



Translations from Armenian into German, 1991 to date

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conducted by Dr. Raffi Kantian¹, and translated from German into English by Stoyan Tsvetkov
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¹ Dr. Raffi Kantian is an author, freelance translator and publicist.

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Introductory remarks

The cultural relationship between Germany and Armenia has experienced, especially since the 19th century, a great upswing. That was mostly due to the Armenian students that have studied at various German and German-speaking universities. Symbolically speaking a significant role was played by the fact that Khachatur Abovian, who played a pivotal role in the revival of the Armenian literary language, studied at the German University of Dorpat (today's Tartu) in Estonia. Or if we were to name another example: the icon of the modern Armenian music - Komitas - studied in the years 1896-1899 at the Humboldt University of Berlin, which was named in honor of its founder – the Prussian king Frederick William III - “Frederick William University.” A commemorative plaque was also placed there in memory of his name in September 2012.

Increasing cultural contacts also led to the translation of German literature into the Armenian language. Thanks to this trend Goethe's “Faust” was translated over 30 separate times to Armenian. The question, however, is if this dedicated and comprehensive translation activity exists also in the reverse direction. This research is concerned particularly with the years after 1991, or in other words after the declaration of Armenia's independence. There is a good reason for this: Armenia was able to establish strong contacts with Europe and especially countries like Germany or Austria. But how have these contacts manifested themselves when it comes to the translation of Armenian literature?

As it can be seen from the table, in the years 1991–2012 it was mainly literature that was translated from Armenian language, fairy tales were clearly less represented and amongst the scientific texts there are almost exclusively theological and philological works to be found. I will mainly be focusing on the literature here.

As a reference I have used the databases of the German National Library in Frankfurt and Leipzig and also the Berlin State Library, which is a property of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. Of great help was Steffi Chotiwari-Juenger's book “Die Literaturen der Völker Kaukasiens – Neue Übersetzungen und deutschsprachige Bibliographie” (“The Literatures of the Peoples of the Caucasus – New Translations and German-Language Bibliography”) and also the insight into the subject of Professor Armenuhi Drost-Abgarjan, Meliné Pehlivanian and Pater Simon from the Mechitarist Congregation in Vienna. I've also used my own personal archives and library, as well as my internet research.

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It's logical to divide the time periods when Armenian works were translated into three separate phases. The first phase is concerned with the time period up until the end of World War II, the second – up until the German reunification in 1990 and finally the period after the reunification.

The first phase: the time period up until the end of World War II

The Mechitarist Armenian Catholic Church has been present in Vienna since the beginning of the 19th century. The Order has contributed to the renewal of the Armenian language, edited the works of the ancient Armenian literature, encouraged the modern Armenian language and devoted itself to Armenological and philological studies. They have also focused on the translation of classical world literature works from Western authors (Rousseau, Voltaire and others) into Armenian. They did not devote themselves so much, however, to translations from the Armenian language into other languages.

The published somewhere in between 1911 and 1931 work from O. Bardenhewer, Th. Shermann and K. Weyman “Bibliothek der Kirchenväter: Eine Auswahl patristischer Werke in deutscher Übersetzung” (“Library of the Fathers: A Selection of Patristic Works Translated into German”) (BKV2) contained a number of translations from Armenian language with introductions from Simon Weber:

Eznik v. Kolb: “Wider die Irrlehren” (“Against Herresies”); Koriun: “Beschreibung des Lebens und Sterbens des hl. Lehrers Mesrop” (“The Life and Death of St. Mesrop”); Mesrop: “Ausgewählte Reden aus dem Hatschachapatum” (“Selected Sayings from the Hatschachapatum”); Mambre Verzanogh: “Homilie über die Auferweckung des Lazarus“ (“Homily of the Revival of Lazarus”); “Reden des (Katholikos) Johannes Mandakuni“ (“Speeches from Johannes Mandakuni”); Egische: “Erklärung des Vaterunsers” (“Explanation of the Lord’s Prayer”); Egische: “Worte der Ermahnung über die Einsiedler” (“Words of Exhortation of the Hermit”).

There were also other translations: “Faustus von Byzanz: Geschichte Armeniens” (“Faustus of Byzantium: History of Armenia”), Cologne 1879, and “Des Moses von Chorene Geschichte Gross-Armeniens” (“The Moses of Chorene: Story of Greater Armenia”), Regensburg 1869, both translated by Dr. M. Lauer; “Synodalrede des Nerses von Lampron, Armenischen Erzbischofs von Tartus im 12. Jahr” (“Synodical Speech of the Nest of Lampron, Armenian Archbishop of



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Tartus in the 12th Year”) as interpreted by Karl Friedrich Neumann, Leipzig 1834, and finally “Armenische Kirchenlieder” (“Armenian Church Songs”) by Dr. Paul Vetter in 1880.

The literature was also not neglected. A big role was played by the Armenian students in Leipzig. Abgar Joannissiany published in the years 1886-1888 several volumes of Armenian literature in German, which were published in the Wilhelm Friedrich Publishing House in Leipzig. (see Hacik Gazerian: “Die deutsch-armenischen akademischen Beziehungen und der Leipziger Armenisch-Akademische Verein, Teil II”). Arthur Leist, who had brought Vol. 1 of “Armenischen Bibliothek” (“Armenian Library”) and “Drei Erzählungen von Raphael Patkanian” (“Three stories from Raphael Patkanian”), published with E. Pierson “Armenische Dichter” (“Armenian Poets”), Dresden 1898.

1909 in Leipzig appeared the stories of Avedis Aharonians, translated by A. Finck-Gjandschaezian. Later Pascal Ohaniantz presented in his work “Armeniens Leid” (“Armenia’s song”) translations from Armenian, which he published in 1912 in the Carl Konegen Publishing House in Vienna. Translations from Armenian one could also find in Paul Rohrbach’s “Armenien” (“Armenia”), Stuttgart 1919. We end this phase with the story “Der Sternwagen” (“The Star-Cart”) from Hamasdegh, which was presented in 1940 in “Mitteilungsblatt der Deutsch-Armenischen Gesellschaft” (“Newsletter of the German-Armenian Society”).

Second Phase: From the end of World War II up until the German reunification

When speaking about West Germany, officially named the Federal Republic of Germany, it can be said that the publishers (especially the well-known ones) were not especially interested in publishing Armenian books. This was influenced by the financial considerations at the time. It is suspected that the bad sales figures had a negative impact on the publishing houses in market-oriented West Germany. Consequently only a small part of publishing houses for which the marketing played only a minor role were able to fill this gap. It should be mentioned that the works “Hohelied” (“Song of Songs”) and “Jerk Jerkots” were published from the Oganessian Publishing House in Munich 1983. They were translated by Raffi Kantian and appeared later in his work “Von den Steinen Armeniens” (“From the Stones of Armenia”), Berlin 1990. Also in the volume “Armenien - kleines Volk mit großem Erbe” (“Armenia - a Small Nation with a Large Inheritance”) from the Catholic Academy in Hamburg (1988), which was translated by Friedrich Heyer and Raffi Kantian, one could find Armenian literature from “the birth of Vahagn” to the modern times. Some parts that were translated by Tessa

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Hoffmann and Raffi Kantian could also be found in the anthology “Lebenslieder Todes klagend - Lesebuch vergessener Völker” (“Life Songs Death Lamenting - Book of Forgotten Nations”).

A big role in the distribution of Armenian literature was played by journals and magazines such as “Litfass”. Back in 1970 they published a small compilation from Krikor Melikya in Issue 119 from 1980. Later this compilation was followed by a larger one from the same author, but this time spreading over 50 pages. The most comprehensive compilation of Armenian literature was finally published in Issue 160 (1990), which consisted of a booklet with the title “Armenien: Macht Licht! & Freiheit!” (“Armenia: Power, Light, Freedom!"). This edition, from now on managed by Raffi Kantian, contained to publish not only prose and poetry, but also essays on contemporary history, on works of Sergei Paradschanow and so on.

Finally a few words regarding the influence of the radio as a medium for the popularization of Armenian literature. Although radio stations were having an ever decreasing interest in Armenian literature, it was still represented in a limited number of stations, such as Radio Bremen in 1977, where a prose by Schahan Schahnur as translated by Raffi Kantian was presented.

A very different picture presented itself in East Germany, officially known as the German Democratic Republic (GDR). There were objective reasons for that. The GDR was part of the Soviet Bloc and was thus in some way also linked to the Soviet Union. As a result the works of Soviet writers, including Armenian ones, were often published in East Germany. Since the financial considerations weren't a major factor for the publishers in the GDR, they could print Armenian literature without any risk. An early example for that is the book “Armenische Novellen” (“Armenian Novels”) from the year 1949. Another example is Lewon Mkrtschian's compilation of classical Armenian poetry “Die Berge beweinen die Nacht deines Leides” (“The Mountains Weep for the Night of Your Sorrow”) as adapted by Annemarie Bostroem and translated from Russian and Armenian by Horst Lothar Teweleit. The book contained works from Masrop Maschtotz (5th century) to Sayat-Nova (18th century).

Armenian authors were also presented in individual volumes. A short list: “Der Schelmenstück der Hammeldiebe” (“The Rogue Piece of Mutton Thieves”) by Hrant Matevosyan as translated by Lieselotte Remane, Publishing House “Kultur und Fortschritt” (1969); “Das Taubenkloster - “Essays, Gedichte und Verslegenden, Poeme, Prosa” (“The Pigeons' Monastery - Essays, Poems, Prose”) by Hovhannes Tumanyan, translated in German by Friedemann Berger, Adolf

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Endler und Elke Erbe, Publishing House “Volk und Welt” (1972); “Kampf um Baku” (“Battle for Baku”) by Mikayél Chatirian and translated Corrinna and Gottfried Wojtek, “Volk und Welt” (1972); “Der Glockenton der Karawane” (“The Bell of the Caravan”) by Avetik Isahakian as adapted by Annemarie Bostroem, “Volk und Welt” (1978); “Die karminrote Schildlaus” (“The Cochineal Carmine”) by Ruben Howsepyan, as translated by Ingeborg Schroeder, “Volk und Welt” (1986); “Der Schemrz, der weitertreibt” (“The Pain That Endures”) by Paruyr Sevak which is translated by Annemarie Bostroem and Peter Brasch, Waldemar Dege, Stefan Doering, Thomas Guenter, Katja Lebedewa, Helmuth Malonek and Klaus-Dieter Tonojan, “Volk und Welt” (1987); “... aber sonst ist alles reine Wahrheit” (“...But Everything Else is Pure Truth”) by Hrant Matevosyan and translated by Charlotte Kossuth, “Volk und Welt” (1988); “Die Koenigin von Armenien” (“The Queen of Armenia”) by Sero Chansadjan, in German by Ruprecht Willnow, “Neues Leben” (1989).

Also the magazines in the German Democratic Republic played a mediating role in increasing the popularity of Armenian literature. Of particular note is the magazine “Sinn und Form” that around September/October 1975 devoted over 60 pages to Armenian literature. In charge of this was Lewon Mkrtschian.

A special role was played by the magazine “Sowjetliteratur” – a monthly journal of the Writer’s Union of the USSR, also with its own German edition. This edition was available in East Germany and it often contained works by different Armenian authors.

Finally, another characteristic feature was that nearly all translations derived from the Russian language. It has already been mentioned that the financial consideration played no role. This was also the reason why the repeatedly mentioned above publishing house “Volk und Welt” had the opportunity to employ 300 people, including not only translators and linguists, but also ethnologists and others.

The third phase: from the German reunification up until today

The reunification in the year 1990 brought with itself a fundamental change. The GDR and its economy system collapsed. There was no longer a special link between the GDR and the Soviet Union and thus no relationship with Soviet Armenia. A year later the Soviet Union along with its republics no longer existed and so literary contacts no longer existed. The transition to capitalism had also brought difficult times onto the former East German publishers. In the

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summer of 1994 the aforementioned publishing house “Volk und Welt” had instead of 300 employees only 30. Many of the old East German publishers no longer exist today. All this taken in account meant that reunified Germany had the same conditions as the ones in the old Federal Republic.

Consequently only small and dedicated publishers committed themselves to supporting Armenian authors. Two of them are mentioned. The first is the Nora Publishing Community that published two volumes of “Armenische Erzählungen” (“Armenian Stories”) in 2005 and 2010 (translators: Helmut Bode, Gann-Maria Braungardt, Helga Gutsche, Charlotte Kossuth, Heinz Küebarth, Adelheid und Sarkis Latchinian, Liselotte Remane, Brigitte Schröder, Hella Rymarowic). The editor for both of them was Adelheid Latchinian. The Arcor Publishing House published in 2012 the bilingual book “Mein Armenien” (“My Armenia”). The adaptations of the poems by Yeghishe Charents were handled by Konrad Kuhn, who also wrote an extensive introduction. To spread the Armenian literature was also the idea of the Frankfurt-based publishing house “Hay Media”, which published Shahan Shahnour’s novel “Der Rückzug ohne Lied” (“The Silent Retreat”) - translated by Samvel Ovasapian in 2011.

There were also publishers that had a more “special mission”. A good example is the based in Munich and Vienna edition KAPPA. In 2000 it published the anthology “Verschlossen mit silbernem Schlüssel/Literatur aus Armenien, Aserbaidshan, Georgien” (“Locked with a Silver Key / Literature from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia”). Editors were Marianne Gruber and Manfred Mueller with the Armenian part of the book trusted to Raffi Kantian. The occasion was “unliterary”: in the second half of 1998 the Presidency of the Council of the European Union was held by Austria and wanted to make an example with the release of such an anthology.

In the summer of 2000 the so called “European Express” (Europaexpress) was organized by the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin. Authors from 43 European countries, including Armenia, took a train from Lisbon that took them to Paris, Brussels, Hanover, Kaliningrad, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and eventually to Berlin. A volume named “Europaexpress - Ein literarisches Reisebuch” (“Europaexpress - A Literary Travel Book”) was later released in which two essays from the authors David Muradyan and Levon Khechoyan were published - “Lyrischer Fahrplan” (“Lyrical Schedule”) and “Eiserne Vorhänge” (“Iron Curtains”) – in 2001 by Eichborn Publishing House. The organizers had also uploaded the stories of two authors – “Der Brunnen von Charpert”



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(“The Fountain of Charpert”) and “Das Beben der Erde” (“Earth’s Shaking”) – both of which were translated by Raffi Kantian, on their no longer existing website: www.literaturexpress.org.

The Federal Republic of Germany also sought a literary connection to the post-Soviet states, including Armenia. That’s why the Literary Colloquium Berlin (1994) invited the two authors Ruben Howsepyan and Henrik Edojan, together with Raffi Kantian, to a four-week stay, ending with a final reading.

The Literature Workshop in Berlin also had connections with Armenia and invited in 1995 Geworg Emin (translated by Tessa Hofmann), Hovhannes Yeranyan, Silva Kaputkyan and Asat (translated by Raffi Kantian) to a one-week stay in Germany with readings, followed by a scholarship awarded to Zorair Khalapjan in 1996.

The magazines had less and less interest in the promotion of Armenian literature. No more compilations of Armenian literature were published and only a single poem from the listed above author Asat was ever published. An exception was the released by the ADK (Akademie der Kuenste, Berlin) “Journal of the German-Armenian Society”, which had examples of Armenian literature – mainly poetry – written in a bilingual format. Translations were made partly by Konrad Kuhn and in most cases by Raffi Kantian.

The radio broadcasters exhibit a bit more commitment than before. Radio Brandenburg invited in 1994 Ruben Howsepyan and Henrik Edojan for a very extensive interview. The Southwest Radio Baden-Baden (now part of Southwest Broadcasting) aired five essays by Raffi Kantian in the years 1996-1998 - “Schahan Schahnur: Das bittere Los der Entwurzelung” (“Shahan Shahnour: The Bitter Fate of Uprooting”), “Der ausgeträumte Traum der Oktoberrevolution: Über den armenischen Dichter Jegische Tscharenz“ (“The Dream of the October Revolution: The Armenian Poet Yeghishe Charents”), “Die Lyriker Zahrad und Krakuni: Literarischer Anschluß unter schwierigen Bedingungen” (“The Poets Zahrad and Krakuni: Literary Connections During Difficult Times”), “Der Wiederbeginn in der Tauwetterperiode: Der armenische Dichter Parujr Sewak“ (“The Revival of the Khrushchev Thaw: The Armenian poet Paruyr Sevak”), “Vom Zeugen des Massakers zum Opfer des Genozids: Der armenische Lyriker Daniel Varuschan“ (“From the Witnesses of the Massacre During the Genocide: The Armenian poet Daniel Varuschan”). As early as 1995, Klaus-Peter Walted had presented in the same station the works – “Deutsch-Armenische Literaturbegegnung, Mein Weg führt zum Berg

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himmelan” (“German-Armenian Literary Encounter “My Path Leads to the Mount and Beyond”) with stories from Zareh Krakunis “Von den Steinen Armeniens” (“From the Stones of Armenia”) and the 160th Issue of the magazine “Litfass”. In recent years the radio station “Deutschlandfunk” drew attention to itself. It featured Gesine Dornblueth’s radio essay “Die Überwindung der Sprachlosigkeit: Armenien und die vorsichtige Annäherung an die Türkei” (“Overcoming the Speechlessness: Armenia and the Cautious Rapprochement with Turkey”), which contained numerous literary examples. Also aired was Mirko Schanitz in his feature “Dort das ferne Europa...” - Armenische Dichter verlassen den kaukasischen Kreidekreis” (“There the Distant Europe... “Armenian Poet Left the Caucasian Chalk Circle”) from 2006.

Now a few words regarding the new connections at a country level. The state of Saxony-Anhalt has cultural contacts with Armenia. These cultural contacts have also resulted in literary cooperation. Examples for this are a few released books from the magazine “Oda” with examples of Armenian poetry. Freshly released are also two new books – “Zeitgenössische Armenische Lyrik” (“Contemporary Armenian Poetry”) and “Als die eisigen Tage endlich vorüber waren” (“As the Icy Days Were Finally Ending”) – both of which were published in 2012.

The aforementioned translation of theological and philological works can be connected with the names of Armenuhi Drost-Abgarjan, Hermann Goltz and Andrea Schmidt. With their work they continue to some extent the tradition established in the 19th and 20th Century in the German-speaking countries. Their texts are published regularly in anthologies, commemorative books and so on. They are also aimed at a very specific audience.

Armenia’s special case

For some time Armenia has been seeking to publish German translations in the country and to propagate them. Efforts in this regard had already existed during the Soviet era. Nahabed Kouchak’s “Hundertundein Hairen” (1988), translated by Annemare Bostroem and Horst Lothar Teweleit, supervised by Lewon Mktschian, is one such example. The 1998 anthology of classical Armenian poetry “Ein Wort aus dem betäubten Herzen: Klassische armenische Dichtung, V.-XVIII. Jahrhundert” (“A Word from the Troubled Heart: Classical Armenian Poetry, V-XVIII. Century”) also by Annemarie Bostroem and Horst Lothar Teweleit, edited by Lavon Mkrtchian, is another such attempt in this direction. So is the Armenian folk epic “David von Sassun” (David of Sassoon”) edited by Sargis Khachent in 2004. In the year 2005



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Raffi Kantian translated and edited “Dort das ferne Europa – Zeitgenössische Lyrik aus Armenien” (“There the Distant Europe / Contemporary Poetry from Armenia”) and finally in 2012 the book “Zeitgenössische Armenische Lyrik” (“Contemporary Armenian Poetry”) and for its appearance many people have contributed (Wilhelm Bartsch, Daniela Danz, Matthias Fritz, Christine Hoba, Constanze John, Raffi Kantian, Christian Kreis, Werner Makowski, Cornelia Marks, Hermine Navasardyan, Marco Organo, Victor Pambuccian, André Schinkel, Hrachya Stepanyan).

As pleasing as this development is, the question remains as to the marketing of these works in German-speaking countries.

Instead of final words

It’s safe to say that the translated Armenian works in reunified Germany aren’t very well sold. Even considering some editions that have a circulation of around 6,000 copies, that is still not a very large readership. But it would also be unfair to say that only the Armenian literature is suffering from such problems, because they are also to be seen with many other national literatures.

This wasn’t the case however in the GDR, where the books of Armenian authors were sold in large numbers. Ruben Howsepian’s “Die karminrote Schildlaus” (“The Crimson Scale Insect”) had a circulation of 20,000 copies. For magazines it was a similar picture.

The works of philologists and theologians will continue to exist in the future and so will their translations. These works have no financial boundaries.

How will the cultural collaboration with Saxony-Anhalt affect the situations remains to be seen. It’s also unknown what future steps the media is to take, especially the radio stations. For all the enthusiasts, however – including translators and publishers – it’s safe to say one thing: there is still much to do!

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