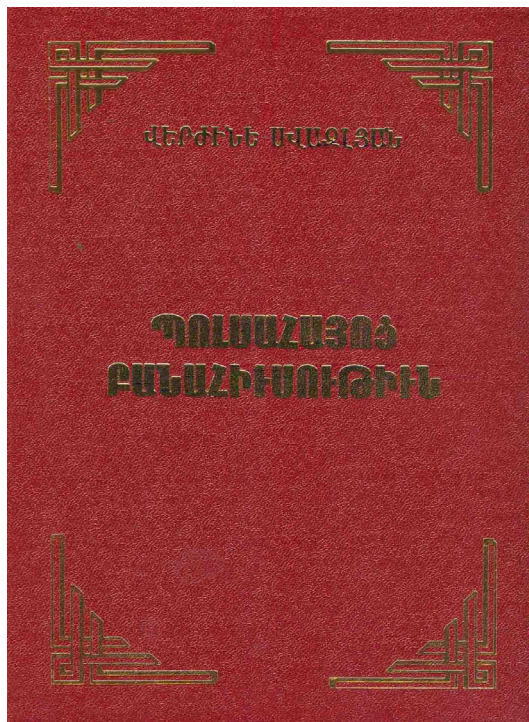


**THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF CONSTANTINOPLE
AND ITS CONTEMPORARY ORAL TRADITION
(According to the ethnographic observations in 1996 and 1997)**

Svazlian Verjine

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the NAS RA

In 1996 I was invited to Istanbul to deliver a report at an International Conference of a singular nature organized on the occasion of the 535th anniversary of the establishment of the Armenian Patriarchate in Turkey and dedicated to the celebration of Vartavar, the Transfiguration of Christ. I had the opportunity there not only to get acquainted with the life and customs of the contemporary Armenian community numbering 60.000 people, the cultural events, but also, by writing down ethnographic materials and studying them, to find out the qualitative and quantitative changes that these ethnographic materials had undergone during the 150 years following Garegin Srvandziants' oral tradition studies. This research work was published in Western Armenian language in Yerevan in the year 2000.¹



**Svazlian V. The Oral Tradition of the
Constantinople Armenians (Yerevan, 2000)**

Referring to the history, it should be noted that after the occupation of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, Fatih Sultan Mehmed II proclaimed it capital of the New Ottoman State and renamed it Istanbul. He transferred there the families of Armenian masters from the inner provinces of the Turkish Empire,² who not only increased the number of the Armenian community, but also imparted beauty and radiance to the newly-built capital.

In 1461 the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey was founded, to which the Sultan granted certain ecclesiastic and communal rights. In the subsequent years the number of the Armenians in Istanbul grew gradually due to the migration of people from Sebastia, Kayseri, Tokat, Akn, Mush, Cilicia and other

¹ Svazlyan 2000.

² Based on the idea expressed in "The History of the Ottoman State" [Von Hammer von 1834: 524] that, following the occupation of Constantinople, Fatih Sultan Mehmed II conquered Kafa (1475) and transferred from there 40.000 people to his capital, Hrachia Adjarian concludes: "The Armenians of Constantinople have emigrated from the Crimea and naturally they would have taken all these words (Turkish - V. S.) from the Crimean Tatars, consequently the letter K is pronounced Kh just as the Armenians of Nor-Nakhichevan" (Adjarian 1941: 8-9).

provinces in search of work. During the rebellion of the Jalalis (end of the XVI century - beginning of the XVII century) the Armenian community of Istanbul was supplemented not only by Western, but also by Eastern Armenian resettlers.

The Armenian community of Istanbul was not homogeneous. The densest layer consisted of craftsmen, migrating cultivators and unskilled workmen. The skilled workmen were assembled in handicraftsmen's associations. The Armenian jewelers, silk spinners, blacksmiths, tailors and watchmakers had a great fame. The wealthy class was composed of *hojas* (tradesmen), *chelebis* (intellectuals), *sarafs* (money-changers) and subsequently of *amiras* (wealthy and influential people), as well as of representatives of the trading and loan-giving class, who, owing to their finances and their business-like efficiency, had gained influential positions, had established relations with the Court and played an active role in the economic and political life of the Empire. The important State posts at the Court were trusted to the wealthy Armenians (amiras). For example, Harutyun amira Bezjian was the Sultan's counselor, the Duzians managed the goldsmith's art and the minting of coins, the Dadians had the monopoly of gunpowder-making and the Balian directed the architecture. These professions were transmitted by inheritance, from generation to generation. The Armenians had also ministers of the post, the telegraph, public construction, agriculture, foreign affairs, etc., in the government of the Ottoman Empire and, subsequently, deputies in the Ottoman Parliament as well. The wealthy class included also the broker-merchants, who organized the traditional Turkish-European trade.

The Armenian community of Istanbul had also famous intellectuals, such as teachers, clergymen, artists, writers, physicians, lawyers, painters, musicians, who took an active part not only in the public and political lives of the Court and of the Armenians of Istanbul, but also in those of the whole Western Armenians. The Armenian Patriarchate was recognized by the State as the leader of the Armenian community.

As in the past, all the religious, educational, benevolent, literary and cultural organizations of the Armenian community lean at present upon the Armenian Patriarchate and its dependent institutions. Referring to the churches of Istanbul, H.J. Siruni remarks: "During centuries the Armenian Church has been a rampart for the existence of the Armenian nation, has protected its spiritual heritage and has given it hope during hardships."³

The Armenians of Turkey, as an organized community, have preserved, under the direction of the Patriarchate, their religious, educational and benevolent institutions in Istanbul up to the present day. The Patriarch is the head of the Armenian Apostolic churches in Turkey and is elected by the assembly of deputies. The religious assembly is elected in a similar manner. The Armenian Patriarchate is reinforced also with efficient members, who perform various duties in different committees.

³ Sirouni 1965: 662.



The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople

The trusteeships, which are elected for a period of four years, manage and support the general communal institutions, such as the National Hospital Soorp Prkich and the Karageuzian orphanage. The trusteeships are assisted by the Women's and Youth auxiliary commissions.

The district councils, which are also elected for a period of four years by the Armenian population of each district, are

the energetic and efficient links of the public life of the Armenian community. The district councils are the organs governing and supporting the local communities and their duty is to maintain the church and the school of the quarter in a brilliant condition.

The religious communal life is gathered around the churches. The Armenians have in Istanbul and in the provinces 42 churches which are divided into 6 dioceses: a). Old City - 16 churches, b). Western Bosphorus - 11 churches, c). Eastern Bosphorus - 7 churches, d). Prince Islands - 1 church, e). Provinces - 6 churches, f). Island of Crete - 1 church.

Recently, the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Kayseri (1996), the Blessed Virgin Church of the village of Vakef in Saman Dagħ (Moussa Dagħ) (1997) and the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church of the Kenali Island were renovated by permission of the Turkish government, the efforts of the Armenian Patriarchate, the financial means of the community and under the direct supervision of the previous Patriarch, His Beatitude Archbishop Mesrob Mutařian (1998-2016).

Nearly all the churches have their choir and their choirmaster elected by the general assembly of the choirs. All the churches functioning at present in Turkey are magnificent and provided with all facilities; everywhere there is a spotless cleanness and a God-pleasing atmosphere. Besides the everyday divine services and the Holy Mass of Sunday, Armenian Christian baptisms, opulent and magnificent nuptial feasts and requiem ceremonies for the deceased take often place in these churches in the presence of numerous believers.

The first regular Armenian school, where learned clergymen have been educated, was founded in 1715 by the Patriarch Hovhannes Kolot of Bagħish (1678-1741) on the Scutar (Turk. Üsküdar) height. The name of this meritorious clergyman is linked also with the creation of the Main Library and the foundation of the National Library, which is the continuation of the former; these two institutions have played a very important role in the further development of the Armenian culture.

At the present 18 schools function in Istanbul, of which 5 lyceums: the Central Lyceum in Ghalatia, the Yessayan Lyceum in Taxim, the St. Cross Lyceum in Scutar (formerly Dbrevank), the Sahakian-Nunian Lyceum in Samatia and the Viennese Mekhitarist Lyceum in Pangalti. Worthy of remembrance are the Bezjian Main School in Kumkapu, the Dadian School in Makreköy, the Merametjjan School in Feriköy, the Aramian-Oundjian School in Kadıköy, the Levon Vartouhian School in Topkapu, the Tarkmanchats School in Ortaköy, the St. Sahak-St. Mesrob School in Yeşilköy, the Nersesian-Yermonian School in Scutar, the Semerjian Academy, the Immaculate Conception Schools in Samatia and Pangalti, the Venetian Mekhitarist School in Bomonti and lastly the Kalfayan-Karageuzian orphanages.



**Armenian St. Asdvadzadzin Mother Church
(1828), adjacent to the Patriarchate of
Constantinople**

These educational institutions continue their instructive-illuminative activities according to the program of the State Educational Administration of Turkey and based on the traditional Armenian nurture principles. Nearly all the quarters, densely populated with Armenians, have their schools and kindergardens. Besides the teaching of the Armenian language and of religion, that of the Turkish language and other foreign languages is on a high level, since, upon admission to the higher educational institutions, the knowledge of these languages is of prime importance.

Next to nearly all the schools, Alumni Associations function on a benevolent basis, which endeavor to keep alight the Armenian cultural life by organizing various art events (lectures, theatrical performances, sport competitions, concerts, exhibitions) and publications.

The Armenians of Istanbul have also a number of communal organizations, among which are significant "The Institution of Armenian Teachers of Turkey" in Pangalti, "The Invigorating Centre" in Kenali Island of the Karageuzian Alumni Association, where, according to the characteristic given by the superintendent of the Prince Islands, Archbishop Mesrob Mutaftian, "the disadvantaged children of the community come in summer to profit from the pure air, the sea and the nature and to get invigorated physically." The new generation is bound with great fervency with the Sportive and Physical training Unions of Taxim and Şişli.

The Armenian community of Istanbul sacredly preserves also, generation after generation, the 16 cemeteries, which are always maintained clean and in good order owing to the efforts of the devoted members of the community.

The Armenian press of Istanbul reflects in great detail the events occurring in the country and in the whole world, as well as the big and small problems of the community. Besides the authoritative daily newspapers “Zhamanak” (Time) (editor: Ara Kochunian) and “Nor Marmara” (New Marmara) (editor: Robert Haddejian), the bilingual (Armenian and Turkish) “Agos” (Furrow) weekly (founder: late Hrant Dink) is published since 1996 and enjoys a large popularity. The “Herald of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul” is published every week in Armenian and Turkish languages and is distributed free of charge in the churches. This informative publication presents a detailed account of the activities of national and international importance realized by the Armenian Patriarchate during all the days of the week. This information is at present transmitted in English and Turkish languages through the Internet. The “Shoghakat” (Refulgent) periodical, which contains ecclesiastical, cultural and philological materials, is also published.

The illustrated, colorful and magnificent magazine “Soorp Prkitch” (Saint Savoir) (editor: Makrouhi P. Hagopian) provides information about the latest discoveries in universal medicine, the modern techniques introduced into practice in the various departments of the National Soorp Prkich Hospital, the daily life of the hospital-old age home and the endless donations.

The periodicals “Hopina” and “Lusatu” (Luminary) of the Gedronakan Alumni Association, “Nor San” (New Alumnus) of the Mekhitarist Alumni Association, “Zhepit” (Smile) of the Teachers’ Foundation and the literary-cultural magazine “Poondj” (Bouquet) of the Soorp Khach Lyceum students are also published.

It should be emphasized, in honor of the Armenian community of Turkey, that all the churches and the cultural organizations functioning under the management of the Armenian Patriarchate realize their daily activities owing to the benevolent donations of the thrifty, yet magnanimous representatives of the Armenian community, who, having inherited that graceful tradition from their meritorious ancestors, become the pledge of the vitality and the perpetuity of their own community.

According to official data, about 60 thousand Armenians live at present in Istanbul and barely 5 thousand live in the provinces. They are engaged mainly in trade and national handicrafts. To the intellectuals of the past, new names have succeeded, such as N. Khrakhuni, Zahrat, R. Haddejian, A. Dirazan, Igna Sariaslan, Z. Biberian, as well as devoted teachers of the new generation, renowned physicians, lawyers and architects, who have specialized in Turkey or in other foreign countries and are now contributing to the development of the country and of the Armenian community.

From the representatives of the Armenian community in Istanbul (during my sojourn in Turkey), as well as from former natives of Istanbul living now in Armenia, belonging to the various sex and age groups, I have written down about 1.570 units of large and small materials of oral tradition.⁴

⁴ A certain number of folklore materials written down by the renowned Armenian linguist H. Adjarian, a native of Istanbul, and his sister, Armenouhi Adjarian, were published in the Azgagrakan Handes 1902: 160-196.



The author writing down the narrations of the Constantinople Armenian Zaven Sofouyan (1921, Partizak)

The oral tradition of the Armenians of Istanbul, which is a constituent part of the oral culture of the Armenian people, has developed during centuries with the general principles of the folklore of the Armenian people; however, along with the generalities and the similarities, it has embraced very peculiar and original properties due to the historical-public life of the past and of the present they have lived.

Summarizing the different folklore materials I have written down, it should be noted that the heritage of the oral tradition of the Armenians of Istanbul is presented, for the first time, in a scientifically arranged order together with its genre and thematic variants. The published collection of my inscriptions includes:

- I. ORAL TRADITION IN PROSE – 300 units;
- II. ORAL TRADITION IN VERSE – 142 units;
- III. PHRASEOLOGICAL ORAL TRADITION – 1.108 units;
- IV. RITES – 3 units;
- V. SONG MELODIES – 17 units;

Total – 1.570 units

I. ORAL TRADITION IN PROSE rich in genre and thematic diversity forms a definite section in the oral creation historically developed and inherited from generation to generation of the contemporary Armenians of Istanbul migrated from the different provinces of Turkey and established there. This section includes:

1. Fables and Tales (16 units). The fables “King Aram’s son, Ara the handsome” and “The capture of Troy” reflect the real events and the characters in the ancient lives of the Armenian and Greek peoples described in supernatural and exaggerated hues. These historical events are commented with a mythological reasoning to be the effect of supernatural forces. While the theme of the meditative-philosophical tales “Do good, throw it in the sea,” “The shepherdess,” “The force of craftsmanship,” “The boy who had seen the world,” “Man’s fortune,” “The happy man” and others is the man seeking the meaning of happiness, standing, with his daily worries, face to face with the mystery of transitory life.

The real tales (“Little brother,” “The sweetest and the bitterest,” “The force of the liquor”) praise diligence and honest conduct. These tales are generally of an instructive-educational character.

2. Legends (11 units). These are the toponymic tales of the Armenians of Turkey, which interpret the various toponyms by means of attractive traditions, for instance, "The Monastery of Hope of the Heybeli Island," "The St. George sanctuary of the Large Island," "The St. John Church of the Burgas Island," "St. Karapet, the dream-giver," "The Korikos fortress in Cilicia," "Kheder Bek's plane tree," "Father Abraham's grapevine," which is as follows:

"One day, an angel came as a guest at Father Abraham's house, who had no food to offer the angel. So he went to the stable, took out a calf, slaughtered it and offered it to the angel. The calf's mother returned from the pasture in the evening and saw that the calf had disappeared and began to shed salty tears. Seeing this, the angel got much distressed and said to Father Abraham: "Fetch me the calf's hide and the bones." Father Abraham brought the remnants of the calf. The angel blessed the hide and the bones and the calf came to life again. The remnants were buried in the orchard. The following year a grapevine grew in the same place."⁵

3. Religious-Moral Tales (32 units). The theme of these tales is mainly biblical, since, according to the Armenians of Istanbul "The Bible should become the root of morality for everyone," such as "God's message," "The names God has given," "The fortune God has given," "The punishment God has given," "Providence," etc. However, the religious-moral tales of this nature are not simple reproductions of biblical episodes, but each has a particular development of its plot line, which, reaching its climax, imparts the popular work not only a moralistic shade, but also a public response. For example: "If you give, God will give you more," "God the distributor," "Mohammed's message," "Mohammed and the Armenian Hagop," "Unity is force," etc.

Here is one of the moral-advisory tales:

"One day there was a funeral procession in the street. The people were watching it in silence. An old man spoke to himself aloud.

- I wonder if this man is dead or he will still be living.

A young man, who heard him, said:

- Daddy, when someone dies, that's the end; how can he be living?

- Eh, my son, - replied the old man, - if the deceased hasn't done any good job in his life and hasn't left any good memories, then he is really dead. But if the deceased has left behind him good children, good deeds and good memories, then he doesn't die and his memory is immortal."⁶

4. Humorous Tales (53 units). Laughter has always accompanied the Armenian of Istanbul, who has condensed his lively and cheerful philosophy in the following popular meaningful aphorism: "One laughter is worth a pound of roast meat." He has also criticized through laughter the human faults, such as laziness ("The lazy daughter-in-law," "The lazy carpenter"), deceitfulness ("The shoe-maker who didn't pay his debt," "The tailor and the client"), prudence ("The prudent barber"), greediness ("The judge

⁵ Svazlyan 2000: 96.

⁶ Ibid: 137.

and the robber”), ribaldry (“The foul mouth”), larceny (“The thief of the church,” “St. Antoine and the thief,” “The newly-consecrated pastor”), vindictiveness (“The vindictive man”), lust for wealth (“The boy and the doctor,” “The young men and the wealthy”) which is more of a meditative-philosophical character than humorous:

“Two young men saw a beautiful building in a garden. One of them said to the other:

- Look! What a beautiful building!

The owner of the building heard this, came out of the building and said to the young men:

- I will give you this building, if only you give me your youth.”⁷

A special series in this section is assigned to the humoristic tales of the fools, where the crazy is ready even to count the goat’s hair provided that the doctor let him go home (“The fool’s fell”). However, the healthy man visiting the madhouse to count the number of insanes is greatly astonished by the clever language of “the mad liable to be tied up,” who says “Go and count those who are outside, they outnumber us,” an answer which considers the oddities reaching the limits of insanity of the people reputed as clever.

A particular series among the humorous tales consists in those dedicated to the well-known oriental epic character Mulla Nasrudin, which inform us that this renowned person has lived in Turkey and that his grave is found in Aksaray. Such a prevalence (11 units) of the humorous, yet instructive tales of Mulla Nasrudin among the Armenians of Istanbul is indicative of the century-old co-existence of the Armenian and Turkish peoples and of the mutual cultural influences.

5. Parables and Animal Tales (21 units). In these creations, which are compact in form and allegoric in content, the Armenians of Istanbul artistically portray, through animal characters, the people’s wicked and piteous faults, such as deceitfulness (“The wolves and the shepherd”), greediness (“The snake and the man,” “The fish and the man”), slyness (“The lion, king of the forest”), imposture (“The mournful partridge,” “The flea-louse”), arrogance (“The camel and the fly”), ingratitude (“The tortoise and the scorpion,” “The frog and the mouse”). The villain, in these parables, is always punished. Some parables praise, after the example of the kind and innocent animals, shrewdness (“The clever owner of the dog”), gratitude (“The grateful bear,” “The sensitive sea-gulls,” “The thankfulness of the dolphins”) and other moral merits. Let us see how the dolphins expressed their thankfulness:

“One day, two fishermen were catching fish with their boat. When they were drawing their net out of the water, they saw that about forty dolphins had surrounded their boat and, their heads out of the water, were screaming plaintively.

- What do they want? - asked, amazed, one fisherman to the other.

- I don’t understand their language, replied the other.

⁷ Ibid: 177.

When they drew the net out of the sea, they understood the behavior of the dolphins, since a baby dolphin had fallen into the net. The fishermen took it out and dropped it in the sea again. When the fishermen returned to the wharf they were astonished to see about forty dolphins encircling and jumping round the boat and expressing their gratitude to the kind fishermen with screams of satisfaction.”⁸

6. Custom Tales (54 units). The popular oral creations of this type have a real and local basis and depict, in a small volume and in bright, artistic colors, the distinctive life style of the Armenians living in the different provinces of Turkey, their specific customs and the various standards they have with regard to morality. Istanbul “claimed,” in the past, “to be the little Paris” and the poor provincials (the outsiders) who had come to Istanbul not knowing the Turkish language, still confused, and, coming in contact with the new environment, often lived in embarrassment, not understood and even with a complex of being deceived (“The provincial who did not know Turkish,” “The provincial in Pera,” “The Caesarean and the Istanbulite”). These psychological states, besides creating humorous situations, have provided also grounds for silent dramas.

Peculiarities characteristic to every ethnographic group are emphasized with intimate irony in these custom tales. Unforgettable pictures embellish the tales describing the skillfulness of Caesareans (“The Caesarean father and son,” “The Caesarean girl and the Jewish peddler,” “Nazar, the Caesarean”), the wittiness of Tomarzians (“The Tomarzian’s answer,” “The Tomarzians and the aeroplane,” “The Tomarzian ‘Button’ and the yoghurt-selling aunt”), the frugality of the inhabitants of Tekirdagh (“The Tekirdaghian mother-in-law”), the patriarchal character of the dwellers of Yozghat (“Pirouz from Yozghat,” “The betrothed couple of Yozghat,” “The Yozghatian girl on the beach”), the taciturnity of the Adana brides (“The Adana bride”), the naivety of the inhabitants of Akn (“The provincial and Aknian innkeeper”), the self-defensive spirit of the denizens of Moussa Dagħ (“The young asses of the granddad of Moussa Dagħ”), as well as the peculiar features of the conduct and customs, life style and habits of the Armenians living in other localities.

The tragicomic theme undergoes a further development by depicting the perplexed and embarrassed state of the Armenian provincials immigrated to foreign countries (“The provincial who didn’t know French,” “The Zeytouni in France,” “The Tomarzian in America”), where the naive ignorance of the emigrant provincial of the language, the laws and regulations of America is described in humoristic colors:

“Mr. Harutyun from Tomarza and his friend went to America. There they entered a factory to work without knowing a word of English. The chief showed, on a big clock placed on the table, the time until which they would have to work. Then, another worker came in and the chief showed the working time on his wrist-watch, saying:

- You will have to work from this hour to that one.

- You saw that, didn’t you? - said Mr. Harutyun to his friend, the chief showed us the time on the big clock, therefore he will make us work longer than the other worker.

⁸ Ibid: 210.

- This man is deceiving us, replied his friend.
And both of them fled from the factory.”⁹

Of special interest are the novel-type tales with an unexpected ending depicting the conduct and customs of various peoples, their bearing, their standards of mental and moral perceptions, as well as the behavior of the other peoples with the Armenians, such as “The Jew who helped the Jew,” “The clever Jew,” “The advice of the Jewish father,” “Mournful Mannik and the Greek neighbor,” “The traveling Laz,” “The Albanian and the oil bottle,” “The Yugoslav pastor,” “Don’t boast like a Persian,” “The foreign police commissary,” “Three friends,” “The Adapazari woman and the Turkish station-master” and other custom tales.

It is constantly evident in these tales that the Armenians had neighborly relations with the foreign inhabitants and that they also had a resolute force of will in keeping high their dignity (“The priest of Kayseri and the foreigners,” “The charm of the Armenian alphabet”) and the spirit of their national individuality, which has found its artistic expression in the following tale:

“An Armenian from Istanbul was traveling on a ship to the Far East, to China, Japan and Australia. Naturally, there were on the ship people of various nationalities. They decided, one day, that everyone of them would make a speech in his own language in order that the others could listen. The Jew stood up and made a speech in his language. The Indian rose next and spoke in Indian. Then it was the Armenian’s turn, who had not a high education, so he decided to recite all the letters of the Armenian alphabet, but he declaimed with such a strong feeling that all the spectators clapped their hands and congratulated the Armenian, saying:

- Your speech was wonderful. How beautiful is your language!”¹⁰

7. Historical Tales and Memoirs (113 units). The folklore materials I have written down include a special section dedicated to the tales and memoirs of historical importance, which artistically reproduce, in chronological order, the following historical events and characters:

= The foundation of the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey in Istanbul in 1461 under the leadership of Patriarch Hovakim following the occupation of Constantinople, in the period of the establishment of the Ottoman Empire and on the immediate initiative of Fatih Sultan Mohamet II.

= The Sultan’s counselor, Harutyun Amira Bezjian of Armenian origin, the heads of the mint the brothers Amira Duzians, the architects Amira Balian who succeeded one another, the talented actors Mardiros Mnakian, Hagop Vartovian, Marie Nvart, the well-known musicians Tateos effendi, Kemani Sarkis, Oudi Hrant, the intellectuals Bedros Tourian and others who lived during the reign of Sultan Mahmoud II and who have greatly favored the flourishing and prosperity of Istanbul and have contributed with a

⁹ Ibid: 264.

¹⁰ Ibid: 281.

boundless devotion to the political, economic and cultural progress of their native country.

= The outrages committed in the reign of Sultan Hamid II toward the Christians, including the Armenians, during which the Armenian Patriarchs Mkrtych Khrimian, Nerses Varzhabedian, Maghakia Ormanian were able to maintain the equilibrium owing to their judicious and skilful activity, without deteriorating the created historic situation.

= During the tragic years of the World War I and especially the forcible deportation and the mass extermination of the Armenians of Turkey planned by the leaders of the government of the Young Turks in 1915, the heart-breaking memoirs and the historic tales of the Armenian eye-witness survivors miraculously rescued from these historic events and of their future generations.

= During the double patriarchy of the Patriarch Zaven Der-Yeghiayan, the sheltering of hundreds of thousands orphaned children and widowed women in the Kalfayan and the Karageuzian orphanages and the National Soorp Prkich Hospital.

= The declaration of the Republic of Turkey and the radical reforms achieved by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in all the spheres of the country; the amiable behavior of that politician towards the renowned Armenian linguist Hagop Martayan (Dilachar) and others.

= The social and life style adaptation of the Armenians living at present in the Republic of Turkey with the Turkish and other ethnic groups, and their friendly relations.

= The patriarchal activities of the Patriarchs Karekin I Khachadourian, Shnork Kaloustian and Karekin II Kazanjian.

= The visit of His Holiness Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians to Turkey and his cordial meetings with the Armenian community.

= The role of the Archbishops Shahan Svadjian and Mesrob Mutfian in the Armenian community.

= The effect of the God-pleasing sermons of the Archbishop Mesrob Mutfian (now Patriarch) upon the adults and the youngsters.

= The ceremonies of the reopening and anointment of the renovated churches of Kayseri and Saman Dag (Moussa Dag) by permission of the present government of Turkey and thanks to the apostle-like activity and the indefatigable efforts of His Beatitude the Patriarch Mesrob Mutfian.

This period, which is full of historical events, forms an entire chain of consecutive happenings and characters and which has been elucidated, link by link, by fully-evidenced folklore tales of historical value. It is evident in the above-cited historic tales that the century-old co-existence of the various peoples living in Turkey has perpetually prevailed, irrespective of the political circumstances; moreover, the diligent and peace-loving spirit of the Armenian community is devoted, nowadays, to the progress and the prosperity of the present day Turkish Republic.

The historical tale "Sultan Hamid and Patriarch Maghakia Ormanian" is of interest:

"One day the counselors of Sultan Abdul Hamid told him:

- Do you know, Sultan, that the Armenian Patriarch doesn't take a meal without saying grace? He crosses himself without fail before the meal.

- Honestly? If so, let us invite him to dinner, we will see if he dares to cross himself before me.

Abdul Hamid gave orders to organize a great dinner and to invite the Armenian Patriarch.

Maghakia Ormanian appeared augustly before the Sultan and saw the sumptuously laid table. All sat round the table. Before starting to eat, Patriarch Ormanian raised his right hand and, pretending to point to the various delicious dishes on the table, he unnoticeably made the sign of the cross, saying:

- At first, we shall taste that delicious dish, then eat this one, then that dainty one and then this one and finally that's all!¹¹

And he started eating. When the banquet was over, Patriarch Ormanian expressed his thankfulness for the reception and took his leave. The Sultan gladly told his counselors:

- Did you see that the Armenian Patriarch was afraid of me and didn't make the sign of the cross?

The counselors replied:

- You are mistaken, Sultan, before the dinner, the Armenian Patriarch, pointing to the dishes, already made the sign of the cross on your table, but he crossed it in such a manner that you did not notice."¹²

The following historic tale is an episode in the chain of sufferings endured by the Armenians of Turkey in the years of the First World War. This incident has happened in reality.

"One day a celibate priest came to Los Angeles from another state of America. One of our acquaintances, Mrs. Aghavni, went to the church to listen to his sermon. During the sermon, Mrs. Aghavni stared at the priest as if she was in love with him. She felt that her behavior was sinful before God and she wanted to get rid of that obsession, but she was unable to do so. She felt herself very nervous. Mrs. Aghavni's son had graduated as a psychologist. He saw his mother's strange mood and sent a letter to the Reverend Father telling him that they had liked his sermons and that they would be glad to see him and to listen to him once more. After some time, the celibate priest in question visited Los Angeles again. Mrs. Aghavni's son told her mother:

- Mother, the Reverend Father you liked so much has come again. Go to the church.

His mother, afraid of herself, did not want to go. Then his son went to the church and invited the priest to visit their house. They sat round the table. Mrs. Aghavni looked again fixedly at him, at his face, inside his eyes.

The Reverend Father asked the lady:

¹¹ In Armenian "all" means amen, which sounds like Amen in praying.

¹² Svazlyan 2000: 301.

- Madam, how did you come to America? Where are you from?

The lady started her history.

- I am from Tomarza. My parents were rich. At the time of the World War I I was a little girl, but I had also a younger brother. My brother got lost during the war. My poor mother used to weep several times a day remembering her little son and said: 'My sweet son, if I knew that I shall lose you, I wouldn't nurse you for such a long time...', since my brother Zaven had fallen into the blazing fire of the bread-baking pit and was extensively burned. My mother had nursed him with balms and soothing ointments for a long time and he had recovered.

The Reverend Father rolled up the sleeves of his cassock and showed them the scars of his burns, saying:

- I am that boy,

Mrs. Aghavni's joy was boundless. She exclaimed:

- So that was the reason that these eyes of yours were haunting me from the day I saw you first.

After losing one another for several decades, sister and brother hugged each other in a warm embrace with rapture and tearful eyes.¹³

A series of similar tales and songs of historical nature I have written down from survivors.

II. THE ORAL TRADITION IN VERSE, which artistically reflect the various impressions, the meditations and emotions, the joy and love, the sorrow and affliction obtained from the surrounding nature and public life.

Songs have always accompanied the inhabitants of Istanbul, and can be divided into the following groups:

1. Lullabies (5 units) are tender maternal songs of a peculiar genre sung for lulling a baby to sleep ("Sleep, my sweet," "Sleep, my dove" and others), among which the following is of interest:

Sleep, my dear baby,
I'll sing you a lullaby,

The bright moon is gently
Looking at your cradle.
I'll tell you many tales
And sing lovely songs,
While you rest in your bed
In a sweet sleep.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid.: 373-374.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 387.

2. Children's Play Songs (14 units) are melodious games composed by adults to amuse and entertain children of different ages, which are recited in the simplest language, such as "Eghrik-meghrik (Honey-butter)," "Dan-dan," "Clap-clap."

A beautiful example is the following:

My little boy's eye
Looks like the cross of the church,
My little boy's mouth
Looks like the altar of the church,
My little boy's nose
Looks like the rafter of the church,
My little boy's back
Looks like the door of the church,
My little boy's hands
Look like the books of the church.¹⁵

3. Children's Songs (8 unit) are composed mainly for children in a comprehensible language intended to give an idea about the interests of childhood, which form a basis for the future development and self-recognition of the individual, such as "Round and plump," "I am a pretty girl," "When I grow up," "I am an Armenian," which is satiated with a feeling of national dignity:

I am an Armenian, a highborn Haigazian,¹⁶
I speak in the language of Haig¹⁷ and Aram,¹⁸
I have no crown, gold, throne and diamond,
But my heart is rich and particularly honest.¹⁹

4. Adolescent Songs (4 units). These are songs composed for or by the pupils and are intended to disseminate the volitional and moral qualities in young boys and girls, such as "Hail, temple of wisdom," "The hymn of the Armash Seminary," "Will, labor and vigor," which is as follows:

Will, labor and courage,
Man is endowed with three skills,
That, on earth or on water,
Will bring him certain success.²⁰

5. Love Songs (23 units) are popular ditties composed by analogy of the medieval "hayrens,"²¹ which express tender and delicate spiritual feelings; while the lyric love songs "Our house is opposite yours," "You come picking roses, sweetheart," "My heart

¹⁵ Ibid.: 391.

¹⁶ Name of the race of the Armenian ancestor Haik/Haig.

¹⁷ Ancestor of the Armenian race.

¹⁸ Armenian king.

¹⁹ Svazlyan 2000: 393.

²⁰ Ibid.: 395.

²¹ Medieval Armenian songs.

is rotating like a millstone” are the echoes of the former rustic creations. A beautiful example among the love songs is the following:

The sea of Istanbul is curling in waves,
How sweet is the breeze of love blowing,
May the Lord give me the fortune to see her,
To fulfill my dream and then to fall into the sea.²²

6. Emigration Songs (15 units). In the past, Armenians who had migrated from the provinces to Istanbul, considered it as a stopping place where they came to work, to earn money and to send it to their families and the Armenian emigrant who awaited news from his native land has often sung “Call, crane, call” or has assured himself by murmuring “have patience, my soul, have patience,” while the Armenian living in the Diaspora has dreamt of his Homeland, singing:

I shall go to Yerevan,
I shall read the primer,
What shall I do in foreign lands?
I am going to Armenia.²³

7. Ritual Songs complete the ethnographic materials I have written down about baptismal, nuptial and funeral rites.

a) Nuptial Songs (19 units). These are ancient recordings of ritual songs praising the bride during her dressing and during the carrying of her dowry to the bridegroom’s house; among them are: “You are fortunate, girl,” “The priest gives nuptial blessing,” “A caravan set out from the town of Aleppo” and “They are taking away the girl, weeping, lamenting,” which depicts the sad farewell of the dressed underage bride from her father’s house:

They are taking away the girl, weeping, lamenting,
They are combing her hair with a silver comb,
And wrapping her head with the nightingale-decorated shawl,
Don’t cry, pretty girl, your eyes and brows will be spoiled,
Cursed be he who gave you in marriage so young.²⁴

b) Festive Songs (34 units). The Armenians of Istanbul holily preserve not only their ancient churches, but also their Christian holidays and the national holidays of pagan origin, as well as the popular songs performed during those holidays, such as “Song of Christmas,” “Song of Christmas eve,” “Song of the New Year,” “Easter has come,” “Lottery songs and melodies of the Ascension and of the Transfiguration of Christ,” which have been composed both in Armenian and in Turkish languages.

The following song is dedicated to the New Year:

How beautiful is this evening!
Let us light colorful candles.

²² Svazlyan 2000: 396.

²³ Ibid.: 405.

²⁴ Ibid.: 406-407.

The New Year has come as a guest
And has brought us green trees.²⁵

And this one is devoted to Easter:

Easter has come with much joy,
And has brought us baskets full of eggs,
And cakes dainty and tasty
Which mother has baked with love.²⁶

The pagan worship of the sun appears intertwined with the biblical characters, Father Abraham and the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the following Ascension or lottery song:

The key descended from the sky,
Our house was filled with sunshine,
Our bread is Father Abraham's bread,
Our water is Virgin Mary's milk,
Bride, draw your good lot!
And may Ascension fulfill your wish!²⁷

Some "Vartavar" (Transfiguration of the Christ) songs have been composed also in Turkish language:

Hey! Mentivar, Mentivar,²⁸
Mentivar has a definite time,
He who loves Mentivar
Has five sofas in Heaven.²⁹

8. Custom and Humorous Songs (11 units) are mostly amusing creations sung during merry festivities, such as "I lived quietly before my marriage," "A red dress for the daughter," "Playing the mandolin," as well as the humorous dance-songs "Wave, wave your handkerchief," "It's a lie, it's a lie," "Hala, hala, hala, Ninoyi," which are designed to raise the cheerful moods of those present.

Here is an attractive example:

On Monday, Monday, Monday,
On Tuesday I bake bread,
On Wednesday I sew,
On Thursday I wash my clothes,
On Friday I clean the house,
On Saturday I go to the bath,
On Sunday when nobody works,
Why should I?

²⁵ Ibid.: 415.

²⁶ Ibid.: 417.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Mentivar" in Turkish means Vartavar.

²⁹ Svazlyan 2000 425.

Therefore I go to the church.³⁰

9. Nature Songs (9 units). The Armenians of Istanbul are not only devout, but nature-lovers as well. They regard as equal sources of inspiration the blue sea of Marmara ("On the Sea"), the thickly-branched forest ("I went to the forest"), the birds soaring freely in the infinity of the sky ("The stork"), the animals grazing on the velvet pasture ("My pretty, innocent lamb") and the various crops and fruits of the fertile nature ("What place is renowned for what"). This last song praises the crops and the produces growing or manufactured in the various quarters of Istanbul stretched out on the shores bordering the magnificent Marmara Sea and in the different regions of the vast territory of Turkey:

The fish of Kumkapu,
The mulberry of Topkapu,
The lettuce of Yedikule,
The plum of Yenikapu,
The apple of Amassia,
The cucumber of Langa,
The fig of Izmir,
The roast peas of Nide,
The peach of Bursa,
The pear of Tokat,
The water of Tashdelen,
The chestnut of Konia,
The cotton of Adana,
The pistachio of Ayntap,
The potato of Adapazar,
The basturma³¹ of Kayseri,
The coal of Zonguldak,
The honey of Erzroom,
The apricot of Malatia,
The watermelon of Tigranakert,
The kishmish³² of Urgup.³³

III. PHRASEOLOGICAL ORAL TRADITION. This section includes a great number of materials.

1. Proverbs (370 units). This genre of oral tradition reflects in a concise and vivid form the historical and life-style conditions of the public life of the Armenians of Istanbul, the peculiarities of their character and temperament, their moral faculties, their national customs, their beliefs and religion, their psychology and outlook. Among the lively

³⁰ Ibid.: 430.

³¹ Dried, salted and spiced beef.

³² Raisin.

³³ Svazlyan 2000: 432.

examples are: "We went to Tokat and became disabled," "Worry for a year, work for a day," "A man of craft remains hungry till noon, one without remains hungry till night," "Whatever the size of the mosque, the muezzin with call the same 'Allahu akbar' he knows," "The searcher will find God."³⁴

2. Edifications (200 units) are moralistic aphorisms, which have an educational and instructive object and have been mainly created by the representatives of the senior generation having great life experience and sagacity. The edifications are designed for the inexperienced youth to preserve them from the imminent, threatening danger, expressed in an exhorting, imperative manner, such as "Don't rely on your force, money or beauty, since they are transient," "Before being happy, make your companion happy," "The only thing which will remain is the monument made up of your virtue and your good deeds," "Remember that you were born naked and you will leave this world naked."³⁵

3. Maledictions (50 units). The Armenians of Istanbul have not many maledictions, since the church also has always reproved the people by the adage "Don't curse!", consequently they leave the judgment of the evildoer to Providence, saying, "May God judge you!"³⁶

4. Benedictions (100 units). These concise, vivid and meaningful creations are saturated with liveliness and with warm, tender behavior toward the meritorious man. The sun, the soil, the water, the flower and the leaf, as symbols of nature and life, have become the criteria of appreciation in these small wishful formulas: "May your sun be bright!", "May the soil become green in your hands!", "May your life be endless as water!", "May roses grow on your path!", "May you live as many years as there are leaves on the olive tree."³⁷

5. Idioms (270 units). The oral tradition of the Armenians of Istanbul is overflowing with vivid, meaningful idioms and catch-words, a fact, which makes their oral language unique and colorful. Some good examples are: "To carry the water up the wall" (to complicate matters), "To play his pipe" (to have his own way), "His tongue revolves in his mouth" (he is talkative), "The price of fire" (very expensive), "To rock the cradle" (to render services).³⁸

6. Riddles (42 units) allegorically describe the object and its properties in a ciphered form to give an idea about the parts of the human body (the heart, ear, mouth, nose, eye, tongue), the phenomena of nature (the sun, moon, rain), the plants (the onion, lemon, sunflower), the animals (the fish, snake, turkey), as well as the achievements of human civilization (the church, book, watch, violin) and others, for example:

³⁴ Ibid.: 438-458.

³⁵ Ibid.: 459-470.

³⁶ Ibid.: 471-473.

³⁷ Ibid.: 474-479.

³⁸ Ibid.: 480-494.

What is it?
 That is man's best friend,
 Has no evil and no malice,
 Doesn't claim bread, doesn't demand water,
 Doesn't give trouble,
 It is, on the contrary, useful. [Book]³⁹

7. Patters (5 units) are successions of similar words and sounds, which have to be recited rapidly and faultlessly, as the following one: "I eat the fish and throw the mouse, I throw the mouse and eat the fish."⁴⁰

8. Verse Aphorisms (23 units) are versified, harmonious and melodious, dialogistic adages, which are often used in the daily oral language, such as:

Glory to Thee, O Lord!
 Marry the bachelors, O Lord!⁴¹

9. Creeds (28 units). Although the Armenians of Istanbul are devout Christians, some remains of superstition persist, nevertheless, up to the present day in their daily lives, which have rather been converted into a picturesque language, for instance: "If your eye is twitching, a guest is expected," "If the salt is spilt, a fight will occur in the house," "If the sugar is spilt, love will prevail in the house."⁴²

10. Prayers (20 units). Almost all the Armenians of Istanbul, including also the Turkish-speaking ones, know the Lord's prayer and other prayers. However, the incantation-like prayers are known not by everyone, but by individuals endowed with supernatural forces. Since these prayers were placed under a taboo and the narrators believed that, upon reciting them aloud, they would be dispossessed of the grace endowed by heaven, it was, therefore, very difficult to find out and to write down the prayers of "The evil eye," "The evil Nazar," "The snakebite," "The child's colic" and others.

A special section in this series is devoted to the prayers addressed to Our Lord Jesus Christ, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to Saint Sarkis, to Hovhan Voskeberan and to the other saints, recited in Armenian, as well as in Turkish, of which the following is an example:

I lay on my right, I turn to my left,
 May the angels witness my religion and belief,
 God is my head, Jesus is my companion,
 He who does evil to anyone
 Will have his mouth locked and his tongue turned to stone.
 Amen.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid.: 495-501.

⁴⁰ Ibid.: 502.

⁴¹ Ibid.: 505.

⁴² Ibid.: 506-507.

⁴³ Ibid.: 514.

These popular creations are, in the sense of genre, delicate entreaties-requests, which implore the Almighty God not so much for material prosperity, but rather for spiritual grace and which are not only personal, but impersonal as well:

Holy Trinity,
Give recovery to the sick
And remission to our sins,
Love and unity to the Armenians
And peace to the world.
Amen.⁴⁴

IV. RITES (3 units). This section comprises the baptismal, nuptial and funeral customary ceremonials of ethnographic character of the past which I have described in detail as far as possible together with the corresponding song citations, while the contemporary rituals, although modernized to a great degree, are always loyal to the faith of Christ and to the traditions of the 1700-year old Armenian Apostolic Church.

During my sojourn in Istanbul I felt that, irrespective of everything, the Armenian community of Turkey is traditionalist. It is traditionally bound to its millennial Mother Church and to the Christian faith and is trying to preserve also its mother tongue.

Thus, under the conditions of the present cultural disintegration of the Armenians in the Diaspora, the above-cited ethnographic fragments I have written down on my own initiative and saved them from a total loss become, owing to their historical-cognitive value, the material evidences of the traditionalistic level of the contemporary Armenians of Istanbul.

Translated from the Armenian by: ***Tigran Tsoulikian***

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⁴⁴ Ibid.