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FROM THE HISTORY OF TRANSLATIONS OF KAZAKH LITERATURE INTO ARMENIAN

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Abstract: The article examines the history of the translation of works by Kazakh authors (both classics and contemporaries) and examples of oral folklore into Armenian across the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. During the Soviet era, works by Makhambet Utemisov (1804-1846), Ybrai Altynsarin (1841-1889), Abai Kunanbayev (1845-1904), Jambyl Jabayev (1846–1945), Gabit Musrepov (1902–1985), Anuar Alimzhanov (1930–1993), Ilyas Yesenberlin (1915–1983) and Mukhtar Auezov (1897–1961) were translated, as well as works by other Kazakh poets and prose writers representing the then-dominant artistic movement of socialist realism. The initiators of these translations into Armenian were the celebrated classics of 20th-century Armenian literature: Silva Kaputikyan, Gevorg Emin, and Paruyr Sevak. Following the declaration of independence by Armenia and Kazakhstan, the centuries-old Armenian-Kazakh cultural ties entered a new stage of development. It then became possible to translate and publish in Armenian works that were censored during the Soviet era, including the poetry of Kazakh *zhyraus* (folk bards) and the works of Shakarim, Magzhan Zhumabayev, and Akhmet Baitursynov. Significant publications include the fundamental *Anthology of Kazakh Literature* (2019), a new edition of Mukhtar Auezov's epic novel *The Path of Abai*, the first translation of Abai's philosophical prose, *Kara Sozder* (*The Book of Words*, 2020), and the first collection of *Kazakh Folk Tales* (2023) in the Armenian language. Furthermore, through comparative textual analysis and an examination of literary-critical approaches to the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the article elucidates the methodological aspects of selecting themes (reflecting a shift away from the predominance of translations of Socialist Realist works aimed exclusively at glorifying

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the Soviet system toward introducing Armenian readers to the works of authors repressed during the Stalinist period) and texts for translation, as well as the nuances involved in the accurate transmission of the national values and Eastern figurative system crystallized in the Kazakh originals to Armenian readers through literary translation.

Keywords: Kazakh literature; translation traditions; Abai; Magzhan Zhumabaev; Akhmet Baitursynov; Mukhtar Auezov; Armenian-Kazakh cultural and humanitarian cooperation

1. Introduction

Armenian-Kazakh cultural ties have a rich history dating back to the era of *Dasht-i Qipchaq* (the Kipchak Steppe), when Armenians began migrating to the vast steppes of Northern Eurasia. Multilateral Armenian-Turkic contacts, naturally, have an even more ancient history. Unique evidence of the linguistic, historical, and cultural ties between Armenians and the Turkic-Kipchak world can be found in the Armeno-Kipchak manuscripts — texts written in the Kipchak language using the Armenian alphabet (Safaryan et al. 2016: 168-176; Simonyan et al. 2022: 213-235).

Historically, Armenians and Kazakhs were integrated into the system of the Russian Empire and, subsequently, the Soviet Union. During the Soviet period, on the one hand, comprehensive cultural exchanges between the union republics were encouraged at a high state level (including introducing readers across the various republics to classical literary heritage and contemporary literary developments through translation). On the other hand, it must be emphasized that the ideological clichés of the Soviet communist system erected insurmountable barriers not only to the translation but also to the publication of the original works of many great writers whose worldviews were regarded as nationalist and "hostile."

A new phase of translation activity, incorporating medieval literature, the once strictly prohibited works of previously repressed writers, and examples of contemporary Kazakh literature, began following the dissolution of the USSR and the declaration of independence by both Armenia and Kazakhstan.

The purpose of this article is to examine the translation of Kazakh literature into the Armenian language and its connection to the historical and socio-cultural transformations within the post-Soviet space. The specific objectives are: 1) to provide a description and periodization of the aforementioned translations; and 2) to identify correlations between methodological approaches used in the process of literary translation under varying historical and political conditions.

Despite their historical significance, Armenian–Kazakh literary relations during the Soviet period have not been systematically examined. Although the authors have previously published studies in Armenian, Russian, and Kazakh addressing individual aspects of Armenian–Kazakh cultural and historical ties, those studies considered the subject only fragmentarily and in different contexts. The present article addresses this gap by providing the first comprehensive and systematic account of the translation of Kazakh literature into Armenian and, in doing so, presents the most complete picture to date of these literary interactions.

2. Soviet Period: (Un)veiling Ideological-Methodological Clichés of Translations

Predictably, during the Soviet period, the works of Kazakh and other authors translated into Armenian were primarily those that glorified the Soviet system, socialist construction, the communist future, and the figure of Stalin (until the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, when Stalin's cult of personality was officially condemned), as well as the works that interpreted the history of the Kazakh people (and other peoples of the former USSR) and their national cultural traditions only in forms sanctioned by Moscow. As a rule, translators did not master the original languages, and Russian served as an 'intermediary' for them.

Works by Jambyl Jabayev (Jabayev 1938), Mukhtar Auezov's epic novel *The Path of Abai* (Auezov 1952; Auezov 1988), as well as books by Gabit Musrepov (Musrepov 1980), Anuar Alimzhanov (Alimzhanov 1982), and Ilyas Yesenberlin (Yesenberlin 1984; Yesenberlin 1989) were published in Armenian (translated from Russian). Anthologies representing Kazakh prose and poetry by various authors (Kazakh poets 1968; Khachatryan 2018: 299-314) were also released. Khazakh prose was translated by Harutyun Harutyunyan, Olga Sanahyan, Dora Yesayan, and Arpik Vardapetyan, while the poetry was rendered by Lyudvig Duryan (a well-known songwriter), Henrik Tumanyan, Vahe Hovakimyan, Artashes Poghosyan, Vardges Babayan, Gevorg Virapyan, Vagharshak Norents, Nansen Mikaelyan (a prominent children's writer) etc. Several generations of Armenian children grew fond of the Kazakh folk tale *The Magic Fur Coat of Aldar-Kose*, which was artfully "strung onto the pearl necklace" of a collection of folk tales from diverse peoples of the USSR compiled by Khachik Hrachyan (Hrachyan 1952: 28-30). It is noteworthy that the role of folklore — particularly fairy tales — in Soviet literature during the Stalin era is explored in an insightful and multifaceted manner in the works of Western authors (Miller 1990; Zemskova 2017). Regarding Kazakh reality and translations into Armenian, the work of Jambyl Jabayev is a striking example where folkloric traditions and extreme ideological commitment — a truly "epic" glorification of Stalin and the Soviet system — are interwoven. In 1938, the State Publishing House of Armenia released a mass-circulation edition of Jambul's *Songs and Poems*, which for many years remained the only book by a Kazakh author in the Armenian language. The publication is prefaced by *The Life of an Akyn* (Jambyl's autobiography), which concludes with the author's exhortation to dedicate "the finest songs of our hearts to the leader of the peoples, *STALIN*" and the declaration: "Long live *STALIN* — the great master of human happiness" (in both instances, the name *Stalin* is emphasized typographically in all capital letters) (Jambul 1938: 11). This collection, in particular, includes the lyrics to Jambyl's songs *Listening to Stalin's Speech*, *Greetings to You, Supreme Soviet*, *Klim Batyr*, as well as excerpts from *The Poem About Voroshilov*, dedicated to Stalin's comrade-in-arms Kliment Voroshilov (1881–1969). It also features the *Poem on the Brotherhood of Peoples*, which exemplifies the intertwining of folklore motifs with the the broader ideological celebration of the Soviet system and.hyperbolized glorification of Stalin's "genius."

It must be acknowledged that while the Communist publishing industry was highly ideologized, it nonetheless encouraged the publication and translation of classical

literature and folklore from the union and autonomous republics into Russian and other languages. Moreover, during the period known as the "Khrushchev Thaw"[1] a significant turning point occurred, leading to an expansion of the thematic scope of both published and translated works. For instance, representatives of the Union of Writers of Armenia asked one of the USSR's most prominent leaders Anastas Mikoyan during his visit to Armenia: "Why is it possible to publish the works by the 'White Guard' author Ivan Bunin in Moscow, but not those of Levon Shant in Armenia?" Mikoyan responded that such prohibitions were no longer in effect (Archive No 510, File 128).

Kazakh newsreels have preserved unique footage of the June 1968 visit of the Armenian delegation, headed by Robert Khachatryan, the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia to Almaty, then the capital of Kazakhstan. Three canonical figures of Soviet-era Armenian poetry: Silva Kaputikyan (1919–2006), Gevorg Emin (1921–1998), and Paruyr Sevak (1924–1971) were among the members of the delegation. These poets made a truly singular contribution to the strengthening of Armenian-Kazakh literary ties. This event was followed six months later by a visit from a delegation of Kazakh cultural figures to Yerevan, which included meetings at the studio of the world-renowned Armenian painter Martiros Saryan and an unforgettable performance of the Armenian song *Tsitsernak (A Swallow)* by the eminent Kazakh opera singer Bibigul Tulegenova.

It was during this period that a cooperation project, unrivaled for decades in its pragmatism and specificity, crystallized and came to fruition: the reciprocal publication of translations of Armenian literary works into Kazakh and vice versa. This memorable initiative was successfully brought to life, allowing readers to access, in the Kazakh language, not only the works of the classics of Armenian literature: St. Grigor Narekatsi, Nahapet Kuchak, Sayat-Nova, Hovhannes Tumanyan, Avetik Isahakyan, Daniel Varoujan, Vahan Teryan, Yeghishe Charents, Hovhannes Shiraz, Hamo Sahyan, Silva Kaputikyan, Gevorg Emin, and Paruyr Sevak, but also contemporary Armenian authors.

The epic novel *The Path of Abai*, which holds a prominent position within the literary and scholarly legacy of Mukhtar Auezov, was first translated into Armenian during the Stalinist era (1952). Sixty-eight years later, in 2020, as part of the commemorations for the 175th anniversary of the great Abai in Armenia, it was decided to republish Auezov's novel. This edition featured minor editorial refinements to Hrant Borozanyan's translation, based on a comparative study of the Armenian and Russian translations against the original text. For instance, at the very beginning of the novel (in the opening paragraph), the Kazakh original employs the term *shakird* (denoting a student of a *madrasah* — a Muslim religious school). It is widely known that Abai received both an Islamic religious and a Russian education. In the Russian translation,

[1] The "Thaw" refers to a period in Soviet history characterized by the partial liberalization of political and public life, widespread de-Stalinization, the rehabilitation of victims of the Stalinist regime, the relaxation of censorship, and the emergence of a certain degree of creative freedom. The onset of the "Thaw" is dated to Nikita Khrushchev's speech on "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences", delivered at the 20th Congress of the CPSU on February 25, 1956 (Ustinkin 2012: 129-133; Tian 2011: 139-142)

which functioned as the 'intermediary' for both the Armenian translation and the 1952 edition, the word *shakird* was omitted. By contrast, in the 2020 edition the term has been explicitly restored, thereby more fully conveying the linguistic and historical-cultural dimensions of the author's intent.

Special recognition is due to the graphic illustrations created by the contemporary Kazakh artist Nurlan Buranbayev specifically for the Armenian editions of Auezov's novel and Abai's own *Words of Edification*.

The Armenian republication was necessitated by the prominent role of Mukhtar Auezov and his epic novel in the history of 20th-century Kazakh literature. It is well known that in preparation for writing the novel, Auezov undertook extensive and painstaking research that went far beyond merely gathering biographical facts about Abai. Given the lack of formalized history, historiography, and documentary evidence in late-1930s Soviet Kazakhstan, he was compelled to research and document the system of Kazakh customary (precedent-based) law, ethnographic data (including funeral rites, weddings, and folk customs), details of the Kazakh calendar and cosmogonic concepts, as well as various historical issues of 19th-century Kazakhstan (Auezova 1997: 18-21)[2]. Furthermore, Auezov's role as a scholar of source studies in the preparation of scholarly editions of Abai's heritage cannot be overstated. Given its panoramic portrayal of history and the role of the individual, Auezov's work can be aptly compared to Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* (Safaryan 2020: 162-173)[3]. As Kyrgyz author Chinghiz Aitmatov, one of the most prominent prose writers of the Turkic Muslim world, captured the essence of Auezov's groundbreaking idea: "Mukhtar Auezov became the eyes of the nation. The fortunate alignment of the spiritual aspirations of the artist and the people became a single, full-flowing current of the Kazakh national epic under Auezov's pen, much as it did in the Russian novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* (Auezova 1972: 19). This comparison made by Aitmatov highlights both the authentic historicism and the epic scope of *The Path of Abai*, as well as the dialectical unity of historical and artistic elements within the novel (Auezova 1997: 304-305). Considering Mukhtar Auezov his mentor and the greatest artist among those he personally knew, Chinghiz Aitmatov wrote: "…This is the contribution of all Turkic-speaking peoples, including those who were nomadic in the past. The *Abai* epic is our artistic and social encyclopedia. It is our shared mandate. It is our account for the eras already lived across the vast Eurasian expanse. It stands for everything we had to endure throughout our long-suffering history, and for everything

[2] Mukhtar Auezov described his creative methodology in such a vivid and well-substantiated manner: "While gathering material, I interviewed Abai's friends and admirers, as well as his former enemies and rivals - either his contemporaries themselves or their sons and grandsons. As a result of these efforts, I accumulated such a wealth of information about my future protagonist that I often recalled one of Gorky's great maxims: 'Write about that which you have no right to remain silent about.' Even now, with the novel on Abai's youth and early years completed, I find that I still possess such a vast amount of material not included in this work that it would be possible to write another entire book of the same scale on this very period of my hero's life" (Auezova 1997: 410).

[3] Chingiz Aitmatov so aptly elucidated Auezov's monumental conception: "Mukhtar Auezov became the eyes of the nation. Under Auezov's pen, the fortuitous convergence of the spiritual needs of both the artist and the people flowed, much as it did in the Russian *And Quiet Flows the Don* into a single, full-flowing channel of the Kazakh national epic" (Auezova 1972: 19).

we managed to grasp while creating our own system of values, our artistic and moral world, and our great poetic word. In this sense, Mukhtar Auezov elevated us to a global level of universally significant artistic and historical thinking. To survey the world, to be visible to others, and to engage in dialogue while proclaiming the dignity of the human spirit, one must possess peaks such as Mukhtar Auezov" (Auezova 1972: 141).

3. Novel Approaches to Translation Selection in the Post-Soviet Period

Armenian-Kazakh cultural ties received a new impulse for development following the declarations of independence by Armenia and Kazakhstan. Significant milestones in the post-Soviet cooperation between the Armenian and Kazakh peoples include the opening of the Embassy of Armenia in Kazakhstan and the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Armenia, as well as the commencement of academic and scientific collaboration between the leading universities of the two sovereign nations — Yerevan State University (YSU) and the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU) — facilitated by a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2010. Other key developments include conferences dedicated to the ideas of Eurasianism, issues in Armenian-Kazakh relations, and the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate (2015); a Kazakh film festival held in Armenia (2017); and opening at YSU of the first Center for Kazakh Language, Culture, and History in the CIS region, named after the great Kazakh thinker Abai (2020). These milestones also encompass literary readings dedicated to the heritage of Kazakh classical literature, as well as meetings and discussions with contemporary Kazakh writers. Unlike the Soviet stage of translation, the post-Soviet era was accompanied by profound social transformations and the liberation of modern creative and research strategies from the dictates of Communist ideology, the clichés of atheism, and the imposed "artistic frameworks" of "socialist realism." The post-Soviet translation process had to align with new methodologies and respond to the evolving perceptions of the contemporary reader. Inevitable shifts in the ethical and aesthetic reception of literary texts within post-Soviet societies have necessitated a fundamental re-evaluation of how phenomena from one cultural-civilizational system are adapted to another during the practice of literary translation. A key innovation in translating Kazakh (and other Turkic-language) works into Armenian during the post-Soviet period is, specifically, the preservation of the traditional Eastern figurative system and the use of more appropriate Armenian equivalents instead of the "Russified analogues" that dominated the Soviet translation tradition.

An example of the fruitful cooperation established in the 2000s between two prestigious journals *Literary Armenia* (published in Armenia in Russian) and *Alem Adebieti* (*World Literature,* published in Kazakhstan) was the translation of works by contemporary Armenian prose writers and poets into the Kazakh language, with an entire voluminous issue of the Kazakh literary journal dedicated exclusively to Armenian material. The introductory article, titled *Armenia, Ararat, Matenadaran*, was written by the journal's editor-in-chief, Kenes Yusup. This issue featured poems by Silva Kaputikyan, Tatul Bolorchyan, Levon Blbulyan, and Henrik Edoyan; prose and essays by Hrant Matevosyan, Margo Ghoukasyan, Patrik Artem, and Susanna

Harutyunyan; and an interview with Hrant Matevosyan conducted by Hovik Vardumyan. The volume also included reproductions of masterpieces from various periods by Martiros Saryan (including his *Portrait of the Poet Yeghishe Charents* (1923) and *Ararat Valley* (1945)) (Alem Adebieti *2008*). Thanks to the *Ruhani Zhangyru* (*Spiritual Revival*) program, known as the program for the modernization of social consciousness and the multi-year efforts of Armenian scholars and translators, as well as the valuable consultations and organizational support provided by the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Armenia, a unique literary 'triptych' was published in Armenian translation for the first time. This was made possible through the collaborative work of Turkologists from YSU, specialists from the M. Abeghyan Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (NAS RA), contemporary poet-translators, and the "Bzez" publishing house. The triptych includes the *Anthology of Kazakh Literature* (2019), Abai Kunanbayev's *Words of Edification* (*Kara Sozder*, 2020), and a new edition of Mukhtar Auezov's epic novel *The Path of Abai* (*Abai Zholy*, 2020). The publication of these books became a long-overdue necessity decades after Armenia and Kazakhstan gained independence, reflecting the new landscape of the publishing industry in these friendly nations. The aforementioned anthology was compiled by Timur Urazaev and Kaisar Amirzhanov and edited by Vardan Devrikyan and Alexander Safaryan. The preface was written by Alexander Safaryan, while the historical and philological notes were authored by Vardan Devrikyan. Notably, at the initiative of the Union of Kazakh Writers, the preface to this fundamental anthology of Kazakh literature in Armenian was published in the prestigious Russian-language Kazakhstani journal *Prostor*. This version appeared in the author's own translation and was presented in its entirety. During the Soviet era, *Prostor* (Safaryan 2020: 162-173) was renowned for publishing out-of-favor writers such as Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Osip Mandelstam, as well as the first scholarly materials dedicated to the works of Mikhail Bulgakov. The publication of the preface to the Anthology in Russian translation in the journal *Prostor* appears to have been motivated by the interest of Kazakh writers and readers to the publicistic representation, offering an "external perspective" on the highly contested issues of post-Soviet Kazakh socio-political discourse, including the necessity to reassess the historical evaluations of the Soviet period, the crystallization of definitions concerning Stalinist repression, the catastrophic famine and depopulation in Kazakhstan, and the recognition of the necessity of presenting the poetic legacy of outstanding poets such as Magzhan Zhumabayev to the international community.

The structure of the anthology was determined by a chronological and genre-based approach. The "Poetry" section included, for the first time, the medieval oral poetry of the *zhyraus*, figures who were simultaneously epic bards and warriors[4]. The works of

[4] The early period of *zhyrau* poetry is represented by the works of Asan Kaigy (*Asan the Sorrowful* or *Asan the Grievous*). Asan is a near-mythological figure, inspired by the search for the promised land, *Zher-Uyuk*. Legend tells that he traversed the earth on the winged she-camel *Zhel-Maya* in search of a place where his long-suffering people could be happy, eventually vanishing in the sands of Central Asia. In honor of Asan's son, Abat — who fell heroically in battle against the Kalmyks — a burial site known as *Abat-Baitak* was erected in the present-day Aktobe region of Western Kazakhstan; it

Asan Kaigy Zhyrau (14th–15th centuries), Kaztugan Zhyrau (15th century), Shalkiiz Zhyrau (15th–16th centuries), and Bukhar Zhyrau (17th–18th centuries) were translated by E. Militonyan and V. Khastur. Nineteenth-century poetry is represented by names that are as original as they are diverse, both in terms of genre and modes of lyrical expression. Makhambet Utemisov (1803–1846) was a heroic-romantic warrior-poet who died in the struggle for his people's freedom from Tsarist colonization. Also featured are the poems of Abai Kunanbayev (1845–1904), Ybrai Altynsarin (1841–1889), and Shakarim (1858–1931), whose spiritual and poetic legacy became accessible only in the post-Soviet era. Twentieth-century poetry is represented by the works of forty-seven authors. The translation of the anthology includes both the republication of several translations of Kazakh poetry — originally rendered by Gevorg Emin, Silva Kaputikyan, and other prominent Soviet-era Armenian poets — and newly commissioned translations. A key "innovation" of the anthology is the inclusion of works by authors who were repressed or banned from publication during the Soviet period, such as Mashkhur Zhusup Kopeev (1858–1931), Sultanmahmud Toraygyrov (1893–1920), Beimbet Mailin (1894–1938), Magzhan Zhumabaev (1893–1938), Akhmet Baitursynov (1872–1937), Alikhan Bokeikhanov (1866–1937), Myrzhakyp Dulatov (1885–1935), Ilyas Zhansugurov (1894–1938), Saken Seifullin (1894–1938), and Kasym Amanzholov (1911–1955). The name of the mystic poet Mashkhur Zhusup Kopeev who prophetically foretold the seventy years of Soviet rule, the historical junctures, and the subsequent liberation of the Kazakh people — is today widely cited not only by specialists but also by the general reading public. The fact that these poets served as translators of the poetry of Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, for instance, Akhmet Baitursynov is well known for his translations of Ivan Krylov's fables and Pushkin's fairy tales (*The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*; *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*), and that they became authoritative conduits to the world of Russian culture for Kazakh readers, did not spare them from political persecution.

The primary difficulty lay in the lack of Russian translations for the works of rehabilitated victims of Stalinist policy, such as Beimbet Mailin, Magzhan Zhumabaev, Akhmet Baitursynov, Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Myrzhakyp Dulatov, and Kasym Amanzholov. This necessitated translating these works into Armenian using interlinear glosses (literal word-for-word translations) which were prepared by a Kazakh language instructor at the Department of Turkology at YSU Shushanik Khachatryan, a specialist with advanced proficiency in Kazakh. The translation project involved Varoujan Khastur — renowned in Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora for his masterful

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remains one of the many sacred landmarks of Kazakh culture. Shalkiiz Zhyrau is regarded as the first poet to adopt the philosophy of Sufism from the dervishes — the wandering mendicants of the East. Sufi themes, imagery, and motifs were later developed in the poetry of both Abai and his nephew, Shakarim — a recluse and a victim of Bolshevik repression. In the 18th century, Shalkiiz reflected upon Sufi ideas and artistically substantiated the concept of the causal conditioning of all earthly existence—pandeterminism. The word *Shal* literally means "old man." The connotation that defined Shalkiiz's literary name is the symbolism of wisdom and the authoritative word: an elder endowed with the gift of foresight and prophecy. Finally, Bukhar Zhyrau, who brought the medieval era to a close, is known for developing epic and narrative elements and for his lyrical interpretation of the historical events during the final stages of the Khanate's formation.

translations of Omar Khayyam and Magtymguly Pyragy, and Edvard Militonyan, Chairman of the Writers' Union of Armenia and a long-time friend of Kazakh poets, who was the first to translate the works of Olzhas Suleimenov (b. 1936) into Armenian. Levon Blbulyan translated works by Akhmet Baitursynov (1872–1937) — an eminent Kazakh educator, leader of the "Alash" movement, and victim of Stalinist repression, executed as an "enemy of the people." The *Anthology* also featured examples of Kazakh folk tales, journalistic essays by Olzhas Suleimenov regarding the history of his book *Fixing the World with a Metaphor*, and selected pages from the correspondence between Fyodor Dostoevsky and Shoqan Walikhanov. Moreover, studies by prominent Kazakh literary scholars were published in Armenia for the first time: a synthesizing article on the concepts and genres of Kazakh literature by Rimgali Nurgali, and an article by Kuralay Urazaeva on *zhyrau* poetry.

Reflecting on the established practice of implementing innovative methodologies to present the classical literary heritage of Kazakh and other Turkic peoples to Armenian readers, and recognizing the importance of folklore as a tool for cultural dialogue and mutual enrichment, the faculty of Yerevan State University, in collaboration with the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Armenia, produced the first fundamental collection of *Kazakh Folk Tales* in Armenian (2023). The publication (256 pages) includes prefaces in both Armenian and Kazakh, alongside translations of magic tales, animal fables, and tales of everyday life and satire. In compiling the collection, the Armenian translators and publishers adhered to the traditional classification established by Kazakh scholars. In the historical and philological notes to the volume, various concepts of Kazakh reality encountered in the tales were clarified for the Armenian reader. These include the names of national dishes (*beshbarmak*, *kazy*, *kuirdak*, *baursak*, etc.), the portable nomadic dwelling (the *yurt*), and various utilitarian objects. Among the items explained are the *kamcha* (a traditional whip used by Turkic peoples), the *kuryk* (a horse breeder's long pole with a loop), *koshma* (felt matting), and the *khomut* (a horse collar, part of a harness). The translators into Armenian opted to retain original Kazakh terms and provide corresponding, at times detailed, explanations. They reasoned that using approximate Armenian equivalents would have constituted an unacceptable deviation from the source text (It is noteworthy that during the Soviet period, translation traditions permitted and even encouraged the use of "Russified equivalents"). This modern approach was further reinforced by the fact that certain Turkic words have identical meanings in Armenian particularly in its dialects such as *kose* (beardless) and *biz* (an awl).

Within the socio-political discourse of sovereign Armenia, it is crucial to re-evaluate the pathways of engagement with the Turkic-Muslim world and to provide a comprehensive representation of the history and phenomena of Turkic spiritual culture (Safaryan 2004: 219-229; Safaryan 2004:141-152). The current paradigm of translation activity, in tandem with the interdisciplinary research of Armenian Turkologists, can facilitate the identification of both shared elements and the unique characteristics of national cultures crystallized within the centuries-old literary heritage of diverse peoples.

4. The Armenian Translations of Abai's Works

The tradition of literary scholarship links Abai Kunanbayev with the Armenian enlighteners Khachatur Abovyan and Hovhannes Tumanyan[5]. Abai was united with these Armenian thinkers, as well as with the classic of Turkmen literature, Magtymguly Pyragy, by a universal dream: to transform others through love and to reorganize the entire social environment. This stems from a unique mode of religious tolerance, expressed in the assertion that "…no matter how many religions there may be, they all maintain that justice and love are inherent to God" (Kunanbayev 1993: 80), and Abai's ideal of human self-perfection: "…the one who possesses the most knowledge, love, and justice is a sage and a scholar; such a person has mastered the world" (ibid., 82). The scope of Abai's knowledge and his literary and musical interests extended from the Bible and the Quran to Arabic, Persian, and Turkic philosophy and literature, and from Russian to Western European culture. The memoirs of the American traveler and journalist George Kennan are particularly noteworthy; he wrote about the inhabitant of the steppe who had made such an impression on him: "I was told about a Kazakh named Ibrahim Konobai [Abai], a frequent visitor to the library who reads Mill, Buckle, Draper, and others. At our very first meeting, he surprised me by asking to explain induction and deduction. It turned out he had become deeply interested in English and Western European philosophers. When we spoke twice about Draper's book, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, he displayed a great knowledge of the subject" (Kennan 1972: 193). The renowned Kazakh scholar Zhibek Syzdykova wrote of the three sources and, consequently, the receptions of Abai's poetics: "the oral creativity of the Kazakh people, the finest examples of Eastern poetry, and Russian culture" (ibid.).

The issue of translating Abai's works into Armenian is inherently linked to the role of Russian as a mediator language. In this context, Russian translations of the Kazakh poet serve as the primary instrument of cultural transmission. During the Soviet era, the poetry of the Kazakh classic reached Russian, Armenian, and other readers through the translations of Mikhail Dudin, Vera Zvyagintseva, Maria Petrovykh, Lev Ozerov, and Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky (Sizdikova 2007: 187-233). In 1970, the *Hayastan* publishing house released a collection of Abai's selected poems translated by Armenian poets Artashes Poghosyan, Vahagn Karents, Vram Hovsepyan, Soghomon Mkrtchyan, and Mikayel Harutyunyan (Kunanbayev 1970).

Abai's masterpiece of philosophical prose, *Words of Edification* (*Kara Sozder*), has been translated into numerous world languages, including Russian, English, Chinese, French, German, Turkish, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Mongolian, Latvian, and Korean. To

[5] In particular, the Armenian literary scholar Sergey Daronyan, who collaborated with Mukhtar Auezov, noted how the great Kazakh prose writer and scholar "loved Armenian literature and knew it well." Daronyan shared his recollections regarding the immense significance Abai held for Auezov: "For me, Abai is synonymous with Kazakh literature and the Kazakh people, much like Khachatur Abovyan is for you, I assume. Their creative works share many foundational characteristics. Both were poet-enlighteners and the founders of their respective modern national literatures; both profoundly exposed the wounds of their long-suffering peoples. Moreover, their tragic fates share much in common..." (Auezova 1972: 67).

mark the 175th anniversary of Abai's birth, *Words of Edification* was translated into Armenian for the first time. In preparing this first Armenian edition, the translators (Alexander Safaryan, Varoujan Khastur, and Arman Safaryan) utilized various Russian translations produced over the years — specifically those by Viktor Shklovsky (1945), Leonid Sobolev (*The Thirty-Seventh Word*), and Satimzhan Sanbaev (1970), as well as later versions by Rollan Seisenbaev and Klara Serikbaeva (1992–1993). They also consulted Turkish and English translations, cross-referencing all versions with the text of the original Kazakh scholarly edition (Kunanbayev 1995: 158-218).

Abai's *Words of Edification* were translated into Russian by the renowned Soviet man of letters Viktor Shklovsky as early as the Stalinist era. At that time, Abai was already perceived as a "sanctioned symbol" of Kazakh national identity, in contrast to the Kazakh *zhyraus* or authors linked to the *Alash Orda* national liberation movement. However, Shklovsky's Russian translation contains significant omissions and stylizations, clearly resulting from the ideological dictates of militant atheism. In the Armenian translation, specifically, religious passages that had been previously excised have been restored. For instance, following every mention of the Prophet Muhammad, the Armenian version includes the phrase obligatory for any devout Muslim (the *salawat* or *tasliya*) — "peace and blessings of Allah be upon him" — an invocation that Abai himself would never have omitted (Kunanbayev 2020: 85).

As the authors of the preface to the Armenian edition of Abai's philosophical and literary masterpiece emphasized, "Abai is more relevant today than ever before, as his enlightening and humanistic philosophy addresses the new challenges of the 21st century, at a time when our contemporaries must choose a trajectory for personal development while remaining within the flow of progress, precisely navigating between the Scylla of national insularity and the Charybdis of cultural dissolution within globalization" (Kunanbayev 2020: 17). Notably, the translation was published with a dedicated preface in Armenian, Kazakh, and Russian.

It should be noted that the book's title was translated literally into Armenian as *Sev Khosk'er* (Black Words), reflecting the complete semantic overlap between the lexical fields of the word *kara* in Kazakh (and other Turkic languages) and *sev* in Armenian. Significantly, the Turkish translation is likewise titled *Kara Sözler*. In the annotations to this edition, it was essential to clarify specific concepts for the Armenian reader regarding Kazakh national customs and the realities of the nomadic steppe economy. These included terms such as *zhut* (the mass die-off of livestock due to severe weather), *bi* (a judge who administers justice based on codified Kazakh steppe law), and *baige* (traditional Turkic horse racing).

5. Conclusion

The overview of the history of translations of Kazakh literature into Armenian presented in this article illustrates the significance of transmitting national spiritual values. It further highlights the vital role played by the creative work of translators, Orientalists, and publishers in the process of the mutual cultural enrichment of nations.

The periodization of translations into Soviet and post-Soviet eras is rooted in the historical socio-political transformations of societies across the post-Soviet space. It reflects the necessity of dismantling the ideological clichés of the communist-totalitarian past and introducing Kazakh authors to Armenian readers who were accused of nationalism and Pan-Turkism during the Soviet period,such as Magzhan Zhumabayev and Akhmet Baitursyn whose works were strictly prohibited from publication. At the same time, the preparation of new editions was guided by a methodological imperative to account for the traditions and positive legacy of Armenian-Kazakh cultural and humanitarian cooperation. This approach, in particular, justified the inclusion of Soviet-era translations produced by preeminent poet-translators and canonical figures of 20th-century Armenian literature, such as Silva Kaputikyan and Gevorg Emin.

A key innovation in *the post-Soviet* translation of Kazakh (and other Turkic) literature into Armenian is the specific methodology used to adapt phenomena from one cultural-civilizational system to another. This approach prioritizes the preservation of the traditional Eastern figurative system and the use of precise Armenian equivalents in place of the "Russified clichés" that dominated the Soviet translation tradition. Furthermore, new editions are supplemented with prefaces and extensive historical and philological annotations that provide insight into the original Kazakh source texts *(whereas, only brief biographical notes on the authors were included in Soviet-era Armenian collections of Kazakh poetry and prose).* These literary translations from Kazakh into Armenian have been supported by rigorous Turkological and literary research, making it possible to model trajectories for cultural and humanitarian cooperation between Armenia and the Turkic-speaking world.

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ARMENIAN-ARABIC TRANSLATION INTERACTIONS IN SYRIA IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY, HISTORICAL MEMORY AND DIALOGUE

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Abstract: As a multiethnic and multicultural country, Syria has historically served as an important environment for the coexistence of the Armenian and Arab peoples. Diaspora communities formed in the post-genocide years, particularly in Syria, had not only to survive but also to preserve their cultural identity and their desire for dialogue. Therefore, translation became a key tool, creating a space for communication and self-expression across languages. The dialogue between Armenian and Arab writers, reflected in numerous translations, contributed to mutual understanding, the reassessment of historical memory, and the deepening of cultural contacts. The aim of this study is to systematize, propose a periodization of, and present the prerequisites for the prosperity and rise of translated literature from Armenian into Arabic and from Arabic into Armenian in Syria, particularly during the 1970s–1990s, focusing on its historical, cultural, and political dimensions. In addressing this topic, we seek to understand how Armenian–Arabic translation interactions have influenced the development of Armenian–Arabic social life and political thought. The study also seeks to highlight the role of Armenian–Arabic translation literature in Armenian–Syrian relations, arguing that it has played an important role in establishing dialogue between the two peoples and has further expanded Armenian–Arabic relations.

Keywords: Armenian-Arabic translation; cultural identity; historical memory; linguistic distinctiveness; Armenian-Syrian literary relations

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1. Introduction

Syria has been a crossroads of cultures for centuries, where the harmonious coexistence of different peoples, languages, and religions has formed a special civilizational environment. In that region, Armenian-Arab relations have played a prominent role not only in the political and economic spheres, but also in the spiritual and cultural spheres. In particular, Syria has been one of the oldest and most stable centers of Armenian-Arab coexistence, where a unique experience of mutual cultural recognition and interaction has been formed.

Armenians have centuries-old roots in Syria, which have deepened not only as a result of the genocide, but also since ancient times, as a result of which Armenians have become active participants in the cultural field of Syria. In Aleppo, Damascus, Qamishli and other cities, Armenian intellectuals, teachers, writers and spiritual leaders have also contributed to the development of a common Arab culture.

In 2022, Levon Ter-Petrosyan published *Armenia and Christian Syria: Cultural Ties (4th–5th Centuries)*, a revised version of his doctoral dissertation defended at Leningrad State University in 1987 (Ter-Petrosyan 2022: 5). The study examines Armenian–Syrian literary relations during the fourth and fifth centuries, a formative period in which Armenian literature was enriched through the translation of Syrian literary works. These translations played a decisive role in shaping medieval Christian literature, influencing both its generic and aesthetic development and facilitating the dissemination of Syrian literary traditions throughout the Eastern Christian world.

Ter-Petrosyan's monograph represents a major contribution to the study of Armenian–Syrian literary relations. Based on extensive manuscript research, he reconstructs the corpus of fourth- and fifth-century translations, traces the transmission of Syrian literary monuments into Armenia, and demonstrates their influence on the development of early Armenian literature. Drawing on evidence from more than 70 Armenian and Syrian manuscripts, he establishes rigorous criteria for dating and classifying the translations while proposing a comprehensive methodology for the study of translated literature (Ter-Petrosyan 2022: 474). The discovery of two previously unknown Armenian translations of works by *Ephrem the Syrian — The Book of Faith and The Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* — further advances our understanding of early Armenian–Syrian cultural contacts (Ter-Petrosyan 2022: 474). Moreover, by preserving works that have otherwise been lost in the original, the Armenian translations provide valuable insight into the history of Syrian literature, making an important contribution to both Syrian literary studies and the preservation of Syria's cultural heritage.

The question of whether modern Syrians are the inheritors of what was done in the past is now being raised not only in Arab countries, and particularly in Syria, but is also being considered by Western European scholarship. Many scholars are coming to the conclusion that modern Syrians are the descendants of those Syrians who lived here in antiquity.

Continuous literary ties have been established between Armenians and Arabs starting from the 7th century (Arissian 2016: 50). At the beginning of the 20th century, during his visit to the Arab East, Nicholas Marr studied literary monuments in book

repositories and found an Arabic translation of the book *On the Life of Gregory the Illuminator and the Adoption of Christianity by the Armenians* (Arsharuni 1960: 185). Marr's discovery and his publications created great excitement within the circles of Arabic studies 60 years ago. This important document speaks to the literary ties existing between the two peoples since the 7th century, and the interest of Arab figures in Armenian history.

Arab historians and geographers of the first centuries of the Caliphate and the Arab conquests played a significant role in the formation of these ties. In their travel books, many of them enriched world literature with new data about the countries and peoples of the Transcaucasus, particularly the Armenians. The matter, however, is not limited to this. Certain Arab authors, such as the writer Al-Waqidi (Muhammad ibn Umar, 748–823), who wrote *The History of the Conquest of Mesopotamia and Armenia*, made use of Armenian sources (Arsharuni 1960: 185).

Armenian-Arab ties are attested by an episode in the classical Armenian Epic *Daredevils of Sassoun* (*David of Sassoun*), where the Armenian people created an image of immense humanistic power: the episode of the meeting between David and the old Arab soldier after defeating Msra Melik, where the wise elder's counsel could rightly be considered part of the treasury of world literature.

Different Homeland historians have addressed historical-bibliographical works dedicated to Diaspora Armenian political parties (Khurshudyan 1964), paths of socio-political struggle (Simonyan 1968), national-liberation movements of Arab peoples (Hovhannisyan 1967), Armenian immigrant communities (Gasparyan 1962), and Arab-Armenian communities. Materials concerning the ties between the communities and the Mother Homeland, as well as the cultural relations between Armenians and Arabs, can be found in their monographs and articles (Najaryan 1974: 238-239).

An attempt to periodize Armenian-Arab literary relations was made by Arshaluys Arsharuni, whose work prepared the basis for subsequent researchers (Arsharuni 1960). Karlen Dallakyan's work *From the History of the Lebanese-Armenian Democratic Press* is also an important part of the research (Dallakyan 1964).

Yeghia Najaryan[1] engaged with the history of periodizing Armenian-Arab cultural relations (1945–1970). "It is not difficult to guess that the very ground of the history of new Armenian-Arab cultural relations, upon which we will step in the following pages, has mostly remained bare and uncultivated until now," Najaryan writes (Najaryan 1974: 239).

The article focuses on the factors contributing to the mutual recognition and development of cultures within the context of Armenian–Arab relations, with particular emphasis on the role of translation in Syria during the 1970s–1990s. Employing a retrospective methodology, the study draws on historical experience, literary examples, and contemporary cultural developments to demonstrate how translation initiatives

[1] Yeghia Najaryan was an Orientalist and editor born in Beirut. He received his secondary education at the Seminary of Antelias and subsequently held teaching positions at the Abgarian School in Beirut and the Targmanchats School in Damascus, while also engaging in editorial work. In 1959, he immigrated to Armenia with his family. He continued his education at the Faculty of Philology of Yerevan State University, graduating in 1963. For more than forty years, he worked in the Arabic Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

contributed to the formation of cultural bridges and the mutual recognition of the two peoples.

The absence of a comprehensive work regarding the time period under discussion (1970s–1990s) forces us to make an attempt to develop our narrative based largely on articles relating to the topic found in the Armenian and Arabic press, most of which are informative in nature. We make no claim for it to be complete, because works about which nothing has been written are missing from the list.

The present study demonstrates that the Armenian–Arabic translation tradition has evolved through multiple historical stages and has encompassed a wide range of literary genres, including fiction, poetry, and historical writing. Despite this rich legacy, the field remains insufficiently explored and requires greater scholarly attention and wider dissemination. Strengthening research on Armenian–Arabic translation is essential, as translation has long served as a key medium of cultural exchange and an important pillar of Armenian–Arab relations.

2. Factors Contributing to the Development of Cultural Ties

The Armenian Genocide of 1915 marked a turning point in the history of Armenian–Arab relations. From the early twentieth century onward, particularly in the aftermath of the Genocide, large numbers of Armenian survivors settled in Arab countries, most notably Syria and Lebanon. The local Arab population received the displaced Armenians with compassion and hospitality, providing them with food, shelter, and medical care. In a letter addressed to the owner of the newspaper *Al-Taqaddum*, the Patriarchal Vicar of Aleppo, Father Harutyun Yesaian expressed his gratitude for the humanitarian assistance extended by both public officials and the residents of Aleppo, emphasizing that their efforts not only alleviated the suffering of the deportees but also protected them from devastating epidemics (Keshishian 1997: 185).

The establishment of substantial Armenian communities in the Arab world inaugurated a new phase in Armenian–Arab relations, reinforcing centuries-old economic, literary, and cultural ties. While these relations had previously developed at a relatively gradual pace, the permanent settlement of Armenians in Arab countries transformed them into sustained and multifaceted interactions. During the initial decades of resettlement, the Armenians' primary concern was survival and economic stability, leaving limited opportunities for cultural engagement. Consequently, early contacts with the Arab population were largely confined to everyday communication and practical cooperation. As Armenian communities became more firmly established, these interactions gradually evolved into broader literary, educational, and cultural exchanges, laying the foundation for the flourishing of Armenian–Arab translation and intellectual cooperation in the decades that followed.

In the 1920s-1940s, the new settlers took care of establishing their own national schools. Schools belonging to various denominations were opened throughout Syria, where Armenians constituted a more or less significant number. These institutions prioritized instruction in Western Armenian — the native language — since most Cilician Armenians spoke Turkish at home. Learning Armenian therefore served not

only communicative purposes but also shaped students' intellectual development through language. French ranked second in importance, while proficiency in Arabic was generally limited to the basic needs of everyday communication and trade. In many cases, Turkish fulfilled a similar role. As Hagop Mikaelian observes, "Turkish spread among Armenians through family roots or where they lived. For the Armenian, Turkish ways — its habits, its past — felt more familiar than those tied to Arabic." As he notes, four centuries of coexistence under the Ottoman Empire created stronger cultural affinities between Armenians and the Turks than between Armenians and the Arabs (Mikaelian 2018: 472).

Nevertheless, cultural ties developed only gradually, as early interactions between the Armenian newcomers and the local population remained limited. Consequently, cultural exchange was initially modest, with relatively few shared traditions or forms of expression. Communication was further constrained by the widespread belief among many Armenians that their stay in the host countries was temporary and that they would eventually return to their homeland, a perception that delayed deeper social and cultural integration. (Najaryan 1974: 243).

Robert Jebejian interprets the newcomers' lack of integration into the new environment differently: "After the Armenian population of Cilicia and the Armenian provinces migrated to Syria, they made a fundamental mistake by seeking only a shelter in this country" (Jebejian 1996: 204). He considered the presence of an individual or individuals within the community who possessed higher education along with a proficiency in Arabic to be essential: "It should have been formed much earlier, so that Syrian-Armenians could have integrated sooner into the various spheres of the country's life" (ibid.).

Unlike in Lebanon, Arabic was not a compulsory subject in Armenian schools in Syria. It was only from the mid-1920s onward that the introduction of Arabic language instruction in Armenian national schools gradually emerged as a subject of discussion within Armenian circles (Najaryan 1974: 255-257).

When Syria gained independence, Armenian schools began shifting away from rigid approaches to Arabic instruction. Before that year, exposure remained sparse, shaped more by obligation than engagement.

Following Syria's independence, Arabic became the nation's official language. In Armenian schools, instruction in Arabic started once government legislation took effect — this sparked demand for newly trained Armenian scholars specializing in Arabic studies. Such developments might lay basis for renewed cultural exchange between Armenians and Syrians. As Vardan Svadjian notes, "Maybe that gap made sense three or four decades back" (Svadjian 1988: 3). A generation fluent in Arabic language, civilization, and history — able to engage meaningfully with Arab counterparts — never emerged. Building on Svadjian's observations, Hagop Mikaelian argues that, despite holding Syrian citizenship, Armenians in Syria possessed only a superficial understanding of the surrounding Arab society (Mikaelian 2018: 472). Locals, meanwhile, remained unaware of Armenian historical narratives, literary works, or cultural expressions up through the late 1960s. This lack of outreach meant self-presentation was absent, according to Mikaelian (ibid.).

The process of presenting Armenian literature in Arabic in Syria saw its turning point in the 1940s, particularly during the Second World War. It was in those years that, outside of Damascus, the Faculty of Engineering was founded in Aleppo, "which was to serve as a basis for Aleppo's future university" (Jebejian 1996: 202). Making progress steadily, Aleppo State University became a multi-branch institution, serving as an important center of learning for students of diverse national backgrounds from different regions of the country. It was attended by students who had graduated from high school, taken the state 'baccalaureate' examination, and cleared the university admission threshold. According to compiled statistics, between 1965 and 1994, 968 Armenian young men and women graduated from Aleppo University alone, though very few of them pursued the Arabic Literature section of the Faculty of Philology (Jebejian 1996: 202-203).

However, studies show that the birth of Syria's state universities and the graduation of hundreds of young people from them would gradually give rise to new Arabic literary circles, whose literary path heralded the existence of literary schools. Undoubtedly, these differed from the literary groups of 1921 and 1934 (Nazarian 1985: 31). The most important among them was the "Syrian Writers Association," which was founded in 1951 and later, in 1954, was renamed the "Arab Writers Association" (Nazarian 1985: 32).

This expanding intellectual and literary environment also created favourable conditions for the translation of Armenian literature into Arabic. The first literary work translated into Arabic in the 1940s was Avetik Isahakyan's famous poem *Abu Lala Mahari*. It was translated by Khayr al-Din al-Asadi, a well-known philologist from Aleppo, and Barsegh Chatoian, a scholar of Arabic studies[2]. Their work became popular particularly within Arabic circles (Chuljian 1945: 138). The book was published in 1948 and reprinted in 1952 (Keshishian 2001: 178). Prior to the Arabic translation, the work had been translated into Russian.

In 1950, Zareian's *The Prayer* (published in *Sawt Al Takhatum*) and *The Bloody Leaven* were released in Arabic, translated by Barsegh Chatoian, an Arabic teacher in Aleppo (Aharonian 1950: 2, 4).

Following the translation by Al-Asadi and Chatoian, Avetik Isahakyan's *Abu Lala Mahari* was also translated by Nazar Nazarian and Nizar Khalili. Reflecting upon the translations by the aforementioned authors, Hovsep Ghazarian notes that these works, unfortunately, do not faithfully manifest the poetic value of Isahakyan's poem. While he does not explicitly comment on the artistic flaws of these translations, Ghazarian at the same time attempts to personally translate several verses of the poem, which had been referred to as a "Ghazal" by Avetik Isahakyan (Ghazarian 2012: 232).

In May 1966, at the invitation of the Armenian Society for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, Syrian translator Nizar Khalili held a meeting with the representatives of the Yerevan intelligentsia during his stay in Yerevan. In the interview, he addressed the necessity of expanding Armenian-Arab cultural ties. Khalili

[2] Barsegh Chatoian's contribution to the strengthening of Armenian-Arab literary ties is substantial. Under his authorship, Arabic textbooks and an Arabic anthology of adaptations from Armenian literature were prepared, from which only Siamanto's poem *The Strangulation* was published in the 1954 issue of the Arabic-language journal *Al-Adib* (The Writer) (Najaryan 1974: 302-303).

explained that the reason for the lack of Armenian-Arab translated literature was not only a lack of language proficiency, but also the absence of translations in the Arabic language: ..".for the broad masses of the Arab people, the treasury of Armenian literature" remained unknown. Nizar Khalili simultaneously noted: "I never thought that Armenian literature was this rich. And I began to delve deeper and deeper into the study of the Armenian language. I even began to read ancient Armenian literature in Grabar (Classical Armenian)" (Najaryan 1974: 302; Hayreniki Dzayn 1966: 4).

Throughout the 1950s, Armenian periodicals began to feature 'gems' of Arabic literature translated into Armenian. These works highlighted the "harsh social conditions of the Arab peasantry," the lives of the urban working class, and their fierce struggle against colonialism (Najaryan 1974: 281-282). The goal was not only to introduce Armenian readers to celebrated Arab authors but also to emphasize the 'common experiences' and deep-rooted ties between these two historically persecuted peoples.

One such example appeared in the 1958 volume of the Aleppo-based literary journal Yergir. The story *The Donkey* — written by Muhammad Sidqi, an Egyptian artist, scholar, and member of the Committee of Supporters of Peace — was translated into Armenian. It was 'Armenified' by Nazaret Nazarian, a lawyer from Aleppo who sought to inform the Armenian community about the daily struggles of Arab workers and peasants against social inequality (Najaryan 1974: 281-282).

By the 1960s, as Syrian theater underwent a revival, national theaters were established across the country under the Ministry of Culture. Further development of Syrian television and cinema also offered talented young Armenians the chance to take their first steps into the performing arts.

In 1967, the journal *Mshakuyt* was launched in Aleppo, edited by Andranik Ararat. The main mission of the periodical was to record the history of Arab literature from its origins up to the 1970s. This initiative aimed to spark a movement of mutual cultural discovery (Mshakuyt 1967: 108-109) — a gesture of gratitude to the Arab people who, having shared the burden of tyranny, were the first to welcome Armenian refugees following the Genocide (Nazarian 1967: 109).

This movement earned the heartfelt support of Arab intellectuals and youth, who took a keen interest in its programs and goals (Mshakuyt 1967: 109). Within the pages of *Mshakuyt*, Nazar Nazarian's work, *A Sketch on Pre-Islamic Arab Literature*, became a recurring feature (Nazarian 1967: 110-124; 1970: 73-88; 1972: 55-63).

The pioneers of this translation movement included Nizar Khalili[3], Nazar Nazarian (Nazarian 1972: 55-56; Toranian 1991: 32)[4], Ghassan Kajjou (Boyajian 2000: 268)[5], and later Lusi Sulahian (Mshakuyt 1972: 34)[6], among others.

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[3] Nizar Khalili (1925-2019) was an Arab translator, Armenologist, pedagogue. He received his higher education in Beirut. From 1943–1946, he taught Arabic at the Zavarian School in the Nor Kyugh Armenian district of Aleppo. He became proficient in Armenian during his pedagogical work. The Syrian intellectual, recipient of the Movses Khorenatsi Medal, great Armenophile, and translator Nizar Khalili visited Armenia several times.

[4] Lawyer (Maître) Nazar P. Nazarian (1932-1991) was born in Kessab. He received his primary education in Kirikhan (Iskenderun region). Following the dissolution of the Sanjak, he settled in Aleppo and studied at the State Schools (Ghassanieh and Sultanieh) in Aleppo. In 1956, he attended

In the early 1960s, the renowned satirist Hagop Baronian's work, *The Honorable Beggars*, found a new voice in Arabic through the translation of Nizar Khalili. The translation was brought to life by senior students at the AGBU Lazar Najarian-Calouste Gulbenkian Secondary School, who staged the play in Arabic to high praise from the audience (Mikaelian 2018: 477). In 1967, Khalili also published an Arabic translation of Hovhannes Shiraz's epic poem, *Siamanto and Khjezare*, in Aleppo (Vardanyan 1968: 270; Toranian 1993: 3)[7].

In 1968, Nazar Nazarian introduced the Armenian readership to the lives and legacies of two Arab giants: the scientist and philosopher Ibn al-Haytham and the legendary writer Taha Hussein (Nazarian 1968: 76-79, 212-217). Nazarian even translated an excerpt from Hussein's influential book, *Al Ayyam* (The Days) (Nazarian 1968: 215-217). The following year, Nizar Khalili contributed an Armenian article titled *Current Affairs*, which mapped the linguistic geography of Semitic languages, tracing them from southern Armenia down to the Arabian Sea, and from Persia to the Mediterranean (Khalili 1969: 252-256).

The year 1969 also marked the major celebration of the centenary of the "All-Armenian Poet," Hovhannes Tumanyan. In Aleppo, his opera *Anush* was performed, and through the efforts of the Jubilee Committee, Khalili translated several of Tumanyan's masterpieces into Arabic, including *Anush*, *A Drop of Honey* (1968), *Gikor*, and the epic poem *David of Sassoun* (1970) (Vardanyan 1970: 245; Barikian 1976-1978: 429). By May 1970, Daniel Varoujan's illustrated collection, *The Song of the Bread*, was released in Arabic, translated by Nazar Nazarian (Vardanyan 1971: 256). Nazarian provided an introduction to Varoujan's life, and the work was lauded by the Arab public and the critic Munqeth Al Hashimi, who noted that he felt 'enriched' by Varoujan's ability to elevate human love to a state of deification (Zorian 1977: 35-37).

This was part of a broader effort by Nazarian, who translated excerpts from Armenian authors like Zohrab, Varoujan, and Charents into Arabic, while bringing the works of Arab masters like Naguib Mahfouz and Taha Hussein to the Armenian community (Zorian 1977: 37). In 1971, Lusi Sulahian founded the *Baruyr Sevak*

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the Homs Military Reserve Officers' School, from which he graduated. He held a number of state positions in the Municipality and the State Library. In 1964, he graduated from the Faculty of Law at Damascus State University. In 1968, he was appointed director of the Cultural Center in the Syrian town of Arab Pounar, after which he assumed the position of Vice-Librarian of the Aleppo State Library. He was a visiting teacher at the AGBU Lazar Najarian Calouste Gulbenkian School in Aleppo, and then, from 1971, he served as the director of the same school. In 1972, he was elected a member of the Aleppo Provincial Local Committee. Thanks to his excellent knowledge of Arabic, he engaged in translation work.

[5] Ghassan Kajjou is Lusi Kassabian's husband. Reading Avetik Isahakyan's poems translated into French, he was fascinated and, together with Lusi, dedicated himself to translation work. Their translations were broadcast on Yerevan Radio in 1977.

[6] Lusi Sulahian (1940-2021) was born in Aleppo. She received her primary education at the Krtasirats School in Aleppo, and then attended the French "Lycée" higher education institution. In 1960, she entered the literary arena and began writing in Armenian in various Diaspora periodicals and literary journals.

[7] Toros Toranian notes that Shiraz's poem was published in Arabic in 1956. The suggestion (or idea) to translate it into Arabic was given by an Armenian driver, Hrant Partagchian.

Literary Salon in Aleppo, creating a hub where Armenian and local writers could build close ties — a movement that eventually grew far beyond its salon setting to reach a wide public audience (Mshakuyt 1976: 14).

This thriving translation environment was shaped by dedicated individuals and, after the 1980s, increasingly by Armenian unions and organizations.

In 1972, the Syrian writer Adib al-Sayed published *Armenia* in Arab History in Aleppo. After seven years of research of historical Arab records, al-Sayed documented Arab-Armenian relations from the 8th to the 11th centuries, focusing on the Bagratuni period. His goal was to provide a historical document that would inform the Arab public about the deep, centuries-old foundations of the friendship between the two peoples (Vardanyan 1973: 276; Toranian 1972: 46).

In the late 1970s, Nizar Khalili published 14 of Grigor Zohrab's short stories in Arabic, released in collections titled *Silent Sorrows*, *Voices of Conscience* (Vardanyan 1977: 256; Vardanyan 1978: 259), and *Selected Stories from Life*. Khalili's diverse output also included a translation of Artsrun Kchoyan's work on Mkhitar Heratsi, exploring the medical ties between the two cultures (Vardanyan 1975: 219). He later translated modern works by Lusi Sulahian, Vartkes Petrossian, and Sero Khanzadyan (Toranian 1993: 3).

Beyond Armenian literature, Khalili also translated Georgian classics into Arabic, including Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and works by Ilia Chavchavadze (Toranian 1993: 3)[8].

In 1973, Lusi Sulahian met with the Arab writer Walid Ikhlasi and introduced the novelist Abdul Salam al-Ujayli to Armenian readers (Sulahian 1980: 40-42)[9]. During this meeting, she explored the novelist's life and literary career. After a brief overview of his works, al-Ujayli expressed his hope for a "path of thought" and a "ray of literature" to be established between Armenian and Arab letters, uniting these sister nations. The author's connection to the Armenian people dated back to his childhood. He recalled how, "during the black days of the Exile, Raqqa opened its heart and arms wide to receive that poor people who had been mercilessly expelled from their home" (Sulahian 1980: 42).

In 1976, to mark the 100th anniversary of Avetik Isahakyan's birth, Nazar Nazarian published a beautifully designed and illustrated Arabic translation of the epic poem *Abu Lala Mahari* (Barikian 1976-1978: 429). Also commemorating Isahakyan's centenary, Nizar Khalili translated a volume consisting of "Master's" (Isahakyan's) selected prose and poems (Toranian 1993: 3).

On February 16, 1977, at the initiative of the Syrian Union of Arab Writers, a literary evening was held at the Arab Cultural Center in Aleppo. The event was

[8] He also translated *The Philosophical Analysis of the Soul* by Orbelyan and short stories by Sulkhan-Saba. Toranian mentions in the article that the translations from Georgian into Arabic were printed under the patronage of a Georgian resident of Damascus who had settled in Syria decades ago and was engaged in trade.

[9] Abdul Salam Al Ujayli was one of the representatives of Arab prose and made his literary debut with more than two dozen works. His story *Nights are Everywhere* and the novel *Mother of the Black Virgin* were translated into Armenian and published in the *Shirag* monthly.

dedicated to presenting the Arabic translation of *The Humiliation of Love*, a volume of short stories by the Aleppine Armenian writer Lusi Sulahian (Zorian 1977: 23-28)[10].

From Aleppo, lawyer Nazar Nazarian introduced the Armenian public to the prominent Syrian prose writer Iskender Louqa[11]. A titan of Arab and Syrian literature known for his support of short stories and novellas, Louqa's story *The Teacher* (from the volume *Feast*) was translated into Armenian by Nazarian (Nazarian 1982: 37-40). As a representative of the realist school, Louqa's works highlighted the life of an ordinary person, with a focus on his or her worries, sorrows, pains, and occasional joys.

Armenian–Syrian cultural relations thus entered a new historical phase, shaped by several interrelated factors. First, after a prolonged period of silence, the generation that had survived the Armenian Genocide increasingly sought opportunities for communication and cultural self-expression. Second, public commemorations of the Armenian Genocide, particularly the fiftieth anniversary in 1965, drew the attention of the local population and stimulated interest in the historical events underlying these observances (Mikaelian 2018: 473). At the same time, interest in Armenian history and culture gradually expanded within Arab intellectual circles. Finally, the multicultural character of Syria's educational institutions, especially its universities, enabled Armenians and Arabs to study alongside one another, creating favourable conditions for closer cultural and intellectual interaction.

3. The Rise of Translated Literature from the 1970s to the 1990s

During the 1960s, Armenian–Arab cultural relations became increasingly systematic, extending beyond the study of the literary heritage of the two peoples to encompass the contemporary literary process. In Syria and Lebanon, where substantial Armenian communities had been established, the works of contemporary Arab writers were regularly translated from Arabic into Armenian, while essays and studies on both classical and modern Arabic literature appeared in the Armenian literary press. Unlike the earlier, largely sporadic and privately initiated efforts, these activities became coordinated by the progressive National Front, making Arabic literature and contemporary literary developments an integral part of the cultural policy of progressive Armenian circles in the Arab East. At the same time, the Armenian press actively covered major historical and literary anniversaries celebrated in the Arab

[10] Lucy Soulahian's short story, *The Humiliation of Love*, speaks about a family's guilty mother who, instead of showing maternal love and care to her only God-given gift — her only daughter — betrays and makes her miserable by betrothing her to a man she does not love. Through vivid imagery, the author attempts to present phenomena that have become customary within a philistine society. She emphasizes the psychological state of the characters, as well as the contradictory feelings and emotions within the daughter's inner world, transporting us to a sad reality of life that we still witness today. The Arabic translation of this story was published in the special issue of *Mawqef Adabi* (*Literary Stance*) dedicated to Syrian writers.

[11] Iskender Louqa is a well-known Syrian prose writer, born in Alexandretta. He received a diploma in Pedagogy and Psychology from Damascus University, and then a journalism certificate. Later, he was awarded a doctorate in Arabic Literature and Language. He is the author of more than two dozen works.

world, thereby promoting cultural dialogue and mutual understanding between Armenians and Arabs. A notable example was the commemoration of the 900th anniversary of the birth of the Arab philosopher and poet Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri, which was widely observed by Armenian communities in the Arab East. These developments were accompanied by the emergence of a body of Armenian poetry celebrating Armenian–Arab friendship, reflecting the growing cultural rapprochement between the two peoples.

Starting in the mid-1960s, a warm diplomatic climate between the Soviet Union and Syria began to bear cultural fruit. Both through official state channels and the Committee for Cultural Ties with the Diaspora, homeland artists, intellectuals, and writers became frequent visitors to Syria. Their presence was more than symbolic. The events they held emphasized a growing necessity for these two peoples to truly know one another. These exchanges fostered greater mutual awareness and created favourable conditions for the further institutionalization of Armenian–Arab literary relations, particularly through the increased translation and dissemination of literary works.

At the end of the 1970s, Armenian-Arab cultural relations entered a new historical stage, especially at the official state level, with meetings between official delegations from Armenia and Syria. In October 1978, at the invitation of the Aleppo Archaeological Institute and the Syrian Ministry of Culture, a three-member delegation from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Armenian Academy of Sciences arrived in Syria, which was warmly received by the Syrian Ministry of Culture. In addition to visiting archaeological sites, the delegation held meetings and discussions with the Arab community. On this occasion, Robert Chebejyan made the following statement: "For the first time, ties were established between the newly established, but already a major institution, Aleppo University and the Yerevan Academy" (Missirian 1979: 115-116).

These connections took root within the institutions themselves. The Yerevan Academy's library began a formal exchange with the Aleppo National Museum, the Public Library, and the Arab Cultural Center. The delegation arrived with a significant gift — volumes on Armenian history, written in both Armenian and Russian, specifically for the Aleppo University Library. The underlying intent was simple but carried a deep weight — to introduce the 'noble Arab people' to the layers of Armenian culture and historical identity (Missirian 1979: 116-117)[12].

Creative voices were also moving into the political and social heart of the region. In 1979, the Aleppine lawyer Nazar Nazarian shared his play, *The Devil and Petar*, with the writers and readers of Aleppo. Significantly, Nazarian wrote the work in Arabic and drew his inspiration from the Palestinian struggle. It was a clear demonstration of how Armenian creative minds were engaging directly with the challenges and movements of the Arab world (Missirian 1979: 117-118).

[12] Aleppo University would provide the books through the library to students pursuing higher education, but due to the small number of Arabs who knew Armenian, the books would be provided to Armenian students, not only for their own use but also with the awareness of the duty to make them accessible to Arab students.

In 1985, a collection of short stories by Vardges Petrosyan was published in Damascus under the title *The Old Man Who Forgot to Die*, the preface of which was written by the President of the Arab Writers Union, Ali Oqla Orsan (Alemian 1986: 3).

In the Lebanese-Armenian press, specifically in Zartonk, the work *The July 10 Coup and Its Consequences* by the Turkish intellectual figure Sheikh Muhsen Fani — translated from Ottoman Turkish by Nazar Nazarian — was published in the form of a series of articles. In this work, the Turkish author documents that "by the will of the Turkish authorities, both during the days of Sultan Hamid and under the Ittihadists (Young Turks), Armenian lands were confiscated and their true owners were subjected to massacres" (Alemian 1986: 3).

In 1986, by decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Syrian government, Nazarian's play *Doors* was approved for publication in Arabic translation, the subject matter of which was drawn from the liberation struggle of the Arab people (Alemian 1986: 3).

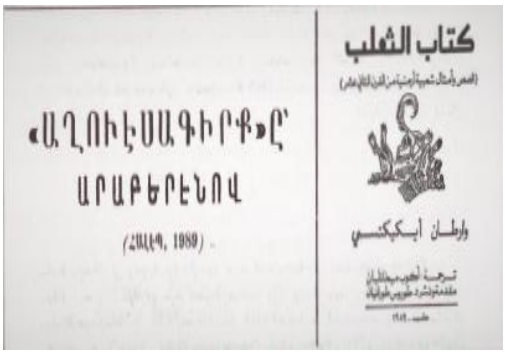
In the 15th issue of the Syrian literary weekly newspaper, Nazarian's latest short story, *The Story of the Butterflies*, was featured. In it, the author uses butterflies to depict the horrors of the Lebanese War, demonstrating the spirit of sacrifice and purposefulness of the Lebanese people (Alemian 1986: 3). The *Zartonk* columnist, Rosette Alemian, reports that Nazarian has completed the Arabic translation of *Anabasis*, one of the masterpieces of Greek literature, as well as an Armenian anthology titled *an Overview of Arab Writers* (Alemian 1986: 3).

In December 1986, under the auspices of the Aleppo branch of the Arab Writers Union, on the occasion of the Translators' Festival, a scientific session and an artistic evening were organized, which opened up new horizons for taking planned and confident steps towards strengthening Armenian and Arab cultural ties and establishing the cultural cooperation of the two peoples on a solid foundation (Ararat 1987: 3). On August 22, 1987, the permanent assembly of the Translators' Scientific Session was called to office. And the latter, on October 25, 1987, approved the establishment of the Translators' Festival Executive Assembly. All the Armenian and Arab cultural associations of the city of Aleppo, as well as individual intellectuals and artists, were invited to join the two assemblies (Ararat 1987: 3)). The duty of the two assemblies was to organize scientific and artistic evenings on Translators' Day, to plan and pursue the implementation of the translation and publication of scientific and artistic works from Arabic to Armenian and from Armenian to Arabic.

With the active support of the Arab Writers Union, Aleppo branch, literary relations reached a new level of sophistication. Through elegant translation publications, select works from contemporary Armenian masters were introduced to the Syrian intelligentsia and the broader reading public. A significant highlight of this era was when the Arabic journal *Ad-Dad* in Aleppo dedicated its November-December 1986 issue entirely to the Armenian people. The issue featured an opening article by editor Abdullah Yorghaki Hallaq titled *Our Brother Armenians*, followed by Riad Abdullah Hallaq's exploration of Armenian literature, including a tribute to the writers martyred in 1915. It also included a study on Armenian-Arab relations by Nikolay Hovhannisyan, a specialist in Oriental Studies (Vardanyan 1988: 211).

A major turning point here occurred in 1987 with the celebration of the Feast of the Holy Translators in Aleppo. This was not a solo effort. It was organized by the Arab Writers Union in close collaboration with Armenian cultural groups. Prominent figures gathered to deliver scholarly lectures on the power of translation in bringing nations closer together (Svadjian 1988: 4). By this point, these initiatives had moved past the stage of small-scale experiments. They had become the guarantee of a long-term revival for Armenian-Arab ties.

In 1988, the journal *Shirag* presented the life and extensive work of the Lebanese writer Mikhail Naimy, a giant of Pan-Arab and world literature who authored nearly forty books. This introduction was made possible through the translation work of Toros Toranian (Toranian 1988: 20-25)[13].



In 1989, George Jabbur's short story *This is No Sin!* was released, translated into Arabic by Nazar Nazarian (Nazarian 1989: 83-85). That same year, the medieval Armenian fabulist Vardan Aygektsi's collection of fables, Kitab al-Tha'lab (*The Book of the Fox*), was published as a standalone volume in Arabic. Translated by the Aleppine Armenian intellectual Hagop Mikaelian, the work includes an introduction explaining the vital role fables play in folklore (Keshishian 1989: 144). Mikaelian draws parallels to Ibn Muqaffa, the compiler of the famous Kalila wa Dimna, and emphasizes that Armenians, like other Eastern peoples, had their own rich tradition of folk fables, meticulously collected by the pens of Mkhitar Gosh and Vardan Aygektsi (Keshishian 1989: 144).

It is essential to note that the public commemorations of the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the Armenian Genocide (in 1965 and 1975), the growing relations between the Homeland and the Diaspora, and the anti-Turkish actions of Armenian organizations in the 1970s all created the prerequisites for a more vocal 'politicization' of the Armenian Question. By 1988, the struggle for Artsakh's survival and the devastating Spitak earthquake signaled a new historical era for Armenian-Arab friendship. While translation work had previously been the result of individual passion, Armenian unions in Aleppo now began to take an active and equal role in the publishing field.

Speaking about the activities of cultural organizations over the past decades, Vardan Svadjian notes that the work they have carried out toward Armenian-Arab cultural rapprochement is not on an appropriate level. He proposes inviting Arab intellectuals to events organized by Armenian associations to deliver lectures about their culture and the issues that concern them. He considers the expression that a

[13] In 1987, Toros Toranian met with the Lebanese Arab writer Mikhail Naimy at his home in Lebanon. During the warm atmosphere of the meeting, Toranian read excerpts to Naimy from his book *The Meeting* (translated into Armenian in 1959), which caused admiration and delight in the Arab writer.

certain segment of the Armenian people does not understand Arabic to be outdated. Svachyan's goal was to evaluate "cultural values objectively" through the path of dialogue and mutual acquaintance (Svadjian 1988: 3).

In the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the art of translation saw a new stage of development in Syria, and particularly in Aleppo, entering a new historical phase.

This was a response to the crucial days facing the Armenian people in the Diaspora, Armenia, and Artsakh. With the Lebanese Civil War, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait shaking the region, the Armenian Diaspora found itself navigating a storm of instability. Amidst this, the movement for Artsakh's existence became a shared concern for all Armenians. Inspired by both the pain and the victories of the homeland, the Diaspora used translation to combat anti-Armenian propaganda and reclaim a history that others sought to distort or reverse.

During those days, works by Syrian Arab writers were successively published, which were dedicated to the tragedy of the Armenian people, who had been massacred by Turks. In the post-Genocide years, the Syrian Arab people had witnessed the deportation of an entire nation, the arrival of caravans on Syrian lands, and the immolation of a portion of them. After a while, particularly after the 50th anniversary of the Great Crime (Genocide) and following the 1970s, some Syrian Arab writers transformed the tragedy of the Armenian people into literary material (novels, short stories, theater), particularly in the depiction of social life in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and the Euphrates region in general. The character of the Armenian entered these works to portray the era and the interaction between the two peoples. "Thus, the Armenians became part of the popular heritage of Euphrates literature," writes Nora Arissian[14] (Arissian 2022: 256-260). Arissian cites the novel *Al-Quds* by Arab writer Ibrahim al-Khalil, in which the author describes in detail the deportation of the Armenians, their arrival on the banks of the Euphrates River, and their escape from death.

In Arabic works, specifically short stories of the 1990s of the 20th century, Armenian characters are included, through whom the writer presents the suffering of the Armenians and their integration with the people of the Euphrates region. Unfortunately, Nora Arissian does not write the authors' names in her article, mentioning only the works: *Ghadir al-Hajar* (*The Stone Brook, Latakia*, 1998), the character of Artin in the short story *Al-Sahrij* (*The Cistern*), Gohar in the short story *Gohar*, or *the Road Leading to Urfa*, and Arush in the short story *The Desert of Birds* (Arissian 2022: 258).

In the final quarter of the 20th century, a wave of Arabic-translated books was published by organizations such as the AGBU, the Armenian Youth Association (AYA), the Hamazkayin Armenian Youth Association (HAYC), and various independent figures. These works often found a home in the prestigious Arab press,

[14] Nora Arissian in 1988 and 1989 received two certificates of specialization in French from the Sorbonne University, and in 1990, a certificate of higher education in the field of translation. She has numerous academic articles and translations published in various languages across periodicals in different countries. She is a member of the Arab Writers Union (as of 2007, she is the only Diaspora Armenian woman writer to have joined this union). By decree of the Syrian President, in 2022, Nora Arissian was appointed Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Republic of Armenia.

including Al-Adab Al-Ajnabyah (Foreign Literature) in Damascus, Ad-Dad in Aleppo, and Al-Faysal in Saudi Arabia (Keshishian 2001: 179).

In 1992, the Publishing Committee of the Hamazkayin branch released Nayim Al Yafi's *Armenian Massacres and the Position of the Arab Opinion on Them*. As a lecturer at Damascus University and President of the Aleppo branch of the Union of Arab Writers, Al Yafi's voice carried immense weight (Azezian 1994: 30). That same year, Ghassan Kajjou and Lusi Kassabian translated an anthology of twenty Armenian short stories, a charitable project supported by the Aleppo Writers' Union (Haratch 1992).

In the year 1993, at the initiative of the publishing committee of the Hamazkayin Armenian Youth Union (HYU) branch (Aleppo), Levon Mkrtchyan's English work *Artsakh or Karabakh Region: Past and Present* (Azezian 1994: 30) was also published in Damascus, translated into Arabic by Khaled Jubeili. The 85-page booklet was dedicated to the issues of Artsakh self-determination that began with the February uprising in Artsakh in 1988. Along with translations that clarify political perspectives, monographs in Arabic are published on an individual initiative, which relate to the centuries-old Armenian-Arab relationship and the processes undertaken in the joint struggle for Armenian-Arab justice.

In addition, the translations covered various topics, the entirety of which was a flowerbed, reflecting the historical path of the two peoples, their achievements, their struggle against the tyrannical, ruling feudal system, the customs and habits of the peasant and the citizen, panoramic images of the Armenian massacre, reflecting the rich depth of Armenian poetry, human and universal experiences, Armenian artisans in the image of the hardworking Armenian son, etc.

After the 1990s, not only were translations made, but also works in Arabic were published by Armenian intellectuals on their own initiative.

A notable example of original Arabic literary production by an Armenian intellectual is *The Doors*, written by the Aleppo-Armenian intellectual and member of the Arab Writers Union Nazar Nazarian and published by the Syrian Ministry of Culture in Damascus in 1993. The publication of the play marked a new stage in Armenian–Arab literary interaction, demonstrating that Armenian writers in Syria were no longer engaged solely in translation but also contributed original works to Arabic literature. Set in the ancient Canaanite city of Yabus (present-day Jerusalem), the allegorical play revolves around five closed doors bearing the inscriptions "Human Rights," "Peoples' Rights," "Justice," "Freedom," and "Peoples' Rights to Self-Determination" (Minassian 1995: 8–9). Through these symbols, Nazarian addresses universal questions of justice, human dignity, and the struggle for fundamental rights, illustrating how Armenian intellectuals employed Arabic as a medium for engaging with broader social and humanitarian issues.

In addition to dramatic works, the anthology includes selected translations of Armenian prose and poetry. The editorial approach, however, is not uniform. While some translations are preceded only by a brief introductory note, others are accompanied by concise biographical sketches of the Armenian authors. These biographical introductions provide Arab readers with the historical and literary context of the authors' lives, facilitating a deeper understanding of the circumstances that

shaped their literary production and the thematic concerns of their works (Minassian 1995: 8-12).

Given the breadth of the translated corpus, a detailed discussion of every publication falls beyond the scope of the present study. Instead, the Appendix provides a systematic bibliographic overview of the translated works, classified according to their principal thematic orientation. The tables document translations devoted to Artsakh, the Armenian Genocide and the Armenian Question, literature, history, the Sanjak of Alexandretta, and medical science, together with bibliographic information on their authors, translators, places and dates of publication, and source references (see Appendix, Tables 1–6). This classification illustrates both the thematic diversity of Armenian works translated into Arabic and the breadth of Armenian–Arab translation activity during the period under examination.

In the following years, translation literature experienced an upswing. Encouraged by the resonance of the translation movement, a new constellation of Armenian and Arab translators was formed in the country. Expanding the scope of translation work, they published not only material related to Armenian History, the Armenian Question, and the Armenian Massacres, but also works on medicine, numismatics, archaeology, and other subjects.

The emergence of new names in this field — His Eminence Archbishop Bedros Miriatian (Primate of the Armenian Catholic Diocese of Perio), Mihran Minassian, Alexan Keshishian, Nora Arissian, the first Consul of Aleppo Boghos Sarajian, Houri Azezian, Hrach Sahakian, Hrant Habeshian, Maral Gpichyan, Kevork Norikian, Avo Katrjian, Manvel Jiji, Hagop Mikaelian, Hagop Okjian, Harout Vartanian — and from the Arab milieu — Husni Sayyed Labib, Sami Al Jundi, Samir Brek, Huda Hanna, Shawkat Khaled Jibaily, Muhammad Munqez Al Hashimi, Suraiya Hamdi, Tawfiq Burro, and others — speak to the cooperation and further strengthening of cultural ties between the two peoples (Keshishian 2001: 178; Mikaelian 2018: 474).

4. Conclusion

In the post-Genocide years, Armenian refugees, displaced from their homeland and thrust into a new environment, were initially concerned primarily with their physical survival. Following Syria's independence, however, Arabic was declared the official state language, and Armenians, as citizens of the country, recognized the necessity of acquiring the language for communication with the local population and participation in public life. The translation movement, which began in the second quarter of the twentieth century, experienced a resurgence during its final three decades. The coexistence of the Armenian and Arab peoples, together with their joint struggle for Syrian independence, fostered closer mutual acquaintance and encouraged interest in the centuries-old history of the two nations.

In Syria, Armenian–Arabic translation interactions developed into a multi-layered cultural process. Translations from Armenian into Arabic and from Arabic into Armenian contributed to strengthening cultural identity by introducing Armenian literature and culture to the Arabic-speaking environment and Arabic intellectual and

literary traditions to the Armenian-speaking one. Translation activities also played an important role in preserving and transmitting historical memory through the dissemination of historical testimonies, memoirs, and literary works. They enabled the Armenian historical experience, including the memory of the Genocide, to become accessible to Arab readers, while making Arabic social and political realities better known to Armenian readers. By the 1980s, translation had evolved beyond the boundaries of purely linguistic mediation into an important instrument of cultural dialogue and coexistence.

Although Syria has endured more than a decade of armed conflict and the process of reconstruction is still ongoing, translation continues to hold the potential to contribute to cultural restoration. As in the past, the mutual translation of Armenian and Arabic literature by a new generation of translators can continue to promote intercultural dialogue and reaffirm the values of multicultural coexistence.

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Appendix

The following tables provide a bibliographic overview of the principal Armenian works translated into Arabic between 1992 and 1995, as documented in the Syrian press (Kantsasar Exclusive 1994: 30-32; 1995: 8-12).

Table 1. Publications on Artsakh

No.	Author	Title of Book	Translator	Place and Year of Publication	Source Literature
1.	Levon Mkrtichian	"**Artsakh or Karabakh: Between Past and Present**"	Khaled Joubaili (from English to Arabic)	Damascus, 1992	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 30)
2.	Lady Caroline Cox and John Eibner	"**The War for the Right to Self-Determination in Armenian Artsakh**"	Khaled Joubaili	1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)

Table 2. Publications on the Armenian Genocide and the Armenian Question

No.	Author	Title of Book	Translator	Place and Year of Publication	Source Literature
1.	Henri Verneuil (Ashot Malakian)	"**Mayrig**"	Yousef Golshakji (from French to Arabic)	Latakia, 1992	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 30)
2.	Nayim Al Yafi	"**The Armenian Massacres and the Position of the Arabs**"	Written in Arabic	Latakia, 1992	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 30)
3.	Shavarsh Toriguian	"**The Armenian Question and International Law**"	Khaled Joubaili (from English to Arabic)	Latakia, 1992	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 30)
4.	(Anonymous/ Arab history)	"**Arab Gallows and Armenian Massacres**"	Aleksan Bayramian (from Arabic to Armenian)	Damascus, 1992	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 31)
5.	Mevlan Zadeh Rifat	"**The Dark Folds of the Turkish (Ottoman) Revolution**"	Tawfiq Burro (from Ottoman Turkish to Arabic)	Aleppo, 1993	(Azezian, Kantsasar Special Issue 1994: 31)

6.	James Bryce, Arnold Toynbee, Herbert Gibbons, and Fridtjof Nansen	"**Select Pages from Historical Writings Dedicated to the Armenian Massacres of 1915**"	Khaled Joubaili	Latakia, 1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)
7.	Taner Akçam	"**Turkish National Identity and the Armenian Question**"	Alexan Keshishian	Damascus, 1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)
8.	Haykazn Ghazarian	"**Historical Documents on the Armenian Massacres of 1915**" ("The Genocidal Turk")	Nizar Khalili	Latakia, 1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)

Table 3. Literary Publications

No.	Author	Title of Book	Translator	Place and Year of Publication	Source Literature
1.	20 Armenian Writers	"**20 Armenian Short Stories**"	Lusi Kassabian and Ghassan Kajjou (from Armenian to Arabic)	Aleppo, 1992	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 30)
2.	Perch Zeituntsian	"**The Saddest Man**"	Nazar Nazarian (Revising editor: Ruben Boghossian)	Kuwait Ministry of Press, 1993 (published 1994)	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 8)
3.	A Group of Armenian Writers (6 Western and Eastern Armenian writers, 18 stories)	"**The Story of an Arab Woman**" (World Short Stories Series, No. 16)	Boghos Sarajian	Damascus, 1993	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 8)

4.	Kevork Ipchian	"**The Green Falcon**"	Nizar Khalili	Beirut, 1993	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 9)
5.	William Saroyan	"**The Broken Wheel**"	Mamira Breq	Damascus, 1993	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 9)
6.	Article Authors: Sderk, M. Qanar, Sh. Kahien, and J. Deny	"**Armenians in the Encyclopedia of Islam**"	Ibrahim Zaki Khorshid, Ahmat Al-Shandawi, and Abdul Hamid Younes	Aleppo, 1993	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 9)
7.	Zohrab Ainablyan	"**A Voice from the Mountains of Kessab**"	Nizar Khalili	Damascus, 1993	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 9)
8.	Koutsi Mikaelian	"**People of the Stone Age, Women of the Stone Age**"	Shawkad Yousef	Ministry of Culture Publication, Syria, 1993	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 9)
9.	Avetik Isahakyan	"**Abu Lala Mahari**"	Nazar Nazarian	Latakia, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 10)
10.	Paruyr Sevak	"**Let There Be Light and Other Poems...**"	Mihran Minassian	Latakia, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 10)
11.	William Saroyan	"**Seventy Thousand Assyrians**"	Husni Sayyed Labib	Aleppo, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 10)
12.	Paruyr Sevak	"**Selected Poems**"	Boghos Sarajian (Revising editors: Lusi Kassabian and Ghassan Kajjou)	Aleppo, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 11)
13.	William Saroyan	"**My Cousin Tigran**"	Husni Sayyed Labib	Aleppo, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 11)
14.	St. Gregory of Narek	"**Book of Lamentations**"	Nizar Khalili	Aleppo, 1994	(Minassian Mihran,

					Kantsasar Exclusive 1995: 11)
15.		"**Nazar Nazarian, Postcards of Longing: From Yerevan to Aleppo**"	Compilers: Mahmoud Ali Al Sayyed and Farid Nazarian	Damascus, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 11)
16.	Vahagn Davtyan	"**Requiem**" (Hymn to Eternal Life)	Archbishop Petros Miriatian	Latakia, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 11-12)
17.	Carlos Yeghiazarian	"**How to Be a Good Person**" ("The Innocent Man")	Lusi Kassabian and Ghassan Kajjou	Aleppo, 1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)
18.	Kevork Temizian	"**Selected Poems**"	Lusi Kassabian and Ghassan Kajjou	Aleppo, 1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)

Table 4. Historical Publications

No.	Author	Title of Book	Translator	Place and Year of Publication	Source Literature
1.	Urartologist Margaret Riesner	"**Urartu - An Ancient Armenian Kingdom in the Cradle of Ararat**"	Muhammad Wahid Khayata (Director of Museums and Antiquities of Aleppo Province) (from German to Arabic)	Aleppo, 1993	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 32)
2.	Alexandr Khachatrian	"**Collection of Armenian Arabic Ornamentation (8th-16th Centuries) Vol. 1**"	Shawkat Yousef (from Russian to Armenian)	Damascus, 1993	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 32)

Table 5. Publications on the Sanjak of Alexandretta

No.	Author	Title of Book	Translator	Place and Year of Publication	Source Literature
1.	Alishan Bayramian	"**The Armenian Struggle for the Arabness of Alexandretta**"	Aleksan Bayramian (from Arabic to Armenian)	Damascus, 1992	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 31)
2.	Alishan Bayramian	"**The Issue of the Sanjak of Alexandretta and International Diplomacy (1929-1936)**"	Hrant Habeshian (from Armenian to Arabic)	Damascus, 1993	(Azezian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1994: 32)
3.	Tareq Mumdaz	"**Lines and Information**" (Statistical and Historical Information on Alexandretta)	Nizar Khalili	Aleppo, 1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)
4.	Franz Werfel	"**The Forty Days of Musa Dagh**"	Khaled Joubaili	Latakia, 1995	(Minassian Mihran, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)

Table 6. Publications on Medical Science

No.	Author	Title of Book	Translator	Place and Year of Publication	Source Literature
1.	Compiler: Robert Chebejyan	"**The Development of the Visual Sense and the Visual Organ**"	Arpi Pamboukian and Samir Antaki	Homs, 1994	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)
2.	Vahakn Dadrian	"**The Role of Turkish Doctors in the Armenian Massacres During WWI**"	Alexan Keshishian	Latakia, 1995	(Minassian, *Kantsasar* Exclusive 1995: 12)

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in relation to this research.

Ethics Statement

The author(s) confirm that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERPRETER'S STATUS IN MICHAEL FRAYN'S *THE RUSSIAN INTERPRETER*

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Abstract: Offering an external and fictional perspective on interpreting in the Soviet Union, this article involves a close reading of Michael Frayn's prize-winning 1966 novel, *The Russian Interpreter*. The study focuses on the changing status of Paul Manning, a British postgraduate student in Moscow who is originally called on to provide commercial interpreting services for a visiting British businessman, Gordon Proctor-Gould. However, Manning's role and remit evolve as his position as an interpreter expands to blend Proctor-Gould's professional activities with his complicated personal life. After contextualising the necessary background on fictional translators and on Frayn and his novel, this article first foregrounds the method in which Manning was recruited, before examining how the interpreter deals with the blurring of professional and personal spheres. Finally, it profiles an example of a disastrous interpreting performance, noting the implications for Manning's status as a practitioner.

Keywords: British students in the Soviet Union; fictional interpreters; interpreting in the Soviet Union; transfiction; 20th-century English literature

1. Introduction

The geopolitical tensions of the Cold War era proved to be a dynamic influence on literary fiction across various world literatures (Hammond 2005), as the political relationship between the West and the Soviet Union became increasingly frosty. In the case of the United Kingdom, a literary portrait symbolising the country's postwar rethinking of its foreign policy towards its erstwhile Second World War ally is The Russian Interpreter, a 1966 novel by the eminent author, playwright, and translator Michael Frayn. As will be presented and discussed in this article, the novel is loosely inspired by Frayn's first brief sojourn in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s, which took place after he graduated from university and several years after his military service as a Russian linguist.

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Blending comedy and social commentary, Frayn's narrative portrays the humorous travails of Paul Manning, a young British postgraduate student in Moscow who, through his Russian language skills, becomes unwittingly embroiled in a shady scheme with predictably disastrous consequences. Given Frayn's own familiarity with the Russian language and Soviet culture and society, as well as with translation and interpreting through his linguist training, the novel can be said to offer a unique external view on contemporary Soviet reality. Therefore, via the close reading of three selected excerpts from the book which hone in on aspects of the interpreter's role, status, and ethics, this article builds on previous research to outline how this specific example of literary fiction depicts interpreting-related perspectives in the Soviet Union during a pivotal period in its history.

2. Transfiction and The Russian Interpreter

Perhaps owing to their multifaceted role as bridges between cultures and the manifold connotations of mystery and intrigue that this can imply, translator and interpreter protagonists have been a recurrent feature in literary fiction. Commonly grouped under the designation of 'transfiction' (Bergantino 2026: 1), scholarly analyses of these works and their fictional characters have centred on various authors and national literatures. Arrojo's (2017) seminal monograph profiled the presence of translator protagonists in several works by canonical authors such as Borges, Cervantes, and Kafka. Additionally, the numerous contributions in edited volumes coordinated by scholars such as Kaindl and Spitzl (2014), Spitzer and Oliveira (2022), and Miletich (2023) examine the portrayals of translators and interpreters in varied works of fiction which represent a wide array of languages and literatures. Thus, as highlighted by Valdeón (2025: 1120-1121) in his overview of contemporary trends in academic research on translation and translators, transfiction remains an attractive topic which generates significant scholarly interest.

In keeping with the topic of this special issue, several analyses have foregrounded fictional translators in the Soviet and post-Soviet space. Focusing on examples of detective fiction, Baer (2005) has traced the figure of the translator in works by popular Russian authors such as Boris Akunin, and Olshanskaya (2014) has also examined the portrayal of fictional translators and interpreters in Soviet and Russian cinema and literature, including the 2006 novel by the internationally-acclaimed author Liudmila Ulitskaya, Daniel Stein, Interpreter. The titular interpreter in the latter work has also been analysed in detail by Baer (2014), who has additionally scrutinised the translator protagonist in a fictionalised memoir authored by Semyon Lipkin, the noted Soviet literary translator of Central Asian languages into Russian (Baer 2022). Furthermore, Viktor Pelevin's novel Generation P, which features a language professional as its main character, has been analysed by Ivashkin (2018).

In the Soviet and Russian context, Olshanskaya writes that "translators' personae have been used in several Russian literary and cinematic texts in a variety of contexts," adding that these milieux can include metaphorical representations of "ideological and cultural tensions between home-grown and imported phenomena, or between the East

and the West" (Olshanskaya 2014: 144). This latent instability can also be noted in works with translator or interpreter protagonists by native Russophone authors who have opted to write in other languages; as Hansen observes in her studies of novels by Andreï Makine, Michael Idov, and Olga Grjasnowa, "translation is associated with performance and deception" (Hansen 2019: 400).

In synthesising these two notions (i.e., cultural and ideological tensions with deceptive and performative elements), Michael Frayn's second novel, The Russian Interpreter, represents an interesting study for analysis, adopting the case study-based approach common in transfiction research (Bergantino 2026: 24-25). Born in London in 1933, Frayn is a noted British author, playwright, and journalist, receiving a Tony Award in 2000. As a novelist, his works have been thrice nominated for the renowned Booker Prize (in 1999, 2002, and 2021), and the novel analysed here received the prestigious Hawthornden Prize in 1967, the year after its first publication (see The Booker Prizes 2026; Hawthornden Foundation 2026).

Indeed, Russian has been something of a leitmotif in Frayn's remarkable career. After an initial foray into the language at school (Wroe 1999), he was successful – as he details in the introductory note to the updated 2015 edition of The Russian Interpreter – in gaining a sought-after place to learn Russian during his compulsory military service in the early 1950s (Frayn 2015: v). With the geopolitical importance of the language increasing in the era that was to usher in the Cold War, the need for trained linguists correspondingly increased and specialist intensive courses were developed (Footitt 2011). Hence, as Frayn observes, "some six thousand of us were taught Russian, and trained to be translators and interpreters" (Frayn, 2015: v), before observing laconically that "by the time I'd done my Russian course, in 1952, the blockade of Berlin had long since been lifted, and I never had to interrogate any prisoners, or even […] listen in to Soviet radio traffic" (Frayn 2015: xiii). As Frayn mentions in a recent memoir recalling selected friendships during his life, whilst training as a linguist he also served as co-editor of the course's bilingual literary magazine, and additionally made the acquaintance of the formidable director of the programme, Professor Dame Elizabeth Hill (see Frayn 2023).

His interest in the Russian language continued at Cambridge, where he initially studied modern languages before switching his degree to philosophy (Wroe 1999). After a short study stay at Moscow State University (which was to prove fundamental for the genesis of The Russian Interpreter), Frayn later returned to Soviet Union as a journalist, even covering the visit of the then British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, in 1959 (Wroe 1999); he has mentioned his experiences in the Soviet Union in newspaper articles and interviews (Wroe 1999; Frayn 2005). In terms of cultural activities, Frayn is well-known for his acclaimed English translations of plays by Anton Chekhov (Hesse 2015: 156-157), and his official entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica (2025) also underlines how Chekhovian themes have influenced his dramatic oeuvre as a whole.

As highlighted in the introductory note to the most recent edition of The Russian Interpreter, Frayn undertook a short-term visit to the Soviet Union's most elite educational institution in 1956. Though the author is at pains to state that the events in the novel are fictionalised (Frayn 2015: v), he nonetheless concedes that some of the

Soviet characters are loosely based on some of the people he met during that first visit to the country (Frayn 2015: ix). Given Frayn's deep immersion in Soviet culture and society, as well as the fact that his knowledge of Russian proved sufficient to translate Chekhov, it can thus be advanced that the setting and milieu to these fictional events is nonetheless grounded in the reality of that time – as Frayn himself observes: "The old Moscow that I tried to give some people a picture of in this book was part of my own past as well as Russia's" (Frayn 2015: xiv). To this can be added Frayn's own in-service training as a Russian translator and interpreter, as well as his admittedly rudimentary experience in practical interpreting.

Though listed as an example of a work of literary fiction with a translator or interpreter as a key character (see Fólica and Lladó 2017: 2), extensive analysis of The Russian Interpreter has seemingly only appeared in two previous studies, both written in German. The first, part of an extensive monograph by Andres (2008), examines Frayn's work as part of a comprehensive comparative study of several other novels with interpreter protagonists. As summarised by Simescu (2019), Andres's analysis adopts a common structure, beginning with the work itself, before examining the role and context of the interpreter and interpreting, and noting their centrality (or not) to the work's given plot. For The Russian Interpreter, her study centres on the interpreter's contribution to the novel's overall portrayal of communication and communicative aspects. The second study (Salevsky and Salevsky 2005), is a brief chapter which focuses solely on Frayn's novel. It concisely summarises the main plot points, making pertinent remarks on the interpreter's role, before linking the novel and its setting to macro-level phenomena, such as the geopolitical thaw in relations between East and West in the immediate post-Stalin era up until the mid-1960s.

The present article expands on these two analyses to offer critical reflections on three main instances where interpreting plays a key role in the novel – Paul Manning's initial recruitment as an interpreter; a pivotal moment in his interpreting 'career'; and his poor performance when interpreting at an important banquet. Though these instances may also feature – to a greater or lesser extent – in prior German-language scholarship on the novel, the present study examines these through a different lens, centring on the interpreter's status in these interactions. In utilising detailed close reading (an approach also employed by Arrojo's 2017 monograph), and with judicious reference to the text of the original novel, this article also refers to Frayn's aforementioned introductory note (Frayn 2015: v-xiv), which draws attention to the real-life Soviet personalities Frayn met during his initial stay and whose presence underpins the narrative's fictionalised events. In integrating these facets, it is intended to offer new insights on the status of the interpreter-protagonist in The Russian Interpreter.

3. Recruitment and First Forays as an Interpreter

The titular Russian interpreter of Frayn's second novel is Paul Manning, a British postgraduate research student in the Faculty of Administrative-Management Sciences at Moscow State University. Indeed, Manning's academic peregrinations have taken

him from Cambridge to the fictional 'London School of Civic Studies,' and now onto Moscow "for his eighteen months' hard labour" (Frayn 2015: 5). Despite his seemingly impressive educational trajectory, Manning's accomplishments are less than stellar. Though he had brought his thesis to the Soviet Union "for its health," the work was "still poorly" (Frayn 2015: 5), noting that Manning holds vague notions of taking his research to warmer climes: i.e., to "Berkeley, perhaps, or Accra" (Frayn 2015: 5). Taken in the context of the time of the book's publication, in highlighting the famously restless campus of the University of California or socialist-leaning Ghana under Nkrumah, these brief asides – underscored by his current decision to study in the Soviet Union – also serve to hint at Manning's own political and ideological sympathies. The young Briton is under the quasi-paternalistic care of his erudite Soviet departmental host (and minder) Sasha Zaborin, who tells his charge in flawless English that he is "'personally responsible for you to the committee and […] for seeing that your research goes well while you are in our country'" (Frayn 2015: 10).

Manning's services as an interpreter are requested by the enigmatic Cambridge graduate Gordon Proctor-Gould, a fellow Briton who swears that he overlapped with Manning when they were studying at the same Cambridge college, although Manning does not recall this (Frayn 2015: 2). Proctor-Gould appears to be a businessman trading in minor artworks, additionally boasting of his "exclusive rights on the whole Soviet market" (Frayn 2015: 27) to organise networking delegations which bring together distinguished Soviet and British personalities via group tours of the other's country. As a sweetener, Proctor-Gould has brought a library of English books with him as gifts for his Soviet hosts. Noting the difficulty of obtaining foreign publications in the country, these innocuous "presents for the natives" (Frayn 2015: 21) later transpire to have a different purpose. Although never fully explained, these books are apparently part of a scheme to smuggle in and out sums of money, as well as literary manuscripts that have been banned by the Soviets. Thus, from the outset of the novel, the importance of words and language – both written and spoken – is highlighted.

Despite his ostensibly frequent contacts with the Soviet Union, Proctor-Gould is a self-declared poor linguist, underscoring his inability to read Cyrillic by stating that he had "never mastered this comic alphabet they've got" (Frayn 2015: 27). Though acknowledging that the Soviets "who are going to be presentable as personalities in Britain or the United States speak English" (Frayn 2015: 27), Proctor-Gould is keenly aware of the importance of having a native English speaker as his personal interpreter. He states that "'it's not easy to assess the personality of a Russian when it's being filtered through another Russian, with a Russian outlook and Russian preconceptions. What I need, it seems to me, is not a Russian who has learnt English, but an Englishman who knows Russian'" (Frayn 2015: 27-28). Indeed, together with issues of trust and reliability, this understanding is a core tenet of diplomatic interpreting and the reason why bilateral delegations usually have their own interpreters (Akgün and Yetkin Karakoç 2024: 78).

Proctor-Gould is also cognisant of the financial aspect, adding that he would pay Manning London rates in a currency of his choosing. Given that the two men do not formally know each other, Manning enquires about the background research that Proctor-Gould has done on him, with the businessman replying "'Just that your

Russian is fluent, and that your standing with both the Soviet authorities and the Embassy is reasonably good'" (Frayn 2015: 28), overcoming Manning's wariness that his countryman is seeking to utilise him for subterfuge. In analysing this swift and informal recruitment procedure, it is evident that Manning has been selected purely based on the opinion of others. Interestingly, no qualifications, tests, or even evidence of previous interpreting experience have been asked for, despite the fact that by the 1960s, both the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union were formalising interpreter training at the institutional level (Coveney 1982; Chernov 1992). In addition, as a non-Russian-speaker, Proctor-Gould is unable to assess for himself whether Manning is a competent interpreter. Rather, Manning is simply in the right place at the right time, thereby fulfilling Proctor-Gould's need for a trustworthy native English speaker who can interpret for him at various events. This timeliness is also borne out by real-life examples from high-level contexts, when even ballerinas with the requisite language skills have been called on as interpreters in given situations (Naimushin 2023). As such, the importance of trust in such settings is highlighted (Rizzi and Lang 2025: 206-207).

Yet, there is no mention in the novel of how Manning acquired his Russian skills – given that his thesis is in the domain of administration and management studies, it is to be surmised that his expertise lies in social science rather than philological disciplines. In addition, he has resided in Moscow for the past year-and-a-half, but there are no references to him attending language courses (such as the preparatory year of intensive Russian language that foreigners undertook before admittance to Soviet faculties – see Rosen 1970: 247-248). Nonetheless, as later events confirm, it does appear that he has a degree of fluency in the language across various registers, despite the challenges that Russian can pose for learners from non-Slavonic-speaking backgrounds.

A further point which becomes increasingly relevant is the question of Manning's reimbursement. As his mention of 'London' rates states, Proctor-Gould appears to be used to interpreters; indeed, the businessman highlights that Manning's abilities are to supplement the official Soviet interpreters he uses on his other duties. It is Proctor-Gould who dominates the discussion, thus offering a clear demonstration of power. Though the sum of two guineas per hour is offered, no documents or contracts are signed, and the presumably considerable logistics of transferring the payment (or its equivalent in Swiss francs, roubles, or other currency) are never expanded on. As such, Manning's limited capacities to negotiate – and by extension, his general naivety about the whole scheme – are highlighted in this excerpt, illustrating his lower status. In sum, the lack of formal paperwork means that the terms of business between the two men remain, quite simply, a gentleman's agreement.

Yet, following his agreement to become Proctor-Gould's interpreter, Manning's life in Moscow is transformed. In demonstrating the intersection of interpreting with elite worlds (Hoyte-West 2021), his humdrum student existence is substituted by "a round of parties, receptions, conferences, congresses, reunions, exhibitions – all the various bends and corners in life at which a sediment of people might be deposited for inspection" (Frayn 2015: 30), and Manning gains entry to strata of society he had previously not come across. In a further development, Manning learns of Proctor-Gould's lucrative sideline as a commission agent for various British institutions,

spending "hours with him calling on government offices, university departments, and cultural agencies to convey greetings from British counterparts" (Frayn 2015: 30). The multifarious nature of these interactions makes it difficult to categorise Manning's activities within a broader descriptive taxonomy of interpreting settings (i.e., as a liaison, business, or community interpreter, etc. – see Ozolins 2014), which themselves are often characterised in a notional hierarchy. What is apparent, however, is he interprets in consecutive mode.

Turning to the descriptions of interpreting featured in the novel, Manning is somewhat disgusted by Proctor-Gould's superficially performative nature which contrasts with Manning's own introspected personality. Indeed, with a note of derision, he thinks privately of his employer as a "public man" (Frayn 2015: 31), as demonstrated by Proctor-Gould's penchant for speechmaking:

> "On the slightest pretext, at even quite small receptions, Proctor-Gould would make a speech. The phrases which came rolling so steadily and emphatically out on these occasions – […] – were not exactly clichés. They were units of the public language. At first their abstraction and generality appalled Manning as he translated them. Yet he could see them have their effect on the audience – the limited effect of public language on a public audience, but an effect nonetheless" (Frayn 2015: 31).

Despite his own personal reservations as to the vacuity of the words he is required to interpret, Manning nonetheless remains faithful to the original speaker's wishes by interpreting them faithfully. To his consternation, however, he observes the effect that these seemingly vapid platitudes have on their intended audiences: "People listened and applauded with genuine respect and interest. An attempt at some more personal form of communication, conceded Manning grudgingly, might have had no effect at all without the framework of a real personal relationship to give it meaning" (Frayn 2015: 32).

It is after one of these events, having been introduced by Manning, that Proctor-Gould meets Sasha, Manning's English-speaking Soviet host at the university. The two get on famously and the trio decide to head for dinner together. However, "Manning felt very much the third of the three. He was not needed as an interpreter, since Proctor-Gould and Sasha were speaking English together, and he was lumbered with a large silver-plated model of the university skyscraper" (Frayn 2015: 32).

As mentioned by Salevsky and Salevsky (2005: 105-108), this event foreshadows the blurring of the boundaries between interpreter and client, with implications for Manning's standing. It also provides a clear portrait of the interpreter's uncertain status when his services are no longer required: with no language barrier impeding communication between Proctor-Gould and Sasha, there is no need for Manning's presence. He is figuratively and literally redundant, his junior status exemplified by carrying round Proctor-Gould's cumbersome gift from his Soviet hosts like a lackey. Indeed, Manning's ancillary role is confirmed by his exclusion from the two men's deep conversation, noting that "it was he who had to drop back when there was not enough room for three abreast on the pavement, then run a couple of steps to catch up again. It was he who had to interrupt to insist that they decided on a restaurant, as the other two strode towards nowhere, completely absorbed in recalling their mutual

childhood passions for stamps, railways, and wireless sets" (Frayn 2015: 32-33). Accordingly, the sense of his own superfluousness leads him to experience an "obscure irritation. It was as if one's parents and one's teacher had taken to each other too readily; a threatening coalition" (Frayn 2015: 33).

Indeed, this episode highlights the oft-discussed notion of the interpreter's visibility – or lack of it – in various communication settings (Martínez-Gómez 2015: 175-178). When his linguistic skills are no longer required, Manning is simply ignored, thus underlying that he is seen as a conduit rather than as an active participant in the conversation. This is particularly heightened by the intimate nature of the topic the men are discussing animatedly, that of childhood reminiscences, which represents a sharp contrast to Proctor-Gould's banal and formulaic speeches in his role as a "public man." Yet, despite his hostility at being excluded, Manning is simply conforming to the professional expectations underlined in the gentleman's agreement, and which are de rigueur for any professional interpreter. However, as subsequent events in the narrative detail, the situation regarding his uncertain status is to become much more complex.

4. A Change of Circumstances

As also summarised elsewhere (Salevsky and Salevsky 2005: 106-107), the ultimately ill-fated relationship between Proctor-Gould and Raya, a non-English-speaking lecturer at the journalism faculty but who proves to be a state informer, gives important perspectives on the interpreter's status in the novel.

Raya's first meeting with the Englishmen occurs when she tags along, seemingly uninvited, to the Faculty's departmental picnic in the forest outside Moscow. She initially attaches herself to Manning, flattering him by addressing him with the title of "Comrade Interpreter," thus elevating his status, before mentioning that she is interested in Proctor-Gould. However, her inability to speak English makes her reluctant to embark on a relationship, adding that "There seems to be a terrible lot of explanation to go through before the appropriate moment arrives" (Frayn 2015: 46). The solicitous Manning offers his services as an interpreter, which Raya dismisses with irony: "'A love affair through an interpreter. That's a very cultured prospect'" (Frayn 2015: 46). Yet, this is what indeed happens, and Raya and Proctor-Gould swiftly become an item. Indeed, over dinner in a restaurant, at first Manning is very eager and supportive regarding their relationship, noting that he "felt that Proctor-Gould's compliments [to Raya] were indirectly compliments to himself. He translated them fully, wherever possible improving upon them and making them more fantastic in the Russian" (Frayn 2015: 60).

In this instance, this burnishing is a notable example of Manning not conforming with the expected professional conduct of interpreters (Torresi 2024). In short, he is manipulating what is being said for his own ends, as his ego has been flattered. However, this approach quickly backfires when Proctor-Gould wishes to invite Raya to Britain as one of his distinguished personalities. Amazed at the suddenness of this move, Manning disbelieves that the invitation is genuine, to which Proctor Gould responds "'Paul,' he said, 'you're supposed to interpret what I say, you know, not

argue about it.'" (Frayn 2015: 61). When Manning answers that he was no longer on duty, and that the occasion was social, rather than business, Proctor-Gould retorts that "'In my profession all occasions are business ones. In any case, I'm paying you, Paul'" (Frayn 2015: 61).

An argument ensures between the two men, with Raya repeatedly banging on the table and loudly demanding a translation which attracts the attention of the dinners. With reluctance, Manning purposely mistranslates what Proctor-Gould is saying, and his rendition of the businessman's "'Tell her I think her wonderful directness and charm will communicate remarkably well, even though she doesn't know English'" (Frayn 2015: 62) becomes "'He thinks that your lack of English would make it rather difficult'" (Frayn 2015: 62).

Yet, perhaps echoing the sentiment of exclusion that Manning felt previously during Sasha and Proctor-Gould's meeting, his attempts to thwart the relationship are unsuccessful. Unbothered by the state authorities, Raya moves into Proctor-Gould's hotel suite, and the further blurring of the boundaries between Manning and his countryman are illustrated when Manning is summoned to interpret some "logistical points" in order to "get a few things settled" in the couple's nascent relationship. Noting that Proctor-Gould could "scarcely get one of the Intourist [state] interpreters" (Frayn 2015: 71) to do so, the businessman makes clear that he would not ask Manning "to translate anything that might embarrass" him (Frayn 2015: 71). Despite pulling rank in the outburst over dinner where Proctor-Gould underlined that he is paying Manning for his interpreting services (and the clear power differential that this displays), a further blurring of professional and personal spheres occurs when Manning's original remit changes. Noting that the couple "quarrelled endlessly, with Manning's assistance" (Frayn 2015: 80), it was observed that:

> "There was less and less for Manning to interpret between Proctor-Gould and his official contacts, more and more between him and Raya. Manning's earnings declined; it was somehow tacitly agreed between them that it would be improper for Manning to be paid for interpreting Proctor-Gould's dealings with his mistress. Each day Manning swore that he would have nothing more to do with them; but each time the message came he hurried round (Frayn 2015: 80).

Eventually Raya leaves, taking Proctor-Gould's precious books with her. Unaware of their dual purpose, Manning assists his client in trying to retrieve them, leading to a convoluted wild goose chase across Moscow. Given that the services that Manning was engaged for – the interpretation of formal events – have changed drastically, his loyalty to his client represents a clear example of the psychological links which underpin their gentlemen's agreement. Though the circumstances may be different, Manning feels a sense of duty to his employer, although no formal contract has been signed. In this regard, lines between professional conduct and overfamiliarity have most certainly been transgressed, and Manning's status moves from esteemed linguistic facilitator to that of a sidekick.

5. A Final Humiliation

Close to the novel's dénouement, immediately before Proctor-Gould's illicit wheeze with the book smuggling is exposed, Manning performs exceptionally badly at an important occasion. The scene is a grand faculty dinner, held in the banqueting suite in the university skyscraper. The faculty dean presides over the occasion; Sasha of course is in attendance, and Proctor-Gould has been invited too. Manning has become increasingly inebriated after the endless toasts, but when the dean makes a speech to address the British businessman, Proctor-Gould is eager to respond, thereby requiring Manning's "'usual skilful services'" (Frayn 2015: 162). In a state of extreme drunkenness, Manning panics: "What the hell had Proctor-Gould been saying? He couldn't remember the half of it" (Frayn 2015: 163). Attempting a brief summary into what he thinks is Russian, Manning experiences his countryman's admonishment: "'What do you think you're up to. Paul. […] You were speaking English. Do you realize that?'" (Frayn 2015: 163). The following ensues:

> "He hurriedly tried again in Russian, and the speech continued. But the more he translated, the more obsessed he became with his lapse, and the insight it had given Proctor-Gould into his standards of accuracy as an interpreter. And the more he worried about that, the less he heard or remembered of what Proctor-Gould was saying, and the more he had to improvise. It was like a nightmare in which his appalled gazing back at each last disaster brought blundering into the next" (Frayn 2015: 164).

Finally, after the ceremonial presentations of various books, the interpretation is over, with Manning "in the process of descending from the remoteness of the sky into a chair which had somehow appeared to catch him" (Frayn 2015: 164). Ultimately, the evening is capped off with the arrest of the two Englishmen, who are taken into custody and subsequently deported back to their homeland.

As the above illustrates, this final event exemplifies Manning's own uncertain status. In the first instance, his subordinate position means that he feel unable to decline Proctor-Gould's request. Though he commits the error of not paying attention to the original speaker, compounded by simply summarising the speaker's words in the original rather than interpreting the language, this situation is something that, had Manning been trained to a professional standard, he could have been able to mitigate. In addition, he is also concerned by Proctor-Gould's potential erosion of trust in his abilities.

Indeed, history has infamous (though infrequent) examples of poor interpreting on the international stage, such as the American president Jimmy Carter's visit to Poland (Chekin 2023) or Nelson Mandela's memorial service (Pienaar and Cornelius 2015: 191-195). Such occurrences are hugely embarrassing and carry the potential – as in the case of Manning's misinterpretation – for reputational risk. Yet, as Frayn observes in his introductory note, this event in the novel was partly inspired by his own experiences. Confiding that he "even once or twice did a bit of interpreting" but "wasn't very good at it" (Frayn 2015: xiii), he adds that his "first effort was at a horrible drunken Soviet banquet marking the end of our stay in 1956," where he interpreted a speech by a visiting French scientist into English, rather than into

Russian. Unlike Manning, who was made aware of his mistake immediately, Frayn only realised much later; fortunately, he adds that "not that anyone, at that stage in the evening, had appeared to notice" (Frayn 2015: xiii). For Manning, however, there is to be no deliverance from his poor performance. As his literal transit into police custody symbolises, the situation is arguably emblematic of his own complex and blurred relationship with Proctor-Gould and, by extension, with the wider Soviet context.

6. Conclusion

Through analysing the changing status of the interpreter protagonist over the course of Frayn's second novel, the three instances highlighted in this article have examined how Paul Manning was recruited, noting the power differential exemplified by the unbalanced professional relationship between Manning and Proctor-Gould, as well as the consequent blurring of spheres when Manning is called upon to interpret in Proctor-Gould's personal life. It also notes the challenges caused by Manning's general lack of professionalism and his ensuing inability to deal with challenges relating to his shifting role and uncertain status. In terms of contributing to the scholarly literature on interpreters in fiction, this analysis provides a portrait of an unqualified ad hoc interpreter, where interpreting in commercial, professional, and personal settings become merged, with far-reaching consequences. Building on this study, further investigations could therefore focus on the depiction of interpreters in other fictional English-language works set in the Soviet Union, as well as contrasting these findings with similar works of Russian literature set in the Soviet period and which also feature translators and interpreters as principal protagonists.

In sum, given its grounding in the Soviet reality as experienced by Frayn himself, as well as the author's commitment to offering a literary snapshot of the Soviet Union as he first encountered it in the mid-20th century, the study has presented relevant external perspectives on how, via the activity of interpreting between Russian and English, an Englishman navigated the complexities of life in a society very different to his own.

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MEKHITARIST TRANSLATION TRADITION AND SOVIET LINGUISTIC THEORY: A RETROSPECTIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This article is an attempt at a comparative examination of the translation tradition of the Mekhitarist Congregation and Soviet linguistic translation studies. The aim of the research is to analyze the principles of Armenian philological translation thought from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century in light of theoretical approaches developed in the mid-twentieth century. Drawing on primary texts, the author demonstrates that the observations of the Mekhitarists exhibit functional parallels with theoretical models of linguistic translation studies. The article emphasizes that the proposed comparison is retrospective in nature and does not imply direct historical continuity or identification between different epistemological frameworks. Linguistic translation studies are regarded as one of the possible analytical perspectives through which the classical Armenian translation experience may be examined in a systematic manner while preserving its historical and cultural distinctiveness. This approach may contribute to a more multilayered understanding of the history of translation thought.

Keywords: Mekhitarist translational approach; Soviet translation theory; comparative analysis; linguistic paradigm; philological tradition

1. Introduction

Questions concerning fidelity, linguistic precision, and the relationship between the source text and its translation have occupied translation thinkers for centuries. Although systematic translation theory emerged only in the twentieth century, many of its central concerns had already been articulated within earlier translation traditions. Comparable issues concerning translation began to be discussed in a systematic manner particularly in the Soviet Union from the mid-twentieth century onward. The Soviet school of translation studies — through the foundational works of Andrei Fedorov (1953), Yakov Retsker (1974), Leonid Barkhudarov (1975), Viktor Vinogradov (1978), Alexandr Shveitser (1988), Vilen Komissarov (1990), and others — formed a theoretical framework that sought a systematic and structural description of the translation process. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this school operated within a

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specific ideological and institutional context, in which positivism at times led to excessive schematism and, under the conditions of a dominant ideology, the aesthetic and contemplative dimensions of translation were subordinated to the analysis of linguistic structures.

However, the formation of this paradigm did not proceed smoothly and encountered serious resistance (Garbovskiy 2022; Garbovskiy 2023). In particular, the Soviet linguist Alexander Reformatskiy, in his article *Linguistic Questions of Translation* (1952), denied the possibility of translation theory as a separate discipline, arguing that the various genres and types of translation could not share a unified theoretical core (Reformatskiy 1952). Responding to this position, Fedorov, in his *Introduction to Translation Theory* (1953), substantiated the objective nature of translation theory:

> "Other fields of practical activity and scholarly knowledge present no fewer difficulties in generalizing their governing principles. To deny translation theory as a scientific philological discipline, even one limited by narrow special boundaries, would first of all mean denying the existence of regularities in the relationship between two languages — understood, of course, broadly (that is, including the correlation between their stylistic systems)" (Fedorov 1953: 15).

At the same time, another fundamental debate was unfolding within translation theory. From the standpoint of "realist translation," Ivan Kashkin criticized Evgeny Lann and other literalist translators, characterizing their translations as "technologically precise" and "formally precise," which, in his view, failed to convey the artistic spirit of the original (Kashkin 1977 [1952]: 22–41). This criticism reflected the Soviet literary demand to adapt translation to the aesthetics of socialist realism while also making it more vivid and readable. Literalists, by contrast, sought to preserve the linguistic and structural distinctiveness of the source text as an inseparable component of its artistic value.

This debate extended beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. The linguistic approach was also affirmed in the West, particularly by the French linguist Georges Mounin. In his 1963 book *Theoretical Problems of Translation* (1963), he defended linguistic theory as the principal foundation for the study of translation. In his view, "translation is a contact between languages and at the same time a phenomenon of bilingualism" (Mounin 1963: 4). He regarded translation simultaneously as a creative and critical activity, without separating the two. Mounin emphasized that translation theory makes it possible to draw broader conclusions from translation practice and to overcome "craft-based methods," thereby uncovering regularities and ensuring their theoretical generalization (Mounin 1963: 16).

Although these twentieth-century discussions are generally regarded as the point at which translation theory acquired systematic academic foundations, many of the questions they addressed had already been anticipated in earlier translation traditions. Armenian translation thought from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, most clearly represented by the scholarly and cultural activity of the Mekhitarist Congregation, developed within a philological-humanistic framework that likewise emphasized fidelity to the source text, linguistic precision, and literary quality. While formulated in a different intellectual and historical context, many of its principles

reveal striking points of convergence with issues that later occupied Soviet translation theorists.

The present study is based on a close reading of two key Mekhitarist texts: the preface to Arsen Bagratuni's *Mshakakank'* (Vergilius Maro 1847: 7–32) and Arsen Ghazikyan's letter addressed to Hrand Nazariantz (Nazariantz 1912: 7–68). An examination of these primary sources demonstrates that the Mekhitarists' translation practice possesses a coherent internal methodology grounded in philological precision, fidelity to the source text, and careful literary judgement.

Thus, the juxtaposition of the Mekhitarists' humanistic-philological paradigm and the Soviet systemic-linguistic paradigm may at first glance appear problematic, given the chronological and methodological distance between them. In the present article, however, Soviet linguistic theory is not employed to 'validate' or 'modernize' the Mekhitarists' experience but rather as an analytical framework through which earlier Armenian translation thought may be re-examined. The aim of this article is to investigate the Mekhitarist translation tradition and Soviet linguistic translation theory as two autonomous yet, at the analytical level, functionally comparable manifestations of translation thought. Rather than equating historically distinct epistemological systems, the study adopts a retrospective methodological perspective that makes it possible to trace how similar translation problems have been conceptualized across different historical periods and intellectual traditions.

2. The Mekhitarists' Experience as a Humanistic-Philological Paradigm

In the history of translation studies, the period up to the twentieth century is often characterized as a stage of theorizing by practitioners. During this time, theoretical reflection had not yet emerged as an independent discipline; rather, it appeared in the form of master translators' analyses of their own work and their formulation of methodological principles. In the Armenian context, this phenomenon found its most vivid expression in the Mekhitarist translation school, where practical skill and philological inquiry served as the basis for developing stable translation principles.

The founder of Soviet translation studies, Fedorov, was among the first to argue that theorizing about translation must be grounded in linguistics, since language is the common point of intersection for all translations (Fedorov 1953). From another perspective, the Armenian translation tradition shows that Mekhitarist figures in certain respects aspired to the same kind of objectivity: they acted as highly trained philologists with deep linguistic competence who, alongside their translations, conducted comprehensive literary and linguistic research.

The artistic principles of the Mekhitarists were first systematically formulated by Bagratuni in the extensive preface to his translation of Virgil's *Georgics* (*Mshakakank'*). This preface is a key primary source for understanding the internal logic of the Mekhitarist translation school and its significance in the history of Armenian translation. There, translation is viewed above all as a means of expanding and enriching the functional capacities of the native language. Bagratuni's approach is grounded in classicist aesthetics, in which the semantic and formal components of a

text must stand in functional harmony. He defines a complex set of criteria for fidelity, including not only semantic accuracy (metaphrase) but also the reproduction of the stylistic and emotional layers of the original (Vergilius Maro 1847: 7–32).

Bagratuni considers fidelity the primary condition and fundamental principle of the translation process. In his view, fidelity to the original encompasses both semantic and emotional-stylistic dimensions. The former involves the accurate rendering of ideas without unnecessary additions or reductions; the latter requires the transmission of affective force and stylistic nuance. He also stresses the importance of preserving the arrangement of ideas. At the same time, recognizing that additions and omissions cannot be entirely excluded due to differences between languages, he urges that they be minimized and insists that any additions must serve the development of qualities already present in the original (Vergilius Maro 1847: 9–10).

Bagratuni's views became foundational for Mekhitarist translators. In this respect, the observations of Ghazikian are particularly noteworthy. They are presented in a detailed letter addressed to the Armenian writer and futurist theorist Hrand Nazariantz, published by the latter in 1912 in the book "Tasso and His Armenian Translators". There, Ghazikian criticizes another Mekhitarist translator, Athanas Tiroyan, for his translation of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (Tasso 1912). He closely examines the translation of the first canto, analyzes individual discrepancies in comparison with the original, and at times presents his own translation (Tasso 1911), published a year earlier than Tiroyan's version, in order to highlight qualitative differences. In some cases, he even back-translates erroneous Armenian renderings into Italian and proposes alternative translations to demonstrate the resulting "absurdity" (Nazariantz 1912: 31–49; Jrbashyan and Mkryan 2025: 13–16).

Ghazikian distinguishes between "errors" and "inaccuracies" as subcategories and examines translation mismatches under these headings. Although he does not provide formal definitions, the distinction is clear from his analyses. An error denotes a gross mismatch that distorts the meaning of the original at the semantic or linguistic level, whereas an inaccuracy is a translational lapse that, despite the general comprehensibility of the translation, fails to convey important nuances of the source text. Within inaccuracies, Ghazikian identifies three subgroups. He names the first two "addition" and "omission." For the third he introduces no separate term, but his examples show that it concerns stylistic inadequacy, when certain stylistic features of the original are not preserved in translation. For example, he notes that in the translation of stanza 59 Tiroyan "spoiled Tasso's beautiful repetition (such repetitions are also found in Homer and Virgil, whose translators did not abridge them)" (Nazariantz 1912: 48; Jrbashyan and Mkryan 2025: 14–15). Notably, beyond pointing out errors and inaccuracies, Ghazikian sometimes also explains their causes, demonstrating a critical analytical approach (Nazariantz 1912: 31; Jrbashyan and Mkryan 2025: 15).

The experience-based approach developed by Mekhitarist translators reveals a consistent concern for multilayered fidelity: semantic accuracy, stylistic nuance, and emotional resonance. Bagratuni's demand to minimize unnecessary additions and omissions, together with Ghazikian's distinction between "errors" and "inaccuracies," attests to the existence of a hierarchical (if not fully formalized) system of translation

quality assessment. This system enabled structural and functional analysis of translated texts. In Mekhitarist theoretical writings, one encounters principles grounded in a rich tradition of translation practice. Soviet theory, in turn, conceptualized analogous phenomena as types of translational equivalence and transformations.

In general, the Mekhitarists' translation tradition operates on a philological level, giving priority to the direct observation of textual correspondences. The analytical precision of Mekhitarist translators — expressed through line-by-line comparisons and explanations of the causes of deviations — provides a basis for comparative analysis with linguistic theory. Thus, the Armenian tradition emerges not as a preliminary or incomplete practice, but as a historically developed and methodologically consistent approach to interlingual transfer. This makes it possible to employ selected concepts from Soviet linguistic translation theory as comparative analytical tools, while remaining attentive to historical and epistemological differences. In other words, the Mekhitarists' observations may be interpreted through later theoretical categories, allowing the process of translation to be approached from multiple perspectives, including a linguistic one.

3. Parallels between Soviet Linguistic Theory and the Mekhitarists' Experience

The formation of Soviet linguistic translation theory in the mid-twentieth century was characterized by the schematization of the analysis of the translation process. Nevertheless, the Soviet school offered concrete solutions to translational problems. Whereas for the Mekhitarists "closeness to the original" and "stylistic propriety" were understood as outcomes of the translator's talent and aesthetic sensitivity, in Soviet theory they acquire the status of translation equivalence and functional correspondence.

On the one hand, the practicism of Soviet theory allows the translational process to be viewed as a phenomenon subject to structural and analytical description. On the other hand, the Mekhitarist translational experience — with its pronounced philological and cultural dimensions — demonstrates that translation issues are not limited to mere linguistic substitutions; they are perpetually linked to the aesthetic, historical, and cognitive demands of a given culture.

In this sense, for the Mekhitarists, translational fidelity encompasses not only lexical or semantic correspondence but also an endeavor to reproduce the stylistic, emotional, and cultural layers of the source text. Consequently, a comparative examination of these two traditions enables the synthesis of linguistic schematism with intuitive-aesthetic interpretations, viewing translation as a multi-layered process in which linguistic, cultural, and philological factors are inherently interconnected.

Representatives of linguistic translation theory define 'translation' in broadly similar terms, focusing on the invariance of content. According to Barkhudarov, "translation is the process of transforming a text produced in one language into a text in another language while preserving the content plan, that is, the meaning" (Barkhudarov 1975: 11). This definition treats translation as a linguistic transformation in which semantic equivalence is primary. With the same underlying logic but a broader emphasis, Retsker maintains that "the translator's task is to convey by means of one

language the complete and accurate content of the original, preserving its stylistic and expressive features" (Retsker 2007: 10). Here, aesthetic correspondence is added to semantic accuracy as a requirement.

These theoretical positions are functionally consonant with Bagratuni's reflections on fidelity. Although he does not formulate his claims in later theoretical terminology, he proposes nearly identical criteria. In his view, translation must not be limited to the transfer of surface meanings. A complete translation should preserve the exactness and precision of the author's ideas and convey subtle meanings and emotional nuances without unnecessary additions or omissions. For Bagratuni, the reproduction of the original's "loftiness" and "splendor" is primary: what should be visible in the translation is the author's work rather than the translator's self-expression (Vergilius Maro 1847: 9–10). Thus, like Barkhudarov, Bagratuni demands strict preservation of meaning, and like Retsker, he emphasizes full content together with stylistic-expressive features.

To transmit fully the emotional layers and stylistic features of the source text, it becomes necessary to treat the word as a complex system of information. According to Vinogradov, the informative structure of the word includes two main types of information: linguistic and extralinguistic (Vinogradov 2001: 51–52). Mekhitarist translation practice shows that their aim was to reproduce not only intralinguistic content but also layers of extralinguistic information. From this perspective, Bagratuni's requirement for "perfect precision of thoughts and flawless clarity" is comparable to the objective of conveying denotative information (Vergilius Maro 1847: 9). At the same time, he insists that translation quality also depends on preserving the connotative — emotional and expressive — layer. Bagratuni maintains that a full-fledged translation must reproduce both elevated style and emotional impact, which constitute an inseparable part of the author's individuality. According to him, translation quality depends on precise rendering of subtle meanings and feelings, preventing the dominance of the translator's own style. In methodological terms, this may correspond to Vinogradov's concept of extralinguistic information (Vinogradov 2001: 25–27), which includes aesthetic and associative components. Bagratuni's translation of Virgil suggests that he deliberately employed the resources of Classical Armenian (Grabar) to reproduce stylistic features of Latin. What the Mekhitarist theorist describes as preserving stylistic force and nuance may, in Soviet linguistic terms, be interpreted as reproducing the informational structure of the word, where stable semantic content is interwoven with emotive-expressive and pragmatic values (Vergilius Maro 1847: 9–11).

The concept of fidelity occupies a central place in Bagratuni's exposition; within linguistic theory, this concern is elaborated through the mechanisms of equivalence and adequacy. Komissarov considers a translation adequate if it fulfills the pragmatic goals of the translation act, achieves the highest possible level of equivalence for that purpose, does not violate the norms and usage of the target language, and preserves the genre and stylistic features of the text. He considers a translation equivalent if it reproduces the content of the source-language text at any level of equivalence (Komissarov 1990: 233–234).

Komissarov's five-level model of equivalence (communicative purpose, description of the situation, description of the message, the meaning of linguistic signs, and syntactic structure) (Komissarov 1990: 51-69, 70–91) makes it possible to see that the Mekhitarists on the basis of their rich experience prioritized the higher levels of equivalence. Bagratuni's requirement to preserve the "perfect accuracy of the thoughts" (Vergilius Maro 1874: 9) is comparable to the first and second levels (communicative purpose and situation). At the same time, his insistence on preserving the "arrangement of the thoughts" indicates attention to further levels as well, including syntactic structure and the level of linguistic signs.

From this point of view, Bagratuni's position is clear: his argument implies an understanding of both the concepts of "equivalence" and "adequacy," and he does not accept one without the other. Addressing the translation of verse, Bagratuni observes that the need to preserve metrical structure sometimes compels the translator to resort to additions or reductions. However, he sets an important condition: any change must arise from the logic of the original and must not contradict the accuracy and beauty of the author's thought (Vergilius Maro 1847: 9–11). From the perspective of Soviet translation theory, this can be interpreted as maintaining a balance among different levels of equivalence — situational, communicative, and syntactic. Accordingly, preservation of form (metrical pattern) should not undermine content adequacy, and added elements should be understood as a motivated development of the original thought rather than as foreign insertions (Vergilius Maro 1847: 9–32).

Unlike Bagratuni, Ghazikian avoids abstract claims and prefers to speak through examples. In addition to identifying "errors" and "inaccuracies" in Tiroyan's translation, he grounds his criticism in interlingual observations through direct comparison of the original and translation. His methodology is effectively close to what Soviet translation studies describe as contextual analysis. As noted above, his third type of inaccuracy concerns stylistic inadequacy, while the first two — addition and omission — correspond to recognized types of translation transformations. Ghazikian also identifies problems related to other transformations, such as transposition and substitution. His critical observations show that he regarded translation as a series of linguistic operations in which semantic development and structural substitution serve faithful reproduction of the spirit of the original. He emphasizes that the translator must avoid mechanical literalism and prioritize the internal patterns of the target language — a stance that aligns with and can be mapped onto Barkhudarov's transformational model. This perspective confirms that the Mekhitarists, through their observations on the "nature of language," essentially propose approaches similar to those found in the theory of interlingual transformations, where the substitution of linguistic units is performed to preserve semantic and stylistic invariance (Barkhudarov 1975: 191–231; Nazariantz 1912: 31–49).

In the Mekhitarists' translation concept, the rendering of realia also occupies a significant place. In Soviet translation studies, this is classified as part of extralinguistic information, whose reproduction often requires descriptive translation or transcription. The Mekhitarists, as representatives of a multilingual and multicultural environment, frequently employed domestication, using the vocabulary of Classical Armenian (Grabar) to make Greco-Roman cultural concepts accessible to the Armenian reader.

This process, which Shveitser (1988) and Komissarov (1990) describe as pragmatic adaptation, was elevated by the Mekhitarists to a high level of philological craft. The notes and commentaries they provided alongside their translations may be regarded as an additional informational layer of the translated text, compensating for linguistic non-equivalence. This again indicates that the Mekhitarist school treated translation as a systemic phenomenon in which meaning is not confined to linguistic signs alone but extends to cultural and historical contexts.

In this context, it should be emphasized that although translation studies has been enriched in recent decades by new concepts — such as the communicative approach (Nida 1964), Skopos theory (Reiss and Vermeer 1984; Nord 1988), and the hermeneutic model (Steiner 1975) — linguistic translation studies has not lost its relevance. As a schematized school of thought, it continues to serve as a foundation for subsequent theoretical developments, since any cultural or pragmatic analysis is, first and foremost, grounded in the linguistic realization of the text (Matyushin 2024).

The relevance of the linguistic paradigm is largely conditioned by its connection to long-standing translational experience. This circumstance allows the Mekhitarist heritage to be viewed not as an isolated historical phenomenon, but as a translational practice that can be integrated into contemporary theoretical discussions. From this perspective, it can be suggested that certain approaches in linguistic translatology provide an opportunity to describe and systematize, in a new light, principles that were present in various forms within the Mekhitarists' translational practice. At the same time, this does not imply that the Mekhitarists' activities were shaped within the logic of linguistic translatology or that they directly prefigured subsequent theoretical models. Rather, it concerns certain functional and methodological parallels between approaches formed under different socio-historical conditions.

In this regard, the comparative examination of Mekhitarist translational principles and the Soviet linguistic school does not aim to present them as a single unified or continuously evolving theoretical system. Instead, it is an attempt to reveal, through comparative analysis, how translational approaches formed in different historical and epistemological environments can respond to similar problems. Linguistic theory is viewed here not as the ‘scientific culmination’ or ‘validation’ of the classical philological tradition, but as one of the possible analytical tools through which the Mekhitarists' experience-based observations can be described more systematically, while preserving their historical and cultural peculiarities.

Thus, one of the primary points of comparison between the Mekhitarists and the Soviet school can be seen in the problem of functional-stylistic equivalence. While linguistic translatology offers specific tools for the analysis of textual layers, the Mekhitarist tradition provides concrete examples of interpreting these issues. This comparison allows translation to be viewed not merely as a relationship between linguistic systems, but as a process involving cultural, aesthetic, and cognitive challenges. From this viewpoint, linguistic translatology can be perceived as one of the possible modes of analyzing the classical philological tradition, without the pretension of replacing it or subsuming it into a single theoretical system.

4. Conclusion

This study makes it possible to consider the Mekhitarist translation tradition and Soviet linguistic translation studies as distinct, yet in certain respects comparable, approaches within the history of translation thought.

An examination of the tradition of Soviet translation studies alongside the Mekhitarists' translation practice, commonly characterized as humanistic-philological, reveals a number of points of intersection. The Mekhitarists' principles of "closeness to the original" and "stylistic propriety" may be interpreted not only as aesthetic preferences, but also as approaches that, on an analytical level, are comparable to the theoretical formulations of equivalence and adequacy developed within Soviet linguistic translation studies.

Bagratuni's observations concerning semantic precision and the transmission of emotional nuances may be interpreted in light of such theoretical propositions as those advanced by Barkhudarov and Retsker. Similarly, Vinogradov's concept of the informational structure of the word may serve as an analytical framework through which the Mekhitarists' approach to the semantic multilayeredness of the translated unit can be interpreted. This makes it possible to examine their consistent efforts to reproduce not only the denotative, but also the connotative and background layers of the source text, which may be viewed as conscious attempts to ensure translational equivalence.

An examination of Ghazikian's critical observations suggests that the assessment of translation quality within the Mekhitarist school was grounded in a systematic analysis of errors and inaccuracies arising from translation practice itself. His distinction between "errors" and "inaccuracies," as well as his detailed discussion of additions and omissions, is functionally comparable to the analytical approaches formulated in various branches of linguistic translation studies, including the Soviet school.

The Mekhitarists' translation experience represents material shaped by the practical resolution of translational problems, whereas linguistic translation theory provides methodological tools for the structural description of comparable material. From this perspective, the comparative examination of Soviet translation studies and the Mekhitarist translation tradition constitutes an attempt to demonstrate that the solutions proposed for translational problems may reveal certain functional and methodological similarities that make it possible to theorize translation strategies found within different historical and cultural paradigms.

Overall, this comparative perspective may contribute to the view that linguistic translation studies do not replace the classical philological tradition, but rather offer one possible means of analyzing it. Such an approach makes it possible to regard the Armenian translation tradition as a complex and intellectually grounded practice capable of entering into contemporary theoretical discussions while preserving its historical and methodological autonomy.

The observations presented here may serve as a basis for further research, suggesting possible directions for further research in the history of Armenian translation thought from new theoretical and methodological perspectives.

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DIPLOMATIC INTERPRETING IN SOCIALIST BULGARIA: SOVIET INFLUENCES, POLITICAL LOYALTY AND INTERPRETER-DIPLOMATS DURING THE COLD WAR

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Abstract: This article examines the development of diplomatic interpreting in socialist Bulgaria and its relationship to Soviet practices during the Cold War. Drawing on archival documents from Bulgaria's Central State Archive (CSA), memoirs, and visual sources, it analyses the institutionalization of diplomatic interpreting after 1944, the tension between political loyalty and linguistic competence in interpreter selection, and the emergence of interpreters as trusted political mediators. The study argues that diplomatic interpreters occupied hybrid positions at the intersection of linguistic expertise, political reliability, and state service. It also demonstrates how photographs and memoirs can help reconstruct the roles of interpreters who remain largely absent from official diplomatic narratives. By combining Bulgarian and comparative Soviet evidence, the article contributes to the historiography of diplomatic interpreting in Eastern Europe and to broader discussions of interpreter agency and visibility.

Keywords: diplomatic interpreting; interpreter-diplomats; Socialist Bulgaria; political mediation; interpreter visibility; Cold War diplomacy

1. Introduction

The history of diplomatic interpreting in Eastern Europe during the Cold War remains unevenly explored. While considerable attention has been devoted to major diplomatic conferences, international organizations, and Soviet interpreters, the development of interpreting institutions and practices in smaller socialist states has received comparatively little attention. This imbalance has created what Santoyo Mediavilla (2006) describes as 'blank spaces' in translation history. Bulgaria constitutes one such case. Despite its strategic position within the Soviet sphere of influence and its active participation in international diplomacy after the Second World War, the history of Bulgarian diplomatic interpreting has remained largely absent from Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS).

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This article examines the institutional development, professional practices, and ideological dimensions of diplomatic interpreting in Socialist Bulgaria from the late 1940s to the 1980s. Adopting a comparative perspective inspired by recent work in Comparative Translation and Interpreting Studies (Tyulenev and Zheng 2017; Van Doorslaer 2017), it explores the relationship between Bulgarian practices and Soviet models of interpreter recruitment, training, and professional identity.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the interpreter's role as a political and cultural mediator rather than a neutral linguistic intermediary (Roland 1999; Baer 2014; Fernández-Sánchez 2019). Research on Soviet interpreters has shown that political reliability and institutional trust often mattered as much as linguistic competence in determining access to high-level diplomacy (Rogatchevski 2019). The Bulgarian evidence reveals similar dynamics. Following the political transformations of 1944, new diplomatic institutions and language-training programs developed within a framework that emphasized political reliability alongside professional expertise. For much of the socialist period, diplomatic interpreters remained largely self-taught, although more systematic forms of professional training emerged after the establishment of the Union of Bulgarian Translators in 1974. A 1977 one-month course for simultaneous interpreters stressed the need to cultivate both professional competence and ideological commitment, reflecting contemporary perceptions of interpreting as part of the broader ideological confrontation between East and West (Dankov 1977: 37–39). In the same report, interpreters were described as indispensable yet often overlooked participants in high-level negotiations, contract discussions, conferences, and other forms of international exchange, underscoring both their practical importance and their frequently invisible position within official narratives. Archival sources likewise reveal persistent tensions between ideological loyalty and linguistic competence, while also highlighting the emergence of interpreters as trusted intermediaries between state authorities and foreign interlocutors.

The article addresses three questions: how diplomatic interpreting was institutionalized in Socialist Bulgaria after 1944; how political loyalty and linguistic competence shaped the recruitment and evaluation of interpreters; and how interpreter-diplomats negotiated their roles as language specialists, state representatives, and political confidants. Drawing on archival documents, memoirs, and visual sources, the study argues that diplomatic interpreting under state socialism cannot be understood solely as a matter of linguistic transfer. Rather, interpreters occupied a hybrid position at the intersection of professional expertise, political trust, and state service.

2. Rebuilding Diplomatic Interpreting after 1944

The institutional development of diplomatic interpreting in Socialist Bulgaria cannot be understood separately from the broader political transformation that followed the events of September 1944. The establishment of a communist regime brought not only a radical reorganization of the country's political institutions but also a profound restructuring of the diplomatic apparatus (see e.g. Statelova and Tankova 2002; Lilkov and Hristov 2019). As in other countries incorporated into the Soviet sphere of

influence, significant parts of the pre-war political and administrative elite were replaced by new cadres whose legitimacy rested primarily on political commitment rather than professional experience.

This transformation had important consequences for diplomatic communication. Before 1944, Bulgarian diplomacy relied on a relatively small but experienced corps of diplomats educated in foreign languages and accustomed to operating within the conventions of European diplomacy. The political changes that followed disrupted established patterns of recruitment and professional continuity. Some members of the pre-war diplomatic establishment were removed from office, while others became politically suspect because of their social origins, educational backgrounds, or associations with the previous regime. Among them were Dimitar Shishmanov (1889–1945), a diplomat, writer, and polyglot educated at the University of Geneva (Shishmanov 1995), who was sentenced to death by the People's Court[1], and Stefan Bochev (1910–2002), a diplomat and journalist who was dismissed from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, imprisoned, and later interned in the Belene labour camp (Bochev 1999, 2009). The new state therefore faced the task of rebuilding its diplomatic institutions while simultaneously creating a new generation of personnel capable of representing Bulgaria abroad.

The shortage of qualified foreign-language specialists was particularly acute. During the immediate post-war years, the authorities required increasing numbers of interpreters, translators, and multilingual officials to facilitate contacts with the Soviet Union, other socialist countries, and international organizations. International youth brigades constituted one of the earliest environments in which interpreters were recruited and deployed on a significant scale. Archival records document 1,589 foreign volunteers from more than a dozen European countries participating in brigade activities in 1948 alone (CSA–Sofia, Fund 1053, Inventory 1, File 1484, p. 1), creating a substantial demand for multilingual mediation. Because these projects brought together Bulgarian and foreign participants, they created a growing demand for multilingual personnel and generated extensive documentation concerning interpreter recruitment and evaluation.

The gradual expansion of Bulgaria's international activities during the 1950s and 1960s further increased demand for qualified interpreters. Participation in international organizations, state visits, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic negotiations required personnel capable of operating in multilingual environments. Consequently, interpreting became progressively institutionalized within state structures. In this respect, the Bulgarian experience closely resembled developments in the Soviet Union, where interpreters occupied positions closely connected to the political and diplomatic apparatus (Roland 1999).

The reconstruction of diplomatic interpreting after 1944 therefore involved more than the replacement of personnel. It required the creation of new recruitment channels, training mechanisms, and institutional structures capable of supporting Bulgaria's

[1] Unlike the multilingual proceedings at Nuremberg, the Bulgarian People's Court conducted its proceedings in Bulgarian and did not require institutionalized interpreting arrangements.

expanding international engagement. These foundations would continue to shape the profession throughout the socialist period.

3. Political Loyalty versus Linguistic Competence

One of the most striking findings emerging from the Bulgarian archival material concerns the relationship between political loyalty and linguistic competence in the recruitment, evaluation, and professional development of interpreters. Although both qualities were officially valued, the available evidence suggests that political reliability frequently occupied a privileged position, particularly during the formative decades of the socialist regime.

This tension became visible already in the international youth brigades of the late 1940s, where interpreters were assessed not only on language skills but also on political reliability and ideological engagement. Maria Daskalova, a medical student with knowledge of German, was described as a "good interpreter" yet criticized for "naivety," insufficient "vigilance and political acumen," and for interpreting "mechanically" while "never add[ing] anything of her own" (CSA, Fund 1053, Inventory 1, File 1489, pp. 2–4). Such assessments suggest that interpreters were expected to exercise political judgment as well as linguistic competence and that political considerations often received greater attention than interpreting abilities.

The archival record also reveals the limitations of a recruitment system that prioritized political reliability over professional qualifications. Reports occasionally criticized interpreters whose linguistic competence did not correspond to the needs of the task. In the summer of 1948, for example, Lora Manoah, a medical student with knowledge of French, Italian, and German, was assigned to the Albanian brigade and subsequently criticized for not knowing Albanian and being unable to perform her interpreting duties (CSA–Sofia, Fund 1053, Inventory 1, File 39, p. 4).

These tensions are particularly significant because they demonstrate that contemporaries themselves recognized the limitations of purely ideological selection criteria. While political loyalty remained indispensable, some reports increasingly emphasized the importance of professional competence and the need for better-qualified interpreters. An evaluation report on Vasil Kiranov, a heavily criticized interpreter assigned to the Czechoslovak brigade, recommended that future recruitment prioritize candidates' language skills while treating "reasonable political alignment" as a secondary criterion (CSA–Sofia, Fund 1053, Inventory 1, File 110, pp. 55–57). The recommendation is noteworthy because it explicitly reversed the hierarchy that had often characterized early socialist personnel policies, suggesting that effective international communication required expertise that could not be replaced by ideological commitment alone.

The Bulgarian evidence therefore challenges simplistic assumptions about the relationship between ideology and professionalism under state socialism. The archival documents do not reveal a straightforward rejection of professional standards in favour of political criteria. Rather, they point to an ongoing process of negotiation between competing institutional priorities. On the one hand, interpreters were expected to

embody the political values of the socialist state and to function as trusted intermediaries in contacts with foreigners. On the other hand, the practical requirements of diplomacy, international cooperation, and multilingual communication created a persistent demand for genuine linguistic expertise.

Figure 1. *Wilhelm Filipov (centre) with Austrian Chancellor Josef Klaus (left) and Todor Zhivkov (right) during the Austrian state visit to Bulgaria, 1969.* Although not a diplomat, Filipov occupied a position of unusual proximity to political leaders as an interpreter, illustrating the trust and access that the role could entail. **Source**: CSA–Sofia, Fund 378B, Inventory 2, File 1, p. 10.

A revealing example is provided by Wilhelm Filipov, a professor of German language and literature at Sofia University who served as interpreter during talks between Todor Zhivkov and Walter Ulbricht (Nikolova 2007)[2]. According to Filipov's memoirs, Zhivkov made a joke on a religious subject and insisted that it be rendered literally, reassuring the interpreter: "You will not be expelled from the Party — I said it, not you." The remark drew a clear distinction between the political responsibility of the speaker and the technical role of the interpreter. Yet the very need for such reassurance suggests that diplomatic interpreters were not perceived as entirely neutral intermediaries but as participants who shared part of the symbolic and political responsibility for what was said. Equally revealing is Filipov's response that he was not a Party member, prompting Zhivkov's humorous reply: "Is that why you are such a good interpreter?" Despite its light-hearted tone, the exchange points to a degree of professional autonomy among diplomatic interpreters. The case suggests that trust in diplomatic interpreters in socialist Bulgaria was not always contingent upon Party

[2] Although Filipov does not specify the date or year of the visit, he links the episode to Walter Ulbricht's visit to Bulgaria in connection with the expansion of bilateral treaty relations. This most likely refers to Ulbricht's official visit of 6–10 September 1967, during which Bulgaria and the GDR signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (CSA–Sofia, Fund 117, Inventory 30, File 23).

membership and that professional authority could derive primarily from linguistic and cultural expertise (**Fig. 1**).

A comparable tension can be observed in studies of Soviet diplomatic interpreting. Research on Soviet interpreters has shown that political trust was often a prerequisite for access to senior political leaders and sensitive diplomatic negotiations (Roland 1999; Rogatchevski 2019). Yet the same studies also demonstrate that interpreters who achieved lasting professional success typically combined political reliability with exceptional linguistic competence. The Bulgarian case suggests a similar pattern. Political loyalty may have opened the door to positions of responsibility, but successful performance ultimately depended upon professional skills that could not be reduced to ideological commitment.

The persistence of this tension can also be traced in later decades. Training initiatives associated with major international events, including youth festivals and other forms of international exchange, continued to emphasize the political responsibilities of interpreters. Lectures devoted to ideological vigilance, contacts with foreigners, and questions of state security existed alongside efforts to improve language training and interpreting techniques. Such training programs (e.g. CSA–Sofia, Fund 1053, Inventory 9, File 102, pp. 17-21; CSA–Sofia, Fund 1053, Inventory 9, File 110, pp. 17-18) reflected the dual expectations placed upon interpreters as both language professionals and politically reliable representatives of the state.

The Bulgarian archival evidence points to a distinctive model of diplomatic and political interpreting in which professional expertise and ideological loyalty were organized within a hierarchical relationship. Political reliability frequently served as the primary condition for recruitment and advancement, while linguistic competence remained essential for effective performance. As a result, interpreters occupied positions that blurred the boundaries between linguistic mediation, political representation, and state service. The Bulgarian case thus illustrates how the history of interpreting can illuminate broader questions of expertise, trust, and political power in socialist states, where international communication required a constant balance between political control and professional competence.

4. Interpreter-Diplomats and Political Mediation

The archival and memoir evidence examined in this study suggests that diplomatic interpreters in Socialist Bulgaria occupied a position that extended well beyond linguistic mediation. Their responsibilities, access to political leaders, and participation in high-level diplomatic encounters placed them within a broader category that may be described as interpreter-diplomats. In this role, interpreters functioned simultaneously as language specialists, political confidants, and representatives of state interests. The Bulgarian case thus supports Roland's (1999) argument that diplomatic interpreters frequently occupy hybrid positions in which linguistic expertise and political trust become inseparable.

The emergence of interpreter-diplomats was closely connected to the institutional environment of the socialist state. Access to senior political figures required not only

linguistic competence but also a high degree of personal and political reliability. Interpreters often participated in confidential meetings, accompanied delegations during foreign visits, and became witnesses to discussions that remained inaccessible to most officials. Their work therefore depended upon relationships of trust that transcended ordinary professional qualifications.

One illustrative example is provided by the career of Serafim Serafimov. His early experience as a brigade interpreter during the post-war period was followed by a distinguished diplomatic career that eventually placed him in direct contact with major international figures (**Fig. 2**). At the age of twenty-two, Serafimov was recommended through Communist Party channels for a French-language course in Sofia designed to prepare future diplomatic personnel. Upon completing the course, he joined the Human Resources Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was subsequently posted to the Bulgarian legation in Paris. During this period, he also served as a French interpreter for Swiss volunteers participating in a youth brigade in Bulgaria in 1948. Serafimov's trajectory demonstrates how interpreting could serve as part of a broader pathway into the diplomatic establishment. Rather than constituting a profession separate from diplomacy, interpreting often functioned as one of the mechanisms through which politically reliable and linguistically skilled individuals entered the structures of international representation. The continuity between post-war cadre formation and later diplomatic service is already visible in Serafimov's 1948 personnel evaluation. While noting his insufficient command of French, the report praised him as hardworking, intelligent, observant, modest, and politically astute (CSA–Sofia, Fund 1053, Inventory 1, File 1487, p. 22). The assessment suggests that political reliability and personal qualities were regarded as indicators of future diplomatic potential even when linguistic competence remained imperfect.

Figure 2. *Serafim Serafimov and Todor Zhivkov on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, September–October 1960*. The image captures Serafimov early in a career that combined interpreting and diplomatic service. **Source**: CSA–Sofia, Fund 378B, Inventory 2, File 371, p. 74.

The memoirs of Bulgarian diplomatic interpreters provide further evidence of this hybrid role. Ivan Boev, who served as one of Todor Zhivkov's principal Russian interpreters in the period 1979-1989, repeatedly emphasizes the importance of political trust in his professional life (Boev 2011). His recollections suggest that interpreting at the highest political level required more than technical competence. The interpreter was expected to understand political context, anticipate communicative difficulties, and contribute to the successful conduct of diplomatic encounters. Such expectations were not unique to Bulgaria. Similar observations appear in the memoir literature of Soviet interpreters, particularly in accounts describing the work of Vladimir Pavlov (2000), Viktor Sukhodrev, Oleg Troyanovsky, and Valentin Berezhkov with Soviet leaders.

The relationship between Todor Zhivkov and his interpreters offers particularly revealing insights into contemporary expectations concerning the interpreter's role. Memoirs describe situations in which Zhivkov prepared interpreters for his speeches containing culturally specific references, idiomatic expressions, or Bulgarian proverbs that would present difficulties in translation (Nikolova 2007). These accounts indicate an awareness that successful communication depended upon cooperation between speaker and interpreter rather than upon mechanical linguistic transfer. They also suggest that interpreters were expected to exercise independent professional judgment when confronted with communicative challenges.

An even more revealing example concerns a conversation recalled by the Arabic interpreter-diplomat Kiryak Tsonev during a meeting between Todor Zhivkov and Muammar Gaddafi in Tripoli (Tsonev 2005: 202–205). According to Tsonev, members of the Bulgarian delegation had been instructed to avoid language associated with madness or mental instability in their dealings with the Libyan leader. During the meeting, however, Zhivkov asked Gaddafi whether he was aware that certain Western politicians referred to him as a "mad colonel." Recognizing the potential diplomatic consequences of translating the expression literally, Tsonev rendered it in a more neutral form, referring instead to an "extremist colonel," a formulation that, according to his memoirs, pleased Gaddafi. He later informed Zhivkov of the modification and explained the reasons for his decision. Rather than criticizing the intervention, Zhivkov reportedly accepted the explanation and remarked that they were both diplomats and interpreters and were paid precisely because they knew what should and should not be translated literally. Whether recalled exactly or retrospectively reconstructed, the episode reveals contemporary assumptions about the interpreter's function. Rather than reproducing every utterance mechanically, interpreters were sometimes expected to evaluate communicative consequences, protect diplomatic relationships, and adapt messages to the requirements of political interaction. In such situations, fidelity was understood not as literal reproduction but as service to broader diplomatic objectives.

This understanding corresponds closely to recent scholarship emphasizing the active role of interpreters in political communication. As Baer (2014) has argued in the context of Cold War diplomacy, interpreters frequently acted as participants in political processes rather than passive transmitters of information. Their interventions, omissions, and reformulations could influence the course of communication even when they remained invisible within official accounts. The Bulgarian evidence provides further support for this interpretation.

At the same time, the position of interpreter-diplomat was characterized by a fundamental paradox. Interpreters occupied a place of considerable proximity to political power, yet their contributions often remained unacknowledged in public narratives. They participated in historic meetings, accompanied senior leaders during international visits, and facilitated communication between political systems, but official documentation frequently treated them as secondary figures. Their influence depended precisely on their ability to remain unobtrusive while exercising considerable communicative responsibility.

The careers of Bulgarian diplomatic interpreters therefore challenge conventional distinctions between diplomacy and interpreting. Rather than operating at the margins of diplomatic activity, interpreters formed part of the diplomatic process itself. Their authority derived not only from language competence but also from political trust, institutional loyalty, and an ability to navigate the complex communicative demands of international relations. The Bulgarian evidence consequently supports a broader understanding of diplomatic interpreting as a form of political mediation in which interpreters functioned simultaneously as linguistic experts and diplomatic actors.

Viewed from this perspective, interpreter-diplomats constituted an important component of the socialist state's international apparatus. Their activities illuminate the mechanisms through which political leadership communicated across linguistic and cultural boundaries, while also revealing the extent to which diplomatic communication depended upon individuals whose role cannot be reduced to translation alone. The Bulgarian case thus contributes to a growing body of scholarship that recognizes interpreters as active participants in the making of diplomatic history rather than merely its invisible facilitators.

5. Visibility, Memory and Archival Reconstruction

One of the central methodological challenges in the history of diplomatic interpreting is the paradoxical relationship between visibility and invisibility. Interpreters occupy positions of exceptional proximity to political decision-makers and often participate directly in significant diplomatic encounters. Yet their presence frequently remains obscured in official records, media reports, and retrospective historical narratives. As a result, historians of interpreting are confronted with a recurring problem: individuals who played indispensable roles in international communication often leave only fragmented traces in the historical record.

This phenomenon has been observed in studies of Soviet interpreting. Rogatchevski (2019) characterizes Soviet diplomatic interpreters as “semi-visible” figures whose professional activities placed them at the centre of major political events while simultaneously relegating them to the margins of official history. Their voices are often absent from diplomatic archives, and their contributions are rarely acknowledged in formal accounts of international negotiations. Similar patterns can be identified in the Bulgarian case.

The problem is particularly evident in the documentation of high-profile diplomatic encounters. Official records typically focus on political leaders, diplomatic outcomes,

and institutional actors, while interpreters appear only sporadically, if at all. Media coverage tends to reproduce the same hierarchy of visibility. Political figures occupy the foreground of historical narratives, whereas interpreters remain largely anonymous despite their essential role in facilitating communication. Consequently, the reconstruction of interpreting practices requires historians to move beyond conventional diplomatic sources and to employ a wider range of evidence.

Figure 3. *Donka Melamed with foreign visitors during brigade activities, Divotino, Bulgaria, August 1947*. Although photographs of several brigade participants who also served as interpreters survive, this appears to be the only currently identified image depicting a brigade interpreter in a context directly related to her mediating role. The photograph illustrates the partial visibility of interpreters in the visual record of international youth brigades. **Source**: State Archive – Pernik, Fund 1220, Inventory 1, File 130, p. 2.

Visual sources reveal a similar pattern of partial visibility. Photographs of several Bulgarian brigade participants who also worked as interpreters in 1946-1948 have survived. However, these images typically depict them as members of the brigade collective rather than in their capacity as linguistic mediators. To date, only one photograph has been identified that appears to depict a brigade interpreter engaged in an activity related to her mediating role: an image of Donka Melamed with unidentified foreign visitors at the construction site of the Pernik–Voluyak railway line (**Figure 3**). The identification of Donka Melamed is based on the author's analysis of archival photographs and documentary sources and was confirmed through an interview with her daughter, Galina Melamed. The rarity of such images itself is significant. While interpreters were present within official visual representations of the brigades, their specific role as facilitators of international communication was seldom foregrounded.

The problem of visibility becomes even more apparent in the documentation of high-profile diplomatic encounters. A revealing example is provided by the visit of Fidel Castro to New York during the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1960. The visit generated extensive international attention and has been discussed in numerous political and historical accounts. Yet the individuals who enabled communication between the Cuban delegation and its interlocutors are rarely identified. Official narratives concentrate on Castro, his meetings with foreign leaders, and the broader political significance of the visit. The interpreters who participated in these encounters remain largely invisible.

(a) Menia Martínez during Castro's meeting with Nikita Khrushchev

(b) Stella Avishay during Castro's meeting with Todor Zhivkov

Figure 4. *Interpreters at Fidel Castro's meetings in the Theresa Hotel, Harlem, New York, during the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 1960.* Neither interpreter is identified in most written accounts of these encounters. The photographs illustrate how interpreters often disappear from diplomatic narratives despite their visible presence during the meetings themselves. Their roles can be reconstructed only through the combined use of photographs, memoirs, and archival sources. **Sources:** (a) Private archive of Vladimir Lebedev, Khrushchev's personal assistant; (b) Archive of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agence, 60-1551-7. *Credit*: A. Alekseev.

Closer examination of available sources, however, reveals a more complex picture. Archival materials, memoirs, press reports, and photographs each provide partial and sometimes contradictory evidence regarding the individuals involved in interpreting. In some cases, memoirs mention meetings without identifying interpreters. In others, official documents record participants while omitting the linguistic mediation upon which communication depended. Photographic evidence can occasionally supply information absent from textual sources, allowing researchers to identify interpreters whose presence is otherwise undocumented.

The cases of Menia Martínez, a young Cuban ballet dancer educated in the Soviet Union (**Fig. 4a**), and Stella Avishay, a Bulgarian journalist from a Sephardic Jewish family whose first language was Ladino (**Fig. 4b**), illustrate the value of such an approach. Their roles do not appear in most written accounts of Fidel Castro's meetings with Nikita Khrushchev on 20 September and with Todor Zhivkov on 27

September 1960 at the Theresa Hotel in Harlem, New York. In his memoirs, Serafim Serafimov, who accompanied Todor Zhivkov to this meeting while serving as Second Secretary at the Bulgarian Mission to the United Nations in New York, provided a two-page account of the encounter but did not mention the interpreter (Serafimov 2003: 148–149). The identification of Menia Martínez and Stella Avishay is based on the author's comparison of photographic, memoir, and archival sources. Yet photographic evidence, memoirs, and other supplementary sources confirm their presence in encounters that required linguistic mediation. The images do not merely supplement the written record; they challenge assumptions created by archival silence. By documenting the physical presence of interpreters in spaces from which they later disappeared narratively, photographs reveal the extent to which diplomatic history is often written around interpreters rather than through them.

The reconstruction of interpreter activity in Socialist Bulgaria depends upon the combination of multiple categories of sources. Official archives provide institutional context but often omit individual interpreters, while memoirs preserve personal experiences that are largely absent from official documentation. Photographs and journalistic accounts offer additional perspectives but rarely explain interpreters' precise functions. No single source type is sufficient on its own. Only by triangulating archival records, memoirs, visual evidence, and contemporary publications is it possible to reconstruct a more complete picture of interpreting practices.

This methodological challenge helps explain the continuing importance of memoir literature for the history of interpreting. In the Bulgarian context, the memoirs of interpreters and diplomats such as Wilhelm Filipov, Ivan Boev, and Serafim Serafimov provide valuable insights into professional practices, communicative dilemmas, and relationships with political leaders that are difficult to recover elsewhere. Although such testimonies require critical evaluation, their value lies not in providing entirely objective accounts but in illuminating aspects of interpreting that official records frequently neglect. When combined with archival evidence, they constitute an essential component of historical reconstruction rather than merely anecdotal material.

The Bulgarian evidence suggests that interpreter invisibility should be understood not simply as an absence from history but as a consequence of how historical records are produced and preserved. Interpreters were often present at important diplomatic and international encounters yet remained marginal within official narratives. Significantly, this condition was recognized by contemporaries themselves. Writing in 1977, Dankov described interpreters as indispensable participants in negotiations, conferences, and other forms of international exchange whose contributions frequently remained unacknowledged. The cases of Donka Melamed, Menia Martínez, and Stella Avishay confirm this pattern. Like their Soviet counterparts, Bulgarian interpreters occupied an intermediate position between visibility and invisibility: essential to diplomatic communication, yet often absent from historical memory. Recovering their contributions therefore requires methodological approaches capable of integrating dispersed traces from different categories of evidence and, in doing so, helps broaden both diplomatic historiography and the history of interpreting, while demonstrating that patterns previously observed among Soviet interpreters also characterized diplomatic mediation in a smaller socialist state.

6. Conclusion

This article has examined the development of diplomatic interpreting in Socialist Bulgaria within the broader political and institutional context of the Cold War. Drawing on archival documents, memoirs, and visual sources, it has explored the reconstruction of interpreting after 1944, the relationship between political loyalty and linguistic competence, the emergence of interpreter-diplomats, and the problem of interpreter visibility. In doing so, it has addressed a largely neglected chapter in the history of linguistic mediation in Eastern Europe.

The Bulgarian case demonstrates that diplomatic interpreting under state socialism cannot be understood simply as a technical activity of linguistic transfer. Interpreters were expected to function simultaneously as language specialists, politically reliable representatives of the state, and trusted intermediaries in international relations. Political loyalty frequently served as a prerequisite for recruitment and advancement, yet the practical demands of international communication repeatedly underscored the importance of professional expertise. As a result, interpreters occupied positions that blurred the boundaries between linguistic mediation, political representation, and diplomatic service.

The evidence also highlights the agency of diplomatic interpreters. Rather than acting as neutral conduits, interpreters exercised professional judgment, adapted messages to diplomatic circumstances, and contributed to the management of political communication. At the same time, their contributions often remained obscured within official records, requiring reconstruction through a combination of archival, memoir, and visual sources.

From a comparative perspective, the Bulgarian experience reveals important similarities with Soviet models while demonstrating the value of examining smaller socialist states on their own terms. More broadly, the study contributes to efforts to integrate interpreters into the history of international relations by showing how expertise, political trust, and communicative mediation intersected in Cold War diplomacy. The history of diplomatic interpreting in Socialist Bulgaria thus offers a useful lens through which to understand the relationship between language, power, and international communication in the socialist world.

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SLAVIC FOLKTALES IN GEORGIA: TRANSLATION AND ADAPTATION

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Abstract: This article examines the translation and adaptation of Slavic folktales in Georgia from the Soviet period to the present, analysing their role as instruments of cultural transmission, ideological mediation, and literary transformation. Drawing on a multidisciplinary framework that combines translation studies, folklore studies, polysystem theory, and comparative literary analysis, the study investigates Georgian translations of Czech, Bulgarian, Polish, Slovak, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Yugoslav folktales published between the 1950s and the present day. Particular attention is paid to the ideological framing of Soviet-era editions, the function of Russian as an intermediary language, and the translation strategies employed in rendering culture-specific elements, mythological figures, magical objects, and narrative structures. The analysis demonstrates that translated folktales functioned simultaneously as vehicles of socialist cultural policy and as dynamic agents of intercultural dialogue, fostering enduring literary connections between Georgia and the Slavic world. At the same time, translators actively negotiated between foreignization and domestication, integrating Slavic narratives into Georgian folkloric and literary traditions while preserving their cultural distinctiveness. The study further examines contemporary theatrical adaptations, demonstrating that these narratives continue to circulate beyond their original ideological context as living cultural texts that undergo continual reinterpretation. By tracing the historical evolution of translated and adapted Slavic folktales in Georgia, the article argues that translation should be understood not as secondary reproduction but as an active process of cultural creation that reshapes literary systems, collective memory, and intercultural communication.

Keywords: Slavic folktales; Georgian translation; mediated translation; polysystem theory; Soviet cultural policy; folklore translation; cultural transfer; theatre adaptation

1. Introduction

Fairy tale collections are more than mere stories; they are mirrors of culture, reflecting the fears and values of the societies that tell them. In Georgia, the translation of Slavic folktales flourished during the Soviet period, revealing a complex interplay between artistic creativity, cultural exchange, and ideological oversight. These translations were produced under the shadow of Russian imperialism, within a framework that imposed

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political and social constraints. However, they also opened channels for dialogue, mutual understanding, and enduring cultural connections. Far from being passive reproductions of foreign texts, these tales became active agents in shaping Georgia's literary and folkloric landscape. Slavic folktales keep a strong presence in contemporary Georgia, engaging audiences without ideological constraints or censorship. The ongoing circulation, translation and adaptation of folktales for theatre and audio media reveal the ability of such tales to function as dynamic cultural texts, effectively negotiating linguistic, temporal and performative boundaries.

2. Historical and Cultural Context of Georgian–Slavic Literary Relations

Georgia and the Slavic regions (including Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the broader Balkans) share a rich tapestry of cultural and historical connections. These connections extend to various aspects, including politics, religion and literature. The relationship between Poland and Georgia can be traced back to the early seventeenth century, a period during which both countries confronted the expansion of the Ottoman Empire as a shared challenge (Woźniak 1998; Wojtasiewicz 2012). In the eighteenth century, both nations were threatened by the emergence of the Russian Empire. The shared struggles for independence and efforts to preserve national cultures under the pressures of the Russian Empire fostered early literary and intellectual exchanges, particularly during the Romantic period, when themes of national identity and cultural memory were emphasised. Georgian-Bulgarian relations have deeper historical roots, grounded in shared Byzantine influence. The Ukrainian-Georgian literary context, as part of the cultural and scholarly history of both nations, includes a substantial body of artistic, translated, and scholarly-critical literature. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a tradition devoted to the study of Georgian literature first began to take shape in Ukrainian academic writing (Mtchedeladze 2024: 533).

The project, which was highly productive and carried out in the 1960s, has been described as a kind of oxymoron – a "Soviet Erasmus." The programme facilitated exchanges among universities in the Soviet republics intending to foster mutual study of languages and cultures, as well as training new specialists. The origins of this exchange can be traced back to the establishment of a partnership between the universities of Kyiv and Tbilisi in 1964. The project was innovative in two respects: firstly, in its form; and secondly, in the new content it introduced into inter-university relations. The development of models of national culture occurred under the Soviet framework, through processes of reproduction and transformation, resulting in the infusion of national content into totalitarian structures.

The Ukrainian-Georgian dialogue has successfully overcome initial differences to establish a relationship characterised by mutual respect and collaboration. This was most effectively achieved when the relatively neutral field of translation studies assumed a dominant role in the research of literary relations. The Soviet period can therefore be viewed as a time of significant development of literary and cultural contacts between Ukraine and Georgia. However, it is also important to note that this

period coincided with the most extensive phase of literary dialogue conducted under the specific conditions of imperial oversight. The translations of classical works are a distinctive marker of the literary relations between Georgia and Ukraine during this period.[1] The Soviet period was a time of significant cultural exchange between Ukraine and Georgia, particularly in the literary sphere. However, it should be noted that this period also coincided with the most extensive stage of literary dialogue conducted under the specific conditions of imperialism (Chkhatarashvili 2015). This institutionalized university network and imperial oversight did not merely facilitate intellectual contact; it directly established the ideological parameters through which foreign folklore was filtered. This political conditioning becomes immediately visible when examining the subsequent wave of publication**,** paratextual framing, and thematic orientation of Slavic collections during the Soviet era.

3. Translation of Slavic Folktales into Georgian: Historical Development and Publishing Trends

The Soviet period introduced new structures and constraints that reshaped the literary and folkloric polysystem. Official cultural policy emphasized the doctrine of the "Friendship of Peoples," positioning translation not only as a moral duty but also as an instrument of ideological guidance (Mtchedeladze 2024: 534). Within this system, translated literature – including folktales – occupied a dual role: it was peripheral in aesthetic terms, yet central in its ideological function. Translation between Soviet republics was actively encouraged to promote unity, mutual understanding, and socialist internationalism, always under careful supervision. Folklore, in particular, was seen as a politically safe medium; its popular and flexible nature allowed it to be adapted to convey narratives of shared historical struggles and collective values.

Soviet Georgia thus became both a recipient and a producer of translated folklore, illustrating how subsystems of the cultural polysystem interacted dynamically. Publishing houses such as *Nakaduli*, *Sakhelgami*, *Ganatleba*, *Merani*, *Sabchota Sakartvelo* and others commissioned translations of Slavic folktales, often including introductions and commentary that framed the narratives in terms of socialist moral lessons or cross-cultural solidarity. At the same time, Georgian folklorists and translators were engaged in comparative studies, using Slavic materials to illuminate parallels with Caucasian narrative traditions. From a polysystem perspective, these activities demonstrate how translations and local folklore influenced each other, negotiating their position within the broader Soviet literary system while balancing aesthetic, cultural, and ideological priorities.

Since 1953, Georgia has published a series of Slavic and Eastern European folktales, reflecting sustained interest in regional folklore. The first of these was Karel

[1] Researchers of Ukrainian literature are achieving notable success in Georgia. The studies by Sophio Chkhatarashvili (2015) and Ivane Mchedeladze (2026) cover various stages in the history of Georgian-Ukrainian literary relations, as well as research on translation studies and socio-cultural issues. Tbilisi State University is home to the Institute of Slavic Studies, the Centre of Ukrainian Studies and the Centre of Polish Studies.

Erben's *Czech Folktales*, translated from the Czech by Elene Eristavi in 1953. Then, in 1954, followed *The Wishing Stone: Bulgarian Folktales*, translated by Ketevan Nadiradze. *Ukrainian Folktales*, translated by Valentina Khazalia published in 1957. Another edition of *Czech Folktales*, translated by Lia Eristavi, appeared in 1969, alongside *Russian Folktales, compiled, with introduction and notes by Elene Virsaladze* in 1968. The 1970s saw a proliferation of editions: *Polish Folktales*, compiled and translated by Givi Chichinadze with editorial oversight by Elene Virsaladze and colleagues, in 1970; *Slovak Folktales*, translated by Lia Eristavi, in 1971; *Belarusian Folktales*, with introduction and notes by Ksenia Sikharulidze, in 1972; *Yugoslavian Folktales*, in 1974, including the folktales from Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Macedonia; *Ukrainian Folktales*, compiled with introduction and notes by Ksenia Sikharulidze, also in 1974; and *Bulgarian Folktales*, translated by Natela Arjevanidze, Ketevan Nadiradze, and Manana Zubadalashvili in 1975. In the contemporary period, *Czech Folktales*, translated by Lia Eristavi, was published in 2013, and *Russian Folktales: Anthology*, translated by Tamar Babuadze with editorial and illustrative contributions, appeared in 2014.

4. Ideological Framing and Socialist Realism in Soviet-Era Folktale Translations

In the translated editions of Slavic folktales published in Soviet Georgia, the influence of socialist realism and the broader ideological directives of the Soviet cultural system is clearly visible, particularly in the prefaces and paratextual materials that accompanied the texts. These introductions consistently foreground social conflict, class struggle, and the moral supremacy of the working class, framing traditional folkloric narratives through the lens of socialist values.

The editor of the *Bulgarian Folktales* asserts that fairy tales reveal "the existence of good and evil," emphasise social inequality, and cultivate faith in the boundless potential of the working person, who inevitably triumphs over evil and dark forces (Bulgaruli zgaprebi 1975: 8). Kings, sultans, and rich landowners are depicted as exploiters who have become wealthy "through the sweat" of the working masses. Conversely, the hero, emerging from "the bosom of the common people," is seen as embodying strength, determination, and moral righteousness. Even individual episodes, such as the scene in *The Little Ploughman* where a magical calf returns the setting sun to noon to prolong the workday, are interpreted allegorically: labour is depicted as a transformative force capable of overcoming natural limits and producing human happiness (Bulgaruli zgaprebi 1975: 59-64).

A similar ideological framing is evident in the preface to the Georgian edition of *Czech Folktales*. In this context, the defining feature of the Czech tradition is characterized as "extremely simple democracy," expressed through narratives in which common people – peasants, artisans, soldiers, and labourers – are depicted as more intelligent, just, and courageous than members of the ruling classes (Chekhuri zgaprebi 1969: 8). The preface draws attention to the fact that ordinary protagonists often outmanoeuvre princes, counts, and even kings, and in some cases even ascend to royal

status themselves. It is important to note that such an ascent is not driven by the pursuit of power, but rather by the fulfilment of civic duty, the defence of the oppressed, and the opposition to injustice. The message is clear: human dignity and social value are not derived from factors such as birth, wealth, or status, but rather from factors such as labour, moral integrity, intelligence, courage, and modesty. Accordingly, the concept of happiness is presented as a consequence of personal virtue, rather than an arbitrary gift of fate.

These ideological readings demonstrate how Soviet-era translations functioned not only as vehicles of cultural transmission but also as instruments of political pedagogy. By reframing traditional folk narratives within the discourse of socialist morality, the prefaces sought to harmonise international folklore with Soviet ideals of class consciousness, productive labour, and the ethical primacy of the common people.

The translated collections typically encompassed the full range of folktale sub-genres, including magic tales, realistic tales, anecdotes and jokes, formula tales, and animal tales. Narratives displaying parallels with Georgian oral tradition, particularly those rooted in agrarian themes, were particularly welcomed. For illustrative purposes, we can consider the Bulgarian folktale entitled *The Little Ploughman*. In this narrative, the son of a poor widow is assisted by two miraculous calves, which are rewarded for their kindness. This motif bears a strong resemblance to the Georgian folktale *Faithful Bulls*, in which two giant bulls assist their master by ploughing the field and lengthening the day by striking the sun (Ketelauri 1977: 89-97). Such correspondences demonstrate both shared archaic agrarian imagery and mutual narrative structures across Bulgarian and Georgian traditions. At the same time, Bulgarian folktales are characterised by their distinct national features, which ensure that – even when there are thematic affinities – they retain a recognisable cultural specificity.

The Magician and His Pupil provides a compelling case for the comparative study of Slavic and Georgian folktales and corresponds to ATU 325, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. This tale type, which is widely attested across Eurasian traditions, depicts a pupil who acquires magical knowledge and ultimately confronts a malevolent or unscrupulous teacher (Öztürk 2025: 94; Troshkova 2019: 1022; Uther 2004). This narrative exemplifies the motif of magical transformation and clever resourcefulness, characteristic of the "Helpful Animals" or "Magic Object" types in folklore, and illustrates the interplay of cunning, loyalty, and magical agency in Slavic fairy tales. The Georgian folktale *Master and Pupil* chronicles the experiences of a peasant's son who, unbeknownst to him, is placed under the tutelage of a sinister master (Wardrop 1894: 2-5).

A comparison of the Czech and Georgian versions of the tale about a young man learning magic from a powerful mentor highlights both universal motifs and culturally specific variations. In the Czech tale, the hero feigns illiteracy in order to master transformations into animals and birds, leveraging his magic for practical gain through market trickery, ultimately resulting in a magical ring that secures his marriage. The narrative places significant emphasis on social interaction, everyday cunning, and the role of incidental helpers. In contrast, the Georgian tale focuses on epic confrontation with evil: the hero trains under the devil-teacher Vakhraca, employs complex sequences of transformations to defeat his opponent, and returns home to a peaceful

life. Trade and social manoeuvring are secondary considerations. Both versions share motifs of apprenticeship, magical mastery, and the use of transformations for personal benefit and protection. However, cultural context shapes their emphases. Czech storytelling is characterised by its emphasis on practical ingenuity and social astuteness. In contrast, Georgian storytelling places greater emphasis on epic conflict and moral triumph.

These two examples illustrate how the cross-cultural transmission of Slavic folktales in Georgia not only preserves core narrative structures but also allows local adaptations to reflect Georgian cultural values, social norms, and narrative preferences. This clearly illustrates the interplay between the universality and specificity of folk narratives in terms of circulation.

The examination of Slavic folktales translated into Georgian demonstrates a multifaceted process of cultural transmission, in which narrative content, ideological framing and local resonances intersect. Translations not only made these stories accessible to Georgian audiences but also mediated them through the lens of Soviet socialist realism, emphasising social justice, labour, and the moral virtues of common people. Prefaces and editorial commentary reinforced these themes, highlighting class consciousness, civic duty, and the ethical rewards of hard work and integrity. At the same time, the tales themselves maintained universal folkloric motifs, such as magical helpers, heroic quests and triumph over adversity. This allowed them to resonate across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

5. Mediated Translation and the Cross-Cultural Transmission of Folktales

The circulation of translated fairy tales in Georgia provides a particularly illuminating example of mediated or secondary-language transmission. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, Eastern European folktales enjoyed remarkable popularity in Georgia**.** Yet it was precisely Russian, functioning as a mediating linguistic channel, that facilitated the wide reception of Slavic and Eastern European narratives. Russian served as the primary conduit through which children's literature, theatrical repertoires, and illustrated editions reached Georgian readers.

A significant body of recent scholarship reconsiders the notion of 'mediated' or 'indirect' translation, emphasizing that translations filtered through another language, culture, or adaptation should not be viewed as diminished or secondary versions of an 'original.' One influential contribution is the discussion of mediated translations as independent re-creations, which contribute to the ongoing variability of fairy tales. In this approach, translation is not a transparent mechanism of linguistic transfer but a generative, interpretive, and culturally embedded act. Such perspectives are particularly productive for fairy-tale studies, where many narratives lack a stable "authoritative" version, exist in multiple variants, and circulate fluidly across oral and literary channels.

In the study by Alvard Jivanyan, mediated translations (whether interlingual, intralingual, or intersemiotic) are regarded not as inferior approximations of an "original," but as independent re-creations that contribute to the continued afterlife and

variability of fairy-tale texts. This approach challenges the conventional notion of translation as a straightforward process of linguistic transfer, instead emphasising its role as a complex, interpretive, and culturally influenced act. In that sense, mediated translation becomes a natural part of fairy-tale dynamics — not an exception, but often the norm (Jivanyan 2024: 45).

A recurring theme in the literature on fairy tale translation is the challenge of preserving or negotiating cultural and literary equivalence, especially in translations intended for children's readership. Piro Tanku emphasises that fairy tale translation involves more than just transferring language; it is also about transferring cultural worldviews. Translators must navigate cultural differences in norms, social assumptions, and imagery, adapting narrative and linguistic features so that the tales remain accessible, meaningful, and appropriate for the target audience (Tanku 2013: 469).

The complexity of the text increases with the inclusion of culture-specific elements, including folkloric motifs, mythical real characters, idioms, archaic or regional language, and symbolic references. Many of these elements may not have direct equivalents in the target language. As demonstrated in a recent study on German fairy tales, translation of such "realities with linguo-cultural specificity" often compels translators to choose among strategies such as generic matching, functional analogy, calibration, or transcription (Karpiuk et al. 2023: 84). Consequently, the process of mediated translation often involves a degree of cultural negotiation, whereby certain features are adapted to the target culture, others are retained in their original form, and some are hybridised. This dynamic interplay can have a significant impact on the interpretation of the narrative, its register, and its cultural impact.

Another important dimension is the intersection between translated literary tales and oral narrative traditions**.** While written translation is one medium, these translations often feed into oral re-tellings, local adaptations, and folklore repertoires — thereby blurring the lines between 'literary' and 'folk.'

As pointed out in a chapter of *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*, translation, retelling, and adaptation of fairy and folk tales for children often overlap; what we call "translation" can be a form of adaptation and retelling, not simply conversion. This applies especially when tales travel across languages and cultural contexts: what emerges may become part of a new oral tradition, mediated through successive retellings (Inggs 2018).

A broader conception of mediated translation extends beyond direct interlingual transfer to include various forms of cultural mediation undertaken by folklorists, bilingual storytellers, and ethnographers. Oral narratives may be recorded, transcribed, translated, and occasionally adapted before entering another linguistic and cultural environment. Especially in bilingual and diasporic contexts, these processes represent legitimate forms of textual transmission and should be understood as part of the broader continuum of mediated translation.

This perspective is particularly relevant when studying the cross-cultural movement of tales, their integration into local folklore repertoires, and the dynamic evolution of story types. Mediation and retelling do not simply exist as translations, but as part of living oral-literate circulation, blending literary origin, translator intervention, and oral adaptation.

The examples of cultural domestication are clearly observable in the rendering of magical objects and supernatural motifs. In Bulgarian folktales, the motif of the wishing object is often represented by the *вълшебният пръстен* – magic ring. In the Georgian translation, the term is rendered as 'natvristvali' – wishing stone. This is a well-known magical object in Georgian folklore. It is associated with the fulfilment of wishes and supernatural assistance. Instead of preserving the original form of the magical ring, the translator substitutes it with a culturally familiar equivalent, thereby relocating the narrative into a symbolic framework readily recognisable to Georgian readers. A comparable adaptation occurs in the translation of the Bulgarian concept of *жива вода* – water of life, which is rendered as 'ukvdavebis tskali' – water of immortality. Despite the fact that both expressions refer to a miraculous substance capable of restoring life and overcoming death, the Georgian term emphasises immortality rather than revival, reflecting local mythological conceptions of supernatural power.

6. Translation Strategies in the Georgian Reception of Slavic Folktales

When analysing and evaluating a translation, it is crucial to consider the genre, as this can significantly impact the interpretation and reception of the text. It is important to note that strategies that may be fully appropriate for translating a work of literary prose are not necessarily suitable for a fairy tale, and vice versa. Within the broader category of fairy tales, distinctions must be made between folk tales and literary tales, each of which demands a different stylistic and interpretive approach.

In the field of Georgian scholarship, Germanist Dali Panjikidze (1937-2018) and Slavist Giorgi Tsibakhashvili (1921-2013) have both made significant contributions to the study of Georgian translation theories, practices and stylistics. Their in-depth analyses, especially those of translations from Slavic traditions, identify the key stylistic challenges in the genre and propose evaluation criteria for translating fairy tales. According to Panjikidze, the rhythm and intonation of the fairy tale constitute fundamental stylistic markers that differentiate it from other forms of prose. Additional features characteristic of the genre include: simplicity and clarity of narrative structure; straightforward, unembellished figurative language; patterned repetition; the predominance of indirect speech; formulaic openings and closings; a clearly expressed national colouring; traditional character names and functional naming practices; and the integration of couplets or rhyming lines into the narrative. Translators must consider the aesthetic texture of the fairy tale and ensure that this is recognised and preserved. Maintaining the cultural and linguistic specificity of a folktale is as important in fairy-tale translation as in other forms of literary translation. However, this dimension is particularly vulnerable to loss, especially when translation occurs through an intermediary language. In the Georgian context, translations mediated through Russian frequently acquire a distinctly Russian stylistic colouring, even when the source tale originates from a different cultural environment. Ultimately, as with any literary genre, the challenges of fairy-tale translation must be resolved at the level of

style. Sensitivity to genre-specific stylistic features is therefore essential to producing translations that are both aesthetically coherent and culturally respectful.

Giorgi Tsibakhashvili emphasised several key issues that arise in the translation of fairy tales, the foremost being the relationship between the source text and its translation. In theory, an ideal translation is often defined as a complete transfer of the original work into another language while preserving all its essential features. These include its content, plot structure, characterisation, stylistic nuances, cultural colouring, linguistic particularities and narrative tone.

While such an ideal is undoubtedly aspirational, it is also, realistically, unattainable. In practice, every translation inevitably entails some degree of loss or transformation. Please note that certain elements may be omitted, altered or reinterpreted. It should be noticed that some loss is unavoidable and is due to the structural and expressive differences between source and target languages. However, other shortcomings may be subjective and depend on the translator's competence, interpretive choices, skill and sensitivity.

These divergences become even more pronounced when a text is translated not from the original language but from an intermediary translation – for example, Georgian translations of Slavic fairy tales rendered via Russian versions. In such cases, the Russian translator has already undertaken a complex interpretive task, attempting to understand and convey the essence of the original. The Georgian translation, in turn, reflects the broad, surface-level features of the tale – its storyline, plot sequence, proper names and selected lexical items. It should be noted that these components may not fully correspond to the primary source due to possible alterations, including but not limited to abbreviations, episode reordering, and both intentional and unintentional modifications of names that may have occurred during the initial translation stage.

Literary form is inseparable from the expressive resources of the language in which it is created; thus, when the linguistic fabric changes, so too does the aesthetic form. For this reason, Tsibakhashvili argues that analyses comparing a second-hand translation directly with the original are largely unproductive, as a genuine relationship between the two texts effectively no longer exists.

Instead, the reader is left with the impression of encountering a fairy tale, an impression created primarily by the narrative content, proper names, cultural markers and references to everyday life or historical context. It is important to note that translations made through an intermediary language are not without value. There is a possibility that they will continue to fulfil significant literary, educational or cultural roles. However, the value of these translations is inevitably more limited than that of translations made directly from the original, and the intermediary translation functions as an indispensable yet invisible mediator in the transmission process.

In the Georgian translations of South-Eastern European folktales, the rendering of fantastic creatures offers a particularly telling example of culturally motivated translation strategies. Rather than preserving the internationalized Latin or Slavic forms (e.g., *drago*, *zmei*, *zmija*), translators consistently employ the Georgian folkloric term *gveleshapi*. This choice reflects a conscious domesticating strategy: the foreign creature is not simply transferred as an exotic entity but is assimilated into the Georgian mythological system, where serpentine and aquatic dragon *gveleshapi*

("snake-whale," *gveli* – serpent, *veshapi* – whale) occupy a central position. Such decisions illustrate how translators navigate the tension between maintaining the cultural specificity of the source text and ensuring recognizability, resonance, and narrative coherence for Georgian readers.

In Slavic folktales, fairy-tale antagonists typically appear as dragons and snakes. Both scholars and ordinary readers acquainted with South Caucasian traditions readily perceive the typological parallels among these figures. The Slavic *zmei* family – Polish *żmij*, Belarusian *змей*, Russian *змей*, Bulgarian *змии*, Macedonian змев, Serbian змај, Croatian *zmaj*, Slovene *zmaj*, Ukrainian *змії* — belongs to a broader category of serpentine adversaries widely attested in the region. In the South Caucasus, dragons play a similar role. They are associated with water, danger, liminality, and the protection or violation of natural boundaries. The Georgian compound *gvel-veshapi* further underscores the hybrid nature of this creature, aligning with the Armenian *vishap* (Marr and Smirnov 1931: 98-101). It is evident that snake, worm and whale collectively constitute a unified semantic category, encompassing monstrous beings.

From a translation-theoretical perspective (Even-Zohar 1979), the substitution of 'drago' with 'gveleshapi' in Georgian folklore demonstrates that translators do not approach folktales as static texts, but rather as dynamic components of the target literary-folkloric polysystem. By selecting culturally embedded mythological terminology, translators can ensure the successful integration of Slavic narratives into the Georgian narrative universe. This process enables the translation of folktales to be made comprehensible and ensures that they are accepted as a natural and integral part of local storytelling conventions. This strategy demonstrates how translation – especially of folklore – operates not only at the lexical level but also at the deeper level of symbolic systems, genre norms and culturally shared mythological taxonomies.

The translation of magical birds demonstrates a similar process of cultural accommodation. Across Slavic folklore, the Firebird occupies a prominent position as a luminous, prophetic creature associated with both fortune and danger. Known under various names — including Ukrainian *жар-птúця*, Russian, Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian *жар-птица*, Croatian *žar-ptica*, Polish *żar-ptak*, Czech *pták ohnivák*, and Slovak *vták ohnivák* – the bird functions as an object of quest and wonder, frequently initiating the hero's journey. In the context of Georgian folklore, the 'paskunji' is a supernatural creature that bears a striking resemblance to the aforementioned bird. This powerful winged entity is said to possess the remarkable ability to transport heroes between different realms, thereby providing them with invaluable aid in overcoming formidable challenges that appear to be insurmountable. The firebird and the paskunji occupy a comparable position within their respective narrative traditions, as extraordinary birds connected with the otherworld, magical assistance, and the hero's quest. Consequently, Georgian readers encounter the Slavic firebird not as an entirely foreign mythological creature, but as a figure that can be interpreted through existing local narrative patterns and symbolic associations.

In contrast to the domestication of mythological terminology, Georgian translations generally preserve the Slavic personal and place names with a high degree of precision. This strategic use of foreignisation reflects a deliberate translational balance: while culturally specific supernatural beings are adapted to the Georgian mythological

system, proper names remain unchanged to maintain the narrative's geographic and ethnic anchoring. By retaining the original anthroponyms and toponyms, translators ensure that the cultural provenance of the tale remains visible, allowing Georgian readers to situate the story within its Slavic context even as certain narrative elements are assimilated into local folkloric conventions. This dual strategy underlines how translation deals with the conflicting demands of maintaining fidelity to the source culture and achieving functional integration into the target culture's literary polysystem.

7. Contemporary Stage Adaptations and the Afterlife of Slavic Folktales in Georgia

The continued presence of Slavic folktales on the Georgian stage demonstrates that their reception has extended beyond literary translation into the broader sphere of cultural performance. Theatrical adaptation represents a new phase in the intercultural transmission of folklore, where translated narratives are reinterpreted through dramatic performance, visual expression, and contemporary artistic language. Rather than replacing literary translation, stage adaptations complement it, illustrating how folklore continues to evolve while remaining accessible to new generations of audiences.

Current stage adaptations of Slavic folktales in Georgian theatres fulfil both educational and artistic functions, preserving traditional narratives while presenting them in forms that resonate with contemporary spectators. In addition to the scenic adaptations of Grimm's, Perrault's and Andersen's fairy tales, Georgian theatres also stage selected Slavic folktales. In 2012, performances based on Czech fairy-tale motifs were staged at the Theatre for Young Audiences, including *The Golden-Haired Princess,* directed by Anatoli Lobov. In 2019, the Tbilisi Theatre for Young Audiences hosted a performance based on Belarusian folktales, produced as a co-production with the Minsk Theatre for Young Audiences. The artistic director, Vladimir Savitsky, and the set designer, Nino Chitaishvili, staged the play, which was created using motifs of Belarusian folktales. The play was performed in two languages under the title *Shlyakhtich Zavalnia, or Belarus in Fantastic Narratives*. The play, based on the novel by Jan Barszczewski, combines a classical collection of gothic and folk horror stories drawn from the eerie tales and legends of northern Belarus, narrated by Zawalnia to his guests. The stage adaptation skillfully weaves together multiple narratives, focusing on individuals who, whether voluntarily or not, succumb to temptation, abandoning their principles in the pursuit of gold and power, and gradually descending into moral corruption.

A reinterpretation of the Slovenian folktale *The Twelve Months* was staged at the Marjanishvili Drama Theatre in Tbilisi in January 2025 as part of its Christmas programme. This well-known fairy tale, classified as ATU 480 *The Kind and the Unkind Girls*, is deeply rooted in the folk traditions of Southeastern Europe and exemplifies the extensive journey of a folktale across languages, media, and cultural contexts. It is evident from these contemporary productions that Georgian interest in Slavic folktales extends beyond shared moral values. In fact, it is also sustained by

emotional resonance, cultural familiarity, and the enduring appeal of its narrative charm. An analysis of these two aspects — translation and theatrical adaptation — indicates that fundamental themes, such as the hero's attainment of magical knowledge, the support of helpful animals, and the quest for the golden-haired princess, demonstrate remarkable resilience even as narrative elements, structures, and character portrayals are adapted. These transformations highlight the dynamic nature of folklore, where each retelling must balance the need to preserve tradition with the requirement to accommodate contemporary tastes, social norms and aesthetic expectations.

8. Conclusion

Translations and adaptations of folktales function as complementary channels that facilitate the transmission, transformation, and renewed appreciation of narrative traditions across cultural boundaries. The present analysis underscores not only the persistent appeal of particular tale types but also the complex mediating practices through which translators, editors, and dramatists negotiate relevance, coherence, and aesthetic impact. The dual nature of this lens, which is both textual and performative, serves to reinforce the prevailing perspective that folk narratives are mutable cultural artefacts. These narratives continually traverse temporal, linguistic and aesthetic spheres, while concomitantly maintaining their core ethical and imaginative functions.

Contemporary Georgian stage adaptations also demonstrate the enduring vitality of Slavic folktales, illustrating their ability to engage audiences both artistically and affectively, transcending the ideological frameworks that previously influenced their reception. In a cultural environment such as Georgia, where narratives circulate across multiple linguistic and semiotic thresholds, translated fairy tales should be understood not as secondary or derivative but as dynamic cultural productions that contribute actively to the shaping and ongoing evolution of literary, folkloric, and theatrical systems. This re-evaluation underscores the pivotal function of translation and adaptation in preserving folklore as a living, perpetually self-renewing cultural phenomenon.

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