



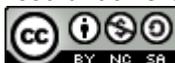
Translations from Armenian into Italian, 1991 to date

a study by the Next Page Foundation in the framework of the Book Platform project

conducted by Sona Haroutyunian¹
2012

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PART I

Historical Overview

The first reliable vestiges of an Armenian presence in medieval Italy are found in the Byzantine Exarchate of Ravenna. Some of these exarchs, like the famous Narsetes (Nerses) the Eunuch (541-568) and Isaac (Sahak) (625-644) were of Armenian origin. In this same period, the names of other Armenian leaders in Italy, under whose command fought numerous Armenian soldiers, are also remembered. In addition to these officers and soldiers were many Armenian traders and monastics in various Italian cities like Ravenna, Venice, Florence, Naples, Ancona, Rome and others.

A new chapter in Armenian-Italian relations began in the 12th Century with the concurrence of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and the Crusades. According to the dates provided by Father Alishan, between 1240 and 1350, there were twenty-two Italian cities that had an Armenian church, and in some cities like Rome, Bologna and Venice, there was more than one church (Alishan 1893). However, the dispersion of Armenians in Italy reached its peak in the mid-14th Century. The existence of numerous guesthouses, signs of an animated traffic of travelers and merchants, and the many convents with their notable cultural and literary activities, attest to an evolved and active community. By the 16th Century, approximately forty Armenian churches and monasteries, many of them having special inns also called “guest houses” adjacent to the church, where traveling Armenians would stop and rest in the city, are mentioned to be in Italian cities. The birth of Venice’s “Casa Armena” or “Armenian House” on Calle delle Lanterne near St. Mark’s Square, the area most populated among Armenians in Venice, is also significant. Some sources indicate that this building became a guesthouse for Armenians around May 25, 1235. Though the actual date is likely a few decades prior, Venice is proud to have the oldest Armenian House or *Hay Tun* in Europe. In addition to the mentioned colonies, the Armenian community of Livorno was born in the 16th Century (Owl’owrlean, 1891).

One of the most notable Armenian cultural accomplishments also took place in Italy in the 16th Century. In 1512, the Venice-based printing house established by Hakob Meghapart issued its first-ever printed book in Armenian, the *Urbat’agirk’ (The Book of Friday)*, which is now kept in the library of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice. It is significant that the Armenians were the first eastern peoples to use Gutenberg’s invention, although the art of illuminated manuscripts still retained its viability for a long time. The second publisher after Meghapart was the Abgar Dpir [scribe] Tokhatetsi, who published the first Armenian calendar in Venice, where he went on to publish another seven books. Since then, several Armenian printers worked in Venice until the Mekhitarist Fathers opened their own printing house. However, only beginning in the 18th Century do we witness fervent publishing by the Mekhitarist monks in the Venetian lagoon. Starting from 1717 on the Island of Saint Lazarus, these monks would create a priceless cultural hub that would



subsequently become one of the mighty pillars of the national Awakening. Armenian books were printed in Ferrara, Rome, Milan, Livorno, Pavia and Padua, however the printing activity of the Mekhitarists in Venice occupies the most esteemed place in Armenian cultural history in the last few centuries.²

Translations by the Mekhitarists

From the Golden to the Middle Ages, the Mekhitarist Renaissance and beyond, a great amount of translation work was accomplished in the Armenian cultural sphere. Due to the language's richness and flexibility, classical and modern masterpieces have been able to be translated into Armenian with great success.

One of the main objectives of the Mekhitarist Congregation was to create a new bridge between East and West to facilitate intellectual exchange. Wrapped in the strict silence of their cloisters, the Mekhitarist Fathers began their untiring labor of translating the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans and European masterpieces from the time the order was first established. This tradition was kept alive and renewed by the training of countless, excellent translators. Almost all of the immense translation work was accomplished in the 19th Century with the translation of European Classical and Romantic literatures into Old Armenian and then into Modern Western Armenian in the 20th Century. Today, thanks to all of these translations, numerous masterpieces scintillate the Armenian literary corpus.

The aesthetic taste and artistic knowledge of an entire generation was formed under the aegis or thanks to the example of the classicist school, launched by excellent translators such as Father Vrt'anes Askerian and Father Yeghia T'ovmachian. This activity reached perhaps unequalled heights with such translators as the Hürmiüzian brothers and, above all, Father Arsen Bagratuni, who spearheaded the initiative. Aside from being the author of the neoclassical poem *Hayk diutsazn* [Hayk the Hero], Bagratuni, one of the greatest representatives of Armenian classicism, also produced excellent translations of the *Iliad*, *Olympic Odes*, *Antigone*, *Electra*, *The Characters*, *Ars poetica*, *Orations*, *Funeral Orations*, *Britannicus*, *Mithridates*, *Iphigenia*, *Alzira*, *Merope*, the *Sepolcri*, *Saul* and *Paradise Lost*. He translated these texts into classical Armenian, or *grabar*, with the refined and solemn style which distinguishes the Mekhitarist school (Bagratuni 1863, 1869). It is thanks to the brilliance of Father Arsen Bagratuni that the Armenians could read Dante's masterpiece before many in Asia and even some in Europe (Haroutyunian 2012).

One of the worthy heirs of the great Mekhitarist translation tradition was Father Arsen Ghazikian. Ghazikian's translation style is almost always distinguished by care, faithfulness, harmony, literary value and vocabulary, in addition to which is his extraordinarily intuitive choice of texts.

The role played by the Mekhitarists in Armenian culture is evident. Thanks to them and their translations, Armenian culture came into close contact with various cultures from all over the world, and in particular with that of the West, allowing it to be assimilated and re-elaborated. As the great erudite Arshak Chopanian said, "The Mekhitarists opened up the whole of the West to the Armenians."

² See among others: Peratoner, 2006 (ed. by); Zekiyani, 1990, 2000.



Armenian-Latin Translations

Unequivocally, the foundations for Armenian translation in Italy were laid in the first half of the 19th Century when, on the Island of Saint Lazzarus, the Mekhitarist monks printed books, which also provided their Latin translations alongside the Armenian texts. This created a widespread interest in the publications among Europe's patristic, ecclesiastical and cultural spheres.

A figure of particular prominence in these philological studies was Mekhitarist Father Giovanni Battista Aucher (Mkrtich Avgerian, 1762-1854), who in 1818 published a critical edition with a new Latin translation of the *Chronicon* by Eusebius of Cesarea. Until its publication, this book was believed to be lost, however the Armenian translation was able to reproduce it in its entirety (Aucher, 1818). This publishing event caused a great sensation and immediately highlighted the importance of the Armenian manuscript tradition. In the words of Professor 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: 232).

The importance of the Armenian translations is clear also in the works of Ephraim of Syria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Philo Judaeus, John Chrisostom and others, which have been preserved in the global literary canon thanks to the classical Armenian translations. These Armenian texts are the closest surviving texts to the originals. While only a few fragments of Eusebius's *Chronicon* are left from the original Greek, it is preserved in its entirety in classical Armenian.

Only three years after Father Giovanni Battista Aucher published the *Chronicon* by Eusebius of Caesarea, he published three sermons in Armenian by Philo of Alexandria, - *ex armena versione antiquissima* (as was written on the title page), again alongside its Latin translation (Aucher 1822). In 1826, other exegetic sermons by Philo on the Old Testament were added to this publication, and in 1827, so were the *Fifteen Homilies of Severian* (Aucher, 1826; 1827). At the same time, an edition of the *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* in 1826 marked the beginning of a series of editions that highlighted the works of St. John Chrysostom from the ancient Armenian manuscript translations. These editions would conclude only in 1862 with the *Commentaries on the Letters of St. Paul*. 1876 saw the publication of the St. Ephraim's *Commentary on the Diatessaron* of Taziano. This text was already prepared by Fr. Aucher and was published posthumously with a contribution from the philologist Georg Mösinger (Mösinger, 1876).

In 1878, from the manuscripts kept on Saint Lazarus, the Fathers published the fragments of an *Apologia* by Aristides, a Christian author of the 2nd Century quoted in some ancient sources but until publication believed missing.³ The event gained international resonance,⁴ and gave rise to research over the following decades, making it possible to rediscover and become reacquainted with the original texts in their entirety.

³ *Sancti Aristidis Atheniensis sermones duo quorum originalis textus desideratur, ex antiqua armeniaca versione nunc primum in latinam linguam translati*, Venetiis, 1878. The publication includes fragments of two works. The attribution of the second of these to Aristides is currently considered dubious.

⁴ Cardinal Pitra wrote to the Fathers on 28th November 1878: "Short though it may be, that which reaches us from your inexhaustible Armenia is all gold and reflects the Golden Age of apologetics". The issue of 1st December of *Le*

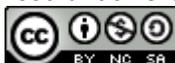


Armenian-Italian Translations

By the mid-19th century, the Mekhitarists presented translations of important Armenian books to the Italian public, including two invaluable literary translations of the *History of Movses of Khoren* and the *History of Agathangelus*—two pillars of Armenian historiographical literature from the Golden Age. These books were thus made accessible to western culture via Saint Lazarus's printing tradition and were the fruit of the Mekhitarist monks' collaboration with Niccolò Tommaseo (Tommaseo, 1841; 1843).

Other notable translations and publications include: Father Avgerian's *Orations of Nerses of Lambron*, remembered as one of the most significant figures in Armenian literature and ecclesiastical history (Aucher, 1812); Father Mesrop Gianashian's *The Hymns of Nerses Shnorhali* (Gianascian, 1973), Nerses Shnorhali (Nerses the Graceful) being one of the most important representatives of the Armenian church; Sayat' Nova's *Works* (Gianascian, 1964); *Modern Armenian Poetry* (Gianascian, 1966), etc.

Thus, the Mekhitarist fathers were and continue to be the primary figures in the nation's intellectual rebirth and cultural history.



PART II

Armenian-Italian Translations

1991-2012

Having referenced the unique role and significance the Mekhitarists' translations played in the Armenian "Awakening", I now turn to the main argument of Next Page Foundation's task, which requested a compilation of the titles of Italian translations of Armenian texts from 1991 till today.

When the Foundation entrusted this work to me, I recalled the discussions about the mapping of translations with my colleagues while working as a faculty member at the Misano Adriatico campus of New York's Nida School of Translation Studies. These discussions were very helpful in actualizing this work.

Throughout my research I encountered many obstacles. Firstly, the absence of catalogues presented a large difficulty, but also stressed the importance of Next Page Foundation's initiative. Secondly, a short period was given for such serious research, which also happened to coincide with the month of August, a vacation month in Italy when the research establishments are closed. It was thus very difficult to get in touch with translators and collect information. In addition, these vacations were followed by the beginning of the academic year, compounding the complications, as most of the translators also teach, and were busy in the whirl of the academic year's start.

However, not only was I able to conduct cross-investigations of various lists published for other subjects, but I managed to establish a viable cooperation with some of the translators. In this way, I was able to coordinate the task entrusted to me in the best way possible and produce the preliminary results in a short timeframe. Until the last moment the catalogue was being replenished with new editions. As a result, and taking into account the obstacles faced in obtaining this information, I don't rule out that there may be a few translations not listed.

The present study of Armenian-Italian translations between 1991 and 2012 begins with the publication of the translation of *Urbat'agirk'*, the first printed Armenian book. This translation was published as a monograph by the world's ancient and prestigious Roman National Academy of Lincei in the series *Memories of the Lincei Academy*.

Being that 2012 marks the 500th anniversary celebration around the world of Armenian Typography, this study is a symbolic coincidence. The *Urbat'agirk'* was the first Armenian book published in the world, and this year marks its jubilee; it also happens to appear first in my catalogue as the first book translated into Italian after 1991, the date of Armenia's independence.

Works from *grabar*, ancient Armenian, dominate the Armenian-Italian translation corpus: *Urbat'agirk'* (The Book of Friday), Eznik Koghbatsi's *Against the Sects*, P'awstos Buzand's *History of the Armenians*, Ghukas Sebastatsi's *The Wars of Davit' Bek, an Armenian Hero of XVIII c.*, Koriun's *The Life of Mashtots*, Grigor Narekatsi's *The Tree of Life: panegyric of the cross* and *Armenian Spirituality: Gregory of Narek's Book of Lamentation*, Nerses Lambronatsi's *The Pledge of Hope*, Egishe's *History of Vardan and the Armenian Martyrs*, *Commentary on Joshua and Judges* and *The passion, Death and*



Resurrection of our Lord, Hermes Erametz's (attributed to) *The Armenian Hermes: A Catechism. Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios, 'Definitions'*, Grigor Skevratsi's *Exhortation on the True Faith and a Virtuous Pure Life*, *The answer of Jakob of Nisibis to Aristakes*, *The Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church*.

Translations from Eastern Armenian to Italian include Aksel Bakunts's novellas (*Tales from the Silence - Five Armenian novellas*), Hovhannes T'umanian's *Fairy Tales*, a collection of different authors' poetry *Armenia*, Raffi's *The Meliks of Karabakh* (1600-1827). *Materials for the Modern Armenian History*, Vahagn Grigoryan's *Last Journey of Vostan* and Elda Grin's *Hands*.

Translations from Western Armenian to Italian include Daniel Varujan's *The Song of the Bread* and *The Seas of Wheat and other Armenian poems* poetry collections, Father Boghos Ananean's *The Life of Mashtots* and Yervant Odian's *Comrade Clueless*. There are also books whose authors and Armenian titles are not marked in the catalogues, for example in the cases of the publications of *Il Canto d'Armenia (The Song of Armenia)* and *Armenia*. As a matter of fact, the mentioned books are selections of different Armenian authors' poetry collated into one publication. The first one of these anthologies was undertaken by Father Levon Zekiyani. From ancient times it includes *Vahagn's birth* and *Church Hymns*. From the Middle Ages, it includes Kostandin of Erzunka, Frik, Arak'el of Siunik', Hovhannes of T'lkuran, Sayat' Nova and excerpts from Alexander Romance. The compilation's translation also highlights contemporary authors including Hovhannes T'umanian, Siamant'o, Daniel Varujan, Misak Metzarents, Vahan Terian, Yeghishe Charents, Hovhannes Shiraz, Paruyr Sevak and Zahrat. These translations have been realized by Father Boghos Zekiyani, Gabriella Uluhogian, Paola Mildonian, Antonia Arslan, Alfred Hemmat Siraky, Giusto Traina and Claudio Gugerotti. The collection *Armenia* includes poems by Sona Antonyan, Artem Haruthyunyan, Henrik Edoyan, Manase, Rosa Hovhannisyani, Hratchya Saruchan, Artak Hambardzumyan.

In the catalogue, *La Cucina d'Armenia (The Cuisine of Armenia)* and *Così ride l'Ararat (Ararat Laughs Like This)*, nr. 1 and *Anche l'Ararat ha la suocera (Even Ararat has a mother-in-law)* are without Armenian titles. The first book is a translation-study on Armenian cuisine and the second includes anecdotal excerpts.

Elda Green's novel *Hands*, which is published in 34 languages including Italian, as well as a bilingual Armenian-Italian book devoted to Armen Zaryan's life and works, published on the 95th anniversary of his birth, are also included in the catalogue. Also among the catalogued works is the first Italian printing of Hovhannes T'umanyan's *Folktales* (2005). It includes only six tales, while in 2007 twenty were printed in Yerevan. Only five out of the catalogued books are without ISBN numbers, most likely due to the fact that assigning numbers was not a necessary stipulation in the past.

Also included in the catalogue are translations which, by themselves, are not publications, like *Some insights into the book of history of Sebēos*, which was published in Bazmavep in 2009, *The Armenian Hermes: A Catechism, Hermes Trismegistos to Asclepios, 'Definitions'* printed in 2009 in *The Secret Revelation of Ermete Trismegisto*, and *The answer of Jakob of Nisibis to Aristakes* published in *Afraate, Expositions*, in 2012.



INTERVIEW

Before passing to the conclusions, below I present a special interview conducted with my Armenian Studies colleagues in Venice and Bologna, Professors Aldo Ferrari and Anna Sirinian, whose translated works are included in the catalogue.

1. **Sona Haroutyunian (SH): Has there ever been a collaboration between Armenian and Italian publishing houses?**

Aldo Ferrari (AF): As far as I know, this type of collaboration has never existed.

Anna Sirinian (AS): Not that I know of, neither in the past nor the present.

2. **SH: How would you define the situation of literature translated from Armenian to Italian?**

AF: I would say it's good, but very limited. Ultimately, various texts important in ancient literature by authors like Sebeos, Pavstos Buzand, Eghishe and Eznik were translated, but very few from modern literature. It's a pity because a knowledge of modern literature is fundamental to getting closer to a foreign country.

AS: Very little is translated. Armenian literature of almost any epoch remains almost practically unknown by the Italian public.

3. **SH: What kind of market do these translations have?**

AF: The translations from classical Armenian have a limited dissemination because of their intrinsic difficulty, while modern literature could have a lot of success, like the many editions of Varujan's poems demonstrate. A major push in coordinating the ideas and activities of the Italian Armenists in this direction would be important.

AS: Actually, it's very limited; but it's also true that the publishing houses interested in terms like "ethnic" might want to take initiative in this regard. However, it would need to be a well-translated work, well-presented to the Italian public. And the publishing house would naturally need to have good advertisement.

4. **SH: Why have there been certain subjects and genres for translation and others not?**

AF: The major part of the translators have a philological or historical background which thus favors the translation of more antique texts, or at least texts not strictly of



a literary character. Nevertheless, this would be an opportune moment to add new translations of modern Armenian literature to the canon.

AS: I think that the choice was made arbitrarily. For example, in terms of poetry, for the beautiful anthology *In Forma di Parole* there was a favorable situation between the Armenologists of Italy and the editor, Gianni Scalia, already interested in diverse forms of poetry. It's also like this with Nadia Cavaliera and the magazine "Bollettario" (*Armenia*). Having already published other literary collections from other ethnic peoples, she wanted to "open up" Armenia to the readership as well. These publications were thus undertaken by publishers already "accustomed" to multiculturalism. Besides, there are also scientific works that are products of historical, philological, and more specifically theological, studies. These publications generally gather in specialized spheres within the various disciplines, but naturally their circulation remains limited.

5. SH: And what of the financial resources, prospectives and collaboration among the Armenian community and the publishing houses in the promotion of Armenian literature?

AF: The availability of the Armenian community in Italy is limited, but it could be better utilized if there were a precise project to undertake and articulated translations. It should be noted that there really exists a notable editorial richness in Italy that could be better utilized to spread the knowledge of modern Armenian literature in Italy. Other than publishing single authors, a large anthology of Armenian poetry could also be conceptualized.

AS: It would really be desirable to promote this literature, both with Italian initiatives and with the collaboration of the Italian and Armenian publishing houses. The Italian public, in my opinion, is ready to welcome a good and wide selection of Armenian modern and contemporary works in translation. I'm thinking about an anthology, for example, of Armenian poets from 1900, or a novel, or a selection of short stories. However, it needs to be, like I said, a good and accurate translation, prepared ad hoc for an Italian readership, and presents Armenia and its cultural richness in an authentic way. And, of course, it needs to be a "special" and courageous publishing house ready to invest in this. This is not easy, especially at this moment.



Conclusions

1. The Armenian-Italian translations were carried without an intermediary language.
2. A significant amount of work was translated from old Armenian literature, i.e., Sebeos, P'avstos Buzand, Eghishe, Eznik, etc., but comparatively little is translated from contemporary sources like Khechoian, Beledian, etc. Thus, these authors remain quite unknown. However, over the past two decades, modern poetry has been included in one comprehensive anthology, *Armenia*, by Sirinian-Bais and the work *The Song of Armenia*, half of which includes modern poetry.
3. Realistically speaking, at this moment it is especially difficult for publishers to invest in translation. On the other hand, let's not forget that an entire market for literary translation exists, and besides the publishers and translators, agents, book fairs, presentations and reviews play a significant role in the dissemination of these books. Thus, whereas once only the publisher and translator were involved in the process, now there is a need of group collaboration with people playing various roles to ensure the success of the book.
4. It is necessary to seriously consider training new translators, perhaps by choosing from among the best students in Armenian Studies, as it is not a given that someone who knows both Armenian and Italian can necessarily translate well. It's necessary that the translator have linguistic skills and specific training as a translator, a deep sense of responsibility and the ability to consult, compare and willfully collaborate. At the same time I must painfully admit that until today Italy's Ministry of Education has not provided "Translation Theory and Linguistics" as a subject in the Armenian language curriculum. Meanwhile, this same Ministry has provided this course for a number of other languages. It is thus not possible at this juncture to officially train students in this domain.
5. Speaking about the translator's responsibilities, it's also necessary to consider their rights. While interviewing the translators it became clear that the major part of their work was done upon their own initiative, often for free or for very low pay which was sometimes made much later after the completion of the work. Thus, before all else, it is necessary that the translator is paid accordingly. It's also important that serious literary translations with introductions, footnotes and summaries, are finally considered as scientific publications. Otherwise skilled translator-scientists would give preference to one's own creative work and not to the translation of another's work. This being said, it should be recognized that the translation is infact a creation. And, as the well-known Mekhitarian monk Father Arsen Ghazikian explained, translating is ten times more difficult than the writing. Let us not forget that translation is a result of intricate philological and linguistic hard work interlaced with other factors as well.

Let's hope that we, the Armenian scholars of Italy, work collaboratively on new ideas and projects. The results of such work will replenish the present bibliography of Armenian to Italian translations, benefiting the spread of Armenian culture, and honoring our sacred translators by continuing the mission they began in the 5th century.



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