

ABOUT THIS BOOK

(History of GURUN)

This is an attempt to give the future historian the bases or the raw material which he might make use of when preparing his studies on the characteristics of the folklore, customs and norms of GURUN and its surroundings.

In the compilation of the present volume we have referred to various sources, taken into consideration the latest theories formulated by authoritative and highly reputed historians of American, British, French, German, Russian and Armenian nationalities, like Frederch Bayern, J. de Morgan, E. Forrer, Nicholas Marr, C.F. Lehmann-Haupt, S. D. Erémian, Nicolas Adontz, Manandian, and others. First-hand reports, letters, statistics and other valuable documents originating from Gurun were also studied to give a clear picture of the everyday life that was lived there, and their desperate cries which fell on deaf ears.

All of these now belong to the past.

Despite all the miseries and misfortunes, our Compatriots have achieved posts of high renown. Working by night and studying by day, these sons of Gurun have become famous physicians, surgeons, engineers, opera singers, writers, have established commercial empires, and the once ragged orphans with a gloomy future, now are the employers of their executioners.

In the few pages that follow, we have tried to stress the message of this resurrection to our English speaking generation.



In the Third Millennium, B.C., during what the historians would call the Bronze Age, there have been many city-states scattered all over the eastern part of Asia Minor, extending from northern Mesopotamia to the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea.

The most important of these states were those of Hatti ((Hittites), Muski, Gimirri, (Cimmerians), Tégarama, Hayassa-Azzi, Isuwa, Also, Urartu, Supri (Supria) Mitanni, and a host of other ethnic groups. The multitude of these groups eventually formed the basic ingredients of the Armenian people.

During the course of the centuries that followed, one kingdom rose

against the other, the rest of the neighbouring chieftains took sides with one or the other, according to the existing situation, so that a constant state of warfare perpetuated.

At one time King Sargon of Assyria took up a punitive campaign against the state of TIL-GARIMMU, or, according to Hittite monuments, the state of TEGARAMA, known during the Ptolemaic era as GAURENA, or the present-day GURUN.*

But this expedition failed due to the death of Sargon, in 705 B.C.

Ten years later, in 695 Sennacherib sent one of his generals against King GURDI of Til-Garimmu (Tegarama = Gurun). King Gurdi was prudent enough not to face the superior Assyrian forces. Til-Garimmu was occupied for a short period, but due to the fact that it was very difficult to keep this country in servitude, they only ravaged it and returned. Thus Til-Garimmu was still able to maintain her independence.



Til-Garimmu actually formed the territory of Armenia Minor, the first cradle of the Armenian element west of the Euphrates. They later crossed it and transformed Urartu into Greater Armenia. It could be assumed, therefore, that the inhabitants of Til-Garimmu were basically Armenians.

The kingdom of Tégarama was not so ephemeral as could be thought of. The Bible has honoured it by inserting its name in the eponym of peoples enumerated in Chapter 10 of the Genesis. At present the masculine personal name Torgom is still used. There are further notions in Ezekiel Chapter 27; 14.

It is not difficult to recognize the countries or the peoples represented by the above eponyms: — Gomer (Gamer) is Gimirri or the Cimmerians in Cappadocia (Armenian Gamirk); — Magog (land of the Gog) Gyges of Lydia; — Madai is Media, south of the Caspian Sea, corresponding to north-west of Persia; — Javan (Iovan) is Ionia; — Thobel is Tabal, a part of Cilicia south-west of Tegarama; — Meshech is Muski or Phrygia; — Tiras (Theiras), perhaps Thrax, Thrace.

The sons of Gomer (Gamer) were Ascenaz (Iskuzi or Iskunzi), the Scythians; — Togarmah (Thergama or rather Thegarma) is actually Tegarama or Til-Garimmu (Gurun), Armenia Minor; — Riphath, perhaps Arpad, is Rfad north of Aleppo.



In Gurun, near the Shughul quarter in a narrow pass there still stands a huge rock, on which there are inscriptions, presumably in Hittite language — the only living witness of the glorious past of historic Til-Garimmu.



The mass movement of these ethnic groups towards east marked the beginning of the decline of Urartu, north of Lake Van, and the emergence of a new people — the Armenians. Almost at the same time

*These four names are used interchangeably.

the frequency of appearance of Til-Garimmu on the stage of history started to ebb, Needless to say that during the following centuries Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and many other cultures have crossed Gurun back and forth. Many civilized and barbatic tribes and peoples have passed and gone. So much so that the Armenian physiognomy had almost vanished from that area.



There are good reasons to believe that as early as the 6th Century (A.D.), there has been an Armenian community in Gurun. This period coincides with the Arab expansion, and their penetration into Armenia through the south-east. The situation was later aggravated by the Seljuk and Tartar invasions from the far east. However, it is not known exactly from where did the Armenian population pour into Gurun. But one thing is known that any political turmoil or imbalance in the east (Greater Armenia) had its repercussions in the west (Armenia Minor). Attempts have been made to clarify or pin down the location of these emigrations. yet there is no proof whatsoever to substantiate any theory with documentary evidence. But it is clear that from the early 7th Century A.D. there has been a deeply-rooted family system whose economy depended mainly on agriculture and cattlebreeding. The proverbs, sayings and other cultural similarities tend to give us the hint that there had been migrations of families to Gurun from as far east as Gharabagh, an East-Armenian territory.

In later years, excavations have been carried out by individual adventurers, who have brought to light old bridges, aqueducts, tombs, graves and other inscriptions on rocks, as well as spear heads, various sorts of arms and human skeletons with some parts missing. This has given some notion to the fact that periods of peaceful life and dreadful wars have followed each other. Archeologists of American, British, Swedish, German and other European nationalities have come to Gurun, taken the prints of these age-old carvings in Hittite and Greek languages, but it is not known whether or not these have been translated.



First-hand reports, letters, and other valuable documents pertaining to Gurun have been preserved after 1800. Furthermore, travellers passing through Gurun prior to that date, have published the account of their journeys. As such, fairly reliable sources of information and statistics have reached us. We could know the number of population, their habits, customs and occupation, number of churches and schools, their folklore and culture in general, as well as the insupportable life under the constant plundering feet of the Turks. In fact not only in Gurun, but all over Asia Minor the Armenian population was always in danger. Pillaging, wanton destruction, extortion, kidnapping and murder were part of everyday life. The sharpness of an axe was tried on an Armenian neck. The court would not punish the guilty Turk, on the contrary, it would reprimand or advise the Armenian not to «provoke» him any more.

It might seem unbelievable or imaginary, but truly such was the situation until 1914.



Before Gurun was deprived of its Armenian population, it was practically the centre of shawl weaving industry. It was famous for its top quality products. The artisans working on the looms were so ingenious that no competitor outside Gurun would dare challenge their handicraft. The most beautiful designs came out of Gurun. Moreover, all innovations were featured by Gurunians, so much so, that the first mechanized loom in the area was introduced by a dauntless and imaginative Armenian entrepreneur named Sarkis Minassian, who brought it from Manchester, as well as a weaving «Jagoire» machine from Paris.

The raw material, wool, was partly produced locally, and the rest was imported from Kurdish shepherds in Syria.

According to the report of the year 1911 by the French vice-Consul in Sivas, the yearly textile production on the export market was estimated at \$600,000.

There were several kinds of shawls. The most famous were the «Bademy», «Gogozuk», «Lafory or Lahory», «Chubukhlu», «Ajemy» and «that of the Sage Uncle». This latter was a very famous weaver, a genius, who would produce shawls with his special trade mark.

Next to the weaving industry, the most important economic activity was trade. Merchants of Gurun were criss-crossing the whole territory of Asia Minor. All sorts of goods (shawls, cloths, dried fruits) were taken to big cities within a radius of 1000 miles. To stress this aspect people would jokingly add that «...a lame Gurunian trader has reached China». They had established big commercial firms in Constantinople, Izmir, Trabzon, Erzerum, Aleppo, and had trade relations with European countries. Armenian daily newspapers in Constantinople and Izmir published advertisements for the promotion of Gurunian products.

Since the economy was not self-sufficient, industrialization was the only way out. However, until the introduction of the relatively modern weaving machines, demand was far exceeding supply.

After the Armenians were massacred and forced to exile, the Turks had broken these machines into pieces and sold them here and there.

Today, in the Sivas museum, one can still see examples of «Shawls of Gurun», as last remnants of a lost profession.



Family life in Gurun was strictly conservative, but never tyrannical. Nomatter how large the number, all the members of the family used to live in the same house — children, grand-children, grand-grand-children and all. Needless to say, that all traditional customs and norms were strictly adhered to. Although the head of the family was the final authority in the house, yet other members too would take active part in the administration of the family economy. In certain instances, after the death of the father, it was not unusual to pass the financial management of the house to the third son, while his elder brothers would busy

themselves with other activities. Women were also invited to participate in debates on important family affairs.

Parents would carefully choose the bride for their son from among the young girls in the neighbourhood. They would take into consideration the reputation of her parents and herself, her education, her ability to do housework and other related matters. Sometimes they would give their consent to the young man's selection, and start establishing contacts with the girl's parents in elaborate and round-about ways.

The divorce rate was nil.



Gurun is situated in a long valley, with high peaks and caves all around. It is usually agreed that before the year 1914, the population did not exceed the limit of 15,000 with a 2/3 majority of Armenians. In residential quarters the houses were surrounded by orchards of sizeable area, which supplied the household with all the fruits needed. The surplus was dried and exported to other towns. The most abundant and famous were the apple, the apricot, the mulberry, the cherry etc. Various sorts of marmalades and jams were prepared and stored for consumption during the long months of winter.

Some of the populous Armenian quarters were Shughul, Eoren, Jakh-Jor, Khasbagh and others, each of which had a parish church with an organized Diocese, headed by the Bishop of the Mother Church situated in the Market area. There were also Ferman and Terjan quarters, named after the inhabitants who were composed exclusively of Fermanian or Terjanian families. In certain areas, like Ashur quarter, the Turks were dominant in number.

Besides the Orthodox Gregorians, there were also Catholic and Protestant Churches. Each of these three communities had its own schools adjacent to its churches. Special schools were established also for girls.



Came the year 1914. The Turkish government entered into the war alongside their allies, the Germans. The unique opportunity was now at hand to satisfy their hatred against the Armenians, and «solve the Armenian Question once and for all».

The top secret plan was then executed.

All the men between the ages 18-60 were recruited for military service, but only as «Labour Detachments». They were sent out to open roads and dig ditches only to be used as their graves.

On the infamous day of 24 April 1915 the Armenian elite — writers, journalists, priests, Members of the Parliament — all over Asia Minor was arrested at the same time, and within a short time they were sent to their doom. Almost all of them were killed in cold blood and were left in the open air to decay.

This operation was successfully completed and the exodus of the rest started, which was composed of women, children and the old.

Their misery and suffering was beyond any imagination and belief,

and could not be explained in words. Volumes have been written by American, British, French, German and other eye-witnesses, and pictures were taken to prove to the world that only the Turks could carry out such atrocities.

The same procedure was followed in Gurun. Those who preferred not to die as easily, took arms and sought refuge in the highlands. Unfortunately they were much too few against superior forces, and had all the disadvantages to overcome.

So that, out of the approximately 10,000 Armenians of Gurun, less than 2000 only could survive this Calvary, a typical Turkish trade mark, which stands unique in the history of mankind.

Today, after almost 60 years, the once flourishing and prosperous Gurun has become a lost village. Visitors in 1972 describe that all the houses, churches and schools have been destroyed. Themselves born in Gurun, they could only see traces of their ruined houses, unable to specify correctly which of the two had been their birth-place. The Mother Church was successively used as prison, stable, warehouse, and is now being used as a cinema.



Outside their homeland, the Gurunians are now scattered all over the five continents. A sizeable number of them now live in the United States, Argentina, Uruguay, France, Greece, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. In Turkey there are only a few who, like all other Christian minorities, are under constant and heavy pressure from the Turkish government attempting to dissolve them all.

Shortly after their settlement in these hospitable countries, the Gurunians came together and founded Compatriotic Unions to encourage one another, help alleviate the burden of the poor, pay the tuition fees for the needy school children, support them through higher educational institutions. And from that wretched multitude of 2000 shipwrecked Gurunians came an army of scholars, doctors, engineers, artists, painters, singers, poets, writers, businessmen and artisans.

We can truly be proud of these achievements, and look forward to seeing all of us united under one roof of the Fatherland.

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