Although the first traces of Mandel'shtam's Armenian myth emerged as early as 1915-22, it was not fully articulated until the early 1930s with the publication of the lyrics of the Armenian cycle and the prose of Journey to Armenia. It would seem that the realization of the Armenian fantasy, first in the actual journey of May-November 1930, and then in the resultant texts of 1930-31, confirmed Mandel'shtam's vision of his moral and poetic imperative both as a source of freedom and as a protection against time, convincing him that he could and should try his hand once again at lyric poetry.

In the verse of the 1930s, echoes of the Armenian myth surface repeatedly, taking various semantic, metaphorical, grammatical and rhetorical forms. I would like to consider both its original sources and some of the instances of its later recurrence in the limited confines of this article.

1. This article was at least in part inspired by conversations with Ivan Venedictovich Elagin concerning the problems of identifying poetic impulses and imperatives in the poetry of different poets; it is dedicated to Ivan Venedictovich in memory of those highly illuminating, often amusing, and ever animated discussions.

Mandel'shtam revived two early models, one ideological, the other poetic, to meet the needs of his poetics of the 1930s. First of all, in his essay “Petr Chaadaev” (1915), Mandel'shtam had expressed admiration for his protagonist for taking “moral freedom as his holy staff” and setting off for Rome to fulfill his “holy obligation.”3 Fifteen years later, in “Fourth Prose,” he employed the conditional mood to imagine himself carrying his “Jewish staff” to Armenia—“the youngest sister of the Jewish nation”—thereby assimilating Chaadaev’s “holy obligation” into his later work and merging the 1915 motif of moral freedom with that of his desperate need for personal and poetic freedom in 1929-30. This incantatory fantasy-myth is presented in chapter 7:

I had a patron once, Mravian-Muravian, the Peoples' Commissar of the Armenian nation, younger sister of the Jewish nation . . . . My patron died . . . .

Had I traveled to Erevan, I would have spent three days and three nights eating black caviar sandwiches at the huge railway station buffets . . . . On the way I would have read Zoshchenko’s best book and exulted like a Tatar running off with 100 stolen rubles . . . . I would have taken courage with me in my yellow straw basket piled high with fresh, clean-smelling linen, and my fur coat would have danced on a golden hook. And I would have descended at the Erevan station, bearing my winter coat in one hand, and my walking stick—my Jewish staff—in the other. (CPL, 317-18).

3. Poetic freedom in “Fourth Prose” includes ethical, esthetic and political freedom. It is in this work that Mandel'shtam recognizes his Jewish consciousness as the moral imperative or impulse behind his poetic consciousness, and associates his ideal image of the poet with his image of the raznochetny, outcast, and Jew. For more details, see J. G. Harris, “The Impulse and the Text,” CPL, pp. 27-31, 661-62.