

“But how does one explain Dante’s enduring popularity, and that of his harsh eschatological masterpiece in particular? The answer, I believe, lies in the poem’s distinctive textual characteristics.

The *Comedy* is *neither an open nor a closed text* (Eco, *The Role of the Reader*); it is neither writerly nor readerly (Barthes, *S/Z*). Rather it is more like what Fiske in *Television Culture* calls a ‘producerly’ text. A producerly text is polysemous and combines the easy accessibility of the readerly with the complex discursive strategies of the writerly. These peculiar textual qualities allow the poem to produce meaning and pleasure in audiences which run the gamut from the uneducated to the most sophisticated and discerning.

The *Comedy*’s uncanny ability to generate meaning derives not so much from its formal, hierarchical allegory as from the allusive density of its literal narrative. [...] In saying this, I do not mean to imply that the

Commedia’s *polysemy* is boundless and structure-less: the poem defines the terrain within which meaning may be made?”

Amilcare Iannucci

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Dante’s New Life in 20th Century Literature and Cinema
Essays in memory of Amilcare Iannucci

Like doves summoned by desire

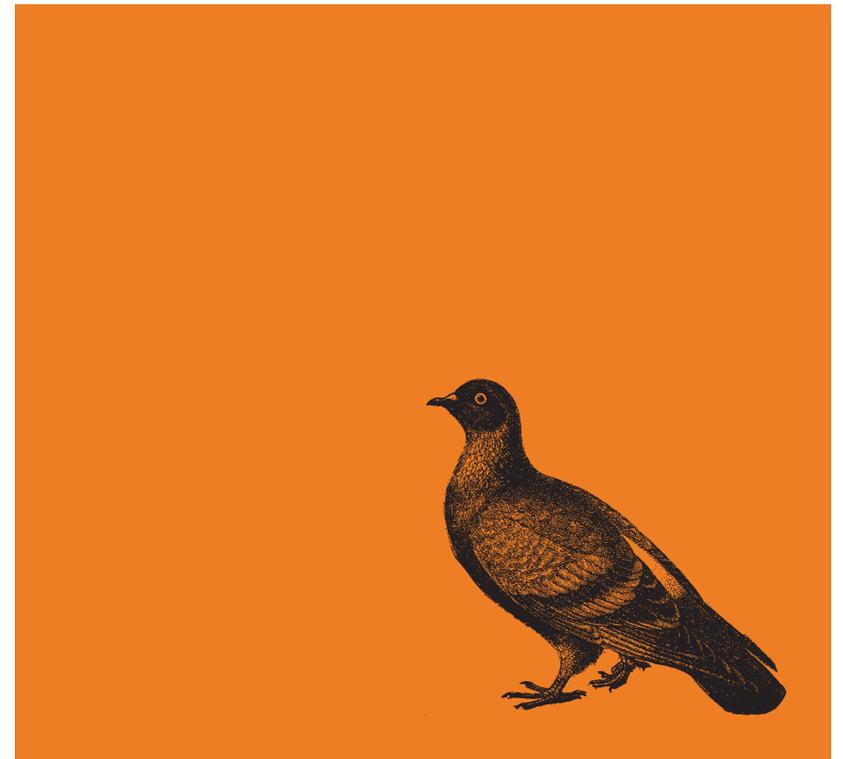
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Sona Haroutyunian (Venice, Ca' Foscari University)

“The Homer of Modern Times”: the Reception and Translation of Dante in the Armenian World

One of the masterpieces of world literature, the *Divine Comedy* has played such a role in the history of culture and civilization that it requires no introduction. We will therefore immediately begin by looking into how this rich heritage was received in Armenian culture, paying particular attention to its role and significance. We will then provide an overview of references to Dante and his works, focusing especially on the contributions of the Mekhitarist Fathers, and finally a third section will discuss Armenian translations of the *Commedia*.

I. The art of translation in the Armenian world

For Armenians, the art of translation is as ancient as literature itself and is considered highly prestigious. The “blessed” or holy translator—as he was called from the time the craft first began—is the bearer of a divine gift and grace which, thanks to assiduous, continuous work, culminates over time into experience and erudition. The Armenian Church is probably the only one in the world to have canonized its translators and dedicated a feast day to them. Called, appropriately enough, the “Eve of the Holy Translators,”¹ it offers a clear indication of how highly the art of translation is considered in this culture.

The 5th century was a crucial period in establishing this tradition. The principal events of this time are the invention of the Armenian alphabet, the revision of the liturgy, and the creation of an ecclesiastical and national literature. Three men are prominently associated with these innovations: *vardapet*² Mesrop Maštots³, *Catholicos*⁴ Sahak Part‘ew (387), and King Vramšapuh (394).

The invention of the alphabet was the beginning of Armenian literature, and proved a powerful factor in uplifting the national spirit. During

a single century, Armenian written culture developed greatly, reaching its glory in this century known in literature as The Golden Age. The principal genre of this age was historiography (Agat’angeghos, P’awstos Biwzand, Movsês Khorenats’i, Eghišê, Ghazar P’arpets’i), which up to now is considered to be the original source not only for Armenian history, but also for that of the neighboring nations. Among the developed branches of the literature of the 5th century were philosophy (Davit’ Anyaght’ [David the Invincible], Eznik Koghbat’s’i) and translation. The first book that was completely translated into Armenian was The Bible, which was regarded as a masterpiece and was known as the Queen of Translations.

From the 5th century on, the art of translation continued to be developed and became specialized in various schools, fulfilling cultural, cognitive and scientific purposes while transferring the knowledge of the world into Armenian. There began to be translated texts by Greek and Syriac authors such as Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil, Severian of Gabala, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ephraim of Syria, John Chrisostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Proclus, Dionysius Trax, Philo Judaeus, Porphyry, Aristotle, Plato, and others. The loss of the Greek originals has given some of these versions a special importance; thus, the second part of Eusebius’s *Chronicle*, of which only a few fragments exist in the original Greek, has been preserved in its entirety in Armenian.⁵ These translations not only contributed to the development of the national culture, they also testify to the richness of Grabar, the Old Armenian language.

The tradition of translation was consolidated throughout the Middle Ages with the addition of Latin treatises by writers from the West such as Albertus Magnus and Thomas of Aquinas. It saw a period of resurgence starting in the early 18th century, thanks to the work of Abbot Mekhitar, who at the beginning of the 1700s founded the Congregation which would later bear his name: the Order of the Mekhitarists.⁶ After a temporary stay in the Morea (1703-1715), the Congregation established itself permanently in Venice, giving life and new vitality to a vigorous cultural movement that benefited all Armenian people. It brought Armenian history and literature of the past into prominence; the language was renewed, raising it above the state of vernacular dialect; and finally, classical Greek and Roman literature was disseminated among Armenian speakers. The translations of numerous masterpieces of Greek and Latin antiquity lent authority to the Grabar lan-

guage. Thanks to this gradual purification, both popular literature and literature in translation found a fertile ground for development, since without a “high” language with a literary value, neither this rich production of cultural publications nor creative works could have existed.

The Mekhitarist Congregation had its home in the Venetian lagoon, on the beautiful island of San Lazzaro, for over three centuries. The community has been wholly involved in initiating and promoting social and cultural activities, dedicating itself to the printing arts, founding and operating schools, and performing spiritual missions. The Congregation is widely recognized for its contribution to the rebirth of Armenian philology, literature, and culture in the early 19th century.

The island of San Lazzaro, or “of the Armenians”, as it is called, is known around the world to scholars of Oriental studies as a Cultural Center and the “Armenian Academy of Sciences,” the official title given to it by Napoleon.⁷ Indeed, one of the main objectives of the 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 work of translation was done in the nineteenth century under the combined influence of European Classical and Romantic literatures.

Owing to the guidance or example of the Classicist school, started by such outstanding translators as Fr. Vrt’anês Askêrean and Fr. Eghia Tovmachean, the esthetic taste and artistic awareness of an entire generation was honed and cultivated. The school reached inimitable heights with works by translators like the Hiwrmiwz brothers and, notably, the leader of the movement, Fr. Arsên Bagratuni,⁸ the most outstanding representative of Armenian Classicism, author of the epic poem *Hayk Diwts’azn* [Hayk the Giant], which was modelled after Homer’s *Iliad*. “The Bagratunian school”⁹ is also cited in an article by Emilio Teza, the well-known Italian critic and translator.

Thanks to the work of the Mekhitarist Fathers, Armenians have been given access to and are able to read in their own language—not without a

certain amount of pride—not only anthologies but even entire texts by Italian authors (such as Dante, Tasso, Metastasio, Alfieri, Foscolo, Manzoni, Leopardi, Collodi, De Amicis, Giacosa, Vittoria Aganoor, Ada Negri, Papini, and others), from Greek authors (Homer, Sophocles, Demosthenes, Euripedes, Plato), from Latin authors (Virgil, Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius), and from French authors (Lamartine, Bossuet, Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Chateaubriand, Fénelon, and so on).

II. References to Dante and his works

Given the background we have just mapped out, it is not surprising that there has been no lack of interest in the ultimate masterpiece of Italian poetry, Dante Alighieri’s *Commedia*. Indeed, as a result of the tireless efforts of the Mekhitarist Fathers and their students, Armenians were introduced to Dante’s work before many Asian nations and even some European ones, thanks to the great literary mind of Fr. Arsên Bagratuni. He used the traditional ancient Armenian language of Grabar, employing the solemn, sophisticated style that distinguishes the Mekhitarist school.

It can therefore be stated that knowledge of Dante and his writings in Armenian began to be disseminated at the beginning of the 19th century thanks to the Congregation, through their works on world geography, short encyclopedias on the lives of illustrious people, and in studies on Western literature. The name of Dante could be encountered not only in the periodicals of the time, but also in school textbooks, especially those on history and literature. It is known that as early as the first half of the 1800s, the Mekhitarists wrote and published books that were used in the schools of Constantinople, Smyrna and other cities, in addition to the institutions belonging to the Congregation.

In 1802, a book by Fr. Step’anos Agonts’, *Geography of the Four Continents*, was published in Venice. Speaking about Florence, Agonts’ stressed that the city had given life to various illustrious figures over the course of the centuries. As an example he cites Dante exclusively, describing him as “the famous Italian poet, the father of the Italian language who magnificently embellished a language that was composed of various idiomatic elements proper to different languages, especially Latin, replacing them

with forms that truly reflected the nature of Italian.”¹⁰ The high consideration with which Dante was introduced into Armenian literature is certainly worth noting.

Opinions were not always positive, however. In 1839, in Venice, Fr. Matt'êos Maghak'-T'êop'ileants' published a two-volume dictionary in Armenian on the *Lives of Illustrious Personages*, presenting to the Armenian world the first detailed information on Dante's life and works. Unfortunately, his negative attitude toward the *Commedia* is evident: Fr. Maghak'-T'êop'ileants' disagreed with Dante's placement of the representatives of the clergy in *Hell*, concluding that nobody had managed to falsify and deride the holy Christian faith to the extent Dante did in his work. At the end of his article, he actually notes with satisfaction that “in the Spanish version certain passages were revised or gone over again and some cantos of *Hell* and *Paradise* were excluded.”¹¹ He is probably referring to the *Index* of 1612, where the *Commedia* appears as banned, “no corrigiendo.” The lines to be expurgated were Inf. XI: 8-9, XIX: 106-117, Par. IX: 136-142, a total of 21, which continued to be banned until the *Indice ultimo* of 1790.¹²

Later Mekhitarists and other Armenian intellectuals who made some sort of reference to Dante expressed their admiration for the poet and his immortal work. In 1850, once again in Venice, Fr. Ambrosios Galfayean published a textbook in Armenian entitled *Brief History of the Middle Ages*. In describing the civil wars of Florence, the author says that “the well-known poet Dante, persecuted in his native land, was forced into exile in other cities.” He also adds that “The poet Dante composed his immortal masterpiece and called it the *Commedia*.”¹³ After this appearing in this book, Dante's name was cited with increasing frequency in other literary sources. While Dante was initially introduced to the Armenian reader purely as the creator of the Italian language, later Armenian literature also contains references to his works, especially to the *Divine Comedy*.

As the patriarch of the Armenian and Armenological press, founded in the lagoon city in 1843, *Bazmavêp*¹⁴ (Polyhistory) became the ideal vehicle for publishing and disseminating translations of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. During the years between 1860-70, studies on Dante and his poem were written, and the first Armenian translations began to appear, ushering in a new literary era. When the 600th anniversary of the “Divine” Poet was observed

in 1865 and his statue was set up in Florence, the Armenian press covered the event. An image of the statue is actually reproduced on two pages of the *Pazmaveb* review, accompanying an article by Fr. Samuël Kesarean entitled “Dante’s Statue in Florence” and his translation of Canto III of *Hell*. “The translation of *Inferno* Canto III, in which the Poet arrives in front of the Gate of Hell and there reads a dreadful inscription, provides a taste of the Sublime Poem by the immortal Poet, alongside the image of his magnificent bust,”¹⁵ the author writes.

In 1874, once again in Venice, Fr. Garegin Zarbhanalean published a textbook, *History of Medieval and Modern Literature of Europe* which devoted a great deal of space to the history of Italian literature. It includes an entire 40-page chapter dedicated solely to Dante, in addition to the references made to the poet in the sections on Petrarca, Tasso, and others. Fr. Zarbhanalean’s study covers the question of the Italian language and literature prior to Dante, followed by a detailed biography based on various sources but primarily taken from the *Vita Nuova*. “The civil wars in his city, the ungratefulness of his fellow Florentines and the exile he suffered for his patriotism kindled sentiments of hatred and vengeance in the affectionate, saddened heart of the Poet. To quench these feelings he took solace in his genius: poetry. Poetry became the shining sword of the Archangel for the Poet, who in a certain sense even appropriated the part of God;” and Zarbhanalean continues metaphorically, “distributing awards and punishments as he best saw fit to those he thought most deserving, and making his voice resonate throughout eternity.”¹⁶

Going on to describe the poem, he writes that the epithet “divine” is fully justified because the *Commedia* is the most wide-ranging and singular work of human genius after the writings of Homer, thanks to its wide variety of poetic genres: the fantastic, the tragic, the historical, the elegiac, and the comic. Zarbhanalean does not agree with the fact that Dante placed pagans in Hell alongside “believers of the holy Christian faith.” “Certainly, this is one of the imperfections of his Poem. However, this mixture of the sacred and profane, fiction and truth, was typical of Dante’s time. Christianity was so strong that poetic fictions of this sort were harmless to it,”¹⁷ says the critic. He concludes by observing that “Dante is the greatest poet of the Middle Ages, the Homer of modern times. He regenerated the poetry, we might say, that the genius of the *Iliad* had created. While the former drew it out of

the abyss, the latter dragged it out of the lethal darkness of barbarism. The distance between the two geniuses, the interval that separates creative power from the power of regeneration, is very short.”¹⁸

It is evident that considerable effort was put into presenting Dante by the *Bazmavêp* review and by the Mekhitarist Fathers in general. The same thing cannot be said of Eastern Armenian literature.¹⁹ It is true that Eastern Armenian readers knew Dante from the *Bazmavêp* review and Russian sources, however, the amount of attention devoted to him was much less, and as we shall see, and the number of translations was very limited.

As early as the 19th century, around the 1850s when Dante started to be known in Armenian literature, M. Nalbandyan, the outstanding writer of this period, a poet and critic, borrowed the poet's name as a banner for his avant-garde ideas, defining the Florentine as “wise and immortal.” Nalbandyan spoke about Dante primarily during his early literary activities, in his book *Yaghags haykakan matenagitut'ean* [Armenian Bibliography], believed to have been written in 1855. Nalbandyan presents himself on this occasion as an apologist, an enthusiastic protector of modern Armenian, Aškharhabar. His opponents claimed that to give up the ancient language, Grabar, in order to create literature that was easy for people to understand would lead to its extinction. Nalbandyan responds to this objection by posing another question: “How is one to explain the survival of the European peoples who adopted a language that everyone could understand, building a bridge to the world with the Enlightenment? Not only did they thrive, they continue to do so today.”²⁰ To buttress his ideas, Nalbandyan uses Dante as an example, describing his creation of the Italian language and the opposition the great Florentine encountered from some quarters. On another occasion, Nalbandyan refers to Dante when the Armenian writer Perch P ošyan is criticized for his poem *Sos ew Vardit'er* [Sos and Vardit'er]. “If the author must be criticized for the fact that his work has imperfections,” writes Nalbandyan, “we are curious to know which works are perfect. Not even Milton, Shakespeare, Homer or Dante are devoid of imperfections. How is it possible that our eminent philosophers are ignorant of this fact?”²¹ But he immediately adds: “We must not forget, however, that the authors I referred to are the greatest poets the world of man has ever produced.”

In 1876, Dante's biography was published in the *Dprots' mankavarzhakan* [The Pedagogical School] review in Vagharšapat (now Ejmiatsin):

“In 1298, Dante began to compose the marvelous poem that became his greatest consolation during the bitter years of his exile. Although written in an enigmatic style, it has been translated and commented upon in all the European languages and is so infused with poetic spirit that it continues today to attract readers and capture their attention. It will never age and in no way will it ever lose its uniqueness.”²²

Interest in Dante and his work grew during the twentieth century. Books on the great Florentine and, most importantly, complete translations in modern Armenian, began to surface. Starting in 1919, the translation of Adolfo Padovan’s *Figli di Gloria* was published in the *Pazmaveb*. In 1920, a single-volume version saw the light, including the first three chapters by Padovan, the first of which consisted of about fifty pages, dedicated entirely to Dante. Apart from the many merits of the book, which is a celebration of great thinkers and men of action, there was another reason to translate it into Armenian. The book came out after the horrors of the First World War and especially after the Armenian nation—the first Christian state in history—underwent a terrible genocide at the hands of the Young Turks, who conducted savage massacres followed by mass deportations. As the translator’s preface makes clear, the book was published as a protest against the monsters and criminals of the twentieth century:

If we turn our gaze for an instant toward the criminals of our century, the perpetrators of new crimes who are petrified before the sacred cries of innocent children, and if we raise our eyes toward the true geniuses who are the pride of nature, the creators of works which educate the heart and hone the mind, is there any melancholy-filled soul who will not surge with rage at the monsters of our century, whom even Dante would be incapable of finding an appropriate place for in the afterlife?²³

In 1921, commemorations for the 600th anniversary of Dante’s death were held all over the world. At that time, Soviet Armenia was going through difficult times, which were anything but favorable to the celebration of cultural events.²⁴ Armenians of the Diaspora, however, made their voice heard far and wide. The September 1921 issue of the *Pazmaveb* review was dedicated entirely to Dante. In the introductory article we read that: “For six hundred years Dante has been admired and he will never lose his majesty and beauty. On the contrary, future centuries will continue to admire him because his memory will never fade.”²⁵ It ends with these words:

“*Pazmaveb*, the doyenne of the Armenian press, expresses the sense of its respectful admiration and reverence on the part of a nation that also belongs to the category of peoples of genius, who although still on their knees... are never bereft of hope.”²⁶ In the same issue we find an article by Fr. Ghewond Tayean on “Music in the Comedy” and a translation of Canto I of *Paradise* by Fr. Arsên Ghazikean.

The periodical *Hayastani koch‘nak* [Bell of Armenia], out of New York, published the translation of Canto III of *Hell* by Fr. Ghazikean, and M. Ananikean’s entire article on “Dante Alighieri.”²⁷ After providing a detailed biography, Ananikean proceeds to tell the story of the great love the “Divine” Poet felt for Beatrice and comments: “The heart that was tormented by this love could not rest in peace until the completion of his great masterpiece, the *Commedia*, one of the magnificent poems that raised Dante to the heights of Parnassus next to the ‘summits’ of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare and Goethe.”²⁸

In 1965, Armenians gave due prominence to the celebrations for the 700th anniversary of the birth of Dante. Both in Armenia and in the Armenian colonies of the Diaspora, ceremonies were organized, articles were published, poems dedicated to the anniversary were composed, and various cantos of the *Commedia* were published. As before, the *Pazmaveb* review dedicated an entire issue (November-December 1965) to the occasion. In the editorial, Fr. Mesrop Chanašean notes:

Thanks to the force of his talent and the undeniable value of his work, Dante provides a literary bridge connecting the ancient and modern worlds. The ancient world, nurtured on Greek and Latin Classicism, had its own separate concepts and arts that find their closure in the *Commedia*; at the same time, it served to open the avenue to new ideas, new tastes, and in a word, a new artistic current. Dante was a great novelty for his time. Indeed, his influence had a strong effect on later generations who took their inspiration from him a few centuries later, successfully preserving his vital freshness and appeal from their times until our own. This is a surprising phenomenon, one that can be explained by the energy generated by the compelling fascination of his work.²⁹

Another article in the same issue is on “Dante’s Immortality”. After giving a sketch of Dante’s general characteristics, the author, Fr. Ep‘rem Têr-

Ghazarean, briefly recounts the poet’s biography, discusses the *Commedia*, and concludes with the minor works. He ends with these words: “Dante is immortal because he gave life to a source of new, infinite light, not only for Italian literature, but for all the literatures of the world.”³⁰ The review also presents an article on “Dante and His Work”³¹ by Fr. Hovhannês T’orosean, prepared for a conference to be held in Paris and published posthumously in this issue. Yet another noteworthy piece is that dedicated to the “Centennial of Armenian Translations” by the scholar Fr. Nersês Têr-Nersêsean³². The revised translation by Arbun Tayan of the first cantos of *Hell*,³³ *Purgatory*³⁴ and *Paradise*³⁵ are also included, as well as poetry dedicated to Dante, notably an excerpt from the *Vision of Death* by Eghiše Ch’arents’ entitled “Dante and Ališan.”³⁶

A solemn ceremony for the 700th anniversary of the birth of Dante was held in the sumptuous Hall of Mirrors in the 18th-century Venetian palace of Ca’ Zenobio, the seat of the Moorat-Raphael Armenian College at the time, and was attended by distinguished guests from Armenia, Italy, and elsewhere. On May 29, 1965 in Erevan, a soiree dedicated to Dante was organized with the attendance of the Italian Ambassador.

Armenian interest in the “Sommo Poeta” continues to this day. In 2001, under the auspices of the President of the Italian Republic, the Centro Dantesco of Ravenna honored the 1700th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity as the Armenian state religion organizing an exhibition on the theme of Dante, including sculpture, medals, paintings, graphics, and printed works by Armenian artists. On September 20, 2002, the Ravenna Center for Cultural Relations organized a soiree at the Basilica of San Francesco as part of the cultural initiative “Dante September 2002.” The event was entitled “The *Divine Comedy* around the World - 5th Exhibition of International Interpretations,” dedicated to Dante in Armenia. During the evening, a reading of *Paradise* Canto XXXIII was given in Italian and Armenian, using the most recent Armenian translation of the *Commedia* by Ruben Ghulyan, who participated in person. This was the first appearance of a new trend in the Armenian literary world, that of translating the *Commedia* entirely into “terza rima”.

III. Armenian translations of the *Divine Comedy*

It is rare for a work of genius to receive an equivalent translation or one that adequately expresses its meanings, rhythms, and stylemes. Before reaching a translation that verges on perfection, the same work is often re-worked over decades by a number of different experts. Not surprisingly, then, during the second half of the 19th century, following in the wake of Fr. Arsên Bagratuni, various scholars tried their hand at translating the *Commedia* into Grabar. Different interpretations of the same episode appeared, usually in verse, some of which are rhymed but along with others in prose. This phase has been dubbed the “period of Grabar translations” done by Mekhitarist Fathers Arsên Bagratuni³⁷ (before 1866), Edward Hiwrmiwz³⁸ (1866), Srapion Hek’imean³⁹ (1866), Yartut’iwn Esayean⁴⁰ (1869) (authorship attributed to him by Fr. Nersês Têr-Nersêsean), Samuêl Gant’arean⁴¹ (1871), Davit’ Nazaret’ean⁴² (1871) and Ghewond Ališan⁴³ (1855⁴⁴, 1881⁴⁵).

Fr. Hiwrmiwz’s name does not actually appear on his translation. In Fr. Ghewond Tayean’s opinion, the text actually belongs to Fr. Samuêl Gant’arean, who later used the pseudonym of Kesarean. As early as 1889, Emilio Teza, in his article *Quali parti della Divina Commedia fossero tradotte in armeno*, confirmed that the translation of the Count Ugolino episode belongs to Hiwrmiwz.⁴⁶

From a chronological point of view, the first person to translate Dante into Armenian was Fr. Ališan. In 1855 he translated the first verse of *Inferno* Canto III to describe the ruins of Ani.⁴⁷ While Fr. Arsên Bagratuni undertook the translation with the aim of rendering the *Commedia* into an Armenian poem, he was unfortunately unable to finish it. In the *Pazmaveb* review of 1868, on page 190, there is a note by the editor explaining that Bagratuni had the intention of translating the whole *Commedia*, but that he unfortunately died in 1866. There is reason to believe, therefore, that the translation, which was discovered after his death and published posthumously in 1868, was completed at least one or two years before.

At the beginning of the 20th century, between 1899 and 1930, translations into Aškharhabar were predominant, and it was in this period that the *Commedia* was completely rendered into Armenian by Fr. Garegin Zarbhanalean (1874), Avetik’ M. Ezek’ean-Proyeants⁴⁸ (1880), Fr. Arsên

Ghazikean⁴⁹ (1899), Hrant Alatin⁵⁰ (1912), Fr. Aristakês K‘asgantilean⁵¹ (1927), Fr. At‘anas Tiroyea⁵² (1930), Vagharšak Norents‘⁵³ (1930), Arbutayan⁵⁴ (1938), Hrach‘ K‘ajarents‘⁵⁵ (before 1966), Soghomon Taronts‘i⁵⁶ (1966) and Ruben Ghulyan⁵⁷ (1985).

The most popular of these first translators was certainly Fr. Davit‘ Nazarêtean (1840-1911), who was able to publish a little book of 200 pages, *Selected Tercets from the Divine Comedy*,⁵⁸ which includes 25 long passages, 1754 verses, and annotations. The complete translation of the *Divine Comedy* was finished around the year 1900, but the version in Grabar by Nazarêtean remained unpublished. According to Fr. Nersês Têr-Nersêsean, this is because Aškharhabar speakers had already begun to outnumber the people who knew Grabar at that time, and Fr. Arsên Ghazikean had already begun the first attempts in modern Armenian. Emilio Teza gave highly praised this translation and demonstrated how true it was to the original by translating about 15 verses back into Italian, coming to the conclusion that: “It is always faithful and follows the poet almost verse by verse, with a simplicity that in no way detracts from its liveliness...although one could be frightened by the rhyme scheme, there is no reason for courageous translators to be intimidated by it.”⁵⁹

All the partial translations, except that by Tiroyea, include cantos from the *Inferno*: to be specific, the inscription on the gate of Hell appears 7 times, while 5 other translations provide the *cantica* in its entirety, resulting in a total of 12 versions of the most popular lines of the *Divine Comedy*. After these come 11 versions of the dramatic episode of Count Ugolino. Undoubtedly, the Mekhitarists displayed extraordinary taste in choosing which passages to translate. But there is another reason why the verses of the *Inferno* are the most popular among Armenian translators: Armenians find the *Inferno* to be a reflection of their personal suffering.

All the translations are from Italian, except that by Vagharšak Norents‘ done from Russian, a rather common practice during the period of Soviet Armenia. The translators took into consideration the various levels of interpretation⁶⁰ of the *Commedia*. Some translated it into rhyming poetry, others into prose, believing that it is impossible to render it into Armenian using “terza rima”. The latter, following the philosophy of Saint Jerome - *non verbum de verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu*⁶¹ - privileged meaning over form.

At the beginning, Fr. Arsên Ghazikean translated into Grabar. He often used to joke that “[he] even dreamed in Grabar.” Later, however, he came to the conclusion that modern Armenian had by then become a language that could be used even for the works of the great classics.⁶² During these years, modern Armenian was purified from the influences of the classical language; through his translations, Ghazikean was one of its main promoters. He had a significant role in establishing modern Armenian’s status as a literary language, not without provoking reactions from the remaining purists. Ghazikean translated *Hell* and *Paradise* into verse, while *Purgatory* was put into prose. He himself explains why:

Not only do the results not correspond to the effort put into them, the difficult content will become even more difficult if transposed into poetry. Verse is not essential for poetry, especially in this context where, except for a few episodes, the rest could be written in prose, and even more so as far as the translation is concerned. I therefore trust in my readers’ leniency.⁶³

His comments and justifications are not convincing. If what he says is true, why did he not translate the entire work into prose? There used to be a widely shared opinion—one that perhaps persists, almost like a stereotype passed on without any proof—that Ghazikean paid more attention to the quantity than to the quality of his translations. It is true that over a period of thirty years, from 1899 to 1927, he published 30 volumes of translated poetry, in all 7,000 pages chosen from the greatest geniuses of world literature. They include Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Horace, Dante, Tasso, Milton, Foscolo, Leopardi, Manzoni and a few women writers like Vittoria Aganoor and Ada Negri. This comes to a total of about 50 volumes. Nevertheless, the style of Ghazikean’s translations is almost always distinguished by its carefulness, faithfulness, harmony, literary value, lexicon, and above all, by the extraordinary intuition that went into the choice of the texts. He had excellent literary taste and considerable linguistic prowess. With his translations of poems by the greatest authors of the world into Armenian, Fr. Arsên Ghazikean was the initiator and artificer of direct communication between Armenian thought and the creative talent of the world’s literary geniuses, so much so that some consider him to be the Bagratuni of modern Armenian. The fact is, however, that Fr. Arsên Bagratuni was an inimitable genius, considered without equal in the history of Armenian literary translations. In any case, the famous literary critic Aršak Ch’opanean defined the Ghazikean version as “absolutely faithful to the original, in excellent Armenian

and with a rigorous meter,”⁶⁴ making it an object of pride in the history of Armenian culture.

In 1930, Dante’s *Paradise* appeared in Armenian with a new literary attire, illustrated by Gustave Doré. The translator’s name was Fr. At‘anas Tiroyean, the author of no less than 30 books on topics of linguistics, philology and grammar, including a 1911 translation of Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*. His translation of Dante, although not in rhyme, is distinguished by its innovative meter, defined by the author as “Armenian hendecasyllable”,⁶⁵ which he himself did not use at all times, or with consistent results. Despite this, Tiroyean’s translation has high literary value and is perhaps even better than his predecessor’s in some passages, in terms of stylistic consistency and linguistic density.

Arbun Tayan, one of the former students of the Moorat-Raphael College in Venice who then settled in Erevan, managed to produce the complete translation of the *Comedy* after laborious efforts and published it by HayPetHrat⁶⁶. It appeared in three elegant volumes—*Hell* in 1947, *Purgatory* in 1952, *Paradise* in 1959—with illustrations by Gustave Doré and an introduction by Avetik‘ Isahakyan⁶⁷ for *Purgatory*, while he had Alek‘sey Jivelegov⁶⁸ write the introduction for *Hell* and *Paradise*. The translation is in rhymed verse: the first verse rhymes with the third, while the second is in free verse. The translator’s explanation for this choice is:

Maintaining the complicated system of the “terza rima” of the original in the translation is not as important when there are so many other elements that are more important to preserve, especially because the value of the original Dante does not lie so much in its external beauty as it does in the content. To remain faithful to the content, translators have often given up the meter or the rhymes of the original while others have even given up the verses, translating into prose.

Some years later, in 1969, in Erevan, the Academy of Sciences Press published the *Divine Comedy* in Armenian, using the Tayan translation. This single-volume, luxury edition is illustrated with color reproductions from 15th-century manuscripts of the *Commedia* held in the Vatican Library, the Marciana Library of Venice, and the British Museum. For this revised translation, Tayan consulted the 5th edition by Scartazzini-Vandelli of 1907, the 1870 version by Fraticelli and Camerini, and the 13th reprint of the Scar-

tazzini-Vandelli of 1946, in addition to the 1957 version, edited by the well-known critic and historian of Italian literature Natalino Sapegno. The latter two publications of the *Commedia* in particular became the basis and source for Tayan's revised translation, which came out in its third edition in 1983, published by the Erevan University Press.

Tayan came under Italy's spell as an adolescent. No doubt, he fell in love with Dante and his immortal work while he was a student at the Moorat-Raphael College, inspired by the enthusiasm of Fr. Arsên Ghazikean. Over the years, with his knowledge of the Italian language, Tayan intensified his research, studying voluminous commentaries and widening his specialized studies to other European languages. At the same time he was engaged in his Dante studies and gaining extensive experience as a translator, his knowledge of Armenian was enlarged and enriched, thus making him an able, sophisticated interpreter of Italy's greatest poet.

Although Dante's work is historically bound—it actually consists entirely of events, people, concepts, and languages from a specific historical period—it transcends and traverses all eras, remaining constant in its intellectual and poetic value, emotional impact, and thought-provoking qualities. As such, it takes on the character of a model that continuously attracts new interest from subsequent generations. It is not surprising, then, that a new translation of the *Divina Commedia* into Armenian, by Ruben Ghulyan, thus appeared at the beginning of the 21st century. After doing various translations of Russian poetry, Ghulyan devoted himself to Dante without ever having been in Italy and without ever studying the language at an academic level, a fact which earned him a great deal of criticism. His love for the poem grew out of his reading of Armenian poets like Eghiše Ch'arents' and Hovhannes Širaz,⁶⁹ who were influenced by Dante and out of Tayan's translation, prompting him to start learning Italian on his own. His goal was to surpass Tayan and succeed in translating the *Divina Commedia* into “terza rima”, a choice which often forced him to stray from the original content and one that distinguished him from his predecessors. Building on the translation experiences of Fr. Ghazikean, Tayan and Losinski, in Russian, Ghulyan managed to realize his dream after about 30 years of work. In 1996 he had already published a first Armenian translation of the *Vita nuova*, which is now ready for its second, completely revised edition. In 2004 he published

his version of *Hell*⁷⁰, in 2005 that of *Purgatory*⁷¹, and in 2007 *Paradise*⁷², although he continues to work on perfecting it.

In conclusion, Dante’s translations have enriched Armenian poetic language and have enlarged the confines of its linguistic and stylistic possibilities. Thanks to the translations and the need to transmit the proper message to the reader, in addition to theological vocabulary, many compound words characteristic of Medieval or Western Armenian literature entered into circulation as well as neologisms, idiomatic expressions and some dialectal words. It is worth mentioning that famous Armenian poets (like Ch‘arents‘ and Širaz, for example) have borrowed some poetical forms and styles from Dante’s poem, developing them in accordance with their national spirit.

Of course, given the limits of a single article, other topics requiring in-depth study cannot be taken into consideration. We reserve this task for the near future, when we intend to provide an exhaustive discussion of Dante’s specific influence on Armenian poets.

Notes

¹ This Feast Day, *T'argmanch'ats' ton*, is observed on October 13, and is dedicated to Mesrop Maštots' and Sahak Part'ew.

² A distinctive figure in the Armenian Church, Holy Monk and Doctor of Theology, with special canonical privileges. Mesrop is considered to be the first *vardapet* and the first in a continuous tradition to receive the title, symbolized above all by the *baculum magisterialis* (*gawazan vardapetakan*) which is conferred during a special liturgical rite.

³ Mesrop Maštots' invented a national alphabet (405) of thirty-six letters; two more (long *O* and *F*) were added in the twelfth century.

⁴ His Holiness, the Catholicos of Armenia and of all Armenians is the head archbishop of Armenia's national church, the Armenian Apostolic Church. The first Catholicos of Armenia and of all Armenians was Saint Gregory the Illuminator (302).

⁵ In 1818 Mekhitarist Father Mkrtych' Awgorean (1762-1854), a figure of particular prominence in philological studies, published a critical edition with a new Latin translation of the *Chronicon* by Eusebius of Caesarea, which until then was believed lost and which the Armenian translation was able to reproduce in its entirety: *Eusebii Pamphili Chronicon bipartitum, nunc primum ex armeniaco textu in latinum conversum, adnotationibus auctum, graecis fragmentis exornatum, Venetiis, 1818*. See K. Vard. Sarkissian, *A Brief Introduction to Armenian Christian Literature* (London: 1960), 12-30.

⁶ On Mekhitar and the Mekhitarians there is a large bibliography. I shall note here only a few key works: on Mekhitar's life and work see M. Nurikhan, *Il servo di Dio Abate Mechitar, sua vita e suoi tempi* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1914); B. L. Zekiyan, *Mekhitar rinnovatore e pioniere* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1977). On the order, its history and spirituality, see B. Sargisean, *Erk'hariwrameay grakan gortsun'ët' iwn ew nšanawor gortsich'k' Venetkoy Mkhit'arean Miabanut'ean* [Bicentennial Literary Activity and Noted Figures of the Mekhitarist Congregation of Venice] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1905); idem, *Erk'hariwrameay krt'akan gortsun'ët' iwn Venetkoy Mkhit'arean Miabanut'ean* [Bicentennial Educational Activity of the Mekhitarist Congregation of Venice], vol. 1 (1746-1901) (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1936) (the 2nd volume was never published); Leo (A'ak'el Babakhanian), *Erkeri zhoghowsatsu* [Collected Works] in 10 vols, vol. III (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1966-1989), 482-522; K. B. Bardakjian, *The Mekhitarist Contribution to Armenian Culture and Scholarship*, (Cambridge, MA: Middle Eastern Department, Harvard College Library, 1976); R. P. Adalian, *From Humanism to Rationalism: Armenian Scholarship in the Nineteenth Century* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); B. L. Zekiyan, A. Ferrari (ed. by), *Gli Armeni a Venezia. Dagli Sceriman a Mechitar: il momento culminante di una consuetudine millenaria*, (Venice: L'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2004). Some significant tokens of the general esteem among Armenians for Mekhitar and his work are quoted by B.L. Zekiyan, "Il monachissimo Mekhitarista a San Lazzaro e la rinascita armena del Settecento," in *La Chiesa di Venezia nel Settecento*, Contributi alla storia della Chiesa Veneziana 6 (Venice: Studium CattolicoVeneziano, 1993), 221-48.

⁷ Alberto Peratoner (ed. by), *From Ararat to San Lazzaro* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 2007), 137-38.

⁸ Fr. Arsên Bagratuni (1760-1866), Armenian poet, philologist, linguist, grammarian, philosopher, translator. He is the author of Armenian translations of Homer's *Iliad*,

Pindar’s *Olympian Odes*, Sophocles’s *Electra*, *Antigone*, The *Characters* of Theophrast, *Ars Poetica* of Horace, *Orations* of Cicero, *Oraisons funèbres* of Bossuet, *Britannicus*, *Mithridate*, *Iphigénie* of Racine, *Alzire* and *Mérope* of Voltaire, of Foscolo’s *Sepolcri*, of Alfieri’s *Saul* and *Paradise Lost* of Milton. For a detailed study see: Gabriella Uluhogian, “Tra documentazione e filologia: le scuole Mechitariste di Venezia e Vienna,” in B.L. Zekiyani e A. Ferrari (ed. by), *Gli Armeni a Venezia. Dagli Sceriman a Mechitar: il momento culminante di una consuetudine millenaria*, 223-37; Paola Mildonian, “Autori e traduttori Mechitaristi,” *ibid.*, 239-67.

⁹ Emilio Teza, “Quali parti della *Divina Commedia* fossero tradotte in armeno,” in *Giornale della Società Asiatica italiana*, vol. III (Rome: 1889), 155.

¹⁰ Step’anos Agonts’, *Ašklarhagrut’iwn ch’orits’ masants’ ašklarhi*, *Ewropia* [Geography of the Four Continents, Europe] p. 2, vol. III (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1802), 20.

¹¹ Fr. Matt’êos Maghak’-T’êop’ileants’, *Kensagrutiwn ereweli arants’* [*Lives of Illustrious Personages*], Vol. II (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1839), 636-38.

¹² See “Fortuna di Dante in Spagna”, in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, vol. V (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1976), 360.

¹³ Fr. Ambrosios Galfayean, *Hamarôt patmut’iwn mijin daru* [Brief History of the Middle Ages] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1850), 473.

¹⁴ The transcription of the name appeared as *Pazmaveb* until 1970. It has been published without interruption from 1843 up to the present. In the beginning it served for popular education. Later it changed into an Armenological review, and now is the organ of the Mekhitarist Academy of San Lazzaro, Venice.

¹⁵ Fr. Samuël Kesarean (Gant’arean), “Dantêi andrin i P’lorentia” [Dante’s Statue in Florence] *Pazmaveb* 2 (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1871), 39-42.

¹⁶ Fr. Garegin Zarbhanalean, *Patmut’iwn matenagrut’ean mijin ew nor daruts’ yArewmuts* [History of Medieval and Modern Literature of Europe] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1872), 160. Fr. Zarbhanalean is known in the Armenian world for his texts on the history of Armenian and European literature, used by high-school students. It must be stressed, however, that his publications are not simply textbooks: they are scholarly studies on the literary history of various nations.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁹ Modern Armenian was created in the 18th century, and is divided into two branches: Eastern and Western Armenian. Eastern Armenian is spoken and written in Caucasian Armenia and in the Persian and Indian colonies, while Western Armenian is spoken and written in Anatolian Armenia and in the other colonies. It must be kept in mind, however, that Eastern and Western Armenian are not two separate languages; rather, they are branches of the same language, distinguished by some grammatical, syntactic and phonetic differences.

²⁰ Nalbandyan M., *Erkeri liakatar zhoghovatsu*, vol. II (Erevan: 1940), 21.

²¹ Nalbandyan M., *Erkeri liakatar zhoghovatsu*, vol. III (Erevan: 1947), 326-27.

²² Dprots’ mankavarzhakan [The Pedagogical School] 11, p. II (Vagharšapat: 1876), 433-40.

²³ Padovan Adolfo, *Figli della Gloria*, Tr. by Fr. Sahak Têr-Movsêsean (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1920), 5-6.

²⁴ In 1915 the Young Turk government had murdered one and a half million Armenians and emptied Western Armenia of all its indigenous Armenian population. Of

Armenia there remained only a tiny stretch of arid rock in its eastern sector upon which was founded the first independent Armenian State in some 600 years.

²⁵ *Pazmaveb* 9 (1921), 273.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

²⁷ *Hayastani Koch'nak* [Bell of Armenia] (New York: 1921) 41, 1228-32; 42, 1262-65; 45, 1358-61.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 41, 1232.

²⁹ *Pazmaveb* 11-12 (1965), 293.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 301.

³² *Ibid.* 331. Fr. Nersêš Arch. Têr-Nersêsean (1920-2006) dedicated years of his work to collecting statistical data on Dante's presence in the Armenian world.

³³ *Ibid.*, 311.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 316.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

³⁶ Armenian poet, prose writer and translator, Eghiše Soghomonyan (1897-1937) came of age in an era of mass slaughter, of World War I and the Armenian genocide. He was jailed in 1936 during the Stalinist purges and then died in prison in 1937. Literary or aesthetic consideration of the poetry of Ch'arents' cannot avoid reference to these and related questions of national history and politics. Among the results was *Vision of Death*, his longest poem of 744 lines that deals with Armenian history from the mid-19th century into the beginning of the 20th. It is a journey into the nation's history, a past that appears now as a netherworld of burnt and charred trees populated by the living dead who have suffered the disastrous failure of their national ambitions. At the outset, feeling the need for a companion, Ch'arents' invites Dante from "the grim middle ages." As the poets enter this world of the dead they encounter many characters. Among figures who personify different moments of the Armenian cultural renaissance and political organization, they also meet Mekhitarist Father Ghewond Ališan, a great Armenian scholar.

³⁷ Fr. Arsên Bagratuni, *Ardzanagir drantsn dzhochots* [The Inscription of the Gate of Hell], *Pazmaveb* (1868), 190.

³⁸ Fr. Edward Hiwrmizw (1799-1876), prominent members of the Order, who was promoted to the rank of Archbishop by Pope Pius IX. He translated into Armenian the *Aeneid* and *Georgics* by Virgil, Faedrus' *Fables*, Tacito's *Annali*, *Phèdre* of Racine, *The Adventures of Telemachus* of Fénelon, *Tragedie sacre* of Metastasio, *Paul et Virginie* of Bernardin de Saint Pierre, *Merope* of Alfieri, *Aristodemo* of Monti and *Promessi sposi* of Manzoni.

³⁹ Fr. Srapion Hek'imean (tr. by), *Hell* XXXII, 124-139, XXXIII 1-90, *Pazmaveb* (1866), 333-35.

⁴⁰ Fr. Yarut'iwn Esayean, *Drvag i mah Ukolineay* [Ugolino's death episode], *Pazmaveb* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1869), 90-91.

⁴¹ F. Samuël Kesarean (Gant'arean) (tr. by), *Ert' Dantêi i Dzhokhs* [Dante's journey towards Hell] *Hell* III, *Pazmaveb* 2 (1871), 43-45.

⁴² F. Davit' Nazarêt'ean, *Chašak yAstuatsayin teslaranên Dantêi* [Selected Tercets from the Divine Comedy], *Pazmaveb* (1871), 149-60.

⁴³ Fr. Ghewond Ališan (1820-1901) was a great Armenian scholar, historian, geographer and poet. He was the leader of the Romantic movement in Armenia as well as its most important exponent. Thanks to his voluminous scientific and literary works, Ališan

is one of the most representative and appreciated authors of the 19th century, also putting out a large collection of poetry (Venice, 5 volumes, 1857-58).

⁴⁴ Fr. Ghewond Ališan, *Teghagir Hayots' Metsats'* [Topographic Description of Armenia Major] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1855), 32.

⁴⁵ Fr. Ghewond Ališan, *Širak* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1881), 38.

⁴⁶ Emilio Teza, *ibidem*, p.155.

⁴⁷ Constructed in the 5th century as a fort, Ani was the capital of the kingdom of the Armenian Bagratid dynasty from 961 to 1045, developing into a vital trading and cultural center. The earthquake of 1319 and the ensuing devastation by the Mongols in 1330 completely destroyed the city. Even today, visible traces of palaces, groups of dwellings, fortifications, bridges, long stretches of the walls and many churches remain, providing evidence that is fundamental for the study of medieval Armenian architecture.

⁴⁸ Avetik' M. Ezek'ean-Proyeants', *Thargmanakan erkeri zhoghovatsu* [Collected Translated Works] (Tphghis: 1880), 68.

⁴⁹ Fr. Arsên Ghazikean (tr. by), *Chašak Dantêi yAstuatsayin katakerguthenê, Pazmaveb* 1 (1899), 24-27.

⁵⁰ Hrant Alatin, *Hosank'* (Cairo: 1912) n. 7, 102 ; n. 8, 122-23, n.10, 155-56.

⁵¹ Fr. Aristakês K'asgantilean, *Geghuni* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press 1927), 52.

⁵² Fr. At'anas Tiroyean (tr. by), *Paradise* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1930), 367.

⁵³ Simon Hakobian, *Evropakan grakanut'ian glkhavor ejerë* [Anthology of selected excerpts of European literature] (Erevan: HayPetHrat, 1936), 49-74.

⁵⁴ Arbut Tayan, *Grakan t'ert'* 53 (Erevan: 1938).

⁵⁵ Hrach' K'ajarents', the former editor of the magazine *Masis* of Beirut, supposedly translated several cantos of the *Commedia*, as he himself documents in his letter of May 2, 1966, addressed to Fr. Nersês Têr-Nersêsean. These translations have unfortunately been lost.

⁵⁶ Soghomon Taronts'i, *Hazar u mi sirt* [A Thousand and One Hearts.] vol. II (Erevan: 1966), 124-28.

⁵⁷ Ruben Ghulyan (tr. by), *Purgatory* XI 1-142, *Sovetakan grakanut'ium* 10 (Erevan: 1985).

⁵⁸ F. Davit' Nazarêt'ean, *Hatëntir yAstuatsayin teslaranên Dantêi Aligiereay* [Selected Tercets from the Divine Comedy] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1875), 200. These include: from *Inferno: The Gate and the Vestibule of Hell*. Charon (III, 1-136), Cerberus (VI, 7-33), *The Gluttons – Ciacco* (VI, 34-102), *The Wrathful – Filippo Argenti* (VIII, 13-69), *The Angel of God* (IX, 64-105), *The Suicides* (XIII, 22-132), *Geryon* (XVII, 1-27), *The Thieves* (XXV, 46-138), *Count Ugolino* (XXXII, 124-139; XXXIII, 1-78), *Lucifer* (XXXIV, 28-69). From *Purgatorio: Sordello* (VI, 58-151), *The Virgin Mary and the Sacred Ark* (X, 34-72), *To the Proud* (X, 121-139), *Pater Noster* (XI, 1-30), *Climb to the Second Terrace* (XII, 88-136), *Statius* (XX, 124-151; XXI, 1-136), *Earthly Paradise* (XXVII 109-142, XXVIII 1-63). From *Paradiso: The Vows* (III, 1-130), *The Roman Eagle* (VI, 1-96), *The Redemption of Man* (VII, 1-120), *St. Francis of Assisi* (XI, 43-117), *Invocation to Virgin Mary* (XIII, 1-45), *The Glory of God* (XXXIII, 49-145).

⁵⁹ Emilio Teza, *Dante in armeno*, in *Bollettino Italiano degli Studi Orientali*, I. No. 19, April 10 (Florence: 1877), 362-66.

⁶⁰ A key to interpreting the *Divine Comedy* lies in a passage of the *Convivio* (II.1) where Dante claims that the significance of a work can be weighed according to four levels of meaning: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical.

⁶¹ Saint Jerome, *Epistula* 72.

⁶² *Pazmaveb* 11-12 (1965), 341.

⁶³ *Pazmaveb* 9-10 (1902), 408.

⁶⁴ Aršak Ch'opanean, *Anahit* 1-4 (Paris: 1908), 10-11.

⁶⁵ The translator was inspired by Bagratuni, who had studied and defined the meter of the ancient hymns of the Armenian Church. Bagratuni called this "Armenian meter" because he believed it to be the meter of ancient Armenian poetry before the introduction of the syllabic meter in the Cilician era. Tiroyeanc thus attempted to adapt this meter to modern Armenian.

⁶⁶ HayPetHrat – Armenian State Press.

⁶⁷ Avetik' Isahakyan (1875-1957) – famous Armenian poet, writer, academician, member of the Armenian Academy of Sciences and a prominent public figure. Born October 19 (31), 1875, in Alek'sandropol (present day Gyumri), Armenia. Isahakyan began his formal education at St. Ejmiatsin Geworgyan seminary (1889-92). In 1893 he attended classes at Leipzig University as a non-matriculated student. He started his literary as well as political careers in his early youth. Upon his return from Leipzig in 1895 he entered the ranks of the newly established Alek'sandropol committee of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation; he supported armed groups and sent financial aid to Western Armenia from Alek'sandropol. He was arrested in 1896 and spent a year in Erevan prison. His first book of poetry, *Erger ew verk'er* [Songs and Wounds], appeared in 1897. He also wrote legends, ballads, fables, and, in 1909, a short philosophical poem called *Abu-Lala-Mahari*. Between 1919 and 1937, he worked on giving a literary form to the medieval epic poem *Sasna Mher*.

⁶⁸ Jivelegov Alek'sey (1875-1952) – historian, art critic, literary scholar, theatre expert and enthusiast, Armenian translator. His works are primarily on the art and literature of the Renaissance. Author of a series of books, including among others: *Mijnadarean k'aghak'nerë Arewmtean Ewropayum* [Medieval cities in Western Europe] (1902), *Arewturë Arewmutk'um mijin darerum* [Trade in Medieval Europe] (1904), *Alek'sandr I ew Napoleon* [Alexander I and Napoleon] (1915), *Italakan Veratsnndi aknarkner* [Outline of the Italian Renaissance] (1929), *Dante Alighieri* (1933), *Dramayi tesut'yunë XVI d. Italiayum* [Theory of Drama in the 16th century in Italy] (1953).

⁶⁹ Hovhannes Karapetyan (Širaz) (1915-1984) – one of the great Soviet Armenian Poets and writers of Eastern Europe. Born Hovhannes Širaz in Alek'sandropol on April 27, 1915, only three days after the terrible massacre of Armenian writers and other intellectuals by the Young Turk government. His childhood, spent starving, thirsty and barefoot, took place during the most tragic times in Armenian history. Širaz's poetry is popular in Armenia: Hušardzan mayrikis [Memorial for my Mother] had a printing of 50,000 and sold out in a week. Until his death on March 14, 1984, Širaz published many books, mostly poetry, but also quartets, parables and translations, and he enjoyed the love and recognition of Armenians everywhere as one of the greatest Armenian poets of the last century. He is the author of *Hayots Dant'eakanë* [The Armenian *Danteakan* (Dantesque)], a poem of 4000 verses which the poet likens to 4000 tombstones for the millions of Armenian innocent victims. (See Hovhannes Širaz, *Hayots Dant'eakanë* (Erevan: Nairi, 1991), 343).

⁷⁰ Ruben Ghulyan (tr. by), *Dzhokhk' [Hell]* (Erevan: HGM ed., 2004), 240.

⁷¹ Ruben Ghulyan (tr. by), *K'avaran* [Purgatory] (Erevan: HGM ed., 2005), 232.

⁷² Ruben Ghulyan (tr. by), *Drakht* [Paradise] (Erevan: HGM ed., 2007), 226.