

PANAIT ISTRATI STREET, PHARAKLATA, CEPHALONIA

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Abstract

The pathways in Panait Istrati's life were sinuous, meandering, and full of unexpected; similarly to searching for texts in the translations volume I contributed to, taking into consideration the Greek reader. Difficult and perhaps exciting – for this very reason – was the work, to look for and select texts from Panait Istrati's works, untranslated from Romanian into Greek. The research was completed during February-March 2013, in libraries, bookshops and antiquarian bookshops in Athens, Bucharest and Ploiești. My route initially avoided exactly Brăila, Istrati's birthplace, to re-find it, at the end, redemptive. The intention was to present to the Greek readership, between one sunrise and one sunset, the world of Panait Istrati. The world he came from, but also the one in which he kept on fleeing. The world – imaginary, but also real – in which he never got, his Cephalonia being Cavafi's Ithaka. Panait Istrati never stepped on the road bearing his name in Pharaklata, Cephalonia. I invite you to join us and him in the world he was looking for².

Keywords: Panait Istrati; Romania; Greece; translation; cosmopolitanism.



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² The present paper is part of a longer essay entitled Caragiale and Istrati – Two Writers of Greek Origin, Masters of Romanian Literature. The paper will be presented in Greek in a cultural review in Greece.

1. Introduction

Following an interview with Professor Stavros Deligiorgis³ at the radio cultural broadcast of Manolis Polentas at *Sto kokkino* – red-hot – Greek station, it came out that many Greeks, people of culture (and not only), are genuinely interested in I. L. Caragiale and Panait Istrati and their works. The wish expressed during the Literary Translations Workshop of Contemporary Balkania, a cultural society in Athens, to present meaningful pages of translations from the culture of both countries found thus its immediate objective.

We chose then to present Caragiale and Istrati through translations of their short works, trying to highlight the cosmopolitanism and the current relevance of their writing: the connections with Greece and France, with the rest of Europe, with the current age, in an essay included in a translation volume, associated with a chronological updated list and several photos.

The two great Romanian writers, so different from each other, but also so similar, continue to be up to this day in today's world in which people do not truly live, but unadaptably run from one corner to the next, in search of a truly unclear ideal, using a language full of loans from increasingly more numerous languages and with migration issues in a world foreign to them.

Both have an acute sense of observation, and one, Caragiale, surprises us even today through his modernism and concise style of his writing, while Istrati, as Tudor Vianu states, "*is an Oriental and the gift of his storytelling is, indeed, its main characteristic*" („Chira Chiralina”, *Viața Românească*, 10, October 1924)

As Odysseus, they are storytellers-travellers, knowledgeable of man's sinful nature. Caragiale does not hesitate to ironize it, while Istrati gets closer, showing understanding about it.

They both have an original pace and rhythm of text, a specific musicality. This makes that one of the cornerstones of a translator of their works to be the very transposition of this unique pace for each of them. Caragiale himself once said that "*the rhythm is the essence of style!*"

Both of them love Romania with their whole heart, even if Amos Oz said, and Caragiale would have fully agreed with him: "*I love Israel, but I don't like it very much.*" (Freedland, 2016) Iorgos Seferis said it even better: "*wherever I travel, Greece wounds me.*" (de Bernieres, 2005). Istrati, in an attempt to define his identity said: "*no matter how cosmopolitan I would be by birth, vagabond, in love with endless horizons, as you see me, I nevertheless remain: Romanian, through my mother and her language and my beautiful Brăila; Greek by father and his "beloved patrida"*"⁴.

If in Odyssey Ulysses goes towards Ithaka, namely to Cephalonia, from there, from the Lixouri and Argostoli ports, came Istrati and Caragiale towards our culture. From Lixouri, as known, Istrati's father came to Brăila. From Argostoli came to us (via Constantinople), in a long voyage, Caragiale's family. Romania is, actually, the birthplace of Andreas Embirikos, but also of Iannis Xenakis and many people of culture forging a strong mutual connection of understanding and cooperation between Romanian and Greek artists.

³ Following an interview with Professor Stavros Deligiorgis at the *Sto kokkino* - on red - radio cultural broadcast of Manolis Polentas, a Greek station, it came out that many Greeks, people of culture (and not only), are genuinely interested in I. L. Caragiale and Panait Istrati and their works. The wish expressed during the Literary Translations Workshop of Contemporary Balkania, a cultural society in Athens, to present significant pages of translations from the culture of both countries, found thus its immediate objective. I chose then to present Caragiale and Istrati through translations of their short works, trying to highlight the cosmopolitanism and the current relevance of their writing: the connections with Greece and France, with the rest of Europe, with the current age, in an essay included in a translation volume, together with a chronological updated list and several photos.

⁴ Panait, I. 1985. *How I Became A Writer*, Reconstitution based on autobiographical texts, chosen, translated and annotated by Alexandru Talex, 2nd edition (520)

Eventually, both writers belong to the whole world, starting with Europe. The European voyage of Caragiale's and Istrati's works, between the young and open to novelty Romanian culture, who is also unjustly considered as a "minor culture" and the Greek one, source of everything is being called European culture, was intermediated by France and its culture. Eugene Ionesco declares that his "French" theatre is rooted in Caragiale's, and this is not minor! Istrati's works, a marginalized modernist, reached the Greek reader mainly via translations from French. Once again, the French culture creates bridges between cultures, making for writers the whole earth their country.

I believe though that the Balkanic element, pristine and delightful combination of blood and Greek and Romanian spirit, is Caragiale's and Istrati's most important contribution to enriching the world literature.

2. Istrati's Literary Citizenship

Son of Zoița Istrati and Cephalonian Georgios Valsamis from Pharaklata, a tobacco smuggler, Istrati has never met his father. A leftist militant, he worked numerous journal articles and fiction works. Both Nikos Kazantzakis and Romain Rolland admired his works, the later describing him as "*un nouveau Gorki des pays balkaniques*" (Istrati, 2009: xxxii)

When we discuss Istrati's literary citizenship though, we need to go beyond George Călinescu's statements, such as "Panait Istrati is a French writer because he wrote in French, but is ignored by the French literary consciousness, by French literary histories, by dictionaries, just as the Romanian ones will not be able to highlight him"; and this is because the French Literature assumes him since, in the seventies, a collection of *Works* appeared in three volumes, with a preface by Joseph Kessel. The Romanian literary world also assumes him if we only mention the fact that the *Dicționarul Scriitorilor Români (Romanian Writers Dictionary)* by Papahagi-Zaciu-Sasu, as well as *Dicționarul general al literaturii române (General Dictionary of Romanian Literature)* endorsed by the Academy, reserves him generous commentaries. He therefore belongs to two literatures, as we see.

Regarding the third one, the Greek literature, the natural interest comes out through the almost entire translation of his works, especially the one from the French route. "Greek-Romanian novelist of French language" writes about him in the *World Dictionary of Biographies* (Ekdotiki: Athens, 1991). "Greek-Romanian novelist" says critic Alexis Ziras too for the Istrati entry in the ample *Dictionary of Modern Greek Literature* (Atens: Pataki, 2007: 197). As Elena Lazar, Ambassador of the Hellenic World (2005), awarded the Golden Cross of the Order of the Eucharist declares: "*One of the many aspects composing the 'Greek capital' in the biography of this 'world citizen' who is Panait Istrati is his relationship with Nikos Kazantzakis and his partner, Eleni, in a crucial moment in his life. In Athens, in Kifissia, in February 1928, Istrati will start to write The Thistles of the Baragan. Istrati owes the Cretan his triumphant entry on the Greek scene. On 31 December 1927, the editors of the Athenian Proia (Morning) will read a warm article written by Nikos Kazantzakis about the novelist from Brăila, Romania. In his turn, Istrati signed in July 1928 in Le Monde, a laudative text about Kazantzakis. Istrati's article is the first to make Kazantzakis known in Europe...*" (2013). About how strong Istrati's relationship with Kazantzakis was, the volume authored by Professor Florin Vasilescu comes as a major one, *Scriitori printre sirene. Povestirea și viața povestitorului: Panait Istrati și Nikos Kazantzakis (Writers for mermaids. The storytelling and the life of the storyteller: Panait Istrati and Nikos Kazantzakis)*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy, Fundația Națională pentru Literatură și Artă in 2006 (210-211)⁵. And, about his relationship with Greece, the following words said by Istrati

⁵ During the time, the two [...] were thought as important, caused admiration, as well as reserve. They relate to each other not only through their ethnic root and friendship, but through the style of their prose. Their works were often compared to the writing of Albert Camus. There are sufficient similarities between the biographies of their famous protagonists. Adrian Zograffi and Alexis Zorba are closely related to the spiritual biography of their

himself are meaningful, reminded by Lazar again: “From all peoples, Romanians and Greeks are the closest to my soul. I love and understand them because of the blood they gave me. Their gifts and weaknesses are my own.” (Istrati, 1985: 520) It comes obvious that Istrati is claimed by the Greek literature as well!

Panaït is proud to be Romanian and loves Romania. He is also proud about being Greek, although he rarely speaks about Greece. Where from this passion for Romania? In my opinion, this comes from the language, because Panaït firstly loves Romanian language. When he speaks Romanian, he cannot hide his emotion. He often recites from Eminescu [...] Panaït loves words, he chooses them carefully, and caresses them. I will never forget how he uttered a Greek word which seemed very beautiful – Come, come, come, he used to call, as a young chick to eat from your hand. Come, come, come, with his gentle voice. And when the desired word appeared, eventually, as a bird getting closer, fearfully flapping its wings, Panaït would stand up, trying to calm the bird, welcoming it with his beloved and famous greeting – Kalosto! Kalosto! And his whole excited body would shake of emotion, said Samios-Kazantzaki (2013: 115-6)

3. Istrati, a Balkanic Writer

I think that Octav Șuluțiu is far from an inaccuracy when he states that Istrati “cannot be claimed either by the French spirit or the Romanian one”, that he is “an Oriental” (Dimisianu, 2013: 64-65). I would say now, that neither by the Greek one. He is more than a “Balkanic” according to Romain Rolland in his famous preface, because I will agree with Florin Vasilescu in his volume “Scriitori printre sirene. Povestirea și viața povestitorului: Panaït Istrati și Nikos Kazantzakis”: “The Mediterranean space is one of the ‘existential alterity’ in which the actions of Istrati’s protagonists ‘have a stake in searching for ideals’, and their wish to be loved, understood, to find matches in the area of aspirations materializes in adventures.” (80-81)

Critic Gabriel Dimisianu declares that it is:

an assimilated exoticism, localized framed in the stylistic line of Romanian literary Balkanism is about in them [Istrati’s works]... I mean that there is a tradition of Romanian literary exoticism to which Panaït Istrati can be related to, as caller of harbour worlds of mixture, Southern, expressive, and highly colourful. It is however the case, as mentioned on other occasions, to provide the concept of Romanian specific with a broader meaning than it is usually conveyed. The Southern spirits, the world of river and marine harbours, are Romanian as well, a component of the specif which, to our detriment, we are not always willing to acknowledge.

Panaït Istrati goes along the line of this tradition of localized exoticism, assumed, be it written in French or in Romanian. His predecessors are Alecsandri (in his prose), Ion Ghica, N. Filimon, I. L. Caragiale, as mentioned, but has followers as well, such as Zaharia Stancu, Fănuș Neagu and others. It is not offensive to think about Panaït Istrati as a Romanian writer, in the suggested context, and if the French consider him a French writer, so much the better for Panaït Istrati and for Romanians. (65-66)

Istrati’s portrait would not be complete without the framework made by one of the most specialized Romanian literary critics – Mircea Iorgulescu – in his volume, *Spre alt Istrati [Towards Another Istrati]*. The critic shows those who described Istrati as a “Balkanic adventurer”, a “vagabond” that his rising is “the expression of freedom in front of the world, of this world, for ever divided in winners and losers, where evil is everywhere, inside people as well as outside them.” (168)

authors who made them memorable. Istrati and Kazantzakis become the very protagonists of their prose. (Istrati, 1985: 520)

Ioan Holban adds to this the following information:

Istrati's rising comes from the conscience of freedom (in life and writing), 'the divine gift' offered to this 'Balkan Charlot' for whom reading stands for, in his formative years, as a kind of freedom and a cult for truth. While studying Istrati's biography, the critic reveals one of the future routes for the analysis of his oeuvre: writing as an act of rising, as insurgence. This way of rising makes perfectly valid two most exiting and original connections: with Don Quixote and with Hamlet. Firstly, Istrati's 'heroism' is similar to that revealed by Cervantes' character in Unamuno's and Ortega y Gasset's vision; I would say though that disagreements with the world create the searches and Istratian departures (one volume has the very title Mes départs), just as the famous hidalgo would create his 'positive' utopia: Istrati and Cervantes' protagonist discover what I would call the world State of crisis in two of his instances: the 'chivalresque' one and that of the early twentieth Europe. He gets close to Hamlet – Iorgulescu says – through his damnation, 'the melancholic prince with the book in his hand, revolted against the rottenness of the world', being a 'symbolically representative' character for Panait Istrati. (România Literară, 2011)

4. The Cosmopolitanism of Istrati

Through his works, Istrati made known to the French world, and not only, the specific of a strange part of the Romanian space – the crossroads between the Orient and the West – the mouths of the Danube, the old Brăila harbour, where so many nations used to live: along Romanians, Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Albanese, Semits, Germans, Italians, Romani, but also Slavic (Russians and Bulgarians). It was a variegated world, a mixture of languages, traditions, customs, cultures, human faces who would enjoy and suffer together or on their own. It was a cosmopolitan world rendered in a creation he authored with authentic gift. Zamfir Bălan states:

Adrian's wanderings (an alter ego of the writer) take his steps through Constantinople, Pireus, Smirne, Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, Ghazir, back to Brăila and again, for one winter after another, 'in Egypt, with stops in Turkey, Greece and Italy, both at departure and at return. Leavings and homecomings. Seeking. Drifts. Regains. Roads, foreigners, friends, luxury, abjectness, humanness, cruelty, indifference, blind fath, debauchery, boredom, innocence, suffering, fear of death, unleashed passions, repulsion, the wild beauty of nature, loneliness, art, refinement, bitterness, hope – a world, the Mediterranean, 'a good part of my soul'.

For Panait Istrati, the Mediterranean is the world constantly defined through an alternation of his 'tempers': a world where dream has the consistency of the real fact, and the real appears detached from the dream; a world where illusion gets rooted in people's life with the force of certainty, and certainty nowhere appears more illusory than here.' (2014 : 11)

Greek critic Yannis Maglis remarks:

His literary style was extremely original and stands out through an unmatched [...] 'seductive' narrative gift. This is his gift. His story charms you, takes you along it. Because, as Romain Rolland states, 'he is a born storyteller, a teler of Oriental tales, and once he launches into a story, no one knows, not even him, if it will last an hour or a thousand and one nights. The Danube and its meanders... His genius for storytelling is so irresistible that even in the letter he wrote me the evening before his suicide attempt, twice he interrupted his desperate account to narrate two humorous stories from his past life. (1974, Preface Ο μπαρμπα Αγγελής, Κυρα-Κυραλίνα, Κωνσταντής)

5. Translations in Greek of Istrati's Works

5.1 Translations from French and Romanian

I will somewhat return to what has been my interest: the translations of Istrati's works into Greek. **From my research, not at all effortless, I found the following translations into Greek:**

TRANSLATIONS IN GREEK (Οι μεταφράσεις στα ελληνικά):

- (2014) Τα γαϊδουράγκαθα του Μπάραγκαν/Ciulinii Bărağanului/ The Thistles of the Bărağan, Φαρφουλάς, μετάφραση: Γιώργος Μανάδης, translations from French
- (2014) Μεσογειακές Περιπλανήσεις/Peregrinări Mediteraneene/ Mediterranean Wanderings, Ίστρος, Βραίλα, συλλογική μετάφραση, translations from Romanian
- (2011) Ταξιδεύοντας με τον Παναίτ Ιστράτι/ Călătorind cu Panait Istrati, adaptation after *Mussa*, Αιγόκερως, μετάφραση: Μπουμπουλίνα Νικάκη, translations from Romanian
- (2006) Ο σφουγγαράς και άλλα διηγήματα/Culegătorul de bureți și alte povestiri/ The Sponge-Fisher, Κάκτος, μετάφραση: Όλγα Τρέμη, translations from French
- (2006) Βαλκάνιοι συγγραφείς- Μιχάλης Σταφυλάς, Εκδόσεις: Βασιλόπουλος Στέφανος translations from French
- (1998) Κυρά Κυραλίνα/Kyra Kiralina/Chira Chiralina, Ίνδικτος, μετάφραση: Αιμίλιος Χουρμούζιος, translations from French
- (1992) Κυρά Κυραλίνα, KONTIN/ Kyra Kyralina, Codine, Ed. Kaktos, translations from French (1992) Προς την άλλη φλόγα/Spre altă flacără/ To the Other Flame, Δωρικός, μετάφραση: Ιφιάνασσα Χατζηδημητρίου, translations from French
- (1990) Κυρά Κυραλίνα/Kyra Kiralina/Chira Chiralina, Dorikos Publishing House, translation Ιφιάνασσα Χατζηδημητρίου, translations from French
- (1988) Ο ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ, Kaktos Publishing House, translations from French
- (1988) Ο ΜΙΧΑΗΛ, Kaktos Publishing House, translations from French
- (1987) Κυρά Κυραλίνα /Kyra Kiralina /Chira Chiralina, Κάκτος, μετάφραση: Όλγα Τρέμη, translations from French
- (1987) Προς την άλλη φλόγα/Către altă flacără/ To the Other Flame, Κάλβος, μετάφραση: Κώστας Κριτσίνης, translations from French
- (1987) Κυρά Κυραλίνα – Κοντίβ, Ed. Kaktos, translation S. Panousi-Olga Tremi, translations from French
- (1983) Νεραντζούλα/Neranțula, Κάκτος, μετάφραση: Α. Φορτούνας (1983) Νεραντζούλα/Neranțula, Gramata Publishing House, translation Τάσος Λαζαρίδης, translations from French
- (1979) Κυρά Κυραλίνα/ Kyra Kiralina/Chira Chiralina, Kaktos Publishing House, translation Olga Tremi, translations from French
- (1979) KONTIN/Codin/ Codine, Kaktos Publishing House, translation S. Panousi, translations from French
- (1979) ΜΙΧΑΗΛ/ Mihail/ Michael ΕΚΔ. ΚΑΚΤΟΣ, 1979 ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΗ Α. ΠΑΝΤΕΛΑΚΗ, translation from Romanian
- (1978) Ο μπαρμπα Αγγελής, Κυρα-Κυραλίνα (Κυρά αδερφή μου), Κωνσταντής. – Panepistimiakos Typos Publishing House, translation Γιάννης Μαγκλής, translations from French
- (1974) Ο Μπάρμπα Αγγελής/Barba Angheli/Μοș Anghel, Κωστοπούλου Ξένια, μετάφραση: Γιάννης Μαγκλής, translations from French
- (1971) ΝΕΡΑΤΖΟΥΛΑ- ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΕΓΝΑΤΙΑ, ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΗ Τ.ΛΑΖΑΡΙΔΗΣ, translations from French
- (1968) ΚΥΡΑ ΚΥΡΑΛΙΝΑ-ΕΚΔ. ΔΩΔΕΚΑΘΗ ΩΡΑ, ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΗ Β.ΑΓΓΕΛΙΝΑΣ, ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΡΟΜΑΙΝ ΡΟΛΑΝ, translations from French
- (1931) Νεραντζούλα/Neranțula/ Nerantula, Εκδόσεις Όμηρος, μετάφρ.: Π. ΣΙΑΒΑΝΟΣ, translations from French
- (1928) Ο Μπάρμπα Αγγελής/Barba Angheli/Μοș Anghel/ Uncle Anghel, Κοραή, μετάφραση Γαλάτεια Καζαντζάκη, translations from French
- (1925) Κυρά Κυραλίνα/Kyra Kiralina/Chira Chiralina, Αιμίλιο Χουρμούζιο, translations from French.

I also must add that I am not sure that in the research done in the many libraries in Greece, in Athens only, I have found all the translations made in Greek. There are many small hidden libraries, very well endowed with books, but whose content is not found on the internet. There are also many small and large libraries in the provinces that I did not have objectively access to. So, this is an open topic for the future.

5.2 The Particular Case of Mediterranean Wanderings

In this volume the main idea which led us was those of translating from what Panait Istrati wrote directly in Romanian, meaning: *Culegătorul de bureți* (*The Sponge-Fisher*), *Sotir*, *La stăpân* (*Servant*), *Capetan Mavromati* (*Captain Mavromati*), *Cine a scris Hamlet?* (*Who is the author of "Hamlet"*) and *Nemurire* (*Immortality*), which were later rewritten in French with some additions.

He also translated into Romanian himself from French: *Kyra Kyralina*, *Moș Anghel* (*Uncle Anghel*), *Codin* (*Codine*), *O noapte în Bălți* (*A night in the backwaters*), *Bakar*, *Kir Nicolas*, *Țața Minca* (*Tsatsa-Minnka*), *Între un prieten și o tutungerie* (*Between a friend and a tobacco company*), *Casa Thuringer* (*The Thuringer House*), *Biroul de plasare* (*The Placement Office*) and the stories that compose the volume *În lumea Mediteranei — Apus de soare* (*In the Mediterranean world – Sunset*).

I will focus more on the 2014 volume, *Peregrinări mediteraneene* (*Mediterranean Wanderings*), *Istros*, *Brăila*, collective translation, and I will refer to what Deligiorgis wrote in his afterword as conclusion:

*Of course, compared to his Romanian counterpart, the Greek reader of Istrati holds an advantage because the greatest part of his works was translated – similar case to the plays of Caragiale; compared to the Romanian reader of Kazantzakis – no matter his huge novels sale in Romania, who lacks access, for example, to the *Odyssey*, or his *Tercets*. We have here a case of asymmetry, probably similar to the constant comparison of the two Balkans, ours and Walter Benjamin's. The later, starting from inside Europe (including Russia) and claiming even to be a Baudelaireian wanderer through great cities, ends in his vision the (unfinished) *Arcade/Passengewerk* piece in which he started to describe places, passages, even (inclusively) houses of the disconsolate and the poor, namely those whom both Kazantzakis, and Istrati tried to know and love them in their own meanderings (175).*

It is a volume that a team of Romanian translators worked on, which has presented a degree of increased difficulty. Their merit, knowing how complicated the Greek language is, is even greater.

As it can be seen, Panait Istrati was translated almost entirely into Greek, the Greeks people and their literature claiming him in their turn. There have been many remakes of the most important writings of Panait Istrati. We have tried, with this volume, to present texts that have not been translated into Greek, and, as more originality, in a direct translation from his mother tongue, in which he wrote them himself.

In the initial intention, unaccomplished due to objective reasons, there would have been another 5 representative texts, written by Panait Istrati himself in Romanian. These, were published after his death in the volume edited by Alexandru Talex.

I consider, without false modesty, that this volume is something original, because of our will to include only texts written directly by the author in Romanian, knowing that most of the translations were made from French.

6. Conclusions

I will say, at the end of my essay about Panait Istrati, my thoughts following the research on our book:

The pathways in Istrati's life were sinuous, meandering and full of unexpected; so was the search of texts included in the volume I contributed to, taking into consideration the Greek reader. Difficult and perhaps for this reason exciting, as well as the task to discover and select texts from Istrati's works, untranslated from Romanian into Greek. The research was completed during February-March 2013 in libraries, bookshops and antique bookshops in Athens, Bucharest and Ploiești. Our route purposely initially avoided Brăila, Istrati's birthplace, to re-find it, at the end, redemptive.

The intention was to present to the Greek readership, between one sunrise and one sunset, the world of Panait Istrati. The world he came from, but also the one in which he kept on fleeing. The world – imaginary, but also real – in which he never got, his Cephalonia being Cavafi's Ithaka.

Even if certain texts are pastiches, of Istrati himself, or by chance, or of his followers, willing of fame, we dared to present them now. I motivate this, with the 'justification' provided by Alexandru Talex, this exceptional critic of Istrati:

In the pages of this edition, the reader will then directly meet Panait Istrati, his specific way to speak, to judge, to live. Without amputation, without adaptation or external intervention. The editor had the difficult task to find texts, to select and connect them, to translate – when necessary – and to complete a montage as fluent 'par lui-même', so that the reader gets the impression that everything was purposefully written, in this format, by the writer.

The spine was his 'autobiography' – shortened to years, facts and intervals – written by Panait Istrati, in late March 1923, at Romain Rolland's request, concluding from his early lines: 'Making my mind to review my life so far, I do not know what will come out of my pen, especially that it is not about dreams, but a fierce reality... My life is made of oases, lost in a desert known by me only. Occasionally, where it became necessary for Panait Istrati's text to be supplemented, I appealed to annotations as footnotes on respective pages. (41-42)

În paginile acestei ediții, cititorul se va întâlni deci *direct* cu Panait Istrati, cu felul său specific de a vorbi, de a judeca, de a trăi. *Fără nici o amputare, fără nici o prelucrare sau intervenție din afară.* Alcătuitorului ediției i-a revenit sarcina dificilă de depistare a textelor, de alegere și înlănțuire, de traducere a lor – când a fost cazul – și de realizare în mod cât mai curgător a montajului „par lui-même“, pentru ca cititorul să aibă impresia că totul a fost scris anume, în această formă, de către scriitor.

Coloană vertebrală ne-a fost „autobiografia“ — condensată pe ani, fapte și perioade — scrisă de Panait Istrati, la sfârșit de martie 1923, la cererea lui Romain Rolland, concludentă de la primele sale rînduri : „Hotărîndu-mă să trec în revistă viața mea de pînă acum, nu știu ce va ieși în astă seară de sub condeiul meu, mai ales că nu-i vorba de vise, ci de-o crîncenă realitate... Viața mea se încheagă din oaze, pierdute într-un pustiu numai de mine știut“.

Pe-alocuri, unde s-a simțit nevoia ca textul lui Panait Istrati să fie întregit, am recurs la adnotări în subsolul paginilor respective.

We made a selection from volumes *Cum am ajuns scriitor (How I Became a Writer)* (1985, Bucharest: Minerva), *În lumea Mediteranei (Mediterranean)* (1936, Bucharest: Cartea Românească); *Trecut și viitor (Past and Future)* (1925, Bucharest: Renașterea) and “*Musa (Moussa)*” (in *Viața Românească*, 1925). From the two texts in 1925, “*Musa (Moussa)*”, went with several changes in *Mediterana. Răsărit de soare (Mediterranean. Sunrise)* (1934) and the second, “*Cine este autorul lui Hamlet? (Who is the author of Hamlet?)*” was included in the other volume, *În Marea Mediterană. Apus de soare (Mediterranean. Sunset)* (1936). These texts are a premiere for the Greek reader and a premiere for the translation of Istrati's works. It is the first time when these texts are translated from Romanian, and not from French.

The other texts, which should have been included in our volume, are from *Cum am ajuns scriitor (How I Became a Writer)*. It was not written by Istrati as such, but it is a genuine collage composed by Alexandru Talex, autobiographical pieces by Istrati, sections of his works, correspondence, and interviews. The intention of the creator of such 'representations' – to offer the reader an idea as

broader as possible about Istrati's biography and art – also contributed to my decision to make them known to the Green reader.

Just as Istrati tried in his writing to 'translate' his exile and that of the others, we, the translators of his work into Greek language, tried, respectfully, to translate him. Istrati has never stepped on the road bearing his name in Pharaklata, Cephalonia. Yet we invite you to join him and us in the world he kept looking for!

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