



Translations from Armenian into Ukrainian, 1991 to date

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The Matrix of Contemporary Armenian-Ukrainian

Literary Relations

Armenian-Ukrainian relations are long-standing and have a history of centuries. In the 11th century, when the Seljuk Turks invaded and conquered the oldest Armenian capital Ani, tens of thousands of Armenians were forced to emigrate. Many of them, crossing the Black Sea, appeared on what is now the island of Crimea and found a new haven in Kafa and Akkerman.

Four hundred years later, when the Turks, with their dividing, conquering nature occupied Fortress Kafa (Feodosia), large groups of Armenians were forced to immigrate to different cities of north-western Ukraine: Lviv, Kayanets-Podilsky, Kutu, Yazlovets, Brody and Lutsk, while some others in large groups strove for the countries of north-western Europe in quest of happiness and bright future, never stopping the natural flow of their creative work on the way. And wherever Armenians appeared, be it the territory of Ukraine or any other place, they would leave an indelible trace - their good traditions that have reached us through centuries and generations.

As a result of mass emigration of Armenians already in the 14th century, particularly in the territory of Ukraine, Armenian-Ukrainian literary relations started forming, which grew and developed during the centuries, as the life itself was dictating similar historical conditions for the existence and the development of the two nations: they were to fight against the foreign invaders to preserve their own national identity, language and the culture.



I would not want to go back to the strengthening and development factor of the old pre-revolutionary Soviet era (1861-1971) Armenian–Ukrainian literary relations, as Seda Amiryan has deeply studied and perfectly represented it in her literary monograph entitled “Armenian-Ukrainian literary relations”.

It is also worth mentioning that the literary relations between the two brotherly republics greatly developed during the Soviet years; different anthologies, as well as separate books of Armenian and Ukrainian writers were published dedicated to different literary decades. I should also mention that Pavlo Tichina is the one who had a great contribution in the development of literary relations. He was fluent in Armenian and had visited Armenia many times to be present at different symposiums.

In 1939 directly under Tichina’s supervision twenty-five Ukrainian poet-translators started working on the epic poem “David of Sasun”, and due to their zealous efforts the translation was completed and published in Ukraine in time for the celebration of the one thousand’s anniversary of the epic poem.

Pavlo Tichina’s initiative in developing and strengthening Armenian-Ukrainian literary relations was continued by Maxim Rilsky, Viktor Kochevsky, Levon Mirijanyan, Gevorg Tatosyan and Miron Nesterchuk.

After the 60-ies of the Soviet era several scientific conferences took place in both countries dedicated to Armenian-Ukrainian historical relations and the reports of these conferences were published in separate volumes. Many well-known historians, such as Ya. Dashkevich, V. Hrabovetsky, V. Grigoryan, Gh. Ayvazyan had their great contribution in this sphere.

As it was mentioned above, the basis for the progressive development of Armenian-Ukrainian mutual literary relations was set by Seda Amiryan. The exchange programs



between the universities of Kiev and Yerevan served as a favorable condition in building a bridge between the literatures of the two nations. The result of these programs was the formation of a constellation of gifted armenologists and ukrainologists: Oleksandr Bozhko, Lyudmyla Zadorozhna, Raisa Gharagyozyan, Vasyl Shklyar, Meri Petrosyan. Owing to the efforts of this constellation, the special Ukrainian edition of “Garoun” was published in Yerevan in 1971. Two years later, the journal “Dnipro” of Kiev was subsequently dedicated to Armenia. The realization of all these projects was supported by the Writers’ Unions of the two countries, and the translators mentioned above were members of either Armenian or Ukrainian Writers’ Union.

In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the years of independence a period of cross-cultural vacuum started forming; the previously established relations and means were no longer used, and the programs that were prepared earlier but where not realized, appeared on the shelves of different editorials and gradually sank into oblivion.

In all the previously Soviet and now already independent republics cultural communities were created for the national minorities that had their charters and were trying to keep in touch with their homelands. In 1994, the Armenian community in Kiev managed to publish the bilingual (Armenian and Ukrainian) newspaper “Aragats” whose editor-in-chief was Zhenya Tserunyan. Translation samples of Armenian-Ukrainian literature appeared on the pages of the newspaper, mainly taken from anthologies published during the previous Soviet years, as well as articles and a continuous course of the Armenian language.

I got acquainted with the translation art in 1997.

I have translated young contemporary Ukrainian writers and had them published in Armenian literary magazines and different newspapers. I have always given my preference



to the originals only. I still do. Mainly due to the financial difficulties the translations I did from Armenian into Ukrainian and vice versa have remained in silence in my personal library for many years. And not only did the translations.

Ukrainian publishers are interested in the works of European famous writers and writings in English, in the works of Nobel Prize winners, where the factor of the writer's name plays a great role in the realization of the translated book on the market. Here is a simple example: "Kamenyar" publishing house of Lviv published one thousand copies of the world-famous "The Book of Lamentations" by Gregory of Narek (also known as Grigor Narekatsi) in 2005 translated by M. Nesterchuk. The publishing of the book was financed by the government and was dedicated to the one thousand seven hundredth anniversary of Christianity in Armenia. The book was not a success in terms of marketing. As a result, the whole print-run of the book was distributed between state and university libraries.

What is the reason of such ill success? Is it the passiveness of Armenian communities, cultural educational companies, or the cultural departments of embassies, that were unable to decently introduce this masterpiece of Armenian literature of Middle Ages? In 2005 the book cost eighty hrivnas; today its price is twenty hrivnas.

Meanwhile, "A hundred and one hayren" by Nahapet Kuchak translated by Ihor Kalynets has been published twice, in three hundred copies each time, and now this book is totally consumed. Ihor Kalynets continually participates in various presentations and always presents his works and programs, thus satisfying the readers' needs.

Nowadays, many translators themselves are the publisher, the supplier and the organiser of presentations for their books. There are no bookstores near the writers' unions where these books would be sold.



From the 5th to the 8th of November of the current year the 6th forum of translators, writers and publishers of CIS and Baltic countries is going to take place. During the five previous forums more than fifty people more or less involved in the literary life of their country were invited to participate in the forum in Armenia. I think that during these five years at least five programs could have been introduced to the Ministry of Culture of RA. During the last year's forum two representatives of the Lviv delegation and myself approached the Minister of Culture H. Poghosyan with a suggestion to publish the novel "Trees of Incense" by Levon Khechoyan and his collection of short stories in Lviv. The book is now at the printing-house and will be published within the frames of "Mutual Publishing" program dedicated to the five hundredth anniversary of Armenian typography. But there is again the danger of financial crisis that exists in Ukraine. Hopefully everything will be fine and the publishing house "Sribne slovo" will find the necessary financial means for the publishing.

Nowadays there is no censorship and critique, which can easily favour the factor of plagiarism. When I was preparing the small volume of Ukrainian mini-anthology with its Armenian translation, I considered it worth sending to Armenia to the Writers' Union with expectations of a review. The review was written by Hrachya Beyleryan, which in its turn was published in "Ghaghanj" journal of Lviv's territorial writers' union in my translation.

Not so long ago, in May the presentation of the first 2012 edition of "Vsesvit" literary translation journal took place in Kiev. The publishing delay was related to the financing of the journal. But the financing of that edition was covered by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia, as the book was being published on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of Armenian typography. The author of this article, who is the translator of two authors, has not even received an invitation for the presentation, not mentioning that I did



not even receive the translator's example. No problem, the journal can be bought at any bookstore, but no bookstore in Lviv sells the literary journal "Vsesvit".

So how is a writer or a poet from Lviv, not mentioning an ordinary citizen supposed to know how the literary life develops in the once-friendly Armenia? Only four of the translators who had worked on this edition had translated from the original: M. Nesterchuk, R. Gharagyozyan, O. Bozhko and the author of my article; all the other articles were translated from interlinear Russian translations.

It is a pity, that in twenty years in the detached and ignorant large Ukraine only eight books translated from Armenian into Ukrainian were published. Two or three books might have slipped from my sight, but I could look into it in the future to discover those I had not noticed. Armenologist and translator L. Zadorozhna in her article entitled "The mission of translation in the creation of nations" expressed her concerns about the fact that we had appeared in a non-systemized matrix, that the writers' unions were unable to solve that issue and that the only hope was in the hands of the translation chairs of the appropriate institutions and their students.

Meanwhile the number of fighters of our translation army gradually decreases, and it is a sad fact that in these twenty years many literary figures deceased among whom were S. Amiryan, G. Tatosyan, V. Kochevsky, Ya. Dashkevich. I am sure that there are many books in their archives that are worth publishing to illustrate the vacuum layers of Armenian-Ukrainian literary relations.

One of the oldest and the most famous Armenian communities of Ukraine, whose spiritual and cultural life from the day of its formation has been ruled by the Church, was formed in the city of Lviv. The Armenian community in Lviv is the oldest and the largest; it was



established in the 11-12th centuries. It comprised of a beautiful Armenian temple surrounded by an enormous ecclesiastical complex: chapels, monasteries, a convent, a court (even the representatives of different national communities would give preference to the court of the Armenian community in the processing of court cases) and a publishing house. And it is not by chance that in different state and national libraries of Lviv old Armenian manuscripts are still preserved.

The scientific library of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv holds eleven antique and exquisite manuscripts which have not yet been studied in a due manner. These are mainly ecclesiastical books. There is also an exceptional Armenian-Turkish dictionary where we find Armenian-Latin, Armenian-Polish, Armenian-Slavonic, Armenian-Kypchak entries. All these books have possibly been volumes of Armenian Community library; some books have reached us through prince Chartorisky's collection and now need the study of competent specialists. It is worth mentioning that from the beginning of my translation career to date I am working on an Armenian-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Armenian explanatory dictionary. I hope someday the financial crises will end and there will be bright sunny mornings on the fields of Armenian-Ukrainian literary relations.

