, Komitas Vardapet said:

This is the fourth time that the youth is running here to be enthusiastic with his literature, while we, the old, like Zardarian's described scabby dog are waiting for the street-boys to kick us with the stone to move [...] When I read *Tsaygaluys*, I didn't imagine Zardarian at all. I imagined an entire nation with all its beauty and elegance. When I was browsing the pages, I didn't see words or phrases there. It seemed to me that an unknown creature holding me by the hand was leading me through unknown places, towards treasures and shining splendors. And when we are speaking about Zardarian, it seems that he never existed for me. Instead there exist the life, the earth, and the fatherland he describes so beautifully. I didn't see adjectives in his works. I saw images, instead. Images, that many poets look for but can't find. But Zardarian was able to find them as he perceived them, with their whole beauty [...] Zardarian presented them as the breath of the province. Let's breathe that breath, especially you, the young, breathe it with your young breath, because it comes from the province, our native land, which has sweet sun, tasty water, limpid sky, and the air is vital. And the beauty is flying above all these. Let's breathe those beauties"³¹.

Zardarian's works are translated into many languages, including French, English, Turkish, German, Italian, Norwegian and Romanian.

Translation Activity of Zardarian

Zardarian was one of the few pedagogues in Western Armenian reality who understood the importance of offering pieces of world literature to students. Mainly for this purpose he translated works of French, Turkish, English and Russian writers and published them alongside with the Armenian ones in the pages of the *Meghraget* (Honey River) reader, founded and edited by him. He also spread the translations in the pages of periodicals of that time. Those translations are not only important because of their high literary qualities, but they also show the preferences of the translator and his outlook. M. Gorky was one of the preferable writers of Zardarian and he translated Gorky's "Mother" and "Friend".

³¹ Komitas 1913, 37–38.

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Zardarian also translated the tale “*Rangi and Papatūā* or Sky and Earth” from New Zealand Maori culture. The translator’s note reads:

The Tale that we are presenting in translation is a production of the clever, bold tribe of Maori. This warrior tribe had a highly developed religion and was worshipping many gods, which were incarnations of big forces of nature. They believed in the supreme spiritual principle, which they called *Adva*. Today all Maoris are civilized, and almost all of them are protestants. The rhetorical abilities of their spokesmen in parliament will make us envy them. This unique literary gem is an evidence of the artistic talent of Maori³².

Zardarian also translated Oscar Wilde’s “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” and dedicated it to the memory of Petros Azizof (Khoren Sargsian)³³. Taking into consideration the metric and rhyme issues he preferred to translate it into prose. He made the same choice for Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven”. He translated a legend about Philo Judaeus by an unknown author. For his translation of Anatole France’s “*Les dieux ont soif*”, writer and critic Hakob Siruni wrote:

The only pleasure of those days [January 19 - April 11 (24) 1915] was the literary material published on the pages of *Azatamart*. And it was in those days that Zardarian began translating and printing Anatole France’s “*Les dieux ont soif*” as an appendix. He was about to complete the work if April 11 [24] didn’t ruin the paper as well³⁴.

Within twenty-five years of his translation activity Zardarian expressed his openness to other cultures and willingness that the nations live in mutual understanding and peaceful harmony. From Turkish authors he chose Mehmet Emin, Mahmud Ekrem, Abdullah Cevdet and Tevfik (Mehmet) Fikret³⁵. Besides these authors, in the 6th volume of *Meghraget* he included seven other Turkish authors in Armenian translation. In the preface Zardarian wrote:

We did our best to present an important nation living in the same place with us. We gave the precedence to modern authors. This experiment can be imperfect but never useless. For two nations that are united by a historical and political fate, who live next to each other and work together, it

³² Zardarian 1959, 585.

³³ In *Razmik* there is an anonymous article entitled “Petros Azizof: Biographic Notes and His Hanging”. Cf. **Anonymous** 1905, n. 1–2. According to **Ter Khachaturian** 1977, 415, it belongs to Zardarian.

³⁴ **Siruni** 1924, 130; **Teodik** 1919.

³⁵ Siruni reveals to be the Armenian translator of Turkish authors. Cf. *Hayrenik*, Boston, 1925, n. 3, 40.

is important that they know each other, especially intellectually. This reciprocal knowledge will help to dispel many prejudices and perplexity, which are the result of a lack of intellectual communication between these two nations. The literature will play a role in building harmony, step by step, in the psychology of the two nations, vanishing the accumulated bitterness and disseminating in its place more human, honest reasonable feelings that can serve for the progress of the two nations³⁶.

These lines are written on April 15, 1914. A year later, in April 1915, Zardarian was imprisoned together with Daniel Varujan, Siamanto, Ruben Sevak and other Armenian intellectuals by the Young Turk regime and brutally murdered shortly after.

Concluding Remarks

The theme that dominates in Zardarian's works is the Western Armenian villager and the village fumbling in need, degradation, ignorance, superstition, oppression, and moral decadence. The positive influence of Tlkatintsi was integral to the formation of Zardarian's literary individuality to become an enthusiastic devotee of Armenian provincial literature.

However, Zardarian's style and his works' ideological, literary value and the breadth of the vocabulary he used to express his tales had far surpassed his predecessors like Tlkatintsi, Gegham Ter-Karapetian, among others, who had also written about the Armenian villager.

In contrast to his teacher Tlkatintsi who adds Turkish vocabulary and sometimes generates ungrammatical syntax, Zardarian avoids the frequent use of foreign words and phrases³⁷. On the other hand, Zardarian doesn't completely adopt the 'polished' Armenian of Constantinople. With the aim of keeping the local flavor, when necessary, he weaves some dialectal vocabulary to the Armenian of Istanbul, "*polsahayeren*". The environment that he describes is the village, so every now and again he adopts Turkish or Persian elements used among various dialects to keep the naturalness of that region's style. Sometimes he misuses the case of the direct and indirect objects, and the negative of *debitative* mood in *piti* [must] by prefixing the negative particle 'ch' on *piti* and not on the verb, as **chpiti**

³⁶ Zardarian 1914, 5–7.

³⁷ This author experienced translating Tlkatintsi's "Akh, Astvatz, Astvatz " [Ah Dio, Dio!] and "Ese intzi, inch ka?" [Dimmi cosa c'e'!] into Italian. Forthcoming 2016.

gar 's/he wouldn't have to come' instead of *piti chgar*, more common among the Armenian writers of Constantinople³⁸.

During his activity, Zardarian purified his language and sought to achieve artistic heights, which can be noticed especially in the last period when he was the editor of *Azatomart*. His way of narrating is evidently elaborated. With the words of Srmakeshkanlian (1913, p. 28), another prose writer of the period, "if you delete even a single word from his [Zardarian's] sentence, it will limp and fade."

Zardarian didn't limit himself to the rural, village environment though. Instead, he widened and deepened the frame of presenting the images of everyday life, creating some realistic characters, which have cognitive and literary value.

Zardarian also carried out vast translation activity. However, study of his figure as a translator leaves much to be desired.

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³⁸ **Djanashian** 1945, 9–10.

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ՌՈՒԲԵՆ ԶԱՐԴԱՐՅԱՆԻ ԳՐԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ԹԱՐԳՄԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԳՈՐԾՈՒՆԵՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ

ՀԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՅԱՆ Ս.

Ամփոփում

Քանալի բառեր՝ Ռուբեն Զարդարյան, «Ռազմիկ» լրագիր, արևմտահայ գրականություն, թարգմանություն, հայ մամուլ, գավառահայ գրականություն, թուրք հեղինակներ:

XIX դարի վերջի և XX դարի սկզբի հայ գրականության երախտավորներից մեկը՝ Ռուբեն Զարդարյանը, գավառական կյանքի իրազեկ մեկնաբան էր: Նրա ստեղծագործություններում գերակշռող թեման արևմտահայ գյուղացին է և կարիքի, քայքայման, անտեղյակության, սնահավատության, ճնշման և բարոյական անկման ենթարկվող գյուղը: Հայ գավառական գրականության

խանդավառ նվիրյալ էր Ջարդարյանը, որի գրական անհատականության ձևավորման գործում մեծ է Թլկատինցու ազդեցությունը:

Ջարդարյանի գրական թարգմանչական գործունեությունը ևս կրում է նրա խոր անհատականության կնիքը:

ЛИТЕРАТУРНАЯ И ПЕРЕВОДЧЕСКАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ РУБЕНА ЗАРДАРЯНА

Арутюнян С.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: Рубен Зардарян, газета «Размик», западноармянская литература, перевод, армянская периодика, литература армянской провинции, турецкие авторы.

Рубен Зардарян, один из наиболее известных и интересных авторов армянской литературы конца XIX – начала XX веков, является великолепным знатоком провинциальной жизни. Превалирующей темой в его рассказах является деревенская жизнь и угнетённая нищетой, незнанием, суеверием армянская деревня. Огромное влияние на формирование его индивидуальности оказал Тлкатинци.