

**THE TRICENTENNIAL GLORY OF THE ARMENIAN KINGDOM OF CILICIA
AND THE SELF-DEFENSIVE BATTLES OF THE ZEYTOUNTSIS
(Historical-Folkloric Review)**

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Following the Armenian Genocide in 1915, the deportation of Cilicia (1921) and the calamity of Izmir (1922), the Armenian-inhabited regions of Western Armenia, Cilicia and Anatolia became completely deserted. A considerable part of the Western Armenians was exterminated, while those, who were miraculously saved, emigrated to the various countries of the world.

After a number of wanderings, many of them were repatriated from Constantinople, Greece, France, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, the Balkan states and other countries to Soviet Armenia and settled in the newly-built localities perpetuating the memory of their former cradles (Nor [New] Arabkir, Nor Zeytoun, Nor Hadjn, Nor Aresh, Cilicia, Moussa Ler, Nor Ayntap, Nor Marash, Yedessia, Sebastia, Malatia, Nor Kharbert, etc.).

By the call of my Western-Armenian blood and starting from the 1955 (in the beginning on my own initiative and subsequently making use of the individual expeditions organized by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia and concurrently with other scientific works) I have written down the oral relics of the spiritual culture of the refugee-repatriates, who were the eyewitnesses of the above-mentioned historical events, these relics had practically not been recorded and studied in Armenia before for various reasons.

We have deliberately endeavored to involve in this study surviving narrators not only from Cilicia, but also from a number of Armenian-inhabited provinces of Western Armenia and Anatolia with a view to giving a rather complete idea about the folklore of the Western Armenians, their emotional world and their meditations.

Though it has not been easy, under the inevitable influence of time and space and under the conditions of the extensive literacy in the Motherland, to find out elderly narrators, bearers of the one-time folkloric traditions and to record from them various materials, nevertheless, we have tried, in every possible way, to preserve the dialectical peculiarities of the given locality and to genuinely present the oral speech of the narrators.

The dialectical materials have been recorded using the approved scientific transcription, taking into account the already decaying and disappearing dialects of Cilicia (Zeytoun, Fendedjak, Hadjn, Moussa Dagħ, Kessab, Marash, Beylan, Ayntap, Deurtyol, Sis, Tarson, Adana, Mersin), as well as the linguistic peculiarities of the Western Armenians of certain regions of Western Armenia (Yedessia [Urfa],

Tigranakert, Bitlis, Erzroom, Van, Kharbert, Kghi, Balou, Malatia, Kayseri, Sebastia, Yozghat, Konia, Afion-Garahissar, Adabazar, Eskishehir, Bursa, Biledjik, Nicomedia, Izmir, Chanak-Kalé, Rodosto, Constantinople).

The genre and thematic diversity of the materials included in this paper is attributed, first of all, to the ups and downs of the public-political and economic life of the Western Armenians, to the constantly changing circumstances (since the important historical events of the past, the diverse impressions of the life and lifestyle of the people could not be merely confined to the limits of certain folkloric types [genres]) and then, also, to our purposeful intention, namely, to put down everything, which is possible to save from a total loss. For that reason, we have classified the materials of practically all types of the traditional folklore of a number of Armenian-inhabited provinces of Cilicia, Western Armenia and Anatolia, and also the narratives of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide.

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Cilicia¹ or “Sissuan – the beautiful bow-shaped land”² extends on the south-eastern part of Asia Minor, separated by natural borders, the Taurus Mountains, in the east by the Black or the Amanos Mountain range, while the blue-violet waters of the Mediterranean Sea ripple in the south.

Cilicia, which has splendid plains and mountainous regions, is irrigated with large and deep rivers, such as the Piramos (Jeihan), Saros (Sihoun), Kyudnos (Tarsus Chay) embellished with waterfalls, Calycadnos (Seleucia), Lamos (Lamas) and others. These rivers, which originate in the Northern Mountains, bring with them fertile mud for the crops, rendering the already rich soils of the Cilician plain more fertile and drop subsequently into the Mediterranean Sea³.

The north-eastern part of Cilicia, Mountainous Cilicia, which was also called “The Throne of Cilicia,” is a mountainous highland with cedar, olive, fir, pine, oak and other verdant forests, fertile pastures and flowery meadows. The fauna is rich with a wide variety of animals (gazelle, fallow deer, roe deer, chamois, panther, bear, hyena, jackal, lynx, wild boar, etc) and birds (stork, bustard, eagle, griffon, owl, falcon, heath-cock, partridge, quail, peafowl, pheasant, starling, etc), as well as various mineral ores (iron, pyrites, lead, silver, limestone, sulfur, vitriol, copper, salt, borax, etc.) and different medicinal waters⁴.

The ancient inhabitants of Cilicia were the tribes and tribal groups of Asia Minor. The Armenians settled in Cilicia as far back as during the reign of Tigran the Great (95-55 B.C.), when the eastern part of the country was joined to Armenia and the Gulf of Issus (now: Alexandrette) was called Armenian Gulf. Later, John Chrysostom reported

¹ According to the ancient legend, the country was called Cilicia by the name of King Agenauros's son, Cilix, who, following his unsuccessful search for his sister, Europe, kidnapped by Zeus, settled there. *See* Mutafian 1988: 71-77.

² Alishan 1883: 59.

³ Keleshian 1949: 9.

⁴ For more details *see* Ter-Ghazarian 1966.

in his letter, written in 404 from his Cilician place of exile, that the village, where he lived, was Armenian-inhabited and that an Armenian prince was the owner of that region. As a consequence of the policy conducted by the Byzantine Empire to force the Armenians to emigrate from Armenia, a great number of Armenians lived in the eastern regions of Cilicia in the first half of the 7th century. It is also known that the town of Sis was rebuilt in 809 and where numerous Armenians moved and settled. Starting from the 10th century, the Armenian population of Cilicia was so dense, that the Armenian Catholicos Khachik I Arsharouni created new bishoprics there⁵.

By forcibly resettling the Armenians in the Minor Asian bordering provinces of its realm, the Byzantine Empire tried not only to create a dependable Christian stronghold against the Mohammedan East, but conducted also a policy of weakening Armenia, of depriving it of its independent state life and of imposing Chalcedonism to the Armenians. Receiving vast territories in those regions, the Armenians created a well-developed economy and supplied the imperial army with efficient and glorified warriors.

The policy of relocating the Armenians took a massive turn particularly in the 11th century, when, by the interference of Byzantium and following the fall of the Armenian Bagratouni Dynasty of Ani and other local dynasties, many princely houses from Vaspourakan, Artsakh, Sassoun, Shirak and other localities of Armenia moved to Cilicia together with their military forces, vassals and tax-payer villagers, evading the massacres and the violences of the Seljuk hordes and established in the towns of Sis, Mamestia, Adana, Tarson and their outskirts. Ruling over vast lands, towns and fortresses, the Armenians gradually controlled also the military, political and economic life of the region.

A number of Armenian principalities existed in the 11th century in Cilicia, of which the most viable and famous was the principality founded in Mountainous Cilicia by Prince Rouben, a relative of Gagik II, the last king of the House of Bagratounis. Forcing out the Byzantines in 1080, Prince Rouben established an independent Armenian state, turning the fortress of Vahka, located on the road from Hadsjn to Sis, the center of the Roubinian state.⁶

The Armenian principality of Cilicia was in constant struggle with its neighbors, the Byzantine Empire, Iconia, the Seljuk Sultanate and the Latin principality of Antioch. During those bloody wars, many regions of the country repeatedly changed hands, however, the Roubinian princes, owing to their flexible policy, were able to make use of the divergences of their enemies and gradually expanded the borders of their principality and, at the end of the 12th century, they ruled over nearly the whole country. The Armenian principality of Cilicia became so powerful and so vast, that in 1198, by the consent of Byzantium and the Crusaders, Cilicia was solemnly proclaimed an independent kingdom in Tarson, and Levon II was nominated King of that Armenian state (1198-1219).

⁵ Sarafian 1953: 4.

⁶ Keleshian 1949: 22.

The contemporaries estimated that important event as a re-establishment of the House of Bagratounis on a new land, in a new country, where an Armenian population of many thousands was concentrated, among which were noblemen, clergymen, military-men, countrymen, artisans and tradesmen.

Subsequently, the flow of Armenians from Great Hayk and other localities to Cilicia grew even larger.

The following fragment of the popular song, which has reached us from generation to generation refers to the resettlement of the Armenians, organized during the reign of King Levon:

*“We set out from the Moosh plain,
King Levon folded his whip,
We were left as foreigners,
Unite, Armenians, unite!”⁷*

In our days, the repatriate-survivors from Cilicia assert, referring to their ancestors that they had emigrated from Ani: *“We are from the town of Ani. Formerly, our Zeytoun was called Oulnia. After the destruction of Ani, our ancestors came and settled there, they built houses and churches. We had in Zeytoun the valley of Ani, the Kars Bridge, the Shoughri Bridge over the Arian (Blood – in Arm.) valley. All those names were from the town of Ani...”⁸*

Armenian Cilicia, during its glorious three-hundred-year statehood (11-14th centuries) was reputed with its well-developed political and economic system, flourishing trade, enlightened centers of science and culture. Basically continuing the feudal traditions and customs of the periods of Arshakouni and Bagratouni Armenia, the public system of Armenian Cilicia bore also, to a certain extent, the influence of the Byzantine and Western-European civilizations.

The propitious climate, the fertile river-valleys and the fecund plains of the country favored the development of agriculture and cattle-breeding in the mountainous grass-rich pastures.

During the reign of Levon the Magnificent, Cilicia had about four hundred towns and fortresses, of which the most famous were the capital Sis (Sison) fortress, also Anarzaba, Vahka, Kapan, Lambron, Levonkla, Bazé, the Bardzr (High) fortress, Anamour, Aryuts, Aregni, Berdous, Enkouzout, etc.⁹

About half of the more than one million population of the country lived in the towns. The largest section of the urban population consisted of small artisans and tradesmen.

⁷ Henceforth, the references to the original texts, which I have inscribed from the Cilician narrators, are made according to the continuous number and page of the following book: Svazlian: № 417, 163.

⁸ The blue-eyed, fair-haired, broad-shouldered 94-year-old survivor with a manly bearing, **Karapet Tozlian**, has communicated us, with the dignity peculiar to the Cilicians, the narratives and songs about the past of Cilicia and especially about the Zeytoun people he had heard from his parents and grandparents. See Svazlian 1994: № 66, 80.

⁹ Keleshian 1949: 10.

The trades of silversmiths, goldsmiths, gunsmiths, spinners, rug-makers, carpet-makers, glass-makers, tailors, masons, blacksmiths, shipbuilders, workers of wood, leather, ferrous and non-ferrous metals were particularly developed.¹⁰

The towns and the ports (Adana, Alaya, Ayas, Anarzaba, Korikos, Mamestia, Sis, Seleucia, Tarson, etc.), being exclusively royal domains, developed under state patronage. During the Roubinian reign, the town of Ayas (Yegias) and Alexandriak (Iskenderoun) performed the role of first-rate ports between the East and the West. Assyrians, Arabs, Jews, Greeks, Persians, Italians and French people lived in the Cilician towns and ports side-by-side with the Armenians and traded under privileged conditions. Armenian Cilicia had close commercial ties with Italy, Crimea, Mother Armenia, Assyria, Egypt, the Sultanate of Iconia and other countries. The Kings of Cilicia concluded numerous trade agreements with the commercial societies and trading-houses of Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Sicily, Marseille and other towns. One of the glorious deeds of the Roubinian house was the minting and circulation of coins with Armenian letters for the first time.¹¹

The important links in the central and local administration of the state were the courts, the Higher Court or Great Darbas, under the chairmanship of the King. With a view to defending the country against foreign enemies and to consolidating its power inside the country, the royal court had created a permanent, regular and efficient army.

The flourishing of the Armenian culture was the result of the unprecedented political and economic rise of Armenian Cilicia. It developed on the basis of the centuries-old Armenian cultural traditions. The royal court patronized and encouraged the cultural enterprises of the Armenian intellectuals. Thus, for instance, Constantine I founded the Seminary of Castamon, Toros I – those of Drazark and Mashkevor, Mleh – that of Mets Kar, Levon II – those of Akner and Gaylu. Toros II was a skilled philologist. Levon III, who was given the title of “Bibliophile,” had elaborated the program and the regulations of the famous Seminary of Akner and organized the job of collecting and copying the selected and rare manuscripts. Levon III was assisted by his wife, Queen Keran. Queen Zabel, the King’s father – Constantine, the Kings Hetoum II and Oshin greatly contributed to the development of the Armenian culture.

The Armenian intellectuals working in the cultural centers of Armenian Cilicia have meticulously collected, studied and copied thousands of manuscripts handwritten in the previous centuries and translated into the Assyrian, Arabic, Latin and Greek languages numerous valuable scientific and literary works. The fundamental principles of the art of writing have been theoretically elaborated and popularized in Cilicia. Many scientific, literary and art creations reflect the elements peculiar to the era of Renaissance.

The leading statesmen and intellectuals of that period, such as Nerses Shnorhali (Nerses the Graceful), Nerses Lambronatsi (Nerses of Lambron), General-in-Chief Smbat, Hovhannes Plouz Yerznkatsi (of Yerznka), Movses Yerznkatsi (of Yerznka) and

¹⁰ Ibid: 15.

¹¹ Ibid: 12.

others, suggested the idea of the general teaching and education of the young generation. For that purpose, a great many schools were opened in the various localities and monasteries of the country, where hundreds of pupils of both sexes studied at the same time. The education was free of charge and accessible. The gifted pupils continued their education in higher specialized schools or seminaries-universities, where they were taught theology, philosophy, logic, jurisprudence, diplomacy, medicine, chemistry, foreign languages, as well as the arts of poetry, painting and music. These subjects were taught by well-known professors appointed by the royal court, scientists, archbishops, doctors in theology, who trained scientists, state and religious high-ranking individuals. The teaching was conducted in the popular colloquial language, in average Cilician Armenian.

Important scientific centers in Armenian Cilicia were Akner, Arkayakaghni, Drazark, Hesvants, Mashkevor, Mets Kar, Mlidj, Jermaghbyour, Skevra, Sis, Tarson and other seminaries in different towns. Among the seminaries of Sev Ler (Black Mountain) those of Aregi, Shapiri, Shooghr, Paghakdziak, Parlahon (God's Paradise), Vardkan, Karasheet were renowned. Of the numerous seminaries of the capital Sis, the secular university founded by Nerses of Lambron was well-known and where famous statesmen and scientists were educated. The celebrated scientists, who lectured there, translated and studied the works of Homer, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Euclid, Theophanes, Pythagoras and others. The Seminary of Drazark was famous for the teaching of languages, for the fine arts of writing, painting and music. The incomparable manuscript illustrator Sarkis Pitsak was educated in that seminary. Maestro Hovsep, fabulist Vardan Aygektsi (of Aygek) and other distinguished personalities lectured there. Mkhitar Gosh perfected his education in one of the seminaries of Sev Ler, while Nerses the Graceful and Grigoris perfected their education in Shoughri. Gevork Meghrik, Grigor Loretsi (of Lori) and other eminent personalities lectured in Parlahon. Professor Hakob and Hovhannes Plouz of Yerznka lectured in Mets Kar, the greatest center of science, arts and writing. Grigor Skevratsi (of Skevr) and Nerses Lambronatsi were educated at the seminary of Skevr. Among the people, who had a good fame in Cilicia were also Mkhitar Heratsi, Abusayid, Grigoris, Simeon, Joslin and many other physicians and illustrious personalities. Bearing in mind this interminable series of prominent representatives appearing in the various spheres of public life, Hovhannes the memorialist has named Cilicia "The country of philosophers and studious people." That was "The Silver Age" of the Armenian culture¹².

Besides the above-cited eminent personalities, a number of secular and ecclesiastical statesmen were engaged also in chronography and historiography. Worthy of mention are Commander-in-chief (Goundstabl) Smbat's "Yearbook" and his masterpiece "Datastanagirk" (Code of Law) (1265), then Mattevos Urhayetsi (of Urha), priest Grigor Kessouni, Samvel Anetsi (of Ani), Vardan Aknertsi (of Akner), monk Maghakia, Nerses Shnorhali (the Graceful), Nerses Lambronatsi and many other

¹² Ibid: 38.

brilliant personalities, who have not only authentically and truthfully described the heroic and admirable tricentennial historical events, but have, with boundless sorrow, deplored the unavailing efforts of our consecutive Armenian Kings against the foreign invaders to preserve the statehood of the one-time glorious Armenian Cilicia founded by King Levon II the Magnificent.

In 1375, the Kingdom of Armenian Cilicia was in decline as a consequence of the invasion of the Mamluks. Subsequently, that territory was invaded by the Ottoman Turkish tribes and, in the middle of the 17th century, the Avshar Gozan oghlu tribe ruled almost arbitrarily.

There is practically no written information about that anarchic period since everything was committed to the flames.

Referring to that period, Grigor H. Galoustian quoted what he had heard from Prof. Y. G. Chakmakjian: "It is told, by tradition, that the Armenians living in the towns of Sis, Adana, Tarson, Ayntap and the neighboring suburbs belonging to Cilicia were subjected to more atrocities than in the other localities." After the fall of the Roubinian dynasty, the Turks had completed the destructive work that the Arabs had left unfinished, had massacred the people, had wrecked to the ground villages and boroughs, they had demolished churches, monasteries and seminaries and had sometimes appropriated them; this last fact is testified by the "Yaz-Jamisi" mosque in Adana and "Kilisse-Jamisi" mosque in Tarson, which are erect up to the present day. These are churches remaining from the days of the Roubinian Dynasty. The old Armenian inscription on the gable of the mosque in Tarson, testifying that it had been constructed in the days of King Oshin, remained undamaged till 1905, which I have seen with my own eyes."¹³

During that period, the condition of the Armenians of Cilicia was so distressing and humiliating, that they were compelled, in their daily life, to wear black or dark-colored garments, since those, who wore red or green, were killed. Women and girls did not come out of their houses in daytime for fear of being abducted. The adolescent males avoided wandering about freely for fear of being killed or forcibly turkified. For that very reason the young boys came out of the house dressed in rags and soot-stained faces. The Armenian peasant could not keep body and soul together, if he did not pin his hopes on the Turk bey's patronage and "did not become his gâvur, as a slave or serf. When dissatisfied with any Armenian found under his ownership, a bey enjoyed the state privilege to kill him any day and in any manner he liked... Beys opposed to each other, urged one another to kill their gâvur as a revenge. In those cases, the Armenians were in great fear lest their beys entered into an argument or started a fight, since in both cases the Armenian was always the aggrieved party. There was legal action and judgment for a killed sheep, but there was neither legal action nor judgment for sacrificed Armenians. The Armenians' testimony was already not acceptable in the law-courts..."¹⁴

¹³ Galoustian 1934: 697.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Referring to the Turkish speech of the Armenians of the above-mentioned regions, the witness continues: "In order to educate the young Armenian generation, not only the Armenian schools were prohibited, but those who uttered an Armenian word had their tongues cut, consequently the Armenians living in the above-cited towns (Sis, Adana, Tarson, Ayntap and their environs – V. S.) had lost their mother tongue and had become Turkish-speaking."¹⁵

Alluding to the condition of the Armenian population of Ayntap of that period, G. Sarafian has noted: "The oppression and the persecutions of the Armenians by the Turks were so severe, that Armenian-speaking Ayntap became Turkish-speaking like the other Armenian-inhabited main towns of Asia Minor. And the last sharp and terrible blow to the Armenian speech of Ayntap came from the Yenicheris (Janissaries), who cut the tongues of those speaking Armenian. Those, who were forcibly turkified, took away with them their Armenian words and expressions and the Armenian customs."¹⁶

And to substantiate his statement he has quoted trustworthy arguments: "The anthropological data of the Ayntap Turks are very similar to those of the Armenians. The Ayntap Turks observe the customs and traditions of their ancestors, the Armenian Christians, they do not approve polygamy, they are attached to their ancestors' traditions, to their native beliefs, they attend the Armenian churches, the "-ian" and "-ents" Armenian endings in their family names persist along with the Turkish "-oghlu" or "-ollu," as, for instance, Pilavents oghlu Sarkis or Odzakhotan (Odzikhaytian) oghlu, etc. As it is evident, the 1800s became a transition period for the Armenian speech of Ayntap to be converted into the Turkish."¹⁷

This fact is confirmed also by the Turkish-language folkloric materials we have written down from the surviving repatriates originally from the above-enumerated Armenian-inhabited localities of Cilicia.

However, the public-economic conditions of the Armenians of the mountainous regions of Cilicia had been different.

Referring to the Armenians of the mountainous regions of Cilicia, Doct. H. Ter-Ghazarian has noted: "Following the fall of the Kingdom of Armenian Cilicia, the Armenian peasantry living in the flat plains, who were driven away by the persecutions of the invading hordes from the plains of Cilicia, have nestled in the impregnable positions of forests and in the inaccessible crevices of valleys to avoid persecutions. Zeytoun, Hadjn, Vahka, Kapan, Androun and the environs are inhabited by Armenian peasants and have had their special dialects, their monasteries and their places of worship. Motivated by their internal free instinct to lead an untroubled life, they have chosen those isolated places at least to maintain their semi-independent existence."¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid: 698.

¹⁶ Sarafian 1953: 5.

¹⁷ Ibid: 7.

¹⁸ Ter-Ghazarian 1966: 65.

The numerous folkloric materials we have recorded in the various dialects of Cilicia (Zeytoun, Hadjn, Marash, Moussa Dagħ, Kessab, Beylan and others) are a testimony to that fact.

There are a number of factual historical narratives in the materials we have written down, where it is told in popular interpretation how the Zeytounis did not tolerate the oppression of tyrants, such as Gozan oghlu. *“At one time, Khozan oghlu (Gozan oghli – V. S.) was like a king in Cilicia. Mount Nemrut, Gâvur Dagħ, the Armenian Tavros were all under his thumb. He came with his musclemen to collect taxes from every Armenian village. The Armenians used to ask Khozan oghlu every year: “Master, shall we bring the butter melted or not melted?”*

Khozan oghlu used to answer: “You, gâvurs, melt it and then bring it to me!”

Things went on in this manner for some time, but since our Zeytouni people are a little inflexible they do not like a commander above them. And one day they decided together and said: “If Khozan oghlu comes this year, we won’t give him anything.”

Khozan oghlu came with his musclemen and saw that the Armenians did not want to give him anything, on the contrary, they were ready to fight. So he became furious. And thus the enmity between the Armenians and the Turks started. That is why we thought of making arms in order not to lose our honor.”¹⁹

As a consequence of all these events, Sultan Murad issued a special decree on the 17th of February 1618 granting Zeytoun the status of a “privileged region,” according to which Zeytoun would be exempt from the poll-tax paid to the imperial treasury. The decree stipulated: “No Turkish official should enter the province of Zeytoun and no harm should be caused to the exceptional and autonomic status that I have granted the people of that province to govern themselves without any external intervention.”²⁰

Remaining dignifiedly faithful to that decree and taking advantage of their favorable natural geographical conditions, the Zeytounis have, in the lap of impregnable mountains and valleys and away from busy road, led a semi-independent life for a long time, a fact which the pashas of Marash and the neighboring Mohammedan tribal chiefs did not tolerate and tried periodically to abolish the semi-independent status of Zeytoun.

In 1780, Eumer pasha of Marash came with a large army and besieged Zeytoun during seven months. A valiant young man named Hakop found a resourceful way to kill him, while the army, defeated by the brave Zeytounis, fled in terror²¹. That historical event, bequeathed from generation to generation, has reached us as a historical narrative entitled *“Kotosh-Motosh Hakob”*.²²

In 1819, the Zeytounis unleashed a furious counterattack on Chapan oghlu’s²³ gang of robbers. The following fragment of the Turkish-language epic song refers to that heroic event:

¹⁹ Svazlian 1994: № 75, 84.

²⁰ Lazian 1946: 99.

²¹ Keleshian 1949: 686.

²² Svazlian 1994: № 76, 84.

²³ Keleshian 1949: 687.

*“The Ottoman rifles fired “chat-pat,”
The rifles of the Zeytounis ignored them all,
The soldiers of Chapan were all shot and fell down,
Chapan oghlu, give up your dream of conquering Zeytoun!”²⁴*

Subsequently, in 1847, Topal (Lame) Sado attacked Zeytoun with his army of many thousands reinforced by two thousand Albanian volunteers.²⁵ The Zeytounis united and delivered them also a heavy blow; only twenty-four men from the enemy’s army were able to run away:

*“Topal Sado came to our Zeytoun,
And coveted our twelve-year-old maids,
We aimed our guns on our knees,
And Sado bek was killed on the spot.”²⁶*

The Zeytounis were always ready to counterattack the enemy in order to preserve their lives and to uphold their honor. *“That is why,”* continued our narrator from Zeytoun, **Karapet Tozlian**, *“we did not think about playing and dancing, we thought about making guns and gunpowder from the iron and pyrite ores of our mountains in order not to lose our honor. That is why every time a boy was born in our town, we used to say: ‘A new gun-holder will swell our ranks. Our Zeytounis are valiant, courageous people’.”²⁷*

The Zeytouni mothers also educated their children to be courageous and fearless by singing lullabies such as:

*“My son will soon become a brave,
And will bring down the enemy’s soldiers,
The rifle with a silver ring on his shoulder,
He will fight selflessly for his native land.”²⁸*

To the Cilicians educated with consciousness of the human rights and with the spirit of dignity and magnanimity the yoke of violence of the foreigner was, undoubtedly, incoherent, which, accumulating, would erupt like a volcano as the rebellion of Zeytoun in 1862.²⁹

The Zeytounis had divided their armed forces composed of seven thousand people into four detachments under the command of the four princes of Zeytoun, Nazaret Sourenian, Mkrtich Yaghoubian, Assatour Yenidounian (Norashkharian) and Hazor (Ghazar) Shovroyan.

With their heroic fight, they defeated the enemy’s army of many thousands, composing the following humorous song:

“Aziz pasha came and set the cannon,

²⁴ Svazlian 1994: № 397, 154.

²⁵ Keleshian 1949: 687.

²⁶ Svazlian 1994: № 397, 155.

²⁷ Ibid: № 78, 87.

²⁸ Ibid: № 147, 117.

²⁹ Keleshian 1949: 687.

*He threw a hundred shells and killed a donkey,
Tashchian shot the gunner and knocked him down,
The pasha, terrified, sh...t in his pants!”³⁰*

Besides cannoneer Tashchian, many others displayed their bravery in this heroic battle, for instance, the twenty-one-year-old Melikset Kasseмян. He was seriously wounded by the enemy, but with his abdomen torn and his intestines falling out, he continued to fight and, dragging himself with difficulty, he crawled and reached the height of Saint Prkitch, where his relatives found him, took him to the hospital, and he was saved. Learning about this astounding event, Mkrtych Peshiktashlian was deeply inspired and wrote the poem “The Dying Dare-Devil.” Perpetuating the memory of the Zeytounis, that same historical event has reached us as “a real happening” and is told as the authentic historical narrative “The Brave Zeytouni.”³¹

In the unequal battle of Chakerderé gorge the Zeytounis were able to drive out Aziz pasha’s regular army of fifteen thousand men and as many irregular army (bashi-bazouk – in Turk.) of the neighboring tribal chiefs till the River Jahan, throwing them out of the borders of the province.

The following fragment of the epopee also relates about that heroic battle of Zeytoun:

*“In eighteen sixty-two,
On August two by the Roman calendar,
We killed the Circassians on forty bridges,
The corpses decayed before the vultures devoured them.”³²*

Aziz pasha was replaced by Ashir pasha and by others, who were all instructed to punish the rebellious Zeytounis, however, they too were not successful in repressing the heroes of Zeytoun.

The rebellion of Zeytoun was the first revolt against the Turkish tyranny. It has given the hope of struggle not only to the Armenians of Zeytoun and Cilicia, but also to the progressive intellectuals of the time, to Mikael Nalbandian, Haroutyun Svadjian, Mkrtych Peshiktashlian and to all those, who saw the solution of the Armenian Question in the armed rebellion of the popular masses.

Subsequently, the French government interceded in the matter with its “peaceful” mission, which aimed at making use of the national liberation movements of the peoples languishing under the Turkish tyranny for its diplomatic interests and “the Problem of Zeytoun” was ostensibly “solved in peace.”

Some time later, in 1865, Turkish barracks and a mosque were built in Zeytoun, a Turkish prefect was nominated together with his new officials, who brought with them two hundred and fifty Circassian mercenaries under the leadership of a commander. They were housed in the newly-built barracks, which was also the governmental office

³⁰ Svazlian 1994: № 78, 86.

³¹ Ibid: № 79, 87.

³² Ibid: № 397, 155.

and started to collect taxes from the Zeytounis, to plunder their possessions and to harass the women and the girls.

At that time, the spiritual leader of Fernouz was Bishop Nikoghayos Khorkhorouni, who was a very courageous clergyman and who always carried a dagger on one side and a revolver on the other. Once, when he was celebrating Mass, he was informed that the Turks had stolen the village herds of cattle. The bishop left the divine service unfinished, saying: *"I'll go and bring the herds of cattle and then I'll continue the Mass..."*³³

Unable to tolerate the violences of the prefect Tavout Niazi, the Zeytounis decided, in 1875, to resort to self-defense. Filled with indignation, they burnt the government building and the mosque and requested the Prince Papik Norashkharian, renowned for his exploits and titled "Pasha" by the people, to lead their rebellion.³⁴ Prince Papik welcomed the suggestion and, as a call to military service, ordered to beat the sacred drum of Zeytoun, which had been blessed by bishop Sarkis of Cilicia.

Three hundred Armenian braves gathered at once around Prince Papik and rushed, under his command, to square accounts with the parasitic and cruel tax-collectors, the Derebey Circassians. Encouraging his brave soldiers, Prince Papik boldly declared:

*"Prince Papik announced. - I do not take anybody into account,
I will not obey the notables of Aleppo,
If a hundred thousand soldiers come, I won't move from my place,
You cannot capture Zeytoun, Pasha, go back!"*³⁵

The Turkish government concentrated new military forces intending to suppress the protracted rebellion of the Zeytounis, but the latter continued to struggle fiercely. Categorically refusing to pay taxes, they expelled from the town the Turk prefect and the policemen nominated from Aleppo and proclaimed themselves independent:

*"Wasn't the Zeytouni who killed five thousand Circassians?
Our nation shall not leave you this land;
Is it possible
That the son strikes his father?"*³⁶

The resistance commanded by Prince Papik continued till the end of the Russian-Turkish war, when the Sublime Porte was compelled to start negotiations with Prince Papik recognizing him as the Mayor of Zeytoun. Eventually, as a result of a compromise, Zeytoun calmed down.

Russia's victory and the results of the war in the Russian-Turkish armed conflict provoked dissatisfaction in the governing circles of the Western-European states, particularly of Great Britain, Germany and Austria-Hungary. The latter demanded to reconsider the Treaty concluded in San Stefano after the war in 1878. And in the Berlin

³³ Ibid: № 103, 104.

³⁴ Keleshian 1949: 687.

³⁵ Svazlian 1994: № 397, 155.

³⁶ Ibid.

Congress held in the same year, the obscure 61st clause was passed under their pressure, according to which the Sublime Porte committed itself to realize, without delay, the improvements and reforms arising from the local needs in the Armenian-inhabited provinces and to ensure the safety of the Armenians from the Circassians and the Kurds.

Along with these public-political events, the educational life of the Armenians of Cilicia having great cultural traditions was also gradually becoming more active after its centuries-old idleness.

The seminaries functioning almost secretly next to the monasteries in the various provinces of Cilicia were, after the example of Constantinople, gradually replaced by preparatory schools named "Tsaghkots," which were later changed into schools with their special "Boards of Trustees." The latter, entering in competition with the preaching and illuminative activity propagated by the missionaries established in Cilicia, gave a new impetus to the cultural life of the local Armenians. The first Armenian regular educational institution, the National Nersissian School, was founded in Ayntap as early as 1856, and in 1858 the nighttime Tangaran-School Society was founded, which was later renamed Ousoumnassirats-Tangaran Society. The first public library of Ayntap was founded in 1862, which, after being enriched with books donated from Jerusalem, became a model national educational institution under the name of Vardanian Library. With the object of founding a school in Hadjn the Vardanian Society was established on the 1st of September, 1874, by the Noubarian-Shahnazarian Alumni, which, subsequently, in 1878, choosing the whole of Cilicia as a field of activity, became the Cilician Patriotic Society and established kindergardens, preparatory and secondary schools in Hadjn, Ayntap, Marash and elsewhere. Worthy of special mention are the cultural centers Athens of Cilicia of Ayntap, the American Higher College for Girls, the Vardanian and Atenakan Colleges, the Cilician Seminary, the Central College of Turkey and other educational institutions, the graduates of which were sending spiritual light to the Armenians of Moussa Dagh, Kessab, Kilis and other towns and boroughs of Cilicia by providing them with teachers, women-teachers, priests and preachers.³⁷

Under the conditions of such a cultural renaissance, the mass massacre of the Armenians, organized by the Sultanic government in the years 1894-1896 was quite unexpected, the object of which was to suppress the national progress and the liberation movements and to put an end to the Armenian Question.

Still in 1894, the regular Turkish army and the Hamidié regiments had squared brutal accounts with the Sassounis, when the latter offered a heroic resistance in besieged Sassoun. Seeing those atrocities, the great European powers, England, France and Russia had elaborated in May 1895 a new project of "Armenian Reforms" and had handed it to the Sultan. However, the "Red" Sultan Abdul Hamid had not only disregarded it, but, in September 1895, when the Hunchaks had organized a peaceful demonstration in the Bab Ali Square of Constantinople, he had drowned that

³⁷ For more details see Galoustian 1934: 427, and Sarafian 1953: 651-670.

demonstration in blood, causing two thousand Armenian victims. Moreover, mass massacres of the Armenians had started in that same month in Trapizon, Babert, Derjan, Yerznka, Bitlis, Charsandjak, Kghi, Baghesh, Gyomoushkané, Erzroom, Malatia, Kharbert, Akn, Diarbekir, Marzvan, Sebastia, Zili, Urfa and elsewhere. The massacres were accomplished with the help of the regular military units and the Hamidié regiments by the cruelest and the most inhuman methods.

Seeing that their turn would soon arrive, the Zeytounis rallied around their four princes, raised, once again, the banner of rebellion under the leadership of the 75-year-old **Hazor (Ghazar) Shovroyan** and the Hunchak public figure Mr. Aghassi Tour-Sargssian, who had come from England.

*“Norashkharian, Shovroyan
Sourenian and Yaghoubian
United all four
And fought against the Turks.”³⁸*

They besieged the governmental building, the military barracks of Zeytoun, where six hundred Turkish soldiers were under training, they cut off the water supply of the barracks coming from the foot of Berznka Mountain, they disarmed the local garrison, they seized the ammunition and the food supplies and got ready to withstand the new Turkish regiments rushing to Zeytoun.

*“We fought near Berdiz Chay,
We came and captured the barracks
And took the askyars prisoner,
We hoisted our flag.”³⁹*

Sultan Hamid flew into a rage and ordered: “You must annihilate that mountain and burn it to ashes!” He ordered to attack Zeytoun from several directions with an army commanded by Ramzi pasha and composed of the Turkish regiments of Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut and Adana (about sixty companies), but again the campaign ended without success.

Subsequently, Ali bey attacked the village of Fernouz, near Zeytoun, with an army of thirty thousand men. The villagers of Fernouz withstood also the attack with a small number of fighters during three days causing heavy losses to the enemy.

Ultimately, Ramzi pasha’s army, recruited and completed with the regiments of Constantinople, Izmir, Konia, Sebastia and Kayseri, waged an attack upon one thousand five hundred Armenians who had taken up positions and had installed batteries at the foot of Sandukh Mountain:⁴⁰

*“The pasha heard and flew into a rage,
He came to Jermuk and pitched tents there,
He fought a battle at the foot of Sandukh,*

³⁸ Svazlian 1994: № 399, 156.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Keleshian 1949: p. 688.

*He disgraced himself and ran away.*⁴¹

During these battles, the Very Reverend Doctor Bardughimeos of Fernouz distinguished himself with his heroism and, armed to the teeth, he not only fought bravely, but he also encouraged the unarmed villagers with his example:⁴²

*“Reverend Bardughimeos
Moved forward, did not stay behind,
The rifle on his shoulder, the sword at his waist,
He was a skilled fighter.”*⁴³

The more was the number of enemy soldiers, the more was the indignation of the villagers:

*“The psalm-readers took up rifles,
The priests took up adzes,
The women took up pitchforks
And sent the Pasha’s corpse sprawling!”*⁴⁴

A handful of Zeytounis fought heroically during more than two months against the Turkish army of many thousands. They suffered a lot of privations, but they did not bow down to the enemy:

*“The enemy came, Zeytounis!
Take up your gun, ride your horse!
Stand as heroes before the Turks
And kill the black soldiers!*

*Let us be heroes, Zeytounis!
We have to take vengeance on the Turks
In return for our mothers’ sacred milk,
Let us squeeze handfuls of blood!”*⁴⁵

In the history of Zeytoun, from 1780 till October 20, 1895, forty-one clashes and sixteen incidents were recorded,⁴⁶ however, that last formidable battle, which was fought against the Sultanic government, was Zeytoun’s victory.

In 1895, at the end of December, Zeytoun was calmed down as a result of the intervention of the consuls of six European states and compromises and was saved from the Hamidian massacres like the freedom-loving and heroic Moussadaghians, whereas about three hundred thousand Armenians fell victim to the Turkish yataghan in the Armenian-inhabited provinces of Western Armenia and Anatolia.

⁴¹ Svazlian 1994: № 399, 156.

⁴² Keleshian 1949: 688.

⁴³ Svazlian 1994: № 399, 156.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid: № 396, 154.

⁴⁶ Lazian 1946: 99.

The years following the Hamidian massacres were characterized by a general depression. The Armenian population of the demolished towns and villages began, self-absorbed in their sorrow, to restore silently the ravages, spreading enlightenment through the schools and relying on their faith through the churches. In those years, numerous foreign philanthropist-benefactors from the various corners of the world hurried to lend a helping hand to Cilicia and founded American, British and German educational institutions and orphanages. From 1895 till the First World War, these Armenian and foreign scholastic institutions greatly contributed to the job of the education of the new generation.

In conclusion, we should note that the precise and trustworthy relics of the popular oral tradition we had written down and cited in our present report clearly define and substantiate the erstwhile radiant historic events and personalities of the tercentennial Cilician Armenian Kingdom, as well as the cruel afflictions fallen subsequently to its lot, and the real pictures of the heroic struggles starting from King Levon II the Magnificent till the courageous rebellion and the self-defensive battles of the Zeytountsis in 1862.

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