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**EURASIA
PARTNERSHIP
FOUNDATION**

FRAGMENTS OF ARMENIA'S SOVIET PAST:

Tracing
the Armenian-Azerbaijani
Coexistence



Institute of Archaeology and
Ethnography, National Academy of
Sciences of Armenia

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FRAGMENTS OF ARMENIA'S SOVIET PAST:
TRACING THE ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI COEXISTENCE

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Based on fieldwork and archival material, the book "Fragments of Armenia's Soviet Past: Tracing the Armenian-Azerbaijani Coexistence" focuses on some fragments of coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the Soviet Armenia, as well as on traces and memories of tangible and intangible culture of that coexistence.

The book discusses various layers of the Soviet past on the delicate borderline of forgetting and remembering; it brings to the reader's attention soviet monuments, popular sacred spaces and pilgrimage sites, and the Azerbaijani Theatre in the Soviet Armenia. The book will be of interest to social scientists involved in oral history, history and memory studies, as well as a broader circle of readers.

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THE

authors of the book would like to express their gratitude to all those who have supported its creation.

The project was born when an Azerbaijani colleague, Bakhtiyar Aslanov, contacted us with a suggestion to implement a joint project. Thus, we are thankful to Bakhtiyar for the initiative and the initial idea of a bilateral project.

We are grateful to our colleagues and professionals that have helped with their advice in different phases of our research, particularly to the members of NGO “Hazarashen” Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies and researchers at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of RA (IAE) Ara Gulyan, Levon Abrahamian, Harutyun Marutyan and Hamlet Sargsyan. We are thankful to scholars Gayane Shagoyan and Hranush Kharatyan at the IAE for their useful comments, advice and opinion.

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PREFACE



THE book “Fragments of Armenia’s Soviet Past: Tracing the Armenian-Azerbaijani Coexistence” is the end result of a project that started back in 2017. In May of that year, we were contacted by a group of Azerbaijani civic activists and researchers who suggested creating a joint research project. As a result of those discussions, we decided to conduct research on the topic of “shared space,” which involved investigating how Armenians and Azerbaijanis used to live together in Armenian and Azerbaijani SSRs respectively, and have formed respective social and cultural environments until the start of the Karabakh conflict at the end of the 1980s.

NGO “Hazarashen” Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies, along with its Azerbaijani partners, therefore developed a project proposal corresponding to this framework. The proposal was submitted to the Eurasia Partnership Foundation’s Peacebuilding Funds Opportunity initiative, implemented under the “Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement” (PeaCE) programme, and funded by the European Union. However, at the end of 2017, we were informed that the Grant Selection Committee had decided to finance only the Armenian part of the project, as implementation of a similar research in Azerbaijan was impossible given the current situation, hoping that it could later become a basis for implementing a similar project in Azerbaijan. Our research team held long discussions on the appropriateness of unilateral implementation of such a project and in the end, we decided to move forward with the work.

The current state of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations is complicated due to the Karabakh conflict, but these relations also proved to have been complex, problematic and controversial in the past. The past carries interethnic clashes seen at the beginning of the 20th century (1905-1907, 1918-1920). It also carries the imposed ideological and political realities of the Soviet period, based on the propagandist slogans of “peoples’ friendship,” that established some frameworks for these relations, including their controversial and problematic pages. In fact, the century-long history of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations includes examples of the conflict processes, experienced at the beginning and at the end of the 20th century, and over 70 years of coexistence under the Soviets. As this book will show, neither the Soviet model, nor local coexistence models and mechanisms formed around worship and religious sites on the frontiers, could prevent new conflict. In essence, the political conflict associated with the Karabakh issue and its rapid involvement of mass populations was bigger than the coexistence models and mechanisms, which were “overcome” by the conflict.

However, our research is not about the current and past conflicts. It is about specific models and mechanisms of peaceful coexistence at a local level that exist “outside” these conflicts, and discusses specific cases related to Soviet realities as well as the popular practices in the areas of contact. Based on the traces of social and cultural coexistence environments of the past, as well as fragments of human memories, our work focuses on specific topics, refraining from generalizations. It is based on archival material, relevant literature and other sources, as well as press and fieldwork. The interviews were mostly conducted using oral history methodology, and the field material is based primarily on the memories of local Armenians. As the Azerbaijani part of the project was not approved and the research was carried out only in Armenia, it does not provide the possibility for comparative analysis. Finally, it should be mentioned, that different parts of the book have different authors and therefore there are stylistic differences.



LUSINE KHARATYAN

INTRODUCTION: BORN TO BE COSMONAUTS¹

THE WORLD IN THE YEAR 2000

excerpts from “Araks” newspaper published by Meghri District Executive Committee of the Communist Party, May 23, 1968, Meghri, Soviet Armenia.

An influential popular scientific English monthly newspaper devoted one of its recent issues to predictions of future. The published material is very interesting, though the author does not touch upon social aspects of the problems forecast. Below are some short pieces from the publication, presented to readers by “NEDELYA.”²

THE VICTORY OF SCIENCE

Rough calculations show that the number of scientists and engineer investigators in the world will reach 25 million in 2000. With the added use of electronic machines, the productivity of scientists and engineers will increase tenfold by the end of the century. This will greatly increase the intellectual power of the human mind.

AUTOMATED MANAGEMENT

Automation is one of the major scientific and technical phenomena of our time that should reach out to all spheres of life. It is expected that during 1970 to 1978 there will be automatic control of passenger planes, by 1988 collection of legal data will be automated and an automatic translator will be created, from 1980 to 1995 robots will be widely used, and between 1985 to 2000 an electronic computing machine will be created with an intellect of an “average person.” Increased use of machines increases anxiety about mass unemployment. According to experts, there is no such threat.

NEW TIMES, NEW TRANSPORTATION

By the end of the century, urban populations are expected to grow fourfold. City-giants will be born, like Boston-Washington with 400 kilometers of length and a population of 80 million, as well as Tokaido, with a population of 85 million, etc. People will have more free time and will move from place to place more frequently. Starting from 1980, buses with internal combustion engines will be out of use as they are a source for air pollution. Electric cars, mostly taxis with no drivers, will form the basis of public transportation. They will travel at a speed of up to 50 kilometers an hour, but that would be a real 50 and not the current 15 kilometers on average. Traffic lights will disappear. Production of “family planes” will largely increase in 2000. The roofs of the buildings will be used as airports. Airplane control will be fully automatic. The railway will be unrecognizable. If the passenger trains continue to operate at a speed of 800 kilometers per hour, air

cushions will be used to transport cargo in special containers. A new airplane introduced in 2000 will carry 2000 passengers at ten times the speed of sound.

POPULATION

The world's population grew very slowly, reaching 600 million from the dawn of humanity until the 17th Century. Then the number started to increase rapidly. There were 3.281 billion people on our planet in 1965. This number will be 6.130 billion in 2000. Many specialists have a more optimistic view. They believe that as a result of decreasing fertility, the world's population will be between 4.2 and 4.5 billion in 2000.

This 50-year-old article with a reference to British scientists, widely used in current Armenian media³ is from “Araks” newspaper published by Meghri District Executive Committee of the Communist Party. It came to light while searching for articles on the shared life of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Meghri, and became a starting point for our travel in space and time. How did the residents of Meghri villages and towns in 1968 picture the world in 2000? Were there any visible signs to support these predictions in their surroundings? Imagine a *kolkhoz*⁴ worker from Lehvaz village, hiding from the sun under the shadow of a tree and reading this article with a glass of cold tan,⁵ while having a short work break. Could the worker imagine that only 20 years later he would not be enjoying his tan in the place where he probably dreamed of automated work promised by British scientists, visualizing how he would sit on a pillow and observe the work of robots cultivating and harvesting the land? Hadn't that very farmer seen some predictions during his life come true? Part of the farming was already done by machines, just a few years before the country of Soviets had stepped into space, Meghri railroad station was built and there was increasing railroad traffic transporting people and cargo to Baku, Yerevan and other destinations. Only 30 years later, in 1988, an airport was opened in Meghri. The country of Soviets spoke about space and schoolchildren dreamed of becoming cosmonauts. In 1968, one could hardly imagine that in just 30 years the generation dreaming to discover vast depths of the infinite universe would re-establish the old borders and draw new ones within itself. Opened in 1988, the airport would operate for less than two years, while the lively and active railway station would turn into a ghost of unrealized potential; abandoned, crumbling and empty.

What were the lives of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the shared settlements like during the Soviet period? What were their everyday activities and relations? What was the role and significance of space as constructed before and during the Soviets, with its economic, social, domestic, commemorative, and other characteristics? What written information and oral memories are kept today about the lives

and relations with Azerbaijani neighbors of those years? Are there any sites of material culture preserved, and are there any memories about the role and significance of those sites? What do people remember about intangible culture?

To answer these questions we open several windows to the recent past. The first window traces the practical experiences of Armenian-Azerbaijani co-existence during the Soviet period, exemplifying the case of Meghri District of the Armenian SSR. The second looks at co-existence through the memory of shared usage of sacred space. The third window presents the formation of Azerbaijani theatre in Soviet Armenia.



Meghri railway station, photos by Raffi Kortoshyan, 2018

These are different windows. The first two are largely windows of oral history and memory, woven together with pieces from newspapers and other written

sources, as well as visuals of monuments and structures that have been preserved to a certain extent. Small fragments of the puzzle are visible through these windows, where the memory of shared life and usage of sacred space is chiefly presented from the Armenian perspective. Such perspective obviously cannot provide a full picture. The current memory in Armenia is primarily social memory, even though most bearers of those memories also have personal experience of co-existence. Our interviewees lived with Azerbaijanis during the Soviet period, when the relations were regulated according to Soviet requirements, and the memory of narrators stems from the patterns of those relations, as well as the peculiarities of the subsequent Karabakh Movement, Armenia's independence and the war. At the same time, nearly 30 years have passed since those days when they lived together. Even the memories stemming from personal experience are partly "refined" under the influence of stormy and hostile events of the last 30 years, or the narrators themselves present their memories with some reservations and revisions.

The third window opens the curtain of the Azerbaijani theatre in Armenia. In contrast to the first two windows, this one is primarily based on written sources; such as articles, books, archive documents, and written memoirs. As a result, it is more historical and does not include oral history related to Azerbaijani Theatre.

In a variety of ways, we try to open some windows of information and memory about the Azerbaijani population of Armenia. We avoid generalizations and conclusions. One can even say we end with suspension points. First, we believe the presented material is insufficient for making conclusions regarding the complex relations. Secondly, we are keen to remind readers that the topic is not closed; its study is delayed, oral memory changes, and there is an increasing deficiency of sources for the history.

Three chapters of the book allow sneaking through the windows. The first chapter is titled "Ideological Landscape: The Person and the Monument in the USSR," and provides a general overview of the Azerbaijani population in Armenia and its geographical distribution. The region of Meghri, which the chapter focuses on, encompasses various forms and manifestations of complex relations and multilayered, sprouted memories regarding coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis. This chapter discusses life during the Soviet period, current memories of that life, Soviet monuments and other public construction, as well as some episodes of local Azerbaijani rituals and celebrations.

The second chapter on "Religious Landscape: Sacred Spaces and Pilgrimage Sites" is about two such places; Bughakar and Babahaj. The complicated coexistence of Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Meghri has its interesting manifestations in the local landscape, such as monuments, sacred places, and their shared - as well as conflicting - narratives. These narratives allow looking at various layers and cultural expressions of not only those equivocal relationships, but also their transformations, current perceptions and rethinking of the memory. The two monuments are discussed in this context.

Chapter 3 on “Cultural Landscape: Inventing Tradition - Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia,” presents theatre’s history, playlist, famous people, as well as the issues related to the theatre.

In the end, books like this tend to become monuments; monuments of often ignored and mostly unheard voices of 20th-century Armenia. As nothing is forgotten, as long as there are people who remember, our generation of cosmonauts wishes a good journey to its readers. Try to enter inside from the window of Meghri railroad station, sealed by this well-known Soviet poster released on the occasion of the Great Patriotic War⁶ victory, where no-one and nothing is forgotten.

НИКТО НЕ ЗАБЫТ
НИЧТО
НЕ ЗАБЫТО!

9 мая



USSR poster for May 9 Victory Day on the window of Meghri Railroad Station
"No one is forgotten, Nothing is forgotten"
Photo by Raffi Kortoshyan, 2018

- ¹ For the expression “born to be cosmonauts” the authors are thankful to Yekaterina Gileva from Novosibirsk State Technical University. During a Baikal international school on memory, Yekaterina told Lusine Kharatyan, how her generation of Soviet schoolchildren - raised on the dream of space exploration - had lost that dream on the day when they saw the scenes of devastation following the earthquake in Leninakan, Armenia, in 1988.
- ² A Soviet and subsequently Russian weekly published from 1960 to 1995.
- ³ Articles referring to “British scientists” talking about recent scientific and technological discoveries are frequently found in the Armenian media in the 2000s. This resulted in a meme, whereby if the author does not find sufficient sources about a phenomenon and there is no sufficient knowledge available, British scientists should be contacted, who would definitely have an explanation.
- ⁴ A form of collective farm in the Soviet Union.
- ⁵ A cold drink, made from a mix of plain yogurt with water.
- ⁶ In Soviet Union Great Patriotic War was the name of the war that USSR fought against the Nazi Germany in 1941-45.

chapter 1

IDEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE:
THE PERSON AND THE
MONUMENT IN THE USSR



LUSINE KHARATYAN

IDEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE:
THE PERSON AND THE
MONUMENT IN THE USSR

USSR, A BIG FAMILY OF PEOPLES FRIENDSHIP

Data from the last two censuses conducted under the Soviet Union provide evidence that some short time before the collapse of the USSR, the non-Armenian population of the Armenian SSR was comprised mostly of Azerbaijanis, (5.3 percent in 1979 and 2.6 percent in 1989 respectively).⁷ However, due to the Karabakh conflict, no Azerbaijani residents are registered according to the last two censuses conducted by the Republic of Armenia.⁸

Azerbaijanis residing in Armenia were predominantly rural inhabitants and lived mainly in Shirak, Ararat, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Tavush, Lori and Syunik marzes (provinces) of the present day Republic of Armenia as well as in the capital city Yerevan. Back at the time when the Azerbaijanis lived in Armenia, there were Azerbaijani schools, newspapers and radio programs, an Azerbaijani theatre, an Azerbaijani department operated at the Pedagogical Institute named after Khachatur Abovyan. Today there is almost no trace of their former significant presence in public space⁹ and public memory.

At the beginning of the 1990s-due to the escalation of the conflict- the areas in both republics that were predominantly of Armenian and Azerbaijani or mixed ethnicity were emptied of Armenians in Azerbaijan and of Azerbaijanis in Armenia respectively. The conflict-intense nature of the relations and war itself left their mark on the memory and memory politics of the two countries that were being formed in parallel to the events. This happened also due to the fact that despite continuous efforts of Soviet authorities directed toward building friendship between Soviet nations, people still vividly remembered the clashes and misunderstandings of the past. Thus, in Armenia, the presence of Azerbaijanis gradually faded from collective memory or became confined to local circles and individual recollections.

Today, the only witnesses to the culture of the absent people that once lived here are the traces they left in their former settlements and in the memories of their friends and neighbors with whom they once shared those places. Following that trail, our research brought us to Meghri district of Armenia's Syunik province. Two considerations guided our choice. Firstly, we discovered during desk research that there are some preserved monuments¹⁰ related to Lehvaz and Nyuvadi (Nrnadzor) villages. The second factor was connected to the knowledge that in the past both Azerbaijanis and Armenians lived at Levaz village of Meghri; it used to be a shared space and thus it was possible to record the memories of the community's Armenian residents about their Azerbaijani neighbors.

Interesting data about features of Soviet era life is contained in the official newspaper of Meghri district Executive Committee,¹¹ which was published with some intervals since 1935, first under the name "Kolkhoz village," later renamed to "Kolntesayin¹² village," and becoming "Araks" in 1965. According to the data published in "Araks" newspaper in 1968, the 1959 census reported 3,351 Azer-

baijanis living in Meghri. The same newspaper published another article in its January 16, 1990 issue. Entitled “Accelerate the Socio-Economic Development of Resettled Villages,” the article reported on the joint session of the Ideology and Socio-Economic committees of the Armenian Communist Party’s (ACP) district executive committee. We learn from this article that “the events of last year at Nagorny Karabakh and around it created tensions in our district as well. As a result, 2,500 Azerbaijanis left Meghri. The villages of Aldara, Vardanidzor, Maralzmi - and partially Lehvaz - became fully vacated. As of December, 1989, around 388 Armenian families relocated to Meghri, mainly residing in the villages Aldara, Vardanidzor, Lehvaz, as well as in the town of Meghri.” The article does not include a mention of Nyuvadi, which was the largest village of the district almost exclusively inhabited by Azerbaijanis. Aldara (present day Alvanq) and Lehvaz (a mixed Armenian-Azerbaijani populated village, the name of which is unchanged) also stood out by the number of their inhabitants.

Since Meghri had a significant number of Azerbaijani inhabitants, some articles in the district newspaper were published in Azerbaijani until the beginning of the 1950s. One can assume that once the newspaper was solely published in the Armenian language, it lost a segment of its Azerbaijani readership. Evidence to this effect is contained in A. Aliev’s speech published in the April 6, 1958 issue of the newspaper. Aliev, the principal of the Vardanidzor’s seven-year school, said this, “For years our district newspaper dedicated a page to articles in Azerbaijani. The significance of this fact is clear to many of you since Azerbaijanis live here and they want to read the newspaper in their native language. Nevertheless, for the last eight years the newspaper is published only in Armenian. As a result, many workers of several Azerbaijani villages do not receive the district newspaper “Koltntesayin Village” and have no opportunity to read it.”

However, even when published only in Armenian, up until the late 1980s, the newspaper dedicated a considerable portion of materials to topics of interest on or about Azerbaijanis with consideration of the fact that most Azerbaijanis living in Armenia read in Armenian. More specifically, it included coverage of the daily life of Azerbaijani villages, articles about prominent Azerbaijani writers, poets, and artists as well as announcements about trips to Baku organized for school-children.

As a reflection of Soviet ideology and propaganda, the newspaper provided special coverage on the USSR policy of peoples’ friendship, with a particular focus on publications about the “ages-long” Armenian-Azerbaijani friendship. It should be noted that such publications referred not only to Armenians and Azerbaijanis of the Meghri district, but also to the peoples of Armenia and Azerbaijan generally, as well as friendship with Azerbaijanis that lived in the districts of Azerbaijan adjacent to Meghri. Thus, we learn from the newspaper that since the 1950s Meghri district has entered a socialist competition¹³ with the neighboring Ordubad district of Azerbaijan SSR. In the 1970s, Minjevan and Meghri became partners in such competitions. Annually, the two districts competed in their volume of harvest, production, sports, education and other areas, while the newspaper dedicated an

entire issue to this topic. There were exchange trips of workers and school students. The newspaper also included special features on significant events that happened in the neighboring republic, including success in industrial, construction and other sectors.

Every year the newspaper dedicated an entire issue to the anniversary of establishment of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan or wrote about the number of students accepted in Baku universities. The May 4, 1967 issue is fully dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan and as such features Baku under the title “My City, My City, My City Baku: So Many Fairy Tales in This City of Light.” It is worth mentioning that the materials of this issue were prepared by the editorial group of Baku’s Armenian “Communist” newspaper. One of the articles on the last page is about the Yerevan avenue in Baku, noting that the street resembles Yerevan’s streets and going on to mention that the employees of the Shoe Salon located in that street are often hosted by Yerevan’s model salons, while the “children are also in contact with Yerevan’s pioneers.” The article ends by this contemplation: “Yerevan... Here too a beautiful street is named after Baku. It’s heartwarming when one is walking across Yerevan avenue in Baku and Baku street in Yerevan... The spring breeze is spreading around the rustle of trees as if carrying along the song of peoples’ friendship filled with deep meaning. If not for the great October, there would never be a Baku street in Yerevan and the spacious Yerevan avenue in Baku.” It is remarkable that back in 1967 the author of the article links the existence of a street named Baku in Yerevan and an avenue named Yerevan in Baku to the events of the October Revolution, as if implying the impossibility of such occurrence in other circumstances, a reality that would be proven in fact only two decades later.¹⁴

We learn from the newspaper publications and from our interviews in Lehvaz that the local Azerbaijanis were well connected with Azerbaijan SSR generally and Baku specifically. Our interviewees reported that, while after school graduation Armenians went to different higher educational institutions in Armenia, many Azerbaijanis moved to Baku to continue their education.¹⁵

“I was close to one of them, his father was a shepherd, but he entered the Medical School in Baku. He was a very smart guy. He failed the exams the first year, but went again the next year. His name was Faraj. I do not remember the last name. He was a great guy. They moved to Baku. As far as I remember he was later assigned to a post in Kubatlu. ...Some of them went to Yerevan to study, to Yerevan Pedagogical, named after Khachatur Abovyan. For example, the son and the daughter of our neighbor, they were at Khachatur Abovyan Pedagogical...there was a department there, an Azerbaijani one. They studied there and came back to work as teachers. At school. The girl was in Meghri, but the boy worked right here, at school. Sometimes they went to Yerevan to study, but mostly they went to Baku,” - a 60 year old male resident of Lehvaz told us.

The stories that we documented in 2018 in Meghri provide evidence that aside

from the so-called socialist competition and Soviet propaganda, the residents of the district had good neighborly relations, not only with the Azerbaijanis living there but also the Azerbaijanis of the bordering settlements of Azerbaijan SSR. For example, an 80-year-old female resident of Lehvaz recalls contacts between Ordubad and Meghri, as well as an Azerbaijani acquaintance:

“Once my husband said that we should go shopping, to buy things for the kids that we ordered. There was not much stuff here. He said let’s go today. I said the weather is bad today, it is going to rain, but he said he could only go that day. So, I said OK, let’s go. And we went. The kids were at school. We went to Ordubad,¹⁶ to Nakhijevan, we entered the store. Heavy rain started. We hardly managed to pull off to the side of the road, we thought water will wash over the car. I saw a car riding up, a Turk’s¹⁷ car. I said Razmik [the husband’s name], who do you think that is? I put out my hand to stop him, he said, ‘leave it, the man is coming this way’. He came to us. The water was almost at the car level. He helped, he pulled the car, tied it to his car and pulled us down. Up until recently we kept in touch. He took us to the straight road, where there was no water. He came to say ‘thank you’, said ‘let’s go to my place’. I said ‘no, thank you’. Even up until recently, when pear harvest was there, whatever harvest we had, I put aside their share. He was from Nakhijevan. We kept in touch. Then, when he heard my husband died, he sent stuff. Back then we had no contacts, no news. He sent stuff earlier. He did not come himself, but sent stuff. They brought it.”

An elderly man recalls that they went to Ordubad for different reasons, “They [people] went to buy stuff, to buy wool for making blankets and mattresses. Sometimes they took sick people to Ordubad.” His son adds, “They had connections to Turkey long ago.¹⁸ We bought clothing there, we often went to Ordubad and places, to buy cloths and stuff. They came here for butter, beer, sausages and stuff, they came here for those types of things.”

Generally, the newspaper of the Meghri district executive committee was actively promoting the notion of peoples’ friendship up until 1989, keeping the district’s Armenian and Azerbaijani population in focus. Propaganda in support of friendship between nations was typical to the Soviet press and depending on context it could be targeting a specific nation. We see regular publications and articles in different issues of the newspaper, references to CPSU¹⁹ programs, decrees of the Communist Party on friendship of peoples, quotations on this topic by different prominent figures. In addition, from time to time, the newspaper published creative work of individual authors dedicated to the topic of Armenian-Azerbaijani friendship.

Following up on the topic, we can also see how depending on its specific propaganda objective the editorial group used the same text in different ways. To illustrate, the April 29, 1966 issue of “Araks”, which was dedicated to the 46th anniversary of establishing Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, published Charents²⁰ poem “Soviet Azerbaijan,” which ended in the following line, “To our brother nation [in



singular], salute, salute.” However, in the same newspaper’s September 19, 1968 issue dedicated to friendship and solidarity between different nations and people, the same poem ends differently, “To our brother nations [in plural], salute, salute.” In the first case Charents is quoted to encourage Armenian-Azerbaijani friendship, while in the second case generally the concept is of friendship between peoples.

In general, in the 1960s Charents often appears on the pages of the newspaper as an advocate for the friendship of nations. The 1967, September 13 issue dedicated to the 70th anniversary of Charents’ birthday includes an article by the deputy-principal of Aldara village school entitled “The Poet of Peoples’ Friendship.” It has no references to Charents’ life or work, but focuses on Armenian-Azerbaijani friendship once again: “The Azerbaijani literature lovers are also preparing to have a worthy celebration of the anniversary, which is not surprising. Charents himself is a great poet praising peoples’ friendship. Just remember how skillfully he had depicted the Turkish sailor’s pure feelings toward Lenin in his work “Lenin and Ali.” In his satirical poem “Kabkaz Tamasha,” the great patriot has bitterly criticized the poisonous enemies of his beloved people, the Armenian Dashnaks, the Azerbaijani Musafats, and the Georgian Mensheviks, who had driven their people close to ruination under the guise of saviors of the nations. They ruthlessly robbed and plundered their people, while enjoying luxurious lives for themselves. [...] On the 15th anniversary of establishing Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, which he attended as a delegate from Armenia, Charents noted: “too bad that it is my first visit to Azerbaijan. If I had been here before and after the revolution, I would undoubtedly observe the magnitude of changes that happened. This is my first acquaintance with Azerbaijan. I can see that you are all international people...” This article along with the abundance of articles on peoples’ friendship published continuously in different issues of the newspaper throughout the 1950-60s indicate to what extent the propaganda and party ideology of Soviet official politics was focused on formation of “friendship” and “internationalism” especially in an area that was culturally diverse and had a legacy of not-so-smooth inter-ethnic relations.

Interestingly, in the aftermath of the 1988 Sumgait events²¹ newspaper “Araks” launched a series of friendship letters under the title “We are Internationalists,”²² under which it published the letters of Armenian and Azerbaijani residents of Meghri villages that told about their friendship and included calls for amicability. Two sample letters that were published under this heading are presented below.

OUR POWER IS IN FRIENDSHIP

The indestructible friendship between the Armenian and Azerbaijani people has ages long history.

This friendship becomes more than solid here, in Meghri district. This is why the Meghri people, be they Armenians or Azerbaijanis say, “if you want to learn

friendship, come to Meghri.” And that is the truth: There is no Armenian family in Meghri that does not have its “dost”²³ Azerbaijani family and vice-versa.

Let me use my family’s example. My father, Hovhannes, had two “dost” families in neighboring Aldara village- the families of Allahverdi amu and Aghaqishi amu. I remember that when these families needed anything, they turned to my father for help. When my father needed anything, he asked Allahverdi and Aghaqishi “dosts.” They are not with us any longer, but even now their children and I continue our “dostship.”

During the Great Patriotic War, I worked in Azerbaijani village of Aldara as the secretary of the Communist organization. I befriended Rzagul Guliev, resident of Aldara and we became as close as brothers. Rzagul is not with us anymore, but his son Abdun Abdunov is and he still considers me his uncle.

I have good friends in Nyuvadi- Akhmedali Aliev, Jalal Aliev, Hamdi and Shamil Zafarofs (passed away), Hasanguli Zafarov and many others.

This friendship that was built and strengthened during years will never be ruined.

The events happening recently in Nagorny Karabakh are, no doubt, exciting. However, addressing such sensitive issues in a short period is impossible, time is needed.

I believe that no matter what is the resolution of this issue, it should not affect the ages-long friendship of Armenian and Azerbaijani people. The Lenin nationality policy is built on such foundations that no force can shake them.

We are excited about comrade M.S. Gorbachov’s address to Armenian and Azerbaijani people, which once again demonstrated the care and concern of our party.

We need to be reasonable and approach all issues with a cool head.

Gr. Grigoryan
Veteran of Patriotic War and of Labor

UNAFFECTED FRIENDSHIP

Recently a lot is said about the friendship between Armenian and Azerbaijani people. I want to add my few words as well.

In 1929-30 I was ten years old. I did not understand much about life. I remember we had a good friend from Mazra village of Kapan district. He was a blacksmith; his name was Poghos. He often visited us. He was a strong man, tall, with broad shoulders. In 1931 he visited us again with a big bag of goods. He had not forgotten any of our family members, each of us got a present.

Water ditches were running along the streets that gradually became flooded. The flood that descended from the mountains brought with it a gigantic rock that got stuck between our house and that of our neighbor’s. The water was rising and

threatening our house. I remember well how confused my Dad and uncle were, and only Poghos, the blacksmith did not lose his spirit. He picked up a thick and long log that was laying around the yard and started pushing the rock that was blocking the water. The rock rolled over and thus our houses were saved from the mortal threat.

Years have passed, decades, but I still vividly remember this incident. Now blacksmith Poghos's children live in Aza village of Ordubad district. Our friendship carries on.

The Ohanyan family lives in Shvanidzor. We never consider Ivan Grandfather, his children Ishkhan, Artem, Arakel, Arshaluys and others anything but keen. This friendship that started with our ancestors lives on, we are there for each other in good and bad days, we cheer each other's success, we share the grief, help relief the sorrow.

When we go to Shvanidzor, we feel at home there.

We have many Armenian friends. Mamikon Harutyunyan, a well-respected teacher is one of them. His grandfather, Aghasi, his father Rustam became friends with our elders before the October revolution. They shared their bread, they supported each other in any way they could.

As for me, I and M. Harutyunyan are friends for 47 years, since 1941.

Today a strong friendship ties me with Grisha Grigoryan from Meghri, Grish Hakobyan who lives in Yerevan and with tens of other Armenian families. If I go to Yerevan, I always stay in G. Hakobyan's place. His sons and daughters call me uncle, since Grisha always called me brother.

Well yes, that is how things stand. The ages-long friendship that ties our two peoples has solid foundations. It is well visible in our district. At factories and plants, collective and state farms the representatives of the two nations work next to each other creating goods.

It is true that some outcasts may want to disparage this genuine and pure friendship, but they will have to answer to us, to working people, who have nothing to divide and who share one noble goal, i.e. to honor what the party requires from us, to cherish this friendship as a treasure.

Ahmedali Aliev
Veteran of War and Labor
Village Nyuvadi

We also learn from the newspaper that in 1989 the schools were conducting the so-called "lessons of friendship."

However, despite many articles dedicated to friendship between nations published by Soviet newspapers, despite continuous efforts of the Communist Party

in this direction, despite the memories of our interviewees about peaceful coexistence, certain tensions were observed between the two people even during the most uneventful times under Soviet rule. An 80-year old woman from Lehvaz recalls remarkable episodes from their trip to Agulis (Azerbaijan SSR, Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic):

“There were 12 churches in Agulis,²⁴ I have been there. The newlyweds from here rented a bus and everyone who wanted to joined, be it a woman, a man, not married, with kids. We went. Everyone had taken food, as much as they could. We were a full bus from our village, but I do not remember which year it was, we went to Agulis. There are 12 churches there. We entered one. A big church it was and the date and even the year written in red blood, by finger. Later, when we were having rounds around the church, a red pen was used to write who came there, what they did. We wrote too. 12 churches. When we came down to go to Ordubad, there is this so-called *chiman*, a place with no large trees, where we could eat. One of the women says open this door, seems to be an Armenian’s house, there is the garden, the gate. Sorry, we put all shame aside, we said we want to use the toilet. I put my nose everywhere. So we went. Some five women. We knocked, an old lady opened the door, we said hello, she answered in Turk [Azerbaijani], and I say may we, we are here because... The woman who made me go is pushing me to say. She says no, the Armenians have no right to be here. Well. We went back. I said see that it was all for nothing. Now I became a bad person for that Turk [Azerbaijani]. So we went. We were eating there. The Turk [Azerbaijani] inspector came and spotted the bus. This *chiman* I mentioned, was all pliant as a reed. We had the fire going, making barbeque. Everyone had brought what they could. The militiaman came and said what right you have to be here. We tried this way and that way and then my husband, cast any shame aside. He was a tough man, tougher than my father in law. Yes. When they kept on fighting, he got up and said. Listen here, you come to Meghri every day, slaughter the ewes to celebrate that Armenia and Azerbaijan became brothers, so why have you caught us here and ask what are we doing here? Women were huddled together as Kaj Nazar,²⁵ not knowing what to do. Then, we had our meal, got on the bus and this officer brought the bus and our men to Ordubad police station. Parked it there. My husband, the driver, two other men, one is a militia, he has passed away, he and his wife were our neighbors, they all went to Ordubad police station. There too, my husband said-you come every day, we are like brothers, you slaughter ewes, what is your problem, why is all this? Now the secretary of Nakhijevean District Committee, of Ordubad, they all come along, together with militia. We are on the bus; some have their kids with them. When they came, the secretary of the district committee knew my husband, they were close. When we did not get a car here, that Turk secretary said he would arrange the car for us. But from this country to that country you should spend millions to be able to do that.

This is how close they were. He says hi, what's up. My husband tells him what's up, how we came over, how the militia caught us, our wives, our girls. There were no girls there, all were married women, one or two young boys, all inside the car. This is all wrong, you come and slaughter your cattle, you say that Armenia and Azerbaijan have become brothers, and then you detain us. The secretary told that militia to let us go."

In this small story by our interviewee there are three references to her husband's following words, "you slaughter the cattle, to show that Armenians and Azerbaijan have become brothers." Such importance attached to this sentence opens up interesting layers of Soviet nationality policy. In particular, it shows how declarations about brotherhood between peoples sought to silence the more profound and unresolved issues. This quotation from the interview is noteworthy in showing how - whenever the smallest problem arose - people immediately referred to official doctrines, as if warning their opponents that their behavior deviates from the "main course." In fact, it is difficult to understand from this incident what the real reason for militia intervention was. Perhaps the people involved in this trip had broken some laws, for example, were in a border zone without a required permit.²⁶ Perhaps it was not allowed to start a fire and make a barbeque in their chosen place. However, it is apparent that even when the Armenian group was the offender, the intervention of Azerbaijani militia was perceived as having nationalistic motives and the Soviet ideology of friendship between nations was used to resolve the issue. The other interesting aspect of this story is the memory about the blood stains in Agulis churches. The grandmother of our interviewee came from Agulis, she was the priest's daughter and several times during our conversation her grandmother's story was retold - her escape to Meghri through forests following the Armenian-Turk clashes at the beginning of the 20th century. Then, when we talk about her only trip to Agulis, every two minutes she mentions the number of churches - 12. She also says that "there was one large church," the date and even the year written in blood, the fingerprints there. In reality, it is difficult to say without special scrutiny whether it was blood or red paint. Perhaps the colour of the church walls is linked to the granny's story and the image materializes in the colour of blood. The third noteworthy incident is the refusal of the Azerbaijani woman to let them use the toilet by saying that "Armenians have no right being here" although as our interviewee believed the door they knocked at "seemed to be an Armenian's door." In this case our interviewee and her friends assume that the door looks like one of an Armenian, but they also seem to want to check who lives there. When they knock at the door they are refused entry on national prejudice. This incident exposes a number of layers; such as family and collective memory, the Soviet routine and Soviet politics. In between this two are the individual people, who are trying to use the officially declared "friendship of peoples" as a weapon to address the specific issue they face. Moreover, since our interview happened 50 years after the retold events, as well as some 30 years after the Karbakh war and the collapse of the USSR, our interviewees' memory bears the imprint of those events and the story is recounted with interpretations adapted to those later events.

To summarize, despite the policies that the Soviet state used to promote friendship of peoples and internationalism, the unresolved issues between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the history and memory of complex relations between the two nations continued playing an important role in people's daily life. This is evident both in the stories of our interviewees and in the local media, where articles on the topic of friendship feature so many references to "ages-long friendship" that one starts doubting its existence. However, our field material in conjunction with the series of articles entitled "We are internationalists" indicate that while there could have been perception issues on the group level, during the Soviet times people had a relatively positive relationship with their Azerbaijani acquaintances, neighbors, colleagues and friends at the individual level.

PEOPLE AND SPACE

Despite the availability of useful information, the Soviet newspapers generally provided one-sided representation of reality; they acted as supplements to the Communist party, were strictly censored and endorsed the ideology of the indestructibility of the one party rule. They never seriously covered the existing issues and did not ensure even minimal diversity of opinions. It is not simply by chance that one of the key items of Gorbachov's Perestroika (reconstruction) was the concept of Glasnost, which implied moderate censorship and diversity of opinion.

The newspapers that we studied contain some information about people's lives during that era. But the interviews with people who lived in the places of Armenian and Azerbaijani cohabitation provide more interesting, lively and realistic material. Lehvaz village of Meghri district is one such cohabitation settlement. It is located in the Syunik marz (province) of the Republic of Armenia, six km northwest from the town of Meghri. Since the end of the 19th century the village has been mentioned²⁷ as one that had an Armenian and Turk²⁸ (later Azerbaijani) population.

During the last years of the Soviet rule, the village had a secondary (ten years) Azerbaijani school, while the Armenian school provided eight years of schooling. Armenians continued their education in Meghri after they finished the eight-year school. Due to the reduction of the Armenian population of the village, the Armenian track of the school did not function during the last Soviet years.²⁹

We learn from the issue of "Araks" newspaper dedicated to the 50th anniversary of USSR's formation that "50 years ago, in 1922, Lehvaz had only 18 households. In the later years, during a short period, the village expanded to stretch out to the edges of the gorge. Currently, there are 178 families in the village, of which 200 people are Armenians and the rest are Azerbaijanis."³⁰ In the same year, in 1972, one of the publications of the newspaper's May 13 issue documents: "It will be difficult to find a house in Lehvaz that will have history of longer than 15 years. All buildings are new, spacious, surrounded by trees and shrubs. The Armenian and Azerbaijani workers living in the village are working tirelessly

to improve the public economy of the village, to make it more prosperous and wealthy.”

In March, 2018, our interviewees from Lehvaz told us that at the beginning of the last century there was an inflow of residents to Lehvaz from the upper mountainous Armenian Gudemnis and Vahravar villages. As an elderly woman from Lehvaz recalls:

“They had come down from those villages on the top. From Gudemnis. During the Armenian-Turk clashes, that happened, in [19]15, back then ... after the clashes. Once the fighting was over, there were many brothers in Gudemnis, so they sent them here. I guess there were Turks there, whoever... I cannot say much on that, this village was vacant, they were sent here to live here. Here people are from Kuris, from Gudemnis, from Vahravar. From all over. This is how it grew. They kept having children.”

Compelling materials are available about Lehvaz from back when the clashes had happened at the beginning of the 20th century. One is a reference to Qearbalay Mehti from Lehvaz, who “never avoided putting the Turks at fault publicly.” At the same time, it is said about those days that “In the mountain of Alagyoz, Armenians and Turks from Lehvaz fought against the Turks together.”³¹

During the Soviet years, Azerbaijani settlements of Bughakar, Tey and Pshgag were merged into Lehvaz with their population resettling there and their lands being added to the Lehvaz Collective Farm.³²

“I can only speak about what I saw during the kolkhoz. I am a 60 year old man and I can say what I saw during that time. As to sources, well in [19]18 several Turks came from those villages at the top, but I cannot say anything more specific. Collectivization was happening back then too, wasn't it? They collected people, brought here, those villages were fully ruined. They came here and this village became almost all Turks. The Armenians were few and far between. 70 percent were Turks...Azerbaijanis,” one of the Lehvaz residents tells us.

Soviet modernization had fully transformed the village. It included a club, a two-storey building that opened in June 1960.³³ In 1948 Lehvaz' electrification was completed and cinema equipment was provided.³⁴

Periodical media also provides evidence about the socioeconomic issues that Lehvaz faced back in the 1950-70s. More specifically, the newspaper of the district executive committee raised the issue of absence of a public bathhouse, which was urgent both in 1956 and 1965.³⁵

As the locals report, during the Soviet period the village was divided across a gorge into “Armenian” and “Turk” neighborhoods. In 1968 the residents built a bridge to connect the two, which they named “Friendship.”³⁶

Despite living in separate neighborhoods, as villagers report, the Azerbaijanis

and the Armenians had active neighborly relations, and in some sections they lived next to each other. An 80-year-old woman tells us:

“Those were good times, we visited each other, were friends. Look here, behind my house, my neighbor was a Turk, they had a tonir,³⁷ she made the dough and called me over. Come, I have made the dough today, what about you? Don't you want to bake your bread? I made my dough and she baked, she baked herself, she did not let me bake... We were so close... Back then Turks were all over this village, there were many Turks. The village Soviet,³⁸ the collective farm –they were controlled by Turks. There were only few Armenians. The Turks were many.”

An elderly resident of the village tells us about joint work and neighborly relations:

“When I worked at the kolkhoz, we went to the mountains together, stayed there, some ten people, in two different workgroups, those were different lands, but we stayed together, Armenians and Turks. Two Armenians have moved to this house [points to the neighboring house that belonged to an Azerbaijani], but back then, during the Turk's times, you should leave your shoes downstairs and only then go upstairs. Now, you go in, there are so many potholes, you are a lost case. They do not keep it clean. That woman, Nubar, was such a good one, her husband's name was Murkha. Her children left for Baku earlier on, they also exchanged their house and left.”

Another elderly woman tells about her neighbors:

“Downstairs, in this building, our building, a Turk used to live. His wife's name was Maqin, his name was Maqarli. Close by. We put up that wall just recently, over there where the car entered and parked. Used to be open. Then he [her husband] put up an iron fence, but left this spot open so as we could go down to their place, they could come over. Their son fell down from the club wall; my husband took him to hospital in his motorcycle. Back then, there were no Armenian-Turk divisions. The other one, the one that had a tonir, where I baked my bread, she started the pit, she told her children to bring the dough rolls, to bring lavash,³⁹ even meals, ready bread...told them to lay the bread to dry. Not only for me, but for everyone. Back then there were no Armenian-Turk divisions.”

The theme of joint baking of bread and sharing bread is prevalent in memories. It seems to emphasize the ideas of neighborhood and friendship. In traditional cultures, sharing food is one of the major acts toward becoming friends. In the accounts of our interviewees, it is also perceived as the main symbol of being neighbors.

It should also be noted that while speaking about Azerbaijanis that they knew in the past, our narrators attach special importance to the fact that they spoke Armenian.

“We did [work] together. We lived together. Our neighbor spoke Armenian much better than some of our villagers who spoke a dialect. Our neighbor spoke pure literary Armenian. He was an Azerbaijani. Look, over there, in that building. They spoke perfect Armenian. The child, I mean, not their elders. They understood, they spoke. But they had a thing. Even if they knew, they would not speak; they spoke in Turkish, the elders. But the kids, they did. How many did this neighbor had? Four-five kids, they all spoke perfect Armenian... We played *chingili* together, back then, with wooden clubs. We played together, we spent time together. We became more advanced and then started playing badminton. The son of that neighbor, when he graduated from the Pedagogical and returned, he worked as a teacher. He bought the first badminton. We were still kids at that time. His name was Vasil. He spoke perfect Armenian. Perfect. Naturally, he studied in Yerevan. Arpina, she died in a car crash, she also spoke fluent Armenian, their kids too, everyone, they learnt but their elders did not learn. But they spoke fluent Armenian...He bought the first badminton, in this village, to this neighborhood, we played together. I remember that. In short, we had good human relationship. Good ones.”

According to some Lehvaz residents, Armenians mostly spoke Azerbaijani with Azerbaijanis. Sometimes, they used Armenian to answer questions in Azerbaijani, just on principle. “For example, my Mom used to say that Shafiga would ask her, Shushik khala⁴⁰ why don't you speak in Turk? They spoke in Turk, my Mom would not respond. She understood, but she responded in Armenian.” The same person says that though her mother responded in Armenian to Azerbaijani, she herself spoke in Azerbaijani:

“I spoke in Turk with Shafiga. That Turk girl, a bulky girl she was, around grade 8 or 7. My second daughter was married in Yerevan. I told her I am going to Yerevan. She says, khala, let me come with you. I said OK. We went by train. My son-in-law came and took us from there to Abovyan. We went to a store then. There were no Armenians-Turks back then, all was mixed. She is asking me in Turkish-khala, should I buy this curtain? Seems like it was today. The girls working at the store stood watching us- this woman is an Armenian, that one speaks Turk. I told her, if you have to ask, call me tyota.⁴¹ She could speak in Armenian, but not clearly. Should I buy that curtain? Or the other one? No, I will tell her in Turk. That is how close we were.”

The village bus stop is another witness about the presence of the Azerbaijani population in not so distant past. On this typically Soviet concrete structure one still can see the names of Azerbaijanis.

As reported by our interviewees, the Azerbaijanis left the village in late 1988. In most cases, they had exchanged their houses in advance and then moved their household items. Armenians from Baku and other Armenian populated areas in Azerbaijan settled in the Azerbaijanis' houses that were exchanged with them.



The view of Lehvaz from South-East in 1932 and 2018
Photos by Grigor Poghosyan (1932) and Raffi Kortoshian (2018)

“When they [Armenians] started leaving Baku, it started earlier, didn’t it, then naturally, they made them [Azerbaijanis] to leave here too, and they exchanged houses. The deported Armenians from Baku came here; they made arrangements here, the Turks got lucky. Well, they lived well here, working in the collective farm, elsewhere, but naturally the Armenians lived in Baku or in cities or around cities, in Sumgait. So, this is how the Armenians came. They mostly came from Baku to this village. They came and exchanged the houses, nicely, they collected everything and left, there was no violence against the Turks... Some of them moved to Ordubad direction, they even took their coal with them, hired cars, loaded their things, whatever they had-be it coal, wood. They mostly took everything with them. Those who left earlier, they did not, but later they returned. Sometimes they went to Baku for exchange, with those who should exchange with them (the house), came back here together to make the exchange. They did the paper work for that.”



The bus stop at Lehvaz village, photos by Raffi Kortoshian, 2018

At present though, some of these Armenians had left and sold their houses to Armenians from Meghri's mountainous villages or just left the houses locked and empty.

Lehvaz used to be a mixed Armenian-Azerbaijani cohabitation village, but the other villages were more homogeneous—either Armenian populated or Azerbaijani populated. The largest village with an Azerbaijani population was Nyuvadi. Nyuvadi (present day Nrnzdor) is one of the remotest villages of the Republic of Armenia situated some 435 km from Yerevan and 30 km from Meghri, at the Armenian-Iranian border. We learn from the different issues of Meghri district committee newspaper that Nyuvadi was one of the wealthiest collective farms during the Soviet years. Under the Soviets, the Nyuvadi collective farm started farming the fallow lands adjacent to the village as well as pioneered the high mountainous pastures. The villagers had built the road to mountain pasture and meadows, as well as barns to better manage cattle breeding in that area.

Alongside with most of the villages of Meghri district, Nyuvadi was electrified in the 1940s, most probably right after the war.⁴² We learn from the issue of “Koltntesayin Village” newspaper dedicated to 35th anniversary of establishing Soviet rule that in 1955 ““Ilyich lamps”⁴³ are burning in all Nyuvadi houses, the radio loudspeakers are broadcasting, many people own a radio, wardrobes, good quality beds. Illiteracy is dealt with in the villages, a new school was built, and all teachers are locals. Every family is getting newspapers or magazines. The village has a club and a library where villagers read, play chess and checkers, and listen to radio programs. At the spacious club auditorium they watch films, and attend concerts. The village has a store and several standard-model buildings. The economy prospers from year-to-year; the collective farm is a millionaire. Back in pre-Soviet times Nyuvadi residents did not even have an idea about cars, while now the farm owns three cars, a silos collector, two water pumping stations with powerful pumping machines. During the recent years, the collective farm has cultivated around 50 hectares of vacant lands where tropical fruit trees are growing lavishly now.”⁴⁴

However, the same newspaper features an article in its November 12, 1961 issue titled “The Problems of Our Village,” from which it becomes clear that similar to many villages of the Armenian SSR, Nyuvadi was also facing some development issues. According to the author, despite the electrification, Nyuvadi is powered only one-two hours during the day and the voltage is so low “that the lamps hardly start warming up. The electricity grid condition is very bad, especially inside the village.” The poles were shaky; the wiring went very low over roofs and was dangerous for children. For quite some time, the need for a bathhouse was discussed in Nyvadi, but there wasn't one in the village. There were issues related to healthcare. “For how long should this village with a thousand residents remain without a doctor? How much longer should the sick people wait for the doctor who comes to the village from the district center via impassable roads? The village residents may not be this dismayed should the village health care facility be in good condition. In other villages, healthcare facility have a dedicated build-



Nyvadi village at the end of 19th century, image from "Sisakan" by Gh. Alishan

Nyvadi (Nrnadzor) village in 2018, photo by Raffi Kortoshian

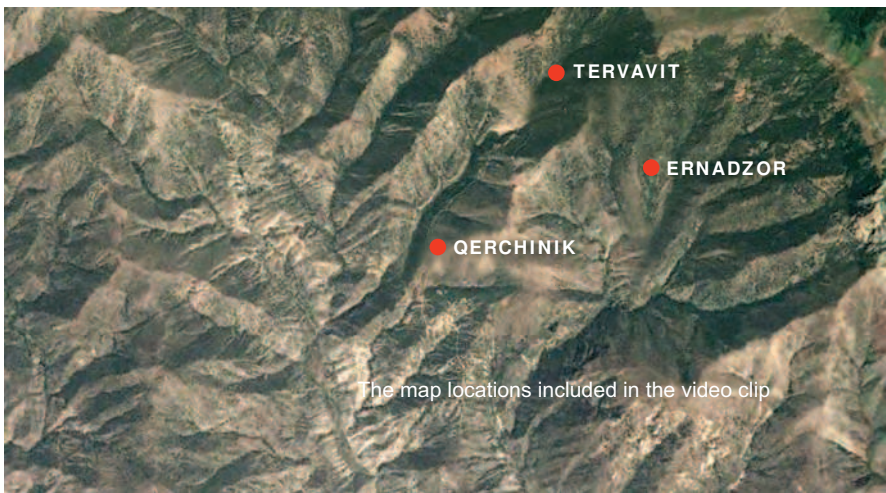


ing, with medicine cabinets, emergency items and possibility of intervention should there be a need for bandaging or urgent relief. It is not the case in Nyuvadi. In a damp and semi-destroyed building, there are a few bottles and vessels, and this place is called health facility.”⁴⁵

In November 14, 1970 issue of “Araks” there is an article about Nyuvadi written by I. Mamedov and reporting on the past and the present of the village with statistics in support of village development: “In 1850, only 15 Azerbaijani students were enrolled in Yerevan’s provincial school. At present, 18 of Nyuvadi secondary school teachers have higher education. In 1863, altogether only 24 Azerbaijani students were enrolled in all of the province’s schools. At present, 25 teachers work at Nyuvadi school only. One more comparison. Against the 15 students enrolled in Yerevan provincial school in 1850, at present, of all graduates of Nyuvadi school, only one of Soviet Armenia’s Azerbaijani villages, 18 are scientists, 80 have higher education, and ten are post-graduate students. Soviet Nyuvadi is well maintained, it is a reserve of abundant crops, an anchor for hard working, morally stable, initiative-taking and patriotic people.”

These excerpts from the articles published in different years in the district newspaper have one similarity: they present the achievements of the village in the contexts of Soviet modernization. In particular, the authors chose the main symbols of village modernization in the USSR: electrification, the club, the health care facility, machinery, the school. Even the above-mentioned 1961 criticizing article “Problems of our Village,” covers these symbols, more specifically- their improper condition. At the same time the 1970’s article authored by I. Mamedov shows the line of the USSR nationality policy, since the author especially highlights the educational achievements of Azerbaijanis in Armenia under the Soviet rule.

Before leaving for Meghri for fieldwork, our research team did a small survey of internet resources to find information on Nyuvadi from Azerbaijani sources. We ended up finding a number of materials and written work by Nyuvadi’s former residents. A music video found in YouTube had mapped the village and those adjacent sites that mattered in the lives of Nyuvadi inhabitants.⁴⁶ Following that map and our assumption that the sites mentioned might have some connection to cultural heritage, our research team decided to visit those and document the current state of a number of spots noted in the map.



The map locations included in the video clip



A general view of Ernadzor former settlement from the West, photo by Raffi Kortoshian, 2018

It turned out that a number of spots noted on the map are currently located in the area of Shikahogh nature conservation. Since the day was Sunday, the earth road built for cars was closed and we had to find a guide and walk around 22 kilometers to get to see and photograph the different spots. The first spot that we visited was Yrnadzor or Ernadzor.⁴⁷ It is located five km northeast from Nyuvadi, in the area of Shikahogh conservation. The Ernadzor former settlement and the Muslim cemetery adjacent to it on the south have been included in the Republic of Armenia's registry of historic monuments in 2006 (numbers 8.66.1 and 8.66.1.1) and are maintained by the state.



A 1949 headstone, Ernidzor, photo credit Raffi Kortoshian, 2018



A 1937 headstone, Ernidzor, photo credit Naira Hayrapetyan, 2016
A 1872-73 headstone, Ernidzor, photo credit Raffi Kortoshian, 2018



The 1956 issue of March 15 of Meghri district executive committee's "Koltntesayin Village" newspaper reports that in the 1950s around 50 heifers of Nyuvadi collective farm were kept in former Ernadzor rural settlement. The author describes the appalling state of the barns and the heifers, concluding that it is out of collective farm authorities' sight and they might not be aware of the real situation.⁴⁸

Most tombstones in the former settlement have inscriptions. Out of the three tombstones that we photographed, one has an inscription in Arabic and bears a 1289 hijri (1872-1873 a.d.). The second has inscriptions in Arabic and Cyrillic and is dated to 1937, while the third has only a Cyrillic inscription and is dated to 1949.

The next spot that our research group visited is Tervnit or Tervavit. According to one of the January 1959 issues of "Koltntesayin Village," Tervanit was the summer pasture, "yaylagh"⁴⁹ of Nyuvadi. P. Rustamyan, the author of the article, reports that despite winter conditions, Nyuvadi collective farmers had started the construction of a "car road" leading from the village to "Tervan" yaylagh and as of January 1959, a five km section of the road was leveled and ready.⁵⁰ In 1970, a new barn was built in Tervavit. "The construction of a sheep barn for 700 heads of sheep was completed in the "Tervavit" pasture, around ten km away from the village. The sheep spending the winter over there will have access to water, which will be piped from a nearby spring. A separate room for shepherds is installed next to the barn."⁵¹ In April 2018, nothing was left of this large barn in Tervavit. There was a spring for cattle and a few wooden huts. Here, according to our guide, shepherds stay during summer when they bring the cattle to the mountains.



Tervavit Spring, photo credit Raffi Kortoshian, 2018

The observations and site inspections undertaken by our research team made during its walking tour of Ernadzor and Tervavit indicated that the earth road that the Nyuvadi residents built during the second half of last century remains the

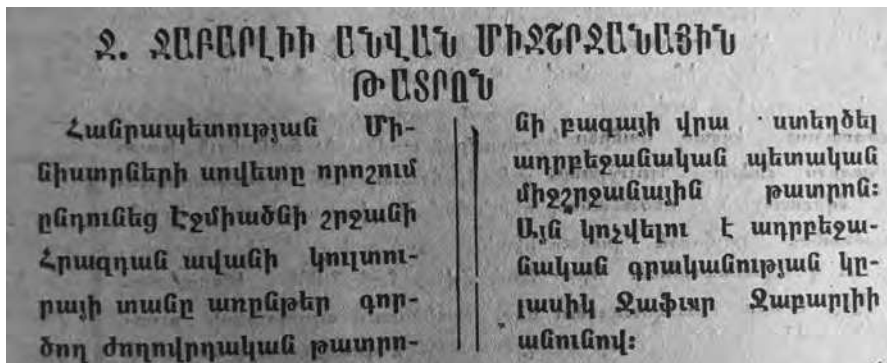
only pathway for off-landers. These sites are currently within the Shikahogh conservation, a fact that somewhat limits traffic.

Thus, visited communities have undergone serious transformations during the Soviet era. Most specifically, the Soviet modernization has affected the villages both in terms of physical appearance and with respect to population. The villages had been connected to electric power, construction and development of public spaces happened, cultural, educational and healthcare institutions appeared. These developments had affected people's daily life and routine. Their life quality and education levels improved. It is remarkable that former Nyuvadi residents had preserved in their mental map the achievements of the Soviet time by mapping in detail their accomplishments from collective farm work, such as barns built in remote yaylaghs, the roads built to get to those and others. At the same time, our interviewees from Lehvaz recall their life in Soviet era reflecting on neighborly interactions and their contacts within the context of the Soviet village.

CULTURAL LIFE, TRADITIONAL HOLIDAYS

The Soviet state planned and organized its people's cultural life. Theatre and, later on, Cinematography were considered as major tools of the Communist Party's political-ideological propaganda. Driven by the slogan "Art for Masses," art reached out to large masses. To illustrate, in all Soviet villages cultural clubs were built to organize the population's cultural life. Amateur theatre, as well as singing and dance groups functioned in the clubs. Testimonies found in Meghri's district newspaper, alongside the interviews we conducted, indicate that theatre and cinema played an important role in the daily lives of both Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

Theatres, song and dance groups of neighboring Nakhijevan and Ordubad often had guest performances in the Azerbaijani populated villages of the district. From 1966 on, they were joined by the Jabarli inter-district Azerbaijani theatre of Armenian SSR. The Meghri residents learnt about the establishment of this theatre from November 16 issue of "Araks" newspaper.

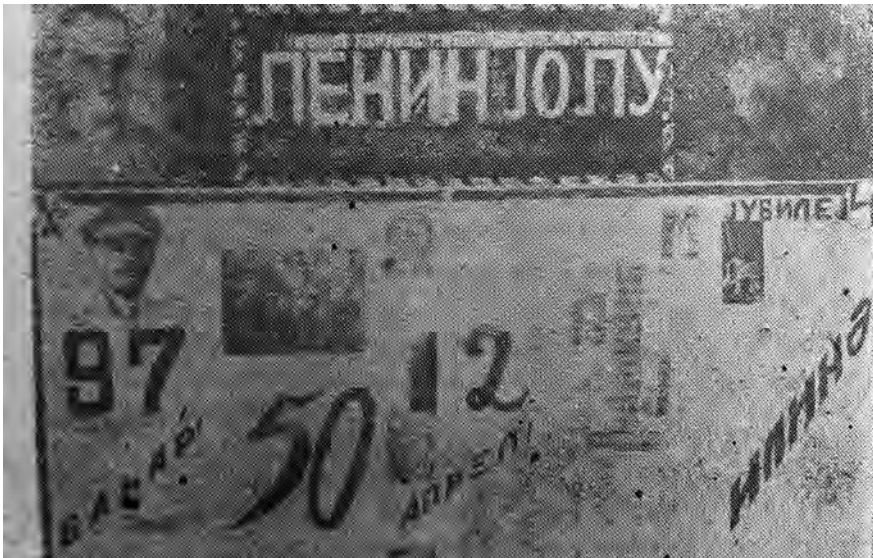


The announcement about the establishment of Jabarli theatre in "Araks" newspaper, 1966

Our interviewees also speak about touring concerts and theatre groups:

“Theatre came over, both Turk and Armenian. More Turk [Theatre]. From Ordubad, Nakhijevan mainly. Mainly from there, Nakhijevan. Concerts too. Armenian theatres did not come often. [We went]. They came too. I understood the Turk performances, but I could not speak well, the way they spoke Armenian. Of course, I understood, but I did not speak fluent Azerbaijani. But there were Armenians among us who spoke Azerbaijani fluently. Those who mainly worked together in the kolkhoz.”

In addition to theatre performances and concerts, amateur groups functioned in Azerbaijani villages, and there were wallpapers produced in Azerbaijani. The best examples of such newspapers included the “Bala Qirpi” satiric wallpaper of Nyuvadi⁵² and Lehvaz’s “Lenin Yolu” (Lenin’s Way). We learn from Meghri district executive committee’s newspaper that, “Bala Qirpi,” for example, used cartoons and satirical articles to criticize those co-villagers who displayed behavior not compatible with Communist way of things. As to “Lenin Yolu,” it was the newspaper of Lehvaz collective farm’s Communist Party and Young Communist Organization, which was published monthly both in Armenian and Azerbaijani.



Lehvaz’ “Lenin Yolu” wallpaper, May 1967

Newspapers and our interviewees testify that all Soviet holidays were celebrated in the district. An elderly woman from Lehvaz recalls how Armenians and Azerbaijanis celebrated the holidays:

“May the 1st, March 8. Long live May 1, long live our red day, our red future. We said such words, just said them. We put a glass jar on a piece of wood, inside was a rag soaked in oil, we kept it and then burnt it. Some eight-ten youths went on village rounds at night; this is how we celebrated May 1. Back at school times.

On March 8, gifts were given, meals were cooked, drinks drank, we partied and then called it a day. On May 1 and May 2, in the past, not now, we went out to picnic when the days were good. Each work unit went out to the orchards, we took meat, other things, and we partied and came back. Nothing like that happens now. If you are doing fine, you are fine regardless of the day. If you are miserable, then you are miserable. If you are healthy and well, then do well, if not, then not.”

It is interesting to observe how the memories of our interviewees from Lehvaz retained the Azerbaijani’s celebrations of their holidays:

“There were no celebrations, we celebrated only New Year. Easter came later, it happened later. They celebrated Novruz, Bayram. On Charchambay day, we hang purses from garrets. There were a few houses with garrets, we hang those, the purses, they [Azerbaijanis] put something inside, we pulled them up. We dropped it, they put something inside, some sweets, and we pulled it up. Sometimes it was grains, corn, whatever they made at home; there was nothing else back then. Some sweets. They put things in the bags, and we pulled them up. For Charchamba we Armenians went to collect from them. They came over at New Year, to wish us happy New Year.”

“On the 19th it was Charchamba, it was called Charchamba, we went out with purses to wish them happy Charchamba, and they gave us coins, or treated to sweets. We had such friendship, we were close to each other, real human interactions,” a 60-year old man from Lehvaz remembered.

Lehvaz residents remember Bayram and Bayram week as the most memorable celebration of their Azerbaijani neighbors. One elderly woman recalls:

“For example they said Novruz Bayram. Was it the 21st of this month? The TV also says Bayram, they say their Bayram, Bayram means a holiday. Bahar means spring; they say Bayram bahar, spring holiday. We say that 21st is when spring comes, by old calendar. I heard that on the TV many times. Now, that is what they celebrate, not the New Year. Bahar Bayram. Spring holiday. That is what they celebrated. That is how it is. It is Easter on the first, isn’t it? They had nothing to do with it, it is Armenian Easter, and we should celebrate Easter on April 1.

Let me tell about Bayram. For example this year both Bayram and Charchamba day are on the 21st. Do you know what Charchamba is? Second day, Second day is Akhshami, and 3d day is the real Charchamba, they dye eggs on that day, what do I know? They cook greens, then they make fire, jump over, they cook pilaf. They dye eggs, 50 to 60 eggs, Children bring over bags, throw them around, or you should just put things inside it without making a show of it, so as no one sees, they grab it and run. They put eggs, grains inside, they put whatever they had, and then they grab and leave. During Charchamba, it is their custom, as I remember;

they should not speak a bad word. During that day, in the evening, they always speak well. Why is this? There were people who were barren; they wanted to see what words go around. If the words are kind, it means the child will come. Or, they made a wish, so they would want to see what is spoken. Or they had a daughter to marry. Something kind, something good. Without speaking they take a cup of water. So they listen and whoever speaks the first word, whose mouth utters those words, they learn from those words what would happen. They open the door, pour the water, and run away, so as you do not know who that was. Then they say it was them. Like, if you make a wish that your daughter should marry, then her. So, I should go see whether she is pregnant.

Also, during that Charchamba day, they got up very early in the morning, during the third day, they went to the river. They should not talk to anyone on their way, if they were talked to, they should not reply. That was their custom, what do I know? They went to the river or the water spring, filled their buckets, jug or kettles, they also gathered seven stones from the river and brought all that home. They put one stone with the wheat, another inside the flour sack; another one went to special spot to bring more income during the next year. Not the first day, not the second day, this was the third day. The third day of the week. After that, on the 21st, it was Bayram. For example, this year, Charchamba and Bayram were on the same day.”

Such detailed account of Azerbaijani holidays indicates that Lehvaz residents were involved in each other's holiday celebrations and rites. The fact that Armenians were part of their Azerbaijani neighbor's cultural life and that they provide evidence that Azerbaijanis were also involved in Armenian holidays and celebrations (“On Charchamba day we Armenians went and collected from them, they came over at New Year, with good wishes”), demonstrates that beyond official interactions (collective farms, work relations, officially celebrated Soviet holidays), there were larger contacts and real neighborly relations. Moreover, one may assume that Soviet authorities would not have encouraged these traditional celebrations, but these stories testify that, as a minimum, they did not prohibit those or just ignored the presence of these holidays and rites in daily life.

SOVIET MONUMENTS

Monuments were an important part of enhancing Soviet ideology and memory politics. This was particularly true in the case of the founders of the Soviet state, Soviet leaders, Bolshevik revolutionaries and alike. The politics of memory also emphasized monuments erected in tribute of the victims of Great Patriotic War. There were several such monuments-in memory of unknown soldier that were placed in big cities, those dedicated to Soviet Army generals and heroes as well as village monuments that commemorated their co-villagers perished during the

war. The memorialization of the Great Patriotic War started in the USSR back in the second half of the 1940s. It began with local initiatives and commemorations that were mostly happening in those locations that were immediately in the war zones or nearby. Those monuments had local value, were for internal use and were placed in rural settlements as simple concrete structures shaped as a pyramid or rectangular steles with a red star and names of dead soldiers engraved. They were usually placed close to a house of culture or at the cemeteries, at village crossroads, close to which bus stops later appeared. In the 1960s the official memorialization and commemoration of the Great Patriotic War was launched in the Soviet Union.⁵³



Lehvaz, Memorial dedicated to the memory of victims of the Great Patriotic War.

Photo credit Raffi Kortoshian, 2018

Our field material from different villages of Armenia provides evidence that such monuments were usually erected with use of public means or were funded by the collective farm as well as through donations from villagers. It was considered that by doing this the public was expressing its gratitude to heroes and thus becoming more attached to their memory. This was one of the very few cases when the rural communities independently chose the style of the monument with Soviet censorship having very little interference in the process. The monument construction started in the 1960s did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some settlements did not manage to build such monuments and were left without a way of commemorating the war victims. However, monument construction continued after the collapse of the USSR as well. All other considerations aside, the presence of such monuments was a matter of honor for the villages.

“Araks” newspaper of Meghri district executive committee revealed in its February 23, 1968 issue that monuments commemorating the victims of Patriotic War were erected in a number of settlements on the occasion of the Soviet Army’s 50th anniversary. The newspaper notes the following, “The workers of the district are paying respect to the immortal memory of their brothers, fathers and other

ИБРАХИМ	И	И
ИСТАНА	Г	А
ИСТИХАН	Б	Ю
ИМАМ	А	А
ИСРАФИЛ	А	Н
ИСТАНА	Л	Б
ИМАРАЛИ	И	И
ИСРАФИЛ	Г	Х
ПУХТАР	С	Л
ИАНСУР	К	А
ИАНШЛАГУДУ	Я	А
ИНАШТОС	И	А
МУРВАТ	К	С
ИЕНТИГУДУ	И	И
ИЕРСЕС	К	О
ИУФТАЛИ	И	И
РУСТАИ	К	Х
РАФИК	Г	И
СУРХАН	И	Т
СЕРГО	С	Р
САДК	О	А
ФАРЗАЛИ	И	И
ШАХГУСЕЙН	А	Ш
ШАХИДАР	И	И
АСЛАН	А	И

Lehvaz, Memorial dedicated to the memory of victims of the Great Patriotic War. Photo credit Raffi Kortoshian, 2018

kin that perished heroically during the War. Such monuments were erected in villages Karchevan, Litchq, Malev, Lehvaz, and Kuris.”

The monument in memory of Soviet soldiers from Lehvaz is still standing in the village. It is also included in the list of monuments protected by the state. In its architectural form and style, it reminds the local, family commemoration-type monuments of the second half or 1940s with names of the dead soldiers and a red star. However, chronologically, it is relevant to the memory policy of the 1960s.

The elder residents of Lehvaz recall the opening of the memorial:

“Well yes, they came and put it up, and then every year on May 9 they went to the monument, all the students of the school, with parents. I remember I went there with a wood stick, with the stick, I went down, close to the road, sat down somewhere, watched the students, talked.”

Some of our interviewees note that the majority of village residents and consequently those who died during the Patriotic War were Azerbaijanis:

“There were few Armenians. 70 percent [of village populations] were Tu[rks]... Azerbaijani. As far back as I can remember, that monument, I was ten years old, it was then that the monument of Great Patriotic War was there, two Armenians and the rest are all Turks [Azerbaijanis]. Imagine their number, since [19]41 the number of Turks was so high, that only two Armenians were killed”, a man aged 60 remembers.

He also remembers the opening of the monument and the annual May 9 events at the monument.

“I remember that they opened the monument, you know how this is done. The first secretary, the second secretary, the third secretary came, did the opening together with kolkhoz head.

On May 9, Azerbaijanis and Armenians together went to the monument, on the occasion of the victory day. There were events, schoolchildren recited poems, in Armenian and in Azerbaijani. Did I say there are names of two Armenians on that monument? The rest are Azerbaijanis. There were school events, we did together.”

As some testify, following the collapse of the Soviet Union a group of youth wanted to erase the names of Azerbaijani soldiers from the monument, but the elderly residents did not let them do that.

“There was a moment when a few young people said lets wipe them out. I told them how could you erase history? There is no way history can be erased.”

When talking about this, some of the men note that the monument is sacred and no one would think to touch it.

“Sure, that monument is sacred, what does it have to do with other things, it used to be one common state back then... Didn't I tell you there are two



Lehvaz, Memorial dedicated to the memory of victims of the Great Patriotic War.
Photo credit R. Kortoshian, March 2018

Armenian names; they were taken from the village. It was a common war. That was out of the question... We never harmed the Turks [Azerbaijanis] themselves, why would we harm the monument.”

One of the typical Soviet visual images are the monumental statues of Soviet

leaders. In Armenia, there were Lenin statues, busts, sculptures and other tributes up until the collapse of the Soviet Union. As to Stalin statues, those were dismantled in Armenia like in other parts of the USSR, following the criticism of Stalin's cult in Khrushchev's era. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, as noted by the witnesses, the only statue of Stalin in Armenia that was standing up until the collapse of the Soviet Union was located in the Azerbaijani populated Aldara (currently Alvanq) village of Meghri district. This statue managed to survive the era of Stalin's cult criticism and stand still thanks to the residents of this village.

As a Lehvazi man aged 60 testifies,

"There was a Stalin statue in Alvanq. You know Alvanq, don't you? Have you been to Alvanq? Is it still there? Only the Turks there kept Stalin's statue. It [village] was called Aldara. Then it turned into Alvanq. It was the only statue, of Stalin."

It should be noted that articles criticizing the existence of Stalin's statue started appearing in "Araks" newspaper only following the escalation of the 1988 Karabakh conflict. An illustration of this is a note titled "Unpleasant Persistence" published in the 1988 August 16 issue of the newspaper.

UNPLEASANT PERSISTENCE

CPSU's 20th Congress was a critical milestone in our country's history. The Party boldly exposed the real nature of Stalin's cult that persevered for decades in addition to pointing out to its dramatic consequences and outlining a course to uproot any traces of that cult from our life.

One of the planned interventions in this regard was the dismantling of Stalin's monumental statues that had mushroomed all across the Union. Our small district was not an exception. Following the war, when small and large collective farms were in dire poverty, they were forced to spend funds on transporting the great leader's statues from the capital and placing them in all the settlements, without an exception. All across the country and in our district as well, there had been full understanding of the Congress' declared directive to remove Stalin's statues. However, with no reason, the then leadership of Aldara that had the patronage of pro-Stalin leaders in the district center, ignored these directives, to put it mildly, and persisted in keeping the statue in place.

30 years later, his statue is still standing erect in the most prominent spot of the village. Stalin is in full military uniform, on his intimidating iron heels, as if standing ready to destroy mercilessly anything honest and human.

According to available information, Aldara residents rationalize that the collective farm's funds had been once spent for this and they do not want the money to go to waste.⁵⁵ Apparently, in all of the country, only the Aldara residents value the cost of property.



Azerbaijanis of Aldara at the Stalin statue⁵⁴

While during the stagnation years, the efforts of Aldara residents to regularly paint and maintain the statue were not encouraged, they were not reprimanded either with no one asking the question as to how much longer should it dominate over the village.

Times are different now. On daily basis, the newspapers publish new materials about Stalin's crimes. One is hard pressed to find any excuses for his behavior. Continued idolization of such a person is no more a matter of disorientation, but it is a direct disregard of the requirement of today's Perestroika spirit.

It appears the present leadership of Aldara is not against removing the statue, since they are younger and they have their independent views. However, the people who had some positions of prominence in the village some 30 years ago do not let them do this and they do not approve of the changes that are happening in the country. Overcoming this unpleasant persistence has been long overdue.

H.Hovhanissyan
Member of USSR's Union of Journalists

Several people reacted to this article including the history teacher of Shvanidzor village school, who noted the following: "I believe that keeping Stalin's statue in Aldara and attempts to idolize it are an evil for our society. Moreover, it is sacrilege and a show of disrespect toward the memory of the innocent victims of [19]30s Stalin terror. It means that Stalinism is alive and well in certain circles."

During Gorbochev's Perestroika period the media reflected a lot on Stalinism vices and criticized its autocracy and repressions. It was around this time that the Russian "Memorial"⁵⁶ was initiated. However, a fact that is remarkable with respect to our field research is that in addition to general publications condemning Stalinism and political repressions, in 1989-90s, there appeared specific articles both in Meghri district newspaper and in the Republican press blaming Stalin directly for the Karabakh issue and generally for the nationality issues. It should be noted that the demand to remove Stalin's statue from Aldara had been formulated in parallel to those articles. According to the interviews with Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan who lived in Alvanq in 2008 (conducted by A. Hakobyan, member of our research team), when they first arrived in Alvanq in 1988-1989, Stalin's statue was still there in the village square, next to the Soviet administration building, but it was removed soon after.⁵⁷

Our research team was unable to find out how and under what circumstances the statue was eventually dismantled. However, we discovered some fragments of Stalin's statue in the village of Nrnadzor (Nyuvadi). The typical hand inside the overcoat betrays the identity of the statue and is a part of the puzzle that is our not so distant past.



A preserved fragment of Stalin's statue, Nmadzor (Nyu-vadi), photo credit R. Kortoshian, 2018

UNKNOWN MONUMENTS⁵⁸

It is known to many in Armenia that the Yugoslavian airplane carrying supplies for the victims of the devastating Spitak earthquake of 1988 crashed during landing killing all seven members of the crew. In Armavir region, on the spot where the plane crashed, stands a monument made of the fragments of the plane. By contrast, very few people in Armenia know that a day before that crash, on December 11, 1988, another plane crashed during landing at Leninakan [currently Gyumri] airport close to Maralik-Leninakan section. The plane that belonged to the Soviet Armed Forces departed from Baku for Leninakan and carried the military servicemen from the Baku regiment who were supposed to help the victims of the earthquake. The Flight Safety Foundations' Aviation Safety Network keeps the statistics of global aviation related accidents and its database is accessible online.⁵⁹ According to this source, the crash of December 11, 1988 of the Baku-Leninakan plane is the worst accident that has ever happened to air transport on the present territory of the Republic of Armenia. As a result, all nine member of the crew and 68 of 69 passengers were killed, a total of 77 people.

In general, very seldom air crashes that happened in USSR were spoken about. The media, as a rule, kept quiet or provided very scarce information about such accidents. In view of the Armenian-Azerbaijani tensions of 1988, reporting about this crash could have been much more problematic. It is interesting, that the day after the crash, on December 12, 1988, the newspaper "Pravda," the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, featured on the bottom right corner of its front page a condolence note for the victims of the crash, signed jointly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers of the USSR. The same condolence note in Armenian can be found at the bottom right corner of the front page of "Soviet Armenia" newspaper (dated to December 12, 1988), which was the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Armenia's Communist Party, The Armenian SSR's Supreme Soviet and Council of Ministers.

The condolence note published in "Pravda," and then translated and republished by the "Soviet Armenia" reads as follows:

"On December 11, when approaching the city of Leninakan of the Armenian SSR, the IL-76 military transport aircraft suffered an accident. Nine members of the crew and 69 military servicemen that were headed for Leninakan to take part in earthquake relief, were killed".

Below this condolence note from the Center, "Soviet Armenia" also published a similar note by the Central Committee of the Armenia's Communist Party, The Armenian SSR's Supreme Soviet and Council of Ministers. Both notes are silent on the starting point of the flight, i.e. Baku. However, around the same time, on December 13, 1988, the newspaper "Bakinski rabochi," an organ of the Communist Party in Baku, published three such notes, one below the other: the publication of "Pravda" that contained the condolences of USSR's top officials to the

victims of the accident near Leninakan, the telegram of the USSR's top officials to Yugoslavia's leaders on the occasion of the accident of the Yugoslavian airplane in the Armenian SSR on December 12, and finally, at the end, the condolence message of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan's Communist Party, Azerbaijan SSR's Supreme Soviet and Council of Ministers for the victims of December 11 crash near Leninakan, which says the following: "on December 11, while approaching Leninakan, the military transportation aircraft of Baku military regiment, suffered an accident." It is only through this official publication that we learn about the fact that the military on the plane were from the Baku base.

It turns out that there is a monument on the spot where the plane crashed, a fact known to very few in Armenia. It is located between the cities of Maralik and Gyumri (Leninakan), left of the Maralik-Gyumri road, on top of a hill.



The monument comprises of two black granite tiles with epitaphs on them and a piece of iron that resembles an airplane tail. Across from it, at the top of black granite tiles, a tufa stone is placed with an Armenian epitaph on it. The following text is written on the granite tile in Russian, "To the crew of IL 76 and the military servicemen that died on 11.12.1988, during the flight to Leninakan that was destined to provide relief to the victims of the earthquake of 7.12.88." At the bottom of the same obelisk, the sign of the Soviet military air force is placed. The smaller, bottom tile of the epitaph is titled "The flight of anguish and duty." Below this title there is a picture of a plane and the names of nine persons, the crew members.

Judging by the monument, it was later on that an orange tufa part was added to the granite tiles and the metallic section that resembles an aircraft tail. The tufa obelisk has the following epitaph, "a fraternal cemetery of soldiers representing different nationalities that were headed to disaster-struck Gyumri and perished in the crash of IL76 aircraft." Use of name Gyumri instead of Leninakan testifies to the fact that this epitaph was placed here at least a couple of years after the crash.⁶⁰



Monument in memory of the victims of Baku-Leninakan air crash, photo by Lusine Kharatyan, 2018

As noted on the monument's epitaph, the crew and the passengers of the plane were really multinational: of 69 passengers 50 were Azerbaijani, 13 were Lezgi, 11 Russian, two Tatars, an Armenian and a Jew, all members of USSR military reserve forces, and the only survivor of the crash was Fahraddin Balayev, who passed away in 2010.⁶¹



The Armenian epitaph on the monument in memory of Baku-Leninakan air crash victims, photo by L. Kharatyan, 2018

In 2008, in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the earthquake, the Armenian National Archives published a compilation of documents entitled “The Earthquake: the Disaster Zone Yesterday and Today: A Look 20 Years Later.” Included in this publication is a report dated November 23, 1989 from A. Aleksanyan, head of the Architectural and Urban Construction Committee under the State Construction Agency to V. Margaryan, the Chairman of Armenian SSR’s Council of Ministers. The report informs about the plans to erect a monument in the memory of the wrecked plane in the town of Artik. The document is entitled “On the Results of the Competition/Tender for Design of Monuments to the Victims of Air Accidents.” It tells us that there was an open tender for the design of monuments in the memory of “Soviet servicemen and Yugoslavian pilots” that “died during the air accidents in Artik and Echmiadzin districts of Armenian SSR while on patriotic and international duty. The tender committee had issued a first grade diploma to architects Sargis Nersissyan and Hasmik Aleksanyan for the design of Artik monument. We learned from the same document that for the implementation of the designs 51.400 Roubles was transferred to a special account, which, however, “is not sufficient” for finalizing working designs and construction of the monuments. The document also states that in order to construct the monument in Artik, a two km road leading to the monument site should be built. Given the fact that the authors of the design are employees of Yerevan Project Institute, it can be assumed that the working design elaboration should have been done by that institution. The road design and the construction of the monument were tasked respectively to the Road Ministry of Armenian SSR and the construction companies under the State Construction Agency. The document

also sets November 30, 1990 as the deadline for the completion of all construction works so as an official opening of the monument is held on December 11, the day of the accident. Appended to the document are also the protocol of the tender committee meeting and the draft resolution of the Armenian SSR's Council of Ministers, which were not included in the publication.

By all accounts, this tender was the immediate response to the resolution of the January 17, 1989 meeting of the Republic's political and economic leadership.⁶² During this meeting Suren Harutyunyan, the then first secretary of the Armenian SSR's Communist Party's Central Committee, had referred to the victims of the Baku-Leninakan flight in his speech "on the Issues Presented to the Party, Soviet and Economic Entities by the USSR Communist Party's Central Committee and the Council of Ministers with regard to Activities Directed to Elimination of the Consequences of Earthquake in the Armenian SSR." "It is with pain and anguish that we remember the tragic deaths of the crew and the servicemen of the Soviet military plane as well as the crew of the Yugoslavian plane who were plane wrecked while on their way to bring aid and relief to the Armenian people," said S. Harutyunyan going on to mention that "the memory of the earthquake victims should be immortalized."⁶³ Today, when addressing urban construction issues, there should be plans for monuments, obelisks, memorials that honor the memory of the national tragedy. Yesterday, in Leninakan, we talked once again about the need to pay tribute to the memory of the crew and the passengers of the Soviet military plane as well as the crew of the Yugoslavian plane. I believe this should be done not with the use of state money, but from people's donations so as the people have their contribution. I believe collecting the money and constructing the monuments is our duty."⁶⁴ In the end, the meeting of the Armenian SSR's party and economic leadership decided "to start an initiative of a number of enterprises and organizations in the Republic in support of constructing the monuments dedicated to the memory of the crew and the passengers of the Soviet military plane as well as the crew of the Yugoslavian plane that were on their way to bring aid to earthquake victims."⁶⁵

Judging from the general look of the monument "discovered" by us in 2018 and the absence of architectural solutions, we presume that we are not dealing with the monument mentioned in the above documents. Most probably, due to the whirlwind of events happening in the USSR and in Armenia, the planned monument had not been erected. However, there is a memorial on the spot of the plane crash, which honors the memory of the victims and which can be accessed via a mountainous path.

- ⁷ The ethnonym “Azerbaijani” was first mentioned in the 1939 USSR census. Before that, the sources and literature, as well as the censuses referred to Turkic-speaking Muslims of the South Caucasus with different terms, such as “Muslims,” “Turks.” According to data there were 130,896 Azerbaijanis residing in Armenia in 1939 (Всесоюзная перепись населения 1939 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_39.php?reg=6). However, data from the 1926 USSR census conducted in the Transcaucasian Federation (Armenia was included in the Federation) mentioned this Muslim Turkic-speaking population of Transcaucasus as “тюрк” (Tyurk) [in Russian], and “Turk” [in Armenian] (Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926 года. Национальный состав населения по регионам республик СССР http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2265). The sharp decline of the number of Azerbaijanis in 1989 is contingent on the Karabakh movement related developments; after which Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR moved to Azerbaijani SSR, while Armenians from Azerbaijani SSR relocated to Armenian SSR. This process had started in 1988, while the census was conducted in the autumn of 1989.
- ⁸ According to the 2001 census there were 29 officially registered Azerbaijanis in Armenia (RA National Minorities in the current state of formation of civil society 2, Yerevan, 2001, page 150, [ՀՀ ազգային փոքրամասնությունների քաղաքացիական հասարակության կայացման արդի պայմաններում 2, Երևան, 2001, էջ 150]). The most recent censuses were not conducted with the use of the same methodology and the smaller groups were not included.
- ⁹ The word “space” is not meant as something merely physical here; instead it is used in a larger meaning to include ideas, discourses and notions.
- ¹⁰ See next chapters, Bughakar, Babahaj and others.
- ¹¹ District Executive Committee of the Communist Party was the main local governance body in the USSR.
- ¹² “Koltntesayin” is the Armenian translation of “Kolkhoz.”
- ¹³ A socialist competition or socialist emulation was a work productivity contest conducted in the USSR between production units, collective farms, state enterprises, brigades, educational institutions, and even between individual workers. The socialist competitions were tasked to Soviet trade unions. The so-called Socialist undertakings were an important part of these contests, in which the key orientation point was the production plan, while the worker’s union and individual workers committed to meet and exceed the targets in the plan. Winners were awarded materially or morally. Material awards included money, goods, tickets to resorts and so on, while the moral awards were certificates of honor, or in case of a working collective a transferable red banner.
- ¹⁴ During the very first years of Armenia’s independence a widespread renaming process started in Armenia. As a result, street names related to the Soviet era, as well as Azerbaijani and their former settlements, disappeared from Armenia’s administrative political map. This process happened in parallel on both sides of the Karabakh conflict. Today, the former Baku street in Yerevan is called Artsakh street, while the Yerevan street in Baku is renamed Vagif.
- ¹⁵ Interviews among the Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan and the residents of Nagorny Karabakh indicate that similar to these Azerbaijanis, the Armenians from rural areas of Azerbaijan who graduated from Armenian schools, would mostly continue their education either in Armenian SSR or in Armenian Department at Baku Pedagogical, an equivalent of the Azerbaijani Department at Yerevan Pedagogical.
- ¹⁶ A city in the current day Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic within the Republic of Azerbaijan.
- ¹⁷ In Armenian spoken language it is common to use the term “Turk” when referring to Azerbaijanis. As Azerbaijanis are Turkic-speakers, this was the name used before the introduction of ethnonym “Azerbaijani,” and people continue to use it to this day.
- ¹⁸ In reality there is little likelihood that Turkish-made products would be sold in Ordubad during Soviet times. Most probably, those are realities of the post-independence time, when Turkish goods appeared in Armenia, and these realities are assigned to the Soviet era. Since the clothing from Turkey is considered of good quality in Armenia, the fact of purchasing clothing from Ordubad is associated to its good quality and its assumedly Turkish origin.
- ¹⁹ Communist Party of Soviet Union

- ²⁰ Yeghishe Charents (1897-1937) was a prominent Armenian poet, writer and public activist.
- ²¹ Organized pogroms of the Armenian population of Sumgait city in Azerbaijan in February 27-29, 1988, in response to the Karabakh Movement. According to official Soviet data, 32 people had died, of which 26 were Armenian. For three days in a row the angry masses violently attacked Armenians on streets and in their houses, and met no interference from Local Militia.
- ²² During Gorbachov's policy of Glasnost, one of the practices in Soviet printed press was the publication of letters from readers. These were not occasional letters, but rather large quantities with their own overview, or thematic series (Letters about the History and for the History, edited by M.Ya. Rozhanskij, Irkutsk 2014, p. 8., in Russian). As P. Paryan notices in her article on "Transformation of the Communist Party's Official Newspaper "Soviet Armenia" in 1989," authored under H. Byol Foundation's research grant in 2019, the official daily of Communist Party "Soviet Armenia" also widely used this practice. In this regard, "Araks"'s effort to prevent inter-ethnic conflict through letters is interesting and corresponds to the tradition of prevailing Soviet ideology, and tries to keep the line of internationalism through the letters of local residents.
- ²³ Translator's note: A spoken language word used in Armenian and originating from Turkish/Azerbaijani that means close, or friendly.
- ²⁴ Agulis was a mediaeval Armenian settlement on the territory of current-day Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic. It was particularly famous for its churches. Part of its population remained Armenian at the beginning of 20th century. In 1919 the town was destroyed and its Armenian population was massacred by the Turkish Army. Azerbaijani writer Akram Aylisly's book "Stone Dreams" is about those events.
- ²⁵ A character from an Armenian fairy tale known for his cowardly nature.
- ²⁶ Special regime operated in USSR borderline zones that required an entrance permit.
- ²⁷ Alishan, Gh, Sisakan, Venice, 1893, page 302. [Ալիշան Ղ., Սիսական, Վենետիկ, 1893, էջ 302]
- ²⁸ In 1897, Davit Akhberjanyants was the village elder (Shahenants M, letter from Meghri, Mshak, 1897, issue 108, page 3. [Շահեանց Մ., Նամակ Մեղրիից, Մշակ, 1897, դ. 108, էջ 3]) In 1907, Qearbala Mekhti who was a "Turk" is remembered as someone who was well liked by Armenians and who was always against senseless wars (Droshak, 1907, issue 2, page 26. [Դրոշակ, 1907, դ 2, էջ 26]). In 1911, Aleksan was the village elder (Topchi, the issue of the village elderly in Meghri, Zhayr, 1911, issue 15, page 2. [Թոփչի, Տանտուերության հարցը Մեղրիում, Ժայռ, 1911, դ 15, էջ 2]).
- ²⁹ Once again Armenian sounded. Araks, May 27, 1989. [Նորից հնչեց հայերենը, Արաքս թերթ, 27 մայիսի 1989 թ.]
- ³⁰ Toward 50th anniversary of formation of the USSR: Under the warm brotherly sun: One village one family, Arshavir Mkrtchyan, Lehvaz village mayor, June 13, 1972. [Դեպի ՍՍՄԿ կազմավորման 50-ամյակը, Եղբայրական ջերմ արևի տակ, Մի գյուղ է մի ընտանիք, Արշավիր Մկրտչյան, Լեհվազի գյուղատվեսի նախագահ, 13 հունիսի 1972 թ.]
- ³¹ Smbatyan, G., Syunik at Trial, Armenian-Tatar clashes, Yerevan, 2017, page 392. [Գ. Սմբատյան, Սյունիքը փորձության մեջ. Հայ-թաթարական բախումները, Երևան, 2017, էջ 392]
- ³² Ethnographic field material, March 2018, Lehvaz.
- ³³ "Kolntesayin Village," June 12, 1960 [Կոլտնեսային գյուղ, 12 հունիսի 1960 թ.]
- ³⁴ "Echmiadzin," the official magazine of Holy See Echmiadzin, October-December 1948. [Էջմիածին, Ս. Էջմիածնի Հայրապետական աթոռի պաշտոնական ամսագիր, հեկտեմբեր-դեկտեմբեր 1948]
- ³⁵ A letter to the editorial group: A Bathhouse or?... "Kolntesayin Village," November 1, 1956. G. Khacatryan, "Instead of a Feuilleton. I wish it weren't a dream," June 30, 1965. [Նամակ խմբագրությանը. Բաղնիք, թե՛..., Կոլտնեսային գյուղ, 1 նոյեմբերի 1956 թ., Գ. Խաչատրյան Ֆելիետոնի փոխարեն. Ափսոս երազ էր..., Արաքս, 30 հունիսի 1965 թ.]
- ³⁶ "Araks," Septeber 19, 1968. Generally, using "Friendship" as a proper name was widely spread in Soviet naming tradition thus reflecting the slogan for the peoples' friendship in the physical space. There were spaces named Friendship in almost all Soviet cities. To illustrate, in Yerevan there is a metro station and an adjacent square with that name.
- ³⁷ A clay stove usually built into the ground, traditionally used for making bread, cooking and heating purposes

- 38 The name of the Village Council under the Soviets.
- 39 Traditional Armenian flat bread.
- 40 Auntie
- 41 Auntie in Russian
- 42 “Echmiadzin,” the official magazine of Holy See Echmiadzin, October-December 1948. [Էջմիածին, Ս. Էջմիածնի Հայրապետական պաթոռի պաշտոնական ամսագիր, հոկտեմբեր-դեկտեմբեր 1948]
- 43 “lamps” were the symbol of Soviet modernization in the 1920s. They reflect the policy that even the most remote villages in USSR should be electrified.
- 44 35 Years of Soviet Rule. Nyuvadi 35 Years ago and Now. “Kolntesayin Village,” November 29, 1955. [Սովետական իշխանության 35 տարում. Նյուվադի գյուղը 35 տարի առաջ և ներկայումս, Կոլտեսային գյուղ, 29 նոյեմբերի 1955 թ.]
- 45 J. Abasova, “Problems of Our Village,” “Kolntesayin Village,” November 12, 1961. [Ջ. Աբասովա, Մեր գյուղի հոգսերը, Կոլտեսային գյուղ, 12 նոյեմբերի 1961 թ.]
- 46 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOpXRagiKqY>
- 47 Alishan refers to the village using the same name (Alishan, Gh. Sisakan, Venice, 1893, page 308). The 1932 state map of Armenia refers to it as Arnadzor.
- 48 A. Khachatryan, Letters to the editorial group, Out of Sight, Out of Control. “Kolntesayin Village,” March 15, 1965. [Ա. Խաչատրյան, Նամակներ խմբագրությանը. Աչքից հեռու, գործից անտեղյակ, Կոլտեսային գյուղ, 15 մարտի, 1965 թ.]
- 49 Summer pasture for cattle.
- 50 P. Rustamov, “Car Road to Yaylagh,” Kolntesayin Village, January 15, 1959. [Փ. Ռուստամով, Ավտոճանապարհի դեպի յայլաղ, 15 հունվարի 1959 թ.]
- 51 “News from Nyuvadi village collective farm,” December 3, 1970. [Լուրեր՝ Նյուվադի գյուղի կոլտեսությունից, 3 դեկտեմբերի 1970 թ.]
- 52 The district executive committee’s newspaper had regular features of the wallpapers under the title “Overview of Lower Press.”
- 53 Anna Rylova, Natalya Konradova, Heroes and Victims, Memorials of the Great Patriotic, Untouchable Fund, 2005, 2-3 (40-41) [Анна Рылева. Наталья Конрадова, Герои и жертвы. Мемориалы Великой Отечественной Неприкосновенный запас » 2005, 2-3(40-41) <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2>]
- 54 http://www.aldara.az/ardi.php?n_id=64, last visited on 09.06.2019
- 55 This is confirmed also through our field material. An interviewee who was involved in party and administrative work in Meghri during that time also speaks about this.
- 56 “Memorial” is an international, historical-educational advocacy and charitable NGO which was established in 1987 in Moscow and aimed to study the political repressions in the USSR.
- 57 Arsen Hakobyan, Some Aspects of Adaptation of Refugees: the case of Lehvaz and Alvanq villages of Meghri District, essay, 2008 (in Russian, unpublished)
- 58 We refer to only one monument with the assumption that there might be others as well, which are not yet known to the larger public.
- 59 Data is available online, at <https://aviation-safety.net/database/>
- 60 Throughout 1990-92, Leninakan was named Kumayri and was renamed to Gyumri only on March 13, 1992, Dictionary of the Settlements of the Republic of Armenia, at RA Cadastre’s website https://www.cadastre.am/storage/files/pages/pg_907871769_HH_bnak_bar..pdf
- 61 http://www.aniarc.am/2018/12/11/baku-gyumri-airplane-crush-1988/?fbclid=IwAR2sYtO1Qn2r-p1_pHXuoTevt1MlsoScLn9msuDOoBjhi2A19q5whnQ_UBc
- 62 “The Earthquake: the Disaster Zone Yesterday and Today: A Look 20 Years Later,” a collection of documents, National Archive of Armenia, Yerevan, 2008. [«Երկրաշարժ. Աղետի գոտին երեկ և այսօր. Հայացք 20 տարի անց», փաստաթղթերի ժողովածու, Հայաստանի Ազգային Արխիվ, Երևան, 2008]
- 63 Ibid
- 64 Ibid
- 65 Ibid

chapter II

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE:
SACRED SPACES AND
PILGRIMAGE SITES

LUSINE KHARATYAN / ARSEN HAKOBYAN / RAFFI KORTOSHIAN

BUGHAKAR (BOGHAKAR) PIR

THE Pilgrimage site Bughakar Pir⁶⁶ is located eight kilometers northwest from Lehvaz village of the Syunik province of Armenia, on the southeastern slopes of Sheikhud Mountain, very close to the state border with Nakhijevan.⁶⁷ According to the sources we studied, the place was first mentioned as Pughakar in the 18th century.⁶⁸ Its first mention as a Turk-populated village appears in the Armenian newspaper “Mshak” in 1888. According to the Mshak’s publications, in 1913 Boghakar-Bughakar had 14 to 20 houses of Turk inhabitants, who were expelled by the state from the public forest, because they were cutting the trees. In 1919, the wealthy magnate L. Mantashyan purchased Bughakar Turk-populated village to serve the nearby mines.⁶⁹ However, the name of the settlement appears in official (Russian Empire then Soviet) statistics from 1908. According to its data, the number of residents was 194 in 1908; 96 in 1914; 44 in 1922; and 41 in 1931. No such settlement is mentioned in 1831, 1873, or 1886 Russian Empire statistical data.⁷⁰ According to the Dictionary of Toponyms of Armenia and Neighboring Countries, a settlement named Boghakar with a population of 139 already existed as revealed in the 1897 census. It had 53 residents in 1939. The settlement was abandoned during the 1930s and its population mostly resettled to Lehvaz village in Meghri district.⁷¹ The toponym is linked to a mountain pass of the same name that connects Agulis, Ordubad and Meghri, mentioned as Baghakar pass. It was also known as Bughakyar, Pughakar and Bughakar.⁷² Interestingly, the nearby Armenian village Vahravar is also mentioned as Bughakar in the 1886 Russian Census.

First mention of the pilgrimage site we found is from 1913, when it is described as “old Turk Pilgrimage place Bughakar.”⁷³ According to an Azerbaijani legend, before the construction of a shrine-pilgrimage site, mysterious phenomena were happening on the site at nights that scared people. As a result, no one would settle there. The legend tells that those who stayed overnight saw lights and heard voices. They got scared, left the place and never came back. Finally, a fearless khan⁷⁴ decided to construct a building on the site. His servants built one of the walls of the building, but found it mysteriously destroyed in the morning. They built the wall again, but it was again destroyed. The Khan was puzzled. Eventually, a white-bearded old man called the Khan and told him a dream he had. The old man had seen another elderly man in his dream. The man in his dream complained that his wife was being disturbed: every night they built a wall, but the wife could hardly pull her hand out of it. Hearing the old man’s dream, the khan decided to build a shrine for religious martyrs. The construction was completed very soon after. Thus, Boghakar Pir was founded.⁷⁵

A letter from Meghri dated August 8, 1888 contains interesting information related to Bughakar. The letter particularly tells: “...20 people got crazy in the village. The fanatics asked a psychic reader Molla⁷⁶ to heal the crazy. For the past several days, the Molla has visited the mentioned psychiatric village and promised to hunt all the “ghosts.” He believes that the ghosts are in the bones of those sick and comprise of all nationalities. The Molla was generously paid by the families of the mad.”⁷⁷

Perhaps the formation of the pilgrimage site, with a shrine built later, is also related to this Molla. A similar narrative appears in a story from the Azerbaijanis of Ordubad who link the origin of the pilgrimage site to an Iranian dervish, imam or an akhound preaching Islam or a version of it in the area. The site became a sacred place after the death of this saint.⁷⁸

At the turn of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, Sayyids⁷⁹ were actively entering Baku province and Muslim areas of the South Caucasus from Iran to collect religious pledges and donations. They often settled in the villages and settlements of their choice, and made the local folk sanctuaries “canonic,” linking them to a Shia Muslim tradition of a saint, as they were believed to represent a kinship of a Shia saint.⁸⁰ In the 19th century the Sayyids from Iran played an important role, especially in the establishment of new pirs in the area.⁸¹ According to 19th century author Hakhverdov, a Sayyid from Iran could announce that he had a dream of an ancestor being buried in a place and make the villagers believe it was a Pir.⁸²

Smirnov, who studied the Nakhijevan area in the 1930s and whose respondents were mostly representatives of acting, or former, Muslim clergy, mentions that a ziyarat⁸³ of Sayyids Ahmed Ibn Musa Ghazim, either exiled here or hiding from their enemies, was located in Boghakar village.⁸⁴ According to the religious tradition, children of the seventh Imam Musi Ghazim, run away and spread in the northern regions of Iran to escape from the persecutions carried out by Harun al Rashid and Abbasids in the 8 to 9th centuries. Some other sacred places in Azerbaijan, such as Bibi Heybat near Baku, are also linked to this Imam. At the end of the 19th beginning of the 20th century Sayyids settled around this Pir “discovering” the Pir’s burial site, which belonged to the Imam’s sister, though it was linked to a different tradition previously.⁸⁵ It should be noted, that on the other side of the Araks River bordering with Nakhijevan, there was a village called Alemdar, a religious center and living place for Sayyids.⁸⁶

Based on their origin, there are two types of pirs and ziyarats in Azerbaijani culture. The first type, traditional or archaic pirs, are associated with pre-Islamic local beliefs, cultures and animistic ideas. Pirs from a later period are influenced by Islamic narrations, design and style. Traditional pirs are usually located within nature, in isolated areas, near water and forest, and are associated with fertility and perceptions regarding health.⁸⁷

The second type is associated with Muslim preachers, martyrs or Sayyids.⁸⁸ Pirs in the Caucasus were considered a product of non-official, non-orthodox small tradition and rural environment, and their sacred space included women.⁸⁹ To a certain extent, it was in opposition to official religious Muslim institutions and mosques.⁹⁰ In this respect, it should be mentioned that at the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century various streams and groups “opposing” official and orthodox Shi’ism were quite active in the North of Iran, as well as Nakhijevan and the bordering regions of Araks. They were also somewhat encouraged by the Tsarist Administration.⁹¹

As to Bughakar, the folk tradition does not link it to a specific name. This is typical for traditional sacred sites of the region. At the same time, evidence of traditional rituals on the site point to the folk beliefs' nature of the place.

According to a local Armenian folk tale, there is a stone on the way to Bughakar. The snow never stays on this stone in winter because of thermal underground streams. Therefore, the stone is called "Baghakar," and the name "Bughakar" derives from it.⁹²

Bughakar was not missed from the attention of ethnographer Stepan Lisitsian, who visited the place and left interesting accounts during his 1932 Zangezur⁹³ expedition. Lisitsian's description is not about a single sacred site. Through comprehensive research, it tried to answer how - and in what circumstances - the creation of such sacred places was made possible. Lisitsian mentioned in his manuscript that though the site was considered Muslim, local Armenians believed that in the past there was a Christian chapel in the place.⁹⁴ Examining the issue in comparison with other sacred places of the Armenian Highland and Zangezur, Lisitsian links the origin of Bughakar to the ancient worship of sacred spirits, whereby local people sought the protection of sacred sites from evil spirits who were said to curse the mountain passes.⁹⁵ His studies reveal interesting eyewitness accounts. Lisitsian particularly wrote that this Muslim sanctuary was made of stone and had been recently renovated, its metallic roof was painted red, and it had an additional construction for the believers. One of the rooms of the main building, decorated with Iranian ornaments, included the "pir's" tomb in the center. The tomb had a table-like wooden construction on it covered with a black tablecloth. There were candleholders, as well as portraits of Muhammed and the "pir" on the table.⁹⁶ According to Lisitsian's account, covered with a black cloth, the burial sites of three holy Muslim women who lived with the "pir," were found in the other room. Three triangular stones were put on their head sides. Lisitsian mentioned that the saint either did not have a name, or it was not preserved. According to a legend, a mountain bull-deer-"bugha" came down on the "pir," and the sanctuary's name was coined from it.⁹⁷

Interestingly, Nukhota St. Hovhannes Armenian sanctuary (Karchevan⁹⁸-Nakhi-jevan area) also has a legend related to a saint, his accompanying women and a mountain deer. It is believed, that a saint from Nukhi⁹⁹ named Hovhannes, along with his sisters Martha and Yeghisabeth, was praying in this place, in the forest. After he died, a mountain deer came down to his grave, sacrificing itself, and leaving its horn at the site.¹⁰⁰ The Iranian "Turks" also knew about the sanctuary, as they had stolen its door, but then returned after the thief's back was bent. This tale lives until now, but the "Iranian Turk" is replaced with an Azerbaijani. According to the tale, an Azerbaijani man stole the door, put it on his back, but could not put it down anywhere. When he reached his village, the head of the village advised him to take the door back to where it belonged, whereupon the door would come down by itself. The Azerbaijani man followed the advice and promptly returned the stolen door to the Armenians.¹⁰¹

Based on the style of the building of Bughakar and the date (1916-1917) indicated in the only inscription visible from a 1932 photo taken by Lisitsian's expedition member Poghos Grigorian, the building was most probably constructed in the beginning of the 20th century. Grigorian's photos show that the inscription was put on the wooden frame of the tomb, and there are two images, one on each side, depicting the Prophet Muhammed and his son-in-law Ali. It is dedicated to Muhammed Bin Hassan Al Mehdi, the 12th Imam of the Shia religion.

يا محمد يا علي، ... ١٣٣٥ ... صاحب الزمان،

السلام عليك يا صاحب الزمان، السلام عليك يا خليفة الرحمن،

السلام عليك يا شريك القرآن، السلام عليك يا قاطع البرهان،

السلام عليك يا امام الانس و الجان، السلام عليك و على ابائك الطيبين

و اجدادك الطاهرين المعصومين. ورحمة الله و بركاته.

Translation from Arabic by Raffi Kortoshian: "Oh Muhammed, oh Ali. ... 1335 (1916-1917 թթ.)... The Lord of the time. Greetings to You, Oh the Lord of the time, greetings to You, oh, the successor of the All-forgiving, greetings to You, oh, The Equal to Quran, greetings to you, oh Undeniable Fact, greetings to you, oh Imam of people and Jinns, greetings, greetings to You and to your good fathers and to your pure and innocent ancestors. With the God's mercy and generosity.



History Museum of Armenia, Lisitsian Archive, 1540-103, size 8x10.9 cm
Pilgrimage Site "pir," Bughakar, Meghri, 1932
Photographer Poghos Grigorian

Throughout the 1960 to 80s, the territory of Bughakar belonged to the Lehvaz collective farm. The collective farm's apple orchards, as well as the villagers' summerhouses were located there.¹⁰² Currently, the pilgrimage site is on the territory of a state protected nature-reserve "Boghakar," established in 1989. Located on top of a hill, in a woody gorge and surrounded by high mountains, the Boghakar Pir is an impressive building. Nakhijevan Republic is on the other side of the mountains. According to our interviewees, Azerbaijani pilgrims would come from there by foot. Our interviews, as well as some publications in the local newspaper of Meghri District Executive Committee of the Armenian SSR show that the Pir had a special significance and importance in the lives of local Azerbaijanis and Armenians. It was a pilgrimage destination for many people from Ordubad, Nakhijevan, Meghri town and the villages, and even Baku. A 90-year-old woman from Lehvaz recalls the different reasons for pilgrimage as well as the places where people would come from:

"...For example, you promise a sacrifice if your son returns from the army safe and sound, or for a success of an undertaking. So, if your wish was fulfilled, you would make a sacrifice there [in Bughakar Pir]. Then they [Azerbaijanis] would always go to that place from Nakhijevan, Ordubad, Norashen. They would cross the mountains, there is a path there, they are now there, the army, what do I know... The path is visible from Bughakar. They [the Azerbaijani soldiers] are visible too. They would come from there [Nakhijevan]. Also from here, [they] would come by a train, get out and go [to Boghakar]. Depending on their material means, there were poor and rich."

According to a 60-year-old man, while churches in Meghri were not functioning during the Soviet period, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis of the region would go on pilgrimages and make sacrifices in Boghakar:

"Imagine our church under the Soviets; the churches were not functioning in Meghri. The churches were closed, but they [the pilgrimage sites] were functioning. That Pir. We, Armenians, would also go there, make a sacrifice."

An old man describes the road to Bughakar and tells:

"So during the season they would come, even from Baku, with cars up to Aygedzor,¹⁰³ then a new road was built, I mean in old times, there was nothing back then, they would go to Boghakar, cultivate the land, 40-50 tones of apple was collected in Boghakar, antonovka, belafloor...¹⁰⁴ This was during the Soviet system. And then, in Boghakar people would come from that [Nakhijevan] side, from Ordubad... from there to Boghakar they came easily, from Agulis, by foot."

An 80-year old man tells that the people were coming to Bughakar mostly during Shahsey-Vahsey,¹⁰⁵ and that the Armenians would go there only for collective farm works and "had nothing to do" with the Pir:



History Museum of Armenia, Lisitsian Archive 1540-104, size 7.5 x 10.7 cm
Icon, Bughakar, Meghri, 1932
Photographer Poghos Grigorian



History Museum of Armenia, Lisitsian Archive 1540-102, size 8x10,9 cm
Pilgrimage Site "pir," Bughakar, Meghri, 1932
Photographer Poghos Grigoryan

"That was the God of the Turks. Something like our church. They constructed it beautifully... So, they would come from Ordubad, often times from Baku. They, the Turks, we were not going there, we had nothing to do with that Pir of Turks. But we were always working there in Boghakar.

They would come and go. They were growing potatoes for Kolkhoz, we would go to bring it. They would exclusively come for the saint. There were seven small buildings under the saint for staying [overnight or for some days]. They have built such small structures in two places, so as two to three people could stay at a time. They would come and stay for three to four days, pray to the God and leave.”

Not only Lehvaz villagers remember how important Bughakar Pir was for Azerbaijanis, but also people from Ordubad. As soon as we were back from Boghakar to Meghri, one of our field team members put a photo from Bughakar on Facebook. The first reaction was from an Azerbaijani friend living abroad. After making sure that the photo was actually taken in Boghakar, the friend with Ordubad roots made the following comment:

“You know that they have “pir” called Malik Ibrahim and a big old cemetery in uptown Ordubad, and it dates back to the 12th century if I remember correctly, but this one was more important than that. They wowed with its name, even until today. If they want to convince someone, instead of by God, they say by Bokhkar (Boxkar haqqı). And they would promise all their major/utmost charities and animal sacrifices to Bokhkar. It was the most important one for the entire population of Ordubad until the start of the conflict. In old days, people just walked through mountain passes, with mules and horses. Even my mom was taken as a child (late[19] 30’s early [19]40’s). It is amazing that it is still standing. They call it Bohkar.”

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As of March 23, 2018 the Bughakar/Boghakar sanctuary is still standing. The building is made of uncut white stone and clay. It has a rectangular plan, and an inner niche on the western wall. The main entrance opens from the east, and the remaining two entrances from the north and south. There is no Mihrab niche¹⁰⁶ in the south and there is an entrance in the traditional place where it should have been. The dome is well preserved. The wall paintings in 1932 photos differ from the preserved fragments as of 2018. Therefore one can assume that the place was re-painted in the second half of the 20th century.

Our interviewees remember Bughakar Pir at its best times. Some older residents of Lehvaz describe the building in detail, both the inside and the outside. According to an elderly man, apart from the central building with a dome, the construction had four rooms. He describes one of these rooms as a reception area. The “reception” was on the same level with the central domed construction, and there were several other rooms along the corridor leading to the central room. The stairs were leading here, while there were three other rooms on the lower level. According to him, these rooms were for the servants of the sanctuary. There was a wooden table in the center of the central domed room, covered with carpets. There was a tombstone under the table, and the front of it looked like an altar, where the visitors would light candles. The floor was fully covered with carpets and the visitors were required to remove their shoes when entering. There was a huge, very old, oak tree next to the building, where most animal sacrifices were

performed. Completing his description, the old man compared Bughakar Pir's luxurious appearance with the magnificent German churches he had seen when serving in the Soviet Army on the territory of Eastern Germany.

“Boghakar Pir was a Persian Mosque, an old one... I grew up there since the age of around three. My mother was then the secretary of the party organization, here in Lehvaz. They were cultivating the land over there and people would go there... Like our churches are all on the mountains, to be strong, not to fall, it was also like that [...] there are two gorges, one from this side, with its waterfall, so you pass the waterfall and there is a large gorge, you enter the gorge and there it is, Boghakar Mosque was standing there....That Pir was Persian. A person, don't know his name, was buried there, like in Georgia, in Havlabar,¹⁰⁷ our great people, our writers, were buried next to the church, someone like them was buried there [in Boghakar]. There was a tomb in the building with the dome, something like a table with a tombstone underneath, and the table was covered with carpets, the tombstone was under the table with wooden legs, and there was something like an altar in front of it, so they could light a candle. They [the Azerbaijanis] also had this candle [tradition]... When we were visiting, we would also take our shoes off, inside was fully covered with carpets ... The candle lighting place was right in front of the entrance, on the right side, there was something like a window, a passage from the back, looked like a window, but it was a passage with narrow stairs for them, and there was another room there, under the stairs.”

The presence of candles is interesting, as candle lighting is not typical for Muslim sanctuaries. The existence of this custom also indicates cultural interconnection and exchange. Interestingly, the old man compares the tombstone of the sanctuary with the Armenian pantheon of Tbilisi, which is also on the territory next to the church and is yet another characteristic of religious-ritual space.

The narrators also remember that the Pir used to have two servants, a woman named Fatima Khanum and a man whom they just called “Molla”.

“So, when you went to the Pir, there was a corridor, Fatima Khanum's place was on one side and Molla's place on the other. They had different places, and had no right to change it. Presumably, the dead man's corpse was on one side, and the women corpses were on the other. For example, there were lyalu-myalus... do you know what lyalu is? They would make knots with the thread, put a child [a doll] in it and swing. They made small ones and hung those there, if it swung, then they would have a child. So, that was Fatima's place. The man's place was for praying. You would pray there, and there was a money box, if you wanted you could put money, was up to you. So many times, I put it. You prayed and walked out backwards. The same there [at Fatima's place]. The main building is on a higher level, and there is a corridor inside, something like a corridor. A door opens to Fatima's place, and another one to Molla's. Below the



Bughakar Pir, photo by Raffi Kortoshian, 2018

Bughakar Pir, March 2018, photo by Raffi Kortoshian



Molla's place is a gorge with a river. And from the other side there are houses on different levels. Those who went there for praying, would stay in the houses. These were small houses. So, just like that. You should go there and see how impressive it is, oh... Carpets were everywhere, they made it like a mausoleum, as if it was a corpse, as if it was buried there, I don't know, they covered it with a black cloth, both were covered. You'd go kissing, kissing and then turning around three times, it was wider than this table, so you'd turn around, then walk backward towards the door and get out... The shrine, was also covered with a black cloth, you turn around, you kiss, and there was a money box, you could put money in it, if you wanted. I don't know, those who wanted would put. If you vowed to give money, you'd do it, and then get out and leave."

Interestingly, an Azerbaijani legend tells that there were two shrines in Boghakar, for a woman and for a man. According to the Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore, the sanctified Agha,¹⁰⁸ his wife and his sons were buried there.¹⁰⁹ The stories we recorded in Lehvaz village in 2018, as well as the photos of Poghos Grigorian from 1932, also indicate the existence of "female saints."

According to another narrative, a boy cuts one of the trees near Bughakar Pir. He sees the blood dripping from the cut. The boy loses his speech from fear. He is taken to a fortuneteller. The fortuneteller confirms that the boy has committed a sin, and should make a sacrifice to Bughakar Pir. The boy gets back his speech after making the sacrifice.¹¹⁰

Interestingly, some of the memories of Lehvaz residents are also related to issues affecting the power of speech. An elderly man tells the story of his cousin from Shvanidzor village:

"My aunt's son was born in [19]47. He was a four-year old boy and could not speak. One day my aunt, they were from Shvanidzor, had a dream. She was my mom's younger sister. So, in her dream she was told to go there [Bughakar], and she comes here. And my mom would always go. My dad took the linens and they went there on a donkey to stay there. So, they take Valod [the aunt's son] there. You know, where the oak tree is? Fatima Khanum hosted them, she knew my mom, and it was a different level of respect when you knew the person. So, they chained Valod, my aunt's son, around the oak tree, they left him there and went home [the small houses/rooms around the Pir], and lit the candles. Somewhere around 4 am. They hear a dog bark. They get up to see that Valod is barking like a dog, my aunt's son is barking like a dog. My mom approached him first, she looked at the stairs leading to the Pir, and he [Valod], calls "auntie, auntie!" So, things like this happen."

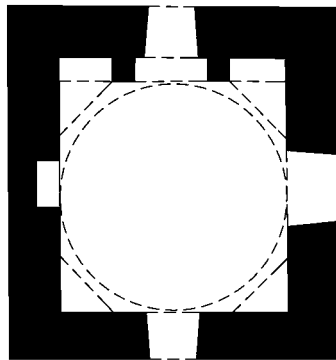


Bughakar Pir, main building from the inside, photos by Raffi Kortoshian, 2018





History Museum of Armenia, Lisitsian Archive 1540-102, size 8x10,9 cm
Pilgrimage Site "pir," Bughakar, Meghri, 1932
Photographer Poghos Grigoryan



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Meghri district, village Lehvaz, Bughakar Pir, Plan by
Raffi Kortoshian, March 2018

A Baku woman in her 50s also tells about Pir's power with respect to "speech issues:"¹¹¹

"My grandma has told me, and also all my relatives know about this. I was not born yet, but my cousin was three years old when her father died. After his death, my cousin would not speak for a year. They took her to many doctors, as well as different saints. Then they learned about that place [Bughakar]. They called it Boghakyar. So, my cousin was brought there. As they told, she was laid down on the floor and put to sleep. When she fall asleep, her face was closed with a kerchief. She woke up in ten-15 minutes, they took the kerchief, and seeing my grandma she immediately screamed "nene."¹¹² She gained her speech on that day. No one believed that she'd ever talk. It was from the stress. She loved her dad very much... It happened in 1964, my cousin was born in 1961."

An elderly woman from Lehvaz recalls a fragment, which is not related to the speech, but illustrates the Pir's "punishment," that has to do with the mouth:

"Martik's daughter was a schoolgirl, she is dead now, her father was the village head, he went there [to the Pir] and there was a fight... He used foul language, and threw away something, I don't know what, from the Pir, and his daughter's mouth was twisted. So, they even took the child to Yerevan for months, but it was not corrected."

According to a 90-year-old woman from Lehvaz, the Pir, like the Molla mentioned in the above letter, would also heal from psychiatric conditions:

"Sometimes they would lay down and sleep in the church [the Pir] for days. Supposedly, they were mad and slept for healing. They said it was cured. How do I know? They brought [people] and made them sleep there. After the nap they were considered healed."

In 1972-73, chief doctor of Meghri, surgeon L. Poghosyan had authored a series of articles on traditional healing practices of the region in local newspaper "Araks." Published on September 11, 1973, the article on "Religious healing practices and their usage in ancient medicine of the region," also reflects on Bughakar, referring to the stories of locals. The article particularly tells the following: "Boghakar pilgrimage site too has a history dating back to the distant past. It was considered a Muslim sanctuary since the 17th century until our days. Boghakar sanctuary-pir has adjunct facilities, guesthouse, dining room, stables, etc. They tell saint Qyazim Agha is buried in the center of the church, while his sister is buried in the adjunct lodge. The site is mostly visited by Azerbaijani believers from Zangelan, Ordubad, and other regions. For healing purposes, they take animals for sacrifice to the sanctuary. And when they come home [Pir building], they approach the tombstone, kiss it and offer expensive gifts and money to Allah's servants. There were cases of many sick people dying on the road to the sanctuary or under the walls of its dirty guesthouse. The death of these believers was considered Allah's will and it was announced that their soul flew to the heaven, to merge with holy souls of the paradise."

As our 2018 interviews with Lehvaz locals indicate, the local population of Meghri and neighboring regions, both Azerbaijanis and Armenians, continued to actively visit the Pir for healing, sacrifice and other purposes up until the last years of the USSR. This was despite many articles against superstition being published in local and republican media, despite the active anti-religion and atheistic work, and despite the propaganda of scientific approaches.



History Museum of Armenia, Lisitsian Archive1540-106, size 8x10,8 cm
 Shrine of Female Saints, Bughakar, Meghri, 1932
 Photographer Poghos Grigoryan

Like the author of the article, our interviewees also speak about the existing facilities for overnight stay. Speaking about the pilgrims, an elderly woman from Lehvaz tells:

“They came when they wanted. [They] Would stay for months. There was even a tonir there. They called me for bread making. They’d tell that my bread was very good. Everything, everything. Oh, oh, oh, you cannot imagine, there was countless linen there, many carpet, samovars, I don’t know... whatever you want... teapots, dishware, everything, the stores were full. Perhaps 100-200 teapots, samovars, mattresses, not inside the Pir itself, not where the Molla (I don’t know who for them) was, there was a separate place, and it was arranged there. They’d come for vows, prayers, and would get it [linen and mattresses] to sleep on. You could stay for a month or two. The sacrifice would be fully distributed. Even if they wouldn’t sacrifice an animal, everything could be considered a sacrifice, say pilaf, their pilaf was very good, so they would distribute it in plates, and it was a sacrifice and was distributed. Everything, everything.”

According to the locals, pilgrims would visit Pir for different purposes. Yet, issues related to health and fertility were the most common reasons. They remember that people would go to Fatima mainly when asking for a child. And they would hang the handmade small lulus¹¹³ there. An elderly woman from Lehvaz tells the following about her female neighbor:

“She delivered 12, 13 children. They died in one, two, six months. Her kids wouldn’t stay. Their house was in the lower part. They told, if you change [the house] like a dog, your kid would survive. [It] Did not work out. Anyway. She went to the Pir and had a boy. Went to the Pir when her baby was only 40 days old. There was a man from Ordubad, a Molla or something. That person told her to sell the baby to him. She asked why. He said ‘just sell the baby,’ and gave her the money. She kept the money until now, the old One-Rubles. So, he [the Molla] says, as he passes [one-ruble banknote] it under his shirt, he tells my friend to give the name Vagif to the child. He said he had seven boys and two girls, and the name of his youngest son was Vagif. He promised that the child would stay, if she’d name him Vagif. So she named him Vagif. She vowed not to cut the child’s hair for seven years. When he became seven, she cut his hair, put it on a weighting scale, and put money on the other side of the scale, and she took it to the church [Boghakar Pir]. She left the money there and took the hair. So she did it. She keeps the hair until this minute. This was her promise for the baby to survive. As a parent you’d do everything... She said if he survives for seven years, I’d cut his hair and take it there. She vowed, vowed for the kid. And as her child survived, she’d always go there.”

Another old woman remembers that nothing helped except the sacrifice to the Pir when her son got sick:

“He got sick. It was hard. We took him to Ordubad, did everything possible and then we vowed. His father took a train to Ordubad. There was a person there who’d cut sacrifice animals. So he cut the animal and [the father] came back. He told to take the sacrifice, he knew the things. When the boy got better and grew up a bit, we went to Boghakar and stayed there overnight. In those houses, there were beds there. We went; we stayed, we cut and distributed the sacrifice, we ate and drank. They would also come. So we came back and he got well.”

According to an old man, they have never been to a church and the only sacred place they ever visited was Boghakar:

“So, I tell my story. When in [19]72 I came back from the army, my father had grown a ram for a sacrifice there when I’d come back from Germany. We... I haven’t been in Echmiadzin¹¹⁴ before [19]80s. Almost nobody from here had visited Echmiadzin. There was no connection. But we’d always go to Boghakar, even from Ghapan¹¹⁵ people would come.”

We were interested to know if there was a special pilgrimage day when Azerbai-

janis would visit Boghakar. While many interviewees would not link the pilgrimages to a specific day- explaining that people visited when they wanted and when they had a problem - some associated the main visits to Boghakar with Shahsey-Vahsey. "They had a time, they call it Shahsey, they'd come on that day, in old times. And they'd beat themselves in Boghakar,"- tells an old man from Lehvaz. An old woman from the same village recalls how Shahsey was celebrated in Bughakar:

"They had a day when they would come to the church, the Pir by mountains from Nakhichevan, from Ordubad. There was a large clearing in front of the Pir with no grass. There, on that clearing, you know the chains we use for the cows; they would shamelessly take out their cloths, just keep the pans, and beat each other with those chains. They'd beat each other as long as the blood would come out. It cuts, an iron on the body, they keep hitting, but not the head. They kept beating like that in a circle. And we were there in our dachas.¹¹⁶ We'd take kids there. The Turks kept beating, 'shrap-shrap', and then they'd spread the tablecloths, put all the food they brought, and go on picnicking."

Though some people remember that there were special celebrations of Shahsey-Vahsey in Boghakar, they also indicate that people went to Bughakar hoping to find a solution for very different issues. Interestingly, practices of exchange and sacrifice were preserved in Boghakar even during the Soviet period. According to the oldest person we talked to, a 90-year-old woman from Lehvaz, one could vow various things in Bughakar, while the exchange of gifts and the practice of sacrifice were very organized:

"Say, you have vowed to put a cloth there. You put it. For example, I had a large white shawl, I don't remember how it was called... A new one. I brought it for my child. I went there, finished my prayer, and then put my shawl there and came back. We were staying in a dacha over there, in those houses. So then I saw a woman from Ordubad had already taken my shawl and covered her head. But they would not take it for free. They should put money, even ten kopeks¹¹⁷ and only then take it. It does nothing to you. Once in ten days or so, they would do an auction of everything. They would put all the items on sale. There was a man of theirs who'd organize it. For example, assume an item costs ten Rubles; they would sell it for five, so cheap. They'd put it for people to take. Only, you'd have to put money, a symbolic amount, say ten kopeks. They'd buy things for the Pir. They'd buy oil, what do I know... different things. Haven't seen or heard them eating over there. Yet, they would put stuff. Not every day, once a week, when the amount of goods would increase. They would bring all the items to a designated place under the wall and would put [them] there, and that man, the Molla... I don't know, there were hundred types of Mollas there... would sell [them]. They'd tell that for example this pencil costs ten kopeks, put that ten kopeks and take it. They wouldn't put a high price, but a low one."

Our interviewee also recalls that there was a special place for sacrifice and it was not allowed to cut the animal anywhere but there:

“There was a place, they’d cut it there. It was right next to the Pir, where the water was running, and a spring. They’d cut it next to the water. There was a tree, they’d hang it on the tree and cut. They’d cut. They knew how to do it. They’d cut it and distribute.”

According to a person from Ordubad, people would take paper money, three to five Rubles to Bughakar, and then would keep that money for luck, without ever spending it.

“My grandma had an old banknote from [19]50 or 60, it was out of circulation and I have inherited it... I recall people promising their utmost charities to Boghakar. It’s a real mystery to me: what was that connection, given that Boghakar was separated from Ordubad by high mountains.”

These oral histories and written sources prove that Bughakar Pir was an important pilgrimage destination for both Meghri and Nakhijevan regions. While our interviewees in Lehvaz tell that Armenian pilgrims also used to visit Boghakar-Bughakar, at least during the Soviet period, they emphasize that the Pir was “their [Azerbaijanis] god,” and mostly tell about Azerbaijanis’ visits to the sanctuary and the ceremonies which took place there. Perhaps this is why when the local Azerbaijanis had left and the borders with Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan were closed, the pilgrimages and folk rituals associated with the Pir were interrupted. Today it is still standing, but an abandoned and forgotten building.



ARSEN HAKOBYAN / LUSINE KHARATYAN / RAFFI KORTOSHIAN

BABA HAJ: SANCTUARY,
MEMORY AND CO-EXISTANCE

BABA HAJ: THE STRUCTURE AND SURROUNDING

Land disputes in Zangezour were often the subject of permanent, unresolved social conflicts between the two groups, Armenians and “Turks,” as well as within the different settlements that followed opposing branches of economics: Armenians were primarily involved in farming, while Muslims were engaged in semi-nomadic and remote cattle breeding.¹¹⁸

However, in the 19th century, under the Russian Empire, contradictions and conflicts between the Armenians and the “Turks” were relatively few, despite their socio-cultural and religious differences. Some kind of co-existence was established in Syunik, also expressed in folk culture, particularly in functioning joint sanctuaries, forming a fragile balance that held shared cultural or religious sentiments towards popular sacred spaces.¹¹⁹

One such shared sanctuary was Baba Haj near Shvanidzor village of Meghri. With its social function, as well as narratives and meanings attached, Baba Haj is a perfect example of how the above-mentioned complex processes intersect. The various layers of the sanctuary reveal conflict and memory, borders and space, an old village place and pasture, the sacred and the ordinary, economic life and group differences, as well as local history and a shared past.

Meghri region carries various forms and manifestations of the spatial and multi-layered memories of complex, sometimes tragic and dramatic interaction and Armenian-Azerbaijani/Muslim/Turk coexistence. These forms and manifestations are often detached from specific situations and displayed in not only personal memories and living stories, but also in materialized and memorialized “sites of memory,” where individual and collective narratives meet to form a part of local history and identity. At the same time, as individual and collective memory, these narratives are a part of a mental map. According to Lévi-Strauss, a space, as a combination of names, “derives the myth with its structure and ritual ceremonies.”¹²⁰

Shvanidzor has often become the focus of armed clashes between Armenians and the “Turks.” The toponyms around the village and traditions linked to them bear signs and memories of Armenian-Azerbaijani/Muslim/Turk coexistence and inter-relations. They reflect mythical perceptions and manifestations of complex past, history and memory. These conflicting narratives around toponyms describing the struggle against “Turks” and “khans” primarily have a diachronic nature. In this case, the places and shared spaces with their corresponding stories and traditions re-create the collective narrative of local history, which also gets ritualized because of religiosity and ceremonies linked to these places.

Baba Haj pilgrimage site has its distinct and unique place in this landscape of “conflict.” It encapsulates and symbolizes both the “Armenian-Turk” conflict and reconciliation not only as a place of memory with relevant narratives, but also as a

shared popular sanctuary, which in essence perfectly symbolizes the co-existence.

This sanctuary contains several interesting layers related to conflict and coexistence narratives, folk beliefs and rituals. The sanctuary is also interesting in terms of its social function. We made an effort to understand how this shared sacred space, which in the past was so significant for Shvanidzor locals, functioned in terms of rituals and meanings attached to it. According to Shvanidzor residents, they “swore by Babahaj more often than by [their own] mother or father.”¹²¹

The pilgrimage site Baba-Haji or Baba Haj is located¹²² within the administrative territory of Shvanidzor village of Syunik Province of RA, six kilometers north from Shvanidzor and 8.5 kilometers north-east from Nmadzor (Nyuvadi) in a small forest next to Bolishen fields. As Lisitsian writes in 1926: “Baba Haji was a Turk and Armenian pilgrimage site not very far from the abandoned Armenian village of Gyumerants or Gumerants, and near the former Armenian village Bolishen. People from Gyumerants had moved to Shvanidzor, forming a corresponding district, while the old village remained as a summer residence.”¹²³ In the past, the sanctuary was in the immediate vicinity of the Armenian villages, but as a result of their abandonment, it became a borderline between Shvanidzor and Nyuvadi.

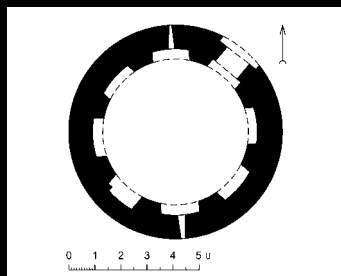
According to our interviews with Shvanidzor locals, the pilgrimage site was a shared sanctuary for Azerbaijanis of Nyuvadi¹²⁴ and Armenians of Shvanidzor. Geographically the sanctuary is located near these two villages. However, its frontier position is not limited to its location between these two villages, but also with the characteristics of traditional cattle breeding, as the summer pastures of Nyuvadi and Shvanidzor¹²⁵ were both nearby.

While the economic life of Armenians and Azerbaijanis differed, both took their livestock to mountain pastures in the summer. As a result, in the areas of mixed Armenian-Muslim populations, (such as Karabakh and Syunik) the summer pastures became zones of intensive and diverse interethnic exchange. Villages were usually ethnically homogenous and geographically remote or isolated, resulting in limited and rare everyday interaction. In contrast to this in summers, the mountain pastures were temporarily transformed into an environment of mixed and multilayered interaction.¹²⁶ As one of our interviewees recalls, in summers the area opposite to Baba Haj was full of tents of Azerbaijani cattle breeders, while on the Armenian side there were shelters of the abandoned Gyumerants village, which became the Armenian cattle breeders' settlement for the season. The locals perceived the sanctuary as a “border” between Shvanidzor and Nyuvadi villages, as well as between their respective pastures: “that was the border of the village, the watershed.”

Architecturally Baba Haj sanctuary is a Muslim shrine, with an adjoining small cemetery to the south,¹²⁷ where those who died in the pastures were most probably buried, as suggested by Cyrillic inscriptions and accounts of Shvanidzor residents. Some gravestones have no inscriptions, and the perceptions about these stones are mixed.



Baba Haj pilgrimage site, photo and the plan by Raffi Kortoshian, 2018



The mausoleum is built from uncut stone and mud. The walls indicate some renovation with clay. The plan is round-shaped. The only entrance is from the north-east. Most probably there was another entrance from the south-west, which was later closed. There are two windows, one on the north wall and one on the south. The sloping arches connecting eight columns hold the sharp dome.

One of the gravestones outside the shrine with an Arabic inscription has Hijri year of 1255 (1839-1840) on it, while the date on the second one is not legible. Yet, most probably it is from the same period.

كل من عليها فان و يبقى وحده ... هذ... .. مو... سنة ١٢٥٥.

Translation: Everything is temporary, only He stays. This... date 1255 (1839-1840)

In the cemetery there is a gravestone with an Arabic inscription that has Hijri year 1317 on it (1899-1900). There are also more recent gravestones with Cyrillic inscriptions.



Baba Haj pilgrimage site, photo credit to Raffi Kortoshian, 2018

Based on its location and structure, Baba Haj was probably a shrine and a cemetery representing the nomadic lifestyle of cattle breeders, since it is relatively far from Nyuvadi village and the Armenian cemetery was in a different place. However, there are interesting perceptions of the building among Shvanidzor residents. According to one of our interviewees, *“that building is neither a chapel nor a Mosque. It’s not an architectural construction, neither our national nor theirs... And it’s a round-shaped building with a dome.”* The use of the phrases ‘neither ours’ ‘nor theirs’ is a strong indicator of the shared nature and uniqueness of the sanctuary.

The sanctuary contains several layers and functions, each with their respective manifestations of meanings and ceremonies. According to local stories, its core

name is based on the tombstones of the “Armenian Baba” and “Turk Haji,” as well as the *portakar*,¹²⁸ indicating the sanctuary’s link to much older layers of folk beliefs and culture. The mausoleum was probably built later, on these layers.



Baba Haj Mausoleum-pilgrimage site from inside, photo credit to Raffi Kortoshian, 2018



The photo is provided by Naira Hayrapetyan, the inscription reading by Raffi Kortoshian



As Lisitsian writes in 1926, “Armenians would go in groups to Baba Haji on the date assigned by Turks, usually on the next Friday of the Holy Virgin’s holiday, sacrificing male goats,”¹²⁹ while “Turks” would visit one day earlier, as noted by an old interviewee from Shvanidzor. The residents of Shvanidzor also remember that group visits to Baba Haji were performed in August:

“Baba was the Armenian, Haj was the Turk [referring to tombstones inside the shrine]. They’d always go there for a sacrifice. Turks would come from a different place, from the mountain dachas,¹³⁰ we would go from here.

These were Nyuvadi Turks. Perhaps it was in August. We were in the mountains at that time. Turks would visit us, and offer a sheep meal. They'd make a samovar offering to the [saint]: I don't know the exact date, but it was in August. Turks would visit a day earlier, and then the Armenians... We had been there as kids. They'd go there for sacrifices. This is an old thing, very old thing. There was a table inside. Baba and Haji, they died and were buried there. Like a table, covered with a cloth, and supposedly they were there. So, we'd take something, like when you visit a church,"- tells the first old woman we meet in Shvanidzor.

Another interviewee recalls that Azerbaijanis would come on horses and mules from their pastures and would organize their picnics around the sanctuary. On these days of August, Armenian and Azerbaijani visitors of the shrine would meet each other. August pilgrimages were common in traditional festive culture of Armenians.¹³¹

The pilgrimage site had an Azerbaijani servant. According to the locals, he did not live there, but would regularly visit the place to look after it. The former mayor of Shvanidzor village, Hovhannes Ohanyan, tells that they [Shvanidzor Collective Farm] during Soviet period would provide construction materials (cement and sand) for the sanctuary renovation, as well as help to create the road close to the place, which was also beneficial for Nyuvadi residents.

CONFLICT, MEMORY AND CO-EXISTENCE

Overall, the sanctuary contains several layers of meanings and functions, including conflict and co-existence. Shvanidzor residents link the origin of the shrine and its etymology to the "Armenian Baba" and the "Turk Haji," indicating that their graves are in the sanctuary. The folklore about the origin of the shrine related to Armenian-"Turk"¹³² clashes become a widespread narrative in this context. According to a legend, Baba led Armenians and Haji led Turks during the clashes. The villagers tell that both were eventually buried at the site and the place acquired a symbolic meaning of reconciliation between the conflicting parties, Armenians and Turks. According to the villagers one of the tombstones was standing, while the other was laying, and the "Armenian" tombstone had a special sign on it, a "sun-cross" and an inscription.¹³³

One of the narratives directly links the origin of the sanctuary to the struggle for pastures, when not only Armenians and "Turks," but also their leaders were left dead, and the leaders were buried on the site (shrine). The shrine was built later to stop the fighting against each other, therefore it provided a place for reconciliation, meetings, offerings, sacrifices, and "worship":

"That was a struggle for pastures [...] and the confrontation line was always here [Baba Haj site], those fights, killings happened in this position, to exclude this in the future... [a sanctuary was built], and it was sacred

for both [Armenians and Azerbaijanis], so they would stop the fighting, would come here to meet, make sacrifices and worship. This [the fighting] is generally told about this place, these graves ... killings happened here, our great one, one of the devotees, one of the leaders, was killed and buried here, and a similar burial happened to them, and the graves were intertwined... they have a leader killed here, like during the clash between two leaders... Both we and them had losses.... The entire thing is about final reconciliation. So with this it became possible... Really, for years they'd jointly come here."

According to the interviewee, the gravestones around the mausoleum belong to dead Armenians and "Turks."

It is known that in some archaic cultures the graves of leaders and ancestors are untouchable and no fighting was allowed on their territory.¹³⁴ One of the stories about Haji Baba tells that "Once upon a time the residents of Armenian and Turkish villages were fighting with each other. The struggle was led by the Armenian Baba and Turk Haji. To end the long fight Baba and Haji have reconciled and jointly built that sanctuary. The villages with two different populations lived in peace since then," "Armenian Baba and Turk Haji have mixed their bloods as a sign of reconciliation and have built that sanctuary."¹³⁵

The former mayor of Shvanidzor, Hovhannes Ohanyan explains the following:

"I don't know their history, but I know there was a mediation policy, like the one by Tumanyan¹³⁶ in Lori region among Georgians, Armenians and Turks, as (it) said connecting the blood, (the) same was here [...] So, that structure is neither a chapel nor a Mosque. It is not an architectural construction, it is neither our national, nor they [Azerbaijanis] have such a thing. It's on the border of two villages, Shvanidzor and former Nyuvadi, currently- Nrnadzor. It's round-shaped structure with a dome, and there are two graves there, of Baba and Haji. Supposedly, the sacred place played a mediator's role in inter-ethnic relations. Armenians would go there to make a sacrifice, and Turks... Azerbaijanis would come there to make a sacrifice. There are also around 30-40 gravestones there. There was no village there in the past, so (I) can't say it was a village. However, as there were people who'd stay five to six months for summer pastures from both sides, the place turned into a cemetery."

Shvanidzor residents think that Baba was the Armenian, as they called 'baba' the male heads of their households: "we, our grandparents, for example my father called his father 'baba,' baba came in, so all should stand up. So the head, the man of the house,-" says Hovhannes Ohanyan.

The fact that the shrine as well as its name, Baba Haj, contains a conflicting - but at the same time intertwined - dichotomy, is also reflected in other narratives related to local history of Meghri region. In particular, there is mention of an Armenian village head from Karchevan named Bab, who was forced to convert to

Islam, served Dizalu khan and became Mirbashi¹³⁷ of Meghri. He became famous in the region for his activities, fought against “Turks” and Armenians who “betrayed him,” and constructed an irrigation system. Yet, at the end of his life, it was revealed that his being a Muslim was superficial and he had secretly preserved his Christianity: “he was appearing as a Turk, but was Armenian in his heart.”¹³⁸

Lisitsian also writes about “some Bab,” who converted into Islam and then returned to Christianity, or according to other sources was a Muslim that converted into Christianity, but is buried in Karchevan.¹³⁹ With this respect, a reference in Ghukas Sebastatsi’s “Davit Bek or the History of Kapan People” is also interesting. According to this reference during the liberation movement of Davit Bek¹⁴⁰ a person named Pap, the son of Srapion from Kaler, was appointed as the military and administrative head of Kenavuts.¹⁴¹ Following Pap’s orders, his army slaughters Turks of Levaz gorge, saving only the residents of Taghamer town. After some time he decides not to fight an army of 8,000 Muslims coming from Ordubad, and withdraws his troops of 2,000 to Kaler. David Bek gets very angry, comes to Kaler, catches Pap and while passing Khachpol mountain, beheads him near Ishkert.¹⁴² The shrine is very close to the site of above-mentioned execution. The village Ishkert (currently Shishkert) is only nine kilometers away from Baba Haj.

It should be mentioned, that the “reconciliation” narratives of the “Armenian Baba” and the “Turk Haji” are prevailing and generally form the basis for the meanings and perceptions of the sanctuary. At the same time, the significance of the reconciliation narratives also suggests the existence of stories about the conflict itself, which were an inseparable component of complex relations of Armenians with Turks/Muslims/Azerbaijanis in the locality. It is known, and the stories recorded in Shvanidzor prove, that the Armenian- “Turk” clashes in the vicinity occurred regularly, and it is hard to link the narratives about the origin of the sanctuary to a particular event. According to one of the stories, the residents of the Armenian village climbed a nearby mountain to shelter from the Turks. To break the defense of surrounded Armenians, the Turks had cut off the water, following the advice of an old woman to take a horse where supposedly the pipeline was: the horse, hearing the running water, had started to dig the ground with its feet. Deprived of water, Armenians surrendered. The Turks had built Baba-Haji sanctuary to signify their victory.¹⁴³

A slightly different version of the same story tells that the villagers went to the mountain and hid from Turks in a stone castle for protection. To stay longer, they brought water pipes to the place from a water source as high as 4,500 meters. However, the Turks had bribed an old woman from the village and she helped them to find the pipes, advising them to take a mule to a specific spot and feed the animal with salt instead of water. The thirsty mule had heard the water running under the ground and started digging. The Turks dug the place, got to the clay pipes and cut the water off for the defending Armenians.

As one of the interviewees mentioned, the “attacks of Turks from Iran” were more dangerous and cruel and during these attacks the villagers would leave for “higher elevations or hiding places.” Narratives about local clashes also exist. One of the tales in Shvanidzor contains both the conflict and the actions the community took to overcome it. According to this story, the “Turks” killed an Armenian shepherd, along with his oxen. In response, a strong man from Shvanidzor “like a bandit, physically very strong... goes there and beats up their shepherd with a stick, brings the livestock and the sheep to the village and tells people to cut and eat it as much as they can. A month passes, he repeats the story, and those [Turks] come with salt and bread and an appeal. My grandpa, his cousin, was the head of the village. So they come and get seated. He [my grandpa], says, you have done this [killing of Armenian shepherd], we say nothing, there is nothing to forgive for what you have done, this person has six children, bring back the father of these orphans and we’ll return your sheep. So, could they? They kept silent. And they connect with the blood, cut each other’s hands, and... so as it never... And they lived in peace for quite some time.” It is interesting that the storyline of “connecting with blood” present at the above story of Baba and Haji, also exists here.

Some fragments about the conflict between Shvanidzor and Nyuvadi are also preserved. One of the interviewees tells:

“Here, they called it Nyuvadi looting.¹⁴⁸ They attacked two times, totally destroyed and looted Nyuvadi. Our people attacked the village tossed out [the residents] and brought everything here. Livestock, furniture, rugs and carpets, cloths. Shvanidzor has robbed Nyuvadi twice.”

Nevertheless, some transformations of perceptions associated with the sanctuary’s narratives are related to changes in time and conditions. Our youngest interviewee, a 40-year old man who guided us to Baba Haj, believed that the myth of Baba Haj as a reconciliation place was formed during the Soviet rule, adding his interpretation of the events:

“Perhaps one of their Turks, their Mollas was killed there and it is a sanctuary for them. Then the Bolsheviks thought they should reconcile two nations so they should have done something. So, both Armenians and Turks were going there, but it is more like a Mosque. It is like something reconciling Armenians and Turks, so they would live in peace with each other. But I don’t know why, more Turks would come.”

THE PEOPLE’S SAINT

As mentioned earlier, Shvanidzor residents’ August pilgrimages were to Baba Haji, thus making the sanctuary a sacred place for the group and community and giving importance not only to celebrations but also to the space. August pilgrimages in the Armenian culture were associated with the mid-August holiday of the

Virgin Mary. The tradition of mountain celebrations was common in Armenian culture. On Virgin Mary's day, people would gather around the same pastures and nearby sacred places, as summer was a cattle-breeding season and cattle breeders in all regions would move to mountain pastures.¹⁴⁹

Many of these sacred places have lost their names and significance over time, but they are usually near water sources,¹⁵⁰ featuring a stand-alone, remote off-road *khachkars*¹⁵¹, a sacred tree, cemeteries, church ruins, half-standing walls, a chapel, sacred stones, where the holiday was celebrated.¹⁵² It is also known, that the August pilgrimages dedicated to the Virgin Mary involved popular pilgrimage sites *Toukh Manuks*,¹⁵³ simple structures looking like Baba Haj, not counting the circular dome.¹⁵⁴ In terms of its landscape and organization of sacred space, Baba Haj is similar to folk and mountainous pilgrimage sites associated with the Virgin Mary.

The importance of Baba Haj for Shvanidzor residents is highlighted by one of our interviewees, who mentioned that they were more likely and more frequently to visit Baba Haj than the church.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, the functional nature of Baba Haj sacred site is directly linked to other layers of folk beliefs, such as those involving fertility. This speaks about earlier roots of the sanctuary, before the mausoleum of Baba and Haji would be formed. Both Armenians and Azerbaijanis perceived the place as a space related to fertility rituals. The core of the "sacred place" associated with fertility is the *portakar* [sacred stone] located in the shrine. Apart from group pilgrimages, the sanctuary would be visited for individual occasions and expectations, but as mentioned, the place should be always visited in a group, one "would not go alone."¹⁵⁶

In traditional Armenian culture, the fertility rituals and expectations were also linked to sacred places associated with the name of the Virgin Mary. These could also be sacred stones related to fertility and childbirth.¹⁵⁷ There are many stories related to fertility with their respective ceremonial descriptions. People would take a *nenni*,¹⁵⁸ a small doll and crib made from small wood sticks and threads, and attach it to the walls of the shrine asking for a child. A 60-year old woman from Shvanidzor tells that her birth was possible thanks to Baba Haj:

"My father was a believer and loved God, my family from both mother's and father's sides believed in God, and it is now transferred to me. Not like I believed, but I do believe in God and his power. So, I was late for a year, was not born immediately. I don't know whether it should have been my birth or somebody else's, every year my father, we had a dacha, my grandma would take the kids and together with my paternal aunt we would go there. From there, my father would take a lamb or a sheep and the kids and would walk to Baba Haj. It was two or four kilometers from Kimerants, a difficult path, my father would put the lamb on his shoulders, and walk to Baba Haj to cut it there. He used to tell that he had promised to cut a lamb every year as long as we'd come to dacha, for his first kid to be born. And he made that doll over there. He himself. The arms, the

head, etc. and put it, they call it nenni, like a crib, from a piece of cloth, he himself made it put the doll in that crib, and there were windows inside, there was a place, so he hung it there, like a swinging crib, he swung and asked the God for a child. And I happened that month [the mother got pregnant that month]. Meaning I was born in nine months.”

The same woman credits Baba Haj with the birth of her first child. Although this time she is helped not by the visit to Baba Haj and a nenni hung there, but by a dream.

“One was Baba the other was Haji. Baba is an Armenian, the papa [father], Haji is a Turk. In my dream one is in white clothes and has a white beard, the other has a white beard, but wears black clothes and black cloak. They came to our house, entered it and forcefully pushed an apple into my mouth, they cut it in half and told to give it to my husband. But they made a cross, the Armenian made a cross, but told in Turkish ‘mashallah, mashallah,’ it is interesting, he made a cross but told mashallah. Only now I think that cross belongs to Armenians, mashallah... The one that made a cross, the white one made a cross, the other one said ‘mashallah,’ mashallah in Turkish means glory to God. That was before Varduhi’s birth, Varduhi is the eldest.”

According to a 40-year old man from Shvanidzor, he is also an “outcome” of a nenni hung in Baba Haj:

“As we couldn’t have a son, my mom also went there, and they hung these so-called nennies there, like a crib. So they also made one for me. I have seen the nennies as a child, but it is not there anymore, nothing is left now.”

Another person tells the following:

“They couldn’t have a child and so they went there. My wife’s father hung a nennie, and her mom got pregnant. Nennie is like a crib, two small wood sticks are inserted into the wall, connected with threads and a piece of cloth is put on the threads, a doll is made and put on in, thus asking for a baby from Baba Haji. So, they’d insert these small sticks into the wall cracks, connect with a thread and decorate with beautiful colorful cloths. There are such places inside the structure.”

Interestingly, the narrative related to children is also applied to the perception of nearby gravestones (the ones with no inscription): it is believed that these are in memory of children or those, who died and were buried there.¹⁵⁹

Azerbaijanis would also frequently visit Baba Haji pilgrimage site to ask for a child. An article “Religious healing practices and their usage in ancient medicine of the region” by chief doctor of Meghri Medical unit, surgeon L. Poghosyan published in “Araks” newspaper on September 11, 1973, mentions the following: “Noteworthy is Haji-Baba mosque located on the north-eastern part of Nyuvadi village. It has a gray stone in the center. That mystic stone became a life and

worship subject for infertile women. Women touched “saint portakar” in the dark corner of the mosque with their abdomens and sex organs, and got pregnant “on God’s will,” while the Molla delivered from Allah allowed infertile faithful women to return to their families only after performing prayers for seven days and nights. When a woman delivered a baby after such religious rituals, her family made big sacrifices for almighty Allah.”¹⁶⁰

As in the case of Boghakar Pir, Baba Haj also received many offerings with various requests. A mid-aged woman from Shvanidzor tells the following:

“First time when I went there, we’d light a candle and would leave something there. I had brand new socks and I have left those. I put my socks in the church and left it. I had been there only once and this is how I saw it. You could also leave money. Whatever you had with you at that moment. So, I had this socks in my pocket at that moment, brand new with a label on them, I left it there. They’d go there if they got sick. Like a pilgrimage site. For example, they have taken my father and have sacrificed a sheep. Mostly people from Nyuvadi would come.”

An 80-year old woman adds:

“They’d bring many things: samovar, pots, cups, things like that. They [Azerbaijanis] brought cups to make tea and drink over there. But there was no water there and they brought water from another place. There was no Molla or anything like that.”

One of our interviewees from Shvanidzor describes the diversity of offerings and sacrifices made to Baba Haj, as well as the site itself and the times of visit:

“We’d always go there until [19]68-[19]70s. It was full [of people]. Later also there were people, but in less quantities. Not many would go to dachas [summer pasture] and the flow of people decreased both from their [Azerbaijani] and our [Armenian] side. There was no special day, it was a sacred place. They’d go in summer, while in mountainous dachas [summer pasture] . Both we and they would go on weekends. It wasn’t linked to any holiday. The space was very clean there. They’d cut the animals in a different place, would cut the ear or rooster’s feet, or would put the head next to it, but would bury the intestine in the ground far away, and there was no smell over there, it was extremely clean... there were small niches like window sills next to the entrance, they’d put those things on the sills. There were tiles from the outside, they would put on those. They’d always leave money there. There was tableware, copper jugs, beautiful samovars, we were going there, they were making tea and we’d drink it. The ones who went, they made the tea. It belonged in there. The samovar was there, forks, spoons, knives, everything, tableware, so you’d dine there and wash the dishes afterwards. Nobody would touch... The old man doing cement works [taking care of the place] was from the nearby village. I’ve helped him. They did not have transportation back then; [visitors] would come on

donkeys. We have made the road, 500 meters from Baba Haji, from there they'd take on donkeys. They'd bring hives, and take those on pack animals. On the other side the territory was very good for honey-making."

In fact, Baba Haj pilgrimage site, along with its ceremonies, ritualized the local history narratives related to the sacred place, however rather indirectly, through the performance of group and individual ceremonies around the graves of "Armenian Baba" and "Turk Haji."

During the Soviet period it was already an evidence and a memory of complicated and dramatic relations of the past, illustrating the development and ways to overcome that past on the local community level. These developments were typical mainly for traditional folk culture and the local environment.¹⁶¹

Within the theme of "conflict" to "reconciliation" or "reconciliation site," it demonstrates how the conflicting sides were "neighbors," who formed some co-existence at a local community level. By playing a role of a social buffer, the sanctuary helped to establish these relationships.¹⁶² Given this conclusion it is not a coincidence that the sanctuary was on the "border."



LUSINE KHARATYAN

SOVIET ANTI-RELIGIOUS
PROPAGANDA AND THE
PILGRIMAGE SITES

AN article entitled “Improving the Propaganda of Scientific Atheism,” was published on the first page of the “Kolntesayin Village” newspaper of the Executive Committee of Meghri District of the Armenian SSR on September 4, 1954. In referring to the role of the Communist Party and party members in the eradication of superstition and old religious practices, it particularly mentions the following: “some primary party units do not pay attention to anti-religious, scientific-atheistic propaganda. This explains why some individual communists are engaged in superstitious practices. Thus, the party member Hamid Hamidov (from Lehvaz), went to a pilgrimage site and renovated the sanctuary instead of doing public works.”

The District Committee’s newspaper then sporadically writes about the two sanctuaries. No other religious or worship site of the district had received such attention in the newspaper, indicating that at least during the 1950 to 60s these two sites plaid an important role in the lives of the locals. This 1961 publication below, with an anti-religious propaganda cartoon (most probably from a Russian newspaper), is particularly interesting, as it criticizes the district’s residents, who, at the age of space discoveries, continue to worship the God.



The text in English:

Title: Like the grandfather and the grandmother...

The text: Some individuals in Nyuvadi and Aldara villages continue to worship God in our days of space discoveries. Along with their families, they visit “Haji Baba” and “Bughakar” sanctuaries.

Moreover, while the people in the picture make a cross entering the church, the author criticizes those “going to the Mosque.”

The same newspaper again covers the visitors of Bughakar and Babahaj pilgrimage sites in 1965, this time next to a caricature of an Orthodox priest.

Some stories we have recorded prove that the local Soviet militia sometimes made obstacles for people visiting Bughakar. Most probably this was also related to the fact of Meghri District being a USSR border zone, where special permits were required to enter. However, the pilgrims found ways to reach the sanctuary. *“They were coming, back then Meghri was a border zone, and no entrance was allowed without a pass.¹⁶³ So, they’d get a permit, would negotiate with the militia, often times militia would take a bribe for allowing (them) to visit Bughakar,”* tell Lehvaz residents.

Some interviewees believe that those closing the road to Bughakar would get God’s punishment:

“There was a Turk [Azerbaijani] militiaman here. [He] was a very bad guy. During the Soviets, visits were not allowed there, and the Militia caught us. This was from [19]73 till [19]76. This guy, his wife was an Armenian and he was a Turk [Azerbaijani], a Major, a sneak, he would stand there and would not allow the cars to go. Or, if you’d go, he would catch and take your driver’s license so you wouldn’t go to Bughakar. But people would go on foot. So, it was already [19]73, I was working in Aygedzor, with my brother we took a sheep and went there... I went via the waterfall, we cut the animal, you know back then with the money from the sheep’s skin alone the storage [collective farm storages] workers would make the world money. They’d leave ten Rubles at the site [Bughakar] and the rest was collected by storage workers. They [the workers] were Armenians, so an Armenian should do something [make money]. So, they would collect all that skin for the state. The custom is to keep the sheep’s shoulder during the sacrifice, I put the meat in the car and we were driving back. And then in front of Lichkvaz this sneak stopped us... I cursed, and my curse is like the one by Fatima Khanum, it coincided with hers, when we left the place [Bughakar], she said... in Turk [Azerbaijani] she said... in [19]60s when I spoke in Baku, they’d say you are not an Armenian... Well, she said ‘on your way back you’d see women, elderly, and children, stop by them and tell them Fatima Khanum asked not to curse on the back. You came to a sanctuary, for a pilgrimage, so you should walk.’ So, when I came and stopped by these old women, they told ‘kid, we know how it is, go with peace.’ And then, when that sneak stopped me, and asked where I was coming from, I told him I was coming from my work section, where I was the chief of the shift, and I showed him my driver’s license and the permit and the car and told him I was coming from my work section. Then I told him he would die in 15-20 days. And then this coincidence happened. It was the month of July, and in some 15 days from that date

he died in a car accident near Vardanidzor while driving back after a picnic in Lichkvaz. So, my first curse worked out, he died. What were the conditions of churches in the Soviet system? He was doing it for his money, it was not related to him being a Turk.¹⁶⁴ When people would come there for a sacrifice, they'd give him some meat so he would allow them to go.”



As we will see in the next Chapter, the anti-religious policy of Soviet authorities involved also some interventions against the religious rituals. For example, as the founder of the Turk Theatre Mkrtych Janan mentions in 1929: “On July 10 to 20 in the joint Workers’ Club of Yerevan the state traveling Turk troupe, very actively participating in an anti-religious campaign against Shakhsey-Vakhsey.” However, the oral histories we have recorded show that this would not restrain people from celebrating it in popular pilgrimage sites, particularly in Bughakar.

- ⁶⁶ A 'Pir' is a religious sanctuary of Muslims in the Caucasus, Iran, Turkey and Central Asia. It is associated with a "respectful" saint or holy man, known as a "master." A ziyarat is a place for visits. (Darieva T. Between "Great" and "Little" Tradition?, taken from the book "Sacred Places, Emerging Spaces: Religious Pluralism in the Post-Soviet Caucasus", (Edited by Tsypylma Darieva, Florian Mühlfried, & Kevin Tuite) Berghahn Books, 2018. p. 21-22). Our team member Raffi Kortoshian's recent fieldwork in Iran and Turkey showed that, for instance, Azerbaijanis of Gharadagh (Iran) consider even Armenian pilgrimage places as a 'Pir', while in Turkey 'ziyarat' is generally applied to pilgrimage to such sites, including the Armenian ones. Most likely people associated 'ziyarat' and 'pir' with the concept of pilgrimage, and one was transferred from Arabic to Sunni Turks, and the other to Shia Azerbaijani from Persian. One of the Yezidi spiritual casts is also called 'Pir'.
- ⁶⁷ Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic is a landlocked exclave of the Republic of Azerbaijan, neighboring with Turkey from the west, Armenia from the north and east, and Iran from the south.
- ⁶⁸ Ghukas Sebastatsi, David Bek or the History of Kapan, Yerevan 1992, pp. 38-39, in Armenian [Դուկաս Սեբաստացի, Դավիթ Բեկ կամ պատմությունն դավանացոց, Երևան, 1992, էջ 38-39]
- ⁶⁹ Mshak, 1913, No. 155, p. 3; Vardanean E., The Entry of Armenian Capitalist in Meghri Region; Mshak, 1917, No 46, p. 3, in Armenian [Մշակ, 1913, N 155, էջ 3; Վարդանեան Ե., Հայ կապիտալիստի մուտքը Մեղրիի շրջանում, Մշակ, 1917, N 46, էջ 3]
- ⁷⁰ Settlements and Population of the Armenian SSR in 1831-59, Statistical Collection, compiled by A. Manvelyan, G. Martirosyan, Yerevan 1962, p. 89, in Russian [Население пункты и население Арм. ССР за 1831-59 гг., статистический сборник, сост. А. Манвелян, Г. Мартиросян, Ереван, 1962, с. 89]
- ⁷¹ Dictionary of Toponyms of Armenia and Neighboring Countries, Yerevan 1988, Volume I, pp. 754-755, in Armenian [Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան, Երևան, 1988, հատոր, Ա. էջ 754-755]
- ⁷² Ibid, p. 572
- ⁷³ Mshak, 1913, No. 155, p. 3, in Armenian [Մշակ, 1913, դ. 155, էջ 3]
- ⁷⁴ Khan, a title for a ruler in Turkic languages.
- ⁷⁵ Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore, Book XXIII (Folklore of Nakhichevan), Volume 2, Baku 2011, pp. 36-37, in Azerbaijani [Azerbaycan folkloru antologiyasi, XXIII kitab (Naxçıvan folhloru), 2-ci cild, Bakı, 2011, s. 36-37]
- ⁷⁶ Derived from Arabic, Molla (Mullah in Arabic) means "vicar," "master" or "guardian," it is a name commonly given to local Islamic clerics or mosque leaders in large parts of the Islamic world, including Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey.
- ⁷⁷ Mshak, 1888, No. 95, p. 2, in Armenian [Մշակ, 1888, N. 95, էջ 2]
- ⁷⁸ Information was provided by an Azerbaijani friend of Ordubad origin.
- ⁷⁹ In Islam, Sayyids were respected people accepted as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and his cousin, Imam Ali, through his grandsons, Hassan Ibn Ali and Imam Husayn Ibn Ali (combined Hasnain), sons of Muhammad's daughter Fatimah and son-in-law Ali.
- ⁸⁰ Vashkevich, A., The Phenomenon of Sayyids in Azerbaijan. Features and Historical Overview. // Конференция «Путь Востока», Путь Востока. Культура. Религия. Политика. / Материалы XVI молодежной конференции по проблемам философии, религии и культуры Востока (25–27 апреля 2013 г.) Санкт-Петербург : Санкт-Петербургское философское общество, 2014, с. 55-61, in Russian. <http://anthropology.ru/ru/text/vashkevich/fenomen-seydov-v-azerbaydzhane-harakteristika-i-istoricheskiy-obzor>: [Вашкевич А., Феномен сейдов в Азербайджане. Характеристика и исторический обзор]
- ⁸¹ Ibid
- ⁸² Ibid
- ⁸³ Ziyarat or Ziyaret is a Turkish and Persian word of Arabic origin meaning 'visit.' In Turkey is used when referring to pilgrimage sites.
- ⁸⁴ Smirnov, K., Materials on History and Ethnography of Nakhichevan Area. Tiflis, 1934, p. 44, in Russian [Смирнов К. Материалы по истории и этнографии Нахичеванского края, Тифлис, 1934, с. 44]
- ⁸⁵ Vashkevich, A., The Phenomenon of Sayyids in Azerbaijan. Features and Historical Overview. Ashurbeyli S. "Overview of the medieval history of Baku, Baku, 1964, p.1947 [Ашурбейли с., Очерк истории средневекового Баку, Баку, 1964, стр. 147.]

- 86 Smirnov, K., *Materials on History and Ethnography of Nakhichevan Area*. Tiflis, 1934, p. 44.
- 87 Darieva T. *Between “Great” and “Little” Tradition?*, in *Sacred Places, Emerging Spaces: Religious Pluralism in the Post-Soviet Caucasus*, (Edited by Tsypylma Darieva, Florian Mühlfried, & Kevin Tuite) Berghahn Books, 2018. p. 22.
- 88 Ibid
- 89 Ibid
- 90 Ibid
- 91 Yunusov, A., *Islam in Azerbaijan*. Baku, 2004, pp. 121-137, in Russian [Юнусов А., *Ислам в Азербайджане*, Баку, 2004, с. 121-137]
- 92 Poghosyan, S., Mkrtychyan S., *Perspectives of Encouraging Cultural Tourism in Meghri*, Report, Yerevan 2002, p.24, in Armenian [Պողոսյան Ս., Մկրտչյան Ս., *Մշակութային տուրիզմի խթանման հեռանկարները Մեղրիում*, հաշվետվություն, Երևան, 2002, էջ 24]
- 93 Zangezour is another name used with regard to the modern day Syunik Province of Armenia.
- 94 Lisitsian S., “Saints” near Mountain Passes, *Soviet Ethnography*, 1936, N5, pp. 202-203, in Russian; Lisitsian St., *Armenians of Zangezour*. Yerevan 1969, p. 281, in Armenian [Лисициан Ст, «Святыни» у перевалов, *Советская этнография*, 1936, N5, стр. 202-203; Սո. Լիսիցյան, *Չանգեզուրի հայերը*, Երևան, 1969, էջ 281]
- 95 Ibid
- 96 In fact, the picture associated with Pir depicts Ali.
- 97 Lisitsian S., “Saints” near Mountain Passes. 1936, *Soviet Ethnography*, N5, pp. 202-203.
- 98 An Armenian village in Meghri District.
- 99 Historical town and district on the territory of modern-day Azerbaijan, re-named into Sheki in 1968.
- 100 National Archive of Armenia, repository 428, list 4, document 93, 19-22, 1926, Karchevan, in Armenian. [ՀՀ ԱԱ (ՀՀ Ազգային Արխիվ), ֆ. 428, ց. 4, գ. 93, թ. 19-22, 1926 թվական, Կարճևան]
- 101 Poghosyan, S., Mkrtychyan S., *Perspectives of Encouraging Cultural Tourism in Meghri*, Report, Yerevan 2002, pp 21-22.
- 102 Ethnographic field material, March 2018, Lehvaz.
- 103 Formerly Pshgag.
- 104 Well-known apple varieties in USSR.
- 105 Shahsey-Vahsey is a ritual dedicated to martyred Ali and his son Hussein, the Ashura holiday of Shia Muslims. The main part of the ceremony involves mourning with self-torturing actions, reciting the words “Shah Ali, vah Ali.”
- 106 A semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of Kaaba in Mecca, which is the direction Muslims should face when praying.
- 107 An Armenian district in Tbilisi, Georgia.
- 108 A honorific title in Iran and Ottoman Empire, Means “chief, master, lord.”
- 109 *Anthology of Azerbaijani Folklore*, Book XXIII (Folklore of Nakhichevan), Volume 2, Baku 2011, pp. 36-37, in Azerbaijani [Azərbaycan folkloru antologiyası, XXIII kitab (Naxçıvan folkloru), 2-ci cild, Bakı, 2011, s. 36-37]
- 110 Ibid
- 111 In November 2018, when L. Kahatyan was presenting the preliminary findings of the research to PEACE program participants from Armenia and Azerbaijan in Tbilisi, a woman from Baku approached her and shared her family narrative related to Bughakar Pir.
- 112 Grandma.
- 113 Small handmade cribs.
- 114 Spiritual and administrative center of the Armenian Apostolic Church.
- 115 Currently Kapan, the administrative center and the largest city of Syunik province of Armenia.
- 116 Summerhouse.
- 117 Armenian pronunciation of the Russian word “kopeika,” which were the small coins in the USSR and Russia.
- 118 Smbatyan G., *Syunik in Trial: Armenian-Tatar Clashes*, Yerevan 2018, p. 7, in Armenian. [Սմբատյան Գ., *Սյունիքը փորձության մեջ*. հայ-թաթարական բախումները, Երևան, 2018, էջ 7]

- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 24
- ¹²⁰ Lévi-Strauss C., *The Savage Mind*, Moscow 1999, p. 243, in Russian. [Левин-Стросс К., *Первобытное мышление*, М. 1999, стр. 243]
- ¹²¹ Edwards Maxim, *Baba-Hadji, symbol of ethnic harmony* <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/maxim-edwards/baba-hadji-symbol-of-ethnic-harmony>
- ¹²² Baba Haj is included in the RA List of Protected Monuments.
- ¹²³ National Archive of Armenia, Lisitsian repository 428, list 4, file 96, Page 4, Collection of Ethnographic Field Material on Meghri. [ՀՀ ԱԱ, ֆ. 428, ց. 4, գ. 96, թ. 4, Դաշտային ազգագրական նյութերի հավաքածու Մեղրու մասին]
- ¹²⁴ As to the importance of Baba Haj for the former Azerbaijani residents of Nyuvadi, our internet research did not yield results on this: the place is not mentioned in accessible internet resources were people discuss places dear/important to them. Baba Haji is not mentioned either by people who moved to Menzim village of Iran from Nyuvadi at the beginning of the 20th century, as they remember, in response to an epidemic.
- ¹²⁵ National Archive of Armenia, Lisitsian repository, 428, list 4, file 96, p.4, Collection of Ethnographic Field Material on Meghri. [ՀՀ ԱԱ, 428, ց. 4, գ. 96, թ. 4, Դաշտային ազգագրական նյութերի հավաքածու Մեղրու մասին]
- ¹²⁶ This phenomenon is examined by Arthur Mkrtychyan on the example of Nagorny Karabakh. See Mkrtychyan A., *Social Life of Armenians of Nagorny Karabakh, Yerevan 2010*, pp. 41-43, in Russian. [Մկրտչյան Ա., *Общественный быт армян Нагорного Карабаха*, Ереван, 2010, стр. 41-13]
- ¹²⁷ According to the locals, the treasure hunters have displaced the two tombstones inside the mausoleum and those are now outside the shrine.
- ¹²⁸ Portakar are ritual stones in Armenian traditional culture linked to the worship of pagan goddess of earth, fertility and motherhood.
- ¹²⁹ NA RA, Lisitsian repository, repository 428, list 4, file 92, document 22. Ethnographic Material on Gyumerants village. [ՀՀ ԱԱ, Լիսիցյանի ֆոնդ, ֆ. 428, ց. 4, գ. 92, թ. 22., Դաշտային ազգագրական նյութեր Գյումերանց գյուղի մասին]
- ¹³⁰ Temporary housing/tents during the summer in the pastures.
- ¹³¹ Kharatyan-Arakelyan H., *Armenian Folk Holidays, Yerevan 2005*, pp. 227-235, in Armenian. [Խառատյան-Առաքելյան Հ., *Հայ ժողովրդական տոները*, Երևան, 2005, էջ 227-235]
- ¹³² Armenian-Turk or Armenian-Tatar clashes, regular conflicts between Armenians and Turkic-speaking Muslims of the South Caucasus in the beginning of the 20th century. In case of Baba Haj, the term is used with respect to clashes preceding those the term refers to, as the events that happened under the Iranian rule are also described as clashes with "Turks."
- ¹³³ Edwards Maxim, *Baba-Hadji, symbol of ethnic harmony* <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/maxim-edwards/baba-hadji-symbol-of-ethnic-harmony>
- ¹³⁴ Morris D., *The Evolution of War*, Moscow 2009, pp. 266-267, in Russian. [Дэйви М., *Эволюция войн*, М., 2009, стр. 266-267]
- ¹³⁵ Isakhanyan G., *Non-Armenian Historical-Cultural Monuments on the Territory of Syunik*, available at <https://www.iragir.am/2012/06/14/66842/>, in Armenian [Իսախանյան Գոհար, *Ոչ հայկական պատմամշակութային հուշարձանները Սյունիքի տարածքում*]
- ¹³⁶ Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869-1923), a well-known Armenian poet, intellectual and public figure.
- ¹³⁷ An administrative title.
- ¹³⁸ Lalayan Ye., *Zangezour Province: Kapan or Ghapan, Brief Historical Overview*, *Ethnographic Journal*, 1904, book XII, pp. 198-199, in Armenian. [Լալայան Ե., *Չանգեզուրի գավառ. Կապան կամ Դափան, պատմական համառոտ տեսություն, Ազգագրական հանդես*, 1904, XII գիրք, էջ 198-199]
- ¹³⁹ NA RA, Lisitsian repository, repository 428, list 4, file 53, page 15. Essay on Meghri region, Meghri region 1926. [ՀՀ ԱԱ, ֆ. 428, ց. 4, գ. 53 թ. 15, Լիսիցյան Ստ., Ավետիկ Մեղրու շրջանի մասին. *Мегриский район*, 1926]
- ¹⁴⁰ Davit Bek or David Beg, Armenian military commander and one of the most prominent figures of the Armenian liberation movement of 18th century.
- ¹⁴¹ Kaler and Kenavuts, rural settlement in Syuink province.
- ¹⁴² Ghukas Sebastatsi, *David Bek or the History of Kapan People*, Yerevan 1992, pp 30-33,

38-39, in Armenian. [Ղուկաս Սեբաստացի, Դավիթ Բեկ կամ պատմություն դափանցոց, Երևան, 1992, էջ 30-33, 38-39]

- ¹⁴³ Isakhanyan G., Non-Armenian Historical-Cultural Monuments on the Territory of Syunik, available at <https://www.lragir.am/2012/06/14/66842/>, in Armenian [Իսախանյան Գ., Ոչ հայկական պատմամշակութային հուշարձանները Սյունիքի տարածքում]
- ¹⁴⁴ In fact, the 4500 meter elevation is a result of narrators' fantasy, as the highest peak of the area is not higher than 2500 meters.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ethnographic Field Material, April 2018, Shvanidzor
- ¹⁴⁶ "Turks from Iran" refers to both Shia Ghzlbashes during Iranian period and the Turkic-speaking Shia Muslims from Northern Iran attacking after Eastern Armenia became part of the Russian Empire.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ethnographic Field Material, April 2018, Shvanidzor
- ¹⁴⁸ During Armenian-Tatar clashes of 1905 Kozaks attacked Nyuvadi and asked for money as retaliation for attacks on Shvanidzor and soldiers protecting the border, as well as killing. Smbatyan G., Syunik tested: Armenian-Tatar Clashes, Yerevan 2018, p. 476, in Armenian. [Սմբատյան Գ, Սյունիքը փորձության մեջ. հայ-թաթարական բախումները, էջ 476]
- ¹⁴⁹ Khachatryan Zh., Armenian Folk Holidays and Ritual Lady-Dolls, 20-21st centuries, Yerevan 2017, p. 131, in Armenian [Խաչատրյան Շ., Հայ ժողովրդական տոները և ծիսական տիկին-տիկնիկները, 20-21 դդ., Երևան, 2017, էջ 131]
- ¹⁵⁰ There is a water spring in Baba Haj too.
- ¹⁵¹ Khachkar (from Armenian word khach meaning cross and qar meaning stone) is a carved memorial stone containing a cross and often with additional motifs. Is unique to Armenia and continues to be used as a grave-stone or a memorial.
- ¹⁵² Khachatryan Zh., Armenian Folk Holidays and Ritual Lady-Dolls, 20-21st centuries, Yerevan 2017, p. 131.
- ¹⁵³ Toukh Manuks are a type of a pilgrimage site or a sanctuary common in Armenia. These are simple small chapel-like constructions usually built on a hill or near water sources. They can be also found in settlements.
- ¹⁵⁴ Kharatyan-Arakelyan H., Armenian Folk Holidays, Yerevan 2005, p. 231.
- ¹⁵⁵ There are two churches in Shvanidzor, one from 17-18th centuries and one from the 19th century.
- ¹⁵⁶ The old woman's statement that "they would not go alone" could be associated with fertility-related visits. Those were usually attended by women. At the same time, this is a remote place and the statement could be related to a possible danger.
- ¹⁵⁷ Khachatryan Zh., Armenian Folk Holidays and Ritual Lady-Dolls, 20-21st centuries, Yerevan 2017, p. 129-130.
- ¹⁵⁸ The same thing is referred as "lalu" in case of Bughakar.
- ¹⁵⁹ Edwards Maxim, Baba-Hadji, symbol of ethnic harmony <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/maxim-edwards/baba-hadji-symbol-of-ethnic-harmony>
- ¹⁶⁰ The interviewees did not mention the portakar, probably because there were men present at the interviews.
- ¹⁶¹ As to the shared sanctuaries and their role in overcoming conflicts, K. Smirnov who studied Nakhijevan in 1930s, noted that despite many such places existing, it did not safeguard the region from destructive Armenian-Muslim clashes "it did not become a link between different groups and this emphasizes even more the sharp contrasts." Smirnov, K., Materials on History and Ethnography of Nakhichevan Area. Tiflis, 1934, p. 43-44, in Russian. [Смирнов К., Материалы по истории и этнографии Нахичеванского края, Тифлис, 1934, стр. 43-44]
- ¹⁶² For this discussion we are thankful to Ara Gulyan, Researcher at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of Armenia.
- ¹⁶³ As mentioned above, like many other border zones of the USSR, Meghri also had a special regime, whereas non-locals required an entrance permit. In this case the interviewee refers to those visitors who were not Meghri residents and were visiting the sanctuary from other places.
- ¹⁶⁴ The narrator specifically mentions that the behavior of the militia was not linked to his nationality: "he was doing it for his money, it was not related to him being a Turk," as he wants to make clear that he has no prejudice towards an ethnicity.

chapter III

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE:
“INVENTED TRADITION”:
AZERBAIJANI THEATRE IN
ARMENIA



ARSEN HAKOBYAN

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE:
“INVENTED TRADITION”:
AZERBAIJANI THEATRE IN
ARMENIA

THE ENTRY OF THE THEATRE IN YEREVAN AND THE MUSLIM POPULATION

THE formation and institutional development of the Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia is directly associated with the country's Sovietization. This had an impact due to the patterns of Soviet policies regarding culture and nationality and the local features of those, conditioned by the traditions, the modernization, as well as the Armenian-Azerbaijani cultural interrelations. In this respect, the "invented tradition"¹⁶⁵ concept can be used to describe the set of newly created, constructed rituals or symbolic social practices created for modernizing societies - or those just entering the age of modernization - aimed at developing new value, cultural and behavioral norms to substantiate the connection with the period in question.¹⁶⁶

Not only does the Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia become a new cultural phenomenon or symbol in itself, but also from the very beginning it accepts its audience and its direct function to change the society in line with the directive of Soviet realities.

As part of the Russian Empire, the South Caucasian societies entered the age of cultural modernization and transformation at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. This process encountered some difficulties among the Turkic-speaking Muslim population due to religious and cultural peculiarities and general political context of the empire.¹⁶⁷ The fact they practiced Islam and had different to the Christian nature of the empire social structure and cultural-religious orientations, further emphasized those difficulties.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, in the 19th and 20th Centuries, the ethnic and religious diversity of the South Caucasian cities and the effect of the empire's cultural policy, led to the intensification of interactions between Muslim and Christian intellectuals and secular elites in the cities. Often graduates of the same educational/secular institutions, these elites shared a common language and an environment of cultural communication.

Formation of the secular intellectual elite of the South Caucasus Turkic-speaking Muslims started in the second half of the 19th century, on the basis of the graduates of tsarist educational institutions. At the same time, not only was this new elite secular "intelligentsia" being formed, but also gradually a corresponding communication environment and tools, such as press and theatre, came into play.¹⁶⁹ This new intellectual elite, the "intelligentsia," was perceived as alien and sometimes even hostile by its own community, as it was considered to have deviated from the traditional Muslim norms and acquired a lifestyle which was not appropriate for that society.¹⁷⁰

The first steps towards the formation of a drama theatre and theatrical culture among the Muslims of the South Caucasus were very complicated, as they were in direct contradiction with the norms of Islam, such as the presence of women on the stage, while the plays with sensitive modern social themes caused opposition among conservative Muslim circles.¹⁷¹

One of the obstacles was the fact that the Muslim faith was often interpreted to prohibit the portrayal of humans and other sentient beings in art and theatre – a practice known as aniconism. This belief meant popular/folk theatrical elements were often in strong contradiction with the limits established by the Muslim clergy.¹⁷²

However, the multi-ethnic nature of South-Caucasian cities became a significant factor for the formation and functioning of new cultural institutions, such as a drama theatre, among the Muslim population of the region.

This was particularly evident in Yerevan, where in the 19th century mixed Armenian and “Tatar”¹⁷³ population and cohabitation existed. It was a city of churches and mosques,¹⁷⁴ where the only cultural pastimes available were limited to those provided by the religious and folk culture.

With this respect, in 1850, the visit of the Aramian Armenian theatre of Constantinople was a real cultural novelty, even a shock for the population of Yerevan. The tour in Yerevan and the Caucasus was sponsored by a rich Yerevan trader Hakob agha.¹⁷⁵ The theatrical cast was performing in the city square called Tsakhi Meidan,¹⁷⁶ where a temporary amphitheatre was built and open for everyone. The population’s reception was quite enthusiastic and the theatre’s visit was extended for another month. Acting as a theatre-circus, on Fridays, Aramian theatre also performed in Turkish, specifically for the Muslim population of the city,¹⁷⁷ and the words “bravo, mashallah, soghul” were heard at the square on these days, as described by an eye-witness.¹⁷⁸

According to Rizayev, a scholar of the history of the Azerbaijani theatre in Armenia, the tour of the Aramian theatre provided the impetus among both Armenian and Muslim intellectuals to think about and practically plan the organization of the theatrical life in the city. Later Chmshkian theatre¹⁷⁹ visited Yerevan. However, in contrast to Aramian’s performances on the square, which were open for everybody, Chmshkian performances were limited only to Armenians. The performances were organized in the churchyard, with the Bishop present, and the entry of Muslims to the area of the church was prohibited. In addition, those performances had historical themes and were performed in Old Armenian, which was incomprehensible for the Turkic-speaking Muslim population of the city.¹⁸⁰

In 1866, Armenian teachers started performing in the school and the theatrical culture was gradually sustained among the Armenian population of Yerevan, and two years later the first female actress, Yelizaveta Ghorghanian performed on a Yerevan stage.¹⁸¹

The formation of theatre introduced changes to the lives of Armenians, Russians and Muslims, as well as the cultural and physical urban space. In 1897, a separate building was constructed for the Armenian theatrical group near Gayanian Women College, next to Poghos-Petros Armenian Church.¹⁸² It became an important feature in the life of the city, where also the Russian group performed. Later, these groups were transferred to the City Club. “Meghu Hayastani” (“The bee of Armenia”) newspaper from 1882 provides interesting evidence about

these transformations: "Persians of Yerevan are now eagerly attending theatre, even the Armenian theatre. Thus, a reasonable number of Persians attended "Arshak the Second" drama performance."¹⁸³

In 1886, thanks to the initiative of a Yerevan-based young teacher, well-known intellectual and educator Firudinbek Qocharli, the Muslim students of the City Gymnasium of Yerevan staged M. F. Akhundov's¹⁸⁴ play "Monsieur Jordan and Dervish Mastali Shah,"¹⁸⁵ which is considered the first Azerbaijani performance in Yerevan.¹⁸⁶ However, this performance was limited to the Gymnasium and did not receive public reactions. Theatrical life and new public culture faced difficulties in penetrating the Muslim population of Yerevan. This was probably linked to the fact that the city was relatively small, far from communication routes, and the Muslim clergy was quite well-positioned and influential.¹⁸⁷ An influential Shia center, the Goy (Blue) Mosque, was located in the city. At the same time, the contrast and conflict between the Mosque, which considered the manifestations of secular culture to be Satanist and cursed the initiators, and the secular Muslim teachers of the Gymnasium, played a special role in the formation of new social culture.¹⁸⁸

Perhaps this was the reason that after the 1886 performance and the religious fanaticism which followed it - as well as the bans and denials it caused - no theatrical performances were organized among the Muslim population of Yerevan for the next ten years.¹⁸⁹

Although Firudinbek Qocharli was attacked and persecuted by Muslim fanatics, his work was continued in the city Gymnasium. On December 8, 1896, thanks to the efforts of the Gymnasium teachers and students, the play "Monsieur Jordan and Dervish Mastali Shah" was staged the second time. This was actively covered in the Armenian media, which considered it the first "Turk"¹⁹⁰ performance in Yerevan attended by Armenian, Russian and Turk audience.¹⁹¹ It was staged in the Hall of Janpoladov's or Janpoladyan' Club as an open performance, where the Muslims of the city "saw their life in a large mirror, (and) have openly and publically heard about the deceiving Muslim clergy."¹⁹²

As revealed by the Armenian newspaper "Nor Dar," ("New Century")¹⁹³ the performance acquired important public significance and function, since it was also a charity, utilized as means to collect money for the needy students of the Gymnasium, putting aside religious differences. Highlighting the importance of public charity, "Nor Dar" noted that it "should be considered the highest achievement of the theatrical performance of Turks and the idea of benevolence in general in Yerevan."¹⁹⁴ Authored by a Yerevan intellectual and theatre advocate Emin Ter-Grigoryan, this piece in "Nor Dar" is the only surviving written account of the performance, and at the same time Ter-Grigoryan became its first and only critic.

As noted by Rizayev, at the end of the 19th century, Yerevan was a small city where most people knew each other, while the intellectual elite was probably comprised of some 20 people, including Emin Ter-Grigoryan and Qocharli, both theatre advocates in Yerevan.¹⁹⁵ It is not surprising that Emin Ter-Grigoryan was the first critic of the performance, publishing the appropriate article in the Armenian media.

THE THEATRE AND THE HISTORY

The establishment, formation and activity of the State Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia reflects different stages and peculiarities of Soviet cultural and theatrical policy: from an amateur theatrical group in a club, to a touring then people's and finally state inter-district theatre. In light of this fact, it is important to understand the context and the content of such cultural policy.

From the very beginning, the Soviet government overemphasized the formation of holidays and ceremonies, which contained new form and content. It believed such phenomena should be in line with the new political-ideological realities. Theatre and theatrical performance had a special role in this context. Lenin published a Decree on the "Unification of Theatrical Work," and in 1919, a Department on Mass Performances and Events was opened, allied to the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment (Narkompros) of Soviet Russia. The department developed and promoted a declaration-program on "The Establishment of Popular Mass Theatres." The program was aimed at involving the wider population in the new social-political reality. Theatrical plays and performances were perceived as an important means for political-ideological propaganda.

It is interesting that the Declaration directly considers theatres "strong means for liberating the masses," that moves from "claustrophobic buildings to the streets, gets the form of popular performances, and states: "people (...) you must gather under the open sky, in a large open space, you must gather".¹⁹⁶

It was emphasized that the creation of the Popular Theatre (People's Theatre) should be implemented with the involvement of the masses and their collective creativity, and surely through cooperation of the collectives and interested individuals. Mass theatre should be more festive than just a theatre to "prepare the free and happy people for the future folk festivity, where the people themselves would be the festive event."¹⁹⁷

When the Bolsheviks were adopting these decisions, the South Caucasus was not Sovietized yet. However, a year later, first Azerbaijan, then Armenia, and in 1921, Georgia were Sovietized. It was symbolic, that the poster "Art to the Masses" appeared on the building of the Armenian Parliament. This was not a coincidence, as in 1918 to 1920,¹⁹⁸ in the absence of a theatre building, theatrical performances and events were organized in the Parliament building.¹⁹⁹ The appearance of the poster on the building of the Parliament perhaps symbolically transformed the function of the building, advancing the theatrical factor and concealing the association with the First Armenian Republic and its public institutions, in this case the Parliament. In 1922, the State Academic Theatre (State Theatre) was established based on the respective decree of the Armenian SSR. The former Parliament building became its permanent performance place.²⁰⁰

In the 1920s, not only did Soviet Armenia enter an active phase of creating socio-political and economic fundamentals for the new society, but it also bore witness to a phase of new cultural and transformation policy. This could not remain iso-

lated from the global changes happening in the Soviet world. The Bolsheviks emphasized the new cultural policy as a means for cultural strengthening and spreading new ideological-political realities.

During this period, the Head Department of Political Enlightenment (Qaghlusavorchutyun), the main structure for the ideological-political implementation of the new policy, as well as the Revolutionary Theatre in Yerevan were established. In addition to eradication of illiteracy, the Qaghlusavorchutyun was responsible for the policy on nationalities, the struggle against religion, and the issue of work among women.²⁰¹

The work with other nationalities residing in Armenia, especially with the “Turkic” part, was particularly challenging. The theatre played a significant role in the enlightenment issues, as 95 percent of the “Turkic” population was illiterate according to Soviet data. The works to establish clubs, rural hut-reading rooms²⁰² and associated theatrical groups commenced in the Republic.²⁰³ Two “Turkic” clubs, for men and for women, were also established in Yerevan.²⁰⁴

In 1922, following the initiative of the leadership of Soviet Armenia and the efforts of Yunus Nouri, already famous among Muslims of Yerevan for his acting work, and Bala Efenidiev, a Communist Party activist, a theatrical group was created attached to the “Turkic club” of Yerevan. The Club staged performances every Friday.²⁰⁵ In 1923, the Qaghlusavorchutyun²⁰⁶ approved the Group’s Charter.²⁰⁷ Yunus Nouri was the only experienced actor in this group: according to Levon Qalantar, an Armenian theatre director, Nouri was the only one who had some experience.²⁰⁸ The group membership included Communist party members and statesmen, such as B. Efendiyev, A. Rzayev, as well as workers, public servants and amateur Armenian actors.²⁰⁹

Bala Efendiyev was an Armenia-born old Bolshevik, a member of the Communist Party of Armenia, and an active participant of revolutionary movements, especially in Baku, where during Baku Commune (1918) he was the Commissar of Baku uyezd. Since 1921, he had held leadership positions in the Republic, including the deputy of People’s Commissar on Internal Affairs, Head of the Department on National Minorities in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, and People’s Commissar on Social Protection. Responsible for national minorities, he was actively working among the “Turkic” population. In one of his reports he mentioned that “the women’s and men’s clubs established in Erivan²¹⁰ play an important role in involving Turkic people in the cultural and social life.”²¹¹

The objectives of the theatrical group were to support the strengthening of the Soviet rule, spread enlightenment and culture among people, struggle against religion and fanaticism, and work for the protection of women’s rights.²¹² The first repertoires were developed in accordance with these objectives. For example, Suleyman Sali Akhundov’s play “Eagle’s Nest,” which was the first Soviet Azerbaijani play, presented the establishment of the Soviet rule in Azerbaijan through the struggle of peasants and revolutionaries against Aghas [the rulers].²¹³ The

repertoire of the group also included Narimanov's "Nadir Shah," Mamed-kulizade's "The Dead," U. Hajibekov's "Meshady Irad" and other plays with similar themes.²¹⁴

In 1924, Qaghlusavorchutyun wrote about the translation of over a hundred plays that could be staged at the "Turkic Club."²¹⁵ At the same time, in accordance to the decision of the Party leadership, Turkic and Workers' Clubs had to organize performance and event exchanges.²¹⁶ The Party structures assigned the group to organize compulsory performances in "Turkic-populated" areas, and it had performed in Ghamarlu, Vedibasar, Zangibasar, Aghbaba and Nakhijevan.²¹⁷

The process and policy of Soviet cultural construction dictated a steady pace, where the organization of theatrical life had played an important role. A 1927 report of Louszhoghkomb²¹⁸ of the Armenian SSR devoted to these issues mentions that "the cultural level of Turks is very low, only Kurds are lower than them," and to put the future cultural-enlightenment works on the right track, among other things "it is necessary to organize stages [theatrical performances] for the Turks."²¹⁹

However, the transition from an amateur group to a state theatre was not an easy task both in terms of organization and human resources. Eventually, on March 15, 1928, "The Armenian State Turk Touring Theatre" or "The Armenian State Turkic Touring Theatre" was established by the Government Decree of the Armenian SSR. It was the first non-Armenian language theatre operating within the territory of Soviet Armenia.²²⁰ In the second half of the 1930s, when the ethnonym Azerbaijani was first circulated, the documents started to name the theatre "State Azerbaijani Touring Theatre."²²¹

The founders of the theatre were Mkrtych Janan, an Armenian actor from Constantinople, and Yunus Nouri, perhaps the only more or less experienced actor at the time, while the administrative director was Hatsagortsyan.²²² Later Mkrtych Janan wrote in his autobiography: "I was among the founders of the State Turk Theatre of Armenia, where I worked as theatrical director."²²³ He noticed that the amateur performances staged before the establishment of the theatre did not correspond to the minimal requirements of a professional theatre. Those were organized irregularly, while the actors performed without stage makeup and any rehearsal.²²⁴

Mkrtych Janan left exceptional accounts on the first steps taken by the new theatre, its first theatrical season, tours, performances and the difficulties it encountered. It is a unique source of information, not only about the history of the Azerbaijani Theatre of Armenia, but also about the social culture of Azerbaijani-populated areas in Armenia during that period.* According to Janan "State Turk Touring theatre was formed in January, without any acting material [professional cast]. We had to include students of the *banfak* ["Faculty of Workers"²²⁵] in the group. As a result, we had to stay in Yerevan till mid June."

* The Russian translations of these documents were partly published by S. Rizayev in "Pages of Friendship" [Ризаев С., Страницы дружбы, Баку, 1964] pp. 44-48. However, Rizayev's publication misses some parts. We have used full archival documents.



Mkrtych Janan

The theatre performed in the building of the State theatre. According to a Louszhoghkomat's Collegium decision, a day each week should have been assigned for the "Turk troupe."²²⁶ The first performance took place on April 14, 1928 in the building of the First State Theatre. It was a performance called "Zoran Tabib," a version of Moliere's "The Reluctant Doctor" adapted for the popular Muslim environment, where the doctor was replaced by a hakim,²²⁷ and the names of the characters were changed to Muslim names.²²⁸

In his first report about the tour, Janan wrote of visiting the settlements Boyuk Vedi (currently Vedi), Ghamarlu(Artashat), Leninakan (Gyumri), Amasia, Ghahranamaz, Ibish (Yerizak, Amasia district),²²⁹ Alaverdi, Manes (Alaverdi),²³⁰ Dzorages, Gharakilis (Vanadzor), Dilijan, Oulunkhanlu (Masis), Chol Mehmandar (Hovtashen, Ararat province), Gharaghshlagh (renamed to Dostlug under the Soviets, currently Hayanist, Ararat province), Khajaparakh (Khachpar, Ararat province), then returning to Yerevan. In the rural areas the audience of the group was the "Turk public," while in the industrial centers, in addition to Turks there were Turkish-speaking Greeks and Yezidis.

He provides a vivid and detailed description of difficulties related to their tour and performances: "the distance among the regions took some 20 days of traveling from us. Most of the travel was on ox carts and by foot. In the remaining 35 days, we were able to perform 34 times. Thus, we did not have a single free day and did not use our summer holidays."

The repertoire included Slavyanski's play "Red Eagle," Moliere's "The Reluctant Doctor" (Zoran Tabib), Jabarli's "Aydin" and "Qyohne Fiqlilar." Of these offerings, "The Red Eagle" and Moliere's "The Reluctant Doctor" were the most performed plays. The first was about the civil war, the revolution, and the workers' movement in Russia, while the second criticized and mocked the hakims and Muslim superstition. Janan explained that while "The Red Eagle" was about the civil war and workers' life, it was very enthusiastically perceived in the villages. He quotes the villagers' exclamations and reactions to different acts of the play.

The stage was an issue for the Theatre. "In the areas of workers and centers we had the opportunity of performing on a stage, while in the villages we did not find any,"- writes Janan. However, they found a solution: "The decoration system we had found made possible to build outdoor stages in the yards of rural houses, in front of rural reading-rooms or mosques. These stages made a great impression on the villagers." Janan suggested to Qaghlusavorutyun to use their method in all touring theatres.

The stage lights were another issue. Janan mentioned that they had to perform during the daylight. Once in Ibij they even had to perform under the moonlight so as people from the neighboring villages could also attend. However, Janan adds that because of these conditions they became inventors and used "the dung, one of the natural resources available in the villages, pouring a lot of oil on it, we'd put it on a stick and burn, thus creating some ancient and fantastic images." It seemed like the touring theatre directly implemented Bolshevik procla-



Yunus Nouri

mation about the masses and people theatres: the people are in the open air, while the night chandeliers ensure the festivity and originality of the outdoor performances.

The report revealed that the theatre performed free of charge in the villages, as “almost all Turk villages had never seen a performance before and did not know what the theatre was.” The tour also revealed local cultural demands: “we have discovered that there is a huge demand for music in workers’ centers and villages; we had a friend who played the tar,²³¹ and the guy could not rest from the requests of workers and peasants to play something. While we were moving from one village to the other, the smaller villages on our way would stop us and ask to play something, then they’d take out their papakhs²³² to thank us.”



Yerevan Turk Theatre in the first year 1929.

1. director Hatsagortyan; 2. artistic director Janan; 3. actor Nouri

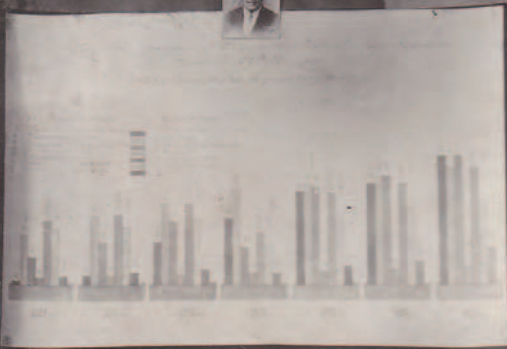
This first tour of the touring theatre was conducted amid very hard and complicated circumstances, especially given that the group did not have previous experience of working in the regions. Janan described the difficulties, when they would travel 10-14 hours on carts, got stuck in the middle of a river and had to enter the water to help the oxen. Yet, “it was not only 14-hour-long shaking in the cart, but also constant climatic changes, when you are high in the mountains for a week, where there is still some snow left, where you are shaking from cold, wearing a coat, and the next week you are in a place where watermelons and melons are cracking from the heat. In such conditions, we should keep an eye

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ՀԱՄԱՐ 1915

ՀԱՄԱՐ 1915



ԻՆՏԵՐՆԱԿ

Մասնակցությունը ՀԱՄԱՐ 1915-1916

1. ԳՐԻՈՒ	1. ԼՐԻՆ ԳՐԻ
2. ՍՐԻՄ ԹՐԵՍ	2. ԿԱՆՏԱՆՈՒ
3. ԻՐԱՆ ԵՐԵՎ	3. ԿՈՍՏԱՆ
4. ԿԵՐ ԻՍԽԱՆ	4. ԼԱՐՍ ԿՅՏԿ
5. ԳՐԻՍԻ	5. ՇԱՐՄԵ
6. ԿՐՄԻՆ ԿՐՄԻՆ	6. ՍՏԵՓԱՆ
7. ՍՐԻՄ ԹՐԵՍ	7. ԵՇԻՆ
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9. ԳՐԻՈՒ	9. ԿԱՆՏԱՆՈՒ

Creative Exhibition
"State Turk Theatre"

Гостеприимство имени



X ЛЕТ
1928 - 29 г.
Театральный сезон



Варталик В.
ХИДОЖНИК



Калыануралы Бахчи
Засл. артистка НКЗСР.
Арм. ССР.



Ахмедов Джемфар
ДИРЕКТОР



Зейнеп Аркян
Засл. артистка НКЗСР



Зейнеп Аркян НКЗСР



Мамедян А.
МЕСКОМ



Торосьян А.



Тусейинов З.



Шахбазов З.



Хачатурян П.
Рустамян А.



Саркисян К.
КОСТЯН



Лышев М.



Тусейева М.



Расульева М.



Кучев А.



Рухович А.



Мамедян А.



Мамедян С.



Мамедян Р.
Хачатурян



Керимян А.



Гаджиев А.



Базирян А.
Арт. МОНТ.



Самурашян А.
ГЛАВ. АРТ. ОСВЕЩЕНИЯ

ФОТО
Г. ХАЧАТУРЯН
ЕРЕВАН



ЕРЕВАН - 1939 г.

X лет.

1938 - 39 г.
Тифлисская дорога

Джабарлы Джабарлы



Масчадинский Илья
— ПЕРВЫЙ



Гордин И. КОНСТАНТИНОВИЧ
ЗНАКОМЫЙ ЛИЦО



Гурьевский Борис Константинович



Гурьевский Борис Константинович



Гурьевский Борис Константинович



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Гурьевский Борис Константинович



Гурьевский Борис Константинович

The Collective of Yerevan Azerbaijani Theatre named after Jabarli in 1938-39. Photo of the 10th Anniversary.

on the health of the group members. We tried to select the best place in a village for sleepovers. However, quite often even the best place was not better than a stable or a barn.”

Yet, Aghbaba district (which corresponds to a part of today’s Arpi and Amasia communities in Shirak province) was a real challenge for the health and life of the group members. According to Janan, in the villages of this district “syphilis was spread for 70-80-100 percent and there were lepers’ asylums.”²³³ The report mentioned that there were also some difficulties related to food supply in the villages. For example, in a district of B. Vedi, very close to Yerevan, the group stayed hungry after being deprived of food for 24 hours. Even when they did find things to eat, the report makes mention of “the low-quality” of the bread. In general, food was cheaper in the cities compared to villages.

Janan was concerned about the harsh economic condition faced by the group: “30-70 ruble salary remained unchanged during the tour, and everybody had debts at the moment.” Due to scarce financing, the group was not able to visit Basargechar²³⁴ district, and was late in visiting Dilijan, as “the Turk nomads have returned to their places.”

Interestingly, not only was the touring group aiming to spread new culture and ideas through its performances, but also it tried to apply these very ideas to its internal relations, either consciously or unconsciously. Janan wrote how they tried to create a communal living and “it should be stated that our actresses had shown an unprecedented attitude by doing the cooking, the patching, and even washing... the clothes, yet, several young comrades turned out absolutely incapable for such communal living, and everything was ruined.” However, he praised three actresses that took care of their living arrangements. It is mentioned, that though they did not have any experience of, or the vast material resources for, traveling to “Turk areas,” they were able to do whatever was within their power.²³⁵

Based on the analysis of the first traveling performances, Mkrtich Janan left another interesting document, “The Activities and Prospects of 1929-1930 Theatrical Season.” He informed readers that: “from the last year’s group that we put lots of effort in, only four or five people remained. The rest had left to continue education or to serve in better conditions.”

“The efforts of Natsmin²³⁶ to attract actors from other places did not yield results, because the actors, learning about the difficulties of the Touring Theatre, found legal ways to leave, and therefore our activities for this season were delayed for a month.”²³⁷

Reflecting on the plans for 1929-30, Janan revealed that “the most difficult task is to find cultural workers among the Turks, particularly actors and actresses.” To solve the issue, and “not finding acting forces in Yerevan, left by the actors from Nakhijevan,” Janan explained: “We had to leave for Tiflis and Baku on October 20, and with a lot of difficulties, (and) many requests, took a Turk actress from the Baku State Theatre and two actors from the Baku Workers’ Theatre.

Thus completing and strengthening the group, with a cast of fourteen, including the director and the prompter, we were barely able to start in November.”

Yunus Nouri had participated in the selection of actors along with Janan. He knew the peculiarities and sensitivities of the local Muslims.²³⁸

Janan wrote the following about the 1929-30 schedule: “the group had to stay in Yerevan till March-end of February and to get prepared for its performances, as well as to serve the Muslim workers of the city.” From March 1, the group would tour “all Turk-populated places of Armenia, as well as Nakhijevan, Julfa, Stepanakert, (and) Gyanja.” He expressed his satisfaction with the increased financing of the group, stating, however, that it was still low compared to “the Turk acting market,” especially as no per-diems were paid. He suggested to centralize the tour-related payments in Yerevan, since when the responsibility for making the payments was put on local executive committees, it became an additional issue for the group, which did not have a separate administrative position and had to wait jobless in provincial centers with no other activity.²³⁹

In 1930, the theatre also staged the works of Armenian dramaturgy, such as “Pepo,” “Namus,” and “Khatabela.” During these years also Arshak Bourjalyan, Armen Gulakyan, Vagharsh Vagharshyan, Levon Qalantar, and Vardan Atshe-myian staged performances in the Azerbaijani theatre. In 1940, Bourjalyan had served as the artistic director of the theatre. Bourjalyan, Gulakyan, and Atshe-myian, were core figures of the Armenian theatre of 1930s and 1940s.²⁴⁰

It is interesting that during the rehearsals of “Namus,” its author, the prominent Armenian playwright Shirvanzade, would often visit the theatre and help the actors and the director with advice.²⁴¹

However, in the 1930s, the theatre was criticized in the press, as well as within party and government structures. It was considered, that the theatre did not stage modern plays, particularly the ones targeting rural populations, and that it advanced “urban” repertoire. The Louszhoghkom of Armenia believed, that the theatre should not move forward with an urban repertoire, but there should be many plays for the rural population reflecting its people’s actual life, especially given that the theatre was a traveling one.²⁴²

In this context, J. Jabarli’s play “In 1905” was staged in 1935 (directed by B. Qalantari). The play had a clear political and ideological orientation.

Jabarli died some months before this Yerevan performance.²⁴³ Later, during 1935, the theatre was named after him as a tribute. Vagharshyan²⁴⁴ left interesting memories. He mentioned that Charents highly valued the deceased author and wrote his obituary in “GrakanTert.”²⁴⁵ In a conversation with Vagharshyan, Charents said that we could not put a value on great talents: “he was a bright, honest man.” During the conversation Vagharshyan informed Charents that the Azerbaijani Theatre of Yerevan was going to stage “In 1905,” and Charents immediately reacted that it was very good and the theatre should also be named after Jabarli. He also suggested, that the theatre itself should be as bright and

ESŞÇ devləti tyrk teatrosu

1934-35 (6)-cı il mevsimi

Şirvanzade


NAMUS


4 pərdə

İstirak edir

Barxdar	xalq artisti O. ABELJAN Qaraxanov
Gylnaz—onun arvadı	Adriq
Sysən—onun qəzbə	Z a r l q
Sumbat—onun oğlu	Ə. Sylejmanov
Hajrapet	J. Sylejmanov
Mərjəm—onun arvadı	D i l a r ə
Sejran—onun oğlu	Ə. Zejnalov
Sysəmbər—Şysənin joldaşı	Ismət
Sənəm	D. Mehəmmədova
Rystəm—onun oğlu	M. Abdulajev
	Ərəb oğlu
Şpaniq	Adriq
Sərqej bəg	Z. Şahbazov
Çavad	H. Həsənov
Çahangir	A. Məhəmmədov
Jegor	A. Taqiev
Martiros	Ç Əlijev
Hambarsum	T. Əlijev
Saqdiş	Hysejnqulu.
1-çi qonaq	X. Xəlilov
2-çi qonaq	Abasqulu
3-çi qonaq	Tahar

Režissorlar: Qaraxanov və Zejnalov

Rez. muavini: M. Baqır

Tamaşanın idarə edir: Ramazanov

Bədii hissə mydiri və baş rez: B. Qələndərli

interesting as Jabarli was, adding that “and then it would deserve his name.”²⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Charents never got to see the performance. His arrest during Stalin’s Red Terror of 1936 and subsequent death in prison the following year meant he never got to fulfill the wish to see “that wonderful and useful play”²⁴⁷ which he expressed a desire to see in conversations with Vaghharshyan.



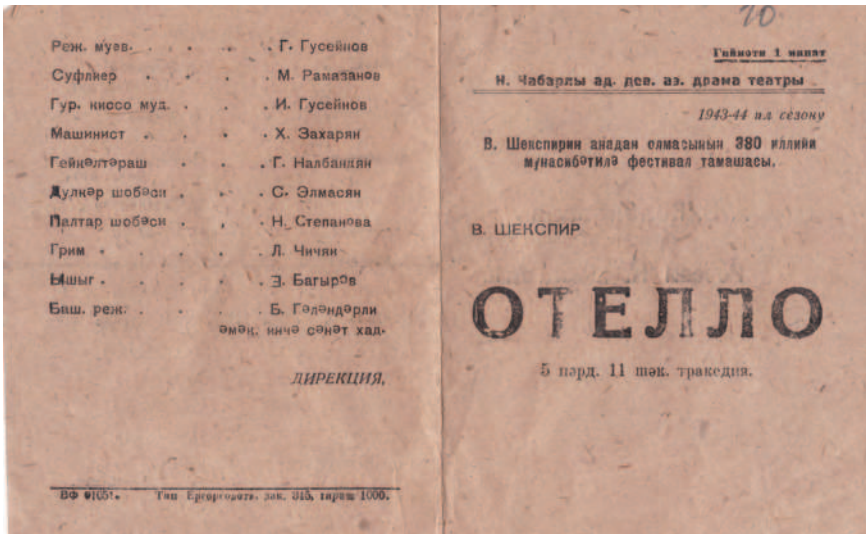
After Mkrtych Janan, the theatre was directed by Bakhshi Qalantarli²⁴⁸ (Merited Artist²⁴⁹ of the Armenian SSR), and Ali Shahsabahli.²⁵⁰ In her 1965 memoir (a manuscript in the RA LAM Archive), the actress Nvard Alikhanyan provided interesting details about Ali Shahsabahli. She first met him during the 1920s in Batumi, Georgia where she played in the Turkish Theatre under his supervision, as she was also fluent in “Turkish.” Later, the Armenian actress performed on the Azerbaijani stage of Tbilisi, where Shahsabahli was the artistic director. However, the Stalin’s 1937 repressions did not spare the Armenian artists in Tbilisi, and Alikhanyan wrote that she was saved by Shahsabahli, who was “an old Chekist

and a Party member.” After these events, Alikhanyan and Shahsabahli moved to Yerevan and stayed there, honoring the requests of local Armenian artists. Soon, the administrative director of the Azerbaijani Theatre in Yerevan signed a contract with Shahsabahli.²⁵¹

During the war years of 1941-45, the Azerbaijani theatre was facing difficulties in terms of financial and human resources, as well as the repertoire, and as noted by S. Rizayev, became a third category Touring theatre.²⁵² Nevertheless, during the Shakespeare festival in 1944, “Othello” staged by Qalantarli received critical acclaim and was considered an important achievement of the Azerbaijani Theatre of Armenia.²⁵³

After the end of the war, the authorities of the Armenian SSR planned to take special measures for the Azerbaijani Theatre, which was in difficult circumstances. It was noted, that the theatre functioned in incomplete conditions, and the artistic collective had been cut by a half. It was envisioned to invite four or five professional actors from Azerbaijan, enlarge the troupe to up to 31 persons, and open a studio. It should be mentioned, that Yunus Nouri, the talented actor and one of the founders of the theatre, had retired in 1948, and perhaps this had an impact on theatre quality.²⁵⁴

During the post-war period, due to economic hardship, there were massive



changes in the status of the theatres in the USSR. As a result, around 500 theatres were shut down throughout the Soviet Union, among those the Armenian State Theatres of Baku and Kirovabad (currently Ganja), several regional theatres of Armenia, including the Azerbaijani State Theatre of Yerevan, closed in 1949.²⁵⁵

In 1959, the Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR decided to open an amateur popular Azerbaijani theatre attached to the House of Culture²⁵⁶ of Nor Aresh district in Yerevan. The text of the decision stated that the theatre was created “to

improve the cultural service available for the Azerbaijani population of the republic.”²⁵⁷ Hovakimyan wrote that in 1961 the Azerbaijani Popular Theatre was opened in the No. 7 House of Culture of Yerevan and formed the basis for the establishment of the Azerbaijani State Theatre in Yerevan named after Jabar Jabarli in 1967.²⁵⁸

In 1966, the Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR created a register of all popular theatres of the republic. The presented documents indicated the existence of one popular theatre performing in Azerbaijani language, which was located in Hrazdan village of Ejmiatsin district (currently Masis).²⁵⁹

In 1966, the Council of Ministers of the Armenian SSR made a decision to open Inter-district Azerbaijani Theatre named after Jabarli. The “inter-district” status implied the existence of a firm theatrical basis (a central base), and performance as a touring theatre in the regions of the republic. In terms of its status, material resources, management and scale (subsidies and expenditure), it was identical to the other inter-district theatres (Artashat, Ghapan and Kamo theatres) of the republic, however it had smaller numbers of performances, audience and revenue. Theatre also traveled throughout the South Caucasus.²⁶⁰

The governmental decree on the Azerbaijani theatre demanded the opening of an inter-district theatre on the basis of the Azerbaijani Popular Theatre at the



Ç. ÇABBARLƏ ADYNA DEVLƏTI AZƏRBAYCANLƏY TEATRƏ

Ç. ÇABBARLƏ

1905-çi İLDƏ

4 PƏRDƏ 11 ŞƏKİLDƏ

İŞTIRAK EDƏNLƏR

İmamverdi	N. Mamedov
Gylsym (İmamverdiin arvadı)	D. Mamedova
Baxş (onların oğlu)	H. Mirzojev
Allahverdi	Əməkdar aq. Junis Nuri
Нават (Allahverdiin arvadı)	Z. Bavajeva
Sona (onların qızı)	Ətajə, Əijeva, Zariq
Ejvaz (onların oğlu)	Daqıstanlı
Qubernator	I. Hysejinov
Palqovniq	Ə. İmanov
Qradanacalnik	I. İsmajlov
Marija (Qubernatorın arvadı)	Adriq
Salamof	Əhməd-Səfaji
Bahadur bəj	G. Baqırov
Aqamjan	Qaraxanov
Hajqaz (Aqamjanın oğlu)	Ə. Sulejmanov
Aram	Z. Şahvazov
Valodin	Ə. Zejnalov
Məhkəmə sədri	İsmajlov
Proqor	A. Mamedov
Qarapet (tamada)	A. Taqıjev
Kəndxuda	H. Əziz
İsaq	H. Əlijev
Qoça	Həsən
Aqajar	İbrahim

Quruluş: B. QƏLƏNDƏRLİ

Tərtibat: A. CILINGARJAN

Mavin rezissor: I. HYSEJINOV

House of Culture of Hrazdan village. The theatre was to be named after Jabarli.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, by the decision of the Ministry of Culture, the theatre was opened at the N 1 House of Culture of Yerevan.²⁶² Aziz Suleymanov, the son of Yunus Nouri, became the director of the theatre.²⁶³ From 1933 to 49, he was an actor at the Azerbaijani theatre, then moved to administrative and party work. Right before his appointment as a director, he was working at the Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR.²⁶⁴

From 1968 to 1984, the theatre was directed by Hidayat Orujev, a journalist of the "Soviet Ermenistan"²⁶⁵ newspaper, a writer and a native of Maralzami village of Meghri district of the Armenian SSR. In 1984, he moved to Azerbaijan. Orujev made a career in post-soviet Azerbaijan: President's Advisor on Religious and Inter-Ethnic Relations, the Head of the Committee on Religious Issues, and since 2012, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan in Kyrgyzstan. Orujev is also known for his anti-Armenian statements, and has issued violent threats to Armenians at the beginning of Karabakh movement, prior to the Sumgait events.²⁶⁶ After Orujev, the theatre was headed by the grandson of Yunus Nouri, Yunus Suleymanov. One of the special developments of the theatre during these years was the fact that most actors were from Baku. However, there was a high turnover among those from Baku.²⁶⁷

The theatre continued its activities up until 1988. The Karabakh events influenced the theatre. A report from the Department of Arts of the Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR sent to the Yerevan City Communist Party Committee in 1989 shed some light on those developments: "During the entire year of 1988, the Azerbaijani Theatre had performed in the Azerbaijani SSR, and the last performances took place in October-November in Lenkoran. As of January 1988, 13 actors worked in the theatre and only five are left now, and two of them had written resignation letters. The rest have exchanged their houses and moved to Azerbaijan. The Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR appealed to the Ministry of Culture of the Azerbaijani SSR in 1987 and 1988 with a request to send professional staff for Jabarli inter-district theatre. According to a letter (from the Ministry of Culture of the Azerbaijani SSR-A.H.) dated January 26, 1989, ten graduates of this year should be sent to Yerevan (Armenia). In case of availability of the national human resources, the theatre will have a clear work opportunity."²⁶⁸

THE THEATRE AND SPACE

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the space where the theatre was located and operated was very important for the theatrical culture, for the formation and further development of the medium as a public institution, as well as for its public function.

The process was complicated in the Muslim environment of the South Caucasus. The theatre performances occurring in private spaces such as palaces, residences, or summer houses were considered progressive enough since some-

times women could be among the spectators of those closed environments, something that was impossible during public events.²⁶⁹

S. Rizayev writes that the uniqueness of the Armenian situation was that the church did not impede theatrical performances. Moreover, the church provided its space for theatre as was the case with the Chmshkian troupe in Yerevan, which performed in the churchyard.²⁷⁰

The Muslim environment was different in this respect, given the opposition from the clergy and their fight against theatre, especially in Yerevan. This is why the first performances in 1886 happened at the city gymnasium. According to the Armenian press “Monsieur Jordan and Dervish Mastali Shah,” the first Turk performance, (1896) was held in Janpoladyan’s Club or at the theatre.²⁷¹

In later years the Janpoladyan Club continued remaining a place in Yerevan where the Muslim theatre lovers staged amateur performances.²⁷² Sometimes the performances also happened at the city club located on the top floor of Buniatians’ house.²⁷³

Vasak Madatov’s “Qrd Qrd” vaudeville that had a distinctively anti-clergy (Muslim) rhetoric, was allowed for staging by Tsarist censorship in 1903, as a family performance. It was held at Panah khan Makinski’s²⁷⁴ house, at the khan’s own initiative. The first performance was a closed one, but the news spread out widely and the khan opened his house for the outside audience during the second performance.²⁷⁵

In 1922, following Armenia’s Sovietization, a “Turkic (“Turk”) club” was established in Yerevan and the affiliated theatre troupe started using the club’s stage.



Bakhshi Qalantari

Aziz Suleymanov

The Club was located in a building close to the Saint Sargis church.²⁷⁶ Rizaev found it symbolic that the Turkic Club was next to the Blue Mosque and the route to the Club passed next to the Mosque.²⁷⁷ The Club itself, though, with its revolutionary performances and participants, negated the Mosque and any religious affiliation. Those attending the Club had to make a choice between the Mosque and the Club. The Club's theatre troupe had an important mission to perform in different districts of the Republic in its capacity of a touring theatre. The Muslim Women's Club was another location for theatre performances. The Club had opened in 1923 not far from the house of Panah khan Makinski.²⁷⁸

In 1928, by the March 15 decree of the Government of the ASSR, the "Armenian State Touring Turk Theatre" was established. In 1928-29, for the first year, the theatre troupe was given the stage of the State Theatre for certain days. However, in advance of the 1929-30 touring season, due to the intensive schedule of the State Theatre, they had to use the Pioneer Club stage. Here is what Mkrtych Janan writes about this: "The most problematic issue this year is that of the theatre building. For some time already the troupe has not had a chance to rehearse since there were no available stages either at the State Theatre, or at the Red Army House or at the clubs." He also notes that they were only able to find a room at the Pioneer Club, but the rehearsals held there could not give the desired results for the young group. "The experienced Armenian troupes have an opportunity to have three or four pre-first night rehearsals, while the rather inexperienced Turk group so far has not have one complete final rehearsal." Janan goes on to mention that the problem with the stage and the building emerged because the State Theatre started having daily performances and as a result: "the chances for the Turk performances to succeed have been minimized." He reports that the issue was presented to the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment.

It can be assumed that the problem had been resolved, and during the later years, during the 1930-40s, the theatre had performances on the stage of the State Theatre. Avetyan remembered that he often was present at the performances of the Jabarli Theatre held on the same stage where the G. Sundukyan theatre actors performed.²⁷⁹ Most probably, this fact made it possible for Sundukyan theatre actors Hrachya Nersisyan, Avet Avetisyan, Vagharsh Vagharshayn, Gourgen Janibekyan, Vahram Papazyan, Avet Avetyan to be present during the rehearsals of the Azerbaijani theatre, to observe the creative process, and to perform on the stage.²⁸⁰

During those years, the touring capacity of the theatre also expanded. The guest performances usually were divided between two casts. In 1934-35 only, one of the casts visited 142 villages and performed 160 times with 30,000 villagers present.²⁸¹

As we already mentioned, in 1959, the Armenian SSR's Ministry of Culture decided to create an amateur Azerbaijani popular theatre affiliated with the Nor Aresh House of Culture in Yerevan. A few years later, in 1966, there is a mention of the Azerbaijani popular theatre operating at Hrazdan village's (Masis) Culture House.²⁸² During the same year, the Armenian SSR's Council of Ministers de-

ЭССР ХКС ЯНЫНДА ИНЧЭСЭНӨТ ИШЛЭРИ ИДАРЭСИ

Ч. ЧАБАРЛЫ адына

Эрмәнистан дәвләт Азәрбайчанлы театры

1940—41 чи ил сезону

БУКҮН

Ч. ЧАБАРЛЫ

А й д ы н

5 пәрдәли драма

Гурулушчу режиссор—Ә. ШАХСАБАҢЛЫ

Тәртибатчы рәссам—В. ВАРТАНЯН

Гурулуш һиссә мүдири—А. РАМАЗАНОВ

Режиссор админис.—Н. МИРЗОЕВ

Тамаша ахшам саат 8-дә башланыр

Гос. азербайджанский драм. театр

Им. ДЖ. ДЖАБАРЛЫ

1940—41 сезон

ПРОГРАММА

ДЖ. ДЖАБАРЛЫ

А й д ы н

драма в 5 актах

Пост. режиссера: А. ШАХСАБАХЛЫ

Художник: В. ВАРТАНЯН

Худ. рук.: А. С. БУРДЖАЛОВ

(засл. деят. искусств.)

cided to establish the J. Jabarli Azerbaijani inter-district theatre based on the popular theatre operating at Hrazdan village's (Masis) House of Culture. In fact, the Jabarli Theatre was a touring one.²⁸³

However, the subsequent Decree of the Armenian SSR's Ministry of Culture placed the Theatre in Yerevan, in Arabkir Culture House and in doing so referenced the above cited decree of the Council of Ministers.²⁸⁴ A document to this effect notes that the change about opening the theatre at Yerevan #1 Culture House had been made to ensure better conditions for the theatre.²⁸⁵ It should be noted that culture houses started appearing in Armenian SSR during the 1950s and in the 1960s mass construction of culture houses was taking place across the city.²⁸⁶

This contradiction is later noticed by the Armenian SSR's leadership in the 1970s. Interesting details are contained in the memo (1975) submitted by R. Parsamyan, then Minister of Culture to K. Demirchyan, the first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party's Central Committee. The document notes that the 1967 decree of the Council of Ministers was followed by the decision of the Arm. SSR's Ministry of Culture about opening the Azerbaijani theatre, by which, however, the theatre was housed in Yerevan's (Arabkir) Culture House #1. Meanwhile, the government's decision to open the theatre in Masis had been based on the fact that most of Azerbaijani population was concentrated in Masis district. Having the theatre there would have provided them with appropriate cultural services, while the unclear decision challenged the success of the government's decision. The author notes that its relocation to Yerevan had distanced the theatre from its audience. In addition, the Culture House did not have the required conditions for the full functioning of the theatre. In the best case it served as a place for rehearsals, decoration storage and for some other production related matters. Cast turnover affecting the quality of performances was also key among the many problems. Due to placing the theatre in Yerevan, the cast of the Hrazdan (Masis) people's theatre that had experienced actors had not been involved. To address the issue with the cast, the theatre had requested opening a department at the Yerevan Theatre Institute, but the Ministry did not support the idea since there was a similar institute in Baku and -if the new theatre functioned well - its graduates would come to Armenia to work. The situation was similar in case of the graduates of the Yerevan Theatre Institute that moved to Stepanakert. The Ministry was making efforts to recruit Baku graduates for employment at the Azerbaijani Theatre of Armenia. The solution to the shortage of actors, according to the document, could be the establishment of a theatre studio whose graduates could later improve their qualifications in Baku.²⁸⁷

The documents reveal that back in 1970, the government of the Armenian SSR decided to propose the Fire Department's building (under the Arm. SSR's Ministry of Internal Affairs) to resolve the problem with housing of the theatre, and had tasked the Ministry of Culture to submit some recommendations with regard to reconstruction of the building. However, the Ministry of Culture instead responded with a list of relevant justifications explaining the impossibility of putting the plan into action. The memo notes that in order to ensure that the theatre functioned



Ч. ЧАББАРЛЫ АДЫНА ЈЕРЕВАН АЗӘРИ
ДӨВЛӘТ ДРАМ ТЕАТРЫ

Тамаша Бөјүк Октябр социалист ингилабынын
50 иллижинә һәср олунур

ЈЕНИ ТАМАША

Әзиз СҮЛЕЈМАНОВ

А Д О В Д А Р

3 пәрдә 4 шәкилдә драм

ГУРУЛУШ
РЕЖИССОР
РӘССАМ

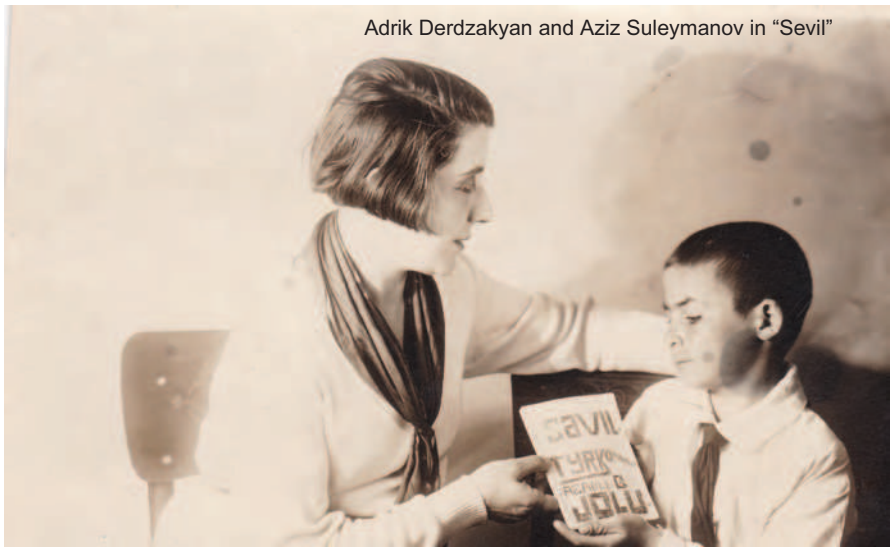
— Тофиг Ағајевиндир.
— Таријел Гасымов.
— Аршалујс Чифликјан.
(Ерм. ССР әмәк. рәссамы)

Реж. АССИСТЕНТИ

— Тамелла
Абдуллајевадыр.



and advanced appropriately, the 1967 decree should be enforced and the theatre should be relocated to Masis House of Culture, which owned a stage, an auditorium with 250 seats, and possessed relatively better conditions. It was only 15 km from Lenin Square – now Republic Square - the center of Yerevan. It is clear that Masis district authorities were willing to support the move by committing to the theatre's administrative and production operations the building of the polyclinic that was being vacated.



Adrik Derdzakyan and Aziz Suleymanov in "Sevil"

The next phase for the development of the Azerbaijani theatre, according to the memo, should have been the construction of a new Culture House that would meet modern standards. The design for the building had been developed and it was to be included in the construction plans.

The document notes that unlike the other inter-district touring theatres, the Azerbaijani Theatre was given an opportunity to perform in Yerevan and this advantage would be maintained after relocation to Masis. The Ministry committed to resolve transportation and other issues related to the move to Masis, including housing issues, since intensive construction was in progress in Masis.²⁸⁸

The position of the Arm. SSR Ministry of Culture with respect to effective functioning of the Azerbaijani Theatre due to its relocation to Masis was perhaps well grounded and justified. The Azerbaijanis that lived in Yerevan and were fond of theatre, had plenty to choose from, including the Armenian and Russian theatre performances, as well as special theatre productions. As for rural Azerbaijanis, it was difficult for them to regularly travel to Yerevan for performances, despite the fact that the theatre was a touring one. If located in Masis, the audience was immediately accessible.²⁸⁹

However, the theatre continued its operations at Yerevan Culture House #1. Up until 1973 their performances took place at the Yerevan Music Comedy Theatre on Mondays, but subsequently, due to the emergency condition of the building, the performances moved to the Russian Dramatic Theatre named after Stanislavski. The Azerbaijani Theatre remained at the Yerevan Culture House #1 up until 1987. After that, because of renovation works, it moved to Azerbaijani secondary school named after Akhundov in Yerevan. As an archive document notes, "following the renovation, the theatre will have reserve rooms, a rehearsal space with a stage, and an administrative section."²⁹⁰

Throughout 1988, the Azerbaijani Theatre enjoyed guest performances in Azerbaijani SSR. In fact, following those performances, it never returned to Armenia.²⁹¹

THEATRE, GENDER AND IDEOLOGY

As already discussed, the religious factors impeded the formation of dramatic theatre culture among the Muslim population of the South Caucasus both in terms of addressing contemporary social themes and the allowance of certain characters on the stage, especially those related to women.

The theatre's public function created a certain environment that contributed to engaging women in public life and pulling them out from traditional and religious social interactions as well as the respective roles those required. The theatre shaped a new, secular culture of leisure as well as new practices and roles.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, the obstructing factor of traditional social practices and religion manifested strongly with respect to the formation and dissemination of theatre culture as well as the appearances of female actresses on the stage. The fact that women were present among the audience was a clear sign of progress in itself,²⁹² and is vividly visible from the very beginnings of the theatre formation in Yerevan's Muslim circles.

During the performance of “Monsieur Jordan and Dervish Mastali Shah” in Yerevan, in 1896, the female characters were played by “heavily mustached men” as reported by the newspaper “Nor Dar.” The author notes that it would have been much better if those roles were assigned to adolescent boys whose voices were more compatible with those of women. The newspaper further observes that this incident “took us back to (the) 1860s when in the Armenian environment as well female characters were played by handsome youths, since women and girls were not allowed to come out on stage.”²⁹³ The full house during the performance of “Monsieur Jordan and Dervish Mastali Shah,” which was attended by Armenians, Turks and Russians, some of them accompanied by their wives, credited a special mention by the author.²⁹⁴

In 1906, Husein Arbalinski and his troupe arrived from Tbilisi for guest performances. The troupe included the actress Gohar (Gyorarchi) Khanum. The troupe performed a number of plays including A. Hakhverdiev’s “Unlucky Youth” and N. Narimanov’s “Nadir Shah.” However, it also faced the naked resistance and animosity from the Muslim religious and conservative circles in Yerevan. Yerevan-based mullahs proclaimed Gyorarchi evil and ordered believers to kill her. She was able to escape only thanks to the art loving community of the city.²⁹⁵

Arbalinski’s guest performances were vital for Yunus Nouri, a future prominent actor, who was provided with a chance to perform alongside askilled cast thus laying the foundations for his theatrical career. The Muslim clergy of Yerevan proclaimed him a non-believer and issued a call to kill him. During an assassination attempt, Nouri was stabbed in the head, but people were able to get to him and save him. Fortunately, a second attempt on his life also failed.²⁹⁶

Although Yunus Nouri played female characters himself, he was the one to initiate the first Muslim women to perform female characters, a fact that did not go without incident as well. He was keen to have a woman perform Gyulchohra’s part in the play “Arshin Mal Alan” and convinced Gasab Ali, a Yerevan resident, to allow his daughter Tamara to play it on stage. The play was being performed successfully when rumor spread that “heroes” of Yerevan mullahs and fanatic believers had gathered in front of the theatre and were waiting for Tamara, to kill her. Thanks to the efforts of the troupe, Tamara was able to escape.²⁹⁷

“The Dead,” a play by J. Memedkulizade, a famous writer and satirist that criticized the existing social norms and religious fanaticism, was not recommended for performance in Yerevan. However, in 1916, the touring Muslim actors’ group staged it, but the day after the performance, poet Ghamgusar, who was one of the actors, suffered a deadly beating from the mob at Yerevan market. The mob was chanting during the attack, “the gyavur, the one who disgraces our sheikhs. hit him.”²⁹⁸

The presence of women was perceived as an issue not only on stage, but among the audience as well. Actress Astghik Yeremyan recorded interesting testimonies from those times. She was in a tour to Yerevan with her operetta troupe that was performing “Arshin Mal Alan” and “Meshadi Ibad” in Yerevan. She writes that

both Armenians and Azerbaijanis attended the plays, but almost always it was the same audience despite the fact that they had only two plays on their repertoire. She recalls that most people came in families, but special places were prepared backstage for the Azerbaijani women since they were forbidden to sit in the auditorium.²⁹⁹ “We became friendly with those khanums. They had free access to our artistic rooms, they gave us their valuable jewelry so as we used the real ones instead of fakes.” They also gave us dresses, eastern mantles, and other items. “We were on stage wearing real golden and diamond jewelry.”³⁰⁰

It should be noted that the price of theatre tickets in Yerevan, especially in case of touring groups, was quite high. Consequently, they were mostly attended by representatives of the elites.³⁰¹

The Soviet society and ideological-political approaches transformed the organization, the content, and the operations of theatres. The Soviet authorities considered theatre not only a media for proliferation of new ideas and values, but also as a means for changing the existing public relations.

One of the main objectives underlying the creation of the theatre group in 1922 at the “Turkic Club” was “the fight against religion and fanaticism, and the struggle for women’s rights.”³⁰²

It was obvious that problems related to the role of women were deeply rooted in the traditional Muslim setting, both in public relations and in theatre culture. Consequently, the purpose of this theatre troupe was not simply one of propaganda and ideology, but also very practical, in effect it should serve as an example of progressive change. Such roles were assumed by Fatima Efendieva and Frangiz Rizaeva, the wives of party officials, ethnic Azerbaijanis Efendiev and Rizaev. They became the first Azerbaijani amateur actresses on Yerevan stage.³⁰³ Gohar khanum and Yunishevskaya—a female worker at Yerevan leather factory (an old Bolshevik) were also involved in the group. From the very beginning of the formation of the group, Armenian women were also involved, such as Asya, Minasyan, who worked at the Agriculture Commissariat of People, and who played Gulchokra in “Arshin al Mala” thus becoming the first Armenian actress on the Azerbaijani stage.³⁰⁴ All of this was intended to break the stereotypes around women; first by placing women on the stage and also because they directly or indirectly represented the party system and the ruling authorities.

In addition, the Muslim women’s club was also assigned an important cultural mission to become the forefront fighter for the new gender policy in Muslim circles. Performances with participation of women happened here, which was a revolutionary development in itself, since it challenged the ages-long engrained stereotype about Muslim women appearing on the stage. It functioned under RABIS,³⁰⁵ which was required to appoint a female head to the dramatic club.³⁰⁶

In 1928, the “Soviet Armenia” daily reported on the performance conducted by Yerevan’s “7-year Turk school” on the stage of the State Theatre and noted that “it is great to see how a Turk girl is on the stage next to a Turk boy. The young

generation of our days is being raised in the spirit of modern times and is gradually leaving behind the rotten customs of the past.”³⁰⁷

However, in reality, a woman's appearance on the stage continued being problematic. When in 1928 the State “Touring Turk Theatre” was opened and the organization of theatre operations became supported by the state, Armenian actresses got involved in the troupe. Zarik Teryan was generally the first woman that was employed by that theatre, and worked there until 1951 as the main female performer. Adrik Derdzakyan, an immigrant from Constantinople and also the first wife of Mkrtych Janan, the founding director of the theatre, also performed in this first troupe. In the first troupe was involved the actress Asya Shirinyan as well. From 1938 to 1946, Nvard Alikhanyan successfully worked in the troupe.³⁰⁸

Janan, when speaking about the theatre's tour of Amasia, recalled that the Turk workers organized a party in their honor, where their wives sang and danced. He emphasized that “this should be considered a very encouraging thing in Turk life.”³⁰⁹

The gender issue in the context of theatre formation was not limited to acting and stage issues only. It was an ideological means of touching upon the social roles of women and leading to their drastic transformation. It should be noted that the newly established theatre started its season in 1929 by performing “Sevil,” a play by Jabarli (directed by Janan), which is one of the major works of Soviet Azerbaijani dramaturgy addressing the issue of women's liberation.³¹⁰ Sevil's part was played by Zarik Teryan.³¹¹ The Yerevan Club of Azerbaijani Women organized collective viewings of the play positioning those as social and ideological “purgatories” from where Muslim women should come out “cleansed and renewed.” These performances served both a symbolic and practical purpose of doing away with hijabs. According to the testimony of an eye-witness, actresses Naiben, Rozan and Khadija shed their hijabs on the stage, after the play, while in general, affected by the play and the performance, several women also started parting with that symbol of a Muslim woman.³¹² Discussions and public lectures on the new role of women were organized in the women' club.³¹³

“Sevil” became generally well known across the South Caucasus. It was staged by Armenian theatre troupes as well and actresses Arus Voskanyan and Jasmin played Sevil as part of their repertoire. The play became so popular in Armenia that many Armenian families named their daughters Sevil.³¹⁴ Meanwhile, in 1929, Hamo Beknazaryan produced the film based on the play at AzStateCinema under the title “The House on the Volcano” (“The Azerbaijani Woman”).

Ideological and political aspect of the theatre was one of the main directions of its work. In the 1920s, before the performances of the “Turkic Club,” especially in the regions, a party representative would give a speech on the significance of the theatre and on its repertoire. More often than not, it was the tireless Bala Eftendiev, who undertook the responsibility.³¹⁵ At other times, it was one of the club leaders who made the speech, after which the performance was conducted. Topics for such speeches included “Marriage and women's role in the family,” “Revolutionary movements of the East,” “Science and Religion,” and others.³¹⁶

N. F. Q. TEATROSUNDA

4 ijynda

Armanistan devleti turq teatrosy tərəfindən birinci dəfə olaraq Naxçıvan şəhərində moke' təməşajə kojylacaq

Syndykjanın əsəri

PEPO

3 pərdədə komedja

İŞTİRAQ EDƏNLƏR:

Şyşan Adrik, Kekel Zarik, Epemja Xədico, Kiko Nyri, Pepə Jysifli, Kakyli Naci, Artjyn Karaxanlı, Samson həkki, Kikola Jakyh Fiqrət, və başkaları.

Təməşə başlanacaq axşam saat 9-da

Təməfuslərdə çalack şərک mysikisi

Biletlərin kiyməti 1 m. 50 k. 30k. kədərdur.

Biletlər hər çun satylır teatronın kassasında

Rezisor: *Canan*

Mudir: *Rəməzanof*

ANONS: 5 ndə KBRMBZB KARTAL təfsilat afişalarua

This tradition was later carried on by the State Touring Turk Theatre. As noted by Mkrtych Janan, before the performance started, there were speeches on arts and culture, and wallpapers were produced during the tours. He described the performance they had in the military camp of Gharakelisa, which turned into a political demonstration because the Red Army soldiers took turns on the stage to speak about communist nationality policy, and then, at the end, their own orchestra played the International for some time.³¹⁷

In 1923, the victims of the Iran earthquake were remembered in Yerevan and Yerevan's Astafyan street became a big performance stage with Iranian actor Tairi performing. The Dervish march proceeded from Astafyan toward the English park, accompanied by national melodies and songs, as well as the satirical pres-



Martiros Saryan,
Portrait of Mkrtych
Janan, 1931

entation of Shahsey-Vahsey.³¹⁸

The Yerevan Turkic Club worked more intensively during Novruz Bayram. In the report submitted by the Club to the Head Political Enlightenment Department of Soviet Armenia it is noted that with consideration of approaching Novruz Bayram, before and during the holiday the following performances are planned: "Bakhtsiz

Javan," "Islami Otaghi," "Meshadi Ibad," "Qyohne Mekteb," "Ghaghlaïi Tifaz," "Pul Ya Allah," "Killer of My Daughter," "Hej Olsun Nush Olsun," "Men Olmushem."³¹⁹

It should be noted that the performances of the Turkic Club were held on Fridays,³²⁰ which was a rest and prayer day for the Muslims.

From its very beginnings, the State Theatre formed in 1928 became involved in public events of anti-religious nature. As noted by Janan, in 1929 "The State Touring Turk group, having very actively supported the anti-religious campaign against Shakhsey-Vakhsey at the Workers' Club on July 10-20, departed for regional guest performances on the 22nd."³²¹

The atheist themes continued being part of the Soviet theatre policy in later periods as well, at least within the official language and ideology stereotypes. However, the repertoire became less anti-religious and started to include plays by Armenian, Azerbaijani and European classical authors.

On March 21, 1959, the session of the collegium of the Arm. SSR' Ministry of Culture discussed the issue of strengthening anti-religious propaganda and dissemination of knowledge on scientific atheism. It was recommended to include anti-religious plays in the theatre repertoires, to the extent possible.³²²

From 1983-85, the plays that were listed as atheist in the Arm. Communist Party Central Committee's report included, for Armenian theatres the "Gadfly" by Voynich, "Qaj Nazar" by Demirchyan, "The Lost Mother and Her Children" by Brekht, and Bokaccio's "Decameron," while for the J. Jabarli Theatre M. Memedkulizade's (a classic author from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century) "The Dead" was mentioned.³²³

Another ideological-political direction promoted through theatre was national policy and internationalism. Jabarli's play "In 1905" should be viewed in this context. It was staged by Yerevan's Azerbaijani Theatre in 1935, and was also performed in the Armenian theatres.

The author reflects on the Armenian-Tatar clashes of 1905 in Baku offering "international proletariat-based interpretations" and emphasizing "inevitability of class conflict" on the backdrop of the love story between Sona, an Armenian girl, and Bakhsi, an Azerbaijani. Guided by the imperatives of the Soviet ideology in dramaturgy, Jabarli reproduces these bloody inter-ethnic clashes by focusing on tsarist monarchy, Armenian and Azerbaijani "national bourgeoisie" on the one hand, and the Armenian and Azerbaijani workers and farmers, on the other.³²⁴

Memorable political events of the Soviet rule, jubilees, and celebrations played an important role within the USSR's ideological policy and theatres were not an exception. On October Revolution's 50th anniversary the theatres were required to have a jubilee repertoire. On this occasion, the Yerevan Azerbaijani Theatre performed "Sevil," a historic revolutionary play by Jabarli, "You are always with me," a Soviet-time play by I. Efendi, "And" (The Oath), a Soviet-time play by Sulmeyanov- Yerevanli.³²⁵

Summarizing the success of these performances, the Arm. SSR's Ministry of Culture gave a special praise to "Sevil," for being of high quality and noteworthy.³²⁶ "Aidin" was distinguished in the 1969 repertoire as a performance of high artistic merit.³²⁷

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of establishing Soviet rule in Armenia, the Yerevan Azerbaijani Theatre staged G. Boryan's "Under the Same Roof," which then remained in their repertoire.³²⁸ The report submitted to central authorities on the 50th anniversary of the formation of the USSR (1971) noted that the Republic's theatres would be staging "the plays of playwrights from brotherly republics". To comply, Yerevan's Azerbaijani Theatre staged G. Khugaevs (Osetia) "My wife's husband."³²⁹ To commemorate the 30th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War, in 1975 Yerevan's Azerbaijani Theatre was planning to stage K. Simonov's "Russian People" (director R. Hasanov, Decorator V. Vardanyan).³³⁰ Simonov's "Russian People" was generally among the "must stage" plays in "brotherly republics." The grouping of dramatic plays into classic, Soviet and foreign was also an important aspect of theatre policy. To illustrate, in 1971, the Yerevan Azerbaijani Theatre was planning to stage A. Shirvanzade's "Namus" as a play falling under the category of "Dramaturgy of Soviet Peoples."³³¹

The repertoires of Arm. SSR's theatres and their analysis were shared with the USSR's Ministry of Culture. In a document sent to Moscow in 1975, the Yerevan Azerbaijani Theatre's repertoire had the following structure:

Soviet Dramaturgy (Azerbaijani) – "The Wedding" (S. Rahman), "Ulduz," "The Mother in Law" (Shakhmkhalov)

Soviet Dramaturgy (Armenian)— "Love or Marriage" (G. Sargsyan), "The Last Evening Outside" (G.Arshakyan)

USSR Nationalities - "Where are you my happiness?" (G. Kuzan, Osetia), "El-brus is getting married" (G. Khugaev, Osetia), "My wife's husband" (G. Khugaev, Osetia), "Tribunal" by A. Makronok.

Contemporary foreign dramaturgy - "A fairly tale about four twin brothers" (P. Panchev, Bulgaria)

Classic (Azerbaijani) – "Arshin Arshin Mal Alan" (U. Hajibekov)

Classic (Armenian) - "One more victim" (G. Sundukyan)

New performances – "The Mother in Law," "Tribunal," "The Last Evening Outside," "One More Victim."³³²

MKRTICH JANAN AND YUNUS NOURI

The founders of the State Azerbaijani Theatre in Yerevan are Mkrtich Janan, an Armenian from Constantinople (Istanbul), and Yunus Nouri, an Azerbaijani from Yerevan. These two different artists with contrasting biographies and destinies were united in 1928 by the "Turk State Theatre" established by the decree of the

Government of the Armenian SSR. What was the basis for the union? Why would professional actor - and a *polsahay*³³³- Janan become the founder of the Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, when he came from a completely different context (Constantinople, Turkey, Europe)? He had only moved to Soviet Armenia in 1922, and naturally had no prior links to Eastern Armenia, the Muslims of the South Caucasus or their intellectual and theatrical circles.

The explanation behind this interesting question was perhaps dictated by the cultural policy, which started in Soviet Armenia at the end of the 1920s, as well as the local peculiarities of its implementation. Due to different circumstances, including the absence of qualified human resources, the progress of the cultural construction was rendered particularly difficult among the “Turk” population of Soviet Armenia. Therefore, taking into account the knowledge of Turkish language, the authorities of Soviet Armenia decided to involve the immigrant or refugee Armenians from Turkey in their education system.³³⁴ For example, in the 1920s, an Armenian from Turkey, Tatul Altunyan, was responsible for the organization and management of choirs and groups in the Azerbaijani schools.³³⁵ The choirs would perform at the school and during other events.

Perhaps the fact that a *polsahay* immigrant Mkrtych Janan (Mkrtych Jananian), became the founding artistic director of the newly created Azerbaijani theatre, was conditioned with this context. Janan was already a professional actor experienced in the organization of theatrical work in Constantinople, fluent in Turkish and familiar with the peculiarities of the Turkish and Ottoman environment.

Rizayev writes that Janan had understood the uniqueness of the cultures of the Eastern people and gave an extra importance to that.³³⁶ Later, Janan writes in his autobiography: “I was among the founders of the State Turk Theatre of Armenia, where I worked as theatrical director.”³³⁷ Then he continues: “During the hard years of kolkhoz³³⁸ construction, I have traveled to numerous villages and workers’ regions of Armenia together with Turk and Workers’ Theatres, and have organized performances.”³³⁹

At the same time, the arrival of *polsahay* Janan in Armenia was also being influenced by the cultural policy of the Armenian SSR in the 1920s. The policy was aimed at identifying the Armenian intellectuals living and working in different places of the world and bringing them to Armenia so it could benefit from their potential.

Janan’s biography contains many interesting facts among its pages. Written during the Soviet period, his autobiography reveals the importance of these fragments from the perspective of his own life.³⁴⁰ As he tells in the story, Janan was born in Constantinople, during Sultan Hamid’s dictatorship (1892). His childhood was spent in Samathia district, where he also studied in Sahagian and Garabedian schools. Both his paternal uncle and older brother were also actors.³⁴¹

Janan was among the intellectuals who had survived the Armenian Genocide. In Janan’s words, he had witnessed and survived “the harsh and terrorizing



Yunus Nouri with the collective of Jabarli Azerbaijani Theatre of Yerevan

regime" of Young Turks during the First World War, which – using acting parlance - he considered "the horrible performance" of his life.³⁴² During these years, he was drafted to the Ottoman Army as an Officer from the Law Gymnasium of Constantinople. However, he deserted his post and was then sentenced to a military exile.³⁴³ He returned to Constantinople afterwards.³⁴⁴

Janan got involved in polsahay theatrical life during his youth. His first performances were about the topic of national-liberation movement. He met his first wife, Adrine Derdzakyan on a stage in Polis. Later she was also involved in the newly opened Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia.³⁴⁵

Janan was a multi-talented actor. In addition to theatre, he was singing during the concerts of "Gusan" choir organized by Komitas.³⁴⁶

After returning from exile in 1918, together with some other zealous intellectuals he initiated the creation of an organization to restore the interrupted Armenian theatrical life in Constantinople. Together the group established "Polis Armenian Dramatic Society."³⁴⁷ Following this, Janan left for Europe, ending up in Paris, where he had followed some courses at Sorbonne University and improved his acting in the theatrical department of Paris Conservatorium. He also continued

his performances, made visits to England, Switzerland, and Italy, and in 1921 returned to Constantinople.³⁴⁸ The massacres of Cilician Armenians during the Kemalist rebellion were over, but the Armenians of Constantinople were living in constant anticipation of new alerts and danger.

After the Triple Entente army had left Constantinople in 1922, and the new Turkish Kemalist power was being established, the situation in Constantinople was difficult. Censorship was introduced and the Armenian intellectuals started to gradually emigrate. This was the time, when the delegation of the Armenian Relief Committee from Soviet Armenia headed by Hovhannes Tumanyan and Artashes Karinyan arrived in Istanbul. "First time I came to closely know Soviet figures, the Soviet perspective," - writes Janan. Especially believing Tumanyan, he decided to move to Soviet Armenia. H. Nersisyan, G. Avetyan, V. Papazyan also made the move with him.³⁴⁹ "I came to my people, to Soviet Armenia," - wrote Janan.³⁵⁰

In Soviet Armenia, Janan got immediately involved in the State Theatre. However, his activity was not limited to acting. He actively participated in the organization of theatrical culture. Most probably, the ruling ideology awakened some romantic pathos in Janan. From the very beginning, he and Amo Kharazyan expressed an interest in creating "Collective Theatre."³⁵¹

It is interesting, that on February 25, 1928 the "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" ("Soviet Armenia") newspaper published an essay entitled "Turk Performance" about the play "Haji Kara" staged with the efforts of "a seven-year Turk school" of Yerevan in the State Theatre. The author of the article V. Terzibashyan, who was an actor himself, wrote that a Turkish-speaking actor from the State Theatre should be invited and assigned to lead that work, and "we are sure no actor will refuse the offer and will take the job with pleasure." In this respect, it was emphasized that "The collective of the State Theatre, as well as its administration have an important role to play in the cultural enhancement of the national minorities." The author highlighted that "there are Turkish-speaking actors among the acting personnel of the State Theatre that could form a group with local amateur actors and organize a performance in our State Theatre at least once a week, especially given that there is an interest in theatre among the Turk workers, as the specific fact showed. The last performance has brought a large number of people to the theatre."³⁵²

Mkrtich Janan becomes the artist to stand at the foundation of the Azerbaijani Theatre in Yerevan. He was the artistic director, the staging director and the designer of the Azerbaijani troupe formed in 1928.³⁵³ In this work he was supported by Qalantar, Vagharshyan and others. His knowledge of Turkish helped him in Azerbaijani-language acting on the stage, as well as in conducting translations.³⁵⁴ According to an archival document, "He became one of the organizers of the State Turk Theatre of the Armenian SSR, traveling with the theatre to the remotest rural areas, performing enlightenment and public works."³⁵⁵

Janan actively worked to involve actors and appropriate personnel, as well as

training them. Janan writes the following about his work at the Azerbaijani theatre: "During five years of the theatre's development, I have tried to give the best traditions of stage experience." He believed his all effort were to prepare Azerbaijani artistic directors, who "would continue the work started. Comrades Huseyinov, Ramazanov and Gaznafar trained in this direction, already have some credentials."³⁵⁶ M. Huseyinov states that "we cannot forget the great work of the long-lasting director of the Turk Theatre, honorable actor comrade Janan."³⁵⁷

As the head and the director of the troupe, Janan also stands at foundations of the Kurdish Theatre in Armenia, as well as participating in the establishment of Workers' and Young Spectators' theatres.³⁵⁸ He also worked in the State Theatre, Leninakan Theatre and Workers' Theatre,³⁵⁹ wrote literary and dramatic works. In this respect noteworthy is the play "Shahname." It received the USSR prize and was known in the Soviet Union, was staged in Armenia, Azerbaijan and many places of the Union, was translated into Russian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, Tadjik, and more. In 1932, he received the title of the Merited Artist of the Armenian SSR, and in 1936 became a member of the USSR Writers' Union.³⁶⁰ Janan had also acted in the following films: "Khaspush," "Kurds-Yezidis," "Two Nights."

Janan's life was interrupted by Stalin's repressions. He was arrested in 1937 and executed by firing squad in 1938, charged with "spying" and as "a member of nationalistic Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyist." Janan's name was included in the list of Armenian writers and artists, a big group of Armenian intellectuals, sentenced to death in the so-called "Stalin's Lists," signed by Stalin himself. The list with the name of Janan, along with the other names from Armenia, was signed by Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Zhdanov.³⁶¹

In 1955, Mkrtych Janan was posthumously rehabilitated. For this purpose, the USSR Persecutors' Office started the revision of his case and rehabilitation process, and requested the Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR to provide appropriate reference letters. The letter from G. Sundukyan Theatre presents the creative and public work of Janan.³⁶² Stalin's repressions did not bypass Janan's wife, Zhanna. She was accused under the same charge and had spent two years in prison, until the case was closed and she was set free.³⁶³

The second artist standing at the foundation of the Azerbaijani Theatre of Armenia, is Yunus Nouri. Yunus Suleymanov was born in 1878, in Yerevan. His father, Haji Suleyman, was also from Yerevan. However, when Yunus was five, his father died, and the child was raised by the mother, Leyla Khanum, and other relatives.³⁶⁴ Nouri writes in his autobiography: "I, Suleymanov Yunis – Nour Suleyman Oghli, was born in 1878 in the city of Yerevan. I have lost my father at the age of five and lived with my relatives."³⁶⁵ His mother sent him to a medrese, a religious school, where he studied Persian and Arabic. The environment of Mollakhana, which was a dark and humid room, and the punishments with falkhka,³⁶⁶ disappointed Yunus. The students' dissent was expressed by jokes and mockery against Mollas. However, for his "mischiefs" Yunus was persecuted. Mollakhana



increased the tuition fees and applied other methods. Yunus had to leave the school.”³⁶⁷ From there he took the knowledge of Persian and Arabic. As he wrote in his autobiography, “Starting at the age of eight and till 14, I have studied in the primary school. Since 14, I have worked as a manual laborer, then I have distributed newspapers.”³⁶⁸

Yunus got interested in fun street games and performances organized by youth on holidays, such as “Qyosa Gyaldin,” “The Lazy Man.” He participated in the “first Turk performance” staged in Yerevan, performing a woman’s role, the role of Shahrabani Khanum. He was noticed by “Nor Dar,” that described the performance of a sympathetic “young Turk,” as a “stage sparkle.”³⁶⁹ Later he also participated in a performance organized at the yard of Panah Khan.³⁷⁰ Afterwards he organized performances along with his friends who loved theatre. These performances would either happen at Janpoladian’s Club, or in the former building of the Theatre of Musical Comedy (Buniatyan’s Club).³⁷¹ Yet, in his autobiography Nouri considered the start of his theatrical career to be the performances of the Huseyn Arbalinski’s troupe, which toured Yerevan in 1906. Here he had an op-

portunity to perform with a professional group.³⁷² As Nouri mentioned, after Arbalinski's tour, theatre fans in Yerevan organized a group, where he also got involved.

Yunus Suleymanov believed that theatrical art he served brought enlightenment. Therefore, he had chosen the stage name "Nouri," meaning "light."³⁷³

In 1918, when the Ottoman Army was getting prepared for Yerevan takeover, together with many others, Nouri migrated to Iran, Khoy city, where he also had some performances, but was subjected to persecution. At the end of the 1920s, after the Sovietization of Armenia, he returned to Yerevan.³⁷⁴

Here he became actively involved in the work of the theatrical troupe of the newly created Turkic Club. He was the director and the head of the group and its only experienced actor. The rest would join the troupe only after the end of the working day at their main jobs.³⁷⁵ He writes the following about this period: "In 1922 I had organized a theatrical group in the Turkic Club of Yerevan, which continued its activity until 1927."³⁷⁶

In 1928, when the State Azerbaijani Theatre was being formed, he was actively involved along with the founding director Mkrtych Janan. He was participating especially in the selection of the personnel, as he was familiar with the peculiarities and sensitivities of the environment. He writes about this period: "In 1929, State Azerbaijani Theatre was organized in Yerevan. Since then and until now (1948-A.H.) I have been working in this theatre."³⁷⁷

The professional performance helped him to improve as an actor. At the same time, Nouri actively worked with the new personnel, helping them in becoming real actors. The masters of the Armenian stage Hovhannes Abelyan, Hrachya Nersisyan, Vahram Papazyan, Hasmik and Grigor Avetyan were his performing friends on the stage. He also plaid Armenians in the "Pepo," "Khatabala" and other plays.

Nouri had strong personal and professional connections with many figures of the Armenian theatre, such as Amo Kharazyan, Grigor Avetyan, Hrachya Nersisyan, Davit Malyan, Ori Buniatyan, Vagharsh Vagharshyan, Gurgen Janibekyan, Davit Gulazyan and others.³⁷⁸ In his memoir entitled "Our Yunus," Buniatyan mentions that "he had no single sign of national discrimination," the national differences were not important for him.³⁷⁹

In addition to theatrical performances, Nouri also performed in the first films of Hayfilm- "Khaspush," "Zangezour," "Mountain Hiking," "The Fishers of Sevan," and "Anahit." In these films he played an Azerbaijani villager, a Red Commander, and a Sheikh. Writing about involving Nouri in "Khaspush," Hamo Beknazaryan mentioned that he initiated a movie that would be about the real Orient, without orientalist decorations. For that purpose he had involved people who would understand it. Nouri got his attention and they had a long conversation. According to Beknazaryan, he knew the real Orient, his feelings, deep emotionality and

truthfulness were organic and characterized him as a smart and thoughtful actor.³⁸⁰ As Beknazaryan mentions, his work was not limited to performing the role, but “I used his advice regarding the lifestyle, characters and habits.” Beknazaryan wrote that the characters he created were examples of the acting mastery. He mastered the technique of expression, and the characters he created were monumental.³⁸¹

The authorities of the Armenian SSR highly valued the work of Yunus Nouri. In 1928, he was granted an individual pension, and in 1935 awarded the title of the Merited Artist of the Armenian SSR. In 1939, Nouri received an Honor-Certificate from the Chairmanship of the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR. He was also a member of Yerevan City Council, and was awarded with a “Medal of Courage for Working during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45.”³⁸²

In 1948, Nouri retired and stopped acting on the stage of Azerbaijani Theatre named after Jabarli. He passed away in 1950.³⁸³ In 1960, the Theatrical Society of Armenia has organized an evening of remembrance dedicated to the 80th anniversary of his birth and 10th anniversary of his death. It provided the perfect event for praising the actor.

One of the sons of Yunus Nouri, Aziz Suleymanov, continued the acting career, but he shifted to administrative and party work, and later became the director of the Azerbaijani Theatre in Yerevan. His other son, Aqper Yerevanli, was a philologist and a writer, the head of the Department of Azerbaijani Language and Literature at the Armenian Pedagogical Institute, while the third son, Agil Suleymanov, was the principal of the Azerbaijani school of Yerevan named after Akhundov.³⁸⁴

- ¹⁶⁵ The expression “invented tradition” is borrowed from the concept introduced to social sciences in the 1980s by the British historian Eric Hobsbawm who suggests many traditions that: “appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.”
- ¹⁶⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger: *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992
- ¹⁶⁷ Swietochowski T., Russian Rule, Modernizing Elites and the Formation of National Identity in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan and Russia: Societies and States/ Responsible Editor D.E. Furman. M.: Letniy Sad 2001: http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_002.htm, in Russian. [Свентоховский Т., Русское правление, модернизаторские элиты и становление национальной идентичности в Азербайджане, Азербайджан и Россия: общества и государства / Отв. ред. и сост. Д. Е. Фурман. — М.: Летний сад, 2001] As mentioned above, the ethnonym “Azerbaijani” was first circulated in the second half of 1930s. Before that, in the written sources and literature different names were used with respect to the Turkic-speaking Muslim population of the South Caucasus, such as “Muslims,” “Turks” and so on.
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁶⁹ Auch, Eva-Maria. Between Adaptation and Self-Affirmation: Early Stage of National Identity Search among the Muslim Intelligentsia and the Formation of New Society in the South-Eastern Caucasus (1875-1905) , Azerbaijan and Russia: Societies and States/ Responsible Editor D.E. Furman. M.: Letniy Sad 2001 (in Russian) [Аух, Ева-Мария, Между приспособлением и самоутверждением: Ранний этап поисков национальной идентичности в среде мусульманской интеллигенции и возникновение нового общества на юго-восточном Кавказе (1875-1905), Азербайджан и Россия: общества и государства / Отв. ред. и сост. Д. Е. Фурман. — М.: Летний сад, 2001] Swietochowski T., Russian Rule, Modernizing Elites and the Formation of National Identity in Azerbaijan, http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_002.htm, in Russian. [Свентоховский Т., Русское правление, модернизаторские элиты и становление национальной идентичности в Азербайджане]
- ¹⁷⁰ Swietochowski T., Russian Rule, Modernizing Elites and the Formation of National Identity in Azerbaijan, [Свентоховский Т., Русское правление, модернизаторские элиты и становление национальной идентичности в Азербайджане.] http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_002.htm, in Russian.
- ¹⁷¹ Auch, Eva-Maria. Between Adaptation and Self-Affirmation: Early Stage of National Identity Search among Muslim Intelligentsia and the Formation of New Society in the South-Eastern Caucasus (1875-1905); [Аух, Ева-Мария, Между приспособлением и самоутверждением: Ранний этап поисков национальной идентичности в среде мусульманской интеллигенции и возникновение нового общества на юго-восточном Кавказе (1875-1905)] http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_003.htm.
- ¹⁷² Ibid
- ¹⁷³ The Tsarist Statistical Sources call the Turkic-speaking Muslim population of Yerevan “Tatars.” According to the first Tsarist Census of 1897, conducted on the basis of linguistic-confessional criteria, Yerevan had a population of 29,006, 43.1% of which were Armenian (“Armenian language”), 9.5% Russian (“Russian language”) and 42.6% Tatar (“Tatar language”).
- ¹⁷⁴ Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia. Baku 1963, pp. 10-11, in Russian [Рзаев С., Азербайджанский театр в Армении, Баку, 1963, стр. 10-11]
- ¹⁷⁵ Hakobyan T., History of Yerevan (1801-1879), Yerevan 1959, p. 626, in Armenian [Հակոբյան Թ., Երևանի պատմություն (1801-1879), Երևան, 1959, էջ 626]
- ¹⁷⁶ The area of modern-day Argishti street in the backyard of Yerevan City Hall. In the past, people would sell *tsakh* (wood) for heating and the name was derived from it.
- ¹⁷⁷ Friday is a Prayer day and a holiday in Muslim culture.
- ¹⁷⁸ Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, pp. 17-18; Hakobyan T., History of Yerevan (1801-1879), , pp. 626-627.
- ¹⁷⁹ Armenian Theatre in Tbilisi.
- ¹⁸⁰ Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, pp. 18-19.
- ¹⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 20-21
- ¹⁸² Saint Paul and Peter.

- ¹⁸³ “Meghu Hayastani” (“The bee of Armenia”), 1882, N 40 april, 23 [«Մեղու Հայաստանի», N 40, 23 ապրիլի 1882]:.
- ¹⁸⁴ Mirza Fatali Akhundov (1812-1878) was a celebrated Azerbaijani author, playwright, and the founder of Azerbaijani modern literary criticism.
- ¹⁸⁵ The full name of the play is “The Tale of Monsieur Jordan the Botanist and the Celebrated Sorcerer, Dervish Mastali Shah”
- ¹⁸⁶ Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia. pp. 24-25.
- ¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 16-19.
- ¹⁸⁸ Rizayev S., Interconnections between the Arts of the Peoples of Transcaucasia, Yerevan 1972, p. 31, in Russian [Ризаев С., Взаимосвязи искусств народов Закавказья, Ереван, 1972, стр. 31]; Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia., p. 19.
- ¹⁸⁹ Rizayev S., Interconnections between the Arts of the Peoples of Transcaucasia, Yerevan 1972, p. 32.
- ¹⁹⁰ In the Armenian sources of the 19th century and until second half of the 1930s, the Turkic-speaking Muslim population of the South Caucasus was literally called “Turk.” There were no differences between “Turk” and “Turkish” in sources of this period. The name of “Tatar” or “Caucasian Tatar” was used as well but it came from Russian sources and texts. Also, in Russian and especially early Soviet Russian sources, the name “Turkic” was used to distinguish from “Turkish.” The name “Azerbaijani” is introduced in the second half of the 1930s. In this Chapter, the two forms-“Turk” and “Turkic” are used in accordance with the sources and the context.
- ¹⁹¹ Nor Dar, 1896, N 223, in Armenian. [«Նոր դար», 1896, N 223]
- ¹⁹² Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia. Baku 1963, p. 25.
- ¹⁹³ “Nor Dar” (“New Century”) was an Armenian social and literary newspaper published in Tbilisi in 1883-1916.
- ¹⁹⁴ Nor Dar, 1896, N 223:
- ¹⁹⁵ Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia. p. 24-25.
- ¹⁹⁶ Konovich, A., Theatrical Holidays and Rituals in the USSR, M. 1990, pp. 19-20, in Russian. [Конович А., Театрализованные праздники и обряды в СССР, м. 1990, стр. 19-20]
- ¹⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁹⁸ Rzayev, S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 38.
- ¹⁹⁹ Vardanyan G., The Culture in the First Republic of Armenia, Yerevan 2003, pp. 136-141, in Armenian. [Վարդանյան Գ., Մշակույթը Հայաստանի առաջին Հանրապետությունում, Երևան, 2003, էջ 136-141]
- ²⁰⁰ From the Information on the Opening of the State Drama Theatre in Erivan. From the report of the head of the State Theatre of Erivan on the establishment and activity of the theatre throughout 1921-23. Banber of the Archives of Armenia (BAA), 1974, N2. pp. 197-201. In Armenian, How the first RA State Theatre “became a mother,” http://www.avangard.am/?page=news&cal_date=25_12_2013&news_id=12484#W_MJL DgzYdU, in Russian and Armenian. [Из информации об открытии гос. драматического театра в Эривани. Из докладной записки заведующего Эриванским гос. театром об основании и деятельности театра за 1921-23 гг., Բանբերը Հայաստանի արխիվների, 1974, N2, էջ 197-201 : Թե ինչպես ՀՀ առաջին պետոթատրոնը «մայրացավ», http://www.avangard.am/?page=news&cal_date=25_12_2013&news_id=12484#Xcfq29U zYdU
- ²⁰¹ Ghazanjyan, V., First Steps of Soviet Armenian Culture, Yerevan 1964, pp. 175-177, in Armenian [Դազանյան Վ., Սովետահայ կուլտուրայի առաջին քայլերը, Երևան, 1964, էջ 175-177]
- ²⁰² During the early Soviet period, the so called “hut-reading rooms” (изба-читальня in Russian) were the main enlightenment centers in rural areas of the USSR. In the 1920s, under the Cultural Revolution these were actively utilized for the eradication of illiteracy, as well as political propaganda.
- ²⁰³ Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 38.
- ²⁰⁴ From the report of the People’s Commissar on Enlightenment of the Armenian SSR on the situation of the enlightenment in Armenia. BAA 1974, N2, pp. 65-67, in Russian. [Из доклада наркомпроса ССРА о состоянии просвещения нац. меньшинств в Армении,

- Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների, 1974, N 2, էջ 65-67]
- 205 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 43.
- 206 Head Department of Political Enlightenment- Qaghlusavorchutyun, the main body responsible for the education and culture in the early Soviet period. In 1920 Department of Political Enlightenment was established in Soviet Russia by Lenin's decree.
- 207 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 39.
- 208 Ibid, p. 47.
- 209 Hovakimyan H., Pages from the History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatres of Armenia, Yerevan 1976, pp. 9-10, in Armenian. [Հովակիմյան Հ., Էջեր Հայաստանի ադրբեջանական և քրդական թատրոնների պատմությունից, Երևան, 1976, էջ 9-10]; Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 39.
- 210 The name of Yerevan used in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in Russian texts.
- 211 Suleymanov N., Miralayev T., Bala Efendiyev, Baku, 1975, pp. 22-24, in Russian. [Сулейманов Н., Миралаев Т., Бала Эфендиев (биографический очерк), Баку, 1975, стр. 22-24]
- 212 Hovakimyan H., Pages from the History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatres of Armenia, pp. 9-10; Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 39.
- 213 Hovakimyan H., Pages from the History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatres of Armenia, p.11.
- 214 Ibid.
- 215 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 41.
- 216 Ibid.
- 217 Hovakimyan H., Pages from the History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatres of Armenia, pp. 11-12.
- 218 The abbreviation for the People's Commissar of Enlightenment, the Minister of Enlightenment during the early Soviet period.
- 219 From the report of the People's Commissar on Enlightenment of the Armenian SSR on the situation of the enlightenment of national minorities in Armenia. BAA, 1974, 2, pp. 65-67. [Из доклада наркомпроса ССРА о состоянии просвещения нац. меньшиств в Армении, Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների, 1974, N 2, էջ 65-67] In the context of 1920 to 1930 nationality and cultural policy, the Soviet authorities classified nationalities based on the model of “culturally advanced” and “culturally backward,” and considered that the latter needed a directive for the modernization of national culture. This vocabulary and classification was used in the official papers and texts. More on this can be found at: Martin T., Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939, Cornell University Press 2001; Baberovskij J., The Enemy is Everywhere. Stalinism in the Caucasus. Moscow РОССПЭН 2011, in Russian. [Баберовский Й, Враг есть везде. Сталинизм на Кавказе, Москва, РОССПЭН, 2011]
- 220 Arutyunyan B. The Armenian Theatre / Editor A. Anastasiev. —History of Soviet Drama Theatre: 1926-1932, Nauka, 1967, v. 3, p. 343, in Russian. [Арутюнян Б., Армянский театр / Под ред. А. Анастасьева. — История советского драматического театра: 1926-1932, М: Наука, 1967, т. 3. стр. 343]
- 221 The Archive of the Literature and Arts Museum of the Republic of Armenia (RA LAM), A. Suleymanov's Repository [ՀՀ ԳԱԹ (ՀՀ գրականության և արվեստի թանգարան) արխիվ, Ազիզ Սուլեյմանովի ֆոնդ, գ.7, թ.1]
- 222 RA LAM Archive, Yunis-Nouri Suleymanov's Repository . (the troupe of the Azerbaijani Theatre in Yerevan at its first year of formation, photo with an attached description, Ghzy-Shafag newspaper, April 25, 1929), in Armenian. [ՀՀ ԳԱԹ արխիվ, Յունիս-Նուրի Սուլեյմանովի ֆոնդ, գ. 129 (Երևանի Ադրբեջանական թատրոնի խումբը իր կազմավորման առաջին տարում, լուսանկար և կից գրություն, ԴՀ Շաֆագ թերթ, 1929, 25 ապրիլ)]
- 223 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository , file 91, paper 1 [ՀՀ ԳԱԹ արխիվ, Սկրտիչ Ջանանի ֆոնդ, գ. 91. թ.1]
- 224 Rizayev S., Pages of Friendship, Baku, 1964, p. 44, in Russian. [Ризаев С., Страницы дружбы, Баку, 1964, стр. 44]
- 225 Banfak (բանվորական ֆակուլտետ, banvorakan fakultet), “Faculty of Workers,” secondary education institution for expedited education of workers and peasants for admission

to the university during early soviet period. It existed in 1919-1939.

- 226 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 21. The Activities and Prospects of 1929-30 Theatrical Season, in Armenian. [«1929-30 թթ. թատերաշրջանի աշխատանքները և հեռանկարները», ՀՀ ԳԱԹ արխիվ, Մ. Ջանանի ֆոնդ, գ. 21]
- 227 Doctor in some Muslim cultures.
- 228 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 63.
- 229 According to the statistical data of the end of the 19th beginning of the 20th century the population of Amasia was Sunni Gharapapakh, a Turkic ethnic group. During the Soviet period, until 1939, they are mentioned as, "Gharapapakh", "Turkish group" etc. Ibish was also a Sunni Gharapapakh village. Gharanamaz village was called Yeinyol up until 1935 (New Way): It was also populated by Sunni Gharapapakhs. Starting with the 1939 Census, the population of the all above settlements is mentioned as "Azerbaijani" (Amasia, Ibish, Gharanamaz)
- 230 According to the 1928 administrative-territorial map of the Armenian SSR Alaverdi and Manes were separate settlements. Alaverdi referred to the copper mines and Manes to the settlement. Since the second half of the 1930s, Manes was also called Alaverdi, and in 1938 it received a status of a city.
- 231 A string musical instrument widely used by many cultures in Iran and the Caucasus.
- 232 A fur cap usually made from sheepskin and used by men.
- 233 In 1920-21, the Turkish Army occupied the Alexandropol Province, including Aghbaba district. Mass rapes took place resulting in the spread of STDs and other diseases. See more in Nercessian N., The City of Orphans: Relief Workers, Commissars and the "Builders of the New Armenia," Alexandropol/Leninakan 1919-1931, Hollis Publishing (2016)
- 234 Later Vardenis region, currently within the Gegharkunik province of Armenia.
- 235 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository , file 21, papers 1-2 [ՀՀ ԳԱԹ արխիվ, Մ. Ջանանի ֆոնդ, գ. 21, թ. 1-2]
- 236 National Minority Council attached to the People's Commissariat on Enlightenment.
- 237 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 21.
- 238 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 62.
- 239 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 21.
- 240 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 62; Rzaev S., Interconnections Between Arts of People of Transcaucasia, p.72; The Armenian History, Volume 4, Book 1, Yerevan 2010, p. 676, in Armenian. [Հայոց պատմություն, հ. 4, գիրք 1, երևան, 2010, էջ 676]
- 241 Hovakimyan H., Pages from the History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatres of Armenia, Yerevan 1976, p. 23.
- 242 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, pp. 84-85.
- 243 Jabar Jabarli (1899-1934) was a writer and a playwright, the founder of the Soviet Azerbaijani dramaturgy and the socialist realism in the dramaturgy. His works mostly address the issues of social inequality, backwardness, women equality and emancipation in the Azerbaijani society. He was born in the Khizi Tat-populated village of Baku Province and died in Baku. The play "In 1905" was written based on his impressions from traveling in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia and Karabakh.
- 244 Vagharsh Vagharshyan (1894-1959) was a Soviet Armenian actor, director, playwright and a public figure, People' Artist of the USSR. In 1941-1944 he was the artistic director of Sundukyan State Academic Theatre.
- 245 A Soviet Armenian social-political and literary weekly published in Yerevan since 1932.
- 246 Rizayev S., Pages of Friendship, Baku, 1964, p. 37, in Russian. [Ризаев С., Страницы дружбы, , стр. 37]
- 247 Ibid., p. 37.
- 248 Bakhshi Qalantari (1903-1982), theatrical director, actor. Graduated from the Baku Theatrical School, then The Leningrad Institute of Theatrical Art, from 1934 to1951 he was the lead artistic director of the Azerbaijani theatre of Yerevan and later Nakhijevan. In 1939, he received the Title of Honored Artist of the Armenian SSR.

- 249 Merited Artist (Honored Artist) was an honorary title in the Soviet Union awarded by the government to actors, directors, film makers, writers, dancers, singers, painters, architects, and others for exceptional achievements in arts. The title is currently in use in the Russian Federation and a number of former soviet countries.
- 250 Ali Shahsabahli (1896-1973) was born in Tiflis where he started his artistic career as a teenager. Later he worked in Azerbaijan, and in Azerbaijani Theatre of Armenia. In 1945, he received the Title of Honored Artist of the Armenian SSR.
- 251 RA LAM Archive, N. Alikhanyan Repository, file 1, paper 35. [ՀՀ ԳԱԹ արխիվ, Նվարդ Ալիխանյանի ֆոնդ, գ.1, թ. 35]
- 252 Rzayev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 103.
- 253 Ibid, pp. 96-97.
- 254 Hovakimyan H., Yunus Nouri, Yerevan 1962, p. 93, in Armenian [Հովակիմյան Հ., Յունուս Նուրի, Երևան 1962, էջ 93]
- 255 Hovakimyan B., The Kurdish Theatre of Alagyaz, <https://www.azg.am/AM/culture/2017102001> [ՀՀ ԳԱԹ արխիվ, Նվարդ Ալիխանյանի ֆոնդ, գ.1, թ. 35]
- 256 Palaces of Culture or Houses of Culture were the major clubhouses in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries established for all kinds of recreational activities and designed to have rooms for multiple use.
- 257 National Archives of Armenia (NAA), Repository 80, List 2, file 74, papers 1-4. [ՀԱԱ (Նայաստանի ազգային արխիվ), ֆ. 80, գ.2, գ.74, թ.1-4]
- 258 Hovakimyan H., Chronology of Popular Theatres of Armenia: 1979-82, Yerevan 1984, p. 13, in Armenian. [Հ. Հովակիմյան, Նայաստանի ժողովրդական թատրոնների տարեգրություն, 1979-82 թթ. , Երևան, 1984, էջ 13] Hovakimyan dates the establishment of the Azerbaijani Popular Theatre of Yerevan to 1961, however, the archival documents indicate its date of establishment December 24, 1959, by the decision of the Colegium of the Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR.
- 259 NAA, Repository 80, List 3, File112, Paper 1. [ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 80, գ.3, գ.112, թ.1]
- 260 NAA, Repository 80, List 4, File 6, 29-35. [ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 80, գ.3, գ.112, թ.1] 157
- 261 NAA, Repository 80, List 4, File 6, 29-35. [ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 80, գ.4, գ. 6, 29-35]
- 262 Ibid.
- 263 Aziz Suleymanov was born in 1914, in Yerevan. Graduated from Baku Theatrical Collage, then Baku Party School. Worked at Jabarli theatre, then held different administrative positions in Masis district, the Ministry of Culture of the Armenian SSR, and Al. Myasnikyan Library. Was a member of the Writers Union of the Armenian SSR, involved in writing and translation. RA LAM Archive, A. Suleymanov's Repository, file 5, papers 1-2, 4.
- 264 RA LAM Archive, A. Suleymanov's Repository, file 5, papers 1-2.
- 265 The main Azerbaijani newspaper in Soviet Armenia.
- 266 HONORING THE VICTIMS OF SUMGAIT (Extensions of Remarks - February 28, 2013)<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2013/2/28/extensions-of-remarks-section/article/E211-2>
- 267 NAA, Repository 80, list 4, file 6, 29-35.
- 268 NAA, Repository 80, list 15, file 60, papers 2-3.
- 269 Auch, Eva-Maria. Between Adaptation and Self-Affirmation: Early Stage of National Identity Search among Muslim Intelligentsia and the Formation of New Society in the South-Eastern Caucasus (1875-1905); [Аух, Ева-Мария, Между приспособлением и самоутверждением: Ранний этап поисков национальной идентичности в среде мусульманской интеллигенции и возникновение нового общества на юго-восточном Кавказе (1875-1905)] http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_003.htm.
- 270 Rzaev S., The Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 19.
- 271 Ibid, page 25. Yerevan's Janpoladyan Club was turned into Officer's house during the Soviet years, which in 2005 was recognized as eminent domain by the RA Government and was demolished. Currently, the Piazza Grande business centre is located in its place.
- 272 Rzaev S., The Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 30.
- 273 Hovakimyan H., Yunus Nouri, page 26, in Armenian [Հովակիմյան Հ., Յունուս Նուրի, էջ

- 26]; Hakobyan T, Yerevan History, 1879-1914, 427-480, in Aemenian. [Հակոբյան Թ., Երևանի պատմություն, 1879-1914, էջ 427-480]
- 274 Panakh khan Makinski, a representative of Maku khan's family.
- 275 Rzaev S., The Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, pp. 28-29.
- 276 Ibid, page 40.
- 277 Ibid
- 278 Ibid
- 279 Rzaev S., Pages of Friendship, p. 41.
- 280 Rzaev S., The Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 104.
- 281 Ibid, p. 78
- 282 NAA, Repository 80, list 3, file 112, paper 1. [ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 80, ց.3, գ.112, թ.1:]
- 283 NAA, Repository 80, list 4, file 6, 29-35 [ՀԱԱ, ֆ.80, ց.4, գ. 6, թ. 29-35]
- 284 Ibid.
- 285 NAA, Repository 80, list 15, file 60, papers 2-3. [ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 80, ց. 15, գ. 60, թ. 2-3]
- 286 Muradyan H., The Houses of Culture in Soviet and Post-Soviet Armenia: legacy, transformation of function and meaning (manuscript), in Armenian. [Սովետական Հ., Մշակութային տները խորհրդային և ետխորհրդային Հայաստանում. Ժառանգականությունը, գործառնային և իմաստային փոխակերպումները, (ձեռագիր)]
- 287 NAA, Repository 80, list 4, file 6, 29-35. [ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 80, ց.4, գ. 6, թ. 29-35]
- 288 Ibid.
- 289 According to a former employee of the theatre, the theatre used to have few performances in Yerevan, and was mostly touring. During Yerevan performances the audience was mostly from Azerbaijani villages. They were transported to Yerevan by buses. Ethnographic field material recorded by A. Hakobyan on July 8, 2018 in Yerevan.
- 290 It should be noted, that only administrative part was located in Arabkir House of Culture, and later temporarily housed in Akhundov's Azerbaijani school. Theatrical rehearsals also happened there. However, up until 1973, the actual performances in Yerevan took place in Paronyan Theatre of Musical Comedy, and later, in Stanilavsky Russian Drama Theatre.
- 291 NAA, Repository 80, list 15, file 60, pp. 2-3. [ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 80, ց. 15, գ. 60, թ. 2-3]
- 292 Auch, Eva-Maria. Between Adaptation and Self-Affirmation: Early Stage of National Identity Search among Muslim Intelligentsia and the Formation of New Society in the South-Eastern Caucasus (1875-1905); [Аух, Ева-Мария, Между приспособлением и самоутверждением: Ранний этап поисков национальной идентичности в среде мусульманской интеллигенции и возникновение нового общества на юго-восточном Кавказе (1875-1905)] http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_003.htm.
- 293 Nor Dar, 1896, 223.
- 294 Ibid.
- 295 Hovakimyan H, Yunus Nouri, pp. 19, 22.
- 296 Ibid., pp. 20, 24.
- 297 Ibid., pp. 31-32; Rzaev S. Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 35.
- 298 Rzaev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, p. 36, Hovakimyan H., Yunus Nouri, p. 24.
- 299 Something like this is described also by V. Papazian in Constantinople when the wives of Turkish elites watched the performances from behind the curtains in his memoir. G. Stepanyan "With Vahram Papazian (memories), Yerevan, 1979, p. 68-69 in Armenian. [Գառնիկ Ստեփանյան, Վահրամ Փափազյանի հետ (հուշեր), Երևան, 1979, էջ 68-69]
- 300 S. Rzaev, Pages of Friendship, Baku, pp. 51-52.
- 301 Hakobyan T., The History of Yerevan: 1879-1917, p. 473.
- 302 Hovakimyan H., Pages from The History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatres in Armenia, pp. 9-10.
- 303 Rzaev S., Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia, pp. 24-25.
- 304 Ibid; Hovakimyan H, Yunus Nouri, pp. 35-36.
- 305 Originates from the acronym of the phrase "workers art" (рабочее искусство). The con-

- cept of RABIS was put to use during the Soviet rule, To unite the world of art and to organize the art workers into one organization, the trade union of USSR's art workers was created in 1920s with its regional section of RABIS.
- 306 Rzaev S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*, p. 40; Suleymanov N., Miralayev T., Bala Efendiyev, Baku, 1975, pp. 26-27.
- 307 Terzibashyan V., *Turk Performance, Soviet Armenia, February 25, 1928*, in *Armenian [Թերզիբաշյան Վ., Թրքական ներկայացում, Խորհրդային Հայաստան, 1928 թ., փետրվար 25]*
- 308 Rzaev S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*, p. 63. Noryan S., Nvard Alikhanyan, *Soviet Art*, 1973, N 7, p. 62, in *Armenian [Նորյան Ս., Նվարդ Ալիխանյան, Սովետական Արվեստ, 1973, N 7, էջ 62]*
- 309 RA LAM Archive, M. Janan Repository, file 21, papers 1-2
- 310 Hovakimyan H., *Pages from The History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatre in Armenia*, pp. 16-17; Rzaev S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*, p. 68.
- 311 Rzaev S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*, p. 69.
- 312 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
- 313 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 314 Rzaev S., *Interconnections Between Arts of People of Transcaucasia*, p. 65.
- 315 Hovakimyan H., *Pages from The History of Azerbaijani and Kurdish Theatres in Armenia*, pp. 11-12.
- 316 Rzaev S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*, p. 69.
- 317 RA LAM Archive, M. Janan Repository, File 21, paper 1-2.
- 318 Rzaev S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*, p. 43.
- 319 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 320 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 321 RA LAM Archive, M. Janan Repository, File 21, paper 1-2.
- 322 NAA, Repository 80, List 2, File 61, paper 5. 159
- 323 NAA, Repository 80, list 15, file 73.paper 48.
- 324 *The History of Soviet Drama Theatre, Moscow, Nauka, 1967, p. 338, in Russian. [История советского драматического театра, Москва, Наука, 1967, стр. 338]*
- 325 NAA, Repository 80, list5, file 4, paper 14.
- 326 NAA, Repository 80, list5, file6,paper 25.
- 327 NAA, Repository 80, list 5, file 22, paper 11.
- 328 NAA, Repository 80, list 5, file 22, paper 22.
- 329 NAA, Repository 80, list 5, file 345, paper 17.
- 330 NAA, Repository 80, list 8, file 68, paper 10.
- 331 NAA, Repository 80, list 5, file 343, paper 5.
- 332 NAA, Repository 80, list8, file 72, papers 15-16.
- 333 'Polsahay' in Eastern Armenian or 'Bolsahay' in Western Armenian is the way Armenians refer to the Armenians from Constantinople (Istanbul). 'Bolis' or 'Polis' is the Greek word for city and the second syllable of Constantinople in Armenian (Konstantinopolis), while "hay" [pronounced "hi"] is the name Armenians call themselves.
- 334 From the report of the People's Commissar on Enlightenment of the Armenian SSR on the situation of the enlightenment of the national minorities in Armenia. BAA 1974, N2, pp. 65-66.
- 335 Rzayev, S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*, p. 54. The USSR People's Artist Tatul Altunyan (1901-1973) was originally from Adana (Turkey) and moved to Eastern Armenia in 1915.
- 336 Rzayev, S., *Azerbaijani Theatre in Armenia*,pp. 59-60.
- 337 RA LAM Archive, Mkrkich Janan's Repository . file 91, paper1.
- 338 Collective Farm.
- 339 RA LAM Archive, Mkrkich Janan's Repository . file 91, paper 2.

- 340 The year the Autobiography was written is not known, however supposedly that it happened at the end of the 1920s.
- 341 Stepanyan G., Mkrtych Janan, Yerevan 1960, p. 8, in Armenian. [Ստեփանյան Գ., Մկրտիչ Ջանան, Երևան, 1960, էջ 8]
- 342 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 91, paper1.
- 343 During the WW I, Ottoman Armenians were drafted to Army, then isolated and exterminated. The extermination of Armenian men in Ottoman Army was one of the phases of the Armenian Genocide.
- 344 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 91, paper 1.
- 345 Stepanyan G., Mkrtych Janan, p. 12.
- 346 Ibid, p. 20.
- 347 Ibid, p. 20.
- 348 Ibid, pp. 24-37.
- 349 Stepanyan, G., Mkrtych Janan, p. 39.
- 350 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 91, paper 1.
- 351 Stepanyan, G., Mkrtych Janan, pp. 45-46.
- 352 Terzibashyan, V., Turk Performance, Soviet Armenia, Newspaper ("Khorhrdayin Hayastan,") February 25, 1928. [Վ. Թերզիբաշյան, Թրքական ներկայացում, Խորհրդային Հայաստան, 1928, փետրվար 25]
- 353 Stepanyan, G. Mkrtych Janan, p. 94.
- 354 Ibid, pp. 94-97.
- 355 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 91, paper 4, typwritten.
- 356 Stepanyan, G., Mkrtych Janan, p. 96.
- 357 Ibid, p. 95.
- 358 Ibid., pp. 89-90.
- 359 RA LAM Archive, Mkrtych Janan's Repository, file 91, paper 4.
- 360 Stepanyan, G., Mkrtych Janan, p.126.
- 361 Stalin's Shooting Lists, Republic of Armenia: <http://stalin.memo.ru/regions/regi3.htm>
- 362 NAA, Repository 80, list 1, file 22, papers 2-7
- 363 The information is provided by T. Sargsyan, Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of Armenia.
- 364 Hovakimyan, H., Yunus Nouri, p. 3.
- 365 RA LAM Archive, Yunis- Suleymanov's Repository, file 116, paper1.
- 366 Falaka or Falakhka is a tool for punishment through beating bare feet traditionally used by the Muslims of Middle East and North Africa.
- 367 Hovakimyan, H. Yunus Nouri, pp. 7-8.
- 368 RA LAM Archive, Yunis- Suleymanov's Repository, file 116, paper1.
- 369 Nor Dar, 1896, N 223.
- 370 Hovakimyan, H. Yunus Nouri, pp. 15-16
- 371 Ibid., p. 26.
- 372 Ibid., p. 20.
- 373 Hovakimyan, H., Yunus Nouri, p. 26.
- 374 Ibid., p. 33.
- 375 Ibid., pp. 34-36.
- 376 RA LAM Archive, Yunis- Suleymanov's Repository, file 116, paper1.
- 377 Ibid.
- 378 Hovakimyan, H., Yunus Nouri, pp. 75-76.
- 379 RA LAM Archive, Yunis- Suleymanov's Repository, file 120/2, paper4-5.
- 380 Rizayev, S. Pages of Friendship, pp. 84—85.
- 381 Ibid., p. 89.

³⁸² RA LAM Archive, Yunis- Suleymanov's Repository , file 116, paper1.

³⁸³ Hovakimyan, H. Yunus Nouri, p. 93.

³⁸⁴ RA LAM Archive, Yunis- Suleymanov's Repository , file 5, papers 1-2.



LUSINE KHARATYAN

INSTEAD OF CLOSING



Very few of the generation of cosmonauts have succeeded in reaching the cosmos. However, modern technologies now allow us to travel in both space and time. In the same manner, people on opposite sides of the Karabakh conflict can – using such tech - transport to places where official and political borders do not allow their physical presence. Such means also allow people to take virtual trips to the past, finding themselves at valuable points of their mental maps, in real time. By doing so, they then enrich their own mental maps, as well as those available via the internet in the form of human stories, texts, images and voices.

Our book is also a unique attempt at mapping. The map that we have in mind comprises marker points that are present in tangible reality, such as monuments. But it also features *sites of memory* such as the Azerbaijani touring theatre or the rituals and celebrations that belong to the physical space of archives, photos, or human memories.

French historian Pierre Nora, writes in his work “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”³⁸⁵ that the “Acceleration of history confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory - social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies - and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past.”³⁸⁶

Speaking about the acceleration of history, Nora describes it thus: “An increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear - these indicate a rupture of equilibrium [...] Our interest in *lieux de de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn-but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *sites of memory*, because there are no longer real environments of memory.”³⁸⁷

According to Nora, any object that is either material or non-material in its nature can become a memory site, since it has become, overtime- or through people’s volition a symbolic element of that specific community’s memory legacy. It can be any space, item or idea that has historic significance in the collective memory, such as museums, monuments, some events or a symbol like the flag. Sites of memory are recognized and officiated by governments, which can lead to homogenization of differing local memories. Nora believes, that in the past there was only one national history and many particular memories, while currently there is only one national memory, but its unity is based on a patrimonial demand, which is constantly expanding and seeking for integrity.

However, some researchers of “social forgetting” or “social amnesia,” believe that “sites of forgetting” should be studied as well to balance the research into the sites of memory. To avoid the linear and homogenous trap of the memory, its multiple voices should be celebrated, and the silenced and forgotten voices should become heard through study of oral history, local memory and folklore. In a way, this book is an attempt to do that. We believe that in the context of the Karabakh conflict it is important that such endeavors occur on both sides.

³⁸⁵ Realms of Memory or Sites of Memory.

³⁸⁶ Nora, Pierre, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory. (Spring, 1989), pp. 7-24.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

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