
**DANIEL VARUZHAN, EMIL VERHAEREN
AND THE ARMENIAN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE**
(Dedicated to Daniel Varuzhan's 125th birth anniversary)

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On the commemorative relief of Daniel Varuzhan (1884-1915) at the University of Ghent in Belgium, where he studied economics and social sciences 100 years ago (1905-1909), are engraved verses from his poem *Nemesis*:

*Ո՛հ ի՛նչ փոյթ կեանքը մեռնող,
Երբոր երազը կ'սպրի,
Երբ որ երազն անմահ է:*

*What does one care for the dying life,
If the dream is living,
If the dream is immortal¹.*

Ghent carries the memory of Daniel Varuzhan, who lies somewhere in an unknown mass grave without a name or any memorial. Ghent is the city of Daniel Varuzhan in the same way as Salzburg is the city of Mozart or Potsdam the city of Johannes Lepsius, the Advocate of Armenians during the Armenian Genocide.

It is not only Armenians who go on pilgrimage to Varuzhan's memorial in Ghent but also those who have not lost yet their dreams of the better future of the humankind.

On February 9, 1958, on Sunday, when the commemorative relief of the Armenian writer Daniel Varuzhan was unveiled in the library of the University of Ghent, Germany was present through the music of Georg Friedrich Handel, whose famous *Largo* from the opera *Xerxes* accompanied the ceremony of unveiling².

This paper is another German gift to Daniel Varuzhan's 125th birth anniversary.

Emil Verhaeren's (1855-1916) and Daniel Varuzhan's biography and oeuvre share a number of common features, such as the evident typological parallels in both poets' biography, their poetic world, the artistic methods and concepts, the literary themes and their place in the national and world literature³.

¹ Cf. *Nemesis*, in: **Daniel Varužan**. *Banastelcakan erker*, Ant'illas, 1986, p. 87.

² Cf. *Memories of Arakel N. Patrik*, in: *Daniel Varužann im hušerum*, b. tpağrut'iwñ, Beirut, 1968, 111, 138 and *Yušamatean Daniel Varužani*, Paris, 1958.

³ Cf. *monographies on Varužan and bibliography by Vazgen Gabrielyan*, **Daniel Varužan**, *Keank'ë ew gorcë*, Ereyan, 1978; **Geworg Madoyan**, *Daniel Varužan*, Ereyan, 1976; **Paruyr Sewak**, *Varužani poezian*, in: *Erkeri žolovacu*, h. VI., Ereyan, 1976, 293-368; **Hovhannes Łanalanyan**, *Daniel Varužan*, Ereyan, 1961; **Hektor Rštuni**, *Daniel Varužan*, Ereyan, 1961; **Derenik Čizmëčan**, *Daniel Varužan: Dproc'akan Keank'ë, antip namaknerë, grakanut'iwne, Gahire/Cairo*, 1955; **Grigor Sargsyan**, *Var Varužani stelcagorcakan keank'ë*, Ereyan, 1947; **Siruni Y. Č. Daniël Varužan**, *Pukreš/Bucharest*, 1940.

Both poets are very important figures in their national literature, already internationally known during their lifetime through translations into many languages. Today, they are “les poètes mineurs” as expressed in the terminology of Roman literary studies.

Each of these poets drew his creative energy from the beauty of the native nature, from the heroic past of the Flemish or Armenian ancestors. Despite the benefit of a good classic education in the Catholic colleges in Ghent or in Venice, both authors came later into conflict with the contradictions within Christianity and turned to pre-Christian images and models for their poetic inspiration; still, they never left their Christian roots. Both of them died a tragic death.

A systematic comparative study of the life and work of both poets remains a desideratum, though detailed information about Varuzhan’s Flemish period can be found in the mentioned monographies on the poet⁴.

The first comparative look at both writers with reference to the topic of my present contribution shows that such comparative study can be very productive and very promising.

There is a direct evidence about Emil Verhaeren’s attitude to the Armenian literature recorded in his short preface to the Anthology “La Vie et le Rêve” by the famous Armenian writer and literary critic Aršak Č’ōpaneane (1872-1954) in the series *Mercur de France* (1904).

Emil Verhaeren held Aršak Č’ōpaneane in high esteem especially for his merit to make the Armenian classical, medieval and modern literature accessible to the European reader through French translations. Through these translations, Emil Verhaeren came to know these educated people, the first Christian Ethnos of the world with rich intellectual, cultural and spiritual property who had been suffering persecutions and destructions for centuries. He wrote: “You realize the oldest and the most divine idea given birth by the mankind for a poet. You stop having an own identity, in order to become a human mind of your country. Certainly you don’t create it (this spirit - ADA) but you recreate it after those centuries-long forms, which are given to it by the fate. Those who are not able to see its existence ...at least can see mentally through your books its real life, work, dreams, love and struggle ... Your heart, my dear friend, beats there, not parallel to but in the very midst of the heart of your homeland. And that distinguished place is that one, where I wish it would remain for centuries”⁵.

Emil Verhaeren took the view that the Armenian people would never die, not even being on deathbed after the massacres of 300.000 Armenians under Sultan

⁴ Cf. for example **Vazgen Gabrielyan**, pp. 93-148.

⁵ *The Armenian translation of the preface by Emil Verhaeren cf. in: Aršak Č’ōpaneane, Keank’ ew eraz, Paris, 1945, VII-VIII. Cf. also the collection of his works Erker, Ereyan, 1966 and 1988.*

Hamid in the 1890-ies. He believed that the people having so many diverse forms of expression of literary thought must not die.

He praised Daniel Varuzhan above all for his connection to the traditions of his people. He held the opinion that the highest place a poet can reach is the heart of his homeland. One can deserve such a place when the heart of the poet beats for his country and throbs with that of his homeland.

Daniel Varuzhan met the requirements of the Flemish poet completely. He entitled one of his most famous poetic cycles published in 1910 “The Heart of the Race” (Յեղիհն սիրտը). He might have done this under the direct influence of the foreword by Emil Verhaeren. Later, in his letter to Aršak Č’ōpaneian, Varuzhan wrote: “You must collect the crumbs of the heart of our people beating among the 3 million Armenians and concentrate them under the one breast to feel your own life even for a short time for the sake of art and the song of life”⁶.

In the songs of the poetic cycle “The Heart of the Race”, the heart of the Armenian people throbs with that of Daniel Varuzhan who celebrates in verse the traditions of his people with dedication and demonstrates his close bond to them.

Still, what kind of traditions did his people possess, where had he drawn his creative energy and the forms of literary expression from? What are those traditions so highly esteemed by Emil Verhaeren?

The Armenian literature enjoys high position among the pieces of Oriental Christian literature because of its large scale and the high quality of the texts translated from Greek and Syriac in the early period of the Christian literature. A glance at the edition of *Clavis patrum graecorum* by M. Geerard and J. Noret in 6 volumes clarifies the significance of Armenian literary tradition. Early Armenian translations preserved many lost classical texts of world literature. The works of ancient philosophy and early Christian theology inspired the Armenian Hellenistic culture and sciences. Many translations, commentaries and copies of the works of writers like Aristotle, Plato, Proklos, Jamblichus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Basilius of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianz, Afrahat and Ephrem Syrian were written in Armenian, building the basis of the original Armenian literature.

Few years after the creation of the Armenian script by Mesrop Maštoc’ in 405, the Bible and the most important liturgical and theological books of the Christian Church were translated and adapted into Armenian.

The original Armenian literature at the initial stage of its formation is also a testimony of a high-developed distinctive Armenian culture which was formed due to the cultural exchange and the adoption of Christianity in the region.

The pre-Christian oral tradition (mythology and folklore) was partly taken down in the works of Christian authors. The myths and legends of the struggle

⁶ Cf. **Daniel Varužan**, *Namakani, Ereyan*, 1965, pp. 207, 172, 174 and *Vazgen Gabrielyan*, pp. 150-151.

of Hayk, the progenitor of Armenians, against the Assyrian tyrant Bel or of Ara the Fair against the Assyrian queen Semiramis (Shamiram), who was in love with Ara, of the Goddess Astlik and the Armenian Hercules Vahagn, the Dragon killer, who the nicest hymn in the old Armenian literature is devoted to, are recorded in the *History of Armenia* by the Father of Armenian historiography Movses Xorenac'i (5th century).

The reception of classical antiquity in Armenia flourished in 18-19 centuries again under the Patriarch Yakob Nalean (1706-1764) in Constantinople and in the classical school of Mekhitarists, the collaborators and successors of the founder of the Mekhitarist order in Venedig Mxit'ar of Sebaste (1676-1749). Daniel Varuzhan received his preliminary education in the monastery school of Mekhitarists Collegio Armeno Murad Rafaelian in Venice (Palazzo Zenobio).

The Mekhitarist monks wrote tragedies and epic poems in a style of Greek metrics. It was here that Daniel Varuzhan got to know the national models created in imitation of the antique literary images, which were revived in order to inspire the ideas of the better future and hopes of the national independence of Armenia. The Armenian classicism reached its culmination in the work of Arsen Bagratuni (1790-1866), the translator of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Demosthenes, Vergilios and Cicero. He wrote the masterpiece of Armenian classicism, the epic poem "Hayk Diwc'azn", "Hayk the Hero". Bagratuni's heroic poems shaped the cycle of Varuzhan's epic poems "Diwc'aznaveper".

Daniel Varuzhan used the pagan hymn of Vahagn as a basis for his introductory programmatic poem of the cycle "The heart of the Race" (1910).

This poem opens the first sub-series of the cycle "On the Altar". Combining the metaphors of biblical poetry with those of the old Armenian hymn, Daniel Varuzhan applies a metaphor of offering church chants as a spiritual sacrifice to God upon his songs, which he sacrifices on the Altar of old Armenian deities for his country. He converts the classical forms of expression into the modern symbolic images and metaphors. He presents here his artistic program through the poetic pictures borrowed from the old Armenian hymn of Vahagn.

This old Armenian hymn begins with the description of labour pains giving birth to Vahagn. The sky, the earth, the purple sea and the red reed within are included in the birth pangs. The red reed spits out fire, flame and smoke. From the flames springs up a juvenile with fiery hair, a flaming beard and eyes like two suns.

Daniel Varuzhan transformed the literary imagery of the song of Vahagn to a metaphoric one, comparing it with the birth of a literary piece by the poet. The divine reed at the seaside transforms into a poet's pen and gives birth to the songs glorifying the old glamorous times of his ancestors. He lets the pen made of reed give birth to the songs of homesickness, which the poet offers on the Altar of his compatriots who had to leave their home. He lets the pen give birth to the songs of blood and fire destroying the people and their homes during the massacres. The poet sacrifices these songs on the Altar of victims of these massacres. He lets the pen give birth to the songs on the poet's own
cold

fireside and the dry fountains of his paternal house. The poet devotes these songs to his mother. Finally, the poet lets his pen give birth to the songs of the heroic struggle of his people and sacrifices the songs on the Altar of fighters for the brighter future of his homeland.

The pen delivers light, when the poet sings in labour the songs of the bright past of his country. It breathes lamentations when the poet sings in labour the songs of the homesickness. The heart of the poet climbs up as a burnt offering from the pen when the poet sings the songs of blood and the massacres. Smoke comes from the pen when the poet sings the songs of his destroyed home. Finally, flame bursts from the pen like a flame climbing out of the red reed in the purple sea bearing Vahagn, the Dragon killer, when the poet sings in labour the songs of the struggle. The names *Vahagn* or *Dragon* don't appear in the poem. But they are implicitly present symbolizing the Armenian people fighting against the evil that massacres their country and ancient culture.

The oral Armenian tradition followed by the written tradition up to late Middle Ages. The national epos of Armenians *Davit of Sassun* that reached us in many variants is an evidence of it.

The genre of *Hayrens*, medieval folk songs about universal human themes such as love, struggle for social justice, etc. known through the poetry of Nahapet Kuchak or the troubadour poetry of Nalash Hovnathan and Sayat-Nova nurtured the creations of such Constantinopolitan writers, as Paltasar Dpir or Petros Lapanci in the 18th century. Daniel Varuzhan also drew his inspiration from these literary and oral sources.

Roman and the Armenian literary criticism saw a contradiction in the poetry of Emil Verhaeren and Daniel Varuzhan who used Christian and pre-Christian literary themes and metaphors at the same time.

Emil Verhaeren is the author of both "Les Flamands" and "Les Moines. Daniel Varuzhan is the author of both *Hethanos Erger* ("Pagan Songs") and of *Golgotayi Calikner* ("The Flowers of Golgotha"). The poetic creative power of Daniel Varuzhan's poetry was compared with that of the greatest representative of the Armenian medieval poetry Grigor Narekac'i, called Dante of the Armenian poetry, especially with his masterpiece "Book of Lamentations" (Matean Volbergutean) that developed the high culture of medieval Armenian sacred chants.

In the poems "Way of the Cross" and the "The Light" from the cycle "The Flowers of Golgotha" Daniel Varuzhan identifies himself and the stations of his life with the stations of the Cross and Christ's Passion. The poet's artistic idea is: death on the Cross, the crucifixion bears the light of resurrection. Light is the destination of his way to the cross and the goal of his life. This idea is repeated through the refrain of the poem many times: "And I go to the source of light". At the same time, the poets' way to the cross is that of his people who fell and rose thousand times at the thousand stations of its long way.

The Christian motives of crucifixion and resurrection, the mystery of the incarnation are mixed with the pagan motives of the Indian version of the birth

of Vahagn, that is the labour pains of the Indian goddess Agni giving birth to a son with the fire eyes symbolizing light. For the poet, the mystery of incarnation is the incarnation of poetic word. Like Homer and Dante, he drinks the wisdom of art from the stars at night to present it to the people during the day. Art is the mystery of incarnation. It leads the humankind to light, regardless of the name of the light (Vahagn, Agni or Christ). The lyrical hero knows that nobody can prevent him from going his way to the light. He tells the dark forces bringing him to the cross: "Don't cast your shadow of vulture wings over my way full of sun and leading to the suns ... I go to the source of light".

During the celebration of 1.500 anniversary of the Armenian alphabet, Daniel Varuzhan expressed the same idea vividly in connection with the Armenian alphabet. The poet believed the history of the Armenian script to be a history of fixing the existence of the genius on the eternal firmament of parchments with fiery nails. Armenian letters were striding to the sunrises of the future like caravans with their open hearts and led our Armenian existence for a centuries up to the threshold of the present millennium beginning with the letter "A", the Initial capital letter for the Armenian word *Astowac* (God) praying for the Armenian nation with extended arms to the sky till the last letter of the Armenian alphabet "K" the Initial capital letter for Christ/K'ristos⁷.

Having been brought up in the spirit of the classicism as well as a piety of catholic Mekhitharist fathers, Daniel Varuzhan overcomes the conflict between these two spiritual models by harmoniously combing them in his poetry. A paraphrase of the poet concerning the development of the Armenian language demonstrates it: "The Grabar (The Old Armenian) is dead, long live the Grabar!"

We leave the further analysis of complicated problems related to the poetics of Daniel Varuzhan and Emil Verhaeren to future comparative studies. The aim of our contribution was to provide an overview of rich literary heritage nurturing of such a splendid flower of new Armenian poetry as Daniel Varuzhan.

Both poets wrote to give the generations the reminiscence of the best traditions of their peoples and the task to continue the struggle for the dream of the better future, free from suffering, full of justice and light.

**ԴԱՆԻԵԼ ՎԱՐՈՒԺԱՆԸ, ԷՄԻԼ ՎԵՐՀԱՐԵՆԸ
ԵՎ ՀԱՅ ՄԻՋՆԱԴԱՐՅԱՆ ԳՐԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ**
(Դ. Վարուժանի ծննդյան 125- ամյակի առթիվ)

ԴՐՈՍՍ-ԱԲԳԱՐՅԱՆ Ա. (Գերմանիա, ք. Հալլե)

Ամփոփում

Դանիել Վարուժանը (1884-1915) և Էմիլ Վերհարենը (1855-1916) ազգային գրականության կարկառուն ներկայացուցիչներ են և թարգմանվել են բազմաթիվ լեզուներով: Այս տաղանդավոր բանաստեղծների ստեղծագործությունների ուսումնասիրությունը բացահայտում է, որ նրանք ողբերգ-

⁷ Vazgen Gabrielyan, *Daniel Varuzhan*, pp. 355-356.

վել են հայրենի բնությամբ, նախնիների խիզախ անցյալով և պատմությամբ:

Թեև երկու բանաստեղծներն էլ ստացել են հոգևոր կրթություն, նրանց ստեղծագործության մեջ առկա են հեթանոսական պատկերներ ու նախատիպեր:

**ДАНИЕЛ ВАРУЖАН, ЭМИЛЬ ВЕРХАРН
И СРЕДНЕВЕКОВАЯ АРМЯНСКАЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРА**

(к 125-летию со дня рождения Д. Варужана)

ДРОСТ-АБГАРЯН А. (Германия, г. Халле)

Резюме

Как Д. Варужан, так и Э. Верхарн являются яркими представителями национальной литературы, творчество которых было переведено на многие языки мира. Темой их произведений были родная природа, история и героическое прошлое их народов. Хотя и оба поэта получили духовное образование, но в их творчестве доминируют языческие образы и прототипы.