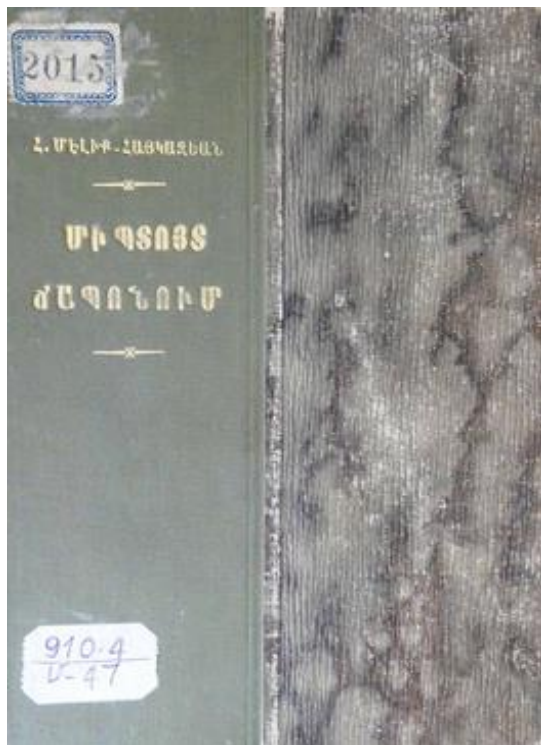


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Heghine Melik-Haykazyan. «A Stroll in Japan», Tbilisi, 1905, p. 192<sup>1</sup>

Prose-writer and pedagogue Heghine Melik-Haykazyan who was born in Shushi is one of the very few Armenians who visited Japan in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The impressions of that journey are put together in a book entitled “A stroll in Japan” which was printed in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1905. More than hundred years later, this book was digitized by initiative of japanologist Anna Vardanyan in Yerevan, Armenia. The author describes the cities she has traveled through, the visited temples and teahouses, thus presenting the lifestyle, manners, traditions, religion and history of the Japanese people. The book also mentions how informed Japanese were about Armenians, which can be considered as the first factual evidence of the historical development of the Armenian-Japanese relations. Current case also reviews the links between Heghine Melik-Haykazyan and Armenian writer Nairi Zaryan, as well in the context of the visit to Japan.

We do not know much about Armenian prose-writer and pedagogue Heghine Melik-Haykazyan (Stepanyan 3).

She was born in 1874 in one of the Armenian cultural centers of those times – Shushi, in the family of a serviceman and a translator Aleksander Melik-Haykazyan. Heghine attended her hometown school (Shushi Realakan College) then accomplished higher education in England and France. Her father was the patron for publishing the great Armenian writer Raffi’s work “The Bunches”. She was married to an Armenian intellectual Tigran Bekzadyan, they had a daughter named Varya. Mrs. Heghine was a woman with comprehensive knowledge: she spoke English, French, German and Russian. She worked for press, was a member of “Vernatoun” (trnsl. “attic”) literary circle in Tbilisi, together with Hovhannes Tumanyan, Levon Shant, Avetik Isahakyan, Derenik Demirchyan, etc. A preserved letter dating to March 2, 1916, was addressed to Heghine from Hovhannes Tumanyan (Tumanyan 402-408). Here, “the writer of all Armenians” wrote about his misery because of the loss of some family members.

Coming from a wealthy family, Heghine Melik-Haykazyan had an opportunity to travel. She was one of the few Armenians who managed to visit China and Japan in Far East in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her memories from China were written down in the essay “On the Manchurian Border: Impressions of the Tourist”.

<sup>1</sup> The review has been sent to «Scientific Artsakh» Journal 10.06.2021.

Her memories from the trip to Japan Heghine Melik-Haykazyan gathered in a single book called “A Stroll in Japan” which was published in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1905 (Melik-Haykazyan 192). The rebirth of this book took place in 2019: it was digitized due to the mutual efforts of the Digital Library of Armenian Literature, “v-ann” and JTI companies. This digitization after almost hundred ten years was not something untimely, especially considering the rapidly growing interest in Armenia towards Japan, its culture and language.

Heghine Melik-Haykazyan’s book “A Stroll in Japan” is a great read even for today. Probably this is first book-length travelogue about Japan written in Armenian language. I happened to study this book in the National Library of Armenia during one of my visits. I could not assume that I could discover new facts that would turn the historical wheel of Armenian-Japanese relations back with about ten years. Talking in modern terms, Mrs. Heghine was a real blogger who would publish her impressions after each journey and share it with her readers (Vardanyan, "Discovering").

The author describes the places she has been to (Nagasaki, Unzen, Kyoto, Tokyo, Nikko, Yokohama) presenting the lifestyle, manners, traditions, religion and history of the Japanese people, as well as the role of the Japanese woman, as an “Oriental Parisian”, in the society. She tells about the visited temples, the teahouse, the concert of geishas and the theatrical performance. Heghine made very striking generalizations: “In the house of every Japanese person, both inside and in the garden, there is a unique touch of satisfaction, moderation and aesthetic simplicity”; “Japanese and rudeness, are two words that do not match”; “The simplicity and open-heartedness of a Japanese person gives him a unique charm”; “From the point of discipline and elegance the Japanese people have no other equal in the entire world”. Reflecting on the tradition of seeing off their guests with giving them food for the road, Melik-Haykazyan pleasantly noticed: “As you see, it is quite beneficial to be a guest in Japan”. She also pointed out that unfortunately the Japanese character was changing because of the negative influence brought by the Europeans. In fact, after a century these same thoughts are now being circulated among the older generation in Japan.

Heghine Melik-Haykazyan also shared a ridiculous story, about how a Japanese servant met her and her friends at the train-station in Tokyo and accompanied them to his master’s house. It turned out that he had confused them with his master’s European guests whom he knew before, as all the westerners had similar appearance for him, just like all the Japanese looked the same for the Europeans.

Hideharu Nakajima, a Japanese Armenologist, good friend of Armenian people and editor in chief of “Ararat” magazine published in Japan, presents this *book and Japan described through the eyes of Heghine Melik-Haykazyan with great admiration: “We may claim, that this book is a true masterpiece written by an Armenian woman who thoroughly perceived and loved the soul of Japanese people. The book presents the old and modern culture of Japan, with the uniqueness of its traditions”* (“Digital book presentation, Journey to Japan”, 00:15:22-00:19:40).

In 1854, a treaty in Kanagawa was signed between USA and Japanese government, thus giving opportunity to many foreigners to enter a country that formerly established itself locked behind the iron curtain. The foreigners began to follow the modernization process of Japan from various perspectives. A big wave of “Japonism” – the interest with Japan and Japanese people, emerged in Europe. The books by R. Alcock, H. Schliemann and I. Stone were published.

Heghine’s journey in Japan started in June, when she stepped on Nagasaki. She describes the Japanese people, their culture and traditions with an exceptional geniality. Mrs. Heghine presents the works of craftsmen and artists, the education process of geishas, as well as the life of ordinary people. The fact that author writes about Shintoism referring to Lafcadio Hearn and brings a quote from his book “Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan” published in 1894, is of particular admiration. In the chapter entitled “Towards Unzen”, Heghine shares her experience when taking the steep road up towards Obama. Jinrikishas were not able to go up the hill and the author had to sit on a shaky hand barrow, eventually ending up with nausea. Another interesting story uncovered back then still vital tradition in Japan, when men and women used to take mineral water bath together. The special way of greeting by schoolchildren exclaiming “Ohayo, ohayo”, was referred

by Heghine as a result of good manners. In other chapters of “Yokohama”, “Tokyo”, the author describes places she has been to like Nikko, Hakone, Kamakura, mentioning also about Yokohama, as if being previously a small fishing town, which was then transformed into a European city.

In 1895, Heghine traveled through Shimonoseki, which became known due to China-Japan alliance, she then took the steamship from Nagasaki to Kobe, crossing the beautiful Setonaikai - the Japanese Mediterranean Sea ("Digital book presentation, Journey to Japan", 00:15:22-00:19:40). Unfortunately, she did not stay long in Kobe, otherwise she would have definitely written about the Great Eastern Hotel, that belonged to Diana Abgar and her husband, both Armenians by nationality. It is stunning how detailed Heghine describes the Japanese apartments, buildings, parks, the Chion-in temple in Kyoto, geishas, Kabuki, as well as Obon and winter festivals. The twenty-five photographs enclosed in this book that describes Japan in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, are in turn valuable documents making this work even more exciting.

One of the remarkable parts of the book is in the chapter “Kyoto at night”, where Heghine had a conversation with a wealthy Japanese person who invited her to his house to watch a festival from the second floor:

*“First, he expressed his gratitude for the honor to welcome me at his place, secondly, he asked my nationality and when he learnt that I am Armenian, he directed his deeply surprised look and asked me with suspicion:*

*- Are you one of those Armenians, who constantly struggle against Turks?*

*It was my turn to be surprised now.*

*- Oh, so you have heard about Armenians?*

*- Of course, I did. If I am not mistaken, there were massacres several years ago. There was a missionary here, who was collecting money to send it over to you. How are things going in your country now?*

*I was looking at his face and did not know what to answer. Shall I rejoice or grieve that the big wave of our pain had reached all the way to the Japanese islands.*

“One of the Armenians who constantly struggle against Turks”: this type of a response by the Japanese person once again states that Armenian-Japanese relations have even deeper roots, which brings both admiration and astonishment. It turns out, that the Japanese witnessed the real trauma of the Armenians connected with the Turks ("The Fan of Japan Anna Vardanyan has made a FB Note"). This small excerpt from Heghine Melik-Haykazyan's book can be considered as the first factual information on Armenian-Japanese historical and cultural relations, which gives us opportunity to turn back the chronological wheel of these historical bonds for about ten years. Until now the beginning of these relations have been counted from 1910 connected with Diana Abgar's name (Vardanyan, "Ararat" magazine).

Armenologist Artsvi Bakhchinyan in his book about Armenian-Japanese relations claims that in 1961 Armenian writer Nairi Zaryan visited Japan, where he met with the head of the writers' union of Japan Sukeitsi Aono. The latter shared with him that he had traveled to Armenian three years ago, visited Matenadaran, where he was told that in 15<sup>th</sup> century an Armenian lady had traveled to Japan and wrote a book about it. However, as Zaryan returned to Armenia, he discovered, that Mr.Aono was told not about 15<sup>th</sup> century, but about Heghine Melik-Haykazyan, who had traveled to Japan in 1905 and later published “A Stroll in Japan” - the book about her memories and impressions.

Zaryan wrote: *“...I have read that book when I was a young boy and after coming back from Japan I read it once again. In which way 1905 was misinterpreted as 15<sup>th</sup> century, is not hard to guess. But I carried that beautiful mistake with me throughout Japan and talked about it in all the cities I have visited with a feeling of national pride”* (Zaryan 423).

Revealing the importance of Heghine Melik-Haykazyan's “A Stroll in Japan” book and its significance in strengthening the Armenian-Japanese relations, Japonologist Anna Vardanyan together with the Digital Library of Armenian Literature, initiated the presentation of this book's

digital version on May 16, 2019 at AUA ("Digital Book Presentation, Journey to Japan"). Officials as the Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Armenia Mr. Jun Yamada participated in this event (ASUE Media and Public Relations Division).

So, at the moment this may be the 1<sup>st</sup> book about Japan written in Armenian language. Mrs. Haykazyan portrays Japan in an extremely positive way, avoiding criticism or condescending views of cultural practices that are not familiar to the author. As a woman she deeply felt Japanese women role in family, noticed the very little elements of Japanese way to introduce their culture. The way they think, the way they move, the way they were welcoming guests, the way they keep their traditions, the way they were trying to rise-up their product quality, the way they felt their religion. Reader will find out that even more than a century ago Japanese people knew about Armenians, about their problems with Turks. It is very important to note that due to this little episode we may say that Armenian-Japanese friendly relations started long before Mrs. Diana Abgar was appointed as an Honorary Consul of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armenian Republic.

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