

IMMORTALITY OF GENIUS¹

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A. Bekaryan, Bayron and Armenian reality (in Armenian and English), Yerevan, 2013, YSU Press, 403 p.

Armenian Byronist Anahit Bekaryan's book written with undisguised love and care for every fact of life and work of the great poet of the 19th century, George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) and addressed to both Armenian and English-speaking readers (it would be desirable to see its Russian edition as well) crowns the research of the Armenian cultural figures about the English poet, whose romanticism is as relevant and eternal as eternal are all the great achievements of the human spirit.

The book is interesting and valuable both in the coverage of materials related to the creative and life quests of the poet, and in its compositional structure: it contains materials about Byron's cooperation with the members of the Congregation of the Mkhitarists², Armenian epistles of the poet, his Armenological studies, as well as the Armenian literary and public thought about him. In essence, it is a mini-encyclopedia that contains a vast array of information about the part of the poet's life that was associated with the Armenian reality and left an unfading mark in its minds and heart.

The personality of Byron – “the ruler of the thoughts” of many generations - is one of the brightest and greatest figures in world literature by its intellectual power.

Byron's extraversion, his appeal to the fate of humanity predetermined the direction of his historical and literary and cultural interests. His attraction to the history and culture of other nations was also due to the search for new creative impulses.

Even before the poet's first journey in 1809-1811 he was attracted by the history, culture and literature of the peoples of the East. The second trip in the autumn of 1816 to Venice marked Byron's first acquaintance with the Armenian cultural figures, which is one of the richest spiritual arsenals of mankind. About the world-renowned Armenological centre at St. Lazarus Island and Byron's connection with them wrote both Armenian and foreign researchers, such as A. Avgerian, E. Pechikian, Kh. Dashtents, T. Moore, A. Morua, G. Jeffreson, D. O'Brien, A. Vinogradov and others. “Tired of the European civilization” the poet became friends with the members of the Mkhitarist Congregation and started taking lessons of the Armenian language from A. Avgerian, according to whom Byron was inspired to study the Armenian language due to the

¹ “Լրաբեր” հասարակական գիտությունների, 2014, N 2, էջ 330-334:

² The Mkhitarist Congregation (also spelled the Mekhitarists/Mechitarists) is an Armenian religious (Catholic) and cultural organization, founded by the Armenian scholar and statesman prelate Mkhitar Sebastatsi (1676-1749) in 1700, in Constantinople. In 1706, the Congregation moved to Methoni (Greece) and in 1717 settled down in Venice on the Island of St. Lazarus (p. 229).

desire to translate into English the works of Armenian historians, and in the opinion of geographer, historian and philologist, Ghukas Inchichian, Byron wanted to get acquainted with the treasury of Armenian poetry. Byron's cooperation with the Mkhitarists was very prolific and was crowned with the publication of an English-Armenian grammar textbook in 1817, and an Armenian-English grammar textbook in 1819 together with A. Avgerian. Byron was particularly interested in history, and according to L. Feuchtwanger's figurative expression he was trying to find there "not ashes, but flames", which determined the future of this or that nation. He translated into English some excerpts from "History of Armenia" by Movses Khorenatsi, "A Synodical Discourse" by Nerses Lambronatsi, two epistles by St. Paul to the Corinthians and the Armenian poem "The Byzantine Summer-House in the Straits of Constantinople" by Gh. Inchichian, which enabled the English-speaking readers to learn about the history and culture of the Armenian people who had made an undeniable and worthy contribution to the civilizational development of humanity (p. 223).

The book indicates that Byron's love towards Armenia and its culture was not one-sided. In the first half of the 19th century the poet's personality, his creative temperament, the range of interests could not leave indifferent the Armenian admirers of his talent. No iconic figure of the 19th century had such influence on his contemporaries as Byron with his cosmos of spiritual structure, existential need for knowledge and study of world culture. "Byronism" found its reflection in Armenian literature as well, since Byron's multidimensionality of thought and love of freedom were in tune with the representatives of the Armenian culture, echoing the national liberation aspirations of Armenians. In this sense, the Armenian "Byronism", as A. Bekaryan rightly states, occupies a special niche in the development of world "Byronism" (p. 336). And it is no coincidence that one of the first translators of Byron into Armenian - Ghevond Alishan - called him the best poet of the century. Great Tumanyan was so fascinated by Byron's poetry that he was taking English classes at the British vice-council Mourdad to be able to translate Byron's poem "The Prisoner of Chillon" from the original which he published in 1896 (pp. 308, 339). It is symptomatic that Smbat Shahaziz's poem "Levon's Grief" was written under the direct impression of the poem "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage".

Byron's genius was praised by such Armenian poets as Ruben Vorberian, Vahram Torgomian, Yeghia Pechikian, Marie Atmachian, Nairi Zaryan, Hrachya Hovhannisyan, Vahagn Karents and others.

Byron's life and fate, like all his work, full of rebellious love, searching, contradictions, social pathos - is, in fact, the matrix of English culture in the highest of its manifestations. And Anahit Bekaryan, carefully looking at the course of the life of the poet, draws up the vector of his creative and social relations, as reflected in his rich epistolary heritage as a cultural phenomenon in which literary and social realities of his era were refracted. Social and political twists and turns, the formation of aesthetic, philosophical and literary views and trends in Western Europe in the late 18th- early 19th

centuries, found a place in his letters and diaries which are a valuable historical and literary monument. This lyrical and philosophical document contains in particular 14 letters, dated to the years 1816-1821 and addressed to T. Moore and J. Murray and in essence is a declaration of love for the Armenian people and its centuries-old culture (p. 348). Byron's "Some Pages from the Letters", first published by the author of the book in 1986 and presented in this monograph in expanded form, are evidence of the invaluable role Byron played in the promotion of Armenian culture in Western Europe.

It is thanks to Byron's letters that the English-speaking reader drew information about the Venice Mkhitarist Congregation as the largest Armenological centre, formed in the early 18th century thanks to the selfless work of its members - A. Avgeryan, A. Gouver, S. Teodorian, S. Somalian et al.

Besides, as A. Bekaryan writes in the preface of her valuable and brilliantly written monograph, Byron's letters contain information about the formation of Armenology in Western Europe in the 18th-19th centuries, particularly in England and France. Suffice it to mention the names of the Orientalist Saint-Martin, Doctor of Medicine M. Bellaud, historian Le Vaillant de Florival who later became well-known Armenologists. The study of Byron's epistolary heritage sheds light on Armenian-European literary ties in the 18th-19th centuries.

The part of the book concerning the materials of Armenian periodicals devoted to the creative path of the English poet is read with genuine interest. For the first time the Armenian reader got acquainted with Byron's biography and works thanks to the publication placed in the magazine "Bazmavep" in 1846. About his work and depth of his intellectual quest articles were published in the literary-and-social and political magazine "Tsaghik", the Constantinople weekly "Meghu", the Tiflis newspaper "Mshak" and the magazine "Taraz".

According to Byron's perception poetry is the sense of the past and the premonition of the future. Driven by dreams, passion, craving for familiarization with the culture of other nations, the great romantic Byron headed for the future, and this explains the fact that the lines of the poet, born from mental stratification still evoke response in the minds and hearts of people. And the book by Anahit Bekaryan who from her student years admired his poetry that painted the world with new colors - the Armenian "Byroniad"³ can rightly be regarded as a historical and literary monument to Byron from the grateful Armenian nation.

***Translated from Russian by
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³ The Appendix of the book (pp. 361-375) comprises the photocopy of Byron's translations from Armenian chronicles, published in Venice in 1907, in the island of S. Lazzaro in the collection *Lord Byron's Armenian Exercises and Poetry* (in Armenian and English, pp. 18-53), as well as the poet's translation of separate excerpts from Inchichian's *The Byzantine Summer-House in the Straits of Constantinople* (Ամարաւոց Քիւրաւորեան) poem with the original text.