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Nalbandyan, Mikael

Armenian Literature (poetry/verse)

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Mikael Nalbandyan (1829–1866), born to an artisan family in Nor Naxičevan in Tsarist Russia, received his primary education in his home town, pursuing a religious calling which he abandoned in 1853. He left for Moscow to teach Armenian language courses at the Lazarian Institute of Oriental Languages, which had been established as a private institution in 1815 and which, public since 1827, had by the mid-century become an important Orientalist training institute for civil servants and interpreters. Nalbandyan also took medical courses at Moscow University between 1854 and 1858.

While in Moscow, Nalbandyan established a close relationship with Stepanos Nazarian, the founder and editor of the Armenian periodical *Hiusisapayl* ("Northern lights", 1858-64). The journal was known for its critical attitude both to traditional Armenian customs and to feudal and ecclesiastical privileges in imperial Russia. Together with Xaçatur Abovyan, Hakob Melik Hakobian (Raffi), and Ġazaros Ağayan, Nalbandian contributed to the journal on issues regarding Armenian populations around the world and their national consciousness. On visits to Istanbul, London, Paris, and Calcutta in 1859-60 and 1861-62, Nalbandian also became acquainted with a variety of intellectuals outside Tsarist Russia. In Istanbul, Nalbandian established contacts with Ottoman-Armenian intellectuals such as Harutiun Svadjian and Hagop Baronian (both involved in the Armenian journal *Megü*, "The bee", 1856-65), and shaped his views on the socio-economic problems Armenians faced in the Ottoman Empire. During his visit to London, he met émigré revolutionaries like Mihail Bakunin and Aleksandr Herzen, who inspired his views on serfdom and peasant reforms. In 1862, he published his social critique on imperial agricultural policy in an article which aroused government suspicion. Later that year, he was placed under arrest; in 1866, he died, still in detention, of tuberculosis.

Nalbandyan's nationalism was cultural and moral rather than territorially autonomist. Poems like *Yeraz* ("A dream"), *Azatut'yun* ("Liberty"), and *Idalac'i agjka ergë* ("The Italian girl's song") evoke national feelings, cultural belonging, and nostalgia for the ancient Armenian kingdoms, without specifying concrete territorial or constitutional ambitions. Nalbandyan also advocated a simplification of classical literary Armenian (*Grabar*) by replacing it with a vernacular style (*Ašxarabar*).

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