

Memnon in Constantinople:
Translation Transformations of Voltaire's
short story *Memnon ou La sagesse humaine*

The Greek translation of Voltaire's philosophical short story *Memnon* was anonymously published as an extra separate section in Caspar Ludvig Momartz's *Βοσπορομαχία* (Leipzig 1766) under the editorial care of Eugenios Voulgaris. The translation proved quite durable: it remained long in use, going on to be republished twice before the Greek Revolution, though never autonomously. It kept the position as a supplement in the second edition of *Βοσπορομαχία* (Venice 1792) and reappeared, for the third time, in the collection of Phanariot poetry *Διάφορα ηθικά και αστεία στιχουργήματα* (Vienna 1818) edited by Zissis Daoutis. Apart from printings, the circulation of the translation in manuscripts is quite possible, given that Daoutis informed the readers in the preface of his collection that the poems published were taken from "various notebooks (commonly called Mismaya)" ["διάφορα καταστιχάκια (κοινώς Μισμαγιά λεγόμενα)].¹ Thus, the Greek *Memnon* not only inaugurated the reception of Voltaire's works in the Greek-speaking world, but also met with moderate success.

Eugenios Voulgaris is widely held to have been the translator, although there are still some doubts as to that.² The first known mention connecting Voulgaris with the translation is dated to 1815. As stated in the 13th volume of *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne* (Paris, 1815):

Traduction en vers du Memnon, de Voltaire. Cette traduction, faite par Eugenios dans sa jeunesse, se trouve imprimée à la suite de la Bospromachie de Momars; quoiqu'elle ne porte point de nom d'auteur, on sait qu'elle est de ce prélat. (p. 492)³

In any case, the Greek translation of *Memnon* is another literary work that came out of a group of scholars in Constantinople in the mid-18th century. This "circle of Constantinople" included Ioannis Rizos of Mane, author of *Στοιχειομαχία*, Caspar Ludvig Momartz and Eugenios Voulgaris, author and editor respectively of *Βοσπορομαχία*, and foreigners such as the English ambassador James Porter. The literary salon of Madame Tyaniti (otherwise Mariora Rizos, Ioannis Rizos' sister) might have been an ideal place for them to gather together, sharing the same interests and exchanging ideas and knowledge.⁴ They acted shortly after the glorious 'Tulip Period' (1718-1730), a fruitful and creative phase of Ottoman history, which had resulted in a cultural flowering.⁵ At the

same time, there are the first signs of the Greek reception of Enlightenment. In this context of the Phanariots' cultural and political rise appeared the Greek translation of Voltaire's *Memnon*.

A piece of information on the translation given in the preface of *Βοσπορομαχία* goes as follows:

Η διήγησις οπού μετά ταύτα ακολουθεί του Μέμνονος, είναι μία επίπλαστος και μυθώδης Παραβολή, κατά λογάδην συγγραφείσα υπό του Γάλλου Ουολταριού· την οποίον κάποιος, ειδήμων, ως φαίνεται, της Γαλλικής Διαλέκτου, την μεθρμήνευσε, και εις τους κοινούς τούτους στίχους της γλώσσας μας την μετερρύθμισεν. Ο μύθος είναι αστειός. Είναι μύθος, αλλά περιέχει πολλές αληθείας.⁶

[The following story of Memnon is an invented and fanciful Parable, written in prose by Voltaire the Frenchman, which someone obviously versed in French language translated in these plain verses. The myth is funny. It is a myth, but it contains many truths.]

Voulgaris is held to have been the writer of the preface, as well. According to him, the text is a parable. It is obvious that, by this term, he connects *Memnon* with Jesus' parables in the Gospels and the tradition of the Christian teaching. The fact that the story is imaginary cannot deprive the parable of the ability to reveal the truth to whoever knows how to interpret it rightly.

In general, the Greek translation is thought to be faithful, although it changes the form of the original text,⁷ by turning it from prose into verse narrative. This choice of the translator is remarkable and has been explained by the assumption that Greek scholars of the time were not yet familiar with literary prose.⁸ On the other hand, we should take into account that *Memnon* was first published in the collection *Recueil de pièces en vers et en prose par l'auteur de la tragédie de Sémiramis* (1749) as a supplement to a series of six philosophical poems entitled *Discours en vers sur l'homme* (previously published in 1738).⁹ Voltaire justified his choice to attach *Memnon* written in prose to the poetic *Discours en vers sur l'homme* with the following introductory statement: "Ce petit Ouvrage ayant quelque rapport aux Discours en vers ci-dessus, on a cru devoir l'imprimer à leur suite".¹⁰ Thus, there was a connection of *Memnon* with versification from the beginning. Besides, such a transformation was not peculiar to Greek. There was also a French poetic version entitled "Damon ou le sage insensé" and published in the magazine *Mercur de France* (October 1759).¹¹ Additionally, the genre of instructive poetic fable (or apologue), which is relevant to parable,¹² had established an unquestionable status in 18th century neoclassicism. Especially, the popular fables in verse depicting human characters such as some oriental narratives in the second collection of fables by Lafontaine might have been a prominent exemplar for someone "versed in French language" ["ειδήμονα της Γαλλικής διαλέκτου"] with didactic intentions.

The story is as follows: in the morning of a day Memnon, resident of Nineveh, decides

to become wise and blissful. In order to accomplish this, he believes that he only has to free himself from passions. By the end of the same day, however, all his plans have failed. One-eyed and extremely poor, he goes to sleep and dreams of a celestial spirit from a star next to Sirius, who is assigned to supervise Memnon's family. The spirit, having introduced itself, goes on to give a philosophical lecture on the impossibility of absolute human blissfulness. Despite this fact, the spirit insists on the idea that the Universe as a whole has been created according to a harmonious plan. Memnon, however, still doubts that.

The fact that Greek Memnon shifted into the field of poetry resulted in some differentiations from the French text, which, although slight, have had a decisive effect on the meaning. Some of them may help us understand the context in which the Greek translator and his circle received the Voltaire's story. As we will see, the Greek translator appears to have had a familiarity with the topics of Memnon. We may also discern his own view which Christian theology and tradition seem to have infused. We will examine two such cases in the following lines.

In the first one, the celestial spirit explains to Memnon the arrangement of worlds and celestial globes, depending on the grade of their perfection:

[...] être parfaitement sage. C'est donc une chose à laquelle il est impossible de parvenir? s'écria Memnon en soupirant. Aussi impossible, lui répliqua l'autre, que d'être parfaitement habile, parfaitement fort, parfaitement puissant, parfaitement heureux. Nous-mêmes, nous en sommes bien loin. Il y a un globe où tout cela se trouve ; mais dans les cent mille millions de mondes qui sont dispersés dans l'étendue tout se suit par degrés. On a moins de sagesse et de plaisir dans le second que dans le premier, moins dans le troisième que dans le second, ainsi du reste jusqu'au dernier, où tout le monde est complètement fou. ¹³ (my italics)

The Greek version is as follows:

[...] την τελείαν
 Και ακροτάτην φρόνησιν, και γνώσιν, και σοφίαν.
 Είναι λοιπόν αδύνατον; ο Μέμνων μας φωνάζει,
 Αυτό που ήθελα εγώ; και πικραναστενάζει.
 Ναι λέγει. Είν' αδύνατον. Είναι των αδυνάτων,
 Αυτής της τελειότητος ναύρει τινάς τον πάτον.
 Εις άκρον επιτήδειος, άκρως ανδρειωμένος,
 Και εις το άκρον υψηλός, άκρως ευτυχισμένος,
 Άνθρωπος κάτω εις την γην δεν ημπορεί να γένει,
 Ουδέ ημεις δεν τόχομεν, σ' εσάς πού απομένει;
 Εις μίαν σφαίρα μοναχά αυτό 'ναι δεδομένον,
 Εις όλαις ταις επίλοιπαις είναι αφηρημένον.
 Εις χιλιάδας χίλιας, μυρίας μυριάδας,
 Των Κόσμων οπού έχουσιν οικήτορας Νομάδας,

Η τελειότης πανταχού είναι πεπερασμένη,
 Κατά μικρον, και βαθμηδόν χωρεί και αναβαίνει.
 Ολιγωτέρα φρόνησις, Σοφία, τελειότης,
 Η της δευτέρας των Σφαιρών είναι, παρά της πρώτης.
 Και εις την τρίτην έχουσιν χάριν ολιγωτέραν,
 Και σύνεσιν, και προκοπήν παρά εις την δευτέραν.
 Και ακολούθως εφεξής, έως εις την υστάτην,
 Εκεί έχουν οι οικήτορες την τρέλλαν πληρεστάτην. (p. 147, ¹⁴ my italics)

[(...) The perfect and complete prudence, and knowledge, and wisdom. Is it then impossible what I wanted? cried Memnon with a sigh. Yes, replies [the Spirit], it is impossible, completely impossible for anyone to reach the extreme limits of perfection. There can be no perfectly skilful, perfectly happy man on earth. Even we ourselves cannot have it, how can you? This has been granted to one Globe only, and it has been removed from the rest of the Globes. In the thousands of thousands, in the myriads of myriads of *Worlds, in which there are nomadic inhabitants*, everywhere the perfection is limited, and it goes on by degrees, little by little. There is less prudence, wisdom, and perfection in the second Globe than in the first; there is even less grace, prudence, and progress in the third Globe than in the second, and so on till the last, whose inhabitants are completely fools.]

The French text does not refer to the habitation of the worlds explicitly, and one can only deduce it. On the contrary, the Greek translation refers to “nomadic inhabitants” [“οικήτορας Νομάδας”].¹⁵ It is obvious that Voltaire parodies Fontenelle’s theory on the plurality of the worlds. Fontenelle’s work *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) had earned a large reputation among the scholars of Europe, but also caused many reactions.¹⁶ Following the heliocentric model of Copernicus, Fontenelle claimed that the Universe is unlimited and homogeneous, consisting of innumerable worlds certainly inhabited. Rejecting anthropocentrism, he assumed that the appearance of these unearthly creatures must have been different from that of human beings.

In the Voltaire’s story, the weird celestial creature from a star next to Sirius is an ironic allusion to Fontenelle’s views. In *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Fontenelle had presented the cosmic order in the same way:

Apparemment les différences augmentent à mesure que l’on s’éloigne, et qui verroit un Habitant de la Lune, et un Habitant de la Terre, remarqueroit bien qu’ils seroient de deux Mondes plus voisins qu’un Habitant de Saturne. [...] Cette Planète-cy jouit des douceurs de l’Amour, mais elle est toujours désolée en plusieurs de ses parties par les fureurs de la Guerre. Dans une autre Planète on jouit d’une Paix éternelle, mais au milieu de cette Paix on ne connoist point l’Amour, et on s’ennuye.¹⁷

In addition to that, however, the Greek translator gives the impression of having first-hand knowledge of Fontenelle’s theory about the habitation of the Universe. This explains the reference to inhabitants [οικήτορας]. He is likely to have been aware of Voltaire’s *Micromegas* (1752), as well. Like in *Memnon*, in *Micromegas* Voltaire critiques Leibniz’s

ideas and satirises Fontenelle's views. Giant Micromegas leaves Sirius and sets out for a tour of the galaxy. The galactic wandering of Micromegas may justify the word "νομάδας" (nomads) in the Greek translation.

Greek scholars were not uninterested in Fontenelle's views on the plurality of the worlds. One may note more frequent references to his theory in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* was translated by Panagiotis Kodrikas in 1794.¹⁸ Indirect references can be traced in *Φυσικής απάνθισμα* (Vienna 1790) by Rhigas while a treatment of the issue found a place even in the collection of Alexandros Maurokordatos' literary works *Βόσπορος εν Βορυσθένει* (Moscow 1810).¹⁹ Fontenelle's theory, however, contradicted the Christian beliefs of many Greek scholars. The plurality of the worlds in a heliocentric and non-anthropocentric Universe shook Christian convictions to the creation of man "in the image and likeness of God" as well as the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus for mankind's sake.²⁰ In the context of this reaction, Voulgaris rejected Fontenelle's views. In his treatise *Λογική*, published in the same year as the translation of *Memnon*, Voulgaris referred derisively to the idea of habitation of the Moon and the planets, comparing it to imagining fabulous beasts such as Trachelaphus (Τραγέλαφος) and Hippocentaur (Ιπποκένταυρος). According to Voulgaris, all that was nothing but unacceptable fancies that could not be adjusted to reality.²¹ They were only grotesque fancies like the celestial spirit in *Memnon*.

In the Greek text of *Memnon*, however, certain shifts in the translation led the celestial spirit to lose gradually some of the unearthly weirdness. This is the second of the aforementioned cases.

The celestial spirit in *Memnon* belongs to a group of similar creatures appearing in Voltaire's works, such as Démogorgon, Ituriel, and others.²² In general, there is a lengthy tradition of philosophical angels in 18th century texts. With profound knowledge of the world and mankind, and combining science and natural religion together, philosophical angels play a significant part in narratives that are didactic allegories of the scientific cosmology. Under the influence of Galland's translation of *Arabic Nights*, these stories are usually set in the exotic East. Thus, writers eliminated any biblical hint, and the truth seemed to be derived from natural rather than revealed religion.²³ Voltaire's works abound with such creatures, and the most renown of them is the angel Jesrad in *Zadig* (1747).²⁴

As a rule, the stories by Voltaire in which such creatures appear deal with human happiness and the origin of the evil, usually rejecting Leibniz's optimism. In fact, the angels and the celestial spirits of the former are caricatures of the angels of the latter. In Leibniz's view, these creatures act as intermediaries assigned to explain to human beings

the complicated divine plan of the world.²⁵ According to their profound knowledge of the Universe, this is the best possible world.²⁶

The naivety of the idea of “the best possible world” is rather due to the way Voltaire and other writers parodied it. Optimist philosophers of 18th century claimed that the world was the best possible, not because they disregarded the evil; on the contrary, they considered it as a necessary ingredient of the Creation. The *Theodicies* of the era (the one written by Leibniz being the most famous) insisted on the necessity of the presence of the evil so that the world can be ideal. In this way, the evil did not enter the Creation stealthily in order to contaminate it; the evil existed from the beginning in order to make the Creation better. Providence, taking into account all possible options, incorporated it to the Creation because otherwise the latter would have been imperfect. Usually, the idea was that the perfection of the whole (Creation) consisted in the various imperfections of the parts or, as Voltaire put it,

Vous composerez dans ce chaos fatal
Des malheurs de chaque être un bonheur général.²⁷

In the same way, the celestial spirit in *Memnon* is Leibniz’s mouthpiece. He plays the role of the intermediary who reveals the harmonious order of the Universe, and confirms the idea of the “best possible world”. As Memnon remains doubtful about the perfection of the cosmic plan, the celestial spirit defends the optimist philosophers (“και λέγουν εις την τάξιν τους, όλα καλά υπάγουν” / “everything is going well in relation to its place in the gradation of the whole”, p. 148). Nevertheless, Memnon still keeps his reservations. Voltaire’s ironic narrative aims at undermining Leibniz’s beliefs. The caricature of the angel, presented insensitive and relatively slow to perform his significant cosmic role as a supervisor, is the most effective argument against Leibniz. The translation renders the irony of the original text successfully. For instance, it is worth noting the translator’s inventiveness in naming the celestial creature: some of the designations (“esprit céleste”, “génie”, “l’habitant de l’étoile”, “l’être céleste”, “l’animal de l’étoile”, “philosophe de là-haut”) become further intense or ironic when being translated into Greek: “ουράνιον πνεύμα” (lines 293, 310, 312, 347), “Αστροπολίτης” (329), “Αστροείτης” (357), “ζώαστρον” (375), “Αστραίος” (409), “Αιθεροφιλόσοφος” (417).²⁸

As a result of the translation in verse, there is the emphasis on some features of the spirit, or even the addition of some others. Specifically, in the French text the celestial spirit is presented as follows:

[...] un esprit céleste lui apparut en songe.
Il était tout resplendissant de lumière. Il avait six belles ailes, mais ni pieds, ni tête, ni queue [...].

In the Greek text, one may easily note the enrichment of the description:

Βλέπει ένα ουράνιον ως πνεύμα καταβαίνει,
 Και εις τον αέρα αντικρυ στα μάτια τ' απομένει.
 Είν' όλον φωτοστόλιστον, έξ πτέρυγας απλώνει,
 Ωσάν ακτίνας τα πτερά λαμπρά περιγυρώνει.
 Χέρια, ποδάρια, κεφαλήν, ουδόλωσ δεν ποτάζει. (p. 144, my italics)

[He sees a celestial creature *descending* like a spirit, and *standing in the air* before his eyes. It is all resplendent with light, it is spreading six wings, it is spinning the wings round *brightly like rays*. It has no hands, no feet, no head.]

The French original text does not aim at establishing any evident link with the stereotypical scenes of appearances of Christian angels. The designation of the spirit is celestial of course, but there is no description of a descent from heaven. Furthermore, the spirit is not depicted as flying or standing in the air. Lastly, there is no emphasis on the radiation while, in the Greek text, the phrase “Il était tout resplendissant de lumière” is not only translated “Είν' όλον φωτοστόλιστον” but also strengthened by the addition of a whole line (“Ωσάν ακτίνας τα πτερά λαμπρά περιγυρώνει” / “it is spinning the wings round brightly like rays”). The descent from heaven, hovering, and intense radiation make the spirit look somehow familiar to a Greek Orthodox reader, contrary to the French text that highlights mostly the bizarre shape of the creature (“Il avait six belles ailes, mais ni pieds, ni tête, ni queue”). Thus, the philosophical angel tends to be converted into a conventional Christian angel.

In the third edition of *Memnon* by Zissis Daoutis, a further translation shift made the spirit even more anthropomorphic:

Βλέπει έν ως ουράνιον πνεύμα και καταβαίνη,
 κ' εις τον αέρα αντικρύ ζ τα 'μάτια τ' απομένη.
 Πανταχού φωτοστόλιστον έξ πτέρυγας απλώνει,
 ωσάν ακτίνας τα πτερά λαμπρώσ περικυκλώνει
 Χέρια, ποδάρια, κεφαλήν, ουδόλωσ δεν ταράζει [...] ²⁹

[He sees something like a celestial creature descending, and standing in the air before his eyes. All resplendent with light, it is spreading six wings, it is spinning the wings round brightly like rays, *not at all moving hands, feet, head.*]

The most significant change is undoubtedly the replacement of the rare verb “ποτάζει” (ποτάζω: have, obtain) in the last line with the verb “ταράζει”. Either Daoutis or the scribe of the manuscript replaced a verb, which obviously they did not understand, with another verb, which not only was convenient for the rhyme but also normalised the meaning as it made the described creature familiar by associating it with the traditional Christian imagery. This caused the complete transformation of the celestial spirit: anthropomorphism finally prevailed over the intention of depicting a non-anthropomorphic creature in the original text.

The weird celestial spirit eventually became a conventional Christian angel through a process of translation transformations. This process, completed in the third edition of *Memnon*, had been activated by the choices of the translator in the first edition. As a result, information given by the French text that the celestial spirit resembles nothing (“[...] et ne ressembloit à rien”, in Greek “πράγμα κανένα εις την γην μ’ αυτό δεν ομοιάζει”) is rather misleading since the Greek version of the heavenly creature resembles the Christian angels. Thus, in the Greek translation the spirit is unearthly but not necessarily unfamiliar.

ΣΗΜΕΙΩΣΕΙΣ

1 Ζήση Δαούτη [Zissis Daoutis] (ed.), *Διάφορα ηθικά και αστεία στιχουργήματα*, Vienna 1818, p. 6.

2 Günther S. Henrich, ‘Η παλαιότερη ελληνική παράφραση βολταιρικού έργου, ο *Μέμνων* (1766) και ο Έλληνας της ποιητής’ in Πρακτικά του Γ’ Ευρωπαϊκού Συνεδρίου Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών (Βουκουρέστι 2006), Atnens 2007, vol. 3, pp. 385-392. For a different view see Γιώργος Κεχαγιόγλου [Giorgos Kechagioglou], ‘Σκέψεις για ορισμένες λογοτεχνικές, μεταφραστικές και εκδοτικές ενασχολήσεις του Ευγένιου Βούλγαρη, με επίκεντρο τον βολταιρικό *Μέμωνα*’ in Ελένη Αγγελομάτη-Τσουγκαράκη [Eleni Angelomati-Tsougaraki] (ed.), *Ευγένιος Βούλγαρης. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Κέρκυρα*, 1-3 Δεκεμβρίου 2006, Athens 2009, p. 383.

3 Βασίλειος Φρ. Τομαδάκης [Vassilios Fr. Tomadakis], ‘Η έμμετρη παράφραση του διηγήματος “Memnon ou La sagesse humaine” του Voltaire από τον Ευγένιο Βούλγαρι’, *Νεοελληνικόν Αρχεῖον* 3 (1987-1989) 138-139.

4 See Άλκης Αγγέλου [Alkis Angelou], ‘Ματνάμ Τρανίτη’, *Των Φώτων Β’. Όψεις του Νεοελληνικού Διαφωτισμού*, Athens 1999, pp. 101-142.

5 Selcuk Aksin Somel, *Historical Dictionary of the Ottoman Empire*, Scarecrow Press, 2003, p. 311-312.

6 Ευγένιος Βούλγαρης [Eugenios Vulgaris], ‘Προς τον Φιλαναγνώστην’ in *Βοσπορομαχία*, Leipzig 1766, p. 11

7 Tomadakis, *op.cit.*, pp. 155-157.

8 Κ. Θ. Δημαράς [C. Th. Dimaras], *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός*, Athens 1998 (7th edition), p. 44-45, 150.

9 See the notes of Henri Bénac in Voltaire, *Romans et Contes*, Paris 1960, p. 626 and the on-line catalogue of Bibliothèque nationale de France (<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/servlet/biblio?idNoeud=1&ID=31602496&SN1=0&SN2=0&host=catalogue>, access on 06/07/2012).

10 [Voltaire], *Recueil de pièces en vers et en prose par l’auteur de la tragédie de Sémiramis*, Amsterdam [= Paris] 1750 [= end of 1749], p. 53. In fact, in *Memnon* Voltaire ironically comments on some leibnizian certainties presented in *Discours* (see Jacques van den Heuvel, *Voltaire dans ses contes. De «Micromégas» à «L’Ingénu»*, Paris 1967, p. 213-215).

11 Dimaras, *op.cit.*, p. 479. The French poetic version seems to have had no direct influence on the Greek translation.

12 See M. H. Abrams - Geoffrey Galt Harp- ham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009, p. 8-9.

13 I use the edition Voltaire, *Romans et*

Contes, Texte établi sur l'édition de 1775, avec une présentation et des notes par Henri Bénac, Paris, Garnier Frères, 1960, p. 81-86.

14 References are to the first edition of *Βοσπορομαχία* (Leipzig 1766).

15 In the same way the passage of the french text “[...] A veiller, dit le génie, sur les autres globes qui nous sont confiés” is rendered in Greek as follows: “Σφαίραις πολλαίς ευρίσκονται, όλαις κατοικημέναις, / Εις την επιστασίαν μας είναι παραδομέναις” [“there are a lot of Globes, all of them being inhabited, and entrusted to our surveillance”] (the additions are marked in italics).

16 See Patricia Fara, ‘Heavenly Bodies: Newtonianism, Natural Theology and the Plurality of Worlds Debate in the Eighteenth Century’, *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 35 (2004) 143-160.

17 Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Paris 1686, pp. 210-211, 213-214.

18 Ομιλίας περί πληθούς κόσμων του κυρίου Φοντενέλ... Μεταφρασθείσαι από της Γαλλικής Διαλέκτου εις την καθ’ ημάς απλήν Ρωμαϊκήν γλώσσαν, και υποσημειωθείσαι, Παρά Παναγιωτάκη Καγκελαρίου Κωδρικά [Panagiotakis Kodrikas]..., Vienna 1794.

19 Αλέξανδρος Μαυροκορδάτος [Alexandros Maurokordatos], *Βόσπορος εν Βορυσθένει*, Moscow 1810, p. 166-179.

20 Παναγιώτης Κονδύλης [Panagiotis Kondylis], *Ο νεοελληνικός διαφωτισμός. Οι φιλοσοφικές ιδέες*, Athens, Themelio, 2000, p. 124-128.

21 Ευγένιος Βούλγαρης [Eugenios Voulgaris], *Λογική*, Leipzig 1766, p. 89-90.

22 Christiane Mervaud, ‘Un génie voltairien: Démogorgon’, *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 95 (1995) 1017-1022

23 Daniel Stempel, ‘Angels of Reason: Science and Myth in the Enlightenment’, *Journal*

of the History of Ideas, vol. 36, n. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1975) 63-78.

24 The initial title of *Zadig* was *Memnon, histoire orientale*. The novel was also translated in Greek by Dimitrios Iskenteris and was published in 1819 in Constantinople; see Μαριλίζα Μητσού [Mariliza Mitsou] (ed.), *Βολταίρου Τα περί τον Σαδίκην ή την Ειμαρμένην. Μια μετάφραση του 1819 από τον Δ.Ν. Ισκεντέρη*, Athens, Kastanotis, 1991.

25 Robert E. Butts, ‘Leibniz on the side of the angels’ in K. Okruhlik - J.R. Brown (eds), *The Natural Philosophy of Leibniz*, The University of Western Ontario Series in Philosophy of Science, Dordrecht, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985, pp. 207-226, especially p. 210-211.

26 About the idea of the “best possible world” in Leibniz see David Blumenfeld, ‘Perfection and happiness in the best possible world’, in Nicholas Jolley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 382-410.

27 Arthur O. Lovejoy, ‘Optimism and Romanticism’, *PMLA* 42 (1927) 921-945, from where I take the lines quoted here. See, also, Μίλτος Πεχλιβάνος [Miltos Pechlivanos], «Επίμετρο» in Voltaire, *Καντίτ ή Η Αισιοδοξία*, translation: Π. Κοντογιάννης [P. Kontoyannis], preface: Αλέξης Πολίτης [Alexis Politis], afterword: Μίλτος Πεχλιβάνος, Athens, Polis, 2005, p. 154-160.

28 See Henrich, ‘Ο Ευγένιος Βούλγαρης και η Λιψία’ in Angelomati-Tsougaraki, *op.cit.*, p. 80-81.

29 *Διάφορα ηθικά και αστεία στιχουργήματα*, *op. cit.*, p. 17. See also the apparatus criticus in Άντεια Φραντζή [Anteia Frantzi] (ed.), *Μισμαγιά. Ανθολόγιο Φαναριώτικης Ποίησης κατά την έκδοση του Ζήση Δαούτη* (1818), Athens, Nea Estia, 1993, p. 66.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

ΓΙΑΝΝΗΣ ΞΟΥΡΙΑΣ: Ο Μέμνων στην Κωνσταντινούπολη: Μεταφραστικές μεταμορφώσεις του *Memnon ou La sagesse humaine* του Βολταίρου.

Η ελληνική μετάφραση του διηγήματος του Βολταίρου *Memnon* (1749), η οποία εκδόθηκε ανώνυμα το 1766, αποδίδεται στον Ευγένιο Βούλγαρη. Στην ελληνική μετάφραση το πεζό γαλλικό πρότυπο μετατρέπεται σε έμμετρο ομοιοκατάληκτο ποίημα. Η αλλαγή αυτή ίσως εξηγείται από το γεγονός ότι εξ αρχής ο Βολταίρος είχε εντάξει το διήγημα ως συμπλήρωμα στην ενότητα μιας σειράς φιλοσοφικών ποιημάτων του με τον τίτλο *Discours en vers sur l'homme*. Επίσης, η μετατροπή του πεζού διηγήματος σε έμμετρο το φέρνει πιο κοντά στο είδος του έμμετρου διδακτικού μύθου (ή απόλογου), το οποίο είχε μεγάλη διάδοση και ήταν καταξιωμένο στο πλαίσιο της νεοκλασικιστικής ποιητικής. Αλλά και στο περιεχόμενο της μετάφρασης εντοπίζονται διαφοροποιήσεις, από τις οποίες πιο ενδιαφέρουσες είναι δύο που δείχνουν ότι αφενός ο μεταφραστής είχε ήδη μια οικειότητα με τα θέματα που πραγματεύεται το διήγημα του Βολταίρου και αφετέρου ότι η οπτική του έχει εμποτιστεί από τη χριστιανική θεολογία και παράδοση. Η πρώτη διαφοροποίηση δείχνει ότι ο μεταφραστής πρέπει να είχε προσωπική γνώση της θεωρίας του Fontenelle περί πληθούς των κόσμων, εμπλουτίζοντας την ειρωνική κριτική του πρωτοτύπου. Η θεωρία του Fontenelle είχε προκαλέσει αντιδράσεις μεταξύ των Ελλήνων λογίων, καθώς ήταν ασύμβατη με βασικές θέσεις της χριστιανικής θεολογίας. Η δεύτερη διαφοροποίηση οδηγεί στη βαθμιαία μετάλλαξη του ουράνιου πλάσματος που αποκαλύπτει την αλήθεια του κοσμικού σχεδίου στον Μέμνονα. Από έναν φιλοσοφικό άγγελο του 18^{ου} αι., ο οποίος στο γαλλικό πρότυπο δεν έχει τίποτε ανθρώπινο, οδηγούμαστε βαθμιαία από την πρώτη έως την τρίτη έκδοση της ελληνικής μετάφρασης (1817) στην πλήρη μεταμόρφωσή του σε έναν τυπικό χριστιανικό άγγελο, σε αντίθεση με τις εμφανείς προθέσεις του βολταιρικού κειμένου.