

## ALDO FERRARI

### PAVEL FLORENSKIJ AND THE ARMENIAN DESTINY

#### Introduction

Pavel Florenskij continues to grow in front of our eyes and now appears as a true giant of the culture of the twentieth century, not merely Russian culture. His many-sided greatness as a theologian and scientist, his human and spiritual coherence, his tragic fate as a victim of Communism are now largely recognized and studied (Hagemeister, Kauchtschischwili, 1995; Lingua 1999; Haney 2001; Franz, Hagemeister, Haney 2001; Valentini 2004; Pyman 2010; Beati 2012; Antipenko, 2012; Valentini 2012; Trubačev 2012). This article aims to study his partial Armenian origin, an aspect that has been hitherto rarely considered, and which appears, however, of considerable interest to understand some important aspects of his intellectual training in the wider context of Armenian-Russian cultural relations (Ferrari 2000; 2005).

#### A Caucasian youth

Florenskij's youth was closely linked to the southern Caucasus region, that should be called Subcaucasia<sup>1</sup>, but that will here be called Transcaucasia (*Zakavkaz'e*), according to the Imperial Russian point of view. The region was annexed by Russia between 1801 and 1829, following a series of successful wars against the Ottoman and Persian empires. Compared to the northern Caucasus, where resistance by Muslim mountain dwellers was fierce, Transcaucasia had a less dramatic assimilation in the Russian Empire and experienced a moderate internal economic and cultural development (Ferrari 2007: 69-82). The familiar origin of the young Florenskij may in fact be viewed also in this light, as a particularly interesting example of the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the Russian Empire that is now finally being investigated in all its magnitude and complexity (Kappeler 2006). Florenskij's mother was Armenian, as we will see, but also his father – Aleksandr Ivanovič,

---

<sup>1</sup> This term has been used in recent years especially in order to highlight the age-old historical and cultural affinity between the southern Caucasus and the territories of Anatolia and Iran (**Zekiyan** 1996: 433-434).

whose family hailed from the region of Kostroma – was born in the Caucasus, in Vladikavkaz, the starting point of the famous Georgian Military Highway, that linked the two sides of the Caucasus and that during the nineteenth century represented an important topic in Russian literature and art, from *A journey to Arzrum* by Puškin<sup>2</sup> and *A hero of our time* by Lermontov to the landscapes by Ajvazovskij and Kuindži. After having studied in Tiflis (Tbilisi), Aleksandr Florenskij graduated in engineering in Petersburg and used to work on the construction of the Transcaucasian railway that represented an important factor of the economic development of the region. It was for this reason that Pavel Florenskij was born on 9 (21) January 1882 near Evlach, within the borders of present-day Azerbaijan. This is how Florenskij later described his birthplace in his autobiography *«Detjam moim. Vospominanija proščlych let»* written between 1916 and 1924<sup>3</sup>:

«In 1880 our family moved to the steppes across the Caucasus. We chose the small town of Evlach, in the governorate of Elizavetpol', district of Dževanšar, for our residence [...] it was open steppe country, one of the largest hideouts for bandits across the Caucasus, in the midst of Tartar villages and along the muddy banks of the river Kura» (Florenskij 2003: 60-61).

The Florenskij family, however, soon moved to Tiflis where Pavel completed his primary education and attended high school until 1900 when he enrolled in the University of Moscow. Georgia is therefore very important in the first part of the life of Florenskij, who often speaks about it in his memoirs, starting from the ancient times of this land, so closely linked to Greek mythology:

«I already knew of the expedition of the Argonauts at the mouth of the Phasis, in Colchis, in search of the Golden Fleece. I had learnt that those “mythical places” were precisely those where we lived and that, consequently, the myth was as real as me and our Colchis. The Phasis is today's Rion, and I knew that in the gorge of the Rion there was the rock on which Prometheus had been crucified» (Florenskij 2003: 137)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to point out to a recent Italian translation of this work (Puškin 2013).

<sup>3</sup> It is no coincidence that this text was translated with the title *Souvenirs d'une enfance au Caucase, L'âge d'homme*, Paris 2007.

<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between the Caucasus and Prometheus – which has an interesting local counterpart in the figure of Amirani – see the studies by Čikovani 1966 and Charachidze 1986.

But what attracted the young Florenskij was not only the relationship between Georgia and classical antiquity. Also the Christian art of this land attracted him immensely and influenced deeply his spiritual formation. The ruins of the imposing cathedral of Bagrati, in Kutaisi, inspired him these significant words:

«I experienced a shared feeling with my inner life when, alone, and not without fear, entered in the imposing remains of this very big church with its collapsed vaults [...] Those stones were alive and continued to be alive, and I could not but feel the spiritual forces that lingered there and that on their own would say, in mockery of physics, much more than could be said with philosophical and theological ponderings» (Florenskij 2003: 289).

However, he was also attracted by the vibrancy and the complexity of Georgian anthropology. On the city of Batumi, on the Black Sea, where his family lived for a sufficiently long time, he wrote:

«In Batumi there were people coming from the most varied ethnic groups: Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Georgians, French, English, Belgians, Germans and Italians..... There was everything, everyone with his typical clothes» (Florenskij 2003: 89).

With a certain element of exaggeration someone spoke about Georgia as “the spiritual homeland of Florenskij” (Kautchischvili 2003: 339). Surely, however, the youth in the Caucasus left a remarkable influence on him, as can be seen from these autobiographical writings. Still in 1934, at the time of his deportation to the remote town of Skovorodino in Siberia, the Caucasus came back to his memory:

«There, besides people from Moscow, I met several people from the Caucasus and remembered with them those places that I know so well. With someone who was half Georgian, I tried to refresh what I once learned of the Georgian language and that I have now completely forgotten» (Florenskij 2013: 102).

### **Florenskij and the Armenian nobility**

If present-day Azerbaijan and, especially, Georgia are widely present in the autobiographical writings of Florenskij, the same cannot instead be said with regard to Armenia, even though his mother belonged to an important Armenian family, the Saparov. He was fully aware of this origin and devoted a meticulous research to his family which must, however, be ascribed to a more general and strong interest in genealogy.

As a matter of fact, several scholars refer to a real “philosophy of genealogy” in the works of Pavel Florenskij (Trubačev 2012: 17-36).

In a course read in 1916-1917 at the Theological Academy of Moscow and entitled “On historical knowledge”, he defined genealogy as a discipline based on the study:

«... of genealogy as a whole, in other words as an original individuality, whose features penetrate all its representatives and which possesses a meaning, a specific purpose of the elements that constitute it» (Florenskij 1999: 47).

The genealogical research by Florenskij includes both the paternal Russian branch of the family as well as the mother’s Armenian ancestors. The main source of information on this latter aspect was his brother Aleksandr, who was very keen on the history and the culture of the Caucasus, but he received supplementary documentation by other members of his family (Florenskij 2012: 129). This fragmentary and sometimes inaccurate information did not make Florenskij a specialist in the history and genealogy of the Armenian nobility, but what he wrote about it deserves to be read very carefully.

It should be underlined that Florenskij’s interest in his Armenian origin seems to have arisen at the time of the outbreak of the First World War and the genocide of 1915<sup>5</sup>. This was a tragic moment when many representatives of Russian culture turned their attention towards Armenia and the fate of its people. Within a few years there were several important initiatives, ranging from the anthology edited by Maksim Gor’kij (*Sbornik Armjanskoj literatury*, Petersburg 1915-1916) to the famous anthology by Valerij Brjusov (*Poezija Armenii s drevnejšich vremën do našich dneĵ*, Moscow 1916), in which F. Sologub, K. Bal’mont, Vja. Ivanov, Ju. Baltrušajitis, V. Chodasevič, A. Blok and I. Bunin also participated. Furthermore, in 1916 Brjusov wrote a brief but significant history of the Armenian people, *Letopis’ istoričeskich sudeb armjanskogo naroda*, which was published in Moscow only in 1918 due to difficulties caused by war<sup>6</sup>. The weekly “Armjanskij Vestnik” issued in Moscow from January 1916 to March 1918 is also worthy of being remembered,

---

<sup>5</sup> On Russia’s important political role during these years with regard to the Armenians see Ferrari 2000: 308-311.

<sup>6</sup> There is an Italian translation of this work: *Annali del popolo armeno*, by A. Ferrari, Milan 1993.

marking perhaps the highest point in cultural and political collaboration of the time between Armenia and Russia.

The *Observations on my mother's ancestry (Zametki o rode moej materi)*, written in 1916 (Florenskij 1992: 373-407), can therefore be inserted in this particular historical and cultural context.

«My mother, Ol'ga Pavlovna Saparova – who received the name of Salomeja at her baptism (Salomé in the Armenian language) – was of Armenian-Gregorian origin [...].

The Saparov family left the Karabakh region in the 16th century due to the plague that swept the area and settled with their farmers in the village of Bolnis, in the governorate of Tiflis ... At that time their surname was still Melik-Begljarov. When the plague ceased, almost the whole Melik-Begljarov family went back to Karabakh. A group, in particular three brothers, remained in the village of Bolnis. From the nicknames of the three brothers derived the surnames of the three families that were inter-related: Saparov, Paatov and Šaverdov.

In particular the surname Saparov is derived from the Georgian word *sapari* which means shield, a nickname that this group of the Melik-Begljarov obtained for some military service or other rendered to the kingdom of Georgia.

[...]

In fact the Armenians of the Karabakh region are not Armenians, but belong to a people, the Udis, perhaps akin to the Lesghians. Formerly called Albanians, the Armenians called them Akhavane [sic].

Initially they lived around Lake Gokča; later, – attacked from the south – they moved in the Karabakh region together with their little princes, who had the name of Begljarov, from the name of their legendary ancestor Begljar. But even in the Karabakh they lived in isolation, without mixing with the surrounding population.

The Armenians of Karabakh have retained their distinctive dialect and their traditions.

The Begljarov received the title of melik by the Turkish government» (Florenskij 1992: 373, 376).

Much of this information is in fact wrong or inaccurate. The plague that resulted in the temporary departure of the *melik* (Arm. *melik*)<sup>7</sup> of

---

<sup>7</sup> In peripheral north-eastern regions of the old Armenia, some families of the ancient Armenian nobility who had survived foreign invasions gradually managed to consolidate themselves. The leaders of these small semi-independent principalities – the so-called *melik*' – had a very important role in defending tenaciously the Armenian

Karabakh (Arm. Լարաբա՛լ, formerly Arc'ax) in fact broke out at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while the Begljarov (Arm. Beglarean) received the title of *melik'* by the Persian government and not by the Turkish one. The words of Florenskij regarding the Albanians of the Caucasus<sup>8</sup> and the Udis<sup>9</sup> seem even more problematic. Florenskij's statement that the inhabitants of Karabakh are Udis and not Armenians reflects in fact only a very poor understanding of their complex ethnic identity. All this confirms the limited competence that Florenskij had in the history and the culture of Armenia, including the Karabakh region. In particular, it does not seem that he was aware of the important work devoted by the Armenian writer Raffi (Yakob Melik'-Yakobean, 1835-1888) to the nobility of Karabakh<sup>10</sup>.

Even in one of his famous letters to his children, Florenskij goes back to the “Albanian” origin of his maternal family and to its “extraordinary character”.

«The Saparov family was among a few Armenian families who belonged to the heterogeneous and ethnically poorly amalgamated people who originally inhabited Armenia, to that branch that the Armenians themselves call “Albanians”.

[...]

Some tribes with these ancestries, some of whom established in Georgia and descended from the dominant families in those areas, used

---

character of their territories. The same term sometimes also referred to leaders of the Armenian communities in cities such as Tiflis or Erevan. In the extensive bibliography on the *melik'* see especially studies by **R. H. Hewsen** (1972; 1973-74; 1975-76; 1980; 1981-1982), **A. Łulyan** (2001), **A. Malalyan** (2007) and **A. Ferrari** (2011).

<sup>8</sup> On the Albanians, a Caucasian population that lived roughly in the territory of present-day Azerbaijan and whose descendants who became Turks and Muslims form the core of today's Azeri population, refer especially to **M. Bais**, *Albania caucasica. Ethnos, storia, territorio attraverso le fonti greche, latine e armene*, Milan 2001. For the historiographical dispute between Armenians and Azeris the Albanians of the Caucasus were at the centre of a heated - that has obvious political fallout - see **Shnirelman** 2001: 149-186.

<sup>9</sup> With regard to this population, which is still present today in some villages in Azerbaijan, refer especially to **Schulze** 1982.

<sup>10</sup> *Xamsayi melik'ut'iwñnerə. 1600-1827. Niwt'er hayoc' nor patmut'ean hamar*, T'iflis; also **idem**, *Erkeri žolovacu*, IX, Erevan, 1987, pps. 417-625; there is also a Russian translation of these texts (*Melikstva Chamsy*, Erevan, 1991), an Italian translation (*I melik' del Larabal (1600-1827). Materiali per la storia moderna degli Armeni*, translation and introduction by **A. Ferrari**, Milan 2008) and an English translation (*The Five Melikdoms of Karabagh*, London 2010)..

to remember and even now remember their past as something special. Although in most cases it would be difficult for them to transmit this memory, they still have a sense of superiority. They are families of great beauty and in this respect the Saparov enjoyed an excellent reputation. [...] Compared to others, the Saparov were particularly well-educated and rich» (Florenskij 2003: 175).

Florenskij outlines here some social and cultural characteristics of one of the most important families of Tiflis that during the 19th century was a small cosmopolitan metropolis where the Armenian component was of fundamental importance<sup>11</sup>. At the time of the Russian conquest, the Armenians represented three-fourths of the population of Tiflis (Čchetija 1942: 145; Suny 1986: 251) and to a large extent they controlled economic, social and political life of the city (Čchetija, 1942: 313-317; Karapetyan 2003: 27-29). Tiflis, moreover, was throughout the whole Tsarist era the main cultural centre of the Armenians of the Caucasus, while Yerevan was at that time a town of little importance (Ferrari 2000: 143-144). The Armenian element in Tiflis had a predominantly middle-class character, but one should not forget the presence of several noble families, in some cases having a princely status, such the Behbut'ean/Bebutov, the T'umanean/Tumanov and the Ar'ut'ean/Argutinskij (Ferrari 2011: 84-90). The Saparov belonged to the aristocratic Armenian elite in Tiflis and were related to one of the families of the *melik*» of Karabakh:

«In the group of these few families related to each other and connected in various ways, there was also the Melik-Begljarov family that was very close to the Saparov family thanks to my eldest aunt, Elizaveta Pavlovna, and to a number of marriages. The Melik-Begljarov possessed one *melikdom* out of five, which subsequently collapsed after the

---

<sup>11</sup> The Armenian presence in Georgia dates back at least to the 11th century, an era that saw the dissolution of national kingdoms under the blows of the Byzantines and the Seljuks. As a result many Armenians migrated to the safer realm of Georgia that was moving towards its greatest expansion. Some joined the Georgian aristocracy while others dedicated themselves to trade and to crafts, becoming the most numerous and active element of the cities of the kingdom. Throughout all this long period the relationship between Armenians and Georgians was based on a fruitful economic and social complementarity, without showing yet any signs of the conflict that would subsequently develop between the two communities, especially after the spread of modern nationalism during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the Armenians in Tiflis/Tbilisi see Čchetija 1942; Zekiyan 1985; Suny 1986; Ančabadze, Volkova 1990; Mamulov 1995; Ferrari 2000; Karapetyan 2003.

abolition of the right of primogeniture, and were real and veritable melik, in other words small princes.

Among the richest men in the Caucasus, there was my grandfather Pavel Gerasimovič Saparov, a dandy who liked beautiful things and was certainly not against cultures different from the Armenian patriarchal system.

In his house Oriental customs were combined with sympathy for the government system in Russia and European luxury. In his house there were all sorts of food and objects from Persia and from other Oriental countries; through various alliances relations were maintained even with India where one of the branches of the family had moved. Caravans of camels laden with oriental delicacies often stopped in grandfather's large courtyard. The house was a triumph of silks, carpets and precious objects and the way of life was half Oriental. At the same time, however, grandfather and his brothers had relations with France and from this country they received items of luxury and comfort. In the house there were many foreign objects, a rare thing in Tiflis. [...] This is not the place to describe the house of the Saparov family; what I would like to emphasize is their relationship with Europe.

[..]

One should not think, however, that the Saparov family only sourced from the West its comforts and luxury. Their house offered asylum to many foreigners who happened to be in the Caucasus [...]. Their frequent guest was the academic Abich, the first person to study the geology of the Caucasus

[...].

Besides the Russian language, French was common: the one and the other were at that time a sign of erudition in the Caucasus. Saparov was a friend of many Russians, representatives of civil and military power, whom he welcomed in his house.

One of the most frequent guests was the famous General Komarov, who later married a relative of my mother, Nina Šadinova, and from this marriage the writer Ol'ga Forš was born» (Florenskij 2003: 176-177).

### **A nationalist Church?**

In addition to the interest of this description of a family belonging to the social and cultural elite of 19th century Tiflis, Florenskij's notes about his Armenian origin from his mother's side are all the more significant also to understand the complex process of his "conversion".



The young Florenskij grew up away from any religious faith as a result of an explicit decision by his parents. This decision was to a large extent motivated by their different ethnic and cultural origin:

«My father did not show that he belonged to the Orthodox Church because he feared that he would make my mother remember [...] that he was Orthodox; in the same way my mother showed the same courtesy towards him and behaved in a similar manner with regard to the Armenian-Gregorian Church» (Florenskij 2003: 173)<sup>12</sup>.

As a direct consequence of these mutual delicate feelings Pavel Florenskij spent his youth in an atmosphere that was not only nondenominational, but also totally removed from any religious element, something that is all the more surprising in Transcaucasia, a microcosm in which Christianity – represented especially by the Orthodox Church but also by the Armenian Apostolic Church, by Catholic and Protestant communities – lived side by side with Islam and Judaism in a highly vital and visible manner.

It should also be recalled that Florenskij's mother marriage had not at all been appreciated by her Armenian family and this created hardships that proved insurmountable and had far-reaching consequences:

«... even in a family such as the Saparov, anything but conservative in a religious sense as much as in an ethnic and cultural sense, the marriage of the daughter, the favourite one among other things, with a Russian man without a position and without patrimony, was hardly acceptable.

[...]

On the death of her grandfather, [...], she followed her decision, holding the view that in this way she had broken her ties with her father and that she had not been forgiven; therefore, for being excessively scrupulous, she also considered herself left out from her own people.

[...]

I do not mean to judge the merits of the grounds for this estrangement, but it was in any case my mother who pushed away the others, and not the other way round. With these preconditions it was surely a morbid irritation that she considered herself without a family especially when all her sisters loved her, almost worshipped her, and

---

<sup>12</sup> On the Armenian Apostolic Church – also called Gregorian, by Saint Gregory the Illuminator, who converted Armenia to Christianity in the first years of the 4<sup>th</sup> century – see in particular the studies of **Vaccaro, Zekiyan** (by) 2010 and **Pane** 2011.

were extremely friendly with my father. But my mother's wound grew even deeper. Even if her own family had disowned her, this should not have led, however, to a rift with her own people and much less with her Church. Perhaps neither one nor the other bond were so strong for my mother, but at any rate in her reluctance to utter even one single word in Armenian or to speak and read about Armenia and the Armenians, as well as just to go out of curiosity – or to take us – to an Armenian church, I always sensed something deeper than just a mere estrangement or a lack of interest. My mother feared anything that was linked to Armenia and as a result, by irradiation, this fear spread firstly to the Caucasus and secondly to the nation and the state, after which it spread even to religion and to the family» (Florenskij 2003: 178-181).

Florenskij therefore explains very clearly his real aloofness from the Armenian cultural and spiritual world with the particular and painful personal condition of his mother. This prevented him from developing one of the most remarkable features of the Armenian people, namely the ability to create a “multicultural identity”, which denotes precisely a situation based on the coexistence of multiple cultures in the same person. This situation was not widespread in modern Europe, especially in Western Europe, characterized by a secular trend towards political, social and cultural homogenization on which throughout the centuries national states have been built, but it was very common in the imperial systems of Eastern Europe and the Near East. The existence of “multicultural identities” is especially characteristic of non-dominant communities and in particular of those who, like the Armenians, for the most varied historical reasons find themselves in a “border” position or in a state of “diaspora” (Zekiyan 2000a: 164-173). Florenskij, therefore, in the philosophical and theological context did not become something similar to what Ivan Ajvazovskij (Yovhannēs Ajvazean, 1817-1900) was in the artistic field, namely a person where the Armenian and the Russian identities coexisted fully and creatively (Sargsjan 2010; Ferrari, in press).

The analysis of the Russian thinker continues as he faces in a very explicit manner some important themes of the Armenian culture, particularly in the religious sphere:

«For the Armenians, the first people to have embraced Christianity, this lost its fermenting power and ever ready to die for their allegiance to Christianity [...] the Armenians are no more interested in their religion, as generally happens with everything that becomes a habit» (Florenskij 2003: 178).

Clearly one can wonder if this statement by Florenskij corresponded to the truth and also the extent to which he had sufficient knowledge of the Armenian situation and particularly of the Apostolic Church to affirm such a radically negative argument<sup>13</sup>. In any case what is of interest here is not so much the spiritual situation of the Armenian Church or the religious vibrancy of the Armenians at that time but the perception that Florenskij had about these issues.

Of particular interest is another statement by Florenskij that somehow helps to explain why his rediscovery of religious life took place for him within the Russian Orthodox Church rather than within the Armenian Apostolic Church:

«The Armenian Church is manifestly nationalist and is considered as such by the Armenians; I have never heard of anyone who was converted to the Armenian Church, the Armenian clergy does not know the meaning of proselytism and so the wish of a member of another Church to unite with the Armenian Church would be regarded as an extravagance» (Florenskij 2003: 182).

Indeed Florenskij underestimated the fact that the ecclesiastic belonging was a key element in the identity of the Eastern Christians, and particularly of the Armenians, who thanks to this membership have been able to survive up to the present day in political and socio-cultural contexts that were often very difficult and even tragic. As a matter of fact this “national” significance of the Eastern Churches made it even possible to speak of a specific “theology of ethnos” (Zekiyan 2000b). Anyway, at least in the case of the Armenian Church such a “national” character did not prejudice the opening to the universal dimension of Christianity (Zekiyan 1995).

---

<sup>13</sup> The Armenian Church, independent from the Russian Church, older and more widely spread even outside the Tsarist borders, developed throughout this period in a completely autonomous way. While the interaction between the secular cultures of Russia and Armenia was very strong, the same did not happen in the religious sphere. In this context the Russian influence was limited to diffusion of some icons, previously missing in Armenian churches, while neither liturgy nor theology were in any way influenced. Broadly speaking, the same may be said of religious thought. Russian and Armenian churches were in fact two parallel worlds, almost impervious to one another and from this point of view the intellectual development of Pavel Florenskij, although partly resulting from his own particular familiar environment, may be considered as a significant, even symbolic, example of this situation (Ferrari, 2009).

**The Armenian destiny: merging with other people**

The most significant words written by Florenskij about the Armenians concern the general and final meaning of their historical and cultural destiny. Again speaking of the relationship between his parents, Florenskij refers to the

«... Armenians' tenacity in maintaining their own national character, a strength that is generally appropriate, because otherwise this ancient and cultured people – who had the misfortune to settle between the millstones of world history and that in the several millennia of its existence was continuously beaten and gradually scattered – would long ago have finished among the ranks of extinct populations. It is the history of their own land that proved fatal to the Armenians because who can live peacefully in the line of fire between two trenches on the long strategic road of world history? All the cultural values of Armenia, created in such a talented manner, were a vain attempt to squeeze into a rushing stream that inexorably dragged them away. There has not been one single nation that throughout its existence spent so much energy on its culture as the Armenian people did and which had such poor results. At the end, however, even its extraordinary dynamism faded and one of the most ancient nations in the world had to renounce to have a state and even to its own culture. The Armenians have to look after a much more modest goal: that of ensuring the survival of the little that remained. In fact everything suggests the imminent disappearance of these people. The so-called Armenian conservative spirit is the survival instinct of a nation, an instinct that has no hope, because history cannot save that which no longer has the strength and the will to manifest itself.

[...] It is my strong belief that this nation lies in a historical *cul de sac* and that, as its own cultural purpose, it should set out to merge with other people, bringing them the ferment of an old blood that is no longer productive» (Florenskij 2003: 174-175).

On one hand, therefore, Florenskij acknowledges with admiration the antiquity and the value of the Armenian culture and on the other hand seems inclined to consider the creative vitality of this nation as being substantially extinguished because of its highly exposed permanence on the “great strategic road of world history”. These words, equally remarkable and controversial, can be found in a letter written in a particularly delicate moment of the long history of Armenia: the great movement of social and cultural modernization that characterized the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century (Zekiyan 1997), leaving a

glimpse of remarkable though uncertain prospects even of political developments, had been swept away. The tragedy of the genocide of 1915 put a violent end to the three-thousand year old presence of the Armenians in most of their historic territories (Ternon 2002; Dadrian 2004; Akçam 2004; Flores 2006; Bloxham 2005; Kévorkian 2009). The survivors of this tragedy dispersed in a painful diaspora in four corners of the world (especially France and the United States but also Canada, Greece, Argentina, Australia and so on). It is in this context that Florenskij's statements on the "imminent disappearance of these people" and the "merger with other peoples" should be viewed.

He obviously underestimated the persistency of the Armenians who showed themselves able to survive even a tragedy on the scale of the genocide. Indeed Armenian survived both in a diaspora that became progressively stronger economically as much as culturally and within that republic which – at first independent (1928-1920), then Soviet (up to 1991), now again independent – still represents today a small but important territorial nucleus (Dédéyan 2002: 411-440, 483-520). It is particularly surprising that Florenskij seems unaware of the significant consolidation of Soviet Armenia, a small country, which precisely in those years was growing around Yerevan even if under the particular, and in most cases negative, Soviet dynamics.

### **Conclusion**

The impression that one gets upon reading these autobiographical passages is that Florenskij's attitude was that of a substantial, though painful, estrangement from Armenian history and culture; this attitude stemmed not only from the particular situation of his family and from his mother's voluntary detachment from her own ethnic and cultural origin but also from a certain underestimation of the dynamism of a nation able to withstand even the toughest tests of history<sup>14</sup>. This probably explains not only the exclusive Russian and Orthodox "choice" at the time of his religious turning point but also the fact that he never made Armenian culture an integral part of his life. Not surprisingly he continues to be little known within this culture.

---

<sup>14</sup> I think of the verses of Hovhannes Širaz (1915-1984), *Armenian Destiny*: We were beaten a long time ago, but/The Armenians have lived, are living and will live again. They have beaten us for a thousand centuries, but,/ The Armenians have lived, are living and will live again,/We have been hit by genocide, but/ The Armenians have lived, are living and will live again ... (Mirzoian 2012: 59).

### Bibliography

Akçam 2005: T. Akçam, *From empire to republic: Turkish nationalism and the Armenian genocide*, London-New York, 2004.

Ančabadze, Volkova 1990: Ju. D. Ančabadze and N. G. Volkova, *Staryj Tbilisi. Gorod i goradžane v XIX veke*, Moscow, 1990.

Antipenko 2012: L. G. Antipenko, *A. Florenskij o logičeskom i simboličeskom aspektach naučno-filosofskogo myšlenija*, Moscow, 2012.

Bais 2001: M. Bais, *Albania caucasica. Ethnos, storia, territorio attraverso le fonti greche, latine e armene*, Milan, 2001.

Beati 2012: A. Beati, *Dalla logica matematica alla trans logica della fede in P. A. Florenskij*, Rome, 2012.

Bloxham 2007: D. Bloxham, *The great game of genocide: imperialism, nationalism, and the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford, 2005

Brjusov 1916: V. Brjusov, *Poesija Armenii s drevnejšich vremën do našich dnej*, Moskva, 1916.

Brjusov 1918 (1993): V. Brjusov, *Letopis' istoričeskich sudeb armjanskogo naroda*, Moskva, 1918 (Italian translation. By A. Ferrari, *Annali del popolo armeno*, Milano, 1993).

Čchetija 1942: Š. Čchetija, *Tbilisi v XIX stoletii*, Tbilisi, 1942.

Charachidze 1988: Charachidze, tr. it. *Prometeo o il Caucaso*, Italian translation, Milan, 1988.

Čikovani 1966: M. Ja. Čikovani, *Narodnyj gruzinskij epos o prikovannom Amirani*, Moscow, 1966.

Dadrian 2004: V. Dadrian, *The history of the Armenian genocide: ethnic conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, New York, 2004.

Dédéyan 2002: G. Dédéyan (by), *Storia degli armeni*, Italian translation, Milan, 2002.

Ferrari 2000: A. Ferrari, *Alla frontiera dell'impero. Gli armeni nell'impero russo (1801-1917)*, Milan, 2000.

Ferrari 2005: A. Ferrari, *La cultura russa e il Caucaso. Il caso armeno*, in "Studi Slavistici", II (2005), pps. 137-156.

Ferrari 2007: A. Ferrari, *Breve storia del Caucaso*, Rome, 2007.

Ferrari 2009 : A. Ferrari, *Collaboration sans interaction. L'Église arménienne au sein de l'Empire russe*, in D. Savelli (edition), *La Religion de l'autre. Réactions et interactions entre religions dans le monde russe*, "Slavica Occitania", 29 (2009), pps. 117-137.

Ferrari 2011: A. Ferrari *Alla ricerca di un regno. Profezia, nobiltà e monarchia in Armenia tra Settecento e Ottocento*, Milan, 2011.

Ferrari, in press: A. Ferrari, *I fratelli Ayvazean/Ajvazovskij tra la Crimea e Venezia*, in press in the Proceedings of the Conference of Studies “Venezia tra Oriente e Occidente”, Istituto Romeno di Cultura, Venice 4-5, March, 2013.

Florenskij 1992: Svjaščennik Pavel Florenskij, *Detjam moim. Vospominanija prošlych let*, Moscow, 1992.

Florenskij 1999: Svjaščennik Pavel Florenskij, *Sočinenija v četyrech tomach*, v. 3, Moscow, 1999.

Florenskij 2003: P. Florenskij, *Ai miei figli. Memorie di giorni passati*, by N. Valentini and L. Žak, Italian translation, Milan, 2003.

Florenskij 2007 : P. Florenskij, *Souvenirs d'une enfance au Caucase*, Paris, 2007.

Florenskij 2013: P. Florenskij, *Non dimenticatemi. Le lettere dal gulag del grande matematico, filosofo e sacerdote russo*, Milan, 2013.

Flores 2006: Marcello Flores *Il genocidio degli armeni*, Bologna, 2006.

Hagemeister, Kauchtschischwili, 1995: *P. A. Florenskij i kul'tura ego vremeni*, by M. Hagemeister and N. Kauchtschischwili, Marburg, 1995.

Franz, Hagemeister, Haney 2001: N. Franz, M. Hagemeister Frank Haney (Hrsg.), *Pavel Florenskij - Tradition und Moderne: Beiträge zum internationalen Symposium an der Universität Postdam, 5. bis 9. April 2000*, Frankfurt am Main, 2001.

Haney 2001: F. Haney, *Zwischen exakter Wissenschaft und Orthodoxie, Zur Rationalitätsauffassung Priester Pavel Florenskijs*, Frankfurt am Main, 2001

Hewsen 1972: R. H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Preliminary Study*, “Revue des Etudes Arméniens”, IX (1972), pps. 285-329.

Hewsen (1973-74): R. H. Hewsen, *The Meliks of Eastern Armenia II*, “Revue des Etudes Arméniens”, X (1973-74), pps. 282-300.

Hewsen 1976-76: R. H. Hewsen, *The Meliks of Eastern Armenia III*, “Revue des Etudes Arméniens”, XII (1975-76), pps. 219-243.

Hewsen 1980: R. H. Hewsen, *The Meliks of Eastern Armenia IV*, “Revue des Etudes Arméniens”, XIV (1980), pps. 459-470.

Hewsen 1981-82: R. H. Hewsen, *Three Armenian Noble Families of the Russian Empires [The Meliks of Eastern Armenia V]*, “Hask”, 3 (1981-1982), pps. 389-400.

Hewsen 1984: R.H. Hewsen, *The Meliks of Eastern Armenia VI: the House of Aghamaleanc'*, "Bazmavep", CXLII (1984), pps. 319-333.

Kappeler 2006: A. Kappeler, *La Russia. Storia di un impero multietnico*, Italian translation, Rome, 2006.

Karapetyan 2003: S. Karapetyan, *T'iflisi k'alak'aglunnerə*, Erevan, 2003.

Kautschsvili 2003: N. Kautschsvili, "Florenski e la Georgia", afterword to P. Florenskij, *Ai miei figli. Memorie di giorni passati*, by N. Valentini and L. Žak, Milano, 2003, pps. 335-342.

Lingua 1999: G. Lingua, *Oltre l'illusione dell'Occidente: P. A. Florenskij e i fondamenti della filosofia russa*, Turin, 1999.

Lulyan 2001: A. Lulyan, *Arc'axi ev Syunik'i melik'akan aparank'nerə*, Erevan, 2001.

Maľalyan 2007: A. Maľalyan, *Arc'axi melik'utyunnerə ev melik'akan tnerə*, Erevan, 2007.

Mamulov 1995: S.S. Mamulov, *Armjane v Gruzii*, Moscow, 1995.

Mirzoian 2012: K. Mirzoian (by), *L'Armenia cantata dai suoi poeti*, Erevan, 2012.

Pane 2011: R. Pane, *La Chiesa Armena. Storia, Spiritualità e Istituzioni*, Bologna, 2011.

Puškin 2013: A. Puškin, *Il viaggio a Arzrum*, by A. Ferrari, Milan, 2013.

Pyman 2010: A. Pyman, *Pavel Florenskij: la prima biografia di un grande genio cristiano del 20. Secolo*, Italian translation, Turin, 2010.

Raffi 1882: Raffi, *Xamsayi melik'ut'iwunnerə. 1600- 1827. Niwt'er hayoc' nor patmut'ean hamar*, T'iflis, 1882.

Raffi 1991: Raffi, *Melikstva Chamsy*, Erevan, 1991

Raffi 2008: Raffi, *I melik' del Ľarabał (1600-1827). Materiali per la storia moderna degli Armeni*, translation and introduction by A. Ferrari, Milan, 2008.

Raffi 2010: Raffi, *The Five Melikdoms of Karabagh*, London, 2010.

Sargsjan 2010: M. Sargsjan, *Žizn' velikogo marinista. Ivan Kostantinič Ayvazovskij*, Feodosija – Moscow, 2010.

Schulze 1982: W. Schulze, *Die Sprache der Uden in Nordazerbaidžan*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1982.

Shnirelman 2001: V. Shnirelman, *The value of the past: myths, identity and politics in Transcaucasia*, Osaka, 2001.



Suny 1986: R. G. Suny, "Tiflis: Crucible of Ethnic Politics, 1860-1905", in M. F. Hamm (ed.), *The City in the Late Imperial Russia*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1986, pps. 249-281.

Ternon 2003: Y. Ternon, *Gli Armeni 1915-1916: il genocidio dimenticato*, Italian translation, Milan 2003.

Trubačev 2012 Igumen Andronik (Trubačev), *Put' k Bogu. Ličnost', žizn' i tvorčestvo svjaščennika Pavla Florenskogo, kniga pervaja*, Moscow, 2012.

Uluhogian 1985: G. Uluhogian, *La pubblicistica armena a Tiflis intorno alla metà del XIX secolo*, "Quaderni del Seminario di Iranistica, Uralo-Altaistica e Caucasologia dell'Università degli Studi di Venezia", n. 22, *Georgica I*, Rome, 1985, pps. 67-81.

Vaccaro, Zekiyani 2010: L. Vaccaro and B. L. Zekiyani (by), *Storia religiosa dell'Armenia*, Milan, 2010.

Valentini 2004: N. Valentini, *Pavel Florenskij*, Brescia, 2004.

Valentini 2012; N. Valentini, *Pavel A. Florenskij. La sapienza dell'amore: teologia della bellezza e linguaggio della verità*, Bologna, 2012.

Zekiyani 1985: B. L. Zekiyani, *Il contesto storico della presenza armena a Tiflis*, "Quaderni del Seminario di Iranistica, Uralo-Altaistica e Caucasologia dell'Università degli Studi di Venezia", n. 22, *Georgica I*, Rome 1985, pps. 63-66)

Zekiyani 1995: B. L. Zekiyani, *Riflessioni preliminari sulla spiritualità armena. Una cristianità di frontiera: martyria ed aperture all'oikumene*, "Orientalia Christiana Analecta", vol. 61, 1995/2, pps. 333-365.

Zekiyani 1996: B. L. Zekiyani, *Lo studio delle interazioni politiche e culturali tra le popolazioni della Subcaucasia: alcuni problemi di metodologia e di fondo in prospettiva sincronica e diacronica*, in *Il Caucaso: cerniera fra culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (secoli IV-XI). Atti della Quarantatreesima Settimana di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto medioevo (aprile 1995)*, Spoleto, 1996, vol. II, pps. 427-482.

Zekiyani 1997: B. L. Zekiyani, *The Armenian Way to Modernity. Armenian Identity Between Tradition and Innovation, Specificity and Universality*, Venice, 2007.

Zekiyani 2000a: B.L. Zekiyani, *Il fenomeno dell'emigrazione oggi: verso un nuovo concetto dell'identità e dell'integrazione etnoculturale*, in Id., *L'Armenia e gli armeni. Polis lacerata e patria spirituale: la sfida di una sopravvivenza*, Milan, 2000, pps. 155-173.

Zekiyani 2000 b: B. L. Zekiyani, *Ellenismo, ebraismo e cristianesimo in Mosè di Corene. Elementi per una teologia dell'etnia*, in Id.,

*L'Armenia e gli armeni. Polis lacerata e patria spirituale: la sfida di una sopravvivenza*, Milan, 2000, pps. 199-207.

### **Այդո Ֆերրարի Պավել Ֆլորենսկին և հայոց ճակատագիրը**

Սույն հոդվածն անդրադառնում է հայտնի ուսուստիվածաբան, գիտնական Պավել Ֆլորենսկու (1882-1937) հայկական արձատներին: Իրականում, նրա մայրը, սերելով հանդերձ Ղարաբաղի մի ազնվական ընտանիքից, անձնական և ընտանեկան առանձնահատուկ իրավիճակի հետևանքով որդուն չի տալիս հայկական կրթություն: Հետևաբար Ֆլորենսկին մեծանում է ուսական մշակույթի մեջ, ուստի նրան չի կարելի համարել հայկական մշակույթի մի մասնիկը: Այդուհանդերձ, կյանքի երկրորդ հատվածում նա մեծ ուշադրություն է դարձրել իր հայկական ակունքներին, հիմնականում ծագումնաբանական տեսանկյունից: Սակայն, զավակներին հասցեագրված նամակներում (որոնք հիմնականում գրված են խորհրդային ճամբարներից, որտեղ վերջում նրան գնդակահարեցին), Պավել Ֆլորենսկին բացահայտել է շոշափելի, միաժամանակ ցավալի, օտարություն իր հայկական ինքնության հանդեպ: Այս վերաբերմունքը բխում է ոչ միայն նրա եզակի ընտանեկան իրավիճակից, այլև պատմության նույնիսկ ամենազաժան փորձությունները գիմակայելու ի գորու մի ժողովրդի կենսունակության որոշակի թերազնահատումից: