

The Perception of the City in Topographic Works of Yeremia Chelebi Qyomurtchyan

Gayane Ayvazyan

The Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Ermenistan

The literary merit of Yeremia Chelebi Qyomurtchyan (1637-1695) contains an extensive experience of cultural multi-layer interpenetrations and relations. One of Qyomurtchyan's original features consists in his ability to combine Armenian self-consciousness and, on the other hand, the Ottoman civil consciousness of the 17th century. He was born and spent his life in the Ottoman capital, becoming the bearer of the city culture and a competent citizen. This fact is clearly differentiated within all the historical heritage of Yeremia Qyomurtchyan. However, his topographical works have not only crystallized the author's historical perspectives and preferences, they also represent a firm and harmonious combination of the city and its citizen.

In addition to the structural approaches, the works encompass the great passion of the author towards the city. While describing the city, the author's egocentrism steps back, he makes the city speak for itself and move forward solely in Qyomurtchyan's works. Among the literary rich and voluminous heritage of Qyomurtchyan, we would like to mention his topographies, which are created in a vivid,

unconstrained and fascinating style and in a lively rate. The author has paid tribute as much as possible to his creative imagination, using a variety of allegoric images, stories, conversations, songs (mainly used the art of Qaafiyaa), some of which he work himself and some of which he related from others.

The topographies dedicated to Constantinople / Istanbul (we use both names of the city in accordance with the principles applied by the author) are the following: “The brief description of Constantinople’s strait” (“Hamarōt storagrut’iwn K. Polsi neğutsi”), “History of Constantinople’s fire” (“Patmut’iwn hrakizman Kostandnupol-soy”) and “History of Istanbul” (“Stampōloy patmut’iwn”). We can definitely assume that the last two works have been ordered by the Armenian political elite of that period. As to the “Brief description of Constantinople’s strait”, it is a composition in verse, which provides us with some information concerning the villages and other settlements situated in Bosphorus (in Turkish - Boğaziçi) (in Turkish Boğaziçi, note that the author lists both the ancient and contemporary noues) both their ancient and contemporary names. The current place of this work is unknown, but there are other traces closely connected to it. The grandchild of Komitas Qyomurtchyan - Kozmas Qyomurtchyan (Cosimo de Carpignano), who was the translator of the Spanish Embassy in Constantinople, wrote a book in Italian¹ devoted to the topographical description of the city. There, he also describes the strait, and in the words of Ghukas Intchitchyan, “mentions only the names of important villages, using also both their ancient and contemporary names.”² V. Torgomyan, who had the opportunity to compare the two above mentioned works of Yeremia and Kozmas Qyomurtchyans, shows that Kozmas used his forefather’s work: in some places he just quoted him, adding only his own

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1 Cosimo Comidas de Carbognano, *Descrizione topografica dello stato presente di Constantinopoli*, Bassano, 1794, see Turkish translation: Cosimo Comidas de Carbognano, *18. Yüzyılın Sonunda İstanbul*, (çev. Erendiz Özbayoğlu) (Istanbul, 1993).

2 Է. Ինչեան, *Amaranots biwzandean*, see *Yarajabanut’iwn*, (Venice-S. Lazzaro, 1794), p. 6. *Aşharhagrut’iwn chorits masants aşharhi*, volume V, (Venice-S. Lazzaro, 1804), p. 156.

comments.³ In addition, as shown in works of T. Palyan⁴ and Gh. Intchitchyan, the two Qyomurtchyans applied the same principle while describing the topography of Bosphorus strait. There is no doubt that Kozmas Qyomurtchyan was familiar with the work of his grandparent, and in fact, this is the translation that Trdat Palyan writes about. It is unclear whether Kozmas Qyomurtchyan made the literal translation of this work or simply transmitted it, in accordance with the traditions of the time. We think that even if the original is never to be found, it can be restored (at least semantically) on the basis of the translation.

The next work entitled «History of Constantinople's fire»⁵ is based on the description of the fire, which occurred on July 14, 1660 in Constantinople and destroyed almost the half of the Ottoman capital. The title of the work doesn't belong to the author: Yeremia Qyomurtchyan calls his book «Book of Fire», «The Large Fire» or just «The Large». The author divided the book into six parts. We would like to draw attention especially to the author's approach concerning the question of chronology. He dates the fire according to the Armenian, Arabic, and Persian chronological calendars, he also associates the dates with the years in office of a series of contemporary preeminent leaders and Armenian, Greek and Catholic religious leaders. Generally, all the fires occurred in Constantinople won Qyomurtchyan's attention. Thus, he writes about the fires that occurred from 1565 to 1694 in another book entitled «Annalistic History». But the above mentioned fire of 1660 was perhaps the largest and the most destructive of all the fires that Qyomurtchyan witnessed. It turns out that Qyomurtchyan had the idea to write down this story while writing his «Annalistic history»; however he considered the description of the fire too complicated

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3 Eremia Chēlēpi K'ēomiwrčean, *Stampōloy patmut'iwn, ašhatasirut'eamb V. Torgomeani*, volume II, (Vienna, 1932), p. 475 (see also-ibid vol. I, III, Vienna, 1913, 1938). V. Torgomyan mentions that it was a very singular exemplar of the book and belonged only to the library of Antonyan congregation of Ortaköy.

4 "Biwrakn", (K. Pōlis, 1898), N 34-35, p. 612.

5 Eremia Chēlēpi K'ēomiwrčean, *Patmut'iwn hrakizman Kostandnuwpōlsoy*, hrat. G. Bampuk'čean, (Stanpul, 1991), 184 p.

to include in that work and decided to devote another to that natural disaster. The author chose certain principles to present the fire: although he succeeded in his endeavor to reveal the whole panic and the chaotic situation caused by the fire, are easily understood by a careful reading that his focus was mainly on specific topographical areas. The author outlined the fire's route as it spread from north-south, east-west, guided mainly by city wall gates: according to this the fire began in Ayazma gapı and then spread two directions: in the western part it reached Unkapanı and stopped there. The fire also spread mainly to the east, southeast and south, and, the fates numbered between twelve and two were destroyed by the fire to a large extent. After burning the city walls, the fire penetrated into the city (from Unkapanı until Samatyakapı). As a result, exactly half of the 26 fates, which included also half of the urban areas, were burnt. In addition, this topographic work describes architectural designs in various public places in Constantinople/ Istanbul of the second half of the 17th century, and contains valuable information concerning the city's economy and infrastructure. These information are of a statistical nature and sometimes represent concrete data about the damage caused by the fire. It claimed the lives of 3,000 people, burnt 1070 large and small mosques, 36 synagogues, 9 churches and damaged more than 200 wells, 90 bath-houses, 45 bakeries, 18 bazaars, and so on. The author confesses that he was not able to mention all the data concerning numerous palaces, houses, schools, shops, pools, parks and other attractions destroyed by the fire. Based on the number of witnesses and victims' testimonies, Yerima Qyomurtchyan also provides the overall picture of the psychological pressure on the Istanbul, within the context of material losses of individuals or groups the author provides some important data concerning the ethnic and social composition of the city, as well as their occupations.

While writing about destructions caused by the fire, Yerima Qyomurtchyan mentions even the exact time of the day and the total duration of the fire, it started on Saturday, lasted 7 hours, then continued on Sunday. It was put out on Monday at 11 pm, in other words, it lasted 42 hours.

The author found original and creative solutions in his «History of Istanbul». In both topographies he used an interesting feat by representing the city both from literary and documentary positions. So, the text is attractive and easy to read and one can find there real and imaginary figures, which were put in motion by the imagination of the author. As to the core of the work, it is composed of a well-designed and very pragmatic text that is structured around a certain geographical axis and is developing with a certain logical precision. It should also be mentioned that although the above-mentioned fire was too rapid and lasted only two days, It took Yeremia Qyomurtchyan eleven years (1661-1672) to describe these two later days. He spent 20 years (1661-1682) to represent the pleasant and interesting walk of a foreigner with a citizen of Istanbul. Of course we do not contend that he spent this period of time working only on these two topographies, he pened many other works during this period and he was engaged in political and economic activities. Still, we can assume that the apparent lightness of the work has a more profound and reasonable basis. According to Qyomurtchyan, the «History of Istanbul» (that was also called «The Walk» by the author), has a «concise» statement and contains only the description of the gates of the city walls: the description of intramures is missing, as it belongs to another «style of writing», (according to the author). However, some of the city's interior is described anyways. The author begins his tour from the gates of Constantinople's walls, consistently describing all 26 of then door names, such as Odun Kapı, Balat Kapı, Eğri Kapı are not listed. After the description of the gates of Istanbul, the author comes out of the 26th gate and goes by a boat to Ayvansaray, on the left shoe of the Golden Han towards the left shore of The Golden Horn. From there, he cresses to Kağıthane, on the other side, and then moves south towards Sütlüce and finally Galata, at the Junc-tren of the Golden Han and the Bosphorus. The Golden Horn and appears on the right shore called Kağıthane, then he moves to the south, where was situated the settlement called Sidliche. The walk in The Golden Horn continues to the south, taking the reader to a settlement called Galata, which was situated exactly where The Golden Horn and the Bosphorus are dividing: First, he describes the 9 gates of Galata walls, and then talks about the settlement. After

Galata his route continues along the Bosphorus, more specifically, along its right shore towards north part - Dolmabahçe, Beşiktaş, Ortaköy, Defterdar Burnu, Kuruçeşme Burnu, Arnavutköy, Akıntıburnu, Bebek Bahçe, Rumelihisarı, Yeniköy, Tarabiye, Kefeliköy, Kırkağaç, finally reading Fener, on the southern share of the Black Sea. He then crosses to the Anadolu side which he does not describe in detail. Only the half of the eastern part of the strait is described topographically, beginning with Anadolu Hisarı. The account then the topographic history gradually unfolds to the south, (Gülbahçe, Çengelköy, Üsküdar, Kadıköy, Fenerbahçe) as well as their nearby settlements and architectural monuments. Thus, we can find in topography the walls of Constantinople, some parts of the city, two shores of The Golden Horn, western bank of the Bosphorus, some locations in the southern of the Black Sea, then the eastern shore of the Strait.

The work is based on a traditional allegoric symbol of a city (personification): the author endowed the city with human physical characteristics. He believes that the head of the city is the East, his feet are located in the western part, his face is turned towards Scythia and so on. This image is repeated many times in different parts of the work. In addition to the topographical data, the work also contains valuable information concerning the demographic image of the city. Even though the precise statistical data is missing the numerous layers of the source allow us to imagine the urban population's ethnic composition, religious belonging, occupations, lifestyle, cuisine, transportation and other issues. «History of Istanbul» is a particularly valuable source of data concerning non-Muslim communities (millets) in the Ottoman Empire. The vast majority of non-Muslim population of Constantinople were Greeks, Jews and Armenians, which are represented in the work (we can even find some statistical data). Yeremia Qyomurtchyan's testimonies concerning shedding light on other elements of particularities of Istanbul notes are also very informative and detailed: Europeans were also in the center of the author's attention: he called them "Frank" although he was diversifying European countries.

The other set of questions that lie at the core of the account is concerned with refers to the properties of communities, churches,

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springs and ponds, parks, cemeteries. The work depicts in detail the activities of these peoples: to, Greeks were in a leading position in shipbuilding industry, many of them were captains, others owned large ships. They were sailing along the Danube River, and their main direction was towards the Crimea. Trade was also a quite common and popular occupation among the Greeks. They were dealing mainly with wheat, wood, millet and barley trade. Jewish men's occupation was butchery, fishing, grocery and candle making. Qyomurtchyan's data on Gypsy life style is also notable.

At different times, Constantinople appeared in the spotlight of different authors and researchers, so we do not pretend to present Yermia Qyomurtchyan as the only source of the history of Constantinople, but his work is undoubtedly of great value to conceptualize correctly the image of the city in the seventeenth century.

