Armenian Van/Vaspurakan



Edited by
Richard G.
Hovannisian

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Armenian Van/Vaspurakan

Edited by

Richard G. Hovannisian

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Armenian Van/Vaspurakan
An Introduction

Richard G. Hovannisian

It is not by chance that the first in the series of conferences at the University of California, Los Angeles, on Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces was devoted to Van/Vaspurakan and is now the first of these proceedings to be published. Van is the cradle of Armenian civilization, whether one wishes to accept the epic and biblical versions or the modern scientific, multi-disciplinary interpretations of Armenian origins. It was around the great basin of the highland lake and the enormous, craggy formation, the "Rock," at its southeast corner, that the proto-Armenians and Armenians developed their distinct civilizations, leaving impressive monuments of their material and spiritual culture.

Here in the land of Nairi arose the powerful kingdom of Urartu or Biainili (Van), which rivaled the omnipotent Assyrian Empire centuries before the Christian era. Here, too, in the natural setting of majestic mountains and shimmering waters, the people of the epical Armenian progenitor Hayk (Haik, Haig) persevered as the dominant element down through the centuries—until 1915. Generations of peasant farmers tilled the soil, which produced various grains and delicious aromatic fruit—apricots, pears, apples, grapes, bright red pomegranates, and grand walnuts. Herdsmen tended their flocks in the alpine pastures around the Valley of the Armenians (Hayots Dzor); townsmen crafted gold, silver, and precious stones, forged red-hot iron on anvils, and produced cloth and furniture of all sorts; women created delicate lacework and silks and gradually revealed the beautiful, distinctive designs of carpets woven upon their looms; and architects conceived the plans and oversaw the construction of imposing temples and churches. Here it was that Armenian civilization interacted with those of neighboring peoples, selectively borrowing and adapting to its own needs and

environment.

The Armenians of Van were frequently compelled to resist invading armies and sometimes subjected to brutal treatment from man and nature alike. The armies of the Achaemenid and Sasanid Persians, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Seljuks, Turkmen, Mongols, Turko-Tatars (Timur or Tamerlane), Persian Safavids, and Oghus (Ottoman) Turks wreaked havoc on the land, burning and looting, massacring and maiming, and carrying away countless people into captivity. And here, too, the ground often trembled mightily, challenging Armenian architects to discover the secret of the ways to withstand earthquakes. In due course, this region became known as the "noble land" or "land of princes"—*Vaspurakan*, which in the tenth and eleventh centuries enjoyed the status of a separate kingdom under the House of the Artsruni, contemporaries and competitors of the medieval kingdoms under the sway of the House of the Bagratuni. This decentralized Armenian political structure allowed for Van and Aghtamar to rival Kars and Ani and made possible a broad geographic distribution of architectural monuments and intellectual and spiritual centers with scriptoria and schools of illuminated miniature painting in monasteries such as those in Vaspurakan at Khizan, Kajberuni, Metsop, Artske, Arjesh, Varag, Aghtamar, and elsewhere. From the twelfth century onward, Vaspurakan even had its own local catholicosate or patriarchal see at Aghtamar.

Following the dynastic period in Greater Armenia in the eleventh century, Vaspurakan fell under the dominion of the Seljuk Turks, of the Mongols and the short-lived but horrendously bloody regime of Tamerlane, of Ak Koyunlu and Kara Koyunlu Turkmen (Turkoman) dynasties, and of Kurdish notables. Then, after a series of devastating wars between Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire, it was incorporated into the Ottoman realm in the mid-sixteenth century. Once again, however, the Armenians demonstrated their recuperative powers, as periods of ruin were followed by rebuilding and economic revival and expansion. At the foot of the Great Rock of Van, the population of the walled city increased in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and gradually created the suburb of Aygestan—the Gardens, Orchards, or Vineyards—a new city with broad tree-lined streets, a church in each quarter, a merchant center and market place, and in time schools, foreign consulates, and German, French, and American missionary stations. But all was not well in Van/Vaspurakan. Under Ottoman rule,

the administrative boundaries were frequently altered, the Kurdish element was encouraged to settle in Armenian strongholds, and beset by armed tribesmen many Armenian peasants either fell into a servile status to Kurdish chieftains or became witness to extortion and plunder of their native villages. Some Armenians left the region, especially for Constantinople and other large coastal cities, where they engaged in menial labor, such as that of a porter (*hamal),* and became the *pandukht*, the homesick exile so poignantly described in Armenian literature of the nineteenth century.

Ironically, the growing insecurity for the Armenian villagers of Vaspurakan was paralleled by the spread of literacy and political awareness among the Armenian population worldwide. Located near the frontiers of Persia and the Russian Empire, Van assumed a significant role in this revival. In the 1850s the priest Mkrtich Khrimian (Hayrik), returning from Constantinople to the monastery of Varag (Varagavank), founded *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (the Eagle of Vaspurakan), the first journal published in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Schools for boys and for girls sprang up throughout the region, and it was not long before Armenians were questioning and even challenging their second-class status, vocalizing their protests against the predatory practices of the tribesmen, expressing displeasure with the structures and strictures of their confessionally-based Armenian communal life, and calling for both internal and external reforms.

Small circles of intellectuals coalesced as early as the 1870s under names such as Union and Salvation (Miutiun ev Prkutiun) and Black Cross (Sev Khach) society, with programs aimed at enlightenment and self-defense. These were the harbingers of the emancipatory movement that emerged in the aftermath of failure of the Ottoman government and the European Powers to honor their commitments (San Stefano and Berlin treaties in 1878) to bring about reforms to safeguard the lives and properties of the Armenian population. Under the inspiration of Mkrtich Portugalian, the Armenakan society, organized at Van in 1885, became the first Armenian political party with an active intelligentsia and men prepared to take arms for the defense of their community. Shortly thereafter, the broader-based Hnchakian Revolutionary (later, Social Democrat Hnchakian) Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun) were founded in Geneva and Tiflis, respectively, and established branches in Vaspurakan. Although these groups were sometimes able to conceal

enough weapons and gain adequate training to resist the raids of one or another tribe, they were no match for the power of the state, its regular armies, and its semi-regular mounted Kurdish Hamidiye regiments, created by Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (1876-1908/09). Following the Sasun massacre in 1894 and the general massacres throughout the Turkish Armenian provinces in the winter of 1895-96, the Armenian defenders at Van were able to hold the attackers at bay in June 1896 until, hard-pressed, they yielded to a mediated arrangement whereby the armed men would be given safe passage to the Persian frontier and an amnesty would be granted to the civilian population with assurances regarding its safety. The pledge was dishonored, however, and many of the departing Armenian defenders were killed in ambush, while several Armenian quarters in Van and Aygestan were looted and put to the torch.

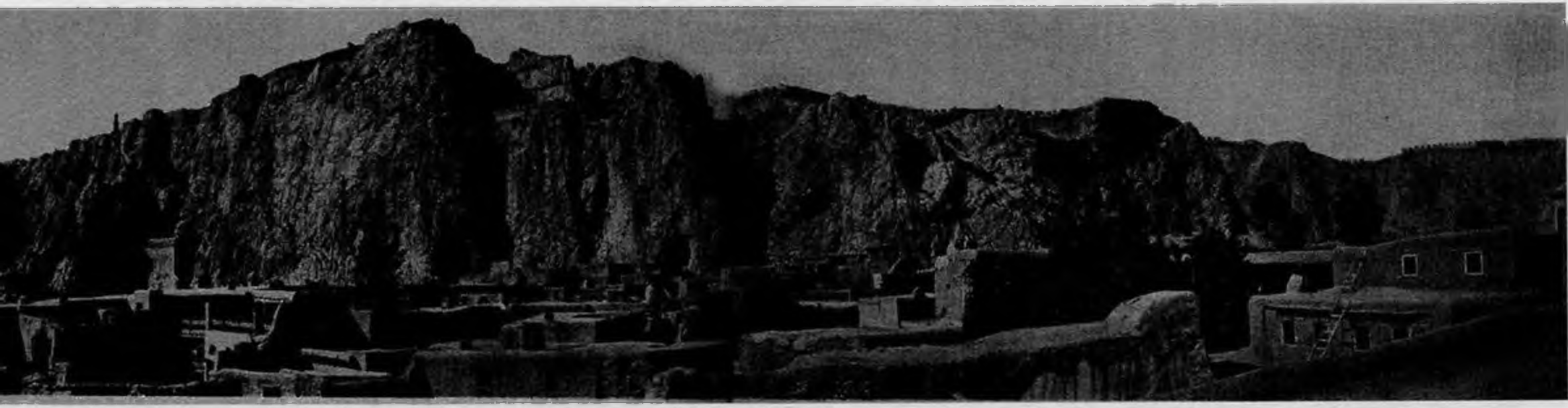
Even after the calamity of 1896, the Armenians of Vaspurakan displayed their recuperative abilities by rebuilding and improving parts of their ancient city and garden suburb and strengthening their positions as merchants, goldsmiths and craftsmen, interpreters (*dragomans*), and as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals. They hailed the Young Turk revolution in 1908 as the dawn of a new era and were encouraged by the fact that Van was permitted to elect its own Armenian deputy to the Ottoman Parliament. But the optimism soon dimmed because of new massacres of Armenians in Cilicia in 1909 and the increasing manifestations of exclusive nationalism within the Committee of Union and Progress or the Young Turk organization, the extreme wing of which seized power at the beginning of 1913. It was under the Young Turk dictatorial clique, headed by Minister of War Enver, Minister of Interior Talaat, and Minister of Marine Jemal, that the Ottoman Empire plunged into World War I in 1914 as an ally of the German Empire.

The world conflagration was to provide the opportunity for the Young Turks to pursue their ideological goal of transforming the Ottoman Empire from a multi-racial and multi-religious plural society to a modern nation state based on one people and one religion. Those who could not or would not conform to the imagined new Turkey were to be eliminated. The war provided a convenient cover to conduct a ruthless campaign against the Armenian people, seen as a major obstacle to the realization of the Young Turk program. The result was genocide. The Armenian defense at Van and Musa Dagh, together with

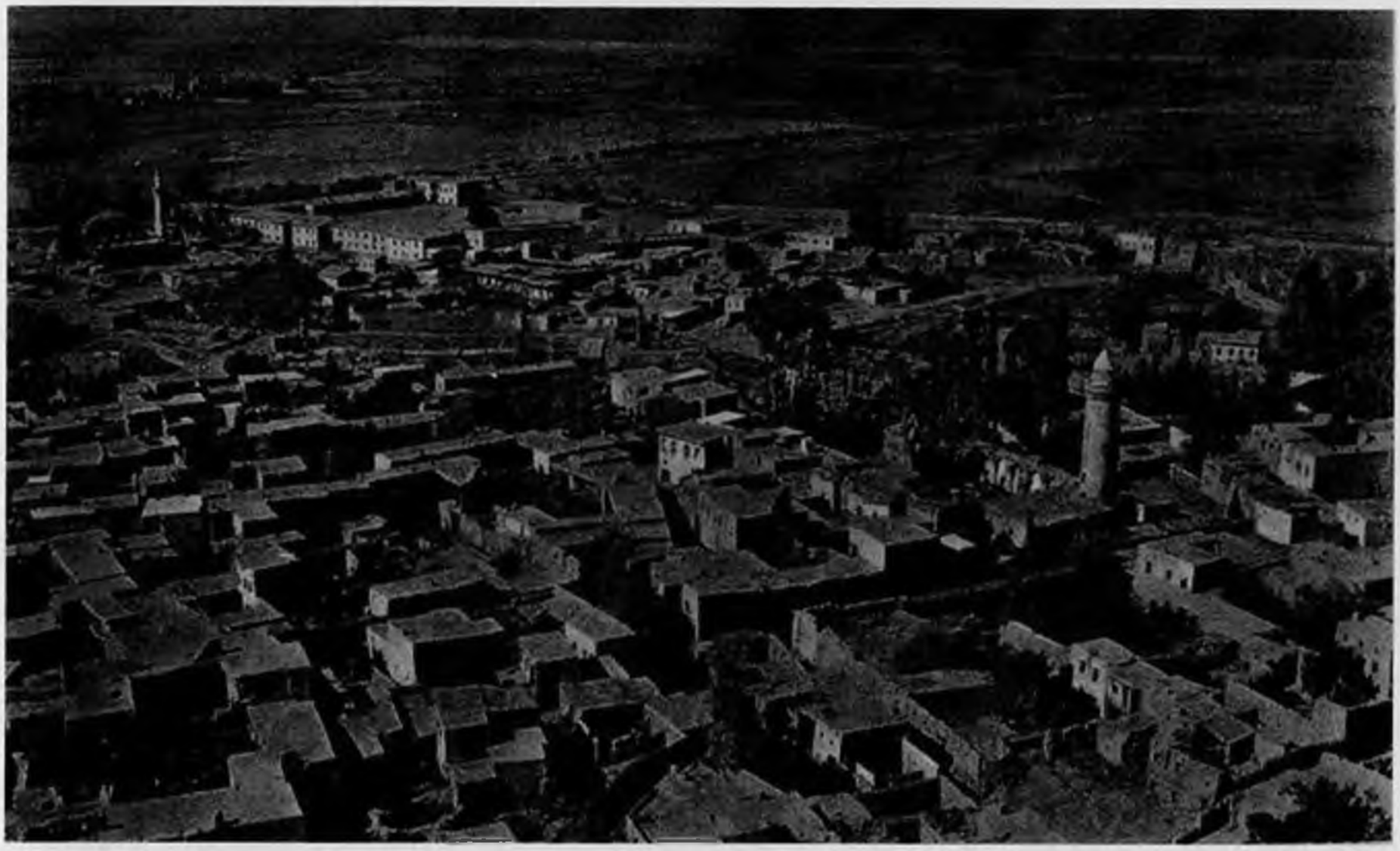
the doomed attempts in more isolated places such as Shabin-Karahisar and Urfa, stand out as exceptions to the decimating deportations or outright slaughter of the defenseless Armenian civilian population from the shores of the Bosporus eastward to the headwaters of the Euphrates River. The bold-spirited resistance at Van, proudly commemorated by the natives of Vaspurakan and their descendants, nonetheless ended in tragedy, as the people were ultimately forced to abandon their homeland, never to return. Armenian Van and Vaspurakan were no more, kept alive only in the nostalgic and melancholy poetry, music, folklore, and, for one generation, by the distinctive Vanetsi dialect. "Van in This World; Paradise in the Next" might still be recited, but no longer by Armenians.

The long, colorful, multi-faceted, and ultimately tragic story of Armenian Van/Vaspurakan is presented in the following thirteen chapters of this volume. It is obvious that collectively the authors can present only a general overview of that story, for the subject of each chapter could easily be expanded into one or more volumes, and many aspects of the daily and spiritual life of Van—miniature painting, church history, music, the creative genius of illustrious figures such as Grigor Narekatsi (Gregory of Narek), and the diasporan history of the Vanetsis—are only mentioned in passing. Still, this collection is noteworthy as an innovative endeavor to draw together the history and culture of Van/Vaspurakan in a single English-language volume. For decades, the severance of the link between a lost homeland and a diaspora still reeling in a state of shock was so absolute that it was not possible to pick up the strands and make meaningful, effective connections between past and present. That, too, is one of the consequences of a denied and unrequited genocide.

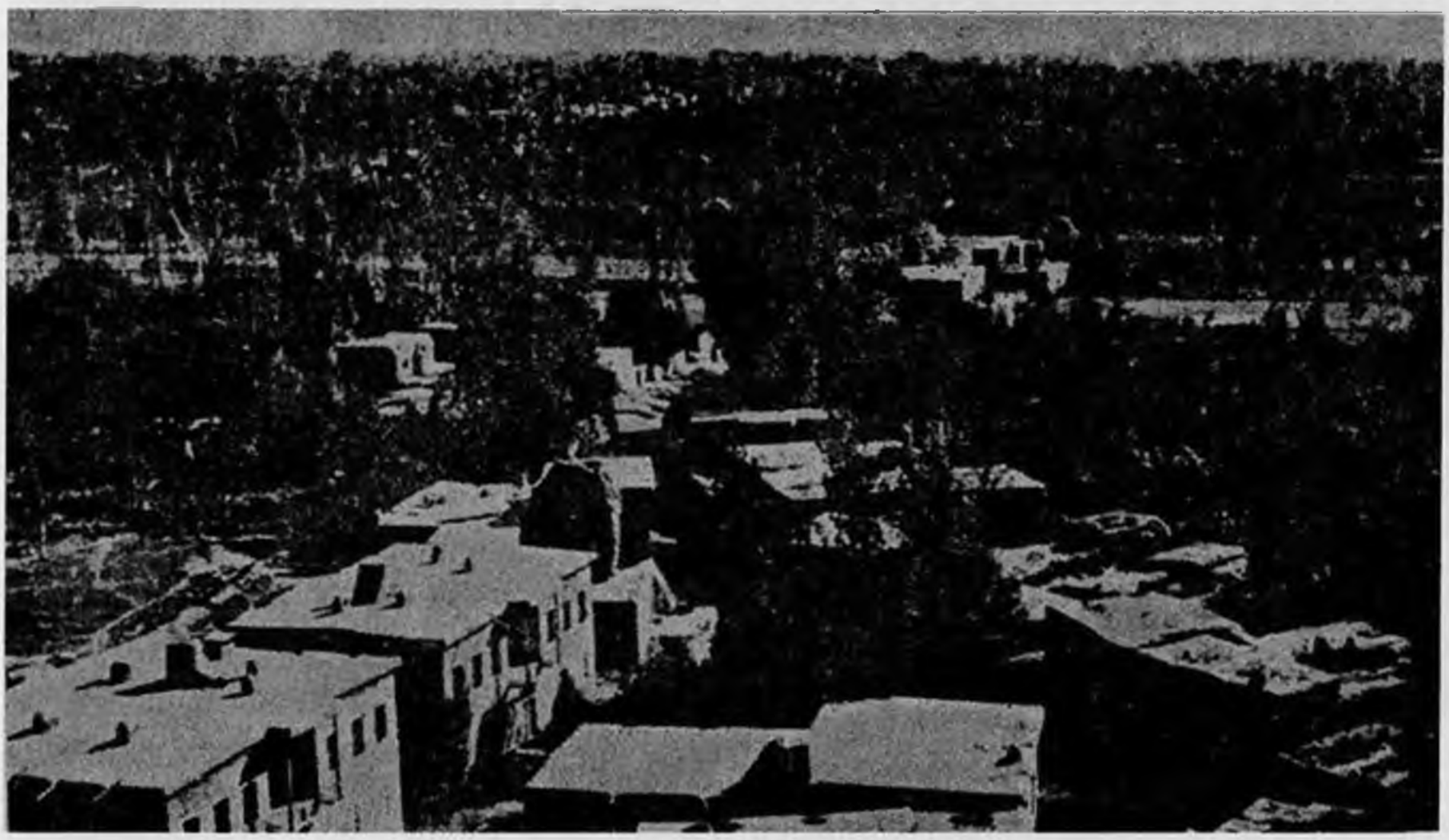
The essays in this volume cover a time span from antiquity to the twentieth century. Robert Hewsen offers a survey of the historical geography of Van/Vaspurakan, presenting its physical and anthropological characteristics, the composition of its principalities, and the progression of political and military powers under which the Armenians had to endure. Professor Hewsen notes that recently some Armenians have begun to rediscover Vaspurakan, "which for all the misfortunes that have taken place there retains its natural beauty." James Russell recounts the preservation of historical memory through epic and myth and how this holds true for both the Urartian and Armenian epochs at Van. Ancient Anatolian myths and biblical stories sometimes took



"The Rock" of Van



The Inner City



Aygestan—The Garden District

on Armenian vestments, whether in the form of the god Vahagn and the fearsome sea creatures in Lake Van or the national epic, *Sasna Tsrer,* the dare-devils or wild men of Sasun, in the cycle from Sanasar to Pokr Mher with his lightning sword. Professor Russell concludes: "The mythology of Van is a deeply-rooted tree whose leafy branches shade all the Armenian tradition and stretch out to touch neighbor and invader."

Robert Thomson and Peter Cowe focus on the medieval Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan, established by Gagik Artsruni in 908 A.D. The tenth-century historian Tovma or Thomas Artsruni has recorded the heroic and biblical origins, the noble virtues and deeds, the religious fidelity, and the military prowess of this illustrious family in order to provide it with the desired legitimacy and glory. But Tovma also laments the disunity of the Armenian princes, their individual ambition and gullibility. Professor Thomson discusses the historian, his models, and his place in Armenian historiography, concluding that the work "remains the prime source for Artsruni traditions and an eloquent witness of noble life in Armenia before the Turkish invasions." Professor Cowe examines the relations of the Artsruni kingdom with the Bagratuni kingdom to the north in Ani. He provides a historic review of the two houses and compares their policies toward the Arabs, the caliphate in Baghdad, the Sajid emirs of Azarbayjan or Atrpatakan (northern Iran), and the Byzantine emperors. The Church of the Holy Cross (Surb Khach) on the isle of Aghtamar is but one of the impressive feats of King Gagik Artsruni and his successors.

The architectural heritage of Vaspurakan is presented by Nairy Hampikian, who views the medieval churches and monuments as a memory layer, which needs to be respected and preserved by whoever may presently be in control of the region. She examines the "built environment" that was intended to persist against the mountainous nature of the terrain, the uncontrollable movements of the earth, and the ferocity of invasions. Hence, a "regional memory" has evolved to discipline the environment, while each successive group has added its own vision, thereby also creating layers of "cultural memory." Dr. Hampikian examines the style of several churches in Vaspurakan, pointing out and explaining their key characteristics. She demonstrates how the Armenian dome or *gmbet* was passed upward to the next layer through the Seljuk *gumbats* and concludes that "multi-cultural regional memories are an indispensable part of our full understanding of the

architectural heritage of the region."

Dickran Kouymjian contributes two chapters. The first of these presents a survey of Van/Vaspurakan between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries under a succession of non-Armenian overlords: Mongol, Turko-Tatar, Turkmen, Persian, and Ottoman. He draws upon Armenian chroniclers and scribes to relate the horrors of invasion, conquest, and subjugation, the gratuitous cruelty of Timur Lang (Tamerlane), and the desolation and famine caused by the incessant wars of competing empires. Yet even in the midst of ruination the Armenians found ways to cope and even to gain some favors from their overlords, while the Armenian monastic complexes continued to foster art and learning. He concludes: "As adversity regularly followed prosperity during these centuries, the tenacity and determination of Van's inhabitants were forged with the strength of its famous Rock." In his second chapter, Professor Kouymjian brings Van to life with visual perceptions from nineteenth- and twentieth-century travel accounts. The "Great Rock," upon which the Urartians chiseled their cuneiform-like inscriptions, has fascinated writers since the time of Moses of Khoren (Movses Khorenatsi) and has long been the subject of wood engravings and pictorial representations by Italian, French, German, British, Armenian, and Turkish travelers and scholars. Although Van was destroyed between 1915 and 1918 and a new city has risen nearby, the old, vanished city and its expansive garden suburb become vivid through these pictures, a few of which are reproduced in this volume.

Nineteenth-century themes are developed by Rubina Peroomian and Sarkis Karayan. Thanks to the endeavors of Mkrtich Khrimian and Garegin Srvandztiants, Van became an important center of Armenian provincial literature. Dr. Peroomian examines the lives and works of these clerics, the prevailing conditions of the time, the underlying themes of *Artsvi Vaspurakan, Artsvik Tarono* (Little Eagle of Taron), and other publications of the two native sons. She regards this provincial literature as a source of inspiration and an innovative influence in the formal literature of the Western Armenians. It was intended "to revive Armenians from their torpor of servitude and ignorance, to inspire them with national pride and self-awareness, and to exhort them to strive for a better future." Dr. Karayan draws together and analyzes various sets of statistics and censuses relating to the Armenian and non-Armenian population of the province of Van. Statistical con-

troversies become all the more relevant in view of the denial of the Armenian Genocide and attempts of some writers either to minimize or to exaggerate the number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and each of its provinces. Karayan assesses the impact of the gerrymandering of provincial and county boundaries and the less-than-convincing calculations of certain historians.

Turning to the twentieth century, Anahide Ter Minassian has contributed two chapters. The first of these, written in the present tense, describes Van and its people at the turn of the century. We visit the walled city backed up against the "Rock," its government buildings, bazaars, distinct quarters, churches, mosques, and schools before moving on to the garden or orchard district, Aygestan, with descriptions of its streets and houses, exterior and interior, educational establishments, foreign consulates and missionary compounds, and even its renowned cats with mismatched eyes. She concludes: "In this lazy eastern town, where certain inhabitants have almost a European living standard, the drama awaits." The drama, of course, is World War I and the events at Van in 1915, the subject of Dr. Ter Minassian's second chapter. The saga of the Armenian defense of Van in April-May 1915 is presented in considerable detail with a sense of immediacy. Aside from key figures such as the governor Jevdet Bey (Enver Pasha's brother-in-law) and Armenian leaders Aram Manukian and Armenak Ekarian, many individuals who have faded from memory come back to life. The period of struggle, from April 20 to May 16, 1915, is divided into three phases with parallel but separate developments in the city and in Aygestan, which were isolated from each other. The deliverance and exhilaration prompted by the arrival of the Russian army and Armenian volunteer regiments from the Caucasus were short-lived, however, as an abrupt Russian withdrawal in July forced the Vanetsis to flee toward the Russian Armenian provinces and Iran, where they fell victim to the terrible deprivations that await refugee populations. Ter Minassian concludes that there is no validity to the charge of an incipient Armenian nation-wide rebellion against the Ottoman government but concedes that the Armenians "may occasionally have been guilty of refusing to be massacred without offering resistance."

The Turkish version of these same events paints a very different picture. Clive Foss reviews a number of books written by Turkish authors, some of them from Van itself, to show how the Armenians

are portrayed. He notes that these works advance "a point of view that may not be familiar or seem rational to the readers of this volume." Most of them discount the significance of Armenia and of Armenians in history until suddenly in the nineteenth century they appear on the scene as a major threat to the tolerant state that has allowed them to live in peace and harmony. The Armenians become terrorists, prodded on by the Russian and British imperialists and by their revolutionary priest Hrimian (Khrimian) and other troublemakers, conducting unspeakable atrocities against the Muslim population. Professor Foss observes that, in contrast with these publications, recent works written in or adapted and translated into English are more effective as they are made to seem "cool and scientific-looking."

The final chapter combines literary, historical, political, and philosophical themes, as it deals with the historical novel, *Ayrvogh Aygestannere* (The Burning Orchards) by Soviet Armenian writer Gurgen Mahari, himself a child of Van who fled to the Caucasus in the mass exodus of 1915. In a radical reevaluation of the lore surrounding the defense of Van, Mahari toppled the Armenian heroes, ridiculing the delusion of self-styled revolutionaries and intellectuals who believed they were truly engaged in an emancipatory movement. Publication of the work in 1966 stirred a violent storm of protest, and Mahari was ultimately forced to recant and to make major revisions for a new edition. Marc Nichanian presents this episode with caustic words for Mahari's censors and deplores the "methodical destruction of the novel." Lurking everywhere just beneath the surface is the Armenian Genocide. Ironically, what popular pressure unwittingly drove Mahari to do by conforming to the theme of heroism, Professor Nichanian concludes, was actually "to renounce the Catastrophe, the very idea of Catastrophe."

In the preparation of these conference papers for publication, the editor has selected and included a number of related photographs to make the descriptions in the text all the more vivid. He has also attempted to standardize the spelling of proper names and the style of transliteration from the Armenian script to the Latin alphabet. Because pronunciations in Western Armenian and the Van dialect often vary from Eastern Armenian pronunciations, which serve as the basis for the simplified transliteration system used in this volume, the possibly more familiar form, for example, of "Vasbouragan" is standardized as "Vaspurakan," and the personal name "Krikor" is rendered

as "Grigor." Some exceptions have been allowed to stand, such as "Arjesh" rather than "Archesh." This simplified form of transliteration does not allow for a reconversion from the Latin alphabet to the Armenian script, as, for example, the letter "e" may stand for any one of three Armenian characters, but the system should be more readable for those conversant in the Armenian language yet unfamiliar with the technical transliteration symbols requiring diacritical marks. The same word, however, may be transliterated in slightly different forms because of the variance in spelling between the traditional orthography used in the Armenian diaspora and the reformed orthography that was adopted in Soviet Armenia and used throughout the former Soviet Union. Hence, the word for "history" may appear as *patmutiun* or as *patmutyun,* depending on the orthography in which the work was published. Turkish and Kurdish names are usually given in the form commonly used before the alphabet reform of 1928 in Turkey; thus, Jevdet rather than Cevdet, and Shakir rather than Şakir. Foreign-language terms such as *vilayet* and *pandukht* are italicized only the first time they appear in any given chapter. The editor has chosen not to require absolute consistency when certain discrepancies in statistics or other information seem to exist in chapters by different authors.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Dr. Simon Payaslian, who spent countless hours helping at each stage of the long and complex process of editing, and of Mr. Papken Sassouni, who made the initial translation of the two chapters by Anahide Ter Minassian, In a gracious gesture of support and appreciation, the General Society of Vasbouragan in the United States has contributed toward the publication of the volume. It is my intent to bring to fruition the publication of subsequent volumes in this series, paralleling the sequence of semiannual conferences at UCLA on Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces: Baghesh/Bitlis and Taron/Mush; Tsopk/Kharpert; Karin/Erzerum; Sebastia/Sivas; Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa; Cilicia; and others that may follow. The conference series is sponsored by the Armenian Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Armenian History and organized by the editor of this volume. These publications will appear as a part of the UCLA Armenian History and Culture Series.

Let us now turn to a time when it was still possible to boast with pride and confidence: "Van in This World; Paradise in the Next."

❀ 2 ❀

"Van in This World; Paradise in the Next"
The Historical Geography of Van/Vaspurakan

Robert H. Hewsen

Rivaling the Ararat plain as the heartland of historic Armenia, the land of Vaspurakan holds a special place in the hearts and minds of the Armenian people. According to Armenian tradition, it was here at the fortress of Hayk, in the valley of Hayots Dzor, that Hayk, the national ancestor, established one of his first settlements in the south-central part of the country that, like his fortress and its valley, would forever after be known in Armenian by his name, *Hayastan*.[1] Here was located the core of the Nairi lands, the little known political formations that were the earliest states on the high plateau, and here lay the center of the kingdom of Biainili, called Urartu by the Assyrians, and today often known simply as the Kingdom of Van.[2]

The center of Nairi and Biainili (and of the Armenian land of Vaspurakan to come) was and remains Lake Van, one of the most striking features of the Armenian Plateau. An extraordinary natural feature, it was created in prehistoric times when an eruption of Mount Nimrud at the western end of its basin closed off the egress of what must have been an extension of the present river named Bendimahi-

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[1] Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of the Armenians], ed. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913); reprinted (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), cited hereafter as MK. For Hayk, see MK, p. 88 (book I, chap. 11).

[2] For Urartu, see B.B. Piotrovskii, *Vanskoe tsarstvo* [The Kingdom of Van] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury, 1959), English trans. J. Hogarth; B.B. Piotrovsky, *The Ancient Civilization of Urartu* (New York: Cowles Book, 1960); N.V. Arutyunyan, *Biainili (Urartu)* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1970). For the Urartian sites around Van, see H.F.B. Lynch, *Armenia: Travels and Studies,* vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, 1901; Beirut: Khayats, 1965; New York: Armenian Prelacy, 1990), pp. 53-76.

chai. Called Vana Lij or Vana Tsov (Lake or Sea of Van) in modern Armenian, it was known in ancient and medieval times as Lake Bznunik[3] or Rshtunik[4] after noble families whose principalities lay along its western and southwestern shores. This pear-shaped body of water, lying some 5,600 feet above sea level, is approximately 75 miles long and 40 miles wide at its broadest point. Covering an area of nearly 1,500 square miles, Lake Van is more than six times larger than Lake Geneva (223 square miles) but considerably smaller than Lake Ontario, the smallest Great Lake (7,300 square miles).[5] Its waters reach a depth of more than 400 feet, and the level of the lake has been rising, so that of its seven known islands, Aghtamar, Arti, Lim, Ktuts, Tsipan, Tokian, and Artske, the last three have disappeared beneath the waves.[6]

From the town of Van there is an extraordinary view across the lake to Mount Sipan (earlier Nekh Masik, now Süphan), an extinct volcano more than 10,000 feet high. The waters of Lake Van are a glorious shade of blue, but with no outlet they have become alkaline and undrinkable. The borax gleaned from the alkaline deposits along the shore has traditionally been made into a detergent called *berek* (*perek*). The sole fish in the lake, called in Armenian the *tarekh* (*darekh*), is found only in the fresh waters at the mouth of the Arest River (now the Bendimahi-chai). In ancient and medieval times it was caught here at a point called the Royal Fisheries for the table of the Armenian kings, but in the Middle Ages it was dried and salted for export abroad.[7] The Van region is largely composed of mountains, only 15 percent being made up of plains. These plains are fertile, however, and besides offering excellent pasturage for cattle, sheep, and goats,

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[3] Pavstos Buzandatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots,* ed. Kerobe Patkanian (St. Petersburg, 1883); trans. Nina G. Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories (Buzanadaran Patmut'iwnk')* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), cited hereafter as BP. See MK, I.xii for Bznuniats Tsov, and BP *passim.*

[4] BP, III.x.

[5] Statistics on the size and depth of Lake Van vary somewhat in different reference works. These figures are based on the data in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 15th ed. (1974).

[6] Our only source for all seven isles and their names is the seventh-century geographical text, the *Ashkharhatsoyts.* See Robert H. Hewsen, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992), Book V, chap. 22, sections, iv and vii, cited hereafter as Hewsen, *Geography.*

[7] Hewsen, *Geography,* V.22.viii; BP, III.viii: *Dzknateank arkuni* (Royal Fisheries).

they yield plentiful crops of barley, wheat, and rye.

Urartu: The Kingdom of Van

Despite the Armenian traditions of Hayk, the basin of Lake Van has actually been inhabited since prehistoric times. In the surrounding mountains are found one of the largest collections of petroglyphs —picture writing on rocks—in the old world. We know little of the people of Nairi beyond the fact that they seem to have been a federation of different tribes.[8] Of the Kingdom of Van, we know more, however, because the Urartians have left us inscriptions in their language using the Assyrian script which can now be read. Though their language was totally different from Armenian, their depictions of themselves on numerous artifacts reveal facial features that can still be seen among Armenians today, especially those from the region of Van.

Whatever its origin and ethnic composition, the kingdom of Van appears to have been founded in the ninth century B.C. by a certain Arame, whose name has come down in Armenian tradition as that of the great leader Aram.[9] King Arame's capital lay at Arzashkun on the northeastern shore of the lake, probably near the site of old Arjesh, now inundated by the waters of Lake Van; his successors would move their capital to the high isolated rock to the south of the lake, which became the nucleus of their new capital, the city of Tushpa. Curiously, the name of the fortress and the town at its foot would eventually become Tosp, the Armenian name for the district around the Great Rock, while Biainili, the native name of the kingdom, would give rise to the Armenian name Van for the town, which was sometimes called by both names: Van-Tosp.[10]

For more than two centuries, the kingdom of Van was the major force blocking Assyrian expansion to the north and in so doing, gradually expanded to occupy almost the whole of the territory of later Armenia. Argistinikhili, an Urartian foundation in the Ararat plain, would one day become Armavir, the first Armenian capital, while Erebuni, a fortress that served as another Urartian center in the Ararat

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[8] Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1963), p. 49. Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2.

[9] For Aram, see MK, I.13-14.

[10] Van-Tosp is used by MK, III.35, and BP, IV.55 (Van-Tozb).

plain, over time evolved into the modern Erevan. Apart from developing its own religion, culture, art, and political system, Biainili was particularly sophisticated in architecture, which was adapted to resist the earthquakes so common on the plateau. Sophisticated, too, was the irrigation system of Biainili; one of the canals built by King Menuas is still being used to carry fresh water to Van.

Biainili-Urartu offered a powerful rival to Assyrian domination of the high plateau, and numerous Assyrian campaigns were waged against it. By the seventh century B.C., however, the long struggle with Assyria had taken its toll on both states. In 612 B.C., Assyria was over-whelmed by a coalition of Babylonians, Scythians, and Medes, and soon after, Biainili, invaded by the Scythians, succumbed as well.[11] Sometime in the following two centuries of Median and Persian rule, the Armenian kingdom took shape. Urartu was remembered only as Ayrarat, the name of the central Armenian plain, and the physical remains of the Vannic state came to be attributed to the semi-legendary Assyrian Queen Shamiram, known to history by the Greek form of her name, Semiramis. The canal of Menuas, for example, is still known as the Shamiram-su (river of Semiramis).[12] Under the Armenian kings, the center of gravity on the great plateau shifted to the plain of Ayrarat, and for a thousand years, the town of Van, often known as Shamiramakert (built by Semiramis),[13] fell outside the main theater of activity.

Ancient Van

History is not altogether silent about Van in the long centuries between the fall of Biainili-Urartu and the appearance of our first Armenian sources a millennium later. In the second century B.C., the Greek writer Diodorus of Sicily tells of the constructions of the Queen Semiramis at a place in "Media" that he calls Khauon, which, given the absence of "v" in Classical Greek, is not a bad rendering of the Armenian "Van."[14] Later, in the second century A.D., the Greek geo-

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[11] Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 52-54, and especially Igor M. Diakonoff, *Pre-History of the Armenian People*, trans. Lori Jennings (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984), *passim*.

[12] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2, pp. 60, 73, 122.

[13] MK, II.xix.

[14] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, II.13.iii.

grapher Ptolemy of Alexandria mentions a town of Thospia and another called Bouana, both of which, given Ptolemy's penchant for duplicating place names found under different spellings in different sources, could easily be Van, the first under its lingering Urartian name, the second under its Armenian name.[15]

Van emerges in the full light of history in the fourth century A.D. at which time, we are told, "Shamiramakert" was burned by the Sasanid Persians during their punitive invasion of Armenia in around 363.[16] Some 5,000 Armenian families and 18,000 Jewish families were assertedly carried off to Persia. If we take these figures at face value and allow five members to a family, the population of Van at that time would have been some 115,000 people.[17] Although these figures cannot be accepted, it is possible that the proportion of Armenian to Jewish families may be within reason.

From what we can gather, the town of Van and its district, together with the other lands that came to comprise the later kingdom of Vaspurakan, were in the days of the Armenian monarchy the domains of a number of Armenian princely families. These princely lands were as follows:

1. The principality of Ervandunik, which probably included the tiny districts of Gukan, Artashesian, Artavanian, and Tosp, had its center either at Van itself or at nearby Ostan (Vostan).[18] The ruling House of Ervandunik was descended from the Ervanduni or Orontid royal

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[15] Ptolemy, *Geography*, trans. and ed. Edward L. Stevenson (New York: New York Public Library, 1932), V.12.

[16] BP, IV.lv.

[17] Ibid.

[18] The question of who owned the princeless lands of Armenia has been analyzed in various publications by the author. The basic premise of such inquiry into what might best be called "dynastic geography" is that some principalities consisted of one district in Armenia, while others were made up of several districts but bore the name of one nuclear district that served as their center. In determining who owned the princeless lands, it has been useful to look at the arrangement of the districts and the surrounding mountains in order to determine to which principality they logically belonged. As for the districts themselves, their location for the most part has been determined by Stepan Eremyan, though in some cases especially in regard to the most eastern districts, some reconsideration has been necessary. See Stepan Eremyan, *Hayastane est "Ashkharatsoyts"-i* [Armenia According to the "*Ashkharhatsoyts*"] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1963); Robert H. Hewsen, "Introduction to the Study of Armenian Historical Geography: The Nature of the Problem," in *Geography*, pp. 146-220, 249-65.

family that had ruled Armenia in one branch or another between the time of Alexander the Great and the time of Christ. The family perished in the Vardanants War.[19]

2. The principality of Aghbak, probably with the adjacent, princeless districts of Gazrikiank and Taygriank, was ruled by one Artsruni branch or another until the Ottoman conquest of Van in the mid-sixteenth century.[20]

3. The principality of Rshtunik, lying along the southwestern shore of the lake, very likely also included the adjacent districts of Buzhunik and Arnoyotn (Foot of Mount Arnos). The Rshtunis, of probable royal Urartian origin, are last heard of in the Arab period (seventh-ninth centuries), when they must have become extinct.[21]

4. The principality of Bznunik lay along the western shore of the lake and probably included the adjacent district of Erevark. Its princely House of Bznuni was exterminated by the King Trdat the Great early in the fourth century A.D., and its lands were given to the Armenian Church.[22]

5. The principality of Apahunik was centered around Manavazakert or Manazkert (Manzikert). Its princely family, the House of Apahuni, is last heard of in the mid-ninth century.[23]

6. The principality of Arberani, which lay along the eastern shore of Lake Van near its most northeastern end and probably contained the princeless district of Barilovit to the east, belonged to the House of Gnuni, another Ervanduni branch, last heard of in around 914.[24]

7. The principality of Mehnunik or Metsnunik, probably located north of Ervandunik along the middle course of the Marmet River north of Lake Arjesh, was ruled by a branch of the Paluni House, whose original holdings lay northwest of Taron.[25]

8. The principality of Andzevatsik, in the mountains south of Ervandunik, was centered at the castle of Kangavar. Its princes, possi-

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[19] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 204.

[20] Ibid. See also Robert H. Hewsen, "Artsrunid House of Sefedinian: A Principality in Ecclesiastical Guise," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 1 (1984): 123-38.

[21] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 213.

[22] Ibid., p. 216.

[23] Ibid., p. 199.

[24] Ibid., p. 205.

[25] Ibid.

bly of Medo-Kurdish origin, disappeared after 867.[26]

9. The tiny principality of Ake, which was centered in the fortress of that name at the foot of Mount Akenis, was ruled by princes, also of possible Median origin, who are last known in the early tenth century.[27]

10. The large land of the Mardpetakan lay in the midst of these other principalities and probably comprised the districts of Mardastan, Bun (Main or Original) Mardastan, Chuash-rot, Tornavan, Arjishakovit, Khughanovit, Aghand-rot, Krchunik, and, across the Araxes River, the district of Nakhchawan. A royal land by the fourth century, the Mardpetakan may have been originally a part of Artaz. Its center was apparently the city of Nakhchawan (Greek: Naxouana or Apobaterion, the latter a translation of the Armenian folk etymology Nakhichevan "place of the descent [of Noah from the Ark]").[28]

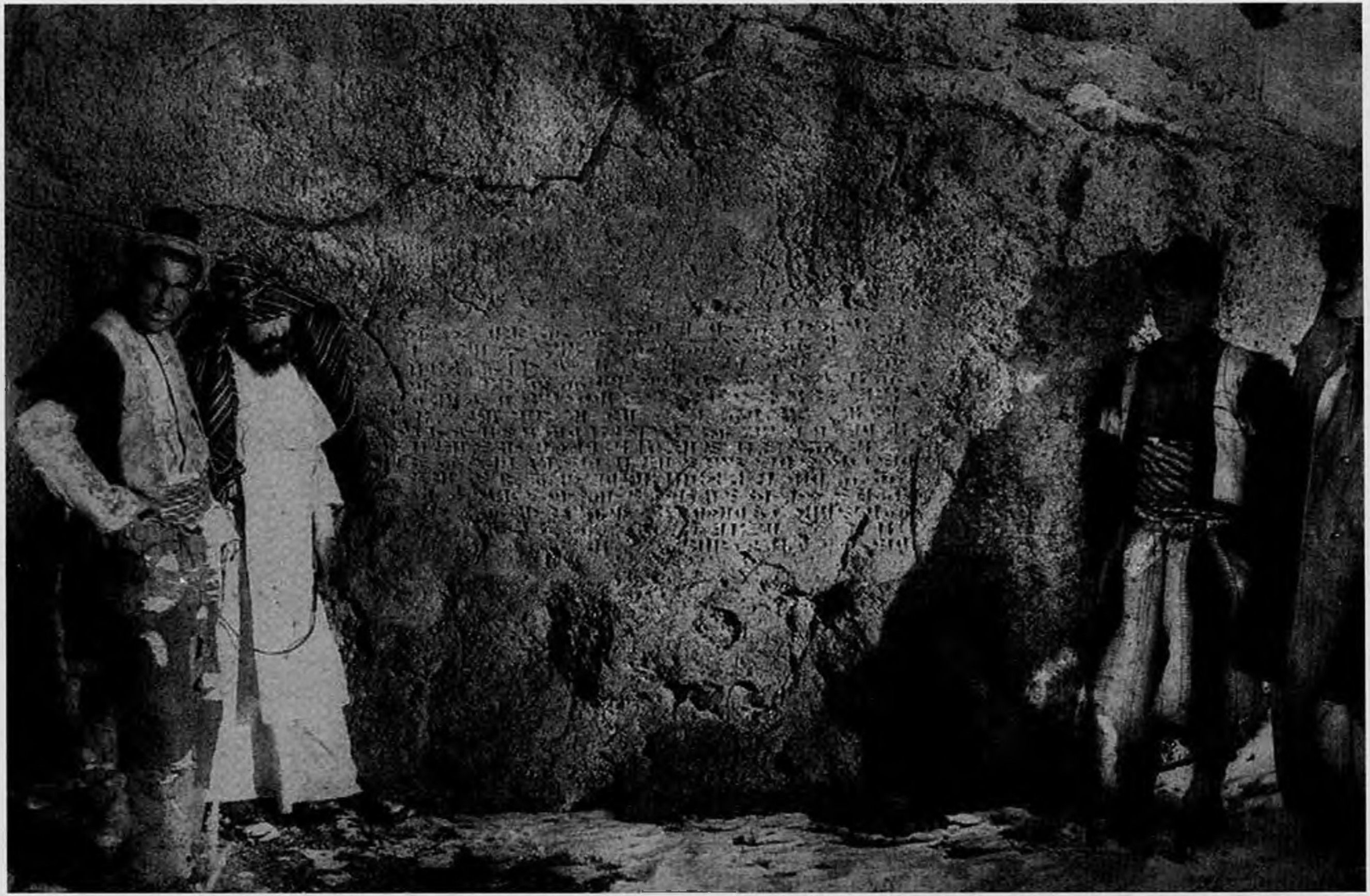
11. The principality of Artaz was owned by the Amatunis, who also boasted a Median origin and may very well have ruled over the entire Mardpetakan before it became a royal land governed by the Grand Chamberlain of Armenia. Artaz, as a separate principality, was centered at the castle of Maku. Ousted from Artaz by the Arabs, the Amatuni are known as vassals of the Artsrunis in the tenth century and of the Georgian Bagratuni dynasty as late as the fourteenth century.[29]

12. Andzakhidzor, the tiny principality of the Ensayatsi family, occupied the valley of the Andzakh River. Its ruling house is not heard of after the Vardanants War in 451.[30]

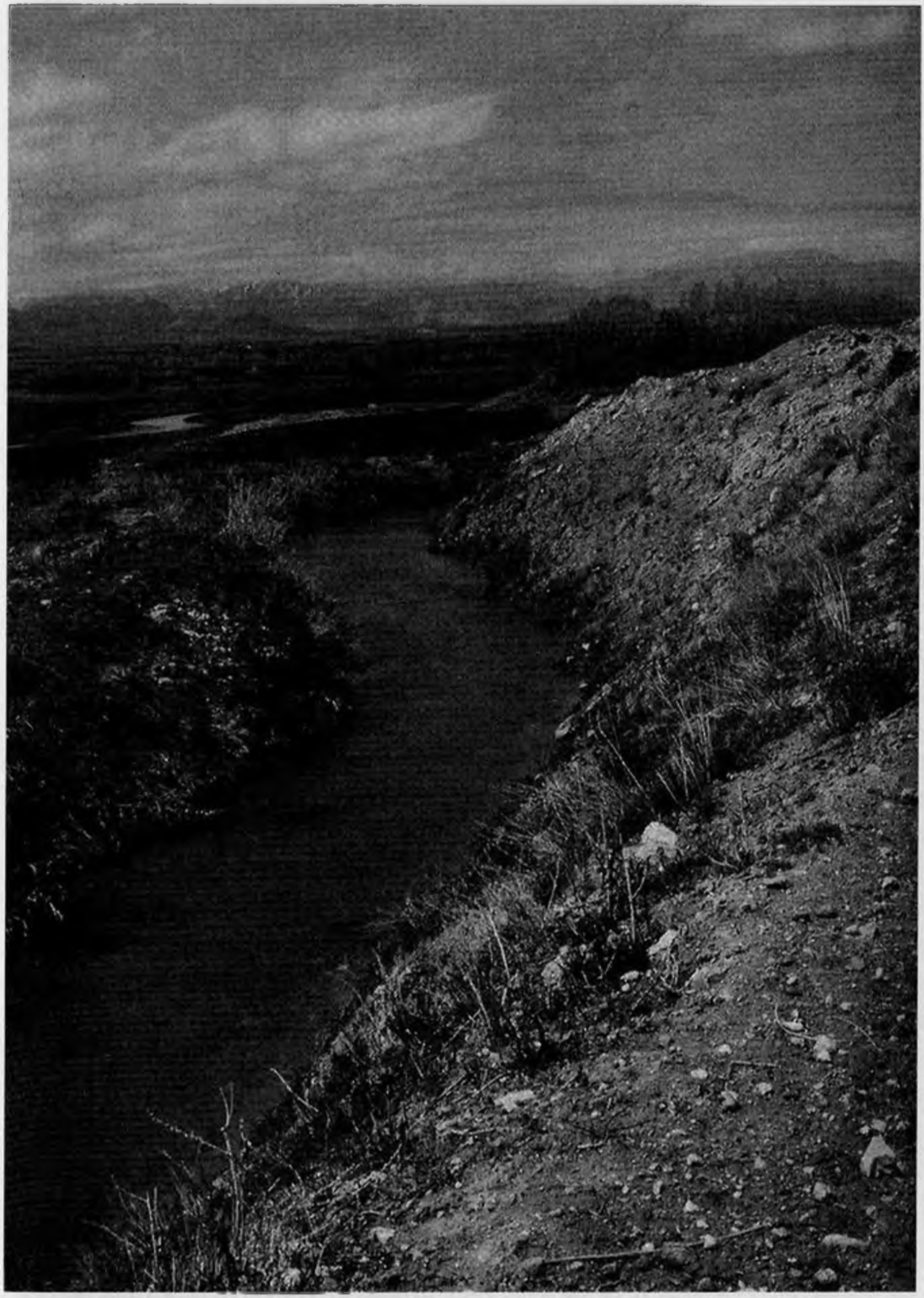
13. The large land of Parspatunik, east of Lake Urmia (Armenian: Kaputan Tsov, meaning Blue Sea), between Mardpetakan and the district of Her, was also known as Marats Amur Ashkharh (strong land of the Medes).[31] Apparently belonging to the Armenian royal house and representing at least a part of the large holdings of the Armenian crown in the Iranian province of Atrpatakan, Parspatunik probably included the neighboring districts of Gabitian and Bakran (Marand).

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[26] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 197.
[27] Ibid., pp. 198-99.
[28] Ibid., pp. 169-71.
[29] Ibid., p. 197.
[30] Ibid., p. 220.
[31] Robert H. Hewsen, "Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography IV. The Vitaxates of Arsacid Armenia: Reexaminaton of the Territorial Aspects of the Institution," *Revue des études arméniennes* 21 (1988-89): 97-149; Hewsen, *Geography*, p. 188n180.



Urartian Inscriptions (Paul Müller-Simonis)



The Semiramis Aqueduct

The entire concatenation of mountains between the principalities of Andzevatsik and Siunik appears to have been heavily, if not entirely, Median in ethnic complexion, as indeed it was Kurdish before World War I. As noted, one of its districts was called Mardastan (land of the Medes), while another was called Bun Mardastan or Mardutsayk (habitat of the Medes). Here, too, lay the towns of Marakan (Median place)[32] and, to the north, Maravan (Mede-town).[33] If the Medes (the Mars or Mards as the Armenians called them) were indeed the ancestors, even in part, of the modern Kurds, then a case can be made for describing the ancient population of this area as proto-Kurdish.

14. Somewhere in this part of Armenia lay the principality of Trpatunik or Atrpatunik, but there is no firm proof where the lands of the family actually lay, and the house, called Truni, last heard of in the mid-ninth century, seems to have been relatively unimportant.[34]

Three of these houses seem to have been especially prominent in the region: those of Rshtuni, Ervanduni (Orontid), and Artsruni, the latter quite possibly a branch of the Ervanduni.[35] The other princes of the region lived in their shadow and, after the extermination of the Rshtunis in the fourth century and the disappearance of the Ervandunis in around 451, the Artsrunis inherited both their territories and their importance. Moreover, with the fall of the Armenian Arshakuni (Arsacid) monarchy in 428, the Artsrunis appear to have acquired the entire territory of the Mardpets, so that before 500 A.D., the bulk of Vaspurakan was already in their hands and, with the Mamikonians, Bagratunis, and Siunis, they were one of the four great princely houses in the land.

Early Medieval Van

In around 387 A.D. Armenia was partitioned by the Romans and the Persians, with the region of Van remaining under Persian rule.[36] During

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[32] N[ikoghayos] Adontz, *Armeniia v epokhu Iustiniana* (St. Petersburg, 1908); trans. Nina G. Garsoïan, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1970), cited hereafter as Adontz, *Justinian*.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 221; Hewsen, *Geography*, pp. 186-87n164.

[35] Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 199.

[36] Adontz, *Justinian*, p. 9.

the Vardanants War, a few decades later, the princes of the area played a major role and some of them (e.g., the Ervandunis) are not heard of thereafter. After the fall of the Armenian monarchy in 428, the House of Artsruni rose rapidly until after the Vardanants War. It gradually gained control of most of the basin of Lake Van, acquiring some principalities as their houses disappeared and reducing others to vassals.

In the Armenian geographical text known as the *Ashkharhatsoyts*, the principalities are ignored and instead this entire region appears as thirty-five districts gathered into a vast province called Vaspurakan, an Iranian term not previously encountered in any Armenian source.[37] Since this geography dates from the seventh century and reflects the changes that took place after the great Byzantine expansion into central Armenia in 591, it seems that Vaspurakan, which is either an elegant Iranian synonym for "Persian"[38] or a term meaning a royal land,[39] must have been used by the Persians to refer to the bulk of the Armenian lands still retained by Persia. The Persian Armenian principalities after 591 included Mokk to the west of Vaspurakan and Siunik in the east. Vaspurakan, which occupied the entire area between the two, may have been simply the name that the Persians gave to a new province created to gather the small principalities—the loose ends as it were—lying between Mokk and Siunik into a single jurisdiction. If the term "Vaspurakan" really does refer to a royal land, then it may well be that all of these principalities between Mokk and Siunik formed a territory whose revenues went directly to the Persian kings.

In the 630s, the Arabs, armed with the militant new faith of Islam, crushed and conquered the Persian Empire. Almost immediately, they began their expansion into Armenia, which they overran and set up as a viceroyalty under Armenian and non-Armenian governors known as *ostikans*. Under Arab rule, the Artsruni princes continued to expand, although they seem never to have acquired all of Vaspurakan, for Artaz and lands to the east of it, including Nakhichevan, were cut off from Vaspurakan during the Arab period.[40] The Arabs, moreover, set up

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[37] Adontz, *Justinian*, pp. 337-38; Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 331; Hewsen, *Geography*, p. 179n144.

[38] Adontz, *Justinian*, pp. 180-81.

[39] Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 2d ed. (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1944), p. 103.

[40] For the Arab period, see Joseph Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquete arabe jusqu'en 836* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1919); Joseph Muyldermans, *La Domi-*

a number of Muslim enclaves in the Lake Van area, including the emirates of Berkri, Arjesh, Adiljavaz (Adiljevaz), Akhlat, and the large state of the Kaysid emirs centered at Manazkert.[41] In this period Van and its region moved back into the main stream of history, because the Arab trade route from Iran passed through the cities on the north shore of the lake on its way to Bitlis and Mesopotamia, while a secondary but nonetheless important road carried trade along the south shore of the lake to Bitlis via Van.[42]

The Kingdom of Vaspurakan, 908-1021

With the assumption of the royal title in 884/85, the Bagratuni House of central Armenia established a precedent whereby any princely dynast with a certain wealth and political power at his disposal might now declare himself a king and, having obtained the acquiescence of the great powers of the day, make the title stand. Within a generation, Gagik (a local variant of the name Khachik) Artsruni, prince of Vaspurakan, seeing little distinction between the qualifications of his house and those of the Bagratunis, also began to think in royal terms. The rise of the Artsrunis from their origin as princes of Aghbak, on the borders of Korjayk, to one of the largest land-owning princely houses in Armenia has already been described. It was only in 908, however, that they became kings with the support of the Emir Yusuf of Azarbayjan (northern Iran), who, it would seem, hoped to use the Artsrunis as a counterpoise to the Bagratunis whom he feared.[43] Yusuf sent Gagik a crown and a robe of honor, and shortly thereafter the caliph al-Muqtadir (908-32) at Baghdad did the same. As with the Bagratuni ascension to the royal throne, the Byzantines could do nothing but acquiesce, styling Khachik *arkhon ton arkhonton* (ruler of rulers), the same rather ambiguous title they had granted Ashot Bagratuni. Like

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nation arabe en Arménie (Louvain: J.-B. Istas, 1927); Aram Ter-Ghewondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia,* trans. Nina G. Garsoïan (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976).

[41] See Ter-Ghewondian, *Arab Emirates.*

[42] Hakob Manandyan, *Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade,* trans. Nina G. Garsoïan (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1965), p. 156.

[43] Nina G. Garsoïan, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia," in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1: *The Dynastic Periods* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 156-57.



THE KINGDOM OF VASPURAKAN, 908–1021

the Arabs, the Byzantines, too, doubtless saw the existence of two Armenian monarchies rather than one to be in their own best interest.[44]

Fortunately, Tovma Artsruni, the tenth-century historian of the House of Artsruni, describes the division of the Artsruni lands between the two brothers Gagik and Gurgen in 903-04 which shows us clearly what the family possessed on the eve of its acquisition of the royal title.[45] To Gagik went "the east and west portions facing the north:" the fourteen districts of "Chuash, Tornavan, Artaz, Mardastan, Garni, Arberani, Aghand-rot, Barilovit, Palunik, Metsnunik, Tosp, Rshtunik, Bogunik, and Gugan."[46] To Gurgen went "the eastern part to the south: the thirteen districts of Andzakhidzor, Krjunik, Khulanovit, Mardastan, Arjishakovit, Arnoyotn, Greater and Lesser Aghbak, Ake, Tamber, Taygriank, Erna, and Zarehavan" (the last two lying outside of Vaspurakan and formerly parts of neighboring Parskahayk).[47] Besides possessing most of Vaspurakan, however, the Artsrunis soon inherited the principality of Andzevatsik, eventually acquiring at least the overlordship of the Bagratuni principality of Mokk,[48] as well as certain portions of the earlier land of Turuberan. In addition, they disputed the district of Kogovit, south of Mount Ararat, with the Bagratunis, which proved to be a continual bone of contention between the two kingdoms to the benefit of their Muslim neighbors.

The rise of Artsrunid power led to a number of other princely houses rallying to their banner. Some of these had been dispossessed by the Muslims; others simply sought Artsrunid protection. Several came from outside of Vaspurakan. Among the vassal houses were those of the Ake, Amatuni, Andzevatsi, Apahuni, Kajberuni, Varazhnuni, Vahevuni, Gnuni, Gabeghian, Havnuni, and Trpatuni or Truni.[49]

The kingdom of Vaspurakan had no specific capital, the court following the king as he transferred his residence from place to place—

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[44] *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 3, p 29.

[45] Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutiun tann Artsruniats*, ed. Kerobe Patkanian (St. Petersburg, 1887; reprinted, Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1991); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *The History of the House of Artsrunik'* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985). See also V.M. Vardanyan, *Vaspurakani Artsruniats tagavorutiune* [The Artsruni Kingdom of Vaspurakan] (Erevan: Erevan State University, 1969).

[46] Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutiun*, III.29.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., p. 200.

[49] Ibid.

Van, Vostan, etc. During his reign, however, Gagik I (908-43) chose to reside on the Isle of Aghtamar.[50] The greatest of the kings of Vaspurakan constructed the underground stone conduit to bring water from the summit of Mount Varag to Van, erected a palace on the slopes of Mount Artos to take advantage of the view of both the lake and the volcanic cone of Mount Nekh Masik (Sipan) beyond, and built the religious structures at the foot of the rock of Amrakan behind the city of Van: the Church of Holy Zion and its two chapels, one dedicated to the Resurrection and the other to the Ascension. But Gagik's greatest accomplishments were his constructions on Aghtamar itself. This islet, once the property of the Rshtuni family and already fortified in the fourth century, lies just off shore and is a little over a quarter of a square mile in size. Beginning with a hard gray limestone cliff rising about 260 feet above the waters, the height declines to the east to a broad level site where a spring provides ample water. Here Gagik founded a town; erected a large, square palace consisting of a great domed hall surrounded by exedrae and other chambers decorated with murals; built magazines, storehouses, and a treasury; laid out streets, gardens, and orchards; and planted trees and designed areas of recreation and relaxation for himself and his court. In the midst of all stood his crowning achievement and the only one which survives, the Palatine Cathedral of the Holy Cross, to which a monastery was later attached.[51] Built of pink sandstone by the architect Manvel during the years 915-21, the interior measures nearly 49 feet by 38 feet, with the dome extending 67 feet above ground, supported by a high circular drum resting on four pendentives rather than columns. Decorated on the inside with elaborate murals, the cathedral is best known for its almost unprecedented sculptures in high relief which cover the entire exterior of the building with biblical scenes and which represent in Armenia the summit of the stone-worker's art. It should be noted that, apart from the constructions known to have been built by Gagik I, the famous monastery of Narek was founded during his reign and perhaps also that of Iluvank. To King Gagik is personally attributed the founding of Karmravank (Red Monastery).[52]

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[50] For Gagik's reign and the kingdom of Vaspurakan in general, see Vardanyan, *Vaspurakani Artsruniats tagavorutiune*.

[51] Ibid.

[52] A number of books now exist describing this monument, among them Sirarpie Der

Despite the lavish expense devoted to the erection of the cathedral at Aghtamar, the necropolis of the Artsruni kings was located elsewhere, at a monastery on the slopes of Mount Varag known as Varagavank (Turkish: Yedi Kilisa, meaning Seven Churches). Founded by King Senekerim-Hovhannes (Sennacherib-John) early in his reign (1003-24) to house a relic of the True Cross that had been kept in a simple seventh-century hermitage on the same site, the monastery lay about 5 miles east of Van hidden from the lake by a mountain spur. It is not clear if this hermitage had been the royal necropolis before this time, but we do know that as early as 981, Senekerim's wife, Queen Khoshush, had built a church here dedicated to the Holy Wisdom (Surb Sopi). Over the years, Varagavank became the richest and most celebrated monastery of the Lake Van area.[53] Here resided the archbishops of Van until the late nineteenth century, when one of them, the future Catholicos Mkrtich Khrimian "Hayrik" (Father), founded *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (The Eagle of Vaspurakan), the first newspaper ever printed in Armenia proper.[54]

The Cession of the Kingdom to Byzantium

Not long after acquiring the principality of Tayk in the year 1000, the Emperor Basil II offered King Senekerim-Hovhannes lavish domains in Cappadocia within the Byzantine Empire were he to agree to cede his kingdom to the empire.[55] The king declined at first, but as the Turkish raids began on his southern frontier in 1018 (and probably also because of his own sense of insecurity on a throne that he had virtually usurped), he changed his mind and sent his son David to

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Nersessian, *Aght'amar: Church of the Holy Cross* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); *Aght'amar* in the series *Documenti di architettura armena,* vol. 3 (Milan: Ares, 1974); Stepan Kh. Mnatsakanyan, *Aght'amar* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1983), English trans. K.H. Maksoudian ([Los Angeles]: Editions Erebouni, 1986). Thomas A. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey,* vol. 1 (London: Pindar Press, 1987); Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura armena* (Rome, 1988); J.G. Davies, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture: The Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar* (London: Pindar Press, 1991).

[53] For Varagavank, see Lynch, *Travels,* vol. 2, pp. 113-15.

[54] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 1, p. 24.

[55] Gérard Dédéyan, "L'immigration arménienne en Capadoce au XI[e] siècle," *Byzantion* 45 (1975): 41-117.

negotiate with Basil at Trebizond, where the emperor was preparing for a campaign against the Georgians.

The terms having been agreed upon, the transfer of territories took place in 1021, Vaspurakan reportedly containing ten cities and 4,000 villages.[56] Although the Artsrunis claimed possession of the cities of Manazkert, Khghat, Artske, Arjesh, and Berkri at this time, it seems clear that this was merely a domination—perhaps even a fictitious one—over the four local Arab emirates, Akhlat, Dat al-Djauz, Arjesh, and Barghiri, whose rulers were not really ousted until the Byzantine occupation. Manazkert had never been held by the Artsunis, and it was already Byzantine when it was included in the list of the ten cities ceded by Senekerim-Hovhannes. The other five of the ten "cities" supposedly contained in the realm were Van, Vostan, Khizan, Ketsan, and Hoghts, the last two of which were actually fortresses (the first guarding the passage from Khizan to Rshtunik via the valley of the Arvanis River; the second guarding the road from Ketsan to Bitlis), although both of them may have had towns of some significance around them. Of these five towns, Vostan is the only one known to have possessed a town wall as well as a citadel, but we do not know what the situation was at Amiuk or Van. After the cession, Senekerim-Hovhannes, together with his immediate family, his court, the high clergy of his realm, and supposedly 14,000 families, moved to Sebasteia (Sebastia, Sivas), where the entire Byzantine province of that name was placed at his disposal. When the king died in 1024, however, his body was taken back to Vaspurakan to be buried in the monastery of Varag; his widowed queen was later buried by his side.[57]

Under Byzantine rule, Vaspurakan was known as Baspraknia or Asprakania and placed under an administrator with the title *katapan*.[58] We have no idea where this official had his seat though it may have been at Van (Byzantine: Iban). We know that he did not sit at Manazkert, which was the center of a separate province organized by the Byzantines under the name "Upper Media." The Byzantines did

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[56] The number of villages may be exaggerated, but as late as the time of Cuinet (ca. 1890), the *vilayet* of Van had some 2,279 villages, of which more than half lay in the *sanjak* of Van itself.

[57] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2, p. 115.

[58] Karen N. Yuzbashyan, "L'Administration byzantine en Arménie aux X^{e}–XI^{e} siècles," *Revue des études arméniennes* 10 (Paris, 1973–74): 139-84.

everything in their power to establish in Vaspurakan the Byzantine Church, which during their occupation of the region broke with Rome and the papacy (1054) to become the Greek Orthodox Church. Over a dozen Greek episcopal sees were established in Taron and the basin of Lake Van, although none of them survived the Turkish invasions that forever swept the Byzantines from the Armenian Plateau.[59]

Late Medieval Van

The raids of the Seljuk Turks reached Vaspurakan by 1020. The Bagratuni capital, the great city of Ani, fell to the Turks in 1064, and in 1071 they crushed a Byzantine army led by Emperor Romanus Diogenes at Manazkert. The Seljuks now poured into Anatolia where they set up their center at Konia far to the west, preferring to rule the outlying reaches of their conquests through local vassals. In this way, Vaspurakan, together with Taron to the west of it, passed into the hands of a Muslim dynasty known as the Shah-i Arman (King of Armenia),[60] who made their capital at Van holding forth there (1100-1206) until replaced by the Umayds.[61] During this time, a line of Armenian princes continued to hold Mokk,[62] while a number of local Kurdish notables began to set themselves up at various points south of the lake.[63]

During this period a catholicosate emerged on the isle of Aghtamar, which from the year 1116 served as the ecclesiastical center of the Lake Van area.[64] Originally an anti-catholicosate in schism from the recognized Supreme Catholicos of the Armenian Church, Aghtamar allowed the schism to be healed in 1420 when the incumbent agreed to accept the authority of the Supreme Catholicos in return for being permitted to keep the title catholicos for himself. Gradually becoming a hereditary office, the Catholicosate of Aghtamar was always in the

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, vol. 1, p. 328ff.

[61] Turkish Ministry of Culture, *Van* (Ankara, 1987), p. 116, cited hereafter as TMC, *Van*.

[62] See the Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia, *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran*, vol. 7, s.v. "Mokk."

[63] Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, vol. 1, p. 330ff.

[64] Malachia (Maghakia) Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*, 2d rev. English ed. (London: Mombray, 1955).

hands of a member of a line of the Artsruni family, a situation that lasted until the 1530s.[65]

In the thirteenth century the campaigns of the Khwarizm shahs, fleeing the Mongol invasion of their country east of the Caspian Sea, swept away the Umayds but a decade of renewed Seljuk rule was terminated by the Mongol conquest of Armenia. Despite their initial devastations, the Mongol khans and their descendants, the Ilkhanid dynasty of Iran, brought a long period of peace and prosperity during which trade, monastic life, the construction of churches and caravansaries, and the production of manuscripts reached a high degree of development.[66] A characteristic of the Ilkhanid period was the establishment of a number of firmly entrenched Kurdish emirs in the area, especially to the south, southwest, west, and northwest of the lake. As the Ilkhans weakened, Armenia passed under the control of two rival Turkmen dynasties, the White Sheep (Ak Koyunlu) centered at Diarbekir (Diyarbakr) and the Black Sheep (Kara Koyunlu) centered at Tabriz, both of which continued to rule the Van region through the local Kurdish emirs.[67]

In 1387 Armenia was invaded by the hordes of Timur (Tamerlane), a warlord newly emerged from Central Asia. Timur ravaged much of Armenia but at Van outdid himself in the cruelty for which his name has become legendary. Setting aside the inhabitants whom he felt he could hold for ransom, Timur had the rest of the population driven to the top of the Rock of Van, whose fortress he had totally demolished, and from there had them thrown off the cliff to their deaths. We are told that so many people were dealt with in this way that some survived because the dead had piled so high that the last victims had not that far to fall.[68]

Briefly interrupted by the invasions of Timur, the two Turkmen federations reemerged as rivals in Armenia after the death of Timur's son, Shah Rukh, in 1410. For decades thereafter, the Black Sheep and White Sheep clans surged back and forth across the country ravaging

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[65] Hewsen, "Sefedinian," pp. 128-29.

[66] Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, vol. 1, p. 330.

[67] Ibid.; John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Federation, Empire* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976).

[68] Tovma Metsobetsi, *Patmutiun Lank-Tamuray ev hajordats iurots* [History of Leng Timur and His Successors], ed. Karapet vardapet Shahnazarian (Paris: K.V. Shahnazarian, 1860).

it beyond description. Throughout the fifteenth century, massacre, pillage, enslavement, and rape filled the land, followed by the inevitable famine and waves of disease. In Armenia, trade and commerce came to a standstill, cultural life almost ceased to exist, and large numbers of the local people abandoned their hearths for other lands.[69] The White Sheep crushed the Black Sheep in 1469, but after the death of their chieftain Uzun Hasan in 1469, a sworn enemy of the Ottoman Turks, the White Sheep disintegrated into warring factions and their power was at an end by 1500.[70] Shortly thereafter, however, Ismail Safi, a grandson of Uzun Hasan, who had spent his childhood protected by the monks at Aghtamar, seized control of Persia. There he founded the Safavid dynasty, which quickly renewed hostilities against the Ottoman Turks.

Ottoman Van

A century and a half of Ottoman-Safavid wars now ensued, the common people of Armenia bearing the brunt of the constant devastation.[71] The region of Van was first overrun by the Ottoman Turks in 1534. When conquered definitively in 1548, its northern sector was organized into a vast province known as an *eyalet*, which by 1609 included the *sanjaks* (counties) of Alashkert and Bayazid, as well as most of the later *vilayet* (province) of Bitlis. Until the mid-nineteenth century, however, many of the sanjaks of the eyalet were still under the rule of the virtually independent, local Kurdish *derebey*s (valley lords), and Ottoman rule was usually little more than nominal beyond the city of Van itself. The Ottoman traveler Evliya Chelebi has left a detailed description of Van in the mid-seventeenth century when it was still heavily fortified against a renewal of hostilities with Safavid Iran.[72] According to him, the castle of Van was a structure of enormous strength surrounded by seven walls with seventy turrets and

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[69] Avedis K. Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts (1301–1480)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). The colophons of the fifteenth century detail the horrors taking place in Armenia during that period.

[70] See Woods, *Aqquyunlu*.

[71] Donald E. Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire from Earliest Times to the End of the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 100-43.

[72] Evliya Chelebi, quoted in TMC, *Van*, p. 178.

staffed by 6,000 troops not counting another 6,000 posted in six of the nine other castles that still surrounded the lake (Amiuk, Arjesh, Adiljavaz, Akhlat, Datvan or Tatvan, and Vostan). Some fifty ships plied the waters of the lake in his time.

After the Russian invasion of 1828, the Ottoman government was obliged to bring the frontier lands under closer control. In 1847, the last derebeys were suppressed and the eyalet of Van was made a sanjak of the eyalet of Erzerum, which had always been under a firm Ottoman hold.[73] In 1875, however, when this cumbersome province was broken up, the sanjaks of Van and Hakkari or Hekkiari became separate vilayets, only to be joined together once again into a greater vilayet of Van in 1888. The new administrative unit consisted then of two sanjaks, nineteen *kazas* (districts), and three hundred *nahiyes* (townships or village clusters), altogether containing 2,279 villages.[74] Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian states that there were 275 Armenian parishes of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and subsequent studies have demonstrated that there were more than 400 Armenian villages in the province.[75] Van was the capital both of the vilayet and of the sanjak of that name; Julemerk or Julamerk (Armenian: Jghmar) became the capital of Hakkari. The area of the vilayet was 47,700 square kilometers (18,417 square miles).

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the city of Van was confined within its walls; a wonderfully accurate color drawing of the city recently discovered in the archives of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul shows it to have been, in about 1600, a handsome town at the foot of its cliff, whose churches and mosques dominated the skyline.[76] After about 1850, however, the city began to overflow its wall, spreading haphazardly to the east where there developed what was called Aygestan, the "Vineyard" or "Garden district." Here the wealthy inhabitants of the city, Christian and Muslim, built villas surrounded by greenery and orchards, and here the increasing number of foreign missionaries and consuls settled.[77]

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[73] Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, vol. 1, p. 340.

[74] Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1890), vol. 2, p. 632.

[75] Ormanian, *Church of Armenia*, p. 206. See also the chapter by Sarkis Karayan in this volume.

[76] This drawing has been reproduced in color in TMC, *Van*, pp. 180-81.

[77] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2, p. 81.

As the governor of a frontier province, the *vali* of Van commanded some 1,500 troops based at Van itself, with another two battalions stationed at Bashkale, besides a force of 1,000 *zaptieh*s (gendarmerie or local militia). Despite the proximity of the frontier, Persia had long since ceased to be a threat to the Ottoman Empire and the fortifications of the citadel in Van, though usually closed to foreign visitors, were well known to be in disrepair.[78]

Population

Among the divisions of the six Armenian vilayets in Turkish Armenia, the sanjak of Van was the only one in which the Armenians formed the majority of the population. This majority was lost in the vilayet, however, and probably deliberately so, by the merging of Van with Hakkari, whose population was overwhelmingly Muslim and Kurdish mixed with minorities of Yezidi Kurds and Aisors (Assyrian Christians of the Nestorian sect, a small number of whom, under the name Chaldeans, had become Catholic). Turks were few in the vilayet, and many of these were Islamicized Armenians and Turkicized Kurds. Much of the province was remote and no census taken there before modern times may be considered reliable even by Ottoman standards. Thus, the figures below must be used with special caution.

Vital Cuinet (ca. 1890)[79]

Muslims	
Turks	30,500
Kurds	210,000
Circassians	500
Christians	
Armenian Apostolics	79,000
Armenian Catholics	708
Armenian Protestants	290
Nestorians, autonomous	52,000
Nestorian *rayah*s (subjects)	40,000
Chaldean Catholics	6,000

[78] Ibid., p. 108.
[79] See Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie,* vol. 2, p. 636

Latin Catholics	2
Others	
Yezidis	5,400
Gypsies	600
Jews	5,000
TOTAL	430,000

Maghakia Ormanian[80]
(Armenians in the four dioceses of the vilayet, 1910)

Armenian Apostolics	191,000
Armenian Catholics	500
Armenian Protestants	200
TOTAL	191,700

Armenian Patriarchate (1912)[81]
(Hekkiari excluded)

Armenians	185,000
Assyrian Jacobites	18,000
Turks	47,000
Nomadic Kurds	40,000
Sedentary Kurds	32,000
Yezidis	25,000
Gypsies	3,000
TOTAL	350,000

Ottoman Statistics (1911-12)[82]

Muslims	(69%)	179,380
Non-Muslims	(31%)	79,760
TOTAL		259,140

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[80] Ormanian, *Church of Armenia*, pp. 205-07.

[81] *Réponse au mémoire de la Sublime-Porte en date 12 février 1919* (Constantinople, 1919), p. 46, Appendix E; Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 36.

[82] Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia at the End of the Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 76.

Justin McCarthy[83]	
Muslims	313,322
Armenians	130,500
Nestorians and Chaldeans	62,400
Jews	1,798
Yezidis	1,776
Greek	1
TOTAL	509,797

Economy before World War I

In regard to land use, 21,530 square kilometers (8,313 square miles) of the land in the province was arable; 14,346 square kilometers (5,539 square miles), barren mountains; 6,350 square kilometers (2,452 square miles), forested mountains; 20 square kilometers (8 square miles), marshland; and 5,454 square kilometers (2,106 square miles), lakes.[84] Like the rest of Armenia, the vilayet of Van was largely an agricultural and stock-breeding region. Wheat, barley, millet, corn, and rice, along with tobacco, beans, peas, grapes, figs, and almonds, were its chief crops; cattle, sheep, and goats comprised its herds. There was silver-bearing lead ore at Bashkale, and some oil at Siran, near Bashkale and at Shomoh. Lead and chalk were also found. Lake Van produced the fish tarekh, still dried and exported as in the Arab period, while the soda collected from the lakeshore was still dried into cakes and used as a detergent.[85] There was little industry in the province save for textiles, but the Armenians were known for their fine jewelers, tailors, and other craftsmen. The status of commerce, however, can be imagined from the fact that there was no bank in Van.

Although there were few forests in the province, except in the remoter mountains, its flora and fauna were very rich. Trees included the ilex, elm, and several kinds of oak, while among the animals the brown bear, wolf, fox, hyena, stag, hare, martin, and wild goat were found in the mountains, along with an occasional wildcat and small tigers.

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[83] McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, pp. 39, 77, 97, 102-03.
[84] See Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie,* vol. 2, p. 631.
[85] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2, pp. 40-46.

Ecclesiastical Organization

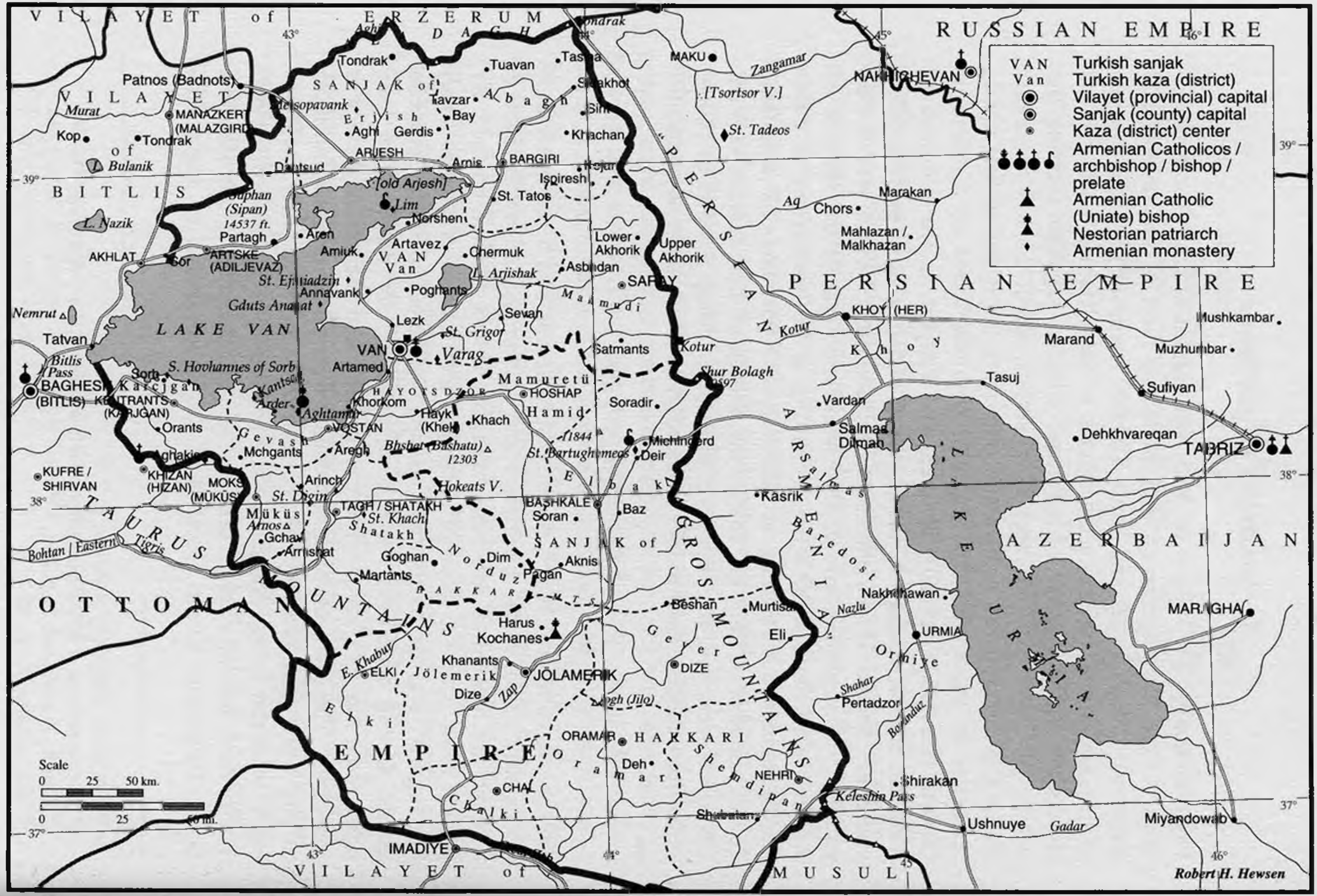
Ecclesiastically, the vilayet of Van was organized into four jurisdictions: 1) the Archdiocese of Van, including most of the sanjak (108 parishes, 130 churches and some 100,000 members); 2) the diocese of Lim and Ktuts, including the islands of those names, each with its monastery, and a number of mainland villages, together forming the nahiye of Timar (25 parishes, 32 churches, about 11,000 members; 3) the Catholicosate of Aghtamar, comprising the island of that name, residence of the Catholicos, together with the kazas or districts of Gevash (Gavash, Giavash), Shatakh, and Karjkan in the province of Van and that of Khizan in the province of Bitlis (130 parishes, 203 churches, around 70,000 members, not counting Khizan with its 64 parishes, 69 churches, and 25,000 members); and 4) the diocese of Aghbak, with its bishop officially sitting at the monastery of Saint Bartoghomeos but residing at Bashkale (20 parishes, 23 churches, 10,000 members).[86] By the 1890s, the bishop of Lim resided at Van. Catholics were few in the vilayet and their bishop resided in Mush, into whose diocese the former diocese of Van had been amalgamated.[87]

The City of Van

On the eve of World War I, the city of Van was still a relatively out-of-the-way place; rarely mentioned and seldom visited by foreigners. Though not located on any main highway, it was situated on the only logical route from the basin of Lake Van into Iran. Its trade was small but regular, and its bazaar was usually well-stocked with European goods. Living conditions were poor, however, for wages were low, corruption was rife, spies were everywhere, and the countryside was insecure.[88] The few well-to-do merchants were all Armenians, but local affairs were dominated by six Turkish clans of some fifty members each, who ran things much as they had done in pre-reform days.[89] These were the only true Turks in the city, the rest of the Muslims being Turkicized Kurds. Because of the large number of Armenians

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[86] Ormanian, *Church of Armenia*, p. 206.
[87] *Dictionnaire de l'histoire et géographie chrétiennes*, s.v. "Arménie."
[88] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2, p. 85.
[89] Ibid., chapter 4, pp. 38-115.



THE VILAYET OF VAN, 1914

in the province, they were usually well represented in the local administration. There were two Armenians on the council that aided the governor, and from 1896 until 1907, his assistant, however silent, was always an Armenian. There were two Armenian members on the municipal council, four Armenian judges in the court of appeals (two in the civil division and two in the criminal division), and Armenians were represented equally with the Muslims in the commercial court.[90]

Despite its poverty and the general backwardness of life in the villages, Van itself was one of the most Europeanized and cultivated towns in Armenia and its Christian population, heavily influenced by the foreign missionaries, American, French, and German, had largely adopted Western clothing by the 1890s. Physically, Van consisted of 1) the citadel atop the great rock cliff, 2) the old walled city (Kaghakamej), occupying 1 square mile at its base, and 3) the garden district (Aygestan), which, stretching to the southeast, covered some 8 square miles, and consisted of eleven quarters and six blocks of its own: Shamiramalti, Haykavank, Pashen-Poghan, Norshen-Ulia, Norshen-Sufla, Akerpi, Hankoysner, Arark, Gulurtagh, Norashen, Ararutstagh, Hafiz-Efendi, Karoyan, Boyents, Javshin, Shabaniyeh, and Seghke-keki.[91] Located as it was, 2 to 3 miles from the shore, Van was virtually a lakeside city, the village of Akants serving as its humble "port." The walled city, entered through four gates, had narrow streets and contained some 5,000 tall, old houses with jutting balconies, some of them veritable mansions, as well as seven old wooden churches, six mosques, and large bazaars. The garden district, with its private houses shaded by tall poplars and surrounded by orchards of apples, peaches, and pomegranates and patches of melons and cucumbers, included another five churches and five mosques. In 1914, Van possessed, besides the citadel, a second fortress on the nearby height called Toprakkale, several barracks for the military units, and the *konak* or government building, with its residence, a European-style chalet on the edge of the gardens, furnished and otherwise appointed in the Western manner.[92]

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[90] Mesrob K. Krikorian, *Armenians in the Service of the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1908* (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 38.

[91] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2, map between pp. 80 and 81.

[92] Rafael de Nogales, *Four Years Beneath the Crescent* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 73.

Schools and Other Amenities

The city of Van had eleven Armenian schools (six parochial, four private, and one endowed by the Armenian magnate Sanasarian) and ten Turkish (six primary, three middle, and one upper level).[93] Churches within the walled city included Saint Tiramayr, Saint Vardan, Saint Poghos, Saint Nshan, Saint Sahak, and Saint Tsiranavor; in Aygestan, Haykavank, Norashen, Arark, Hankoysner, and other quarters each had a church.[94] In addition, Van was the residence of three consuls (British, Russian, and Persian) and two consular agents (Italian and Austrian), and was the site of a German Protestant mission station and a French Catholic Dominican mission. By far the most important of the foreign institutions in the city, however, was the American Congregationalist mission founded by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Boston in 1871. Located in the southeast section of Aygestan, its compound included a church, five schools open to boys and girls, a hospital, a dispensary, and four large missionary residences constructed in the Western style.[95]

The Catholicosate of Aghtamar

Established in 1116 and monopolized by members of families descended from the Artsruni princes until the coming of the Ottoman Turks in the mid-sixteenth century, the Catholicosate of Aghtamar was an anachronism that had degenerated over the centuries so much that under its last incumbent, Khachatur II (1864-95), it had become more of an embarrassment to the Armenian Church than an asset.[96] Instead of being a focal point for the educational and cultural advancement of the local Armenians, it was left to the monastery of Varag, under its dynamic abbot, Mkrtich Khrimian, to assume this role. When the See of Aghtamar became vacant in 1895, it was allowed to remain dormant and was suppressed in 1916. By then, the monastery had been destroyed, the monks killed, and the Cathedral of the Holy Cross looted

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[93] Lynch, *Travels*, vol. 2, pp. 94-101.
[94] Ibid., pp. 101-03.
[95] Ibid., p. 92.
[96] Ibid., pp. 127-29, 136.

and left derelict.[97] Miraculously, it was not destroyed.

Van During the Genocide

Van generally suffered less during the events of 1895-96, when armed mobs were set loose by the Ottoman government on the Armenian population all over the rest of the country. An Ottoman force was deterred from attacking the town as the Armenian political parties joined forces to defend it. When it became known that the political leaders had left for Iran (with many ambushed and killed en route), the officially authorized massacres ended and the Van Armenians escaped the worst atrocities suffered elsewhere.[98] Marked for extermination in 1915, the Armenians of Van again got wind of what was coming and armed themselves for a spirited self-defense. For almost a month, from April 20 until May 16, a few hundred men defended themselves and their loved ones, some 30,000 people, against a Turkish armed force. At the last moment, the Turks abandoned the battle, as a Russian army and Armenian volunteer regiments from the Caucasus approached. Thereafter, the Armenians enjoyed a certain autonomy under Russian protection, but a few weeks later the Russian army suddenly withdrew. Fearing a Turkish advance, the entire Armenian population followed the Russians to the relative security of the Caucasus. Though the Russians re-occupied the region later that year and held it until 1918, Armenian Van had come to an end.[99]

Van Today

After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the two sanjaks of the old vilayet of Van were separated to form the *il*s or provinces of Van and Hakkari. For a long time, the city of Van was virtually in total ruin. Gradually, however, although the old walled city was abandoned, a new town has grown up near the site of the garden district. A new boulevard, Cumhuriyet Street, is lined with

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[97] Nogales, *Four Years*, p. 62, gives a rare contemporary account of what happened at Aghtamar during the siege of Van.

[98] Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

[99] Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence*, pp. 55-57.

handsome apartment buildings and modern shops, and the town now offers decent accommodations for visitors.[100] There are several banks and a local museum. A university has been founded, a modern cultural center has been built, and some local industries have been established in textiles, meat processing, dairy production, animal feed, and the manufacture of chemicals and cement.[101] Since 1970 Van has been connected by rail to the Turkish and Iranian railroad systems and the border with Iran was opened for trade in 1987. Hopes are high for turning the natural beauty of the region into a tourist attraction. There has been talk of rebuilding the old city as an outdoor museum of Ottoman urban life,[102] and in the tourist brochures much is made of the local "Van cat," with its penchant for swimming and its unmatched eyes.

Turks have still not settled the Van area in great numbers, and without its Armenian population both the town and province have become centers of Kurdish life. The Cathedral of the Holy Cross on the Isle of Aghtamar survives as a testimony to the one-time presence of the Armenians of the region. A few intrepid tourists, some of them Armenians, have now begun to discover Vaspurakan, which for all the misfortunes that have taken place there retains its natural beauty unimpaired.

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[100] Hewsen, personal observations, 1998.
[101] TMC, *Van*, p. 178.
[102] Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey*, vol. 4, p. 352.

3

VAN AND THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY

James R. Russell

In a series of lectures delivered at Harvard in the 1970s, the literary scholar Northrop Frye discussed the genre of romance as a category in culture that might be called "secular scripture."[1] Works of this type are not considered to possess the power and charisma of a supernatural source, as do books of divine revelation, nor are they received as normative in the sense of dictating a moral code or imposing acceptance of a cosmological myth. To this extent, such works are secular—that is, they are of the world and are acknowledged to be of human origin. But they overlap the category of scripture in that they adhere to venerated standards of plot, character development, and structure, and they enshrine social values and beliefs that are supra-personal. They transcend the differences of individual choice, even though tradition and inspired imagination rather than an actual god are believed to move the author's pen. They coexist on a middle ground with sacred scripture and secular fiction.

Epic literature can be considered sacred scripture, as the Homeric poems often were regarded in ancient Greece; and the *Mahabharata*, still more strongly, in India. Or it can be employed as a part of a larger body of revelation that partakes of diverse genres, as in the Hebrew Bible or the Zoroastrian *Avesta*, or as a venerated repository of national tradition and a model for values and ethics, alongside a different sacred canon.[2] The Armenian epic of Sasun can be viewed

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[1] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[2] On the use of epic in this sacred context and the particular significance of its treatment of the themes of war and death in relation to divine justice, see James R. Russell, "A Parthian *Bhagavad Gita* and Its Echoes," in Jean-Pierre Mahé and Robert W. Thomson, eds., *From Byzantium to Iran: Studies in Honour of Nina G. Garsoïan* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 17-35; and James R. Russell, "An Epic for the Borderlands: Zariadris

according to this latter model. What Frye said of romance may fairly be claimed of epic in this case: it is a kind of secular scripture. And the latter partakes, as does epic, of myth—itself a term requiring some definition. Myths are stories of supernatural type and moral or cosmological purpose, involving characters and events inherently impossible in normal time and space. Stories require provisional suspension of disbelief—of the kind a reader accords to the flow of a novel, but myths, given their unreality, demand extreme suspension of the sort one generally associates with acceptance of religious faith. What motivates this suspension is the factor of a myth's meaning, its spiritual and emotional message. In a way, a myth is a story too important, its details too densely fraught with symbolism and meaning, to be taken as literally factual in an everyday way. And often, what is sacred, revealed truth to the believer in one religion is recognized only as myth by the adherent of another, though some myths/revelations may overlap several faiths. The parting of the Red Sea, God's appearance on Mt. Sinai, the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ, and Muhammad's night ascension are all myths that the faiths containing them invest with the demand that a believer accept them as true. But to a believer in any one of the three different Abrahamic faiths, some of these are true, while others are stigmatized as myth; their importance to another religion may be recognized, but their truth content is denied.

The Anatolian Background

Let us consider a myth, an ancient Anatolian sacred tale with its strongest roots in pre-Armenian Urartu and its center, the Van region (ancient Tushpa: Armenian, Tosp). It was adopted, then adapted, by successive ancient religions that invested it with truth-content and, later still, assumed the aspect of myth in the context of heroic epic—Armenian secular scripture. A myth that possesses such extraordinary powers of endurance must be endowed with important meaning, raising perennial questions as part of its function of enabling its hearers to confront the basic issues of their lives. It will, in course of time, also alter and overlap with other myths. Different peoples on earth will

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of Sophene, Aslan the Rebel, Digenes Akrites, and the Mythologem of Alcestis in Armenia," in the forthcoming conference proceedings, Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces: Tsopk-Kharpert*.

often produce similar myths. This is not because there are invisible mythological archetypes hard-wired into the human brain—a collective unconscious—nor do separate nations possess intrinsic, invariant features beyond those borne by linguistic and material culture. Such an approach would put the cart before the horse: the horse here is just the similarity of human needs and predicaments themselves.

From the middle of the second millennium B.C. comes the *Song of Ullikummi,* a work attested in Hittite and Hurrian, with roots in eastern Anatolia. A being named Kumarbi plots a rebellion against the weather-god, Teshup (Urartian: Teisheba, the second of the trinity of major gods, the first being the supreme god Khaldi, and the third being the sun-god Shivini). Kumarbi ejaculates upon a rock and from it is born the monstrous giant, Ullikummi, who grows up in the water. Why water? Perhaps the rock was on a riverbank. The sun-god sees Ullikummi and reports to the supreme divinity and the heavenly council, who determine the monster must be destroyed. The weather-god accomplishes this heroic feat. In the west of Anatolia, the myth survived well into Classical times, since the Greeks knew and retold it as that of Agdistis *(agdos),* supposedly meaning "rock" in Phrygian, a language that might have been related closely to proto-Armenian. The story was well-known on the eastern edge of the Anatolian peninsula, half a millennium after the Hittites, too, and at a time when speakers of proto-Armenian were most likely already established in eastern Anatolia. A golden bowl found at Hasanlu in Iranian Azerbaijan from about the beginning of the first millennium B.C. depicts the scene of the climactic battle: a god rides in a chariot drawn by bulls and destroys an enormous monster who rises through the bubbles of a boiling sea.

There is an overt theme of particular importance here: that of the cosmic combat between god (or hero) and monster. We find it reflected in diverse religions, in different forms, with very different shades of meaning. In the story outlined above, it is plain that the god is on the side of human good, for he is saving the world from destruction and chaos; this is the most usual form and message of the combat myth as a type. But sometimes the moral issues illustrated are more nuanced, dealing with ambiguities of the human condition no less important than the need for order and peace. In the epic of Gilgamesh, for instance, the hero and his companion Enkidu kill Huwawa, the monster-guardian of a forest of cedars. It is a brutal, shocking act of

aggression, of human imperialism, against a denizen of the natural order who, however hideous in appearance, has done nothing to provoke the attack. The story, one of the earliest in world literature, is heart-rending, and it raises the troubling issue that human civilization, indeed, human ascendancy on the planet, is gained at the price of murder. At worst, this is an indictment of human nature as we know it; at best, it points to a perennial paradox. The story of the struggle of Odysseus against the Cyclops Polyphemos in the *Odyssey* of Homer has the same disquieting undertone—there is something aggressive and ultimately shameful in the behavior of the acknowledged hero. A myth would be intellectually unsatisfying in the end, and emotionally false, if it presented only the plain duality of right and wrong, without subtlety or nuance; and part of the genius of the ambiguous types of the combat myth is the capacity to perceive the alien, the Other.

There is a mirror image of the combat myth, too: one in which it is the Other, or the monster, or the transgressor, who is hero. This type signifies a rebellion against authority—perceived as indifferent or downright unjust—by a singularly earthly creature. The *locus classicus* for this type is the myth of Prometheus, who gave men fire, the power denied them by the Olympian gods, and for his beneficence was bound by the decree of Zeus to a rock in the mountains of the Caucasus, just north of Armenia, where eagles tear out and eat his liver, which grows back every day. Even in this "mirror-image," where the enemy of the gods is more hero than monster, there is a mitigating subtlety; for one has the sense that Prometheus suffers, to some degree, a condign punishment for the change he has accomplished, the order he has violated: for man as the user of fire has capacities for destruction of which he is mostly unworthy. Human power has wrought untold violence upon the earth. The poet Shelley unbound Prometheus, but the espousal of rebellion by the Romantics was not without its perverse extremism—Byron and Coleridge rehabilitated Cain, too, and the former derived from his study of Eznik of Koghb at Venice a sympathy for Ahriman, the primeval villain of Zoroastrian cosmology.[3]

When the first speakers of Armenian settled on what was to become known as the Armenian Plateau, they adopted not only Urartian words and toponyms but whole myths. So the combat of Teisheba with the

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[3] See James R. Russell, "Polyphemos Armenios," *Revue des études arméniennes* 26 (1996-97): 25-38, with references.

sea-monster survived in tradition after the adoption of Zoroastrianism but with the names of the old characters changed to those of the Iranian divinities and supernatural beings. Thus Armenian Vahagn, whose name is a Middle Iranian form of Avestan Verethraghna, has the same dragon-killing attributes of the Iranian god but with additional, local nuances. His temple was located at Ashtishat, in the rolling green hills just north of the plain of Mush, about 50 miles from the western shore of Lake Van. According to ancient traditions preserved by the historian Movses Khorenatsi and the scientist Anania Shirakatsi, people believed that *vishap*s live in Lake Van. The word "vishap" is Iranian and can mean (the etymology is disputed) either a poisonous aquatic creature or a creature of prodigious size. There are cigar-shaped carven stones found along Armenian river banks, many of the monuments more than 10 feet long, with fish and bulls carved on them, which predate the Armenian speakers in the region and possibly even the speakers of Urartian. But the Urartians put cuneiform inscriptions on them, and the Armenians in due course added crosses to these, re-sanctifying the steles as *khachkar*s (Cross-Stones). The steles are called vishaps, and perhaps served the function of apotropaic talismans—that is, depictions of monsters placed on the shore to keep the monsters from leaving the rivers where they lurked. As late as the 1960s, villagers traded tales of vishaps crawling out of the water and snatching lone collective-farm maidens.[4]

According to legend, the god Vahagn would plunge into Lake Van whenever a vishap there had grown large enough to devour the world; he then dragged out the monster and cast it into the sun. This was, people believed, the cause of the storms that arise suddenly on the lake; and even today, a strong, sudden breeze is called in Eastern Armenian a *vishap kami* (wind). Vahagn, accordingly, bears the epithet *vishapakagh* (reaper of vishaps). Dragons in various traditions, notably Indo-Iranian, guard springs and prevent people from getting water; so

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[4] On vishaps, see James R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Iranian Series, 1987), pp. 205-11. In recent years, the Turkish authorities have tried to arouse the interest of tourists to visit Van by broadcasting stories that a monster of the Loch Ness variety has been sighted in the lake. There is a substratum of folk belief, most likely affected by the lore about lake monsters culled from the popular culture of the West in the mass media, but the Kurds I met at Van in 1994 and 1997 regarded the stories as a commercial ploy and a farce. The lake does, however, have sea snakes, some of them several feet in length.

the function of the hero-god is to free the waters: this is the case with Indra Vrtrahan (smiter of resistance, personified as the dragon Vrtra) in Vedic India and with his cognate Verethraghna in Iran. In the Armenian epic of Sasun, one of the heroic deeds undertaken by the hero Sanasar is to free the waters from a dragon this way. But it is one of several feats, not the crowning accomplishment of his career by any means, and significantly the complex of ancient Armenian myths about vishaps does not involve their preventing access to the waters —they only live in them. So it would be myopic and imprecise to regard the myths about vishaps, including Vahagn's battle with them, as having an Indo-Iranian origin, merely because the old characters assumed Iranian names. We deal rather with an ancient Anatolian mythologem assimilated into Zoroastrian Armenia which survives down to the present day.

The ancient Anatolian myth of the monster Ullikummi is repeated, in Iranian garb, in a work on rivers (*De Fluviis*), wrongly attributed to Plutarch. It is related that Mithras, the Graeco-Roman form for Mithra, the Iranian god of covenants (Armenian: Mihr, later Mher), was a misogynist and therefore masturbated. His ejaculation hit a rock on the banks of the Araxes, the river that symbolized Armenia to the Greeks and Romans, and a monster was born of this onanistic act. He grew and grew, until the gods slew him. His inert corpse became the mountain called Diorphos. This word is otherwise unknown, but it may be related to Greek *orphos*, a kind of sea creature, with the Greek prefix *dia-* (through). The Armenians of Shatakh believed that Vishapasar (Dragon Mountain) is the corpse of a monster slain by Saint George; so this explanation from Greek may be plausible. What is strange is that Mithra is made the malefactor, considering that he was the Zoroastrian divinity revered beyond almost any other in Anatolia: Armenian and Irano-Anatolian names with the element "Mihr" were numerous; one might merely recall Mithridates, the Pontic king in the first century B.C., who was the father-in-law of Tigran the Great, or the Armenian word for a temple, *mehean*, deriving from "place of Mithra." Why should Mithra be the unnatural father of a monster?

As discussed, the combat myth can be seen from two opposing points of view, each with its further nuances. In the *De Fluviis*, Mithras seems to be in the wrong, for he is the unnatural father of a destructive monster. But there is evidence that throws a rather dif-

ferent light on the episode. The mystery religion that focused upon Mithras and penetrated the Roman Empire around the time of Christ, gaining extreme popularity (especially in the army) two centuries later, probably had its beginnings in Armenia.[5] From what we are able to reconstruct of the beliefs of the Mithraists, their god was born of a rock (Greek: *petrogenes*; Latin: *saxigenus*; cf. Armenian, *vimatsin*, used by Saint Nerses Shnorhali to describe Christ). He is often portrayed in a rocky cave, where two torchbearers, twins named Cautes and Cautopates, stand to either side of him as he sacrifices a bull, apparently with the purpose of conferring salvation on his followers. The sun-god Helios is shown as his boon-companion, and a raven hovers near him. Raven (Latin: *corax)* was the name of the first of the seven grades of Mithraic initiation. The signs of the Zodiac form an arch over the god, who is always a youthful, heroic figure in a Phrygian *pilos* (the felt shepherd's cap that was the symbol of manumission in Rome and became therefore one of the symbols of the French and American revolutions—Miss Liberty wears it on the obverse of Morgan silver dollars). Mithraists apparently believed they could predict through astrology, which the Zodiac symbolized, the point at which the celestial and terrestrial equators, now skewed, will merge again, the world as we know it will end in conflagration, and life will be renewed and redeemed, perhaps with Mithras emerging from his cave.

Mithraic temples, called *spelaea* (caves), often contain the statue or bas-relief of a fearsome being with a lion's head and human body, called *Deus Areimanios* (Destructive God). The new initiate, in order to become a fully-fledged member of the order, had to go through the fourth grade, called *Leo* (lion). Among other things, it probably involved being blasted with a flame shot through the open mouth of the lion-headed statue. Mithras, as the witness of covenants (which are made, of course, not only by friends, but perhaps more importantly, between enemies), is called the mediator (Greek: *mesites*) by Plutarch. This title was not an invention of the Mithraic cult in the West, since in Middle Persian he is also credited with *miyanchigih* (mediation) between no lesser opponents than Ohrmazd and Ahriman—God and the devil. Though for the Zoroastrians Mithras is firmly on Ohrmazd's side, the aspect of mediation places him in a role that might still invite

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[5] See James R. Russell, "The Armeno-Iranian Roots of Mithraism," in John R. Hinnells, ed., *Studies in Mithraism* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1994), pp. 183-93.

speculation upon the ambiguities inherent in a middle position between opposites, such as good and evil, life and death, human and supernatural, rebellion and redemption. So Mithras may be the Iranian figure best suited to embody the double role that the combat myth adumbrates.

Van, Sasun, and Beyond

Let us now return to the Van region, to the mythological underpinnings of the Armenian national epic, *Sasna Tsrer*, which may be translated as "The Wild Men of Sasun." The historical setting of the epic, which was first recorded by Bishop Garegin Srvandztiants in the early 1870s from an oral reciter but is known from travel narratives and indirect references by poets for at least five centuries before that, is in the reign of the tenth-century king Gagik Artsruni of Vaspurakan. His daughter Tsovinar, whose name is best explained as "Lady of the Lake," drinks one and one half handfuls of a milky liquid that spurts from an erect rock in Lake Van—this is obviously the seminal fluid of a sea god and an Urartian "Gate of God." A blind portal carven in the rock of Toprakkale at Van and called in Armenian *Mheri durn* (Mher's, that is, Mithra's, Gate) has an invocation to Tsovininawe, the Urartian god of the sea (Armenian *tsov* for lake or sea derives from Urartian *tsue*). Tsovinar subsequently bears unequal twins: Sanasar is the larger, and the true hero; Baghdasar, the smaller, and darkly envious of his brother. The names are modeled upon those of the two sons of Sennacherib, Sarasar and Adramelek, who in the Bible flee their father and settle in Urartu, where they came to be regarded as the ancestors of the Artsrunis, who used Senekerim (Armenian for Sennacherib) as a regnal name. It is oral tradition that recast the names of these supernaturally-engendered twins and made them assonant, like Romulus and Remus, or, more to the point, Cautes and Cautopates. Professor Martin Schwartz proposed in his authoritative study of the Mithraic twins that Cautes means "youth" (cf. Middle Iranian *kotak*, attested in Armenian), and the suffix in Cauto-pates means "slayer" (cf. the Scythian name of the Amazons cited by Herodotus, *oiorpata*, "man-slayer," from **vira-pata-*).[6] If this explanation is correct, it sug-

[6] Martin Schwartz, "Cautes & Cautopates, the Mithraic Torchbearers," in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 406-23.

gests that there existed a rivalry between the Mithraic twins very like that seen in the epic of Sasun.

There are three subsequent generations of Sasuntsi heroes (*kajer*), or crazy men (*tsrer*), or giants (*jojer*): Mher (that is, Mithra) the "Leonine" (*aryutsadzev)*, David, and Pokr (little, younger) Mher. Leonine Mher attains this honorific epithet by killing a lion in single, hand-to-hand combat. He commits adultery and dies in early sorrow. His career represents a kind of darkness or a time of testing and tribulation and perhaps may correspond to the degree of Leo in Mithraic initiatory ritual. It is in any case typical of epic literature that human sexual weakness and the encounter of the hero with death should be treated as significant themes. The clan of Sasun emerges into light once more with David, the golden young king, warrior, and herdsman. Indeed, his biblical namesake, who is the paternal ancestor of our Lord and thus a foreshadower of salvation cosmically, exemplifies the three social functions noted, which are essential to Indo-European society and its poetics. David—whom the Bagratunis claimed as their ancestor, too—is the epitome of everything.

Epic must take place in past time, since its characters are by definition bigger, better, and also more tragic than living men can be, so the last of the heroes, Pokr Mher, is there partly to provide a close and a conclusion, an explanation of why the epic age has ended. Suitably, he exemplifies the aspects of the Iranian Mithra and Roman Mithras which have to do with apocalypse—and not without considerable moral ambiguity. Like the Iranian Sohrab who fought his father Rostam in the epic *Shah-name*, Mher fought once with David, who cursed him. So now his dead father's voice banishes him, calling him Cain—the biblical murderer and outcast. Young Mher is then guided by a raven (cf. the Mithraic *corax)* to the blind stone portal at Van, into which he disappears on his horse. In the cave, some oral accounts declare, hair grows all over Mher's body, and he becomes the typical Wild Man (Caucasian: *garmakochi*; Armenian: *vayri mard*) of folklore, whose ties are to the banished progeny of Cain and to a kind of primal, atheistic Promethean innocence. Mher holds in his hands the wheel of the Zodiac, called in Armenian recitations by the Persian term *charkh-e falak*, and when the stars are right, he will emerge to destroy and save the world. This Armenian oral tradition, with its intimate linkage to Van through the ages and civilizations, is the only literary source that makes connected sense of the diverse



Leontocephalous Figure (*Deus Areimanius*)



The Rock Birth of Mithras



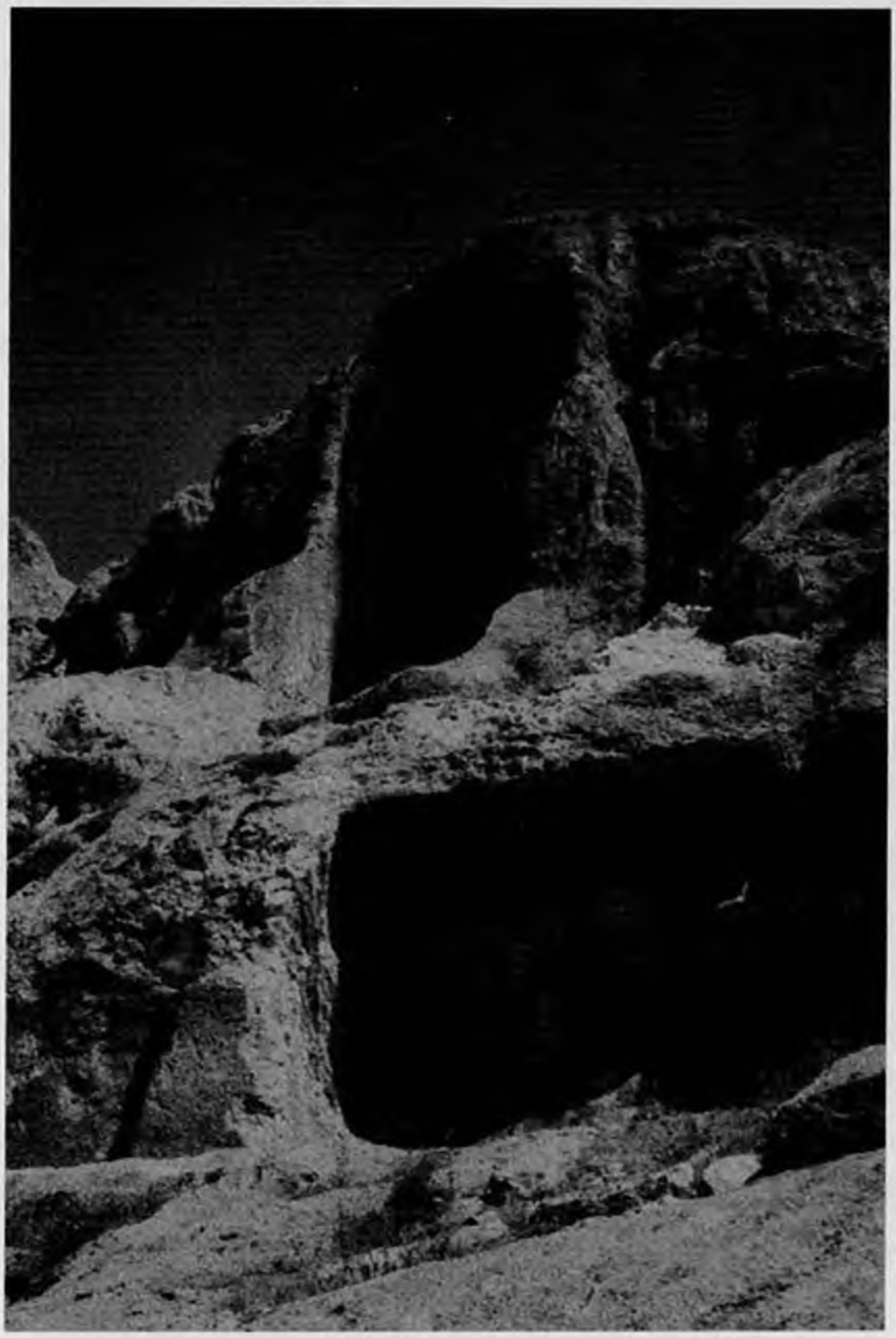
Mithras Slaying the Bull



Vahagn the Dragon-Reaper



Tsovinar at Lake Van on Ascension Day



Mheri Durn (Mher's Gate), Toprakkale

symbols—twins, raven, cave, lion, Zodiac—of the iconography of the Roman mystery religion, many of which have significance also within the Zoroastrianism of Iran, on Van's eastern borders.

Because Armenia became Christian and embraced another Savior, in the centuries when the epic's religious, scriptural elements were transformed (or degraded, one might say) into myth, it is not too surprising that Pokr Mher should have acquired the lineaments of Cain, all the more so when one reflects on the divine/demonic ambiguity of the primeval Anatolian mythologem of the rock-birth. In Soviet Armenia, in the retellings of the epic by the poets Avetik Isahakyan and Eghishe Charents, Christ Himself is relegated to myth, whereas the rebellious, Promethean Mher is acclaimed as the harbinger of true redemption, imagined as emerging from his cave at last during the apocalyptic October Revolution of 1917.

The fate of the weapon of the successive generations of the heroes of Sasun, the Lightning Sword (*tur ketsaki*), is not mentioned in any printed recitation of the epic of Sasun, but an Armenian friend from California, Grigor Poghosian, whose mother Zarouhi Halajian was a native of the district of Shahbaghi of the city of Van, told me she used to say when a sudden storm came up on the lake on a Friday, that it meant Mher was casting his sword into the water. This detail is of immense significance. Plainly, it is a distant descendant of the ancient combat myth of Teshub/Teisheba, probably altered by the intervening myth of Vahagn the dragon-reaper. Here, something from the sea (Sanasar got the sword in a chapel on the bottom of the lake) is being returned, rather than removed; and this is what one wants at the end of an epic—the Germanic Rheingold goes back to the Rhine. But there are very specific parallels to this scene. In the North Caucasus, the epic of the Ossetes (descendants of the ancient Alans, an Iranian people related to the Scythians) is called *Nartä*, which means something like masculine or manly men. The first Nart is born of the lady Satana, who bathes near a stone that a shepherd impregnates: cf. Tsovinar. There are unequal twins, though elsewhere in the epic; but at the end the last Nart, Batradz, dying, orders that his sword be cast into the river Terek (in the Abkhazian version, the same thing happens, but it is the river Bzyp). Twice they pretend to do it, but Batradz knows something special will happen and insists his men not keep the sword. The third time, they throw it in: the river boils. Littleton and Melcor have suggested, quite plausibly I think, that an early

recitation of this episode was brought by Alan cavalrymen in the Roman army to Celtic Europe, where it survived into the epic of King Arthur, who asks thrice that Excalibur be thrown into the water.[7] When his command is finally obeyed, the hand of the Lady of the Lake breaks the surface and catches it. Neither the Armenian nor the Ossetic epic contains this detail, though it would not be amiss in either: Tsovinar's very name means Lady of the Lake, and Satana is plainly a mythological character like Tsovinar, perhaps a survival of Api, the old sea-goddess of the Scythians. We meet her as the powerful, rather witchy Satenik, the wife of King Artaxias (Artashes) I of Armenia, who, we are told by Tovma Artsruni, built a palace at Van for her.

The Armenian epic does in fact have a kind of Lady of the Lake at the bottom of Van, as well as on a mountaintop in Sasun: Maruta (or Maratuk) Surb Astvatsatsin, the Blessed Virgin Mary of Maruta herself. It is in her chapel that Sanasar acquires his magical weapons, and the heroes go into battle in her name. It is perhaps also of significance that only storms on Friday have to do with Mher and his sword. Friday is a very holy and also very unlucky day: Christ was killed, descended to the tomb, and from there to the Inferno on that day. A book of Armenian prayers and spells to counteract demons is called the *Urbatagirk* (Friday-Book). On Friday, God finished making this world.

Let us return a last time to the aspect of the combat myth which deals with the rock-born creature as an unambiguous monster. We have traced the myth, with its associations and permutations, down from ancient Anatolia, from Hittites and Urartians, to the Armenians, first Zoroastrian and then Christian, who preserved and elaborated it. From Armenia, it would seem, strains of it traveled north where they informed the structure of the epic of the Narts, and the Alans bore it westward. The most recent arrivals in Anatolia, the Oghuz Turks, incorporated the combat myth of the rock-born monster into their collection of epic tales, *Dede Korkut*, as the story of Tepegöz, the Cyclops, who is killed with a magic sword—perhaps an Armenian addition to the mythologem.

The mythology of Van is a deeply-rooted tree whose leafy branches

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[7] C. Scott Littleton and Linda A. Melcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 1994).

shade all the Armenian tradition and stretch out to touch neighbor and invader. Sacred text becomes heroic code and oral poem and brings renewal of hope, of inspiration. "Van in This World; Paradise in the Next," goes the saying. But I would, with Vahan Tekeyan, give Paradise to whoever wants it, and take Van.

❀ 4 ❀

TOVMA ARTSRUNI
HISTORIAN OF VASPURAKAN

Robert W. Thomson

It is noteworthy that the tenth century historian Tovma (Thomas) called his book a "History of the House of the Artsrunis," not a History of Vaspurakan.[1] So it seems to me to be useful to approach this *History* via a brief discussion of Van, Vaspurakan, and the Artsruni House. In that way we can emphasize certain features of medieval Armenian society that are relevant to what follows.

The Site

Van appears in Armenian writers from their first works in the fifth century.[2] In the *Buzandaran*, or "Book of Epic Histories," often mistakenly attributed to a certain Pavstos, Van is known as an important Armenian city, where there was also a significant Jewish population dating from the time of King Tigran the Great. In Book IV, 55, we read of deportations from Van and other cities of both Armenians and Jews, who were taken by the Persians to Iran. Van itself was then destroyed to its foundations, but the massive rock remained as the focus of a fortified center.[3]

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[1] Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutiun Tann Artsruniats*, ed. Kerobe Patkanian (St. Petersburg, 1887; reprinted, Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1991); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni: History of the House of the Artsrunik'* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985). All references to the text of Tovma are to the pages of the Armenian text, which are marked in the English translation. Extracts quoted from the *History* are based on this translation.

[2] This discussion is limited to the evidence in Armenian texts. I am interested in what Armenians themselves have to say, in the reminiscences of Armenian authors about this area, and in their perceptions of the past and present. It is not my intention to discuss the pre-Armenian history of Van as the capital of the Urartian kingdom.

[3] Pavstos Buzandatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. Kerobe Patkanian (St. Petersburg, 1883;

Armenians were unable to read the ancient cuneiform inscriptions on this rock and in the vicinity. Movses Khorenatsi attributed them to queen Shamiram (Semiramis), whose unrequited passion for the ruler Ara the Handsome had brought her to Armenia. She liked the country so much—despite the fact that her sorcery could not bring Ara back to life after he had been killed in battle—that she built a marvelous city by the lake, with an aqueduct that brought water from many miles away. Movses says that in his day this massive construction was home to brigands.[4]

Tovma Artsruni also refers to Van as the "city of Shamiram."[5] But he associates it in particular with Satinik (Satenik), the Alan princess, whose marriage to King Artashes is described by Movses.[6] According to Tovma, Artashes used to bring his queen to the palace on the rock in the autumn season for diversion. He gives a lengthy, idyllic description of the lake, the mountains in the distance, the orchards and vineyards along the shore, the gardens in the town below, and not least the temple of Aphrodite/Astghik.[7] Tovma was obviously a local man; his *History* contains several setpieces lovingly descriptive of the lake and the buildings erected by later princes and kings on the shore or on the island of Aghtamar.

Vaspurakan, on the other hand, is not an old Armenian name. It is a word of Persian origin meaning "principal" or "special,"[8] which first appears in Armenian at the beginning of the seventh century.[9]

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reprinted, Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984). English translation and commentary, with appendices, Nina G. Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories* (*Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'*) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[4] Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913); reprinted in facsimile editions (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981), and with additional collations by Ashot B. Sargsyan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1991); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). French trans. Annie and Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie par Moïse de Khorène* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). See Book I, chs. 15-16.

[5] Tovma, p. 63.

[6] Movses, II.50.

[7] Tovma, pp. 52-54.

[8] David N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 88: *waspuhragan*.

[9] It is first attested in the *Ashkharhatsoyts*. See Robert H. Hewsen, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxarhac'oyc')* in the series Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, Nr. 77 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992), pp. 179-81. See also Sebeos, *Patmutyun*

It refers to an area east of the then agreed line in Armenia dividing the Byzantine and Persian sectors, which ran from the southern border of Siunik past the east coast of Lake Van. In this large area lived several Armenian noble families. By the time of Tovma, that is, in the early tenth century, the pre-eminent position of the Artsrunis in that area was recognized. Hence, the historian addresses his patron (Grigor-Derenik, father of Gagik) as "lord of the Artsrunik and prince of Vaspurakan."[10] Vaspurakan remained in general use as a name for the region long after the Sasanian Persian Empire had passed from the scene.

The Family

These introductory comments on Van/Vaspurakan were necessary simply because traditional Armenian society, from the earliest period for which we have Armenian records until after the time of Tovma, was not organized by designations according to town or administrative province. The territorial divisions of Armenia were based on family holdings, and the name of the area was generally the name of the local noble family. The different offices of state were hereditary in certain families. These noble houses served as the administrative entities of the country. And from the ecclesiastical point of view, the bishoprics of the Armenian Church were mostly based on those noble estates. Hence, in the period under consideration there was no bishop of Van or bishop of Vaspurakan, but a bishop of the Artsrunis, a bishop of the Rshtunis, and so on.[11]

The history of Armenia at this period was primarily the history of

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Sebeosi, ed. Georg V. Abgaryan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1979). The most recent translations are that in Italian by Claudio Gugerotti, *Sebeos: Storia* [Eurasiatica, 4] (Verona: Casa Editrice Mazziana, 1990), and one in English by Robert W. Thomson and James Howard-Johnson, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

[10] Tovma, p. 3.

[11] For general descriptions of traditional Armenian society, see Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1963); N. Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian: The Political Conditions Based on the Naxarar System*, trans. with partial revisions, a bibliographical note, and appendices, by Nina G. Garsoïan (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1970); Joseph Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu'en 886*, nouvelle édition revue et mise à jour par Marius Canard (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1980).

the interests of the various noble families, their rivalries and conflicts. This was not a static history; the importance of different families could wax or wane. So before a detailed discussion of the written work of Tovma himself, which reflects a time when the Artsrunis were ascendant, it will be useful to survey very briefly the references to that family in earlier writers.

We first hear of the Artsrunik in the *History* of Agatangeghos. After the conversion of King Trdat, Saint Gregory the Illuminator was sent to Caesarea to be consecrated as the first bishop for Armenia. The king sent him off with a grand escort; the princes of sixteen noble families are named, and the Artsrunis come last.[12] This seemingly modest ranking will be explained away by Tovma.[13] The Artsrunis are mentioned more frequently in the *Buzandaran*. They lived in southern Armenia, close to the Persian border, and there were strong pro-Persian attitudes among them. Their prince Meruzhan is often cited as an archetypal traitor.[14] His fate as described by Movses Khorenatsi is a martyr's crown in the form of a red-hot iron circle.[15]

The fourth century, described so vividly in the *Buzandaran*, was a period of transition from a traditional pagan society to a Christian one. It is not clear when the Artsrunis first acquired a bishop; the *Buzandaran* does not specifically mention one. But later writers often mention the family and their bishop. In Eghishe's description of the heroic rebellion against Iran the Artsruni bishop Mushe played a prominent role, and when Vardan Mamikonian perished at Avarayr, their prince led Vardan's first division.[16]

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[12] Agatangeghos, *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. G. Ter-Mkrtchian and S. Kanayants (Tiflis, 1909; reprinted, Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1980, and Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1987); trans. with facing Armenian text, Robert W. Thomson, *Agat'angeghos: History of the Armenians* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1976). The text is divided into paragraphs and not quoted by pages. See paragraphs 791-96.

[13] See note 42 below.

[14] *Buzandaran*, IV.24.32.50; V.38.43.

[15] Movses, III.37. But according to the *Buzandaran*, V.43, he was pinned to the ground by Babik Siuni with his lance, and then beheaded.

[16] Eghishe, *Vasn Vardanay ev Hayots Paterazmin* [About Vardan and the Armenian War] ed. E. Ter-Minasyan (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1958); trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Elishe: History of Vardan and the Armenian War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). For the battle, see p. 116; Mushe is mentioned on pp. 28, 129. If this Mushe is identical with the Mushe of Aghbak [as assumed by Hrachia Acharian, *Hayots andzanunneri bararan* [Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names], vol. 3 (Beirut: Sevan, 1972), pp. 463-64], then he was martyred. See Ghazar Parpetsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. G. Ter-Mkrtchian and

The Artsrunis appear even more prominently in the *History* of Movses Khorenatsi. There, some new ideas emerge, reflecting the great interest of Movses in origins. He seeks an etymology for the names of the noble families, and a historical date for their appearance. In the book of the prophet Isaiah [37.38], there is a reference to the king of Assyria, Sennacherib (Senekerim). He was slain by his two sons, Adramelek and Sanasar, who escaped to Armenia. Movses cites this biblical tradition and regards the Artsrunis as the descendants of Sanasar.[17] And indeed, the name Senekerim was adopted by a later Armenian king of Vaspurakan. The Artsruni family, therefore, could claim to be of royal stock, descended from the powerful kings of Assyria. Their actual Armenian name, says Movses, derives from their function. They carried the eagle standards for the Armenian king Vagharshak. He thus derives "Artsruni" from *artsiv*, meaning "eagle."[18]

Several Artsruni princes are mentioned by the seventh-century historian Sebeos. The most interesting reference is to a certain Vasak, son of Sahak, who was killed in a Persian invasion in 609. The brief passage is worth quoting: "Although he had caused many losses to the Persian army, yet all the Persian troops mourned him for his valor and bravery; as he was a powerful and tall youth, and especially because he had been raised among them and trained by them in their ways." This is a valuable reference to a long-standing tradition whereby boys were raised in a different noble, sometimes even royal, family. Such arrangements encouraged close ties between the original family and the head of the other family, who was called *dayeak*, "tutor, foster-father." The custom not only operated within Armenia; it also brought Armenian and Persian noble families together. It was an important cultural link between Iran and Armenia.[19]

By the time that Tovma composed his *History of the Artsruni*

S. Malkhasian (Tiflis, 1904; reprinted, Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1985), p. 101; trans. Robert W. Thomson, *The History of Lazar P'arpec'i* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991). Numerous lesser members of the family appear in both Eghishe's and Ghazar's accounts of the war and of its aftermath.

[17] Movses, I.23.

[18] Movses, II.7. Eagle standards are mentioned in the *Buzandaran*, IV.2, but with reference to the Mamikonian house.

[19] Sebeos, p. 112. For the institution of *dayeak,* see Garsoïan, *Epic Histories*, p. 521. The practice pertained in Georgia as well, the "tutor" being called *mamadzudze*. But to my knowledge there are no references to its being adopted as a link with Greek or Byzantine families.

House, that family had been gaining in prominence in Armenia and had been associated with many of the critical events of Armenian history: the conversion of the country to Christianity, the rebellion of 450-51 led by Vardan Mamikonian, and the wars between Byzantium and Iran described by Sebeos. They already had traditions concerning their origin and their name on which Tovma could draw for the greater glory of his patron.

It is worth noting that Tovma explicitly calls his book the *History* of a family. This was new in Armenian writing. For although there were histories that addressed a single issue, like Eghishe's *Armenian War*, or biographies of individuals, like Koriun's *Life of Mashtots*, the major historians had called their books histories "of the Armenians" (*Patmutiun Hayots*). In fact, these histories had a narrower focus than their titles might suggest. Eghishe and Ghazar, for example, were concerned with the Mamikonian family, whereas Movses Khorenatsi had his eye on the Bagratunis throughout. Nonetheless, Tovma is the first to concentrate exclusively on only one noble house.[20]

The Historian

Although Tovma is concerned with a single family, we do learn a great deal about the wider Armenian society of his time by examining his unwritten assumptions and the attitudes of his protagonists in their deeds and words. In what follows I shall address two themes:

1) In order to put his patrons in the best possible light, what aspects of past Artsruni history did Tovma stress?

2) What patterns of behavior emerge as laudable? That is, what virtues were regarded as appropriate for a prince in a leading noble house?

Since Tovma was not blazing a new trail, in that the writing of history was a long-established genre by his time, we should begin by seeing whether he had any explicit models that he claimed to be following. He makes it quite clear that his model is the "world-famous teacher and orator [*kertogh*], the most accurate author" Movses

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[20] Some later historians also restricted their focus. In the tenth century Movses Daskhuranttsi (also known as Kaghankatuatsi) wrote a *History of the Aghvank*, the Caucasian Albanians; and in the thirteenth century Stepanos Orbelian wrote a *History* of his native province, Siunik.

Khorenatsi.[21] Movses had set the standard against which Tovma wished to be compared. Two aspects of Khorenatsi's *History* are particularly relevant for Tovma. The first is the very broad sweep of the work, as Khorenatsi takes Armenian history right back to the most ancient times. Tovma also will begin with a description of the descendants of Noah, from whom all mankind has sprung, and of the ancient Assyrian kingdom. As noted already, Artsruni roots go that far back. The second major feature of Movses' *History* is that it is a disguised piece of propaganda for the Bagratuni family. Tovma makes his own focus on the Artsrunis more explicit. The parallels between the two histories are no coincidence, for at the beginning of the tenth century these two families were rivals for political power. The Bagratunis were certainly dominant in Greater Armenia, but Tovma is anxious to demonstrate that his patrons had no less grand a past. The genius of Movses is that he had set the rules. What Tovma tried to do was to beat Movses at his own game.

Noble Virtues

What then were the points a historian had to stress in order to put his patrons in the best possible light? The first was the importance of ancestry, that is, descent from notable persons of the remote past; then followed the prowess of one's ancestors in warfare and deeds of good administration. Since Armenia was now a Christian land, this emphasis on secular virtues had a parallel in the spiritual sphere, namely, the promptness of one's family to accept Christianity before others, and the piety of one's ancestors. How does Tovma deal with these points in his effort to outdo Movses Khorenatsi?

Both historians look to an Old Testament connection for the origin of their patron families, and both posit a foreign ancestor. Tovma looks to the Assyrians, but Movses had given the Bagratunis a Jewish origin.[22] Because the Old Israel was a forerunner of the Church, it was easy for Movses to make the Bagratunis the first Christian converts in Armenia, since their being Jewish had already led them away from idolatry.[23] In like fashion Tovma stresses the antiquity of the

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[21] Tovma, p. 58. Other references to Movses occur on pp. 6, 9, 24, 44, 75-76.

[22] Movses, I.22. This was later taken farther. By the early ninth century, the Bagratids were claiming descent from King David himself. See Toumanoff, *Studies*, p. 328.

[23] Movses, II.9.24 for their Jewish piety; II.33 for the first Bagratid to convert to Chris-

Artsrunis' Christian faith.

The prowess of ancestors was an important item in any patriotic history. Tovma often returns to this theme, but one episode stands out as being totally unknown to previous authors. According to Tovma, a certain Vahan Artsruni, who is not mentioned by Eghishe or Ghazar, rose to prominence at the time of the famous rebellion led by Vardan Mamikonian. When the Persian governor had been slain and the city of Dvin recovered by the Armenians, they installed the Catholicos there, and the Armenian nobles proceeded to build palaces for themselves. They entrusted the residence of Trdat the Great to Vahan Artsruni, since they planned to make him king over Armenia because he was a powerful man, shrewd and wise, humble, liberal and quick-witted. But the Armenian nobles became disunited—which is a common enough theme in many Armenian historians—they abandoned their plans, and went over to Vardan. Vahan accepted his secondary role and was martyred side by side with Vardan on the battlefield of Avarayr.[24]

Why was this not known to Eghishe? Well, in fact it was, according to Tovma. He explains that the impious Syrian bishop Barsauma was attempting to spread his Nestorian heresy in southern Armenia and had borrowed the book of Armenian history which Eghishe had composed. Eghishe was then residing in the province of Mokk, south of Lake Van. But when the prince of the Artsrunis ordered Barsauma to leave his lands, the latter, in a fit of spite, expunged from this *History* all details concerning the house of the Artsrunis, including Vahan's martyrdom. Eghishe died before the book was returned to Mokk, and later readers supposed that the doctored version was in fact the original.[25]

Military valor, then, in addition to ancestry was an important aspect of nobility. Furthermore, recognition of skill in warfare could come from one's opponents. Just as in Eghishe the shah is said to have high regard for the Armenian soldiers who had to serve in his army,[26] so

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tianity.

[24] Tovma, pp. 79-81.

[25] Tovma, pp. 80-81. For Barsauma, see Stephen Gero, *Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century* (in Louvain series Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Subsidia, 63, Peeters, 1981).

[26] Eghishe, p. 44, gives an interesting description of the formalities observed by the shah toward his subjects.

in Tovma the caliph says to the Artsruni nobles: "You are men of valour, and from your appearance it is obvious that there is much strength in you." The caliph compliments them as true sons of kings and says that he will disregard their resistance to his royal administrators and their refusal to pay taxes because of the affection and mercy he has for them.[27] Perhaps too much attention should not be given to such flattery. In this case, at least, it is but a sweetener to the demand that the Artsruni nobles accept Islam. Tovma laments that many did try to save their lives on this occasion—at the expense of their souls.

Skill in single combat was also important. Prince Ashot Artsruni, for example, is said to have performed many notable acts of valor in the view of drawn-up ranks. This was a common feature of warfare at the time, when champions from either side would engage in combat in sight of their respective armies. Tovma does not exaggerate quite so much as some Georgian authors, but the fame of the victorious champion was highly prized.[28]

Many of the battle scenes are fairly stereotyped. The same motifs and similes appear in Armenian authors from the *Buzandaran* onwards, and often the phrasing has parallels in the battle scenes of the books of Maccabees. As the Jewish heroes were assisted by spiritual apparitions, so also the heavenly hosts might come to the aid of the Armenians. On one occasion the Muslims were held at bay after battle had been joined, for a man in the likeness of light came and stood in the ranks. "In his right hand he had a sword, and in his left a censer full of incense. He was mounted on a white horse and fanned the smoke toward the enemy. As the smoke grew thicker, the Armenians took strength, and when it lessened they had a little respite."[29]

The expected duties of kings and princes went beyond valor on the battlefield. This same Ashot on a previous occasion wrote to the

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[27] Tovma, p. 155.

[28] Tovma, p. 107. For Georgian descriptions of single combat (for example, those of Vakhtang Gorgasali), see Robert W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 168-70, 192-93, 210-11.

[29] Tovma, p. 148; cf. the Introduction to Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, p. 46. For the influence of the Books of Maccabees on Armenian historians before Tovma, see Robert W. Thomson, "The Maccabees in Early Armenian Historiography," *Journal of Theological Studies* 26 (1975): 329-41, reprinted in his *Studies in Armenian Literature and Christianity* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Variorum series, 1994).

Muslim emir Yusuf indicating that he was prepared to come to terms and establish a peace treaty. Tovma puts the following aspirations in the letter: "It is the duty of kings who govern the world to watch over and care for the prosperity of the country, and soften the severity of painful demands for taxes, lest the productive capacity of the country be completely destroyed." Yusuf, on this occasion, passed through Vaspurakan "with a minimum of damage."[30]

Armenian Disunity

Ashot also had trouble dealing with his own princes, who on one occasion were making secret overtures to the Muslims behind his back. He upbraided them:

> If I seem to have wronged you, give now a response to my face and indicate expressly one by one each harmful act. But if I have cared for you tenderly like a father, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings for protection—is this the compensation you pay me? Did you not reflect on the benefits you have received from me? According to each one's age I honoured every one of you with appropriate care and love. The extensive goods among my treasures I gave up year by year to plunder [Tovma here refers to ruinous hospitality]. . . . So is this now the reward, that with treacherous plotting you plan to throw me and my family into the dragon's mouth, while you become the cause of carnage and captivity for the whole land?

When he realized that he could not win them over, Ashot resigned himself to his fate and surrendered to the caliph's general.[31]

Like Eghishe before him, Tovma frequently laments the disunity of the princes. He begins Book III:

> Although we were oppressed and tormented with various afflictions by the domination of the Muslim armies, yet these were few in number and for short periods of time. For the Armenian princes were still living in unison, harmony, and concord. But when discord began to insinuate itself, the grace of the divine power departed. Just as someone might cut into pieces all the limbs of a body until the form of the living man has disappeared—whereas, if one of the limbs is lost, it

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[30] Tovma, p. 117.

[31] Tovma, pp. 136-37.

> is an accidental deprivation but the whole person is not destroyed—in such manner was the unity of this country gradually destroyed as each individual plotted evil against his neighbour and his brother.[32]

Tovma then contrasts the fraternal unity of Ashot's three grandsons two generations later. "Demonstrating the extent of their fraternal deference, with incomparable courtesy each regarded the other two as superior to himself, reckoning the dignity of their princely rank to be equally shared. Merely for his precedence [that is, because he was the eldest] did they agree to give the title to Ashot. In this unopposed harmony they divided the land into three parts." And for a while this mutual confidence succeeded in holding off the Muslim forces. The three were later imprisoned, not by the Muslim emir, but by another ambitious Armenian prince.[33]

The individual ambition and gullibility of princes is well brought out when Tovma describes the way in which the young Hasan was lured into a plot to seize control of a castle in Vaspurakan. "Hasan fell for the bait, hoping for control of the castle and casting his eyes on the desire for ambition. He dreamed of gathering troops and cavalry, giving gifts to magnates and lords, and summoning everyone to support." The plot was successful, but peace between the parties was eventually made by the Catholicos. Our historian notes sarcastically: "By wise and judicious counsel, with sweet and gentle words, they persuaded the young Hasan [he was fifteen at the time], offering him the reverence due to his white hairs, the dignity of his princely station, and such-like."[34]

Religious Attitudes

In the realm of spiritual virtues two aspects are important: the early date of conversion and the notable acts of piety exhibited by Artsruni nobles. In this regard, too, Tovma follows the lead of Movses. The conversion of King Trdat and the work of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, as described by Agatangeghos, emphasize the connection between Armenia and the West. Not only was Gregory consecrated in Caesarea of Cappadocia, he and King Trdat had visited the emperor

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[32] Tovma, p. 122. Cf. Eghishe, pp. 90-91, for Armenian discord.
[33] Tovma, p. 232.
[34] Tovma, pp. 223-24.

Constantine in Rome.[35] But Armenians also recognized that their church owed much to influences from the south, from Christian Syria whose capital was Edessa (Armenian: Urha, modern Urfa). This is made very clear in Koriun's biography of Mashtots. Now there was an ancient local Edessene tradition that its King Abgar had been in correspondence with Jesus Christ, and that after the Resurrection the apostle Addai had come to Edessa and founded the church there.[36] This tradition, which had taken written form by the fourth century, was translated into Armenian and expanded: Addai, known as Thaddaeus in the Greek and Armenian versions, was now considered to have come to Armenia after founding the church in Edessa. In Armenia he was put to death by King Sanatruk.[37] So although the first church did not survive until the time of Gregory the Illuminator, Armenian patriarchs could be said to sit on the "throne of Thaddaeus."[38]

Movses Khorenatsi, however, had made Abgar of Edessa an Armenian king and identified his entourage in the traditional story as Armenian nobles.[39] Tovma does not challenge the basic idea but maintains that an Artsruni prince, Khuran, was the first Armenian believer in Christ baptized by Thaddaeus.[40] Thus, Artsruni claims to have been the first to convert are upheld.

Here it is worth noting that Tovma brings Artashes and his bride Satinik into the Christian era. Artashes is supposed to have built a palace for this Alan princess at Van. Nearby lived holy men, countrymen of Satinik's who had followed her to Armenia. These holy men rebuked Satinik for her continued attention to the vain cult of idols. But, according to Tovma, Satinik did not reject the worship of Astghik, because she expected her husband to lead the way and abandon idolatry

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[35] Agatangeghos, paragraphs 873-82, for the visit to Rome.

[36] For the Syriac version, see Alain Desreumaux, *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus* (Turnhout [Belgium]: Brepols, 1993), with bibliography. For the earliest Greek version of the story, see Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.13, Loeb edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 85-97.

[37] The Armenian version is attributed to "Labubna." For the Armenian text with a French translation, see Ghevond Alishan, *Labubniay divanagir dpri Edesioy tught Abgaru* [Letter of Abgar by Lububna, Scribe of Edessa] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1868). For Sanatruk, see the *Buzandaran*, III.1; further references in Garsoïan, *Epic Histories*, p. 411.

[38] *Buzandaran*, III.12.14; IV.3.

[39] Movses, II.24, for Abgar as Armenian; II.30, for his Armenian nobles.

[40] Tovma, p. 47. Khuran is mentioned by Movses, II.29, without any suggestion that he converted to Christianity.

first.[41]

The piety of the Artsruni nobles is stressed in various ways. In Agatangeghos the Artsruni prince was in sixteenth place in the escort accompanying Saint Gregory to Caesarea. This is easily explained, says Tovma: Tirots had been baptized by Saint Gregory and was of modest and humble character. Being a studious reader of the Holy Gospel, he did not push himself to superior rank among the Armenian nobles.[42]

The Artsruni princes were staunch upholders of Armenian orthodoxy. Tovma states that during the reign of Marcian, when the famous rebellion of 450-51 (Vardanants) occurred, the emperor had convened a council of bishops at Chalcedon. No bishops from Greater Armenia had attended this council, and Tovma is the first to offer a reason. He claims that in the troubles after the rebellion Prince Vasak Artsruni had gone to Byzantium, where he was received by Marcian with rank and honor. But the emperor put pressure on Vasak and other princes to accept the Council of Chalcedon. They replied: "When you convoked the council, why did you not think it necessary to summon anyone from Armenia with a view to the unity of faith?" This is the first reference to Armenian absence from the council as a reason for not accepting it.[43]

Loyalty to the Armenian faith was cemented by martyrdom on various occasions, or at least by imprisonment. In the ninth century the Artsruni Bishop Hovhannes and Prince Grigor were bound with chains and cast into an underground dungeon. They endured for three years before Prince Grigor succumbed to his torments. The bishop survived and was later released, with the title of confessor.[44] These and other heroes for the faith Tovma eulogizes in eloquent fashion.

One further—perhaps more realistic—comment about Artsruni piety. I refer to the fear of death. Prince Ashot and various others had apostatized at a time when their bishop had stood firm. But after Ashot was released from captivity in 858 he resolutely practiced the Christian religion, repenting for his denial of Christ. Six years later the time

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[41] Tovma, pp. 52-54.

[42] Tovma, p. 58; cf. Agatangeghos, paragraph 795. According to Tovma, therefore, Tirots was baptized before Gregory's journey, the purpose of which (that is, ordination) was to authorize Gregory to administer baptism!

[43] Tovma, pp. 82-83.

[44] Tovma, pp. 153-62; pp. 207-08 for the release of Hovhannes and his title of "confessor."

for Ashot's departure from this world arrived, and Tovma comments as follows: "He was plunged into unfathomable remorse and regret; with flowing tears he made the confession of faith, hoping in the mercy of Christ. I do not despise or mock his remorse and repentance. But it is unclear whether they were effective, for with difficulty are scars cleaned away by the exercise of words. However, in the house of Christ's Father there are many mansions. Perhaps they [the apostates] will remain free of torments, although they will not enjoy the wedding feast with the bridegroom."[45]

Ashot's terror of hell contrasts well with the attitude of his grandson, also called Ashot, the elder brother of the famous Gagik. This Ashot died of abdominal sickness at the age of twenty-nine. Tovma comments: "Although Ashot ended the measure of his life prematurely, he acquired a surplus by exchanging the certain and unfailing dissolution of this existence for spiritual, eternal, and undying life, repenting and regretting his youthful inclination to easy and quickly-accomplished evil deeds." Here follows a lengthy description of his pious death.[46]

Worldly Pleasures

But life was not an uninterrupted series of battles, plots, and sudden death. Tovma paints a lively picture of more enjoyable pastimes, which included the building of palaces and the pleasures of the hunt. Just as in ancient times Artashes had delighted Satinik at Van with buildings and gardens, so the later Artsruni princes took advantage of sites along the shore of the lake, or on the island of Aghtamar. Tovma naturally elaborates at some length on the building activity of Gagik, son of his original patron. At Van he was responsible for several new churches; and on the great rock he added banqueting halls, improving on what had earlier been constructed by his father. At Mount Varag he provided a splendid covering for the relic of the Holy Cross, and he cut a water channel from that mountain down to Van. At some distance to the northeast, from where one could look down on the river Araxes and see Mount Masis, he built a pleasure palace. Here was an ideal spot for the hunt, with herds of deer, boar, lions, and onagers.

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[45] Tovma, pp. 137-39 for Ashot's imprisonment; p. 209 for his return; pp. 216-17 for his repentance.

[46] Tovma, pp. 249-51.

In addition to various fortresses in his domains, Gagik founded monasteries endowed with income specifically set aside from certain villages.[47] The most famous of all constructions were those on the island of Aghtamar, described by the Continuator to the History of Thomas. But the church and palace need no further comment here, as they have been studied intensively elsewhere.[48]

I would like to end this survey on a different note. Only once in this *History* are intellectual virtues mentioned. According to the Continuator to Tovma, the emir of Azarbayjan, Yusuf, had heard of the valiant deeds and wise intelligence of Gagik and desired to meet him. Gagik accepted the invitation, and the emir was not disappointed in the virtues of his guest:

> When the tyrant beheld his glorious youthful figure and the wondrous beauty of his lovely face, he was amazed. On questioning him, he received replies of vast erudition that were at the same time profound and enigmatic. . . . Since the Muslim ruler Yusuf was a man of powerful mind, but the most disagreeable among all the sons of men, he therefore submitted the splendid and blessed prince to an arduous investigation. Raising his eyes, he observed him and measured his deportment on sitting and rising. In every aspect of royalty he found him refined and endowed with charming modesty, like gold tested in many furnaces. . . . He questioned him on the dynasties and thrones of kings and pre-eminent families, and the borders of each one's lands, beginning with the Medes and Persians, Judaea and Jerusalem, the Assyrians and Egyptians, the Greeks and Indians, all Armenia as far as the Gates of the Alans and of the Caspians—which [information] is very pertinent for kings. He found him versed in everything and exceedingly learned. He interrogated the undefeated champion on the battles he had fought. . . . He found him like a high mountain, immovable by the blasts and shouts of war. In all this and even more did the Muslim ruler Yusuf observe the grace of God manifested in the valiant and divine prince Gagik, and he greatly rejoiced at his visit to him.[49]

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[47] Tovma, pp. 252-57.

[48] Tovma [Continuator], pp. 293-99. For the church, see Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Aght'amar: Church of the Holy Cross* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Stepan Mnatsakanian, *Aghtamar,* English trans. K.H. Maksoudian ([Los Angeles]: Editions Erebouni, 1986); John G. Davies, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture: The Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar* (London: Pindar Press, 1995).

[49] Tovma [Continuator], pp. 283-84.

It is not necessary to quote more. Tovma reflects more than most Armenian historians the actual interests of the noble family he eulogizes. He is not concerned with learned matters, though a smattering of geography is useful and one certainly should know the names of the eminent dynasties of the past. Prowess in warfare is the prime requisite of the head of a noble family. He is also expected to act with largesse and impoverish himself through hospitality. He has to beware of the plots of his fellow princes and will not be above compromising his faith by apostasy. To redeem such faults, he will endow churches and monasteries and provide splendid ornaments for holy relics. He will expect his monks to pray for his soul, being rather terrified of death himself, while he spends his own leisure in hunting and feasting. What the historian does not explain is how, in such a milieu, he gained his own knowledge of books and previous Armenian writers.

In conclusion, I would stress two points. First, this *History* is significant as the first work to use the *History* of Movses Khorenatsi, though Tovma does attempt to improve on Movses in favor of his own Artsruni house. Second, since the Artsrunis never supplanted the Bagratunis, this *History* by Tovma had little impact outside Vaspurakan. Nonetheless, it remains the prime source for Artsruni traditions and an eloquent witness of noble life in Armenia before the Turkish invasions.

❀ 5 ❀

Relations Between the Kingdoms of Vaspurakan and Ani

S. Peter Cowe

The kingdom founded by the aristocratic house of Bagratuni lasted for little more than a century and a half from its inception in 884/85 to its dissolution in 1045, and the Artsruni kingdom of Vaspurakan maintained its existence for only 113 years, beginning later and concluding earlier, yet their historical and cultural significance far outweighs their relatively brief duration.[1] The broader period surrounding their inception and demise from the eighth to the eleventh century is one of enormous transformation within the whole region of Anatolia and Caucasia, which ushered in a totally new pattern of demography with major consequences for the following era. During all this time Armenia was far from being a provincial backwater but rather represented a crucial central area where the balance of power was continually shifting, first facilitating a measure of independence for the three principal Armenian aristocratic houses, then bringing them under foreign control.[2]

One might well argue on the basis of the alleged origins of the Bagratunis and Artsrunis (the first being Jewish according to the historian Movses Khorenatsi and from the ruling house of David in the account of Hovhannes Catholicos; the other being from the Assyrian royal dynasty) that it was inevitable their relations should be marked by a good deal of strife and contention.[3] Indeed, since the antiquity

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[1] The heyday of the Bagratuni kingdom coincided with the transfer of its capital to Ani in 961. Vaspurakan was raised to royal status by Gagik I Artsruni in 908 and lost its independence through incorporation into the Byzantine Empire in 1021 under Emperor Basil II.

[2] The third noble house of Armenia at this time was that of Siunik, which attained to royal prerogative in 963 and endured until about 1091.

[3] On the Bagratunis' alleged Jewish origins, see Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*

of these ascriptions is uncertain, one might speculate as to the extent to which the strained relations among the houses proved a factor in the acceptance of the legends. Certainly the external policy of the Artsrunis in the late ninth and early tenth century mirrored that of the fourth century, in which rivalry with the Arshakunis (Arsacids) impelled them to pursue a pro-Persian orientation. Under the leader Meruzhan Artsruni they had joined the rebellion against King Arshak II in the hope of improving their political standing in Armenia as a result of Sasanian intervention.[4] Moreover, considered geographically, these Bagratuni-Artsruni tensions were emblematic of more deep-seated differences between the north and south of the country. The north was traditionally more under Greek influence and pursuing closer contacts with Byzantium, while the south was more subject to Syriac influence and links with Iran.[5] Consequently, the north was associated with the spread of Christianity from Cappadocia via Saint Gregory the Illuminator, whereas the south seems to have identified with the apostolate of Saint Thaddeus.[6] Indeed, it is noteworthy that Eusebius in Book VI of his *Ecclesiastical History* mentions the existence of an Armenian bishop already in the mid-third century as the recipient of a work on repentance. The hierarch is called "Merouzannes" (i.e., Meruzhan), whose name was fairly common in the Artsruni family.[7]

[History of the Armenians], ed. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913), pp. 68-69; *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 111; [Hovhannes Catholicos], *Hovhannu katoghikosi Draskhanakertetsvoy Patmutiun Hayots* [Catholicos Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi's History of the Armenians] (Tiflis: N. Aghaniants, 1912), p. 25; and *Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, History of the Armenians*, trans. Krikor H. Maksou- dian (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), p. 73. On the origins of the Artsrunis, see Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, p. 70, and Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, p. 112.

[4] See Ps. Pavstos, *Pavstosi Buzandatsvoy Patmutiun Hayots* [Pavstos Buzandatsi's History of the Armenians] (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1883), pp. 149-52, and idem., *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk')*, trans. Nina G. Garsoïan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 178-80, 391-92.

[5] See Peter Cowe, "The Impact of Time and Place on Grigor Narekatsi's Theology, Spirituality and Poetics," *Le Muséon* 108 (1995): 85-102, esp. 96.

[6] At first the two traditions of Armenia's Christianization were maintained separately or merely juxtaposed. See Ps. Pavstos, *Patmutiun Hayots*, pp. 26, 35, 60; *Epic Histories*, pp. 82, 89, 110. Subsequently, they were gradually interwoven by locating Saint Gregory's conception at Saint Thaddeus' grave in Artaz. See further Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, pp. 142-60, 211-12; Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, pp. 163-77, 220-21.

[7] See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. James E.L.

Similarly, in the sixth century the one nature Christology developed by Cyril of Alexandria became standard in the north, while Nestorian propaganda disseminated by Barsauma, the Syrian metropolitan of Nisibis, seems to have had quite a success in the southern provinces of Armenia in spreading a dyophysite creed, stressing the disjunction between Christ's two natures (human and divine).[8] This elicited the famous letter of reproach from Catholicos Nerses Bagrevandatsi demanding that the bishops of those sees appear, on pain of excommunication, at the second synod of Dvin in 555-56 to condemn Nestorian doctrine and practice.[9] The monophysite/dyophysite controversy also re-emerged in the tenth century and further clouded relations between the Bagratunis and Artsrunis.[10]

Many of the scions of both families left the Armenian highlands after the dismemberment of their kingdoms to accept estates in the environs of Sebastia, though others stayed on in the area and continued to be players in local politics. The Bagratid house in Iberia maintained unbroken rule until the kingdom was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1801. Meanwhile, at the beginning of the twelfth century, the Sefedinian branch of the Artsrunis established the separate Catholicosate of Aghtamar which was preserved in their line until the mid-sixteenth century, while the Catholicosate itself survived into the twentieth century.

Historical Review

The Bagratuni and Artsruni houses gained in importance during the Arab period by maintaining a more cautious and calculating ad hoc policy. This contrasted with the Mamikonians, who remained true to their pro-Byzantine leanings that had characterized their diplomacy since the fourth century. They were impelled to participate in a series

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Oulton, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 129.

[8] See Peter Cowe, "Eghishe's 'Armenian War' as a Metaphor for the Spiritual Life," in *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina G. Garsoïan*, ed. Jean-Pierre Mahé and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 341-59, esp. pp. 354-56 and the sources cited there.

[9] See *Girk Tghtots* [Book of Letters] (Tiflis: Rotiniants Press, 1901), pp. 70-71, and 2d edition, ed. Archbishop Norayr Pogharian (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1994), pp. 196-98.

[10] See Khosrov Andzevatsi, *Xosrov Anjewac'i: Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Peter Cowe (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1991), pp. 5-18.

of revolts against Iranian and Arab domination, reprisals for which destroyed them as a political force.[11] Nevertheless, the track record of the two houses under consideration was by no means unblemished. In the struggle between the Arab Umayyads and the Abbasids of more Iranian origin for control of the caliphate, the Bagratunis had supported the losing faction. Similarly, the revolt of 774, in which both the Bagratunis and Artsrunis participated, was thoroughly defeated at Bagrevand in the following year. In order to counter such tendencies in the future, Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809) implemented a stratagem never before employed by Armenia's suzerains. He encouraged the settlement of Arab tribes in the center and south of the country to undermine centrifugal operations on the part of the Armenian *nakharars* or high nobility as well as to provide a first line of defense against Byzantium.[12] Thus, Arab possession of the capital Dvin separated the important province of Siunik and Artsakh from Bagratid Shirak and Arsharunik. Moreover, the Kaysites, who settled at Manazkert after Bugha's campaign in the mid-ninth century, isolated Taron from the whole of Armenia and separated Vaspurakan from Shirak and Arsharunik. In addition, the Shaybani became emirs of Diyarbakr (Diarbekir), the Zurarids established themselves in Arzn and Bitlis, while the Uthmanids occupied Berkri on the north of Lake Van.[13]

In the eighth and particularly the ninth century, the central power of the caliphate started to wane and the Arab tribes, secure in their territorial holdings, began to cultivate more independent policies. Consequently, they would sometimes make common cause with the Armenian nakharars against the center. This continued until the creation of an Armenian kingdom, after which they naturally fought against Armenian suzerainty imposed on them by the monarch. An excellent example of these ties is afforded by Musa ibn Zurara, lord of Arzn,

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[11] For the typical approach of Sparapet Mushegh, see Ps. Pavstos, *Patmutiun Hayots,* pp. 197-98; *Epic Histories*, pp. 215, 326n3. The valor of Vardan and his nephew Vahan against Sasanian religious pressure in the second half of the fifth century is well known, as is also that of Vardan III in the revolt he led in 572. Subsequent scions of the house were active in the resistance movements of 654, 681-82, 748, and especially the revolt of 771-72 initially led by Artavazd Mamikonian and later by his kinsman Mushegh.

[12] Aram Ter-Ghewondian, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. Nina G. Garsoïan (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976), p. 254.

[13] For the significance of the new constellation of power in the region, consult the map in "The Byzantine Empire," *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4, pt. 1, Joan M. Hussey, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), insert between pp. 608-09.

who married a sister of Bagarat Bagratuni. His son Abul Maghra thereafter married into the Artsruni house and became so thoroughly Armenianized that he privately accepted Christianity and would join his in-laws in their campaigns.[14]

Already in the 830s and 840s Armenia was de facto in the hands of the Bagratunis, the Artsrunis, and the Siunis. Ashot Msaker (790-826) had expanded Bagratid domains at the expense of the weakening Mamikonians and Kamsarakans. Meanwhile, in Vaspurakan the Artsrunis were developing their power base. They took control of Rshtunik with its centers at Van and Vostan and subordinated the nakharar houses of Andzevatsi, Amatuni, Akiatsi, and Trpatuni.[15] They overreached themselves, however, in the rebellion of 850-51 against taxes and harsh treatment. The new *ostikan* to Armenia was denied entry. Bagarat Bagratuni sent an embassy with the tax revenues directly to the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-61) in Samarra. Yet, the Armenian desire to maintain local autonomy was regarded as rebellion. The ostikan's forces attacked Armenia, but they were worsted by Bagarat in alliance with the Artsrunis. Thereupon the caliph dispatched a new army. However, the Artsrunis sued for peace, offering gifts by the mother of the nakharar Ashot, Lady Hripsime, so that Bagarat had to continue the struggle on his own. The Arab army under the Turkish general Bugha meanwhile devastated Armenia, Georgia, and Arran. By 853 the commander had rounded up all the major nakharars and conveyed them to the capital. All except Smbat yielded and agreed to apostatize to win safety. Smbat was held at Samarra until his death in 862.[16]

This was the last attempt by the caliphate at direct control of Armenia and is reflected in the epic *Sasna Tsrer* (Daredevils of Sasun). The Armenian leader during the first Arab expedition, Theodorus Rshtuni, appears in the guise of Uncle Toros, but the primary stratum of the epic treats events of the ninth century in Sasun, Taron, and southern Armenia in general. The revolt precipitated by Bagarat Bagratuni's imprisonment and headed by his son David (Sasuntsi Davit of the epic) and his nephew Hovhannes (becoming Dzenov Ohan) forms the epic's central nucleus. Meanwhile, Bugha, the general who

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[14] Ter-Ghewondian, *Arab Emirates,* p. 48.

[15] Ibid., p. 56.

[16] For the importance of the theme of martyrdom in Armenian culture, see Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i*, pp. 30-31.

quelled Armenian resistance, survives in the epic as Batmana Bugha, Msra Melik's champion. Significantly, it is Gagik Artsruni whom the epic enshrines as King of Armenia.[17]

At the time that al-Mutawakkil was killed by his Turkish troops in 861, Smbat Bagratuni's son Ashot was putting pressure on the Arab emirs who were expanding to the detriment of the nakharars. The Kaysites had taken Akhlat and probably Artske from Bagratid Taron, while the Shaybani won possession of Bitlis from the Zakarids and expanded their lands to Datvan (Tatvan) on Lake Van.[18] In 862 the Caliph al-Musta'in (862-66) saw the Bagratids as a counterweight to the power of the Arab emirates and granted Ashot the title "Prince of Princes." It was just a matter of time until in 884/85 Caliph al-Mutamid (870-92) sent him a royal crown, quickly emulated by Byzantine Emperor Basil I (867-86).

The Artsrunis, however, were somewhat restive, viewing the success of their rivals, and made their move under Ashot Bagratuni's son, Smbat I (890-914). Ashot Artsruni attacked the Uthmanid fortress of Amiuk, but, unable to take it, contented himself with Varag, which was of similar strategic importance. The Artsrunis were not the only ones to be suspicious at this new turn of events. Muhammad, the Sajid ruler of Atrpatakan, attacked Armenia and took Dvin and Nakhjawan (Nakhichevan), capturing the Catholicos. Although Smbat made a peace agreement, Muhammad initiated a second invasion in which he took the royal treasury and Smbat's wife, as well as his eldest son Ashot, as hostage.[19] Moreover, Ashot had to deliver his niece as Muhammad's bride and become a tributary of Muhammad's son, the governor of Dvin. Then Muhammad directed his attention toward the Artsrunis and brought them also into subjection. Thus when Smbat alienated the Artsrunis by bestowing Nakhjawan to Siunik, Muhammad's son Yusuf took advantage of the situation to award Gagik Artsruni a crown in 908. The following year Muslim and Artsruni contingents invaded Smbat's estates and created mayhem. Smbat appealed for assistance from Byzantium and the caliph, but to no avail. He had no alternative but to surrender and face a horrible death by torture and crucifixion.[20]

On Smbat's death Yusuf sponsored the *sparapet* (military com-

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[17] Ter-Ghewondian, *Arab Emirates*, p. 150.
[18] Ibid., p. 55.
[19] Ibid., p. 64.
[20] Ibid., p. 67.

mander) Ashot, son of Shapuh Bagratuni, as pretender to the Armenian throne and installed him as governor of Dvin. However, Smbat's son Ashot Erkat gained Byzantine support and was crowned in 914. He brought the Artsrunis to his side and defeated the Arabs in the following year with a Byzantine army. Subsequently, Yusuf rebelled against the caliph and suffered arrest but was later released from jail and launched new attacks on Siunik and Vaspurakan until his death in 929.[21]

At this time Vaspurakan under Gagik Artsruni was the most powerful unit in Greater Armenia, so much so that Gagik, who had pretensions to the Bagratid throne, was addressed as Prince of Princes along with his Bagratid counterpart in correspondence from Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the Byzantine emperor.[22] Gagik had divided the lands of the Uthmanids of Berkri with the Kaysites and later seized the Zurarid village of Kotom in Aghdznik to provide suitable stone for his construction projects on Aghtamar, which he made his capital along with Van.[23] He gained further legitimacy from influencing the election of a series of catholicoses, who resided at Aghtamar during the years 927-49 while the Holy See at Dvin remained out of bounds. Moreover, Gagik profited from the occasion to secure Aghtamar as an autonomous diocese, with the king's nephew Eghishe as the first archbishop.

Meanwhile, King Ashot Bagratuni's brother, Abas I, succeeded to the throne in 929. He was responsible for moving the Bagratuni capital from the strongholds of Bagaran and Erazgavors to the city of Kars. After Gagik Artsruni's death in 943, he became undisputed master of Armenia. It seems that his son Ashot III (953-77) wanted to return to Dvin but failed to take it early in his reign. In 961 he established his capital at Ani near Argina, where the Catholicos had taken up residence.[24] Subsequently, the Kurdish Shaddadids were driven from Dvin and found refuge in Vaspurakan, which had close ties with districts of Mesopotamia where there were significant Kurdish populations. However, during the reign of Smbat II (977-90) the city reverted to Muslim possession.

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[21] Ibid., pp. 73-77.

[22] Ibid., pp. 85, 167n78.

[23] Tovma Artsruni, *Tovma Artsruni ev Ananun: Patmutyun Artsrunyats tan* [Tovma Artsruni and an Anonymous Continuator: History of the Artsruni House], ed. Vardan M. Vardanyan (Erevan: Erevan State University, 1985), p. 460.

[24] Ter-Ghewondian, *Arab Emirates*, p. 95.

Ashot III is responsible for further weakening the state by bestowing Kars on his brother Mushegh in 962 with the title of king and granting Lori to his son Gurgen in 982. Moreover, after Gagik I's firm reign (990-1020) rapid decline set in as a result of rivalry between his sons Hovhannes-Smbat and Ashot IV, leading to the partition of the kingdom. Likewise, in Vaspurakan, on Abusahl-Hamazasp's death, the Artsruni kingdom was divided among his three sons, Ashot-Sahak, Gurgen-Khachik, and Senekerim-Hovhannes. Meanwhile, Byzantium revised the policy of making alliances with the Armenians to secure its borders with the caliphate, replacing this approach by direct territorial annexation, beginning with Taron in 968. Whereas the campaign under Emperor John Tzimiskes in 974 was driven back by a concerted Armenian effort, now that Basil II was intent on extending the border to the east, that unity was undermined. Childless and oppressed by Turkish attacks, Senekerim-Hovhannes took the unprecedented step of bequeathing his kingdom to Basil in 1021. Interestingly, the arrangement seems to have provoked opposition within the Artsruni House itself, as the Byzantines met with local resistance especially at the fortress of Amiuk, which was under Artsruni control. The same course was adopted in 1042 by the Bagratuni King Hovhannes-Smbat of Ani, yet here too the family was not prepared to acquiesce gracefully. Gagik II held on to the territory for three years until compelled to abdicate.

Lacking leaders of Basil's caliber and the benefit of an Armenian buffer zone, however, Byzantium was unable to defend its new-won lands for long. Ani fell to the Seljuk Turks in 1064, followed by Kars in the next year. These formed a prelude to the decisive defeat the Byzantines suffered in 1071 at Manzikert, which recast the ethnic and socio-political structure of the region.[25]

Royal Symbolism and Its Propaganda Value

Turning from the historical review of the achievements of the Bagratuni and Artsruni kings, it would be of interest to consider the particular trappings of royalty with which they chose to surround themselves. Certainly, the two extant recensions of the Bagratid coronation liturgy

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[25] For the ramifications of this crushing defeat, see George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey, rev. ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), pp. 344-46.

indicate direct borrowing from developed Byzantine practice.[26] However, with regard to the cultivation of a particular image through visual representation, Helen Evans observes a major disparity from the practice of other dynasties on the borders of the Byzantine world, including the later Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. Whereas the Cilician monarchs copy imperial dress and pose in minute detail, Armenians in the period under discussion employ the traditional Byzantine donor image but rather than model the attire worn after Constantinopolitan practice, follow other contemporary cultures, in this case Arab.[27]

Her point is well illustrated by Gagik Artsruni's sculpture on the west front of the Church of the Holy Cross at Aghtamar, regarded as the first figure in Armenian art of a donor holding a church.[28] There, he has been interpreted as wearing the sumptuous crown and robe which Yusuf, Emir of Atrpatakan, had conferred on him.[29] This is also paralleled by the dress of some of his relatives depicted there. Moreover, the sculpture of Gagik I Bagratuni of Ani and the princes at Haghbat underline this trait by the presence of a large eastern turban.[30] Additionally, the figure on the south facade of the church at Aghtamar, which has tentatively been identified as Gagik Artsruni, employs the cross-legged pose characteristic of Sasanian representations of royalty and accepted in the canons of Islamic secular art.[31] This is also paralleled by the family portrait of King Gagik-Abas of Kars from the mid-eleventh century.[32] Hovsep Orbeli also argues from the description of Gagik's palace at Aghtamar that its structure and wall paintings were influenced by prototypes from the Arab world.[33] These observations well accord with Vaspurakan's geographical location and

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[26] For a brief treatment of the subject, see Peter Cowe, "The Inauguration of the Cilician Coronation Rite and Royal Ideology," *Armenian Review* 45 (1992): 49-59, esp. 50, 57n4.

[27] Helen Evans, "Kings and Power Bases: Sources for Royal Portraits in Armenian Cilicia," in Mahé and Thomson, eds., *From Byzantium to Iran,* pp. 485-507, esp. p. 496.

[28] Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 90. For a reproduction of the scene, see Stepan Mnatsakanian, *Aghtamar,* English trans. K.H. Maksoudian ([Los Angeles]: Editions Erebouni, 1986), ill. 8.

[29] Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art*, p. 90.

[30] Evans, "Kings and Power Bases," pp. 485-507, esp. p. 487.

[31] Thomas F. Mathews and Annie-Christine Daskalis, "The Portrait of Princess Marem of Kars, Jerusalem 2556, fol. 135b," in Mahé and Thomson, eds., *From Byzantium to Iran,* pp. 475-84, esp. p. 477.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Mnatsakanian, *Aghtamar*, p. 9.

the range of contacts in which it was engaged with the surrounding emirates.

Certainly, Gagik Artsruni's reign was marked by major building projects at Vostan, Van, and Aghtamar about which we are better informed through Tovma Artsruni's continuator than about any other historical Armenian monuments.[34] In each case Gagik strengthened the defenses, improved the irrigation, and beautified the streets with gardens and pools. Nevertheless, excavation would be required to gain a more accurate overview of the layout. The location of the citadel on the southeast extremity of Aghtamar is comparable to the setting of Ani, in that in both cases the area is a triangular projection, two sides of which are protected by water, so that only the third required fortification.[35] We are told that Gagik also supplied the complex with a harbor, which may have been submerged by a rise in the water level.[36]

Gagik's Church of the Holy Cross at Aghtamar

The palatine church, designed by the court architect Manvel, which is all that remains of these structures, was clearly intended to amaze visitors by its unique sculptures affording a vision of Gagik's piety as well as his economic and cultural prowess. The tale of his shipping the stone from the captured village of Kotom to the island is already a bold geste.[37] Moreover, returning to his portrayal on the west front, we stand in awe of his figure which upstages Christ, to whom he is presenting the model church, both in terms of stature and of richness of adornment, complete with the nimbus which he is the first Armenian king to bear.[38] As Hovsep Orbeli has noted, the figures would have been all the more striking for their bright paintwork, vestiges of which were still visible at the turn of the twentieth century.[39] On the south was the staircase mounting to the royal gallery and the elaborately

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[34] Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutyun Artsrunyats tan*, pp. 450-64.

[35] Mnatsakanian, *Aghtamar*, pp. 6-7. For a convenient schema of the setting and layout of Ani, consult Tadevos Kh. Hakobyan, *Anii patmutyun* [History of Ani], vol. 1 (Erevan: Erevan State University, 1980), insert between pp. 368-69.

[36] Mnatsakanian, *Aghtamar*, p. 8.

[37] Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutyun Artsrunyats tan*, p. 238.

[38] Mnatsakanian, *Aghtamar*, p. 17.

[39] Ibid., p. 31.

carved balustrade which framed it on the inside.[40] The significance of some of the other figures is self-evident, such as the three warrior saints, Theodore, Sergius, and George, who demonstrate the Artsruni family's readiness to defend the faith, as paralleled by the match of David and Goliath and Samson holding a Philistine by the hair.[41] The latter form may be of particular significance, bearing in mind the development in usage of the term *aylazgi* (foreign). Applied to the Philistines in the Armenian Bible on the basis of the Greek lexeme *allophyloi* (foreigners), in later times it was often employed to denote Muslims. This is further heightened by the case of Gagik's eighth-century forebears Hamazasp and Sahak, who were prepared to offer their lives in the service of their beliefs, as paralleled by the sacrifice of Isaac on the south wall.[42]

Granted that the Church of the Holy Cross celebrates Gagik's elevation to the status of kingship, one is struck by the number of royal figures included in the sculptures. Apart from Christ and the Theotokos (Mother of God), there are Old Testament examples of Saul, David, and Solomon, as well as the King of Nineveh from the Jonah story. Moreover, the figures of Daniel and the Three Youths are associated with Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.[43] In view of the Artsruni claim to Assyrian descent, it is perhaps possible to regard the depictions of Jonah and Daniel not merely as general themes of divine deliverance, but more closely associated with the preaching of the word of God to the Artsruni's ancestors, the Assyrians and Babylonians.[44] That would match the Bagratid claim to Judaic lineage, which rooted the house in salvation history. If this is so, then the import of Jonah and Daniel would balance that of Saints Thaddeus and Bartholemew preaching Christianity to a later generation of Artsruni forebears.[45]

The Catholicosate of Aghtamar

The departure of Senekerim-Hovhannes to Sebastia in 1021 did not

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[40] For details, see ibid., p. 13, and for a conjectural reconstruction, p. 30.

[41] For a reproduction of those scenes, see ibid., ills, pp. 30, 32.

[42] For the Artsruni martyrs, see ibid., pp. 21-22, 23, and for Isaac, p. 18.

[43] Ibid., ill. p. 18.

[44] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[45] For the scene, see ibid., ill. 28, and for the underlying legend, see Tovma Artsruni, *Patmutyun Artsrunyats tan*, pp. 78-80.

bring the local Artsruni line to a close. A Sefedinian branch can be traced to Khedenik during the reign of Derenik-Ashot III (943/44-958/59). Subsequently, Abdelmseh Khedinian, a Byzantine curopalate controlling the castle of Amiuk and Aghtamar, emulated King Gagik's strategy of establishing the seat of the Catholicosate on his territory. In this way Catholicos Barsegh (1105-13) relocated to Vaspurakan and settled at Aghtamar. On Barsegh's demise, Abdelmseh and five local priests met in conclave and approved the consecration of the prince's son Davit Tornikian as Catholicos.[46] Davit did not receive recognition from the church at large, however, and hence became the first incumbent of the separate Catholicosate of Aghtamar. This created a schism that lasted until 1409, when a settlement was reached through the good offices of the illustrious vardapet Grigor Tatevatsi. During this time the Catholicosate passed down in the Sefedinian family from brother to brother, and uncle to nephew.[47] By the new agreement the catholicoses of Aghtamar recognized the superior jurisdiction of the Catholicos of Sis and regularized their supervision of the surrounding dioceses. To Aghtamar remained Van, Amiuk, and Mokk on the southeast of the lake, Kajberunik in the north, and Rshtunik and Khizan in the southwest.[48]

One of the catholicoses of Aghtamar, Zakaria III (1434-64) is worthy of particular mention, as he was a candidate for election to the newly restored Catholicosate at Echmiadzin. Passed over initially in favor of the monk Kirakos Virapetsi, on the latter's death he was confirmed in both catholicosates by the Kara Koyunlu ruler of the area, Jihanshah (1437-64). Finally, though, Zakaria's rivals prevailed over him and he met an early death by poisoning. He is further worthy of note in that his nephew Smbat, perhaps under his uncle's influence, was raised again to the rank of King of Vaspurakan in 1466 under the aegis of Jihanshah, briefly and nominally restoring the monarchy after four and a half centuries.

The context for this was the Turkmen's establishing various melikdoms in Siunik and Karabagh, presumably seeking a Christian state

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[46] Robert H. Hewsen, "Artsrunid House of Sefedinian: Survival of a Princely Dynasty in Ecclesiastical Guise," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 1 (1984): 123-38, esp. 124.

[47] For a reconstructed family tree, see ibid., insert between pp. 126-27.

[48] Ibid., p. 133n22.

to counterpoise the independent-minded Muslim polities in the region.[49] Although the experiment terminated on Jihanshah's death in the following year, there are several fifteenth-century colophons that celebrate the royal and catholicosal see of Aghtamar.[50] Catholicos Grigoris II (ca.1544-86) was the last definitely to derive from the Sefedinian house. However, the Catholicosate continued until the death of the last incumbent, Khachatur II Shiroyan, in 1895. Nineteenth-century data indicate its jurisdiction had been attenuated, being exercised only over Aghtamar and the areas of Gevash (Gavash), Shatakh, and Khizan. The last information concerning it dates to 1910 when the diocese of Aghtamar consisted of 130 parishes with 203 churches, and a population of about 70,000, while that of Khizan possessed 64 parishes, 69 churches, and some 25,000 souls.[51] The pillage of the island by the Kurds in 1915 precipitated the dissolution of the see in the following year, thus removing the final vestige of the tenth-century kingdoms.

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[49] Ibid., p. 128.

[50] For example, one might cite the formula of the scribe Hovhannes in a Gospel he copied at Khizan in 1486: "May the Lord God preserve unshaken the hierarchical and royal see of our nation. . . ." See Levon S. Khachikyan, ed., *XV dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the Fifteenth Century], pt. 3: *1481-1500* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1967), p. 88.

[51] Ibid., p. 133n22.

❀ 6 ❀

The Architectural Heritage of Vaspurakan and the Preservation of Memory Layers

Nairy Hampikian

Geographical and Geological Features of Vaspurakan

Lake Van, the heart of the region of Vaspurakan, is dominated by mountains on all sides. Enveloped from the north by the slopes of Mount Sipan, from the west by Nemrud Dagh, with its gigantic volcanic crater, and from the east by the limestone ridges of Mount Varag, Vaspurakan is a naturally fortified area. For this reason, it was chosen by the kings of Urartu as their central locus in the ninth century B.C. Since then the area has been actively inhabited. As the heartland of Urartu, an integral territory of the Ervanduni, Artashesian, Arshakuni, and Artsruni Armenian kingdoms, and the battlefield for Urartian, Assyrian, Armenian, Roman, Sasanid, Arab, Byzantine, Seljuk, Mongol, Turkmen, Persian, and Ottoman armies, among others, the Vaspurakan region bears layers of memory, just as it bears geological layers of relief, a result of the ever struggling tectonic plates, always moving, to rearrange the shape of this part of the earth.[1]

Ironically, the mountainous nature around the lake has been a reason for both attraction and destruction for the population living there. These beautiful mountains have always been moving in rage, causing devastating earthquakes. According to an old Armenian legend, a terrible dragon was dwelling inside Lake Van. When the dragon turned a thousand years old, the angels dragged the dragon out of the lake, up to the open sky toward the sun. The dragon was so old that it could not

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[1] For further information about the Vaspurakan region, see Jean-Michel Thierry, "Notes de géographie historique sur le Vaspurakan," *Revue des études byzantines* 34 (1976): 159-73.

resist and was burned to ashes. What is more interesting than the legend itself is the description of the situation afterwards. "During the following days the vicinity of the lake was covered with such a dense fog that people within steps of each other were unable to see one another in daytime. The sky was roaring. The earth was shaking and ashes poured down from the sky."[2] It is quite clear how the effect of the repeated natural disasters has found its way into this traditional legend, where the dragon can be interpreted as the personification of the earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Nevertheless, the geographical position of the region, as a crossroad between the Mediterranean, Black, and Caspian seas in ancient times and between the Middle East, Asia, and Europe in modern times, has played a major positive role in the flourishing of the economic and political life of the region. On the other hand, its centrality has frequently made it an area of massive migrations and invasions since antiquity. As a result Vaspurakan witnesses an architectural heritage reflecting the diversity of the different cultural groups that have traversed this soil.

Built Environment of Vaspurakan: Between "Regional Memory" and "Cultural Memories"

In view of the geological and geographical features of the region, the inhabitants had to develop a particular built environment, suitable to persist against three main dangers: the rocky nature of the terrain, the uncontrollable movements of the earth, and the ferocity of the invasions. Provocations posed by these natural and non-natural threats have limited the range of characteristics of the built environment and, within this limitation, certain methods were developed which by accumulative experimentation achieved great perfection.[3] Vaspurakan has forced its dwellers, in spite of the cultural differences among them, to develop a "regional memory." All that is man-made here shares the prime burden of "disciplining the environment." Automatically, the various

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[2] Aram Ghanalanyan, *Avandapatum* [History of Traditions] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1969), p. 82.

[3] Garbis Armen, *An Architecture of Survival* (Ottawa: Hairenik Association, 1992). In the articles consecrated to the typology, the author establishes a new way of categorizing Armenian church architecture, one where the structure is the primary criterion in the classification. With some reservations, I believe this is an approach worthy of further development.

architectural expressions of the region have adopted the proven principles of the previous group and added to these their own cultural requirements, thus creating specific "cultural memories" within an overarching "regional memory."

Facing the historical and geographical vicissitudes of Vaspurakan, I will concentrate on the selective topic of Armenian church architecture as an imposing cultural memory. Cultural memory refers to a group-specific variant in building practices within the broader regional memory. By selecting the church on Aghtamar island as an example, I wish to demonstrate the characteristics of the cultural memory of Armenian church architecture and then follow with a brief survey of Armenian churches in Vaspurakan in order to point out similarities and the variations within this memory. Finally, to show the aspect of continuity of the architectural tradition, the *gumbad* type of Seljuk constructions as another cultural variant will be considered.

The Church of Surb Khach on the Island of Aghtamar

Many different constructions commissioned by King Gagik Artsruni (908-43) once pervaded the entire island of Aghtamar. All that remains today is the tenth-century Surb Khach (Holy Cross) Church, a fourteenth-century chapel with what is called a portico, a *gavit* (a hall preceding the churches used for both civil and religious purposes) built in 1763, and the nineteenth-century bell tower.[4] This discussion will concentrate on the main church (Figs. 1-3, Ill. 1).

According to a tenth-century historian, when King Gagik Artsruni decided to build this church, "he gathered at the palace gate a number of artisans, nobles of all nationalities, and whoever was able to realize the king's wishes. The king ordered one of them to become the architect—the wise and genius—and to start building." This man, who was then only a sculptor, later became the architect Manvel, one of

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[4] For more information about Surb Khach, see Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 81-122; Stepan Mnatsakanyan, *Aghtamar* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1983); Hrayr Isabekyan, *Haykakan renosansi chartarapetutyune* [The Architecture of the Armenian Renaissance] (Erevan: Hayastan, 1990), pp. 77-91; Friedrich Karl Dörner, "Vom Bosphorus zum Ararat," *Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt*, vol. 7 (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1981), pp. 301-04; Sirarpie Der Nersessian and Herman Vahramian, *Aght'amar*, in the series *Documents of Armenian Architecture,* no. 8 (Milan: Editzione Ares, 1974).

the most famous medieval Armenian architects. He planned and oversaw the building of the Church of Surb Khach on Aghtamar between 915 and 921.[5]

The plan of Surb Khach comprises four semi-circular niches placed along the cardinal axes to create the cruciform effect both externally and internally. The western niche, which serves as the entrance, and the eastern one, which serves as the main apse, are both preceded by rectangular barrel vaulted spaces, creating an elongated effect to the main east-west axis. All this can be apprehended within the internal space. The central prayer area is separated from the niches by four framing arches. The four niches are joined in the four corners by smaller, nearly circular niches. These run upwards to the level of the springing of the arches framing the central area and are covered with small half domes. The main apse is flanked by two rectangular side sanctuaries that are accessed by the smaller corresponding niches. The hemispherical *gmbet* (dome) rises above a cylindrical drum which is supported by the pendentives rising above the small corner niches.

On the exterior, the four niches as well as the smaller corner niches are covered with tiled pitched roofs. The hemispherical internal gmbet is topped by a second one, in the form of a pointed cone, covered again with tiles. The circular drum is sixteen-sided externally. This massive stone construction is internally decorated by mural paintings, while the exterior is decorated with high reliefs on three registers, grouped according to the themes used from the Old Testament and the New Testament (Figs. 4-6). These paintings and reliefs have been analyzed thoroughly by scholars and will not be discussed here.

The "Cultural Memory" of Armenian Church Architecture in Surb Khach

Having seen this one church, those familiar with Armenian church architecture might observe that it could have been built anywhere in the Armenian realm. This is true, as the common constituent elements of the cultural memory of the art of building Armenian churches, once created, has never failed to be regenerated. Armenian master builders have flavored their creations, giving them what in art history is termed

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[5] Tovma Artsruni ev Ananun, *Patmutyun Artsrunyats tan* [History of the Artsruni House], ed. and trans. Vrezh M. Vardanyan (Erevan: Erevan State University, 1985), pp. 451-64.

as a "style." This style makes of all the churches a recognizable group, with substantial structural properties in common, and differs from types of structures that function similarly in other cultural groups. Yet, though sharing common structural characteristics, each Armenian church is also distinct. The tenth-century historian Tovma Artsruni, while stating that 100 Armenian churches existed in the vicinity of Vaspurakan, notes that "all differed in their details."

An examination of Surb Khach of Aghtamar will show the common characteristics of the cultural memory of Armenian church-building tradition that make them different compared with those of other cultural groups. The differences of each individual building, within the same cultural group, will be clarified by a quick survey of several Armenian churches in Vaspurakan.

Similarity of Armenian Churches

Taking Surb Khach as an example, there exist two key characteristics of Armenian churches: the similarity of the ground plan, and the pointed conical shape of the dome. Surb Khach belongs to the large family of central-plan buildings, which for centuries was a privileged form in the East, especially in Armenia. Charts depicting the typology of Armenian churches illustrate how ground plans sometimes can be identical.[6] For example, the seventh-century Church of Surb Echmiadzin near the village of Soradir or Zoradir in the region of Vaspurakan is considered the model for Surb Khach on Aghtamar island (Ills. 1-2). This repetition itself speaks of a "cultural memory." Studying similarities in the ground plans of Armenian churches in the early twentieth century, Toros Toramanian, the father of Armenian architectural history, has created a typology that has since been adopted, with slight variations, by a number of scholars. Without going into details, I would like only to mention that in one way or another all Armenian churches fit within these types, regardless of chronology. In other words, these types were used simultaneously from the fifth century onward. The compelling question is why is a ground plan repeated?

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[6] Toros Toramanian, *Niuter haykakan chartarapetutyan patmutyan* [Materials from the History of Armenian Architecture], 2 vols. (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1942-48); Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura Armena* (Rome: De Luca Editore, 1988), vols. 1-2; Patrick Donabedian and Jean-Michel Thierry, *Les Arts Arméniens* (Paris: Mazenod, 1987), also published as *Armenian Art* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989).

The answer, I would argue, relates directly to the rocky terrain and uncontrollable movement of the earth. Using stone, an abundant material in the region, Armenian master builders have adopted ground plan forms that resist the restrictions imposed by the region. Here I will only present three main points.

1. The smooth passage of the loads from the dome to the drum, to the pendentives, to the side niches, and finally to the eight pillars of the central prayer hall, is well satisfied by the constituents of the ground plan. Hence, the four-sided semi-circular niches serve as buttresses for a better distribution of the weight coming from above. If these were to be eliminated, the loads would have been distributed on only four pillars, instead of the eight created by the small corner niches.

2. The internal lateral continuous depression separating the entrance niche from the central hall is a spatial solution that serves both to illuminate the interior and to break down the concentrated loads at that junction, making it more stable.

3. The vertical external niches on the eastern façade, while creating an interesting light and shade effect on the façade, function to decrease the width of the masonry at the points where the wall bends internally to create the niche of the main apse. Extra masonry at this point would have simply overburdened the wall, making it more susceptible to earthquake damage, whereas the niche solution created on the exterior helps to distribute the load of the internal semi-spherical weight of the apse. In many late Armenian churches, these niches lost their construction function and were placed anywhere on the façade as a mere decorative device.

Considering these structural features of the ground plan, which I assume were arrived at through a series of repeated experimentations, one may surmise the reasons that Armenian master builders chose similar, tested plans. Their main enemy, the earthquake, forced them to adopt over and again ground plans that gave constructionally-proven safe spatial solutions. As far as earthquakes are concerned, the precautions taken against them went much beyond the ground plan characteristics. With the local stone, the walls were built in a three-fold manner, with a strong mortared middle core and facing stones on the two sides of this core. To exemplify this point, I have chosen the church of Surb Astvatsatsin of Arkelan, as its ruinous state allows us to examine the internal core of its stone walls. This method of build-

ing, borrowed from the repertoire of the Roman traditional stone masonry, was further reinforced by the addition of systematic lateral blocks, running through the whole width of the wall. This allowed the external facing blocks, the middle core, and the internal facing blocks of the same wall to work as one body against movements and, at the same time, be independent and flexible enough to resist earthquakes.

At Aghtamar, Surb Khach reveals yet another anti-seismic precaution. By examining both the interior and exterior masonry concurrently, it is significant to note that the second continuous scroll running on the four façades of the church corresponds with the continuous base of the springing of the internal arches. What this means is that this course of masonry serves as a belting, an anti-seismic device. The architect, himself a sculptor, must have experienced great pleasure in highlighting this zone by the scroll pattern. For him, this course of masonry functioned on more levels than simply messages and meanings of the religious scenes it transmitted to the general public.

The second characteristic of Armenian churches is the choice of the cone as the external shape of their domes. Double domes are not in themselves unusual or unknown, but the use of a conical, pointed gmbet to cover an interior hemispherical gmbet is innovative. This choice is sometimes interpreted as being reminiscent of the volcanic cone of Greater Ararat, but perhaps it can be explained even more as a structural precaution to protect the main load-bearing elements of the building underneath or for a better external visibility by gaining more height, as in fact all double domes do. In addition, it is noted that this same shape is used as the *veghar* (conical head cover) of Armenian monks. Accordingly, it is not implausible to view this choice as a formal means selected deliberately by Armenian architects, as opposed to the flat domes of the Byzantine churches, and one that is highly distinguishable on the landscape. And finally, preliminary research indicates the possibility that the use of double domes was linked with another "functional memory." During restoration work on a tenth-century church in Eastern Armenia, large pottery pots were found placed in systematic rows, in the empty cavity between the two gmbets, with their mouths directed toward the center of the main prayer hall, as a device adding better acoustics. Whether the acoustic use of the double dome is a structural feature of all Armenian churches awaits further research.

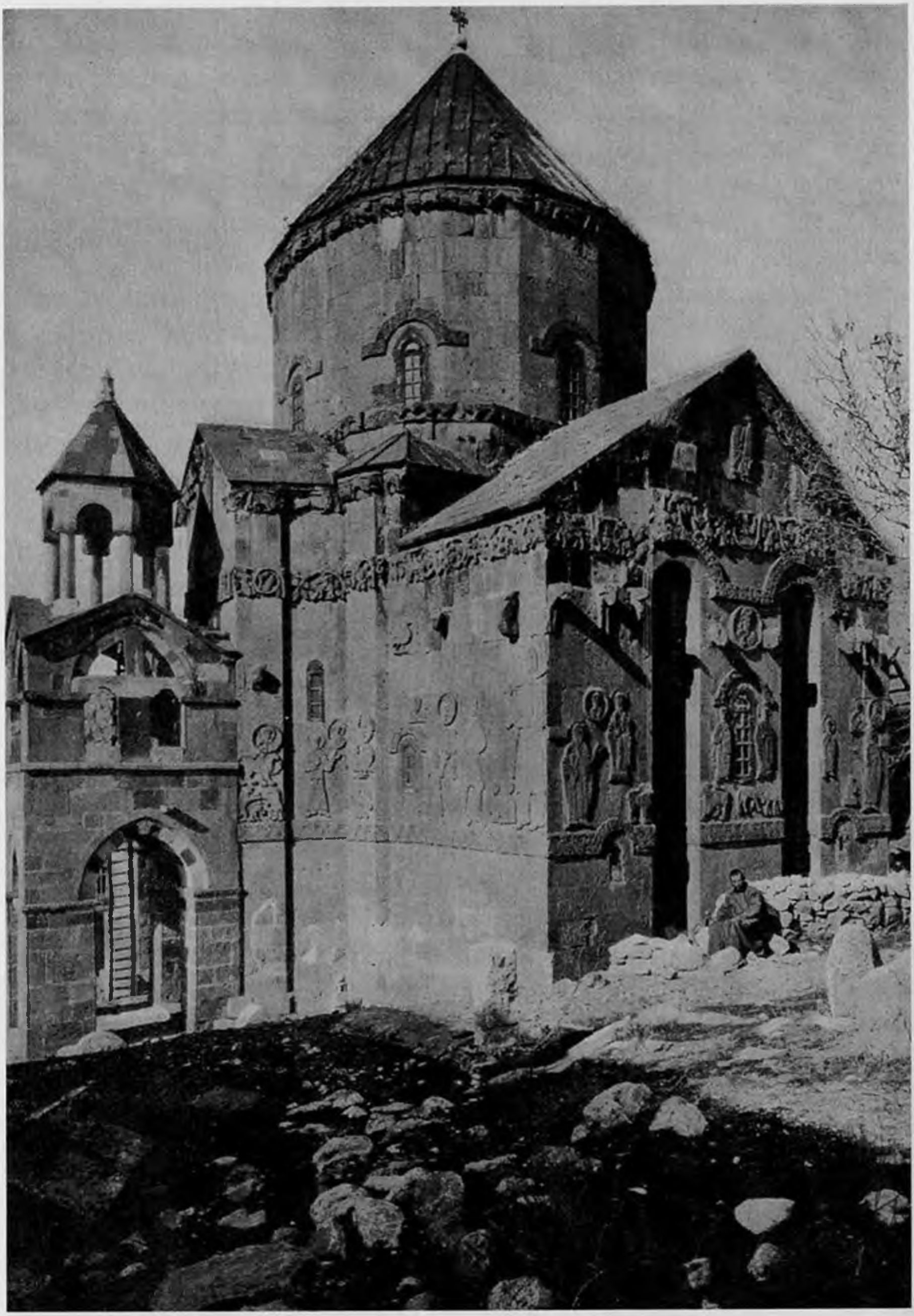
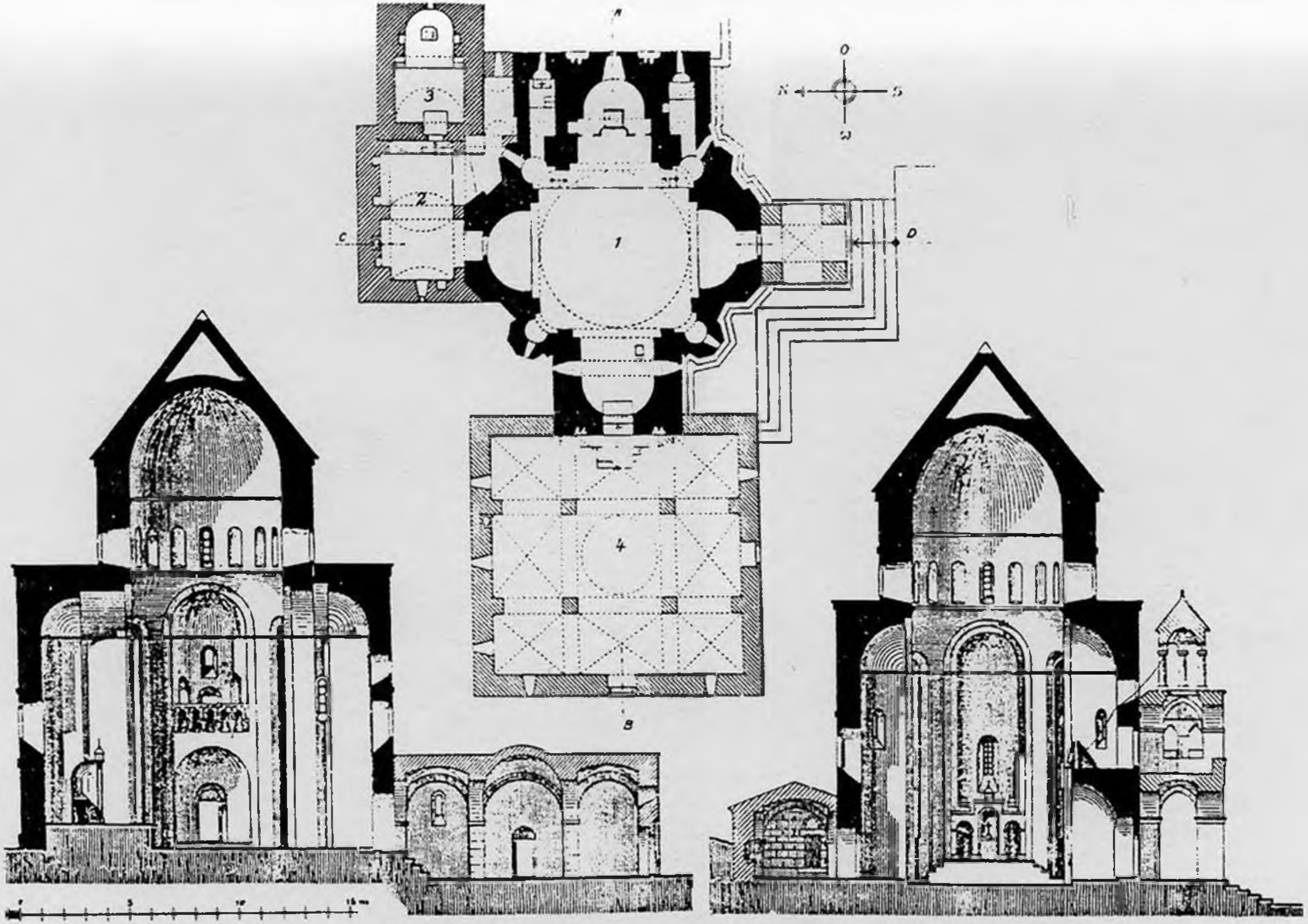


Fig. 1. Surb Khach (Holy Cross), Aghtamar (H.F.B. Lynch)



Ill.1. Diagram of Aghtamar, after Bachmann



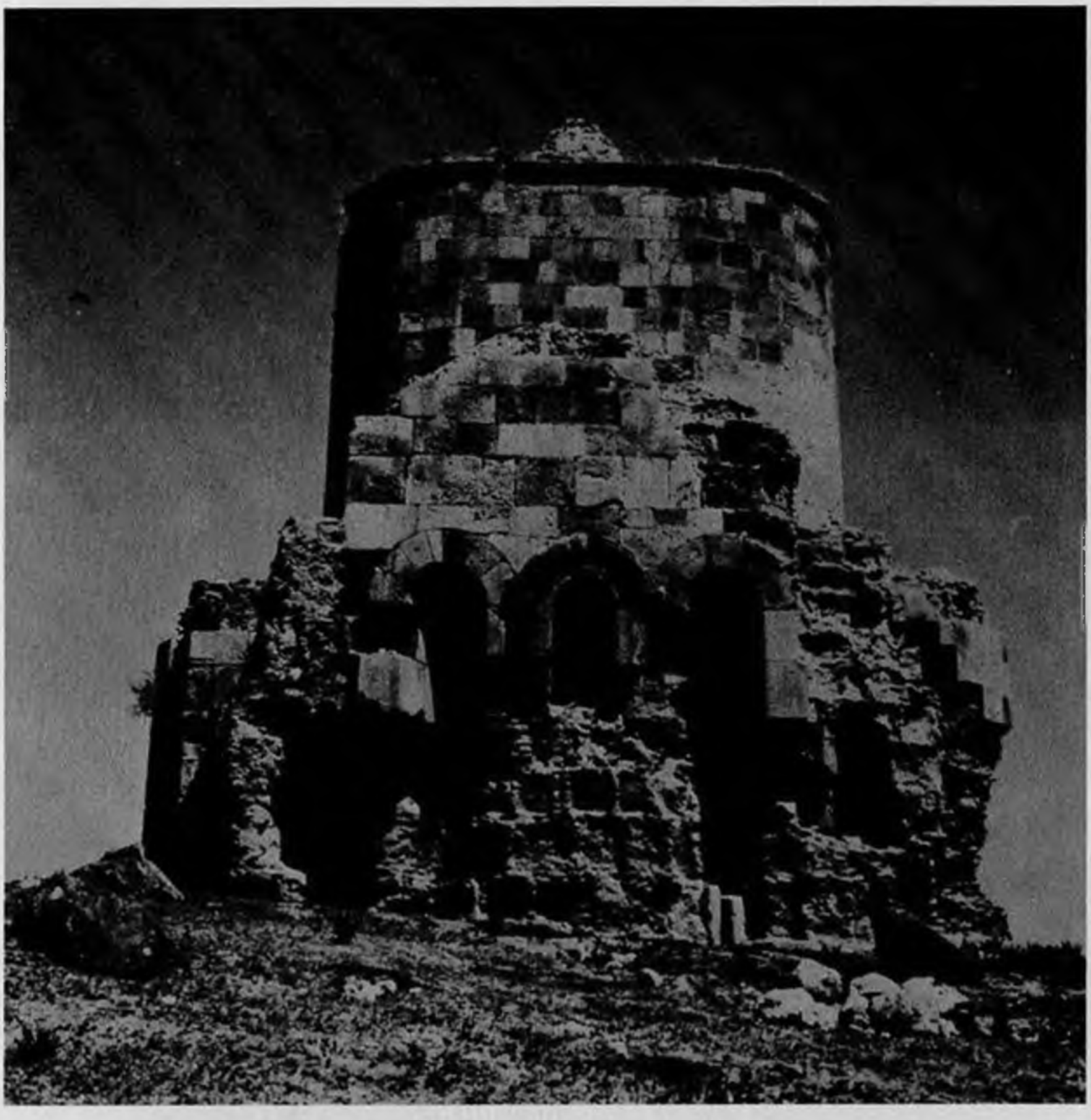
Figs. 2-3. Surb Khach and Cupola, Aghtamar (Armen Hakhnazarian)





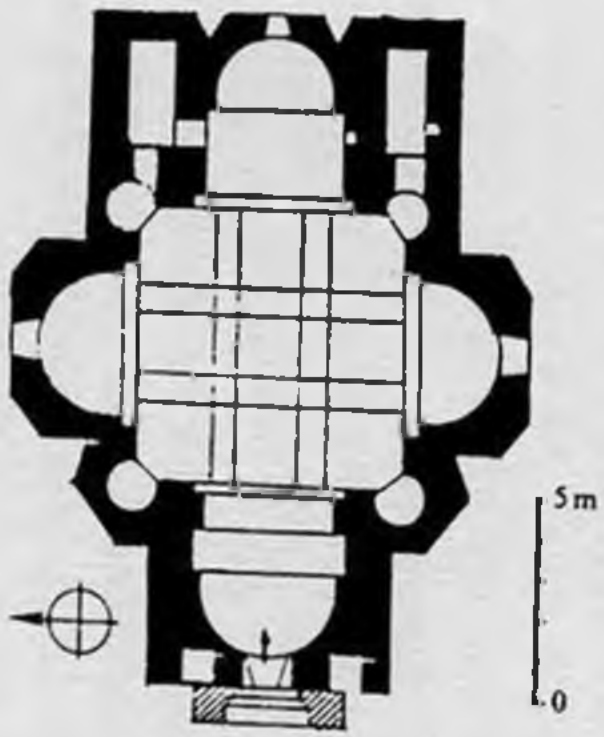


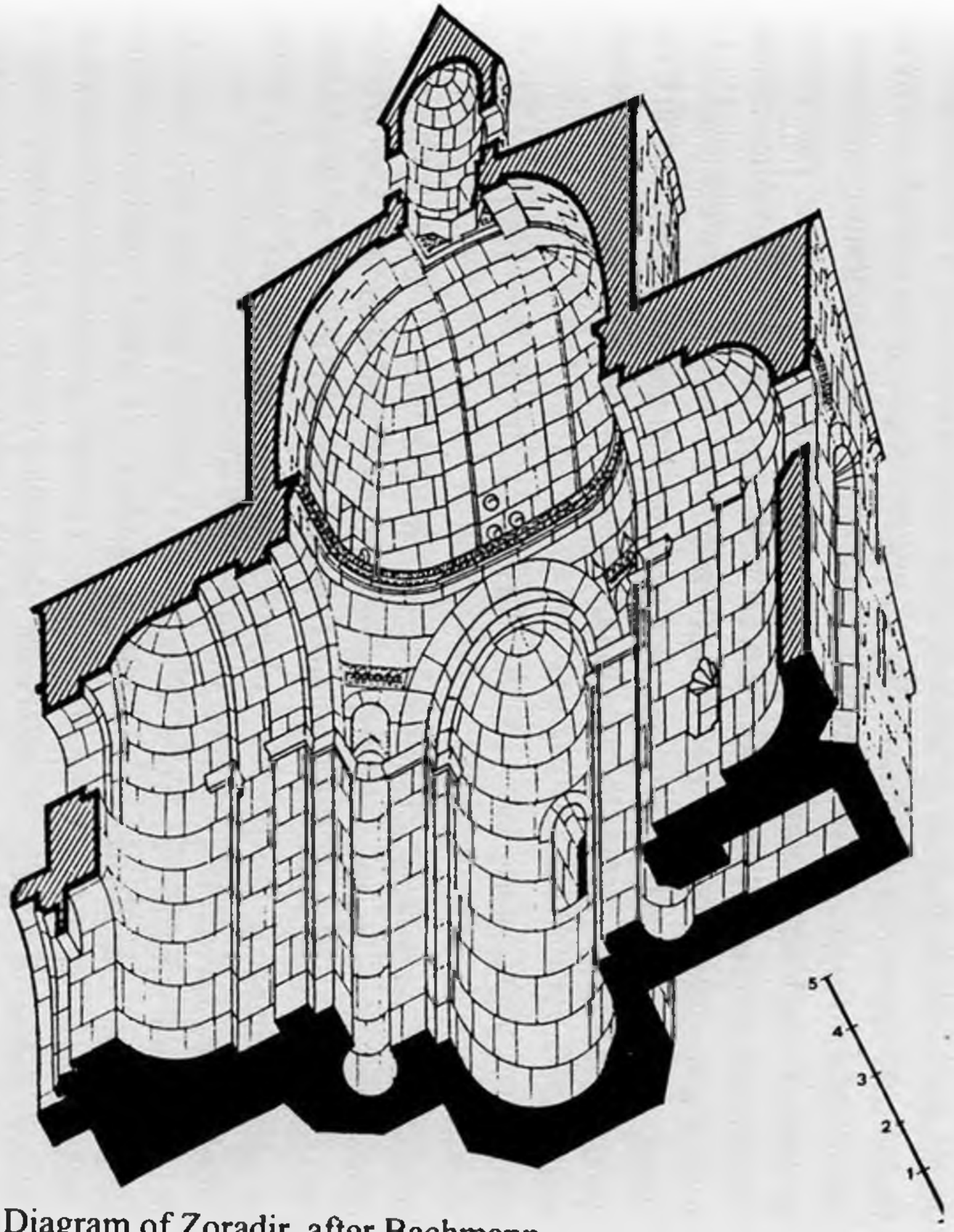
Figs. 4-6. Surb Khach: Adam and Eve, Jesus Christ, King Gagik





Figs. 7-8. Zoradir and Interior (Thierry)





Ill. 2. Diagram of Zoradir, after Bachmann

I have chosen these two characteristics among others, for they reinforce the main prerequisites of the regional and cultural memories as expressed in the built environment of Vaspurakan. Despite the clear separation between them, it becomes obvious that in a long building tradition, such as that of Armenian church architecture in Vaspurakan, these two interact to become the inseparable constituents of a single set of intertwined and interrelated memories. Cultural memory appears to follow regional memory. By this, I mean to suggest that the combined memories of Armenian church building are basically concerned with the problems posed by its main regional enemy—the earthquake. Hence, I suggest that if variations among Armenian churches are to be detected these will be in the details of their constructional elements.

Variations within the Same Cultural Memory

With these considerations in mind, a few churches of Vaspurakan will be surveyed showing the diverse solutions adopted by the master builders to manipulate the cultural memories.[7] Rather than a chronological approach, the primary objective will be to survey the different constructional details of these churches.[8]

1. The Church of Surb Khach in Aghbak, built in the seventh century as the pantheon of the Artsrunis, is also known as Surb Echmiadzin in Zoradir (Figs. 7-8, Ill. 2). The gmbet, a later addition, rises above a square base with smoothed sides, delineated by a decorated frieze above the arches framing the main four niches. This base is created by four pendentives starting with a straight one stone-block lintel, marking the beginning of the curvature and reaching the

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[7] Jean-Michel Thierry, "Les monuments arméniens du Vaspurakan," *Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient* (Biblioteque archéologique et historique), vol. 129 (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1989); Thomas A. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey,* vol. 1 (London: The Pindar Press, 1987); Walter Bachmann, *Kirchen und Moscheen in Armenien und Kurdistan* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1913), pp. 23-57; Varazdat Harutyunyan, *Haykakan chartarapetutyan patmutyun* [History of Armenian Architecture] (Erevan: Loys, 1992), pp. 221-29; Ervand Lalayan, *Vaspurakani nshanavor vankere* [The Famous Monasteries of Vaspurakan] (Tiflis, 1919).

[8] Information on these buildings was basically recruited from the documentation of Thierry, "Les monuments arméniens du Vaspurakan." I want to thank Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian, Director of Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA) in Aachen, for providing me with most of the unpublished photographic material concerning the Armenian churches in the Vaspurakan region.

smoothed corner of the decorated frieze. The gmbet is internally constructed by filling in between a pair of two crossing arches built in stone, each traversing the main axes of the space.[9]

2. The Church of Surb Nshan (Saint Mark) in the monastery of Karmravank was founded by King Gagik in the tenth century. Surb Nshan, once a component of an enclosed monastic complex, today stands in isolation. The horseshoe arch of the apse is an adoption of a foreign form. The dome, again hemispherical from inside and conical from outside, is built in brick with four brick pendentives to support it. Here the architect adopts a foreign form in the main apse and a new building material, within the traditional formal and constructional restrictions of the cultural memory of Armenian church building.

3. Two churches in Goms were documented by Walter Bachmann in 1910. When visited by Jean-Michel Thierry in 1967, only one church had survived in a ruinous state. In this seventh-century Church of Surb Gevorg (Saint George), the transfer from square to circle to support the hemispherical dome is achieved with the help of four stone shell-shaped squinches, yet another constructional variation (Figs. 9-10).

4. The fifteenth-century monastery in Ktuts consisted of the Church of Surb Hovhannes (Saint John), a *zhamatun* (hall), a bell tower, a cemetery, and a large dwelling unit (Figs. 11-12). The latter two have disappeared. Built in stone, Surb Hovhannes is crowned with the traditional double domes supported by pendentives. In the case of the zhamatun, four pendentives carry the roof, constructed by filling between the crossing arches as in Zoradir, with the addition of extra ribs as a compensation for the absence of the four-sided vertical supports found in the church at Zoradir. The central square created by the crossing of the arches illuminates the interior of the zhamatun, as yet another compensation for the absence of the drum and the dome, which would have otherwise served as the main illuminating system.

5. The gmbet of the thirteenth-century Church of Surb Stepanos (Saint Stephen) in Berkri, built in stone, is reinforced by two crossing arches, a technique going as far back as the sixth century (Fig. 13). The adjoining room is the funerary chapel of Surb Stepanos.

6. The fourteenth-century monastery in Gandzak comprises the

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[9] Tommaso Breccia Fratadocchi, *La Chiesa di S. Ejmiacin a Soradir* (Rome: De Luca Editore, 1971).

Church of Surb Tovmas (Saint Thomas), a hall, a cemetery, and an enclosure wall (Fig. 14). The complex was restored in 1581 and later in 1801. The buildings have a lower stone structure and a brick superstructure. Three courses on the base of the drum are built in a zigzag fashion as a separating device between the juncture of transmitting loads from the dome to the pendentives. In this case, this decorative manner, associated with Persian aesthetics, has been adopted without any divergence from the formal and structural basics of Armenian church building. The exterior face of the gmbet has systematic vertical and lateral ribs to gain extra stability.

7. The monastery of Ardzvaber in Arjesh, founded in the thirteenth century and restored later, is built on an Urartian site. The plan belongs to the type of Zoradir and Aghtamar, with four side sanctuaries instead of two. The architect utilized different colored stones as a decorative device and also as a means of emphasizing his masterly masonry details such as the corner niches and the cross-vaulted roof of one of the side sanctuaries.

8. The Church of Surb Bartoghomeos (Saint Bartholomew), founded in the sixth century, has a hall added in front of its entrance in the thirteenth century (Figs. 15-16). It is interesting to note how this hall is covered. Two columns and six pillars set against the internal walls of the hall carry four crossing arches which create the base for the covering of the hall. This method is nothing but another variation of the small side niches of Surb Khach in Aghtamar.

9. Two monastic complexes once existed in Varagavank or Varakavank, Verin (Upper) and Nerkin (Lower or Inner). The foundation of Varagavank is related to Grigor Lusavorich (Gregory the Illuminator) and the story of Saint Hripsimé. Later additions are related to members of the Artsruni family. Nerkin Varagavank once consisted of seven buildings, as documented by Bachmann in 1910. Only parts of a church and the zhamatun remain today. What is of particular interest in this complex is that the constructional elements are a brick variation of its stone parallel in Zoradir. The absence of the double dome allows us to grasp the main internal constituents of the church, the four semicircular niches and the small side niches and their juncture at the base of the gmbet, absent in this case (Figs. 17-19, Ill. 3).

10. The final example is the monastic complex of Narekavank, which goes back to Grigor Narekatsi (951-1003). This famous, once-fortified monastic complex included two churches, a gavit, a bell tower,

the mausoleum of Narekatsi, administrative buildings, and dwellings (Fig. 20). At present, the complex is completely destroyed, but it demonstrates how this and all other such complexes at one time dominated the landscape with their multiple pointed conical domes rising against the sky.

At the end to this brief "tour" in Vaspurakan, we can conclude that the aspects of variability within the cultural memory of Armenian church building are what differentiate buildings and builders from each other. Armenian master builders created a whole range of ways to transfer the loads from the gmbet to the drum, and then to the vertical supports. But they have also utilized brick in place of stone. In Baridzori vank, the builder adopts the Persian way of using brick as building material and at the same time as a decorative device by laying the brick courses on the dome. In the Church of Surb Sahak (Saint Isaac) in Ererin, the brick pendentive is covered with plaster shaped into a false stalactite design. Finally, the brick solution of the cross-vault in the church in Moks is evidence of the use of brick in the same manner that stone would have been used.

Having surveyed Armenian churches in Vaspurakan, it becomes obvious that whatever the conditions of the site, whatever the materials used for building, whatever the period, and whatever the borrowed technique from other cultures, the main theme of the Armenian master builders was to raise safely an internally circular and externally pointed conical gmbet above a prayer hall, which had to satisfy stability vis-à-vis the "natural" enemy, the earthquake.

Seljuk Gumbads as Armenian Cultural Memory in a New Function

In search of continuity in the architectural tradition in the region of Vaspurakan, one should visit another building type in the region, another layer of cultural memory. The Seljuk mausoleum in Akhlat, Ulu Gumbad, the largest of the four best decorated of these pink-stoned mausolea dating from the thirteenth century, has been recently restored Standing nearly 20 meters (65 feet) above ground level, Ulu Gumbad is composed of two levels (Fig. 21). The lower, being square in section, is transferred to a twelve-sided section on the second level, which has a circular interior. The transition from square to twelve sides is realized by the help of a pyramidal transitional zone located above

the lower square externally. The second level is cylindrical in section and is crowned by a semi-circular dome from inside and a pointed conical dome from outside (Ill. 4).[10]

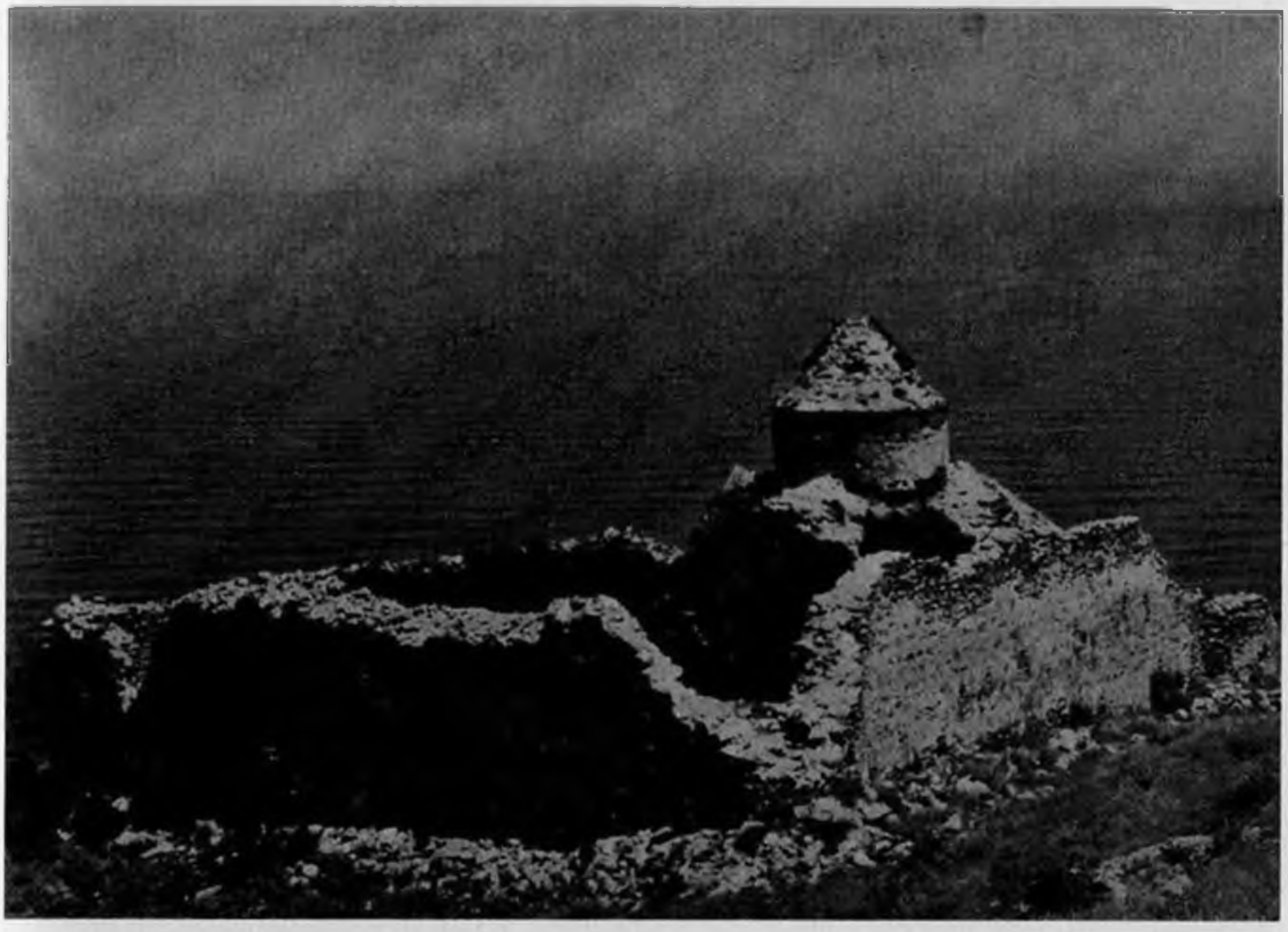
The region is dictating a certain memory on the built environment of the Seljuk patrons, the newcomers to the region. The structural lessons learned about the gmbet in Armenian church construction are transmitted to the building of gumbads. But as the gumbads were used for burial purposes, meaning they needed no prayer hall underneath as in the Armenian churches, the problem of raising the gmbet is eliminated. The gmbet is simply placed on a square base. Hence, it is not difficult to see these gumbads as a simplified variation of gmbets of Armenian churches. No wonder that the Seljuks adopted the term gumbad for these structures as their variation of the Armenian term gmbet.

This architectural transfer from gmbet to gumbad is best demonstrated when Ulu Gumbad is compared with the seventh-century octagonal Armenian church in Varzahan (Fig. 22, Ill. 5). Although the church is not in the Vaspurakan region, its formal characteristics serve to clarify the point made here. The church is octagonal in plan both internally and externally. Eight radially placed buttresses carry the loads of the arches coming from the columns placed radially inside the church. When this church is compared with Ulu Gumbad, it becomes clear how the latter is simply the upper portion of the first, placed directly on the ground.

All the above instances suggest that Vaspurakan's multi-cultural regional memories are an indispensable part of our full understanding of the architectural heritage of the region. This area is an open field for the study of interwoven architectural transactions among cultural memories. From this perspective, among others, it is both unfortunate and unforgivable that the present-day trustees of this architectural heritage deprive future generations of accessing all the memory layers currently available.

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[10] For a further reference related to the Anatolian mausolea and the Armenian connection, see Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 306-11.





Figs. 9-10. Surb Gevorg of Goms and West Window (Thierry)



Fig. 11. Surb Hovhannes of Ktuts

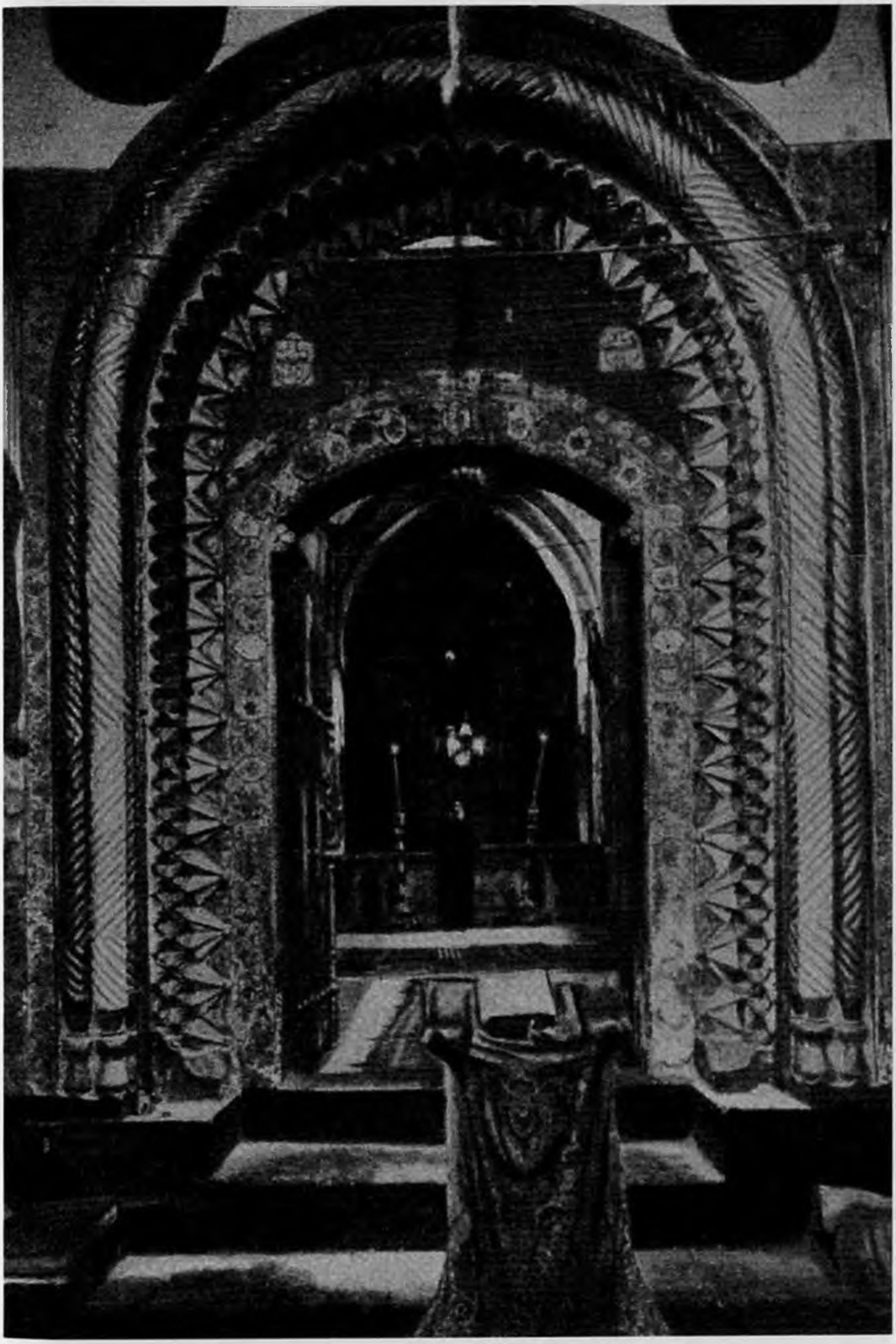


Fig. 12. Surb Hovhannes of Ktuts, Doorway

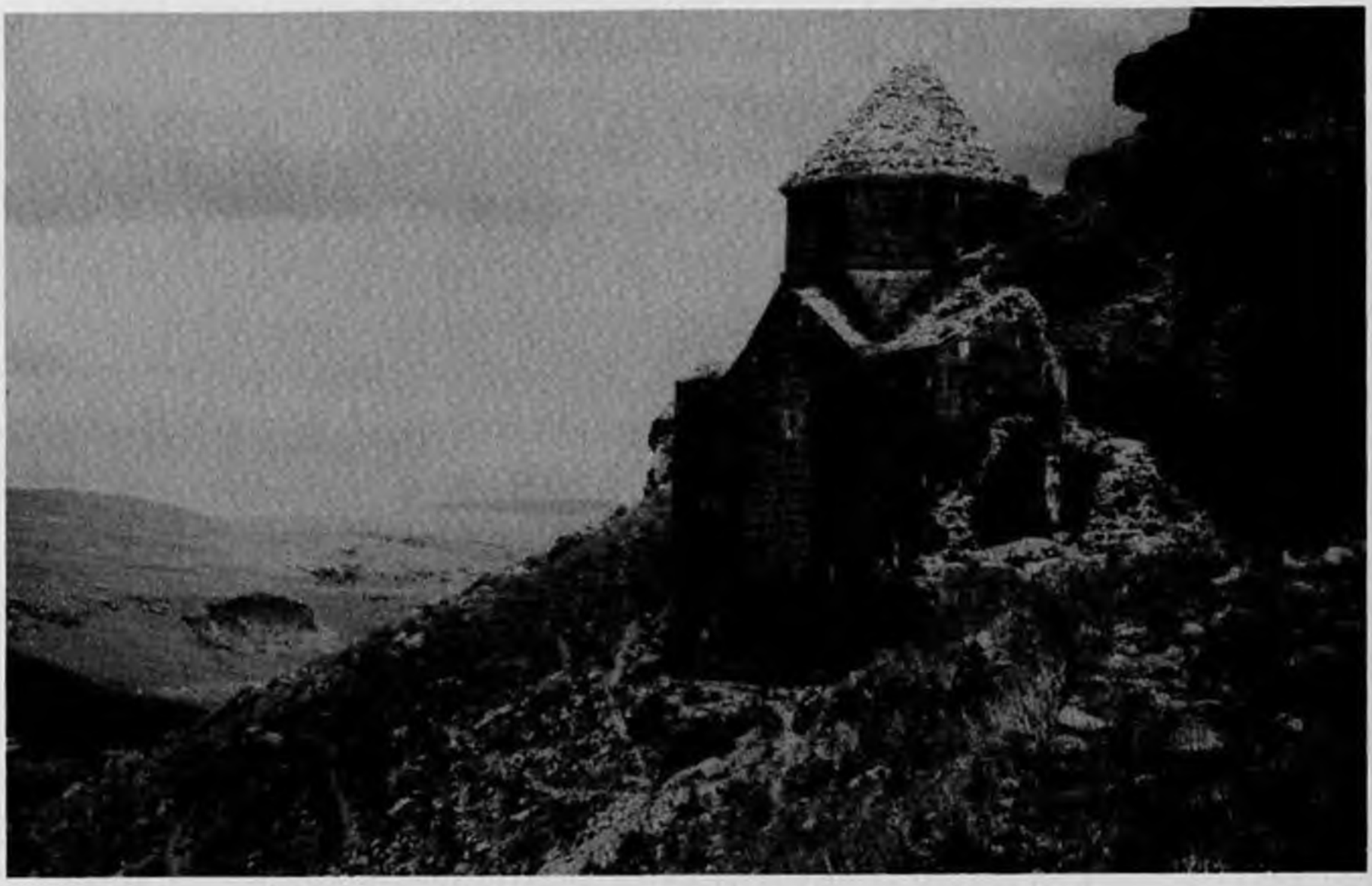


Fig. 13. Surb Stepanos of Berkri (Hakhnazarian)

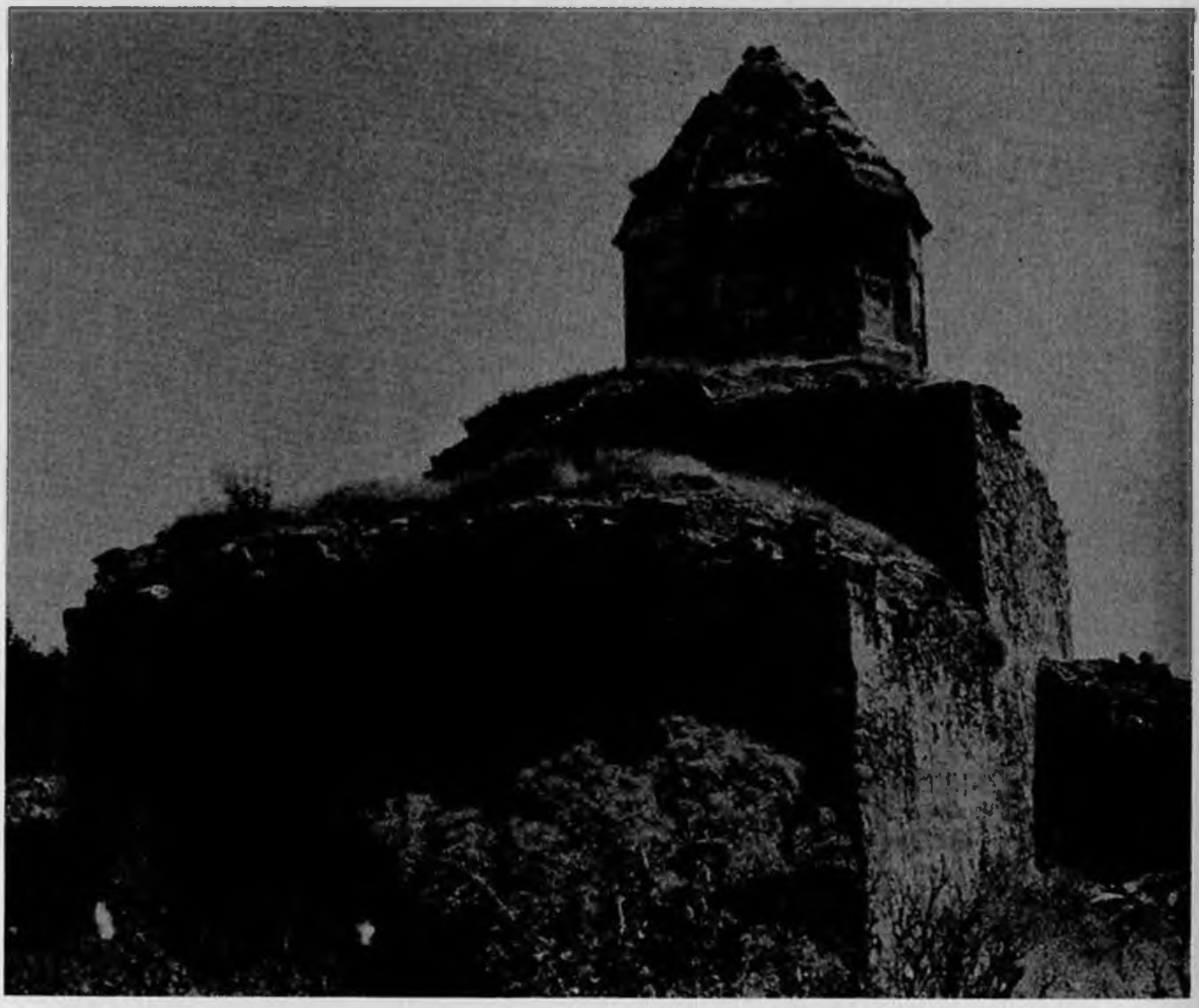
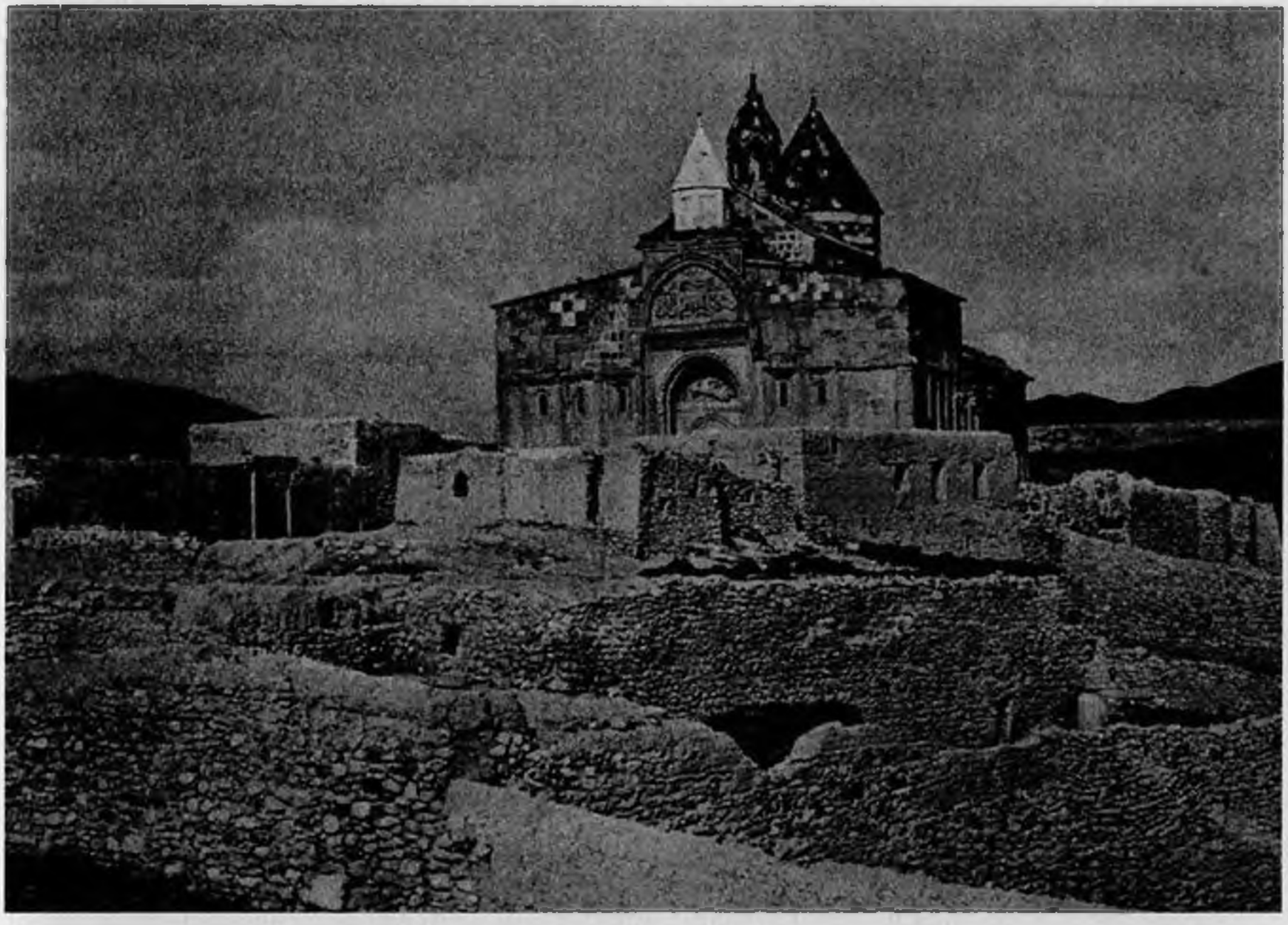
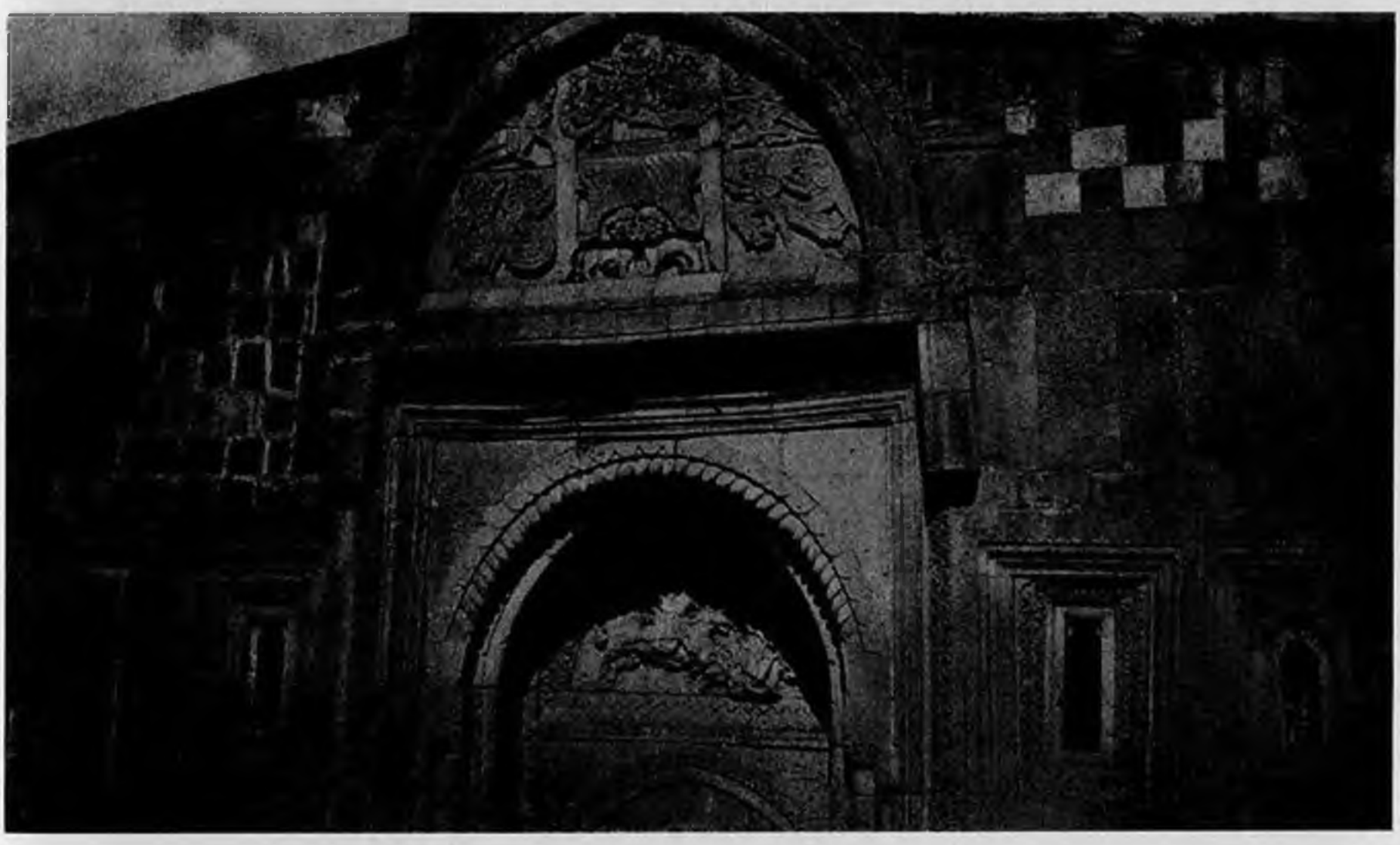


Fig. 14. Surb Tovmas of Gandzak (Thierry)





Figs.15-16. Surb Barthoghomeos and Portal
(Bachmann)

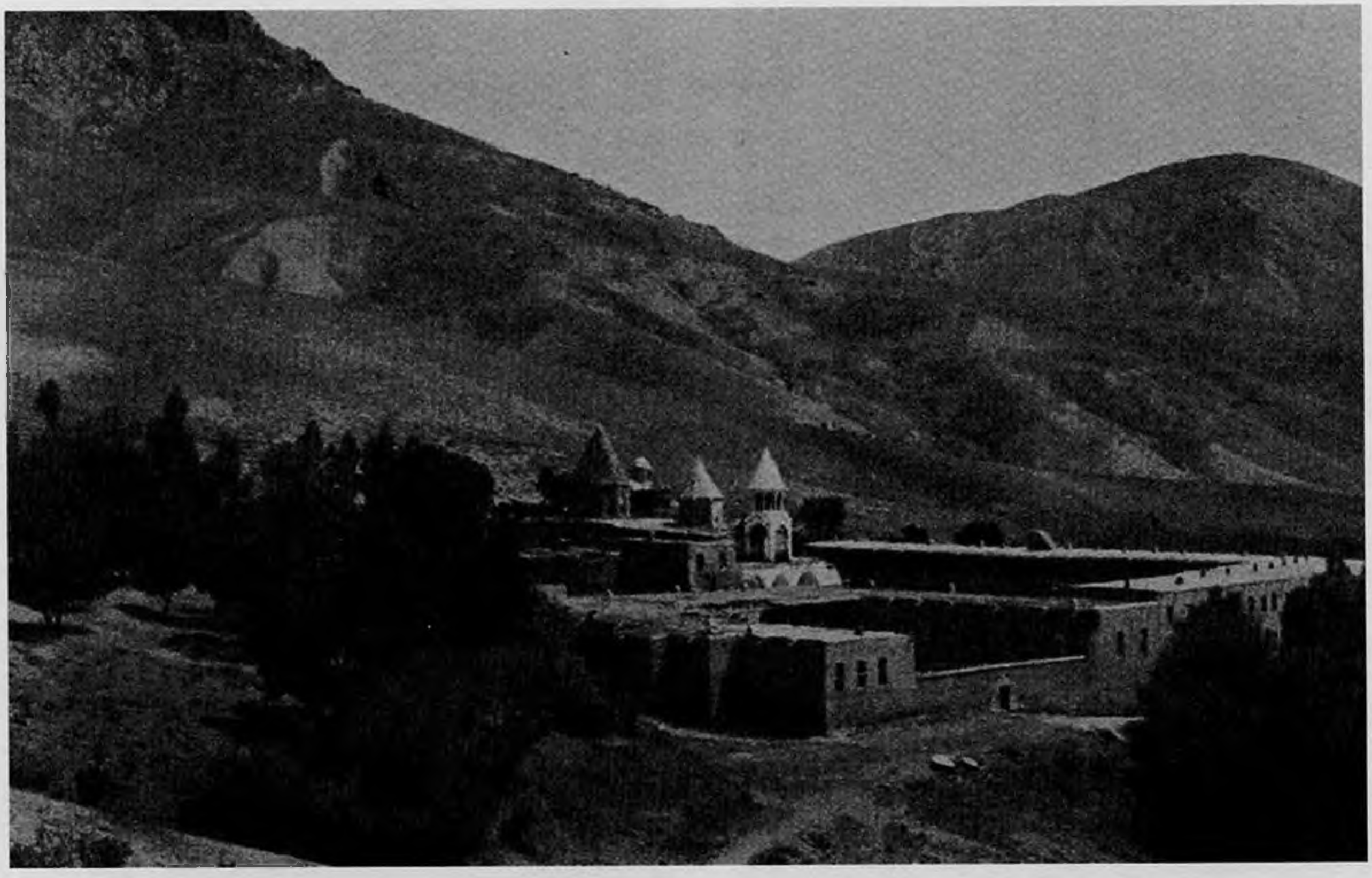
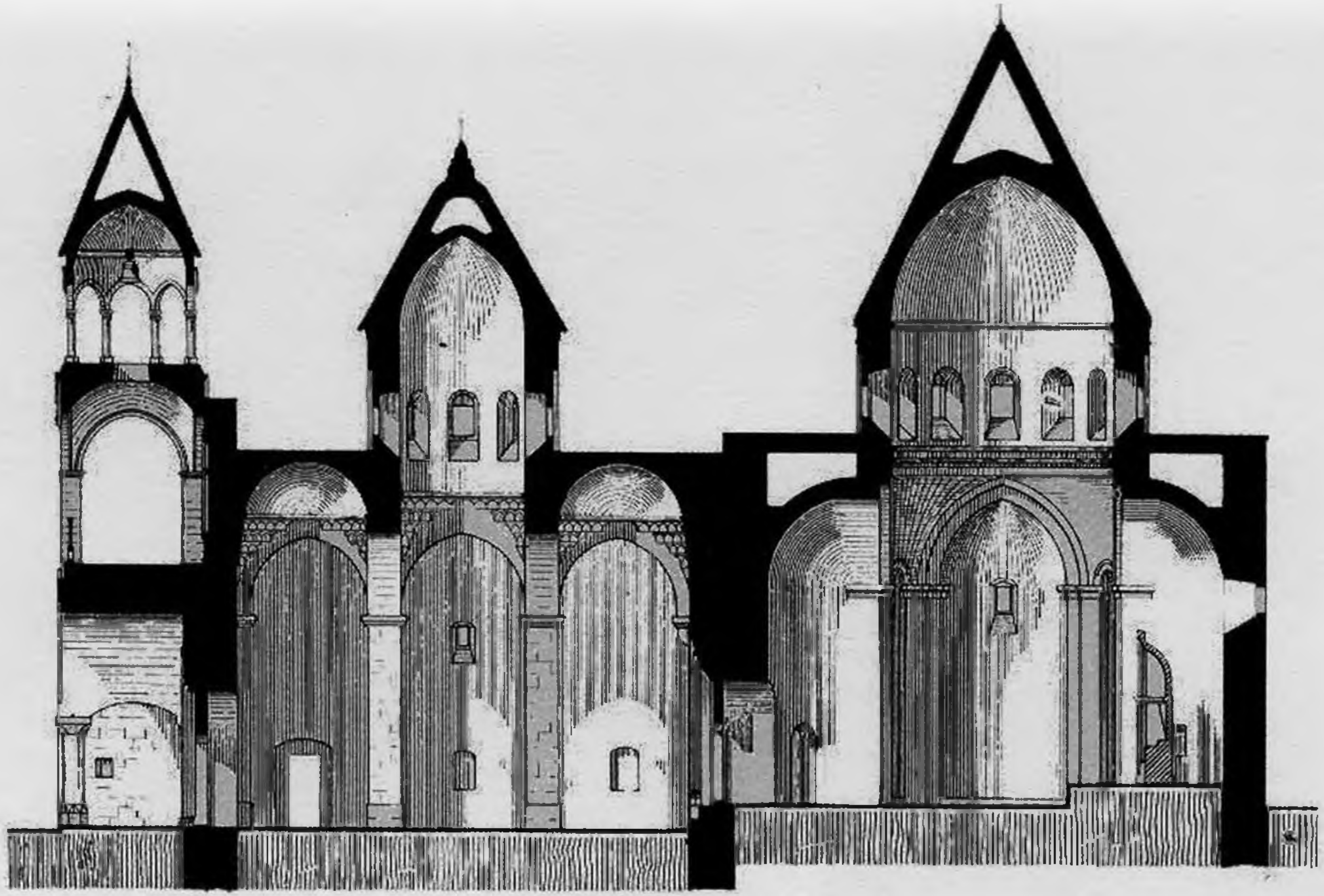
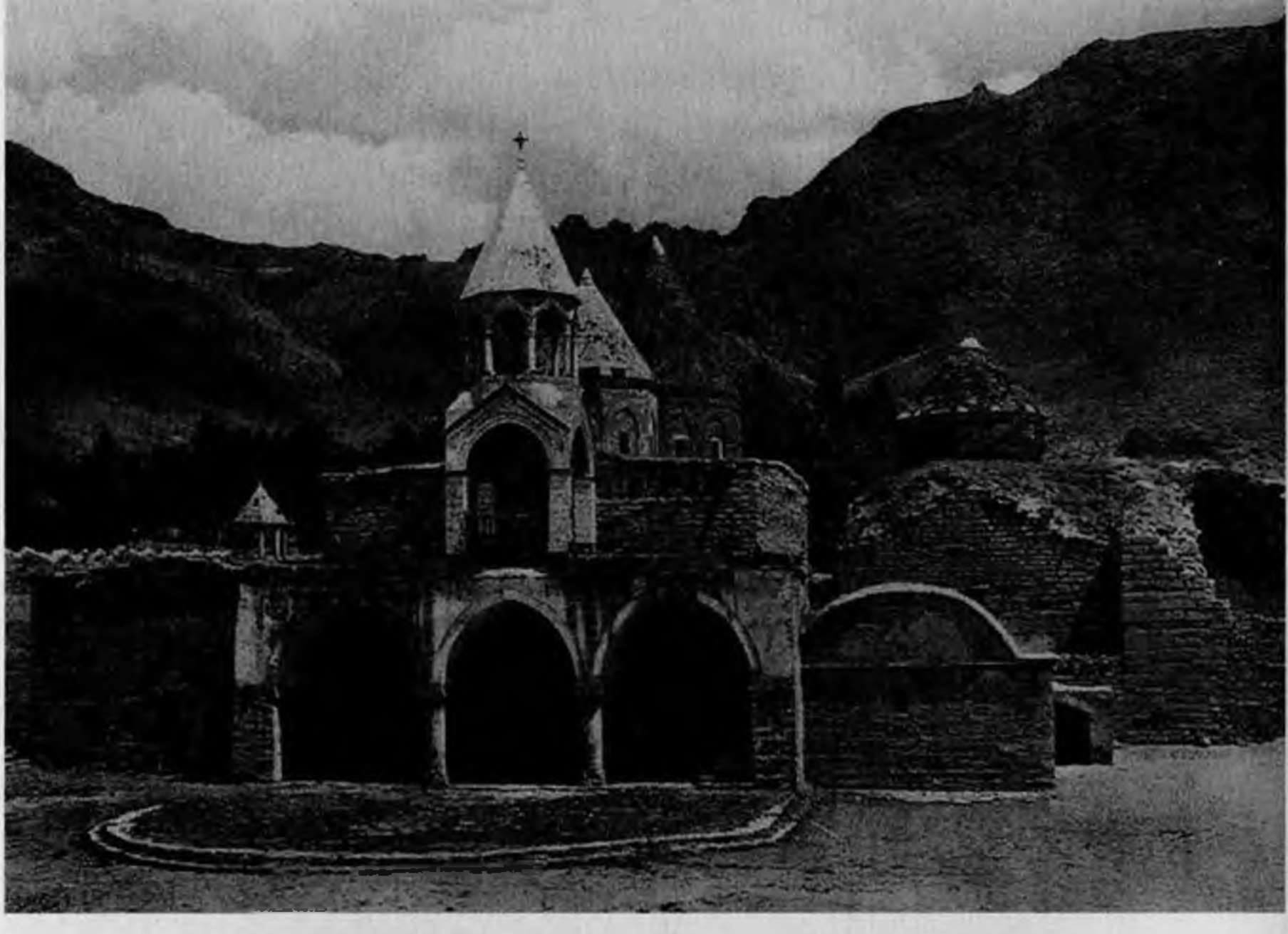
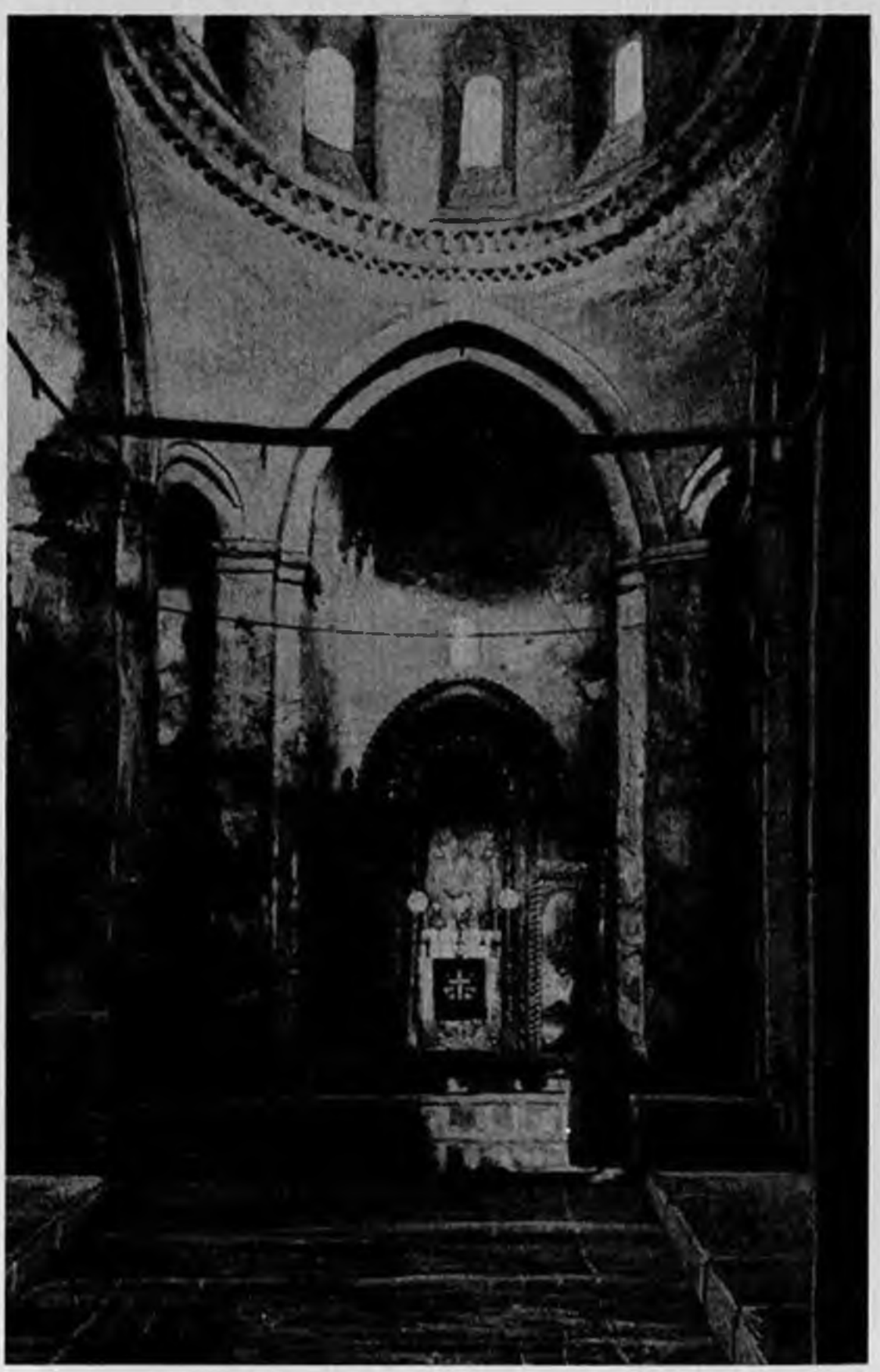


Fig. 17. Varagavank



Ill. 3. Diagram of Varagavank (Bachmann)





Figs. 18-19. Varagavank and Interior

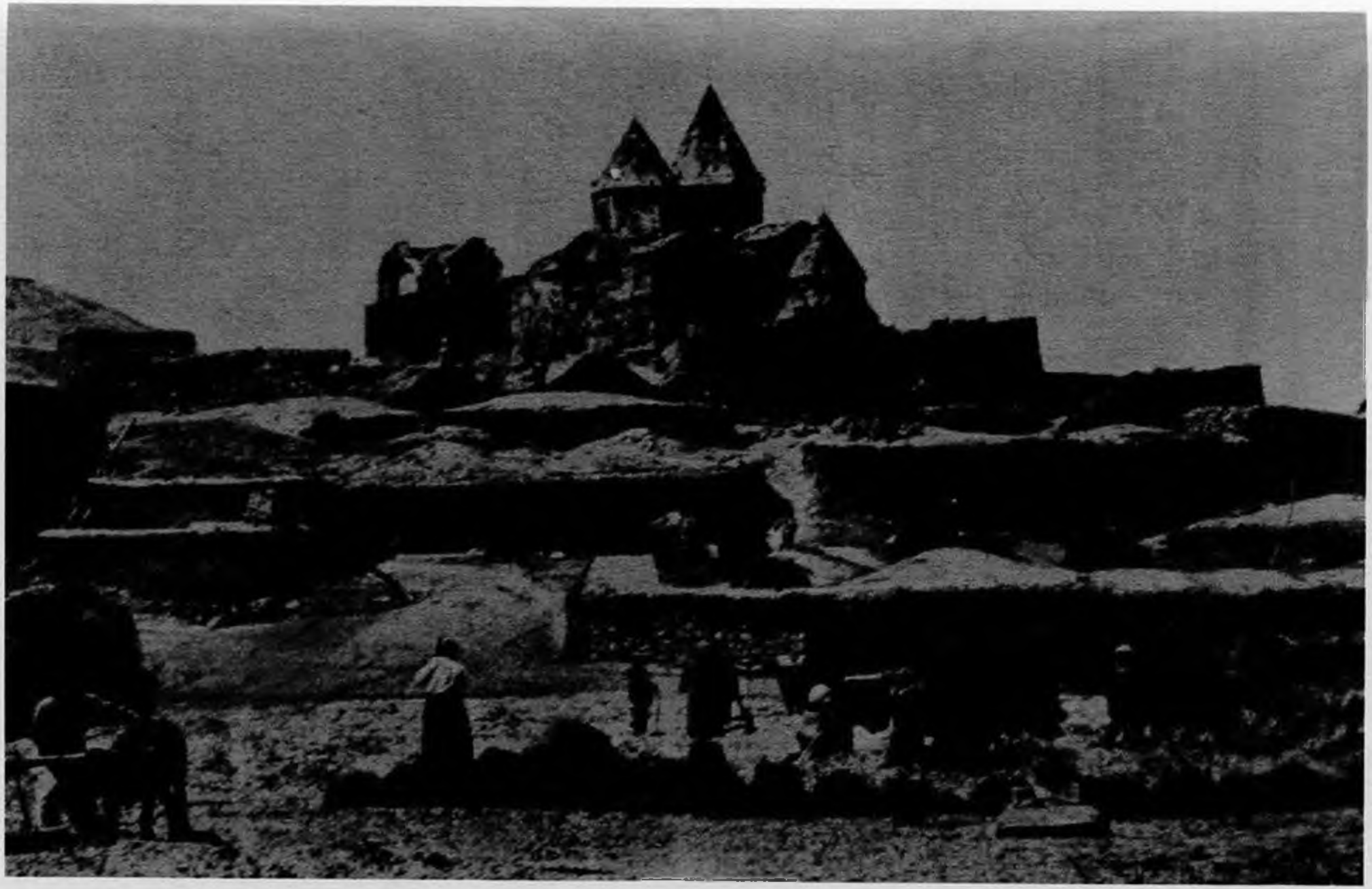


Fig. 20. Narekavank

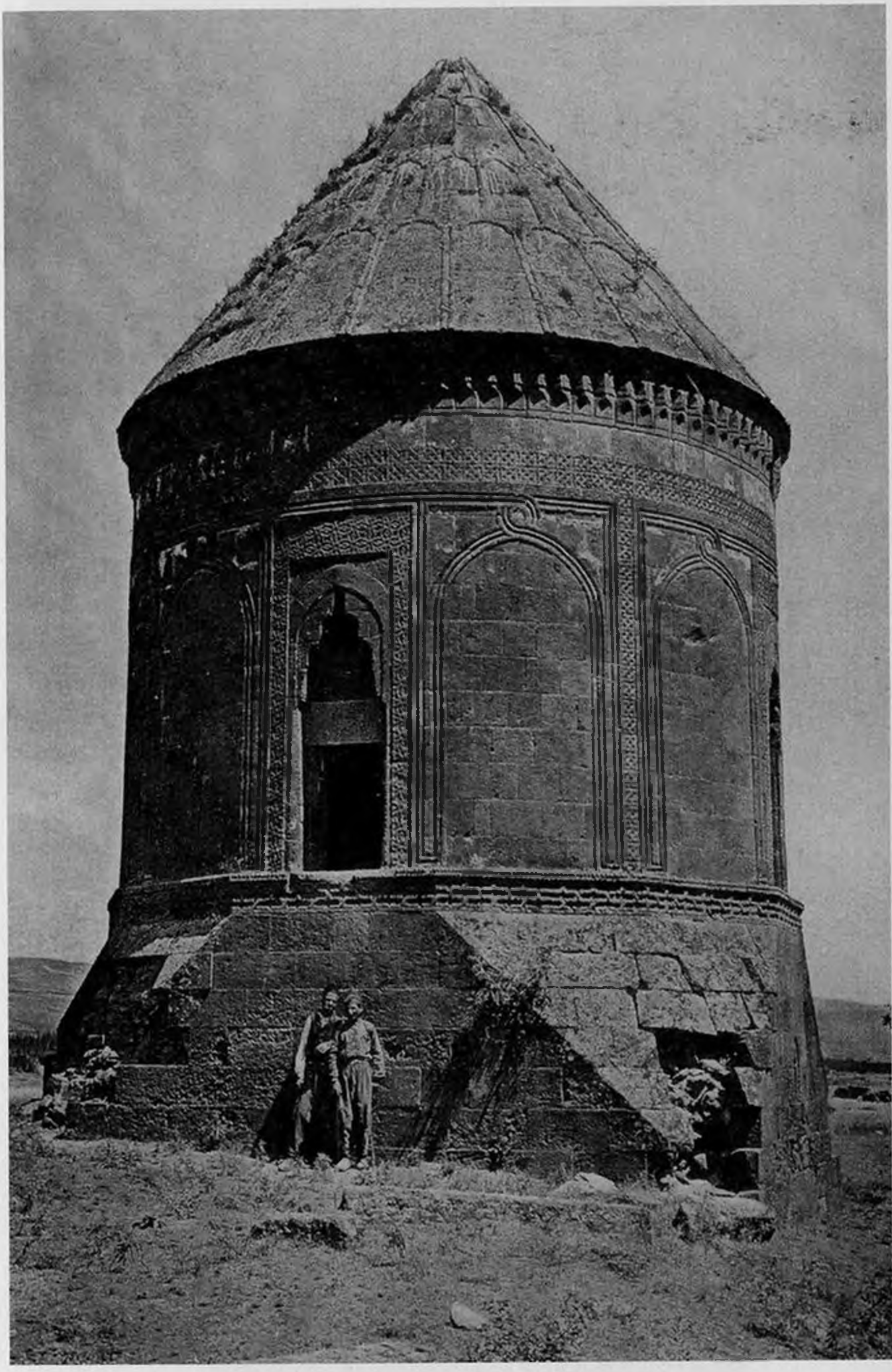
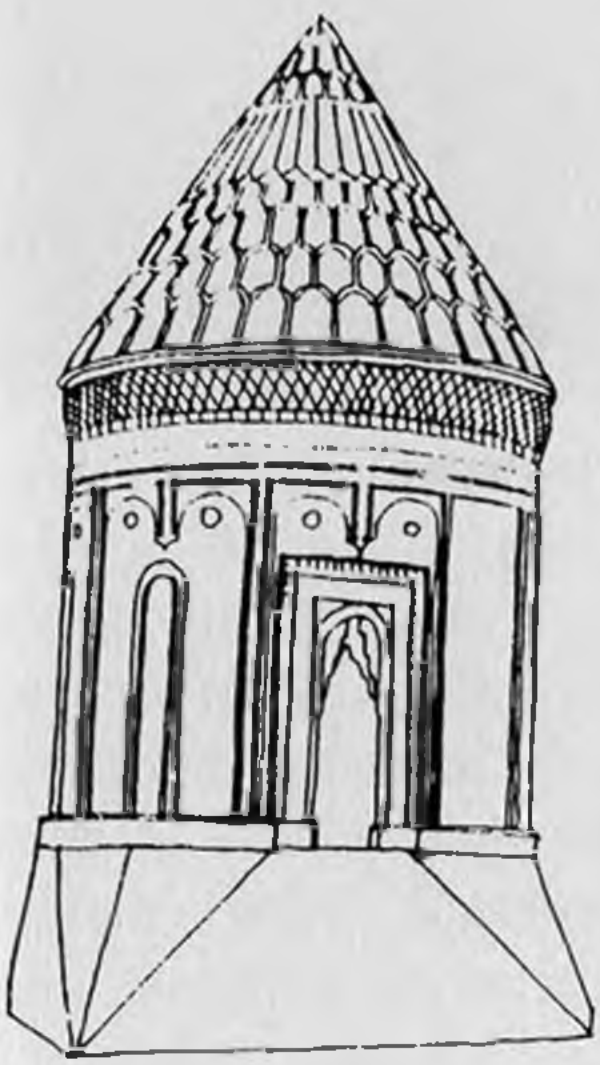
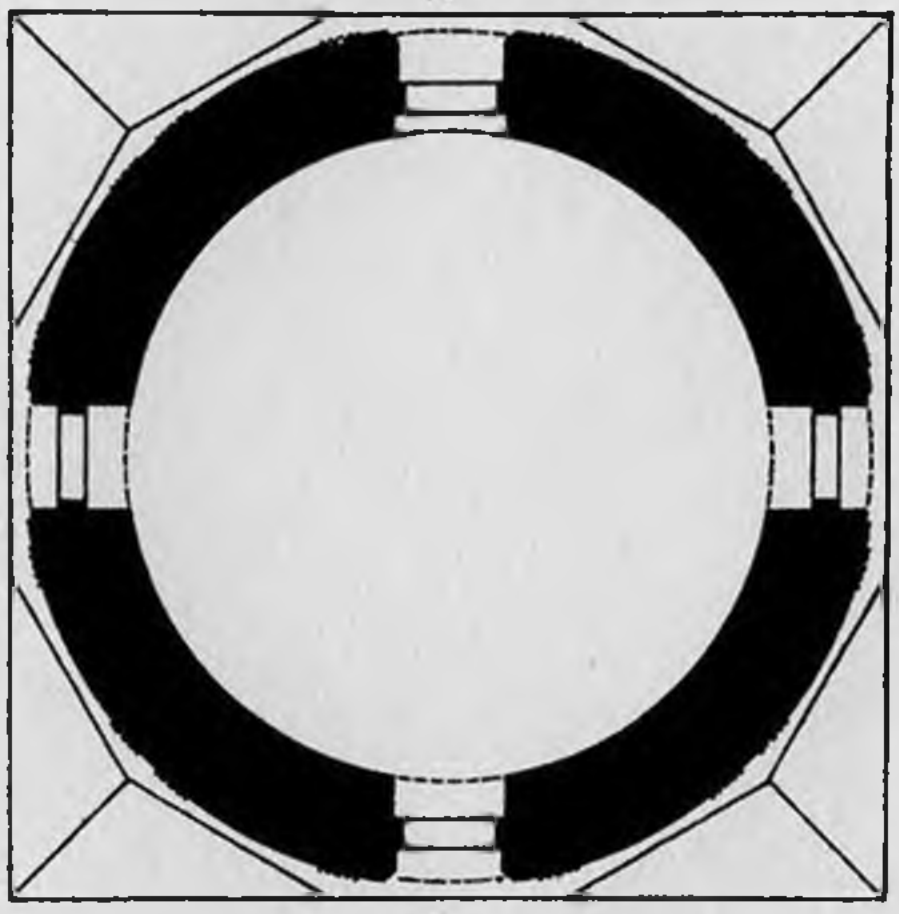


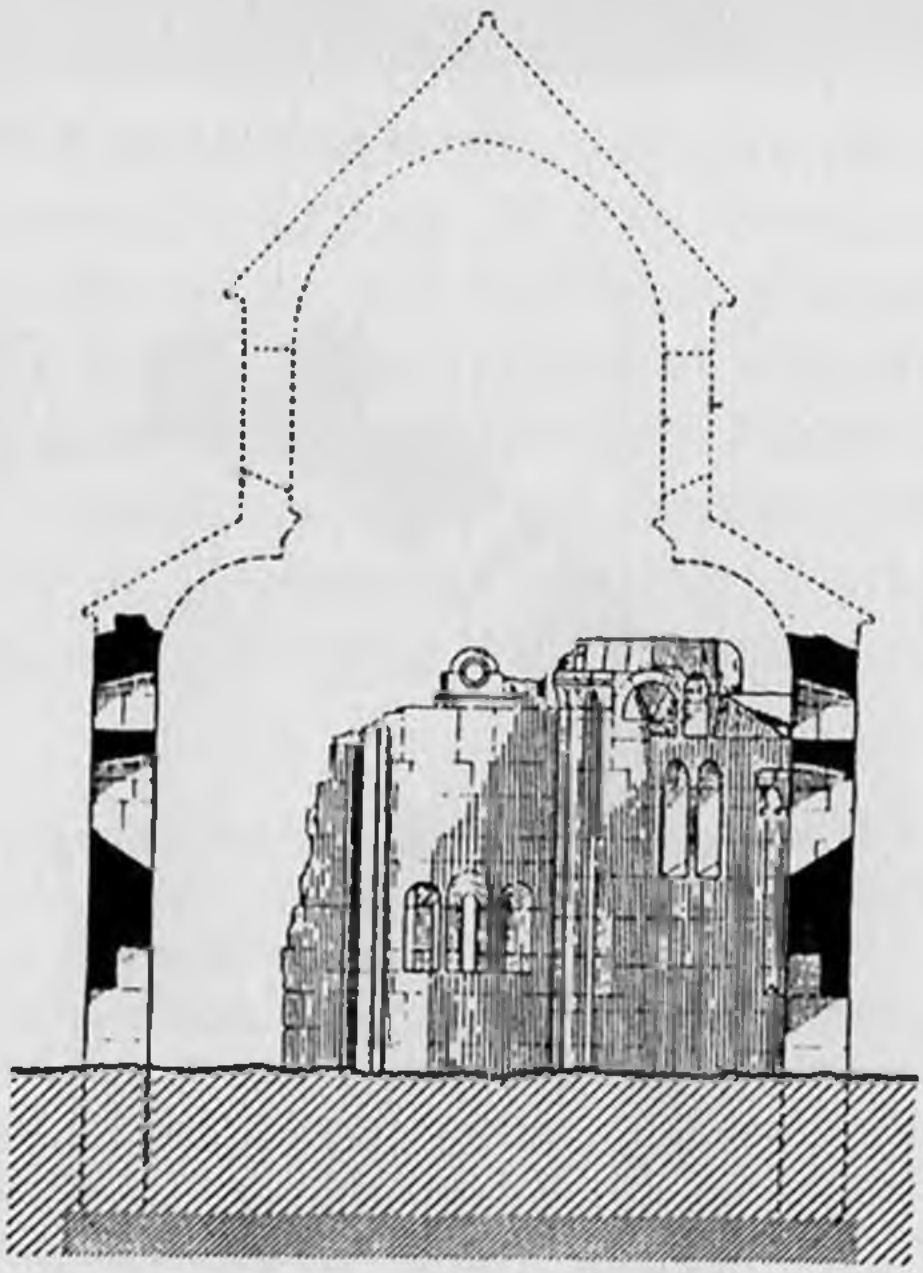
Fig. 21. Ulu Gumbat, Akhlat (Bachmann)



A



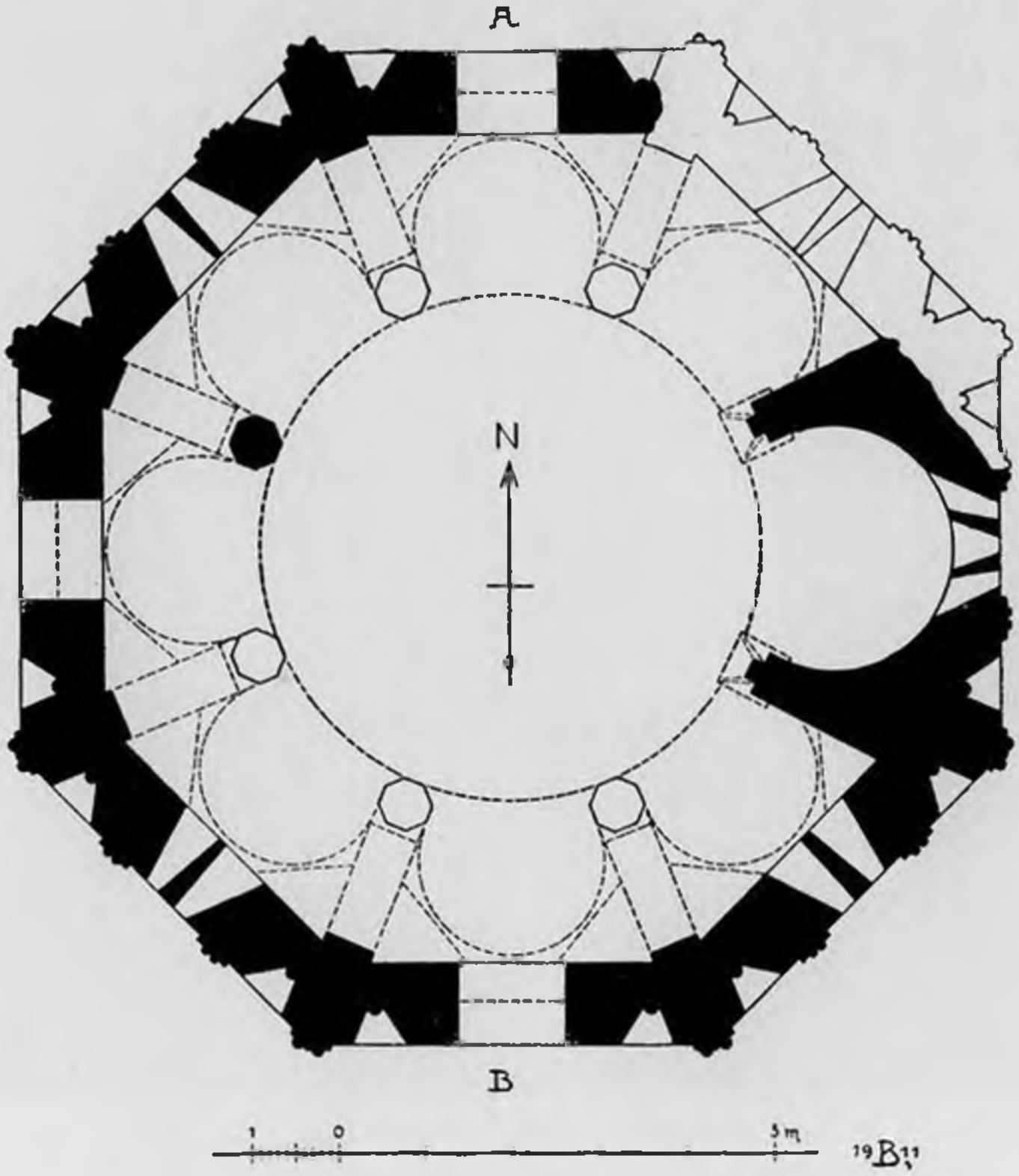
B



Ill. 4. Diagram of Ulu Gumbat



Fig. 22. Octagonal Church of Varzahan



Ill. 5. Diagram of Octagonal Church, Varzahan

❀ 7 ❀

VAN UNDER MONGOL, TURKMEN, PERSIAN, AND OTTOMAN DOMINATION

*Dickran Kouymjian**

The history of Van and Vaspurakan from the fall of the Artsruni kingdom to the seventeenth century is reconstructed from a mass of miscellaneous materials.[1] Lacking is a source dedicated to Van or the province of Vaspurakan such as Tovma Artsruni's account of the ruling family in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. In this survey, no attempt will be made to present a complete and orderly progression of events in either the city of Van or the general region of Vaspurakan. Armenians there were living under the rule of Muslims: Mongols, Turkmen, Kurds, and, from the sixteenth century on, Persians and Ottoman Turks.[2] Chronology will be followed in retelling selected events, defining the various rulers, and describing how they interacted

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* Research for this paper was carried out with the aid of a grant from The Bertha and John Garabedian Charitable Foundation of Fresno, California. I would like to thank the Trustees and Grant Administrator for their continued support.

[1] For a detailed discussion of primary and secondary sources of the period, see Dickran Kouymjian, "A Critical Bibliography for the History of Armenia from 1375 to 1605," *Armenian Review* 41 (Spring, 1988): 39-45. For Van, see Paolo Cuneo, "Etude sur la topographie et l'iconographie historique de la ville de Van," *Armenian Studies/Etudes Arméniennes: In Memoriam Haïg Berbérian*, Dickran Kouymjian, ed. (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), pp. 125-84, and more recently, "Van," in Sergei Vardanyan, *Hayastani mayrakaghaknere* [The Capital Cities of Armenia] (Erevan: Apolon, 1995), pp. 7-46, cited hereafter as *Capital Cities*.

[2] For a general overview of the period, see Dickran Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom (1375) to the Forced Emigration under Shah Abbas (1604)," in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 2: *Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 1-50, and the earlier study, Dickran Kouymjian, "L'Arménie sous les dominations des Turcomans et des Ottomans (XV^{e}-XVI^{e} siècles)," in Gérard Dédéyan, ed., *Histoire de l'Arménie et du peuple arménien* (Toulouse: Privat, 1982), pp. 341-76.

with Armenians or, perhaps more accurately, how Armenians viewed them. As much as possible, texts and events have been chosen which relate directly to the city of Van and the island of Aghtamar and only secondarily to other areas of the Vaspurakan region.

The sole full-length Armenian history of the period is by Tovma Metsopetsi, who covered events from the 1380s up to the time of his writing in the 1440s.[3] We are not, however, totally deprived of historical testimony thanks mostly to minor chronicles and a plentiful group of colophons or memorials from Armenian manuscripts.[4] It is from these colophons and European travel accounts that a history of Armenian Van can be pieced together. Van became the most important center of manuscript production after the fall of the Cilician kingdom in 1375. The beginnings of the revival of local monasteries and their scriptoria can be traced to the late thirteenth century, but it is only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that scribes and artists at Van and other localities around the lake intensively engaged in copying and illustrating manuscripts. Nearly 1,500 of these have been preserved.

The secession of the dynastic territories of the Artsruni kingdom to the Byzantine Empire in the 1020s was accompanied by the immigration of the nobility and some 14,000 Armenian families to the area of Sebastia/Sivas. By the 1070s, the Seljuk Turks had taken Vaspurakan from the Byzantines and were able to keep control of the area in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries by sharing power with local Islamic dynasties, especially Kurdish emirs. In the second and third decades of the thirteenth century, the area of Van/Vaspurakan, together with other parts of Armenia, was devastated by the Khwarizm

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[3] For a French translation, see Félix Nève, "Exposé des guerres de Tamerlan et de Schah-Rokh dans l'Asie occidentale, d'après la chronique arménienne inédité de Thomas de Medzoph," *Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique, Mémoires couronnées,* vol. 2, no. 4 (1861). Also published as a separate offprint.

[4] The colophons of Armenian manuscripts from the fifth century to 1660 have been collected and published, except for those of the sixteenth century. They are conveniently listed by Robert W. Thomson, *A Bibliography of Classical Armenian Literature to 1500 AD* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), pp. 105-06, to which should be added Vazgen Hakobyan, *Hayeren dzeragreri tasnyoterord dari hishatakaranner (1641-1660 tt.)* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the Seventeenth Century (1641-1660)], vol. 3 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1984). Colophons specifically related to Near Eastern history in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have been excerpted and translated by Avedis K. Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

Shah Jalal ad-Din, who was chased west by the Great Mongols. In 1231 he was murdered in a simple act of robbery by an anonymous Kurd south of Lake Van.

In 1236 the successors of Genghis Khan had seized Tiflis, making the Georgian kingdom a vassal state. In 1243 at the battle of Köse Dagh, the Mongol armies of Chormaghun and Bayju-noyin defeated the Seljuks of Rum, turning all of Islamic Anatolia into a Mongol protectorate. It was after this decisive victory that the Armenian kings of Cilicia made the far-reaching decision of submission to the Great Khan and of forging an Armenian-Mongol alliance. The steps were as follows: first, between 1247 and 1250, Smbat, the brother of King Hetum and commander of the Armenian army, made the long voyage to Karakorum, the Mongol capital; then the king himself made the historic trip in 1253-56. During these same years, Hulagu, the brother of the new Great Khan Qubilai, marched west to claim the Near East as his personal territory. With the title Il-Khan, Hulagu seized Alamut, the great fortress of the Assassins, the dreaded Shi'ite Muslim sect, in 1256, and took Baghdad in 1258, putting an end to the Abbasid caliphate (750-1258).

For nearly a half century, thanks to the Mongol alliance, Armenians lived in relative calm under the *pax Mongolica*. Van, like Erzinjan (Erzinka) to the north, benefitted by renewed trade and the possibility of secure travel. The general peace and security in the western domains of the Mongol Empire (the Ilkhanate) allowed commercial and intellectual exchanges between Christians and Muslims under the hegemony of the Central Asian conquerors before the conversion of the Ilkhans to Islam. This revival of activity, which ultimately may be traced back to the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries, when Armenians seemed to be everywhere in the Near East from Egypt to Syria and northern Iraq, was strong enough that it held up during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the Timurids and the Black Sheep (Kara Koyunlu) and White Sheep (Ak Koyunlu) Turkmen dynasties fought each other for control of the Armenian Plateau. The decline took place only in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries during which the protracted war between the Ottoman sultans and the Safavid shahs of Iran made Armenia a deserted no-man's land, the battlefield of the opponents.[5]

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[5] On the progression of the Turko-Persian wars, see Kouymjian, "Armenia from the

It is only after the Persian-Turkish Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin in 1639 that a certain prosperity returned to Armenian urban centers, especially the recently settled community of New Julfa in Iran, but also to cities like Tiflis, Erzerum (Karin), and Van. The seventeenth century was the moment when the Armenians began to enter the modern era, because of the collapse of the earlier semi-feudal *nakharar* system and the importation of new technology, such as printing, and especially ideas from the West.[6]

As for Van itself, scribal memorials of Armenian manuscripts provide descriptions of isolated events for both the city of Van and the region during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. The work of weaving them together coherently remains to be done for Van as well as other regions of Armenian settlement during these long middle centuries between the decline of the Cilician kingdom in the fourteenth century and the general revival of the late seventeenth century. One might add that our knowledge concerning Van and other cities in the pre-Mongol period, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as well as that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remains vague.[7]

The fall of the Kingdom of Cilicia was a cruel disappointment to all Armenians, even if its jurisdiction never reached north of the Taurus Mountains into Greater Armenia. Colophons of the thirteenth and especially of the fourteenth century from areas as distant as the Crimea, Ilkhanid Iran, Julfa on the Araxes (Arax), Ayrarat, Siunik, Tiflis, Erzerum, Erzinjan, Sivas (Sebastia), Baiburt (Baberd), and the Lake Van region acknowledged the successive kings of Cilicia, but immediately after the destruction of the kingdom colophons stopped citing Armenian rulers. Only in Siunik and Lori were local princes and barons, such as the Orbelians, still mentioned. For the rest of Armenia, the Church remained the only permanent, widespread national institution. Its catholicoses, patriarchs, and bishops were unfailingly referred to in the colophonic formulae.

Even worse than the bewildering destruction of the Mongol invasion were the cruelties of Timur Lang a century later. In September 1387,

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Fall of the Cilician Kingdom," pp. 14-21.

[6] Dickran Kouymjian, "From Disintegration to Reintegration: Armenians at the Start of the Modern Era, XVIth-XVIIth Centuries," *Revue du Monde Arménien* 1 (1994): 9-18.

[7] This conference on Van/Vaspurakan and others scheduled in the UCLA series will help to fill in the gaps.

Timur, on his way back to the east, laid siege to Van, then under the control of Yezdin, a Kurd with Armenian sympathies, who may have been Armenian by origin. For twenty-six days the fortress was under attack. Without regard to age or race Timur punished all inhabitants. Men were separated from the women and children, tied up in groups, and cast off from the high ramparts of the Van fortress. In a versed colophon Grigor of Akhlat reports that the pile of bodies at the base became so high that the later victims, when they were thrown down from the height, did not all die because they were cushioned by the mound of corpses.[8] The continuator of the *History* of Samuel of Ani reports that 7,000 were killed at Van in this way.[9]

This was Timur's second campaign of destruction in Armenia, after which he returned to his capital Samarkand loaded down with booty and slaves. But the consequences were not over, because the effects of these two years of ravaging were to leave the countryside in a permanent state of disorder; fields were uncultivated, and in 1388 one of a number of major famines hit Armenia and the Van area. A scribe wrote: "*Shatk i sovu meran ev aylk, shun ev katu keran*" (Many died of famine, and others ate dogs and cats). During Timur's third raid in 1397, his forces attacked all of Vaspurakan, seized the leader of the Hakkari Kurds and imprisoned him at Aghtamar, after which they went on to pillage all of southern Vaspurakan, "burning homes, eating their stores, and searching out anything of value."[10]

Five years later at Angora (Ankara), Timur put a temporary stop to Turkish expansion toward the east by defeating Sultan Bayazid and destroying the Ottoman army. He then rushed off to Central Asia, where he died in battle. But the Timurids had not renounced claims on the region. Timur's son Shah Rukh led three campaigns in the next fifteen years against the Kara Koyunlu confederation. These are described in detail in Tovma Metsopetsi's *History*.[11] In 1420, Shah Rukh

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[8] Levon Khachikyan, "Hayastani kaghakakan vichake ev sotsial-tntesakan haraberutyunnere XIV-XV darerum" [The Political Condition and Socio-Economic Relations of Armenia in the 14th-15th Centuries], in *Hay zhoghovrdi patmutyun* [History of the Armenian People], vol. 4 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1972), pp. 26-27, cited hereafter as "Political Condition." See also Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 15.

[9] Khachikyan, "Political Condition," p. 27.

[10] Quotation from the scribe Grigor. See Levon Khachikyan, *XIV dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1960), p. 621, and his "Political Condition," p. 29.

[11] Tovma Metsopetsi, *Patmutiun Lank-Tamuray ev hajordats iurots* [History of Timur

marched toward Vaspurakan. The chief of the Black Sheep confederation, Iskender, the son of Kara Yusuf, met him with an army of 150,000 but soon retreated to the south to Mardin and Mosul until Shah Rukh left the area after pillaging Van and the surrounding region. The worst was a plague of locusts in the following year, which according to one colophon was so thick that the insects "covered the plains and the mountains, the peaks and the valleys, like a sea," again causing a general famine.[12]

According to other Armenian colophons, Iskender's reign was perceived to be as harsh as any. A scribe writing in Aghtamar in the year 1425 reports: "Armenia was subjected to devastation and plunder, to slaughter, and captivity. . . . For a whole year the wicked tyrant *amirza* Iskender . . . a Turk by race, has seized . . . Ostan [Vostan] and . . . made uninhabitable the regions of Aghbak . . . and Ostan . . . as far as Bitlis. The inhabitants of these regions took refuge abroad, naked, barefooted, and famished. And some, who had escaped to this God-protected island [Aghtamar] and placed their trust in God, . . . escaped from the evil captivity of the wicked tyrant."[13] Another colophon from the following year says that Iskender "made our Armenian homeland like a desert."[14] Several colophons attest to the siege and fall of Van in the same year. At Khizan, Karapet the scribe complains that Iskender "seized our [Kurdish] Emir Sultan Ahmad, and arriving with numerous troops he besieged our impregnable fortress of Van for fifty days."[15] Another colophon is more eloquent: "I, Khoja Astvatsatur . . . bought this book by Narekatsi, which was held in bondage by the Turkmen in the year when Iskender captured the citadel of Van from the Kurds in 1425. And they committed much destruction, and they carried off all the sacred effects. And I saw this [manuscript] book of Narekatsi when they brought it to the Monastery of Veri Varag; and I purchased it with my honestly earned assets and offered

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Lang and His Successors], cd. Karapet Shahnazarian (Paris: K.V. Shahnazarian, 1860). For a partial French translation, see Nève, "Exposé des guerres de Tamerlan et de Schah-Rokh" (note 3 above).

[12] Sanjian, *Colophons*, p. 145.

[13] Ibid., p. 166.

[14] Ibid., p. 170.

[15] Levon Khachikyan, *XV dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the Fifteenth Century], vol. 1 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1955), p. 328; Sanjian, *Colophons*, p. 167.

it to the holy monastery of Veri Varag, where it had been before."[16] Petros the scribe writing in Berkri the following year adds: "This is his [Iskender's] third annual arrival; each time he plundered and carried off captives from our regions of Van and Ostan. He then captured the citadel of Van, and all of us generally, bishops and vardapets, monks and priests, *tanuters* and ladies, took to flight and wandered about in foreign lands and became strangers."[17] In 1427, Tovma Metsopetsi himself, writing at the Monastery of Metsop, complained that the divine liturgy had not been performed for six years.[18]

Iskender also attacked many of the Kurdish chiefs around Lakes Van and Urmia. In 1426, he put an end to the fiefdom of Artaz in the Maku area of Vaspurakan, ruled by Armenian Catholic feudal lords, much to the joy of the Orthodox Apostolic Armenians, who, in one colophon, praise the Muslims for allowing them to make repairs on one of their churches, which had been forbidden them by the Catholics.

By the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the Kara Koyunlu, now under Jihanshah, were subject to continual attacks by the rival Ak Koyunlu or White Sheep Turkmen, who had begun moving up from their lands around Mosul. Attacks against the Lake Van area resulted in heavy reprisals by Jihanshah, who laid waste to Taron and Mush in 1467. The end was near, however, for the Kara Koyunlu dynasty. The charismatic Ak Koyunlu leader Uzun Hasan slaughtered Jihanshah and his most loyal forces in 1467 and became ruler of Armenia. But there was no peace for Armenians in Van; the following four decades were marked by continual struggles between opposing Turkic dynasties in Iran to the east and in Anatolia to the west.[19]

Determined to stamp out all semi-independent authority in his lands, Uzun Hasan attacked Bitlis, the decades-old stronghold of Kurdish emirs who controlled that side of Lake Van. Bitlis, Akhlat, and lands to the south were taken, but after a series of further victories against the Greek Pontic state and the Karamanids in central Anatolia, Uzun

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[16] Khachikyan, *XV dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner*, p. 328.

[17] Sanjian, *Colophons*, p. 171.

[18] Khachikyan, *XV dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner*, p. 361; Sanjian, *Colophons*, p. 172.

[19] Details on these dynasties can be found in the respective articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and in the *İslam Ansiklopedisi*. See also Kouymjian, "A Critical Bibliography," p. 43; John Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire: A Study in 15th/9th Century Turko-Iranian Politics* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976).

Hasan was soundly defeated by the Ottomans. The Ak Koyunlu ultimately submitted to the pressures of the Ottomans and the Safavids. The latter began their rise under Ismail, who as a child was closely bound to Van, especially Aghtamar. According to the early sixteenth century Italian traveler Giovanni Angiolello, Ismail, the son of the Sheikh Haidar of Tabriz, sought refuge from the Ak Koyunlu ruler Rustum on the island of Aghtamar in the 1490s. While there at age thirteen he was crowned king at the hands of an Armenian priest, after which he fled with his father to Karabagh. He later marched on Tabriz, which he captured in 1502 and by that successful act started the Safavid dynasty.[20]

The major competing forces for the control of Van/Vaspurakan and the rest of Armenia were now the Ottoman Turks under Sultan Selim, known as the Grim, and Safavid Iran under Ismail. Selim won the first battle of a war that was to last for 125 years by defeating the Safavids at Chaldiran, not far from the historic battlefield of Avarayr, in 1514, after which he conquered Egypt but did not succeed in gaining full control of Van or Armenia. The Safavids almost immediately struck back, invading Georgia and Shirvan in 1516, thereby establishing a pattern of attack and counterattack for the entire sixteenth century.[21] The first of the three Ottoman campaigns into Armenia and Georgia by Sultan Suleyman, known in the West as the Magnificent, against Shah Tahmasp began in 1533 when Ibrahim Pasha, the grand vizier, was ordered to seize the fortress of Van, which was taken in the next year. Suleyman received the obedience of various Georgian princes as well as the Kurdish emir of Bitlis, who ceded his fortresses south of Lake Van. The Kurds, however, were not brought completely under control until the seventeenth century. The outcome of the campaign gave little more to the Ottomans than the area around Van. But the Safavids immediately laid siege to Van, once again causing death by famine and sword of 16,000 inhabitants.[22] For the next hundred years Van and Erzerum were to be the main staging points for Ottoman

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[20] See Hakob Hakobyan, *Ughevorutyunner* [Travel Accounts], vol. 1 (Erevan, 1932); cf. Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 16.

[21] Details in Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom," pp. 14-21.

[22] Abgar Hovhannisyan, "Hayastani kaghakakan vichake sefyan Irani ev osmanyan Turkiayi tirapetutyan tak" [The Political Situation of Armenia under the Hegemony of Safavid Iran and Ottoman Turkey], in *Hay zhoghovrdi patmutyun,* vol. 4, p. 83, quoting a colophon from a manuscript in Venice.

thrusts against Persia.

The second Ottoman campaign of 1547-48, begun again with the seizure of Van, was led this time by the Persian Shah Tahmasp's own brother, Alqaz Mirza, who had defected to the enemy side. Suleyman was so pleased about retrieving Van that he sent a letter to King Henry II of France in which he spoke of the "impregnability of the fortress which reached to the sky."[23] The French ambassador and military advisor to the sultan, d'Armon, referred to Van as the most famous and indomitable Persian fortress.[24] About this siege, the Ottoman chronicler Solakzade gives a circumstantial account of the thousands of troops and the cannons used against the weaker parts of the fortifications, as well as the work of sappers who undermined the foundations of the ramparts. Only after ten days of incessant bombardment did the city fall. Solakzade also praised the unusual quality of the Armenian architects and builders of the Van citadel. "This fortress," he wrote, "is the key to Persia . . . [about which] the wicked Shah boastfully said, 'As long as the yellow rock [of Van] is under my command, what need have I to fear the Ottoman Sultans?'"[25]

In the next year, 1549, the Georgian army was destroyed, and the western part of the country, along with Armenia, began to be considered as part of the Ottoman Empire. During the three years that followed, Shah Tahmasp made vicious counter-raids against Basen, Bardzr Hayk, Vaspurakan, and Turuberan. Suleyman reacted by officially turning Van and Diarbekir (Tigranakert) into separate provinces, thereby making twenty-one the number of provinces constituting his empire. During this phase of the bitter rivalry over Armenia and Georgia, the sources concur that the Christian inhabitants as a group preferred the Persians to the Ottomans. In Armenia proper, the immediate consequence of the war of 1547 to 1552 was a severe famine in the years 1552-53. The lack of foodstuffs was the result of both

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[23] Manvel K. Zulalyan, *Jalali sharzhumnere ev hay zhoghovrdi vichake Osmanyan kaisrutyan mej (xvi-xvii darer)* [The Jalali Movement and the Condition of the Armenian People in the Ottoman Empire (16th-17th Centuries)] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1966), p. 118; Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 17.

[24] Vardanyan, *Capital Cities,* p. 17.

[25] Excerpts of Turkish primary sources have been collected and translated by Aram Safrastyan, *Turkakan aghbyurnere Hayastani, hayeri ev Andrkovkasi myus zhoghovurdneri masin* [The Turkish Sources about Armenia, the Armenians, and the Other Peoples of Transcaucasia], vol. 2 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1964), p. 142; Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 17.

the reluctance of the peasants to go out to distant fields for fear of their lives and the forced requisitioning by opposing armies and irregular troops of whatever was available.

Just prior to Suleyman's third eastern campaign, Tahmasp in 1553 seized the fortresses of Akhlat and Arjesh and the country around Basen, as well as lands to the north and east. Erzerum, Van, and Artske were laid waste. Shah Tahmasp embarked on a deliberate scorched-earth policy in order to retard an army he could not beat on its progress through Armenia.[26] On May 29, 1555, this phase of the war was concluded at Amasia with the first treaty of peace between the Safavids and Ottomans. Suleyman received or kept Mosul, Marash, Van, Bayazid, and western Georgia. During the next twenty-three years, the Ottomans used Armenians and Kurds—according to a colophon of 1566—to construct or reconstruct forts in Van and Arjesh and probably elsewhere. Shortly after, in the area from Van to Khoi, that is Vaspurakan, the Ottomans encouraged a Kurdish rebellion against the Safavids. To weaken the Persian state, which was in this period perceived as an important rival for eastern trade, the Ottomans planned to seize all of Armenia and Caucasia at any auspicious moment.

Hostilities ended only in 1639 when the Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin finally stopped a century and a half of war. The treaty gave the Ottomans Mesopotamia, with Baghdad and Mosul, the Van area, and Armenia up to Kars. Erevan, Shirvan, and Tabriz went to the Safavids. But Van was not yet exempt from suffering. In 1648 a devastating earthquake hit the city and the surrounding area. The earthquake's force was such that even the enormous ramparts of the inner fortress collapsed and others which did not were torn down. Arakel Davrizhetsi describes in detail the death and destruction. "Innumerable houses, merchandise, and edifices were destroyed," he laments, "and under them were trapped men and animals. The dead were so many that they were taken out of the city. The survivors could not dig enough graves, but in the open cracks in the ground, wrapping eight to ten bodies at a time in cloth, they dumped the corpses into the fissures and covered them with earth."[27] Among the miracles that parallel closely the

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[26] Shah Abbas was to use the same tactic fifty years later in the face of an invading Ottoman army, but with the more extreme measure in 1604 of deporting totally the local Armenian population to Iran, especially to his capital at Isfahan.

[27] Arakel Davrizhetsi, *Patmutiun* [History] (Vagharshapat: Holy See of Echmiadzin, 1884), chapter 35, "*Haghags sharzhin or eghev i Van kaghakin ev iurum shrjakay erkrin*"

Armenian earthquake of December 1988, Arakel tells the story of two youths who survived forty days under the ruins. What is noteworthy in his long description is the way the Armenians of Van started to rebuild both the city and its fortifications "immediately after the dust settled" (his expression). In this project wealthy Armenian merchants of Van, the *khoja* class, played a major role.[28] In order to secure permission to rebuild the many collapsed churches, Khoja Rahijan went to Constantinople to see the sultan from whom he got a *firman* to proceed. Then he and Khoja Akhijan, Khoja Adomian, and others systematically financed the rebuilding of the churches in Van and even in the neighboring monastery of Varag.[29]

The history of this post-war period reveals the wealth that had accumulated in the early seventeenth century among Armenians of Van, principally through trade, and shows the power they had in controlling their own destiny. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Armenians had a good deal of autonomy in the city, and at times they were responsible for most of Van's administration, as was the case in New Julfa.[30] The major clans were also armed and in a position to defend the city should the sultan's officials fail. But that is a subject for the later history of the city.

Trade and Culture

During these centuries many Armenians in cities to the west such as Erzinjan, Sivas, and Kaiseri, towns around Lake Van, and, farther to the east, Julfa on the Araxes, took advantage of moments of peace to engage in trade, benefiting from commercial contacts with the

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[About the Earthquake That Struck the City of Van and Its Surrounding Regions], pp. 378-81.

[28] On the importance of the *khoja* class in the seventeenth century, see Kouymjian, "From Disintegration to Reintegration."

[29] Arakel Davrizhetsi, *Patmutiun*, p. 381.

[30] The details of the governing council of New Julfa are found in Harutiun Ter-Hovhaniants, *Patmutiun Nor Jughayu or hAspahan* [History of New Julfa in Isfahan], 2 vols. (New Julfa: All Saviors Monastery, 1880-81; reissued, 1980). This material has been analyzed by Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, "Silk and Silver: The Trade and Organization of New Julfa at the End of the Seventeenth Century," *Revue des études arméniennes* 25 (1994-95): 389-416. Though Baghdiantz McCabe makes no mention of Van, one cannot but presume that the Armenians of Van had a similar city council made up of the leading merchant families.

diasporan communities of the Crimea, Poland, Holland, and Italy.[31] The most thriving center of Armenian culture in the fifteenth century, and perhaps in the sixteenth century, too, was around Lake Van. The cities and monasteries along and nearby its shores were both individually and as a group the most dynamic of any in Armenia. The region had its own catholicos, established at Aghtamar in 1113. An anonymous Venetian merchant who passed through between 1510 and 1520 says of Aghtamar: "On the island there is a small city, 2 miles in circumference. The city's limits are equal to that of the island. The city is called Armenik, very populous (about 600 houses) with only Armenians, no Mohammedans, and many churches."[32] It should be remembered that the water level of Lake Van has gradually risen since that time, and the island was substantially bigger than at present.

During the early fifteenth century, the Catholicos of Aghtamar benefited by his geographical position in the center of Armenia. Closer to the Armenian population and the remaining semi-autonomous centers in the north of the country than the Catholicos of All Armenians still resident at Sis, he took advantage of the sporadic protection of Kurdish emirs and the Kara Koyunlu rulers by asserting an authority on the Armenian Church and nation beyond the immediate confines of the Van region. From 1434 to 1464, Catholicos Zakaria of Aghtamar, through his ceaseless activity, was a major force in national affairs. As a leader in the events surrounding the re-establishment of the Catholicosate in Echmiadzin in 1441, he was, with the support of the Kara Koyunlu ruler Jihanshah, later able to assume the office of Catholicos of All Armenians and was even resident at Holy Echmiadzin for a time, as was his relative and successor Ter Stepanos IV, Catholicos from 1465 to 1489. Both men were from the Sefedinian family, which claimed direct descent from the Artsrunis. The struggle for local autonomy in Van/Vaspurakan led by the Sefedinians bore fruit for a short time when in 1466 Stepanos Catholicos was able, if only for two years, to consecrate at Aghtamar his own nephew Smbat as King of Armenia. The title was even recognized by Jihanshah, and Smbat established his royal residence, like the Artsrunis before him, at

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[31] Sixteenth-century trade at old Julfa on the Araxes has been discussed by Jurgis Baltrušaitis and Dickran Kouymjian, "Julfa on the Arax and Its Funerary Monuments," in *Armenian Studies/Etudes Arméniennes: In Memoriam Haïg Berbérian*, pp. 9-53.

[32] See Hakobyan, *Ughevorutyunner*, vol. 1, pp. 300-01, partially quoted by Khachikyan, "Political Condition," pp. 44-45, and Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 15.

Aghtamar. Colophons of the period from various areas around Lake Van and even beyond refer to Aghtamar as both the catholicosal see and a royal seat. The exploits of Catholicos Zakaria contained in a long colophon of 1462 from Arjesh provide one of the most vivid early accounts we have of life in the city of Van. Supported by Jihanshah, Zakaria rescued from Echmiadzin the right arm (*aj*) of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, the holiest relic of the Armenian Church, along with the famous processional banner depicting Gregory with King Trdat, and traveled with them to Van and finally Aghtamar. Parts of the passage on Van read:

> He entered the city of Van with numerous bishops, vardapets, and priests and multitudes of people with horses and horsemen. The priests, who walked both in front of and behind the banner, sang sweet melodies. . . .
>
> But the baron who occupied the fortress of Semiramis, that is, the citadel of Van, namely Mahmut Bek, who was padishah Jihanshah's foster brother, witnessing the prosperity of the Christians, wished to see the holy right hand, and he sent for it. When the great pontiff . . . entered the gate of the uppermost part of the citadel, the tyrant Mahmut Bek came out to greet him with all his chieftains and their families and with his sons. They fell down before the holy right hand and kissed it; and they offered supplications. . . . The multitudes of the city and of the canton arrived every day with numerous gifts and offerings, and prostrated themselves before the holy right hand and greeted the great pontiff. . . . [L]ater he [Zakaria] obtained . . . permission to proceed to his ancestral seat at Aghtamar. When he left the city, multitudes of bishops, vardapets, and priests and all the corps of noble khojas of Van accompanied him, with their horses and armed horsemen. They arrived near the coastal city of Ostan. All of its inhabitants, priests and multitudes of people of all ranks, came out to greet them with incense and candles and resounding melodies; so much so that there were more than a thousand men in front of and behind the great pontiff. The ecclesiastical banner was carried in front, and the golden crucifix affixed on the top shone like a light. . . . When the alien [Muslim] inhabitants of Ostan witnessed this rejoicing, they were deeply aggrieved by the splendor and by the forwardness of the pontiff [and they plotted against him, but he managed to flee] and took the right hand of the Illuminator and, boarding a boat, went to . . .

the God-inhabited island of Aghtamar.[33]

But glory was not to last. The northern clergy were hostile to the Catholicosate of Aghtamar and the growing influence of Vaspurakan. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, Aghtamar's authority began to shrink, becoming once again a strictly regional patriarchate bearing the title Catholicos.

Conclusion

From the thirteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, Van and the surrounding region maintained their Armenian character despite constant incursions by Seljuk Turks, Mongols, Turkmen, Kurds, Persians, and Ottoman Turks. Suffering was the lot shared in the early period with the other inhabitants of the city, Muslim and Christian alike. Nevertheless, the fifteenth century was a time of relative prosperity for those engaged in trade with the rise of a powerful middle class led by the merchant-khojas.

In the Mongol and Timurid period the large monastic complexes were the major patrons of art and learning outside of Cilicia. They were the only institutions that had the means to produce even the relatively reduced quantity of material culture that has survived from these centuries. Colophons and inscriptions of donation record numerous examples of how churches and monasteries began to be enriched. Already in the fifteenth century it became common for surviving noble families to give property—villages, orchards, fields—to monasteries to avoid having them pass to Muslim civil authorities. In the Van area at the Theotokos Monastery at Bitlis and at Aghtamar itself, the practice was regularly recorded.

The famous monastic universities of the late fourteenth century associated with Hovhannes Vorotnetsi, Grigor Tatevatsi, and others continued a precarious existence in the north in the first decades of the fifteenth century, only to fall into eclipse in the latter part of the fifteenth and the entire sixteenth century. Among those which played the most active role in the earlier period was Metsop in the Van area. The locus of Armenian artistic activity had by then shifted to the more

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[33] Sanjian, *Colophons*, pp. 274-75.

stable Van area.[34] The monasteries of Varag, Kajberuni, Khizan, Bitlis, Metsop, Aghtamar, and Arjesh flourished during the early part of the fifteenth century. Throughout the sixteenth century, however, these institutions struggled simply to survive. In the first half of the seventeenth century, a perceptible resurgence of monastic institutions, concomitant with the general flourishing of Armenian life, took place. The most active centers of manuscript production were almost entirely in the Lake Van area, and only later in Jerusalem and Aleppo. The second half of the seventeenth century, however, also shows the Van region in decline, giving way to Constantinople and eventually to New Julfa.

The sixteenth century was the worst moment for Van and all of Armenia because of the unrelenting war between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Yet, even through those years the Armenians of Van seemed to be preparing for the postwar peace, which, despite the devastating earthquake of 1648, brought renewed prosperity to the urban classes. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Western and Muslim travelers started to take notice of Van and its unique fortress. For both Persians and Turks it was an important prize, but the Armenians continued to regard the city and the region around Lake Van as their own. The building and rebuilding of the city's ramparts no doubt inculcated a certain pride in its inhabitants and a self-confidence that has prevailed into our time. As adversity regularly followed prosperity during these centuries, the tenacity and determination of Van's inhabitants were forged with the strength of its famous Rock.

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[34] On the artistic production of the Van school of miniaturists, see Hravard Hakobyan, *Vaspurakani manrankarchutyune* [The Miniature Painting of Vaspurakan], 2 vols. (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1976-82); idem., *Haykakan manrankarchutyun: Vaspurakan* [Armenian Miniatures: Vaspurakan] (Armenian, Russian, English text with 100 color plates) (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1978); Lilit Zakaryan, *Iz istorii vaspurakanskoi miniatiury* [From the History of Vaspurakan Miniatures] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1980).

❀ 8 ❀

The Heritage of Van Provincial Literature

Rubina Peroomian

Հայր մեր որ յերկինս . . . : Աստուած քաւեա զիս մեղաւորս, Տէր ներող Տէր ողորմեա . . . չտանես աչն մտքէն, չտանես ամօթն երեսէն . . . զամէն անճարոց ճարիկն անես ասպա մէ: . . . շաղաթաթախ աղօթրան դու բարի կամաթ Հասուցես. մայր մեր մայր Քրիստոսին քէ եմ կանչէ, կամաւոր ժամեր պատարագներ դուք Հիմնաստ կայնէք. զամէն կարիպ-կուրպաթի բանին գործին յաջողութէն տաք, ինոնց սատաղէն մեր կարիպներաց . . . իմ ձեթկիկ ձագերաց ձէնիկ դառնաս . . . Հացին էժնութիւն, ջրին առատութիւն, անձրեւի շատութիւն . . . Հայոց ճոչերաց սէր միաբանութիւն, Հայոց ազգին աղատութիւն . . . Աստուած քէ փառք, ումուտս քէ եմ արէ: Հայր մեր . . .[1]

In loose translation: "Our Father, Who art in Heaven . . . God, save this sinner, God forgiving, God merciful . . . Take not fear from the mind, shame from the face . . . May You cure all those in despair; then cure us . . . Our Mother, Mother of Christ, I call upon you. Help things go well with our migrant *gharib*s . . . May bread be cheap, water abundant, rain plentiful . . . love and unity among the Armenian leaders, freedom to the Armenian nation. God, glory onto You. I have put my hope upon You. Our Father. . ."

This excerpt from "Վանայ պառաւաց աղօթքը" (The prayer of the old women of Van), in the local dialect, is a sample of Van provincial literature. Although regional dialects embody and convey the characteristic outlook and world view of the people of that locale, what places this piece within the realm of Van provincial literature is not the dialect alone but the combination of all its attributes—the frame

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[1] *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, 5th period, 1862-63, no. 3, pp. 87-88, also in Garegin Srvandztiants, *Erker* [Works], vol. 2 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1982), pp. 64-65.

of mind, the anxieties, the hopes and aspirations of the women of Van.

This discussion focuses on the attributes and characteristics of provincial literature, what that literature represents, and its influence on the development of modern Western Armenian literature. It concentrates especially on the provincial literature of Vaspurakan and the role of Mkrtich Khrimian "Hayrik" in promoting and disseminating that literature.

The Literary Scene in Constantinople

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Western Armenian renaissance literature had already made headway in terms of form, content, and ideology. Its language, although still mainly *grabar* (classical Armenian), was in the process of secularization. This language of the Armenian holy scriptures and masterpieces of the Golden Age of the fifth century, in spite of staunch defenders, was losing ground. The gradually enriched and refined Western Armenian vernacular, based on the dialect of Constantinople, was on its way to becoming the principal medium of oral and written literary expression and artistic creation.

The literary milieu in Constantinople was permeated with the ideas of revival and progress. The French Revolution and its proclaimed goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity had become the source of inspiration and motivation for the Armenian literati. In order to reach the masses to disseminate these ideas and foster enlightenment, the renovation of the literary language was an absolute necessity. It is in this context that Khrimian entered the literary arena of Constantinople.

Mkrtich Khrimian was born in 1820 in a suburb of Van known as Aygestan (Orchard or Gardens). At a very young age he lost his father and was raised by an uncle who taught him to read and write and to take part in the family textile trade. Before the opening of the first schools in Van in the 1840s, children received their basic education at home or while learning a trade, predominantly weaving, with their masters. The period is significantly characterized as ջուլհակ-վարժոց (weaver-school).

Mkrtich married only to fulfill his mother's wish, but, after a short wedded life, he set out on a long journey mainly to avoid compulsory military service. To quell the Kurdish uprising led by Badrkhan Bek in 1847, the Sublime Porte used the Armenians against the Kurdish

tribesmen. The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople was coerced into authorizing the formation of Armenian military units to participate in the campaign against the rebels.[2] This action was taken despite the fact that Armenians as non-Muslims were normally prohibited from bearing arms. After a year of traveling through Eastern and Western Armenia, Khrimian settled in Constantinople and found a job as a teacher in a girls' school. He was called the *Vanetsi varzhapet* (the teacher from Van). His charisma and good nature soon made him a popular figure, and his two odes to Armenia and to Christianity, written and published in Constantinople, placed him among the esteemed men of letters.

Khrimian was not just an addition to the Constantinople literati. In fact, in terms of novelty of thought, literary style, form, and language, he had little to offer. Nonetheless, he had brought the fresh air of the province of Van and a passion for the Armenian homeland. Indeed, during his year-long journey around Armenia, he had become enthralled with every rock and every river; he had drawn inspiration from villagers and townsfolk. Their pain and suffering, their joy and pride, had filled his heart with love and tenderness.

His popularity made him a coveted guest among Armenian social circles in Constantinople. Khrimian was a good story-teller. His stories were always embellished with descriptions of the beauty of Armenia, but more important they echoed the woe and affliction of the Armenian provincial folk so genuinely that he came to be known as the recounter of Armenia's pains (Հայաստանի ցաւերու պատմիչ). He had a mission to transmit his compassion, love, and ardor to the people of Constantinople. His long poem (with a foreword in prose) titled *Hravirak Araratian* (Invitation to Ararat), written in 1848 and published in 1850, reflected his adoration of Armenia and his dream of a free homeland. These sentiments, along with his fervid devotion to Christianity, manifested in *Hravirak erkrin avetiats* (Invitation to the Promised Land), dominated his temperament and led him through his career as teacher, clergyman, patriarch, and Catholicos of All Armenians.[3] His sojourn in Constantinople made an impact; his two poems, despite their want

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[2] See Garnik Giuzelian, *Khrimian Hayrik* (Beirut: Hamazkayine, 1954), p. 17.

[3] *Hravirak Araratian* (1850) and *Hravirak erkrin avetiats* (1851), both in grabar, were published in Constantinople. Among other reprints, see *Amboghjakan erker Khrimian Hayriki* [Complete Works of Khrimian Hayrik] (New York: Hay Krtakan Himnarkutiun, 1929), pp. 1-103, 513-633.

of artistic quality, were definite sources of influence and inspiration for the intelligentsia, as was reflected in their literature.

In 1853, Khrimian returned to Van only to find that his mother, wife, and daughter had died. During his seven-year absence his family had gradually succumbed to poverty and disease. His life was deeply affected. Faced with this new predicament, he decided to follow the calling to serve his people as a spiritual leader. In 1854 he was ordained *vardapet* (archimandrite) at the monastery of Aghtamar on the small island near Van.

Returning to Constantinople, Mkrtich vardapet Khrimian accomplished several missions for the patriarchate, mainly traveling to various areas of Armenian concentration in the Ottoman Empire, gathering data on local conditions, thereby also augmenting his knowledge of the land and the people. Khrimian's main preoccupation was the situation in the Armenian provinces, the widespread misery, deplorable living conditions, and continuous deprivations, about which the cosmopolitan Armenians knew or cared very little.

In June of 1855, Khrimian began publishing *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (The Eagle of Vaspurakan). Khrimian was a proponent of grabar, in which his poetry had been written, and although most other periodicals of the time were in *ashkharhabar* (the vernacular), he insisted on using grabar for *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. The main reason for this choice was the contempt he felt for the crude and ugly vernacular. He did not believe that the dialect used in Constantinople would be acceptable to Armenians in the provinces—that is, historic Armenia—or to the Russian Armenians, for whom grabar would undoubtedly be more familiar and appealing than the Armenian of Constantinople.[4] Khrimian believed that the new literary language would satisfy only the needs of the urbanized communities in the western reaches of the Ottoman Empire. He did not support partial solutions; rather, he envisioned one language for all and did not relinquish the idea of sustaining grabar, or a simplified version of it, as the literary language of all Armenians. Later on, however, his zeal to educate people and to fight against ignorance and servitude made him compromise his principles. He began to write in the vernacular and worked toward the progress and refinement of the language intelligible to most Western Armenians.

Artsvi Vaspurakan became a repository of Khrimian's own passion-

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[4] See *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, 1855, no. 1, pp. 12-16.

ate depictions of various regions of Armenia and meticulous recordings about abandoned, half-ruined, or still operating churches and monasteries (Տեսարանք հայրենի աշխարհաց), didactic articles of morality and piety (Բուրաստան բարոյական առաքելութեանց), articles imbued with patriotic love, sentimental calls for the liberation of the homeland, and sad stories of sufferings of *pandukhts*. The terms *pandukht* or *gharib* referred to the Armenian youth who under the pressure of ever deteriorating economic conditions in the provinces had to leave their homes and loved ones and migrate to the big cities, primarily Constantinople, to earn a living. These poor men hoped to save a little money and return someday, but very few succeeded in doing so. Most of them dragged on in their wretched existence under the heavy burden of financial deprivation and longing for their families until they died unnoticed in some dark corner. The magnitude of this deplorable situation was commensurate with a national dilemma, and Khrimian, himself a kind of pandukht, was especially concerned. To deal with this crisis and to keep those miserable people from coming to Constantinople, he advocated giving an economic boost to the provinces by way of introducing profitable enterprises, and, what is more important, educating people and arming them against exploiters and oppressors. He believed that until such time that economic opportunities were created in Armenia and until education and enlightenment became widespread, there would be no way to deal with this problem ("Մինչեւ որ Հայաստանի մէջ ալ շահաւէտ վաստակի դռներ չբացուին կրթութեան ուսմունքը չտարածուի ազգի մէջը՝ հնար չկայ ասոր դէմը առնելու").[5]

The Torch of Enlightenment in Van

Mkrtich vardapet Khrimian could not tolerate the life of a pandukht any longer. He even regarded *Artsvi Vaspurakan* as a pandukht like himself. In fact, *Artsvi Vaspurakan*'s subtitle expressed this dislocation: "Թռուցեալ հայրենասէր թեւօք յԱրծրունի գահէն ի Վանտոսպ" (Flown with patriotic wings from the Artsruni throne of Van-Tosp). At the end of 1856, Khrimian decided that he and his *Artsiv* must return home ("Դարձ Արծւոյն պանդխտելոյ"). Enduring many hardships, he transported his printing press to the Monastery of Varag near the shores of Lake Van. After a lapse of a year and a half, *Artsvi Vaspurakan* resumed

[5] Ibid., 1855, no. 3, pp. 79-80.

publication (January 1858) as the first periodical printed in Van. The migrated eagle had returned from its exile in the Land of Byzantium to its native Vaspurakan ("Դարձ Արծւոյն պանդխտելոյ ի Բիւզանդիոնէն Աշխարհն իւր հայրենի Վասպուրական").[6] He had dreamed and written about this propitious return. He wished he could entice his fellow pandukhts to come back with him. But few who shed tears for their erstwhile life and for their families and native land when they read his *Hravirak Araratian* and *Artsvi Vaspurakan* had sufficient courage to take the big step and return home empty-handed.[7]

Meghu (Bee), a periodical published in Constantinople, reported Khrimian's audacious venture: "As a new Gutenberg, carrying the torch of world enlightenment, trudging over snow and ice, he arrived in Van" ("Իբրեւ նոր Կիւթեմպերկ՝ աշխարհի լուսաւորութեան ջահը իր առաջին ձգած ձիւները և սառերը կոխկրտելով հասաւ Վան").[8] Moreover, the local Armenian authorities were not enthusiastic to see him. "He talks and talks, and I say what is it all about. He has brought and filled the place with some junk and calls it a press, a press" ("Եկեր կը խօսէ, կը խօսէ, ես ալ կ'ըսեմ ինչ է. քանի մը փետ-փետուր բերեր լեցուցեր և մամուլ, մամուլ կը կանչէ"), said a Vanetsi *agha*.[9] Archbishop Gabriel, the primate of Van, too, refused to support Khrimian or grant permission to establish himself at Varag monastery, which he hoped to turn into a center of learning like Venice.

Eventually, Khrimian was able to overcome all the difficulties. He did settle in Varag, where he resumed the publication of *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. The periodical appeared with some interruptions until 1864.[10] Khrimian also initiated the publication of *Artsvik Tarono* (Little Eagle of Taron) in 1862, when he was appointed the prelate of Taron (Mush). His disciple, the vardapet Garegin Srvandztiants, who had accompanied him to Taron, served as the editor of the bi-monthly. Srvandztiants also taught in the newly-opened school in Mush while collecting the folklore of the region. *Artsvik Tarono* was published

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[6] Ibid., 1856, no. 12.

[7] Ibid., 1856, no. 12, pp. 182-88.

[8] *Meghu*, Oct. 10, 1859, no. 28, cited in Haykaz M. Poghosyan, *Vaspurakani patmutyunits, 1850-1900* [From the History of Vaspurakan, 1850-1900] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1988), p. 112.

[9] *Azatamart* (Constantinople), June 20/July 3, 1910, no. 313, cited in *Vaspurakani patmutiunits*, p. 113.

[10] After a long lapse, *Artsvi Vaspurakan* was published once again in 1872 by Manvel Ananian but stopped for good after a few months.

from 1863 to 1865, assuming the same role as *Artsvi Vaspurakan* in educating the simple peasant, instilling love of the native land, and becoming the mirror of pain and suffering of the people of the historic region of Taron-Turuberan. Significantly, both *Artsvi Vaspurakan* and *Artsvik Tarono* shared the same fate—shut down as anti-government publications.

Along with the printing press, Khrimian established the theological seminary of Zharangavorats at Varag. That was the first school in Vaspurakan with modern pedagogic methodology, functioning without corporal punishments, the old method of teaching. In spite of the lack of formal education, Khrimian was a natural teacher. He trained teachers to treat students with care and understanding, to create a pleasant atmosphere for learning, and to inculcate patriotism and attachment to the homeland. He encouraged the preparation of language and history textbooks with these principles and the lore of Vaspurakan as their vehicle. At Khrimian's behest, his cousin Khoren Khrimian, a most devoted teacher at Zharangavorats, prepared three volumes of Հայրենագիտություն (Armenology), and with these textbooks the Armenian folklore and the literature of Van for the first time found their way into the school curricula.

Khrimian made the Zharangavorats school a model of modern education and a driving force in developing a network of schools in Vaspurakan. In these schools a generation of future intellectuals was trained to assume the leadership of the educational and cultural life in Vaspurakan. When the Ottoman persecutions became unbearable, these intellectuals spearheaded secret organizations of self-defense and of struggle for the betterment of Armenian life. Among them were prominent leaders of emancipation and revolutionary movements such as the Tevkants brothers, Khoren Khrimian, Mesrop Papazian, Panos Terlemezian, Poghos Natanian, and Mkrtich Avetisian.

The Zharangavorats school and *Artsvi Vaspurakan* complemented one another in the campaign for enlightenment. The periodical *Artsvi Vaspurakan* was perhaps the first channel through which the Constantinople intelligentsia became aware of the situation in the Armenian provinces. It reported the uprising of Zeitun in 1862, praising the national pride and the courage of the Zeituntsis as an example to follow. In a long article titled "Mer gords noren sksenk" (Let's Begin Our Work Again), Garegin Srvandztiants, a student of that school, admonished people to persevere and stop shedding pitiful tears: "Let

us sacrifice everything we have for the nation / And the nation be content with us forever" ("Ինչ որ ունինք ազգին անենք զոհ / Ազգն էլ յաւիտեան մեզնից մնայ գոհ"). He allegorically depicted the snake squeezing life out of the Armenians, enslaving and instigating disunity in order to rule over them.[11] In the same article, Srvandztiants encouraged Armenians not to give up: "You will strike and will be smitten. You will stand up if you fall. You will surely win your way; you will win if you die, for, you are the truth."

With stories of the past glories of Armenia, *Artsvi Vaspurakan* continued in Van what it had started in Constantinople: inspiring national pride and self-esteem, love of freedom, and patriotism ("Սեռած սրտերու կենդանութիւն տուող ազգային պատմութիւնն է միայն"). It propagated moral values and the importance of education and religious devotion, while criticizing the backward customs and superstitions that hindered progress and modernity. It was through the endeavors of Khrimian and the Vanetsi students of the Zharangavorats school of Varag, Tigran Amirjanian, Ghevond Pirghalemian, the brothers Eremia, Aristakes, and Setrak Ter-Sargisians (Tevkants), Arsen Tokhmakhian, and, most notable among all, Garegin Srvandztiants, that Van provincial literature attained substantial heights and found its way into modern Western Armenian literature. These young devotees and their teachers toured the province, visited every village, collected ethnographic data, recorded the topographic and demographic characteristics of the region, and prepared comprehensive reports and statistics, which were then published in *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. They recorded the popular tales, songs, and folklore; they wrote prose and poetry reflecting the traditions, the festivities, the life of Vaspurakan. They were a part of that life and transmitted the lore in a most authentic way.[12] Khrimian's students followed the motto of their teacher, "with the people, for the people."

A Unique Source of Inspiration

In the 1860s, provincial literature was a new phenomenon and a source of inspiration and innovative influence for the Western Armenian

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[11] *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, 1862-63, no. 1, pp. 9-19.

[12] It should be noted that interest toward ethnic folklore was a new phenomenon even in Europe, and these busy bees were doing in Van what the European folklorists had embarked on only a few decades earlier. It is most probable that Khrimian and his disciples were unaware of this movement in Europe.

formal literature that was forging ahead in Constantinople. The Western Armenian literati came to know the provincial literature that was characterized first by its locus, its place of belonging. Provincial literature emerged from *Hayastan*, from the historic Armenian lands under Turkish occupation. The second characteristic of Armenian provincial literature was its essence: it mirrored the traditional Armenian life, which at the time was still continuing in the provinces. It reflected the regional traditions, popular beliefs, rituals, proverbs, songs, tales, and legends, which were preserved and passed down through the centuries. It portrayed the life of the constantly exploited and abused peasants; it echoed the hardships, grievances, joys, tears, hopes, and aspirations of the people.

The two branches of Western Armenian literature, the formal literature, or the *belles lettres*, and the literature of the provinces, had been developing independently in terms of style, language, theme, spirit, and even form and content. The formal Armenian literature of Constantinople and other Armenian cultural centers developed under the influence of European literary movements. Rather than focusing on content, it pursued sophistication of form, style, phraseology, and versification. It was basically cosmopolitan and drew its themes and its essence from the life of the city, the urbanized Armenians. The "homeland" of its yearnings was a romantic dream. The life it described was far removed from the real life in the Armenian provinces and did not encompass the feelings, the needs, and the aspirations of Armenians who lived attached to their ancestral lands. Its lexicon was limited. Having drifted away from grabar, it depended on the European languages for words to express various aspects of life, such as in agriculture, animal husbandry, and the crafts. The Armenian provincial literature, on the other hand, was rustic and simple in structure and content, but it stayed close to the people and bore the imprint of various genres of folk creations. The calamitous situation in the homeland and the ever-increasing Turkish and Kurdish outrages gave the provincial literature political overtones. Armenian grievances and the urge to rise against oppression, political aspirations for freedom and justice, and commitment to the national struggle ran as a subtext in provincial literature, including that of Van, which was the first to enter into the realm of Western Armenian literature.

With the inception of this process developed a complex relationship between Van provincial literature and the so-called high culture of

Constantinople. The Vanetsi dialect also offered its colorful vocabulary to enrich the literary language. To make up words lacking in the literary language, Garegin Srvandztiants advised the cosmopolitan intellectuals either to go to the original source, the classical Armenian, or to the people and their dialects, instead of seeking the help of foreign lexicons. He wrote, for example: "We are perplexed by the need of so many different words to describe different parts of a ship. Go to the village of Avants in Van. Listen to the village seamen and learn."[13] Srvandztiants showed how the folk songs, tales, and proverbs could impart freshness and liveliness to literature. He gave the example of Narekatsi's "Tsnndian meghedin" (The Melody of Birth) and "Harutian taghe" (The Song of Resurrection) inspired by the style and spirit of popular songs.[14]

Yet, the views of Khrimian and Srvandztiants on Armenian ethnic literature (հայոց տոհմային գրականութիւն) needed some time to sink in and grow. The pair had set the examples of how themes of everyday life in Armenia could be developed into literary works. In one instance Srvandztiants reported on the heart-rending predicament of the Vanetsi peasants, but the emotion and spontaneity he put into that plain and unadorned description turned the piece into a well-wrought leitmotiv for a human tragedy: "Without a shirt on their backs, in the summer heat, in the winter storm, they thrash about in the cinders, step on thorns; they herd cattle, gather wheat and barley; they face fear and pain; they tend the houses of their masters. They never say, 'I am ill.' That is shameful. That is not acceptable. They eat millet and barley. Wheat is for repaying the unending debt to their masters. They toil constantly, but they are always miserably poor."[15]

The conditions following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, the Armenian appeals for reforms, Khrimian's call for armed struggle—the famous iron ladle analogy—filled the Constantinople literary milieu with new enthusiasm to embrace what came from the provinces.[16] In

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[13] Garegin Srvandztiants, *Grots u brots* [Of Literary and Folk Creations], p. 17, cited in *Hay nor grakanutyan patmutyun* [History of Modern Armenian Literature], vol. 3 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1964), p. 567.

[14] Garegin Srvandztiants, *Manana* [Manna], pp. 235-36, cited in *Hay nor grakanutyan patmutyun*, vol. 3, p. 573.

[15] *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, 1862-63, no. 3, p. 71.

[16] Khrimian headed the Armenian delegation to the Berlin Congress and returned empty-handed. The great powers gathered in Berlin to renegotiate the San Stefano peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Article 16 in the San Stefano treaty providing

the 1880s and 1890s, Tlkatintsi, Melkon Giurjian, and Levon Pashalian had already become established writers whose literature gave flesh and blood to the provinces and in whose literature the legacy of Khrimian and Srvandztiants was revived and reevaluated. Simple chronicles from Armenia began to manifest themselves in artistically wrought forms and colors, embellished with profound meaning and plot. *Hayrenik* (Fatherland) daily, published in Constantinople, wrote in 1893: "It is an accepted truth for us that our ethnic literature should have its firm roots in the provinces."[17] Significant is the fact that provincial literature, impregnated with folkloric elements, imparted verisimilitude to the representations of regional settings of literary narrations of the time. And in this phenomenon lies an important aspect of the impact of Van provincial literature on Western Armenian *belles lettres*.

Indeed, Western Armenian literature was drawing closer to the source of life. Universal in its concept and ideology and national in its spirit and source of inspiration, Western Armenian literature was pacing steadily toward excellence when, with the Genocide of 1915, life in Western Armenia and with it Western Armenian culture came to an abrupt halt.

In Continuation of the Tradition

Artsvi Vaspurakan had long stopped publishing, but a generation was ready to continue the tradition. Srvandztiants's *Manana* (Manna) is the province of Van before the massacres, when the Armenian presence still prevailed. It is the lively portrayal of the hustle and bustle of the thriving city of Van, Aygestan, and the villages of Vaspurakan, the sum of all characteristic traits of the region: the Vanetsi customs, mores, songs, proverbs, popular beliefs, curses and blessings, trades and tradesmen, the housewives, their cooking practices and their chores, the pain of separation suffered by multitudes of pandukhts and their

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for reforms in the Armenian provinces was greatly diluted despite the appeals of the Armenian delegation. Article 61 of the Treaty at Berlin stipulated reforms in non-specific terms. Upon his return to Constantinople, Khrimian gave a sermon about his mission. He likened the conference to a big pot of *harise*, a wheat stew. Those who came with iron ladles (that is, who had power) were able to obtain their share of *harise*. Armenians had only petitions in their hand. Their paper ladle melted in the stew, giving them nothing.

[17] *Hayrenik*, 1893, no. 363, cited in *Hay nor grakanutyan patmutyun*, vol. 4 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1972), p. 533.



Mkrtich Khrimian "Hayrik"



Garegin Srvandztiants



ԱՐՑՈՒԻ

ՎԱՍՊՈՒՐԱԿԱՆ

ԹՈՒՈՒՅԼ ՀԱՅՐԵՆԱՍԷՐ ԹԵՒՕՔ

ՑԱՐՄԱՐՈՒՆԻ ԳԱՒԱՌՆ Ի ՎԱՆՏՈՍՊ

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ԲԱՆԱՒՈՐԱԿԱՆ

ՆՈՒԱՃԱՒՈՒՔ ՄԼՔՈՅՆ ԱՐՁԱԻՈՐԱԿԻ Ի ԳՈՒՄԱՑ ՀՈՑԻԵՆԵՑԱՑ

Ալ՝ ի հայրենիք բնակութեանդ գըրեցաք՝ ի գրուխս ափոյիցդ առեմ ընդ ես[ա]ս կան, ի լայնատարած ձագոյն Ա[ր]տաշատ գաւառակ հետացեալ կան առ բաշխարհիկ բնակութեամբ. ոմ[ք] քա[ղ]ցր է յաչխ նոցին հեշտասէր ժշխատակութիւն վէրոյ ա[ս]ացիկ.

Ն՛ա ասեմ, Աբեաթիք իմ նորա փեսասք, Թումլ, Հէհոց ի հասնիցէն ասոյին Հայաստան աշխարհին մերձաւ. ժողովեա ի վերայ Բևրմից Թեւոցդ զհայրենահաս բազմապատ ձագիւնս բնութեան լևբանց, պատիր, ասպ նաւիցես. Թռիչ ամառս մնաիցուն, նախ զփրախասան ոգիդն ի Մխիթնասէր գտանիցես պարծանս ասիանին գրչի, ի նորին Քրիստոսասիրեն քահանայէ վերդ Տաճատրէն. Հոխորտանաց կատաղի խաչագործ գիտողացն

Artsvi Vaspurakan (The Eagle of Vaspurakan), No. 1, 1855

families left behind, all elaborated skillfully with that special folkloric style Vanetsis had lovingly preserved from Narekatsi's time.[18] Srvandztiants textualized and eternalized the province of Van in *Manana*. As Emma Kostanyan maintains in her monograph on Srvandztiants, today when there are no Armenians left there any more, *Manana* remains as a living memory of Van.[19]

Srvandztiants's recordings of Van and other regional folklore became an invaluable source for future writers. The Armenian national epic, David of Sasun, which Srvandztiants first discovered in the Taron region, is beyond the scope of this discussion, but the story of "Siamanto and Khejé Zaré" is a good example of his efforts. Srvandztiants recorded the story that was alive in the mountains of Sipan, on the shores of Lake Van. The story depicted a tragic love between an Armenian shepherd, Siamanto, and the daughter of Khejé Zaré, a Kurdish chieftain. This folktale, published in *Hamov hotov* (Delicious and Fragrant), was later used by Hovhannes Shiraz—or rather the entire plot was absorbed and rewritten as a beautiful literary narration in a long poem. Another example is *Dezhico*, again recorded and published by Srvandztiants. Two renowned twentieth-century Armenian writers, Hovhannes Tumanian and Derenik Demirchian, used this popular folktale and created masterpieces in the genre of socio-political satire; both titled their work after the name of the protagonist, *Kaj Nazar* (Nazar the Brave), although the raw material took on two very different forms in their works. These masterpieces are examples of the usage of folktales as raw material for artistic creations. And that is a representation of another important role of Van provincial literature.

Despite his devotion to Van, his birthplace, Srvandztiants always envisioned the broader picture of Armenia. He chastised those whose patriotism reached only to the boundaries of their hometown, "I, the Karnetsi," "I, the Vanetsi." At the other extreme were Armenians living in the Ottoman cities outside Armenia, for whom the idea of homeland was where they earned their bread ("որտեղ հաց այնտեղ կաց").[20] Srvandztiants dreamed of a free nation, and the only means to reach

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[18] Grigor Narekatsi (Gregory of Narek), a renowned ninth and tenth century Armenian scholar-poet, wrote in the monastery of Narek in Vaspurakan.

[19] Emma A. Kostanyan, *Garegin Srvandztiants* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1979), pp. 69-71.

[20] *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, 1861, no. 3, cited in Kostanyan, *Srvandztiants*, pp. 88-89.

that goal, he believed, was through national struggle against all oppressors. Even before the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Srvandztiants admonished Armenians not to rely on others, but to unite and take up the struggle on their own.[21] Calling on his Mshetsi brothers, he wrote in 1869: "If the Armenians of Mush were true Armenians and true human beings, why would they let the Kurd loot their houses and belongings, snatch their earnings, and defile their honor? . . . They are slaughtered constantly. They are dying. Let them at least do something and give a meaning to their life and death."[22] Even before Raffi's famous reproach of the Armenian clergy who preached subservience and obedience, Srvandztiants blamed them for the passivity of the populace. Bitterly, he cited their argument that Jesus Christ had taught: "If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek. If someone wants your shirt, give him also your overcoat." When the clergy were criticized for reinforcing a servile mentality, their justification was: "What can we do? Jesus Christ did not give us orders to strike back."[23] Indeed, this misinterpretation of Christian teachings represented the frame of mind of the majority of the clergy in Vaspurakan. Arsen Tokhmakhian, a Zharangavorats student, later wrote: "Until the 1850s, the clergy of Vaspurakan were a bunch of imbeciles, always praying and preparing themselves for the next world. . . . Khrimian and his students came to preach nationalism and change the mentality of the people of Van."[24] Naturally, the activities of Khrimian and his disciples, especially Srvandztiants, did not go unnoticed. They stirred animosity among Armenian conservatives and aroused the government's suspicion. Both Khrimian and Srvandztiants were under constant surveillance, their activities were censored and restricted.

In 1871, Khrimian Hayrik, now the patriarch of Constantinople, dispatched Srvandztiants to Van to oversee the implementation of the "National Constitution."[25] Khrimian's letter to his faithful disciple spoke

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[21] Ibid., p. 113.

[22] *Manzumei Efkiar*, 1869, cited in Kostanyan, *Srvandztiants*, pp. 97-98.

[23] Ibid., p. 97.

[24] Arsen Tokhmakhian, *Hayreniki pahanjnere ev hay giughatsin* [Demands of the Homeland and the Armenian Peasant], published in Tiflis, 1881, cited in Poghosyan, *Vaspurakani patmutyunits*, p. 44.

[25] The National Armenian Constitution was authored by Western Armenian progressive intellectuals. It consisted of by-laws to regulate Armenian life and community structures in the Ottoman Empire. The Constitution was ratified in the National Armenian Assembly (Ազգային ժողով) in 1860. After imposing major changes and revisions, the Ottoman govern-

of his distress in view of the frame of mind still prevailing in Vaspurakan. "Go, lament the slavish spirit of the people of Van," he wrote. "Tear open the shrouds of slavery of these dead people. . . . Pull down the veil blinding their eyes."[26] Khrimian continued his letter by encouraging Srvandztiants to preach love of freedom, to enlighten people against deep-rooted superstitions and conformity, to speak about the past calamities that befell the nation, to make them think about ways to prevent new catastrophes, to urge them to prepare themselves and wait for the proper moment.[27]

Irritated and aggravated by the unfavorable outcome of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the ensuing Treaty of San Stefano and Berlin Congress, the Ottoman government heightened the oppression of its Armenian subjects. Censorship on Armenian life, on cultural and educational institutions, intensified. To restrict Armenian educational activities and put a stop to the prospering network of Armenian schools in Vaspurakan, the government increased the number of Turkish schools and levied heavy taxes on Armenian and other minority schools referred to as *millet mektebi*.[28] The teaching of Armenian history was not allowed. Use of the word "Hayastan" was forbidden throughout the empire. Turkish inspectors visited the schools every so often to make sure nothing out of the ordinary was happening.[29]

Persecution was on the rise. Censorship was not limited to cultural life alone. Sultan Abdul-Hamid had decided to deal with the Armenian Question in his own way: imprisonment and massacre, forced migration, or conversion to Islam. The situation was at its worst in Van, where, even before the war, the looting and burning of the Armenian market-place and the continuous attacks of Kurdish chieftains such as Jalaleddin on Armenian villages had taken thousands of lives and had caused heavy financial losses. In his famous novel, *Jalaleddin*, Raffi, an Armenian novelist who witnessed the situation in Vaspurakan,

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ment approved the Constitution in 1863. The document was named *Nizamnamei milleti Ermeni*.

[26] Poghosyan, *Vaspurakani patmutyunits*, p. 101.

[27] Ibid., p. 109.

[28] Ibid., p. 65, for details.

[29] The anecdote goes that in one of these visits, sometime in 1891, the Turkish inspector spotted a notebook with a title beginning with "H" in Armenian. "What is this? Hayastan?" he asked a student. "You are learning the history of Hayastan?" And in fact it was a book on Armenian history, *Hayots patmutiun*. "No!" The student replied calmly. "No Efendim, *Hatsi patmutiun* [History of Bread]. It is on agriculture."

depicts powerful and graphic scenes of the pillage and murder in Armenian villages and the terror Kurdish chieftain spread in the city of Van.[30]

A New Twist in Provincial Literature

The new catastrophes gave birth to new literature—literary responses in the genre of lamentation. *Vangoyzh* (Lamentation for Van) was Khrimian's response to Kurdish atrocities, the pillage and burning of the marketplace in 1876. *Haygoyzh* (Lamentation for Armenians) deplored the massacre of 15,000 Armenians in Bayazid and Alashkert in the wake of the Russo-Turkish War. The haunting question ominously persisted throughout: How could your neighbors who shared your bread and lived off the sweat of your brow desecrate your hospitable table with blood? In spite of the genre of lamentation, very much in line with Movses Khorenatsi's "Ողբամ զքեզ հայոց աշխարհ" (I lament thee, O˜ land of Armenians!), Khrimian's lament carried political implications, a reflection on a way out of the calamity: the resort to arms. "This is the law of nature," he wrote. "You will be slaughtered more and more if you are like sheep, if you do not have the horns of a bull to fight back, . . . if you are unarmed. Did you think you could get the freedom to which you aspired without spilling blood?"[31]

Srvandztiants's response to the renewed calamities followed. In the wake of the great famine and increasing persecutions in the aftermath of the war, Nerses Varzhapetian, Patriarch of Constantinople, sent Srvandztiants to Vaspurakan to report on the plight of the disaster-stricken Armenians, to comfort and assist them, and to urge them not to lose hope. In 1879 both Khrimian and Srvandztiants were in Van. One was the prelate, the other, his assistant. Van was becoming the center of secret organizations, formed as a reaction to the repressive governmental policy against Armenians, to defend the nation in any way they could. The two native sons of Van were waging their own battle by way of writing and preaching.

Toros Aghbar, Hayastani chambord (Brother Toros, the Traveler of Armenia), a two-part literary piece in prose, embodied Srvandz-

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[30] On the losses, see also Eremia Tevkants's report to the Armenian National Assembly in Constantinople. The work is cited in Poghosyan, *Vaspurakani patmutyunits*, pp. 192-93.

[31] See Khrimian, *Haygoyzh* in *Amboghjakan erker*, pp. 274-75. *Vangoyzh* is also included in *Amboghjakan erker*.

tiants's impressions of Armenian life under the dark shadow of escalated terror. It is the lamentation of an imaginary bird, whom Srvandztiants calls Brother Toros. The bird flies over the ruins of Armenia, describes the intolerable situation, and preaches the need to fight back and struggle for freedom and justice. Through the words of his lyric hero, Srvandztiants bewails the loss of Armenian statehood as the symbol of Armenian power and physical perpetuation. With equal intensity, he laments the loss of the erstwhile glory of the Armenian Church as the symbol of Armenian spiritual strength. In spite of the desperate situation in Armenia, abject poverty, absence of safety of life and belongings, continuous prejudice, discrimination, and persecution, Srvandztiants chastises those who leave the homeland for a better life elsewhere. Significantly, Toros Aghbar refuses to visit these Armenians abroad and stays put in the homeland. Srvandztiants agrees. "Yes! You are right," he says. "Go! Deplore! Move people's hearts!" It is better to live upon the ruins and "to seek what was lost in the place where it was lost."[32]

Khrimian Hayrik's *Papik ev Tornik* (Grandpa and Grandson), a work of a similar nature, was published in 1894, probably written in the same year or the year before, when it was arranged that Mkrtich Khrimian be sent away to serve as Patriarch of Jerusalem, far from the heart of the Armenian resistance movement. By then, the situation had deteriorated even more. Turkish and Kurdish aggression and violent assaults on Armenians were on the rise. On the other hand, the government's failure to interfere to halt the atrocities and the participation of the newly formed Hamidiye regiments in the carnage were indications of a pernicious plan.[33] In spite of all this, Khrimian was still exhorting his fellow Armenians to endure the hardships and not abandon their ancestral lands for a safer life abroad. Paradoxically, when there were strong indications of imminent calamity, Khrimian was urging Armenians to cling to their native soil, no matter what might come.

Khrimian's *Papik ev Tornik* is the romanticized portrayal of the Armenian village and the peasant, with the purity of his soul, his sim-

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[32] See Srvandztiants, *Erker*, vol. 2, p. 183.

[33] In 1891, Sultan Abdul-Hamid armed the Kurds and put them in organized cavalry regiments, named for himself as Hamidiye. The pretext was the defense of Turkish borders, but in reality the primary objective of the Hamidiye troops and that of the sultan who organized them was to suppress Armenians.

plistic life, his desires, his sufferings and aspirations. It is a call to the Armenian village, as the ultimate manifestation of patriotism, in keeping with Eastern Armenian writers, Abovian, Raffi, Nalbandian, Muratsan, Proshian, and others. In fact, Khrimian's *Papik ev Tornik* draws closer to Eastern Armenian village literature (գիւղագրութիւն), which was initiated under different circumstances, with a different purpose, and developed on a path different from that of the Western Armenian provincial literature (գաւառական գրականութիւն).[34]

Nurturing Western Armenian Literature with the Spirit of Armenia

This brief survey has emphasized Khrimian's literary legacy and his patronage of Van provincial literature, as was the central and possibly more important role of Garegin Srvandztiants. Indeed, if Khrimian Hayrik was the moving force, the teacher, the promoter, the pivotal element for Van provincial literature to be born, grow, and thrive, Srvandztiants was the figure of prominence, the principal creator of that literature.

The Armenian renaissance had dawned with the influence of European thought, but it returned to the Armenian past for strength and inspiration. It took its impetus from the past achievements to revive Armenians from their torpor of servitude and ignorance, to inspire them with national pride and self-awareness, and to exhort them to strive for a better future. In such an atmosphere Srvandztiants's works, especially *Hamov hotov*, *Manana*, and *Toros Aghbar*, recreate Armenia. In that literary representation of a different Armenia, the people past and present, the rivers, the mountains, the sky, the soil, come alive to invoke and spur what the harbingers of the Armenian renaissance labored to achieve. And this is another important role of the provincial literature.

Khrimian's literature is little read today, except for its inherent political insinuations or for descriptions of the erstwhile Armenian character of a certain place. The literature cannot stand the scrutiny

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[34] The translation falls short of conveying the idea behind this term. This special branch of Eastern Armenian literature refers to a large corpus of writings—mostly belonging to the second half of the nineteenth century—in which an emphasized importance was attached to the village and agriculture and encompassed themes pertaining to rural life, the potential, the future, and the importance of the village in the panorama of Armenian existence.

of a critic seeking artistic quality and aesthetic value. These are not the merits of Khrimian's literary legacy. That legacy is the embodiment of Armenia itself—Armenia lost. Its ideology is patriotism, the memory and love of historic Armenia, fading even in Khrimian's days. For all intents and purposes, this is *littérature engagée*, to use Jean Paul Sartre's terminology. It pursues the goal of igniting souls with the love of the homeland he himself had so fervently embraced, transmitting the spirit of Armenia he himself had discovered, and promoting the need to struggle for enlightenment, emancipation, and freedom. But above all, Khrimian's literature is Van-Vaspurakan with her glories of days of yore, her yearnings for sons drifted away. It is the materialization of Khrimian's unsurpassed urge to eternalize the existing. Did he foresee the impending cruel future? But if so, he could never have imagined the Van of 1915.

❀ 9 ❀

Visual Perceptions of Van Through Travel Accounts

Dickran Kouymjian[*]

Van was the capital and most important city of the ancient, medieval, and modern Armenian province of Van-Vaspurakan. Its foundation goes back to the ninth century B.C. when it served as the capital of the Urartian kingdom. Later, in the tenth and eleventh centuries A.D., it was the main city of the Artsruni kingdom of Armenia. From the eleventh century on, Van came under the successive suzerainty of the Seljuks, Turkmens, Mongols, Timurids, Persians, and finally the Ottomans. During these years of occupation and oppression, the highest Armenian authority was the regional Catholicosate of Aghtamar, headquartered on a nearby island, which administered to the religious and community needs of the Armenian population around Lake Van.

Our earliest description of Van is found in the *History* of Movses of Khoren, traditionally considered to have written in the fifth century, though certain authorities place him in the eighth, even the ninth, century. A long passage covering all of Chapter 16 of Book I describes how the Assyrian Queen Semiramis built a royal palace and fortified citadel on the site of the rock of Van.[1]

> [Semiramis] seeing the beauty of the land . . . said: "In such a temperate climate and purity of waters and land we must build a city and royal residence, so that we may spend a fourth part of the [year] . . . in Armenia." . . .
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> On the shore of the lake she saw a long hill whose length ran

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[*] This article is dedicated to the memory of Paolo Cuneo (1936-1995), whose pioneering study on the topography of Van is the primary inspiration and source for what follows.

[1] For editions and translations of the *History* of Movses Khorenatsi, see Robert W. Thomson, *A Bibliography of Classical Armenian Literature to 1500 AD* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), pp. 156-58.

toward the setting sun. To the north it sloped a little, but to the south it looked up sheer to heaven, with a cave in the vertical rock. From it on the south there opened out a wide meadow like a plain, descending from the mountain on the east to the edge of the lake.

Here that resolute and lascivious Semiramis, after careful examination, ordered forty-two thousand skilled workers from Assyria and other lands of the empire and six thousand chosen from her most talented craftsmen in wood and stone, bronze and iron, who were most proficient in their skills, to be brought without delay to the desired spot. And the work was completed according to her command. Immediately a multitude of various workers and skilled and wise craftsmen was brought. First she ordered the aqueduct for the river to be built in hard and massive stone, cemented with mortar and sand, of infinite length and height; it has remained firm . . . until the present time. . . . And if one were to examine the skill of the cementing around the stones, it would appear to him to have been made with molten wax. . . .

There she ordered the crowd [of workmen] to be divided into many groups and over each group to be set chosen masters of the craft. And thus, by dint of great efforts, within a few years she completed the marvelous [city] with strong walls and bronze gates. She also built inside the city many exquisite palaces, adorned with various stones and colors, of two and three stories, each one turned to the sun where suitable. The sections of the city she divided by beautiful and wide avenues. In the middle of the city she built some charming baths for people's needs, with admirable art. She diverted part of the river through the city to serve every necessity and for the irrigation of the parks and flower gardens. The rest she made run along the edge of the lake to the right and left, to water the city and all the surrounding area. All the regions east, north, and south of the city she adorned with villas and with leafy trees that produced varied fruit and foliage. There she planted many fruitful vineyards. The walled city she rendered absolutely splendid and magnificent, settling within a numberless multitude of inhabitants.

. . . The summit she surrounded with a wall and erected there a royal palace and some fearsome dungeons, difficult of entry and impossible to escape from. . . . But we merely say that of all royal works . . . this is considered the foremost and most majestic.

Now on the side of the rock that faces the sun, on which today no one can scratch a line with an iron point . . . [she had carved out] various temples and chambers and treasure houses and wide caverns; no one knows how she formed such wonderful constructions. And over the entire surface of the rock, soothing it like wax with a stylus, she inscribed many texts, the mere sight of which makes anyone marvel.

> And not only this, but also in many places in the land of Armenia she set up stelae and ordered memorials to herself to be written on them in the same script.[2]

The city is mentioned in the following centuries in Armenian histories, colophons of Armenian manuscripts, especially of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and many travel accounts. However, our first drawings and engravings of Van are from around 1800, after which there is a regular succession of views during the nineteenth century and up until Van's destruction as a consequence of the 1915 Genocide.

From the beginning, all engravings focus on the enormous rock of Van, turned into a fortified palace by the Urartians and maintained as such by later rulers into modern times. This discussion will concentrate on a visual presentation of the fortified city, its garden suburbs, and especially its "Rock."

Much of the visual material on Van has been brought together by the late Paolo Cuneo in a study which combines a visual presentation of the city with textual descriptions gathered principally from nineteenth-century Western travelers.[3] A number of more recent books also contain some additional details, among them those of Sarkis Boghossian,[4] Raymond Kévorkian and Paul Paboudjian,[5] and Sergei Vardanyan.[6] Boghossian was a collector of engravings and other

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[2] Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of the Armenians], eds. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913; reprinted, Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981). For an augmented version, see A.B. Sargsyan, *Movses Khorenatsi, Patmutyun Hayots* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1991), pp. 50-54. The excerpt is from Robert W. Thomson, trans., *Moses Khorenats'i, History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 98-101.

[3] Paolo Cuneo, "Etude sur la topographie et l'iconographie historique de la ville de Van," *Armenian Studies/Etudes Arméniennes: In Memoriam Haïg Berbérian*, Dickran Kouymjian, ed. (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), pp. 125-84. Cuneo was an architectural historian and urbanist; his interest was focused on the monuments, though he offered some descriptive passages and provided the bibliography of his sources.

[4] Sarkis Boghossian, *Iconographie Arménienne/Armenian Iconography: Catalogue of Reproductions in Black and Color of 720 Original Pieces from 15th to 20th Century* (Paris: Sarkis Boghossian, 1987); for Van, see pp. 255-87, figs. 341-93.

[5] Raymond H. Kévorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian, "Le vilayet de Van," in *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire Ottoman à la veille du Génocide* (Paris: ARHIS, 1992), pp. 507-64, reproductions of photographs, figs. 821-56.

[6] Sergei Vardanyan, *Hayastani mayrakaghaknere* [The Capital Cities of Armenia] (Erevan: Apolon, 1995); for Van, see pp. 7-46, cited hereafter as *Capital Cities*.

pictorial material on all aspects of Armenian life; his book, unfortunately, provides almost no text and only a meager bibliography. The work of Kévorkian and Paboudjian is based exclusively on photographs and postcards with a focus on a very carefully documented discussion of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire before the Genocide. Vardanyan brings text and pictures together but relies almost exclusively on Armenian sources or Armenian translations of foreign sources; his publication suffers from the poor quality of reproductions. One might also note the frequently cited and long description of Van, its history, geology, and geography, by H.F.B. Lynch, who included a large number of photographs.[7]

Below are presented chronologically the most important textual references to Van. In the late fourteenth century, the raids of Timur Lang (Tamerlane) in Armenia are often cited by the scribes in their memorials. There are several descriptions from 1387 when Timur, on his way back to the east in September, laid siege to Van for twenty-six days. Without regard to age or race he punished the inhabitants. The men were separated from the women and children, tied up in groups, and cast off from the high ramparts of the Van fortress. In a versed colophon Grigor of Akhlat reports that the pile of bodies at the base became so high that the later victims, when they were thrown down, did not all die because they were cushioned by the mound of corpses.[8] A quarter of a century later, several colophons attest to the siege and fall of Van in 1425 by the Kara Koyunlu Turkmen. Karapet the scribe complains: "Iskender . . . arriving with numerous troops besieged our impregnable fortress of Van for fifty days."[9] Petros the scribe, writing in Berkri in 1427, adds: "This is the third annual arrival of Iskender,

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[7] H.F.B. Lynch, *Armenia: Travels and Studies*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901); for Van, see vol. 2, pp. 38-115, figs. 123-37.

[8] Levon Khachikyan, "Hayastani kaghakakan vichake ev sotsial-tntesakan haraberutyunnere XIV-XV darerum" [The Political Condition and Socio-Economic Relations of Armenia in the 14th-15th Centuries], in *Hay zhoghovrdi patmutyun* [History of the Armenian People], vol. 4 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1972), pp. 26-27, cited hereafter as "Political Condition"; Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 15. Details can be found in Dickran Kouymjian, "Van under Mongol, Turkmen, Persian, and Ottoman Domination," in this volume.

[9] Levon Khachikyan, *XV dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner* [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the Fifteenth Century], vol. 1 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1955), p. 328; Avedis K. Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 167.

son of Kara Yusuf; each time he plundered and carried off captives from our regions of Van and Ostan. He then captured the citadel of Van, and all of us—bishops and vardapets, monks, priests, grandees, and ladies—took to flight and wandered about in foreign lands and became strangers."[10]

From the 1434 to 1464, Catholicos Zakaria of Aghtamar, through his ceaseless activity, was a major force in Armenian national affairs. A long colophon of 1462 from Arjesh by the scribe Tumashay provides one of the most vivid early accounts we have of life in the city of Van.[11] Supported by Jihanshah, the Kara Koyunlu ruler, Zakaria rescued from Echmiadzin, the Mother See and residence of the Catholicos of All Armenians, the holiest relic of the Armenian Church, the right arm of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, along with a famous processional banner depicting Saint Gregory with King Trdat. He brought it back with him to Van and finally his residence on Aghtamar.[12]

One of the earliest European accounts, that of an anonymous Venetian merchant dated to about 1510, provides the first modern descriptions of the fortified city: "The Fortress of Van is built on a rocky outcrop from which sweet water gushes. . . . It is more than a mile in circumference, but like the rock on which it is built, it is narrow and long. Below the fortress there is a large city, the majority of whose citizens are Armenian."[13] Other groups included a Muslim population of Turks, Kurds, Persians, Circassians, Arabs, as well as Yezidis, Nestorian and Chaldean Christians, and Jews.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the major competing forces for the control of Van/Vaspurakan and the rest of Armenia were the Ottoman Turks under Sultan Selim the Grim and the Safavids under Shah Ismail. Selim won the first battle of a war that was to last for 125 years by defeating the Safavids at Chaldiran in 1514, but he did not yet succeed in gaining full control of Van. That was achieved under Sultan Suleyman when the Ottoman army captured the city first in 1534 and then again, after ten days of incessant bombardment, in

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[10] Sanjian, *Colophons*, p. 171.

[11] See chapter 7 in this volume. A full translation is found in Sanjian, *Colophons*, pp. 271-76.

[12] Both objects are now in the Manoogian Museum of the Catholicosate of All Armenians in Echmiadzin and reproduced in *Treasures of Etchmiadzin* (Echmiadzin [New York]: Editions Erebouni, 1984).

[13] Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, pp. 15-16.

1543.

Early in the seventeenth century, the renowned Ottoman traveler Evliya Chelebi gave the following description of Van:

> The city has inner and outer defense walls. The inner ramparts on the western side of the city are high and cut into the cliff, on one side of which is the city . . . on the other side, outside the walls, is the mighty fortress. On the western side, where the city is, there is a carved cliff like ramparts. On the outer side, toward the plain descends a hill, on which in places [along the ramparts] are two storied towers. Outside the walls . . . carved from the natural rock are three gates, the Tabriz gate on the east, the middle gate, and the *iskele* or harbor gate to the southwest; to the southeast are farms and gardens. The city and ramparts are pretty much toward the north of the lake. But there is a path from the ramparts to the lake. During sieges ships can come and go.

Chelebi adds: "When Timur took the city, he assigned one of his officers the task of destroying the fortress of Van. Using various methods and after many trials, the fortress could not be completely destroyed. . . . This will give one an idea of the indestructibility of this mountain-like fortress and its ramparts."[14]

Even though the Ottoman-Safavid wars ended in 1639, Van was not yet exempt from suffering. In 1648 a devastating earthquake destroyed large portions of the city and killed many of its citizens. A detailed account is provided by Arakel of Tabriz in his contemporary history.[15] Arakel also describes how the Armenian merchant class, the *khoja*s, quickly organized the relief effort and the reconstruction which started almost immediately.

By the very end of the eighteenth and the first years of the nineteenth century, views of Van began to appear in Armenian geographical works. From the beginning, the engravings focus on the enormous Rock of Van. The very first pictorial representation (Fig. 1) is found in Mekhitarist Father Ghukas Inchichian's *Geography* published in 1806.[16]

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[14] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[15] Arakel Davrizhetsi, *Patmutiun* [History] (Vagharshapat: Holy See of Echmiadzin, 1884), pp. 378-81; cf. Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 19. For a translated excerpt in this volume, see Kouymjian, "Van under Mongol, Turkmen, Persian, and Ottoman Domination."

[16] Ghukas Inchichian, *Ashkharhagrutiun chorits masiats ashkharhi: Asioy, Evropioy,*

Inchichian, who never saw Van, allowed his imagination full freedom. A romanticizing tendency is perfectly evident. The idealized view is fashioned as a fairy tale European-styled mountain city, though the mosques are clearly indicated as well as the double wall. This image of a single cliff-like pinnacle appears thirty years later in an engraving that seems inspired by that of Inchichian, and, though it is in a book on Armenia by the French traveler Eugène Boré, it is equally fantastic, being a mixture of the European and oriental elements with Lake Van clearly shown in the background (Fig. 2).[17] Boré entitled his engraving "Château de Semiramis â Van," an identification based on the account of Movses Khorenatsi popularized in Europe by the translation of his *History* and the curiosity of Orientalists. Of particular interest is the sensational story of the young German scholar Friedrich Eduard Schultz, who in 1827 set out for Van to discover and reproduce the inscriptions spoken of by Khorenatsi. It was the French Orientalist Jean-Antoine Saint-Martin, himself a translator of Movses Khorenatsi, who persuaded Schultz to take on the mission. Schultz somehow got into the citadel and had himself lowered down the rock cliff to copy carefully each of the cuneiform symbols of a language neither he nor anyone else knew how to read. Eventually, these copies were published,[18] but Schultz was killed in 1829, according to Austen Layard by Kurds in a remote area to the east of Lake Van near Bashkale.[19]

Aprikoy ev Amerikay [Geography of the Four Parts of the World: Asia, Europe, Africa, and America] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1806), vol. 1, pp. 138-43. The engraving is titled "Vanaberd, the Fortress of Van"; cf. Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," p. 140 n24, fig. 7; Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, p. 259, fig. 345; Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 16.

[17] Eugène Boré, *L'Arménie*, in the popular series, *L'Univers, ou histoire et description de tous les peuples, de leurs religions, moeurs, coutumes, etc.* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1838), pp. 16-18; Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," p. 143n26, fig. 8; Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, p. 260, fig. 346, reproducing a similar German engraving by Verleger of 1840 with slight modifications, including the addition of a group of camels and palm trees in the foreground; Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 16, engraving of 1840.

[18] These were eventually published in their entirety, F.E. Schultz, "Mémoires sur le lac de Van et de ses environs," in *Journal asiatique,* 9th ser., 8 (1840): 257-323.

[19] Austen Layard, who passed by the area twenty years later in the 1830s, relates that Nur Ullah Bey, the Kurdish chief of the Hakkari tribe, had Schultz murdered. See Layard's *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London: John Murray, 1853), note on pp. 381-82. This information is confirmed by a contemporary traveler Captain Richard Wilbraham, *Travels in the Transcaucasian Provinces of Russia, and along the Southern Shore of the Lakes of Van and Urumiah in the Autumn and Winter of 1837* (London: John Murray, 1839), pp. 357-58.

The murder of Schultz, coupled with the documents he retrieved, resulted in Van's notoriety. A great number of travelers of the period speak of the misfortune of Schultz and the history of the citadel. All of them refer to the Rock at Van as the fortress of Semiramis.

Among the more detailed descriptions of Van from the period is that of Reverend Horatio Southgate, who visited the area in 1839, about the same time as Layard:

> Out of that plain . . . rises a calcareous rock to the height of several hundred feet, and about a mile in length (I measured the length only by the eye. Schultz reports it to be three miles). It is entirely isolated, and presents so strong a contrast with the perfect level of the plain, that one is ready, at first sight, to pronounce it artificial. So indeed Schultz reported it to be; but upon careful examination, I could find nothing to justify the opinion. The direction of the rock is nearly East and West. The Southern side is a bare, solid, perpendicular face, while the Northern slopes gradually down to the plain. At the foot of the rock, on the Southern side, lies Van. The wall of the city, which is double, composed of earth, and in an excellent condition, is in the form of a semicircle, of which the rock itself is the base. . . . Nearly in the centre of the vertical face, is a large and close inscription in the arrow-headed character. As it was too far up to be deciphered from the town, Schultz caused himself to be let down from above, and copied the whole. The citadel which crowns the summit, has a wall running along the Northern slope and meeting the wall of the town at its extremities. The garrison consisted of an old Turk, who refused us admittance, until he received a written order from the Pasha. The interior was in a neglected and desolate condition. Most of the buildings were in ruins, among others the mosque—an almost invariable accompaniment of Turkish fortresses. The ordnance consisted of a few old cannon, mounted on broken carriages.[20]

The earliest realistic views of Van were published as engravings in the 1840s, the most famous of them by Charles Texier, the French savant who was very much interested in architecture. It was he who provided the West with the first serious remarks on Armenian architecture. In his description there are general views (Figs. 3-4) of both

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[20] Horatio Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1840), pp. 259-60. There are no engravings of Van among the few illustrations.

sides of the citadel and the very first map of the city of Van including the fortress, the walled inner city, and the garden suburbs.[21] Other travelers of the period also sketched or painted the city. Boghossian reproduces a previously unpublished sketch book, executed by an anonymous French artist in October-November 1843, which includes eight genre scenes from in and around the city of Van.[22] Better known are the paintings and drawings of Van and the citadel by the French artist Jules Laurens in 1848. Many served as the basis for the engraved illustrations of a number of travel books, including his own[23] and those of Xavier Hommaire de Hell[24] (Fig. 5) and Théophile Deyrolle.[25] In his book, Austen Layard also included an engraving titled "The Town and Rock of Wan," signed by F.C. Cooper, perhaps a reworking of one of Texier's engravings.[26]

Though photography quickly became the favored medium in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, engravings continued to be published, sometimes together with photographs, such as those of Henry

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[21] Charles Texier, *Description de l'Arménie, la Perse, et la Mésopotamie*, 2 vols. of text and 1 vol. of plates (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1842-52); Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," p. 146, figs. 9-12, the map and all three illustrations: "General View or The Middle Gate," "Tabriz Gate," "Harbor Gate"; Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, pp. 256-59, figs. 341-44, three views and the map; Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, pp. 16-17, the three views. Cuneo provides details on the various artists and engravers responsible for the pictures.

[22] Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, pp. 278-87, figs. 376-83, 392. Boghossian (p. 267, fig. 357) also publishes an anonymous pencil drawing of ca. 1840 of the Rock and the lake.

[23] Jules Laurens, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse* (Paris: Bertrand, 1853), "Vann," in Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, p. 263, fig. 351, reproduced by Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 18.

[24] Xavier Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse, exécuté par ordre du Gouvernement Français pendant les années 1846, 1847 et 1848* (Paris: Bertrand, 1854); "Citadelle de Vann" and a general view, in Cuneo, "La topographie de ville de Van," pp. 151-52, figs. 13-14; Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, p. 261, fig. 348, a colored engraving of the "Citadelle de Vann."

[25] Théophile Deyrolle, *Voyage au Lazistan et en Arménie - 1869*, in the series *La Tour du Monde* (Paris: Hachette, 1875-76), reprinted and translated numerous times, with five views, three by Deyrolle ("Panorama," "Le rocher de Van du côté Nord," and a detail of city and rock) and two by Laurens ("Le lac et la fortresse," which is a view from the top of the fortress, and "Al-Meidan et Mosque"); Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," figs. 15, 17-18 (engraving of Deyrolle), figs. 16, 19 (Laurens). Boghossian has no views taken directly from Deyrolle and thus neither does Vardanyan, who seems to rely heavily on the former.

[26] Layard, *Discoveries in Nineveh and Babylon*, p. 393.

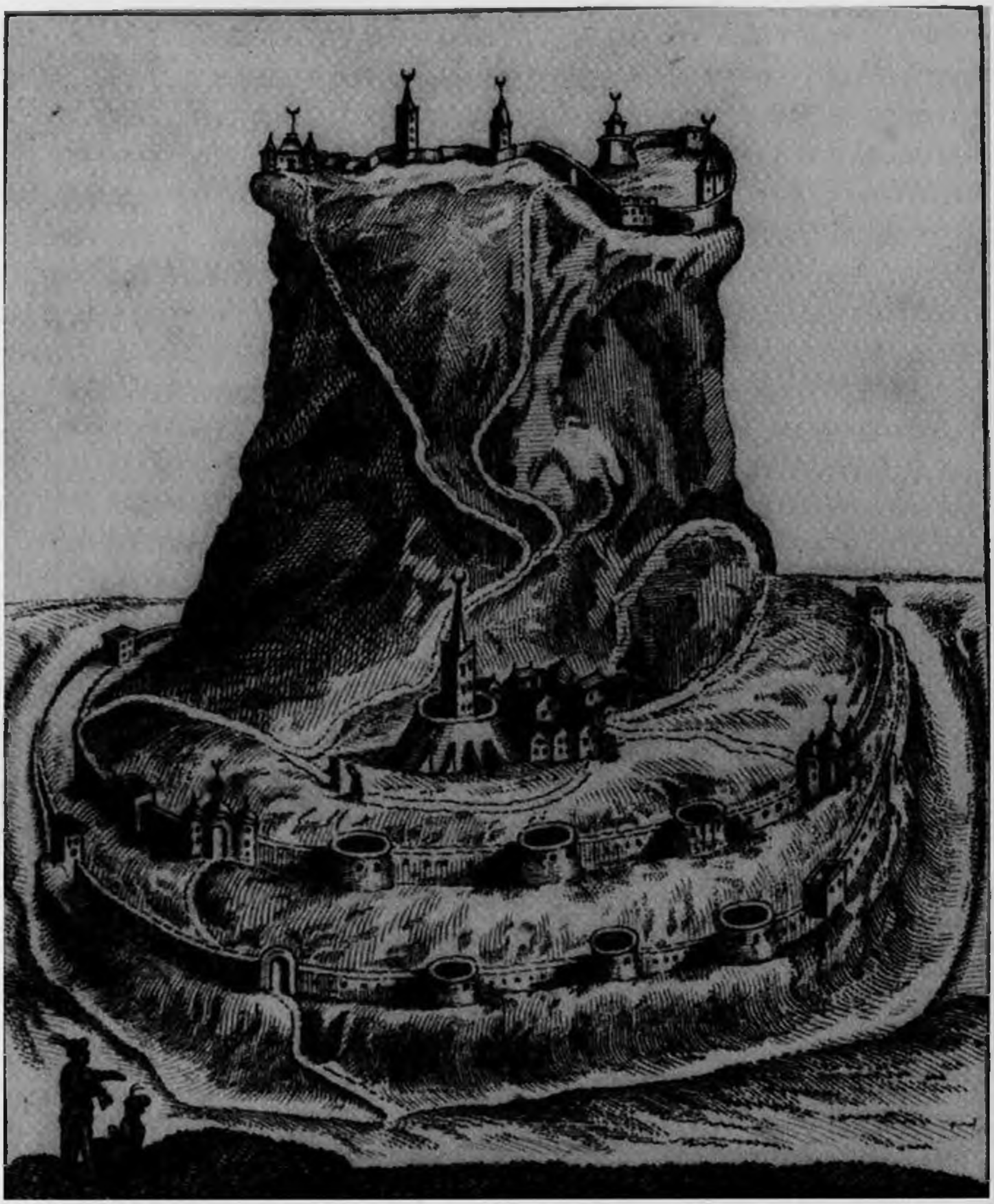


Fig. 1. Vanaberd—The Citadel of Van (Ghugas Inchichian, 1806)

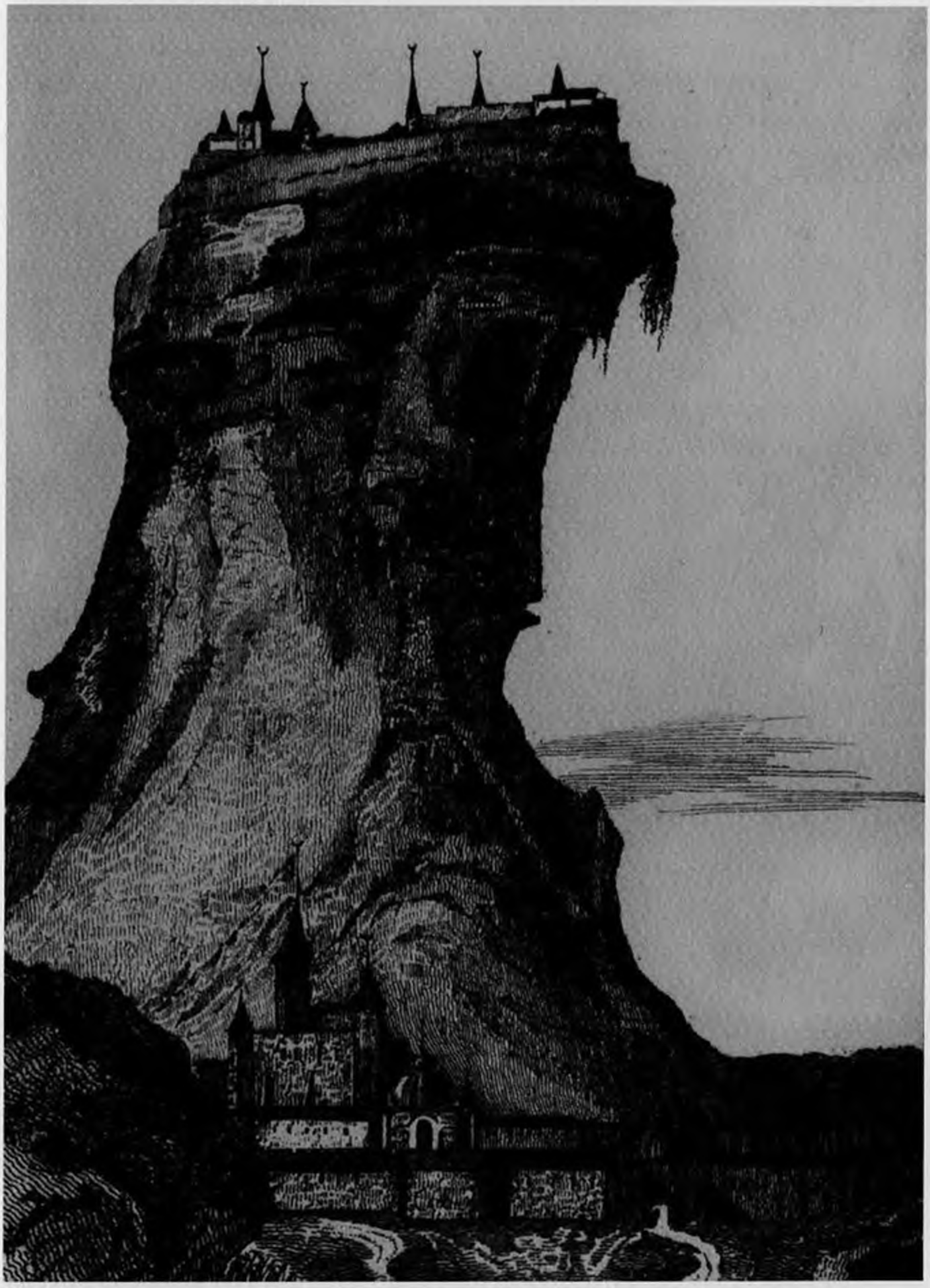
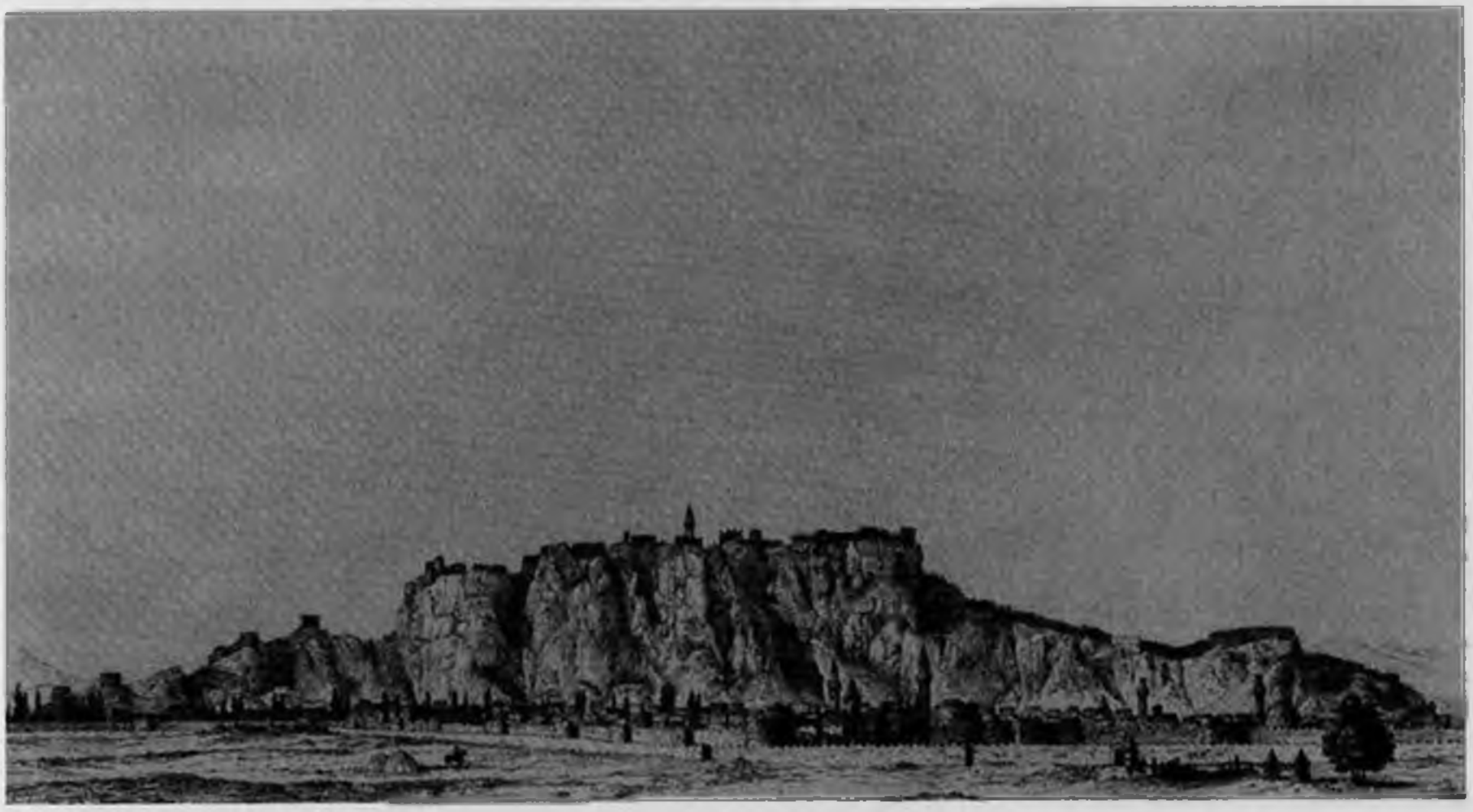
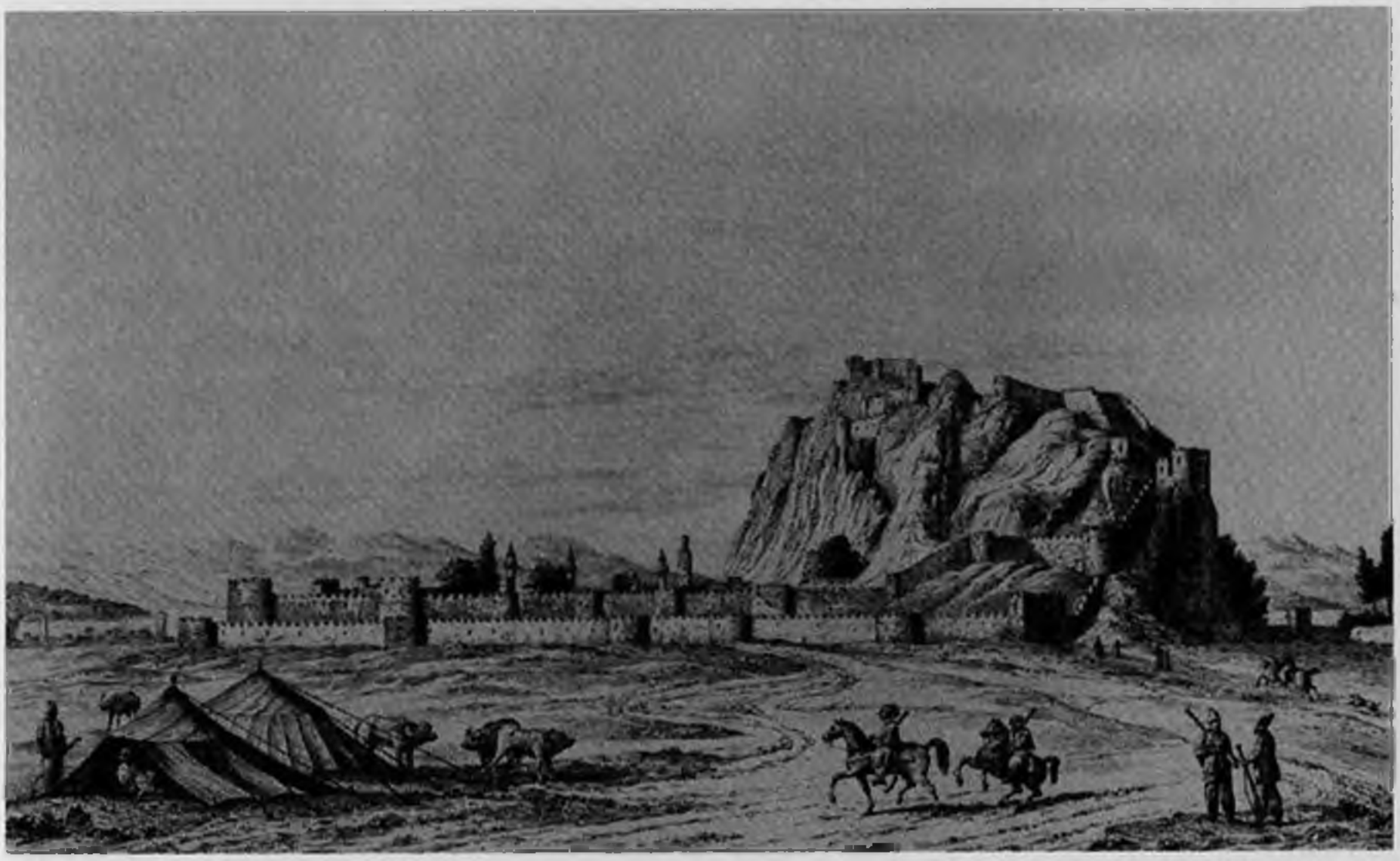


Fig. 2. Citadel of Semiramis (Eugène Boré, 1838)





Figs. 3-4. General View with the Middle (Orta) Gate and the Tabriz Gate
(Charles Texier, 1852; Drawing by R. de la Bourdonnaïe)

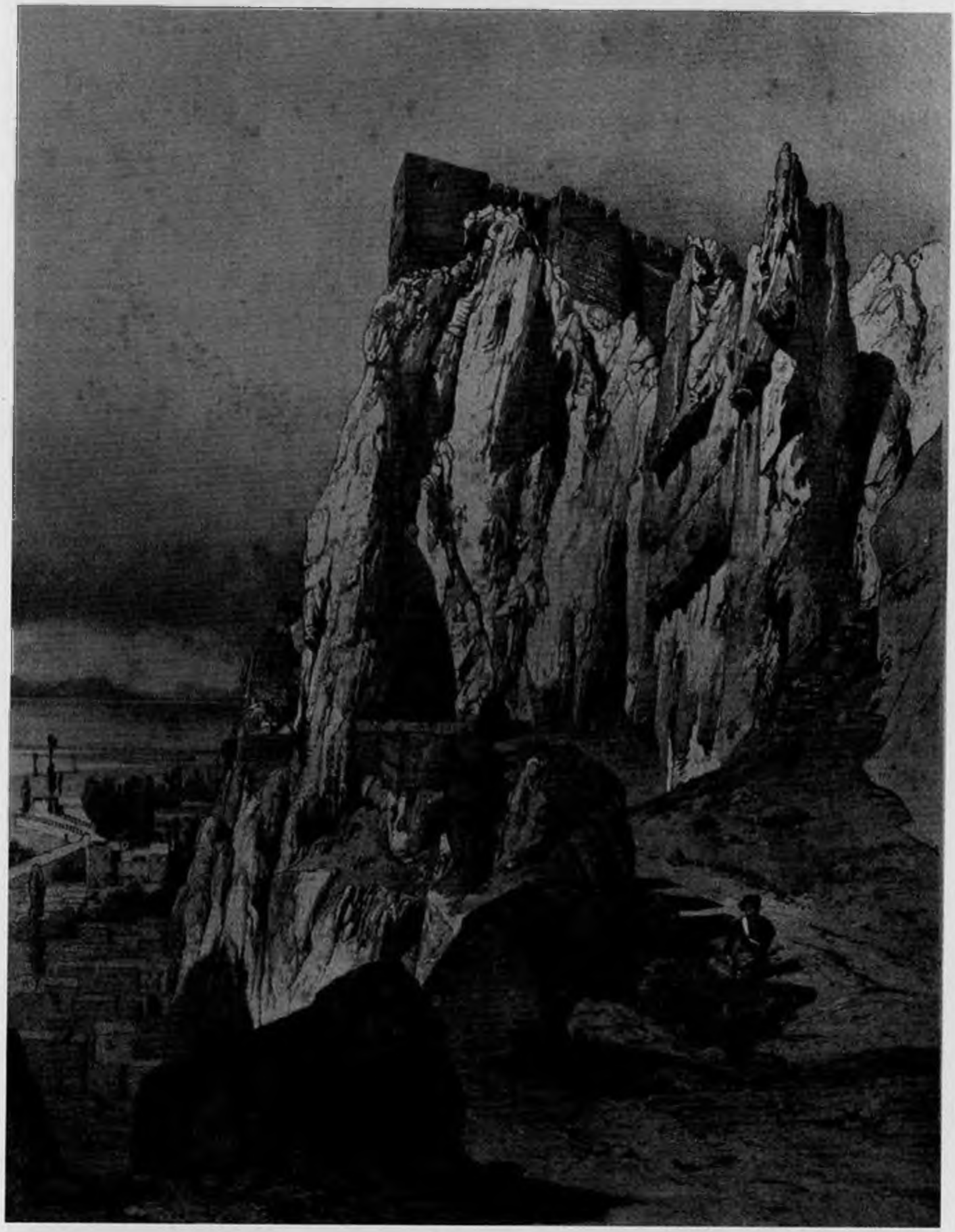


Fig. 5. Citadel of Van (Xavier Hommaire de Hell, 1854; Drawing by Jules Laurens)

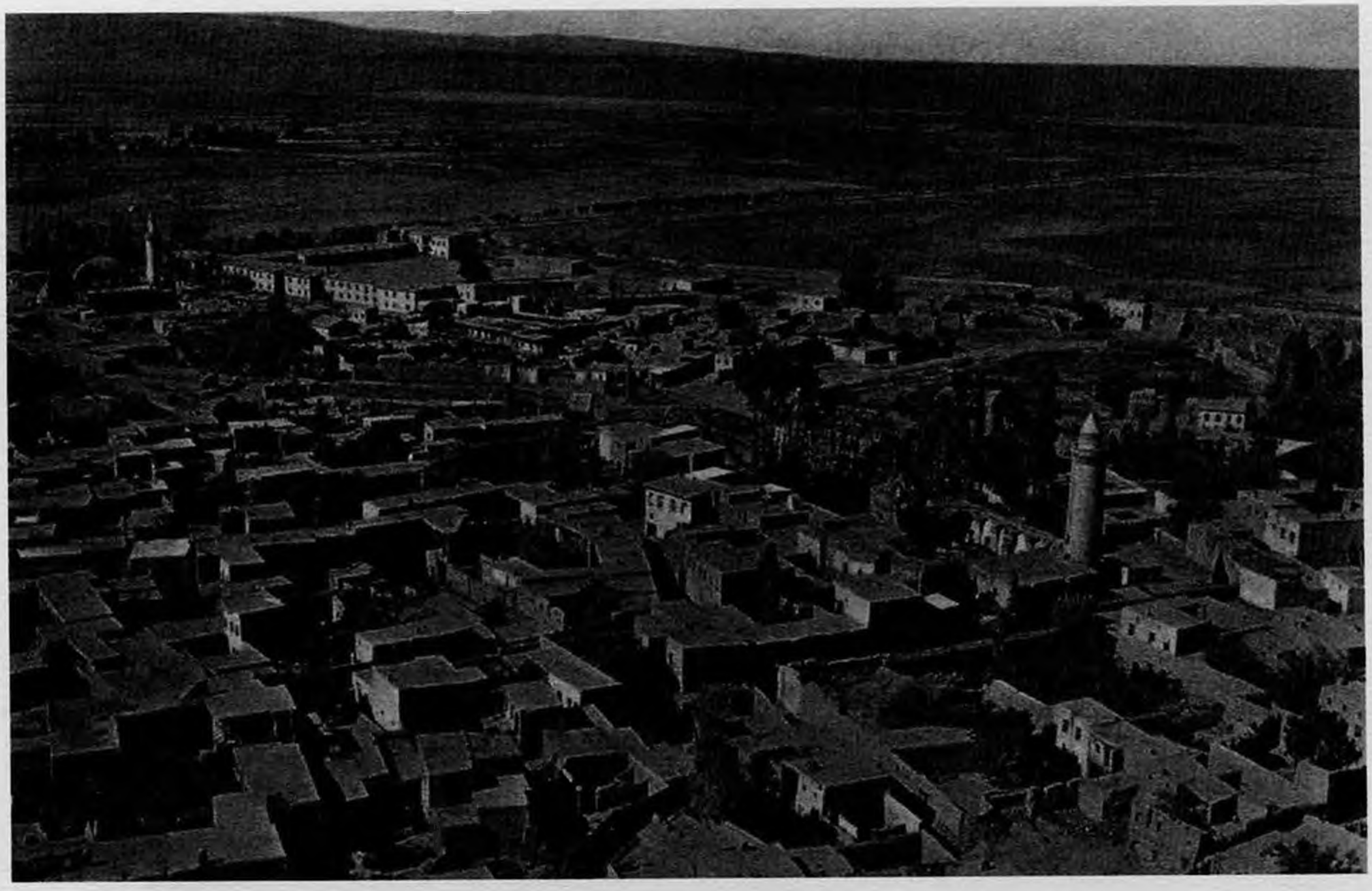


Fig. 6. Van from the Citadel (Bachmann, 1913)



Fig. 7. Ruins of Van, Post-1915 (Tomasso Breccia Fratadocchi, 1967)

Binder,[27] Paul Müller-Simonis,[28] and Carl Friedrich Lehmann-Haupt.[29] Of particular interest is Müller-Simonis' engraving of the modern city in 1892 as it looked from the citadel above,[30] a view that Bachmann was to photograph twenty years later (Fig. 6).[31] Among the earliest photographs of Van are those by Ernest Chantre and Lynch.[32] Chantre, who seems to have passed through Van in 1881, took a large number of pictures of monuments, the inner city, its suburbs, and Van's inhabitants. Some of his photographs of Armenian notables, including Khrimian Hayrik as archbishop of Van, are reproduced by Boghossian.[33]

Photographs and engravings of the old city are doubly precious because the Van of that time no longer exists. Its total destruction during the Armenian defense of Van has been well documented. Shots taken during the last years of World War I and just after show the devastation caused by continuous Turkish shelling.[34]

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[27] Henry Binder, *Au Kurdistan en Mésopotamie et en Perse* (Paris: Quantin, 1887), cf. Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, p. 262, fig. 349.

[28] Paul Müller-Simonis, *Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, à travers l'Arménie, le Kurdistan et la Mésopotamie* (Paris-Lyon: Delhomme et Briquet, 1892), who, according to Cuneo (p. 158), has one of the most animated descriptions of the city and mixes recycled images from Texier with original engravings and photographs, including a detailed plan of the city and its garden suburbs; Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," figs. 20 (map), 21-22.

[29] C.F. [Ferdinand Fredrich Carl] Lehmann-Haupt, *Armenien, einst und jetzt*, 2 vols. in 3 pts. (Berlin: B. Behr, 1910-1931); though published in 1926, the engraving no doubt is from the prewar period. See also Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," p. 172, fig. 28.

[30] Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," fig. 22.

[31] Walter Bachmann, *Kirchen und Moscheen in Armenien und Kurdistan* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1913); cf. Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," p. 169, fig. 27.

[32] Lynch's *Armenia: Travels and Studies* is amply treated in most literature. The book was translatcd into both Russian and Armenian and reprinted (Beirut: Khayats, 1965). A part of Lynch's original photographs have been exhibited in Paris, including some of the Van region. See the catalog by Artémis Ohanian, Berge Achdjian, Haroutiun Kévorkian, and Dickran Kouymjian, *Henry Finiss Bloss Lynch: Fragments d'un discours d'Arménie* (Paris: Berge Achdjian, 1990).

[33] Ernest Chantre, *De Beyrouth à Tiflis, à travers la Syrie, la Haute-Mésopotamie, le Kurdistan en 1881* (Paris: Hachette, 1889); Boghossian, *Armenian Iconography*, figs. 358-62, 365-66, 372 (Khrimian).

[34] Vardanyan, *Capital Cities*, p. 42, two photos showing the shells of deserted and destroyed buildings. For eyewitness accounts of the defense of the city and the Turkish bombardment, see *The Defense of Van*, containing English translation of: Part I, Onnig Mukhitarian, *An Account of the Glorious Struggle of Van-Vasbouragan*, and Part II, Haig Gossoian, *The Epic Story of the Self-Defense of Armenians in the Historic City of Van*, with a preface by William Saroyan (Fresno, CA: Central Executive General Society of

Both Kévorkian-Paboudjian[35] and Vardanyan provide a large number of documentary views of everyday life on the eve of the Genocide, as well as the Armenian resistance fighters during the siege and defense of Van in 1915. And then there is nothing. Viewed from atop the citadel, there is just a desolate, flat plain, full of hundreds of holes (Fig. 7), where Turks have dug for what they believed to be the "treasures" Armenians buried before being driven out forever.[36] The minarets of a couple of mosques are visible. The ruins of Armenian churches near the cliff were photographed by Cuneo and a team of architects from Milan in 1967.[37] After the Genocide, a new Turkish city of Van has sprung up, without Armenians, about 2 miles southeast of the emptiness of the old one and its protective Rock. Yet historic Van remains a vivid memory in the spirit of the few Armenian survivors still living and through the pictures of nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Vasbouragan, 1980).

[35] Kévorkian and Paboudjian, "Le vilayet de Van" (see note 5 above).

[36] Cuneo, "La topographie de la ville de Van," figs. 1-2. Though in photographs taken from the top of the Rock these look like holes that have been dug up, on ground level the aspect is one of ups and downs, as decades of weathering among the ruins have created mounds and recesses. This was observed during a trip to Van in July 1999.

[37] Ibid., figs. 4-6, churches of the Mother of God (Tiramayr) and Saint Vardan. In the 1970s the mosques and their minarets were restored by the Turkish authorities.

❀ 10 ❀

The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Anahide Ter Minassian

Since antiquity, travelers and geographers have been struck by the uniqueness of the site of Van. Perched on a rocky ridge with vertical cliffs, the city of Van is located on the crossroads of many natural avenues dominating the routes to Erevan, Tabriz, Mosul, and Bitlis. Situated in a plain bordered on the west by the lake of Van, the city is surrounded by an amphitheater of snow-capped high mountains. The lake, which attains approximately 125 kilometers (75 miles) in its longest dimension,, is a real inland sea, at an altitude of more than 1,700 meters (5,600 feet). Despite this high altitude, the moderate microclimate has always been favorable to food producing cultures, to orchards and vineyards. The legendary beauty of the basin of Van has inspired a famous Armenian saying: "Van in This World; Paradise in the Next."

At the turn of the twentieth century, Van by its cumulative history was a "city of memory."[1] However, the city that we will invoke does

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[1] See, for example, Paul Müller-Simonis, *Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, à travers l'Arménie, le Kurdistan et la Mésopotamie* (Paris-Lyon: Delhomme et Briquet, 1892); Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie: Géographie administrative, statistique, descriptive et raisonnée de chaque province de l'Asie Mineure*, vol. 2 (Paris: E. Leroux, 1892); H.F.B. Lynch, *Armenia: Travels and Studies,* vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, 1901; Beirut: Khayats, 1965), pp. 38-115. Lynch made two journeys through Armenia, in 1883 and in 1889. The chapter on Van, accompanied with maps and photographs, is an excellent description of the city and the population. Concerning the edification and the urban layout of the city of Van, from antiquity to the twentieth century, refer to the excellent article of Paolo Cuneo, "Étude sur la topographie et l'iconographie historique de la ville de Van," in *Armenian Studies/Études Arméniennes: In Memoriam Haïg Berbérian,* Dickran Kouymjian, ed. (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), pp. 125-84. There is an illustrated article in *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran* [Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia], vol. 11 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1985), pp. 272-74, with several complementary entries: "Van," "Kingdom

not exist any more. During World War I, Van was the theater of an Armenian uprising (1915) and was occupied and then evacuated three times by the Russian army, its population fleeing each time the front changed. It is a city that was totally destroyed in 1918.[2] Today, the site of ancient Van is a vast field of ruins, from where emerge truncated minarets, substructures of walls, and a few remnants of churches. The vague outlines of streets and islands of dwellings are still visible from atop the rocky ridge. The modern city of Van, built in the early 1920s a little distance to the southeast, is a new urban area, the work of the Republic of Turkey. The Armenians, whose testimonies have been extensively utilized in this study, have totally vanished from this site, where their presence had been continuous over a period of more than two thousand years.

Only a few cities have a history as rich and ancient as that of Van. The capital of the kingdom of Urartu in the ninth century B.C. and incorporated in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century A.D., Van is full of relics of the past (cuneiform inscriptions, the so-called Queen Semiramis aqueducts, a Byzantine church, an Ottoman citadel, etc.) despite the destruction caused by a multitude of invaders and by earthquakes (the one in 1648 ruined half the city). For Armenians, Van is above all the prestigious capital of Vaspurakan, the kingdom of Artsruni sovereigns (tenth-eleventh centuries). In the final years of the Ottoman Empire, Van was not only a "memory city," but it is also

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of Van," "Central School of Van," "*Vilayet* of Van," "Vaspurakan," etc.

[2] See Makich Arzumanyan, "Vani Herosamarte" [The Heroic Struggle of Van], in his *Hayastan 1914-1917* [Armenia 1914-1917] (Erevan: Hayastan, 1969). A-Do, *Mets depkere Vaspurakanum 1914-1915 tvakannerin* [The Great Incidents in Vaspurakan in 1914-1915] (Erevan: Loys, 1917). With statistics, maps, documents, and a historical analysis, this volume is an invaluable work. A-Do is the pseudonym of an Armenian sociologist, Hovhannes Ter-Martirosian (1867-1954), a graduate of the universities of Kharkov and Saint Petersburg. Dispatched as a correspondent of the Tiflis daily *Mshak* after the occupation of Van by the Russian army in 1915, he made a study of the area with which he was already familiar, having published *Vani, Bitlisi ev Erzrumi vilayetnere* [The Vilayets of Van, Bitlis, and Erzerum] (Erevan: Kultura, 1912); Onnik Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte* [The Heroic Struggle of Van] (Sofia: P. Palegchian [Balekjian], 1930), a fascinating memoir of one of the local leaders of the Dashnaktsutiun, also translated into English as *The Battle of Van* (Detroit: General Society of Vasbouragan, 1980). See also Artak Darbinian, *Hay azatagrakan sharzhman oreren: Husher, 1890-1940* [From the Days of the Armenian Liberation Movement: Memoirs, 1890-1940] (Paris: Hay Azgayin Himnadram, 1947), giving the Ramkavar viewpoint and especially valuable for the study of the Armenakan movement in Van.

an area in transformation.[3]

The Urban Area

As in antiquity and the Middle Ages, the agglomeration of Van comprises three distinct sectors: the Citadel, the City, and Aygestan (the Orchard or Garden district). The Citadel is on top of the Great Rock, more than a kilometer long and towering over the landscape. In antiquity, the Rock served as an acropolis, where the royal residence, the garrison, the temples, and the archives were situated. After capturing Van in 1534, Sultan Suleyman built the Citadel, which became one of the most powerful fortresses of the Ottoman Empire. But in the nineteenth century, although the Citadel was equipped with fortress artillery, it no longer had a garrison.

The City lying below has a characteristic topography. Backed against the Rock, it is a low city fortified and belted by a double line of notched battlements, preceded by a moat. Adjacent to the Rock on the northeast and on the east, the City has four great gates: the Tabriz Gate, the Serail Gate, the Orta Gate, and the Iskele Gate. From the latter, situated on the west, a route leads through fields to Avants, the port of Van, located less than 3 kilometers from the City. But, in the east, on the Tabriz Gate side, the walls are almost completely collapsed on their huge foundations. With its clay brick and wood houses squeezed in a limited space and its network of narrow, flint-paved dark streets and alleys, the City has kept its medieval character. It remains the center of the region's economic, administrative, and religious life. Here are the khans, the caravanserays, and the markets,

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[3] See *Vaspurakan* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1930), a magnificently illustrated memorial publication by the Compatriotic Union of Vaspurakan in Tabriz on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the uprising. More than a pious remembrance, it includes noteworthy schematics and articles on the origins of the Armenian national movement, on the culture, and on the ethno-history of the Armenians of the region.

There is a very interesting description of Armenian life in Van at the beginning of the twentieth century in Simon Kabamajian, *Kamer, pokrik chamborde Arevelki mej* [Kamer, the Little Traveler in the Orient] (Scutari, 1909), an adaptation of G. Bruno's book, *Le tour de France par deux enfants* to Armenian history and geography; Hambardzum Eramian, *Hushardzan Van-Vaspurakani* [Memorial of Van-Vaspurakan] (Alexandria: Aram Kasabian, 1929), 2 vols.; Victor Gardon, *Le vert soleil de la vie* (Paris: Stock, 1959), evoking the history of a young Armenian and his grandmother living in Aygestan at the turn of the century.

bazaars, and artisan workshops. The principal modern and ancient administrative buildings are clustered around the Serail Gate. These include the *konak* or governor's palace, the central court, the central prison, the police station, the barracks, the post-telegraph office,[4] the Ottoman Bank, the Ottoman tax office, the tobacco administration, the health office,[5] the agricultural administration, the customs building, and the Turkish schools, among them the Dar-ul-Malumie. Built during the Hamidian era (1876-1908), these institutions are testimony to the modernization and the centralization of the provincial administration.

The numerous religious edifices have amazed travelers such as Paul Müller-Simonis, Vital Cuinet, and H.F.B. Lynch. In 1892, Cuinet lists six mosques and seven Armenian churches. At the turn of the century, Lynch records the presence of three mosques, in addition to the impressive ruins at the foot of the Great Rock of the large mosque (Ulu Jami), which probably dates back to the Seljuk era. Two of the mosques, located on the edge of the Muslim quarter, are still functioning. These are the Kaya Chelebi mosque and the Khosrovie mosque, whose construction in 1558 is credited to Sinan, the renowned architect of Armenian origin. The Topchi-oghlu mosque, located in the northern sector, which had become the Armenian quarter, is no longer in use.

In 1909 the existence of seven Armenian churches is confirmed: Surb[6] Petros, Surb Nshan, Surb Poghos, Surb Sahak, Surb Vahan, Surb Tsiranavor, and Surb Tiramayr. Clustered at the center and at the north end of the City, these sanctuaries mark the limits of the Armenian area: therein, near Surb Nshan, is located the Prelacy of the Armenian Church. The City has only 4,000 inhabitants, consisting of 3,000 Armenians and 1,000 Muslims, living in separate quarters.

Aygestan (Aikestan) or the Garden district, located a short distance from the City, is an *extra muros* suburb. Without enclosure, it was built initially with unsteady materials for nomads and the most deprived classes. In this aspect it is similar to the *rabad* of the medieval Arabic city. But its development, which started in the middle of the nineteenth century, continues until 1914. After the great fire of 1876, after the effects of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, after the famine of 1880-81, and after the massacres of the Armenians and the accompanying

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[4] The Turkish-Persian telegraph line.

[5] The region had experienced outbreaks of plague, variola, and typhus.

[6] Surb (Sourp) means Saint.

destruction in 1896, the wealthy families, Christian and Muslim, abandon the City, flee the fires and the epidemics, and look for healthy open spaces to establish their residences. Their example is followed by the foreign consulates (Russia, Great Britain, France, Persia, Italy), by religious missions (American Protestant Mission, French Dominican Mission, German Mission), and by the "modern" educational institutions (Ottoman Rushdiye School). Following the example of the *vali* (governor), the Ottoman high functionaries settle there as well. Aygestan, real residential suburbs that Lynch compares with London's West End, is endowed with public services as well bazaars, mosques, churches, schools, American hospital, military hospital, telegraph, agricultural bank, etc.

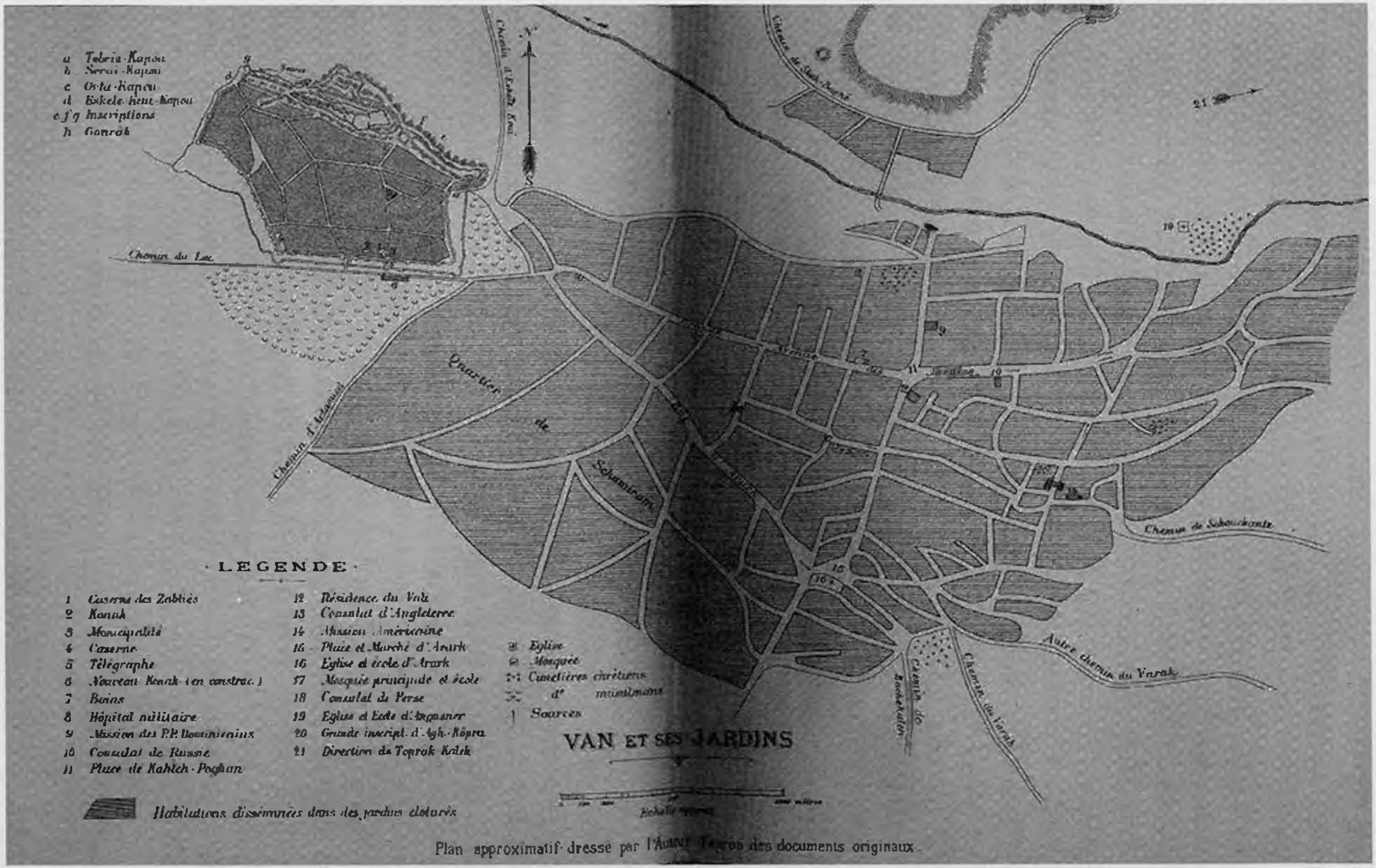
Except for official buildings or a few two-story and even three-story grand residences with verandahs and balconies, the houses are in general low structures. They are engulfed in an ocean of greenery that justifies the name of this "garden city," whose checkered lay out is still visible today. As a matter of fact the streets—Vital Cuinet has counted 148 of them—intersect at right angles; they are lined with a network of irrigation canals edged with willows and poplars that crisscross the orchards: apple, apricot, cherry, orange, lemon, pomegranate, and the vegetable gardens and vineyards. This tree-rich area is bordered on the north by the valley of the Hankoysner River, and beyond by a hill wherein is the famous Mher's Dur or Zem Zem Maghara for Muslims, noted for its cuneiform inscriptions.[7]

Haykavank,[8] with its Armenian quarter that was destroyed in 1896 and its Muslim cemetery, is reduced to an empty space between the City and the Gardens. Around it there are large empty spaces used by itinerant peddlers and by nomads, including the Boshas or Gypsies. A large and long avenue lined with poplars links the City and the Gardens and extends over 5 kilometers, with sections bearing different names. Midway, a crossroads intersects this "Champs-Elysées" of Van. It is the Khach-Boghan. Around this crossroads rise the British consulate's building, whose apartments overlook the square through glass windows (supreme luxury), a hotel, and a few residences of Turkish functionaries and of rich Armenian merchants. According to Armenian

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[7] Little Mher is one of the heroes of the Armenian epic "David of Sasun." Mher and his horse will not come out of the Rock "as long as the world is wicked."

[8] Vank means monastery.



Plan approximatif dresse par l'Auteur d'après des documents originaux

Van and Its Gardens—Aygestan

sources, 17,000 Muslims (Turks, Kurds, Persians, Circassians) and 20,000 Armenians, the overwhelming majority of Van's population in 1914, live in Aygestan, divided in Armenian, Muslim, and mixed neighborhoods, making a total of eleven quarters (*mahal*s). Located on the east and on the northeast, the Armenian quarters of Arark, Norashen, and Hankoysner each have their churches, schools, and fountains whose edification is a pious duty. The second market of Van is located in the Arark quarter, around the Ararents square. The large street Nalband-oghlu, which connects this place to Khach-Boghan, marks the boundaries of mixed habitation. Three barracks built during the Hamidian era—on the north Toprakkale, on the south Haji Bekir, and the center Hamud Agha—allow surveillance over the Armenian quarters. The Muslim sectors, such as the Shamiram quarter, are located to the west and to the northwest, where there is also a zone of mixed dwellings. They also have their mosques, their schools, and their fountains.

It has not been possible to ascertain precisely how the space partition of the ethnic-religious communities of Van has occurred: by spontaneous groupings, by municipal regulations, or by edicts? Although the mosques and the churches, with their minarets and their domes, mark the landscape with the cultural diversity, there nevertheless exist unifying factors. They have to do with the management of areas reserved for work (covered markets and small, dark artisan workshops). The distinction between work areas and residential areas is already well delimited in Van. The type and the construction techniques of the houses are another unifying factor. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the houses in Aygestan, made with wood and clay, are one story, have a terrace-like flat roof, and possess few, even no openings on the exterior. The wooden doors to access the street or the orchard are closed with iron bars. Inside, the living space is distributed around the main room, which may also be the only room: it is the *tanutun* in Armenian. Dug at its center more than one meter deep is the hearth (*tonir*), where bread without yeast is baked. Directly above, a large opening in the roof supported by exposed beams provides for aeration and lighting. Mural decorations embellish certain homes. If carpets are common for rich and poor alike, furniture on the other hand is scarce except for the *sedir* (sofa) and *manghal* (brazier). The presence of numerous domestic animals—donkeys, mules, horses, cows, goats, sheep, dogs, chickens, pigeons—with their smells

and their noises accentuate the rustic character of the Gardens. A multitude of white Angora cats with bluish eyes, the famous cats of Van, wander about the streets. The tree branches swarm with birds: sparrows, wood-pigeons, and even vultures, which must be dislodged by burning vine-shoots at the foot of big pear trees in order to pick the fruit.

With the exception of the Khach crossroads and the vicinity of the main avenue, where urban structures are more dense and where taller houses have windows and balconies, the Gardens have the character of a large village. Buried in bushes of roses and lilies, flanked with barns and stables, the houses are surrounded with orchards and vegetable gardens. These are enclosed with earth walls, which protect the privacy of family life, and through wooden clack-valves located at their base the flow of canalized water is regulated. Through these valves or through breaches easily opened in the clay stone walls, one can move freely in the labyrinth of orchards and escape if necessary from police surveillance. This is the case of the *firar*, the fugitive, pursued for political activities or criminal acts or trying to escape a vendetta.

Thus, by its topography and its layout, Van is an exceptional Ottoman city, but one finds in its urban landscape, as in that of other Ottoman cities of Asia or the Balkans, evidence of the Hamidian modernization. Construction of public buildings reflects the increased presence of the state: barracks, courts, prisons, police stations, schools, a sanitary administration, a central pharmacy, a hospital, multi-story houses, and broad avenues. The telegraph connects Van with Constantinople, thus reinforcing the control of the capital over the methods of administration of the governors and the pashas. The telephone links the office of the governor, located in the City, with the central commissariat or *merkez*, located in the Gardens. But this modernization is incomplete. Van, a city close to the frontier, occupied by the Russian army in 1878, where the Armenians are starting to organize and where the army, the gendarmerie, and the police have been strengthened to the detriment of civil administrators, still preserves the features of a small traditional Eastern city. Thus, for lack of space in the official buildings, some tribunals are installed in the City, on the second floor of the business place or khan of the Terzibashians, a prominent family of Armenian merchants. Built with wood, the khan is located in the bazaar; on the street level there are shops and a manufacturing facility. The tribunals have an austere look, except for

some carpets on the walls and, in winter, large overheated stoves and smoking samovars. The administration of public streets and urban lighting is less than perfect. In the City and the Gardens, the streams that run in the streets act as sewers, carting refuse and remains of animals. The wooden floors of the shops of the Gardens, located a meter (3 feet) above the street level, are reminiscent of the small cities of the American Far West. There also exist in Van underground canals, constructed in antiquity, which bring mountain water to the city. The corporation of *kankans* continues to maintain them.

The Population

It is impossible to state with certainty the population figures of the city and the *vilayet* of Van, and it is even more difficult to specify the demographic weight of the different communities. The contradiction of the statistics is explained by the absence of complete Ottoman censuses of the eastern vilayets and by the successive administrative reforms. For example, in 1875 Van, like Bitlis, was part of the vilayet of Erzerum from which it was detached. In 1888 the *sanjak* of Hakkari (Hekkiari), whose population is mainly Kurdish, was attached to the vilayet of Van, thus resulting in a relative reduction in the Armenian population.[9] The following statistics give an idea of the difficulties encountered by the historian:

British Consul R.A.O. Dalyell, 1862[10]

Sanjak of Van	
Christians	90,100
Muslims	95,100
Sanjak of Hakkari	
Christians	119,000
Muslims (Kurds)	114,500
TOTAL	418,700

[9] The *vilayet* of Van included thereafter two *sanjaks* and nineteen *kazas*.

[10] These figures include the City of Van: Christians, 10,000; Muslims, 8,000, and its suburbs: Christians, 32,000; Muslims, 9,000. See "Tabular View of the Population of the Mutassariflik of Wan," British Archives, cited by Mesrob K. Krikorian, *Armenians in the Service of the Ottoman Empire, 1860-1908* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 33, 118.

Vital Cuinet, 1890[11]

Armenians	
Apostolic	79,000
Catholic	708
Protestant	290
Syrians (Assyrians)	
Nestorian, *rayah* and autonomous	92,000
Chaldean Catholic	6,000
Muslims	
Kurds	210,000
Turks	30,500
Circassians	500
Others	
Jews	5,000
Yezidis	5,400
Gypsies	600
Latins	2
TOTAL	430,000

H.F.B. Lynch, 1898[12]

Kaza of Van	
Armenians	42,000
Muslims	17,000

Report of the French Consul in Van, 1912[13]

Vilayets of Van and Bitlis

Kurds	51.46%
Armenians	32.70%
Turks	5.53%

A-Do, 1912[14]

The Armenian population of Van, 102,910, in 3 cities and 387 villages, with 16,203 hearths

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[11] Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie,* vol. 2, p. 636.
[12] Lynch, *Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 79.
[13] See France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 30 November 1912, F° 22 and 23.
[14] A-Do, *Vani, Bitlisi ev Erzrumi Vilayetnere,* p. 78.

Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople (Without Sanjak of Hekkiari) 1912[15]

Armenians	185,000
Assyrian Jacobites	18,000
Kurds	72,000
Turks	47,000
Yezidis	25,000
Gypsies	3,000
TOTAL	350,000

Ottoman Sources, 1911-12: Vilayet of Van[16]

Muslims	313,322
Armenians	130,500
Syrians (Assyrians):	
Nestorian, Jacobite, and Chaldean	62,400
Jews	1,798
Others	1,776
Greek	1
TOTAL	509,797

Teodik, 1922[17]

Armenians of Van vilayet at the beginning of the twentieth century: 197,000

Which are the correct figures? The data are contradictory and far from reliable. The Ottoman censuses have undercounted the non-Muslim elements. The high number shown in the Armenian statistics in 1912 is explained by the Russian revival of the Armenian Question during the Balkan Wars and by the political stakes involved. This is why the particularly low figures presented by A-Do, following a three-month

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[15] *The Armenian Question before the Peace Conference* (New York: Armenian National Union, 1919), Annex No. 1; Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 36.

[16] See Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1983), p. 110.

[17] Teodik, *Amenun Taretsoytse* [Everyone's Almanac] (Constantinople: V. & H. Ter-Nersesian, 1922), p. 262.

investigation in the eastern vilayets, are sharply criticized by Nikol Aghbalian, future minister of education and culture of independent Armenia (1918-20), in a series of articles in the Tiflis newspaper *Horizon*, organ of the Dashnaktsutiun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation).[18]

Without coming up with a definitive answer, it seems reasonable that on the eve of World War I the Kurdish population is increasing, the Turkish community is numerically insignificant, and the Armenian community in the kaza of Van and especially in the city of Van is preponderant. In addition, if one accepts the figure of 41,000 inhabitants, divided between the City and Aygestan, Van remains at the beginning of the twentieth century a small Ottoman city, with stable demography, not growing by an influx from the countryside. On the contrary, the inhabitants of Van, especially the Armenians, emigrate. The emigration to Constantinople is old; it gains momentum after 1850. Following the massacres of 1896, a few thousand Armenians take refuge in Persia. At the end of the nineteenth century, Armenian peasants are leaving for the industrial centers of Baku, Tiflis, and Batum in Transcaucasia, and some are also emigrating to the United States. This movement, temporary at first, continues to grow because of the economic difficulties and feelings of insecurity and is turning decisive.

Economy and Society

In Van the economy remains traditional. If the city is still famous for its goldsmiths, its silversmiths, its carpets, its copper works, its embroideries, and its artisanal industry, it nevertheless suffers from the competition of the European manufactured goods. Trade, which in the past accounted for the prosperity of Van, is stagnant. Not serviced by the railroad, the city is isolated from the main modern commercial roads, and its economy suffers from the difficulties and the slowness of connections with the outside world.[19] The roads are impracticable in winter. In summer, for a person going from Constantinople to Van, instead of the endless and sometimes dangerous crossing of Anatolia,

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[18] Aghbalian criticizes and corrects the figures of A-Do while at the same time lauding the investigation. See *Horizon* (Tiflis), 1912, nos. 264-66, and 1913, nos. 3, 6-9.

[19] Although supported by the Armenian deputy in the Ottoman Parliament, Armen Garo (Pasdermajian), the 1911 Chester railroad construction project in the eastern vilayets did not materialize.

it is preferable to go by sea to Batum, to traverse Russian Transcaucasia by railway as far as Erevan, and then to hire an automobile to proceed to Van in short stages. This is the route taken in May 1913 by Matteos Eplighatian, an Ottoman civil servant appointed president of the Correctional Tribunal of Van, who had to travel for fifteen days to complete the trip.[20]

The transfer to Van produces in Eplighatian, an Armenian born in Smyrna, educated in Constantinople, a judge in Iannia (Epirus) and then in Aleppo, a deep emotional shock. For him, as for Kamer, *The Little Traveler in the Orient*, who set out for the discovery of his "eternal fatherland" in Asiatic Turkey, Van is Armenia, the land of the ancestors and the symbol of the national epic.[21] For 2,500 years the presence of the Armenians has been continuous in Vaspurakan. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the small island of Aghtamar, with its famous Church of the Holy Cross, was the See of an Armenian Catholicosate, whose jurisdiction extended over some 200 monasteries, churches, and chapels of the region, albeit a number of them had been abandoned.[22] The first call of Eplighatian is upon Vali Hasan Tahsin Bey. An influential member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), Tahsin Bey acquires a real political character in Macedonia and is appointed governor of Van after the Young Turk revolution. He will remain in this position from 1913 until February 1915. A man with little education, but intelligent, hard-working, and experienced, he has the reputation of having been a good governor. If he seems friendly toward the new Armenian magistrate, he nevertheless puts him under the obligation to help the authorities maintain law and order in a city where there prevails "the malicious practices of an uncivilized *bled* [frontier settlement], each one here, engaging in target shooting in his garden . . . just for the fun of it."[23] Indeed, as of sunset, Van resounds, as does Monastir at the other end of the Ottoman Empire, with the crackling of revolvers and rifles.[24] Since

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[20] Matteos M. Eplighatian, *Kiank me azgis kiankin mej* [A Life Within the Life of My People] (Antelias, Lebanon: Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1987).

[21] See Kabamajian, *Kamer*.

[22] Since the demise of the last catholicos in 1896, there was only a locum tenens. The Catholicosate was abolished in 1916.

[23] Eplighatian, *Kiank me*, p. 58.

[24] Bernard Lory and Alexandre Popovic, "Au carrefour des Balkans, Bitola 1816-1918," in *Villes ottomanes à la fin de l'Empire*, ed. Paul Dumont and François Georgeon (Paris: L'Hartmattan, 1992), pp. 75-93. Bitola is the Bulgarian name for Monastir.

the re-establishment of the Ottoman Constitution, there is a significant traffic of weapons in the area. Encouraged by their revolutionary parties to prepare for self-defense, the population, in particular the Armenians, become armed. The treason of Davo, revealing to the Turkish police the site of the Dashnaktsutiun's arsenal (1908), is an event still present in everyone's memory.

Very quickly, Eplighatian understands the difficulty of resisting all kinds of pressures and interventions and of rendering justice by taking into account the rivalries of various ethnic-religious communities. A magistrate entrusted to apply the law, he realizes that even if the Ottoman Code is derived from the French Code, it is nevertheless impossible in Van to comprehend "the spirit of the French laws" that are unsuited to the local conditions. The very high number of prisoners is proof of severe repression. The central prison is dirty and over-crowded. The prisoners, mainly Kurdish and Armenian, are piled up in vermin-infested cells, where Kurdish bandits condemned to life are mingled with hapless detainees who remain sometimes a year without being given a hearing.

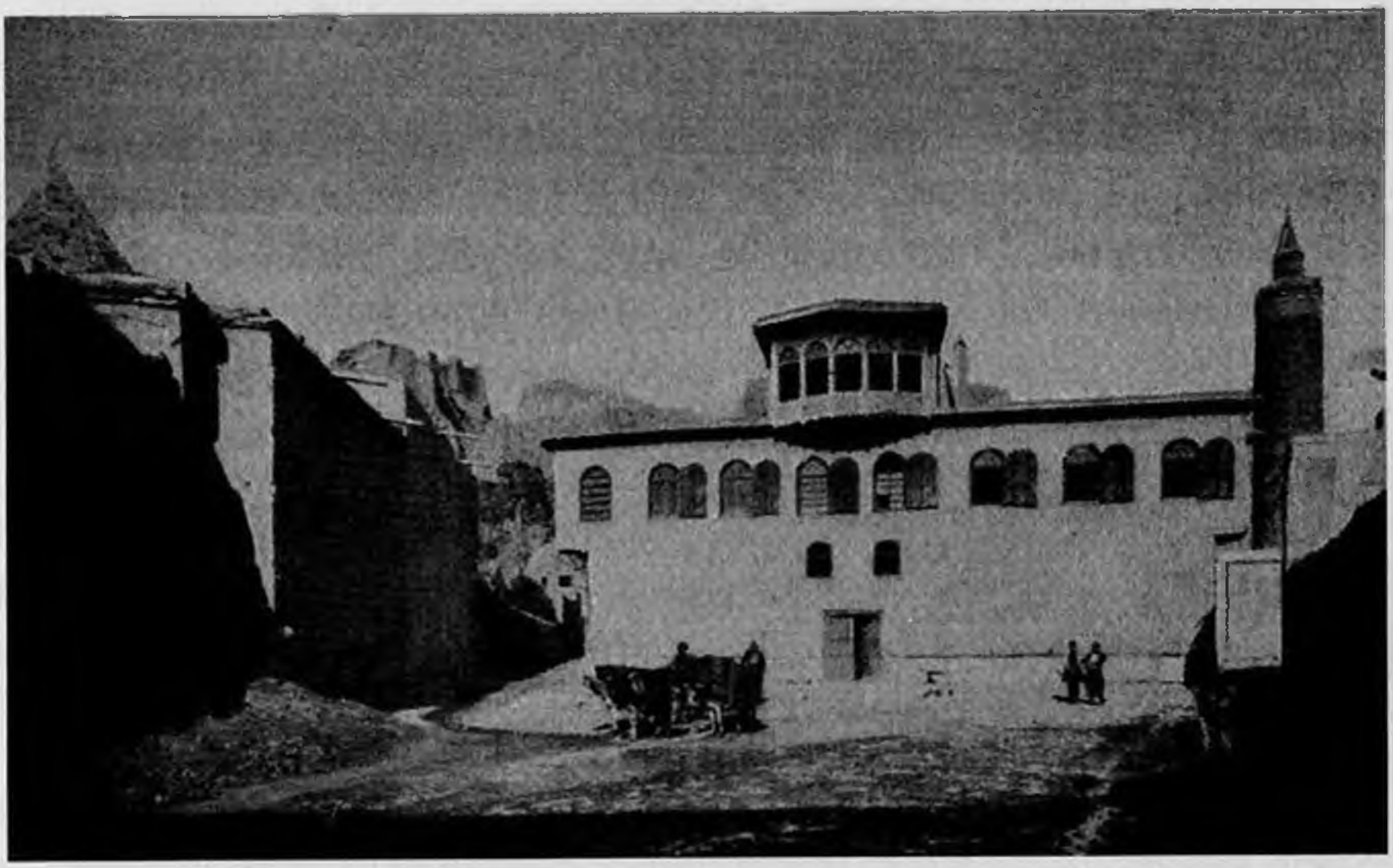
The Armenian revolutionary parties, vigorously repressed in 1896, are reorganized and act openly since the Young Turk revolution of July 1908.[25] If Hnchakians are no longer very active, the Armenakans remain influential in the city where they compete with the Dashnakists or Dashnaktsakans, who since 1904 have come to dominate the boroughs and villages of the mountains, the Lernapar. At the helm of the Dashnaktsutiun there is an ever-growing role of Caucasian militants, natives of Karabagh, such as Nikol Duman, Aram (Manukian), and Ishkhan. The audacity of the Armenian political parties irritates Turkish

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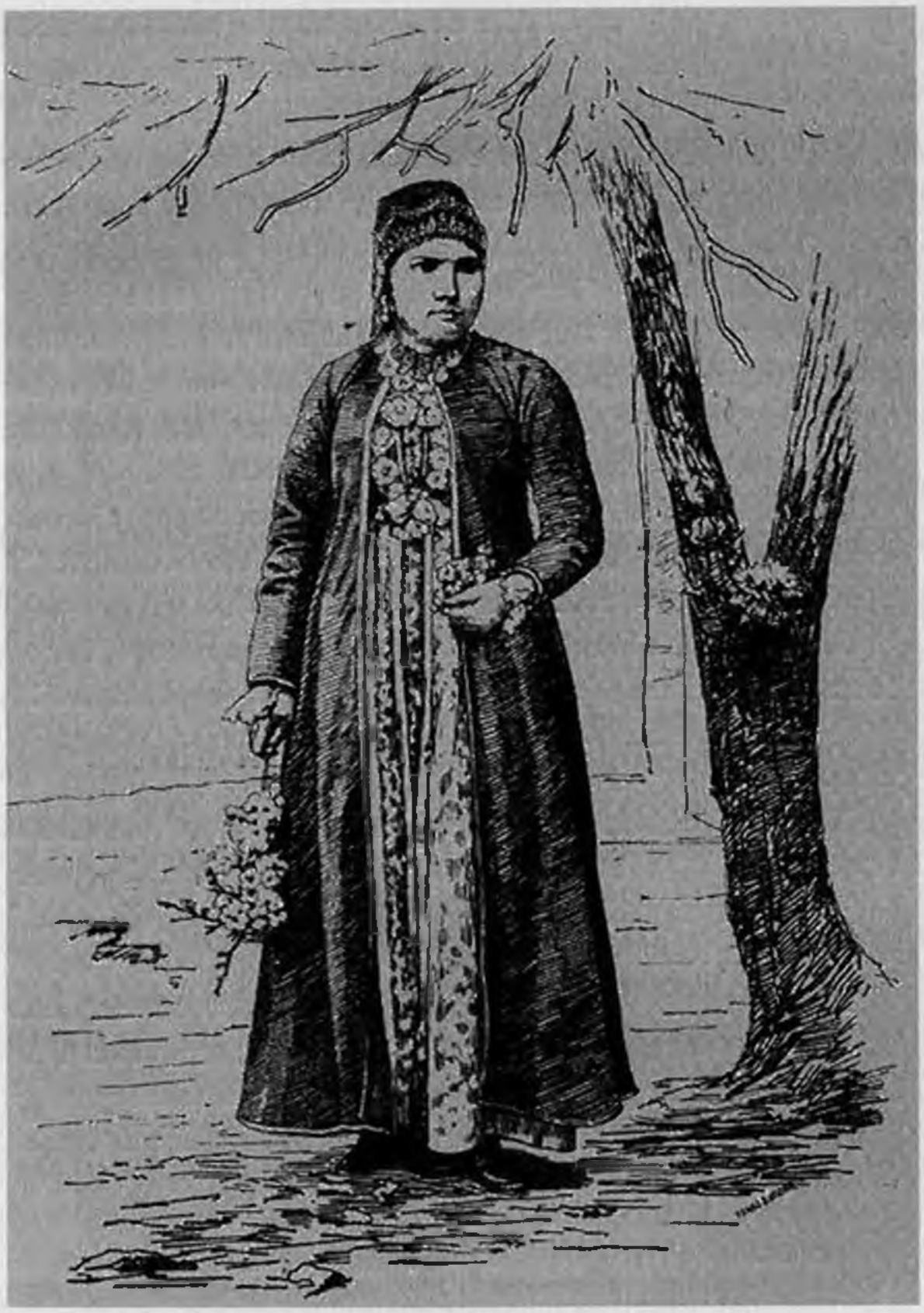
[25] Created by the intelligentsia, the Armenian political parties—Armenakan, founded in Van in 1885; Social Democrat Hnchakian, founded in Geneva in 1887; and Armenian Revolutionary Federation or Dashnaktsutiun, founded in Tiflis in 1890—had as their objectives the implementation of the reforms guaranteed by the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and the emancipation of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, if necessary through revolutionary means. The Armenakan was a democratic and liberal party whose membership and influence would remain regional. The other two claimed to adhere to socialism. It is beyond the scope of this article to treat this broad subject about which there exists much literature. See Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), concerning the Armenian cultural and revolutionary movement in Van before 1896, and for an interpretive essay, see Anahide Ter Minassian, "Le mouvement révolutionnaire arménien, 1890-1903," in *La Question Arménienne* (Roquevaire: Ed. Parenthèse, 1983), pp. 113-67.

notables in spite of the electoral alliance, a pact renewed in 1912, which formally binds the CUP and the Dashnaktsutiun. Each year the Armenians publicly commemorate the Armenian National Constitution (May 24, 1860), thus expressing their attachment to the cultural autonomy of their ethno-religious *millet*, but they live in constant fear of a *depk*, an "event" or "incident" implying violence and pogrom. If they have armed themselves, it is for the purpose of self-defense in such a circumstance. For their part, the Turks fear the intervention of the European Powers, as well as coercion to implement reforms, which would entail a reduction of Ottoman sovereignty in the eastern vilayets. Since the loss of the Balkans (1912-13), Turkish leaders consider Anatolia their national fatherland, and the Armenians, supported by the Russians, are regarded as representing a real danger to the integrity of the empire.

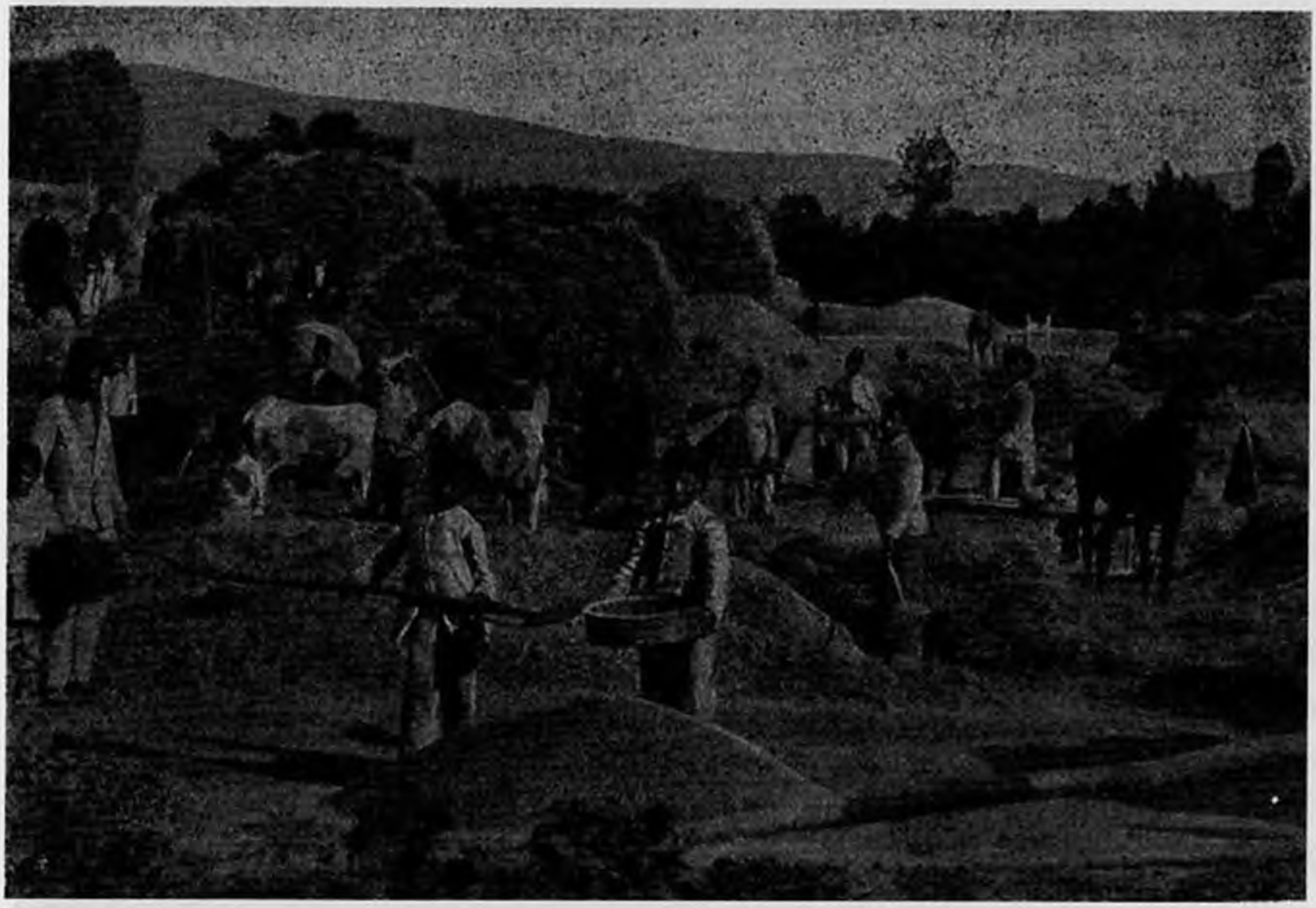
The urban segregation of Ottoman cities is reflected at Van, where society is divided among three distinct communities: Turks, Kurds, and Armenians. The Turks are the last to have arrived. They are few but constitute the dominant political element. Six clans that consider themselves of Turkish origin (Timur-oghlu, Topchi-oghlu, etc.) form a kind of urban aristocracy. Divided by internal quarrels, they have witnessed the decrease of their power following the administrative centralization of the Tanzimat era (1839-76), in favor of civil servants and military personnel of Turkish but also of Kurdish, Albanian, Montenegrin, Arabic, and Circassian origin appointed by Constantinople. The geostrategic position of Van explains the high number of military personnel assigned to the city. Under Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, Van is a place of exile and an undesirable outpost, where civil servants and the military are left for months without getting their pay. Thus a continuous flow of civil servants and officers moves between Van, Constantinople, Mosul, and Rumelia (European Turkey). Among them are many Ittihadists (Young Turks) who will become prominent in the ensuing period (Halil Bey, Kiazim, Abdulkader). One finds evidence of this in the list of governors of Van appointed between 1893 and 1915: Bahri Pasha (1893-97); Tahir Pasha (1898-1906); Ali Bey (1907); Ali Riza Pasha (1907-08); Mahmud Khairy Pasha (1908-09); Bekir Sami Bey (1909-10), future leader of the Turkish Nationalist movement; Ismail Hakki Bey (1911-12), the brevity of whose term



Home of Armenian Merchant (Lynch)



Woman of Van (Müller-Simonis)



Threshing Field



Armenian Oxcart Drivers (Müller-Simonis)

the Armenians regret; and Hasan Tahsin Bey (1913-15).[26] In 1896, Hovhannes Boyajian is named the Armenian assistant to the governor and serves in that position until 1907. Jevdet Bey, appointed as vali in February 1915, is the brother-in-law of Minister of War Enver Pasha and former *mutessarif* (district governor) of Bashkale, where he has earned a sinister reputation and is in place at the time of the dramatic events of spring 1915.

The Kurds represent the majority of the Muslims of Van. They speak a Kurdish dialect but are also Turcophone. The city elites are reluctant to be identified as Kurds and call themselves *Osmanli*. They are assimilated by marriage with Turkish families, send their sons to study in Constantinople, and condemn violence and the armed banditry of Kurdish tribes in the rural areas. The Ottoman government conducts a dual policy toward them. On the one hand, it seeks to reduce the highway robbery around Van and to maintain law and order, a requirement imposed by the presence of the European consuls, but it also stokes the rivalries and blood feuds of the Kurdish *ashirets* (tribes) in the policy of divide and rule. On the other hand, Abdul-Hamid's pan-Islamist proclivity and the creation of the semi-official Hamidiye cavalry regiments in 1891 encourage the Kurds to control and subdue the Armenians, thus making impossible an Armeno-Kurdish entente against the central government.[27]

Compared with the Kurds and Turks, who monopolize the military, political, and bureaucratic functions, the Armenians are the "producers." However, great social, cultural, and economic differences separate the rich *sarrafs* (money changers), the wealthy merchants, the doctors, dentists, and lawyers, who together with some civil servants and some *dragomans* (translators) of foreign consulates belong to the class of the Armenian *aghas*, from the small tradesmen, the craftsmen, the workers, the horticulturists, and the intelligentsia (low-level clergy, teachers, journalists), who live in poverty and even misery. There exists for a long time within the Armenian community a veritable class

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[26] This list was prepared from data provided by Eramian, *Hushardzan Van-Vaspurakani*.

[27] Created on the model of the Cossacks of Russia, these cavalry regiments were part of Abdul-Hamid's Kurdish policy to reinforce the solidarity of the Muslims and to thwart any Armenian-Kurdish collaboration. On this question, see Garo Sassouni [Karo Sasuni], *Kurd azgayin sharzhumnere ev hay-krtakan haraberutiunnere* [The Kurdish National Movements and Armeno-Kurdish Relations] (Beirut: Hamazkayine, 1969).

struggle.[28] The sarrafs, who in Van are the equivalent of the *amiras* of the Ottoman capital, control the Prelacy of Van, the prelacy council, the schools, and the charitable institutions. The merchants of Van often own real property in the lowland valleys and the plain around the city. In fact, it is the possession of land, more than income from trade, which accounts for the prosperity of the aghas. The latter impose on their peasants, whether Armenian, Assyrian, Yezidi, or Kurd, heavy share-cropping contracts. They require more than half of the harvest and have recourse to *multezims* to evaluate the future harvest of wheat. The peasant, on his part, must regularly deliver to the landlord butter, cheese, and other products in order to allow him to replenish his winter reserves. In autumn, he provides an "accounting" and reports on the status of the flocks. The accounts are often a source of conflict, as wolves, disease, or the Kurds have "carried away" a number of sheep. In addition, in the high valleys of mountainous areas, Armenian *ishkhans* (princes) continued to rule over their villages, in Shatakh (Shadakh), in Moks, in Aljavaz (Adiljavaz), where they call themselves *meliks*. Endowed with a splendid physique and superb mustaches, they do indeed have a princely appearance, but they are completely uncultivated. Thanks to these city-countryside relations and to the travels of peddlers, craftsmen, and tradesmen, the Armenian revolutionary organizations are able to infiltrate the villages and install in the rural Armenian, Assyrian, and sometimes Kurdish communities a network of militants whose objective it is to ensure the safety of *rayas* (subject people) and to defend their just cause rather than to solve their economic problems.[29]

The Turkish, Kurdish, and Armenian communities live side by side but rarely interact socially, except for Ottoman civil servants not native to Van who fight the boredom of long winter nights by visiting each other or by having themselves invited by a local family. What strikes the historian is the silence in Armenian sources regarding the social, cultural, and religious life of the Muslims, in particular regarding the Muslim brotherhoods, *bektashis,* and others which are so active in the area. It is a silence revealing the segregation of the groups, even if there were some attempts at rapprochement following the Young Turk

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[28] Koms [Vahan Papazian], *Im hushere* [My Memoirs], vol. 3 (Cairo: Housaper, 1957), p. 185ff.

[29] Ibid., p. 231ff.

revolution and during the parliamentary elections in autumn 1908.[30]

A true educational competition has evolved at Van between Armenians and Turks, both stimulated by a mission of the Congregational Church of America, founded in 1871, which opened two modern co-educational schools—one in the City, the other in the Gardens. Armenian schools are established and developed in response to the call of Mkrtich Khrimian, dean of the seminary at the monastery of Varag (Varagavank), who arrived in Van in the autumn of 1856 exhorting Armenians to emancipate themselves through education.[31] Female education initially encounters the active opposition of conservative elements.[32] In 1898, Lynch mentions eleven Armenian schools, of which nine or ten are in the Gardens, and one, the oldest, is in the City. At this time, there are 2,180 pupils, including 805 girls. The schools are under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Church; among these is the famous Central School founded by Mkrtich Portugalian and closed by the authorities in 1885. The Eramian School (College), a private institution, was founded in 1878 by a blind teacher. The teachers are lay, the tuition is based on the income of the parents, and the curriculum includes, besides Armenian, Turkish, and religious instruction, also French, the exact sciences, and mathematics, history, and geography.[33] The handbooks are imported from Europe and, from spelling books to anthologies of literature, are subject to control of the Ottoman censors. In 1913 the Eramian School boasts 400 pupils. In response to an appeal issued by Catholicos Gevorg V in October of the same year, teachers and pupils are preparing for the important commemorations in Van and Varag of the 1,500 anniversary of the invention of the Armenian alphabet.

Armenian cultural life is particularly active in Van, where schools, libraries, newspapers, and reading circles are concentrated. But there are great differences between the city itself, where 70 percent of the Armenians are taught reading and writing, and the villages of Vaspurakan, where the schools are few and the literacy rate is only

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[30] This cooperation was renewed in 1912, at the time of the election of the Armenian deputy from Van, the Dashnaktsakan Vramian (Onnik Derdzakian, 1871-1915).

[31] Mkrtich Khrimian, called *Hayrik* ("Father," 1820-1907), future Patriarch of Constantinople and Catholicos of All Armenians. See Rubina Peroomian's chapter in this volume.

[32] The journal *Ashkhatank* [Labor] published a long series of articles beginning in October 1913 on "The Armenian School of Van, 1820-1913," signed by H. Bagruni.

[33] Half of the pupils benefited from free tuition.

„ԱՇԽԱՏԱՆՔ“Ի ԼՐԱԲԵՐ

ԹԻՒ 1 — ՀԱՏԸ 10 ՓՐ. — 1913 ՄԱՅԻՍ 6 ԲԵ. ՎԱՆ

ՎԱՍՊՈՒՐԱԿԱՆԻ ՏԱԳՆԱՊԸ

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ԹԱԼԱՆԻԱՑ 1000 ՈՉԽԱՐ

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(ՀԵՌԱԳԻՐ «ԱՇԽԱՏԱՆՔԻ»Ի)

Մայիս 5 ԹԱՂ

Երէկ կաճեցտ գիւղի 1000-է աւելի ոչխարները քշեցին եւ երկու հովիւներն ալ սպանեցին.

Իսկ այս գիշերն ալ Վախրովի մէջ Միր Մէհմէդ էֆ., երկու ոստիկաններ և Վախրովի Ալի ազան.

Գաւառը անապահովութեան եւ սարսափի մէջ է.

Ջ.

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Շատախ 6 մայիս

Շատախ գաւառը մեծ տագնապի մէջ է.ընդհարում եւ չնորհութիւն հանելու նպատակաւ գրաւեցի Շաքիր աղայի հովանաւորութեան ներքեւ կարգ մը միւթէղպիփներ ժողովները կազմեցին.Շաքիր աղայի որդիները յայտնի աւազակ Միր Մհէին միանալով եւուսարի եւ կաճեցի 2000-է աւելի ոչխարները քշեցին սպանելով կաճեցցի 2 հովիւներ։ Երեկ չէ միւս օր սպանեցին հարկահաւաք Մէհմէդ էֆ., երկու ժանտարմներ եւ Վախրովցի Ալի ազան։ Ժողովուրդը յուսահատ վիճակի մէջ է ծայր աստիճան ապահովութիւն չկայ.

Անմիջական օգնութիւն։

Առաջ. փոխանցուց Մկրտիչ Խահանայ

Ը. Ե.— Կաճեցտ Թաղէն 6 ժամ հեռու՝ Տիգրիսի ալ ափին գուցէ հայաբնակ գիւղ մ'է։ Ունի 70 տուն։

Վախրով հայ քրդաբնակ գիւղմ'է. Թաղէն երեք ժամ հեռու՝ արեւելք համանուն ձորի մէջ։ 12 տուն հայ եւ 70 տուն քիւրդ։

ՈՋԻՒ ՊԱՇԱՐՈՒԱԾ

(ՀԵՌԱԳԻՐ «ԱՇԽԱՏԱՆՔԻ»Ի)

Թաղ Մալիս 6

Հաւաստի կիմանանք, որ երէք օր է ի վեր ՈՋԻՒ պաշարուած եւ կուոյ մէջ է։

Ջ.

Մայիս 2-ին Ոզիմէն մէզ հետեւեալ գրած եւ.Աչքիդ Ալրն որոշած է անպայման յարձակում գործել Ոզիմի վրայ։Քիւրդ ազդեցիկները. քացի Իէրվարի Մուհամմէտ աղայէն, բոլորն ալ համակարծիք են չէյխի հետ, միայն Տինոսցի քիւրդերու Զըզիրէէն վերադառնալուն կսպասեն, որ երագրուած յարձակում Ոզիմի վրայ սկսին։

ՎԵՐԻ ՀԱՑՈՑ.ՑՈՐ

ՅԱՐՋԱԿՈՒՄ ԱՍՏԻԱԾԱՇԷՆԻ ՎՐԱԾ

Մայիս 3-ի գիշեր անծանօթ զինեալ քրդեր կը յարձակեն Աստուածաշէն հայ-քրդաբնակ գիւղի վրայ։ Տեղի ունեցած է ուժեղ հրացանաձգութիւն որու հետեւանքով ալ ազգակիները խոյս կուտան.

Գիւղը թէեւ անվտանգ է, բայց բնակչութիւնը տագնապի մէջ է։

ԽՕՇԱՊ

Խոշապին մեզ կը գրեն.— Ապրիլ 27-ին գալգալէյէն բապուր աղասին 100 է աւելի ոսոխականներով յարձակէն անցաւ նորաւուզ հետապնդելու աւազակ Միր-Մհէն, որ վերջի կատարած իր սպանութենէն եւ թալանէն յետոյ անցած էր նորաւուզ (ակնարկութիւն N.25. 121)։ Հետապնդող ջոկատը հինգ Աթօլան գիւղը կը հասնի երբ գալգալէի միւթեսարիֆ Զէվդէտ պէյի հետագրով ստիպողաբար յետ կը կանչուի։

— Նոյեմբեր կանկվար գիւղացի քիւրդ Թամոյի 50 ոչխարներ իրենց գառներով անյայտացած են. Թամոն եւ իր տղան ալ չէն երեւիր կը խոսւի որ աւազակները կապելով զանոնք հետ տարած պիտի ըլլան։

ՏՆՕՐԷՆ ԵՄԲԱԳԻՐ ԻՇԽԱՆ

Հասցէ՝

صاحب اشخادلرك غزتهسيدر وانده

Von Redaction «ACHKHATANG»

ՅԳԱՐԱՆ ԹԱՐՍԵՂԵԱՆ

Վանի «Աշխատանք» թերթի թիւ 1 լրաբերը, որը կը դիտենք հետ, դալափար մը կուտայ թէ ինչպիսի անիշխանութիւն կը տիրէր Թուրքիոյ մէջ՝ եւ ինչ սարսափ կ'ապրէր Վասպուրականի ժողովուրդը Համաշխարհային Պատերազմի նախօրեակին։

Ashkhatank (Labor), No. 1, 1913

30 percent.[34] The press plays a significant role in the development of Armenian national consciousness and identity. In 1858, Mkrtich Khrimian installs in Varag the press of his *Ardzvi Vaspurakan* (The Eagle of Vaspurakan). In 1914 two Armenian weekly periodicals are published in Van: *Ashkhatank* (Labor) and *Van-Tosp*. The first is a socialist periodical managed by the Dashnaktsutiun, while the second is the organ of the patriotic and liberal Armenakans, many of whom had merged into the constitutional democratic Ramkavar Party, which was organized in 1908. Since 1908 the Dashnaktsakan youth movement also engages in the diffusion of small pamphlets, produced through polygraphy, in the boroughs and the villages of the area. One of these gazettes is addressed even to the Turks, whose notables have their own official newspaper, *Van*.

Under the direction of a *mudir* (headmaster), Turkish public education is also in bloom at the end of the nineteenth century. Six primary schools and three *rushdiye* (secondary) schools, located in the Gardens, are operating in clean, ventilated buildings. The teachers are lay, except for some *mullahs* entrusted to teach Islam. Education is of a sound level and is oriented to Turkish children and the sons of Kurdish notables. In 1909 a teacher-training school for the preparation of Ottoman teachers is opened in the City.

In this lazy eastern town, where certain inhabitants have almost a European living standard, the drama awaits. On January 26 (February 8), 1914, the Young Turk government is constrained to accept the administrative, legal, and agrarian reform projects to be implemented in the six "Armenian vilayets," together with Trebizond vilayet. The Armenian Question finally seems to have found a solution. However, in a report dated October 11, 1913, and titled "The Kurdo-Armenian Question," French Vice-Consul Zarezecki warns the Quai d'Orsay (French foreign ministry): "In the vilayets of Van and Bitlis, the relative majority is Kurdish. Therefore, it is important to consider also the Kurdish Question; to speak constantly about the Armenian Question, of Armenian reforms, without mentioning therein the word Kurdish, deeply offends the Kurds in their self-esteem, leads them to believe that these reforms are intended to subordinate them to the Armenians, and develops in the Kurdish soul the sentiment of hatred

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[34] Koms, *Im hushere*, p. 220.

against the Armenians, sown by Abdul-Hamid."[35]

In the summer of 1914, Vosdanik Manuk Adoian (1904-48) is not yet known as Arshile Gorky. He is only ten years old and lives with his family in Van. The war that explodes in far away Europe will become a catastrophe that "will reach all the people, including the Turkish people and the Armenian people," anxiously and accurately predicts A-Do. It will cause the destruction of Van and the disappearance of its Armenian population. It is the beginning of the twentieth century, a century that will show itself to be rich in a succession of political paroxysms and atrocities.[36]

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[35] France, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Series 89, F. 48.

[36] This is the theme of Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Michael Joseph and Pelham Books, 1994).

❀ 11 ❀

DEMOGRAPHY OF VAN PROVINCE, 1844-1914

Sarkis Y. Karayan

Today, more than eight decades after the violent death of the Ottoman Empire, population statistics of the defunct empire continue to be debated by scholars as well as politicians. Since 1965 the statistical controversy, some call it "the war of numbers," has occupied an important place in the propaganda of the Turkish government in order to prove that no genocide was committed against the Armenians during World War I or at least to minimize the number of Armenians killed by lowering the total number of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1914. The main argument of the Turkish government and some scholars in the West is that there was a war from 1914 to 1918 and naturally people die during such conflicts.

On the eve of World War I, Armenians lived in about 4,050 cities, towns, and villages within the current borders of the Republic of Turkey.[1] At present, nearly all who are left live in one city, Istanbul.[2] While in 1914 the Armenian-inhabited towns and villages in the province or *vilayet* of Van numbered over 400,[3] now there is none. In 1914, the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, according to my calculations, were not fewer than 2.3 million.[4] Today, the entire remaining Armenian community in Turkey would scarcely fill a large stadium.[5]

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[1] Sarkis Karayan, *The Extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: An Inquiry to Determine the Number of Armenians Killed in Turkey during 1915-1923, with an Index-Gazetteer of over 4,000 Armenian Inhabited Places in Turkey in 1914*. Unpublished manuscript. This manuscript gives the names, population figures, and location of Armenian-inhabited places in the Ottoman Empire in 1914. In addition, there is a critical discussion of almost all population statistics given by various Armenian and non-Armenian authors.

[2] Apart from Istanbul, there is now only one village with an Armenian community, called Vakifli in the Musa Dagh region.

[3] Data from Karayan, *Extermination of Armenians*.

[4] Ibid.

[5] The Turkish government census for 1955 stated that a total of 56,242 persons reported

Before discussing population statistics of Van vilayet, I want to consider them within the general context of Ottoman population statistics. The Ottoman government did not pay special attention to the number of Armenians until 1878, when the internal issue of reforms in the Armenian vilayets became an international problem, as part of the Eastern Question at the Congress of Berlin.[6] It was during and after the Berlin Congress that population statistics started to play a significant role in discussions between the Ottoman government and foreign powers, namely Great Britain, France, and Russia. The Ottoman delegates in Berlin showed the total Armenian population of the empire to be half their actual number.

The previous Ottoman figures on Armenians were quite different. The Ottoman census of 1844 is considered to be the first real census in the empire, counting 2,400,000 Armenians, two million of whom lived in the Asiatic provinces and the rest in European Turkey. Abdolonyme Ubicini was one of the first to publish the results of this census.[7] Ibrahim Hakki Aykol, a modern Turkish historian, while pointing out the deficiencies in the 1844 census, nevertheless describes it as the first census of the Ottoman Empire done on modern principles.[8] Details of this census have not been discovered, or at least they have never been released. The Ottoman government continued to accept the figure of 2.4 million from 1844 until 1877.[9] According to the govern-

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that Armenian was their mother tongue, while 14,392 persons reported Armenian to be their second tongue. It is safe to assume that all of the latter group were Armenians. See Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık, Istatistik Genel Müdürlüğü, *23 ekim 1955 genel nüfus sayımı* (Istanbul: Müdürlük, 1961), p. 114. The number of Armenians and especially of native Armenian speakers has declined significantly since that census.

[6] The six Armenian vilayets were Van, Erzerum (Karin), Mamuret-ul-Aziz (Kharpert or Kharberd), Bitlis, Diarbekir (Tigranakert), and Sivas (Sebastia).

[7] Abdolonyme Ubicini, *Lettres sur la Turquie: Ou, Tableau statistique, religieux, politique, administratif, militaire, commercial, etc. de l'Empire Ottoman, depuis le Khatti-Cherif de Gulkhané (1839),* 2 vols. (Paris: J. Dumaine, 1853-54), vol. 2, p. 455.

[8] Ibrahim Hakki Aykol, *Tanzimat* (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1940), vol. 1, p. 548. This is a collective work published on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the *Tanzimat* reforms.

[9] See, for example, the book published on the occasion of the International Exposition in Paris in 1867 by a ranking Ottoman official, Salaheddine Bey, *La Turquie à l'Exposition Universelle de 1867* (Paris, 1867), pp. 210-14, where it is stated that Armenians number 2.4 million in the Ottoman Empire. Another high Ottoman official, Megurdich (Mkrtich) Bey Dadian, *La société arménienne contemporaine: Les Arméniens de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris: A. Franck, 1867), p. 8, states that Armenians in the Ottoman Empire numbered 3.4 million, the majority being in Asia Minor.

ment's *salname* (yearbook) for 1877, the total number of Armenians is again given as 2.4 million.[10] The population of the eastern regions, including Erzerum, Baiburt, Erzinjan, Manazkert, Mush, Bitlis, and Van, is given as 1,150,000.

Matters changed in 1878 when the Ottoman delegation at the Berlin Congress lowered the number of Armenians for the Armenian provinces to 586,000.[11] The breakdown was as follows: Erzerum vilayet, 104,000; Bitlis, 156,000; Van, 78,000; Kharput (Kharpert), 88,000; Diyarbekir, 54,000; Sivas, 106,000. I have calculated that if these Armenian vilayets had only 586,000 Armenians, then the total Armenian population, according to the Ottoman government, could be no more than 1,250,000 in 1878. And in fact, from 1878 to 1914, the official Ottoman figures for the Armenians continued to range between 1,123,532 for the year 1895[12] and 1,294,851 for 1914.[13]

The Vilayet of Van

For administrative purposes, the Ottoman Empire was divided into vilayets, which were subdivided successively into *sanjaks*, *kazas,* and *nahiyes*. Van vilayet, as an administrative entity, did not exist prior to 1877. In a book published by J.J. Hellert in 1838, there is a map of eastern Asia Minor.[14] It shows three main areas. The northern part is Erzerum, the middle part is Armenia, and the southern part is Kurdistan. According to the Erzerum vilayet yearbook for 1874, Van

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[10] I have not seen the salname for 1877. Figures quoted are from Khachatur Badalyan, *Haykakan hartse San-Stefanoyi paymanagrum ev Berlini kongresum 1878 t.* [The Armenian Question in the Treaty of San Stefano and at the Berlin Congress in 1878] (Erevan: Erevan State University, 1955), pp. 152-56.

[11] Quoted by A. Hambaryan, "Arevmtahayeri tvakanaki hartsi shurj" [On the Issue of the Numbers of Western Armenians], *Banber Erevani hamalsarani,* no. 2 (1969), p. 100.

[12] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 156-57. The actual figures are as follows: Armenian Orthodox (Apostolic) males 553,188 and females 478,636 for a total of 1,031,824; Catholics 141,174; and Protestants 42,242. The latter two together totaled 183,416. At least half of these (91,708) can be assumed to have been Armenians, making the total number of Armenians 1,123,532.

[13] Ibid., p. 188.

[14] J.J. Hellert, *Arménie et Kurdistan* (Paris, 1838), section of maps called *Atlas de l'Empire Ottoman,* plate XL.

province was one of its sanjaks.[15] Around 1877, Van was made into a separate vilayet. In 1888, the southern, mainly Kurdish-inhabited Hekkiari or Hakkari sanjak was attached to Van vilayet.[16]

It has been suspected from the inception of the vilayet reorganization in the 1880s that the main purpose of the Ottoman government was to join Muslim, mainly Kurdish, areas to provinces that had heavy Armenian concentrations, thereby reducing the Armenian population to a minority.[17] Thus, as mentioned, Hekkiari was attached to the Van vilayet; the Kurdish-inhabited Seert (Sghert) region, to Bitlis vilayet; districts south of Malatia, to Kharpert vilayet; and other Muslim-inhabited districts in the south and west, to the Diarbekir and Sivas vilayets. In the spring of 1895, a memorandum of the French, Russian, and British ambassadors at Constantinople drew to the attention of the Ottoman government the frequent territorial reorganizations in the eastern provinces and suggested that the number of vilayets be reduced in such a way that particular ethnic groups would more or less live together within the same administrative entity.[18]

The total area of Van vilayet, according to Vital Cuinet, was 47,700 square kilometers or 18,417 square miles, Van sanjak being 22,700 square kilometers or 8,764 square miles (including Lake Van, which is 5,454 square kilometers), and Hekkiari sanjak covering 25,000 square kilometers or 9,653 square miles.[19] The Armenian encyclopedia gives the area of the whole vilayet as 39,300 square kilometers (15,174 square miles).[20] For comparison, the present Armenian republic is 29,800 square kilometers or 11,506 square miles.

As mentioned, Van vilayet had two sanjaks: Van and Hekkiari. Van

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[15] *Erzerum vilayet salnamesi, 1291* [*Anno Hejirae*] (Published in Istanbul). Erzerum *vilayet* was comprised of the following sanjaks: Erzerum, Kars and Childir, Erzinjan, Bayazid, Van, and Mush.

[16] For various administrative changes in eastern Asia Minor from 1840 to 1914, see Khachatur Badalyan, "Vani nahange 1840-akan-1914 tt." [The Province of Van from 1840 to 1914], *Banber Erevani hamalsarani,* no. 3 (1986), pp. 13-27.

[17] Marcel Leart, *La Question Arménienne à la lumière des documents* (Paris: Librairie Maritime et Coloniale, 1913), pp. 23-24. Marcel Leart is the pen name of Krikor Zohrab, writer and member of the Ottoman Parliament who was arrested and killed with other Armenian intellectuals in 1915. He used this pen name for this book only.

[18] The full text of the memorandum is given by Leart, *La Question Arménienne,* pp. 38-42.

[19] Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie,* 4 vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), 2:631, 688.

[20] *Haykakan Sovetakan hanragitaran* [Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia], vol. 11 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1985), p. 275.

sanjak was inhabited mostly by Armenians, and was made up of twelve kazas: 1. Van-Tosp, 2. Hayots Dzor (Khavadzor), 3. Arjak, 4. Timar, 5. Berkri, 6. Arjesh, 7. Artske (Adiljevaz or Adiljavaz), 8. Karjkan, 9. Karkar, 10. Moks, 11. Shatakh, 12. Gevash (Gavash).[21] Hekkiari sanjak was inhabited mostly by Kurds. It had six kazas: 1. Hekkiari or Hakkari (Julamerk), 2. Aghbak (Elbak), 3. Norduz, 4. Mahmudi, 5. Gavar (Giavar), 6. Mamuret-ul-Hamid (Khoshab). Apart from Armenians and Kurds, the other ethnic groups in the province were Turks, Circassians (Cherkes), Assyrians, Jews, Yezidis, and Gypsies.

Although there are no reliable sources for the various ethnic groups mentioned, Hambardzum Eramian has calculated the following figures:[22] Armenians, 180,000-200,000; Turks, 30,000, mostly in Van city and the northern kazas of Arjesh and Adiljevaz; Kurds, 130,000, mostly in Hekkiari sanjak; Circassians, about 300 in Adiljevaz; Assyrians (Nestorians), 80,000 to 100,000, mostly in Timar, Saray, and Julamerk; Jews, 1,500 in Bashkale (Aghbak) and Gavar; Yezidis, 2,000 in various kazas; Gypsies, 500, mostly in Van city.

The yearbook for Van vilayet for 1897 (1315 by the *hijra* Muslim calendar) gives the population figures for Muslims and non-Muslims.[23] The Muslims were 207,834, and non-Muslims were 101,285, making a total of 309,119. As in all Ottoman statistics, the Muslims were counted together, with no breakdown of the separate ethnic Muslim elements. Based on these figures for Van vilayet, Armenians could not be anywhere near 100,000, since the total of 101,285 for non-Muslims also included Nestorians, Chaldeans, Jews, and Gypsies. Information of interest in this salname is that Van sanjak had 885 villages and Hekkiari sanjak had 689 villages, making a total of 1,574.

The official Ottoman yearbooks are generally very poor in population statistics. This is true of the Imperial salnames, called *Salname devleti Osmaniye,* as well as salnames for the vilayets. No official Ottoman census figures have been published for Van vilayet with a

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[21] Administrative subdivisions were frequently changed. In the list above, the following had become nahiyes in 1914: Van-Tosp, Khavadzor, Arjak, Timar, Berkri, Karjkan, Karkar, and Moks.

[22] Hambardzum Eramian, *Hushardzan Van-Vaspurakani* [Memorial of Van-Vaspurakan], 2 vols. (Alexandria: Aram Kasabian, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 14-15.

[23] *Van Vilayeti salnamesi* (Istanbul, 1315 [*Anno Hejirae*]), p. 761. This is the first salname for Van vilayet, and the only one available to me. I do not know how many subsequent salnames for Van vilayet appeared until 1914.

detailed listing of its cities, towns, and villages and their population statistics. Fortunately, there are other sources that give detailed figures for the Armenian population.

Population Statistics

There were five censuses of the Armenian population of Van vilayet. These were done in 1853, 1878, 1899, 1909, and 1914. A complete and detailed reproduction of these censuses has been published in 1987 by Khachatur Badalyan.[24] A summary of these censuses is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

1. The census of 1853 (Tables 1 and 2, Column A). This is most probably the first enumeration of the Armenian population of Van vilayet. It was done at the behest of the Armenian Catholicos Nerses Ashtaraketsi of Echmiadzin. It was conducted by a cleric, Gevorg vardapet Ter-Barseghian from the monastery of Lim island, in the northern part of Lake Van. He collected the population statistics and the names of 307 towns and villages. The census for the Hekkiari sanjak was done in 1851 by Pilibos vardapet, the prelate of the Saint Bartoghomeos Monastery in Aghbak kaza. He collected 53 Armenian-inhabited places in Hekkiari sanjak, and these are given in Column A, starting from Norduz down to Mahmudi. Column A presents the result of these two censuses, combined in one column, in the year 1853. The census figures collected by Ter-Barseghian were published in Mkrtich Khrimian's monthly periodical, *Artsvi Vaspurakan,* starting in 1858 and continuing for the next two years. The publication of Armenian population figures by Khrimian was a very bold undertaking, as it might have resulted in increased taxes for Armenians. It shows the spirited and innovative character of Khrimian.[25]

The population figures for Hekkiari sanjak were printed by Giut Aghanian in the *Divan Hayots patmutian*.[26] What is missing from the data of the 1853 census, as given by Badalyan, is the population of

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[24] Khachatur M. Badalyan, "Vani nahangi hayabnak bnakavayreri tsutsaknern est arandzin gavarakneri ev gyughakhumberi" [Lists of Armenian-Inhabited Places of Van Province by Districts and Village Clusters], *Banber Erevani hamalsarani,* no. 2 (1987), pp. 83-110.

[25] Khrimian published *Artsvi Vaspurakan* in Constantinople from 1855 to 1856 and then in Van's Varagavank from 1858 to 1864. It resumed publication under M. Ananian at Constantinople from 1872 to 1874.

[26] The year and page of this series by Aghanian were not available.

Van city, but *Artsvi Vaspurakan,*1858, no. 11, shows 2,528 families made up of 13,752 persons.

The 1853 census as presented in Tables 1 and 2, Column A, shows 361 Armenian-inhabited cities and villages, 9,853 Armenian families (7,325 rural and 2,528 in Van city), and 63,769 persons (50,017 rural and 13,752 in Van city). By including both the numbers of families and the total Armenian population of a place it is possible to calculate the average family size: in Van city, 5.4 persons; Van-Tosp, 6.4; Berkri, 7.0; Karjkan, 8.4, and so forth.[27]

2. The census of 1878 (Tables 1 and 2, Column B). The figures for this year were collected by Eremia vardapet Tevkants (Ter-Sargisian) at the request of Archbishop Mkrtich Khrimian. The results are in Manuscript no. 57/III in the Toros Azatian section of the Museum of Literature and the Arts in Erevan. The census shows only the number of inhabitants in each locality, without mentioning the number of families. This census gives 364 villages inhabited by Armenians, with a total population of 98,428, not including Van city. If the number 18,460 persons for the city is added, the figure given by Aleksandr Eritsov in 1876, this makes a total of 116,888 Armenians in the province.[28]

3. The census of 1899 (Tables 1 and 2, Column C). The figures for this year are from a book by Russian General Vladimir Mayewski,

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[27] In my research of Armenian population figures for 1914, I have faced the problem of the average size of the Armenian family in different parts of the Ottoman Empire, because in most Armenian statistics it is only the number of families which is given. Fortunately, some give the number of both families and persons. The figures I have calculated reveal that in Bitlis vilayet the average size ranged from 5.9 in the Dadik region to 10.8 persons in the Pozgan region of Sasun. For Erzerum, it was 7.2 for the city of Erzerum but 12.5 persons for Kemakh kaza.

[28] Aleksandr Eritsov's figure is cited by Armen Mikayelyan, "Van kaghaki bnakchutyune (XIX d. verchin karord — XX d. skisb)" [The Population of Van City (Last Quarter of Nineteenth Century to Early Twentieth Century)], *Lraber hasarakakan gitutyunneri,* no. 8 (1987), p. 37. Eritsov's study is in Russian, A.D. Eritsov, *Spisok naselennykh punktov byvshei Erzerumskoi oblasti, nakhodivsheisia vo vremennom upravlenii Rossii ("Materialy dlia opisaniia Irana i Aziatskoi Turtsii")* [The Names of Inhabited Places in the Former Province of Erzerum, Which Were under the Temporary Administration of Russia ("Materials for the Description of Iran and Asiatic Turkey")] (Tiflis, 1883), 2 vols. For the population figure on Van, see vol. 2, p. 126. An historian and archeologist, Eritsov (1840-1902) served as "special missions" official on General Loris-Melikov's staff during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. He wrote two books in Armenian, one about the Armenian Church in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, and the other a history of the Nersisian Theological Seminary in Tiflis.

vice-consul at Van from 1894 to 1899. It is not known how he collected the population figures. His book, written in Russian and published in 1904, bears the title, *Military-Statistical Description of Van and Bitlis Vilayets (with an Addendum of Population Statistics)*.[29]

Justin McCarthy, an American demographer, states that Mayewski's population figures were checked by the Ottoman War Office, which found them to be exact and thus translated the book into Turkish for their own use.[30] He concludes that Mayewski's figures are the most reliable, especially when compared with Armenian sources. In fact, he states that Armenian sources have borrowed from Mayewski's figures. I do not find Mayewski's figures very different from those given by Armenian sources before he arrived in Van in 1894. McCarthy's assertion that the Ottoman War Office checked Mayewski's statistics is from the opening statement of the Turkish translator, Major of Cavalry Mehmed Sadik.[31] McCarthy concludes that "Ottoman archives have come to light by a circuitous route," and in the same paragraph he states that Mayewski himself collected the population figures "while on a Foreign Office appointment, properly studied, traveled, and saw nearly every corner of the two provinces in a period of more than five years."[32] Evidently McCarthy is unaware that Turks have been changing the text of Mayewski's book for political purposes and that some statements in the Turkish version of the book are not those of

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[29] The copy I have of General Mayewski's book is in French and Russian. Unfortunately, it does not have the statistical section, which apparently made up one-third of the book. The title of the book in French reads, *Les Massacres d'Arménie, d'après les constatations authentiques du: Général Russe Mayewski, Consul Général de Russie à Van puis à Erzéroum: Soigneusement transcrit de son rapport portant le titre des statistique des Provinces de Van et de Bitlis.* The date of publication is not stated, but the original place of publication is given as St. Petersburg. General Mayewski's book has created many controversies. Mayewski was morbidly anti-Armenian, and the Turks have used the book since 1912 for propaganda purposes. Along this line, Vahakn Dadrian has written a very illuminating review of General Mayewski's book and its use for propaganda purposes by Turkey. See Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Perversion by Turkish Sources of Russian General Mayewski's Report on the Turko-Armenian Conflict," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 5 (1990-91): 139-52.

[30] Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1983), pp. 76, 86 notes 40-41.

[31] Ibid., p. 84 notes 39, 41. The Turkish name of the book is, according to McCarthy, *Van ve Bitlis vilayetleri askeri istatistiği.* It was published in Istanbul in 1912, apparently for political purposes. See note 29 above.

[32] McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities,* p. 71.

Mayewski.

Mayewski's statistics, given in the number of families, is as follows (Tables 1 and 2, Column C): 424 cities and villages (including Van city), 10,734 Armenian families (excluding Van city). Mayewski gives the population of Van city as 2,887 Armenian families. Thus the total becomes 13,621 families.[33] Mayewski considers the average size of the family to be 8 persons. Thus, 13,621 multiplied by eight gives a total of 108,968 persons and multiplied by seven gives 95,347 persons.

4. The census of 1909 (Tables 1 and 2, Column D). The figures for 1909 are from A-Do's study on the vilayets of Van, Erzerum, and Bitlis.[34] A-Do (Hovhannes Ter-Martirosian, 1867-1954) was a historian and demographer. He traveled to Van, Erzerum, and Bitlis vilayets several times to gather economic, social, and demographic data. At Van, he collected his information from the church records kept at Aghtamar and from persons knowledgeable about particular kazas. He gathered statistics from 3 cities and 387 Armenian-inhabited villages. The list is not complete, as he was unable to collect figures for most of Hekkiari sanjak, thus missing about 50 Armenian villages. The result of his study is as follows: 390 sites; 16,020 Armenian families, including 4,000 in Van city; 100,176 Armenians, including 20,000 in Van city. A-Do considered the average size of the Armenian family as 7 persons for the villages, and 6 in the cities and towns. His figure for Van city is evidently only an estimate, as it is given in rounded figures.

5. The census of 1914 (Tables 1 and 2, Column E). Prior to World War I, a census was carried out in all eastern provinces, probably by authorities of the Armenian Church. The results have been published in A-Do's second book, *Mets depkere Vaspurakanum 1914-1915 tvakannerin*, in the new series of *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, and by Teodik. They show 438 sites; 19,302 families, including 4,132 in Van; 119,093 persons, including 22,470 in Van.[35]

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[33] Quoted from Mayewski's book by Armen Mikayelyan, "Van kaghaki bnakchutyune," p. 37. Badalyan does not give Mayewski's figure for Van city.

[34] A-Do, *Vani, Bitlisi ev Erzrumi vilayetnere* [The Vilayets of Van, Bitlis, and Erzerum] (Erevan: Kultura Press, 1912), pp. 9-50.

[35] A-Do, *Mets depkere Vaspurakanum, 1914-1915 tvakannerin* [The Major Incidents in Vaspurakan, 1914-1915] (Erevan: Loys, 1917), pp. 11-30. *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (Boston: General Society of Vasbouragan), serialized in the issues of 1942 to 1944. In the last issue

There have been several other Armenian writers who have given figures for Van vilayet. Garegin Srvandztiants visited all of Van vilayet and collected demographic data.[36] He did not publish his statistics, however, because others used his data and claimed the authorship of the work. He does not identify these people nor the names of publications where they were printed. The Armenian Patriarchate gave the figure of 400,000 for 1882.[37] Manvel Mirakhorian visited Van vilayet in 1883. However, he could not collect accurate population figures.[38]

The Armenian Patriarchate gives the figure of 192,000 for the year 1910 for Van vilayet.[39] Tseruk (Artak Darbinian) on the basis of his study in 1903, found that Van city had 15,000 Armenians and the rest of the vilayet, 121,200, making a total of 136,200.[40] His figures are not from official sources but rather from persons, such as merchants, who had traveled for years in the kazas, as well as from persons who had made special studies of particular localities.

Ottoman Government Figures for Armenians in Van Vilayet

No government figures are available for Van prior to 1877. In 1878, the total Armenian population is given as 78,000;[41] in 1881-82, 34,434 Armenian males, 26,014 females, for a total of 60,448.[42] If the undercounting of females is compensated for by doubling the figure for males, this would be 68,868 persons. For 1895, the figures were 36,349

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that has the statistics, no. 12 (1944), p. 8, it is stated that the population figures were collected from the church records of Van and Aghtamar in 1913-14. Teodik [Lapjinian], *Goghgota: hay hogevorakanutian ev ir hotin aghetali 1915 tariin* [Calvary: Of the Armenian Clergy and Its Flock in the Catastrophic Year of 1915], ed. Ara Kalayjian (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1985), pp. 534-57.

[36] Garegin Srvandztiants, *Hamov hotov* [Delicious and Fragrant], in *Erker* [Works], vol. 1 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1978), p. 396.

[37] Leart, *La Question Arménienne*, p. 59.

[38] Manvel G. Mirakhorian, *Nkaragrakan ughevorutiun i hayabnak gavars arevelian Tachkastani, 1884-85* [A Descriptive Journey to the Armenian-Inhabited Provinces of Eastern Turkey, 1884-85], 3 vols. (Constantinople: M.K. Sareyan, 1885).

[39] Maghakia Ormanian, *L'Eglise Arménienne* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1910), pp. 181-82.

[40] Tseruk, "Vani nahange nerkayums" [The Province of Van at Present], *Murch* (Tiflis), no. 4 (1904), pp. 26-28.

[41] See note 11 above and the discussion in this study.

[42] Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p. 146.

males and 28,280 females, for a total of 64,629.[43] Correcting for undercounting would give a total of 72,698 persons. For 1897, the records indicate 26,085 males and 28,996 females, totaling 55,081 persons.[44] For the same year of 1897, *Van vilayet salnamesi* gives 101,285 Christians and 207,834 Muslims. There is no mention of Armenians. For 1906, the figures are 33,994 males and 25,388 females, totaling 67,988 when correcting for undercounting.[45] For 1914, the total Armenian population is given as 67,792.[46]

Ottoman Government Figures for Muslims in Van Vilayet

For 1881/82-1893, the records show 31,957 males, 27,455 females, for a total of 59,412;[47] for 1894, a total of 212,552.[48] Kemal Karpat, who uses this figure, does not question or apparently even notice the discrepancy between these population figures and those for 1894. For 1895, the numbers are given as 56,462 males and 40,879 females, corrected for undercounting of females (56,462 x 2) to 112,924,[49] and for 1897, 45,294 males and 31,662 females, corrected for undercounting of females (45,294 x 2) to 90,588.[50] Again in the 1897 salname, the number of Muslims is given as 207,834. The discrepancies in Ottoman census figures are significant. For 1906, the figures are 29,408 males and 25,174 females, corrected for undercounting of females (29,408 x 2) 58,816,[51] and for 1914, 179,380.[52] These population figures for Muslims, given above, show the total unreliability of official Ottoman population figures, contrary to Justin McCarthy's assertion that only Ottoman official census figures are trustworthy.

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[43] Ibid., p. 156.
[44] Ibid., p. 160.
[45] Ibid., p. 168.
[46] Ibid., p. 188.
[47] Ibid., p. 146.
[48] Ibid., p. 155.
[49] Ibid., p. 156.
[50] Ibid., p. 160.
[51] Ibid., p. 168.
[52] Ibid., p. 188.

Table 1. Number of Armenian-Inhabited Villages and Van City, 1853-1914

Kazas	A 1853	B 1878	C 1899	D 1909	E 1914
Van Tosp	23	23	23	18	21
Hayots Dzor	31	30	31	32	31
Arjak	20	20	17	22	19
Timar	35	35	38	38	39
Berkri	6	10	16	26	41
Arjesh	23	30	44	43	51
Artske	18	20	30	23	24
Karjkan	19	22	27	22	28
Karkar	9	9	7	19	9
Moks	51	46	50	48	49
Gevash	28	27	23	23	21
Shatakh	44	38	48	51	51
Norduz	12	9	14	11	10
Julamerk	4	3	5	na	5
Gavar	3	2	5	na	2
Aghbak	30	25	24	na	19
Khoshab	2	12	16	11	12
Mahmudi	2	2	5	na	5
Van City	1	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	**361**	**364**	**424**	**390**	**438**

Table 2. Census Summaries of Armenian Population of Van, 1853-1914

	A		B	C	D		E	
Kazas	1853 families	1853 persons	1878 persons	1899 families	1909 families	1909 persons	1914 families	1914 persons
Van Tosp	960	6,112	10,034	1,377	1,730	12,110	1,812	10,835
Hayots Dzor	635	4,083	7,744	1,102	1,299	6,968	1,436	8,869
Arjak	387	2,900	5,055	582	763	5,341	924	6,099
Timar	1,134	7,145	12,018	1,782	1,945	13,255	2,388	14,401
Berkri	151	1,057	2,398	340	817	4,655	1,007	5,152
Arjesh	335	2,542	8,745	518	674	4,468	1,295	10,312
Artske	357	2,665	10,997	503	761	5,378	816	5,589
Karjkan	392	3,299	4,466	768	746	5,222	875	6,439
Karkar	105	748	1,524	93	182	1,274	157	1,103
Moks	798	5,161	8,135	828	976	6,832	829	5,062
Gevash	667	4,573	7,195	793	903	6,321	1,072	6,186
Shatakh	688	4,506	6,743	778	881	5,951	1,114	6,721
Norduz	171	1,440	2,219	168	164	1,148	240	1,630
Julamerk	67	469	440	85	na	na	73	534
Gavar	96	672	1,465	96	na	na	280	1,680
Aghbak	351	2,457	7,157	562	na	na	482	3,439
Khoshab	12	86	1,785	275	179	1,253	252	1,746
Mahmudi	19	102	308	84	na	na	118	826
Van City	2,528	13,752	18,460	2,887	4,000	20,000	4,132	22,470
TOTAL	**9,853**	**63,769**	**116,888**	**13,621**	**16,020**	**100,176**	**19,302**	**119,093**

Conclusion

1. Ottoman census figures of 1914 for the Armenian population of Van vilayet represent 41 percent less than the actual figure.

2. The estimates of Armenian sources for the Armenian population of Van vilayet in 1914 constitute about 50 percent more than the actual figures.

3. Contrary to what Justin McCarthy confidently asserts,[53] detailed Armenian Church sources for the Armenian population in Van vilayet in 1914, and for that matter for many other vilayets in Turkey, do exist; one need only look for such information.

4. Armenians were a majority in Van sanjak, and Kurds in Hekkiari sanjak. The Turkish population was no more than 10 percent of the total.

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[53] McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, p. 55.

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VAN 1915

Anahide Ter Minassian

The events that unfolded at Van in 1915 may be viewed as dramatic episodes in which the Armenian inhabitants were pitted against the Turkish authorities and Kurdish tribes at a time when Russian and Turkish armies faced each other in the Caucasus, in the eastern Ottoman provinces, and in Persia. The swift ripple effect of the war that erupted in Europe would give rise to a tidal wave of shattering inter-ethnic strife in this area where diverse communities—Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Nestorians, Chaldeans, Jews, Yezidis, Gypsies—had co-existed for centuries.

The interpretation of these events constitutes an essential element of the historiography of the Armenian Genocide and for decades has been the object of a deaf dialogue between Turkish and Armenian writers. In 1917, when the final outcome of the war was still uncertain, an important Turkish publication[1] was issued in response to the British *Blue Book*[2] released the previous year under the direction of Viscount James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee.

Until the present, almost all the works of Turkish historians deny the genocide and thus the premeditation of the Young Turk government to eliminate the Armenians. In order to explain the decision to deport the Armenian population in the spring of 1915, they level the grave charge of treason. They are unanimous in treating the uprising of the

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[1] *Aspirations et agissements révolutionnaires des comités arméniens avant et après la proclamation de la Constitution* (Constantinople, 1917). Although the volume is in French, many documents are in Armenian.

[2] Great Britain, Parliament, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-16: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon by Viscount Bryce,* Miscellaneous no. 31, 1916, ed. Arnold J. Toynbee (London: Sir Joseph Causton and Sons, 1916). There is no doubt that this important collection of documents on the Armenian massacres was intended as counter-propaganda to expose the Turkish and German theses, but the facts and reports therein have been confirmed by diverse sources.

Armenians of Van as a "revolt" or an "insurrection" in collusion with the Russian enemy during this critical period of offensive operations by the Entente Powers (Russia, France, and England) in Anatolia and at the Dardanelles (Gallipoli).[3]

Armenian witnesses and historians, on the other hand, emphasize that the Armenians of Van were subjected to a series of political provocations organized by the Turkish authorities beginning in February 1915 and were constrained to take measures for self-defense. According to an expression that appeared very early, *Vani herosamarte* (the Heroic Struggle of Van),[4] and later taken up by Soviet historians of the post-Stalinist era,[5] the uprising enabled the Armenians of Van to escape the tragic fate (deportations and massacres) of their compatriots in the neighboring *vilayets* (Erzerum, Bitlis, Diarbekir, Kharpert). A memorial monument, "The Eagle of Vaspurakan," was even erected not far from Erevan in 1981, dedicated to the victims of "The Heroic Struggle of Van," concrete evidence of the rise of an anti-Turkish sentiment tolerated in Soviet Armenia by the "Center" under Brezhnev.

The Van uprising began on April 7/20, 1915. The first date is according to the Julian calendar then in use in the Ottoman Empire and thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West. This discrepancy has often been a source of errors in dating and chronology. On April 11/24, 1915, when the battle of Gallipoli had begun, the Ottoman authorities arrested and deported several hundred Armenian lay and clerical leaders and intellectuals. This was the onset of the

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[3] See, for example, Kâmuran Gürün, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985). This volume of propaganda has the advantage of including an accessible bibliography and some archival files concerning Van. The same interpretation can be found in the works of certain Western authors, such as Stanford Shaw and Ezel K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), and Xavier de Planhol, *Minorités en Islam: Géographie politique et sociale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

[4] This expression was first used in a proclamation by the Military Committee on April 10/23, 1915. See *Défense héroïque de Van (Arménie)* (Geneva: Droshak, 1916), p. 73. The booklet was published by the official organ of the Western Bureau of the Dashnaktsutiun.

[5] A.S. Hambaryan, "Vani 1915 tvakani herosamarte" [The Heroic Struggle of Van in 1915], *Patma-banasirakan handes*, no. 2 (1985), pp. 33-46; Makich Arzumanyan, *Hayastan 1914-1917* [Armenia 1914-1917] (Erevan: Hayastan, 1969); "Vani Herosamarte" [The Heroic Struggle of Van], illustrated article in *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran* [Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia], vol. 11 (Erevan, 1985), pp. 272-74. There are several additional entries that supplement this article.

massive deportations and massacres of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire.[6] Is it reasonable to believe that an operation of such great magnitude, involving the displacement of more than one million people (even if one accepts the assertions that only deportations were intended and that the Armenian population of the empire was far less than given in European and Armenian sources), could be improvised in four days because of an uprising in a small Anatolian city, an action that no one could anticipate would last long or be successful?

The Young Turk revolution of July 1908 and restoration of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 had raised in Van great expectations from Constantinople. The partisans (*fedayi*s) of the party Dashnaktsutiun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation; ARF) laid down their weapons and emerged in broad daylight as allies of the Young Turks. Adherents of Ottomanism, they preached membership in a common fatherland (*vatan*) of equal citizens without distinction of race or religion. But the Cilician massacres starting in Adana (March-April 1909) created a climate of mutual mistrust between Turks and Armenians. The loss of the Ottoman possessions in Africa and the Balkans, following three wars and three defeats, exacerbated the nationalism of the Young Turks, who supplanted the amorphous concept of Ottomanism with the nationalist ideology of Turkism. In the eastern (Armenian) vilayets, where administrative centralization did not eliminate insecurity, violence, or agrarian problems that set the Armenian *raya*s (peasants) against the Kurdish tribes and the Turkish *agha*s (landed aristocracy), the subject nationalities aspired to the rule of law.

During the First Balkan War (1912), the Russian government, active once again in Near Eastern affairs, resuscitated the Armenian Question. Supported by France and England, it succeeded against German and Austrian resistance and Turkish opposition in securing a compromise agreement of the European Powers on the final Armenian reform project, which was imposed on the Young Turk government on January 26/February 8, 1914. Instead of the six eastern vilayets and Trebizond as a single administrative region, two provinces were created in the compromise: one included the vilayets of Erzerum, Trebizond, and Sivas, and the other the vilayets of Van, Kharpert, Bitlis, and Diarbekir. The two super-provinces were placed under the direction of

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[6] The deportation of Armenians had begun in Cilicia as early as February 1915. This study is based largely on the accounts, memoirs, and primary materials of contemporaries to the events in Van. The Armenian place names of the time have been retained here.

European inspectors-general, who were charged with implementation and supervision of the administrative, legal, and agrarian reforms. The appointment of the inspectors, the Dutch Louis Westenenk headquartered at Erzerum and the Norwegian Nicolai Hoff at Van, was agreed upon in April 1914. When the war erupted in Europe, Westenenk was in Constantinople en route to Erzerum, and Hoff had just arrived at Van. While the *vali* (governor) Tashin Bey, an influential member of the Committee of Union and Progress (Young Turks), extended an icy welcome and consternation reigned among the Muslim civil servants, the Armenian population of Van displayed undisguised enthusiasm.[7] During the reception in Hoff's honor at the Armenian Prelacy, the ARF leader Ishkhan told him: "You are the Messiah for whom we have been waiting for five or six years."[8] The recall of Hoff to Constantinople by the Turkish government on August 3/16, 1914, the day when a general mobilization was ordered, was the first stage in the rapid escalation of mistrust between Turks and Armenians of Van, reaching a climax in the spring of 1915.

The unilateral abrogation in September 1914 of the Capitulations or concessions that had been granted to the European Powers by previous Ottoman governments was hailed by Turkish nationalists. At about the same time the Eighth General Congress of the Dashnaktsutiun quickly adjourned. The twenty-seven delegates, some of whom had come from the United States, had been meeting in a theater in Erzerum with authorization from Minister of Interior Talaat. The general mobilization order caught the delegates by surprise, and they dispersed after electing a representative committee of three members: deputy in the Ottoman Parliament from Van, Arshak Vramian, Rostom (Stepan Zorian), and E. Aknouni.[9] The committee was contacted by a delegation

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[7] For the atmosphere prevailing in Van in 1913-14, see Matteos Eplighatian, *Kiank me azgis kiankin mej* [A Life within the Life of My Nation) (Antelias, Lebanon: Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1987), pp. 113-41. President of the Correctional Court of Van, Eplighatian (Eblighatian) was selected to serve as the Armenian interpreter for Inspector-General Hoff and had to accompany Hoff on his return trip to Constantinople.

[8] Ishkhan (Nikoghayos Poghosi Mikayelian, 1883-1915), a native of Karabagh, schoolmate of Aram Manukian in Shushi and Erevan, and an ARF militant from a very young age, had come to Van in 1904 where he served as teacher, propagandist, and party organizer. Ishkhan was founder in Van of the Dashnaktsutiun's (socialist) journal *Ashkhatank* [Labor] and of a reading room, "Light of Freedom."

[9] Vramian (Onnik Derdzakian, 1871-1915) was born in Constantinople, studied at Gevorgian Jemaran (seminary) in Echmiadzin, joined the Dashnaktsutiun in 1894 and became a central committee member in 1895, propagandist in Bulgaria and Romania in 1897, and member

of Ittihadists (Young Turks) led by Doctor Behaeddin Shakir, Omer Naji, and Hilmi Bey. The first of these was the pivot of the secret Teshkilâti Mahsusa (Special Organization) created at the beginning of August by Minister of War Enver Pasha for the purpose of organizing subversive activities beyond the Russo-Turkish border in the likely event of war with the Russian Empire.[10] The Young Turk deputation proposed that the ARF foment an uprising of the Armenians in the Russian Empire, as had already been agreed upon by certain Georgian and Muslim (Azerbaijani) representatives regarding their own people living in the Caucasus. In exchange for this collaboration, after the victory against Russia, Turkey would help create an "autonomous Armenia" in the Caucasus, to which would even be added some districts from the Ottoman vilayets of Van, Bitlis, and Erzerum. The three Armenian spokesmen deflected these proposals by responding that their party, like all Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, urged the government to pursue a policy of neutrality in the imperialist conflict but added that if war did come the Ottoman Armenians would fulfill their military obligations, just as they had in the previous crises.[11]

After the battleships *Goeben* and *Breslau* had violated the Straits Agreement (according to which no armed vessels were to pass through that waterway when the Ottoman Empire was not at war) and in October 1914 bombarded Russian military installations on the Black Sea, Turkey entered the great war on the side of Germany and Austria-

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of the party's Western Bureau and editor of its central organ, *Droshak* [Banner]. From 1899 to 1907, he was a party field worker in the United States, where in Boston he inaugurated the daily newspaper *Hayrenik* [Fatherland]. In 1907 Vramian was in the Caucasus, and, following the Young Turk revolution in 1908, in Constantinople and then in Van, where he was elected to the Ottoman Parliament in 1912. A brilliant journalist, he was also a contributor to Dashnaktsutiun's newspaper in Constantinople, *Azatamart* [Struggle for Freedom].

Rostom (Stepan Zorian, 1867-1919) was one of the founders of the Dashnaktsutiun in 1890 and served in various responsible positions, including membership in the party's Western Bureau.

Aknouni (Khachatur Malumian, 1863-1915) was born in the Caucasus, joined the Dashnaktsutiun in 1898, created the Association of the Armenian Students of Europe in 1902, and served as editor of *Droshak*. A series of his articles was published in book form as *Plaïes du Caucase* in 1905.

[10] Erik J. Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the C.U.P. in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), pp. 83-84.

[11] Simon Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiun* [Republic of Armenia], 2d ed. (Beirut: Mshak, 1958), pp. 6-10; Johannes Lepsius, *Rapport secret sur les massacres d'Arménie* (Beirut: Hamazkayine, 1968 [first published Paris: Payot, 1918]), pp. 216-21.

Hungary. This move divided the Armenian homelands between the two camps (Triple Alliance and Triple Entente) and transformed the Armenian Plateau into a war zone between the Russian and Ottoman empires. A *fetwa* of the Sheikh-ul-Islam summoned Muslims to a *jihad* or holy war against the infidels.[12] Intended to stir up the Muslim populations of the Russian, French, and British empires, the call had little effect beyond the Turkish borders, but within the Ottoman Empire it intensified the climate of hostility toward the Christian elements.[13] The creation of Armenian volunteer regiments in the Caucasus for use as scouts and auxiliaries in the Russian army, encouraged by the tsarist government and Catholicos Gevorg V in Echmiadzin, was an undertaking pregnant with repercussions. It was with some hesitation that the Armenian National Bureau in Tiflis agreed to organize the units.[14]

In the summer of 1914, the Armenians of Turkey, who since 1908 had been given the same rights and obligations as other citizens of the empire, were inducted into the Ottoman army. The unreliability of statistics does not allow for a determination of the exact number of Armenians mobilized. In Van, as elsewhere, some young Armenians were among those who evaded mobilization. The reaction of the Turkish authorities, who at the beginning of August marched on the Armenian district of Aygestan (Orchard or Gardens) and rounded up all men encountered in the streets, alarmed Aram, the most influential Dashnaktsakan (ARF) leader.[15] Realizing the gravity of the situation, he succeeded in assembling 300 young people, himself leading them to the vali's palace to the great dissatisfaction of the Armenian inhabitants, already affected by repeated requisitions of food, clothing, and

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[12] Maurice Larcher, *La Turquie dans la Guerre Mondiale* (Paris: Etienne Chiron et Berger-Levrault, 1925), pp. 45-48.

[13] This aspect was underscored in the report addressed by the deputy of Van, Vramian, to Minister of Interior Talaat on February 14, 1915. See Onnik Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte* [The Heroic Struggle of Van] (Sofia: P. Palegchian [Balekjian], 1930), pp. 26-34.

[14] Vratsian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiun*, pp. 581-84.

[15] Aram Manukian (Sergei Hovhannisian, 1879-1919) was born in Karabagh into the family of a poor craftsman, attended primary and secondary schools in Shushi and Erevan, served as a Dashnaktsakan organizer among the Armenian working class in Baku in 1902, directed the Armenian resistance in Kars against the Russian authorities in 1903, and was assigned to Van in 1904. Between 1912 and 1914, Aram was the most active Dashnaktsakan leader in Vaspurakan, developing schools, youth movements, village organizations, and the press. In 1915, he headed the self-defense of Van and became its short-lived governor. Aram was one of the founders of the Republic of Armenia (May 28, 1918), serving as minister of interior, at which post he died of typhus in January 1919.

woolens.

The ill-fated offensive of the Turkish Third Army, launched in full winter into the Caucasus by Enver Pasha, ended in a military catastrophe. The Ottoman army, in spite of the heroism and capacity for endurance of the Turkish soldier, was cut to pieces during the battle of Sarikamish in January 1915.[16] The survivors scattered, decimated by typhus, dysentery, and freezing cold. The retreat of the Ottoman troops, mixed with Muslim refugees, was accompanied by requisitions, looting, and massacres in Armenian and Nestorian villages by Kurdish and Turkish irregular bands. Desertions, traditionally high in the Ottoman army, multiplied, including also some Armenians. The pursuit of these men gave rise to new violence. At the same time, Armenian soldiers were disarmed and assigned to labor battalions. This dangerous accumulation of misunderstandings, protests, confrontations, and conflicting interests was analyzed in a report of Vramian to Talaat on February 14, 1915. The only outcome, however, was the replacement of the relatively benign vali, Hasan Tahsin Bey, by Jevdet Bey, whom the Armenians had labeled "Nalband Bey" (the blacksmith) because of his extremely cruel acts of repression in Bashkale, where he had nailed horseshoes on his victims.

After Turkey's entry into the war, significant troop movements took place in the eastern provinces, and beginning in November 1914 Van vilayet was the scene of a number of incidents (*depk,* in Armenian). In the *kaza* or district of Van and the high valleys and towns with a large Armenian population (Shatakh, Hayots Dzor, Adiljevaz, Arjesh, Timar, Gevash, Karjkan) and in isolated Armenian villages (Belu, Atanants, Ulm, Aren, Aliur, Kem.), the extortions, search for deserters, and slashing of telegraph lines degenerated into clashes between soldiers, gendarmes, and *cheté* bands, on the one side, and Armenian self-defense groups, on the other side.

A degree of calm returned in February 1915, thanks to the intervention of two "peace delegations." The first, made up of the two deputies of Van in the Ottoman Parliament, the Turk Munib Effendi and the Armenian Vramian, went to Belu, located in the mountains to the south of the Lake Van. The second, which included the Turk Vafik Bey and the Armenian Ishkhan, appeared in the kaza of Timar, where the Otto-

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[16] W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 282-85.

man army was actively searching for deserters and Armenian youth accused of having taken arms against the Kurds.[17] Vramian, fearful of the real threat of civil war, upon his return to Van addressed a long telegram to Governor Jevdet Bey, who was then near the Persian frontier.[18] Noting that he had already presented to Minister of Interior Talaat proposals to solve the most urgent problems (desertion and violence by gendarmes and armed Kurdish militia), Vramian requested reparations for the damages sustained by the Armenian peasants. He assured the government that it would have nothing to fear from the Armenians if it took measures to secure their life and property. In a menacing reply, Jevdet Bey sarcastically expressed astonishment at Vramian's assessment.

On March 17/30, 1915, Governor Jevdet, accompanied by 600 Circassian horsemen, made a triumphant entry into Van. As required by tradition, he was welcomed outside the city walls by a delegation including Ottoman civil servants and the Armenian locum tenens, Eznik vardapet Nerkararian, Armenian merchants, and Vramian and Ishkhan. While his pleasant and measured remarks were welcomed by the Armenian leaders, within a few days Jevdet had concentrated 2,000 soldiers around Van, and these were soon joined by several thousand mounted men and Kurdish irregulars.[19] On March 16/29, in Shatakh, a large, important village south of Van, the arrest of Hovsep Choloyan, teacher and local Dashnaktsakan leader, together with five young Armenians, was indicative of the increased distrust of the Turkish authorities. Indeed, up to then, the authorities had used the ARF committees as a means to communicate their orders (mobilization, requisitions, war contributions) to the Armenian population. Emotions were so intense in Shatakh that young people took to the woods and the Armenian population of the outlying neighborhoods sought refuge in Tagh (the most important Armenian quarter), where barricades went up.[20] As soon as the news became known in Van, Jevdet Bey summoned the Armenian leaders and told them that all Armenian men from eighteen

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[17] A-Do (Hovhannes Ter-Martirosian), *Mets depkere Vaspurakanum 1914-1915 tvakannerin* [The Great Incidents in Vaspurakan in 1914-1915] (Erevan: Loys, 1917), p. 145. This lengthy work is the result of an investigation conducted by the author in Van in 1915.

[18] At the time of his appointment as governor of Van, Jevdet Bey was commanding a Turkish expeditionary force that had pressed into Persian Azerbaijan after the tactical Russian withdrawal from that region.

[19] Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte,* pp. 34, 38.

[20] See A-Do's *Mets depkere.*

to forty-five years of age were to be mobilized as *amele*s (road laborers) and assigned to earthworks in the frontier areas.[21] Interspersed with insults toward the French and Russians, the governor gave notice that deserters would be subject to the death penalty and their families deported to Iraq or Syria.[22] The requests of the Armenian National Council to allow the Vanetsis (Armenians of Van) to join the regular army or to purchase military exemptions by paying the *bedel* of 43 liras failed.[23] Finally, after heated discussions, the council decided "to deliver" immediately 500 conscripts.

The next day, April 2/15, a meeting of the ARF on the premises of the party's newspaper *Ashkhatank* (Labor) was even more stormy. Vramian, in the presence of Aram and Ishkhan who were silent, held his position against the militants, who were wary about the fate that would await the Armenian conscripts and who denounced the "Armenocidal" policies of the Turkish government. Perhaps prophesying his own approaching death, Vramian declared that it was necessary to be prepared to forfeit the 500, possibly even more, ameles and even accept "the destruction of the whole province by iron and fire" if these sacrifices would spare the majority of Armenians.[24] This position was supported by Eznik vardapet, who issued a call to the Van Armenians to perform all their civic duties.[25]

On April 3/16, at the request of Jevdet Bey, Ishkhan, accompanied by three Armenian fedayis and four Turkish police officers, departed as a mediator to Shatakh in an effort to restore calm and reason. But on the night of April 3-4, in the mixed Kurdish-Armenian village of Hirj, Ishkhan and his three Armenian bodyguards were taken by surprise and murdered by a company of Circassians sent by Jevdet Bey.[26]

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[21] Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, p. 35.

[22] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 154.

[23] The National Council was composed of fourteen clerical and lay members, who assisted the prelate of Van in the administration of the community. At the beginning of the war, it became a more representative body by adding to its ranks two representatives each of the Dashnaktsutiun (Vramian and Ishkhan), Social Democrat Hnchakian Party (Hrand Galikian and Cherbashian) and the constitutional democrat Sahmanadir Ramkavar Party (Kuyumjian and Hovhannesian), together with a representative of the merchants (Terzibashian).

[24] Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, p. 37.

[25] Eznik's exhortation on April 2/15, 1915 was clearly in response to the escalating crisis and was predicated on assurances given that the government had undertaken steps "to protect the life, the honor, and the families" of the conscripts.

[26] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 156, and Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, pp. 42-43, give an account of this trap and emphasize the deception of the vali and the treachery of the

At dawn, forty-six villagers, all the Armenian males of Hirj, were gathered in a stable and savagely slaughtered amid the shrieks of the women and children. All fifty corpses were thrown into a well, from where the Russians would exhume them a month later.[27]

At dawn, on the same day, April 4/17, Vramian and Aram, who were still unaware of the Hirj massacre, were each summoned separately by telephone to the residence of Jevdet Bey.[28] Vramian complied but first succeeded in alerting his comrade, who managed to go into hiding. In spite of his vehement protests and his parliamentary immunity, Vramian was arrested forthwith. Dispatched to Constantinople on orders of Talaat Pasha, he disappeared without leaving a trace even before getting as far as Bitlis.[29]

The bloodshed at Hirj was a prelude to a true "Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre."[30] Detachments of the Ottoman army with two or three field cannons undertook clean-up operations in the Armenian villages of Hayots Dzor, supported by gendarmes and Kurdish tribesmen attracted by the quarry. The army went up the valleys during daytime, stopped at nightfall, and then resumed operations at dawn. It was the beginning of spring when snow still covered the highlands. The Armenian peasants were taken by surprise in their homes, unable to flee to the mountains. Seeking to avoid confrontation, they tried to bribe the Kurds and soldiers with gifts of food, money, jewelry, and weapons. In fear of the worst, they desisted from offering any resistance, but without exception the men were arrested, tortured, and slaughtered or bound together and hurled over cliffs and into lakes. The corpses were profaned, emasculated, and dismembered. The women were raped and carried away with the children and the flocks. In the plundered villages, churches and houses were put to the torch.

Within a few days of the onset of the inferno on April 6/19, 51 villages of Hayots Dzor, Arjesh, and Berkri were wiped away, together with their entire Armenian population.[31] On occasion, the Armenians

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Kurdish friend who had extended Ishkhan his hospitality.

[27] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 166.

[28] The telephone connected the palace of the governor to various police stations in the City and in Aygestan.

[29] In response to the request of a deputation of Armenian spokesmen, an American missionary, and the Italian consul to release Vramian, Jevdet Bey stated that he was merely acting in accordance with instructions of the central government.

[30] Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, p. 103.

[31] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 167.

preferred an "honorable death" or a "human death." In such instances, individual courage, a few rifles, a native knowledge of the terrain, clever use of the landscape and foliage for camouflage, and the presence of a small number of experienced partisans allowed the villagers to keep the army at bay. This was the case at Arjak,[32] whose inhabitants, besieged on April 5/18 on orders of the district governor (*kaimakam*) of Saray, succeeded in reaching Aygestan. To the south, a half dozen Armenian and Assyrian villages managed to fight their way to safety in the mountain of Varag (Varak). In the high valley of Hayots Dzor, the Armenians could only mount 80 rifles against the combined governmental force of soldiers, gendarmes, and Kurdish semi-regulars, supported by mountain cannons. Engaged in such unequal combat, the defenders decided to disperse: eight hundred succeeded in getting to the monastery of Varag; others hid in the forest before ascending toward the snow-covered peaks, where they were gripped by cold and hunger; still others tried to reach Van but were massacred en route.

North of Van, on the peninsula of Timar, where there were about thirty Armenian and an equal number of Kurdo-Turkish villages, the kaimakam of Berkri (Bergri), Zia Bey, and the commander of gendarmerie, Amar Bey, began a systematic ethnic cleansing of the district on April 6/19; only four villages resisted. In Janik, where of the more than 700 Armenian inhabitants 73 men were killed immediately, the population, thrown into panic and swelled in number by refugees descending from the mountains, tried to take to the boats to flee to the small island of Lim. But the army had already established a cordon along the coast, blocking any way to escape. The same scenes of panic and horror occurred in Marmed, a village of 811 inhabitants, whose mayor (*res)* had prudently sent away the armed men and hoisted the Ottoman flag. He was executed in the village church, along with a hundred other Armenians. The gendarmes prevented the women and children from reaching the island of Ktuts, where the Armenians had found refuge during the massacres of 1896. A-Do, in his invaluable work, has recorded, day-by-day and village-by-village, the events that laid waste to Vaspurakan in April 1915. The Armenian resistance was particularly fierce around Varag. Located at a splendid site with very difficult access, the monastery of Varagavank, a religious center and

[32] Arjak was a village of 180 homes with 1,170 Armenians.



Jevdet Bey, Vali of Van



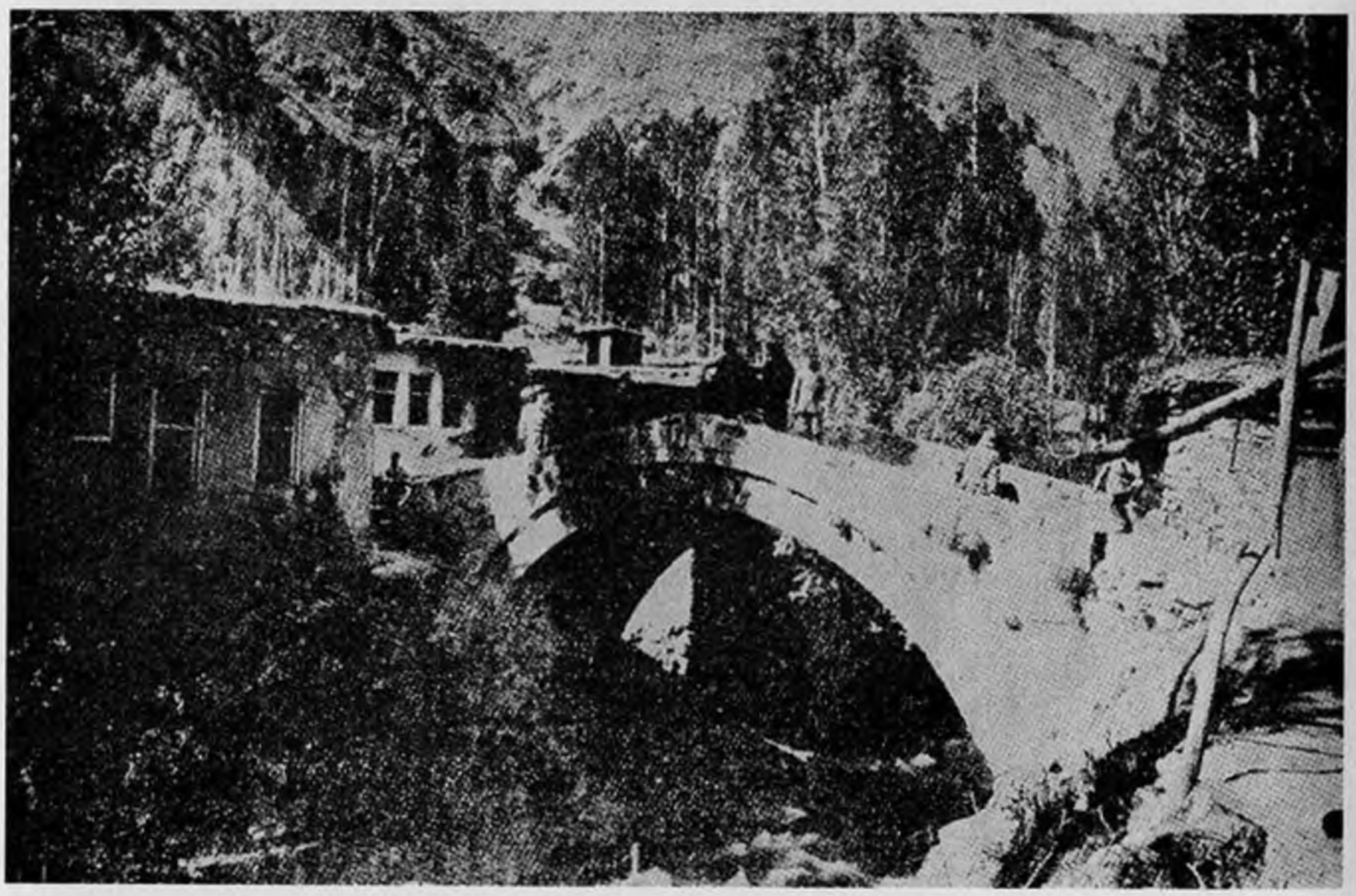
Ishkhan



Arshak Vramian



The Shatakh District



Tagh, Shatakh

place of pilgrimage, exerted a powerful attraction on the Armenians of Vaspurakan. Since the time of Khrimian Hayrik, Varag had become the cradle of the national movement and one of the symbols of the Armenian cultural rebirth. History and geography combined made Varag a natural refuge. Thousands of villagers, the majority of them women, children, and elderly persons, attained the monastery by transversal valleys and mountain paths. Varag, which controlled the two roads from Van to the Persian border, on the north by way of Arjak and on the south by way of Bashkale, was evacuated by the several dozen encamped Ottoman gendarmes on April 7/20, the day when the fighting started in the city.[33] Already encircled, the Armenians of Van were preoccupied with preserving direct contact with Varag monastery as an ultimate fallback position and, if necessary, route of exodus toward Persian Azerbaijan. The geo-strategic importance of Varagavank, whose buildings were hastily reinforced by the refugees, could not escape the attention of Jevdet Bey. After several futile attempts, a large contingent of cavalry, chetés, and Kurdish irregulars, supported by three cannons, overran the Armenian positions on April 25/May 8.[34] Varag was set ablaze and gutted. The Armenians scattered, some ascending toward the heights, and others, flanked by armed men, descending toward Van.

How should the positioning of the Ottoman troops in Van vilayet in April 1915 be interpreted? There is little doubt that the objective was to isolate the city from the outlying small towns and villages. Was this Jevdet Bey's personal initiative at a time when the Russian armies had crossed the eastern borders of the empire? Was this the implementation of a plan conceived in Constantinople to use the opportunity created by the world war to purge the area of its Armenian element? It is clear that Jevdet Bey returned from his failed campaign in Persia persuaded that the Armenians of Van were in collusion with the Armenian volunteer detachments in the Caucasus. The fragility of the political and social situation revived all the mistrust, all the anxieties, and all the hatreds. The rumor of the imminent appearance of the Russian army, guided by Armenian volunteers, caused panic and anger among the Muslim population but stirred both hope and fear among the Armenians, who witnessed the arming of the Kurdish

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[33] The gendarmes left under Armenian pressure, but they had already murdered the two priests and the four servants in the convent.

[34] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 219ff.

tribes by the Ottoman authorities, reminiscent of the prelude to the general massacres of 1896. Fear, and fear alone, was the cause of the Van uprising.

The episodes of the battles, which lasted almost a month, from April 7/20 to May 3/16, 1915, become understandable only through the organization and plan of a city whose site and singularity have since antiquity struck travelers and geographers. Set on a rocky crag with vertical walls and located on the crossroads of several natural routes in a plain bordered in the west by the lake and surrounded by an amphitheater of mountains, Van consisted of two distinct entities: the City and Aygestan.[35] The City was girdled with a system of fortifications backed by the Rock and having four gates leading in different directions. The Orchard or Garden district of Aygestan, at a distance of 4 or 5 kilometers from the City, was a new agglomeration without walls. Some 20,000 Armenians and 17,000 Muslims (Turks, Kurds, Persians, Circassians), that is to say an overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Van lived in Aygestan. It was divided into Muslim quarters, located in the west and the northwest, and Armenian quarters, located in the east and the northeast. Each of the Armenian districts (Arark, Norashen, Hankoysner) had its church, school, and fresh-water spring. In the Arark quarter, on Ararents square, was the second market of Van. Along the avenue Nalband-oghlu, which led to Khach square, was a mixed zone, whose Armenian and Muslim populations would withdraw to their respective ethnic districts when the street became a sector of the front line. In addition, three barracks built during the Hamidian era (Toprakkale in the north, Hamud Agha in the center, and Haji Bekir in the south) made it possible for the authorities to keep the Armenian districts under surveillance. From the very start of the hostilities the road leading from the City to Aygestan was controlled by Muslims on the west and by Armenians on the east. The Armenian population of Haykavank, where no possibility of retreat existed, took refuge in the City. The topography as well as the spatial distribution of the communities explain why the Muslim district of Shamiram always remained beyond the combat zone and why the Armenians of the City and Aygestan, separated from each other, carried out two parallel but separate struggles.

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[35] See chapter 10 in this volume, "The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century."

The Struggle in Aygestan

In contrast with the turmoil of the preceding days, calm returned to Van on April 4/17, 1915. While an Armenian commission acted to draw up the list of the 500 ameles promised to the vali, the workshops, businesses, and schools functioned normally.[36] But the events of Shatakh, the murder of Ishkhan, the arrest of Vramian, and the military operations in Hayots Dzor produced a catastrophic sequence. The refusal of Jevdet Bey to release Vramian and the troop movements, which as of April 5 isolated the two Armenian sectors of Van, convinced Aram that there existed no alternative to self-defense. This was not a new experience for the Armenians of Van. As the common strategy of the three Armenian revolutionary parties (Armenakan, Hnchakian, and Dashnaktsutiun), it had already been tested in June of 1896.[37] Moreover, the "Armenian-Tatar" war of 1905-07, which had pitted Armenians and Muslims (Azerbaijanis) against each other in many places in the Caucasus between Baku and Tiflis, had a stirring effect on the Armenians of Van, Mush, Erzerum, and even Tabriz.[38] The experience also seemed to demonstrate that resistance was a better gamble than submission. Finally, for the Westernized Armenian intelligentsia of Van, self-defense had become a matter of national dignity and political ethics, despite the risks of governmental reprisals.

Sunday, April 5/18, was a decisive day. Armenians and Muslims started to evacuate the mixed districts, and a number of Armenian families sought refuge in the German and American missionary compounds.[39] A new delegation of the Armenian National Council, accompanied by an American missionary, was confronted with Jevdet Bey's demand that all Armenian men from eighteen to forty-five years of age appear before him. This was the moment of final rupture. The three Armenian parties, declaring "that the Turkish government has

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[36] Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, p. 40.

[37] The turmoil of 1896 came to be regarded as a "dress rehearsal" for the events of April 1915. See Artak Darbinian, *Hay azatagrakan sharzhman oreren: Husher, 1890-1940* [From the Days of the Armenian Liberation Movement: Memoirs, 1890-1940] (Paris: Hay Azgayin Himnadram, 1947), p. 64.

[38] Anahide Ter Minassian, "Particularities of the Revolution of 1905 in Transcaucasia," in François-Xavier Coquin and Celine Gervais-Francelle, eds., *1905: La première Révolution russe* (Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 1986), pp. 315-35.

[39] Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, p. 49.

decided to destroy the Armenians of Van," decided to resist.[40] They organized the Military Committee of Armenian Self-Defense of Van, also known as the National Committee of Self-Defense.[41] Most members of the committee were chosen for their military experience and past role as fedayis: Bulgaratsi Grigor and Kaitsak Arakel (Dashnaktsakans), Armenak Ekarian (Armenakan, now Ramkavar), and the talented artist Panos Terlemezian (a veteran Armenakan).[42] The Military Commitee was headed by Ekarian and supported by the Office of Information and Office of Arms Distribution. The members of the Information Office, Hmayak Manukian (editor of *Ashkhatank*), Onnik Mkhitarian, and Armenak Pogharian (all Dashnaktsakans) also served as secretaries of the Military Committee. Assisting them were Ramkavar Vardan Papikian (Vartan Babigian), secretary of a commercial firm, Armenakan-Ramkavar teacher Karapet (Garabed) Ajem-Khachoyan, Hnchakian lawyer Hrand Galikian (Hrant Kaligian), and Dashnaktsakan teacher Arpiar Safrastian.[43] Members of the Arms Distribution Office were the goldsmith Davit Papazian, merchant Vahram Ter-Poghosian (Der Boghosian), craftsman Karapet Beylarian, and goldsmith Vahram Shiroyan, all Dashnaktsakans, and the craftsman Gabriel Semerjian, a Ramkavar. But the heart and soul of the self-defense of Van was Aram Manukian, who after the loss of Vramian and Ishkhan asserted himself not only as an ARF party leader but also as a national leader. This roster of names, professions, and political memberships shows clearly that though the union of the Armenian parties at Van was real, the reigns of defense efforts in 1915 were held in the hands of the intelligentsia, the middle class, and the Dashnaktsutiun.

Before April 10/23, three other organizations appeared: the Red Cross, the Provisions Commission, and the Supply Committee. The Armenian Red Cross of Self-Defense came into existence during the battle. Six persons, having under their direction some thirty pupils, both boys and girls from the upper classes of the Armenian schools, opened four medical stations that were transformed into hospitals. The

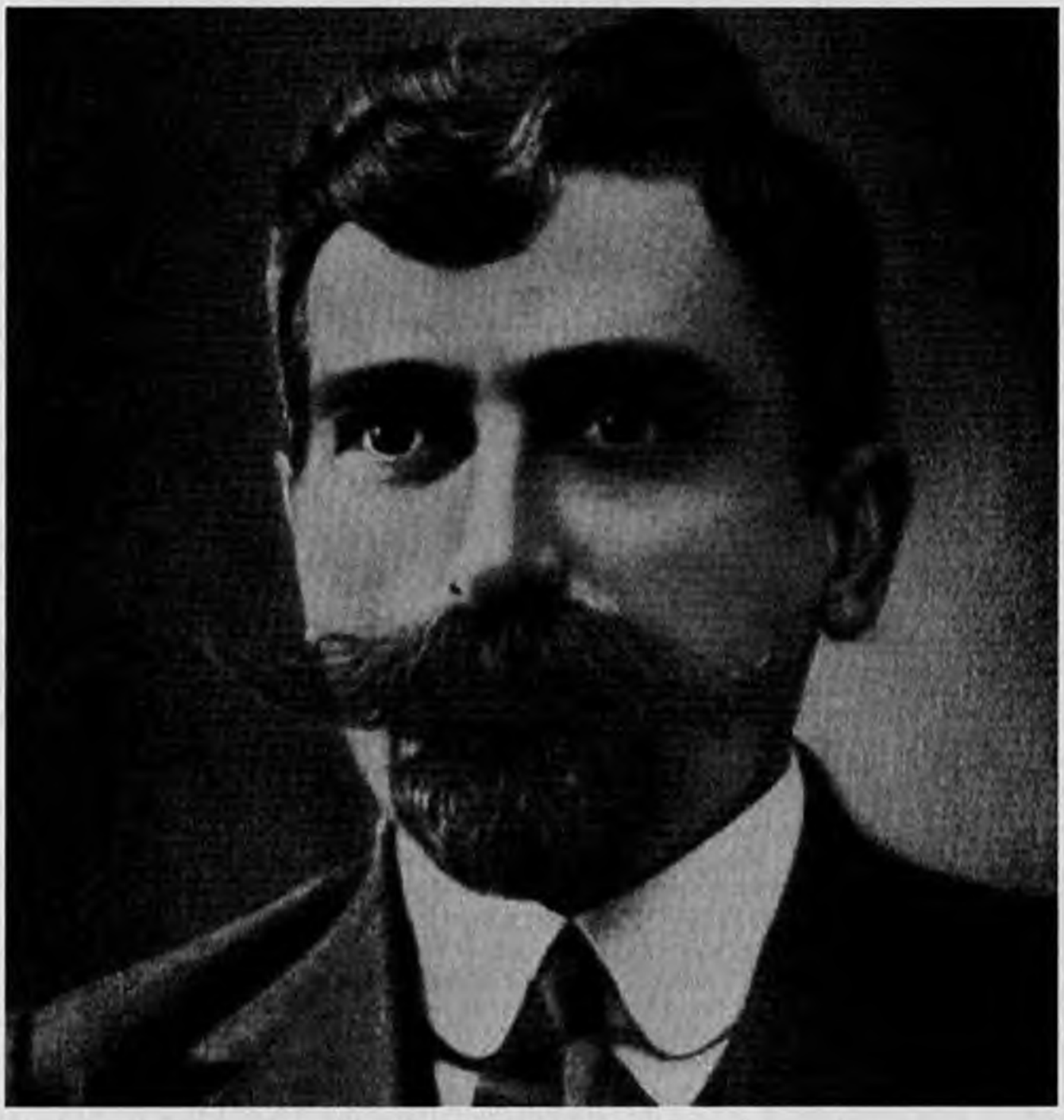
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[40] Ibid., p. 53.

[41] This body is referred to hereafter as the Military Committee.

[42] See *Husher Armenak Ekariani* [Memoirs of Armenak Ekarian], ed. L. Ajemian (Cairo: Nor Astgh, 1947; reprinted, Beirut: Zartonk, 1985). The Ramkavar Party was founded in the autumn of 1908 with the adherence of the Armenakans and some dissident Hnchakians.

[43] In 1916 Papikian began to publish a new series of the journal *Van-Tosp* in Tiflis as the voice of the refugees of Van in the Caucasus.



Aram Manukian



Armenak Ekarian

Provisions Commission (six members and six assistants) inventoried stocks and reserves and had the right to requisition goods and raw materials. The thirteen-member Supply Committee was concerned with subsistence, having to solve problems of resource sharing and providing nourishment to several thousand refugees, in addition to the inhabitants of Aygestan.[44] To these bodies were soon added the Women's Committee to oversee the preparation of clothing and bandages, the Justice Commission, and the Police Corps. A teacher organized from among his pupils a brass band, which paraded near the front lines, tirelessly playing military marches and patriotic songs to provide moral support to the Armenian combatants.[45] A Medical Council to fight against epidemics and a Municipal Council emerged in their turn.

Aygestan was thus organized as a true "Commune." The comparison is not exaggerated, for this was the actual term used by contemporaries. The Paris Communes of 1792 and 1871, about which *Ashkhatank* was writing already on March 7/20, 1915,[46] served as models for these learned Armenians nourished by French history and romantic literature. But the more recent and closer experiences of the Baku Soviet of 1905 and of the *anjuman* (council) of Tabriz in 1908 should not be overlooked.[47] The "Commune of Van" may be regarded as the self-governing municipal power of a population, besieged and gripped by an unbreakable fever for freedom and autonomy. Armenak Ekarian, as president of the Military Committee, addressed his compatriots to explain not their "right" to insurrection but their "duty" of insurrection. "It is not by our will that we shall fight. That was imposed on us. Two ways are open to us: either to bow our heads before the oppressor and submit to an ignominious death or else to come out dauntless and with open brow against him and to prefer the honorable path of our

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[44] The Armenian sources have preserved the names of all committee members. In Van, as elsewhere in the region, each family, rural or urban, lived during winter and spring using reserves prepared in the summer. The problem of supply initially entailed feeding the refugees and the combatants, for whom each family was obliged to contribute. The committee quickly resorted to rationing, allowing 150 to 200 grams of bread a day per person.

[45] The band exasperated the governor, who saw therein a sign of Armenian insolence.

[46] The article, dated February 26, 1915, and signed as Asso from the prison of Van, presumably was written by a jailed militant.

[47] Armenians from the Caucasus played a significant role in the Iranian constitutional movement of 1906-12.

forefathers."[48] The same day, April 5/18, in a less dramatic declaration addressed to the "Warriors of Self-Defense," the Military Committee defined the defensive program, chain of command, and rules of discipline.[49]

These calls were heeded. Convinced "that the Turkish government has decided to destroy our race,"[50] the Armenian population, from all walks of life, without discrimination of sex or age, mobilized. According to a participant, this was "a people's war,"[51] even though this assessment made well after the events cloaks a complex reality where unanimity was not always the rule, where personal egos clashed, and where local particularism sometimes shaped political agendas.

What were the armed forces involved? The vali of Van is estimated to have had at his disposal 10,000 to 12,000 men, consisting of 6,000 infantrymen and 4,000 to 6,000 Kurdish tribesmen, chetés, and gendarmes. He also had twelve guns (light mountain artillery and short-range heavy fortress artillery), rifles and ammunition in unspecified quantity, the city arsenal, and the small flotilla on Lake Van. On the other hand, the meticulous statistics drawn up by the organizations revolving around the Military Committee make it possible to know exactly the strength of the Armenian forces.[52] Including the partisans who arrived with the refugees of Hayots Dzor, there were in Van 1,053 Armenian combatants.[53] This number was circumscribed by the quantity of available weapons in Aygestan: 506 rifles with 74,824 cartridges and 549 revolvers, including 300 six-shot Mausers, with 39,089 bullets.[54] The overwhelming majority of these fighters had no previous military experience, and some had never before held a weapon. The disparity between the opposing sides is obvious. Only determination, moral fiber, organization, and effective defensive strategy made it possible for the Armenians to resist the combined governmental forces.

It was also on April 5/18 that the Military Committee, in an appeal "to our Turkish compatriots," called for the solidarity of Van's Mus-

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[48] See *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran,* vol. 11, pp. 272-73.

[49] The eleven-point regulations are given in Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, pp. 55-56.

[50] From the memoirs of Panos Terlemezian, as cited by Hambaryan, p. 33.

[51] Darbinian, *Hay azatagrakan sharzhman oreren*, p. 326.

[52] The statistics are published in the principal works used in this study.

[53] Thanks to memoirs, declarations, booklets, and other records, the names of most of the combatants have been preserved.

[54] These figures contradict the Turkish allegations of a veritable Armenian arsenal at Van.

lims and Armenians against the "alien" provocateurs of the central government and in opposition to the ruinous policies of the vali.[55] If this call remained unanswered, at least the Muslim inhabitants of Van did not take an active part in the bloodshed.[56]

Transmitted through the Military Committee, Aram's orders were very clear: mobilize the men, leave the weapons in their caches, control the strategic points, desist from any offensive initiative. Better than any account, the contemporary maps make it possible to visualize "the self-defense front" that surrounded the Armenian districts of Aygestan on the evening of April 5. Divided into seven sectors, each one under a local commander, the front included 79 Armenian positions.[57] The salient points of this defensive ring—the river Hankoysner, the military barracks, in particular Hamud Agha in the heart of the Armenian positions, the main streets, the crossroads (Khach, Arark), the tall buildings (churches, schools, hotel, former British consulate[58]), which were transformed into watchtowers and shooting positions, became the sites of confrontation.

The Military Committee issued its directives through dated and numbered official statements, often written in a grandiloquent style. Some of them were true ordinances showing that the committee regarded itself as the legitimate power. *Ashkhatank* continued to be published in a reduced format. Putting a silencer on socialist propaganda and emphasizing instead Armenian patriotism, the newspaper reported each day on "news from the front" and tried to raise morale. It was also for psychological effect that the Military Committee created on April 8/21 the silver "Cross of Honor" for exceptional bravery.[59]

The Armenian chroniclers who recorded each episode of the "Heroic Struggle of Van" are unanimous in dividing the period of combat into three phases: April 7/20-15/28, April 16/29-April 25/May 8, and April 26/May 9-May 5/18, 1915.

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[55] Mkhitarian, *Vani herosamarte*, p. 71.

[56] This information was affirmed by A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 243. The conflict at Van would pit the Armenians against the Ottoman authorities and their armed forces consisting of regular ranks recruited throughout the empire and local Kurdish irregulars and cheté bands.

[57] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 224ff.

[58] Occupied by Turkish gendarmes, the consulate building was set on fire by the Armenians on April 8/21.

[59] The inscription engraved on the cross, "Hay Hegh.," is an abbreviation for "Armenian Revolution" or "Armenian Revolutionary."

The First Period: April 7/20-April 15/28, 1915

An incident sparked the beginning of the battle on April 7/20. Armenians opened fire to avenge the death of two of their compatriots who had tried to prevent the rape of two Armenian women by Turkish sentinels. The governor immediately deployed troops previously consigned to the barracks and launched a thunderous cannon attack, throwing Aygestan into turmoil. Still, at nightfall, although walls and roofs had collapsed, the Armenians held steadfast, having stood the test of fire and even gained some advantages by occupying the telegraph office at Khach and surrounding the Hamud Agha barracks. They consolidated their positions by candlelight during the night. Thereafter, the population became accustomed to the sounds and smoke of the bombardments. In fact, the inaccurate and not very intense cannon fire did not claim many victims. A new commission was charged with recording all damage and having low barricades constructed in the streets and trenches dug between the Turkish and Armenian positions. On April 9/22, Bulgaratsi Grigor, assisted by Armenian *kankan*s (Van's underground irrigation channel diggers), succeeded in laying dynamite beneath the barracks, which burned for several hours.[60] A little girl, Sevo, after "having entrusted her Mauser to her brother so that it wouldn't fall into the hands of the enemy," slipped behind the barrack wall and confirmed that the Turks had withdrawn, for which she was awarded the Cross of Honor.

This episode gave occasion for the Military Committee to issue a reminder that it was necessary to spare weapons and conserve ammunition. Orders were given to fire only if it was certain that the bullet would strike its target.[61] The prolongation of the combat, foreseen neither by the governor nor by the insurgents, left the Armenians with a rapidly dwindling supply of food and ammunition, a crisis that became more acute with each passing day. But for the moment, the tone of the Military Committee was ebullient: "The numerical superiority of the enemy, the certainty of our approaching death do not frighten us. No! We want to enjoy the divine spirit of death. We want to give proof that in this world war of nations, the Armenian people, this ages-old walnut tree of the Orient, knows how to die, weapons in hand,

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[60] See the enthusiastic, detailed account in *Ashkhatank*, April 9(22), 1915.

[61] *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran,* vol. 11, p. 273.

on the ruins of the enemy."[62]

Apparently surprised by the firmness of the Armenian resistance, Jevdet Bey, without relinquishing the use of force, resorted to a long established tactic. He channeled the flow of Armenian refugees from the nearby villages into Aygestan to vanquish the rebels through starvation. Faced with this new situation, the Supply Commission expanded its activities, carefully distributing the limited food supplies and fixing the price of grain. New agencies were created to deal with justice, law and order, and the implementation of ordinances prohibiting alcohol consumption, loitering in the streets, spreading false information, and looting abandoned houses. Orders were also issued to respect "decency" in the homes where several families had been forced to crowd together in close quarters.

The correspondence between the vali and his friend, the Italian consul Spordoni, who represented a state that was then still neutral, is revealing.[63] For Jevdet Bey, the Armenian insurgents were "traitors," who "act to support the operations of the enemy, because they are counting on the swift arrival of the Russians."[64] On his part, Spordoni availed himself to relay the views of the Military Committee to the vali: "If the Armenians have recourse to weapons, it is because they are convinced that the government, under the pretext of military service, wants to exterminate them completely. Without counting on the help of the Russians or without waiting for them, they are determined to defend the lives of their families."[65] Spordoni also transmitted the protest of the American and German missionaries, whose compounds had been shelled and struck by stray bullets and who were in fear of reprisals despite the fact that they had given haven to Muslims and Armenians alike.

At the end of this first period, the Military Committee, notwithstanding its confident official statements, considered the situation sufficiently serious to send messengers to the Russian authorities in the Caucasus with a pressing call for immediate assistance.[66]

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[62] *Ashkhatank*, April 10(23), 1915; A-Do, *Mets depkere*, pp. 259-60.

[63] Italy entered the war in May 1915.

[64] This correspondence extended from April 10/23 to May 3/16, 1915. Seized after the occupation of Van by the Russians, it was initially published in *Ashkhatank* and then in *Défense héroïque de Van*, p. 36.

[65] Ibid, p. 41.

[66] Mkrtich H. Nersisian, *Genotsid armian v Osmanskoi imperii* [Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire] (Erevan: Hayastan, 1982), p. 281.

The Second Period: April 16/29-April 25/May 8

The second period was marked by intense combat, lasting day and night. The governor had received fresh troops with Krupp cannons, which he installed around Aygestan. He sought to achieve a decisive advantage. On their side, the Armenians had acquired some real experience, their brass band marching constantly in the streets playing *Mer Hayrenik* ("Our Fatherland," the anthem of the future Armenian republic), but they now pinned their hopes on the arrival of the Russian army and Armenian volunteer regiments from the Caucasus. Following the battle of Sarikamish, the Russians resumed the offensive and by March 1915 had reoccupied the valley of Alashkert, while on the Iranian-Turkish border, they drove back the Ottoman army that had advanced as far as Tabriz under the command of Enver Pasha's uncle, Halil Pasha.[67]

On April 20/May 3 the Ottoman troops, beaten in Persian Azerbaijan by the Russian 2nd Division and Armenian volunteers of Andranik,[68] retreated toward Van. At the same time, preceded by some 3,000 Armenian volunteers of the combined Araratian Legion,[69] the Russian Fourth Army Corps advanced on Van via Igdir and Berkri. The obsession of all Armenian organizations in the Caucasus was "to save beleaguered Van." After multiple Armenian entreaties, the Russian authorities allowed this Armenian avant-garde to hasten to the relief of Van.

While Jevdet Bey intensified the bombardment, the Armenians sought to develop their military potential in Aygestan. They built a small arms factory, a foundry for bullets, and a gunpowder plant in a laboratory directed by a chemistry teacher,[70] and they extended the network of trenches. Combatants or craftsmen, adult or teenage busybee workers, all have been immortalized in a series of photographs that have been preserved to become a part of the historical record.

It was Bulgaratsi Grigor who came up with the idea of smelting

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[67] For these military operations in the Caucasus and Persian Azerbaijan, see Larcher, *La Turquie*, pp. 393-95, 434-36.

[68] Andranik Ozanian (1866-1927) is the most famous and popular of the Armenian freedom fighters. He was later honored by the Russian high command with elevation to the rank of general. His volunteers at Van numbered between 1,000 and 1,500 men.

[69] In Erevan, five regiments of Armenian volunteers were grouped together as the Araratian Legion under the command of Vardan.

[70] The reference is to schoolmaster and chemist Mikayel Minasian, who commandeered charcoal and saltpeter for this work.

an "Armenian cannon." This simple "fire mouth," tested on April 21 against the Haji Bekir barracks, did not cause any damage. On the strategic military level, the weapon had little value, but its psychological impact was enormous, prompting the Armenians to begin at once to manufacture a second cannon.[71]

The Third Period: April 26/May 9-May 5/18

This period began with a serious Armenian defeat. On April 25/May 8, the Turkish troops captured the monastery of Varag, in spite of the spirited resistance offered by a handful of fedayis headed by Shirin Hakobian (Hagopian). The fall of Varag had several consequences. It sealed the possibility of retreat for the Armenians of Van, and it resulted in the dispersion of the refugees gathered in the monastery, some 5,000 of whom succeeded in reaching Aygestan, bringing with them despair and the looming threat of epidemic and starvation. Finally, it created a climate of defeatism among the exhausted and anxious Armenian population. To stop demoralization and imminent famine, Aram and his assistants increased the rounds of inspections and requisitions, while the Military Committee threatened to prosecute and punish those hiding in their homes or in the missionary compounds.[72]

It was the approach of the Armenian volunteers and Russian army that saved the Armenians of Van. On April 29/May 12 the Turkish authorities, who by then had decided to abandon Van, ceased the shelling of Aygestan and began to evacuate the Muslim population by way of the port of Avants. But as Keri's volunteer regiment and other detachments of the Araratian Legion reached Aygestan on May 3/16, Jevdet Bey's bombardment of the Armenians in the City intensified.

The Struggle in the City

Before the Young Turk revolution of 1908, "underground life," to use an expression dear to the Russian Populists, was difficult if not impossible in Van. The presence of the Ottoman civil and military authorities and the City's structure itself, enclosed between the Rock and the walls, worked against any underground activity. It is true that

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[71] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 342.
[72] Ibid., p. 340.

the City had been the cradle of the Armenakan movement, but since the Dashnaktsutiun had established itself in Van, its focus of operations had been in Aygestan. After the 1908 revolution, the ARF nonetheless took advantage of its new legal status and created a subcommittee of seven members in the City.[73] The seven, Haikaz Kosoyan (chairman), Levon Galchayan, Mihran Toromanian, Davit Sargisian, Mirhrtad Mirzakhanian, Harutiun Nerkararian, and Sargis Shahinian, were skilled craftsmen, tradesmen, and teachers with a relatively high educational level.[74] In 1915 they were to become the leaders of an urban defense operation, for which they were untrained but at which they proved themselves to be quite efficient.

On Saturday, April 4/17, news of the death of Ishkhan, then of the arrest of Vramian struck terror among the Armenian population. Shops and workshops closed, and none of the merchants and craftsmen residing in Aygestan ventured to the City. Locum tenens Eznik vardapet appealed to the governor, who bluntly confirmed the fate of Ishkhan and Vramian. To Eznik's appeal the next day for the release of Vramian, Jevdet reportedly replied: "This country will remain either to the Armenians or to the Turks, but it is impossible that the two can coexist."[75]

By that time the ARF subcommittee in the City had also taken the name of Military Committee and had co-opted two additional members, Daniel, the abbot of Aghtamar, and Mirzakhan Mirzakhanian, a Hnchakian lawyer. The market remained closed on Monday, April 6/19, and communications with Aygestan were completely severed. The crackling of rifle fire and the thunder of the cannonade in Aygestan the next morning prompted the Military Committee to act. Against the Turkish military potential of troops, arsenal, and fortress guns, the Armenian forces in the City, consisting of 100 rifles, 210 Mausers, and 60,000 bullets, were negligible.

The Military Committee, seeking to take advantage of the City's layout, created a defensive ring of about 2 kilometers around the Armenian quarter. The district, bounded on the east by the Tabriz Gate and

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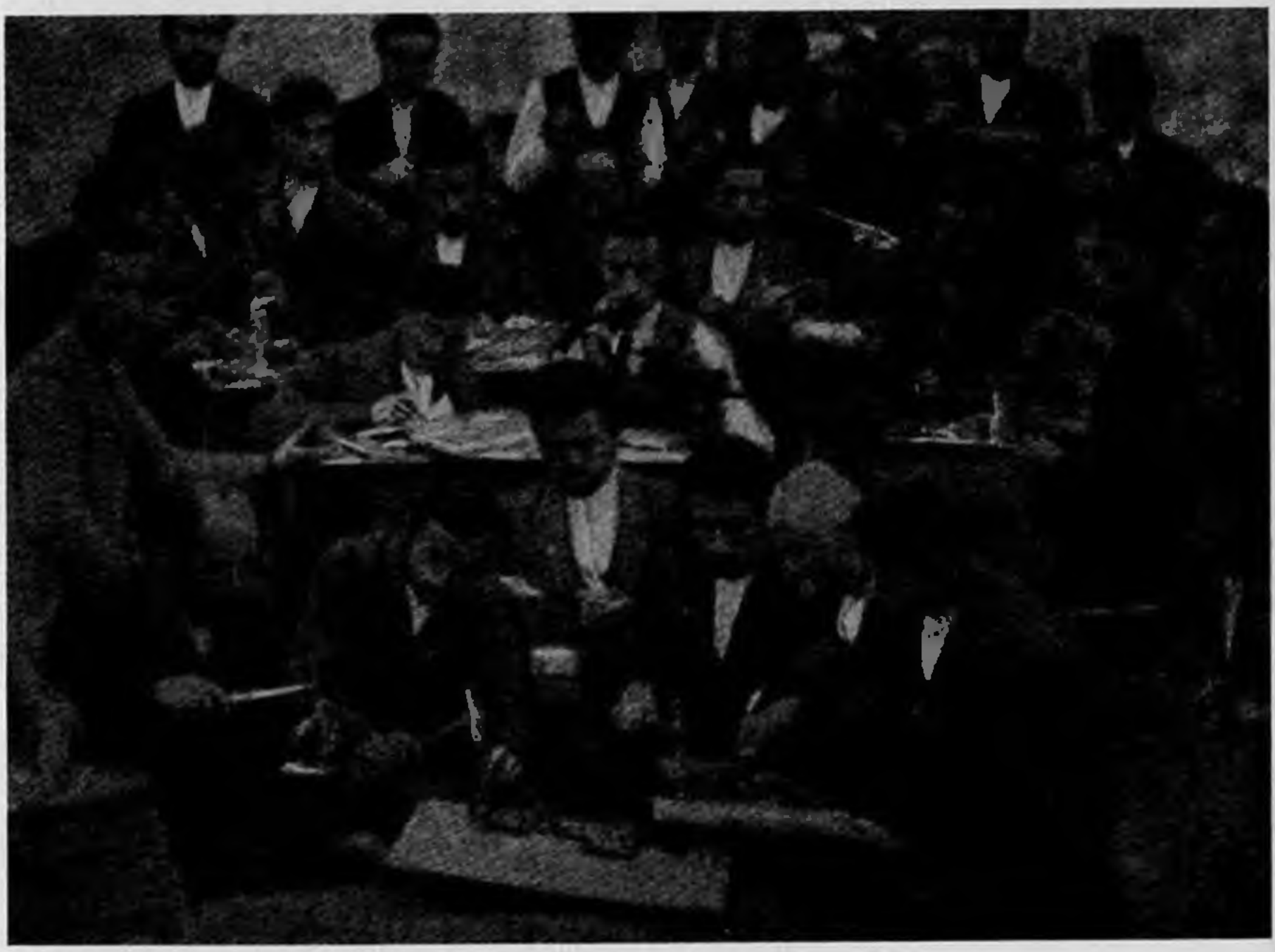
[73] The subcommittee was subordinated to the party committee of Aygestan.

[74] Among the seven, two were graduates of the Eramian School of Van, two had studied there, and one was a graduate of the Gevorgian Jemaran of Echmiadzin. See A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 265.

[75] Ibid., p. 273.



Armenian Trench Diggers



Armenian Cartridge Makers



Van Defenders



Van Commanders

on the west by the granary, was overlooked on the north by the fortress whose antiquated guns were trained on the quarter. The fortress itself, elongated by a notched wall on the rocky ridge, sheltered a company of chetés. The defensive ring was subdivided into four sectors: 1) the Tabriz Gate and a part of the still-standing old walls, but in the line of enemy fire; 2) the buildings of the Ottoman Bank, the Excise Office (Régie), and the Medical Office; 3) the border of the khans and markets; 4) the granary. It was near the granary in the western sector that the first encounters occurred and quickly turned very violent. With the Muslims having evacuated the neighboring districts, the battle was fought house to house and especially for control of high buildings or fortifications. Completely encircled, few in number, poorly armed, and inexperienced, the Armenians had to improvise. Some teenagers, carrying gasoline cans, set the municipal administrative buildings on fire, from where the conflagration spread swiftly to the khans, the telegraph office, and the police station. The Turks responded with a cannonade and shower of bullets, but the configuration of the City tempered the effectiveness of the barrage.[76]

While the majority of the Armenians took shelter in their homes, the Military Committee had to resolve the day-to-day problems of supply, armament, and discipline.[77] It was only on April 20/May 3 that Jevdet Bey forwarded to Eznik vardapet a letter threatening to tear apart the Armenian quarters but offering an amnesty if the insurgents would lay down their arms and throw themselves on the mercy of the government. The negotiations, conducted on the Turkish side by Director of the Public Education Sherif Bey and Director of the Ottoman Bank Alcardi, a person close to the Italian consul, produced no results.[78] In this final period, Jevdet Bey, having received artillery reinforcements, unleashed a fierce bombardment of the Armenian quarter. It was a time for Armenian youngsters, *gavroches* from twelve to fourteen years of age, to demonstrate their prowess by acting as messengers, carrying water and ammunition, and recovering enemy weapons. This was also a period of high drama during which the Military Committee refused entry into the defensive ring of "useless

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[76] At the beginning of April, the authorities had three fortress guns and four more modern artillery pieces installed around the City.

[77] Margos Der Margosian [Markos Ter-Markosian], *Husher ev khoher* [Memoirs and Meditations] (Fresno, CA: n.p., 1958), pp. 101-14.

[78] *Défense héroïque de Van*, pp. 44-46.

mouths," a large group of Armenian refugee women and children driven there by the Turks to weaken the defenders, while, on the other hand, all Armenian attempts to break the siege by digging a tunnel to a point outside the Tabriz Gate failed.[79]

On May 3/16 the Turks, having already evacuated Aygestan, intensified the shelling in the City.[80] It was a day of death and destruction.[81] But the next day the Armenians of the City and Aygestan were able break out of their encirclement and link up. Amid indescribable enthusiasm, they hoisted an Armenian flag above the citadel. Now masters of Van, the Armenians pillaged the abandoned Muslim quarters and set them ablaze. Dismayed by this episode, A-Do noted: "The Armenian, accustomed to produce riches and wealth, has in this instance destroyed and plundered them. It is the brutality of the Turkish government that led him to this sad behavior."[82]

On May 5/18, the Russian army reached Aygestan and the next day, together with the Armenian volunteers, made a triumphant entry into the City amid the enthusiastic cheers of the population. That same day, May 6/19, the Military Committee addressed its last official statement to the Armenian people, to whom it accorded all the merit and glory for the victory and to whom it offered "this marvelous freedom dreamed about by all the geniuses of our people."[83] For its part, the Russian high command manifested its satisfaction by addressing a congratulatory message to Catholicos Gevorg and on May 7/20 naming Aram Manukian as governor of the Van region. In an appeal to his fellow citizens, Aram called upon them to rally around his government, which was "the fulfillment of twenty-five years of Armenian struggle and hope."[84] The creation of an administration and a militia and police force recruited from among the local Armenian population and author-

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[79] A-Do, *Mets depkere*, pp. 336-37.

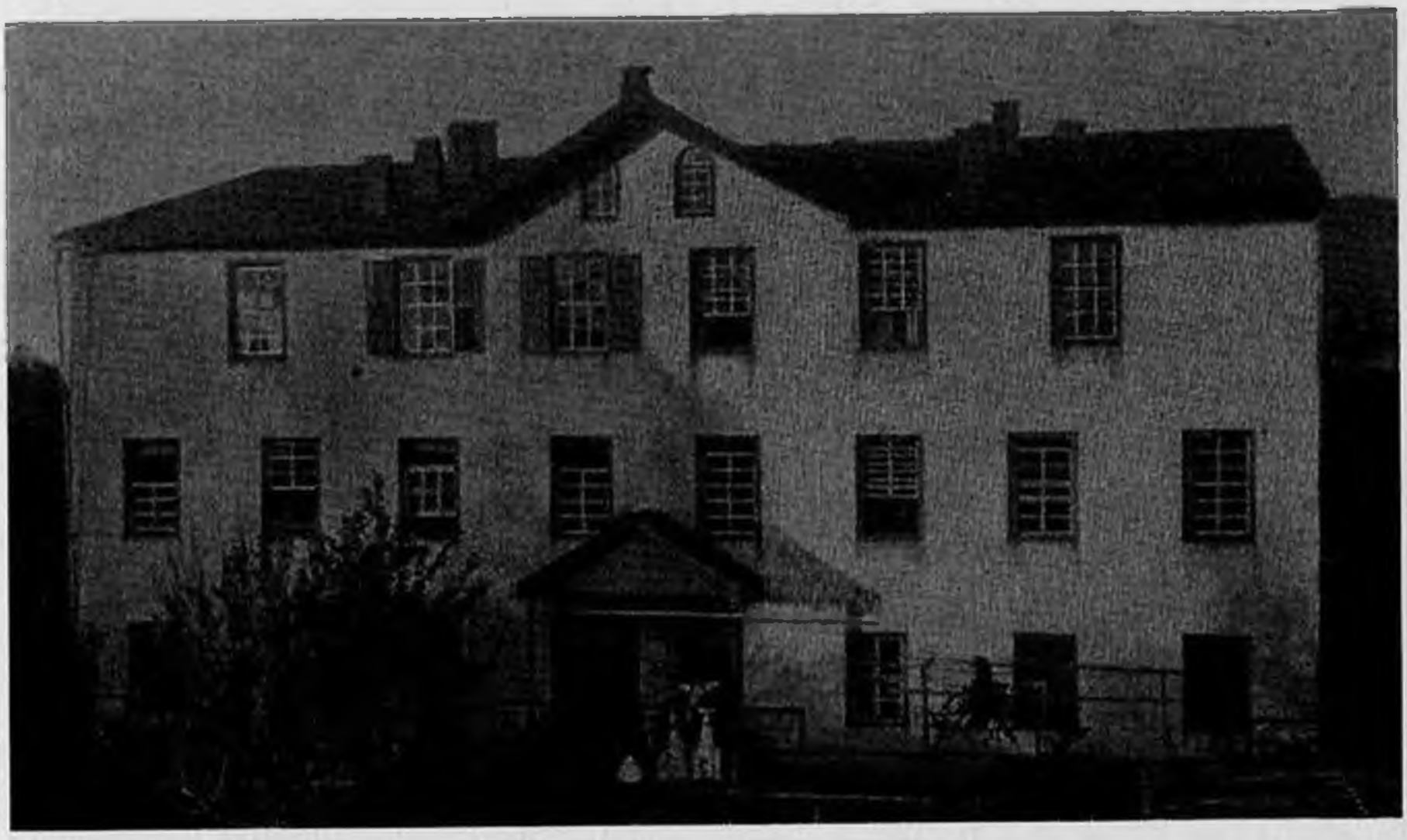
[80] Ibid., p. 357, gives the excerpts of a letter of Jevdet Bey to the Italian consul, explaining his decision to evacuate Van for humanitarian reasons.

[81] Vardan Parsamyan, *Hay zhoghovrdi patmutyun* [History of the Armenian People], vol. 2 (Erevan: Haypetusmankhrat, 1967), gives the plan of the self-defense of Van, with the positions of the Turkish artillery at the beginning of May. On the whole, the number of Armenian victims during the shelling and fighting was relatively low. According to statistics cited by Hambaryan, "Vani 1915 tvakani herosamarte," p. 44, there were 43 deaths in the City and 250 in Aygestan.

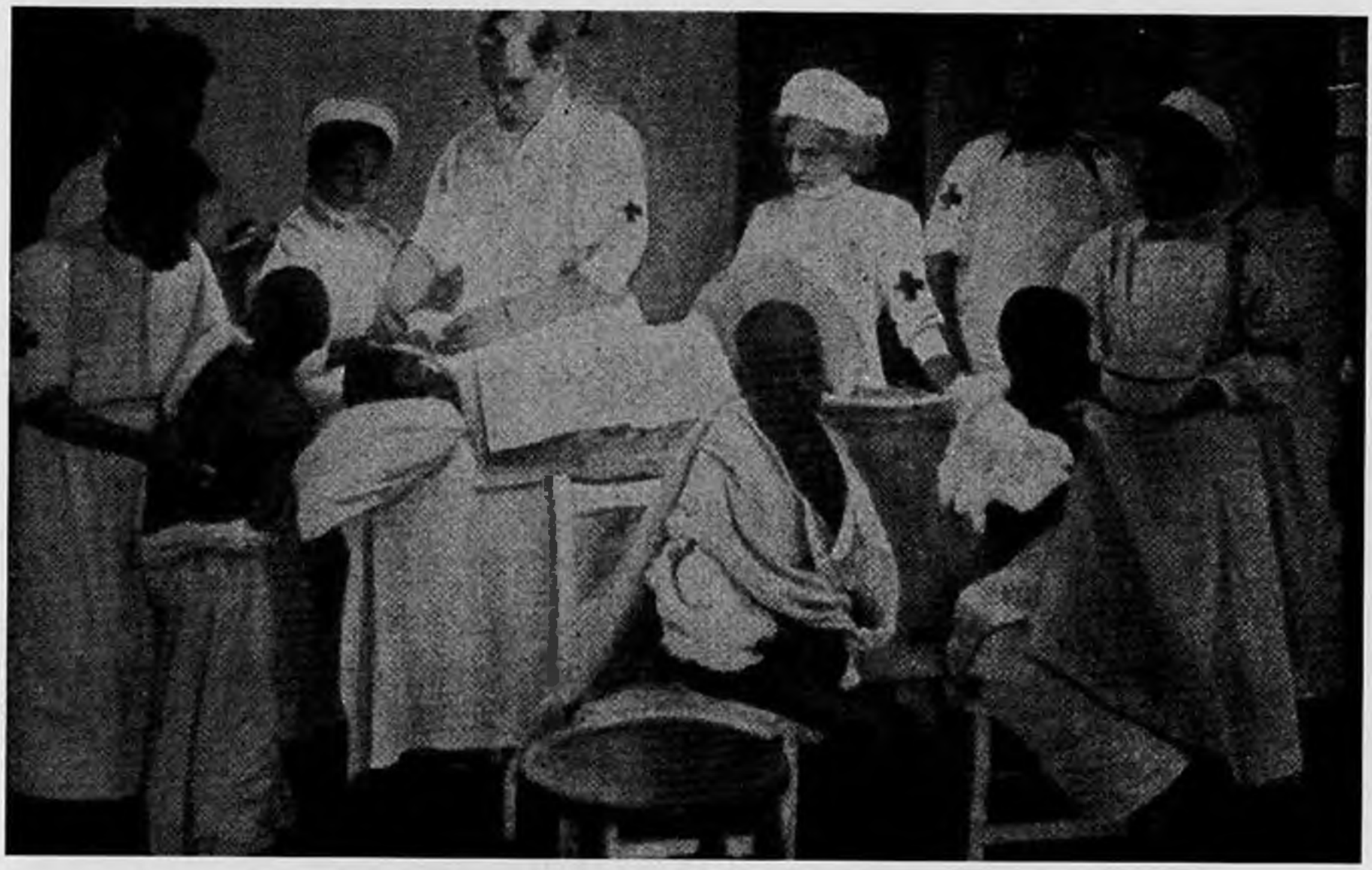
[82] These facts are confirmed by A-Do, Mkhitarian, Der Margosian, and others.

[83] A-Do, *Mets depkere,* p. 363.

[84] *Vaspurakan* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1930), p. 79 (publication of the Compatriotic Union of Vaspurakan in Tabriz).



American Hospital before and after Turkish Bombardment



Dr. Clarence and Elizabeth Barrows Ussher, Aygestan



Armenian Volunteers Entering Van, May 1915

ized by the Russian command stimulated the Armenian political consciousness and reinforced the conviction of those who foresaw a liberated and autonomous Armenia under Russian protection.[85]

Hastening to Van from Tiflis and Erevan in less than one month, activists, intellectuals, and journalists became the euphoric witnesses of this first nucleus of "Armenian sovereignty." While the presence of the Russian army was certainly beneficial and even allowed for some "profitable business,"[86] the most pressing question for the administration was how to save the 150,000 Armenians of the neighboring vilayet of Bitlis whose fate depended on a rapid foremarch of the Russian army.

Detailed to clear the area of the last elements of the Turkish army and of Kurdish irregulars, Andranik's men and other volunteer units after very heavy fighting reached the southwest edge of Lake Van in mid-July. They hoped to relieve Bitlis by joining up with the Russian forces that had taken Manazkert. But the Russian army advanced very slowly and then came up against a stiff Turkish counteroffensive from the direction of Bitlis. In a few days the Armenian flights of imagination turned into tragedy. Fearing encirclement, the Russian command not only withdrew its forces from the direction of Bitlis but also decided to evacuate Van. On July 18/31 the Armenians received orders to pack some food and personal belongings, abandon their homes, and set out for the Caucasus. The orders were received with intense amazement and anger, but there was nothing to do but comply. The "Great Retreat" of the Armenians of Vaspurakan involved more than 100,000 panic-stricken people. It was an indescribable flight of riders and people on foot, of men, women, and children, of mules, donkeys, and cows, and of heavily-laden carriages. The armed volunteers tried to guide and shield the caravans but could not avoid the bloody encounters and heavy losses while crossing over the Berkri bridge.[87]

During the exodus, hundreds of children were lost or went astray, and the columns of refugees were plundered by the Kurds. When the Vanetsis arrived at Igdir, exhausted and demoralized, the refugees had traveled more than 200 kilometers. They were met by Caucasian Arme-

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[85] Ibid., pp. 80-83. The composition of that government and the new administrative divisions is given in *Défense héroïque de Van*, pp. 93-99.

[86] Der Margosian, *Husher ev khoher,* p. 116.

[87] On the "Great Retreat," see A-Do, *Mets depkere*, p. 465ff.; Der Margosian, *Husher ev khoher*, p. 118ff.

nian relief committees, which were completely overwhelmed by the enormity of the need. From Igdir, the refugees were directed toward Echmiadzin, where within a few months disease and epidemics would decimate some 30,000 of them.

Conclusion

As a result of the Ottoman and Russian offensives and counteroffensives in the summer of 1915, Van changed hands three times. During one of those interludes, Aram Manukian returned with some assistants but soon had to leave again in what is referred to as the "Little Retreat." The Russians captured the city once more in the autumn of 1915 and would remain in control until the turmoil caused by the collapse of the Romanov dynasty and empire and by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. During this period Aram was in Erevan, where he would become the "popular dictator" and play a key role in halting the Turkish advance into Russian Armenia near Sardarabad in May of 1918.[88] He is widely regarded as the true "founding father" of the independent Republic of Armenia (1918-1920/21). For those who participated in the creation of this state, the "Heroic Struggle of Van" in 1915 was a decisive milestone.

The movement of the battle front between 1914 and 1918 and the occupation of Turkish Armenia by the Russian army had a far-reaching effect on the destiny of the Armenians, whose fate like that of the Nestorians and Assyro-Chaldeans was linked with a continued Russian military occupation. The interspersed Russian tactical retreats and offensive operations were paralleled by Armenian flight to the Caucasus, followed by return to rebuild abandoned cities and villages. The collapse of the Caucasus front after the Bolshevik revolution of October/November 1917 put an end to this tumultuous and dramatic period in the history of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire.

The last retreat of the Armenians of Van took place in April 1918. As the Turkish army approached the city, approximately 25,000 Armenian civilians, soldiers, and irregulars evacuated toward the Urmia district of northern Persia, where the Nestorian Christians were locked in fierce combat with the Turks (Azeris) and Kurds. This final exodus signaled the end of the two-thousand-five-hundred-year uninterrupted

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[88] Serge Afanasyan, *La victoire de Sardarabad* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985).

Armenian presence at Van.[89]

Was the uprising of the Armenians of Van in 1915 a part of a co-ordinated national scheme of the Armenians to rebel in place after place "to hasten the victory of the Entente, to realize their national aspirations, and to accelerate the fall of the [Ottoman] Empire, which they assumed had only a few days of life left," as was charged by the Young Turk government?[90] Was this the proof that the Armenians were preparing a rebellion "on a grand scale" while the Ottoman state was fighting for its very survival?[91] All the evidence indicates that the Armenians, conscious of their dispersion, weakness, and vulnerability, never conceived such a project, but they may occasionally have been guilty of refusing to be massacred without offering resistance. For Henry Morgenthau, the United States Ambassador in Constantinople from 1913 to 1916, the self-defense of Van was only the courageous resolve of Armenians "to defend their own lives and their women's honour against the outrages which they knew were being planned," after the Turks, by massacring thousands of their Armenian compatriots, had made clear the fate that awaited them, too.[92]

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[89] Paolo Cuneo, "Etude sur la topographie et l'iconographie historique de la ville de Van," *Armenian Studies/Etudes Arméniennes: In Memoriam Haïg Berbérian,* ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), p. 126.

[90] *Aspirations et agissements,* p. 222.

[91] Directorate of Ottoman Archives, *Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915-1920)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1995), p. 7.

[92] Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1919), pp. 304-05.

❀ 13 ❀

"The Atrocious Armenians of Van"
The Modern Turkish View

Clive Foss

For Turkish writers of the twentieth century, the Armenian community of Van played only a minor role in the history of the region. There are two notable exceptions: the "insurrections" of 1896 and 1915. These events attract a great deal of attention in the Turkish literature, because they appear to show the Armenians in an extremely unfavorable light, but otherwise the ancient or modern history of the community is virtually ignored. It is my purpose here to explore these contemporary attitudes, especially through local histories, works usually written by patriotic schoolmasters and journalists who often present information not available elsewhere. There are also a number of more serious historians who have studied Armenian history and the Armenian question in general; their accounts will appear insofar as they deal with Van.

My title reflects the tone of Turkish writing, especially on more recent history and is derived specifically from the work of the man who probably amassed more information about the history of Van than anyone else. Faiz Demiroğlu was the scion of an old and powerful local family.[1] His ancestors came to Van from Iraq in the eighteenth century and soon rose to the highest positions: they were governors, mayors, and prominent local officials. Demiroğlu himself attended military school, then entered the army, eventually retiring with the rank of colonel. He spent the rest of his career in the Prime Ministry Archives, where he devoted himself to studying the history of his home

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[1] There is a sketch of Demiroğlu's work in the introduction to his *Van'da Ermeni mezâlimi, 1895-1920* [Armenian Atrocities at Van, 1895-1920], published by the Institute for the Study of Turkish Culture (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Arastirma Enstitüsü, 1985). For a brief biography, see Aydin Talay, *Bizim eller Van* [Our Regions: Van] (Istanbul, 1988), p. 77, and for his family, pp. 72-77. The dates of Demiroğlu's birth and death are nowhere stated.

town. His love and enthusiasm for the history of Van led him to write innumerable articles scattered in local newspapers and to gather information more systematically in a seven-volume work that covered events up to 1948. This vast work, the largest ever composed on the history of Van, has unfortunately never been published. An extract from it, however, did appear in 1985, under the title *Armenian Atrocities in Van, 1895-1920*. In a sense, this sets the tone for the whole subject.

Early History

The history and antiquities of Van have been the subject of several works in Turkish written from 1913 onward. They all manifest much the same attitude toward the Armenian community, rapidly evident from the first reading. These Turkish views of the origins and early history of the Armenians of Van will be examined before a discussion of the more recent events that Turkish writers treat in considerable detail.[2] The learned and devoted Faiz Demiroğlu may provide a suitable introduction.

Demiroğlu, like many, had little interest in pre-modern history. The Armenians first appear in his brief historical introduction in the eleventh century when their dependent king left his territories to the Byzantines and fled with his people to Sivas in central Anatolia to avoid the newly arriving Seljuk Turks.[3] After the battle of Manzikert in 1071, when tens of thousands of Turks gave their lives for these lands, the Armenians had no political existence. Although an Armenian community was present in eastern Turkey, "there was not even the smallest fragment or trace of an Armenian political presence, sovereignty, or history." The Armenians survived because the Turks saved them from being destroyed by Persia or Byzantium. Armenian traders and workers in the city came to dominate its commercial life by the eighteenth century; Armenian villagers were occupied in agriculture and stock raising. They constituted a protected minority; neither Turkish customs nor the Muslim religion would permit any offense against them. With that, the Armenians emerge into modern times. Demiroğlu

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[2] The works on early history are presented in a different context in Clive Foss, "Armenian History as Seen by Twentieth Century Turkish Historians," *Armenian Review* 45 (1992): 1-52. This treats ancient and medieval Armenian history, and thus overlaps with the first part of the present study.

[3] For what follows, see Demiroğlu, *Van'da Ermeni mezâlimi*, pp. 1-5.

makes two basic points that will often be encountered: the Armenians were never important and certainly not independent, and they virtually disappear from history for almost a thousand years before reemerging to cause enormous trouble for their protective hosts, the Turks.

Modern Turkish accounts of Van begin with Süleyman Sabri's *History of Van and Studies on the Kurds*, published in 1928 but apparently written about 1913, when the narrative ends.[4] It represents a view of a time when the Armenian community was still vital and thus had to be explained. Like most writers of the late Ottoman and early republican period, Sabri clearly identifies the Turks as the earliest inhabitants of the Van region. For him, these were the Hittite Turks (who were also ancestors of the Kurds), and their successors, the Turkish Urartians. In Sabri's time, their languages had not yet been deciphered, so the notion that they were Turks was as plausible as anything else. In his narrative, Armenians only appear long after the Turks, in the sixth century B.C., when they were brought by the Medes into an area that had been purely Turkish. They lived a tribal existence. Subsequently, they were ruled by the Persians and Greeks, until their chief Dikran (Tigran) revolted in the first century B.C. During the long ages when Romans, Parthians, Sasanians, Arabs, and Seljuks controlled the area, Armenians are never mentioned. They brusquely reappear in the narrative only in 1816 when they burn a Turkish mosque and tomb and in 1913 when their revolt causes serious damage. Sabri's point is clear: the original inhabitants of Van were Turks, and the tribal Armenians were never of any consequence, playing no role at all in history until modern times, when they caused trouble. Even the so-called Armenian vineyards or gardens of Van (Aygestan), he adds, were actually planted by Turkomans (Turkmen) brought in by Mehmed the Conqueror. Armenians assertedly got hold of these spacious suburbs only during the reign of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (1876-1908/09).

This view might not seem worth much attention now, because science has advanced and no one believes that the Hittites and Urartians were Turks. It might be consigned to oblivion with an indulgent nod, had it not been reprinted, without any change, as recently as 1982.[5]

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[4] Süleyman Sabri Pasha, *Van tarikhi ve Kürtler hakkinda tettebuat* (Istanbul: Matbaayi Ebüzziya, 1928).

[5] *Van tarihi ve Kürtler hakkinda incelemeler* (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Arastirma Enstitüsü, 1982).

In other words, people are still willing to believe material that is totally outdated and long disproved. Since Süleyman Sabri's time there have been many respectable works of history by Turkish scholars who reject completely the kinds of views he advocated, but new ideas seem slow to penetrate to the level represented by these local histories.[6] Such works have a certain influence inasmuch as they circulate locally and are often the only readily available source of information on a city or region.

One of the most curious of the local histories is the short *Van in History* by Cavit Türkoğlu, published in about 1969 in Van.[7] In spite of fifty years of scholarship, this author still manages to present the Urartians as Turks. They were still ruling the region when Artaxias (Artashes) was brought in by the Medes. Among his subjects was the Arzeruni (Artsruni) family, of Urartian descent. The Armenians, it seems, were immigrants of Phrygian origin from Cappadocia in central Anatolia who imposed their language on the local people in the region of Van. Eventually, they became Christian and even schemed to create their own state. They then disappear from this garbled account until World War I. The only specific fact that Türkoğlu reveals of the ancient Armenians is that they prostituted their daughters. This actually may come from an ancient writer, the geographer Strabo, though it is hard to imagine where such an unversed author could have discovered it.[8] In any case, such information suits his point of view very well. However close to the ridiculous this account might seem, it is clear that the author has done some research and managed to get his work printed and circulated locally. His viewpoint is far from unique.

The brief historical introduction to another local history, *Van in Its Various Aspects* by Cengiz Alper, published in 1974, is equally pat.[9] Here, too, the Urartians have priority. Armenians enter the scene with King Tigranes, who in this version comes from the Hunnish family of Artaxias. He seized Van from the Romans, but they soon put him down. Then, under Persian rule, the Romans help the Armenians regain Van but soon take it over themselves. After this confusion,

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[6] For serious Turkish scholarship that deals objectively with ancient Armenian history, see the works of Günaltay and Umar, analyzed by Foss, "Armenian History," pp. 16ff. and 32ff.

[7] Cavit Türkoğlu, *Tarihte Van* (Van: Aktan Kirtasiye, 1969).

[8] Strabo 11:14.16, describing the Armenians of Acilisene (around Erzincan).

[9] Cengiz Alper, *Cesitli yonleriyle Van* (Ankara: Yargicoğlu Matbaası, 1974).

Armenians disappear from history until the twentieth century. Here, again, it is hard to imagine where the author got his information, but his account clearly represents a widespread attitude. Works like this might not be taken seriously, since they seem to be so far from the mainstream of historical writing. An important official publication should offer some relief and a more rational account of history. In 1973, as part of the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic of Turkey, the government issued a series of state yearbooks. A volume was devoted to each of the 67 provinces, giving a full account of history, geography, and all current conditions. With their abundant illustrations and maps, they offer a real mine of information. Here one would expect to find the official view of the Armenians of Van, who should be extremely difficult to ignore in such a context. The *State Yearbook* for Van almost manages to do just that. Its historical introduction deals soberly enough with the ancient inhabitants of the region: Urartians (not identified as Turks), Phrygians, Persians, Seleucids, Parthians, Sasanians, and Romans. In all this, the Armenians have only a fleeting presence according to which Tigranes established himself in "Ermenistan," then the last Armenian king was killed by the Sasanians in 238 A.D. (again, it is hard to imagine where this came from). In other words, virtually the entire Armenian past of Van has been obliterated: not just the ancient past but also the flourishing medieval kingdom that had its center here and left so many imposing monuments behind. Since the volume deals also with monuments, it can hardly ignore Aghtamar, which it duly presents as an attractive church on an island, without ever mentioning that it was Armenian. Yet the Armenians necessarily reappear—in 1895, when they revolt in order to establish their own state. Finally, during the Russian occupation of Van in World War I, the Armenians committed "inhuman aggression on the few of our inhabitants who did not emigrate"; and when Turkish forces returned to Van in 1918 they found the place in ruins. In other words, the official view is not so different from that of the local historians.

Armenians attracted a great deal of attention in Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s, a time of increasing activism and terrorism. These years produced many works (in books, newspapers, and television) to explain the Armenian past.[10] They usually follow a consistent line, that Arme-

[10] See Foss, "Armenian History," pp. 41-44.

nians were a wandering tribe without any fixed home and therefore without any claim on Turkish territory.

The most recent work I have seen is rather circumspect, but also defensive, at least so far as early history is concerned. *Our Regions: Van* by Aydin Talay appeared in 1988.[11] He naturally discusses Hurrians and Hittites but never actually claims them. He does note, though, that their burial customs, language, and horsemanship do give the impression that they were Turks. In any case, he is quick to point out that Armenian claims to be mentioned in Hittite documents are false and that Armenians have distorted the history of the Urartians to make a connection with them. For him, Armenians arrived with the Phrygians and settled west of Van. Even though Greek and Roman writers refer to this region as Armenia, it had nothing to do with the Armenians, nor has the name any connection with them.[12] Armenians were only a small minority in these regions, and any notion of referring to eastern Anatolia or Cilicia as "Ermenistan" is pure fantasy.

For Talay, neither the Artaxiad realm nor Vaspurakan ever constituted an independent kingdom. Although the Bagratids are erroneously mentioned as ruling the district in the tenth century and building Aghtamar, they are never identified as Armenian. When the Seljuks arrived, the region was called Vaspurakan and was subject to Byzantium. After that, Armenians disappear from the long and detailed narrative until they finally play a significant negative role in modern times.

By now, the Turkish point of view will seem so familiar that it hardly bears repetition. Basically, all writers on Van, from the most official to the most amateur, reduce the early history of the Armenian community to insignificance. Even when they do not claim that the Turks were the earliest inhabitants or do not expunge Armenians from the record all together, they clearly maintain that Armenians never had any important presence in the area. They may have existed in the remote past but never as an independent state, only a fleeting tribe. In this view, they leave the scene before or during the Middle Ages, only to reappear rather mysteriously in modern times. The aim of this viewpoint is the obliteration of Armenian history and with it any claim

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[11] Talay, *Bizim eller Van*, pp. 14-50 (from the beginnings to the nineteenth century), esp. pp. 15-26.

[12] Since the Turkish for Armenian is *Ermeni*, the author could claim that the names were quite different.

to priority or to Van itself.

Modern History

The modern history of Armenian Van (1878-1915) frequently appears in general Turkish discussions of Armenians and the Armenian Question. In each case, the approach is very different, but the conclusions are much the same: the Armenians of Van were a source of constant trouble; they constituted a real danger to the Ottoman state and eventually had to be relocated away from the vulnerable frontier zones.

The most succinct presentation appears in the most-widely diffused of all these works, a deceptively clear and well-written account by a political scientist and former diplomat, Kamuran Gürün. It is called *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed.*[13] Gürün's account of the "Van rebellion" of 1896 quotes extensively from reports by the Russian consul and Turkish military commander to show that the local Armenians carried out an armed revolt, which was eventually suppressed without extensive loss of life. He devotes more attention to the revolt of 1915, planned long in advance to help the Russian attack on Turkey. According to his sources, among which telegrams sent from the local authorities to the central government play a major role, the Armenians of Van cut the telegraph lines, stirred violent incidents in many places, and slaughtered local Muslims before rising in active revolt on April 17, 1915. As a result, troops had to be detached from the frontier whose weakened defenses could then not hold back the Russian advance. Finally, on May 2, Minister of War Enver Pasha suggested to Minister of Internal Affairs Talaat that the Armenians of the border zone be deported beyond the frontier or dispersed in Anatolia; he preferred the former alternative. Gürün thus makes the basic points that will be seen in other accounts: the local Armenians constituted a center of subversion, they stabbed Turkey in the back at the beginning of World War I, and as a consequence they had to be deported. Neither he nor the others give any account or description of the "deportations," nor do they deal with the Armenian community in any detail.

Two other works that appeared in English present the Armenians

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[13] English translation (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); for the relevant passages, see pp. 154-56, 196-99.

of Van in a coherent narrative. The better known is the plausible account of Salahi Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians,* which was widely circulated.[14] He has much to say about Van, which he portrays as a major center of revolutionary activity. First, however, he presents statistics that show the Armenians to have been far from constituting a majority in the province, though one figure does show them as forming 65 percent of the population of the "district" (presumably the city or *kaza*) in 1882. Sonyel traces local revolutionary activity back to the 1870s when Migirditch Portoukalian (Mkrtich Portugalian) converted his school in Van into a center of revolutionary propaganda. Activity intensified in the next decade, with the establishment of the Armenakan Party and then branches of the Hnchak and Dashnak parties. The revolutionaries all enjoyed the support of Russia, which encouraged their terrorism against the Ottoman Empire.

The first stage culminated in the Armenian revolt of 1896, organized by the Dashnaks, who were armed with Russian weapons brought in through Persia. This was to be the first step in a terrorist campaign to attract the attention of the European Powers. The revolt involved widespread incidents, but Sonyel does not give a comprehensive account. He does, however, quote British Consul Williams to the effect that this was certainly a revolt, not an attempt at self-defense. Afterwards, Van remained the greatest center of revolutionary agitation, stirred as usual by terrorists, especially Dashnaks, operating from their base in Tiflis (in the Russian Empire). By 1908, they had brought in enough weapons for 2,000 men and were about to stage a major uprising in the city. The authorities managed to nip this in the bud, thanks to an Armenian informer who revealed the plot and the hidden caches of weapons. The rifles were of a type used by the Russian military, and both Russian and British consulates were deeply involved in the plot. With the suppression of the local Dashnaks, a peaceful situation returned.

The final point of Sonyel, who writes a clear and substantial narrative backed by extensive citations, is that the Armenians of Van planned to take advantage of the world war to stage a major uprising in the rear of the troops defending the frontier. As preliminaries, Armenian soldiers deserted the army with their weapons, huge stores of

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[14] The work was published in London in 1987. Relevant passages are from pp. 79-89, 205-08, 269-75; see also the numerous entries in the index.

arms were hidden, and guerrilla bands were organized. The Armenians of Van, armed with Russian equipment, started their full-scale rebellion in March 1915. The government warned them that drastic action would be taken if the atrocities (which the author recoils from narrating) were not stopped. Finally, the deportations were ordered to save the existence of the empire and protect the local Muslim population. Sonyel gives no account of the methods used nor of the fate of the local population, but he hotly disputes any accusations of massacre or genocide and claims that more Turks than Armenians died as a result of the war.

Sonyel's focus is essentially on the revolutionary organizations and activities based in Van. A third work available in English presents a more general view. Esat Uras's *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question,* a volume of more than a thousand pages, is probably the most influential of all, since it is the source for most Turkish writers.[15] Uras, too, presents statistics that show the Armenians were a minority in Van as elsewhere. He describes the revolutionary committees active in Van, including the Dashnaks and Armenakans, whose aim was to achieve independence and to kill Turks and Kurds wherever they were found. The Dashnaks especially favored Van because it was the gateway to Iran. This activity led to the revolt of 1896, for which preparations had been going on for years. Uras quotes the Russian consul to the effect that the terrorists extorted money from reluctant rich Armenians and that more funds were smuggled in by missionaries and the British consulate. He gives no real account of the revolt but has extensive quotes from the foreign consuls and revolutionary proclamations.

Uras makes familiar points about the events of 1915, with a few additions. Armenians willingly accepted conscription so they could desert with their weapons; the Van Armenians revolted as soon as Russian troops crossed the frontier, massacring all the Muslims they could get their hands on; other revolts spread throughout the province. As a result, the great part of the Muslim population was massacred, and the government responded by the deportation of the Armenians.

All these works in English are consistent in their point of view

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[15] *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* (Istanbul: Documentary Publications, 1988), translated from 2d Turkish ed., *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* (Istanbul 1976; lst publ. Ankara: Yeni Matbaa, 1950). Relevant passages in the 1998 ed., pp. 353-65, 694ff., 702ff., 755-62, 867. See also the index.

and in what they omit. Most notable is their failure, despite abundant sources, to give any coherent account of the events of 1896 or of the fate of the Armenian community. They also are strikingly sober and seemingly objective. Another large work presents a considerably more detailed and vivid account, the longest in Turkish. Mehmet Hocaoğlu's *Armenian Atrocities and the Armenians in History with Documents from the Archives* has not been translated.[16] Hocaoğlu narrates and analyzes the Armenian revolts of 1896 and 1915, using and quoting an array of sources: foreign accounts and documents, Armenian proclamations and newspapers, and especially reports of governors, police commissioners, and other officials, quoted with full references from the Prime Ministry Archives.

Alone among these writers, Hocaoğlu explains local conditions: the geography that made revolt easy (mountainous country and proximity to the frontier), economic conditions (Armenians owned all the best land, Turks relatively poor), and the population (20 percent Armenian in the province, and many semi-independent tribes against whom the sultan created the Hamidiye cavalry). He maintains that the Armenians constantly fomented trouble with the tribes and with the authorities by falsely claiming oppression. Their agitation was stirred by the priest Hirimyan (Khrimian) and the revolutionary committees and backed by the patriarchate, the missionaries, the foreign consuls, and especially Great Britain, which was implacably hostile to Turkey. Hocaoğlu describes the revolt of 1896 in the city and the villages, on the basis of police reports and stresses the attacks by Armenians armed with the latest weapons on the Muslim population, which had only the most primitive or obsolete equipment.

By 1915, Hocaoğlu maintains, the Armenians, who controlled business even in the smallest village and recognized the revolutionary committees rather than the government as their main authority, wanted to wipe out the Muslim population or reduce it to a minority. During their revolt, they committed worse atrocities even than the cannibals. The revolt was planned in advance: long before the war, revolutionary bands were ready to collaborate with the Russians, and when the campaigns began, Armenian volunteers and deserters helped the enemy by stabbing Turkey in the back. Russian armies burned Muslim vil-

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[16] Mehmet Hocaoğlu, *Arşiv vesikalariyla tarihte Ermeni mezâlimi ve Ermeniler* (Istanbul: ANDA Dağitim, 1976), esp. pp. 313-54, 610-44, 727-37.

lages, and Armenians slaughtered the inhabitants.

Hocaoğlu's account of these events is extremely vivid and circumstantial. He does not recoil from narrating the horrible atrocities and the valiant deeds of Turks determined to save their country, including a group of schoolboys who died fighting. The winter of 1914/15 was an especially disastrous time for the Muslim population. Heavily armed Armenians from the villages joined in attacking the city, occupying government buildings and starting fires. The local forces, aided by the entire Muslim population, managed to push them back, but the Turkish troops could not deal both with the revolt and with the approaching Russian forces at the same time. In May, as the Russians drew near, the Armenians began to slaughter the local Muslims as well refugees pouring out of the city. Armenians rushed to join the Russian army all over the occupied territories. When the Russians captured Van, they appointed an Armenian governor; by that time, only about 1,500 Turks were left in the city; the rest had either been killed or escaped. Through all this, Hocaoğlu gives a vivid, almost epic narrative. It culminates in a justification for the deportations and a series of horrible but circumstantial stories of atrocities and tortures inflicted by the Armenians on the Turkish population.

These accounts are all taken from serious works that deal with the entire Armenian Question. Studies on Van itself make the same points but differ in their more immediate and personal approach and often add local color. They also manifest much less objectivity and rarely qualify their opinions. The most important are by Demiroğlu and Talay.

For Demiroğlu, Armenians re-enter history after 1878 when their priest Hirimyan used every pretext to spread propaganda against the regime.[17] Demiroğlu's work, unlike most local histories, has every appearance of serious research: it is organized chronologically around the terms of the governors and uses and quotes many documents from the archives, as well as contemporary personal accounts. For him, a prime villain is Hirimyan, who did his utmost to stir discontent and attract the attention of the European Powers. Troublemakers like this and the attendant malicious Armenian gossip eventually ruined Van. In particular, the Armenians filled visiting foreign travelers, archaeologists, and missionaries with their propaganda. Hirimyan soon became a professional revolutionary, using his press and the educational system

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[17] For what follows, see Demiroğlu, *Van'da Ermeni mezâlimi*, pp. 4-56.

to spread propaganda. This is the background for the serious events that follow.

From 1895, the local Armenians, with the support of foreign powers, began to organize revolts to destroy the Ottoman Empire. The role of foreigners was especially nefarious: American missionary schools filled the heads of Armenian pupils (especially those from the villages) with revolutionary ideas. Demiroğlu remarks: "It was a shame for humanity that American missionaries and foreign consuls supported the Armenian revolts." The terrorists, who had their base in Iran, constantly crossed the frontier and attacked Turkish troops. They used weapons stored in churches and monasteries, and they beat and extorted money from moderate Armenians who believed in cooperation with the Turks. Their revolt was carried out with unspeakable atrocities against the Muslim population, sparing neither young nor old. He supports all his allegations with extensive quotations from archival documents, especially telegrams sent by local authorities to the central government.

Demiroğlu's own work ends with these events; the editor of his book carries on the narrative through 1915, making extensive use of Hocaoğlu and ending with a series of purported eyewitness accounts of the horrendous Armenian atrocities that give the book its name. This part contributes nothing new to the discussion.

The other local account that gives much detail is by Talay. By using personal and family information more than archival documents, it achieves a more immediate and emotional tone. The historical section is only part of his work, which deals with all aspects of modern Van, but it introduces some new approaches which will make the depth of Turkish feelings on this subject more evident.

For Talay, too, Armenians appear from nowhere in the nineteenth century; they had not been mentioned since the early Middle Ages.[18] His account begins with the foreign travelers who greatly exaggerated the Armenian presence in Van. Armenians were actually a minority who tried to become a majority by illegal immigration of compatriots from the Caucasus. Here, too, the priest Hirimyan appears as a chief conspirator. During this period, as the author learned from his grandfather, Armenians stole and sold goods from Turkish religious foundations and generally cheated everyone. As a prelude to his narrative

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[18] Talay, *Bizim eller Van*, pp. 51-57.

of the events of 1895-96, Talay regrets that the Armenians "who had lived under tolerance, love, and respect for centuries" fell under the influence of foreigners and fanatics. Foreigners played a particularly evil role. The revolt of Sasun, for example, was supposedly organized from the British consulate in Van. When the crisis came, Russian weapons and English money enabled the Armenians to revolt and cause many deaths and tremendous destruction in Van.

Talay naturally gives prime importance to World War I when the Turkish troops departed for the front, leaving only gendarmes behind. This enabled the heavily-armed Armenians, who used Aghtamar and other churches as their bases, to revolt in anticipation of the Russian army. As the Turkish population fled from the city in May 1915, they were attacked and massacred by the Armenians. Priests poisoned the wells so the Muslims would be without water, and the valley of Bitlis was filled with corpses of the refugees. The author expresses his shock that "the Armenians should not have done this to us, who trusted them and left them in peace for so long." They repaid Ottoman protection by alliance with the Russians; though they had been poor, they got rich for centuries while the Turks did the fighting. The Armenians next destroyed all the Muslim monuments in the region and turned Van over to the Russians. When the Turkish army finally recaptured the city, it was completely ruined, with hardly anyone left. Of the twenty-three in the author's family, only two (his grandfather and great uncle) had survived the slaughter. He concludes that everyone should realize the value of this land, the possession of which had not come for nothing; the meaning and importance of the tears and tortures suffered here should never be forgotten.

As in the case of ancient Armenia, these accounts of modern Van are remarkably consistent, despite their different approaches. They all present the Armenians as villains, who revolted in 1896 and 1915 despite the kind treatment they had always received, betrayed the Turks during World War I, took the side of Turkey's enemies, and massacred helpless Turkish refugees. If the Armenians suffered, their troubles were far smaller than those they inflicted on the Turks. This interpretation of the past hardly varies, though the tone changes a great deal between the cool and scientific-looking works translated into English and the strong feelings of the local historians. The image could be expanded by considering accounts of other regions and more general

works, but its nature would not change.[19]

All in all, these works show a point of view that may not be familiar or seem rational to the readers of this volume. In it, the Armenian presence in Van is reduced to a minimum from the beginning, then a thousand years of its history are obliterated, and finally, the local Armenians re-enter history forcefully in the totally negative context of revolts in modern times. All of this could be discussed at length and refutations could be offered for virtually every point, but here that is not the purpose, which is simply to present the different levels of modern Turkish writing on the Armenians of Van and Vaspurakan.

Since the message is so consistent, and in many cases so strongly held and felt, it is hard to end on an optimistic note. The gulf between the Armenian and Turkish points of view is enormous, and it is hard to see how any sort of common ground could be found in the present state of thinking. Only if writers like those discussed are willing to see the other side and consider the evidence objectively might there be some hope. But that would involve applying the methods of historical research which have been fundamental since antiquity—that is, examining the evidence impartially to draw a conclusion rather than imposing the conclusion on the evidence and selecting material that will advance a particular point of view. Perhaps a future generation will arrive at a different point of view. Until then, the writers presented here may be taken as representing modern Turkish nationalist thinking about the Armenians of Van.

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[19] Actually, there is one recent work that presents a radically different point of view, openly admitting and discussing the massacre and genocide of the Armenian population of Turkey. This is Taner Akcam's *Türk ulusal kimliği ve Ermeni sorunu* [Turkish National Identity and the Armenian Question] (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayınları, 1992). Since the author was a Communist, he hardly represents the mainstream of Turkish thinking, but the very fact that the study was published in Turkey may indicate a change in direction from the works presented here.

❀ 14 ❀

The Flames of Van

Marc Nichanian

Only a Turk could pass judgment this way...

Ayrvogh Aygestannere (The Burning Orchards), a novel by the Armenian writer Gurgen Mahari, appeared in Erevan at the end of 1966. Mahari died three years later in 1969. He was 66 years old. *The Burning Orchards* is the only novel he ever wrote. One can say without hesitation that it is the greatest novel published in Eastern Armenian in the twentieth century. Other books have been written, other authors have had their hour of glory, but this work is one of the few to have saved the honor of the Armenians in that part of the world, one of the few that inspires me with the hope that perhaps we can still escape the war of propaganda, the encounter with the atavistic enemy and the real or imagined executioner; that we can still find a possible way toward intelligibility; that one day we will be able to overcome nationalistic visions of the world.

These rather abrupt opening lines are not intended to be objective. I do not intend to write a history of the post-Stalinist years in Armenia in terms of the inhabitants' experiences, a history that would narrate the passive resistance to a regime articulated by a renewed affirmation of national pride. Rather, I shall explain the reception of Gurgen Mahari's novel by an entire country, the campaign to defame the author—explicitly in the name of this national pride—that was orchestrated in 1967 immediately after the book was published, and the unbelievable afflictions Mahari endured at the hands of the entire population, from ordinary citizens to intellectuals and even the government. These events are part of the intellectual history of the Armenians of the twentieth century. They bring them no honor, but they constitute an important episode in the history of the complex relationship the Armenians maintain with their past and their present.

The Burning Orchards deals with the final years of Armenian Van: the city's resistance to the Turkish army and mob in 1915, followed by its evacuation. It seems that Mahari, like so many others before him, was doing a work of memory: he was recreating the past, attempting to salvage a world forever lost. But he was also settling accounts with the past, the past of his early childhood. It is undeniable that he was targeting the people he considered responsible for the disaster. As a backdrop to his narrative are the "national liberation" movement, the armed resistance, and the Genocide—the Catastrophe. The novel plays out an interpretation of recent history, the past with which the Armenians were still at odds. The violent debates surrounding the novel, the anathema, the insults and condemnations, question the totality of this history, but they also reveal the workings of Armenian society in 1967. The events cannot be understood outside the Soviet context, which for some fifty years had suspended all reflection concerning the Catastrophe, all historiographical work on the liberation movement, all attempts at reappropriating the past and hence overcoming it. The publication of the novel awakened passions that had remained dormant for many long years. Today, any serious examination of the novel will necessarily stir up a century of passions, hatred, frustrations, tendentious interpretations, inquisitions, imposed opinions, manipulations of the mind.

What, then, happened in 1966 and 1967? First I shall take the time to quote from the recollections of the writer's wife, Antonina Mahari:

> Gurgen began writing his historical book on Van, the city of his childhood, while he was very ill. The major part of the book was written in Balanka, where the fresh air and the mild climate gave him creative impetus. He was in a hurry. "Let me finish this book before I die. I wish to do something for my beloved town in memory of the victims of the Catastrophe."
>
> Anyway, Gurgen was able to write his classic work, which would soon wreak havoc. *The Burning Orchards* brought him great bitterness and pain, and disappointment to his friends. The valuable literary work was trampled under muddy feet. It is impossible to describe the ugly campaign that was organized against the ailing writer. They tore up the book and burnt it. They threw stones at our balcony, watermelon rinds, all kinds of dirt and refuse. Hurtful phone calls to the author, anonymous notes and letters. Of course, I hid many things from Gurgen. He got very upset when he found out about it. "You are going

to save this dirt for history. Don't remove anything, don't hide anything from me. I have to know what my dear brothers are up to. Perhaps this is my destiny."

While he was still in Balanka, they were writing to him from Erevan. "Cursed Turk, don't try to come back. In any case, we're going to kill you." Gurgen was afraid to go back, but I insisted and persuaded him. We returned to Erevan; he took to his study and did not go out on the street. . . .

While he was writing *The Burning Orchards*, Mahari was reliving his memories. At night he was disturbed by nightmares. In his dreams he saw the horrors of the massacres. These horrible memories increased his pain such that he would cry out, "Mother dear, I am dying."

After his death, they began to torment me. They were the Vanetsis, our dear Vanetsis. For example, they would call in the middle of the night. "Why did you wait so long to pick up the phone? You know, you are to blame for all this. If it weren't for you, he would have written something different. . . ." Then they would curse Mahari's memory. I got my share of that too. But I told them that if they wanted to say anything to Gurgen Mahari, they could go to his current "residence" and find out why he wrote as he did.[1]

In another passage, Antonina Mahari singles out the organizer of the defamation campaign as a writer who "disappeared under mysterious circumstances," naturally referring to Paruyr Sevak.[2] It has been said in defense of the latter that the defamation campaign was so generalized that it did not need to be orchestrated by a single person. Nevertheless, Garnik Ananyan, one of the "censors" of 1967, taking up the gauntlet again in 1994, opined that any attempt to absolve Paruyr Sevak of guilt was useless. "He who had the courage to speak out against the falsifications of Turkish historiography could not bear to deal with the 'lost sheep' in his own flock; and even if it was about Mahari, he could not let the memory and the blood [of the victims]

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[1] Antonina Mahari's memoirs have been translated and published in Armenian as *Im odisakane* [My Odyssey] (Antelias: Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1994). This passage is to be found at the end of the chapter, "The Odyssey of The Burning Orchards," pp. 153-54. Mahari's wife was Lithuanian. He had met her during his second exile in Siberia. This detail may explain the acerbic tone of these pages and the vehement words she directed to the Armenians who persecuted her husband—but, then again, who would not have reacted this way under the circumstances?

[2] See Antonina Mahari, "Ayrvogh Aygestanneri odisakane" [The Odyssey of *The Burning Orchards*], in the Erevan bi-weekly *Ar*, May 18-24, 1993, and *My Odyssey*, p. 157.

be trampled on. . . ."[3] Thus, according to the poet Paruyr Sevak and the censor Garnik Ananyan, Mahari was trampling on the memory and the blood of the victims. It is not difficult to imagine Mahari's reaction to such accusations. In any case, he was viewed as a "lost sheep" that had to be morally if not physically crushed. The book was condemned by his closest friends. Once again, Antonina Mahari:

> In Balanka, he received a letter from Norents, who strongly criticized *The Burning Orchards*. "As the secretary of the Party Organization, I demand that you publicly denounce your book." Gurgen was very distressed. How could a writer denounce his own book, especially a book like *The Burning Orchards*? How could he say that to our dear friend Norents, with whom we had come back from Siberia?

So Mahari was officially called upon to renounce his work. The invitation was issued from above, from the Party Organization, through one of his closest friends. The Writers Union officially denounced Mahari and a devastating report was published, again with the same argument: Mahari supports the Turkish version of history.[4] Orchestrated or not, the persecution of Mahari gained momentum all throughout 1967. A special meeting was held at Erevan State University to condemn the novel. Calls were made to the state-sponsored publishing house urging it to withdraw the book from circulation. Finally, the

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[3] Ananyan's comments were published in an article entitled "Dardzial Ayrvogh Aygestanneri masin" [Once More about *The Burning Orchards*] in *Varuzhan*, the monthly supplement of the Erevan newspaper *Erkir*, Erevan, May-June 1994. Ananyan had been Mahari's principal censor during the debates at Erevan State University in 1967, and only fragments of his remarks were published in the newspapers at the time. Here he pulls out from his files the "secret report" he wrote in 1979 on the occasion of the re-publication of the book and declares that, with the exception of some expressions that went beyond the mark, he is in complete accord with what he had then written. Ananyan was responding to an invitation by Seyran Grigoryan (see the latter's article, "Patehapasht Mahariapashtutyun" [Opportunist Mahari Defensism], published in *Varuzhan*, March-April 1994). Ananyan subsequently published his "secret report" *Hraparakakhosutyun ev knnadatutyun* [Journalism and Criticism] (Erevan, 1996), pp. 319-40. Raphael Ishkhanyan responded to his comments in *Varuzhan* by writing an article entitled "Handurzhoghakanutyun te amboghjatirutyun?" [Tolerance or Totalitarianism?] in *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, 1994, no. 156. Ananyan's counter-response, rejected by newspapers on all sides, is included in his *Hraparakakhosutyun ev knnadatutyun*, pp. 341-49.

[4] M. Mkhitaryan, "Groghe ev patmakan chshmartutiune" [The Writer and Historical Truth], *Lraber hasarakakan gitutyunneri*, no. 10 (1967). The results of the inquisitorial examination of the novel were published in *Banber Erevani Hamalsarani*, no. 2 (1967).

book was ceremonially burned in public. In fact, the campaign had an official as well as a popular aspect, as if the entire nation, its honor wounded, were standing up against the author and his novel. The campaign had a devastating effect on Mahari. For forty years he had borne the characters of his novel in his mind, he had withstood all the humiliations, he had come back from Siberia with the intention of not giving in to the hatred and resentment of his oppressors, and now he was psychologically destroyed by the campaign against him. Unexpectedly, he agreed to revise his novel. It seems that he accomplished this work toward the end of 1967 and in the first half of 1968. On July 13, 1968, he wrote to his friend Levon Hakhverdyan, "I agree with all the comments you made (does that surprise you?) I have not modified the novel. I reworked it and presented it for a new edition. I think you will be satisfied."[5] He died a year later.

In 1993, on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the author's birth, tongues were untied, and the actors of 1967 came to the fore: those who had kept their silence at the time now expressed themselves, some defended the novelist, new voices were heard.[6] This time the polemic was situated in a new post-Soviet context, characterized by an open struggle between the powers in charge and the representatives of the old political party, the Dashnaktsutiun—erstwhile revolutionary, now fundamentalist—the party once crystallizing the active voices of

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[5] Levon Hakhvertian cites this passage in an article published on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the writer's birth, "Maharu grakan draman" [Mahari's Literary Drama], in *Grakan Tert,* Nov. 12, 1993. It reads: "*Es chem mshakel vepe, veramshakel em ev nerkayatsrel hatorayin hratarakutian.*" This statement, "It is not I who modified the novel; I reworked it . . . ," highlights the ambiguity of the passage. Does it mean that someone helped Mahari rewrite the novel, telling him what to delete and what to add? Antonina Mahari remains silent on the subject.

[6] It seems to me that among the new voices speaking out in favor of Mahari, Raphael Ishkhanyan was the only one to have understood the reality of what was happening in 1967. As far as I know, no serious study of *The Burning Orchards* has been published outside Armenia. The only book devoted to Mahari in Western Armenian is that of Krikor Shahinian, *Gurgen Mahari vatsuni hangrvanin* [Gurgen Mahari at the Milestone of Sixty] (Beirut: Mshak, 1963). Among the studies on Mahari published in Armenia are the following: a chapter in Sevak Arzumanian's *Sovetahay vepe* [The Soviet Armenian Novel] (Erevan: Hayastan, 1967); Suren Aghababyan, *Gurgen Mahari* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1959); and Silva Bodosyan, *Gurgen Mahari* (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1981). Bodosyan is the only one who devotes a lengthy chapter to *The Burning Orchards* (pp. 144-210) and tries to defend Mahari against the attacks and defamation that followed the publication of his novel.

the nation and now an alternative to power. It so happens that Mahari not only questions the role played by this party during the period from 1900 to 1915 but also whether one can speak about a "movement of national liberation." Those who had attacked Mahari in 1967 or who induced him to rewrite his novel had done so for clearly nationalistic reasons, forbidding the author to question the very basis of the term "national liberation" and thus also the activities of the party that had striven to embody that movement. In 1993, the same intellectuals, previously serving the Soviet regime, would come back, this time on behalf of the fundamentalist revolutionary party, and claim responsibility for their censorship and condemnations of a quarter of a century earlier.

It was only in 1979 that the second version of the novel, "reworked" as it is called, was published in the fourth volume of Mahari's complete works. His original censor, Garnik Ananyan, was again in charge of writing a secret report. But now another character intervened, and he too revealed himself in the final stage of the affair. This was Stepan Topjian, a renowned specialist in modern Armenian literature. His recent article in a diaspora newspaper discloses the role he played.[7] He begins by excusing and forgiving Antonina Mahari for her excessive statements and vehement denunciations. It was only understandable, according to Topjian, for she had suffered with her husband, and furthermore she was not Armenian: she could not understand the extent to which her husband's writing was unforgivable. She should not be blamed. Topjian then anoints himself as bearer of the truth, the truth that was unleashed in the 1967 defamation campaign, which probably makes him the ultimate censor:

> The important thing is that the whole affair was not for nothing. The writer thoroughly reworked his novel, abridging the text, revising it here and there, and adding other longer passages. It is true that, just as the author mentions in the brief preface that appears in the second edition, the novel in its reworked version was ready on January 28, 1968, but it was only published in 1979, after his death, in the fourth volume of his collected works. The text had been prepared for publication by his elder son, Grigor Ajemian. The volume was published by our section, and I can bear witness to the fact that Grigor Mahari

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[7] Stepan Topjian, "*Ayrvogh Aygestannere*" [The Burning Orchards], *Asbarez*, Dec. 2, 1995.

> did the job with great care, devoting all his attention to seeing the whole thing through. There is not a single new fragment . . . that is less good than the best pages of the previous version. The writer reworked his novel not only because of popular pressure, but also because he sought to satisfy his personal artistic requirements, he improved it. . . . Because of this work, the novel has undoubtedly become richer. . . .

This explanation is itself a masterful example of hypocrisy and Freudian repression. It is strange that those who found unforgivable mistakes concerning historical veracity or interpretation and unbearable attacks on the "honor" of the Armenians in the first version, now find the second "reworked" version so artistically brilliant. They know that what is really unforgivable is that Mahari was forced to rewrite his novel. Nevertheless, they want to prove that the rewriting improved the novel, not only by the elimination (or suppression) of everything that was allegedly unacceptable but also by its artistic success. According to his own testimony, Topjian seems to have participated in shaping the "reworked" version. There can be no other explanation for his insistence on the presence of Mahari's son up to the very end, until publication. Clearly he is playing the son against the wife. Moreover, the interpretation of history offered by the "great" Armenian writer was not good enough for the ultimate censor, who arrogated the right to censure it, condemn it, revise it. Sixteen years after the fact, he resumes his attack. He has no regrets concerning his earlier actions. On the contrary, he imposes himself as a sycophant of the "meaning of history," of the "martyrs" who died on the road to "freedom." Their memory had been soiled, it had to be defended, the argument had to go all the way: "Only a Turk could pass judgment this way. . . ." This is the ultimate insult, of course, the unforgivable one in an Armenian context. It is therefore understandable that, while we will have the opportunity to assess these statements, we will not enter into this "debate" on the same terms. These are not statements that one can discuss under any terms.

Why did the light go off...?

Gurgen Mahari was born in 1903 in the city of Van in historic Vaspurakan. He was twelve years old when the city was evacuated and the time of endless exile began. Van was a prosperous city where

the Armenians led a "decent" life, as decent as possible under Turkish administration.[8] In the novel, the Armenian lifestyle in Van is described with bitter, sarcastic humor. Van is portrayed with its villages, its outlying monasteries, and its local quarters, but most of all with its characters, presented in the same sardonic mode, including even those who were not enmeshed in political activities. It must be said that the task of writing about Mahari's life is facilitated (or perhaps rendered more delicate) by the fact that much of his prose is autobiographical. His first such attempt dates back to 1928, a narrative of approximately one hundred pages entitled simply "Childhood." In it he writes about his first twelve years in vignettes, with an obvious literary approach, for the facts of everyday life are narrated in the voice of the youngster who lived them. There is something strange and endearing in this unexpected absorption in a very personal rendering of childhood. Perhaps one must look for the reasons in Soviet cultural policy of the time and its fluctuations; still, the most convincing autobiographical narratives (Vahan Totovents, Mahari) came from writers who had spent their childhood in Western Armenia, a land forever lost. There was a kind of interaction between those cultural policies and the results of the Catastrophe.

Beginning on the third page of this first autobiographical essay, Mahari narrates the death of his father when he was only five years old:

> I remember that someone was dead. Had he been murdered or was it a suicide?
>
> "Mr. Grigor Ajmonts. . . ."
>
> "It was your uncle who did him in. . . . Your father was an

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[8] One should keep in mind certain historical facts in order to measure the "decency" of this life: the constant pressure of the Kurdish *ashirets* in the region, these tribes themselves being driven into organized crime by the Turkish government; the exactions of the period prior to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78; the terrible famine that ensued in 1880-81; the progressive and systematic settlement of Turkish refugees from Rumelia and the Balkans, which was organized by the central government in order to increase the demographic pressure and facilitate the rule by force; the emergence of an Armenian liberation movement; the lootings and the massacres of 1895-96 in the province of Van; the Turkish onslaught in July 1896; the defense of the city and the ambiguous role played by the British consulate; the massacre of a great number of fighters who had been promised safe passage out of the city; and the years of repression and censorship between 1896 and 1908.

Armenakan, your uncle a Dashnak."[9]

Further on, it is the grandmother who narrates, unaware that the child is not asleep:

> "That night should never have ended. We were sitting quietly under the *koursi*. Tigran was there, Anoush here, Grigor over there. . . . Grigor took out a gun, he wanted to clean it. . . . I said to him, 'Put away that Satan's tool.' He laughed and said, 'Don't be afraid, it's not loaded.' And then suddenly, the light went off."
>
> "Why did the light go off. . .?"
>
> "How should I know. . .? We turned it on again. . . . 'Grigor, Grigor' He doesn't answer. The bullet had gone straight to his heart. Not a drop of blood. . . . They took Tigran to prison. . . . The Armenakans said it was the Dashnak committee that had assassinated him by the hand of Tigran. . . . Anoush testified and said he had taken his life with his own hand. Tigran was freed."
>
> This story, the story of the tragic death of my father, remained obscure. When I had grown up, one time a few years ago, when my uncle was still alive, we met in Rostov. He told me it was true. That he was the one who had fired, but that it was purely a coincidence, a terrible accident and nothing more. We were paddling on the Don [River] when he told me this. And over the pounding of the waves, I could hear the question of Khuri Khatun, dead long ago.
>
> "Why did the light go off?"[10]

Thus at the very beginning of his adult life, in the first pages of his prose work, Mahari wrote about much more than the violent death of his father. He captured the indelible uncertainty surrounding this death. His father had been murdered by his brother-in-law one evening in the presence of the whole family (the child was probably sleeping); or perhaps he had been killed by accident, as the child's mother contended, probably submissive and intent on saving her brother's head. The family version assured the son that it was an accident, and the official version became the truth (it had been upheld by the mother facing the commission of inquiry). The accidental death of a father

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[9] In 1956 Mahari brought together his autobiographical narratives in *Eritasardutyan semin* [On the Threshold of Youth] (Erevan: Haypethrat), quoted passage, p. 11.

[10] Ibid., pp. 12-13. In this first narrative of the murder, Mahari puts these words in the grandmother's mouth: "Grigor took out a gun. . . ." Why Grigor, and not her son Tigran? Is this already a Freudian slip?

is something you have to learn to live with. You bear such truths in your adult life, you accept the reality of death, you adapt to it. But how could you accept the uncertainty when the murderer is your uncle, when you spent your childhood at the home of your grandmother, rubbing shoulders with the man who killed your father by accident, according to the official lie or the myth, the man who in turn became a second father, without there being anyone you dared to ask about the truth of the tragedy? It will become clear why I devote so much attention to this singular and tragic episode in Mahari's life. It is always possible to accept the reality, to adjust to it. But not everyone succeeds. One of Gurgen's sisters suddenly went mad. This occurs on the fourth page of the first autobiography. She became mute, and some time later, during the retreat from Van in July 1915, she disappeared.

In the Caucasus, Mahari was raised as an orphan in Dilijan and Erevan. A precocious child, he began to write and publish poems when he was only fourteen. He never stopped writing poetry, even if "it was difficult to become a poet after Charents," as he himself says in a passage wherein he relates his budding friendship with the great revolutionary poet of Armenia.[11] He published several books of poetry[12] and two of short stories.[13] Two autobiographical tales, "Childhood" (1928) and "Adolescence" (1930), signaled an important stage in his prose writing and were probably the occasion for him to become conscious of his real talent as a writer. Nevertheless, these sketches remained unfinished.

Until the end, Mahari was also a very active participant in the literary life of the Republic. In 1925, he was declared undesirable and expelled from the Association of Proletarian Writers of Armenia, and in 1926 he joined the ranks of the group called "November," founded and led by Charents. In 1936 he was tried and convicted of "nationalism" and condemned to ten years of exile. In fact he was liberated

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[11] Ibid., p. 389.

[12] The anthologies are *Titanik* (Erevan, 1924); *Erek agit operet* [Three Agit(ational) Operettas] (Leninakan, 1924); *Bardiner* [Birches] (Erevan, 1927); and *Mrgahas* [Ripened Fruit] (Erevan, 1932). Upon his return from exile, Mahari resumed his activities as a poet and published an anthology of all his earlier writings under the title of *Hndzanner* [Harvest] (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1959).

[13] *Siroy, khandi ev Nitstsayi partizpanneri masin* [On Love, Jealousy, and the Gardeners of Nizza] in 1929, and *Zigzagnerum* [In the Zigzags] in 1931.

and came back to Armenia eleven years later, in 1947. In April 1949 (after a stay of 444 days in the country, by his own count), he was again deported to Siberia, and this time he did not return until July 1954. All in all, he endured seventeen years of exile.[14] In the final years of his second banishment he resumed writing, undoubtedly encouraged by the woman who had newly become his wife. Much later, the tales about his time in exile were collected in a book, *Tsaghkats pshalarer* (Blossoming Barbed Wires), published outside the Soviet Union.[15] Despite the conditions surrounding its publication, this book is not a "samizdat." In fact, the stories it contains deal solely with individual destinies and include no indictments. This is one of the essential characteristics of Mahari as a man and as a writer: the apparent absence of any resentment, any accusation against those who took away part of his life. Admittedly, this also reveals a weakness. It seems that Mahari, motivated by the instinct for survival, refrained from commenting on the terror of 1936-37, on his "trial," and on his judges and his executioners. Mahari was not Solzhenitsyn.

Their names and their deeds
in the Book of Glories...

Our examination of the novel will here focus on the principles of Mahari's undertaking, leaving the full story to be completed when I present an in-depth review of some of the passages that were revised, removed, or added by Mahari in the second edition, so that it will

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[14] In *Pak drneri gaghtnike* [The Secret of Closed Doors] (Erevan: Apollon, 1994), Davit Gasparyan presents the results of his research in the archives of the former NKVD and offers a chronicle of those dreadful years; pages 57-68 are devoted to Mahari, who was arrested on August 9, 1936, and convicted of "anti-revolutionary nationalist activity." Like many others, he was tortured. After initially being held at NKVD headquarters, he was transferred to Erevan Central Prison on September 9, 1937, and then judged and sentenced on July 20, 1938. Mahari was held in Vologda Prison until May 1939, when he was deported to Novo-Ivanovsk Camp. He returned to Erevan on August 20, 1947, was rearrested on November 10, indicted on the same charges, and again deported in March 1949, this time to the Krasnoyarsk region.

[15] *Blossoming Barbed Wires* was first published in Andranik Tsarukian's weekly review *Nayiri* (Beirut) in 1971-72 and then in book form (Beirut: Altapress, 1983). A French translation by Pierre Ter-Sarkissian, *Les Barbelés en fleurs*, was published in 1990 (Paris: Messidor). As far as I know, this is the only work by Mahari available in a Western language. I am not aware of any Russian translations.

be possible to understand the author's motivations and know whether the rewriting of the novel was really an enhancement and a success on the "aesthetic" level, as has been claimed by his critics.

a) *The Burning Orchards* was not written in one season around a single character. Here is what Mahari has to say about his characters:

> Day and night, heedless of Sundays and rest times, for at least four if not five decades, they never ceased knocking at my door, asking, demanding, ordering, arranging everything so that I could write about them, write down their names and their deeds in the Book of Glories. . . . Thus they followed me for years and decades and they are still following me, up to the present time, when I am possessed by the will to finally settle my accounts with them.[16]

In fact Mahari had written the novel's opening episode (which revolves around the character of Ohannes Agha, a rich merchant of Van) as early as 1933, when it was published under the title "The Vanished City" and presented as the first chapter of an unfinished novel, "Gurgen Khan and His Descendants."[17] When he returned from exile, he went back to this story and published it with very few changes under the title *Otnadzaynner ayguts* (Sounds of Footsteps from the Orchards), with a subtitle, "Pages from the Chronicle of a Vanished City."[18]

From the outset, there is this idea of an engulfed town in Mahari's work, a new Pompeii, a disaster with no name, beyond all possibility of designation. This is what he says in the novel: "Yes, there was a city and that city no longer exists. Is it possible to have a Pompeii

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[16] *Ayrvogh Aygestannere* [The Burning Orchards] (Erevan: Hayastan, 1966), pp. 400-01, cited hereafter as Ed. A; and volume 4 of *Erkeri zhoghovatsu* [Collected Works] (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1979), pp. 391-92, cited hereafter as Ed. B.

[17] The episode was published in the Erevan monthly review *Verelk*, nos. 2-3 and 4-5 (1933).

[18] These pages can be read in the prose volume published in 1956, *Eritasardutyan semin*, pp. 403-71. At the end of the story Mahari appended the dates "1934-1955." The only significant change between the 1933 and 1955 versions was the name of the central character: Gurgen became Ohannes Agha Muratkhanian. But this also points to the strange proximity between Gurgen Mahari the author and Gurgen the character, although at first glance they seem to have nothing in common. This proximity invalidates such moralizing views of the character (regarding his greed, among other things) as we find, for instance, in Silva Bodosyan's interpretation. There is a violent critique in Mahari's novel addressed to the "revolutionaries," but there is no serious "social critique" to any extent.

and an Ani within a period of fifty years? What a strange Pompeii and what a strange Ani."[19] Mahari's expressed amazement comes from the fact that we have exactly the same feeling toward this Van consumed in the flames of an immense upheaval as we might have toward Pompeii; as though the events concerning Van, the end of Van, had taken place two millennia ago, as though the town belonged to an immemorial past. The "rebirth" of this town through writing is possible only because the cataclysmic event was a Catastrophe, and a Catastrophe characteristically creates an absolute past. At the same time, only this "rebirth" through writing gives way to the cataclysmic "feeling." Writing the disaster is constitutive of the disaster.

b) We can distinguish three different poles in the novel. The first two are what Proust would have called "ways."[20] First, there is Ohannes Agha Muratkhanian's way. He is a rich merchant of Van, one of the novel's central characters, who absorbs the author's sympathy. Ohannes Agha is a joyful man, a rake, a specialist in strange and revealing dreams, as greedy as might be expected of a wealthy bourgeois, probably with a limited education but with a fair share of common sense that enables him to hold forth endlessly about Van and its destiny. In the first episodes we see how he becomes incensed by the racketeering organized by the "revolutionaries," how he heads into town with his brother Mkho on the back of a donkey, how he is intoxicated by the birth of his child. This gives the reader the opportunity to become acquainted with his family, his wife Satenik, his mother and children (two of whom will play their part in the defense of Van at the end of the novel), and with other merchants, colleagues who like himself are threatened by the racketeering. Ohannes Agha's way also includes his brothers. One of them lives in Constantinople where he ends up dying of a "shameful" disease.

The second pole is Mkho, who oversees the family-owned lands in the village and supplies his brother's household with provisions but must depend on the latter's charity for purchases he wishes to make in the market. The most interesting brother, however, is certainly the third one, Gevorg, because of his role in the novel. Gevorg is a former teacher who has lost his post due to an exaggerated weakness for alcohol, has gone to work for the revolutionaries as the executor of

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[19] Ed. A, p. 402; Ed. B, p. 393.

[20] Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* has been translated into English as *Swann's Way*.

their unavowable deeds and has relinquished his wife Virginie, as much as he is relinquished by her, because of the public contempt that attaches to him.

After Ohannes Agha's way, there is Mihran Manaserian's way. This character makes his first appearance late in the novel but ends up as one of the central figures, becoming as important as Ohannes Agha. Mihran is a fascinating character because Mahari gives him the features of his own uncle, Tigran. Mihran is the "superior" of the deconsecrated Kheka monastery, which he acquired along with the surrounding property thanks to the money he received from his revolutionary friends in exchange for his services. He is their friend, he welcomes them on his premises and helps them on their journeys. Through Mihran, Mahari thus re-creates persons and places to whom he was extremely close, since he lived almost all of his childhood in the house of his uncle, a substitute father and the instrument of the devil. Twice in the novel, Mahari very briefly narrates the scene in which Mihran (according to the first version of the novel) kills his brother-in-law, pushed into this action by Aram (Manukian), the influential godfather of the revolutionaries.

Mihran's way also includes the two Turkish characters who have specific roles in the novel, Kamal the *mudur* (headmaster) and his wife Nana. The mudur is Mihran Manaserian's friend; he pays him a visit on the property near the monastery. One of the things that scandalized Mahari's readers was that the only Turk to occupy a substantial place in the novel was what we could call a "righteous" man. It is essential to note that this is the case only in the first version of the novel. The reader probably knows that there were very few "righteous" Turks in 1915. However, history and family narratives have retained the names of some of them, those who protected Armenian families or—when they occupied official positions—entire cities and provinces, until their ultimate and unavoidable dismissal. Mahari chose to represent one such Turk. This was perhaps a tendentious choice. But it was the choice of a novelist. And the "righteous" did exist among the Turks. Let us acknowledge that this was Mahari's "message."

The third pole in the novel is that of the revolutionaries, of Aram, Ishkhan, and, to a much lesser extent, Vramian.[21] The first two were

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[21] The actions of the first two leaders are well documented, but little has been written on Vramian. As an exception, see Hakob Siruni, "A. Vramyan," *Hayrenik Amsagir* 3 (June

Caucasian Armenians who came to Van to organize the party's cells and set up a nucleus of armed resistance; the third character, Vramian, represented the Armenians of Van at the Ottoman Parliament (after 1908). Mahari's treatment of these characters is well known. It is sufficient to summarize the reasons for which Mahari took the party to task. In the first place, there is the fact that the revolutionary party was unworthy of its name. It took on the job of liberating the Ottoman Armenians from the oppressor's yoke, but it failed to perform a single effective action toward this liberation. It led operations from outside without really knowing the harsh conditions that prevailed inside the country. It promised to introduce arms, and yet the inhabitants of Van eventually found out that the party had failed to carry out even this elementary duty.[22] In sum, the ideology of "liberation" was all window-dressing, perhaps not a deliberate deception, but certainly a delusion. This does not mean that things could have taken a different turn. No, what happened was unavoidable. But in Mahari's eyes, the delusion itself was unbearable, along with the fact that the party ruled through the fear it inspired in the population. In other words, there was no relation between the activity of its members and the conditions of a real struggle for liberation.

Consistent with the novelist's bias and with the novelistic approach itself, what is portrayed of the party's activities is what the people of Van could witness themselves, that is, the racketeering, the internal reprisals, the "terrorist" actions against Armenians, the punishments, the elimination of undesirable members and declared foes. The resistance of Van, according to Mahari's account, is organized and carried out by the inhabitants of the city, without any contribution from the revolutionary party or in any case its chief representative in Van. Mahari's peevishness toward these acts of political banditry does not prevent him from portraying the revolutionaries as human beings, prone

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1925): 43-55.

[22] On this last point, I refer to the memoirs of Armenak Ekarian, the military director of Van's self-defense, *Armenak Ekariani hushere* (Cairo: Nor Astgh, 1947), cited hereafter as Ekarian, *Memoirs*. On page 194 he writes: "We then realized that all in all the Dashnaks had 133 Mauser rifles and 150 revolvers. I was amazed. Was this the 'war-oriented party' that had ransomed the Armenians at home and abroad for decades under the pretext of 'arming the population'? But we needn't be harsh. A large part of the weapons owned by the Dashnaktsutiun had passed into the hands of the government because of the crisis caused by Aram and the betrayal by Davo. But after these incidents?. . . We'd better be quiet about it."

to doubt, and to growing misgivings about the soundness of their activities. Even Aram, toward whom Mahari is most pitiless, is feeble only because he is an anxious human being in an impossible situation. Sometimes Mahari seems to lose all measure in the harshness of his satire and criticism, as for example when the newly-formed Van defense committee brushes off Aram with bland tones.[23] Other passages are still more explicit and speak openly of his fear and cowardice. Doubt, fear, political impotence, these are Aram's main features. His entire action as a partisan is revealed to him in its emptiness. He is not even able to die as a fighter. Such is Mahari's treatment of Aram. I refer the reader to the books and articles devoted to the defense of Van for the role played by the real Aram Manukian.[24]

c) The period covered by the novel extends from an indeterminate date before 1908 to the evacuation of Van in July 1915. In Mahari's eyes, the evacuation is the end of Van. The Armenians of Van, as the reader knows, were not deported. They resisted the Turkish onslaught from April 20 to May 16, when the arrival of Russian troops (preceded by groups of Armenian volunteers) forced the assailants and the Turkish population to flee. However, after about two and a half months of an autonomous administration under Russian rule, they were given the order to evacuate the city. The first evacuation was carried out in very bad conditions: the enormous convoy was attacked several times on the road to the Caucasus by organized bands of Kurds, and there was a significant number of casualties. In spite of this, the Armenians returned to Van on the heels of the Russian army more than once during 1916-18, in the hope that the latter would settle down to stay. Each time their hope was bitterly dashed.[25] Gurgen Mahari

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[23] Ed. A, p. 483; Ed. B, pp. 475-76. This scene is in fact very close to Armenak Ekarian's narrative, which suggests that Mahari had Ekarian's memoirs at hand when he was writing his novel. See Ekarian, *Memoirs*, p. 198.

[24] The best reference, from a Dashnak perspective, is the account of Onnik Mkhitarian (Onnig Mukhitarian), "Vani inknapashtpanutiune" [The Self-Defense of Van], in *Hayrenik Amsagir*, vols. 2-3 (April 1924-May 1925). Onnik Mkhitarian served as a chronicler, recording the events day by day. His chronicle was published in book form and then translated into English. See also *Arame, Mahvan hisnameakin artiv* [Aram, on the Fiftieth Anniversary of his Death] (Beirut: H.H. Dashnaktsutiun, 1969), esp. pp. 76-86 for a biographical essay written by Arshaloys Astvatsaturian. While it is clear that Mahari diverged greatly from historical reality, it is also of interest that, to say the least, Ekarian does not present Aram Manukian in the same glorified way in which he is portrayed by Astvatsaturian.

[25] There is abundant literature on the resistance of Van and the tribulations of the refu-

never returned to his native city. For him July 1915 represents the final disintegration of the world in which he was born. But it is never envisaged separately. After all, it was only a part of the general disintegration that destroyed that fragment of the Armenian people, and that is why Van's end can never be treated independently of the Catastrophe. It is an integral part of the irreversible calamity, even if one takes into account the heroic defense the Vanetsis put up against their attackers.

It must be noted that in the first version of the novel Mahari never describes the battle itself, the struggles, the fighting positions. The battle remains in the background, behind the scenes, but it provides the author with another opportunity to describe the reactions of the characters, their courageous or shameful attitudes, their weaknesses, their appetites, their propensity to carry on with their individual lives despite the sound of gunfire and the threat of being overwhelmed. Van, like all other Armenian towns, cities, and villages that existed before the Catastrophe, was doomed to total destruction. Mahari does not waste time describing murders and atrocities. His only question is, how did something like this happen? It is obvious that his question is not confined to Van and the specific events that took place there. The Catastrophe occurred; the rest is only detail. That is why the ques-

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gees in the years after 1915. In English, see the section on the "Deliverance and Evacuation of Van" in Richard G. Hovannisian's *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 55-57, and a volume titled *The Defense of Van*, published in 1980 in two parts by the Central Executive of the General Society of Vasbouragan. Part 1: "An Account of the Glorious Struggle of Van-Vaspouragan," 129 pp. (a translation of Mukhitarian's series published in *Hayrenik Amsagir*), and Part 2: "The Epic Story of the Self-Defense of the Armenians in the Historic City of Van," by Haig Gossoian [Haykaz Kosoyan], 62 pp. Both parts were translated by Samuel S. Tarpinian, with a foreword by William Saroyan. In French, a collective volume was published in the immediate aftermath of the events, *La Défense héroïque de Van (traduit de différents journaux arméniens)* (Geneva: Drochak, 1916).

Among first-hand testimonies are Armenak Ekarian's *Memoirs* and, for a broader perspective, *Vaspurakan: Van-Vaspurakani aprilian herosamarti tasnhingamiakin artiv, 1915-1930* [Vaspurakan: Van-Vaspurakan on the Occasion of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Heroic Struggle of April] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1930). This is one of the most complete accounts about Van at the turn of the century, the resistance of 1915, and the fate of the Vanetsis after the evacuation. Moreover, this is the only book, to my knowledge, in which a short biographical note on Gurgen Mahari's father is found (p. 248). On the retreat and the successive waves of return between 1915 and 1918, see Armenak Maksapetian's article in the same volume, and Eghishe Vardanian, *Vaspurakani nahanj biurotse* [The Anabasis of Vaspurakan] (Boston: Azg, 1920).

tion, "How did it happen?" is not really of a historiographical nature.

It depends on who's writing the history...

There is more to the fact that Mahari never explicitly relates the events but only evokes them offstage, in the background. *The Burning Orchards* is a satirical novel or a tragedy, its readers are free to decide. The most important point is that it is not a historical novel. Mahari's entire conception of the novel is at stake here. This conception can be characterized by a single term: he was writing a dialogical novel. A dialogical novel is one in which the whole of reality and all of the events are presented through a dual prism: the prism of "ways" and the prism of dialogues, a constant confrontation of various discourses. I will review the nature and the function of this dual prism. It must be noted that what has previously been said here about the history of Van, the revolutionary movement, the self-defense of the city, and the fate of the Armenians, appears only through this double refraction, in the familiar milieu of Ohannes Agha, Mihran Manaserian, and the other characters. This means that it is not possible to identify a single opinion as that of the author, at least formally. On the contrary, the novel is the organized and systematic presentation of all possible opinions, those of the actors themselves, the people who lived and experienced the day-by-day deterioration of the situation until the final disaster. That is why it is absurd to attribute to the author (as many of Marhi's critics have done) any expressed opinion—not the American physician Ussher's, nor Aram's or Ishkhan's, nor the news-monger Gandoyan's, nor Ohannes Agha's. Why not the opinions of Jevdet the executioner as well? Each one has his own point of view or perspective to which the novelist had to give its proper place. Consequently, the whole problem of the novel was one of multiplying the genres, of favoring the encounters and the situations where these various points of view could express themselves. What we are dealing with is a perspectivist novel. Perhaps Mahari would have gone out of his way to say that the novel is perspectivist in its very essence.

I will give a single example of what I am contending here, and it is a central one, because it also contains the "philosophy" characteristic of Mahari's dialogism. The scene occurs at the end of the novel: it is the last encounter between the brothers Ohannes and Gevorg. Soon after this scene, Gevorg will go out and die a stupid and meaningless

death on the barricades. Once again, the discussion revolves around Van, the significance of the name. This has been a constant topic of various discussions throughout the novel: what does it mean to be a Vanetsi, an Armenian of Van? We need to formulate an answer to this question because we live here, and our living here becomes an object of creed, something we need to understand. The question, in others words, is about the "essence" of Van, its place in history, its significance for those who are its "sons" and "representatives." The conversation then moves on to the meaning of "history" itself, and Gevorg feels the need to begin with a genealogy, from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, to Aram:

> "Aram?" asks Ohannes, amazed.
>
> "Why are you so surprised? In history as well as outside history, there have been hundreds of Arams."
>
> "In history, I understand what that means, but what does 'outside history' mean, for God's sake?" Ohannes Agha wanted to probe the question further.
>
> "O.K., I'll explain it. There is Aram Pasha, for instance . . . and also Aram Sabunjian, right? . . . Aram Pasha, whether we like it or not, belongs to history, while Aram Sabunjian, who also is an Aram, can't be considered as belonging to history."
>
> "I get the point. Now tell me this: you and me, do we belong to history or not?"
>
> "It depends. It depends on who's writing the history."[26]

Mahari is dealing with those who "do not belong to history," those who are outside history. This is no longer an issue of novelistic technique (a technique enabling the author to look at history through the prism of non-historical characters). This is a principle, or perhaps it would be better to say, a novelistic philosophy. In this exchange on history and the example of Aram, there is again some perceptible sarcasm but on a grievous note. The multiplicity of opinions, the colliding words, the infinite conversation on ongoing events, this too is "history," but another history, very different from the history of historians. No one will change the course of events, and even Aram, whether we like him or not, is part of it. We (Ohannes and Gevorg) do not take part in the events, we will never have any influence on them. Nevertheless,

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[26] Ed. A, p. 504; Ed. B, pp. 495-96.

the Event becomes what it is through us, because we are following it step by step, we are talking about it endlessly, we are making it emerge and happen through our words and, yes, through our perspectives. All things considered, even the historians—later on, when they come to write about the "heroic defense" of Van—will themselves do nothing else but enter into our conversation. They will protract our utterances; they will repeat them in a slightly more scientific and documented way; they will multiply *ad infinitum* the pro and contra of our exchanges; they will pay their tribute to the dialogism of history.

The entire picture of Davo's betrayal
appeared before his eyes...

Dialogism is a novelistic principle and a view of the world.[27] Mahari carries out this principle as he allows the events to filter through an infinite conversation between the protagonists, where gravity and irony are always side by side, where farce and tragedy get on together. However, this method becomes dubious when the protagonists are actors of the "first rank" who belong to "history," independently of any dialogism. Which dialogism is it possible to perform when Aram

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[27] I have borrowed the term "dialogism" directly from Julia Kristeva. I first encountered it more than twenty-five years ago in her preface ("Une poétique ruinée") to the French translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problemy poetiki Dostoievskogo* (2d ed., 1929), published under the title *La poétique de Dostoïevsky* (Paris: Seuil, 1970). Dialogism is above all an organization of the novel as a confrontation of discourses. It consists of a particular attentiveness to the discursive dimension. It is not necessary here to examine Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic nature of the novel in its entirety. The truth is that I take the opportunity of this study of Mahari to recreate very similar if not identical categories. I retrieve a conceptual setting, which seems to me necessary if we want to understand what happens in Mahari's novel. This conceptual setting comes to me from the novel itself, from the problems it raises, from its confrontation with history, from the fundamental difference between the fictional project and that of historical testimony. On the horizon the Catastrophe is always waiting, the Catastrophe that happened but was never revealed, precisely because of the ongoing monologism, which simply means the naive interpretations, the politicization of discourse beyond all measure, and the "propaganda war." These features are worthy of a conceptual retrieval ad hoc. There will always be time afterwards to ask what this reconstruction owes to Mikhail Bakhtin or to Julia Kristeva. Silva Bodosyan incidentally speaks of Mahari's "polyphonism" and the "dialogic nature of his prose" (the Armenian equivalent for "dialogic" is *tramakhosakan*), without making explicit reference to Bakhtin and without establishing the link between dialogism and the novelistic project as a whole, in particular regarding the transformation of the testimonial narrative [*Gurgen Mahari*, pp. 202-03].

and Ishkhan are on stage "in person"? Thus we have to examine how Mahari maintains the dialogic principle unimpaired, even in this case. What are the means that enable him not to fall into the shortcomings of the "historical novel"?

Here we will consider Chapter 14 of the novel, where the subject is Davo's betrayal. This is one of the well-known episodes of the revolutionary movement in Van; it took place at the very beginning of 1908. Davo (David) was one of Aram Manukian's closest collaborators. He knew everything about the activities of the underground party and in particular he knew the hideouts where the arms were stored. At the end of 1907, he suddenly and angrily broke with Aram, who had supplanted him at his fiancée's side. The party did not give in to his recriminations but simply decided to oust him. Apparently they did not want to do away with him physically because of his past services to the party and also because they had no reason to do so. Davo took the opportunity to escape surveillance, went to the Turkish police, and laid out all the secrets he knew.[28] This was a terrible episode, for it led to the loss of thousands of guns that the militants had been smuggling in for years, with hundreds of lives sacrificed for this purpose. The Armenian quarters of Van were besieged, searched, and ransacked for months. Hundreds of people were arrested and tortured. In the novel, Mahari limits the narrative to the betrayal itself, without speaking of its terrible consequences for the inhabitants of Van. Obviously, he is interested only in the somewhat ridiculous role that Aram allegedly played in the matter. However, the narrative of the betrayal intervenes in the formal framework of a complex novelistic protocol, which I will now try to describe and discuss.

The chapter in which Mahari inserts this narrative situates the action

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[28] It is obvious that I have reported the facts according to the "Armenakan" version, cf. Armenak Ekarian, *Memoirs*, pp. 147-48. Mahari remained faithful to the memory of this party until the end of his life. Hambardzum Eramian is more careful. He gives the same version of the Davo incident but adds, "at least that is what people were saying." *Hushardzan Van-Vaspurakani* [Monument of Van-Vaspurakan], 2 vols. (Alexandria: Kasabian, 1929), vol. 2, pp. 77-78, cited hereafter as *Hushardzan*. Vahan Papazian gives a completely different version in his memoirs, where there is no mention of a "fiancée." In this version, Davo had raped a poor girl (or simply had relations with her) and she had become pregnant. The committee then apparently decided to punish him. See Koms [Vahan Papazian], *Im hushere* [My Memoirs], vol. 1 (Boston: Hayrenik, 1950), pp. 509-11. On the same episode (and again from a Dashnak point of view), see also Levon Meloyan, "Davoyi davajanutiune" [Davo's Betrayal], *Hayrenik Amsagir* 1 (July 1923): 49-60.

in the idyllic setting of Kheka monastery, whose owner and occupant is Mihran Manaserian. The "present time" of the chapter is set in the wake of an incident that has taken place the day before during an eclipse of the sun: an outburst of sexual desire on the part of Mihran directed at Nana, the young wife of the Turkish mudur. The small group of *fedayis* has convened around Aram and Ishkhan at this "summer resort" in order to make a decision concerning the liquidation of one of their members who is accused of having expressed doubts or antipathy toward Aram. The episode is situated perhaps in 1914, years after the actual betrayal by Davo. The other leader of the group, Ishkhan, an "historical" character in the novel as much as Aram himself, allows his mind to wander, and in so doing he breaks solidarity with Aram yet without ever pronouncing a single word against the decision to liquidate a member of the group. Thus, little by little, Mahari considers the whole scene through Ishkhan's thoughts and he does not let go of this point of view until the end of the chapter. Ishkhan himself is assailed by doubts:

> Was their action good or bad? Will they be able to represent for their people what Moses represented for his people and lead them to the Canaan of happiness? The Ottoman Bank episode, Khanasor, the assassination of a pasha—does the sum of these isolated parts constitute a national liberation from the yoke of the Turks?[29]

The doubt expressed here is the most general one. A revolutionary leader suddenly gives way to a radical questioning of his own action, in terms that could have been those of his enemies among the Armenians. Of course, the doubts attributed to Ishkhan are nothing but a repetition of the fierce critique the Armenakans and their heirs always directed against the Dashnaktsutiun. Their only originality here is that Mahari puts them in the head of a Dashnak leader. Meanwhile, Aram is spouting off. In this context, Ishkhan suddenly remembers Davo's betrayal. Consequently, the episode is not retold directly, as for example by the author as narrator but as refracted through Ishkhan's consciousness, thus giving it at least a double framework. First, the meeting of fedayis is framed by the episode of the visit of Kamal,

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[29] Ed. A, p. 289. Khanasor is the place where Dashnak fedayis carried out a punitive raid against a Kurdish tribe in 1892 and has since been recalled as the name of a high deed.

the Turkish mudur, and his wife Nana to Kheka.[30] Secondly, the betrayal and its narration intervene during Aram's tirade against a new black sheep inside the group.[31] At the end of the Davo episode, we come back to Ishkhan, for the incident has been reported from Ishkhan's point of view, as a dialogue that he is holding with himself:

> This whole story had gone through Ishkhan's mind so often, as though it were a series of magical images retrieved thanks to circulating stories and suppositions and private imagination. Now again, the entire picture of Davo's betrayal appeared before his eyes while the open-air meeting continued around Aram in order to examine the fate of a new traitor.[32]

Circulating reports, guesses, and assumptions gives a necessary coherence to the narrative; the whole matter has been enhanced by the force of popular imagination or perhaps by Ishkhan's imagination. In any case, popular rumor plays its role, even if Ishkhan is perfectly aware of what really happened. Here again, one sees how the dialogic principle is carried out in the novel, this time by means of an indirect narrative and a dialogue that a character carries on inside his head. Thus, the real incident is presented through the prism of an individual consciousness or more accurately a critical (albeit silent) discourse, dependent on a multiple refraction, for that consciousness itself receives the event only in the form of a rumor and gives form to it through assumptions, guesses, and imagination.

At the end of the episode, the sarcastic tone takes over, again in the form of doubts attributed to Ishkhan. He imagines the suffering of mothers who saw their sons leave in order to propagate the good news; many of them fell by the wayside, "and this road was called the road to freedom."[33] What consequence follows from all this? They wanted to kindle a fire in the hope that the European countries would come running to their aid. They failed pitifully in their actions against the Red Sultan, Abdul-Hamid II. "They left their native villages but they did not bring any benefit to their fatherland. In the name of the

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[30] Unfortunately, in the present context I cannot draw upon the "sexual" aspect of the Davo incident and its relation to the sexual episode between Mihran and Nana. In both cases, as described and connected to each other by Mahari, the issue is clearly one of transgression.

[31] Ed. A, pp. 292-303.

[32] Ed. A, p. 303.

[33] Ed. A, p. 305. Excised in the second edition.

great cause, they entered into the country, but their foolish policy transformed them into cloven-hoofed and fratricidal Cains."[34] These lines were later removed by Mahari. It is clear that they reiterate a general and unnuanced condemnation of the revolutionary movement, in the full knowledge that the latter aspired to be a movement of "national liberation." It is also clear that Mahari has the right to call this movement to account, when we know that the culmination was a Catastrophe. When Mahari puts these doubts in Ishkhan's mind concerning the benefits and the consequences of the revolutionary action, he judges everything against the Catastrophe, the final event, tantamount to a conflagration, with no political undertones. Dialogism "depoliticizes" events and thus opens the way to a possible interpretation of the Catastrophe. Dialogism as a novelistic principle and as a view of the world transforms the total event and frees it from the matrix of partisan debate. On the contrary, all partisan discussions of the cogency or the justification of the liberation movement contribute to veiling the disaster, to ignoring it and suppressing its content. This is how the novelistic dialogism is in direct relation with the Catastrophe. Perhaps it is a snare or an inducement to give way to the Catastrophe as such.

Oh Cain, wretched, miserable Cain...

Now I would like to offer another illustration of dialogism as carried out through the fictional technique of the refraction of events. This will entail focusing on one of the central questions of the novel: the murder of the father. The example revolves around the character of Mihran and draws on several scenes where he is in the spotlight. One of these scenes is the wrenching chapter in which Mihran is on his way to Kheka monastery, after the Turks have left the region, during the brief period of autonomy under Russian occupation (May-July 1915). Mihran journeys through villages that are empty, devastated, burned out, where the only remaining inhabitants are cadavers, feral dogs, and somewhere a senile old man, a strange survivor gone mad.[35]

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[34] Ibid. This passage has been completely suppressed in the second edition.

[35] Here again it seems that Mahari is echoing a passage from Armenak Ekarian's memoirs, where he tells the story of how his militia came across dozens of entirely deserted villages (during the second retreat of Van in March 1916), and discovered, on the shores of Lake Arjak, a young girl who had lost her mind and was under the delusion that the

There have been critics who were so perverse as to take Mahari to task because, they assert, he did not describe these scenes of devastation and massacre "for themselves" but only for the purpose of "punishing" his character by inflicting an unbearable experience on him. This absurd rebuke is nevertheless revealing. According to these critics, Mahari should have described the massacres and the devastation of Armenian villages in order to denounce them, to produce an indictment. The fact is that there is not one word of denunciation in this novel. The aforementioned critics expected the novelist to present one more discourse of testimony and proof, the only literary response to the Catastrophe that Armenians have offered for more than eighty years.[36] But the novel is neither a legal proceeding nor a moral tale in which the author might have expressed his own moral indignation. Meanwhile, we should understand that the principle of dialogism annuls this disastrous will to prove over and over again. The deaths, mutilations, and misery are not presented in order to provide one more testimonial. They are addressed to Mihran, and it is Mihran who witnesses them, who must face them and understand the ominous nature of the disaster.

> What has happened, my Van, my beautiful brunette, whether or not you believe what your eyes are seeing, there are no more Turks, no Jevdets, no Akiahs left in Van. The rich and the poor Turkish homes, the buildings and the government offices that yesterday inspired fear, are empty now. And the six vilayets are trampled down. They swing their swords without mercy, they don't ask who is who, mother or child, master or servant. They kill by the hundreds and thousands, and they pillage as well, they deport people to the fields, to the mountain passes and the valleys, so that the cities do not reek of death, and the plague does not devour the hordes that are responsible for spreading death and devastation.[37]

Mahari is conversing with Mihran. He discusses the Catastrophe,

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townspeople had all gone to a wedding. See Ekarian, *Memoirs*, pp. 281-84. Mihran's journey is to be found in Edition A, pp. 589-96; the senile old man (who also believes that his family has gone to a wedding) appears on pages 590 and 595.

[36] I devoted a good part of my seminar on "Literature and Catastrophe" (Paris, 1993-95) to an attempt to understand the compulsion to prove the reality of the genocide as the characteristic feature of the post-Catastrophic era.

[37] Ed. A, p. 563.

he talks about the Catastrophe, from the "point of view" of the Catastrophe. Perhaps he never ceased conversing with Mihran his whole life long. Do Mahari's critics understand what it means to have been engaged in a lifetime conversation with the killer of one's father? For that is how long it took Mahari to write *The Burning Orchards*. He needed a lifetime to direct this discussion, to organize it, to give it a form free of himself, free of his own resentment. This was our entire twentieth century's discussion as well, for it revolved around the Catastrophe, with the paternal catastrophe at the core.[38] Was that the point we were headed toward? Was that the aim of so many deaths and murders?

Suddenly, in the midst of Mihran's internal dialogue, Mahari makes him reveal his own truth, which is also Mahari's truth, hidden until now:

> No, Mihran Manaserian has nothing more to do.
>
> He has condemned himself to a life of isolation. In a word, he deserted, he who had been a true Dashnak, a faithful follower of Aram Pasha, the head of the revolutionary committee of Hayots Dzor, the lord and master of Kheka monastery and all its appurtenances, Mihran Manaserian, who in the name of the cause had shied away from nothing, *who had made his own sister a widow and his own nephews orphans*. He had nowhere to escape.[39]

This passage is not the only one in which Mahari reveals the true identity of Mihran and puts him in a position where he must question his life and remember the murder of his brother-in-law. The murder has been mentioned twice before. The first time occurs in the first scene in which Mihran appears in the novel, through a dream:

> Aram Pasha is sitting at his desk, his legs stretched out on a chair. One of the lenses of his glasses is clear, the other is black. One of his hands looks normal, the other resembles a bear's claw. He does not speak, he clears his throat; he does not clear his throat, his voice sounds as if it were coming from a broken record player.
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> "What?. . . . That's the question. . . . Right now, the most important issue is the liquidation of the Armenakans."

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[38] The expression "paternal catastrophe" is from the French "catastrophe paternelle," for which I have found no better translation.

[39] Ed. A, p. 565, my italics. This passage has been severely altered in the second edition.

This was how Aram Pasha spoke, almost, as Mihran stood before him, holding the gun in his hand.

"Why are you showing me that gun? Is that what you used to kill your brother-in-law? How?. . . Like this? In return you inherited the entire monastery, with all the lands and cattle. Hayots Dzor is now yours. You are famous in politics and your word carries weight. The head of the Hayots Dzor committee."

Now the revolver is no longer in his hands but in Aram Pasha's, and he tosses it into the air and catches it with his claw-like hand.

"Mihran, Mihran," he clears his throat, "you have no character, you have no will, you are weak. . . . I don't even consider you a man. How could you have committed such a crime, for mere material security? You widowed your sister and made her children fatherless. Did you do this in the name of the cause, in the name of dis-cip-line? Wasn't your brother-in-law a good Armenian, even though he was our op-po-nent?"

"I didn't kill him," says Mihran, "the bullet went off by accident while I was cleaning the gun. . . ."

"Ha ha ha," laughs Aram, "take this gun, and this list. We don't need the Armenakans, we don't need local diplomats. . . . Eliminate . . . Eliminate, that is all. . . . If not, I'll take back the monastery, the lands, the cattle. If you don't obey me I'll banish you from the paradise of Hayots Dzor. Oh Cain, wretched, miserable Cain."[40]

The dream then continues with a burial scene where the deceased is the victim of "a brotherly bullet, or a tragic accident"![41] Mihran goes into his bedroom, looks in the mirror and is taken aback at the sight. In the mirror he sees the dead man looking back at him, his sister's husband, Mr. Grigor (as a matter of fact, Mahari uses his own father's name here; let us not forget that we are in a dream). The dead man speaks:

"In truth, you are a real son of a bitch . . . for having killed me under your own roof on a calm spring evening. Was it a premeditated

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[40] Ed. A, pp. 246-47. This passage was completely removed from the second edition, so that Aram could not be seen as the instigator of the murder. Cf. Ed. B, p. 247.

[41] Ed. A, p. 247. This sentence was left intact in the second edition because it supports the idea of uncertainty rather than confirming the murder. In the reality of Mahari's life, mourning and burial were impossible because of the uncertainty regarding his father's death. The Catastrophe is tantamount to this impossible mourning. The dream retrieves this "reality."

move, or just a nasty accident? Who cares?"[42]

The dead father entrusts Mihran with the education of his children, and then continues:

> To return to partisan questions, it is clear that your party consists of insane and ignorant people; that is why it will never be victorious. You will glorify yourselves for your defeats and your deaths, like pall-bearers. Your favorite song will be a burial hymn; your favorite color will be black; your favorite scent will be incense. No one can rule the world through hatred. . . . Flowers were not created to adorn the caskets and tombs of martyrs and the martyred people.[43]

Mihran is clearly a fictional character, he is not Mahari's uncle Tigran. A novelistic transformation is amazingly able to capture the lethal core of an entire life, retrieved in dialogic form through the character's dreams or his summary of his own life. One can see that Mahari had no intention of denouncing the murder of his father by a Dashnak militant, sixty years after the fact.[44] On the contrary, he has reconstructed the tragic character of the murderer, wanting to set him free, to follow him through his mistake and his downfall. He even

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[42] Ed. A, p. 248. The passage is slightly but significantly modified in the second edition.

[43] Ibid. These lines were removed from the second edition.

[44] The father was also a school principal, who had probably opposed the Nor Serund (New Generation) "anarchist" movement among his students. In *Hishatakaran nvirvats 1896-i ev 1915-i Vaspurakani herosamartnerun* [Memorial to the Heroic Struggles of Vaspurakan in 1896 and 1915] (Teaneck, NJ: General Society of Vasbouragan, 1945), an article incidentally relates how Grigor Ajemian was beaten up by a group of young students, members of Nor Serund, for having expressed his disapproval of their movement. It is alleged that they stole his gun as well. However, the author of the article (who identifies himself only as Arsen) adds, "This punishment was very controversial. Our leaders [Dashnak] did not approve of this and reprimanded us. They took back the gun and returned it to its rightful owner" (pp. 40-41). There is no mention of the murder of Grigor Ajemian. In the volume *Vaspurakan*, p. 248), there is this short biographical note: "Ajemian, Grigor [Krikor]. Armenakan. One of Mkrtich Portugalian's students. Well known and influential member of the Armenakan Party, killed by accident in 1907. His son, under the name of Gurgen Mahari, belongs to the generation of young poets in Armenia." The Armenian text reads: *patahakan vtangov spannvetsav 1907-in* ["was killed by an accidental danger in 1907"], which makes no sense. The correct reading should be: *patahakan gndakov* ["by an accidental bullet"]. It is extremely interesting that the only reference to this death in a testimonial volume repeats the theory of an accidental death, and makes a Freudian slip, as a result of which the very sentence relating to the death is made incomprehensible.

wanted to enter into his dreams, where no one could dare to judge him. Not even the assassinated father judges him; rather, he entrusts his children to his assassin. Perhaps Mahari wanted to understand how a man, Mihran by name, was able to commit such an act. Perhaps he desired to reconstitute his life in order to bring an end to his childhood obsession and the uncertainty to which he had been so long condemned by his own family. Of course, he had already addressed this at the age of twenty-five, in the first pages of his autobiography. But he had only written the uncertainty then. He had not really written the murder. He had not made the connection with the discussion that went on all through the Armenian twentieth century, on the role and the significance of the national liberation movement. Most importantly, he had not yet understood the father's murder as paternal catastrophe. He did not yet have the means to do so. The murder was simply an episode in his life, testified to in a barely fictionalized report.[45]

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[45] The two most important testimonial works concerning this period, which I have cited repeatedly up to this point, do not leave the murder of Grigor Ajemian unmentioned. Ekarian describes the situation in Van after his return in 1908:

> As I learned about the internal situation, I heard about heartbreaking events. The saddest and most scandalous of these was related to the movement named Nor Serund, which had wrought havoc on the moral level. These were students who had lost their heads; they were organized by the Dashnaks, an organization whose only aim was to destroy the foundations of social and moral life among Armenians. They were against religion, against family and scholarly authority, against laws and concepts of morality. These were utterly degenerate anarchists who had no qualms about organizing uprisings in the schools, and who beat up their teachers and principals in the streets. Of those teachers, I would like to recall the names of Grigor Ajemian and Hovhannes Guloghlian. The former was later assassinated by them. . . . After having ordered the assassination of Grigor Ajemian, who was an Armenakan leader and an influential professor, the Dashnak Party took over all the schools in Van, with the exception of the Eramian School and the Varag Seminary, whose director was Artak Darbinian [Ekarian, *Memoirs*, pp. 153-54].

Hambardzum Eramian, for his part, recalls that the Turkish police were looking for suspects among his students, a number of whom were indeed members of Nor Serund. Eramian stood up for these students. He explains:

> A tragic event would further complicate the Nor Serund affair. During that same week, Grigor Ajemian was shot. Many claimed that Nor Serund was responsible, others said that his brother-in-law, who was on the same political side as themselves [the Nor Serund members] shot him by accident. The government conducted a formal investigation and, in the office of the headmaster of Santekhtian School, found copies of Nor Serund's monthly publication, which poor Ajemian had received regularly. In one of the issues, the students who had been expelled were described as ideological heroes and as victims of their principles [*Hushardzan*, vol. 2, p. 66].

Mahari does not transpose the autobiographical reality into fictional form. On the contrary, this reality can enter into the novel only because the real issue of the novel is the paternal catastrophe, and it enters by way of the dialogic technique of the internal debate, the dream, and the violent contradiction that a particular character, Mihran, is forced to deal with until the end. The murdered father does not denounce or condemn. He sets about debating with his murderer. From now on, through dreams, he will live inside the murderer whose hand was activated by the hated faction. In the mirror of the dream, the figure of Aram takes the place of the Armenakan father. The two figures are intertwined, and in a sense coexist. One does not appear without the other. We are condemned to this irreversible and irreconcilable division. We are condemned to the paternal catastrophe. We are forced to come to terms with it, for an entire life, a whole century.

The reader will have noticed that my commentary, which uncovers the paternal catastrophe at the center of the novel, bears on the first edition of the novel, the only one that Mahari really wanted as it is. The second edition is unacceptable precisely because it destroys the very meaning of the novel, dialogism, the revelation of the paternal catastrophe and, ultimately, what I call the "de-heroization of history."

No human dignity...

In addition to the dialogism and its various aspects (the clashes between diverse points of view, the novelistic presentation of a debate in which the parties are essentially irreconcilable, the radical contradiction within a given character), the novel presents another, no less important characteristic: it declines to give way to any heroization of history. Mahari's critics have noted this point only to take offense at it. Stepan Topjian sees in Mahari's characters nothing but "dirty passions, cruel misdeeds, horrifying vices," in short, no "human dignity." This picture is fairly consistent with the reality. My "only" reservation is that each of these terms must be modified by a coefficient of irony, in particular the last term. No doubt "dignity" is not found in the same place by everyone. Mahari's characters are not the liberators or the freedom fighters of Van. Of the 1915 battles, we perceive only the echo, as consistent with the dialogic principle. No brilliant feat of arms is ever told, no one distinguishes himself by his courage or bravery. The fighting takes place on the barricades and in the trenches, while

the novel's characters hold forth in endless discussions. Even worse, Ohannes Agha goes out of his way to invite his sister-in-law Verzhin to his house (after the death of Gevorg); and not only does he lust for her, but he acts on his desire. In sum, he disregards the consecrated family values that are so precious to the hypocritical critics. Mihran, too, acts on his desire for Nana, the wife of the Turkish mudur. So much for the chapter of "dirty passions."

As for the chapter of "cruel misdeeds," they have been broadly described in the preceding pages: unnecessary cruelties, murders, fratricidal hatred, elimination of opponents—what more is there to say?[46] Under the heading of "horrifying vices," we should probably cite Ohannes' other brother who dies in Constantinople of a shameful disease, because he kept company with "loose women," as they say. Now how shall we classify Aram's sexual capers? Among the dirty passions or the horrifying vices? Aram, the supreme hero, seduces the fiancée of his closest collaborator and provokes the latter's jealous rage. The same Aram goes to bed with his landlord's wife, who in turn shows no particular remorse for her actions. The pathetic husband brags in public, not about his misfortune, for that would be too much, but about his powerful tenant. Again under the heading of dirty passions: for a long time the widowed Verzhin had in fact been a fertile field that only wanted tilling. Mahari (through Ohannes) speaks about this state of affairs in savory language, using expressions from the Van dialect. How is this possible? That our very language, in its most provincial aspects, should harbor in its bosom such incredibly erotic expressions, instead of being the "pure" language we had imagined,

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[46] On this subject, Richard Hovannisian writes:

> To effect these aims and to defend the peaceful population, Dashnaktsutiun would, when necessary, organize fighting units, arm the populace, operate an espionage network, propagandize to raise the revolutionary spirit of Armenians, and, in particular, resort to the terrorization of corrupt officials, traitors, and exploiters. The methods adopted by Dashnaktsutiun were similar to those of the Russian Narodnaia Volia and its successor, the Social Revolutionary party, both of which maintained close contact and ideological bonds with the Armenian leaders [*Armenia on the Road to Independence*, p. 17].

In a footnote (p. 262), Hovannisian adds:

> Opposed ideologically to the Marxists, these organizations believed that individuals could and did shape the course of history. Consequently, the elimination of evil influential persons was a service to humanity. On this premise, "terror," assassination, became a vital tactic of the related parties.

reflecting the pure mores of our provinces?

Now for the chapter of "pride" and "dignity." It is more than true that there is not a single heroic figure in the novel. Hambardzum Eramian, in "real" life one of the great intellectuals from Van, founder of schools and leader of several generations of students, is a target of Mahari's sarcasm because of his "flight" from the area in 1913.[47] Gevorg, the intellectual in the family, rather than educating the minds of the youth, succumbs to his weakness for alcohol, inherits the job of doing the dirty work for the Dashnak faction, and goes to the barricades after a feverish speech, not in the line of heroic duty but only to be killed by a stray bullet.[48] Mihran buries himself in his room, painfully aware of his downfall and petrified by the fear of death. Aram too stays home during the fighting, incapable of leading anything at all. Ishkhan gets stupidly killed in an ambush set up by the Turkish governor. And so it is true: there is no feat of arms, nothing to galvanize popular imagination, not a single character who could be elevated to the national pantheon to serve as a model for future generations. There is a systematic effort in Mahari's work to wring the neck of every idea of heroism, every attempt to "heroize" the characters. This is what he writes in his "Postface, as a Preface," in more moderate terms than mine, to be sure:

> May the old Vanetsis, who now live all over the world, and who burn with nostalgia for their city, forgive me if I did not represent the great and small characters of my novel as saints. They were men and nothing human was unknown to them. It is with great joy that I take their sins upon myself, so as to balance my mistakes and my punishment.[49]

Perhaps after all it is only a matter of taste. To my taste, this effort to demolish all heroism is extraordinary and almost unprecedented. We must understand, however, that this is also the crux of Mahari's project, for several reasons. First, it constitutes the core of what I will persist in calling Mahari's humanism ("nothing human was unknown to them"). It also aims at debunking the dominant faction, which acted upon the minds of men through heroizing its leaders and fighters. It

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[47] Eramian presents the matter in a very different light in *Hushardzan*, vol. 2, p. 194.

[48] The circumstances of Gevorg's death were radically altered in the second edition. No doubt the anti-heroic death was unacceptable to Mahari's critics.

[49] Ed. A, p. 5; Ed. B, pp. 10-11.

questions the very idea that the national parties were actually fighting for freedom. Here again, the Catastrophe as horizon is not far away. And finally, it denounces the reactive nature of heroization, which all nationalisms have perpetuated, partly as compensation and partly as mere deceit. Mahari's censors would have preferred a novel more along the lines of Franz Werfel's, glorifying the Armenians, their will power, their struggle as a minority, their heroic resistance to the enemy, their social values, their liberation movement. Through these critiques, we hear the unquenched desire for recognition. There is no need to call upon Nietzsche in order to understand this desire in terms of resentment. Mahari's magnificence as a man and as a writer lies in the fact that he succeeded in overcoming the psychology of resentment, which was the starting point for an entire generation of writers. By going beyond resentment, Mahari was finally able to uncover the real event, the paternal catastrophe. By fiercely repudiating any delusion, he could reveal the truth about the event.

Fratricidal war...

Now we must make a final effort so that this debate can be developed on a saner basis. *The Burning Orchards* combines epic motifs with satire. At first glance it appears to be a satire, but it is also an epic tale, a modern human, humanist, and anti-heroic epic. But some suspicion will remain until the end. Fifty years after the events, Mahari presents the Armenakan point of view on the catastrophic fate of the Western Armenians. He erects a monument to his father and to the "political" orientation he represented, which he, like many others, paid for with his life. Arguably the greatest weakness of Mahari's critics in Armenia is that they completely ignore this Armenakan past and the terrible confrontation between the two parties (Armenakan and Dashnaktsutiun) in Van. As a result, they ignore the fact that the great Armenian debate which has lasted for a whole century is rooted in this confrontation. We have already discussed some of the questions that animate this debate: Was it really a liberation movement? What else could be done? Was it not necessary to get organized, to educate the people, to bring them to the consciousness of their subjugation, to integrate that consciousness into a centralized and authoritarian movement, and thus to prepare for resistance? On the other hand, the central question that sweeps aside all the others is: how can one give

an account of Catastrophe if one persists in interpreting the history of those crucial years in heroic terms?

It may seem that these questions are of a historico-political nature and thus have no place in the examination of a literary work. This might be true of any other work, but it is obviously false in the case of Mahari's *Burning Orchards*. The ultimate question regarding a possible account of the Catastrophe will in any case remain in abeyance. But there is more to it. The truth is that most of Mahari's critics have already taken sides, even and above all when they demand that history and politics be put aside. All these critics believe that Mahari himself chose his "side" in this debate. They are totally ignorant of the historical roots of the debate, yet they live in the aftermath and they are subject to the consequences. Even Silva Bodosyan, a defender of Mahari, cannot escape the trap when she takes the author to task for not having spoken more about the steadfast Armenian aspiration to political liberty, which according to her has been unwavering for centuries.[50] If Mahari had done so, he would not have laid himself open to the critics: everyone would have understood that he was accusing the Dashnaktsutiun and not the Armenian people![51] Such reasoning is based on biased premises. The truth is that the entire debate is a war of propaganda.

The propaganda war is characterized by resentment, in reality a dual resentment. First there is the resentment of the Armenakans and their heirs toward the faction that ended up holding the upper hand in all the national institutions. But the resentment felt by this latter faction must also be recognized, because it is well aware that all of its activity was cut short by an unprecedented disaster whose breadth and suddenness it could not have foreseen. Mahari's novel, while it erects an Armenakan monument fifty years after the Catastrophe, is aimed precisely against this dual resentment and more generally against the propaganda war. The post-catastrophic novel carries out the metamor-

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[50] "That is the source from which Mahari's irony springs, not against the longing for liberty, the armed resistance, the heroism of the actors, but against the fact that all this was designated by the name of 'revolution'" [Bodosyan, *Gurgen Mahari*, p. 165].

[51] "We would then have avoided the misunderstanding of those who insist that Mahari underestimated the national liberation movements; we would have avoided the gross misinterpretation according to which the responsibility of the Dashnaks before the Armenian people became the responsibility of the Armenian people itself before the Turkish state" [Bodosyan, *Gurgen Mahari*, pp. 166-67].

phosis of the Armenakan position, which had been utterly vanquished and decimated. The novel, here, is a tentative beginning of mourning. It erects a burial vault for the father and his ideas. Mahari's novel was the first serious attempt at mourning after the Catastrophe. The three significant elements we have put forth in our description of the novel (the dialogism, the disclosure of the paternal catastrophe, and the de-heroization of history) document the metamorphosis of resentment. Only the satire is misleading at times, because it attacks the Dashnaks, the faction abhorred by the Armenakan intellectuals (or by "the local diplomats," as Aram called them). This is perhaps the greatest ambiguity in *The Burning Orchards*. The novel aims at the disaster, at writing the disaster. In the disaster there is no faction, no party. In order to approach the disaster, the novelist was obliged to take a position in the propaganda war and, by using satire, to risk a "political" demeanor. Mahari had no choice. The propaganda war cannot be subsumed, it dominates the national life, it draws boundaries and defines sides, it imprints its fratricidal vision of history on everything. It is an integral part of the Catastrophe that fell upon the Armenians.

The Catastrophe never appears as such. It shows up only through oblivion and ignorance. As long as the fratricidal logic of the propaganda war prevails, the Catastrophe will remain hidden, it will not occur, it will remain beyond the horizon. In the fratricidal war, each side pretends to be the noblest representative of the aspiration to liberty and all live in a deadlock, a lethal confrontation, denouncing in the "other" the historical responsibility for the failure, or simply refusing him the right to existence. The failure has always been understood as a treason, from the political murders and the liquidations of 1902-08 to the diatribes of 1967. The fratricidal war is catastrophic precisely because its function is to prevent the Catastrophe from being revealed. But the Catastrophe itself induces this social and psychological structure, in which the propaganda war occupies a central position. In this war, however, the "parties" are not equal and equivalent. For a long time now, one of them has taken over and practically monopolized the vision of history. It left to the other party the monopoly on resentment. This seizure of power coincides with the paternal catastrophe shown by Mahari. After all, it is not merely by accident that in all the accounts of the assassination of Mahari's father, the event is somehow connected with the Nor Serund (New Generation) move-

ment, which propagated anarchist ideas in Van in 1907. Strangely enough, this movement has been denounced as too "extremist" by memorialists on all sides, Armenakan as well as Dashnak.[52] The reasons given for this condemnation are that it rejected any kind of "authority," any "tradition," and consequently any "morality." We must admit that the appearance of such a movement is a true paradox in a purely traditionalist society, which moreover was living in a state of total subjugation where "authority" was in the hands of the dominant people. In sum, the paternal catastrophe was already there long before the Catastrophe occurred. Mahari does nothing but rediscover it around the murder of a father—his father.[53]

What would you do if you were us? Changes...

Following the terrible defamation campaign waged against him, Mahari made sweeping changes to his novel in 1967, in accordance with advice of his "friends." There is no guarantee that the second edition, as we now have it, conforms in any way with Mahari's desire. It was published ten years after his death, with the blessing of his son, Grigor Ajemian.[54]

Mahari made hundreds of changes to his novel. He began by suppressing everything that was too harsh, too hard on the revolutionary

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[52] The correlation established by Armenak Ekarian and Hambardzum Eramian between the Nor Serund movement and the murder of Grigor Ajemian seems to be supported by circumstantial evidence given by Vahan Papazian in discussing Nor Serund and its journal, October 1906-December 1907. He describes the organizations' ideology as follows: "Religion and ecclesiastic traditions were paralyzing prejudices; the clergy was composed of parasites and scavengers. The respect due to individuals and to adults in general (including parents) was considered the characteristic of a slave. Man should not be held back by anything, his liberty was boundless. Scholarly discipline was a tyranny. We had to destroy social classes and authorities that represented the past" [*Im hushere*, vol. 1, p. 486].

[53] There is no discussion of the Nor Serund anarchist movement in *The Burning Orchards*. It is possible that Mahari knew nothing about it.

[54] We noted at the beginning that the insistence on the son's involvement, claimed as a guarantee of authenticity for the second edition, in reality appears as a symptom. Why the son and not the wife? After all, she was Mahari's literary heir. It is clear that Antonina Mahari was willfully ignored during the preparation of the second edition. She had already raised too much dust. A recent personal communication (1998) has substantiated this hypothesis and confirmed the fact that there does exist a final manuscript whose text is different from what was offered in the second edition.

movement and in particular the Dashnaktsutiun. These were minor touch ups, often only a few words in a sentence. He then reconsidered everything that was related to the so-called "responsibility" or "accountability" of the liberation movement in the onset of the Catastrophe. He added a number of chapters, essentially the narration of Van's heroic defense. He changed the circumstances of Gevorg's death entirely. He modified the whole context of the "inappropriate" relationship between Ohannes Agha and his sister-in-law. He severely altered the role of the Turkish mudur. Finally, and to my eyes this is the most tragic and far-reaching revision, he altered the story of the paternal death.

Mahari's friends had probably made it clear to him that his diatribe against the revolutionary movement had unacceptable overtones, as though the Armenians were accountable for their own genocide! This is probably the most portentous question in the whole novel, and also the most difficult one. Should not the Armenians have had recourse to self-defense, should they not have tried to organize themselves, to smuggle weapons in? Should they not have developed an ideology of national liberation and based their actions on this ideology? In the final analysis, what is the relationship between the "liberation movement" (whatever form it took) and the Catastrophe? In the second edition of his novel, Mahari has Arabo refute the theory of provocation (according to which the revolutionary movement provoked the genocidal designs of the Turks and could thus be considered at least partly accountable for the genocide itself) and justify resistance to the oppressor. This justification seems to be self-evident, and precisely because of this self-evidence, it is in fact superfluous. Mahari had never felt the need to justify resistance before, because he had never been against the idea of resistance.

In Mahari's original version, the underlying principles were dialogism as a method and a philosophy; the discourse of the paternal catastrophe; and the systematic de-heroization of history. Without detailing the changes made in the revised edition, let it here suffice to say that it constituted a renunciation of all his principles, a methodical destruction of the novel. Mahari abandons the dialogic principle by narrating the resistance of Van, where he invents new heroes, adopts the nationalistic vision of history, falls into the traps of the historical novel, and erases the paternal catastrophe. The damage has been done and it is irreparable. The true story of the novel

emerges when one considers what happened between the two versions. It is located in the erasure of the father's murder by the hand of Mahari himself. It was not enough for the censors to have expunged all the passages that questioned the value and the heroic validity of the liberation movement. Mahari had to cut out the sacrificial murder of his own father. Popular pressure forced him to return to the theory of uncertainty. Behind these unbounded exigencies, it in fact demanded of Gurgen Mahari that he renounce the Catastrophe, the very idea of Catastrophe.

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