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VARDZK



No. **1**
2015
English Version

The first issue of the Vardzk (Sacred Duty) journal, published in Armenian in 2010, is entirely dedicated to Doctor of Architecture Armen Hakhnazarian, Founding Director of Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA) NGO (now: Foundation)



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2015

English Version

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From the Editorial Board

The members of RAA Foundation (NGO until 2010) always felt the necessity of having a periodical which might present the results of their research and documentation activities unfolded in Historical Armenia and Diasporan Armenian settlements since the 1970s.

However, it was only in 2010 that we were finally able to found a journal targeted at studies of the history and cultural monuments of the Armenian Homeland. It is symbolically named *Vardzk*, namely *Sacred Duty*, in token of the moral obligation of the present and coming generations of Armenians to preserve their ancestral heritage and promote general awareness of it both among Armenians and worldwide.

In commemoration of the first anniversary of Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's untimely death (2009), the first issue of the journal *Vardzk* is entirely dedicated to him.

A LIFE LIVED IN REALISATION OF HIS DUTY TO HIS ANCESTORS' MEMORY

Ever nourished by their sacred native land, in the course of centuries, Armenians have created rich cultural heritage, making the Armenian Homeland a true treasure-house, a museum in the open air.

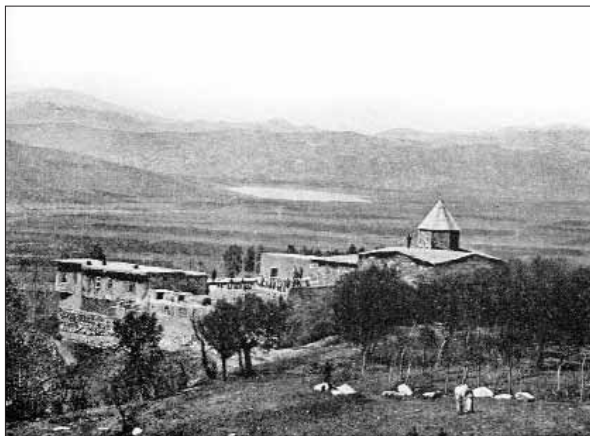
In the aftermath of the Genocide committed between 1894 and 1923, most part of Historical Armenia was annexed to Turkey and another state that had been founded through its efforts, Azerbaijan. Under the new political circumstances, the Armenians surviving in their occupied homeland were practically unable to either preserve their ancestral heritage or study it.

The Republic of Armenia established after 1920 encompassed even less than 1/12th of the Historical Armenian Homeland (Armenia Maior and Armenia Minor): as a result of this, a countless number of Armenian monuments were stripped of their proper owners' care and protection.

After the Genocide, in accordance with a state programme, the historical Armenian districts where massacres had been perpetrated were re-populated by Turks and other Muslims from the Balkans, Mesopotamia and other remote places. However, the monuments still preserved in these lands betrayed the former existence of the exterminated natives, and in order to "solve that problem," Kemalist Turkey applied the Young Turks' "method" perpetrating a new "genocide," this time of the cultural heritage of the slaughtered Armenian nation.

Beginning with the 1920s, the Turkish authorities implemented a state programme aimed at the demolition of Armenian cultural monuments throughout Western Armenia, their actions growing more coordinated and assuming a larger scale between the 1940s and 1960s. The primary targets of these acts of destruction were religious and funerary monuments (monasteries, churches, chapels, cemeteries, cross-stones and tombstones), the most eloquent witnesses of the former Armenian presence. As for castles, bridges, springs, houses, public buildings and other secular structures, they were not destroyed, but stripped of their Armenian inscriptions, primarily those commemorating construction activities.

Until the late 1960s, a great number of religious and cultural centres, scriptoria and spiritual schools, dating back to the early medieval period and the Middle Ages, fell prey to this vandalism, being chiefly exploded. Among them were the churches of Sourb Yerrordutiun (*Holy Trinity*, 5th cent.) in Tekor; St. Hovhannes (631) in Bagavan; St. Gevorg on Lim Island; the uni-nave basilica (5th cent.) and central-domed churches (7th cent.) of Agrak; the churches of Alaman (6th to 7th cents.); the mother churches of Argina and Shirakavan (9th to 10th cents.) that used to serve as Patriarchal residences; the monasteries of Khetzkonk (7th to 13th cents.); St. Sahak (15th to 16th cents.) of Ererin; Krnku (15th to 16th cents.) of Tzevestan; Sourb Astvatzatzin (*Holy Virgin*, 15th to 16th cents.) of Kurupash; Narek (9th to 17th cents.) of Gyavash; Charahan and Spitak (*White*)



Sourb Yerrordutiun (Holy Trinity) Church (5th cent.) of Tekor (nowadays: Digor), Kars Region, as of the 1900s

The same church in 1976 (photo by J. Boll)

St. Hovhannes Church (631) of Bagavan (nowadays: Tashevlek), Diadin District, Erzurum Province, in 1911 and 2008

Karmrvor Sourb Astvatzatzin Monastery (15th to 16th cents.) of Shushants (nowadays: Kevenlik), Van District, Van Province: views from the south-east in the early 1910s and 2006

of Vostan (both of the 15th to 16th cents.); Karmrvor Sourb Astvatzatzin (15th to 16th cents.) of Shushants; Salnapat (10th to 13th cents.) of Koghbants; Sourb Karapet (*Holy Forerunner*; I millennium A.D. to 19th cent.) of Mush; St. Hovhan (10th to 17th cents.) of Yeghrdut; Arakelots (*Apostles'*, 5th to 17th cents.) of Mush; Metzopavank (14th to 16th cents.) of Harutiun; Karmir (*Red*, 16th to 17th cents.) of Hindzk; St. Grigor Lusavorich (*Gregory the Enlightener*) of Muturku, and many, many others. Several thousand Armenian cemeteries were defiled and levelled to the ground, with very few vestiges left nowadays.

It is remarkable to note that the widespread destruction of Armenian monuments was mainly carried out by military forces: in the meantime, neither researchers nor tourists were able to gain entry to the so-called eastern provinces of Turkey.

It was only in the late 1960s, after an interval of over half a century, that certain European specialists in culture were permitted to visit Western Armenia (indeed, under strict control). By that time, however, a lot of historical and architectural monuments had already been totally annihilated.



St. Grigor Monastery (10th to 13th cents.) of Salnapat, Van District, Van Province, in the 1900s (photo by architect Bachmann)
The same monastery in 2007

Horomos Monastery (10th to 13th cents.), Kars Region: views from the north-east in the 1900s and 2008

Sourb Arakelots (Holy Apostles') Monastery (5th to 17th cents.) of Mush, Mush District, Bitlis Province:
views from the west in the early 1910s and 1972 (photo by Dr. A. Hakhnazarian)

Research carried out in Western Armenia from the 1970s until 1980s showed that the demolition of Armenian cultural monuments still continued there. Indeed, the Turkish authorities no longer manifested the “diligence” observed between the 1940s and 1960s: now the historical Armenian heritage was chiefly being destroyed by the local Kurds and Turks who were affected with the fever of finding “the treasures hidden” by the Armenians since 1915, their efforts being encouraged by state propaganda and impunity.



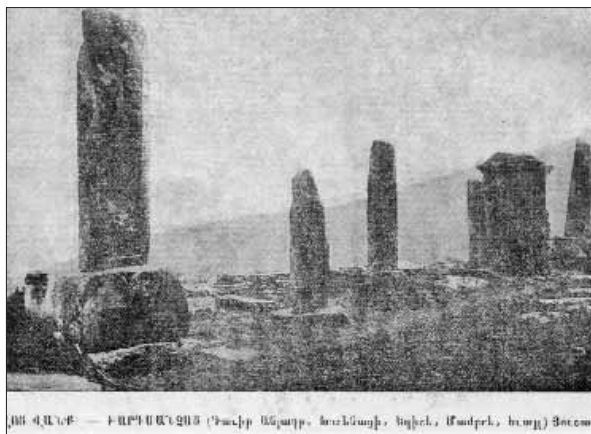
Narek Monastery (9th to 17th cents.), Vostan District, Van Province, as of the 1900s and 2005

Arabkir's mother church of Sourb Astvatzatzin (Holy Virgin), Arabkir District, Kharberd Province, as of 1910 and 2008

Sourb Karapet (Holy Forerunner) Monastery of Mush (I millennium A.D. to 19th cent.), Mush District, Bitlis Province: views from the east in the early 1910s and 2007

The results of scientific studies unfolded in Western Armenia between the mid-1950s and 1980s are especially important and valuable, for many of the monuments documented there during this period are no longer preserved.

Among the researchers who visited Western Armenia during the period specified, mention can be made of architects Paolo Cuneo, Tommaso Breccia Fratadocchi, Hovhannes Marzpanian and others. However, particularly commendable are the activities of two distinguished scholars, Jean-Michel Thierry, a French doctor, and Armen Hakhnazarian, an architect-planner with two doctorates in architecture and technical sciences: the former was eventually permitted to enter Western Armenia in the mid-



The cemetery of Sourb Arakelots (Holy Apostles') Monastery of Mush, Mush District, Bitlis Province, as of the early 1910s and 2007
The same monastery from the east in the early 1910s and 2007

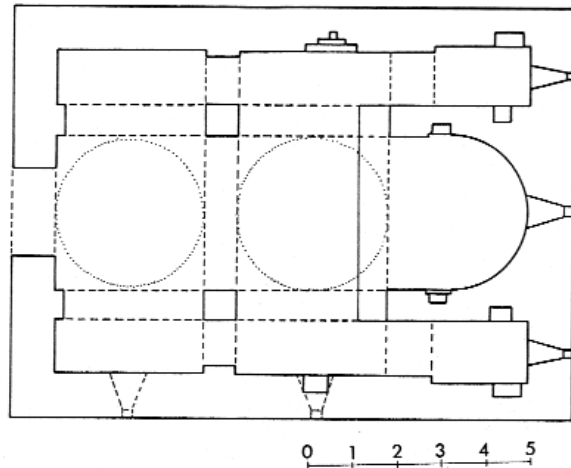
The monastic complex of Horomos (10th to 13th cents.), Kars Region, from the south-east in the 1900s and 2008



Kjav Monastery, Moks District, Van Province, from the south-west and west; its interior towards the east
(photos by Dr. A. Hakhnazarian, 1974)

Dr. A. Hakhnazarian is the only researcher to have photographed this monument before its total destruction in the 1980s.

1950s, and the latter made his first trip there in 1970. Overcoming every possible obstacle posed by the Turkish authorities and neglecting the dangers threatening them, they carried out tireless research in Western Armenia over many decades. Thanks to their efforts, hundreds of architectural monuments were documented—in many cases, for the first time throughout their existence—before they were irretrievably annihilat-



The construction inscription of Kjav Monastery, Moks District, Van Province, which is no longer preserved (photo by Dr. A. Hakhnazarian, 1974); a measurement of the monastic church by A. Hakhnazarian

Kjav Monastery from the south-west in 1974 (photo by Dr. A. Hakhnazarian) and 2008 (photo by S. Karapetian)

Donation inscriptions on a rock adjoining Dolabash Village, Manazkert District, Bitlis Province, as of 1975 (photo by Gundolf Bruchhaus) and 2007 (photo by S. Karapetian)

ed. In this way, they acquired unique archives of photos, records and other materials of historical value regarding Armenian cultural heritage.

Dr. A. Hakhnazarian abstained from publishing the results of his research: he knew from his personal experience that as an Armenian, he would be able to continue his



The monastery of Argelan (14th to 15th cents.), Berkri District, Van Province, from the north-east and west before its collapse in 1976 (photos by Dr. A. Hakhnazarian, 1974)

The same monastery in 2006 (photos by S. Karapetian)

St. Gevorg Monastery (12th to 13th cents.) of Gomk, Karjkan District, Van Province: views from the south-east in 1978 (photo by Dr. A. Hakhnazarian) and 2006 (photo by S. Karapetian)



Armen Hakhnazarian in the mountains of Moks

The church of Putku St. Gevorg Monastery of Moks as turned into an abode for the local Kurds

studies only if he kept them in secrecy. He did not change this strategy even after he had been declared *persona non grata* for Turkey, being obliged to send other researchers to Western Armenia: this is the reason why many of the photographs of his archives were taken by architects of different nationalities, or simply by able and trustworthy individuals whom he supported over many years purely at his own expense.



Armen Hakhnazarian—an outstanding personality and a great patriot infinitely imbued with a sense of moral obligation towards his Homeland and its heritage. Prompted by his patriotism and eagerness to perform his duty to his forefathers and the coming generations of Armenians as well as possible, he became the forerunner of, and the driving force behind, the fulfillment of a mission aimed at the preservation of Armenian cultural legacy and, in a broader sense, national identity.

Armen was born on 5 May 1941 into the family of Arusyak and Hovhannes Hakhnazarian. His father was a native of Agulis (a township in the historical Armenian district of Goghtan) and the only survivor from a large family that had fallen victim to the massacres perpetrated by the Turks in December 1919. Throughout his lifetime, he never forgot his wounded brother's last cries with which he was begging for help, while hiding from the Turks in the gorges of Agulis. In the course of many years, Hovhannes, who was a taciturn person, worked at a book of memoirs entitled *Goghtan District*, in which he provides a detailed account of this slaughter (surprisingly enough, he died immediately the day following its completion, without having ever suffered from any health problems).

Armen would sometimes tell us certain episodes from his father's life, which gave us better understanding of that man's inner world. Of particular interest is the following story.

One day Hovhannes, who was Inspector of the Armenian schools in Teheran, was dining in his place together with his colleagues. During the conversation, the guests started praising their children:

“My son does well at school.”

“My daughter plays the piano perfectly.”

While they were lavishing words of praise on their children, Armen, who had been secretly listening to the adults' talk, was impatiently waiting for his father to likewise compliment him, his heart beating heavily. He thought Hovhannes would at least boast of his climbing trees so dexterously, but all he heard was:

“My Armik [his father called him by this name] has good friends.”

Armen grew very upset upon hearing these words, and it was only from the depth of many years that he realised their significance, for in essence, they were far more important than all the simple praises of his father's colleagues.

In 1959 Armen completed his studies at Kushesh Davtian School, Teheran. He manifested his keen interest in Armenian monuments when still a student of architecture at Aachen University, Germany. In 1969 he defended a doctoral thesis in which he presented the results of his research into the monastery of St. Thaddeus the Apostle located in the historical Armenian district of Artaz (at present: Maku District in West Azerbaijan Province, Iran).

The story of Armen's gaining permission for work in this monastery, located in a border zone under strict military control, speaks a lot about the devotion of a young researcher who had just entered upon a far-reaching path. During a meeting with the king of Iran, held for some students who had received higher education abroad and returned to Teheran, each of these future specialists was given a chance to address the monarch with a request. They were mainly anxious about finding some job, but when Armen's turn came, he only asked the king for permission to carry out long-term research in the monastery of St. Thaddeus the Apostle, and the monarch benevolently met his unusual request.

In 1968 Armen started for the monastery and stayed there for over half a year, measuring it in detail. As already mentioned above, the results of his studies later became the basis of his doctoral thesis.



The old and new buildings of Kushesh Davtian School, Teheran, Iran (photo 2009)
Armen Hakhnazarian as a pupil of this school (photos 1956)

Armen, who had often heard about the deliberate destruction of Armenian monuments in Western Armenia, made his first research trip to this land, abounding in ancestral relics, in 1970. He visited several famous sites only to return home in a state of great confusion and despair: he realised that it was of immense importance to start studies and documentation of the cultural heritage of Western Armenia, but he lacked the financial means necessary for the beginning of the work. A way out was offered by his wife Margrit, a German in origin and an architect by profession who fully shared her husband's concerns and anxieties: she suggested selling her wedding ring to get money for the next journey. Armen followed her advice, the second trip only strengthening his conviction that he should commence long-lasting large-scale research into the monuments of Western Armenia.



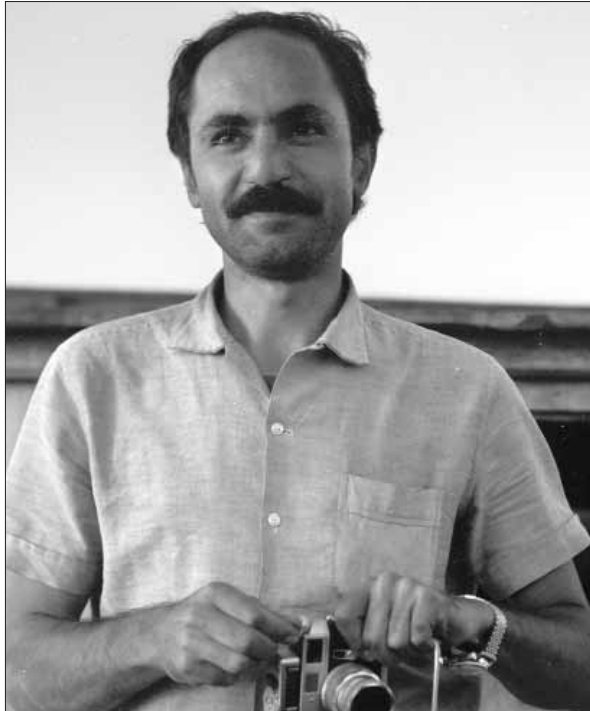
Armen Hakhnazarian with his class-fellows in Teheran, Iran (photos 1960s)

Soon, by a happy chance, Armen got acquainted with Vazgen Barseghian, a physicist and native of Moks (a district in Western Armenia) who lived in New York, USA. Through his financial assistance, in the 1970s he made another six trips to Western Armenia, each of them lasting over two months.

These research trips (Armen considered them as “hunting for khachkars”) were carried out under extremely dangerous and difficult conditions. He constantly had to work under the strict control of Turkish security forces: apart from interrogations, which had already become a commonplace for him, Armen was also sometimes put to prison, this hindering him from pursuing his planned course of action. In the long run, the Turkish authorities declared him *persona non grata*, thus stripping him of the right to make any future trips to Western Armenia. This proscription, however, did not impede the realisation of his patriotic projects.

With Margrit's unfailing support—Armenian heritage was equally dear to her—Armen kept organising long-lasting trips to Western Armenia, Armenia Minor and Cilicia for over two decades, without sparing his modest family budget for the implementation of his sacred mission.

In order to make his work more coordinated and procure some financial assistance, in 1982 Armen officially established Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA)



Armen Hakhnazarian in Vaspurakan, Western Armenia (photo 1972)



Armen Hakhnazarian and prominent composer Aram Khachaturian in Germany (photo mid-1970s)

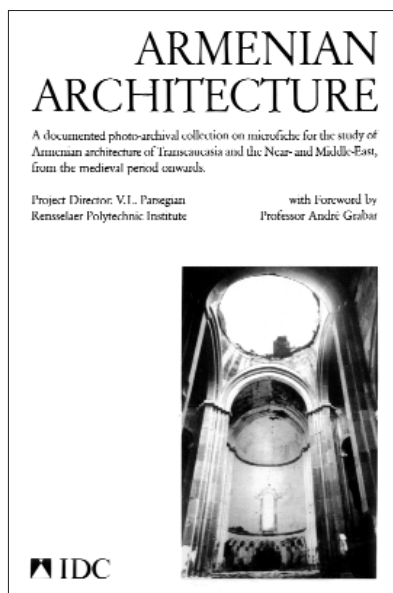
NGO in Aachen, Germany (in fact, it had already been in existence for almost a decade without any formal registration).

In 1980 Armen Hakhnazarian made his first visit to Soviet Armenia, where he had meetings with Vazgen Barseghian and Grigor Hasratian, Head of the country's Principal Department for the Preservation and Use of Monuments. They decided to publish the materials of RAA NGO on microfiche using the most advanced technologies of those times.

Between 1983 and 1990, 7 volumes of microfiche entitled *Armenian Architecture* were published under V. Barseghian's patronage, each of them containing 4,000 to 5,000 images, measurements and texts not only from the RAA archives but also from the collections of the aforementioned Department. Later the work stopped due to the



The 7 volumes of microfiche (1983 to 1990) published under Dr. Vazgen Barseghian's patronage; a microfiche reader



shortage of financial means; besides, modern technologies already allowed the preservation of any form of data through digitisation.

Those having the same interests and goals are predestined to meet one day: I got acquainted with Armen Hakhnazarian in 1989, and we decided to collaborate.

Through the endeavours of a group of Iranian Armenians who were well-informed about the work of the RAA and shared Hakhnazarian's interests and concerns, in 1996 it opened a branch in the USA, with Shahan Harutiunian heading it.

In 1998 RAA NGO was registered in the Republic of Armenia. Its Yerevan Headquarters were established in the Institute of Art of the National Academy of Sciences

of the Republic of Armenia thanks to the good will manifested by Levon Hakhverdian of blessed memory, then Director of that Institute. On 22 February 2000, the official opening of the RAA Yerevan Office was held¹ (in the same year, the organisation was re-registered in accordance with the legislation of the country).

The official registration of the organisation in the Republic of Armenia and the establishment of its Yerevan Headquarters opened new horizons of activity. Its members started digitising its archives containing tens of thousands of negatives, positives, photographs, measurements, maps, and other materials accumulated throughout many decades.

The work gradually becoming larger and larger in scope, a number of new specialists were employed, the budget of the RAA being mostly shouldered by Armen Hakhnazarian. "My wife earns the living of our family, and I am the 'breadwinner' of RAA." This was the answer he often gave to the question about the sources of financial means he provided for the organisation. He would never tell anybody that on one occasion, for instance, he had deprived himself of three canvasses by Ayvazovski, or had sold his paternal house in Teheran to use the money thus gained for the needs of the RAA.

The office was Armen's second family, and the employees were his children.

Armen deeply regretted the impossibility of his participation in the research trips made to Western Armenia, but he often found time to be present at least at the short-term expeditions of the organisation.

Apart from numerous international conferences, from 2007 until 2008, Armen Hakhnazarian also delivered exceptionally interesting talks within the series of weekly lectures held by the RAA for the purpose of increasing knowledge of the Armenian Homeland among the public at large.

¹ The ceremony was attended by Levon Hakhverdian, Director of the Institute of Art, Archbishop Mesrop Ashjian, historian Ashot Melkonian, and others, who stressed the importance of the official establishment of the RAA in Yerevan in their speeches. For details regarding this event, see *Aravot*, no. 33, 24 February 2000, 6.



During the ascent of Mount Ara together with the members of the RAA (23 June 2006)

Through Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's active participation, a number of historical monuments were restored in the Republic of Armenia (the churches of Tatev and David Bek Villages in Siunik Region, Saghmosavank Monastery, and the uni-nave church of St. Sargis Monastery of Ushi in Aragatzotn Region). He also unfolded restoration activities in Artsakh (Sourb Astvatzatzin (*Holy Virgin*) Church in Karintak Village and different buildings of the monastic complex of Dadivank) and Iran (St. Sargis and St. Gevorg Churches in Teheran as well as the monasteries of St. Stepanos Nakhavka, St. Thaddeus the Apostle and Tzortzor).

In the 1980s, within his collaboration with Land and Culture Organisation, Armen Hakhnazarian participated in the restoration of two churches and some houses in Kesab District, Syria.

On 10 June 2008, on the initiative of Tigran Torossian, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, RAA NGO and Dr. A. Hakhnazarian were awarded respectively the **Diploma** and **Order of Honour** of the National Assembly for the extensive research in the territory of Historical Armenia and exceptional services for the preservation of Armenian identity. These awards also commemorated the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the organisation in Germany, and the 10th anniversary of its formal establishment in Armenia.

On 29 January 2009, on the initiative of David Sargissian, Curator of the National Library of Armenia, Hakob Meghapart Medal was conferred on Dr. Armen



During a lecture on the architecture of New Jugha (Yerevan, 29 May 2006)



Visits to the graves of two survivors of the Great Genocide whose memoirs have come down to us: Sargis Avetissian from Aren Village, Artzke District, and Hovhannes Hovhannissian from Arujagrak Village, Basen District (Yerevan, 24 April 2008)



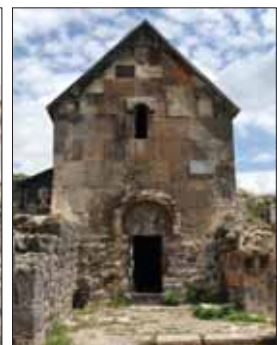
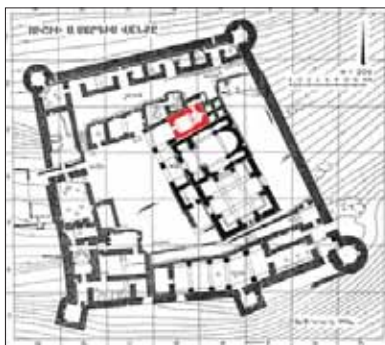
St. Sargis Church in Vanak Quarter of Teheran, Iran, and Sourb Astvatzatzin (Holy Virgin) Church of Darashamb: both restored between 1982 and 1985 with Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's participation



Maghardavank (St. Stepanos Nakhavka) Monastery, Maku District, Iran: restored with Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's participation (photo 2009)



The Ashgarians' house in Kesab, Syria: restored in 1987 with Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's participation; its construction inscription (photos by Raffi Kortoshian, 2007)



St. Sargis Church of Ushi Monastery (10th to 13th cents.), Ushi Village, Aragatzotn Region, RA: restored under Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's supervision



Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian and his colleagues in Sourb Astvatzatzin (Holy Virgin) Monastery of Tzortzor, Maku District, Iran: its semi-ruined church was dismantled and re-erected in a higher place not to be left beneath a water reservoir planned to be built nearby



Saghmosavank Monastery, Aragatzotn Region, RA: restored in 2001 with Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's participation



The monastery of St. Thaddeus the Apostle, Maku District, Iran: circumstantially studied by Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian and later restored with his participation



Dadivank Monastery, Karvajar District, Republic of Artsakh (its restoration started in 1997 under Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's supervision): views from the south in 1993 (photo by S. Karapetian) and 2008 (photo by architect S. Ayvazian)



On 10 June 2008, RAA NGO and Dr. A. Hakhnazarian were awarded respectively the Diploma and Order of Honour of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia

Armen and Margrit Hakhnazarian
Dr. A. Hakhnazarian in Yerevan Office of the RAA (17 June 2008)



On 5 May 2008, the members of the RAA celebrated Dr. A. Hakhnazarian's birthday, without knowing that they were congratulating him for the last time...

Hakhnazarian. He was unable to attend the ceremony, as by that time his health condition had already considerably aggravated, but he had prepared a message of gratitude, which was read for those present:

“I am deeply indebted to the National Library of Armenia for awarding the Medal of Hakob Meghapart to me.

“Like the scriptoria of medieval monasteries, where manuscripts were kept, the National Library of Armenia collects printed books which have always safeguarded the preservation of Armenian culture and Armenian identity in a broader sense.

“Since the 1915 Genocide of Armenians, our ancestral heritage has been doomed to premeditated destruction in our conquered homeland.

“To save the relics of our culture, still preserved in our orphaned motherland, at least on paper, even in their ruined and crumbled state, has been the goal of my life and a sacred duty for the members of RAA NGO.

“Thank you and may you be rewarded for your work. Armen Hakhnazarian.”

On 15 February 2009 (Sunday), we were to hear Armen's voice for the last time. He had rung up to give us his final commandments:

“Always remember Vazgen Barseghian, for he was the very first supporter of our work. May you complete whatever I am leaving unfinished...”

Armen Hakhnazarian died in Aachen City, Germany, on 19 February 2009.



On 1 March 2009, a ceremony was held in Komitas House of Chamber Music in memory of Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian

On 1 March 2009, his memory was honoured at a ceremony held in Komitas House of Chamber Music, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia. Commemorative speeches were delivered by Tigran Torossian, Vardan Oskanian, Rouben Galichian and Hasmik Azizian. Edik Balasanian read Anahit Sargissian's extremely moving poem² dedicated to Armen Hakhnazarian.

² See the Armenian version of *Vardzk*, no. 1 (January-June 2010), 24.



On 17 April 2009, Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian's cinerary urn was interred in the cemetery of Artashavan Village, Aragatzotn Region, RA

On 8 March 2009, Catholicos of All Armenians His Holiness Garegin II conducted a service in Echmiatzin Cathedral in memory of Armen Hakhnazarian. Requiem masses and other ceremonies were also held in Aachen, Köln, Los Angeles, London and Teheran.

Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II granted permission for Armen's interment in the yard of Saghmosavank Monastery, Aragatzotn Region, Republic of Armenia. However, he was against it: as he told his wife some days before his death, once he was buried in the yard of the monastery, other funerals would certainly be held there in the course of time, whereas this should be prevented.

It was Armen's wish that his cinerary urn be buried in the cemetery of Artashavan Village (Aragatzotn Region, Republic of Armenia) situated in a small, peaceful valley not far from the monastery of Saghmosavank, which was so dear to him. His funeral took place on 17 April 2009 in the presence of his wife and two daughters.

On 18 April 2009, a requiem service was held in Saghmosavank in memory of Armen Hakhnazarian.

Armen did not write down his memoirs, but he was fond of telling stories from his



life that had been rich in many different events and experiences. We listened to him with great pleasure, as his narratives were always interesting and taught us a lot.

Below follow some pieces of Armen's memoirs—two stories, which reveal his emotional character and immense devotion to his Homeland and its centuries-old heritage.
by Samvel Karapetian



Putku St. Gevorg Monastery of Moks from the north-east in 1974 (photo by Armen Hakhnazarian)
The same monastery in 2006 (photo by Samvel Karapetian)

In Putku Monastery³

We were four in number walking behind each other. As the way descended, we came down to an abundant river and then again started ascending a narrow path stretching from the foot of the mountain. Having lost the sense of time, I only felt the awakening pain in my left leg.

We had been walking through the gorges of Moks and Shatakh for already 18 or 19 days, spending nights in the Kurdish villages lying on our way as the guests of their heads. Those days, each of which was full of new experiences, had stirred up a boundless sea of emotions in my inner world, although from time to time, my thoughts carried me away to the Seljuk bath-room of Mush: I was looking forward to reaching its salutary hot water and humid air to get rid of the thick layer of dust and sweat covering my body, and especially, of those tiny creatures called fleas and bed-bugs...

I was in the land of my forefathers, who had once planted trees, erected houses and established prospering villages there, constructing churches and monasteries hidden in gorges.

Now we heard the same babble of water symbolising immortality; we saw the same snow-covered peaks, ravines and centuries-old nut-trees, but without the same people. The once Armenian villages of Moks and Shatakh were inhabited by Kurds, their churches and monasteries being either ruined, or reduced to cattle-sheds.

We were walking up the gorge, against the noisy current. In some places, the purl of water was intertwined with the vivifying song of a partridge. I was behind my companions, my cameras hanging down from my neck: I was eager to perpetuate the relics and natural scenes of this unknown, but at the same time, very dear, land to take them with me in the form of photographs.

I had stopped to admire the nature of Moks when I suddenly noticed my companions looking in the direction of some hollow. Approaching them, I stopped petrified with delight and astonishment: an abundant river flowed mysteriously from a dark cavity located in the depth of a huge cavern. Reaching the edge of the rock, it dashed down in an insurgent current, thus becoming the source of the famous river Tigris...

We continued our way up the mountain. The river remained behind us, the velvet verdure of the tableland being sometimes broken by only some small brooks.

Far away we heard dogs barking and soon saw some buildings surrounded with trees—the dear sight of a monastery hidden in the mountains. We were in Putku St. Gevorg Monastery of Moks, which was called *Hanepulik* by Kurds and *Khoroz Kilisa* by Turks, this last name deriving from a rooster relief found on one of the walls of the monument.

We were hosted by Haliz Orhan Bey, a young Kurd—his rifle always over his shoulder—who aroused respect despite his being short of stature.

Haliz Orhan was the great grandson of Murtullah Bey, the Governor of Moks during the massacres of Armenians perpetrated by Sultan Hamid between 1895 and 1896. Despite the order received from the Turkish state and the pressure of his severe tribesmen, he took the Armenian peasants of the entire district under his protection and saved them.

My German friend and I were treated to a meal of wheat berries, which was put on a coloured cloth, spread just on the ground, in a large copper bowl. We were sitting together with the men of the family, our legs crossed. I was eating *matzun*⁴ with bread of barley, at the same time feeling the suspicious, inquiring looks of the Kurds staring at me all the time. Who was I? What was I searching for in those places...?

Having left the others under the plea of washing, I was sitting on the bank of a brook not very far from the monastery, enjoying the serenity of the dusk. Suddenly I heard some quiet steps: an elderly Kurdish woman, the granny of the family hosting us, approached me, looked at me silently for a long time and then started talking and telling me something. Regretfully, I could not understand her, but she went on talking, sometimes turning to the monastery and pointing to something—perhaps, to the Armenian inscription of 1887 carved on its entrance. Then she stretched her hand in the direction of the gorge, gave me a question, but did not get any answer and went on with her story. Her voice betrayed her excitement, and her hands were trembling. I often heard the word *deir*, which means *monastery*. Once or twice she also pronounced the word *Ermen* [the Turkish equivalent for *Armenian*]. She was the daughter of Murtullah Bey mentioned

³ Armen Hakhnazarian distributed several hand-written copies of this story among some of his close friends. It is published for the first time.

⁴ A yogurt-like dairy product.

above and the grandmother of Yashar, our guide in the gorges of Shatak and Moks for over twenty days (he differed from other Kurds in his noble deportment).

I was tired: despite the storm of thoughts raging inside me, sleep overcame me.

We got up before sunrise with the intention of measuring and photographing Putku St. Gevorg after tea so that we would be able to return to Van on the same day. The last part of the monastery to be measured was its *zhamatun*,⁵ which had been reduced to a *tonir*⁶ house. The women and young girls who were baking *lavash*⁷ there were surprised to see us, but treated us to newly-made bread.

Before departure, I was gathering my rucksack, while the others were busy loading their luggage of fresh cheese, a gift from the Kurds, onto the mules. Suddenly the aforementioned aged Kurdish woman came up and stretched a cleanly washed bowl of copper to me: at breakfast she had noticed me trying to secretly wipe the Armenian letters carved on its edge—it was full of fresh milk cream—with bread...

When we were bidding good-bye to our hosts, the men were looking at me with questioning and doubtful eyes, whereas the old granny was smiling.

The Door⁸

Teheran, 1975. The year was drawing to a close, and we were soon to celebrate holidays. The pile of congratulating postcards was gradually rising: pieces of expensive printed paper with only a single line written by hand—a mode of relations typical of the modern world, a habit with which people want to say that they have not forgotten you...

The stamp of one of the postcards depicted Atatürk: it was from Constantinople.

I opened the envelope and found a text typed on two thin sheets, with two small black-and-white photos in folded paper.

The letter was signed by Mrs. Richter. She was writing about one of their neighbours, Ili Said, a retired general who often went hunting with his son in the wooded mountains of Sasun [in Western Armenia]. He had known those places since the years of his military service and had ties in the local villages. That year [1975] the head of Tenkit (Tnget) Village had sent him the following message: “A huge bear has appeared in our neighbourhood from Malato Dagh (Mount Maruta or Maratuk) and keeps causing losses to our village. Bey, we are waiting for you. Please, come and save us from this disaster.”

The general set out for Tenkit with his son, but they failed to reach their destination: in the district of Mush, they were caught in a raging winter blizzard and lost their way. They somehow got to the nearest village, Hirgit (Herkert), and were obliged to stay in the village head’s house for four days, until the snow-storm abated. Then they pulled their car out of snow with the help of the local people and mules, somehow dragged it to the highway and returned to Constantinople.

During their stay in Hirgit, the general and his son ate *tonir* bread and enjoyed the warm *kursi*⁹ watching snowflakes incessantly falling down. At nights they itched themselves desperately up until dawn in a hopeless struggle against lice...

On the third day, after dropping some subtle hints, the village head eventually plucked up courage and led his city-dwelling guests to a cellar close to his stable where “an antique object,” namely, a door, lay hidden beneath straw. “Bey, what’re we to do? The door’s big and heavy; besides, it’s dangerous to take it to Istanbul and sell it. Gendarmes often check luggage and put you in a tight corner once they reveal something ancient. My brother works at the market of Svaz, and my other son’s in Istanbul. We’re thinking of sawing it according to its ornaments to sell it to foreign tourists part by part. What’d you advise? We’re now in bad need of money.”

The general and his son looked at each other.

The blackish double door, which was adorned with reliefs, imparted an atmosphere of mystery to the semi-dark cellar.

5 A large vestibule in Armenian churches (often standing separately) also used for burials.

6 An underground clay furnace.

7 Flat, thin bread baked from wheat or barley flour in an underground furnace.

8 This story was also published in the *Alik*, 6 to 10 May 1997; *Golos Armenii*, no. 69-70; *Garun*, no. 3 (1997), 89-93.

9 A big square chair with a blanket covering it and a container full of burning wood generally put below it.

“You know, agha,” the general’s son finally said in a low voice, “we have a German neighbour in Istanbul who keeps a collection of antiquities. Let’s take a photo of this door before you saw it into pieces. We’ll show it to him: he might agree to buy it.”

“Wait for a while, don’t damage it if you don’t want to reduce its value,” his father added.

“Then we’ll wait to hear from you, bey,” the village head said and again covered the door with thatch.

“...So, Mr. Hakhnazarian, we are sending you the photos taken by our neighbours. The Kurds want about five thousand marks for the door. What is your opinion? We think that the price is high.”

It was beyond doubt that the door belonged to an Armenian church. Although the photographs were small in size and of poor quality, one of them showed some engraved letters which were not intelligible. I read the letter over and over again, sometimes watching the reliefs of the door through a magnifying glass. As if affected by some unexpected fever, I replied to the letter on the same day: “This is an Armenian door. Please, somehow have it moved to Constantinople from the district of Mush. I am waiting to hear from you.”

The letter gave rise to numerous questions. To what church did the door belong? To what year did it trace back? One thing was clear: it was not the door of some ordinary village church.

In April I received a parcel from Mr. Richter: he had sent me a book on the buildings designed by Mimar Sinan, an architect of Armenian origin. While looking through it, I found an Easter card in its first pages. It was a simple postcard, but between the lines of the text written on it, I read a word which told me a lot—Chengili...

I read the word over and over again: it was unbelievable that the door truly belonged to Chengili and used to be located there. I simply could not believe it. The name *Chengili* stirred up a boundless sea of emotions in my mind and awakened my memoirs of my trips to Western Armenia, trips in search of specimens of Armenian architecture, with the goal of saving the crumbled pieces of monuments at least on paper—a photograph or the measurement of some chapel. My mind started travelling through the ways of the past, taking me back, for instance, to the edge of a gorge where I had stopped to take breath. I was in utter despair.

In May 1976 I got another postcard from Constantinople signed by Richter: “Please, stay with us in Istanbul for several days on your way to Europe. The spring of the Bosphorus is marvellous.” The stress was laid on *marvellous*.

* * *

Mr. Richter met me at the airport of Yeshilko (formerly called San Stefano) situated within about half an hour of Istanbul. Both of us realised the goal of my arrival, but we did not drop the slightest hint at it while in the car, on our way home. I was waiting for Richter to start the conversation.

We reached the Richters’ three-storey house on the Bosphorus. I began examining their sitting-room with concealed impatience: they had a lot of ancient pieces of furniture, but nothing unusual. I was shown up into the living-room, where I put my suitcase, and went downstairs for tea.

We were sitting in the balcony. The teacups were empty; all the questions required by the ritual of courtesy had been asked and answered. Mr. Richter slowly rose from his seat and said in a mysteriously low voice: “Let’s go.”

He opened a door and asked me in: I found myself in a small bedroom with a chair, high walls of white, a floor of wood, a bed covered with white cloth, a cross on the wall, and something slanting that was placed against one of the walls, wrapped in a white sheet. Richter closed the door and slowly took away the sheet in silence. The blackish door of wood was in front of me! A miracle! A relic of culture surviving after the massacres of Armenians!

Both leaves of the door were enclosed within a frieze followed by a wider one comprising plant reliefs. Similar, but shorter bands divided each of the two parts of the door into four intricately ornamented sections, three of which were square and one quadrangular.

The squares in the centre of the double door were accentuated by circular floral ornaments reminiscent of the symbol of eternity generally found on the lower part of Armenian cross-stones. The corners of these squares were embellished with two angels, birds, and animals. The chief decoration of the door were the standing figures of apostles and evangelists engraved within two quadrangles. On the left leaf, seven saints could be seen, five of them alike and the other two smaller (one of them showed the baptism of Jesus, with

the sign of the Holy Spirit over him). On the right, four apostles were carved, separated from each other by small columns: Peter was depicted with the key in his hand, while Paul was holding his sword.

The part of the door lock, which was totally broken, bore traces of shots. Its upper and lower sections were seriously damaged by nails.

Apart from its beautiful reliefs, the door also had an Armenian inscription which was not thoroughly intelligible.

At the top of the right leaf: ՇԻՆԵՅԱԻ ԳՈՒՌՍ ՍԲ ԿԱՐՊ...ԻՍ ՉԵՌԱՍԲ ՊԱՐՈՆՍ ՍԱՐԿՈՍԻ (transl.: *This door of Sourb Karp... was made by Mr. Markos*).

At the bottom of the right leaf: ԻԹՎ. Հ.: ՉԿԱ (1312)..... ՇԱՍԱԿԻԻ ԵԻ... ԾՆՈՂԱՅ ԻԻՐՈՅ (transl.: *In the year 761 (1312) ... Shamakyur and ...their parents*).

At the top of the left leaf: ԵՒ ՈՐԳՈՒՆ ՆՈՐԱ ՊԱՐ(Ն)ՈՆ ՍԻՐԱՊԵՏ ԱԻ ԱՍՉԱՏԻՅ... (transl.: *And his son, Mr. Mirapet, and...*).

At the bottom of the left leaf: ԵՍ ՍԱՐԵՊԻՈՆ ՈՐ ԿԱՉՍԵՅԻ... (transl.: *I, Sarepion, who sculpted...*).

I quickly wrote down the inscription, then got up and put the paper in my pocket. Richter again covered the door with the white sheet and we went downstairs. The supper was ready. The maid was coming and going; we were eating, and the meal seemed tasty, but my thoughts had carried me far away.

The only topic of the conversation was the door. “Now I shall tell you.” Wiping his mouth with a napkin, Mr. Richter began: “You cannot imagine the hardships through which the door was moved from Hirit to the city, hidden under some house utensils. We brought it in with great difficulty, in the shroud of night, not directly from the entrance, but from the garden, where a wall was under repairs and there was some open space. As you know, our next-door neighbour is the editor of the *Huriet* so that we were to be extremely careful. You understand, don’t you?”

“Well, so far our efforts have been successful, but keeping the door in our house is a problem. It may be dangerous for us. It is an antiquity, and therefore, part of the cultural wealth of this country so that its conveyance abroad is banned.”

To my hint at giving the spouses Richter the money they had paid for the door, Mrs. Richter said the following after some silence: “You know we did it with great pleasure. Let’s just leave things as they are, for the door is still in our place and we enjoy its beauty. If we succeed in taking it abroad with your help, it will be up to you to decide everything.”

It was late when I went to my room upstairs and lay down, but I could not sleep. I went to the balcony and sat there. In the moonlight, I could see the shadows of some fishing boats in the distance. Everything was undisturbed and only the sound of waves could slightly be heard. It generally brings tranquillity, but I was overtaken by a raging storm. The events of the day and my past experiences had swept on me, arousing more and more questions, and tearing my heart to pieces.

The famous monastery of Sourb Karapet (*Holy Forerunner*) stood in the village of *Chengili*—meaning *belled* in the Kurdish language—situated about 35 km north-east of Mush. When going there, we set out of this city before sunrise in a northerly direction, left behind the village of Garnen and crossed the Meghraget (Karasu). On the other side of this river, we passed by the village of Khoper (Hoper), then turned west and went past the Kurdish villages of Goms (Kyumus), Palas, Tom (Dom), and Ziaret (Tsiaret), which used to be Armenian-populated for many centuries. Due to the heavy shower that had fallen two days before, the earthen road was in some parts completely impassable. Having lost our way, we found ourselves in Dersim by mistake and finally reached Sordar when it was already late. We left our car and luggage near the tea-house in the centre of the village, had some tea there and started preparations for ascending Mount Karke towards the monastery of Sourb Karapet. Our Kurdish guide attempted to talk us out of going there, saying: “The Kurds of Chengili are savages. They aren’t like us...”

Our way to the monastery lay along a narrow path stretching from the foot of the mountain, with bare rocks on one side, and gorges abounding in nut and chestnut, on the other. During the ascent, which took many hours, we saw numerous sacred stones scattered everywhere, with traces of candles on them. On an elevation, the ruined castle of Mushegh Mamikonian could be seen, with a remarkable rock named *Aghdzekants Stone* opposite it. The more we climbed the mountain, the oftener we saw woods of plane: this tree was the symbol of pagan Armenia, and Armenians went to the battlefield with banners depicting it. The

plane of Goghtan, in the shade of which Mesrop Mashtots is traditionally believed to have invented the Armenian letters, is 2,600 years old.

As a rule, Armenian monasteries are hidden in gorges, behind mountains, but Sourb Karapet towers high at a mountain summit, clearly visible from four sides and so lofty that it approaches heaven...

Like many old Christian monuments, it was built in the site of a temple dedicated to pagan Gods Guisane and Dimitr, its founder, Gregory the Enlightener, placing the remains of Bishops Karapet and Atanaguine inside it.

The first prior of Sourb Karapet Monastery was Zenob Glak, one of the adherents of Gregory the Enlightener, after whom it is often called Glakavank (*Glak Monastery*). The nine constantly flowing springs¹⁰ of the monastery gave it another name, *Innaknian (Of Nine Springs)*. It is also known as Sourb Karapet Sultan of Mush.

The history of Sourb Karapet Monastery abounds in cases of destruction and rebuilding: thus, in the 7th century, an earthquake reduced it to ruins, after which its main church, St. Stepanos, was constructed. In the 11th century, Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni erected a palace within the monastery, but in 1058 it was burnt away together with the wooden church of St. Gregory. In the days of the Turko-Persian war (1750), Sourb Karapet was plundered, and its church burnt away. During the Armenian national liberation struggle, namely, in the mid-18th century, the monastery served as an important political centre under the auspices of Father Superior Hovnan. The earthquake of 1784 again demolished the monastic church. In 1788 Sourb Karapet underwent complete reconstruction, during which its narthex was enlarged. Besides, its belfry, monks' cells, scriptorium, ramparts, and other sections were renovated. However, in 1822 it was again attacked and plundered, a lot of valuable manuscripts falling prey to this raid.

The monastic complex of Sourb Karapet, which was enclosed within high ramparts, included a repository of books, a refectory, utility structures, etc., a wall separating the monks' double-floor abodes from pilgrims' rooms.

The church of the monastery used to represent a building of a square plan with 16 pillars. From the west, it was adjoined by a bell tower (1782) which rested on eight columns of marble and also served as a pre-entrance (over many centuries, its blessing toll spread throughout the extensive plain of Mush, where the sacred river Aratzani flows).

The eastern section of the monastic complex consisted of four churches: two uni-nave basilicas and two central ones, which were domed.

Sourb Karapet was one of the most favourite pilgrimage sites of the Armenian nation. At *Vardavar*¹¹ and on the feast day of the Holy Virgin, caravans of pilgrims visited it even from the remotest parts of the country. The yard of the monastery turned into a place of great merriment and festivities: horse riding exercises and minstrels' contests were held there, games were played, and songs and poems performed. The monastery's fame of being endowed with healing power attracted seriously ill people, who returned home in good health.

Special mention should be made of the Meal of the monastery, which was partaken by everybody, from simple peasants to noble princes—a wonderful custom symbolising equality. It was made of the meat of one of the white oxen of the monastery that was sacrificed to God on that day. While writing these lines, I recollect the present-day pilgrimages to the monastery of St. Thaddeus the Apostle, which represent a vulgar scene, for people perceive sacrifice to God as merely slaughter of animals.

Over many centuries, Sourb Karapet was an important centre of science and manuscript writing. Mkrtych Khrimian, who was appointed Father Superior of the monastery in 1863, moved his printing office, then functioning in Varag Monastery, there and started publishing the *Artzvik Taron* (*Eagle of Taron*) magazine together with his pupil, Archbishop Garegin Servandztian.

Before World War I, Sourb Karapet was one of the most important spiritual and national centres in Western Armenia. It housed Zharangavorats Boarding School, which had 80 pupils (many of its graduates later founded schools in different parts of the country).

In the days of the Great Genocide of Armenians (1915), the monastery of Sourb Karapet and the adjacent forests gave refuge to large multitudes of persecuted Armenians. The regular Turkish army units and

¹⁰ These springs included Bareham, Akanakit, the spring of Lusavorich (the *Enlightener*) and Avag Ak (*Chief Spring*), which was located not very far from the monastery, in a northerly direction.

¹¹ An ancient pagan festival which changed into the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ after the adoption of Christianity (301).

Kurdish gangs attacked and encircled it, but they were met with resistance which lasted for over two months. During this period, the last prior of the monastery, Archimandrite Vardan, and his two helpers hid its manuscripts and valuable objects in three different places. Eventually, the Turkish troops destroyed the monastic ramparts in several sections and took it. The carnage that ensued was horrifying: only very few of those under siege had a narrow escape from it, and only some of these survivors were able to reach Eastern Armenia.

Among the latter was Hakob Danielian, the teacher of the monastic school and the only person alive who knew the hiding place of the manuscripts of Sourb Karapet. He, however, did not give it away even for the sake of the salvation of his wife and two children.

In 1916, when the Armenian volunteers, forming the avant-garde of the Russian army, took Mush, Hakob Danielian went there with a special delegation set up by the Catholicos of All Armenians for the purpose of moving away the hidden riches of Sourb Karapet. The Turks had destroyed the places where they supposed these treasures might be lying and exploded the three domes of the monastery, thus finding and plundering two of the hiding places. Fortunately, they failed to discover the third one, where the most valuable manuscripts and monastic property were kept. A lot of precious manuscripts and objects (1,750 in number), including the Gospel of King Hetum, Christ's Gold Hand, and the mite box of the monastery, were saved and taken to Echmiatzin.

* * *

We had been walking for about three hours, and our impression was that the monastery was already very near. Our way abounded in babbling brooks running in every direction, but I did not know their names. Probably, one of them, flowing along the western part of the mountain slope, had its rise in the spring of Lusavorich (it streamed from under two arches into the stone font of King Trdat, where many people had received baptism by Gregory the Enlightener). There was another spring on our right. We knelt and drank its water: perhaps, it was Bareham, the name of which means *Tasty*, as translated from Armenian. And truly, its water was of unsurpassed taste, and you could not help drinking it over and over again...

We passed by countless graves that had been either ruined or dug up. Who knows, the broken tombstones of Commander Smbat and his son, Vahan Mamikonian the *Gayl* (*Wolf*), might be among them...

We reached the monastery of Sourb Karapet once towering at the summit of the mountain, but now representing a huge heap of ruins. A stone is just a stone, but once it is hewn, dressed, polished and engraved, it begins speaking, even singing and protesting; when broken to pieces, it starts weeping.

In total perplexity, we were standing amidst the ruins of the monastery, pain and sorrow gnawing at our hearts. We were at a loss. What should we do? Which stone were we to photograph and which one to measure? All of a sudden, several stones, catapulted from slingshots, whistled past us, bringing us back to reality and reminding us where we were. We were under the close watch of gloomy, suspicious eyes gazing at us from among the ruins. What were we photographing? Where were we going? What were we looking for?

Fragments of sculptured stones and inscriptions, remnants of thick pilasters scattered here and there. Suddenly I noticed a dark opening amidst the ruins opposite me and entered there with difficulty—probably, it was a chapel with a ray of sunlight beaming inside it.

Everywhere I could see traces and holes dug up in search of treasures. To my surprise, I found some walls tracing back to the days of paganism—indisputable evidence of the former existence of a heathen temple in the site of the monastery. Amidst the ruins of the monument, I also saw some spiral pipes of clay. Were they remnants of a unique internal system of warm water, or vapour emission? Located at an altitude of over 2,200 metres above sea level, the monastery must have needed means of protection against the cold of winter.

I smelt newly-baked *tonir* bread: an elderly Kurdish woman extended warm *lavash* to me, her smile unable to conceal her dissatisfaction with something. I took it, thanked her and felt that I was very hungry. I attempted to give her some money, but she did not take it, saying something.

After eating the fragrant *lavash*, I continued taking photographs of the monastery. The shadows of the stones were gradually growing longer, and the evening was approaching. Far below, the bending river Aratzani was glittering with silver in the foggy plain of Mush. The atmosphere was serene, and no sound

was heard. The air was filled with only the sinister breath of devastation—a magnificent monastery totally levelled to the ground, gloomy silence reigning over its ruins.

We started descending from the top of the mountain by the same path. We again drank the water of Bareham Spring. It was not dark yet, but the pale moon was already in the sky. We were silent. I thought that no happiness could exist in a land where so many people had perished, and where such formidable injustice had taken place...

* * *

The dim light of dawn brought me back to reality, and I rose to my feet. I had to arrange my suitcase and start for the airport. I was now undisturbed and discerned a slight ray of hope far away.

When I was in Teheran two weeks later, I told Father about the door and asked him to discuss the possible ways of its conveyance with Dr. Zinser, the former cultural attache of the German embassy in Teheran, who used to take lessons of the classical Armenian language (*Grabar*) from him over many years (he often stayed in our place to have supper with us). Several years before, he had had a promotion and now lived in Ankara, Turkey. I felt that it was difficult for Father to write him: he hesitated for a while, but finally sent him a letter to which he immediately got a reply. Dr. Zinser was inviting me to Ankara, promising to be helpful to me (indeed, he did not have any idea about what I was going to ask him). In September of the same year, I was going on a trip to Cilicia for research into Armenian castles, and I could have a short stay in Ankara on my way to my destination.

On the appointed day, I met Dr. Zinser at the airport, and a short time later, I was already in his magnificent house surrounded with a large garden. I told him about Sourb Karapet Monastery and the door of one of its churches in detail. He listened to me without interrupting me, but when I started hinting at my request, he guessed it, stopped me and flatly refused to help me, saying that it was impossible to transport the door, for it meant smuggling. The vague ray of hope that was alive in my heart faded away. I was discouraged, but I could do nothing. The following day, I met two architects who had arrived from Germany according to our previous arrangement and we left for Adana, Cilicia, together.

Several months later, Mr. Richter sent me a long letter from Vienna in which he informed me with great pleasure that Dr. Zinser had telephoned him during a trip to Constantinople and expressed a desire to see the door. After watching it for a long time, he had said, without asking any questions: “Well, we shall do something.”

Encouraged by this news, I immediately answered the letter, thinking that there was still some glimmer of hope, and the stolen door might even be on its way back to its proper place. However, no reply followed. Several months later, I sent another letter which remained unanswered, like the previous one. That silence being unusual, I had some gloomy foreboding. More than a year later, all of a sudden, I received a note in a laconic style: Mrs. Richter was informing me that her husband had died, and she had moved to a suburb near Munich, Germany. The note ended in a brief sentence in which she said that the door was in Germany.

I left for Munich and met Mrs. Richter in her small flat. I found her greatly changed and depressed. With tearful eyes, she told me the following: “Mr. Zinser truly proved very helpful to us. My husband conveyed the door to Ankara with great difficulty and thence he [Mr. Zinser], as a high-ranking official of the embassy, arranged its transportation to Germany among his personal belongings. Now it is in a workshop in Frankfurt.”

Mrs. Richter continued: “You remember the Turkish maid working in our house in Constantinople, don’t you? She turned out to be a thief, and we dismissed her. Several days later, four policemen came unexpectedly, arrested us without speaking much and took us to prison. Our property was confiscated, and we were slandered of trade in antiquities. The Turkish woman’s words proved more convincing than ours, despite the forty years we had been living in that country, where my husband was known as a person of exemplary deportment. Indeed, we were fond of antiquities and collected some specimens—particularly Byzantine icons many of which hung on the walls of our living-room—but not for commercial purposes. Fortunately, some days before this happened, we had sent the door to Europe.

“My husband had two successive heart attacks in prison and died on his way to hospital. I was released, but forced to abandon the country with only two bags.” Wiping her eyes, Mrs. Richter added: “I have to sell the door, but I do not know at what price.”

This meeting again gave me some hope, but at the same time, I was also put into great anxiety.

Many years passed. I constantly kept looking for someone who would buy the door and convey it to its proper place of location—Armenia. One of my friends wanted to buy it, but later he changed his mind, and the goal I had been persistently pursuing over many years was never reached.

Last year, in the autumn of 1996, the door of Sourb Karapet was put up to auction in London and sold to an unknown foreigner.

* * *

I was talking to Archbishop Mesrop Ashjian on the telephone: “I am in great despair, Armen. Our representatives were there: I had told them what to do, but in vain. The door was purchased by someone not Armenian, whom we do not even know...”

Thus, the door leading to one of the most renowned spiritual and cultural centres of the Armenian people closed before us for ever, the auctioneer’s hammer sending it to a foreign country together with an essential part of our culture and history...

Having finished my story about the door of Sourb Karapet, I was looking out of the window: the sun was shining brightly after the rain, and the sky was blue and clear, but I was ashamed to look up at the heavens...

Instead of an Epilogue

In his story about the door of Sourb Karapet Monastery of Mush, Armen Hakhnazarian confesses with a sorrowful heart that... he is ashamed to look up at the sky... Those knowing him understand why this great Armenian architect and expert in church architecture, this traveller who knows Western Armenia, Cilicia and Karvajar like the back of his hand, this art historian, photographer and master of urban planning, hides his eyes from the heavens. He is ashamed, ashamed as an Armenian, as a worker of art, and simply, as a human being.

Almost before his very eyes, in the hall of Christies Company, London, on 15 October, a single blow of the auctioneer’s hammer marked the loss of the main door of Sourb Karapet Monastery of Mush. Having survived there over 70 years, it was later secretly kept in Constantinople and then in Frankfurt only to be sold one day in England like a slave.

We are mourning over the fact that the church of Yagutie has turned into a mosque: we keep blaming ourselves and others from Paris to Los Angeles, but what about the door of one of the most renowned pilgrimage sites in Historical Armenia, Sourb Karapet of Chankli? For want of only 50,000 dollars, it was irretrievably lost for Armenians and belongs to a foreigner, instead of becoming the jewel of the new museum in Antelias, or joining the door of Arakelots [*Apostles*’] Monastery of Mush, which is kept in the heart of Armenia, in the State History Museum of Yerevan. This is the reason why Armen avoids looking at the sky. Many of us should be similarly ashamed and ought to hide their eyes from the heavens.

by Archbishop Mesrop Ashjian



THE DOOR OF SOURB KARAPET MONASTERY OF MUSH, 1312



RESEARCH ON ARMENIAN ARCHITECTURE
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