

## OSIP MANDELSTAM. THE POET AND THE TIME. HIS LIFE AND ARMENIA

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### **Abstract**

Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938) – a prominent Russian poet, art theorist, translator – takes a special place in the history of Soviet literature.

In the 1920–1930s, Mandelstam, being non-party man and not constantly being member of any literary association, tasted all the misfortunes that befell the intellectual class of his generation and a great many ordinary Soviet citizens; he faced repressions, he was arrested twice, was sent into exile where he died.

Mandelstam's name is closely related to Armenia and Armenian culture. His visit to Armenia (from May to early October, 1930) was life-changing for him. Under the indelible impressions of the biblical country, he wrote a collection of poems "Armenia" (1931) and an essay "Journey to Armenia" (1933). These pieces of art are among the best works in the Russian literature dedicated to Armenia.

There is rich literature on Mandelstam's life and art: memoirs of contemporaries, a great number of monographs, articles and publications. Nevertheless, there are almost no studies about Mandelstam in the Armenian language: the present article partially fills this gap.

**Keywords:** O. Mandelstam, N. Mandelstam, N. Bukharin, I. Ehrenburg, S. Ter-Gabrielyan, M. Shahinyan, Yerevan, Shushi, Tiflis, Ye. Charents, the subject of Armenia, «A voyage to Armenia»

В год тридцать первый	In the year thirty-one
От рожденья века	Since century appeared
Я созвратился, нет	I came from the run,
- Читай: насильно	-I was returned by fear,
Был возвращён	I came back again
В буддийскую Москву.	To Buddhist Moscovtown,
А перед тем	But what before that came
Я все-таки увидел	I saw it all around.
Библейской скатертью	The wealthy table ground
Богатый Арарат	With Ararat Great Mount,
И двести дней	And ten score days I spent
Провёл в стране субботней	In wealthy Sabbath Land.
Которую Арменией зовут.	Armenia is the Land. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mandelstam 2012: 151.

## Preface

The outstanding Russian poet Osip Emil Mandelstam holds a special place in the history of Soviet literature. In the 1920–1930s being a non-party man and outside of whatever literary union, he had tasted all the bitterness that befell the intellectuals of his generation and many rank-and-file Soviet citizens. He was persecuted, twice arrested, and died in exile: «He was an unusual ..., heavy ..., heart-breaking and a man of genius»<sup>2</sup>, – this was the way he was characterized by a notable Russian writer and literary critic V. Shklovsky. While the great poet A. Akhmatova made the following note in her memoirs: «That was a man who was a vagabond in his soul in the highest sense of this word and a poète maudit par excellence, which was fully substantiated by his biography. He had always been drawn by the South, the sea, new locations. And the testimony of his crazy love for Armenia is an array of immortal poems»<sup>3</sup>.

O. Mandelstam's name is largely associated with the country of Armenia and with the Armenian people. Travelling in Armenia for him had become fateful, since his remaining short life had stayed attached to Armenia and to the Armenian culture. Attachment that had been very dearly valued by the Russian poet.

There is a very extensive literary legacy covering the research of O. Mandelstam's life, activities and creative compositions<sup>4</sup>. The latter, however, is mostly concerned with the arrays of poems and «A Voyage to Armenia», a composition written in prose. Certain literary-historical events, related to Armenia, in-depth motivations and premises of his approaches with regard to the life of the Armenian people, etc. have never been detailed.

## O. Mandelstam's life, activities and creation.

The poet was born on January 3 (15) 1891 in Warsaw, to a family of a tradesman. In 1907 he finished the Tenishev school in St. Petersburg. His parents, concerned about his radical ideas leaning towards the SR party (Socialist Revolutionaries) sent him to Paris in September of that same year, and since mid-October 1908 he studied at the philological faculty at Sorbonne. During the summer he travelled in Europe with his family, visiting France, Switzerland, since Autumn 1909 to Spring 1910 for two semesters studied Roman philology, particularly Old French at philosophical faculty of the Heidelberg University, Romano-Germanic section. In early spring 1910 he took a trip for a short time to Italy and Southern Switzerland, and since July 21 to mid-October spent in the Zelendorf suburb of Berlin. It should be noted that the echoes of this travel, the architectural impressions, especially the Gothic Europe, run throughout his poetry.

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<sup>2</sup> Mandelstam 1991: 274–275.

<sup>3</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 6.

<sup>4</sup> See Fragility and fearlessness of life 2021: 13 (enumerated in the talk are the most important works published on Mandelstam); literary materials and biographies, «New Poems», commentaries, research works. Averintsev *et al.* 1990 (eds); Ivanova *et al.* 1991 (eds.); Vorobyova *et al.* 2001 (eds.); Mandelstam 2003; Mets 2005; Mandelstam 2012; Golovin 2016. Others see in footnotes of this article.

On May 14, 1911, Mandelstam was christened at a Methodist chapel in Viborg.<sup>5</sup> On September 10 of the same year he was admitted to the section of the Roman languages at Saint Petersburg University, Department of history and philology; however, he never finished the complete course.

In 1909, O. Mandelstam met the poets Viach. Ivanov and I. Annensky, became involved into the circle of poets grouped around the journal "Apollo". It was this journal that published (1910, N. 9) the initial five poems by O. Mandelstam showing an influence of symbolism. In 1912, the erstwhile notable writers N Gorodetsky, A. Akhmatova, O. Mandelstam, M. Zenkevich, U. Kuzmin, V. Narbut *et al.* integrated into a literary union «Poets' Workshop», published their slogans, whereby in 1913 in the Russian poetry, in contrast to mysticism, was formed a new literary modernistic stream – acmeism. Mandelstam's poetry of that period had been reviewed in the "Rock" collection (1913) published in 600 copies financed by his father (1913). At the start of WW I, in December 1914, he made an unsuccessful attempt to get fixed up in a military train as a nurse, then for two years he collaborated with the Union of Cities. He welcomed the October Revolution enthusiastically, but remained an «apolitical» poet. In 1918–1919 he worked at the Commissariat for Education headed by E. A. Lunacharsky as well as at other cultural and educational establishments. On May 1, 1919 he met Nadezhda Mandelstam (maiden name Khazina, 1899-1980),<sup>6</sup> his future life-long friend. Their separation lasted for eighteen months, in that period O Mandelstam visited the Crimea. He stayed there at the house of the poet M. Voloshin in Koktebel, from March to July 1920, following the famous discussion<sup>7</sup> he set out for Batumi, Tiflis (Georgia), then Moscow, Petrograd, where he lived at the House of Arts. In 1921 the Mandelstams were in Transcaucasia – Baku and Tiflis, in March 1922 they settled in Moscow. In 1922-1923 they lived in the house of Herzen<sup>8</sup> (presently the building of A. M. Gorky International Institute of Literature), at the «writers' hostel», also sheltering, incidentally, a number of literary establishments, including the writers' cafeteria. Mandelstam was given a second-rate "academic facility». In actual life, however, the poet had abandoned the literary «backyard», to spend the 1923–1924 winter in a hired room at Yakimanka Street. Subsequently, in 1924–1927, he lived in Leningrad and Tsarskoe Selo. In the period of uncompromising struggle among the literary groupings Mandelstam retained an independent position, resulting in his isolation within the literary domain, a blind

<sup>5</sup> We shall briefly not that «With Mandelstam the Christianity was mainly in his world vision, but it was mostly of a philosophical, rather than every-day character» (Mandelstam 1990: 43). On O. Mandelstam's approach towards Christianity and their commentaries by the Russian philologist and culturologist S. Averintsev see Averintsev 1990: 22–25; also Lekmanov 2003: 40–41.

<sup>6</sup> It will be noted that N. Mandelstam later in her «Memoirs» (1970) showed the tragic destiny of her husband – the two arrests and the years of exile, in «the second book» (1972) her life with the poet, the psychological and creative portrait of the latter, the literary environment of the 1920–1930's, etc. Also published was a book titled "Memories". In the article we mostly used her ideas and formulations, which undoubtedly were O. Mandelstam's thoughts as well.

<sup>7</sup>For details see Lekmanov 2003: 89–90.

<sup>8</sup> See Vidgof 2012: 117–186. The book gives a detailed account of O. Mandelstam's life and activities in Moscow.

intolerance with regard to the «attendant-writer». «At no time have I been contemporary to anyone», this first line of a poem written in 1924, has served as a multiple indictment against Mandelstam as an extra-political element torn off from actual life.<sup>9</sup> The poems of 1921-1925 are presented with a feeling of acute “rejection”. Related to this period are «Tristia» (1922, «Second Book»), 1923, and «The Noise of Time» (collections of self-biographic stories, 1925). Those were followed by a collection of “Poems” (1928) published with the help of N. Bukharin, chairman of Komintern and editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Pravda”.<sup>10</sup> It was the final intravital collection by Mandelstam and the story «Egyptian Stamp» (1928) which are distinguished by speculations on the intellectual crisis of the intellectual, who prior to revolution had lived on a “cultural rent”. It is to be noted, however, that in 1925–1929 Mandelstam kept mum: he never wrote a poem for five years, mostly edited books, produced about 25 reviews (on German and French book authors), did some work on translations from W. Scott, Charles de Coster, J. Roben, J. Duamel, R. Stevenson and other authors, wrote research works on E. P. Chaadaev, A. Viyoni, A.A. Chenie. Highly valued theoretically are the articles «The Word and Culture» and «On the Nature of the Word» (published in the collection «On Poetry», 1928).

However, the malicious and urban environment was plotting against the poet, even within the political blessings. Mandelstam’s quiet life was disturbed particularly by the well-known skirmish with the literary figure and translator A. Gornfeld<sup>11</sup> and by the feuilleton «Modest Literature or Blatant Hackwork» by D. Zaslavsky published against

<sup>9</sup> Mandelstam 2012: 357.

<sup>10</sup> The Russian political and administrative figure, member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, victim of the Personality Cult, N. Bukharin (1888–1938) extended large assistance to the intellectuals of the time. This is what was written on that point by his American biographer Steven Cohen: «He (Bukharin– A. Z.) facilitated the development of artistic and scientific achievement, and among the party leaders was a rear exclusion, being in good relations with such different people as Osip Mandelstam, Mikhail Pokrovsky, Maxim Gorky and Ivan Pavlov. ... The non-party intellectuals, both technical and creative ... had no reason to be apprehensive of him. He not only protected some, e.g., the poet Osip Mandelstam, but also had a tolerant attitude to and, if not as an ideologist, then as a human being, valued their creative efforts» (Coen 1992: 280). Incidentally, in 1927, August 10 N. Bukharin, perhaps, by request from Mandelstam, Artashes Khalatov with the following problem: «You, probably know our largest literary figure, poet O. E. Mandelstam. They do not let him publish his works in the State Publishing House. I am deeply convinced that it is wrong. True, he is not quite a mass-demanded poet. But he has and must have his significant place in our literature. I am writing this letter privately, since I think you will understand my intentions, etc. My request to you is to talk to O. E. Mandelstam «for a few minutes» or you could show him your enlightened assistance: Your Bukharin» (Lekmanov 2003: 123). Following that letter, matters start moving and “The Collection of Poems” is published. It is to be added that in 1928, when Mandelstam was informed, that some bank workers had been arrested and that they might be executed, he appealed to Bukharin and sent him the newly published mentioned Collection with the following dedication: «... each line of this book speaks on what you are going to do ... » (Vidgof 2012: 175. Averintsev 1990: 34). The verdict was cancelled.

<sup>11</sup> In 1928. The publishers of «Zemlya i fabrika» printed the novel «Till Oilenspiegel» by Charles de Coster. On the title page, Mandelstam was presented as a translator, while A. Ginsburg and V. Kariakin only edited the translations. Mandelstam was the first to report that to Gornfeld, demanding the publisher to disclaim which proves it to have been a mistake. However, Gornfeld goes out into the media with accusations, Mandelstam gives a response, and so on (see O. Mandelstam, op. cit., p. 370). According to Averintsev, “that conflict isn’t worth a damn” (Averintsev 1990: 35).

him in "Literaturnaya Gazeta" on May 7, 1929. Because of all that the frustrated Mandelstam abandoned the United Soviet Writers' Federation although he was supported by a group of outstanding prose-writers and poets sending a letter of complaint to the newspaper, meanwhile, the court also rejected the charges brought against the poet.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, they started to summon him for interrogations, as if in connection with the mentioned Gornfeldian story, however the questions were asked on the period spent «with the whites» in the Crimea, 1913. The matter received extensive public reverberations, which in the early 1930s became a subject of public scrutiny by the Supreme Control Organs of the Communist Party Central Committee.<sup>14</sup>

... Since Autumn 1929 to February 1930 O. Mandelstam worked in the newspaper «Moskovsky Komsomolets», leading the «Literary Page» and providing guidance to the young poets. In February a commission investigating the editorial work of the newspaper gave the staff worker O. Mandelstam the following testimonial: «May be employed as a specialist, however under supervision».<sup>15</sup> As a sign of complaint he left the editorial office and for some time worked at the newspaper «Vechernyaya Moskva».

The poet was wading through heavy emotional experiences, and all of a sudden, a miracle came about. The glowing and suffocating Moscow environment was replaced due to N. Bukharin interference in 1930 by a trip to Armenia since May to early October. Coming to Tiflis, he started after a considerable interval to write poetry. The latest works published in his lifetime were an array «Armenia» and the essay «A Travel to Armenia». «We came back from Armenia, and the first thing we did was to rename our friend (meaning Anna Akhmatova – A. Z.), – wrote O. Mandelstam. – All the earlier names sounded tasteless. Annushka, Anioota, Anna Andreevna. The latter one, of course, is for good. ... But the new name stuck to her, up to the latest days I have called her that new name, the same as she used to undersign her letters: Anoosh. The name Anoosh reminded us of Armenia, of which Mandelstam, as he wrote everywhere, never stopped dreaming».<sup>16</sup>

Having returned to Moscow from Transcaucasia, the Mandelstams tried to settle down in Leningrad. Again aided by N. Bukharin, they received an authorization, and up to January 7, 1931, they stayed in the rest home of the Scientists' Home Central Committee. In Leningrad, however, they did not find favor, since he was for some reason countered by Nikolay Tikhonov, Secretary of the Writers' Union. It was for this very reason that they applied to V. Molotov, the USSR Sovnarkom's Chairman with the problem of job and lodging, however, with no result. Since January 1931 to January 1932 they lived at random flats moving from one place to another.

<sup>12</sup> See details in Lekmanov 2003: 129–136. Also Mandelstam 1989: 414; Vidgof 2012: 195–197.

<sup>13</sup> Averintsev 1990: 35.

<sup>14</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 414.

<sup>15</sup> Lekmanov 2003: 138–139. As noted by N. Mandelstam, that «friendly» characteristic says that he belongs to the row of intellectuals, who can be allowed to work, but under control of party leadership. Anyway, the characteristic did not come to the liking of Mandelstam (Mandelstam 1990: 432).

<sup>16</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 77.

In 1931 O. Mandelstam wrote the most significant poems with the below-cited lines, seeming to provide an answer to all those critics, who for years condemned the poet to living a “museum” life lacking contemporary communication.<sup>17</sup>

Пора вам знать: я тоже современник,	You know me. I stand on modern ground
Я человек эпохи Москвошвея,	I am a man from Moscow Seamstress epoch,
Смотрите, как на мне топорщится пиджак,	Look at my jacket warping all around
Как я ступать и говорить умею!	Look how I step and hear the way I talk.
Попробуйте меня от века оторвать,	Just try to rip me from my age and time.
Ручаюсь вам – себе свернете шею!	I bet you, you will break your neck and spine.

In 1932–1933 the Mandelstams again dwelled in Gerzen’s house.<sup>18</sup> «It was full of all kinds of dregs and stool pigeons».<sup>19</sup> O. Mandelstam, still in the «Fourth Prose», which he dictated to his wife, in the winter of 1929–1930, wrote: «All compositions in world literature I classify into those written by permission and those written by no permission. The first cause disgust, the second one is fresh air. My wish is to spit first into the faces of the permitted writers, to hit their head with a stick and sit them around the table in Gerzen’s House to drink the police tea, every one of them holding a flask with urine analysis in his hand.

I would ban those writers from getting married and having children. How could they bring children into the world? After all, children have to go on with what we are, to utter our main word that stayed half-muted, in case when at least three generations of their fathers sold themselves to the pitted-face evil (he means Stalin - A.Z.)».<sup>20</sup>

... At this period the poet’s financial situation had somewhat improved, again due to N. Bukharin’s interference, he purchased a two-room apartment at Nashokin Lane of Moscow (presently Furmanov Street).

In November 1932 Mandelstam was staying at the rest-home TSEKUBU (Central commission for the improvement of everyday life of scholars) «Uzkoe». On November 10 he travelled to Moscow for one day, to attend a close evening dedicated to Mandelstam’s literary work at the Literaturnaya Gazeta editorial office.<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, the evenings were going on. On February 22, 1933 at Leningrad “Capella”, March 2 at the “House of Press”, March 14 at Moscow “Politechnical Museum”,<sup>22</sup> April 3 at Moscow Painters’ Club.<sup>23</sup> In 1933 Mandelstam wrote a literary-critical Essay «Conversations on Dante» (published in 1967), presenting his general views on poetry. In September he

<sup>17</sup> Lekmanov 2003: 5.

<sup>18</sup> Vidgof 2012: 283–338. On these pages there is a detailed account of Mandelstam’s life and activities in Moscow.

<sup>19</sup> Kuzin 1987: 141.

<sup>20</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 237.

<sup>21</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 409; Vidgof 2012: 325–326.

<sup>22</sup> See details in Vidgof 2012: 415–418.

<sup>23</sup> Lekmanov 2003: 158–159.

presented the complete essay to the top-level literary community at A. Akhmatova's apartment.<sup>24</sup>

However, the personality cult had already been taking shape, and the public, political, literary and cultural life was becoming suppressed. It was yet in December 1930 that Mandelstam wrote a poem entitled «Leningrad», the lines whereof: «My Petersburg, I do not want to die yet» and «And for the whole night only waiting for the dear guests», being its eloquent testimony. In 1931 he said go Gerstein's father, the doctor, about Stalin: « ... a parasitic type ... a foreman who made children work in Egypt».<sup>25</sup> Added to all that is a «crushing» article in the newspaper «Pravda» written against his work «Travelling to Armenia» (that will be described below in detail). In November 1933 O. Mandelstam wrote the fateful poems on Stalin «The Kremlin Highlander», denouncing Stalinism. The poems were very widely spread, in both literary and quasi-literary environment they produced an impression of terror and trepidation:

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<sup>24</sup> Of a cognitive value is L. Grinberg's article "Mandelstam" in his monograph (1982: 413–414), where the author under the impression of that evening gave the following characteristic to the poet: «Mandelstam at Akhmatova's reads conversations on Dante». Mandelstam is short, slim, narrow forehead, small curved nose, the lower sharp part of the face careless, almost gray-bearded, stressed look as if taking notice of nothing. When talking Russian, his toothless mouth is compressed, and the intonation is unexpectedly delicate and melodeous. He is full of rhythms, as well as wonderful words. When reading, he is rocking, moving his hands, by the nature of a luminary, he finds pleasure in breathing to the rhythm of words, after which there is a dancing performance. His walk is funny, with a spine too straight, as if on tiptoe.

Mandelstam has taken a dreamer's name, and indeed, he looks deluded in human environment, where people are wont to hide or falsify their impulses. For that, perhaps, there is no difference between impulse and deed, the difference that constitutes the essence of the European way of life. Anna Andreevna says: «Osip is a box of surprises». Probably, he is very different. And in a rout, perhaps, he is more natural. But decorated Mandelstam, how he is drawn to be near Anna Akhmatova is incomprehensible. He does not possess the simplest manifestations of our civilization. His collar and necktie are loose. What concerns his thin brown striped pants, there are no likes to them anywhere. His everyday behavior is wonderfully impractical. The strange courtesy of his greetings, inability to shake hands, grabbing the thumbs the singing sweetness of the voice pitch, when he asks for matches, all that is some rhythmic and entertaining comedy. He uses an everyday speaking voice, somewhat bohemian, and rough. For example, when reciting, he will look around, asking «am I not blabbering too rapidly?». But when going to an important subject, wide opening the demagogic gates. He is wagging his hands, his eyes express a complete rupture from the table and from the interlocutor, and bread and cheese in his tea saucer. He talks in words of his compositions: clumsy, heavy-tongued, ... greasy. In all cases not forgetting to suffle or joke.

Mandelstam is a phenomenon establishing optimism. We can see a man, who wants to have money and glory and is saddened when his compositions are not printed. But we can see how insignificant that sadness is compared with his feelings of creative inspiration, when those combine with the inexhaustible sensations of imagination. We see the best. The realized value and the man who moved into his work. He moved therein completely, all the way he could, and the rest turned out to be the devil knows what routs, public trials. People victimize their lives to work, their health, freedom, career, their property. Mandelstam's madness in everyday image is human sacrifice. That means that not a single particle of voluntary tension outside poetic work was wasted. Poetic work needs the poet's self-taxation. Without an incessant self-taxation it will rapidly get coarse and depreciated. Everything went there, and in everyday image remained a strange man with unregulated desires, «nuts».

He is full of rhythm, thoughts and pushing-forward words. His business he is doing in progress, ... and indifferent to the environment ... ». Incidentally, in the above-mentioned sense among others similarly interesting information on O. Mandelstam is also given by R. Ivnev in his memoirs, see Ivnev 1991: 143–155.

<sup>25</sup> Gershtein 1989: 108; Averintsev 1990: 29.

Thus, e.g., having heard the poems, the well-known literary critic G. Shengelia said: «We have read nothing here, I have heard nothing».<sup>26</sup>

On February 17, 1934, V. Bonch-Bruyevich made a proposition to O. Mandelstam to sell his archive to the Central Museum of Fiction, Criticism and Journalism. On March 16, to replenish the funds of the museum, the newly organized expert commission for the archive proposed a ridiculously low price of 500 roubles. O. Mandelstam was enraged and wrote a letter to V. Bonch-Bruyevich refusing to sell.<sup>27</sup>

In the mid-April of 1934 O. Mandelstam was in Leningrad. In early May he met Alexey Tolstoy at the «Writers' Union», who chaired the «Sarkijan–Mandelstam» well-known trial, and in the presence of all people lapped him on the face.<sup>28</sup>

As a result, on the night of May 14, 1934, the poet was arrested at his flat in Nashokin Lane.

«The arrest warrant was signed by Yagoda personally, – remembered Akhmatova: – The search continued all through the night. They looked for poems, walking on manuscripts dumped out of trunks. All of us, we were sitting in the next room. It was very quiet... The investigator found “The Wolf” in my presence and showed it to Osip Mandelstam. He nodded silently. He kissed me farewell. They took him away at 7 in the morning».<sup>29</sup> The poem « We exist with no feeling of country or earth ...» in his case was the major object of indictment. Extremely sharp-pointed, with precisely targeted attributes, this poem is herein quoted in full:<sup>30</sup>

Мы живём, под собою не чуя страны,	We exist with no feeling of country or earth,
Наши речи за десять шагов неслышны,	Our speech at ten steps will never be heard,
А где хватит на полразговорца,	And when there is half of the slander,
Там припомнят клемлёвского горца.	They will think of the Kremlin highlander.
Его толстые пальцы, как черви жирны,	His fingers are thick and fatty like worms
И слова, как пудовые гири, верны,	And words are as heavy and mighty as weights,
Тараканьи смеются глазища	The big eyes of cockroach are smiling,
И сияют его голенища.	And the bootlegs are happy and shining.
А вокруг него сброд тонкошеих вождей,	He is skirted with necks of the baby-giraffe,
Он играет услугами полулюдей,	He plays with the service of humans-in-half,
Кто свистит, кто мяучит, кто хнычет	Some are whistling, some mewling, or whining,
Он один лишь бабачит и тычет.	Only he is bawling and prying.
Как подкову дарит за указом указ –	As horseshoes he throws decrees and decrees,
Кому в пах, кому в лоб, кому в бровь,	Some in crotch, some in forehead, in brow, or
кому в глаз.	ears.
Что ни казнь у него – то малина	Each verdict is made in the den,
И широкая грудь осетина.	By the wide-breasted Ossetian man.

<sup>26</sup> Lipkin 1997: 398; Vidgof 2012: 331.

<sup>27</sup> Lekmanov 2003: 173.

<sup>28</sup> In detail, see Lekmanov 2003: 173–174, 218; Vidgof 2012: 323–325.

<sup>29</sup> Averintsev 1990: 38–39.

<sup>30</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 163. On the same poem, see Mandelstam 2003: 361–362. A remarkable analyzes of this poem put into historical context see Katsis 2021.



O. Mandelstam was condemned to three years exile for a free settlement first to Sverdlovsk oblast, the town of Cherdin, and later to Voronezh. The sentence was not too hard, they even let his wife accompany him. In Cherdin Mandelstam being in an aggravated state of mind jumped out of the window. Incidentally, N. Bukharin through V. Molotov, Chair of the USSR Council of People's Commissars, fixed up a pension for the 41-year old Mandelstam. On March 23, 1932 Mandelstam was awarded a pension of 200 roubles for life,<sup>31</sup> which was withdrawn in the very first winter of his exile. «To this day it remains a riddle, what it was that saved Mandelstam's life. Whether it was Bukharin<sup>32</sup> and Pasternak's sponsorship<sup>33</sup> that helped, or the helping role was played by the secret hope of the leader that the master would praise his name? It is not easy to say. Nevertheless, there was an order: «To isolate, but to sustain». To sustain: ... Following the devastating night-time question in go to exile to Cherdin in expectation of a death sentence: The hope of salvation at the sudden arrival of the exile order to Voronezh, as noted by the literary critic N.I. Velikaya: – The disgruntled poet endured: And the most important thing was that he mentally stayed afloat. The Voronezh period (1934-1937) was noted by a creative uplift, Osip Emilievich here composed three "Voronezh notebooks". It became clear that the poet's love for life, earth and man was unquenchable «You have died not yet, you are not alone ... You love the fields and their terrific heights// And in the blizzard, and in dire cold, in tempest and in snowstorm»: «being in dire need and extreme poverty», the poet remains calm and is consoled by that his sweet-worded work is perfect and immortal.

Anna Akhmatova wrote wonderingly: «It is surprising that in Mandelstam's poetry freedom, wide extension and deep breathing came about just in Voronezh, when he was very remote from being free»<sup>34</sup>:

During the years spent in Voronezh, Mandelstam was allowed with wife to prepare literary radio shows on Goethe's youth (which was laid in the basis of creating a Goethe's biographic novel), to produce shows on Gulliver for children, on behalf of the local section of the Soviet Union's writers' Union he was employed at the local theater as literary director, wrote in the newspapers, went to business trips around the region. The Russian poet received visitors: A. Akhmatova, E. Gerstein, N. Stempel, et al.

Here Mandelstam in the initial period did creative work full-scale, again remembered Armenia, wrote poetry on the exiled Armenian shoemakers, which had

<sup>31</sup>«That (pension– A. Z.) was given «for having the great merit to the Russian Literature» «by virtue of the impossibility to use it in the Soviet Literature». This formulation in some sense matched the reality, and we guessed that it belonged to N. Bukharin» (Mandelstam 1989: 110, 405).

<sup>32</sup>See details in Mandelstam 1989: 135–139.

<sup>33</sup>See details in Mandelstam 1989: 135–139.

<sup>34</sup> Velikaya 1989: 8. S. Averintsev wrote: «They often ask: How was that? (It is about the order «To isolate but to retain»– A. G.) that they look for an explanation. Yes, there were care-givers. Akhmatova went to Yenukidze, Pasternak – to Demyan Bedny, Nadezhda Mandelstam to Bukharin. Yes, the Stalin's infamous telephone call did take place (June 13 – A. Z.) to Pasternak as well. However, did any of those matter? And N.A. Struve and B.M. Satnov think that Stalin wanted Mandelstam to become his hand dog» (Averintsev 1990: 39). In the latest period in Voronezh on poetry, see Averintsev 1990: 41–43, also Gasparov 1996.

unfortunately been lost. St. Stoichev, secretary of the Voronezh writers' union party group, reported that in February 1935 in the Voronezh newspaper «Commune» editorial office there was a meeting of writers. A report was presented on acmeism with a purpose of clarifying Mandelstam's attitude towards his past. It became clear that in his report the poet showed that he had learned nothing, remaining stuck at his old positions».<sup>35</sup>

The year 1936 saw new persecutions against O. Mandelstam. «They cut off salaries, – wrote N. Mandelstam in her memoirs. – Acquaintances in the street turned off their faces or looked with blank eyes». In 1937 the almanac «Literary Voronezh» classified the poet as belonging to the Trotskyist gang, spreading around «the spirit of madness and depoliticization». On April 17, 1937 Mandelstam complained to K. I. Chukovsky: «I have come about to be like a dog, a stray dog. ... I am not there. I am a shadow. My only right is to die».<sup>36</sup> While in «The Fourth Prose» he confessed: «While to the French they say: Cher Maître – Dear Teacher, to me, Mandelstam, they say to scratch the dogs». Everyone will have his own lot. I am an ageing man... The eyes of the Russian writers look at me with canine tenderness, as if saying: go and die, to make us free. Where has it come from, that servile malice, that slavish contempt with regard to my name? A Gypsy has a horse at least, but I am neither a Gypsy, nor a horse. ... ».<sup>37</sup>

... On May 16, 1937, the term of exile was done, and the Mandelstams came back to Moscow. However, having no registration, they had to temporarily live in Savelovo, in the vicinity of Kimri. «In Moscow he was always welcomed to the Shklovskies' house, and could visit Pasternak in Peredelkino. To procure money for the most essential needs, he made two visits to Leningrad in the Autumn of 1937, to see Stenich and his old friend Loginsky, and in February 1938, when Stenich was arrested, ... Loginsky was scared to death and refused to receive him (incidentally, O. Mandelstam yet in 1921 dedicated to Loginsky a very deliberative poem «Pedestrian» – A. Z.): «The times were apocalyptic, – remembered Akhmatova: – Disaster was upon the heels of everyone». Mandelstam had no money. They had absolutely nowhere to live. Osip had difficulty breathing, he hunted for air with his lips»... Tired of homelessness and shortage of money, Mandelstam was all of a sudden favored with a handout from the literary foundation – an accommodation at the Samatikha rest-home».<sup>38</sup> It seemed that the matters came to order, it was possible to go on with creative work with no worry, and in the month of March Mandelstam wrote inspiring letters to his close friend Kuzin and to his father. However, it was only an appearance. V. Stavsky, the first secretary of the USSR Writers' Union, and his well-known report with an appended negative resume on O. Mandelstam by P. Pavlensky dispatched to N. Yezhov, the Supreme Commissar of the USSR Internal Affairs,<sup>39</sup> have done their black deed.

<sup>35</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 412, 416; Lekmanov 2003: 185.

<sup>36</sup> Averintsev 1990: 40.

<sup>37</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 243. Life in Voronezh. See Gordin 1990: 53–60; Shtempel 1992; Lekmanov 2003: 180–204.

<sup>38</sup> Averintsev 1990: 43.

<sup>39</sup> See details in Lekmanov 2003: 209–211; Vidgof 2012: 577–578.

On the night of May 2, 1938, when the Mandelstams were having a rest at a resort home since March 8, the poet was arrested for the second time for the counter-revolutionary activity. «... but why?», ..., the poet was arrested for the second time, four years after the first time. He did not make any new acts of audacity – during the hard moments tried to glorify Stalin (Mandelstam was not even saved by the poem dedicated to Stalin and written on January 20, 1937, in Voronezh in 1937 – A. Z.). Then why? – the question is asked by S. Averintsev and that is how it is interpreted. – It seems ... The answer to the question is not difficult. If Stalin is a master of something, it is vengeance and the ability to wait for the right moment to take revenge. The fate of the poet who had allowed himself to inflict an open strike upon the person of the Leader of Nations, had been determined, once and for all: he had not have to tread the earth. From him celebrations were not required. What was required was death: However, it is not difficult to guess that an immediate execution or even a significant term of detention would excite curiosity with regard to the culprit poem that will undoubtedly have repercussions. No, the first punishment had to be ridiculous. A grown-up child had to stand in the corner for his improper behavior. But the bait is thrown, he will not be forgotten. And when the wave of terror will overtake the events and everyone would be roasted by his cares, the poet would unobtrusively vanish from the face of the earth».<sup>40</sup>

Mandelstam was sentenced to five years detention and exiled to a transit trade camp in Vladivostok. Where from the last news from Mandelstam had been received. «My health is very weak. I am extremely exhausted, almost unrecognizable, but sending clothes, food or money, I am not sure whether it is worthwhile. You can try, anyway. With no clothes it is too cold.

Nadenka, my dear, I don't know if you are still there, my little dove».<sup>41</sup>

In that camp Mandelstam passed away on December 27, 1938.

... While living in Herzen's House, there was a writer among O. Mandelstam's neighbors, «a very good and talented man, S. Klichkov. Once, during a discussion, he said to Mandelstam: « Nevertheless, Osip Emilyevich, your mind is Jewish». Mandelstam's response followed momentarily. – «Well, quite possible. However, my poetry is Russian». «That is true, yes, that is quite true»– was Klichkov's acknowledgment in all sincerity».<sup>42</sup> And, indeed, all Mandelstam's creation is written

<sup>40</sup> Averintsev 1990: 39–40.

<sup>41</sup> Averintsev 1990: 44.

<sup>42</sup> Kuzin 1987: 142–143. In connection with the above-mentioned dialogue it is appropriate to point out another relevant material by a renowned literary critic G. Kubatyan (Kubatyan 2005: 286–287). Incidentally, O. Mandelstam liked the following eloquent lines by S. Klichko:

Впереди одна тревога, //	Just ahead is only trouble,
И тревога позади. //	And a trouble in the rear.
Посиди со мной немного, //	Sit with me a little down,
Ради Бога, посиди ...	God be praised, sit down near.

...» (Mandelstam 1989: 191).

within the spirit of Russian poetry. On January 21, 1937, from the place of exile in Voronezh, the writer and literary critic in the letter written to Yuri Tinianov, the poet in a very convinced way wrote about that: «It has already been a quarter-century that I, mixing up important and empty things, float towards the Russian poetry, but soon my poetry would merge with to change something in its structure and content».<sup>43</sup>

It is to be added that until the early 1960s O. Mandelstam's name and creative legacy had been unknown to the wide community of readers. There had been no corner (to say nothing of a museum), that would shelter miraculously saved poets' manuscripts or everyday items. Only in early 2021 there was a Permanent Exposition «Mandelstam Street. Osip and Nadezhda».<sup>44</sup>

### **Mandelstam in Tiflis and Baku**

In early 1920 «anticipating future punishments, from the agitated events, // I fled to the Black Sea ... »: The stops were Kharkov and Kiev, where he (O. Mandelstam – A. Z.) encountered N. Ya. Khazina, the future companion of his life, Koktebel, where he was unable to find peace with Voloshin, and Theodosia, where he was arrested by the Vrangels' counterintelligence and released through the efforts of colonel Tsibulsky, as well as Voloshin and Veresayev, – Batumi, where he was arrested another time by the coast guards of the Menshevik government and released due to the mediation by N. Vitsishvili and T. Tabidze, and eventually Tbilisi»,<sup>45</sup> – as recorded by S. Averintsev.

A notable Russian writer and publicist Ilya Ehrenburg in late September 1920, instead of arriving to Moscow from Theodosia, by the will of fate appeared in Tbilisi with his wife. He met Osip Mandelstam in an unfamiliar city on the very first day. About the days spent by the latter in the company of the Georgian poets Titsian Tabidze and Paolo Yashvili, Ehrenburg left memorable pages in his book of memoirs «People, Years, Life». While telling, that in Golovinsky Avenue the unexpected encounter caused a great joy to him and to Mandelstam who, as noted by I. Ehrenburg, being in Tiflis for two days only, «... was standing on firm ground ... the businessman said: «Now we are going to Titsian Tabidze, and he will take us to a wonderful bar...».<sup>46</sup> Subsequently

<sup>43</sup> Averintsev 1990: 5.

<sup>44</sup> See details in Room for the poet. In Moscow a permanent exhibition is opened. Mandelstam Street. Osip and Nadezhda («Literaturnaya Gazeta» N. 11b, March 17-23, 2021). Incidentally, On Mandelstam life and activity there is a huge amount of controversial literature. One of the latest was printed in «Literaturnaya Gazeta» (N. 19, 12–18 May 2021, p. 17). «The Poet and the Authorities: A few not very familiar episodes from Mandelstam's life». Several materials are under the same title. We read: «In these days biographies of poets often are interpreted in an anti-regime context. F. e., it is unambiguously accepted to present Mandelstam as an opponent and victim of the ruling regime. Members of the St. Petersburg section of the Writers' Union gathered at the Writers' house to exchange views in the difficult years of the century on the relations between the poets and the authorities. At the meeting, their views were presented by Evgeni Antipov». Under the titles «The List of Listeners», «The Personal Pension», «A Banket with Blumkin» and «Bath at Angleterre» there were interesting but partially familiar details concerning O. Mandelstam's life.

<sup>45</sup> Averintsev 1990: 26.

<sup>46</sup> Ehrenburg 1961: 508. By the way, this year we shall see the 130th Anniversary of I. Ehrenburg, this fragment of the article will be a tribute of respect by the Armenian people to the memory of the honorable friend.

Mandelstam told of what happened to him in Batumi, his appearance in jail and his liberation through the efforts of the Georgian poets. T. Tabidze received them very cordially, then, having found Yashvili, they made a reception to the poets, placed them at a hotel. On the next day they went to the Soviet embassy with Mandelstam asking to be sent to Russia, they promised to do so in two- or three-weeks' time. «We had lived in Tbilisi for a fortnight, those days seemed to me like the days of a lyrical retreat..., — recalled Ehrenburg. — I had never seen the Orient before, and old Tbilisi struck me as a city from «A Thousand and One Nights». We circulated the endless Meidan... attended the famous bath house ... in Vera's Gardens we drank wine... In old temples we saw stone-made queens, caressed by the spells. ...». «I was awarded «The Cohabitation Collection of the Tiflis Poets» (titled «Akme» - A.Z.), — wrote Ehrenburg. — I have preserved that booklet by chance. Many among the authors are female poets with poetic surnames. Nina Gratsianskaya, Bel-Kon-Lyubomirskaya, Magdalinede-Kaprelevich. The «Tiflis Cohabitation» poets write sonnets about Svarog, Eros, Sulamith, Sanavallat, Monfort and other closely related acting personalities».<sup>47</sup> It is quite possible that Mandelstam had also received this gift.<sup>48</sup>

«... In the Autumn of 1920 ... the Georgian friends gave us shelter and warmth. ... Yashvili and Tabidze on the Military Road kept us company up until the first station ...»<sup>49</sup>, — the story about the Tiflis days is summarized by Ehrenburg without mentioning the literary evening dedicated to Mandelstam and himself, or individual noteworthy articles in the media.

The evening had to take place on September 26 at the Big Hall of the Conservatoire. The opening speech on «The Contemporary Russian Poetry» had to be made by G. Rabakidze, a multi-faceted erudite and speaker, a brilliant renowned literary figure. I. Ehrenburg recited compositions from the books «Art and the New Period» and «Fire», «The New Dawn», Mandelstam read poetry from the book «Rock». The latter poets' compositions were read by the Russian actor N. N. Khodotov<sup>50</sup> who had found

<sup>47</sup> Ehrenburg 1961: 511–513. It will be noted that like the Petersburg «Workshop of poets» literary association S. Gorodetsky (1916–1921) lived and worked in Western Armenia and Transcaucasia, Zakaryan 2010; Zakaryan 2015). In 1918 in Tiflis he established cohabitation under the same name (in detail see Zakaryan 2011a: 113–130; Zakaryan 2011b).

<sup>48</sup> V. Golovin wrote that O. Mandelstam took part in the «Workshop of Poets» evenings (see Golovin 2016: 19). That is not true, since the Tiflisian «Workshop» yet in early 1919 terminated its activities. Since August of the same year the literary association of the same name was active in Baku (see Zakaryan 2011b: 179).

<sup>49</sup> Ehrenburg 1961: 516–517.

<sup>50</sup> «The poets O. Mandelstam's and I. Ehrenburg's arrival. From the Crimea to Tiflis came the poets O. M. Mandelstam and I. Ehrenburg. Their single evening will take place on Sunday. Program. 1) Gr.. Rabakidze – A talk on contemporary Russian poetry, 2) I. Ehrenburg – a report «Art and the new age» and poems from the books «Fire» and «The New Dawns», 3) O. Mandelstam. Poetry from the book «Rock» and new compositions, 4) N. N. Khodotov – O. Mandelstam's and I. Ehrenburg's Compositions. The evening is of a great literary interest» («Slovo», 24. IX. 1920]. Incidentally, the newspaper «Slovo» on September 26 published an announcement on the title of I. Ehrenburg's book «The New Dawns».

refuge in Tbilisi, and, according to I. Ehrenburg, in those days was setting out to go home to Petrograd».<sup>51</sup>

There have unfortunately remained almost no echos from that literary evening,<sup>52</sup> discovered instead were I. Ehrenburg's appearances in print, undoubtedly presenting interest in the history of literature<sup>53</sup>.

In late October O. Mandelstam set out from Tiflis<sup>54</sup> with I. Ehrenburg to Moscow and then to Petrograd.

Unfortunately, we have not succeeded to establish contacts by O. Mandelstam with the Tiflis Armenians. However, as to whether they had existed is beyond doubt, at that time there lived in Georgia a great mass of Armenians, there were a number of acting unions and clubs. Meanwhile, let us not forget that that was the time of the Armenian-Turkish war, that was mostly drawing attention of the population, while the great Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanyan, overburdened with cares, was in Lori.

... The days spent in Tiflis were so impressive that Mandelstam and his wife appeared in Tiflis another time. «In the year twenty-one ... we were going to Tiflis with Mandelstam by the Tsentroevac (Central department for evacuation of population) train... Going to Tiflis was a heated cargo train loaded with workers who had to see the Armenian exiles arriving from Turkey and to find them employment. Travelling on heated cargo train were ordinary hard-working people. They hopefully succeeded in doing something for the suffering multitude of the Armenians, – recalls Mandelstam. – For a whole week we, no one knows why, remained in Kislovodsk... The peaceful life suddenly ended in Baku. There were a few people in the train who were taken ill with cholera. We were taken to a reserve line, and we remained living in a stationary train, like a railway brigade, while the patients were staying in a city hospital».<sup>55</sup> The Mandelstams had visited Vyacheslav Ivanov and S. Gorodetsky, who in those years found refuge in Baku. Incidentally, Vyach. Ivanov was displeased that he could not succeed to arrange the return to Moscow with the “winners” – the Bolsheviks. He tried to do it through Lev Kamenev, Mossovet's Chairman, but nothing came out of it.<sup>56</sup>

From Baku the Mandelstams came to Tiflis where they lived about half a year. The city, for which very characteristically, in the novel «In Mtatsminda Underground» the Russian writer R. Ivnev recorded the following lines: «You do not feel life anywhere like you do here. The city is in all bright colors of the Orient. That is why pain here is more painful, joy is stronger, while love is more beautiful and fiery. Even the matdusting here is done with a special joy. Fruit and vegetable vendors resemble jobless jesters. They

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<sup>51</sup> See Ehrenburg 1961: 512.

<sup>52</sup> Usually with regard to the current events the next number of the newspaper «Slovo» prints information. The next number of this paper was published on September 28. The 2nd and 3rd pages of this paper in the National Library of Armenia were blank pages because of the typographic defect, there had to be information there about that evening.

<sup>53</sup> For details on that occasion see Zakaryan 2012.

<sup>54</sup> On O. Mandelstam's days in Tiflis, see Golovin 2016: 14–20.

<sup>55</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 33–34.

<sup>56</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 332.

cannot do quiet talking, they will click, giggle, and say jokes even without sparing their own merchandize. ... ».<sup>57</sup>

In Tiflis O. Mandelstam for a short time got close with Boris Legran, the Russian ambassador to Georgia, who, incidentally, had been N. Gumiliov's alumnus in Gymnasium. Perhaps, on this ground Legran appointed Mandelstam a press media adviser, and even provided rations. However, after N. Gumiliov's execution,<sup>58</sup> that was related to him by the ambassador, the Mandelstams had visited the embassy no more.<sup>59</sup>

Let us remember that B. Legran, a Soviet statesman, military figure and diplomat, in 1920 was head of the RSFSR mission for conducting negotiations with the Armenian Republic, the Representative Plenipotentiary of the RSFSR in the Armenian Republic, and then, since November, in the ArmSSR, and since March 1921 was ambassador to Georgia and Azerbaijan simultaneously. It is out of the question that Mandelstam and Legran could not have discussed the events of the past few years that had taken place in Armenia, in the life of the Armenian people ...

Anyway, in Tiflis O. Mandelstam lived in the House of Arts. For the poet, the Tiflis days were one of the most fruitful creative periods: he actively published in the local newspapers, came forward at the most crowded public disputes and evenings, arranged at N. Khodotov's theatrical studio and even became member of the Russian literary union in Georgia and received a monetary grant. He also did some translating work. The Commissar on Education, Kandelaki, paid for translations infinitesimal fees (to Mandelstam –A. Z.)». He translated Vazha Pshavela's «Gogotur and Apshina» that on the same days was translated by Alexander Kulebyakin, a Tiflis resident poet-gereral.<sup>60</sup> Incidentally, a public reading and discussion was organized of the two translations. Excerpts from the translations of those two works by O. Mandelstam were published in the newspaper «Figaro» and magazine «Plamya». The Russian poet also translated excerpts from the works by the members of the literary union «Blue Horns» T. Tabidze,

<sup>57</sup> Ivnev 1973: 158. Incidentally, R. Ivnev wrote about Mandelstam: «The next assistance (besides S. Yesenin's –A. Z.) for me was even more de-politicized on the part of O. Mandelstam. At that time it made me happy. Unlike Vladimir Gordin, Georgy Ivanov and many others, he did not turn away his face from me, but when meeting me, always smiled, being a few heads taller than the central committee opinions and prejudices» (p. 56). R. Ivnev has interesting notes on O. Mandelstam, where he considers the poet «... just an epoch himself ... » (Ivnev 1991: 154). We shall note that Ivnev dedicated to Mandelstam a sonnet titled «A White Night».

<sup>58</sup> For O. Mandelstam N. Gumiliov's execution on August 25, 1921, was very painful. On his death he in those days wrote the poem «I washed when they came to take us away ... », that was printed in Tiflis in the Russian newspaper «Figaro» (on the poem see Mandelstam 2003: 355): «... Through the whole of Mandelstam's life something passes like a declaration of loyalty for the memory of the friend, – as noted by S. Averintsev. – the letter sent to Akhmatova on August 25, 1928 (to Anna Akhmatova, Gumiliov's wife – A. Z.) reads: «Be informed I am capable to hold an imaginary conversation with only two people – Nikolay Stepanovich and you. My conversation with Kolya has not ceased and will never cease» (Averintsev 1990: 30).

<sup>59</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 62–63.

<sup>60</sup> On A. Kulebyakin see details in Zakaryan 2003.

N. Mitsishvili, G. Leonidze, V. Gaprindashvili, published in late 1921 in Tiflis as the First Anthology in Russian under the title “The Georgian Poets”.

However, it never prevented Mandelstam from «angry discussion» or critical grouping (even in the media) against confessing symbolism.<sup>61</sup>

It has to be added that in Tiflis O. Mandelstam also communicated with the Armenian literary community, which is proved by the following eloquent reality. After departing from Georgia, a widely known Armenian futurist Kara-Darvish's (Hakob Genjian) dedication to Gr. Robakidze «Dancing on the Mountains» (A Nocturnal Round Dance) is published in Tiflis translated by Mandelstam.<sup>62</sup> A well-known literary critic Alexander Parnis stated: «The work on translating this composition prior to the active communication with the national culture just launched the Armenian subject matter that in the poet's mature period became an important step in his creative work».<sup>63</sup>

The Mandelstams saw the new, 1922 year on a steamer “Dmitry”, and in March they reached Moscow.

### **O. Mandelstam in Armenia**

«Like every good thing in our lives, so it was with the travel to Armenia that was organized by Bukharin, – as recalled by N. Mandelstam. – The first time he wanted to send us to Armenia was in the late 1920s. At that time the Narkom of Education (as well as the vice chairman of People's Council– A. Z.) was Mravyan. He invited Mandelstam to lecture at Yerevan University. The first trip failed because of Mravyan's sudden death».<sup>64</sup> This is what was written by O. Mandelstam on that occasion in the 7th Chapter of «The Fourth Prose»: «I had one sponsor – Muravian (a pun from the word *muravey*), an insect commissar of the Judah's younger sister, the country of Armenia. He sent me a telegram// Death occurred to my sponsor Mravyan-Muravyan ... // He will not any more come to Moscow naïve and inquisitive ... I had a letter sent to Narkom Mravyan. I took it to the Armenian Mansion located in the cleanest ambassadorial streets of Moscow (the matter is about the Representative Office of the Armenian SSR - A. Z.), to the secretaries. . // I was nearly gone to Yerevan ... On a mission from the Educational Committee to read terrible lectures at a miserable monastery-university to the round-headed shy youngsters. // If I had gone to Yerevan, I would three days and nights attend big railway-station canteens to eat bread and butter with red caviar. ... // Along the way I would read the best books by Zoshchenko (allegedly the collection of

<sup>61</sup> On the days spent by O. Mandelstam in Baku and Tiflis see Golovin 2016: 23–34.

<sup>62</sup> Translation of the poem printed on a post card «Tiflis, 1922» with a dedication and Kara-Darvish' photo, see Armenian Museum of art and literature, Dept. of Souvenirs, Kara-Darvish' Fund, Archive 597.

<sup>63</sup> Golovin 2016: 34.

<sup>64</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 241. Not to sin against justice, let us note that N. Bukharin found an «intermediary» by whose request V. Molotov commitioned S.Gusev, member of Bolsheviks' Party Central Committee Presidium, to organize a business trip of Mandelstam and his wife to Sukhum, and then to Armenia, and to see to their placement, no matter where they stay. S. Gusev in advance called the local Central Committee secretaries asking them to be helpful to the Mandelstams in every way (p. 168, also Mandelstam 1990: 430).



short stories «Who are you laughing at», 1928 – A. Z.) and would enjoy it. And at Yerevan station I would alight from the train, the winter coat in one hand, in the other my Jewish old man's cane».<sup>65</sup>

On June 14, 1929, N. Bukharin, Editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Pravda”, wrote the following letter to S. Gabrielyan, Chairman of the Armenian SSR Education Committee: «Dear Comrade Ter-Gabrielyan, one of our prominent poets, O. Mandelstam, has an intention to do research on Armenia (i.e., Armenian art, literary history, etc.), – Incidentally, – he is a very knowledgeable man and can be of great use to you. He must only be left undisturbed for some time and given opportunity to work. He can write a work on Armenia. He is quite prepared to learn Armenian. Please, respond by telegraph on your apprehension. Yours, Bukharin».<sup>66</sup>

The intention by Mandelstam to go to Armenia had not come by accident. It was rightly noticed that it was very much stipulated by Pushkin's visit to Armenia in 1829, Bryusov's travelling in January 1916, visit by A. Bely in the Summer, 1928 and Spring, 1929, as well as by their widely known works on Armenia, its people, history, and culture.

It should be added that, as was heretofore mentioned, in early 1920 he visited the cities Tiflis and Baku having huge Armenian populations, he had been acquainted with the Armenian reality, translated the above-mentioned work by Kara-Darvish, in Moscow communicated with A. Khalatov, Chairman of the Petrograd Publishers' Council, and with M. Shahinyan, enjoying great authority within the Russian public, political and intellectual environment, about whom in an essay («Shuba» written in 1922 there is an entertaining paragraph, and who in mid-1920s was in Armenia, Nakhijevan and Nagorno-Karabakh, by that time was well informed on the past and present of the Armenian people.

Anyway, the wish to learn Armenian was very imperative, and O. Mandelstam goes to the People's Oriental Institute (formerly the Lazarev Institute). The poet wrote about it: «I was encountered by a sad-looking Armenian youngster.

My amateurish arrival caused no joy to anyone. My plea to help study the Old Armenian did not touch the heart of those people.

As a consequence of false – subjective – orientation, I learned to see a philologist in every Armenian ... Though it may be true to some degree. Those are people who are even now ringing the keys of the language, while opening no treasure-box ... They gave out the names of some worthy Armenian writers, mentioned Academician Marr ...».<sup>67</sup>

Right in the library Mandelstam met Ashot Hovhannisyan, the Soviet state and party figure, historian, who in 1928 lived in Moscow. Here are the poet's colorful lines characterizing this person: «... An elderly man entered the library with dictatorial

<sup>65</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 238. Cf. «Raduga», 1988, N. 3, p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Kubatyan 1989: 11. Cf. Mandelstam 2003: 372. Incidentally, we shall note that N. Bukharin at that time was not editor-in-chief of the newspaper «Izvestiya».

<sup>67</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 249–250.

movements and a majestic posture. // His Promethaeon head emanated a light colored in blueish ash and smoke, like a powerful quartz lamp ... The Wizard's wide mouth did not smile resolutely reminding that word is work. Comrade Hovhanissyan's head possessed the interlocutor reluctance to leave, as a mountain summit that has a form of a head by accident. But the blue-quartz misery of his eyes was worth a smile. // Such are deafness and gratitude, left to us as heritage from the Titans. ...». <sup>68</sup>

... Waiting for the invitation documents from Yerevan in early April 1930, the Mandelstams were in Sukhum «by the Central Committee» paper, on recreation at the government-owned summer house named after Orjonikidze. In those days O. Mandelstam met many renowned people in Sukhum. <sup>69</sup> In this way, being the guest of Abkhasian poet and scholar Dmitry Gulia, the President of the Abkhasian Language and Literature Academy, Mandelstam wrote: «He complained on the difficulties of inventing the Abkhasian alphabet, spoke with respect about the Petersburg prank Evreinov (meaning film director and theatrical critic N. N. Evreinov – A. Z.), who in Abkhasia was suspected in goat worship, and complained of serious defects in scientific research resulting from the great distance from Tiflis». <sup>70</sup> From Sukhum the Mandelstams made their way to Noviy Afon, Gudauta, Tkvarcheli, then set out for Tiflis.

First thing when coming to Armenia, O. Mandelstam in Leninakan took part in the Mayday celebrations then came to Yerevan. <sup>71</sup> «In the tiny room of our hotel («Yerevan» – A. Z.) books on the Armenian culture appeared momentarily. Strzhigovsky (the matter is, in essence, about the latter's work «Architecture of the Armenians and Europe»– A. Z.), the Armenian Chroniclers, Movses Khorenatsi et al., what concerned that country's economy and nature, – wrote N. Mandelstam. – From the books on Armenia's economy O. Mandelstam selected the book by Chopin, a functionary of the Alexandrian times, «The working Description of Armenia». <sup>72</sup> He compared the vivid interest by Chopin to the

<sup>68</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 250.

<sup>69</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 310, 423. In those days having a rest in Sukhum was N. Ezhov, the future Narkom of the Interior, with whom the poet played tennis, Abkhazia's Educational leader N. Lakoba, the «proletarian poet» A. Bazimensky, the ethnographer, collector of Abkhasian popular songs M. Kovach, Director of the Tiflis National Museum Anatoly K-n and other celebrities.

<sup>70</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 261.

<sup>71</sup> «Osip Mandelstam's (creation's –A. Z.) editor of the American publication <B.>Filipov, with a penetration, proper to all editors, decided that Osip Mandelstam had escaped to Armenia from the five-year construction plans.... It is a cheap political speculation, – noted O. Mandelstam. – At the outskirts construction was going on at a wider scale than in the center, and Osip Mandelstam in any case could have nothing against it. What should have been so upsetting to him from the planned economic organization? The matter was clearly elsewhere.

As perceived by Osip Mandelstam, the Crimea, Georgia and Armenia only relate to the Black Sea, it provides communication with the International culture of the Mediterranean» (Mandelstam 1989: 241–242).

<sup>72</sup> The French ethnographer, and historian, I. I. Chopin in 1825 lived in Russia, he was head of the Internal Revenue Service of the Armenian region. He did statistical research. His historical monumental study on the situation in the Armenian region during the period of unification of Russia (1852, in Russian.) in 1840 (a manuscript) had merited the Demidov prize of the Russian Academy of Sciences. O. Mandelstam wrote: «I have been sent to Armenia by no one,

country with the innumerable businessmen that were encountered in the hotel».<sup>73</sup> On the very first day to the hall of the hotel “Yerevan” came “the miraculous painter” Martiros Saryan. At the time of their sojourn in Yerevan the Mandelstams visited his workshop, admiring his pictures of the “sky-colored period” of Art. They also met A. Tamanyan and Young Architects, listened to their discussions. Mandelstam attended the Armenia’s State Library, made use of its funds, was introduced and communicated with the philologist and theatrical figure Mamikon Gevorgyan who is « eloquent, witty and kind, but his elocution is too course and noisy, while speech is oily and factitious».<sup>74</sup> It is interesting that M. Gevorgyan sang for Mandelstam a few excerpts from Firdousi. In Yerevan the poet also heard recitals by the Komitas Joint Choir.

It is known that in Armenian Mandelstams had spent several days at Tsakhkadzor, in the Writers house.

In Yerevan Mandelstam was introduced and made friends with B. Kuzin, whom Moscow deputed to Armenia to investigate how the red ant that can produce «a wonderful red paint», the real red. The latter lived at 92, Spandaryan St., «at the house of very lovely people», the family of Ter-Ohanyan. «I was running to you on Spandaryan Street swallowing the stinging construction dust, so characteristic of the young Yerevan, – wrote O. Mandelstam. – Besides, I felt very nice when under renovation of Ararat Valley rudeness, bumps, city, that seems to be fully entering into the God-inspired...».<sup>75</sup>

It has been noticed that «an encounter with the ancient Armenian culture for him becomes a formative living impression.

It was in Armenia that his friendship originated with B. Kuzin, a deep, straight man, absolutely incapable of conformism. It will be said on that point: «When I entered a sleep, shapelessness and formlessness, // The Friendship made me awake». And what happened was a miracle. «The shapeless and formlessness sleep» was terminated. The poems rushed again».<sup>76</sup>

In those days visiting Yerevan was the most illustrious Russian literary figure Marietta Shahinyan. The Mandelstams met her, as confirmed by the poet’s letter to Shahinyan as of April 5, 1933, with a request to facilitate B. Kuzin’s release from detention (arrested in April 4). Here is a relevant piece from that letter: «Dear Marietta Sergeevna.... If you remember, in Yerevan ... The subject of our accidental encounter with you ... With his personality (B. Kuzin’s – A. Z.) is bundled my absolutely new prose and the whole latest period of my work to that and only to that I am indebted that he introduced into the literature the so-called “mature Mandelstam” period ... They deprived me of my interlocutor, my alter ego, the man, whom I could, and had the time

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like, say, Prince Paskevich, the Griboyedov-type German and one of the most educated *chinovniks* Chopin. ... » [Mandelstam 1968: 182].

<sup>73</sup> Mandelstam 1989: 220.

<sup>74</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 269.

<sup>75</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 256.

<sup>76</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 36: On the relations of Mandelstam and Kuzin see details in Kuzin 1987: 127–144. O. Mandelstam dedicated to B. Kuzin a poem «To the German speech», written in August 1932.

to convince that Revolution has the intellect and the vital madness, and the luxuriousness of the living nature ... Marietta Sergeevna! I want you to believe that I am not hostile to those hands that seized Boris Sergeevich (B. Kuzin – A. Z.), since those hands do both strict and lively work.

However, Boris Sergeevich is not an expert and for that reason, the outer freedom itself, provided our authorities will consider it possible to give it back to him, will only be a small drop of the big internal freedom that has already been granted to him by our epoch and our state.

Yours, O. Mandelstam.

I am sorry for having written not with my own hand, I was not quite able to do that, but rather dictated it to my wife».<sup>77</sup> It can be noted that Mandelstam had been quite right to refer to M. Shahinyan on that matter, for after a few days B. Kuzin was released.

By the way, it is enormously symbolic that in the hardest moments of life, in 1933, on December 1, Yeghishe Charents, having become subject of political denunciations and persecutions, published insidious articles and addressed M. Shahinyan with a petition-letter.<sup>78</sup>

... The Mandelstams were having a month's recreation time at Number 1 trade-union rest-home. Since it was very hard for O. Mandelstam to endure very hot and stuffy air in Yerevan in Summer time, he was offered to have a rest on the island on the Lake Sevan, and so the Mandelstams came up to that house – remembers Anahit Khudaverdyan. – The Mandelstam spouses had no children, but loved and wanted to have children. The poet's wife's dream was to have a boy. When Osip Mandelstam sat down at a table to work, she used to tiptoe out of the room, shutting the door behind her, calling to her the children playing near the window, lest they disturb her husband writing poetry».<sup>79</sup>

At Sevan the Mandelstams communicated and became friendly with the ethnographer, historian and archaeologist Asatur Khachatryan, Chairman of Armenia's Central Executive Committee, State and Party official, historical and literary critic Artashes Karinyan, provincial expert Hovhannes Saghatelian, chemist Stepan Hambaryan, and doctor Hertsberg, ichtiologist and entomologist, with L. Arnold, in "A Journey to Armenia", providing biographical data on each one and specific characteristics.<sup>80</sup> This is what N. Mandelstam writes about the Armenian scientists: «At Sevan we met with Egyptologists and numismatic scholars. They arrived in their homeland from every corner of the world. They came out to be genuine Europeans and

<sup>77</sup> Kuzin 1987: 131-132. In this connection speaking to A. Akhmatova L. Ginzburg asked: «–What is it, his hand does not work at all. // – No, but he dictates, and that is completely unimportant. In his whole life he had been so helpless, all the same he could not do anything with his hands» (Ginzburg 1982: 416). «I have no manuscripts, have no notebooks, have no archive. Have no writings either, because I never write – confessed Mandelstam: – I am the only one in Russia who writes with his lips ... » (Mandelstam 2003: 237).

<sup>78</sup> Details see in Charent 1987: 226–230.

<sup>79</sup> Lekmanov 2003: 141.

<sup>80</sup> See Mandelstam 2003: 246–249.

more resembled real scientists than those we met in Moscow, mostly in TSEKUBU hostels and health resorts. ... The Armenian old scholars were in control of not only territorial, but also temporal, i.e. historic visions. They were able to penetrate with their vision through the depth of time. The world had already forgotten all colors, but those had yet not died on the historic Armenian land proud of her old scholars».<sup>81</sup>

During the days spent in Armenia, the Mandelstams were full of fears on the Kurd's revolt in the Ararat Region and on the brutal actions by the Turks.<sup>82</sup> N. Mandelstam wrote: «In the first quarter of the century the Kurds massacred the



From left to right Ya.S.Khachatryants,  
N.Ya.Mandelstam.  
O.E.Mandelstam and a group of children.  
Yerevan, Avan, 1930.

Armenians, while in the second quarter themselves were massacred from the very host that had dispatched them to murder».<sup>83</sup> That was a full-blown assessment that O. Mandelstam had been perfectly informed of the Armenian Genocide executed by the Turks. While in the poem «Hafiz is nursing a rose...» the line «The living are over the mountain» said that the poet knew the real hosts of the lands behind Mount Ararat...

Since May 1930 up until early October the Mandelstams lived and went around Armenia, displaying a great interest in Armenia and the Armenian culture, attended historical and architectural monuments, saw the ruins of the Zvartnots Temple («Not ruins, not at all ... », that is the starting line of the poem describing Zvartnots), In Ashtarak, in the village of Byurakan, he climbed the environs of Mount Aragats, the Armenian and Kurdish nomadic places... He tried to learn Old Armenian,<sup>84</sup>

decided to write a work on the subject «Arshak and Shapuh». Its confirmation is «A Journey to Armenia», prosaic work «Alagyaz» section at the end of historian Pavstos Byuzand's «Armenian History» free narration with Testimonies by the names of Arshak, Shapuh, Anhush Fortress, Drastamat.

<sup>81</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 441–442.

<sup>82</sup> On these events see in detail Saiyan 2017.

<sup>83</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 447.

<sup>84</sup> «I received my first lesson of Armenian from a girl named Margo. Her father was an outstanding diaspora Armenian, < ... > and, it seems, a consul approving of the Socialist build-up and the national progress from the bourgeois circles. < ... > Anyway, I have learned nothing < ... > It is enough to say that she was devoid of any pedagogical abilities. Margo had not the least notion about the mystic and its sacred beauty» (Mandelstam 1968: 183). We shall also note that, at Sevan the teacher A. Kh. took up the task to teach Armenian to O. Mandelstam. According to O. Mandelstam, was inspired by «hatred of the white guard, contempt of the Dashnaks, and a pure Soviet wrath» (Mandelstam 1968: 182).

It is known that during his stay in Armenia O.Mandelstam had received from Sovnarkom of Armenia 300 roubles monthly as *sinekura* – a well paid pension without holding any office.<sup>85</sup>

On O. Mandelstam's days of stay in Yerevan, there was an interesting episode connected with the visit to the ruins of the Avani Hovhan Bagaratsi (the Temple Cathoghike). Residents of the Old Yerevan street «Tsarskaya ulitsa» remember: one day, all of a sudden, it was noticed that Mandelstam had not shown up at the hotel, nor at Spandaryan Street (where he often appeared to see B. Kuzin). It became clear that he had been in Avan, studying a chapel, the stones, cross-stones, while living in the church. «By his own words, he “conversed with a heathen dragon who was above the entrance to the Cathedral, and with a lion, who was in the small courtyard. “The rarest synthesis of Paganry and Christianity”. Mandelstam called a temple in Avan “a looted little pagan booth” and never stopped wondering at the architectural mentality of the builder».<sup>86</sup> It is to be noted that as a record of this event a group photo has been retained showing besides the Mandelstams also Ya. Khachatryants, the husband of M. Shahinyan, a philologist, translator, with a group of children. Incidentally, this picture is the only document of the Mandelstams' visit to Armenia. N. Mandelstam in connection with the visit to Armenia wrote: «For Mandelstam going to Armenia was a return to the native edge – to the place where there was the beginning of everything, to the fathers, towards the source. After the local silence the poems came back to him in Armenia and had never left ...».<sup>87</sup> For the Russian poet Armenia was “the Country's book ... that had been a manual for the earliest people». «There is nothing more instructive or happy, than when you plunge into a society of quite another race, that you respect, with which you sympathize, which you are proud of, despite being an alien. The Armenians' fulfillment with life, their course tenderness, their noble bone marrow full of working zeal, their unexplainable disgust towards every kind of metaphysics as well as an admirable intimacy with the world of the real things – all that told me: you are awake, never fear your time, do not dodge, – wrote O. Mandelstam. – And I wonder if that was not why I was placed among the people renowned for their trading activities, who, at the same time, live not by the passenger terminal clock or else, a sundial, as seen at the Zvartnots debris astronomic wheel or as a rose-flower entablature within a stone».<sup>88</sup>

Anyway, «We have gone a lot around Armenia, and seen a great deal, although, no doubt, not all that we wanted. We knew little of people»,<sup>89</sup> – attested N. Mandelstam. A propos, the eloquent reality confirming the last statement is as follows. Thus, a notable literary man L. Mkrtchyan wrote: «In September 1959 Ilya Ehrenburg asked me about Osip Mandelstam. He came to Armenia and was interested specifically on

<sup>85</sup> Details see in Mets 2019: 262ff.

<sup>86</sup> See Ghazinyan 2002; also Kubatyan 2005: 18.

<sup>87</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 372.

<sup>88</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 249.

<sup>89</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 78.

whether the author of poems on Armenia, which were the work of genius, was known in this country.

I knew nothing about the repressed poet (died in December 1938 in a labor-camp hospital).

Here almost no one knows about him, – said Ehrenburg – Only Martiros Saryan and Saryan's son Sarik remember his poems».<sup>90</sup>

A similar story is related to a «disfavored» Russian author V. Grossman. In 1961, November 3, he came to Armenia, and lived here for two months. He created Travelling notes "Good for you", dedicated to the Armenian people's history and culture through Hrachya Kochar (in the book mention is made of the writer Martirosyan) inquired about Mandelstam's visit to Armenia, the latter's written works on the subject of Armenia and it came about that not a single writer of the old generation knew anything about it.<sup>91</sup>

Incidentally, as we learn about Mandelstam from the memoirs by B. Kuzin, the Mandelstams had intended to settle in Armenia. «The latest days in Yerevan passed in endless conversations about the future. – To go to Moscow and strive to achieve something new, to settle there in some way or to remain in Armenia? It is not easy to count, how many times the solution of this question changed. But the day of my departure was finally resolved. – There is only one choice – to stay here. Only by plunging into the ancient Armenian culture, within Armenia's life, history and art (it was meant, as a matter of course, to master the Armenian language in its completeness) could there be an awakening of the creative lethargy. The return to Moscow was absolutely out of the question. On the eve of my departure I bade a farewell to the Mandelstams, as we had no doubt, for good».<sup>92</sup> Life, however, made other arrangements ...

### **O. Mandelstam in Shushi**

The city of Shushi is an important public, political, spiritual and cultural center. It is known that yet in 1837 this city was visited by the great Russian Poet M. Lermontov. In a letter to his relative S. Rayevsky he reported: «Since the day that I left Russia, from Kizliar to Taman, my way lay through the mountains, I was in the city of Shushi, in the cities Kuba, Shamakhi, and Kakhet» (emphasis is ours - A. Z.).<sup>93</sup>

On March 23-26 1920, the troops of Turkey and Azerbaijan and the Muslims demolished the ancient citadel city and massacred the Armenian population. That had been the subject of multiple witness accounts, and publications by the Armenian and foreign intellectuals as well as public and political figures. Thus, M. Shahinyan in the 1920s travelled in Transcaucasia – Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, Mountainous Karabakh and Nakhijevan, leaving interesting notes on that account. In "The Ghost of

<sup>90</sup> Mkrtchyan 1998: 220; see also Kubatyan 2005: 73.

<sup>91</sup> Grossman 1967: 210. See also Gonchar-Khanjyan 1989: 7; Kubatyan 2005: 73.

<sup>92</sup> Kuzin 1987: 140.

<sup>93</sup> Sevyan 1991: 118. Incidentally, Michael Harutiunyan wrote about that fact a poem titled «In the Lermontov Shushi» (118–119).

Shushi", chapter VI of the essay on Karabagh, she recorded: «The first thing that struck me was silence. I had never felt such silence, and it seemed absolutely unnatural. It was all of a sudden as if the silence were whispering. The stones were breathing and their whisper made the hair on your head stand on end. In March 1920 here during three days the city was demolished and 7000 houses were set on fire, the number of murdered Armenians, according to different sources, reached 3 to 4 thousand, some say it was over 12 thousand. Fact is that of 35 thousand of Shushi no one was left alive. In some streams one could see corpses. A person having imagination here would hardly breathe, you walk and walk along pervasive smoke-painted remains of dwelling, or rather along the walls, they spurn you to hurry, you fear you will never get out at all. ...».<sup>94</sup>

In the book wrote by Giovanni Guaita, an Italian historian, theologian, author and translator «A Scream from Ararat. Armin Wegner and the Armenians' Genocide» we read: «In March 1920 the Turks and the Azerbaijanis committed another atrocity – a massacre in the city of Shushi. In Karabakh Shushi was an important cultural center of the Armenian life. Since the 19th century it had its monastery, its church, theater, hospital, diocese school, publications were issued of Armenian books and magazines. In late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Armenians counted over 60 percent of the city's population. Only within a single day March 22, 1920, the evil Turks demolished thousands of Armenian dwellings, churches, libraries, printing houses, massacred over 30000 people. In this way the Kemalists in Shushi reiterated what the Young Turks perpetrated in Baku (i.e. the events in Baku in September 1918 – A. Z.)»<sup>95</sup>

Another important evidence is the reflections of those tragic events by O. Mandelstam and his wife.

On returning to Tiflis from Armenia, 10 years after the Shushi massacre in March 1920, the Mandelstams came to this oldest Armenian city. Why did they visit Shushi this time? That visit could largely have been stimulated by M. Shahinyan's aforementioned travel and the city's description that had been no doubt familiar to the Russian poet, following the interaction with the Armenian intellectuals, as well as with the Shushi-native Ter-Gabrielyan, the initiator of the Mandelstams' visit to Armenia.

On terrifying impressions of Shushi N. Mandelstam gave interesting information. This painful excerpt will be cited in full. «... At the latest trip from Yerevan, the end of our travel in Armenia. At dawn we set out from Gyanja (Gandzak – A. Z.) for Shushi by bus. The city started with endless cemeteries, then a small market place, terminating the demolished city streets: We had already happened to see abandoned villages, consisting of a few half-demolished dwellings, but in this once rich and prosperous city images of destruction and death were most terrible to see. We walked along the streets and everywhere the same double row of roofless, windowless and doorless images. The gaping openings of windows showed empty rooms, sometimes fragments of

<sup>94</sup> Shahinyan 1931: 362. Incidentally, the book was dedicated to «Ja. Khachatryants, spouse and comrade».

<sup>95</sup> Guaita 2005: 46.



casing, half-demolished ovens, somewhere remnants of broken furniture. The houses were of widely known rose-colored tuff, two-storeyed. All partitions were destroyed, and in the gaps between those skeletons were light spots of blue skies. They said that following the massacre all wells were full of corpses. If anyone remained alive, he had escaped from this city. On any mountain-side roads we met not a single person. Only below, on the market place, was a weeping group of people, not a single Armenian, only Muslims. O. M.'s impression was that the market-place Muslims were those murderers' remnants who ten years before had demolished the city, however, there was no use to them: the Oriental squalor, terrible cluttered traps, pus-stained face. They sold corn flour, pies, donuts... we dared not buy donuts from those hands, despite being hungry ... Neither could one drink water from those wells... Not only the city had no hotels, but the newcomers had to spend the night in the so-called "commons", men and women in the same room. The bus to Gyanja would have to depart in the morning... We were offered to stay at a private home, but I was apprehensive of the eastern boils, while the Mandelstams could not get rid of the idea that we dealt with robbers and murderers. We decided to move to Stepanakert, the regional center. To reach the place was possible only by a horse cart.

There we met a noseless coachman, the only one on the premises, with face half-covered with a leather mask. And then everything happened exactly as it was in the poem («Coachman»– A. Z.), and we did not believe that he would get us to Stepanakert. We passed the home-going way. Here we spent the night in the "common" and in the morning got bus tickets quite easily (through the regional Soviet) and reached the Gyanja or Nukha railway». <sup>96</sup>

That was the shocking impression left by Shushi upon the Mandelstams, ten years after the demolition of the city.

### **«Armenia» Array of Poems. The days in Tiflis with Ye. Charents**

The Mandelstams go from Armenia to Tiflis, where they will stay up until November 5, 1930. Here, Mandelstam writes the array of poems "Armenia" published in the journal «Noviy mir» under the title: «Armenia. Twelve Poems. O. Mandelstam». <sup>97</sup> Later he wrote on Armenia five more poems, which, however, were not included into

<sup>96</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 359–360. Recapitulating historic events is done not only to remember the past, but also to take lessons. Of those episodes are the mentioned events having taken place in Shushi. All those things were manifested in the Soviet years by the Azerbaijani state-level encroachments on the Armenian independence. However, in May 8 -9, 1992, the Armenian armed forces liberated the city. Not coming to terms with the situation, Azerbaijan with the immediate participation of Turkey with the involvement of International terrorists, using the Israeli military technology and Israeli combat equipment on September 27, 2020, unleashed aggression against Artsakh treacherously seizing Shushi. The 1920 massacre of the Armenian population and the 2020 demolition of the city is the manifestation of the genocidal policy against Artsakh and the Armenian people that remained with no response from the International community.

<sup>97</sup> «Noviy mir», 1931, Book 3, March, p. 62–63. By the way, printed in the same number was M. Shahinyan's second part of the novel "Hidrocentral" (pp. 5–17), while the previous parts were published by the Journal in 1930, Vol. 1–7, 10.

that array. Of course, the Biblical Spirit is felt, Armenia is presented with a spiritual image, the historical destiny of the people, their language and culture, the belonging to the European world, in the next poem he sculptured a more earthly image of Armenia, reflected the work of the people, their everyday life.<sup>98</sup> «In Mandelstam's poems of the 30s there is fear and confusion, and there also exists a somewhat growing admiration of everyday phenomena. He creates with love the language on works about history, art, life. Such is the array "Armenia", starting in 1930 the latest creative period of Mandelstam»,<sup>99</sup> – wrote the Russian literary critic and writer L. Ginzburg in his article «The Poetics of Osip Mandelstam».

In essence, the poems dedicated to Armenia, have been discussed, analyzed and commented in detail upon the depth of Mandelstam's poetry particularly in what concerns the symbols,<sup>100</sup> therefore, oral expression was sufficient.

... In those days Yeghishe Charents was in Tiflis. It was there that they first met and got close. Mandelstam wrote: «A basic friendship was waiting for us in Tiflis. In the hotel we were visited by Yeghishe Charents, and we spent with him two or three weeks, meeting nearly every day. I understand why the friendly free relations with Charents started in Tiflis, rather than Yerevan, however the reason lies elsewhere...<sup>101</sup> I remember the way the acquaintance started. Mandelstam read to Charents the first poems about Armenia, he then just had started to write them, Charents listened and said: «From you, it seems, a book is flowing», I remember those words, for Mandelstam later said: «You heard that he said: he is a real poet». At that time I did not know that for a poet «the book» is a complete structural formation, a big unity. Then under some pretext Pasternak told me about «the miracle of binding the book» and the same was said by Anna Andreevna-Anoosh (Anna Akhmatova – A. Z.). All that was summed up in the words by Yeghishe Charents, and we always remembered that in Yerevan lives a real poet. I remember nothing of his other words, since one cannot write down a spouse's or a relative's word with whom you drink tea, walk searching for a place where you can buy cigarettes. At that time there could be a crisis on cigarettes, and men established friendship with a group of urchins, since with no cigarettes it is hardly possible to talk, while they used to talk a lot and long. Possibly, Charents' words that he was heading for a book, was just a friendly greeting, something that enables any poet to do his work, while in that life it was not so easy to get. Armenia, Charents, the old men of the University, children, books, the wonderful country all branching into architecture,

<sup>98</sup> On the occasion of O. Mandelstam's 125th Anniversary the History Museum of Armenia published a luxurious album-catalogue where photos were commented using eloquent excerpts from the poet's "Armenia" array, see Catalogue 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Ginzburg 1982: 288.

<sup>100</sup> Particularly deep, delicate and detailed notes and parallels are yielded by Kubatyan 1974: 103–116; 1989: 11–20; 1991: 79–88; 2005: 7–66. See also Semenko 2003: 89–111; Gonchar-Khanjyan 1989: 5–10; Andreeva 1995: 67–77; 1999: 63–70; 2001; Gonchar, Andreeva 1996: 82–93 etc.

<sup>101</sup> We shall note, it is at least strange, Gurgen Mahari's statement that he met Mandelstam in the summer of 1930 in the hall of the hotel "Yerevan" and they were introduced to each other by Ye. Charents (see Mahari 1966: 47–48). By the way, Charents since July 1 was head of the fiction department of the State Publishing House and frequently visited Tiflis, attended «Hayartun», talked with writers, signed agreements on printing their works.

the unanimous singing (that of Komitas – A. Z.) and the whole position of this country is what gave Mandelstam second wind», to live his entire life».<sup>102</sup>

Incidentally, in all probability, the close friendship between Charents and Mandelstam facilitated his translation of the poem «the sixth feeling».

It is to be noted that in Tiflis O. Mandelstam was supported by Beso Lominadze, the First Secretary of the Transcaucasian region, who had promised to arrange a job for him at the Archive, and to provide him with an apartment. However, B. Lominadze was accused with certain encroachments against the party and summoned urgently to Moscow. «Just when the tragedy of Lominadze burst out, whom Osip Mandelstam had visited three or four times for a personal reception, noticed that following us, wherever we were going, there was a tail of spies. Perhaps, the local surveillance decided in all cases to track down the mysterious visitors of disfavored prominent personalities. Just at that time we got it home to us that we had nothing more to do in Tiflis and we beat it to Moscow without delay».<sup>103</sup>

### **The Motivation for Writing the poem “The Coachman”**

Following “Armenia” Array of poems in 1931, June 12, the dire impressions received from Shushi were reflected in the poem “Coachman” by O. Mandelstam. It shows that Armenia for the Russian poet was not a random attraction, but rather a biographic fact, and that the Armenian subject for him was not a local but a universal factor, one can say, even metaphysical – it was an existential key to open the tragic character of existence.<sup>104</sup> «Its theme is the coachman, who ignores where he is heading, – the president of plague (that connects the Pushkin’s little tragedy «Feast during a Plague»–A. Z.), with a masked someone on whom we all depend ... Mandelstam had noticed long ago that we know nothing about those on who depends our fate ... We know even less about those plague-feasting presidents. The poem was born by a private person and a wider combination – that is the source of its meaning...»,<sup>105</sup> – wrote N. Mandelstam.

«The Coachman» poem also was honored with a detailed analysis and scrutiny, as noted in A. Pushkin’s lyric poetry, particularly by evident associations with the plots «A Travel to Arzrum», «A Feast during a Plague», with the motifs of the works named “The Devs”.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, given herein is only a single excerpt from the poem «The Coachman».

<sup>102</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 79. With regard to looking for the place to buy cigarettes see also Mandelstam 1990: 438. On Charents and Mandelstam having not met in Yerevan, as well as on the subjects of probable conversations by Mandelstam and other writers, on the coincidental tragic events in the lives of the two poets (particularly on the Stalin’s call to Pasternak on December 30 1930 in connection with Mandelstam, and in the Kremlin through Charents Stalin’s Curiosity on St. Zoryan, the letter by the poets to M. Shahinyan) the late G. Kubatyan had interesting observations, see Kubatyan 2005: 71–87.

<sup>103</sup> Golovin 2016: 44.

<sup>104</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 359.

<sup>105</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 360. By the way, in 1929–1930 in Karabakh and Hadrut had suffered plague.

<sup>106</sup> See particularly Khzmalyan 1991: 89–92.

Так, в Нагорном Карабахе,	In Karabakh of the Mountains,
В хищном городе Шуше	In the predator city Shushi,
Я изведаль эти страхи,	I experienced all those fears,
Соприродные душе.	That my soul was willing to see.
Сорок тысяч мертвых окон	Forty thousand empty windows
Там видны со всех сторон	Can be seen from all the sides,
И труда бездушный кокон	And once working heartless cinder
На горах похоронён.	Is interred on the heights.
И бесстыдно розовеют	No shame in the rosy
Обнажённые дома,	Naked dwellings on the hill.
А над ними неба реет	And above the sky is fuzzy
Темно-синяя чума.	It is blue and black like hell. <sup>107</sup>

### The Prose Work «A Journey to Armenia» and its echoes

In 1931-1932 O. Mandelstam wrote the Essay «A Journey to Armenia», which is mainly a story about Armenia, but also a meditation on human history and world languages, the French Impressionism, physiology and education. On the details of writing this work Mandelstam in April 1931 wrote to his father: «I wonder if there are programs or perspectives? Certainly, there are. I will make you known my writing ordeal. After Armenia I lately completed lyric poetry, the large array gave me not a single *copeck*. Nothing can be printed. (The journal editors complain and accept nothing). The praise goes high. I also write prose, a long-time and painful affair, however that is the reason why they do not close deals with me and do not pay in advance. That becomes clear in half-a-word. I have fully put up with it, never suggest anything anywhere, make no requests anywhere, ... It is important, dad, to create works, but where they are going to be placed, is not essential ... I do not put aside my pen due to everyday empty things, work is good and joyful».<sup>108</sup>

Prior to printing «A Journey to Armenia» on April 5, 1933, O. Mandelstam wrote in an aforementioned letter to M. Shahinyan: «Dear Marietta Sergeevna. This work that I am sending to you and want you to read, has not been printed yet. (It will appear in the Publishing House «Zvezda» and Leningrad publishing house,<sup>109</sup> but it so happened that this work, this manuscript is already working and breathing as a living man, responding as if alive, and at the same time, it struggles. Can you remember, in Yerevan you gave me a volume by Goethe and we were reading an article from F.C.E. (see an article by

<sup>107</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 153.

<sup>108</sup> Mandelstam 1987: 204.

<sup>109</sup> M. Shahinyan was one of the members of the Leningrad Directorate of the «Writers Publishers». It was decided to publish «The Voyage to Armenia» as a book, it was in the process of proof-reading, however, after the appearance of the negative reviews, the publication was frozen.

Mandelstam «On the Problem of Darwin's Scientific Style» printed in the journal «For Communist Enlightenment», 1932, April 22 – A. Z.), where I and you on your part and mine admired the “living” nature. Our momentary encounters with you and even Yakov Samsonich (and even through M. Shahinyan's husband Ya. Khachatryan – A. Z.), (it was known that M. Shahinyan was tough on the ear – A. Z.), has always defended reality of his stillborn definitions. You have always opposed me for not listening to materialism's or dialectics' music or it does not matter, whatever it is called. The same conversation went on along my «Voyage». The material world is a reality, something that is given, but born with us. In order that the given become reality, one must revive it in the real sense of the word. That is indeed, science that is indeed, art. ... ».<sup>110</sup>

In one of his letters O. Mandelstam wrote: «My little book («A Journey to Armenia» –A. Z.) says that the eye is the means and tool of thinking, that light is force and ornament thought-idea. This is the way they speak about friendship, science, intellectual passion, rather than things».<sup>111</sup>

To «The Journey to Armenia» I have given a many-faceted scrutiny and commentary, there were multiple publications,<sup>112</sup> that is why it is enough of that.

The Essay «A Journey to Armenia» was published in Leningrad, 1933-1935 (pp. 103–125). Editor – Cezar Volpe, not only published that work, but printed an excerpt of an article on King Arshak by critical literature, whom the Assyrian Shah held in a dark vault without exit and with no ray of light “the Assyrian has detained my heart...”<sup>113</sup> For that Volpe was fired, but not arrested. The newspaper «Pravda», August 30, 1933, under the subtitle “Bibliography” published a very negative review by S. Rosenthal on this work titled «The Shadows of Old Petersburg («Zvezda», 1933, 1–7)». Following that publication O. Mandelstam was advised «to give up» the work «The Journey to Armenia». «The period of apologetic letters had not yet been canceled».<sup>114</sup> Having read the stuff in the «Pravda», O. Mandelstam addressed his acquaintance in All-Union Bolshevik Central Party Committee. The latter received him immediately, expecting that the poet came to apologize, however, he simply declared that it was inadmissible to publish the yellow press materials in a central newspaper». «Mandelstam, you are talking about the newspaper» “Pravda”, – was the answer. «I am not to blame that the article was printed in the Pravda», – responded Mandelstam».<sup>115</sup>

Anyway. The “Pravda” critic mercilessly criticized the literary traces of the Petersburg period, the writers incorporating the remnants of layers and fragments of the old literary schools» - V. Shklovsky, K. Vaginov, N. Zabolotsky, but the main target was O. Mandelstam. «Osip Mandelstam made a «Journey in Armenia» and in 1933 told

<sup>110</sup> Mandelstam and Kuzin 1987: 131.

<sup>111</sup> Mandelstam 1968: 191.

<sup>112</sup> Zolyan 1986: 226–236; Nerler 1987: 69–79; see also studies mentioned above in footnote 100. Recently an extremely remarkable study has been published dealing with the “Journey to Armenia” (Katsis 2022).

<sup>113</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 335. Cf. Mandelstam 1989: 301.

<sup>114</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 341.

<sup>115</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 342–343.

about it in the journal «Zvezda». ... From Mandelstam's old, rotten, great-power chauvinism smell is coming, that, awarding praises on Armenia, glorified its exotics, its slavery of the past centuries, while on the present Mandelstam had not written a word, – as noted by Rosenthal. –To journey in this way» one can stay at home, and skirt yourself with engravings, old books and rare Armenian antiquities ... One can go by the witty notes by Mandelstam about Bezimensky. In that there is a relentless wrath of one who does not understand the proletarian literature... So spoke and wrote as well as journeyed before the revolution «Veni» poets, poets of the sea-side bear-house street, poets of the smelly saloons, heroes of literary «fridays» and «tuesdays». «The Petersburgian old-time poet-acmeist O. Mandelstam, – continues the article writer, – passed by the stormy, blooming and joyful Socialism-building Armenia ... O. Mandelstam enjoys poor opinion by M. Slonimsky (a representative of the Soviet prose – A. Z.). ... A poet, as they say, with no life experience, striving to serenity and well-being, indifferent to everything, except his wishes, is condemned to hell». And finally, as a conclusion, «Zvezda» on its pages published the best Works of the Soviet literature. However, in «Zvezda» there are still a lot of grim, fruitless writers. The journal needs a strong hand, a Bolshevik eye. The writers need to be re-educated, a relentless struggle has to be maintained against the evil class creativity. // We must boldly put forward new writers from the workers' environment».<sup>116</sup>

In all generality, O.Mandelstam was not too much affected with this review, he simply tried to forget it, whereas that was a threat and a notice.

As Mandelstam wrote, “Armenia produced a reaction to this article by giving the poet a handle of “Dashnak” in the media: that meant that for Mandelstam all subjects on Armenia will have been shut down except Martiros Saryan and his son Sarik,<sup>117</sup> when leaving, he knew that he was destined to stay away».<sup>118</sup> His testimony from the array «Armenia»:

<sup>116</sup> «Pravda» (M.), 30. VIII. 1933. Note that prior to that, on July 17, the “Literaturnaya Gazeta” published a similar article by N. Oruzheynikov.

<sup>117</sup> Our searches, in the Armenian press, however, had been vain. Let us also note that the abovementioned can be explained by, as it was noted above, in the 1960s the old-generation Armenian writers did not remember Mandelstam or any of his works on Armenia, except Martiros Saryan and his son Sarik.

We can add that years later, in late 1960s and early 1970s, in the literary life of Armenia, interesting but sad things were recorded. As written by G. Kubatyan, the editor-in-chief of the journal «Literaturnaya Armenia», Gevorg Emin, a well-known poet, in an interview to the Paris newspaper «Russkaya misl» for printing O. Mandelstam's work was removed from work in the journal (most probably, he mean the article Emin 1967: 82–83), and that in the Central Committee he was considered uncontrollable. Actually, in 1974 the «Literaturnaya Armenia» fired its employee G. Kubatyan, since he dared to publish an article about O. Mandelstam, wherein were printed the unpublished poems by O. Mandelstam which were condemned for «Armenian nationalism and Sionism» (Kubatyan 2005: 164). It is to be added that on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of O. Mandelstam's death in 1998, G. Kubatyan wrote “Air stealer or where is that street?”, a summarizing excerpton of Mandelstam as a poet (see Kubatyan 2005: 418–421).

<sup>118</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 344.

Я тебя никогда не увижу,	I shall never perceive you again,
Близорукое армянское небо,	The sky that is near at hand,
И уже не взгляну, прищурясь,	And will never be hit by a frame
На дорожный шатёр Арарата,	That will form an admirable tent
И уже никогда не раскрою	And naught will be open, including
В библиотеке авторов гончарных,	The door to the pottery den,
Прекрасной земли пустотелую книгу,	The hollow resounding beauty
По которой учились первые люди.	The book that instructed the earliest men.

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### Conclusion

Osip Mandelstam is a 20<sup>th</sup>-century original and interesting celebrity of Russian literature with a controversial and complicated life story. His life and literary way was staggering between uplifts and downfalls.

«Mandelstam always, during his whole life, was striving to go to South, towards the shores of the Black Sea, to the Mediterranean basin. First he recognized the Crimea and loved the Eastern Coast and then, in the year 1920 he was in the Caucasus... In 1921 he had already spent half a year with me in Georgia, and in 1930 we from May to November (early October – A. Z.) lived in Armenia and Tiflis, where after a long silence he returned to poetry. I am talking about the genuine journeys, rather than on the accommodations in the rest-homes, which were quite numerous. The Mediterranean basin, the Crimea, the Caucasus were for Mandelstam an historical land, the book, «that had been a manual for the earliest people». For Mandelstam, the historical world was restricted to the peoples confessing Christianity, and he perceived Armenia as an outpost “at the edge of the world” (“Whole days you at the edge of the world – Swallowing tears, standing upright. They spat in your face with shame and grief “From the bearded cities of the East.) ... In these years we have seen at every step traces of the Musavatist massacres (not just only Shushi ...), and that deepened the feeling of being an outskirts surrounded by alien people and countries. In the poems on Armenia creeping in unexpectedly was the subject of the end and annihilation. «And they remove from you your plaster after death (italics are mine – A. Z.)».<sup>120</sup>

The indelible impressions received from Armenia were deeply reflected in Mandelstam’s lyric poetry and prose. The Armenian theme became linked with multiple reflections on human history and recognition of history, world vision, the nodal point of ancient cultures.

The journey made to Armenia was for O. Mandelstam the most illuminated pages of his life. The poetry and prose born from familiarity with the Biblical Country are of the best pages written in the Russian literature about Armenia.

<sup>119</sup> Mandelstam 2003: 138.

<sup>120</sup> Mandelstam 1990: 381.

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