

150 Years of Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari

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From Academia Armena Sancti Lazari to the Establishment of Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari

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Abstract The Armenian Studies have a very long tradition in Italy. However, the establishment of the official teaching of Armenian at Ca' Foscari is particularly significant. It is a direct continuation of many Armenian traces present in the lagoon city for centuries, such as the birth of the first Casa Armena in Europe in 1245, the prosperous diplomatic relations between the Republic of Serenissima and the Kingdom of Armenia, the printing of the first Armenian book in 1512, the arrival of Armenian merchants from Julfa, who highly contributed to the economy of Venice, and finally the institution of the Mekhitarist Congregation of the Armenian monks on the island of San Lazzaro, recognised by Napoleon as Academia Armena Sancti Lazari. After an historical excursus, the paper will go on to detail some significant periods of Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari.

Summary 1 Historical Overview. – 2 Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari.

Keywords Venice. Armenians in Venice. Armenian Studies. Ca' Foscari University. Mekhitarist Congregation.

1 Historical Overview

Venice has always had an irresistible appeal for the Armenians, who can find there evident or forgotten traces of their ancestors under the cloths of pilgrims or merchants, monks, artists and literary figures, ambassadors, and even sovereigns. Venice is proud to have the oldest 'Casa armena' in Europe, in Calle delle Lanterne, later renamed as Calle degli Armeni. "Domum in qua stant Armenij volumus ut in perpetuum ipsi in ea stare debeant", can be

In 1994 when I made a step in Venice as the first exchange student of the first ever signed agreement between Yerevan State and Ca' Foscari Universities, I could not imagine that a few decades later I would have the honour to write the history of Armenian Studies in Venice. It is really a difficult task to restore the long and rich chronology of Armenian Studies in Venice and summarise it within the limits of a single article. Hence, I hope in the reader's forgiveness if some names or events have been left out of this paper. My special thanks go to the Department of Asian and North African Studies as well as to the International relations offices of Ca' Foscari and Yerevan State Universities for providing me with some archival documents.

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read in the testament of the doge Sebastiano Ziani's nephew Marco.¹ This was not by chance. The Republic of Venice enjoyed a privileged relation with the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. Hence, the doge paid the honour back with this generosity.² In 1434 there is also mention of the small church of Santa Croce, which is the only one among the forty Armenian churches present in Italy during the Middle Ages that still hosts masses celebrated after the Armenian rite by the Mekhitarist fathers of San Lazzaro.³

From the beginning of the sixteenth century on, when the role of Venice in the world trade started to decline, the Armenians supported strongly its economy.⁴ As a matter of fact, in many official papers issued by the highest bodies of the Venetian government the following can be read:

Questa nazione armena è stata sempre per pubblica deliberatione raccomandata; [...] Armeni et Persiani in particolare che tra' forestieri sono li più frequenti, e quasi solo che sostengano il negotio in quelle parti; [...] la benemerita e prediletta nazione armena [...] che traffica summe rilevanti di denaro [...] con le mercancie apporta considerabilj benefici a questa città. (Peratoner 2007, 109)⁵

Venice is also the birthplace of the first Armenian printed book, entitled *Urbat'agirk'* (Book of Friday), issued between 1509 and 1513, in the Venice-based printing house established by Hakob Melapart.⁶ Since then, nineteen Armenian printers worked in the city.

1 Venezia, Archivio di Stato (ASVe). "Testamento di Marco Ziani": Procuratori di San Marco, Misti, b. 180.

2 Some sources indicate that the building became a guest house for Armenians around 25 May 1235. For further details on Venetian-Armenian community consider among many others Alishan 1893; Hermet, Cogni Ratti di Desio 1993; Peratoner 2007, 107-12; Karapetian 2011, 223-229; Manoukian 2014, 25-7.

3 In 1348 there is also mention of another church and a convent, that of San Giovanni Battista dei Frati Armeni, at Castello.

4 For further details consider Aslanian 2011; McCabe 1999.

5 "This Armenian nation has always been dear to the Republic by official decree; [...] especially Armenians and Persians, who come here most frequently among the foreigners, and are almost the pillars of the trade; [...] the good-doing and beloved Armenian nation [...] who moves huge amounts of money [...] and through goods it trades brings a significant contribution to the city" (Peratoner 2007, 109).

6 For the transliteration of the Armenian examples this author adopts the system based on the works of the linguists Heinrich Hübschmann and Antoine Meillet as referenced in Meillet 1913, 8-9.

And finally, Venice is the home of the Mekhitarist Congregation of Armenian Monks at San Lazzaro island,⁷ beacon of cultural and spiritual awakening of the Armenian people and defined by Napoleon as “Academia Armena Sancti Lazari”.

Since their foundation, the fathers have set themselves the principal aim of creating a new intellectual exchange between East and West, and have ceaselessly published important contributions as well as translated the works of classical antiquity into Armenian, together with modern European masterpieces.⁸ A great deal of this translation work was done in the nineteenth century.⁹ In parallel to their religious and cultural missions, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Congregation underwent considerable expansion of its educational activities with the foundation of numerous schools and colleges in the Crimea, Venice, Padua and various centres in Asia Minor and the Caucasus.¹⁰

In 1843 the Academia Sancti Lazari inaugurated the publication of the periodical *Pazmaveb*. It is regarded as the patriarch of the Armenian and Armenological press and published without interruption from 1843 up to the present.¹¹ Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR) has classified it among scientific journals.

In the Venetian panorama, one of the figures of particular prominence in Armenian Studies was the Mekhitarist father Giovanni Battista Aucher (Mkrtič' Awgorean). In 1818, he published a critical edition with a new Latin translation of the *Chronicon* by Eusebius of Caesarea. Until its publication, this book was believed to be lost, however the Armenian transla-

7 On Mekhitar and the Mekhitarists there is a large bibliography. I shall note here only a few key works: on Mekhitar's life and work see, Nurikhan 1914; Zekiyan 1977. On the order, its history and spirituality, see Sargisian 1905; 1936; Leo 1946, 979 ff.; Bardakjian 1976; Adalian 1992; Zekiyan, Ferrari 2004. Some significant tokens of the general esteem among Armenians for Mekhitar and his work are quoted by Zekiyan (1993, 221-48).

8 There are a few publications inherent to Armenian Studies antecedent to the establishment of the Mekhitarist Order, such as *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam*, the oldest book in Europe that uses the Armenian characters and has some important observations concerning the phonetics (Albonesi 1539). Also, it's worth mentioning *Dictionarium armeno-latinum* by Rivola (1624), and *Grammaticae et logicae institutiones linguae literalis armenicae* (Galano 1645). For more details consider Morani 2014, 363-73.

9 For further details on the translation activity of the Mekhitarists, consider Mildonian 2004; Uluhogian 2004; Haroutyunian 2011, 2012.

10 For more details on Mekhitarists' educational activities, consider Peratoner (2007, 141-3) and also “Murat-Rap'ayëlean varžaranneru barerarnern ew irenc' ktaknerë” (*Bazmavep*, 1936, 9-12, 167-200), and especially chap. 2 “Samuël Muratean: azgayin mec barerar” (Samuel Muratean: Great Benefactor of the Nation) (175-186).

11 The transcription of the name appeared as *Pazmaveb* until 1970. In the beginning *Bazmavep* served for popular education. Later it changed into an Armenological review, and now it is the organ of the Mekhitarist Academy of San Lazzaro, Venice. For the birth of *Bazmavep*, cf. Zekiyan 1995; Ćemčemean 1994; Xaç'atryan 2011, 2012.

tion was able to reproduce it in its entirety (Aucher 1818). This publishing event caused a great sensation and immediately highlighted the importance of the Armenian manuscript tradition.¹² Interestingly, for his philological work on the *Chronicle* of Eusebius of Caesarea and *De Providentia* of Philo of Alexandria, Giacomo Leopardi drew the mentioned two texts. In his introduction Leopardi writes:

Some of those many works written by Philo of Alexandria, that lack to the Westerners are preserved nowadays among Armenians who translated them in their own language at the time of Theodosius the Younger, i.e. fourteen centuries ago. (Leopardi 1845, 201; Author's translation)¹³

The cultural prestige that the Mekhitarist Congregation had earned by the early nineteenth century attracted the English poet, Lord Byron.¹⁴ From the end of November 1816, during his stay in Venice, he visited the San Lazzaro island a number of times. With the help of father Aucher he applied himself to the study of the classical Armenian language. To his friend Thomas Moore, Byron wrote:

By way of divertissement, I am studying daily, at an Armenian monastery, the Armenian language. I found that my mind wanted something craggy to break upon. (Byron 1844, 329; cf. Prothero 1901, 4: 9)

He reached the stage where he was able to translate some short literary texts from Armenian and collaborated on a basic grammar in English. He also collaborated on an Armenian-English and English-Armenian dictionary by father Aucher.¹⁵

12 For more details consider Uluhogian 2004, 232.

13 The original Italian text reads: "Di quelle molte opere scritte da Filone alessandrino giudeo che mancano agli occidentali, alcune si conservano anche oggi fra gli Armeni, recate nella loro lingua a tempo di Teodosio minore, cioè quattordici secoli addietro". Consider also Bolognesi 1998; Haroutyunian 2014.

14 For Byron and Mekhitarists, consider among others Mesrobian 1973, 27-37; Dowsett 1989, 7-52; Byron 1983.

15 In a letter dated 2 January 1817, Byron wrote: "Despite their sad lot and the uncertainty of the future, their land will always and for all time remain the most interesting in the world, and their language, in order to be the more charming, needs only to be studied further. If we read the Scripture correctly, the earthly paradise was in Armenia, [...] it was in Armenia that the floodwater subsided and the dove found a place to land. But when the earthly paradise disappeared, misfortune befell the country, and although it was a powerful kingdom for centuries, it maintained its independence with difficulty; the satraps of Persia and the Pashahs of Turkey have devastated this country where God created man in His own image" (Byron 1983, 16).

The Mekhitarist Congregation in its role of cultural promoter also attracted the greatest interest of intellectuals and writers, such as Foscolo, Berchet, Monti, Bellotti, Hobhouse, etc.¹⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, the Mekhitarist Order arouse also the interest of the Italian linguist, journalist and essayist Nicolò Tommaseo. Thanks to his collaboration with the Armenian monks, two pillars of Armenian historiographical literature were presented to the Italian public: the invaluable literary translations of the *Storia di Mosé Corenese* and the *Storia di Agatangelo* (Tommaseo, 1841, 1843). Another important figure in the panorama of nineteenth century Armenian Studies was the Venetian priest Giuseppe Cappelletti (1802- 1876). Cappelletti widely collaborated with the Mekhitarists, was a member of their Academy of Sciences and contributed to the translation and publication of many important works.¹⁷ Also, Cappelletti was the one who realised the importance of opening space for Armenian Studies within the Italian Academia:

Oggidì in tutta Europa non c'ha che una sola cattedra di lingua armena, ed è questa nel collegio reale di Parigi, onde uscirono alcuni giovani grandemente solleciti di conoscere le cose armene, e di pubblicarne tradotti i migliori scrittori. Fa veramente vergogna che in nessuna provincia colta di Italia vi sia una cattedra di armeno idioma, aperta dalla munificenza di un qualche Principe, per cui prevenire, in parte almeno, i Francesi nella gloria di tradurre e pubblicare le classiche produzioni degli scrittori di quella illustre nazione.^{18,19}

It will be not long after that several Italian universities would establish the official teaching of Armenian, firstly in Padova (1928), followed by Milan (1954), Bologna (1973) and Venice (1976).²⁰

16 For more details consider Camporesi 1966, 376.

17 Cf. among others Cappelletti 1829, 1833, 1840, 1841, 1877.

18 With respect to Cappelletti's contribution, his name passed unobserved because of his controversial personality. In 2010, Tamara De Valerio, a PhD student at the University of Rouen, delivered an important talk on Giuseppe Cappelletti's contribution in Armenian Studies, unveiling many aspects that by that time remained unobserved. The paper was delivered at the Padux-Araxes cultural association's annual workshop in Milan. To our knowledge it has not been published yet.

19 "As of today, there is only one chair of the Armenian language, and this is in the Royal College of Paris, wherefrom graduated some young people very eager to know the Armenian literature, and to publish the translations of the best writers. It is truly a shame that in no educated province of Italy there is a chair of Armenian language, established by the munificence of some prince, in order to prevent, in some part at least, attributing the French from the glory of translating and publishing the classic works of the writers of the illustrious nation" (Author's translation).

20 For further details on Armenian Studies in Italy consider Zekiyani 1996,13-16; Zekiyani, Bonardi 1998: XI-XII; Morani 2014, 363-373; Manoukian 2014, 207-213, as well as different

2 Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari



Figure 1. Vincenzina Flora,
“Armenian Alphabet”.
Gold-plated mosaic 53 × 53
(courtesy of the artist)

The history of Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari began in 1976, according to the common will of the rector Feliciano Benvenuti and the abbot of the Mekhitarist Order of Venice, Boghos Ananian. It was established “as an opening window of the Armenian Academia of San Lazzaro on the Italian world” (Manoukian 2014, 211).

The teaching was entrusted to the Mekhitarist monk Father Levon Zekiyian. “The new university environment [...] had never been familiar to me before. In fact, I came from a curriculum of studies for which I had never set foot in an Italian university before, neither as a student nor as a lecturer”, testified prof. Zekiyian years later (Zekiyian 2004, 39; Author’s translation).

Initially, the instruction was free, and the lessons of Armenian were part of the course denominated “Iranian Dialects”. Five years later, due to the abolition of free teachings at Ca' Foscari, “Armenian Language and Literature” became a distinct course.

Further, in 1997, Armenian was consolidated into a four-year regular teaching at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature within the Degree in Eastern languages and Civilizations. With the words of Manoukian, “[it] was an important result, because it recognized to the Armenian culture an adequate space and relevance in the representation and understanding of the complex Middle Eastern and Caucasian reality” (Manoukian 2014, 211).

Currently, with the abolition of the Faculties, Armenian Studies are at the Department of Asian and North African Studies.

issues of the *Rassegna Armenisti Italiani* of PADUS-ARAXES Cultural Association, especially the column “Centri armenistici e associazioni collegate all’Armenia operanti in Italia”.

The presence of Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari allowed to promote important activities. First of all, it's worth mentioning the establishment of the "Intensive Course of Armenian Language and Culture" by prof. Zekiyan in 1984. "Under many aspects this course can be seen as an ideal continuator [...] of the mission once undertaken by the Moorat-Rapael College", affirms Manoukian (2014, 212). The course was the fruit of collaboration between Ca' Foscari and the Padus-Araxes Cultural Association.²¹ Another result of this collaboration was the birth of the audio-visual course of the Western Armenian-language teacher Hayeren Khosink.

Since its establishment in 1987 by Levon Zekiyan and Gabriella Uluhogian (University of Bologna), the Padus-Araxes Cultural Association had a leading role of liaison between different Italian Universities, as well as scholars interested in the Armenian Studies. It has its journal, *Rassegna armenisti italiani*. The Association supported various activities of Armenological interest and funded courses at Ca' Foscari. In particular, until 2010, the Association sponsored the Armenian Language Practice course (*lettorato*) entrusted to this author, and between 2010-2015 Armenian Language and Literature courses, taught by Benedetta Contin and Paolo Lucca.

Other important activities carried by the chair of Armenian Studies, include conferences - *L'Armenia tra Oriente ed Occidente* (1978), *Culture Transcaucasiche* (1979), the workshop *Gli armeni nella cultura italiana* (1982-87) -, the Armenian film festival in Venice (1983), and a research project on Armenian documents preserved in the Vatican Secret Archives (part 1, 1994).

Within Armenian Studies, art has always arisen a big interest. In fact, in 1988 Levon Zekiyan organised the 5th International Symposium of Armenian Art in collaboration with Adriano Alpago Novello, Ermanno Arslan, Hrant Pambakian, Gabriella Uluhogian and Giovanni Curatola (Zekiyan 1991). In his inaugural message of the symposium, prof. Zekiyan thanked the rector Giovanni Castellani and the head of the Department of Eurasian Studies Giuliano Tamani, and affirmed:

The meetings between scholars of the same discipline or related disciplines have become more and more affirmed in recent decades, as one of the essential means of developing scientific investigation. It is certainly motivated by this conviction that the Department of Eurasian Studies and the Magnificent Rector of the University of Venice have accepted

²¹ In 1984-86 the Summer Intensive Course of the Armenian Language was initially organised at Moorat-Raphael College. Between 1986-2015 the course was held in collaboration with Ca' Foscari. Since 2016 it takes place at the General Studium Marcianum of Venice. For more details on the activity of the Intensive course consider Kasbarian 2005; for further details on this and other activities of the association, see the website of the PADUS-ARAXES Cultural Association at URL <http://www.padus-araxes.com> (2018-03-05).

with great availability the proposal to organize this Symposium, and that numerous prestigious institutions at national and international level have joined to it... (Zekiyan 1991, 35-7; Author's translation)

A year later, after the success of the Symposium, Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari were enriched with a new course dedicated to the Armenian art and architecture. It was held by Adriano Alpago Novello,²² whom the colleagues and Armenians jokingly called 'Alpaghian', thus 'armenizing' his last name through the particle *-ian*, typical to Armenian surnames (cf. Macchiarella 2005, "Presentazione"). Once professor at Polytechnic University of Milan, he was one of the main promoters of the Centre of Study and Documentation of Armenian Culture, founded in Milan in the '70s. In 1991 it transferred to Venice, to Loggia del Temanza. The Centre, under the direction of Minas Lurian, continues to support different conferences and seminars of Armenological interest in collaboration with Ca' Foscari. Among the supporters of the Armenian Studies it is worth mentioning Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which has contributed the fellows of the Chair with scholarships and grants.

Prof. Levon Zekiyan retired in 2011. In 2014, he was appointed by Pope Francis as Apostolic administrator of Armenian Archieparchy of Istanbul, with the dignity of Archbishop.

In 2005 Aldo Ferrari - historian and expert in Russian and Caucasian Studies - joined the chair of Armenian Studies and after the retirement of prof. Zekiyan, became the head. He teaches Armenian Literature, Introduction to Armenian Culture, History of Caucasus, History of Russian Culture. The courses of Armenian Language (both theory and practice) are entrusted to this author according to the agreement between the Embassy of Armenia in Rome and Ca' Foscari since 2011 and with the support of the Ministry of Education of Armenia.

In 2015, in the occasion of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide the Department of Asian and North African Studies sponsored several events, such as the international conference *Metz Yeghern - Armenian Genocide: Past and Present Challenges* (in collaboration with the Ca' Foscari School of International Relations, CeStuDir, CEM, ASIAC and Padus-Araxes), as well as the international workshops "Translating Memory: the Representation of the Armenian Genocide in Literature and Film", in collaboration

22 For a complete bibliography of prof. Alpago Novello cf. Macchiarella 2005. After the retirement of Alpago Novello, prof. Gianclaudio Macchiarella continued the course with the initial collaboration of Gaiane Casnati (Manoukian 2014, 211). Upon Macchiarella's suggestion, *Onnik Manoukian Lecture Series* were established, which allowed to integrate the teaching of Armenian language and art with seminars of Armenological interest. Aldo Ferrari, Marco Bais, Giuseppe Munarini were among those who contributed with integrative courses on Armenian culture and history.

with the “Laboratorio sulla Traduzione delle Lingue Orientali” and “The Armenians in the Islamic World: Paradigms of Interaction” in collaboration with Padus-Araxes Cultural Association.

Recent activities promoted by the Chair include the workshop “Giornata di Studi Armeni e Caucasicci”, which marks its twelfth edition (since 2007, in collaboration with Padus-Araxes and ASIAC) and the series of lectures “Armenia: una civiltà di frontiera” (six editions since 2013). The interest for Armenian art at Ca' Foscari is testified by the success of the seminars on Armenian art, “Seminari di Arte Armena,” which already marks its fourth edition under the coordination of Aldo Ferrari and Marco Ruffilli.²³ Thanks to the collaboration between Ca' Foscari, Sorbonne, AIEA and ASIAC, an important international conference was organised in 2018: *Journey to Armenia: From Ancient to Modern times*.

Since 1990, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) permitted the discussion of PhD theses in Armenian Studies. This decision was the fruit of the request presented to the Ministry by the Professors Levon Zekiyian, Gabriella Uluhogian and Giancarlo Bolognesi (Kasbarian 2005, 71).²⁴ Since then, a number of PhD theses as well as post-doctoral research projects were carried out by the fellows of the Chair, including the areas of history, philosophy, philology, linguistics and translation.²⁵

23 Within this vein it is also worth mentioning the case of the painter Vincenzina Flora, who ‘fell in love’ with the Armenian alphabet. In parallel to her lessons at the Accademia di Belle Arti of Venice, she enrolled in the Single Courses of Armenian Language and Literature at Ca' Foscari to intertwine her linguistic and artistic interests. Her final work, exhibited the day of her thesis discussion, was a mosaic showing all the letters of the Armenian alphabet. It was gold-plated, as most of the Byzantine and Venetian mosaics, thus recalling the ancient relations between Venice, Bysantium and Armenia (see fig. 1).

24 After this permission, the first PhD discussion was in 1995 by Valentina Calzolari from the University of Bologna, who further became the head of Armenian Studies at the University of Geneva and promoted an exchange programme with Ca' Foscari. She is also the president of AIEA, an Armenological association which among many other events has supported the recent conference *Journey to Armenia: From Ancient to Modern times*.

25 In 2007 Paolo Lucca discussed the PhD thesis *La prima versione armena di 1-2 Cronache: edizione critica*. Three years later Milena Bernardelli discussed on *Alessandro Magno nel Medioevo armeno: quando l'effimero diventa eterno*. In 2011, Benedetta Contin finished her PhD thesis on *La version arménienne des oeuvres grecque de David l'Invincible: Recherches sur la formation du vocabulaire épistémologique arménien*. In the same year, at Ca' Foscari, I discussed my PhD thesis entitled *An Analysis of Dante's Tenses in the Armenian Translations of the “Divina Commedia”*. Post-doctoral research projects include among others: *Reflections on the Verbal System: From Comparative Linguistics to Translation Theory* (Haroutyunian 2011-2013); *Philosophical and theological production of David the Invincible* (Contin 2014-2016, with the contribution of Gulbenkian Foundation); *From Manuscript to Printed Book: The Publishing History of the Armenian Version of the ‘Breviarium Sacri Ordinis Praedicatorum’ (Venice 1715)* (Lucca 2014-2016); *Migratory Flows: From Language Contact to Cultural Translation* (Haroutyunian 2017-2018).

The recent decade is characterised by the development of new relations between Ca' Foscari and the Republic of Armenia. "The current agreement has been active and fruitful for a long while [since 1993], and we warmly support the continuing of this mutually beneficial cooperation", can be read in Rector Pier Francesco Ghetti's letter addressed to the Rector of Yerevan State University Aram Simonian.²⁶ In September 2007, the rectors met at Ca' Foscari to sign the new agreement for cooperation in the areas of education, science and culture.²⁷

In the following years, the rector Carlo Carraro received the ambassadors of Armenia in Rome, Ruben Karapetian and Sargis Ghazarian. In 2011 an agreement was signed between the Embassy of Armenia in Rome and Ca' Foscari in support of Armenian Studies in Venice, funding the courses of Armenian language (both theory and practice). The agreement was renewed in 2014.

Within its internationalization strategy, Ca' Foscari cooperates with Yerevan State University, Armenian National Agrarian University, Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University, Gavar State University, "Yerjanik" Children's Charity Organization, in the context of European Erasmus Mundus, WEBB, EMBER, HERMES projects. Moreover, since 2014, the Travelers Club of Ca' Foscari University Foundation organises cultural trip to Armenia guided by Aldo Ferrari. In 2015 the Ca' Foscari delegation was the only one among other Italian universities to represent Armenia during the Model United Nations at Harvard.

Since 2016, the success of European Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility two projects marked an important milestone in the cooperation between Ca' Foscari and Yerevan State University.²⁸ The subject areas covered by the projects include History, International Relations, Archeology, Literature, Linguistics, Translation Studies, Economics. The cooperation foresees students' (BA, MA, PhD), professors' and staff' mobility. In 2017, for the first time the Chair of Armenian Studies hosted an Erasmus+ Visiting Professor from Yerevan State University, Prof. Alvard Jivanian. He is expert in children's literature and the Armenian translator of *Peter Pan* and *Harry Potter*; among others, he enriched the activities of the Chair by teaching courses and delivering public lectures. She finished her final lecture on "*Harry Potter's* Armenian Translation" with the following testimonial:

I am completing my Erasmus+ professorship at Ca' Foscari University in Venice and going back home. I will take into my ears the sounds of this

26 Ref. n. 20067, August 2, 2007, Venice.

27 Pr. 9599-III/13 14/04/08. The first student exchange agreement between Ca' Foscari and the Yerevan State University was signed in 1993.

28 The coordinator of the project is Alessandra Giorgi in collaboration with Elena Rova (for Archaeology) and Sona Haroutyunian (for Translation Studies and Literature).

never silent town because the seagulls are early risers, the howling of the badly behaved but proud winds. In my eyes, I will keep the images of big ships making their slow pace at Zattere and leaving foaming white dragons behind. They bring peace to my heart and a hope to return. Karen Cushman writes in her fictional diary of a young girl: "He told us wondrous stories of the places that he has been. The cities have names that whisper like the wind: Venice, Damascus, Byzantium, Samarkand. I say them over and over to myself so I will not forget them". (Cushman 2012, 26)

It is really a difficult task to restore the long and rich chronology of Armenian Studies in Venice and summarise it within the limits of a single article. However, after this excursus, it can be affirmed that the Mekhitarist monks laid the bases for Armenian Studies in Venice. They already had their successful educational experience in Venice through the Moorat-Raphael College, the boarding school for Armenian children, at the gorgeous Venetian *palazzo Ca' Zenobio*. Hence it was a natural desire to expand the instruction of Armenian at a university level. On the other hand, it can also be concluded that the establishment of Armenian Studies at Ca' Foscari University is undoubtedly a continuation of a consolidated tradition that dates back to the very origins of the lagoon city, a tradition that can be denominated 'Armeno-Veneto' to recall Alishan (1893) or 'La Venezia degli Armeni', to recall Hermet and Cogni Ratti di Desio (1993).

"If not in Venice, where else Armenian should be taught?" (Zekiyan 2004, 48): these were the words of Gianroberto Scarcia, the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures and one of the main promoters of the establishment of Armenian at Ca' Foscari in 1976.

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