

GOGHTAN DISTRICT

HOVHANNES
HAKHNAZARIAN

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The book presents the memoirs of Hovhannes Hakhnazarian, a survivor of the massacre of the Armenians perpetrated by the Turks in his native town, Agulis, Goghtan District (Nakhijevan), in December 1919. He provides a brief history of the district, particularly reporting details relating to this slaughter.

Hovhannes Hakhnazarian's work is especially important for the study of the history of the extermination of Nakhijevan Armenians by the Turks and Azerbaijanians between 1918 and 1920.

A FEW WORDS

For many times, I have had the chance of enjoying the sight of the mountains of Goghtan District, towering aloft in serene magnificence, with their summits shrouded in mist, from the southern bank of the river Arax. Hiding myself in the gorges or on the mountain slopes, I could see Agulis, Tseghna, Bist, Ramis and Paraka from afar with their gardens, nostalgia for my paternal house rending my heart to pieces: I was so close to it, but at the same time, it was something unreachable and distant for me.

My father, who had a miraculous escape from the massacres of Goghtan between 1919 and 1920, fought in Garegin Nzhdeh's army for the liberation of his homeland when still a young boy.

Stripped of his home, native land and dear ones, he went through an unspeakable mental torture which he suffered with dignity. In the meantime, he found enough moral strength to build a new life, dedicating himself to the culture and education of the Armenian nation. These memoirs represent the fulfillment of the very last moral duty he had set before himself.

Nowadays Armenia is living through a period of self-cognition and independence that came to follow the 70 years of slavery under the Soviet rule.

The present book of memoirs, which is entitled *Goghtan District*, casts light on one of the dark periods of the history of the Armenian nation.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all those people who assisted me in the accomplishment of this work. Particularly cordial thanks are due to literary critic Andranik Sarian, who willingly assumed the proof-reading of the Armenian original of this work.

Armen Hakhnazarian

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hovhannes Hakhnazarian was born in Agulis Township of the historical Armenian district of Goghtan in 1900. He received primary education at the local school, after which he entered Gevorgian Seminary of Echmiatzin, where he studied from 1912 until 1918 (his father Martiros Hakhnazarian, a graduate of the same Alma Mater, worked as a Senior Inspector there).

Between 24 and 25 December 1919, the Tatar bandits put their centuries-old neighbours, the Armenians of Agulis, to unspeakable carnage. Dr. Hakhnazarian's family fell victim to this slaughter, from which only his elder sister was saved thanks to the fact that she was studying in Tiflis at that time. Himself having a narrow escape from these massacres, Hovhannes Hakhnazarian went through a true odyssey the account of which constitutes the last chapter of the present work.

In 1920 Dr. Hakhnazarian left for Tabriz, whence he moved to Czechoslovakia.

In 1922 he entered Karls University of Prague with a scholarship granted by the Czech Government. Having received a doctoral degree in Historical Studies and Philosophy, he continued his studies at the same university, majoring in comparative linguistics and classical languages for four years.

Between 1933 and 1935, Hovhannes Hakhnazarian taught at Teheran's Haykazian-Kushesh-Davtian Armenian National School, where Professor of Linguistics Ruben Abrahamian worked as an Inspector. Parallel with teaching practice, Dr. Hakhnazarian learnt the Persian language, acquiring an especially good command of Middle Persian through the support of Prof. R. Abrahamian (the monograph he wrote about the latter is the most eloquent account of their close friendship).

In 1936 Persia's Ministry of Enlightenment invited Dr. Hakhnazarian to teach Linguistics at the State University of Teheran (in the same year, all the Armenian schools of the country closed on Reza Shah's order and reopened only in 1942).

When Prof. R. Abrahamian left for Armenia in 1944, Dr. Hakhnazarian was invited to assume his post of Inspector at Kushesh-Davtian School.

Between 1950 and 1951, he initiated the foundation of a male secondary school that was a branch of this institution. In 1953 to 1954, he established Mariamian Female Secondary School under Margar Sargissian's patronage.

Due to the Persian Armenians' failure to repatriate to Armenia, a great number of Armenians flooded into Teheran from various districts of the country. As a result, their number greatly increased in the capital beginning with 1947. To meet the spiritual needs of these people and provide them with proper education, Dr. Hakhnazarian founded a number of national schools such as Abovian,

Shahaziz, Danayi, Hur, Hakhnazarian, etc. He also proved of immense instrumentality in the publication of text-books for these schools.

A university professor, the curator of the same university and a member of the Supreme Committee at the Ministry of Education, Dr. Hakhnazarian was held in great esteem in the country's political circles. Thanks to the high popularity he enjoyed, he easily smoothed away any problems facing the Iranian Armenian national schools.

Dr. Hakhnazarian conducted courses in contemporary and classical Armenian at the Faculty of Letters of Teheran's State University.

Generally speaking, from the very first day of his working practice until his retirement in 1965 and even until his death on 19 July 1978, Dr. Hakhnazarian took a most active part in almost all the public events held by Persian Armenians.

Hovhannes Hakhnazarian is the author of two historico-philological works on the monasteries of St. Thaddaeus and St. Stephen the Proto-Deacon and First Martyr: the former was published in the "Hur" magazine (1971), and the latter was included in the 10th volume of the series entitled "Documenti di Architecture Armena" (Ares, Milan, Italy).

In 1969 Hovhannes Hakhnazarian represented Teheran State University at the solemnities held in Yerevan in commemoration of Armenian national poet Hovhannes Tumanian's 100th birth anniversary. His impressions were later summarised in an extensive piece of writing published in the second volume of Raffi Year Book (Teheran, 1970).

Dr. Hovhannes Hakhnazarian worked on the present book dedicated to his native district and village for many years. This work is an attempt to offer an all-embracing history of Goghtan, intertwined with the author's memoirs which make it very interesting and close to the reader's heart.

While reading his memoirs, we come across a great number of prominent personalities who lived in the pre-Soviet period and played an important role in the history of the Armenian people.

We ourselves are of the opinion that the most valuable part of the work is the one dedicated to the massacres perpetrated in Agulis and the adjacent villages on 24 to 25 December 1919. Representing an eye-witness account of this harrowing carnage, it casts light upon the events that marked this period.

One cannot help reading the tragic story of the slaughter of the author's family and his nation without tears and a beating heart. He had a miraculous escape from this massacre to be able to convey the account of this tragedy to the coming generations. A tragedy that seems the repetition of the Great Genocide of the Armenians...

Andranik Sarian
20 July 1983

LETTER TO MY FATHER-IN-LAW

Yerevan, June 2013

Dear Father-in-law,

I am aware that you suffered a serious life-long trauma, and as many of your generation of Armenians, you were not ever able to talk about your experiences. During the four final years of your life, you wrote down the story of Goghtan, an Armenian district in Nakhijevan,¹ recording the disaster that befell your family and the whole Armenian population in your hometown, Agulis, in 1919. You put it down during the 1970s, when you were alone with your memories and reminiscences. There was no internet and no possibility of quick worldwide communication. You lived in Iran, an Islamic country which welcomed its Christian minority and became a second Motherland for many Armenian refugees, albeit with no possibility of contacting other intellectuals across the border, in the small country of Soviet Armenia. At the end of your book you hope that the terrible events that began in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 and reached the Armenian population in Nakhijevan in 1919 to 1920 will be ever recorded objectively.

What you could not have imagined was that in February 1989 traumatic events, similar to those in your homeland, were to recur against the Armenians in the cities of Sumgait and Baku, as renewed Azerbaijani pogroms, culminating with the struggle in Karabakh (Artsakh).

As a result of these conflicts, all Armenian cultural monuments were destroyed by the Azeris not only in your home town of Agulis, but also all over Nakhijevan. In 2002 the Azeri military annihilated the Armenian medieval cemetery in Julfa (Jugha) with bulldozers (while Persian King Shah Abbas spared these monuments in 1604). Various protest notes sent to UNESCO brought only a brief respite and by the year 2005, the World Heritage Site of about 10,000 uniquely designed cross stones had been completely destroyed by Azerbaijan, the area being converted to military practice ground.

Dear Father-in-law, you write in your memories that you tried to live in peace and harmony with your Azeri neighbors in Agulis and the surrounding villages (amongst them you had a good friend and when you went back after the pogroms, you saw him again and spent a night at his place). However, you could not find any trace of your younger sisters.

Historiography has reached a new dimension in modern times: in addition to fair scientific reporting, there are many fabricated histories. As Atatürk writes, history is not only made but also written. In the Turkish school textbooks the pupils are still present-

¹ Bypassing Armenia's Government, Stalin and Lenin handed over Karabakh (1920) and the region of Nakhijevan (1923) to the newly-born republic of Azerbaijan, which was named after the Persian province of Azerbaijan.

ed with a distorted view of history over the fate of the Armenian population in these lands. Likewise, the Azerbaijani versions of history are extremely untrustworthy and falsified.²

The Armenians are and will always be a reminder of their horrific past. Almost every Armenian was affected by the events of the Genocide that started in Turkey 100 years ago, but they endured and created new life and culture, remaining Armenian, although far away and detached from their homeland. You yourself built, founded and headed many Armenian schools in your second homeland apart from being an active scholar and teacher. You thought that none of your family had survived the terrible massacres of Agulis except yourself and your sister who lived in Tbilisi. Your only son, my husband, felt that it is every Armenian's obligation to preserve their culture and past and, I think, you would have been proud of his achievements. For a long time, Armenia was only his spiritual homeland, but at last in 1991 he started collaborating with Samvel Karapetian, a fine and kindred spirit, with whom he shared much.

There are now four Hakhnazarian families in Armenia. One is the family related to your sister (they are all chemists). There are three others akin to your grandfather and grandmother who lived outside Agulis in 1919. One family, that of Dr. Ophelia Injikian, are all doctors, and the third branch includes Nora Ghoukassian (a lecturer of Russian), her journalist husband and daughter, who is a professor of art. There is also the family of Souren (of Komitas Quartet) and Gayane Hakhnazarians, all musicians. At present Souren's youngest son Narek Hakhnazarian, an award-winning cellist, is playing to world-wide audiences.

Your granddaughters Talin (children's therapist) and Sharis (a teacher like you) are very thankful to you (by the way, they were baptized in Khomeni's times in St. Stepanos Monastery near the river Arax, which still retains the door presented to it by the city of Agulis). You write not only about the terrible end of the Armenian life in Goghtan, but also take us back to the times before 1919. You describe the different Armenian cities and villages with their churches, schools, feasts, traditions and important personalities. Although the Azeris destroyed all Armenian traces after 2000, your memory cannot be taken from us.

As you see, there are Hakhnazarians who survived the pogroms, who meet each other in Armenia and do not forget Agulis.

Yours,
Margrit Hakhnazarian-Bünemann

² See Azeri anti-Armenian book entitled "War against Azerbaijan. Targeting Cultural Heritage." Compiled by **Kamala Imranly**, Baku, Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008. For exposing the false Azeri claims, see **Galichian Rouben**, *The Invention of History. Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Showcasing of Imagination*, London, 2007; idem, *The Clash of Histories in the South Caucasus. Redrawing the map of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iran*, London, 2012; **Ayvazian Argam**, *The Historical Monuments of Nakhichevan*, Detroit, 1990; *Nakhijevan. Atlas*, Yerevan, 2012.

GOGHTAN DISTRICT

My main goal is to lay out before my readers a work with a brief history of the prospering district of Goghtan and my dear birthplace, Verin (Upper) Agulis, once boasting the title of Small Paris, but now reduced to ruins. This work also provides some information on the local dialect, historical monuments, with a special emphasis upon the glorious life and tragic extermination of the native Armenians of Goghtan who lived and created unique cultural heritage there throughout many centuries.

Given the fact that entire Atropatene and Ararat Province were dependent on the Urtian kings, we can presume that the name of Goghtan is of Chaldean origin, just like many other Armenian toponyms. However, this is only a presumption: so far no thorough research has been conducted with this respect.

Geographical Position. The historical district of Goghtan (Goghtn) occupies a triangular area of 1,500 to 1,600 square kilometres and lies at an altitude of 948 to 960 metres above sea level. Its length is 37 kilometres from the north southwards, and 48 kilometres from the east westwards. The southern extremity of the district, i.e. the territory between Ordubad City and Aza Village that is about 20 kilometres wide, is washed by the river Arax.

In the west, Goghtan borders on Yernjak and Aprakunis. In the east, Mount Kaputjugh separates the district from Syunik Province and then descends towards Ordubad in a curved line, reaches the Arax river-side and separates Goghtan from Arevik District.

In the north, Goghtan is surrounded by the mountains of Kaputjugh that extend towards the west.

The villages of the district lie in the gorges of these mountain branches that stretch almost parallel to each other towards the south-west, as well as in the valleys of the rivers flowing through these gorges.

Originally, Goghtan was the property of a princely family. Afterwards it shifted back and forth between the provinces of Vaspurakan and Syunik.¹ The Ashkharatsuyts of the 7th century mentions it as the 33rd district of Vaspurakan.²

1 **Հակոբյան Թ.**, Հայաստանի պատմական աշխարհագրություն, Երևան, 1968, էջ 190: **Աքրահավան Ա.**, Անանիա Շիրակացու մատենագրությունը, Երևան, 1944, էջ 350:

2 **Երեմյան Ս.**, Հայաստանը ըստ «Աշխարհացոյցի»-ի, Երևան, 1963, էջ 117: Ashkharatsuyts, which literally means Mirror of the World, represents an Armenian manual on cosmology and geography. It was compiled between 591 and 610 and was used as a textbook of geography at the schools of medieval Armenia parallel with the History of the Armenians by Movses Khorenatsy and the mathematical and cosmological works by Anania Shirakatsy.

This small district used to be an apple of discord for the princely houses of Syunik and Vaspurakan, but it also saw times of sovereignty.³

In the south-west, Goghtan is separated from these two provinces by the river Arax. In the east and north-east, it is Mount Kaputjugh that performs the same function. In cold weather, Kaputjugh is rendered absolutely impassable and the only means of Goghtan's communication with the district of Arevik is a narrow road running along the left bank of the Arax, through a gorge descending from the mountain towards the Arax river. According to Alishan, formerly the entire district of Arevik was united with Goghtan and they formed a single diocese, but later it was separated from Goghtan and included within the borders of Syunik, these unifications being, indeed, achieved by force.⁴

Movses Khorenatsy places Goghtan within the borders of Vaspurakan Province.

The earliest record in Armenian historiography relating to Goghtan dates back to the century before Christ's birth, when "...many princesses of Azhdahak's seed with young men and a multitude of prisoners, more than ten thousand in number, he [Armenian King Tigran the Great (95 to 55 B.C.)] settled from the eastern flank of the great mountain as far as the borders of Golt'n..."⁵

The toponym of Goghtan is also mentioned in another record making reference to the same events: "This Tigran, who was even more powerful and stronger than his ancestors, killed Medes' King Azhdahak through the support of Persian King Cyrus, for they were allies... and took prisoner his descendants, about 1.000 in number. He kept Anush, the mother of dragons, respectfully and settled them in Goghtan, Jugha, Khram..."⁶

Greek geographer Ptolemy, who was the contemporary of Artashes II (birth date unknown to 20 B.C.), mentions the district by the Greek name of Colten, or Goltine.⁷

Koriun, the biographer of Mesrop Mashtots, names the district Goghtan Tun, i.e. House of Goghtan. Historiographer Tovma Artzruny (late 9th cent. to the early 10th cent.) refers to it as Goghtnastan.⁸

Movses Khorenatsy, who collected and recorded the famous tales and songs of Goghtan dating from the pagan period⁹ speaks about Goghtan in great detail, referring to it as "...the wine-producing district of Golt'n..."¹⁰

3 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, Սիսական, Վենետիկ, 1893, էջ 309: **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, Պատկերազարդ բնաշխարհիկ բարարան, հ. Ա, Վենետիկ, 1903-1905, էջ 542-547:

4 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 309.

5 History of the Armenians by **Moses Khorenats'i**. Translation and Commentary on the Literary Sources by **Robert W. Thomson**. Harvard University Press. USA, 1980, p. 120; **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 310; **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, idem, p. 543.

6 Մանր ժամանակագրություններ, հ. Բ, կազմեց Վ. Հակոբյան, Երևան, 1956, էջ 307: Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. I, Երևան, 1971, էջ 892:

7 Մանր ժամանակագրություններ, idem, p. 307; Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, idem, p. 892.

8 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 310; **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, idem, p. 543; **Այվազյան Ա.**, Նախիջևանի պատմա-ճարտարապետական հուշարձանները, Երևան, 1978, էջ 7:

9 These tales and songs are the only manifestations of the highly-developed literary taste and culture of the Armenians in the pre-Christian period.

10 History of the Armenians by **Moses Khorenats'i**, p. 121.

Alishan expresses his admiration with the Armenians of Goghtan who succeeded in creating such a rich heritage of spiritual values and highly-developed culture, perpetuating “the exploits of the Armenian heroes and kings”¹¹ in their poems and tales.

The available historical sources make few references to the princely house of Goghtan. Among the local noblemen mention is made of Prince Shab (Shabit),¹² his wife Nshan as well as their son Khosrov and their grandchild Vahan.

In the last quarter of the 4th century, mention is made of Prince Atom,¹³ who went to Cesarea with some other Armenian noblemen to participate in the ordination of Catholicos Husik in 341. During the same period, Nersissian Gahnamak mentions the ruler of Goghtan as ranking the 46th among the Armenian noblemen. Another source, dating from the early 5th century, mentions the prince of Goghtan as the 15th in the Gahnamak.¹⁴

Under the Armenian Arshakids, Goghtan District provided 500 soldiers for the Royal Army.

In his biography of Mesrop Mashtots, Koriun writes that before the invention of the Armenian letters, the great scholar decided to expand his activity “...in areas of heathendom...”¹⁵ one of which was Goghtan, where the local Armenians still cling to their ancient faith, refusing to accept the new one: “...the blessed one [Mesrop Mashtots] arrived in Rotastak of Goghtan, his first parish. And expounding the doctrine in his usual manner, in company with the pious Shabit, he filled the province with the message of Christ’s gospel, and in all the towns of the province he established orders of monks. He was soon joined by Git, son of the Christ-loving Shabit, who followed in his father’s footsteps, and rendered much service to the vardapet in the manner of a true son.”¹⁶

From Koriun’s words it becomes clear that Mashtots went to Goghtan to preach the word of God and extirpate the traces of the pagan faith,¹⁷ but we presume that he also intended to study the specimens of the ancient Armenian tales and songs that he knew were still preserved in the district.

According to the Armenian historiographical sources, in the 7th century, the Arabs invaded Goghtan for several times and took many prisoners there.

In order to strengthen their position in Armenia, the Arabs started exterminating the representatives of the secular authorities of the country so that the common people

11 Ալիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 309-310; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 543.

12 The Life of Mashtots by Koriun. Translated by Bedros Norehad. Golden Jubilee Publication. 1964, p. 36.

13 Աճառյան Հ., Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան, հ. Ա, Երևան, 1942, էջ 254:

14 «Սոփերք Հայկականք», ԺԳ, Վենետիկ, 1854:

15 The Life of Mashtots by Koriun, p. 35.

16 Idem, pp. 35-36.

17 The places where St. Mashtots preached and prayed, isolated from the blessings of secular life in Goghtan, also saw another hermit, Aghan Artzruny, the disciple of Sahak Partev and later the teacher of future historiographer Ghazar Parpetsy. See Լալայեան Ե., Գողթան գաւառ, «Ազգագրական հանդէս», գիրք 11, Թիֆլիս, 1904, էջ 324.

would remain without leaders, for this would render them unable to rise in revolt against the foreign invaders. Under various pretexts, the Armenian noblemen were invited to the city of Nakhijevan, where they were shut up in a local church and burnt to death.¹⁸

A great number of Armenian princes were suffocated to death in the church of Khram City located on the other side of the river Arax in 709. Their wives and children were taken to Arabia as prisoners.¹⁹

Indeed, the Armenian princes of Goghtan did not escape this bitter fate. Vahan Goghtnetsy, the son of Goghtan's Prince Khosrov, was among those infant captives whose fathers had been treacherously killed. When about four years old, he was forced into converting to Islam under the name of Vahap. An able and prudent child, he received good education, studied the Arabs' religion and customs and grew up as a valorous young man, being soon promoted to a clerk in the Royal Council: "... some time later, in 709 they cunningly assembled all the Armenian princes in two churches in Neghchvan [Nakhijevan] and Khram and burnt them to death. Their wives and offsprings were taken prisoner, among them being four-year-old Vahan, the son of ruler of Goghtan Khosrov..."²⁰

Assuming power, Caliph Omar allegedly ordered to gather the Armenian prisoners and set them free. Learning that he was one of those captives, Vahan-Vahap expressed his desire to return home, but Caliph Omar was unwilling to permit his return, for the Arabs needed the clever young man for his services. Moreover, he did not believe that Vahap used to be an Armenian captive and did not wish to believe the Armenians confirming this. In Mesopotamia the Caliph found fifteen Arab scholars who knew Vahan and were familiar with his past. When they attested to the young man's Armenian origin, the Caliph attempted to tempt Vahan with offers of promotion, for he did not want to keep him by force. The young man, however, was firm in his decision and declared, "Set me free so that I will be able to go and see to what extend my homeland has been devastated. ...and then I shall come back to You."²¹

In 719 Vahan returned to his birthplace Goghtan. Some time later, he got the news that Caliph Omar had died, and this annuled his promise of going back to Mesopotamia. Vahan started repenting bitterly for his renunciation of his forefathers' faith that he had committed when still very young. His family members urged him to marry so that their princely house would not be left without heirs. Vahan got married to the daughter of one of the princes of Syunik and gradually the Christian faith revived strongly in his heart.

Vahan, however, found himself in a grave predicament, for outwardly, he still remained an apostate. To escape that situation somehow, Vahan decided to leave everything and depart for Greece with twenty horsemen. His wife, however, learnt

18 Հակոբյան Վ., Մանր ժամանակագրություններ, հ. Բ, էջ 333:

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

about his secret intention and informed her brothers about it. The latter persuaded him to stay, for his escape would certainly endanger all those who remained in the district.

Some time later, Vahan left for Georgia, but then returned, finding himself in a still more difficult situation, since now the Arab authorities had started persecuting him for his renunciation of Islam. What was even more intolerable was that his dear ones avoided contact with him for fear of being punished by the rulers of the country.

Unable to bear the persecutions on the one hand and the coldness of his dear ones on the other, Vahan made up his mind to return to Sham City of the Near East (present-day Damascus), the residence of the new Arab Caliph. He opened up his soul before the latter, told him about all the sufferings he had gone through and implored him for permission to remain Christian. His entreaties, however, proved futile, and in 737 he was sentenced to death.²²

The story of the tragic death of Vahan Goghtnetsy shows how deplorable the conditions of Armenia and, particularly, Goghtan District were under the Arab tyranny.²³

Vahan Goghtnetsy's memory is perpetuated in a number of poems and motets one of which follows below:

“With his longing heart, he returned to the fine district of Goghtan, went to the village of Vanand surrounded by gardens and asked the guards for grapes. The latter recognised him and told their acquaintances: ‘This is our converted prince.’ Hearing this from the people, Vahan left...”²⁴

After the treacherous slaughter of the Armenian noblemen and high-ranking servicemen, Goghtan was stripped of its leaders. Thirty years after Vahan Goghtnetsy's martyrdom, a certain Prince Sahak is mentioned as the ruler of the district. In the subsequent period, Goghtan is mentioned as part of the Emirate of Dvin subject to the Arab masters.

During the initial period of the establishment of the Bagratids' Kingdom, Goghtan District was included within the borders of the Princedom of Syunik together with Nakhijevan. As a diocese, it was under the jurisdiction of the Bishopric of Tatev.

22 «Սոփերք Հայկականք», էջ 61-91: The story of the tragic death of Vahan Goghtnetsy shows how deplorable the conditions of Armenia and, particularly, Goghtan District were under the Arab tyranny.

23 Prominent Armenian linguist and lexicographer Manuk Abeghian (1865 to 1944), who made a detailed analysis of the biography of Vahan Goghtnetsy, writes: “The author of this hagiography is not only the contemporary of Vahan Goghtnetsy, but also knew him well. The modifications and changes the original of this work may have undergone later have not been able to strip it of its details and the moving manner of narrative, which put it beyond doubt that the author of the original text was a contemporary of the tragic events he reports.” Աբեղիան Մ., Հայոց հին գրականութեան պատմութիւն, գիրք Ա, Պէյրուս, 1955, էջ 483-487:

24 See the original in: Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 339.

In return for Ashot Artzruny's support in the wars against the Arab emirs, King Smbat the Bagratid presented him with Nakhijevan City and the adjacent district of Goghtan, that was constantly an apple of discord for the principalities of Vaspurakan and Syunik. The king's decision intensified this rivalry even further aggravating the conflict between the princely houses of the Artzrunies and the Syunies. Unwilling to reconcile himself to that loss, Prince of Syunik Smbat even rose in rebellion against the Bagratids, but he was defeated by the outnumbering allied forces of the Bagratids and Artzrunies and had to recognise the authority of the Armenian king.

Between 904 and 906, the Artzruny princes manifested hostility towards the ruling Bagratids, in the aftermath of which, the districts of Yernjak and Goghtan were demanded back and restituted to the Principality of Syunik. This intensified the enmity between the ruling dynasty of the country and the Artzrunies, who were largely supported by the Arab Caliphate.²⁵

The Bagratids failed to restore the full territorial integrity of Armenia, but when the vast Arab Caliphate was being divided into separate states and minor emirates, the Byzantine Empire was engaged in long-term wars against the Arabs and the Bulgarians so that they were able to exempt Armenia from the taxes it paid to the Caliphate, leading the country towards political, economic and cultural progress.

This, however, did not mean the end of the Arab conquest of Armenia, for the Arab hordes continued their attacks against the country. The Emirate of Atropatene attempted to take possession of not only Dvin and Goghtan, but also the entire country, endangering the independence the Armenians had gained through such hard struggle.

In the second half of the 10th century, the Bagratids succeeded in making Goghtan part of the Armenian Kingdom for a short time, but the Arab Emirate of Dvin was able to keep the district under its control for rather a long time. This was particularly due to the hostile aggression that Governor of Atropatene Afshin manifested against the Bagratids, thus making them gradually give up their aspirations of liberating a number of southern districts and Goghtan.

After the carnage of the Armenian noblemen, the spiritual leaders of Goghtan took up the reins of the spiritual government of their nation. Under the auspices of the Arab emirs who had made Ordubad their administrative centre, the local church dignitaries cut themselves off from the diocese of Syunik and made Goghtan a separate diocese whose leader's seat was the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle in Verin Agulis.

The circulars and decrees of Catholicos Sargis dating back to 1006 show that Syunik, Baghik, Arevik, Vorduat, Arkulik (Agulis), Vanand, Yernjak, Nakhijevan and Jugha, "...as far as the river Yeraskh flows...", as well as Vanand and Goghtan, were under the jurisdiction of the bishopric of Syunik.²⁶

In the last quarter of the 10th century, the Bagratids increased their power and succeeded in shifting the districts of Nakhijevan and Goghtan back into the rule of the

25 Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. III, Երևան, 1976, էջ 36:

26 Idem, p. 122.

Central Armenian Government. However, at the end of the same century and early in the 11th century, the occupation policy of the Byzantine Empire and its ongoing conquest of the Orient highly endangered Armenia's hard-won independence and statehood. On the other hand, the Arab emirates, together with the hordes of Seljuk and Turkish mercenaries and nomads, put in grave danger the existence of not only the principalities of the Artzrunies and Syunies but also the Central Government of the Bagratids. During this period, Goghtan District, which was exposed to continual devastation and massacres, shifted back and forth between the Emirate of Atropatene and the newly-established Seljuk principedom, Ordubad being the administrative centre of the district, with its Turkish inhabitants enjoying numerical superiority over the local Armenians.

Under the Persians' rule, the district of Goghtan was renamed Azat-Jiran, but the Diocese of Goghtan continued existing, with the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle being the residence of its spiritual leader.

The district of Azat-Jiran was governed by the khan of Ordubad who was under the jurisdiction of the khanate of Nakhijevan, that, in its turn, was under the general control of the Governor of Atropatene.

Azat-Jiran was divided into five mahals (districts): Ordubad, Agulis, Dasht, Belev and Chananab (Tseghna).²⁷

The governors of these mahals were subject to the khan of Ordubad. The same function in the Armenian villages was performed by village heads (tanuter) who bore the title of Melik. According to historian and merchant Zakaria Aguletsy, whose work contains several references to the Meliks of Agulis, although they were elected by the common people, their election was to be approved and ratified by the central authorities (they were to pay a certain amount of money for this).²⁸ Indeed, these elections were only a formal ceremony: as a rule, the candidates were elected by a small circle of people; moreover, in the course of time, these posts became almost hereditary.²⁹

The Armenians of Goghtan shared all the sufferings and privations that befell their compatriots during the Seljuk and later Mongol invasions as well as those of Timur. The Persian-Ottoman long-lasting wars, as well as the tyranny of the Kezelbashes, Jalalis, Ak-Koyunlus and Kara-Koyunlus were just as disastrous and fraught with tragic results. The accounts of these sinister incursions found in the works by Zakaria Aguletsy and his contemporaries are filled with panic, horror and lamentation.

Describing the oppression the Armenians were exposed to in the days of Sultan Mohammed in a colophon dating from 1601, Priest Ghazar writes that "the Christians were persecuted [to such an extent] that the fathers sold their sons."³⁰

27 **Լալայան Ե.**, idem, p. 259.

28 **Ջաբարիա Ագուլեցու** օրագրությունը, Երևան, 1938, էջ 70:

29 Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. V, Երևան, 1974, էջ 15:

30 **Հովհաննիսյան Ա.**, Դրվագներ հայ ազատագրական մտքի պատմության, հ. 2, Երևան, 1959: Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. IV, Երևան, 1972:

The various invaders and principalities struggled hard to enslave and plunder the Armenians, for the Armenian prisoners were an additional source of income for them. According to the contemporary historians, the Armenian captives sold in Egypt, Istanbul and other remote places amounted to several hundred thousands.

The calamities brought forth by the war were accompanied by famine and various epidemics. Those who had had a narrow escape from slaughter and various diseases were heavily taxed and fined. Even in times of peace, the infants were cruelly seized from their Christian parents, especially when the latter proved unable to pay the obligatory taxes and various other payments set by the ruling authorities.

In the aftermath of this harsh predicament, a number of prosperous Armenian villages of Goghtan were gradually stripped of their inhabitants, being re-populated by Turks. Being driven out of the fertile plains that yielded rich harvest, the Armenians huddled together in the barren mountainous zones and gorges where the soil was not fecund enough to provide them with their daily piece of bread. This is the reason why part of Goghtan Armenians gave up their ploughman's implements and started looking for other means of existence. Most of them turned to trade which was often conducted overseas, forcing the Armenian merchants into abandoning their native villages and cities. In the course of time, they grew attached to the foreign cities where they worked and in many cases even took up permanent living there.

The names of the villages and townships of Goghtan District can be found in the works of a number of Armenian historians, but it is only Bishop Orbelian who provides a combined list (1309) of the villages of Yernjak and Goghtan Districts.

Alishan and Epikian present these villages, mentioning in brackets the district to which they belong:

1 Bust (Bist)	(Goghtan District)
2 Tevi	(ditto)
3 Amasro Vank	(ditto)
4 Norakert	
5 Voghohi	(Goghtan District)
6 Teghiak	
7 Gundavank	
8 Voskedzor	
9 Angudik	
10 Noragyugh	
11 Arevek	
12 Shaghkert	(Goghtan District)
13 St. Gevorg	(Yernjak District)
14 Zavachri Vank	
15 Aparank	
16 Van	(Goghtan District)
17 Gagh	(Yernjak District)
18 Gochen	(Goghtan District)
19 Vopik	

20	Mayreak	
21	Vanand	(Goghtan District)
22	Agulik	(Goghtan District)
23	Kerekunik (also known as Bekerunik)	
24	Amarashen	
25	Voghdav (Voghdu)	
26	Kdovna	
27	Aprakunik	(Yernjak District)
28	Karkop	
29	Berdik	(ditto) (24)
30	Rapat ³¹	

Alishan also provides a separate list of the villages of only Goghtan District: some of these villages are unknown to us, the others are either consigned to history or inhabited by Turks nowadays:

1	Tagavoramarg	(?)
2	Dasht (Nerkin Agulis)	
3	Tseghna	
4	Ramis	
5	Buhrut	
6	Shrju	(?)
7	Paraka	
8	Aghahetsik	(?)
9	Dastak (Turkish)	
10	Trunik (Turkish)	
11	Tnakert (Tanakert)	
12	Obovanis (Onis, Unis) (Turkish)	
13	Kaghakik	
14	Anapat	
15	Andamej	
16	Vern	
17	Gettsik	(?)
18	Gegheretsik	(?)
19	Nunits	(?)
20	Vorduat	
21	Vaghaver	
22	Parakert	
23	Poradasht	(?)
24	Metsgun	
25	Astvatzatzni Gyugh	(?)
26	Bazmari	(?)
27	Gandzi	
28	Deghsar	

³¹ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 315; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 546.

29 Sal (?)

30 Pelev

31 Khurs³²

Alishan did not include the name of Verin Agulis in this list, but he mentions Nerkin Agulis as well as Parakert, which later joined Verin Agulis.³³

According to Lalayan, the Armenian population of Goghtan District represented the following picture in the early 20th century:

1 Verin Agulis	2,205 inhabitants
2 Der, Verin Aza, Nerkin Aza	more than 2,000 inhabitants
3 Tseghna	963 inhabitants
4 Nerkin Agulis	739
5 Paraka	739
6 Tanakert	527
7 Ramis	377
8 Allahi	347
9 Kaghakik	314
10 Meservanis (Mesropavan)	230
11 Khurst	(inhabited by Turks)
12 Handamej	146
13 Disar ³⁴	75

This list was later used by prominent Armenologist and linguist Hr. Ajarian, who visited all the villages of Goghtan District with outstanding Armenian writer Paruyr Sevak in 1932 for the purpose of studying the local dialect.³⁵

I lived in Verin Agulis until late 1919. In 1922 and 1923 I travelled in all the villages of Goghtan and found out that this once thriving district with more than 30 purely Armenian villages now comprised only some 7 to 8 Armenian villages: Tseghna, Ramis, Paraka, Bist, Meservanis (Mesropavan), Allahi, Der, as well as Verin and Nerkin Aza.

The Turkish bandits reduced to ruins Tanakert, Der as well as Verin and Nerkin Aza in late 1919, but after the Soviet takeover, part of their population returned and started reconstructing their homes.

Alishan, who never visited Goghtan during his life-time, provides valuable information relating to its geographical position and history. He commences his account of the villages of the district with those lying in a gorge extending in the south-east of the district. Then he proceeds to the other gorges stretching parallel with this one, and the villages located there.

We have followed the same principle and start our work from the villages of the gorge lying in the south-east of the district.

32 Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 315; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, pp. 546-547.

33 Ալիշան Ղ., ibid.

34 Լալայեան Ե., idem, pp. 297, 305, 314-318, 322-323, 326, 332-333.

35 Աճառյան Հ., Բնություն Ագուլիսի բարբառի, Երևան, 1935, էջ 6:

ORDUBAD (VORDUAT) CITY

Location and Geographical Setting. The city of Ordubad (Vorduat¹), which is surrounded by a green valley, is situated at the farthest end—at this point, the river of the same name merges into the Arax—of the depressions which descend southwards in a curved line from the lofty mountain chain of Kaputjugh. This valley, which is between 6 and 7 kilometres wide, slopes from the north southwards towards the Arax through a smooth and sandy territory. During winter months, Kaputjugh, that connects Goghtan with Syunik and Arevik, is rendered impassable. Communication between these two neighbouring districts becomes possible only through Ordubad, and this fact increases the political, military and economic importance of this city.

Ordubad lies within hardly 3 versts of the river Arax, at an altitude of only 1,000 feet above its level (N 38°49'20," E 63°43'20").²

The lofty and absolutely bare mountains that surround the city from the north-east turn it into a kind of citadel. Those rising in the west and overlooking Goghtan are lower but nude like them.

Means of Communication. To the east of Ordubad, along the left bank of the river Arax, parallel with the railway line of Julfa-Baku runs a smooth road leading from Karjevan to Meghri.

In the west, another smooth road, which is quite wide, connects Ordubad with Julfa. In the south of Nerkin (Lower) Agulis, this road is branched into another stretching up to Verin (Upper) Agulis. Another branch of the same road runs up to the villages of Verin (Upper) Aza and Der, then joins the newly-built road leading to Tseghna Village and continues up to Julfa through Aza.

In the north, the gardens of Ordubad border on Handamej Village, whence another road leads to Verin Agulis across a small hill. The gardens of Handamej boasted rich vegetation and foliage, thanks to which, it served as a summer residence for the wealthy class of Ordubad.

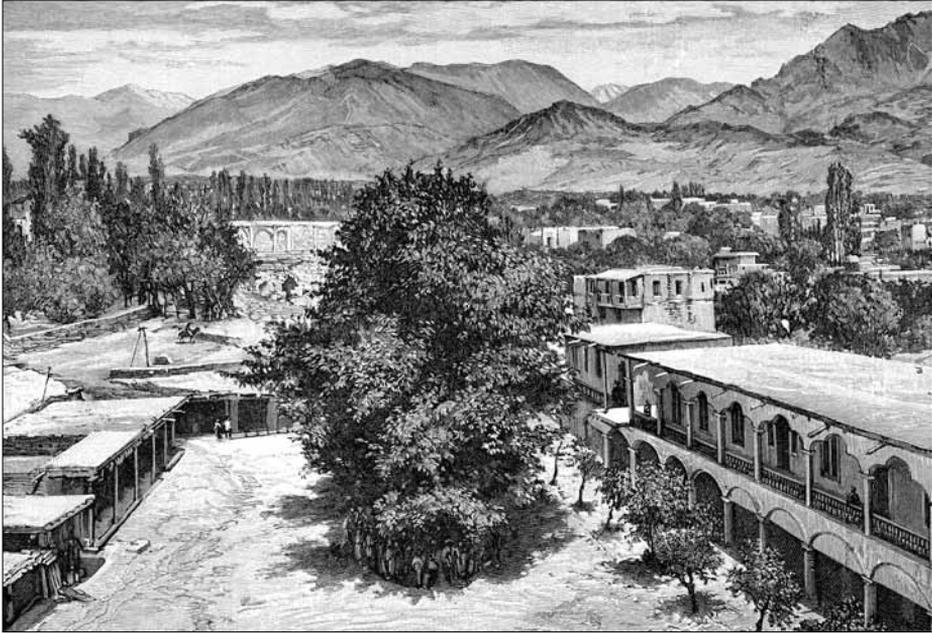
Formerly, when the Arax did not mark the Russo-Persian borderline yet, Ordubad was also directly connected with the ancient district of Paytakaran (present-day Gharadagh) lying on the right bank of this river.

Thanks to the warm climate, the prolific black earth and fertilizers coming from the mountains, the valley of Ordubad enjoys splendid gardens abounding in grapes, fine apples, cherries, pears, peaches, apricots, various sorts of plums and other fruit trees.

In summer-time, it is very hot in this city of semi-tropical climate. Getting extremely warm, the adjacent bare, rocky mountains impart their warmth to the city, which suffers from stifling heat until 9 o'clock in the evening, when the northern winds cool the weather considerably.

¹ The name of Vorduat is mentioned in an inscription carved on the front of the door of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle (1554 to 1566).

² **Լալալյան Ե.**, idem, p. 293.



Vordvat (Ordubad). A general view

The weather in Ordubad is conditioned not only by the cool of the nearby gardens but also by the water of the river Ordubad and numerous springs. These springs, which were mainly built by the Armenians in times bygone, amounted to about 70 early in this [20th] century. Almost every house in Ordubad is provided with either spring or river water.

In contrast to the beautiful valleys and gardens surrounding Ordubad, the city itself is rather unattractive, with crooked streets and houses surrounded by high earthen walls. The only exception is a straight wide avenue built in the recent decades: it is planted with trees and has canals with flowing water near the pavements.

The gardens extending in the neighbourhood of Ordubad, and the houses once belonging to some wealthy Armenians who left the city for ever still retain their beauty, but on the whole, it was absolutely bare of vegetation and had filthy streets when the author of these lines last saw it half a century ago. Russian writer Nefedev is right to compare it with a beautiful woman who wears shining diamonds but dirty rags.³

At the beginning of this [20th] century, Ordubad occupied a territory of about 45 sq. versts (probably, it has grown larger now⁴) and consisted of five quarters: Sar-Shaghar, Mingis, Amparas, Kurdatar and Yuch-Tarankea.⁵

³ **Լաբալյան Ե.**, *ibid.*

⁴ When the author uses time expressions like now, at present, nowadays, etc., he means the '70s of the 20th century.

⁵ **Լաբալյան Ե.**, *ibid.*

Among the remarkable sights of Ordubad is a rock on which a citadel towered some centuries ago. It was probably built by Prince Khosrov, who was martyred by the Arabs. At present only the Armenian church of St. Stepanos is preserved in this site. In front of it extends a park whence you can have a magnificent view of the city and the nearby gardens.

Apart from the Armenian church, Ordubad also has a Russian church housed in quite a fine building erected with the means of Araskhanian, a wealthy Armenian from Agulis.⁶

The city has forty-one mosques only five or six of which are renowned, although they are not of any significance. Amongst the Islamic sanctuaries can also be mentioned Imam-Zade rising on a rock in the neighbourhood of the city. As a rule, in front of these mosques there are small squares serving as places of assemblage.

Ordubad is also renowned for a magnificent ancient plane rising in its lower part. German naturalist Petzhold, who visited the city in 1863, considered it the hugest tree he had ever seen: its trunk is 20 metres in circumference. The lightning has smashed its upper branches, but the lower ones, that are rich in foliage, cover most part of the square situated around it. The trunk of the tree has rotted away from inside, creating a hollow between 5 and 6 metres long and 4 to 5 metres wide. As described by French traveller Dubois, who visited the city in the second half of the previous [19th] century, it can easily accommodate from 8 to 10 people.⁷

Another site of antiquity is a ruined caravanserai whence an underground tunnel leads to a church built, as tradition has it, by Bartholomew the Apostle and named Tyarn End-Araj [literally translated as Welcoming God]. Later the foundations of this church served for the construction of the principal Persian mosque of Ordubad.⁸

Origin of the Name. The city, called Erdvart in the dialect of Agulis, is otherwise also known by the names of Vorduat, Vordvar, Urtuat, or Vortvat (this last one is mentioned by Vardan the Geographer), whose origin remains obscure.⁹

A Historical Introduction. According to a church legend, after the Crucifixion of Christ, in the '40s of the 1st century A.D., Bartholomew the Apostle came to Vorduat and worked some miracles there. This legend is recorded by historian Stepanos Orbelian of Syunik, who writes, "...the blessed apostle built a church in the western part of Goght'n... where they constructed a monastery named Tear'ne'ndar'aj... there was by the village of Ordvat a damaging river... [Bartholomew and his group] prayed and the waters were restrained..."¹⁰

As stated in the same legend, Bartholomew the Apostle built this church under the auspices of Prince Shab, whom he had baptized together with all his family. During

⁶ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 318; Լալայեան Ե., ibid.

⁷ Ալիշան Ղ., ibid; Լալայեան Ե., idem, pp. 295-296. A Turkish shoemaker had even opened a shop in this hollow, where often some 8 to 10 people gathered, drank tea and played cards (I myself have seen them there).

⁸ Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 296.

⁹ Ալիշան Ղ., ibid.

¹⁰ Available at: <http://rbedrosian.com/SO/so3.htm#6>



Vordvat (Ordubad). An Armenian house

his sojourn in the village, he acquired a large number of followers, then charged his disciple Kumsi with the spiritual leadership of the place and moved away to continue his preaching activity in the other townships and villages of Goghtan.

Although the hagiography of Apostles Thaddaeus and Bartholomew was invented by the Armenian church dignitaries of the 5th to 6th centuries, it contains important historical references to the city of Ordubad. Thus, the alleged visit of these apostles to the city in the 1st century A.D. shows that it has ancient history and used to be purely inhabited by the Armenians. Furthermore, it also becomes clear that it was the residence of the Armenian princes of Goghtan in the pre-Christian period. Apparently, they chose the city as their residence taking into account its favourable geographical position at the junction of two districts: Ordubad is also connected with Paytakaran via the Arax.

As attested by some historical records, Vorduat was also an important spiritual and religious centre: according to Alishan and some other philologists, for quite a long period of time, the United Diocese of Goghtan and Arevik Districts as well as the residence of the diocese leader were located in this city.

The name of Vorduat is further mentioned in connection with an incident that happened to a patriarch named Shabit. His two sons, Vasak and Shapuh, entered into a conflict over the possession of the city, and the former injured his brother seriously with a sword while fighting him in the vicinity of the city. Later, however, he repented, and after Shapuh had recovered, he left everything to him and retreated to a monastery, assuming the religious name of Gyut.

Under the Arab rule, Vorduat served as an administrative centre for the Arab emirs. At the same time, it was of great importance as a place via which armed forces moved to Lernahayastan.¹¹

Indeed, we cannot confirm that the castle mentioned in this poem was built by Prince Khosrov, for as we have already mentioned, so far no comprehensive research has been conducted into the history of these territories.

A bull issued by Catholicos Sargis (11th century) mentions Vorduat or Ordubad as a diocese belonging to the Armenian Church: apparently, it was dependent on the Archbishopric of Syunik.

In the first half of the 14th century, Hovsep Krnetsy's brother Gevorg is mentioned as Prince of Goghtan District, but we are not sure if at that time Vorduat still retained its status of princely residence.

During the period of Seljuk and Mongol invasions as well as under the Iranian rule, the number of the Armenian population of Ordubad and some adjacent villages shrank, as compared with that of the Tatar tribes. The high positions in the state, administrative, judiciary and tax bodies were vested in the members of the latter; moreover, they gradually took possession of the real estate and movable property belonging to the Armenians and ousted them from many spheres of activity. In the course of time, the Armenian inhabitants of Ordubad were stripped of their rights and leading positions, just as was the case in many other places of Armenia. Indeed, they could work as farmers, craftsmen and merchants, but they were no longer able to retain possession of their belongings and means earned with the sweat of their brow.

Zakaria Aguletsy (1630 to 1691) makes frequent references to Ordubad in his diary, making it evident that once this city was the centre of Goghtan, and many state figures lived there. Indeed, it still had an Armenian population, but it was the Turks who enjoyed numerical superiority there. In a colophon of 1679, Aguletsy writes the following, "In October 1128 (1679 of our era), the judge of Orduvar resigned from his post, being replaced by Shekhalislam ['Shekhalislam' in the original]. ...Rather a cruel and pitiless man, he inflicted much damage to the local churches: thus, he seized 50 *tumans*¹² from both the monastery and church of Agulis under the plea that they had recently been built and he had authority to do so. He committed many wrongs. ...he bought the post of judge and set up his residence in Orduvar."¹³

In a report submitted to Peter the Great and the high political circles of Russia, Israel Ori mentions the name of Ordubad, stating: "There is a purely Turkish city named Ordubad, inhabited solely by merchants and craftsmen. It has neither armed forces nor any fortifications, but you can find countless treasures and much ammunition there. It holds a neutral position."¹⁴

11 Literally translated from Armenian as 'Mountainous Armenia,' also known as Republic of Lernahayastan.

It represented a state formation in Zangezur (Syunik) that existed between December 1920 and July 1921.

12 A Persian monetary unit.

13 **Զարպրիս Ագուլեցու** օրագրությունը, Երևան, 1938, էջ 144-145:

14 **Լ.Ուրի**, Հայոց պատմություն, հ. 3, Երևան, 1973, էջ 54:

Certainly, Ori had not visited Ordubad during his travels, and his statement that it was "...a purely Turkish city..." does not correspond to the reality, for the Armenians lived there until the first decade of the 20th century, claiming a leading part in its economic and industrial life. Ori merely attempted to convince the Russian authorities that the country was truly defenceless so that the latter would launch their attack against Caucasia as soon as possible.

Under the Ottoman rule, Ordubad grew to the administrative centre of the district. During the Armenians' liberation struggle led by David Bek,¹⁵ this city assumed a hostile position against him and joined the Ottoman troops. Sefi Ghuli Khan, the commander of the armed forces of Ordubad, resisted David Bek's liberation army for a long time, but eventually, he suffered defeat with heavy losses and was forced into ceding the city to the Armenian warriors.¹⁶

After David Bek's unexpected death, the Turks of Ordubad rose in rebellion against the Armenian forces, but Army Commander Mkhitar succeeded in defeating them.

During the Persian reign, Ordubad was divided into five quarters and had a population of 635 houses. At the same period, the city had 25 pastures, 6 caravanserais, 6 mosques, 3 spiritual schools and a stone bridge built by the Armenians. Ordubad was also a renowned place of arms production.

After Caucasia had been conquered by the Russians between 1827 and 1828, Ordubad became the centre of all the Armenian and Turkish villages of the district.¹⁷ In the times of Persian domination, the city was governed by Yahea Khan, whom the Russians charged with attending to the administrative affairs of the district (Alishan refers to him as 'vijapet'). Later this post was mostly held by influential landowners, or the representatives of the wealthy Turkish class.

After the Russian conquest of Caucasia, the name of Goghtan was ousted from general usage, and that of Ordubad City spread to the entire district.

Up until World War I, with every passing year the Turks strengthened their leading position and fortified their predominance in the district, where even the lowest posts were occupied only by them, despite the fact that they did not have proper education and could not even speak Russian fluently.

Beginning with 1827, a small part of the Armenians who had emigrated from Muzhambar and Salmast came to add to the number of their compatriots in Ordubad.¹⁸ Despite this, however, the Armenians were still a minority in the city, for the Turks'

15 Famous Armenian freedom fighter David Bek led the liberation struggle of Syunik against the Iranian khans and Turkish invaders. This prominent military figure, whose birth date is unknown, died in 1728 (Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 3, Երևան, 1977, էջ 302).

16 Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. IV, էջ 17-175:

17 Under tsarism Yerevan and Nakhijevan became provincial and district centres respectively, while Ordubad remained as a regional (okrug) centre.

18 Ալիշան Ղ., ibid; Հակոբյան Թ., Ուրվագծեր Հայաստանի պատմական աշխարհագրության, Երևան, 1960, էջ 444:

bigotry and intolerance continually made most of them sell their property to their Turkish neighbours very cheaply and leave their homes.

The more the Armenians moved away from Ordubad, the more it lost its beauty and splendour. Before the mass resettlement of the Armenians, the local Armenian quarters, that boasted rich vegetation as well as clean and paved streets, stood in high contrast to the barren and inhospitable Turkish quarters. As a rule, the Armenian houses were larger and built of stone.

In the Armenian quarter of the city stood the small but fine church of St. Stepanos, which formerly bore the name of St. Vardan, apparently, after prominent military leader Vardan.¹⁹

After the establishment of Russian rule in the region, a municipal Russian school opened in Ordubad.²⁰ This institution, which offered semi-secondary education, had only a small number of Armenian pupils, while the majority of them were the offsprings of wealthy Turkish families.

The Armenians had their own parish school which, however, closed in the course of time due to the reduction in the number of pupils (this was the result of the Armenians' mass resettlement).

The Russian authorities unfolded large construction activity in Ordubad, where they built post and telegraph offices as well as two hospitals, one for the civilians and the other for the frontier guards.

According to the available statistical data tracing back to the beginning of the 20th century, the population of Ordubad represented the following picture: 2,244 males and 2,006 females with a total of 4,250. The Armenians constituted 179 males and 173 females with an aggregate of 352.²¹

Economic and Industrial Life. Although the Armenians formed a minority in Ordubad in the late 19th century, they boasted very important positions in its economic and industrial life. In 1870 Karapet Papazian (he was born in the Armenian village of Handamej located several kilometres north of Ordubad) opened a textile factory in the city. This factory employed 250 workers and had 500 spinning-wheels and cauldrons. In one of its sections the men cooked the cocoon; in another about 50 women

¹⁹ Vardan Mamikonian was one of the most prominent members of the Mamikonians' princely family. In the 5th century A.D., he led the Armenians' struggle against Sassanid Persia and was the commander-in-chief of the Armenian troops at the famous battle of Avarayr (451).

²⁰ Gevorg Petrossian, one of the most prominent actors of the Armenian theatre, was a graduate of this school (he was born in Ordubad in 1860). Leaving the secondary school successfully, Gevorg entered Lazarian Seminary of Moscow, but he did not like the classical education offered there so that some time later, he left his studies incomplete and went to Tiflis. Gevorg received further education at the Real School of Tiflis and devoted himself to the stage after he had accomplished his course there. For many years, he played in numerous performances in different cities such as Tiflis, Yerevan, Shushi, Baku, etc. He also set up troupes, being received with great warmth everywhere. Gevorg Petrossian also performed roles in the Russian language at the theatres of Moscow and Petrograd («Մշակ» 1882, 12 մայիս; «Տարազ», 1892, № 7; «Արձագանք», 1892, 12 յունիստ; **Լալայեան Ե.**, idem, p. 296).

²¹ **Լալայեան Ե.**, ibid.

drew out and twisted the silk threads with the help of the spinning-wheel. These silk threads were exported into Moscow as well as other Russian and European cities having silk-weaving mills.

Ordubad had another famous textile factory belonging to the brothers Babayan and employing 211 male and female workers.

Almost at the same time, the Araskhanians from Verin Agulis and a certain Nunsusian living in Nusus Village (situated in the aforementioned gorge) founded another textile factory in Ordubad. The Russian authorities had declared it a must to establish such factories in the large cities of the region. Raw silk cocoon was brought to Ordubad from Goghtan and the townships of the neighbouring district of Arevik, i.e. Karjevan and Meghri. In those times, the textile factories of Agulis did not function at all in contrast to Ordubad, which boasted flourishing textile industry.

The local bigoted Turks, however, were not able to appreciate the highly important and useful work the Armenians did in the city. The great fire that broke out in 1887 reduced to ashes the Armenians' stores, workshops and commercial offices (those left intact by the fire gradually closed in the course of time). The financial losses inflicted on the Armenians amounted to millions.

During the Armeno-Turkish fights of 1905 to 1906, most of the Armenians left Ordubad, their textile factories shifting into the Turks' possession (most of them became the property of a Turk who had formerly been an ordinary worker). Between 1921 and 1922, when the Soviet authorities nationalised these factories, their Turkish owners took advantage of the weak vigilance along the banks of the Arax, crossed the border and took up living in Tabriz, carrying away with them part of their movable property.

Unlike Verin Agulis, Ordubad did not boast luxurious shops in the European style where one could find not only Russian products but also others imported from the Western countries, including woollen articles, shoes, boots and a wide variety of other items of everyday use. Despite this, however, it was a centre of great commercial activity and had a large market where the villagers of Arevik bought wheat, barley, tea, sugar and other necessary provisions. Via this market they transported dried fruit, raw silk cocoon and drinks to Caucasia and the markets of Transcaucasian countries. In Ordubad the Armenian villagers of Kakavaberd sold the fleece of their sheep and thence carried meat, cheese and oil to Agulis.

The Turkish inhabitants of Ordubad were involved in large-scale smuggling, as a result of which, Russian sugar and other factory products had lower prices at the markets of Persia, as compared to those in Caucasia. Buying these products in Tabriz, the Turks transported them illegally to Goghtan, or Syunik and sold them at more reasonable prices to their fellow Muslims and Armenians.

Remarkable economic progress was observed in Ordubad in the years preceding World War I which marked the beginning of the construction of the railway line connecting the cities of Julfa and Baku. This meant profitable work not only for various Turkish contractors but also the Turkish builders who worked on this line for several years on quite advantageous conditions.

Great busyness of commercial life was also observed at the market of Ordubad when many Russian officials took up living there together with their families.

After the Russian revolution of 1918 to 1919, the situation grew worse for the Armenians: the Tsarist army units started withdrawing from the Turkish front hastily, selling their arms and ammunition at very low prices to the Turks, or sometimes even exchanging them for some bottle of drink on their way back home via the railway line of Julfa-Nakhijevan-Shahtakhti.

Part of these arms were conveyed to Goghtan and distributed among the local Turks. In Ordubad were located the headquarters of the Turkish officers and soldiers who were to train the Turkish villagers in the use of arms. It was a must for every Turkish family to buy several pieces of arms and the necessary amount of ammunition.

Within a short period of time, all the roads in the district grew highly dangerous, with Ordubad blocking communication between Goghtan and Arevik. The local Armenians made every possible endeavour to continue living with the Turks in peace, but in vain.

The mountainous villages of Karjevan, Meghri and Kakavaberd of Arevik District mostly bought their annual stores of cereals and other provisions at the market of Ordubad. Once it had closed before them, they had to obtain all these vital provisions from the landowners of Iranian Atropatene [Azerbaijan] and arrange their conveyance to their villages across the Arax.

Defeated by Khalil Pasha's army, General Andranik²² retreated to Julfa, whence he moved to Goghtan together with the Armenian refugees from Nakhijevan, Yernjak and Western Armenia who were following his troops. Taking up temporary living in Tseghna Village of Goghtan, he occupied himself with the reorganisation of his scattered forces, intending to later advance towards Zangezur together with his followers amounting to several thousand. However, the Turks of Ordubad kept the only road leading to Zangezur blocked so that the general decided to fight his way out by force.

The former, who had not forgotten the formidable disaster that had befallen Yaji Village, sent a large delegation to Agulis, asking the Armenians to intercede before Andranik so that he would give up his plan of launching a military action against Ordubad. Wishing to retain their good neighbourly relations with the Turks, the Armenians of Agulis met this petition and sent all the members of the National Council of their village to the commander to persuade him to abstain from attacking

²² Andranik Ozanian (1865 to 1927) was a prominent freedom fighter, a national hero and an outstanding figure in the Armenian national liberation movement. He dedicated himself to the liberation of Western Armenia when still very young. During the massacres of the Armenians between 1894 and 1896, he participated in the struggle against the Turkish troops in Taron and Sasun. Beginning with the late 1890s, Andranik actually became the leader of all the liberation groups fighting in Western Armenia. He earned himself the fame of national hero particularly during the defence of Arakelots Monastery of Moosh (1901). From 1922 until his death, Andranik lived in Fresno City, USA. In 1928 his remains were moved to Paris and interred in the cemetery of Père Lachaise (Հայկական սովետական հանրազգիտարան, հ. 1, Երևան, 1974, էջ 392). At present the prominent Armenian rests in the cemetery of Yerablur, Yerevan, in his homeland.

Ordubad and the Turkish villages of Goghtan, and move to Zangezur through the mountains. The prominent army leader was very disappointed with this request, but he did not turn it down and moved to Zangezur across Kaputjugh, taking with him the aforementioned Armenian refugees and leaving Goghtan to the mercy of fate.

When the Turks retreated from Caucasia after the final defeat of Germany and Austria, Nakhijevan and Goghtan again formed part of the newly-established Republic of Armenia, and the Armenians of these districts found themselves in temporary peace.

The representative of the Republic of Armenia who arrived at Agulis was only formally recognised by Ordubad, which still kept the road leading to Arevik under blockade. The representative of the Armenian authorities did everything within his power to live peacefully with the Turks of Goghtan, but his efforts proved futile, mainly due to the hostile and uncompromising position held by Ordubad. Some time later, the Musavatist Government of Baku incited the Turks of Nakhijevan, Sharur and Yernjak to revolt against the Republic of Armenia. Despite the fact that Ordubad and the neighbouring Turkish villages had been saved from Andranik's attacks only thanks to the intercession of the National Council of Agulis, its ungrateful and mean Turkish inhabitants, united with the blood-thirsty Tatar barbarians who had escaped from Lernahayastan, exterminated the thriving Armenian villages of Goghtan one after another.

"Thanks" to the trophies gained during the plunder of Verin Agulis and a number of other Armenian villages, Ordubad is now considered the second largest city in Autonomous Nakhijevan and is dependent upon Azerbaijan.

The railway line of Baku-Julfa, which had been left incomplete in the aftermath of World War I and the unfavourable political and economic conditions following it, was thoroughly accomplished under the Soviet authorities. At present Ordubad is directly connected with Baku, as well as with Nakhijevan via Julfa. It is also linked with the railway line of Julfa-Tabriz-Teheran.

The direct connection with Baku will certainly promote the economic and industrial development of Ordubad and the adjacent Turkish villages. Moreover, this will promote the cultural, educational and spiritual modernisation of the district.

The significance of Ordubad has grown thanks to internal factors as well. Thus, a wide network of recently-built highways now connects it with the remotest places of the district. The present-day omnibuses reach even the mountainous Armenian villages. On the other hand, however, these busy roads have facilitated the Turks' disastrous penetration into some four to five Armenian villages of Goghtan, that have enjoyed the seclusion of their mountains so far, remaining intact by the enemy.

ANAPAT

Location. The once populous township of Anapat, which may be considered a suburb of Ordubad, is situated several kilometres north-east of this city, on the bank of a stream flowing from the village of Gandzak located farther north.



Անաթի Ա. Ստեփանոս եկեղեցւոյ յԱնաթատ զեղջ .

Anapat. The ruins of St. Stepanos Church in the late 19th century

A little below the township, on the slope of a gorge stretches an Armenian cemetery with a small, semi-ruined chapel.

South of Anapat, vineyards and various other orchards cultivated by the Armenians extended for several kilometers. At present [1975 to 1976] they lie totally abandoned and reduced to barren steppes stretching up to the Arax river.

Gh. Alishan and S. Eprikian consider Anapat as a purely Armenian-inhabited village.²³ These highly-merited fathers of Mekhitarist Congregation, however, confuse it with another village lying in the farthest north of Goghtan.

Anapat used to have a “cloister of hermits” where the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, Mesrop Mashtots, is said to have spent some time repenting. It is rumoured that after his death, some people wanted to intern his remains in Anapat, but Prince Amatuny²⁴ found the village of Oshakan more appropriate for this purpose, presumably, due to its proximity to Echmiatzin.

It is most probable that after his arrival in Goghtan, Mashtots visited Vorduat and Anapat, but neither his biographer Koriun nor Moses Khorenatsy have any historical records to confirm this.

Anapat used to have a purely Apostolic community.

The ruins of the local church of St. Stepanos were preserved until the second decade of the 20th century.²⁵

²³ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 319-320; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 167.

²⁴ Prince Vahan Amatuny (5th century), who was one of the disciples of Mesrop Mashtots, moved his teacher’s remains to Oshakan and buried him there, building a central-domed church-mausoleum over his grave.

²⁵ Ալիշան Ղ., ibid; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 167; Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 298.

HANDAMEJ

Location. This once purely Armenian-inhabited village is situated on the right bank of the river Ordubad, 3 to 4 kilometres north of the city of the same name.

It was divided in two quarters: upper and lower. In the second half of the previous [19th] century, when the Turks of Ordubad enjoyed numerical superiority, some Turkish families penetrated into this village and took up living in its upper quarter, the local Armenians being forced to retreat to the lower one.

Yervand Lalayan, who visited all the villages and places of Goghtan District in the first years of the 20th century, speaks with admiration about the clean streets and semi-European houses of the Armenian quarter of this village.²⁶

On my way back to Agulis from the filthy streets of Ordubad, where the stifling heat was suffocating, I often passed through Handamej, where I took delight in watching the beautiful houses of the Armenians surrounded by rich gardens shrouded in luxurious foliage. In the yard of almost every house you could see water flowing through clean channels, which, together with the numerous trees of the gardens, spread cool air and invigorated the passers by. Generally speaking, the entire village of Handamej was surrounded by orchards and gardens that extended as far as Ordubad. It can be stated with full confidence that Handamej was the most thriving village throughout the gorge of the river Ordubad.

The village had a vaulted church which stood in a large garden in the lower quarter. It was preserved intact until the first two decades of this [20th] century. Several buildings adjoining it housed the local primary school and the dwelling of the parish priest.

As reported by Lalayan, early in the 20th century, Handamej had an Armenian population of 146,²⁷ but this number was reduced to some 3 to 4 families after the majority of the local inhabitants had moved to Verin Agulis, Tiflis, Zakatala, Baku and other Russian, or Transcaucasian cities.²⁸

The Armeno-Tatar fights that broke out in 1905 gave rise to large-scale emigration among the Armenians of Goghtan. After several innocent Armenians had fallen victim to the hostile attitude shown by the local Turks, most of their compatriots abandoned their native villages, selling their houses, gardens and arable lands very cheap. The others who represented the wealthy class of Armenians did not sell their ancestral estates but put them under the care of some Turkish servants, or rented them out to rich Turkish families. These people visited their native hearths only for a short time during the summer months, but this lasted only until 1917, when the Turks rendered it impossible to retain any communication with the village.

The Armenians of Handamej gave birth to many intellectuals, but very few of them are known by name. Let us remember only the brothers Minas and Khachatur from the

²⁶ **Լալայան Ե.**, *idem*, p. 297.

²⁷ **Լալայան Ե.**, *ibid*.

²⁸ **Աճառեան Հ.**, *Քննութիւն Ազգութի բարբառի, Երևան, 1935, էջ 9*: Most of these people succeeded in creating prosperous living conditions thanks to their diligence.

Avetissians' family, who were graduates of the Faculty of Medicine of Moscow University: later the former moved to Tiflis, and the latter to Baku.

I also know several other intellectuals who generally visited the village in summertime, but unfortunately, I did not have personal acquaintance with them and do not remember their names.

GANDZAK

Location. The village lies on the bank of a stream flowing from the north, in a gorge several kilometres north of Anapat (the gardens and arable lands of these two villages almost merge together).

Gandzak used to be an entirely Armenian-inhabited village. Its ancient church, which was preserved standing until the first two decades of this [20th] century, was a famous place of pilgrimage for the Armenians of Agulis as well as those of the adjacent villages.²⁹

As attested by Gh. Alishan, near Gandzak was situated a monastery dedicated to Sts. Andrew and Hakob.³⁰

In 1512 mention is made of the head of Gandzak Village Siluanis.³¹

In 1603 the population of the village represented the following picture: 70 Armenian houses with 200 adults and 150 under age, as well as 20 Turkish houses. Half a century later, the Armenian population of Gandzak comprised a single house and five monks.

A record of 1725 mentions monk Petros, in whose days the church of the aforementioned monastery bore the name of the Holy Virgin. It retained a sculpture that seems to have served as a cross pedestal. This sculpture was engraved with the following words dating from 1476: «Ի խաչս յիշատակ» (transl.: *This cross in memory*).³²

The pilgrimage site of Gandzak was frequently visited by the Armenians of Agulis up until the massacres of 1919 to 1920.

NUSNUS

Location. Nusnus (Nansis, as the Turks call it) is situated along the bank of the river Ordubad, a little north of Handamej.

According to Alishan, the toponym of 'Nusnus' derives from the old Armenian name of Nunits,³³ which is mentioned in the form of Nunis in an inscription (1633 to 1636) carved above the door of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Nusnus is the northernmost village in the gorge of Ordubad. Being the first place to make use of the river water, it boasts abundant water, thanks to which it has exten-

29 **Լադայեան Ե.**, idem, p. 298.

30 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 331; **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, idem, pp. 641-642.

31 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, ibid; **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, ibid.

32 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, ibid; **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, ibid.

33 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, ibid; **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, ibid.

sive orchards and alleys almost overlapping with the arable lands and gardens of Handamej in the south.

In the north and east, the village is surrounded by the mountain branches of Kaputjugh (or Alangyaz, as the locals call it), which provide green pastures and hunting-grounds only early in spring. The hills rising in the west are dry and barren.

The Armenians of Nusnus were occupied with farming, gardening, silkworm-breeding and bee-keeping. The Turks were mainly engaged in farming and cattle-breeding.

The Turks' bigoted intolerance and the Armeno-Tatar fights made the Armenians gradually leave their native hearths. Their resettlement assumed particularly larger scale towards the close of the 19th century and in the first decade of the 20th century, when some of them moved to Verin Agulis, and others took up residence in various Russian and Transcaucasian cities.

Among the outstanding wealthy families of Nusnus, mention should be made of the Nusnussians, who founded a silk factory in Ordubad, together with the Araskhanians from Verin Agulis, towards the end of the 19th century. One of the members of Nusnussian Family had retired from business affairs due to his age and lived in Agulis, where he had an active participation in, and great influence on, the community affairs of Agulis Armenians, particularly when this township lived through harsh times.

Indeed, Nusnus had an Armenian church and school, but we do not have any records relating to them due to the fact that the local Armenians abandoned the village rather early.

According to Alishan, between the villages of Handamej and Nusnus, towards the east lay a Turkish place named Gyulyaman, but its exact location is unknown to us.

North-west of Nusnus, in another gorge were the fine arable lands belonging to the wealthy family of the Terians from Agulis. This family, whose representatives were called Shasha-Agha in our village, also held possession of the villages of Aza and Der. During summer months, several Turkish families lived in this gorge, serving as guards for these lands.

NIGIDEH

Location. This Turkish village is situated in a rocky glen at the upper edge (i.e. northernmost part) of the gorge of Agulis (its pastures and barren arable lands extend on some sunny slopes above it).

Most probably, in times bygone, the nearby mountains used to be covered with forests whose remnants, between 20 and 30 trees of thick trunks and rich foliage, were preserved in the table-land of Piri Kashvan: local people regarded them as sacred trees and did not cut them down³⁴ (on the whole, the village was devoid of fruit trees, the local inhabitants growing mostly barley and millet).

³⁴ **Լալայեանի Ե.**, idem, p. 301.

The houses of Nigideh, which were built of stone and earth, were located below ground level.

The village suffered considerable damage in the aftermath of the flood of 1872.

A narrow and hardly accessible path that traverses the lofty mountain of Kaputjugh-Alangyaz led from Nigideh to Syunik's Armenian village of Lijk. During winter months, it was rendered absolutely impassable.

Nigideh represented a purely Turkish village whose inhabitants were mostly occupied with animal husbandry—only a very small number of them were farmers, or served as such for the Armenians of Agulis. They sold their cheese, oil and vegetables, such as fennel and brooms made of special plants, at the market of Agulis and bought corn with the income received.

According to the results of the population census carried out in 1873, Nigideh had 14 houses with 61 souls.³⁵ At the beginning of the 20th century, they grew to 22 houses with 272 souls.³⁶

KILID AND KYOTAM

Location. On the left side of the road leading to Karjevan, on some mountain slopes between 4 and 5 kilometres east of Ordubad City, two ancient Armenian villages lie, at present [1975 to 1976] entirely inhabited by Turks. These are Kyotam and Kilid, which are separated by quite a lofty and absolutely bare mountain having a large cavern near its summit.³⁷

The Origin of the Toponyms. Kilid (Kalid) is the Persian equivalent for key: apparently, this village, towering high on a mountain slope in the narrow gorge of the Arax, served as a kind of key to the city of Ordubad.

In contrast to Kilid, the origin of the name of Kyotam is not so easy to find. In Arabic the word kyotam is used to denote a special kind of tree whose leaves yield a hair dyeing material wide-spread in the Orient, especially with the Muslims. We can presume that once this tree abounded in the village, although it is hard to believe that any tree or flower could grow on these rocky and bare mountains.

Gh. Alishan supposes that the name of Goghtan derives from the word Keli, which he distorts into Gedam or Kedan. He considers this village the cradle of the history of Goghtan District, viz. hence the people later moved westward.³⁸

Yer. Lalayan thinks that Kyotam and Goghtan have something common in their pronunciation. Also taking into account the fact that Kyotam is situated closer to Ordubad, he is inclined to believe that the inhabitants of Goghtan were the original settlers of this village who later moved westward.

³⁵ Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, p. 324.

³⁶ Լալայանի Ե., *ibid*.

³⁷ According to a local legend, this cavern, which is rich in stalactites, has an underground opening extending up to the river Arax. See Լալայանի Ե., *idem*, p. 298.

³⁸ Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, pp. 316, 317.

We do not agree with either of these investigators, but still, we cannot find any interpretation for the word Kyotam. It is most probable that these villages got their names after they had been stripped of their Armenian residents, during the periods of the Mongol invasions, or the Persian domination, when they were totally re-inhabited by Turks.

While passing near these villages, one wonders how people could choose these wild, barren mountains for habitation. The point is that the chief occupation of the local inhabitants was cattle-breeding. During the hot summer months, they ascended Kaputjugh together with their stock and returned to the village only in autumn, leaving their collected fodder on the mountains—we often saw piles of hay below the village. However, it was mainly the valleys of the Arax that provided food for their sheep, as snow melted there earlier as compared to the other places.

The houses of these villages, which were built of stone and earth, were located below ground and looked rather miserable.

According to the results of the population census of 1873, Kyotam had 100 inhabitants. As for Kilid, it had 28 houses with 168 souls.³⁹

Thus, the brief history of Ordubad City and several villages located on the river of the same name shows that the Armenians gradually gave up in their unequal struggle against the Muslims. In the course of time, the Turks took possession of not only the city of Ordubad, once the residence of the Armenian princes of Goghtan, but also of the villages of Anapat, Gandzak, Handamej and Nusnus.

In the aftermath of the massacres, persecutions, plunder and emigration, the Armenians gradually left the district, whereas the Turks who have remained unpunished for their crimes to this very day, enjoyed life on account of what the former had created with the sweat of their brow throughout many centuries.

AGULIS

A BRIEF HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Location and Geographical Setting. A 17th-century author whose name remains unknown reports the following concerning the geographical position of Agulis and Goghtan District in general. He states that the “rugged and rocky” mountains rising north of Agulis protect the vegetation from blizzards, while in the south its fields and saplings are open before the spring breezes. The district that has everything necessary for the needs of the local people boasts most favourable conditions “...for building, planting and sowing...”⁴⁰

Origin of the Name. The name of *Agulis*, or *Agulik* as it was called in centuries bygone, is etymologised as meaning ‘*Rich in Gardens*’: supposedly, it derives from the Armenian word ‘aygi,’ the equivalent for ‘garden.’ This viewpoint cannot be substantiated at scientific level, but it seems to be well founded for the city of Agulis truly abounded in gardens.

³⁹ Ալիշան Չ., ibid.

⁴⁰ Մաշտոցի անվան մատենադարան, ձեռ. 1760, էջ 314-316; Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, p. 120.

Another interpretation for the toponym Agulis is found in an ancient legend which goes as follows:

On his way from Vorduat to Agulis, Thaddaeus the Apostle fell asleep on a lofty rock towering between Agulis and Handamej. Waking up very early in the morning, he cried out, “Akn i luys” (“Light fell into my eyes”), and these words were later allegedly distorted into Agulis.

According to Alishan, a German traveller took photograph of this rock, on which the local inhabitants periodically lit candles in memory of the apostle.⁴¹

The aforementioned unknown writer of the 17th-century also dwells upon the etymology of the toponym of Agulis, which he interprets as deriving from the word ‘argilis’ meaning something ‘forbidden’ or ‘inaccessible’ [‘argelel’ is the Armenian equivalent for ‘to forbid’]. This etymologisation may be accounted for by the fact that the magnificent city of Agulis enjoyed some privileges and was exempt from any outside interference [in its local affairs] on the part of the local authorities. As an exceptionally splendid place, it was subject only to the central government.

While referring to Agulis, the author of this material uses the Armenian word ‘khas’ generally meaning ‘beautiful,’ ‘splendid.’ He, however, interprets it as equivalent to the word ‘forbidden,’ metaphorically meaning ‘something superb and unsurpassed.’ According to A. Hovhannissian, this etymologisation of the toponym Agulis is of particular value: “Agulis was ‘forbidden’ for ‘this capital’ stood out among the other towns and cities. Being ‘forbidden,’ it enjoyed the love and warmth of the other Christian nations. It was ‘forbidden’ thanks to its ...three-storey residences... in which their inhabitants enjoyed their lives and which aroused delight among those seeing them. It was ‘forbidden’ thanks to its abundant springs and delicious fruits, thick forests [originally, the mountains of Agulis were covered with woods], as well as its ever green foliage and flower-rich gardens that were particularly magnificent in appearance in spring. Finally, it was ‘forbidden’ thanks to its fascinating nature and its countless riches... weakens all kinds of intriguers, affects their minds and enfeebles their will, rendering them timid and unstable.”⁴²

Historical References. Early in the 11th century, Catholicos Sargis mentioned the city in one of his bulls by the name of Argulik among the districts belonging to the diocese of Syunik.⁴³

Prominent typesetter and publisher Mateos Vanandetsy, who worked in Amsterdam in the 17th century, repeatedly calls himself Mateos Aguletsy.

In the 16th century, Agulis was a large centre of trade with commercial ties with Russia, Persia, India and Western Europe.⁴⁴

41 Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 325; Էփրիկեան Մ., idem, p. 10.

42 Մատենադարան, ձեռ. 1760; Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, p. 125.

43 Ստեփանոս Օրբելեան, idem, p. 263. In the mid-17th century, Archimandrite Zakaria Vagharshapatsy, who is known as a scholar, makes reference to it under the same name in the colophon of a Bible.

44 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 1, էջ 61:



Verin Agulis. A partial view of the central quarter (early 20th century)

The large size and great importance of Agulis between the 17th and 18th centuries is well evident from the fact that in his report submitted to Peter the Great Israel Ori⁴⁵ wrote that he hoped to recruit 6,000 fighters from this city to aid the Russian troops upon their arrival in Caucasia (it should be noted that he calculated to receive a smaller number of soldiers from Nakhijevan).⁴⁶

From a colophon Priest Ghazar wrote in Agulis in 1601, while reduced to a fugitive, we learn that the Armenians suffered the tyranny of Sultan Mahmud during that period.⁴⁷

Further historical references to Agulis are found in the hagiography of Priest Andreas by Bishop David Shamkhoretsy. According to this record, in 1617, while preparing an invasion against Oghuz Ahmed Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman army, Shah Abbas the Great wished to visit Verin (Upper) Agulis. Learning about his intention beforehand, the Armenians of Agulis covered part of the road the shah was to pass through with carpets and held a splendid reception for him.

As had been ordered, those meeting the Persian shah comprised school children led by their teacher, Priest Andreas. The hair of all the pupils had been cut very short, and the shah guessed that this had been done deliberately so that the pupils would look

⁴⁵ Israel Ori (1659 to 1711) was a prominent figure of the Armenian liberation struggle.

⁴⁶ **ԼՈՒ**, Հայոց պատմություն, հ. 3, Երևան, 1973, էջ 56:

⁴⁷ **Հովհաննիսյան Ա.**, idem, p. 72.

ugly and he would not be able to select the most beautiful among them. He ordered to punish those who had initiated it. Thinking that many parents would be killed as a result of it, young teacher Andreas assumed all responsibility for that “crime.” The Persian monarch ordered to arrest and torture him in prison, forcing him into renouncing his religion. Refusing to do so, the priest was severely tortured to death on 18 November 1617.

The history of the martyrdom of Priest Andreas was recorded by Bishop David Shamkhoretsy, who had been witness to it,⁴⁸ but it was handed down to Armenian historiographers thanks to Arakel Davrizhetsy,⁴⁹ who probably made use of Shamkhoretsy’s work.

Priest Andreas was a native of Nakhijevan. When Shah Abbas the Great conquered this city in 1604, his parents took their only child and fled to Verin Agulis. Receiving primary education in Agulis, Andreas moved to the Great Cloister of Syunik [Syunyats Metz Anapat in the original], where he continued his studies with Movses Tatevatsy, one of the most prominent scholars of those times.

Completing his studies, Andreas returned to Verin Agulis and started working as a teacher and priest at the local school and St. Hovhannes Church of Khojadzor respectively. Both Bishop Shamkhoretsy and Davrizhetsy speak very highly about the merits and exceptionally good features of this young priest and devoted teacher, who sacrificed himself to save many innocent lives.

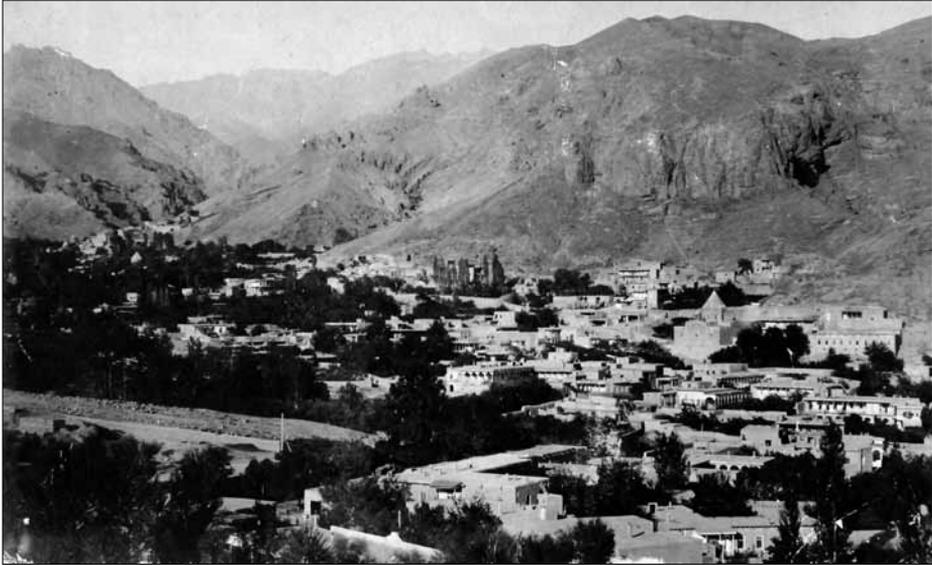
As an eye-witness to his tragic martyrdom, Bishop Shamkhoretsy writes that Andreas’ corpse was thrown into an open field to become prey to wild beasts and predators. It was only several days later that his friends dared to secretly move what had remained of his body and bury him in the left vestry of St. Hovhannes Church of Khojadzor. Up until the total destruction of Agulis, the local Armenians held sacred the memory of this selfless teacher (some classes of the school that he himself had founded were still preserved in the yard of this ancient church).

The fact that the school of Agulis had an intelligent and educated teacher like Priest Andreas attests to the high level of education in this city. It also shows how important the education of their children was for the Armenians of Agulis. On the other hand, his tragic death shows in what dismal conditions the inhabitants of Agulis lived during that period...

After long and disastrous invasions, in 1638 Persia and the Ottoman Government signed a long-lasting peace which was not broken for almost a century. This peaceful period proved highly productive for the Armenians: they breathed a sigh of relief and started reconstructing their devastated and plundered villages and towns one after another. Once more their fields and gardens were covered with foliage and once more

48 K. Sukiassian carried out detailed research into this work. See «Պատմա-բանասիրական հանդես» (henceforward: «ՊԻՀ»), Երևան, 1976, № 1, էջ 199.

49 **Պատմութիւն Առաքել վարդապետի Գարիիժեցոյ**, Վաղարշապատ, 1896, էջ 217 (henceforward: **Առաքել Գարիիժեցի**). Davrizhetsy wrote his history in the last years of his life, between 1651 and 1662. Armenian writer Muratsan has a historical novel dedicated to Priest Andreas.



Verin (Upper) Agulis. A partial view of the central quarter (early 20th century)

smoke was seen rising from their chimneys. Touching upon this period of comparative prosperity that the Armenian towns and villages forming part of the khanates of Yerevan, Karabakh and Nakhijevan enjoyed in the days of Najaf Ghuli Khan, Deacon (Sarkavag) Zakaria writes: “Truly, the land of Ararat flourished with all its trees and saplings, fruits and seeds, flowers and plants, mountains and fields, rivers and springs, ...birds and quadrupeds, ...and in general, abounded in all blessings.”⁵⁰

This period of peace and creative work marked great progress not only in agriculture throughout the district of Goghtan, but also in crafts and overseas trade. In Venice and Toscana, one can find a great number of inscriptions and archive materials attesting to the large-scale commercial activity the merchants of Agulis, Dasht, Dastak and Tseghna had with these places. The Armenian silkworm breeders of Agulis and Dasht had close ties with such centres of sericulture as Gilan, Mazandaran and Tabriz.

As confirmed by the Armenian and foreign sources of the 17th century, Agulis as well as the adjacent villages and townships had quite large populations enjoying a prospering life. These times were marked with remarkable activities in the cultural life of Agulis. Large-scale activity was also observed in the sphere of construction: the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle and more than ten churches were thoroughly renovated during this period (these sanctuaries were the scriptoria of many manuscripts enriched with floral illustrations).

Yerevan Repository of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) retains a valuable manuscript by an unknown writer of the 17th century who provides us with interesting

⁵⁰ Quoted from: Ջարարեայ սարկաւագի պատմագրութիւն, Ա, Վաղարշապատ, 1870, էջ 39. Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, p. 122.

records relating to Goghtan District and its “capital” Agulis. Analyzing this material, Ashot Hovhannissian writes: “The writings of this unknown author are of exceptional value. Despite its rhetorical style, it is an important source reflecting the historical reality of those times. ... it breathes with a secular spirit and optimism. It tells you how enthusiastic the merchants of Agulis and the public at large were [about the development of their city]. ...the villagers dug canals to provide water for the vineyards as well as other orchards in the stifling summer heat, and created oases of marketable agriculture, gardening, viticulture and silkworm breeding through artificial irrigation.”⁵¹

The reliable diary by Zakaria Aguletsy, which abounds in factual evidence, is a most remarkable source relating to the great economic and cultural progress observed throughout Goghtan District. This scholar also shows what immense role the merchants of Agulis had in the construction activity unfolded in their city.⁵²

Agulis’ history of the first quarter of the 18th century is partly connected with the liberation movement of mountainous Armenia led by David Bek. Reaching an agreement with the Persian court, this prominent military leader launched an attack against the Ottoman army units that had invaded the district of Arevik. Driving away the Ottomans from the village town of Meghri, the Armenian liberation army attacked the Ottoman troops that had fortified themselves in Ordubad and the local Turks who were supporting their fellow Muslims. The enemy suffered defeat and were forced into a withdrawal. In 1727 David Bek succeeded in totally liberating Goghtan from the Ottoman troops. However, during the fights against the Ottoman troops stationed in Nakhijevan City the Persians deserted the front: part of David Bek’s soldiers started gathering the scattered Persian deserters, while the others moved to Agulis and fortified themselves in the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle.

David Bek’s fiasco at the battles of Nakhijevan and the unwillingness of the Persian soldiers to fight side by side with their allies made the authorities of Agulis adopt a cautious position towards the Ottomans. The inhabitants of Agulis were not sure if his fighting forces would be able to defend the city against the huge multitudes of Ottoman troops. This is the reason why they decided to adopt a neutral position and demanded that the liberation army of Syunik, led by Melik Parsadan, leave Agulis. The latter did not agree at once, and the sides entered into a conflict which aggravated to such an extent that head of Agulis Melik Musy ordered the local armed forces to drive them away by force. During the firing that ensued a bullet killed David Bek’s close comrade-in-arms Melik Parsadan, who was attempting to reach an agreement with the Armenians of Agulis.⁵³

A short time before these events, David Bek expressed a desire to have Melik Musy killed due to his unfavourable attitude to the Armenian liberation movement, but Melik Parsadan persuaded him not to do so and saved his life.

51 Հովհաննիսյան Ա., *idem*, p. 126.

52 Հովհաննիսյան Ա., *idem*, p. 123.

53 Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. IV, էջ 172-175:

David Bek's forces being rather small in number, he decided not to engage in fighting and suffer further losses; instead, they buried Melik Parsadan in a graveyard located north of the monastery,⁵⁴ destroyed part of the monastic ramparts to open way for their withdrawal and left Agulis through the mountains.

Armenian historiography has interpreted this highly unpleasant incident as an act of treachery, but such an approach is not fully objective. At that time, Agulis had a population of over 10,000 houses. The city also has its own armed forces, but still, the local inhabitants were not convinced if David Bek's army would be able to defend the district against the Ottoman army units far outnumbering them and were afraid lest the Ottomans might launch a counter-attack and devastate their thriving city once the prominent army leader left it.⁵⁵

Fortunately, the Persian garrison of the castle of Yerevan, the armed citizens and the Georgian troops who had come to their rescue succeeded in repelling the khan's army. On his way of withdrawal, Azat Khan invaded a number of Armenian villages and towns and reached Agulis. Dazzled by the countless riches of the city, he encircled it from the west and demanded that the local inhabitants provide a vast amount of food for his army. The Armenians of Agulis were also to pay ransom to the khan for the security of their lives.

A great number of families which had found refuge in the mountains and woods while trying to escape this harrowing carnage abandoned their ruined city for ever and resettled in Shushi, Izmir, Constantinople and even India. In Shushi the former residents of Agulis founded a separate quarter where they at first pursued rivalry with the inhabitants of Ghazanchi and other merchants in wealth and position. In the course of time, however, they forgot their vernacular and were assimilated into the local inhabitants.

Those of Agulis Armenians who took up living in Constantinople settled down in a quarter founded by their compatriots and called Bey Oghli after a hill in their native city.⁵⁶

54 This cemetery still preserves Melik Parsadan's grave as a constant reproach to Melik Musy, who was later punished for his treachery.

55 As we have already written in the part of this work devoted to Ordubad, after David Bek's untimely death, this city rose in rebellion against the forces of Lernahayastan. Commander Mkhitar, who had assumed the command of the Armenian forces, succeeded in stifling this mutiny for a short time, but soon he himself fell victim to an inimical bullet fired by his own compatriots. His tragic death put an end to the eight-year-long Armenian liberation movement, that had been split up from within. Although the liberation movement of Lernahayastan reached a deadlock by Commander Mkhitar's murder by his own compatriots, the victories the Armenian warriors had gained in their unequal struggle against the foreign oppressors helped the Armenians keep alive the high concept of restoring the Armenian statehood.

56 **Լեո**, Հայոց պատմություն, Երևան, 1946, հ. 3, էջ 724-726: Leo writes in the third volume of his *History of the Armenian Nation* that the Armenians of Agulis who emigrated to Constantinople in 1752 founded the quarter of Bey Oghli there after a hill that rose in their native city. The highly merited historian, however, distorts the historical facts, for this quarter came into being long before the aforementioned resettlement. This is confirmed by the fact that Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsy IV, who died in Constantinople in 1680, was buried in the cemetery of Bey Oghli.

Most of Agulis Armenians who had hidden themselves in the mountains and forests during the invasion of Azat Khan did not forsake their native homes and returned after the invaders had left their city. They devoted themselves to the reconstruction of their city, but it was not to ever regain its former magnificence and population. Agulis, that had a population of about 10,000 houses a short time before, could hardly restore one-tenth of them. It proved impossible to restore the formerly functioning industrial factories and those occupied with silkworm breeding.

History does not provide us with any information as to when the Turks first penetrated into Agulis. Before Azat Khan's invasion, the city had a limited number of Turkish families which later greatly increased in number. After the extermination and capture of numerous Armenian families during the disastrous invasion of 1752, the Turks took possession of the Armenians' lands and estates and took up residence in the most prospering quarter of Agulis that abounded in water. Its Armenian church is still [as of 1975 to 1976] preserved there.

In the aftermath of Azat Khan's invasion, devastation spread to not only Agulis but also the adjacent and remote Armenian villages where the residents were either exterminated or taken captive to Tabriz. The forsaken houses of these villages were re-inhabited by Turkish families. A number of Armenian families were saved from these massacres by managing to escape to the mountains and woods in due time, but during the Armeno-Tatar fights of 1904 to 1905, they abandoned their homes for ever. In this way, Obovanis, Trunik, Disar, Vanand, Khanagha, Dastak and a number of other Armenian villages were reduced to Turkish ones.

Azat Khan's incursion proved so baneful and fatal that it was remembered with horror and deep hatred even several centuries later. They bitterly cursed the barbaric khan and his hordes which reduced to ruins the once magnificent city of Agulis as well as many other places.

In the last quarter of the 18th century, the district of Goghtan still suffered chaos and anarchy. Taking advantage of the conditions that were favourable for them, various gang leaders and chieftains who had come to power in the course of certain circumstances robbed the peaceful Armenian people of what they had earned with the sweat of their brow, put the bond of slavery upon thousands of young women, girls and boys and sold them as dumb animals at the markets of Oriental cities without any punishment.

How painful it is to write the history of any part of Armenia: you have to incessantly mention unspeakable persecutions and sufferings that fell to the Armenians' lot throughout their existence.

The bandits and invaders who were accustomed to living at the expense of others were always dazzled by the riches and splendour of Agulis together with the countless treasures accumulated in the local churches and monasteries—they were mostly donated by the faithful. The Turks called Agulis 'A Gorge of Gold,' and this is the reason why this city was repeatedly attacked and plundered, while its inhabitants were slaughtered or taken captive.



Verin (Upper) Agulis. A partial view of the central quarter

One involuntarily thinks that Destiny sent all these evils and calamities to our people, as the clergy interpret it, in punishment for the sins and wrongdoings they had committed.⁵⁷

One wonders what blessings the industrious Armenians of Agulis could have created and how far their progress and development would have gone if they had been allowed to live in liberty and peace, save from continuous persecution and carnage.

Agulis had not recovered from the wounds inflicted by the harrowing invasion of Azat Khan when it suffered another disaster in 1788.

A colophon preserved in the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle and apparently, written some time after the sinister events that marked this year states that a gang leader called Mustafa Khan launched a surprise attack against Agulis, plundered the local people and robbed the churches and monastery of the city of their gold and silver vessels as well as their manuscripts and printed books. These trophies were later sold at the market of Yerevan, whence only a single manuscript was saved and returned to St. Thomas the Apostle. The colophon does not say anything concerning the number of the victims of this invasion.⁵⁸

Shortly afterwards the Russo-Persian war of 1827 to 1828 began. Conquering entire Caucasia, the Russians advanced towards Persian Atropatene and moved

⁵⁷ Աղիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 331-333.

⁵⁸ Սմբատեան Մ., Երնջակ, Տիփլիս, 1904, էջ 457; «Արարատ», 1911, էջ 1006; «Ազգ. հանդես», 1904, էջ 167; Ոսկեան Հ., Վասպուրականի եւ Վանի վանքերը, մաս Բ, էջ 721-722:

between 40 and 50 thousand Armenians from Salmast, Khoy, Maragha, Maku and Muzhambar to their newly-occupied territories. A large group of these immigrants resettled in Verin Agulis, but nevertheless, it had already been reduced to a village or village town at best.

The natural disaster that befell the village town in 1884 caused serious damage to it: the shower of hail that struck Agulis and Nigideh in little balls of ice resembling nuts in size and the torrential downpour made the river burst its banks. Its water, mixed with debris, flooded a number of houses in its immediate neighbourhood and destroyed the fields and gardens lying farther south. The torrent falling down from the surrounding mountains covered the streets of the village town with silt and inflicted heavy damage upon the gardens located on its way. Fortunately, there were only few fatalities, but most of the damaged houses stood unreconstructed up till the time we left Agulis [1920].

Population. According to Petros Ghapanetsy⁵⁹ and historian Zakaria Vagharshapatty, Agulis had a population of 10,000 houses. Nalian reports that sometimes it had 800 houses.⁶⁰

Agulis, which was divided into ten quarters, had textile factories, a great number of workshops, caravanserais and a large market located in its heart.⁶¹

According to Chopin, in the decades following the Russian rule, Agulis had a population of 122 houses with 770 souls, Parakert excluded. As stated by this author, by that time 50 Turkish families had resettled in the village.⁶²

According to the results of the official population census carried out by the Russian authorities in 1893, Agulis had a population of 1,263 souls, including the local Turks.⁶³ Although several centuries earlier quite a different number was used to denote the population of Agulis, we can state that by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Agulis Armenians had surmounted the devastation spread by Azat and Mustapha Khans and created prospering lives for themselves.

The 17th-century Armenian merchants of Agulis were not only concerned with industry or accumulation of financial means. Although some of them left their native city and resettled in prospering European cities, they did not keep aloof from the spiritual life of their compatriots but used the income they gained to contribute to the development of Armenian culture and literature.

59 Petros Ghapanetsy (18th century), who was a prominent poet in Syunik, was a member of Echmiatzin's monastic community. Catholicos Alexandre II sent him to the Crimea and then Constantinople as an envoy of Holy Echmiatzin. He worked in Adrianople as an inspector and spent the last years of his life in Nikomedia. Petros Ghapanetsy died rather advanced in years in 1784 (Լեւոն, Հայոց պատմություն, հ. Գ, Երևան, 1946, էջ 1066; Նազարեան Շ., Պետրոս Ղափանցիի և նրա ազատասիրական երգերը, «ՊԲՀ», № 1, Երևան, 1966, էջ 229-328).

60 Ալիջան Ղ., idem, p. 325; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 10.

61 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 1, Երևան, 1974, էջ 61:

62 Ալիջան Ղ., ibid; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 12.

63 Մարգարեանց Ս., Ազուլեցոց բարբառը (Զոյերի լեզուն), Մոսկվա, 1883, էջ 5-6:



Verin (Upper) Agulis. A partial view of the central quarter (1916)

Among these people, mention should be made of Khoja Gyulnazar's son Khoja Nahapet, who lived in Venice. In 1687 he arranged the translation and publication of a work entitled *An Interpretation of the Sweet Psalms of David the Prophet* "by humble Archimandrite Hovhannes from Constantinople," that "was published with the means of Agulis inhabitant Khoja Gyulnazar's son Nahapet in his own house."

S. Sargissian and Garegin Levonian, the author of a book titled *The Armenian Book and the Art of Printing*, are of the opinion that Khoja Nahapet did not expect to receive any financial compensation for the means spent on the publication of this work. Moreover, he was already known as the benefactor of another book published several years before the aforementioned work in the printing house of Barbon, Venice.

Together with Anton Ghardashents from Jugha, Khoja Nahapet also sponsored the publication of the second edition of the *Document of Agreement* in the same printing office.⁶⁴

Continuing his meditations on the book of psalms of David the Prophet, Levonian particularly states that "...this work is a great novelty, and one half of it is the first ever published book in modern Armenian that the Armenian reader has seen."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Լևոնյան Գ., Հայ գիրքը և սուպագրական արվեստը, Երևան, 1946, էջ 99-100:

⁶⁵ Լևոնյան Գ., idem, pp. 99-100.

This book, which has a leather binding decorated with ornamental patterns, represents a splendid, large-scale publication consisting of 840 pages printed on fine-quality paper and enriched with numerous floral letters, illustrations as well as ten pictures that elucidate the text, each of them covering an entire page. In those times, this work served as a “pocket book” for the Armenian students; this is the reason why Khoja Nahapet attempted to make it as easy to understand as possible and no expenses kept him from fulfilling his intention.

At the beginning of the book is found a large image of Khoja Nahapet, which shows that the Armenian merchants living in Europe had not changed their Armenian style of dressing until the late 17th century.

At its beginning the work also has a versified colophon written by Khoja Nahapet. Below follows the translation of several parts of it:

“In the year 1135, in the days of Catholicos Yeghiazar, I, humble Nahapet, the son of Gulnazar, who is a native of Agulis Village, wrote this poem... By Hovhannes, an archimandrite from Istanbul, whom I begged to embark upon this work... It is easy to understand... this was what I desired in the depth of my heart for the good of our people... I spent large means in harsh times until I published it and accomplished this work...”⁶⁶

This colophon is followed by a preface in which Archimandrite Hovhannes states that Nahapet sponsored this publication “not out of material considerations,” but “for the spiritual comfort of the Armenian nation, and not in complicated wording but in the modern vernacular so that everybody understood it easily and enjoyed the text.”⁶⁷

Levanian supposes the expenses of the publication of this work were rather heavy for Khoja Nahapet, since he did not publish any other books until his death in December 1694.⁶⁸

The Armenian original of the aforementioned versified colophon written by Khoja Nahapet shows that he was an educated man with good command of the Classical Armenian language, *Grabar*. His long sojourn in Europe had helped him acquire knowledge of, and great competence in, many matters, but despite this, he had not forgotten either his mother tongue or his homeland and compatriots. He imparted immense significance to education and made a great contribution to the development of Armenian culture and science.

The second decade of the 19th century marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Armenian people. Under the treaty of Turkmenchai, signed in 1828, Tsarist Russia acquired control over entire Transcaucasia, including Eastern Armenia. While implementing new administrative divisions in their recently-gained territories, the Russian authorities established the Armianskaya Oblast (i.e. Armenian Province), which also included the district of Goghtan now referred to as region (*okrug* in Russian) of Ordubad.

⁶⁶ Լևոնյան Չ., idem, pp. 99-100.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.



Verin (Upper) Agulis. A partial view of the central quarter

The government of the Armenian administrative units was vested in Russian officials, whereas in Ordubad the same function was to be performed by Ehsan Khan and his brother Sheikh Ali Bey, both of them of Turkish origin. For rather a long time, they governed in the region guided by archaic laws, customs and their own desires.⁶⁹

This unilateral order issued by the Russian authorities aroused great protest amidst the Armenians of Goghtan, for in fact, the government of the district had remained in the hands of the same corrupt khans who were now oppressing them as before. However, all their complaints and mass-meetings proved of no avail: moreover, the local khans, who were now in alliance with the Russian authorities, punished them severely for their “disobedience.”

During the further administrative changes, when the Province of Yerevan was established, the Armenians of Goghtan were completely ignored and the administrative control of their district remained in the hands of the local influential Turkish landowners and the wealthy class of Turks. Taking advantage of their high positions, they appointed their Turkish compatriots to all the lower posts and thus exploited and oppressed especially the poor people living in the villages.

Under the Persian rule, Agulis was dependent only upon the central government and itself controlled its lands. During the period of Russian reign, the feudal system again bypassed the village, and the local people retained their ownership rights to their lands. Indeed, they were heavily taxed, but instead, they were save from the tyranny of big landowners.

⁶⁹ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, սր. 3, Երևան, 1967, էջ 7, 105:

In the 18th to 19th centuries, Agulis was governed by an Armenian Melik who was assisted by a Turk elected from among the local Turkish inhabitants. In the administrative and at the beginning also judicial affairs, the melik was dependent on a chief official whose residence was in Ordubad. The village heads of Turkish origin were awarded a noble title by a special decree of the Russian authorities.

Trade in Goghtan. Despite the political and administrative disadvantages and inexplicable discrimination shown against the Armenians, the period following the year 1828 proved quite favourable for them from the standpoint of the development of economy, trade and crafts. It turned out particularly advantageous for the Armenian merchants: the authorities now provided them with safer means of communication, put an end to the acts of plunder and murders committed on the highways, and lifted all kinds of taxes and other types of payment formerly imposed on them. The newly-established government kept commerce and crafts under its immediate auspices.

Of great contribution to the development of commercial life in Agulis proved the continuation of the railway line of Transcaucasia to Julfa and the construction of a motorway extending from Julfa to Agulis. These two important events changed the markets where the traders of Agulis had been unfolding their activity until that time: now Izmir, Constantinople, Venice and other Italian cities were replaced by Tiflis, Baku, Astrakhan, Nizhni Novgorod, etc. Within a short time, the merchants and craftsmen of Agulis set up colonies in Zakatala, Nukhi, Tiflis, Baku and other cities. So great was the number of Agulis Armenians in Zakatala and Nukhi that some of the local inhabitants even learned the dialect of Agulis in the course of time.

The traders of Agulis opened numerous commercial centres in Moscow to facilitate their large-scale export and import. They also unfolded large-scale activity in the export of cotton, rice and dried fruit from the remote cities of Persia into the Russian markets.

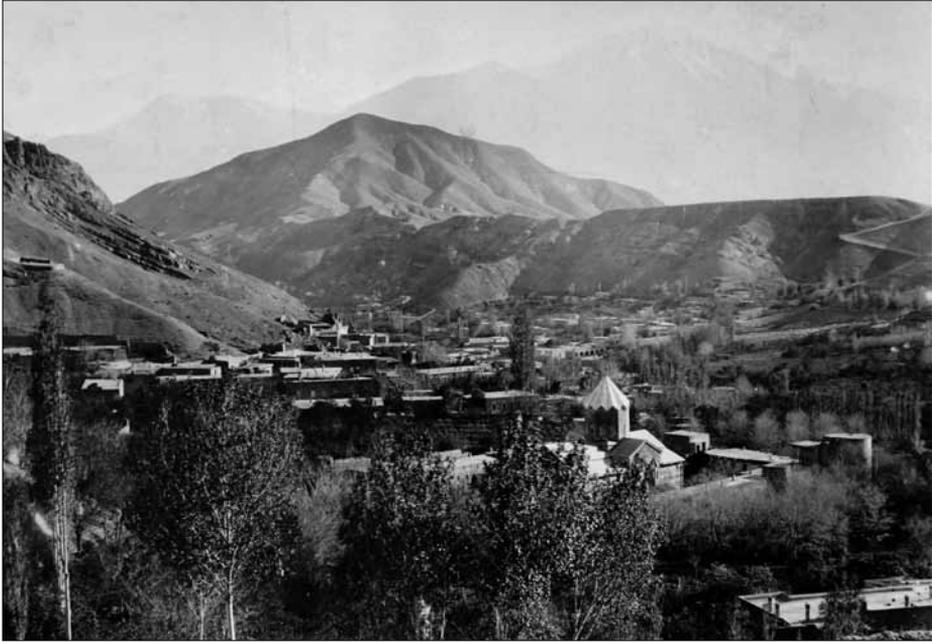
In Tsarist Russia serious attention was paid to the development of silkworm breeding as well as the cultivation of cotton and madder. Soon Transcaucasia and Eastern Armenia became important centres of the cultivation of cotton and the raw material necessary in sericulture.⁷⁰

After the manufacturers of Agulis and the adjacent Armenian villages had founded a number of textile factories in Ordubad, silkworm breeding entered a stage of great development both in Agulis and the neighbouring Armenian villages. Apart from the raw material of silk, a group of enterprising merchants from Agulis also gained large profit by cultivating and exporting grain.

Thanks to the hard work of numerous traders who were engaged in large-scale commercial activity both in Agulis and some remote cities, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this small village, which had so frequently seen devastation, plunder and massacres, reached a prospering life and even earned itself the title of Small Paris.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. V, էջ 256:

⁷¹ Էփրեմյան Ս., idem, p. 11.



Verin (Upper) Agulis. A partial view of the central quarter (1928)

Parallel with the establishment of a new administrative system in the Armenian Province, the Tsarist authorities started restricting the power of the Armenian Church. It should be mentioned that under the Arab, Seljuk, Mongol, Persian and Turkish rulers, when the class of Armenian noblemen no longer existed, the then reigning authorities recognised the Bishopric of Goghtan as the ruling body in this district. However, the Tsarist authorities who had taken control over all the internal and foreign affairs of the country found it intolerable that the Armenian clergymen should in any manner intervene in the fulfillment of the functions of the state.

Under the new statutes passed on 11 March 1836, the rights of the Holy See of Echmiatzin were restricted and dioceses were established. In the meantime, the Tsarist authorities closed down the Bishopric of Goghtan, the centre of which was the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle in Verin Agulis. Now it was reduced to a priory, and from this time onwards, its Father Superior was entitled to attend to only religious and spiritual matters. The sanctuary preserved its ownership rights to its lands, but it suffered a reduction in the number of the clergymen serving there: now only the priests and a prior were left out of the latter, that used to amount to about ten. Beginning with the second decade of the 20th century, Holy Echmiatzin appointed priors for this monastery. Thus, Agulis gradually lost its status of being the spiritual centre of the district. In the course of time, both the village and the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle were deprived of their almost two-millennia-old spiritual and cultural traditions.

Early in the 20th century, the Tsarist authorities attempted to confiscate the estates of the Armenian churches, but in vain. The national Armenian schools did not remain closed for long, and the schools of Agulis were again able to return to work and provide education that met the contemporary standards.

The Armeno-Tatar Fights of 1905 to 1906 broke the peaceful construction work unfolded in Agulis and the district of the same name for some time. I find it important to say a few words about these fights to give a clearer picture of the recent history of Agulis and Goghtan District in general, as well as to show the inter-relations of the local Armenian and Turkish inhabitants.

In those years, the Turks manifested rather bitter hostility against the Armenians in other Armenian districts and cities and even inflicted casualties to them. The district of Goghtan, however, had remained safe from inimical attacks by the time the aforementioned fights broke out. As a result of the hostilities, a number of villages in Goghtan changed their ethnic make-up, the Armenians now forming merely a minority in the neighbourhood of the outnumbering Turks.

Most probably, the contemporary Armenian press retains some information relating to the events of those years, but I failed to acquire them. Fortunately, I had at my disposal the memoirs of Martiros Abrahamian from Bash-Garni, who participated in the self-defence of Agulis during these fights. His recollections contain very important records about what was going on in Goghtan between 1905 and 1906, as well as the civilised mode of life that the prospering Armenians of Agulis boasted at that time. Anything reported by a neutral and objective person like Martiros Abrahamian is of great importance so that I have tried to make as much use of his memoirs as possible.

The Turkish mob that treacherously attacked the defenceless Armenian civilians was encouraged by the Tsarist authorities who were supplying them with arms and abundant ammunition. Totally unprepared for such a “surprise,” the Armenians were taken aback, but thanks to the urgent measures taken by Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), they quickly organised their self-defence.

Concerned with the situation of Goghtan in general and Agulis in particular, the Central Committee of Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation), which included Ruben Melik-Musian from Agulis, decided to send experienced revolutionary Ghazar Kocharian as well as fighters Khenko and Smbat to Agulis to arrange the self-defence of the village on the spot.

Before that through the efforts of Agulis Armenians, large gates were built on all the roads leading to their village. These gates had special barriers for the patrol and guards.

In May 1905, Smbat and Khenko returned to Bash-Garni, while Ghazar Kocharian stayed in Yerevan. In Agulis these men were replaced by famous revolutionary Smbat, who was assisted by Kaytzak Arakel (Arakel the Lightning), Mashadi Avo, Kyosa Heros and other warriors.

Some time later, a group of prominent fighters (Kurd Khecho, Yeghia, Koperi Saro, Dali Khecho and one of Andranik’s soldiers, Voskan from Moosh), moved to

Goghtan (they were joined by the author of the aforementioned memoirs, Martiros from Bash-Garni) under the leadership of Dro.⁷² On their way to the village, they were joined by Ghazar Kocharian, Tono, Hambardzum and two soldiers. Escaping the open roads, they crossed mountains and gorges and finally, in late May 1905, they reached Tseghna. The group had a two-day rest in this village, where they met one of the hayduk leaders fighting in Sasun, Iso Koriun. The latter's group included Nasrat, Vahan, Gevo and several other combatants. The members of Dro's group put their horses under the charge of Koriun's group, which was to cross the mountain chain of Kaputjugh towards Lijk-Kajaran, whence it was to move to Meghri.

Arriving at Agulis from Tseghna, Martiros Abrahamian wrote: "We came to Agulis. An Armenian Switzerland. The life and soul of Goghtan were Verin and Nerkin Agulis, as well as Tseghna and Tanakert. Commerce was highly developed here. Both the local men and the women were educated and even more developed than the Armenians of Yerevan."⁷³

I am truly moved by this characterisation given in simple wording. Martiros was still very young in the days of the aforementioned events, but despite that, he had been to many places in Armenia and it is not surprising at all that he was able to fully appreciate the civilised living conditions the Armenians of Agulis had created in their remote village enclosed within mountains.

Dro's group was to replace that of Sebastatsy Murad,⁷⁴ who had left Agulis on an order received from Dashnaktsutjun. His aids, however, Kaytzak Arakel, Mashadi Avo, Kyosa Heros and several other warriors, had stayed in the village.

On the second day of the arrival of Dro's group at Agulis, the local national bodies held a reception in honour of Murad and the newly-arrived fighters. It was attend-

72 Drastamat Kanayan (1883 to 1956) was an outstanding Dashnak figure. Between 1905 and 1906, he struggled against the Tatars. At the beginning of World War I, he returned to his birthplace Igdır, where he was appointed Commander of a volunteer detachment. In late 1917, the Armenian National Council appointed him Commissar of the Armenian Corps. In November 1920, Dro was appointed Minister of Military Affairs in the Dashnak Government of Soviet Armenia headed by S. Vratsian (Հայկական սովետական հանրապետության, հ. 5, Երևան, 1979, էջ 232).

73 **Մամեան Ա.**, Խմբապետ Մարտիրոս Աբրահամյանի (Բաշգետնեցի) յուշերը, «Ալիք» օրաթերթ, 1977, 16 օրոստոս, № 182:

74 Sebastatsy Murad (1874 to 1918) was a prominent representative of the Hnchak Party and one of the most active participants of the Armenian liberation struggle. He received education in his birthplace, in Khorokhon Village, Sebastia Vilayet, and in Constantinople, after which he continued his studies in London. For the purpose of struggling against the anti-Armenian policy of the Turkish Government during the massacres of the Armenians perpetrated in 1896, Murad became member of the Hnchakian Party. On a party assignment, he moved to Iran, where he acted as the leader of the Armenian hayduks in the district of Salmast. In 1904 he participated in the revolt of Sasun as one of the members of Andranik's group. During the Great Genocide of the Armenians (1915), Murad went to Tiflis and was recruited to Andranik's volunteer detachment, within which he participated in the fights of Yerznka, Erzurum and Sarighamish. He was killed in the summer of 1918, while fighting against the Turkish army in the Armenian unit of the troops of the Commune of Baku (Հայկական սովետական հանրապետության, հ. 8, Երևան, 1982, էջ 93).

ed by the prior of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle, the inspector of the local school and other figures of influence in the national life of Agulis.

The following day Kaytzak Arakel left Agulis together with his followers, while Dro's group stayed there to see to the organisation of self-defence there.

"If I have ever had a nice time throughout my life, it was the period spent in Agulis, amidst the Armenians of Agulis,"⁷⁵ hayduk leader Martiros writes with a bitter pain of something missing in his life.

Discussing certain issues of self-defence, Dro left Agulis three days later, charging fidayi leader Ghazar Kocharian with supervising the process of the work instead of himself. In twenty days' time, he returned on a special assignment, had a short rest there and returned to Yerevan, taking with him Kurd Khecho and Saro.

Thanks to the hayduks' presence in Agulis, life was tranquil both in the village and in the district in general. However, after the arrival of these combatants, a painful incident occurred there (the local Armenians could not forget it for a long time).

As we read in hayduk leader Martiros' memoirs, a Turkish inhabitant of Agulis who belonged to the Ghochi tribe demanded that Doctor Nersissian, one of the representatives of the wealthy family of the Nersissians, give him some money, but the latter refused to meet that senseless demand. Several days later, while the doctor was sitting below a plane tree opposite his house, near an abundant spring, the aforementioned Ghochi approached him and shot him to death without uttering any word. The tragic death of the doctor shocked the Armenian and Turkish inhabitants of Agulis, for he had always provided medical aid both for the former and the latter; moreover, he had always helped the poor without ever taking any money from them.

The local authorities sent the murderer to prison, but some ten days later, he was released under guarantee. This criminal would come to the market every day and stay there until the evening. His haughty demeanour aroused such vexation amidst the Armenians and the warriors who were in Agulis that the latter demanded that the local body of Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun permit them to punish that arrogant assassin. Their demand, however, was not met, for the Dashnaks did not wish to incite new acts of mutiny in the village by their consent.

Some time later, Dashnaksutiun's Committee of Agulis charged a soldier named Lorto with kidnapping this Turk who had become a true scourge for the entire village with his incessant threats. Lorto, however, confined himself to merely warning the Ghochi against his haughty behaviour and was severely reprimanded by the Party for his disobedience. Anyway, in the course of time, the Ghochi criminal was justly punished for what he had committed.

In August 1906, Dro ordered in written form that hayduk leader Ghazar and Martiros leave Agulis for Lernahayastan, where he was at that time, together with all the members of their group. However, meeting the request of the national body of Agulis, they made a trip to the northern villages of Goghtan and returned to Agulis. Around

75 Մարտիրոս Ա., *ibid.*

this time, an Armenian and four Turks were killed on the road of Agulis-Tseghna, in the aftermath of which, the Turks of the district stirred up mutiny there, and the Armenian villages of Goghtan found themselves in rather a dangerous situation.⁷⁶

This, however, cannot be said about Agulis and the adjacent Armenian villages, which escaped inimical attacks thanks to the strict vigilance of the Armenian hayduks. It was only Dastak, Handamej and Nusnus that suffered some damage during these turbulent years, as the Armenian families of these villages that had already been reduced to a minority forsook their real estate and movable property and resettled in Agulis, or more distant cities.

Although Agulis suffered a number of victims in the first years of World War I, it continued living a prosperous life. The local residents enjoyed a particularly nice time during the summer months, when their fellow villagers working outside Agulis, or studying at foreign universities returned to their dear ones.

Although Agulis was considered a village in those times, it was quite like a city in its appearance and the mode of life of its inhabitants. Moreover, it was more developed than some of the provincial cities such as, for instance, Nakhijevan.⁷⁷

The reins of the administrative life of the village were in the Armenians' hands: it was headed by an Armenian rather advanced in years, who, however, managed to attend to all the local affairs with the help of a good-hearted Turk acting as his assistant.

In those years, the justice of the peace of the district took up residence in Agulis together with his family. The village had only several guards with ordinary arms who did not find it necessary to lock the large gates even at nights. Life flowed on in absolute tranquility and nobody thought of any danger. Nobody guarded the gardens of the village either in the day-time or at nights, for theft and robbery had completely disappeared thence.

In the war-time, a certain Vahab Effendi appeared in Agulis and started working as a teacher at the school of the village's Turkish quarter and as a preacher in the local mosque. Outwardly, he attempted to look like a person who was for peace and good-neighbourly relations, but in the depth of his heart, he hated the Armenians bitterly and was imbued with that bigoted intolerance typical of one having purely Turkish psychology. He usually dressed in a semi-religious and semi-secular style. His eloquence earned him great influence in the affairs of the Turkish community of Agulis so that in the course of time, he was "promoted" to a leader, although he was not so very old.

Vahab Effendi did not wish to live in the Turkish quarter and I do not know how he managed to accommodate himself in a beautiful house belonging to the Hovnians' family⁷⁸ and located in the neighbourhood of the quarter where his fellow Muslims lived. When I returned to Agulis in 1923, he still lived there. This Vahab

76 Մանեան Ա., *ibid.*

77 Լարսյան Ե., *idem*, p. 305.

78 They had first moved to Agulis from Shorot Village, but later they left the village for Tiflis; that is why, their house stood unoccupied.

Effendi, who was nothing but a mean criminal, was to play a detestable role during the massacres of Agulis, and we shall see it in the chapters that follow.

The Gorge of Agulis. Some branches of the mountain range of Kaputjugh, or Alangyaz, as the locals called it, extend southward in a slightly curved line and gradually move farther from each other, forming the gorge of Agulis, which descends from the north towards the south at a length of 3 to 4 kilometres. These mountain branches form several gorges at their upper edges that are rather narrow, then they descend southwards in two sub-branches. The gorge is hardly between 2 and 3 kilometres wide, but it is considerably widened in its middle part thanks to the aforementioned mountain branches that are gradually separated from each other. In its lower part, the gorge turns into a smooth plain embracing the orchards and arable lands of the village.

Through the gorge of Agulis flows the river of the same name that is not so very abundant. It takes source in several tributaries that merge together near the village of Nigideh located at the uppermost edge of this gorge. During spring months, heavy precipitation makes this river rather abundant, as a result of which, it often overflows its banks and floods the fields and gardens lying to the south, as well as the houses standing in its immediate neighbourhood. History has recorded the great floods of 1872 and 1884, when several houses sank into water and the village suffered serious damage. In summer months, however, the river dries up to such an extent that it scarcely provides water for the mill of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle situated in the north of Agulis.⁷⁹

In the east, this gorge is separated from Ordubad City and the villages of Handamej and Nusnus by quite a large, barren territory that is several kilometres wide and extends southward, up to the Arax river-side. During spring months, the inhabitants of Handamej and Nusnus as well as those of the Turkish quarter of Agulis generally grazed their cattle in this territory, which was reduced to a dry steppe in the heat of summer.

The highest of the mountains surrounding Agulis from the north-east is Gindar, called so in the local dialect. It represents a very rocky and absolutely bare mountain the continuation of which is Aghasar. Turning eastward, the latter bypasses the Turkish quarter of Agulis, then extends farther in the rear of the famous monastery of Sourb Astvatzatzin, located outside the village, and, finally, joins the mountain ranges of Nusnus.

In the west, Agulis is surrounded by some mountain chains of no name which extend downwards in a curved line from the village of Nigideh. These mountains that look like ramparts stretch in the rear of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle (on the slopes of these mountains runs a path leading to Tanakert, Trunis, Kaghakik and Northern Goghtan), then extend towards the south-west and edge the market of Agulis.

⁷⁹ This river providing but scanty water, the inhabitants of Agulis had to find other resources of water in the depths of the unattractive mountains surrounding their village. It should be said that they greatly succeeded in increasing their supply of water.

At this point the rocky mountains change into a cluster of lofty hills composed of friable earth and stones (from these hills a path leads to Vanand, Disar and Khanagha).

One of the hills of this cluster is called Hru Gyulu, i.e. Top of the Well: this name derives from a large cavern situated on its slope and rich in pure clay soil. The local people used the very viscous clay of the only “mine” of Agulis to make tonirs and fire-places.

In its continuation, the aforementioned chain of hills bypass in a curved line the rear parts of the middle and lower quarters of Agulis and join a hill named Bey Oghli over which lies the grave-yard of the aforementioned quarters. On the left, Bey Oghli is joined by another lofty mountain called Setits Sar, at the foot of which runs the highway of Julfa-Agulis. In spring months, the slopes of Setits Sar abound in a very useful plant called *tzentaran* in the local dialect (it can be found only on this mountain throughout Agulis). The poor families of the village used it to enrich their meals, or dried it up and made fragrant vodka from it.

These mountains that surround Agulis from three sides protect it from the cold winds blowing from the north, and thanks to this, winters are comparatively mild here. In spring the blasts of hot air coming from the south gradually reawaken nature, turning the gorge of Agulis into a large ocean of blossoming trees. Springs last quite long in this gorge and during this season the gardens attached to the houses were attired in various beautiful flowers the seeds and saplings of which reached Agulis from Yalta or other coastal cities of the Black Sea thanks to the Armenian merchants.

During summer months, the adjacent mountains that grew very warm in the scorching sun affected the weather, but the heat emitted by them was not so unbearable, as the entire gorge of Agulis abounded in rich vegetation: some houses even had springs.

Agulis grew particularly attractive at the end of summer and at the beginning of autumn, when the heat became milder and various sorts of fruit ripened, spreading abundance everywhere. Sadness permeated only through those families which had to part with their dear ones studying or working outside Agulis.

Springs. Walking in the streets of Agulis, one was delighted by the diligence and enterprising character of the local inhabitants that were manifested at every corner. Almost at every two steps one could see pure, cool and healthy springs flowing from some underground sources.

The most abundant of the local springs that exceeded twenty was one called Snasets Khav (‘khav’ is the equivalent for ‘spring’ in the dialect of Agulis). This spring, whose source was at least within a distance of a kilometre, came out to the surface of the earth in the neighbourhood of the south-eastern gardens of the village. This spring that boasted very cold water is mentioned for several times in the diary of Zakaria Aboletsy,⁸⁰ who attests that it was an ancient one.

80 **Չաքարիա Աբուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, Երևան, 1938, էջ 115-116, 140:

Zakaria Aguletsy also makes repeated mention of Shambi Khav,⁸¹ writing that at the feast of the Blessing of Water, on the day of Christ's birth and baptism (6 January), the cross was cast into its water with great solemnity, in the presence of the Prior of St. Thomas the Apostle, the leader of Goghtan Diocese as well as thousands of common people.

Shambi Khav provided drinking water not only for people but also for animals. Besides, it served for the irrigation of the gardens of the lower quarter of Agulis.

The aforementioned author also mentions two other springs belonging to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle. Father Superior Petros the Archbishop, who was the spiritual leader of Goghtan District, continued his predecessor Khachatur the Archbishop's construction activity and enclosed the sanctuary in large ramparts fortified by towers. The monastery had two springs, an abundant one flowing within these ramparts, and another having cold, tasty water and running north of it.

In 1612 one of the wealthy inhabitants of Agulis, Melik Melkum, had a spring dug up in the central quarter of the village without consulting anybody. He conveyed part of its water to his house through pipes and made a tap in front of it so that the people could drink water thence. Through two other pipes this water reached the local square called Meydan and Melik Aghaveli's house.⁸²

In the same year, Melik Melkum had another spring dug up at the foot of a mountain rising in the rear of St. Hovhannes Church located in the lower quarter. Through an opening in the ramparts of this church, he conveyed its water to the yard of the sanctuary.⁸³ In front of this spring was built a large basin in which water was stored to be used in the irrigation of the gardens of the church and the nearby houses. While still young, my friends and I often swam in this basin and lay in the sun.

In Zakaria Aguletsy's times, the cemetery of St. Hovhannes was destroyed and the remains interred there were moved to a new graveyard extending over an adjacent hill.⁸⁴

In 1616 another Armenian merchant named Nuri built another spring in the upper quarter of Agulis.⁸⁵ It runs on the road leading to the monastery and is called Nurents Khav, i.e. Nuri's Spring, up till our days [1975 to 1976].

These records that date back to several centuries show that the wealthy Armenians of Agulis did not spare efforts and money to dig springs out of the depths of rocky mountains for the sake of the prosperity of their city. Indeed, they were assisted by their fellow citizens who realised the importance of what they were doing. In those

81 When I was a young man, I often swam in the water of this spring in summer, quivering with cold.

82 **Զարաթիս Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 141:

83 Ibid.

84 As for the church, it was surrounded by a large enclosure, the site of the former cemetery now having turned into an orchard. In our times [up till 1919 to 1920], besides this large yard abounding in trees, St. Hovhannes also had an extensive vineyard on the right and some fruit trees on the left. Both the orchard and the vineyard were locked, and only the priest could enjoy their fruits (he lived in a comfortable house of several rooms).

85 **Զարաթիս Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 141:

times, Agulis represented a thriving, populous centre of commerce and the local people could afford to carry out such useful undertakings.

Agulis had some other springs among which mention can be made of Prji Khav flowing in the central quarter. Its abundant water served for the functioning of the old baths of Agulis. Besides, it also provided potable and irrigation water for the inhabitants of that quarter.

A similar spring ran in the territory of St. Shmavon Church in the middle quarter of Agulis (the huge gates of the local houses attested to their ancient history). The sound of the water of this mysterious spring that cascaded down in numerous steps still rings in my ears. It resembled a dark cave, its darkness horrifying children.

Another spring ran in front of the house of the wealthy family of the Nersissians, on the left bank of the river, not far from the market. This spring, which was famous for its cold, healthy water, represented a beautiful scene: a branch of it flowed in the yard of this house and provided water for the garden abounding in various species of roses. Another branch of it flowed outside from below the house and gave water to the passers-by: generally, nobody went past it without having a handful of water from it. The Nersissians' neighbours used the water of this spring for many different purposes, including the irrigation of their gardens. In the hot summer months, we often angrily watched the servants of rich families bathing their masters' horses and giving them drinking water in the babbling canal formed by this spring.

There flowed another cold-water spring in a large garden extending in front of the house of our school teacher Harutiun Kalantarian, in the vicinity of the market. It provided water for the neighbouring houses as well.

St. Christopher Church, standing in the central quarter of Agulis, had two springs, one flowing in its yard, and the other at the street. These springs provided drinking water for the pupils of the parish school situated beside this church. The one that ran at the street also provided irrigation water for all the yards and gardens of the central quarter of Agulis.

In our youth [1910s], we were particularly attracted by Lula Khav, i.e. Pipe Spring, that flowed out of the southern wall of the house where Mr. Adamian lived (he taught arithmetic at our school). Running out of a pipe, it flowed towards the gardens lying on the river-side. Father and I often went to visit Mr. Adamian, who had refused to work at the municipal Russian school of Ordubad and had moved to the school of Agulis. Now his family rented a beautiful, tall house belonging to a merchant who had moved to a distant city.

The upper quarter of Agulis, which was also called Verin Get, i.e. Upper River, was not very rich in springs, but those owned by several wealthy families as well as those belonging to the monastery were enough to satisfy the needs of the local inhabitants.

Before reaching the monastery, you could see a gorge having a stone bridge of large dimensions. During spring months, the gorge⁸⁶ was filled with waters flowing from the mountains.

⁸⁶ Prominent director Sevumian's parents' house was located near this gorge. The house revived and became very noisy when Sevumian himself came to our village with his troupe.

Besides the abundant spring of the monastery that could easily serve for the functioning of a mill, there was another spring in the north of Agulis. It was Jutin Khav in the quarter of Parakert, which was famous for its unusually cold and tasty water. Its healthy water revived the gardens and farming plots of that quarter, keeping them in full blossom.

In contrast to all the aforementioned quarters, the one where we lived had most scanty water supply. I remember Father had employed specialists to increase the pressure of the water of the spring running near our house. They exploded the cave opening from inside the mountain with dynamite in search of new channels of water. The worker who was blowing up the cave was injured in the hand due to his carelessness. For a long time, Father was busy curing his hand: as for the spring water, its pressure was not increased so much. Every time the local inhabitants took water from this spring, they had to turn off the tap so that the water would not be wasted away and would suffice the others.

Not only did the springs of Agulis give life to the local gardens and vegetation but they were also very useful for their health. There never occurred any case of abdominal diseases in the village, and it was only the infectious diseases spread among children that took away many lives.

According to Alishan, south of Nigideh, on the left bank of the river extended the village of Parakert, which had unusually beautiful gardens and orchards. In 1873 it had 36 houses with 233 inhabitants, as well as about 12 Turkish families.⁸⁷

In Parakert my mother's aunt Sona lived, and her house is vivid in my memory. It usually took Mother, my elder sister and me more than an hour and a half to reach to her place, with several times of rest on our way. In order to get to aunt Sona's large and truly princely house, we had to pass through a spacious garden extending in front of it. Aunt Sona herself looked like a princess, despite her being of middle height. Probably, she was over eighty, but she was very vigorous and quick in her movements. Her children had a factory of sweets and pastry in Tiflis and Warsaw and it was only in summer that they were able to come to Agulis to see their mother and have some rest.

Once while talking to her, I dropped a passing remark that their quarter belonged to Verin Get. Aunt Sona was very hurt with my words and corrected me by saying that their quarter was called Parakert and had nothing in common with Verin Get.

Parakert was truly very attractive, with all its houses enclosed in beautiful gardens abounding in fruits and having no shortage of water. It was generally cooler here as compared with the central quarters of Agulis so that Parakert, whose appearance matched its name⁸⁸ could serve as a place of summer residence.

Almost in the middle of Agulis, a high stone bridge was built over the river Agulis. On its right side, several centuries earlier, was founded the market of Agulis, which occupied quite a large territory.

⁸⁷ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 324.

⁸⁸ *Parakert* may be literally translated from Armenian as *built with glory, magnificent*.

To the south-west of the market and bridge extended the middle quarters of Agulis where the comparatively wealthier families of the village lived. At the southern edge of the village lay its oldest quarter called Khedzodzyur or Khojadzor in the local dialect (Khetsadzor in literary Armenian).

Along the left bank of the river extended several Armenian quarters after which came the Turkish quarter of the village that turned eastward in a straight line. The lower part of this section of the village boasted abundant water supply and the most fertile lands throughout Agulis, but the more it ascended towards the mountain rising in its rear, the more it lost its attraction and became drier.

Most presumably, the lower part of the Turkish quarter used to be inhabited by the Armenians. This is attested by the presence of a semi-ruined church called Hndzants Luys in the local dialect and located at the edge of this quarter (it used to be a famous pilgrimage site). As confirmed by the aged inhabitants of Agulis, both the mosque of this quarter and the school adjoining it were built in the site of an Armenian church which was later rebuilt as a mosque.

Construction Activity. Agulis had the following quarters (the list begins with the northernmost ones):

- 1 Parakert (this was the largest quarter)
- 2 Verin Get
- 3 Shernatak or Shersherani (so called because of a nearby small waterfall)
- 4 Vank
- 5 Nurijanians'
- 6 Linj (Lanj)
- 7 Verin
- 8 Khedzodzyur or Khojadzor (this was a Turkish quarter)
- 9 Dzig Pugh (interpreted as 'Long Street')
- 10 Kheshkashin (Kheshkashen).

A highway stretching from Julfa and Ordubad crosses an extensive smooth territory called Tipi Tap and lying at the foot of Setits Sar and entered the quarter of Khetsadzor. Part of this road that extended to the market of Agulis from this Turkish quarter was paved with pebble, thanks to which the four-horse carriages and stage-coaches reached the caravanserai of the market, built several centuries earlier, without difficulty. The telegraph and post offices as well as other state offices were located near the market.

The road running to the left of the bridge and leading to St. Christopher Church and thence to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle was very steep so that it could be used by only pedestrians and load-carrying animals. On Red Sunday of Easter, the inhabitants of Aza and Der who came to this monastery on pilgrimage rode their carts with oxen up to the sanctuary without sparing the poor animals. Most part of this road was paved so that mud did not pose much difficulty to pedestrians in rainy weather.

THE HOUSES IN VERIN (UPPER) AGULIS

Verin Agulis, which extended from the north southwards, lay in a gorge between 2 and 3 kilometres wide and at first occupied the left bank of the river Agulis. Only a small part of the local houses were built in a smooth territory in the immediate neighbourhood of the river-side, while the rest gradually retreated towards the steep slopes of the mountains surrounding the village from the north-east. Not only did the Armenians of Agulis manage to build houses in a semi-European style at the foot of these mountains but they also grew beautiful gardens there.

The houses in Verin Agulis did not rise one above the other, as is generally the case in villages where the roof one house serves as a yard for the other. Every house occupied distinct space and had its own yard and garden. The greater the house owner's financial means, the larger his yard and garden were. The latter either extended in front of the house or surrounded it and apart from fruit trees and different species of grapes, also had various flowers and rose bushes that gave a special beauty and attraction to it. The rose bushes were sometimes imported from the Crimean Peninsula or the coastal cities of the Black Sea that were rich in this flower. The Armenians of Agulis tended their gardens with special care and tenderness: at the approach of winter, they wrapped the rose bushes in special mats so that they would not freeze. Some of them even had greenhouses for flowers and tropical fruit trees such as the lemon and orange.

The wealthy families would often pull down their old houses and rebuild them into contemporary larger and more comfortable ones. In the comparatively recently-built houses the bakery, kitchen and rooms intended for the house employees were separated from where the house owners lived. The Armenians of Verin Agulis used more or less recent methods of building: often their houses consisted of several floors and had a large balcony overlooking the yard of the house.

The families of modest means could only afford to repair their ancestral houses. For instance, they would erect modern rooms either above their old *tonratun*⁸⁹ or in its vicinity. *Kursi*⁹⁰ was no longer in use in Agulis: instead, the Armenians built Russian stoves in the walls or heated their rooms with tin stoves in which they burnt wood.

The wealthy families had metal or wooden beds in their bedrooms, whereas the members of the poorer ones slept on thick woollen mattresses placed on the floor and covered themselves with woollen blankets in winter and thin, cotton ones in summer. In the morning the bedding was kept in special closets.

In almost all the houses the dining-room had a big table with chairs. It was in very few families that the meals were eaten from table-cloths spread right on the floor.

The living-rooms of the rich families stood out for their luxury, with their floor made with pure wood and covered with beautiful carpets. In a word, beginning with the early

89 A building with a *tonir*, an underground oven, traditionally used in bread baking in Armenia.

90 A big, square chair with a blanket covering it and a container full of burning wood generally put below it. When it was cold, people lay near it and covered their feet with the blanket.

Middle Ages, Agulis was familiar with, and accustomed to, the European mode of life introduced by the local merchants who constantly travelled in Europe and Russia.

Most of the families of Agulis baked their several months' store of *lavash*⁹¹ in their *tonratuns*, dried it up and arranged it in special closets which also kept their reserves of various kinds of pastry made for the new Year, Easter or other feasts.

The other provisions of the household were kept in a vaulted underground cellar overlooking the yard with small windows: the inhabitants of Agulis called it *maghaza*. In separate jars the housewives kept their winter stores of oil, cheese, *ghavurma*,⁹² rice, yellow peas, lentil, haricot, beans and various pickles.

The grapes were generally hung from intersecting wooden sticks and were thus kept until May for those members of the family who worked in the city or studied abroad. The apples, pears and peaches could be kept in store for long in cellars. The wooden sticks were also used for hanging the sweet *sujugh*⁹³ made in the juice of grapes or mulberry.

In special glass containers the housewives kept various fruits and jams: particularly wide-spread was the jam of nuts.

In a cellar usually located on the lowest floor of the house were stored various kinds of wine, vodka and European drinks. Almost every family made wine and vodka from the grapes of their own gardens. Those who did not have one received a share of these drinks from their rich neighbours.

Wine was kept in big clay pitchers, or in big and small bottles of glass. Some families kept wine between twenty and thirty years of age: as a rule, they kept it for their children's weddings, or various other solemn occasions.

Some families had milking animals to satisfy their own needs. Others also had horses, but you could see hens more frequently, perhaps, kept as an addition to the meat stores of the household.

The houses of Agulis had a remarkable feature, namely they were absolutely isolated from the street. The high enclosure surrounding them separated them from the street, while the windows overlooked either their yards or balconies.

In order to enter a house, you went in through its door opening into the street, after which you appeared in either the yard or the garden of the house. The houses of Agulis did not have special isolated parts for the women, as is the case in the Orient. In warm weather, the inhabitants of Agulis mostly spent their time in their yards or gardens: most of them even slept in the yard or on the roof at hot summer nights.

The Armenians of Agulis were famous for their extreme cleanliness. You could never find any insects in their rooms, while during the same period, in some of the houses of Yerevan and Tiflis people could not sleep because of the trouble caused by bed-bugs and fleas.

91 Flat, thin bread baked from wheat or barley flour in an underground oven.

92 Pieces of cooked meat that are roasted, covered with oil and kept for winter.

93 A kind of Oriental sweets.

After Ordubad, it was **the market of Agulis** that played an important role in the economic and commercial life of Goghtan District. It occupied quite a large territory and was called *bazaar* in the dialect of Agulis. The market of Agulis, however, differed from the bazaars of Oriental cities in that it was very light and did not have a common ceiling. Nor did it have special gates for entrance and exit, and was open from two or three sides. In its middle part, the market was quite wide, and this, together with the trees of rich foliage rising on both its sides, made the market an agreeable place.

This market probably existed since the initial period of the foundation of Agulis, but its territory and dimensions varied from time to time.

The earliest historical reference to the market of Agulis is made by Zakaria Aguletsky: we read in the pages of his diary that in 1680 a certain Musabek bought some plot in the southern part of the market from four to five people whom he paid 39 tumans. He embarked upon building a caravanserai on his newly-acquired site, and charged Sarkar Arakel from the Tumans' family with carrying it out.⁹⁴

Presumably, the construction of a caravanserai was necessary to host the bodyguards of the Persian officials who often visited Agulis on horseback, or the inhabitants of the adjacent villages who brought provisions to Agulis on beasts of burden. This caravanserai was quite large, with several spacious cattle-pens and storehouses for grass and barley. At night it was locked by a lofty, wide gate.

When I still lived in Agulis [up till 1920], this caravanserai usually hosted the four-horse carriages transporting people from Julfa, as well as the three-horse stage-coaches.

The cabmen who spent night in the rooms built in front of the caravanserai took their passengers to Julfa the following morning and left for this city to return to Agulis again the next day.

One of the rooms of the caravanserai served as a tea house where an elderly inhabitant of Agulis served tea from a big samovar. He was a tall man with a venerable beard, always wearing a Circassian coat, high boots and a fur cap. He was a great lover of merry-making and pleasant pastime and for this reason, the inhabitants of Agulis had nicknamed him *Shakhov*.⁹⁵ He was fond of dancing lezhinka and singing a joyful Armenian song called *Shakhov-Shukhov Im Yar (My Cheerful Sweetheart)*. This man had travelled much in his life and was a desirable guest in the houses of Agulis Armenians.

As already mentioned, the market of Agulis covered quite large space. On both sides of its middle part that was wide and unoccupied extended shops that were built opposite each other. The ones built in front of the central part of the market belonged to the Armenian merchants. This part of the market was always busy and attractive in appearance.

⁹⁴ **Չարաբիա Ազուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 149:

⁹⁵ *Shakh* means *merriment* in everyday Armenian. The word *Shakhov* indicates that he was a very lively, vivacious person and spread mirth around him.

The Armenians' shops abounded in the best specimens of woollen, cotton, silk, velvet and chintz textiles with bright flower patterns produced in European and Russian factories. In these shops you could find a wide range of cloths for shirts and bedding, as well as ready-made clothes. They were rich in shoes, as well as boots and chinaware. In Agulis you could buy samovars and oil lamps of every kind and size that were made in the Russian city of Tula. There was a specialty store of various locks and keys, all of them of factory produce. In general, you could find anything necessary for your household, including various sorts of sugar: it will not be an exaggeration to say that the inhabitants of Agulis did not need to have anything brought for them from foreign places, as the market of Agulis provided them with everything.

The Armenian merchants had some command of the Russian language and retained close ties with the merchants of Agulis living in foreign cities. They even had family relations with some of them, this helping them arrange the conveyance of all kinds of clothes, textiles and household articles to Agulis.

The shops of the merchants of Agulis served not only the local families but also the Armenian inhabitants of Goghtan District in general: the latter sold their agricultural products in Agulis and spent the money thus acquired on buying clothes, shoes, chinaware, etc. The Armenians' shops also had clients among the wealthy Turkish families of Ordubad and Agulis who particularly came here to buy beautiful cloths for women, etc.

Since Agulis was situated not far from the border of Persia, the Turkish smugglers imported Russian manufactures that were sold cheaper at the market of Tabriz. Prior to World War I and during its first years, it was they who provided most of the sugar, tea and other products made in the Russian factories.

A special shop at the market of Agulis was given to a Turkish butcher who was on close terms with an Armenian. His meat was also bought by the Turks, but the richest Turkish families did not generally buy more than half a kilogramme of meat and his main clients were the Armenians. During summer months, when the inhabitants of Agulis returned to their village from remote places, you could find fresh meat every day, but in winter it was only several times a week that meat was sold at the market. Livestock for slaughter was mostly procured in the mountainous Turkish villages of Goghtan and Syunik.

At the eastern end of the market, Hakhnazarian & Abian Commercial House had erected a modern building for its office. In the eastern part of the market were the shops of the Armenian craftsmen, i.e. tailors, shoemakers, barbers/hairdressers, watch-makers and goldsmiths.

On the lower floor of the office of the aforementioned Commercial House, two brothers who had returned from service in the Russian army built a bakery and made bread. Generally, the inhabitants of Agulis baked their bread in their houses, but the children and youth liked the bread baked in the bakery very much so that the two brothers' business was a great success.

After the unexpected death of the owners of this bakery, one of their Turkish workers took up their business. He built another bakery in some other part of the market and was able to accumulate large means particularly when flour was difficult to obtain in the war-time and bread grew dearer.

In the rear of the principal market, in a narrow sunless street stretching parallel with it side by side were the stores and workshops of the petty Turkish merchants. Interesting as it was, the Turkish traders did not have shops in their quarters, and their activity was concentrated at the market situated in the Armenian quarter (all their workshops were here, too). The Turkish women were not in the habit of coming to the market and all their shopping was done by the men. The women of rich Turkish families came to the market only when they needed to buy textiles and the like from the Armenians' shops. The workers and ordinary craftsmen such as masons, tinsmiths, carpenters, gardeners, porters, saddlers and makers of slippers were mainly Turks.

With the exception of a couple of shops selling cheap chintz, the Turks mostly dealt in food: you could find rice, millet, peas, haricot, various spices as well as different sorts of cheap Oriental sugar, etc. in their shops.

The overwhelming majority of Agulis Armenians grew all sorts of vegetables and greens in their gardens and had no need to buy them at the market. In addition, some dried up greens, haricot, peas, Jerusalem artichoke and honey were brought from the mountainous Armenian villages of Goghtan. The same is true of as well as butter and cheese which were made in total cleanliness in these villages. In order not to remain without meat during winter, almost every family made *ghavurma* at the end of autumn. Besides, every house kept poultry to be always supplied with eggs and meat, particularly when unexpected guests visited them. The rich families were in the habit of preparing the necessary amount of provisions for a whole year at once. These are the reasons why most of the Armenian families did not have to buy provisions from the Turks' shops so that the latter's clients were only the Turks and the poor Armenian families.

In the middle of the market, below a beautiful arched covering some huge scales hung: they were used to weigh the imported provisions, timber or coal and were open from three sides.

The market of Agulis was not only an economic and commercial centre but also an assembly point for men. Some of them sent their purchases home with their servants or children and stayed at the market for long to talk, or engage in certain commercial activity. Some shops were just places of meeting for the people who came to Agulis for their summer holidays.

In the evenings, when the winds spread cool to the neighbourhood of the river-side, the wealthy, influential men of Agulis were in the habit of sitting on the benches under the canopy of some plane-trees of rich foliage, near the bridge and talking over the current news until midnight.

In those times, life was still tranquil and peaceful, and the market of Agulis lived and worked normally, although the Turks were not able to hide their deep envy and hatred for the Armenians' prosperity and their predominance at the market.

Between the market and the aforementioned caravanserai rose a building with a large garden: it housed the local Court, Administration, Police as well as the offices of the village head and justice of the peace. The basement of this building served as a prison.

Exactly opposite the court were the post and telegraph offices of Agulis whose manager was always a Russian until the revolution of 1917.

In summer the post reached us every day, while in winter it came only several times a week. Before it reached Agulis, almost the entire population of the village gathered in front of the Post Office. After it arrived, the big sealed leather packages were taken inside the building where they were arranged as per the surnames of the addressees. This took rather a long time during which the people waiting outside usually grew very anxious and impatient. When finally the doors of the Post Office opened, everybody hurried to ascend the stone stairs towards the hall. When order was restored, one of the officials of the Post Office rose on a high chair and read the addresses and names of the recipients one by one, handing out their mail. The telegraphs were sent through special messengers. This solemn ceremony would repeat itself every day: even those who did not expect to get anything did not deprive themselves of the pleasure of being present. It was especially the newspapers and magazines that were expected with great impatience. During World War I, the inhabitants of Agulis showed great interest in the political news and the situation reigning on the front, and those who received papers read the news to scores of people.

Among the **historical monuments** of Agulis, mention should be made of a **high stone bridge** (1713) dating back to the times of Persian domination. A special stone placed on this bridge bears a bilingual, Persian and Armenian, inscription with the names of those people who made a financial contribution to the construction of this fine monument. This bridge linked the right and left parts of Agulis.

The Gardens of Agulis. Agulis opened up with all its beauty before those arriving from Julfa by carriage when they reached the last turn of the highway stretching at the foot of the southern hill of the village. At this point Agulis that extended shrouded in the green of its gardens could be seen from top to bottom, up to its farthest edge.

Zakaria Aguletsky writes in his diary that in 1670 the Viceroy of Atropatene [the vizier of Tabriz], Mirza Ibrahim Khan sent his representative to Agulis, accompanied by a group of armed horsemen, demanding that the local Armenians should give him saplings of fine-quality apple, pears of the sort of malacha that were remarkable for their sweet, juicy pulp, peach, apple and other fruit trees for his newly-bought garden in Tabriz. The inhabitants of Agulis met that demand, gathered several hundred saplings from different gardens and sent them to the khan.⁹⁶

This interesting record shows the high level of development of gardening and the cultivation of fine fruits in Agulis still several centuries ago, for they were renowned even in Tabriz. Prior to Zakaria Aguletsky's times and after him, the village suffered

96 **Չարադիս Ազուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 90:

devastation for several times, and its inhabitants, isolated amidst these remote mountains, were incessantly subjected to persecutions so that they did not know what a safe life was at all. Despite this, however, their striving for progress did not fade away and they devoted themselves to their small plot of land, without sparing efforts to dig springs out of the ground and turn their village into true paradise.

Their centuries-long hard work yielded its results, and in the first two decades of the 20th century, Agulis enjoyed bloom and prosperity. In some gardens you could find at least 20 sorts of grapes, apart from the wide variety of fine fruits. The care and affection with which the Armenians of Agulis tended their remote plots of land descending towards the gorge, and the others attached to their houses aroused admiration and delight.

Particularly special attention was paid to viticulture. The Armenians of Agulis had special methods of growing grapes: firstly, they did not bury the young plants of grapes in earth, as was commonly done in Yerevan, Echmiatzin, Ashtarak and elsewhere. Instead, they raised them on thick square frames of wood called ertanuts in the dialect of Agulis. There were even specialists of the saplings of grapes (particularly famous was Gaspar Dastakian with his sons) who cut up the newly-grown branches of grapes several times a year so that they “did not grow wild.” Early in August, some of the vine leaves were cut down so that they could get the warmth of the sun and become sweeter.

The grapes were picked in late autumn, almost in December and were hung on structures of wood.

Famous French traveller Chantre, who visited Agulis and enjoyed the beauty of nature there, together with the lavish hospitality of its civilised inhabitants, regretted deeply to leave the village. Later she wrote in her book that Agulis could be considered a cradle of geniuses thanks to its industrial, enlightened and prospering residents.⁹⁷

The commercial and industrial life of Agulis was based on the cultivation of mulberries for the purpose of silkworm breeding. Almost all the families belonging to the modest class of workers were occupied with this. Their work generally took them between 2 and 3 months during which they were able to earn most of their living.

The silk cocoon was sold in two ways at the market: the silkworm was sold immediately after the cocoon was spun, and the larva was killed in boiling water so that it would not pierce through the cocoon and come out. In this case, the silk threads were not cut off while being drawn. A number of families, however, dealt in the eggs of the silkworm so that they let the larva come out and reproduce itself, after which it was examined by a magnifying glass. The healthy eggs of the silkworm were placed in special boxes and exported to Caucasia and the Transcaspian countries. The eggs of the silkworm of Agulis were widely known and were in great demand so that some families gained a large profit from this business.

⁹⁷ Միլլիանի Մ., idem, p. 12.

It should not be thought that Agulis gained its fabulous prosperity by only domestic economy: the shortage of arable lands, the tyranny of foreign governments and the continuous persecutions always hindered the Armenians of Agulis from work in their native village so that they had to seek other means of earning living outside it. The shrewd and prudent Armenians of Agulis had a flair for trade which was particularly manifest beginning with the Middle Ages. During this period, a great number of families from Agulis took up a permanent residence in different European countries and cities. The tombs of Agulis merchants buried in Constantinople, Smyrna (Izmir), Venice and Florence attest to the immense role the merchants of Agulis played in international transit trade.

Cemetery. North-east of the market of Agulis extended one of its old graveyards where, most probably, the representatives of the wealthy class were buried (we often passed by this gloomy site while going to Tanakert or Kaghakik with beasts of burden). At the times we lived in Agulis [up to 1920], burials were forbidden in this cemetery, where the huge tombs and their epitaphs attested to the former magnificence and glory of the place (nobody has ever studied these tombs and their epitaphs).

Municipal Park. The cemetery was adjoined by a large territory planted with ancient pines of rich foliage and willows of thick trunks. Prior to World War I, the young men of Agulis living in the village and those studying at Russian universities and schools of higher education had the idea of turning the site into a park.

The conservatives of Agulis opposed this idea, considering it a sacrilege to dig out the buried human remains and scatter them here and there. The young men, however, did not yield up to this opposition, and the national bodies of Agulis had to make some concessions in the long run, on condition that these remains be re-buried in the upper parts of the cemetery in a special religious ceremony.

The site of the future park was a successful selection, firstly because it lay in the centre of Agulis and had an elevated position: in addition, the breeze blowing from the gorge adjoining the river made the weather cool in the heat of summer. The park was crossed by a wide canal which made it even more agreeable. The lofty pine-trees and willows bending towards the river made the part particularly mysterious and attractive.

The idea of having a municipal park was an important step for Agulis towards its becoming a developing city. Public parks are usually found in large cities: although Agulis represented a large village or a small village town at that time, it acquired a park thanks to the efforts of the local young men. As already mentioned, the entire village was shrouded in gardens and almost every house had its garden (sometimes even more than one), and still, the existence of a public park was something quite different (the young men called it *boulevard*, another European word that penetrated into the dialect of Agulis).

The pupils and students studying outside Agulis made life busier and more cheerful in the village. They did not want to confine themselves to their parents' caring affection and wished to enjoy themselves at big parties where they could meet more people and where young men and ladies could meet each other. This gradually moved

the Armenians of Agulis out of their narrow family circles and brought them closer to the municipal life, which was more than sitting in front of their doors at the street or walking to and fro there.

The park was truly enriched by the famous musicians of Agulis who were able to win the hearts of even those who had lived in large cities like Moscow and Tiflis and were familiar with musical life. The same is true of the people for whom Agulis served as a place of summer residence.

In order to cover the expenses of the park, an insignificant entrance fee was introduced. Although access was not denied for the Turks, they never came there, which was for the good, for there were always Armenian girls and women in the park and the Turks' presence was not desirable at all (the only exception were the brothers Rezayi from Ordubad, who studied in Moscow, wore European clothes and had ties with many Armenian families).

Often special walks were organised in the park for charity purposes, or for the school of Agulis. On such days, the entrance fee was higher, a lottery was held and ice-cream and cold drinks were sold (spirits were forbidden there). On such occasions, the park was visited by the aged people as well, for they wanted to have their share of contribution in the acts of charity.

During World War I, the Turks perpetrated the harrowing Genocide of the Armenians. Before returning to our parents from Echmiatzin Seminary, we had witnessed the emigration of the Armenians of Van and the adjacent district. We had also seen our unfortunate compatriots huddled up in the monasteries of Echmiatzin, Hripsime and Gayane. We returned to our native home when the entire Armenian nation was in heart-rending mourning; that is why, we found it inexplicable and wrong for our fellow villagers to pay so much attention to their pastime and completely ignore the problems facing our people. The economic slump and the current political circumstances that were fraught with grave danger aggravated the situation in the districts of Agulis, Goghtan and Yernjak with every single passing day. In those crucial days, he found it unforgivable for the inhabitants of our village to devote themselves to merriment and parties. We thought we had better organise our self-defence and occupy ourselves with issues relating to it. We did not believe in the sincerity of the Turks' attitude towards the Armenians. We knew for certain that in all the Turkish villages of the district the Turkish servicemen were training their young compatriots and inciting them against the Armenians.

The music played in the park did not make us happy at all, and in order to punish the musicians and those walking there my friend Karo and I would generally go to the gardens of Agulis and fire several volleys in the direction of the park. When we returned to the village half an hour later and directed our steps towards the park, we found absolutely nobody either in the park or in the streets. Even the guards would disappear in these cases: our volleys frightened everybody into retreating to their houses and locking their doors firmly. We thought how defenceless the Armenians of Agulis were and how unprepared to secure their collective security. The day following this

trick, my uncle Harutiun, who was familiar with our crazy deeds, would give us a wink at the market to show that he knew who had fired the volleys against the village.

Indeed, we did not “launch” such “attacks” every day, but we preferred to walk in the streets rather than go to the park.

When I returned to Agulis in 1922, I found all the gardens of the village, together with the fine planes and willows of the park, totally uprooted by the Turkish savages of Okhchishabad and the gorge of Geghi...

THE RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS OF AGULIS

No village or village town in Armenia can boast such an abundance of religious and historical monuments as Agulis. We can state with firm conviction that it had even more churches than Nakhijevan, Yerevan, Alexandropole, or any other cities with a large Armenian population. Only Nor (New) Jugha can match Agulis with this respect.

Our village had twelve big and small churches, which shows how pious and attached to their national customs the Armenians of Agulis were. The earliest records relating to the churches of Verin Agulis and the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle are found in the diary of Zakaria Aguletsy in connection with the renovation of these sanctuaries.

A record by an unknown author who had a miraculous escape from the slaughter perpetrated in Agulis by Azat Khan in 1752 mentions all the churches of the village by name and provides their total number.⁹⁸

Starting with the southern quarter of the village town, it states: “The second church is dedicated to St. Hovhannes Mkrtych [John the Baptist]; St. Shmavon the Apostle; St. Hakob Alpien the Apostle; St. Christopher; St. Stepanos Nakhavka; St. Minas Zoravar [the Commander], all of them enriched with various ornaments and splendid vessels, and performing divine service day and night. At the edge of the village stood another [church] dedicated to the Holy Virgin. It is a site of pilgrimage where the Lord is glorified every day. There is one more church bearing the name of the Mother of God in the village proper: hence virgins’ motets are heard. Besides, there are two small churches, one of them called Sourb Amenaprkich [Holy Saviour], and the other St. Hakob the Supreme Father of Metzbin.”⁹⁹

This record does not make any mention of the church of Entzayats Luys (pronounced as Hndzanats Luys by the Armenians of Agulis) located in the neighbourhood of the Turkish quarter of Agulis.

Another record on the churches and monasteries of Agulis can be found in the “Jrakagh” magazine (Moscow). It dates back to 1861 and is provided by Israel Mamikonian, who participated in the church procession held on the occasion of the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God (the Blessing of Grapes).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 331-333.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ «Գնարար», 1862, էջ 86-87:

Sourb Tovma Arakyal (St. Thomas the Apostle) Monastery

Among these ancient sanctuaries, the most magnificent and largest was the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle standing in the north of the village, in a quarter called Vank. Catholicos Abraham of Crete (1734 to 1737), who attended the ceremony of the coronation of Nader Shah (8 March 1736), enjoyed the hospitality of Agulis on his return from the plain of Mughan. He writes the following with this regard: "...I remained there until Holy Easter and New Sunday [the Octave of Easter], for the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle is enchanting and amazes all who see it."¹⁰¹

The monastery is described in more details by prominent philologist and traveller M. Papazian, who writes the following, totally amazed at the unusual beauty and splendour of this sanctuary, "When visitors enter the church, their admiration grows even stronger at the sight of its bright interior. We can certainly state that it is unmatched: neither the Cathedral of Echmiatzin nor the most outstanding monastery throughout Great Armenia cannot boast this beauty, brightness, cleanliness, the ornaments of the walls and ceiling, the finely-built cross-carrier that the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle has. In a word, everything is superb. During our travels, I did not ever see anything matching the unspeakable magnificence of the exterior of Nakhavka and the interior of this monastery..."¹⁰²

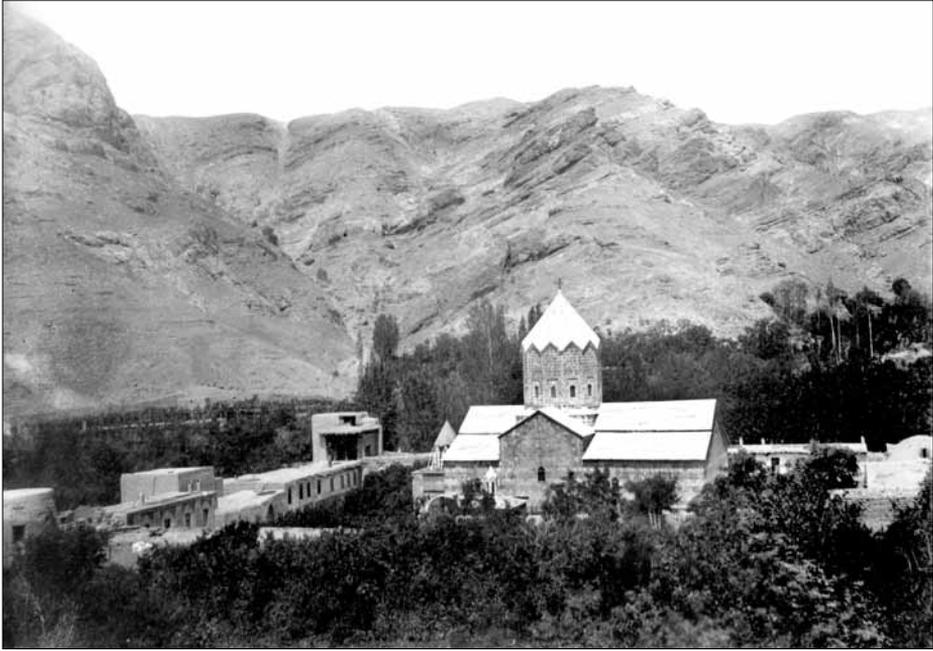
When I went to Echmiatzin with my father to take the entrance examinations of Gevorgian Seminary, we visited the monastery. I was astonished to see that the Cathedral of the Holy See was much smaller and insignificant in appearance than the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle of our village. Perhaps, I would not be so immodest as to write these lines, but Papazian's extensive and objective description encourages me to do so. Indeed, this sanctuary surpasses all the Armenian churches and monasteries I have ever seen in its magnificence and, particularly, interior beauty.

I will abstain from going deeper into the history and description of the monastery, for Gh. Alishan, Shahkhatunian, Voskian, Papazian, Lalayan and many other scholars did it with the skills of professionals and in much detail.

After the adoption of Christianity in Armenia, the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle served as the centre of the diocese of Goghtan and the residence of the bishop leading this diocese. Tradition links the foundation of the sanctuary with Bartholomew the Apostle, who allegedly built it in memory of Thomas the Apostle after Christianity had taken root in the district. He charged his disciple Kumsi with replacing him in Goghtan and left the district. When Kumsi died, he was buried in a place not far from the monastery and later a chapel was built in this site.

101 The Chronicle of **Abraham of Crete**. Annotated Translation from the Critical Text by George A. Bournoutian. California, 1999, p. 124.

102 **Փափազեան Մ.**, Հնուքիւնք վանօրէից, գիրք 4, Վաղարշապատ, 1891, էջ 287: Papazian's description is very interesting and important, but we confined ourselves to only quoting this small passage. **Ռսկեան Հ.**, Վասպուրական-Վանի վանքերը, մաս Բ, էջ 682-684:



Verin (Upper) Agulis. The monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle as seen from the south and west (early 20th century)

After the monastery had undergone renovation between 1633 and 1636, the tympanum of its western portal was engraved with the following inscription:

Բարդուղաւէմոս ի հայս եկեալ, գտուն տե(անն) նախ սստ հիմնարկեալ. Ս(ուր)բ Թօվմասի առաքելոյն | անուն կոչեալ զահ հաստատեալ: Կոմսի անուն զհր աշակերտին. տեսուչ տեղոյս զնա եղեալ, | որ և գտուն Գողթն գաւառիս. ի նա յանձնեալ զհօտն ընտրեալ մերձ Ագուլիս և դաշտ զօվեալ | Յղնա, Ռամիս սմա յանձնեալ. Բուստ, Փառակա ևս տեալ. Բուհրուտ, Տկիս անքակ եղեալ | եւ Շրջոս ընդ Մասրեվան. Աղահեցիք ցանկ հաստատեալ Դաստակ, Վանանդ կցորդ եղեալ | Տրունիս, Տնակերտ միաբանեալ, Օրովանիս և Քաղաքիկ և Անապատն Յանդամիջաց, Վերին Գետցիկ և Զեշ/երեցիք, ա Նումնիս Յորդվատ բաժին կարգաց: Ս(ուր)բն Գրիգոր յորժամ եկեալ է առաքելոյն նօմոսք տեսեալ ձեռագրով նոյն հաստատեալ և նգովիք ամրափակեալ: յամի տ(եան)ն ԳՃ և | հինգ (305) հասեալ Լուսավորչին պատճէն գրեալ. արձանագրիս որ սստ եղեալ:

Transl.: Bartholomew came to Armenia and built a house of God dedicated to St. Thomas the Apostle. He appointed his disciple Kumsi leader of this diocese that included the entire flock of Goghtan District, i.e. Agulis and its fields, Tseghna, Ramis, Bust, Paraka, Buhrut, Tevi, Sherju, Masrevan, Aghahetsik, Dastak, Vanand, Trunis, Tnakert, Obovanis, Kaghakik, as well as Anapat, Handamej, Verin Get, Keshheretsik (Gegheretsik), Nunis and Vordvat. In the year 305, the Holy Enlightener confirmed this diocese with his own handwriting.

Published in: Ալիշան Գ., idem, p. 326; Ըսիխաբունեանց Յ., Ստորագրութիւն, հ. Բ, էջ 325; Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 307; Փախազեան Մ., idem, p. 288; Ոսկեան Հ., idem, pp. 677-678; Այվազեան Ա., Նախիջեանի վիմագրական ժառանգութիւնը. Ագուլիս, հ. Բ, Անթիլիաս, 2005, էջ 65.

This portal also bears a relief of Christ with a cross in his hand and Thomas the Apostle standing in front of him and touching his rib.

As legend has it, the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle was founded in 56 A.D. When Gregory the Enlightener arrived in Goghtan in 305, he approved what St. Bartholomew had established and renovated the monastery. In general, the foundation of part of the churches and monasteries of Armenia is associated with the hagiography of Apostles Thaddaeus and Bartholomew. Even if these records are considered merely legends far from trustworthiness, it goes without saying that the ancient monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle was founded at the very beginning of the Christian era in Armenia, for as legend has it, its first leader, Bishop Movses was appointed by Gregory the Enlightener himself. It has been historically proved that the Primate of Goghtan Diocese, Bishop Huys, was among those dignitaries who signed a Vow of Solidarity with the Armenian Church, against the enemies of Christ, this action having been initiated by Catholicos Nerses the Great (c329 to 373).¹⁰³

We shall abstain from presenting the list of the spiritual leaders of Goghtan District and that of the priors of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle beginning with the

¹⁰³ Գիրք բրոնց, Թիֆլիս, 1901, էջ 73: Ոսկեան Հ., idem, p. 690.

Enlightener's times. These lists can be found in Shahkhatunian's and Alishan's works: the information they provide is based on reliable historical records.¹⁰⁴ Voskian made use of the latter's work while preparing a study of the history of the monastery.

We have also avoided touching upon the cultural activities unfolded in this sanctuary and the manuscripts created, or copied there.

The monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle was not a famous scientific centre like those of Gladzor, Tatev and Echmiatzin, but its priors and monks were highly educated people and created, or copied a great number of manuscripts of religious, historical and philosophical contents. A considerable part of these manuscripts fell prey to the attacks of various Arab, Seljuk, Mongol and Ottoman khans and gang leaders. Despite this, under Prior Grigor Ter-Stepanian the Archimandrite (in 1898), the manuscripts of the sanctuary totaled between 80 and 90. In the days of his successor, Archimandrite Mesrop Maksudian (in 1906), only 58 manuscripts were preserved in the sanctuary. Some of the most important of them were moved to the repository of Echmiatzin, whereas the rest was either destroyed or stolen and later sold at the market of Tabriz after the massacres of Agulis committed on 25 December 1919.¹⁰⁵

Architectural Description. The church of the monastery represented a fine cruciform edifice, with its lofty dome resting on four large pillars. It also had three small belfries.¹⁰⁶

Several windows opened out of the northern and southern walls of the church, and in one of these windows was placed the font.

Some marble stones set in the western face of the bema were engraved with reliefs representing the apostles and enriched with floral patterns.

Papazian provides the following description of the interior of the church: "The entire walls—about three arshins¹⁰⁷ below the arches—are painted marble, the remaining part... being painted white. Both the arches and the entire ceiling are adorned with reliefs of Oriental style done in various colours and in gilt. Taken separately, each of these reliefs represents a cross, but most of them look like bunches of flowers.

"From inside, the dome is painted blue like the sky...

"It has only a single altar... whose ornate wooden cross-carrier represents a fine and clean work. At the very edge of this cross-carrier stands out the Holy Cross bearing a representation of the Saviour with his arms wide open. On both his sides are angels, one of them holding a chalice and the other the tablets of Commandments.

104 Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, pp. 312-313.

105 The manuscripts of St. Thomas the Apostle were catalogued between 1911 and 1915 and published in the "Ararat" magazine and the "Azgagrakan Handes."

106 The bells of these belfries contained so much silver that their peal was heard up to Ordubad, which was located within about 10 kilometres.

107 An ancient unit of length equal to 2 feet 4 inches.

“...The part in front of the bema is raised with the help of marble stones each of which is about two arshins long and one arshin wide. The upper parts of all the stones are engraved with beautiful reliefs of various colours...”¹⁰⁸

On each of the right and left sides of the main altar a vestry was built. From the one on the right some stairs led to the gallery¹⁰⁹ of the church. In this sacristy were kept the church vestments and repository of ancient manuscripts and old printed books. The left vestry housed the museum of the monastery retaining the right hands of Thomas the Apostle and St. Hakob, parts of the wood on which Christ was crucified, some relics of the virgins of Gayane and many crosses, both gilded and silver. The museum of St. Thomas the Apostle once boasted a large collection of beautiful episcopal and archimandrite crowns, amicees as well as other expensive church items and vessels most of which were private donations made to the sanctuary.¹¹⁰

The monastery was fortified by square ramparts within which, all around it, some buildings rose, part of them of stone and the others of brick.¹¹¹

A door opening from the western part of the monastery led to its very spacious courtyard, in the centre of which rose the magnificent edifice of the church. Its walls were bare of any reliefs or ornaments. The dome of the church was very simple and had 12 windows.

The church had three entrance doors the most beautiful among which is the western one. It is a quadrangular door with three arches edged with finely-carved ornamental reliefs. On its sides, this door bears reliefs representing Holy Virgin Mary and Mary of Magdalene. On its upper part God the Father, the sun and the moon are carved, and a little below them the aforementioned inscription is engraved commemorating the foundation of the monastery.

The western door of the church was surmounted by a belfry built in 1825 with the means of Persian Prince Abbas Mirza. It had an inscription which was carved in Persian.

Several years later, the belfry collapsed, and the piece of marble bearing this inscription was kept in one of the rooms of the belfry until 1919.

In 1831 the Hakhumians' family (they later resettled in Shushi) restored the ruined parts of the dome and left an inscription around the dome commemorating their deed.

The second door of the church opened into the northern part of its courtyard. On its upper part a relief represented Paul the Apostle with a crosier in one hand and a Gospel in the other.

108 **Փափազեան Մ.**, *ibid.*

109 *Vernatun* in Armenian: a special section in a church resembling a balcony whence women generally followed divine service, the church hall being intended exceptionally for men.

110 **Շահխաթունեան**, *Ստորագրութիւն*, էջ 327: Cf. *idem*, pp. 322-329; **Ալիշան Ղ.**, *idem*, pp. 326-329; **Փափազեան Մ.**, *idem*, pp. 286-287; **Լալայեան Ե.**, *idem*, pp. 306-311; **Էփրիկեան Ս.**, *idem*, pp. 13-18; **Ոսկեան Հ.**, *idem*, pp. 684-686; **Սմբատեան**, *idem*, p. 489; Բազմալէպ, 1899, էջ 70-72.

111 **Փափազեան Մ.**, *ibid.*

The lower part of this door was engraved with the following inscription:

Թուականիս հայկականի մի յորելեան երկշրջանի, եռակ տասանց (1695) որով վարի սա կառուցաւ քառանկիւնի ձեռամբ Յովհան վարդապետի, որ էր / յաջորդ յայսմ գահի բագում ծախիւք անթվելի չորիւք ամօք / սա կատարի երիւք դրամք ըստ խորհրդի կամարակապ զարմանալի անյուամբ մեծին Սբ. Թովմայի, նման վերնոյն ընդ Սիօնի. սա մեզ շնորհեաց պարզեւ բարի գաստուածամոյս աջն ձրի ամուր պատուարք բոլոր թէմի պաշտօնէից իր հովանի պարծանք է սա Գողթ գաւառի եւ ցնծութիւն հայոց ազգի նպատուրթե(ամ)ք տեսնն Յիսուսի, ի փառս անուան մի եռակի:

Transl.: ...In the year 1695, this quadrangular [monument] was built by Hovhan the Archimandrite, who ascended this throne. It was completed within four years at the expense of countless means, with three doors and amazing arches. Dedicated to St. Thomas... bestowed blessings upon us... [as] a strong support for the entire diocese... to the rejoicing of the Armenian people by the grace of Lord Jesus in glory of the name...

Published in: **Շահխաթունեան**, idem, p. 323; **Ալիշան Գ.**, idem, pp. 327-328; «Ազգ. Հանդես», էջ 309; **Ոսկեան Հ.**, idem, pp. 679-680; **Այվազեան Ա.**, idem, p. 66.

The third, southern, door of the church was a simple arched one bearing the following inscription:

Իշխանութեամբ Պարսից ազգի, Շահ Հուսէին բագաւորի, / դիւանաբէկութեամբ Մուսաբէկի, որ էր տեղեաւ Ագուլեցի, / եւ Յոհաննոս առաջնորդի վերախիշխօղ յայսրմ թեմի, / որոյ յաւորս սա կանգնի՝ այս վայելուչ եկեղեցի:

Transl.: This fine church was erected under the reign of the Persian nation and Shah Husein, in the days of Divanabek Musabek, who was from Agulis, and Primate Hovhan, who ruled the district.¹¹²

Published in: **Շահխաթունեան**, idem, p. 324; **Ալիշան Գ.**, idem, p. 328; «Ազգ. Հանդես», էջ 309; **Ոսկեան Հ.**, idem, p. 681; **Այվազեան Ա.**, idem, pp. 65-66.

North of the church, numerous rooms were built for the Father Superior and the monks. Particularly richly-furnished were the room of the diocese leader, as well as the reception-room, refectory and bed-room. The great number of the rooms of the monks attests how large the monastic community of St. Thomas the Apostle was and how active spiritual life was there.

The monastery also had special rooms intended for pilgrims and guests, as well as a large kitchen surmounted with a dome.

North-east of the church ran a spring of pure cold water. The sanctuary had another spring that was even more abundant and whose water was conveyed through underground pipes from rather a far-away place up to the northern garden of the monastery.

¹¹² Instead of the equivalent for 'district,' the original of the inscription has the equivalent for 'diocese,' which we have interpreted as 'district,' for a secular person like Musabek could not be the leader of a diocese.

Emerging from under the ground at this point, it flowed to the courtyard of the monastery and thence to its southern garden. The water of this spring was truly very abundant and could easily move an entire mill.

The barns of the monastery were located south of the church.

St. Thomas the Apostle had a male school where the author of these lines studied for a year before its turning into a unisex institution and moving to another, newly-erected building. In those years, the sanctuary had a very small monastic community so that the teachers of the school lived in the monks' cells.

Beginning with the 11th century, namely the days of Catholicos Sargis,¹¹³ the history of St. Thomas the Apostle is closely connected with that of Agulis. The colophons of numerous manuscripts created in the sanctuary particularly after the 14th century provide important information about the local priors, the cultural activity unfolded there as well as the attacks and devastation that Agulis and the sanctuary suffered on many occasions.

The year 1633 marked the beginning of a stage of prosperity for the sanctuary. It particularly flourished during the days of Archimandrite Khachatur¹¹⁴ (1630 to 1664), the spiritual leader of Goghtan District, who embarked upon the difficult task of the renovation of the sanctuary in 1636. A record states the following with this regard: "...in the days of Khachatur, the Archimandrite of Archimandrites and the leader of St. Thomas Monastery of Goghtan District, who repaired this holy monastery from its very foundations together with its tall, arched and dome-shaped church, and surrounded it with lofty ramparts... and reconstructed it through many hardships and privations."¹¹⁵

Archimandrite Khachatur's prolific construction activity is also mentioned in the colophon of *Girk Hartsments* by Grigor Tatevatsy.¹¹⁶ It states that despite the severe predicament in which the Armenians had found themselves in the aftermath of the Ottoman and Persian wars, Archimandrite Khachatur successfully accomplished the reconstruction of the monastery that required heavy expenses.¹¹⁷

Prominent historiographer of the 17th century, Zakaria Vagharshapattsy¹¹⁸ writes the following about this outstanding dignitary: "He renovated and revived his resi-

113 Catholicos Sargis Sevantsy (992 to 1019) was ordained and served in the monastery of Sevan when still a young man. He worked as Father Superior in Shoghaga and then in Sevan Monasteries, and later succeeded Catholicos Khachik. He restored the metropolitany of Syunik, and, probably, made the diocese of Goghtan dependent on it. It was only two hundred years later that Goghtan was able to free itself from this state of dependency, again becoming an independent diocese. On the order of Sargis Sevantsy, Stepanos Taronetsy the Asoghik wrote his famous historical work (*Աճառեան Հ.*, Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան, հ. Դ, էջ 409).

114 Catholicos Movses Syunetsy ordained him as bishop and appointed him spiritual leader of Goghtan District and Prior of St. Thomas Monastery.

115 *Շահխաքունեան*, idem, p. 326. Also see Հայերեն ձեռագրերի ԺԷ դարի հիշատակարաններ, հ. Բ, Երևան, 1978, էջ 860.

116 This work, written in 1397, embraces all sciences and was used as a kind of encyclopedia in those times.

117 Հայերեն ձեռագրերի ԺԷ դարի հիշատակարաններ, հ. Բ, Երևան, 1978, էջ 737, 860:

dence [the monastery] with splendid fineness, to the enjoyment of... the spectators, and turned it into true paradise, enriching it both spiritually and materially.”¹¹⁹

Archimandrite Khachatur did everything within his power to raise the repute of the monastery, increase the number of the monks whom he continually urged to engage in scientific activities. The period of his being Father Superior of St. Thomas the Apostle marked not only financial prosperity for the sanctuary but also the creation of works on various subjects.

His death was a heavy blow to the Armenians of Agulis and the other villages of Goghtan. Fortunately, Archimandrite Petros, who succeeded him as Prior, turned out a very enterprising clergyman of high merits. He did his best to strictly keep to the path his uncle, Archimandrite Khachatur had set for the further development of the monastery.

Ascending to the throne of leader of Goghtan Diocese, in 1669 Archimandrite Petros invited Archbishop Michael, acting as Vicar of Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsy, to visit Agulis. This church dignitary was greatly delighted to see the magnificent beauty of Agulis and, particularly, its monastery.

Zakaria Aguletsy makes frequent references to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle in connection with different religious festivals. During the period when I still lived in my native village [until 1920], the Palm Sunday, Easter and Red Sunday were generally celebrated in this sanctuary. These feasts were marked with great solemnity: on the eve of Easter, the women and young girls went into Lent and fasted with great piety. During this period, they attended the churches of their quarters every day and prayed. On the last day of Lent, they prepared for receiving Communion the following day.

Catholicos Abraham of Crete, who was invited to Agulis on his way back from the ceremony of the coronation of Nader Shah (8 March 1736) and remained there until Holy Easter and New Sunday, was asked by the local inhabitants to lead the events held in connection with New and Red Sundays [the third Sunday after Easter] and bless them.¹²⁰

When the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle ceased being the centre of Goghtan Diocese in 1838, it partly lost its importance and influence in the district, but it remained as a famous pilgrimage site where people gathered to celebrate various religious feasts. These celebrations were generally attended not only by the inhabitants of Agulis but also a great number of believers coming from different parts of the district.

On the days of pilgrimage, the believers generally started from their villages before sunrise on their carts drawn by oxen, or buffaloes. Around 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning, we could hear the sounds made by these carts from afar. Tens of carts carrying

118 Bishop Zakaria Vagharshapattsy was taken captive to Nor Jugha during the invasions of Shah Abbas. He received education in this city where he learned five languages. He later worked as the secretary of Catholicos Movses (1629 to 1632).

119 Այլշան Գ., idem, p. 327; Cf. Ռսկեան Հ., idem, pp. 706-707.

120 The Chronicle of Abraham of Crete, p. 124.

women, girls and children dressed in special village costumes would enter the lower quarter of Agulis, whence they made for the monastery (these people also took with themselves food for several days). Although there was no wide road after the bridge and it was extremely difficult to overcome the ascent to the sanctuary, some believers tortured their animals into carrying them up to the monastery. St. Thomas the Apostle had very large rooms intended for pilgrims, but some of them preferred to spend the night in tents that they pitched over their carts. The pilgrims coming from Aza brought with them the animals they were to sacrifice: they also brought large amounts of wine and vodka.

Touching upon the reconstruction of the monastery, this historian writes that Archimandrite Khachatur embarked upon it several years after assuming the post of the spiritual leader of Goghtan. He selflessly devoted himself to his diocese throughout 34 years, until his death in 1664. Ten years before his death, he had appointed his nephew, Archimandrite Petros, as his vicar.¹²¹

We also read in the pages of his diary that Archimandrite Petros (1664 to 1683) built a chapel of finely-finished stones over Archimandrite Khachatur's grave south of the church.¹²²

Zakaria Aguletsy also writes that upon assuming the post of Father Superior of the monastery, Archimandrite Petros built huge ramparts around it and fortified them with six towers. The abundant spring of the sanctuary was enclosed within these ramparts.

Agulis was visited by famous Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsy IV (1655 to 1680) as well as some of his predecessors and successors.¹²³

After Hakob Jughayetsy's death in 1680, the Religious Assembly held in Echmiatzin decided to send Archimandrite Petros to Jerusalem so that he would lead Archimandrite Yeghiazar to the Holy See to be ordained as Catholicos of All Armenians.

Archimandrite Petros obeyed the decision of the Assembly and in 1680 left for Jerusalem, whence he returned with this Patriarch. When the latter was elected Catholicos, he appointed Archimandrite Petros as his vicar, but the latter refused to accept that high position and returned to his beloved diocese on 20 December 1683.¹²⁴

The aforementioned attests that the diocese of Goghtan had some influence upon the affairs of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Archimandrite Petros, who served the diocese of Goghtan and the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle with such selfless devotion, died unexpectedly during one of his trips, in Sourb Karapet (Holy Forerunner) Monastery of Yernjak.¹²⁵

He was succeeded by Bishop Ohan (Hovhannes),¹²⁶ who distinguished himself with prolific activity like his predecessors. He repaired the belfry of the sanctuary that

121 **Չաքարիա Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 63-64:

122 Idem, p. 64.

123 Idem, p. 57.

124 Idem, p. 152.

125 Idem, pp. 78-79; **Մմբատեան Մ.**, idem, p. 210.

126 **Չաքարիա Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 79:

had been damaged by the earthquake and completed the construction of the ramparts and their towers.

In the days of Bishop Ohan, the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle received a number of donations, including an expensive Bible sent by Catholicos Nahapet (this act of donation is mentioned on 10 January 1700),¹²⁷ as well as some specimens of the first printed Gospels and other printed books from Bishop Thomas Vanandetsy living in Amsterdam.

In the decades that followed, the monastery became witness to such tragic events as the murder of Melik Parsadan, one of David Bek's commanders, as well as the attacks by Azat Khan and Mustapha Khan. We have already dwelt upon these events so that we shall now confine ourselves to this passing reference.

In 1820 on the order of Catholicos Yeprem Dzoragehtsy I (1809 to 1830), Archbishop Simon Bznuny, who had been serving as the spiritual leader of Artaz District and the monastery of St. Thaddaeus the Apostle, was appointed Father Superior of the monastery of Agulis.¹²⁸

In 1837 Goghtan ceased representing one of the dioceses of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and consequently, the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle was stripped of its status of episcopal residence. Despite this, however, up until the year 1912, it had some prominent priors: one of them, Archbishop Gevorg Surenian, appointed Father Superior on 31 January 1874,¹²⁹ was elected Catholicos of All Armenians (Gevorg V).

The monastery had large arable fields: the harvest they yielded helped sustain over ten monks.

The monastery also had a male school the earliest records relating to which date from the second half of the 14th century.¹³⁰

We shall start our account of **the churches of Agulis with St. Hovhannes Mkrtych** (St. John the Baptist) located at its southernmost extremity. It was built in an elevated site on the left side of the road leading to the village from the south.

A curved string of mountains, extending in the rear of this church from the north to the west, formed a curved line and joined the hill of Bey Oghli and Serits Sar, forming quite a large plain. From the south-west, this dry and barren plain was crossed by a highway below which lay a plot of arable land and some gardens belonging to this church and certain private individuals.

From three sides, the church was enclosed within ramparts. The entrance to the sanctuary was from the side of the street whence between seven and eight steps led to the large courtyard of the church, where the priest's dwelling was built, its spacious

127 Մայր ցուցակ հայերէն ձեռագրաց Մաշտոցի անուան Մատենադարանի, հ. Բ, Երևան, 2004, էջ 190:

128 **Հակոբյան Է.**, Թաղեսու առաքյալի վանքը, Թեհրան, 1999, էջ 25:

129 Gevorg Surenians V (1847 to 1930). In: Վավերագրեր հայ եկեղեցու պատմության, հ. 13, Երևան, 2005, էջ 48. Gevorg Surenians served the monastery until 12 October 1878.

130 **Այվազյան Ա.**, Ագուլիս, Երևան, 1984, էջ 60:

balcony overlooking the street. In this courtyard there was a large bakery, various barns, as well as an ancient school house where Priest Andreas taught his pupils several centuries earlier.

On both sides of the courtyard were the orchards of the church which were partitioned off with a wall and had their separate doors. The monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle excluded, none of the churches of Agulis had such an extensive courtyard.

Some six to seven steps led from the courtyard of the church to its entrance proper and belfry. Next to these steps there was a basin in which spring water was stored to be used in the irrigation of the foliage-rich trees of the courtyard and the adjacent gardens. The spring of the sanctuary also provided drinking water for the houses and small courtyards of the neighbourhood. This was *Melikents (Melik's Family's) Spring*, which took source in a rush-rich gorge lying at the foot of the mountain rising behind the church. Some of its water was lost in the sand while running downwards above the surface of the ground, the rest flowed through an opening of the church ramparts towards the aforementioned basin.

No historical records have come down to us regarding the date of the foundation of the church. Its earliest mention is connected with the martyrdom of Priest Andreas in 1617. The tortured body of the priest remained lying in a deserted field for several days until it was secretly moved to St. Hovhannes Mkrtych Church and buried in its left vestry.¹³¹

In 1663 the Armenians of Agulis embarked upon the renovation of the church¹³² and completed the work on 5 November 1665. In 1686 the interior of the sanctuary was adorned with frescoes.¹³³

According to Zakaria Aguletsy, the cemetery of Agulis used to be located in the vicinity of St. Hovhannes Mkrtych Church (some of this historian's ancestors were buried there). After the reconstruction of the church, this graveyard was destroyed and the remains of the deceased were moved to another cemetery lying over the hill of Bey Oghli rising within about half a kilometre of the sanctuary.¹³⁴

The church of St. Hovhannes Mkrtych cannot be distinguished for its large dimensions. Nor is it remarkable from the standpoint of building art as it is erected with undressed stone. From inside, its dome bore the following inscription:

Կառուցաւ հռ(յ)ակապ և հրաշագան և վա(յ)ելուչ երեք բեմեա ս(ուր)ք եկեղեցիս յանուն ամենաս(ուր)ք Ա(ստվա)ծածնին և Ս(ուր)ք Սկրտչին և Ս(ուր)ք Նախավկային ի Ռ-ՃԺԲ (1663) թվին իսկ Ռ-ՃԼԵ (1686) ա(մ)ին գա(ճ)եցաւ: Եւ ի Ռ-ՃԾԲ (1703) թ(վ)ին զարմ(ա)նալի կաթողիկէս շինեցաւ ի փաստս Զ(ր)հ(ստոս) ա(ստուծոյ):

131 Առաքել Դավիթեցի, էջ 291:

132 Չաքարիա Ագուլեցու Օրագրությունը, էջ 130:

133 Idem, p. 65.

134 Չաքարիա Ագուլեցու Օրագրությունը, էջ 63, 65, 130:

Transl.: *This magnificent, wonderful and fine three-apse church, dedicated to the Holy Virgin, as well as Sourb Mkrtych and Nakhavka was [re]built in 1112 (1663) and plastered in 1135 (1686). And in 1152 (1703) its amazing dome was erected to the glory of Lord Jesus.*

Published in: **Լալայեան Ե.**, idem, p. 65; **Այվազեան Ա.**, idem, p. 76.

The church had a fine door built with small pieces of wood, as well as ivory and nacre. It was engraved with the following inscription:

Յիշատակ է դրոշու այս Հախումին եւ կողակցին եւ որդւոցն նոցին. Ած. որդրմի աշխատատրւացն քվին ՌՃԼԱ (1682):

Transl.: *This door is in memory of Hakhum, his spouse and their sons. May God have mercy upon the builders. In the year 1131 (1682).*

Published in: **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 330; **Լալայեան Ե.**, idem, p. 65; **Այվազեան Ա.**, idem, p. 76.

Supreme Father St. Hakob of Metzbin

This church is situated at the foot of a hill called Pokr Sar (i.e. Small Mountain), amidst some gardens not far from the church of St. Hovhannes Mkrtych, in the south-east of Agulis. Probably, once it used to be surrounded by houses, the ruins of which are still preserved.

The church of Supreme Father St. Hakob of Metzbin represented a small building: on the feast day of St. Hakob divine service was held there with great solemnity, with all the priests of the township officiating there, and most of the believers remained outside its walls, for it could not accommodate them all.

The date of the construction of this monument remains unknown: it is mentioned in the Lamentation of 1752.¹³⁵

St. Shmavon the Apostle

This church, which represented a small building with a spacious yard, was located not far from the eastern bank of the river Agulis, below the market of Agulis, in one of its oldest quarters where every house¹³⁶ had a large garden and was fortified by a huge, thick wooden gate and high walls. Most probably, formerly divine service was administered there every day, but when we lived in Agulis [until 1919 to 1920], the township was in need of priests so that public worship was held in the sanctuary only on the feast days of St. Shmavon and Simon the Elder, with all the priests of Agulis officiating there.

The date of the foundation of the church is unknown, but according to a historical record, in 1481 a certain Shmavon served as a guard in this church as well as in the other churches of Agulis.¹³⁷

As attested by Eprikian, the church was adjoined by a convent and retained several cross-stones.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 332.

¹³⁶ These dwellings were erected in some old building style.

St. Hakob Alpian the Apostle

This sanctuary, which had a large garden extending in front of it, was also called Entzayats Luys, which the Armenians of Agulis pronounced as Hndzanats Luys. It stood on the left bank of the river Agulis. In 1879 the Ter-Michaelians levelled the monument with the ground in order to replace it with a new one, but it remained incomplete for reasons unknown.

No religious service was ever celebrated in this church: believers visited it only during the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God.

St. Christopher

This sanctuary rose at the foot of Mount Gindar, in the upper quarter of Agulis, about half a kilometre above the left bank of the river Agulis and the market of the village. Two gates, opening from the north and south, opened into the courtyard of the church that was not very spacious and had no trees, but was finely paved with pebblestones. Another entrance of several steps led to the school of the church. St. Christopher also had two abundant springs of pure water, one of them running in its courtyard and the other outside it. These springs provided potable water for the inhabitants of the quarter who also used it for the irrigation of their gardens and plots of farming land (some wealthy families had their own springs).

The residents of the upper quarter of Agulis mostly represented the rich class of the population of the township and it was customary for them to make contribution to the renovation and improvement of the monument. Its walls bear some cross-stones perpetuating the memory of those who made donations for the reconstruction of the sanctuary.

The year of the foundation of St. Christopher Church is unknown. Zakaria Aguletsy reports an old legend according to which it was built by Thaddaeus the Apostle.¹³⁹ The earliest record relating to the sanctuary is found in the pages of this diary, in which we read that on 15 December 1670, the monument unexpectedly collapsed, fortunately, without causing any injuries.¹⁴⁰

The same source stresses that the ruined church was reconstructed through the local people's contributions. Bichibek, Malkhas and khoja Gulnazar, an inhabitant of the upper quarter, raised money and started major overhaul in the sanctuary in 1671. They completely cleared the ruins and filled its foundations with stones and lime. In 1672 they brought thirty masters from Kurdistan and constructed the building of the church up to the "top of its doors." In November, however, when the weather grew colder, they had to stop the construction. According to Zakaria Aguletsy, at that time St. Christopher had three doors opening from the south, north and west.

137 **Սմբատեան Մ.**, idem, p. 300; **Աճառյան Հ.**, Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան, հ. Գ, էջ 199:

138 **Էփրիկեան Մ.**, idem, pp. 15, 16.

139 **Զաքարիա Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 95:

140 Ibid.

In March 1673, another forty masters came from Kurdistan and resumed the construction of the church with finely-finished stones, taking it up to the ceiling. In November these artisans received their payment and left Agulis. During this time, St. Christopher received 25 crosses and various pictures of religious contents from some benefactors. Zakaria Aguletsy himself donated a picture of the Holy Virgin to the sanctuary. The church also got some financial donations.

By 1673 one of the vestries of the monument that had already been completed was blessed.

In May 1674, eighteen masters arrived at Agulis and completed what had been left unfinished in the church. Some other craftsmen who had come from Binistu built a bakery in the courtyard of St. Christopher.

On 1 April 1675, seventeen masters came from Kurdistan built the holy altar of the church and its interior arches. Two Armenian masters from Jugha, Ovanes and Khundveli, supervised the process of the reconstruction of the sanctuary (the chief master had arrived from Moks).

By late 1675, the church was fully completed.¹⁴¹

The church of St. Christopher represented a fine building of impressive appearance. Above the church school a special dwelling was built for the local priest and his family.

Sourb Astvatzatzin (Holy Virgin)

About 200 steps east of St. Christopher, above its school, on the slope of a mountain the church of Sourb Astvatzatzin stood. When looking at this small sanctuary from below, you got the impression that it had been directly cut into the mountain. It represented a building with a small dome and could hardly accommodate one hundred and fifty people.

An unknown author mentions Sourb Astvatzatzin in the Lamentation over the Village Town of Agulis.¹⁴²

Israel Ter-Grigorian-Mamikonian, who visited Agulis in 1861 and participated in the celebration of the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, writes the following in an article: “They [the procession of believers] did not go to the small church of Sourb Astvatzatzin, which used to be a convent. Instead, they addressed her the same prayers and supplications and made for the church of St. Hovhannes... chanting “*Aravot Luso*” [an Armenian motet - translator].¹⁴³ The church was built on such an elevation that the procession failed to ascend the slope and had to hold the religious

141 **Զարաթիա Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 97: It is remarkable that the workers and masters who took part in the reconstruction of the church were invited from Kurdistan. In their dialect, the Armenians of Agulis used the ethnonym of ‘Keord,’ i.e. ‘Kurd,’ while referring to the Turks; therefore, we can presume that Zakaria Aguletsy means Turkish or Tatar workers and builders while speaking about those who had arrived in Agulis from ‘Kurdistan.’ He himself invited “Kurdish” masons during the construction of his own house.

142 **Աիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 332.

143 **Տեր Գրիգորեան-Մամիկոնեանց Ի.**, ibid; «Ճարարդ», 1862, էջ 86-87:

service at the foot of the mountain. This source also shows that a hundred years ago the nunnery of Sourb Astvatzatzin Church no longer existed.

This convent, which was not located very far from the church, represented an edifice of huge gates. So high were its walls that from outside only the tops of the trees of the garden were visible, while the nuns' dwelling was hidden behind these high walls. The nuns had their special way of going to the church [the author occasionally refers to Sourb Astvatzatzin as a chapel, apparently, due to its small dimensions]: they bypassed the church of St. Christopher and reached there by a narrow path.

It remains unknown when the convent of Sourb Astvatzatzin closed, but when I lived in Agulis, the local Armenians still remembered the story of the nuns' tragic martyrdom and its capture by the brigands of Azat Khan in 1752. Most probably, the monastery closed down after this sinister invasion.

St. Minas Zoravar (the Commander)

This church, which is mentioned in the Lamentation over the Village Town of Agulis,¹⁴⁴ represented a building of wooden roof and was located in Shernatak Quarter of Veriget. Most probably, once it served as a hermitage, but in our times no hermits lived there. On St. Minas' feast day, divine service was celebrated in the sanctuary with great solemnity, all the priests of Agulis officiating at the ceremony that was usually attended by most of the local population.

St. Stepanos Nakhavka (St. Stephen the Proto-Deacon)

This fine stone church, which had a three-storey belfry, was situated between the quarters of Verin Get and Parakert (the unknown author of the aforementioned Lamentation mentions it among the other churches of Agulis). In 1845 it underwent major overhaul through the financial assistance of Mahtesy Hovhannes Ter-Janian.¹⁴⁵

On the feast day of St. Stepanos, religious service was held in the sanctuary, with all the priests of Agulis officiating at the ceremony that was usually attended by most of the inhabitants of the village.

Amenaprkich (Holy Saviour)

The small chapel of Amenaprkich stood above the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle and rested on two pillars. As legend has it, Bartholomew the Apostle's disciple Kumsi is buried in its southern part.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Ալիշան Ղ., *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, pp. 330-333; Լալայան Ե., *idem*, p. 302.

¹⁴⁶ Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, p. 326.

The door of the chapel bears a cross-stone with the following inscription:

Խշո յիսկ Ջանասունյ Ղսանյ: Խարնչնյ. Փերյ ավնրիկ: Ազիկ: ՋԼԹ (1490):

Transl.: *This Cross in memory of... 939 (1490).*

Note: The Armenian original of the inscription contains the names of those to whom the cross is dedicated, but they are too damaged to be deciphered.

The Armenian original published in: **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 332; **Լալայեան Ե.**, idem, p. 302; **Այվազեան Ա.**, idem, p. 75.

Sourb Astvatzatzin (Metz Anapat)

The pilgrimage site of Sourb Astvatzatzin, which was also called Metz Anapat (i.e. Great Cloister) to be differentiated from the other smaller church of the same name, ranked second after the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle by its fame and popularity among the Armenians of Agulis and the residents of the adjacent Armenian villages. It was situated on a hill (at the foot of this hill ran the road of Agulis-Nusnus) in an isolated site outside Agulis, east of the village town. From the north-east, the sanctuary was surrounded by lofty rocky mountains.

The dark, gloomy cells cut into the rocks north of the church, outside its ramparts, attested that formerly hermits lived there; probably, the name of Metz Anapat derives from this fact. These cells had their separate springs whose water flowed towards a nearby gorge.

Sourb Astvatzatzin Church had a spacious courtyard in the middle of which rose a two-storied building intended for the habitation of the clergymen. This dwelling divided the courtyard in two parts, the second of which was more elevated as compared to the first. This upper courtyard had a large covered area under which there were large tables (pilgrims could have their meals or tea around them). Often schoolchildren were taken to the church for a walk. Furthermore, Sourb Astvatzatzin was also frequented by the young inhabitants of Agulis. The other, lower, part of the courtyard boasted a cold-water spring flowing from the depths of the mountains: its water was used in the irrigation of the church garden and fields. These lands that lay in the east of the church yard, were completely ignored in the last years of Agulis' existence due to the shortage of work-force.

Every year in the middle of August, believers from all over Goghtan gathered there to celebrate the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin and the blessing of grapes with great and solemn festivities.

Sourb Astvatzatzin Church was not a building of large dimensions (in order to enter it from the courtyard, believers had to climb up several steps); nor was it remarkable from the standpoint of construction, but despite this, on the day of the feast of the Holy Virgin, almost nobody remained at home, for everybody wished to be present at the ceremony of the Blessing of Grapes and the celebration of the Assumption of Virgin Mary. Many people brought grapes from their gardens to have them blessed in the sanctuary. Since the church was not very large, believers entered there by taking

turns and left after having addressed their prayers to the Lord so that others could enter, too. During the ceremony, young people mostly walked in the courtyard or went outside it to enjoy the beautiful scene opening before them from the top of the hill.

Most probably, formerly, when there were a great number of priests in Agulis, this church held daily religious services, but when we lived in the village, only the guard of the sanctuary lived in the comfortable dwelling intended for the clergymen (he was to ring the church bells every morning).

Many families were in the habit of having their children baptized in Sourb Astvatzatzin Church.

In front of the sanctuary rose a hill on which there was a cemetery (in the last years of Agulis' existence, burials were seldom held there).

From the Armenian quarters of Agulis there were two ways of going to Sourb Astvatzatzin Church, both of them passing through the Turkish-inhabited parts of the village. If you were to visit the sanctuary from the southern quarters of the village where the Armenians lived, you had to cross the river by the wooden bridge lying over it, then enter Dzig (Straight) Street (on both sides of this street stood the Armenians' abandoned houses and the textile factories, if I am not mistaken), leave behind the ruined building of the church of Entzayats Luys and the Turkish mosque of Agulis. You had also to pass by a big spring around which the Turks were in the habit of sitting and talking (when the church procession reached the spring, those sitting around it rose in token of respect for the Armenians' religious festival).

Then the procession passed by the Armenians' gardens and moved forward until it reached the Turkish cemetery of Agulis. Thence the participants of the procession covered rather a long way and started ascending the hill on which towered Metz Anapat with all its magnificence, surrounded by gardens and arable lands, all of them fortified by ramparts.

If the believers chose the second road, they were to start from the middle and upper quarters of the village, leave behind St. Christopher Church and the school house, then enter the Turkish quarter of Keshkashin and thence direct their steps to Sourb Astvatzatzin, where they reached after having covered rather a long way.

The historical records relating to this church are scanty. The earliest of them is found in the pages of the diary of Zakaria Aguletsy, who writes that after his brother's death, he went to "Sahri Astvatzatzin of Akulis" together with his late brother's wife and children, who were his guests.¹⁴⁷

Sourb Astvatzatzin is further mentioned among the other churches of Agulis in the Lamentation of 1752.

The elderly inhabitants of Agulis remembered that during the pre-Christian period, Sourb Astvatzatzin Church replaced a pagan temple. Allegedly, during its reconstruction, some idols were found in its walls but the workers imprudently broke them to

¹⁴⁷ Չարսրիս Ագուլեցու Օրագրությունը, էջ 109:

pieces out of their bigotry. This is even attested in an unpublished journal by Priest Hakob Ter-Andreassian,¹⁴⁸ who served in Dasht Village.

According to this journal, in 1847 Shekhiants Karapet, a native of Shushi, left Tabriz because of the epidemic of cholera raging there and found refuge in Dasht. Several days after his arrival at this village, he went on pilgrimage to the greater church of Sourb Astvatzatzin and donated a hundred pieces of gold for the renovation of the monument. He gave this money to a certain Sarukhanbekov and ordered him to supervise the overhaul himself.

Allegedly, a wall partitioned the church in two parts, and when it was pulled down in order to join the two sections together, the heathen idols were unclosed. Sarukhanbekov and Ohanes Makarov broke these stone deities, which Priest Hakob regrets greatly, considering what they did an unwise act.¹⁴⁹

The entire population of Agulis participated in the solemn procession of the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin. It even included the children and pupils, as well as the students studying abroad and merchants working overseas. It had become a kind of imperative for all the native Armenians of Agulis to take part in the celebration of this festival. Some women even walked barefoot in the procession.

Israel Mamikonian, who visited Agulis in 1861, witnessed these festivities and described them in the “Jrakagh” magazine (editor: Mser Mserian the Master). His article being of the utmost importance from the standpoint of the national and religious customs of Agulis Armenians, we have entirely included it in this work. The author starts his publication with the following introduction: “On June 12 of the year 1861 (№ 40), Your editorial staff charged us with reporting about events of national importance occurring around Agulis, the activity of the local schools, as well as the celebration of festivals, this assignment being, indeed, highly useful for the entire Armenian nation. Therefore, now I am attaching to this letter an account of a feast held in Agulis with a request to publish it, for it shows the church traditions and customs of our dear compatriots.”

The Feast of Agulis

by Israel Ter-Grigorian Mamikonians

Shushi, 28 October 1861

“On 12 August of this year [1861], I went to Verin Agulis to see my noble friend. After quite a long talk with him, I decided to return to my place of habitation that was in Dasht Village (Nerkin Agulis), since it was already rather late. My dear friend, however, kept me from doing so and persuaded me to stay with him that night, saying that the following morning they were to celebrate the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, during which a large church procession was to visit all the churches of Agulis. My desire

¹⁴⁸ For further information about this prominent clergyman, see the part of this work devoted to Nerkin Agulis.

¹⁴⁹ **Լալայեան Ե.**, *idem*, p. 304.

to see all the churches of the village made me yield to his persuasion and I stayed there. After some more sweet talk, we went to bed, but hardly had we had some rest when the church bells began ringing so that we had to get up, wash and go to church.

“After the nocturnal service, at 7 o’clock in the morning, we heard the toll of bells once more, its echo filling the gorge of Agulis. Then the clergymen of each church, accompanied by their pious and God-fearing flock and singing motets of repentance with crosses, gonfalons and Gospels in their hands, came to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle. Thence the Very Reverend Father Superior took the right hand of St. Thomas¹⁵⁰ and the same procession made for the church of Amenaprkich, singing motets on their way.¹⁵¹ People believed that Kumsi, the disciple of Bartholomew the Apostle was buried beneath the bema of this church. Upon their arrival there, they kissed the walls of the holy church with the greatest piety, left some offerings¹⁵² and lit candles there. Then the participants of the procession directed their steps towards the church of St. Stepanos, where we saw on a table a gilded right hand covered with silver, with a small basin filled with water beside it. In this basin was a cup from which all the people gathered there were to drink the blessed water. Now the multitude, that had grown even larger, went towards the church of St. Minas passing through sandy streets. There we found various holy relics, including the right hand of a saint, near which lay a basin full of water with a cup [intended for the same purpose as described above]. Performing the same religious service there, the believers continued their procession in the direction of St. Christopher, which was the main church of Agulis. It was a magnificent edifice, enriched with various ornaments, again with the gilded right hand of a certain saint placed on the table together with the silver-covered relics of other saints. Again we found a similar basin of water near which the same ceremony was conducted. After completing the religious service there and praying for peace throughout the world, the participants of the procession did not go to the small church of Astvatzatzin standing on a slope (several years earlier it used to be a convent), but addressed their entreaties and prayers to the Holy Virgin [at the foot of the mountain] and continued their way towards the church of St. Hovhannes located within half a stadium. In this sanctuary we saw another right hand belonging to some other saint, lying amidst other relics. Completing the ceremony there, the procession went to the church of St. Shmavon, where they saw the right hand of yet another saint¹⁵³ lying on the altar together with some other relics. After divine serv-

150 This relic is mentioned in the inscription carved on the northern door of the church. See **Շահխաթունեան**, idem, p. 323.

151 **Շահխաթունեան**, idem, pp. 323, 327-328.

152 On this day, leaving offerings in the church was obligatory, for it was a token of the future prosperity of the sanctuary.

153 It was engraved with the following inscription: *Յիշատակ է սուրբ Աջս Վարդանի դստեր Դժխանին, եւ իւր որդի Ստեփաննոսին, և յիշատակ է Վարդանի որդի Զօհրապին, իւր որդւոցն Օհանիսին, Յակոբին և Շմաւօնին, այս է Աջ սուրբ Առաքելոյն Շմաւօնի, բուին ՌճԿԶ (1717):* Transl.: *This holy*

ice had been completed, the believers went to the church of St. Hakob Alpián also called Entzayats Luys. This was the last church where the same religious service was conducted, the procession moving towards the Great Cloister of Sourb Astvatzatzin in the east of Agulis, within one and a half stadia. And the believers started walking on that stony and sandy road, all of them on foot; moreover, the women were barefoot and covered with sheets in that extremely hot weather, but with cheerful faces and happy hearts, that were a token of their great piety. After divine service had been held in the cloister, some of them received the communion and returned to their homes.

“The customs of the celebration of the feast of the Assumption and the festivities that accompany it are retained unchanged in these two villages. Apparently, the custom of celebrating it with such fervent piety and great solemnity is very old. This is also attested by the records of an inhabitant of Agulis named Zakaria in the pages of whose biography we find a description of the ceremony of the Casting of the Holy Cross into the Water in the times of Persian domination. I find it most expedient to quote his own passage relating to this feast: ‘On 6 January... 1129 (1680) that was Saturday, I. Zakaria, held the ceremony of the Blessing of Water (Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ) in Agulis. All the inhabitants of the four quarters gathered in the church of the Upper quarter... and the Prior of our monastery, Archimandrite Petros attired everybody: between 50 and 60 people were dressed in dressed in surplices. Playing the *naghara*¹⁵⁴ and *zurna*,¹⁵⁵ they went to the spring of Shabi to have its water blessed. It was a fine sunny day. That year the judge of Agulis was Musabek from Musabek’s family. He sent for the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Orduvar as well as some four to five influential people who were present at the blessing of the water together with some other Kurds [Turks]. When the ceremony was over, all of them left the place [and bid farewell] with great cordiality and peacefulness. Neither the Kurds of Orduvar nor those of Agulis demanded any taxes from the Armenians: they took with them only a plate of melons and 6 lumps of sugar, these being the entire tribute paid.’¹⁵⁶

“The silver crosses, gilded relics and church vessels mentioned above originally belonged to the Holy See of Echmiatzin. Apparently, some people acquired them in payment of the debts that the Holy See owed to them, then brought and sold them to the God-loving people who purchased them back with their own means and donated them to their churches. This is attested by Zakaria Aguletsy who adduces the following example to illustrate this: ‘On 1 August 1127 (1678), a merchant from Astapat came to Agulis: he had brought with him a great number of crosses and church vessels

right hand is in memory of Vardan’s daughter Dezhkhan and her son Stepannos, and it is in memory of Vardan’s son Zohrab, his sons Ohanis, Hakob and Shmavon. This is the right hand of Holy Apostle Shmavon. In the year 1166 (1717). The Armenian original published in: «Շուքարի», Մսուկուս, 1862, էջ 87; Այվազյան Ա., Ազուլիս, էջ 94-95.

154 A percussion instrument.

155 An Oriental wind instrument.

156 **Չարարիս Ազուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 147:

which he was to sell with the blessing of Archimandrite Mukel [Michael], the Vicar of Echmiatzin, who had signed a special paper approving this. He particularly wrote that ...Zakare from Yerevan had borrowed some money for Echmiatzin. When Zakare died, they asked the merchant [not to demand the debt], but the latter refused, saying that they had to pay. Since Echmiatzin did not have any money, we were obliged to give these silver crosses and vessels to that man in restitution of the debt. Everybody may buy them both for their churches and monasteries. We ourselves gave them willingly in payment for our debt.' ¹⁵⁷

Israel Mamikonian's description of the solemn church procession that took place on the occasion of the Feast of Assumption one hundred and twenty-two years earlier is most trustworthy and circumstantial.

In our days, the Armenians of Agulis preserved these customs thoroughly and the church festivals were celebrated right as they were in Zakaria Aguletsy's times, or during Israel Mamikonian's visit to the village. As in those days, the believers started their procession from the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle, with all the clergymen and almost the entire population of Agulis participating. The only difference was that now they were led not by the prior of this monastery who was at the same time the spiritual leader of Goghtan Diocese: the Very Reverend and the archimandrites (their number exceeded ten) accompanying him were now replaced by the priests of the village who walked at the head of the procession comprising a great number of believers attired in surplices. Singing motets and holding crosses and gonfalons in their hands, they visited all the churches of Agulis and moved towards Sourb Astvatzatzin Church in the end.

This sanctuary started preparations for the solemn celebration of the feast beforehand. On the eve of the feast day, *lavash*¹⁵⁸ was baked in the *tonratun* of the church for pilgrims, and tens of sheep were slaughtered as a token of sacrifice to the Holy Virgin. The cooked mutton was wrapped in pieces of lavash in a square form and these "sandwiches" were arranged in large baskets. The following day, about half an hour before the beginning of the solemn service dedicated to the Holy Mother of God, these baskets were placed at the church entrance together with blessed grapes to be handed out to the believers. Some of the local inhabitants brought grapes to the sanctuary to have them blessed. Generally speaking, the Armenians of Agulis did not eat the grapes of their own gardens before the feast of Assumption (only the children sometimes ignored this custom).

The religious service held in celebration of the feast lasted very long, but those present were in no hurry to go home. It was particularly the young who took their time over leaving the sanctuary: both its courtyards were overcrowded with young men and ladies. In summer-time, the young inhabitants of Agulis who worked in remote cities returned to their village to find their future spouses from among the girls and young

¹⁵⁷ Idem, p. 139; «Ճոսքսար», Մսկուս, 1862, էջ 87.

¹⁵⁸ Flat, thin bread baked from wheat or barley flour in an underground oven.

women of Agulis who were famous for their beauty. Shy as they were, they did not spare efforts to look as attractive as possible in their fashionable clothes; this is the reason why the long duration of the divine service played into their hands.

When finally the priests and aged people left the church, they directed their steps towards the large baskets of mutton and grapes beside which more than ten to twelve people were handing them out to the believers in an orderly manner. Nobody attempted to jump the queue, for everybody was convinced that they would certainly receive their share of the meat of sacrificed sheep.

This day marked a most pleasant pastime for both the young and the aged residents of Agulis. More than half a century has passed since then but I still remember how fascinating those days were and how happy we all were then...

* * *

After this brief historical introduction on the churches and monasteries of Agulis, we can conclude that most of them were either reconstructed, or repaired between the 16th and 17th centuries. Although no new sanctuaries were built in the centuries that followed, none of those already existing remained ruined or semi-destroyed after foreign invasions, or natural disasters: the Armenians of Agulis always took care of them and renovated, or even reconstructed them every time they suffered damage. Despite the fact that Azat Khan's harrowing incursion of 1652 took away many lives in Agulis, the local religious and historical monuments were preserved in a fine state until the second decade of the 20th century.

The existence of a magnificent monastery and more than ten churches comes to attest that Agulis was truly quite a large and populous city: we do not think that Petros Ghapanetsy exaggerated the number of the local population while stating that they comprised over 10,000 houses in the late Middle Ages. We should give the Armenians of Agulis and, particularly, the representatives of the upper class their due, for what they did for their native village truly awards them high merits: they enriched it with unmatched historical monuments that are unsurpassed throughout Eastern Armenia, excluding Nor Jugha.

Indeed, the outer splendour of these buildings was not the only concern of the inhabitants of Agulis: they also lived a very active spiritual life, with every church having its parish priest and conducting divine service every day (it was attended by most of the residents of the given quarter).

Apart from the bishops representing Goghtan Diocese, more than ten church dignitaries lived in the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle and the Cloister of Sourb Astvatzatzin. In addition to their spiritual activity, these high-ranking clergymen also unfolded prolific cultural and educational work in Agulis.

Prominent historiographer Arakel Davrizhetsy's History¹⁵⁹ contains records that are indirectly connected with the spiritual life of Agulis. One of its chapters (23) is dedicated to the "miracles" worked by a certain archimandrite named Poghos. Although insignificant from a historical standpoint, the information found in it provides some picture of the spiritual life of the pious and gullible Armenians of Goghtan.

According to a story that Davrizhetsy either wrote himself or heard from another person, Archimandrite Poghos, who lived in Bar Village of the province of Moks, was a very pious, God-fearing clergyman and a skilled orator. Several merchants from Goghtan, including Khoja Hayrapet from Tseghna, heard his interesting preaching in Tabriz and asked him to go to Goghtan with them and preach there for the spiritual comfort of the local Armenians. Archimandrite Poghos met their request and started for Goghtan accompanied by these tradesmen. He first arrived in Northern Goghtan via the district of Yernjak and thence made for Tseghna and Agulis.

As we have already mentioned in this work, during his preaching in Agulis, Thaddaeus the Apostle (some people think it was Bartholomew) built a church there and appointed his disciple Kumsi as a spiritual leader there. According to a legend, after his death, Kumsi was buried in the narthex¹⁶⁰ of this church, but some time later, the door of this church unexpectedly closed "without any bolt and bar" and would not open despite all the efforts of the believers.

When Archimandrite Poghos came to Agulis, the local people begged him to unlock the church door by the mercy of God. For a long time, he prayed in front of the locked door, "shedding bitter tears that flowed like a spring" and asking the Lord to break the locks of the door. After the prayer, the archimandrite hit on the door with his hand for three times and cried out, "Oh, Lord, open up this door for us! Unlock it with Your grace!" And suddenly the door opened...

The people who had become witnesses to this miracle hurried to enter the church and pray the Lord fervently for their sins. The news of this wonder rapidly spread to all the adjacent villages and men, women and children from everywhere hurried to this sanctuary to address their supplications to the Saviour from thence.

After the door of the church had opened, the people opened their hearts to their faith which was even more strengthened thanks to the interesting sermon delivered by Archimandrite Poghos. During his short-term activity in the village, he deepened the sense of order and discipline in the people's minds: new churches were erected in Agulis and the neighbouring villages, and the number of schools increased. Gathering the schoolchildren around him, Archimandrite Poghos travelled in the villages of Goghtan where he taught the people the word of God.

During his sermons he also visited the large village of Astapat, where the people complained that their church was small and could not accommodate many believers.

159 Manuk Abeghian, who is a renowned expert in Armenian literature, considers this work "an inelaborate collection of various stories."

160 A square (quadrangular) antechamber placed in front of the church, destined for both civil and religious use.

Without consulting anybody, the archimandrite ordered to destroy the monks' cells and enlarge the church at their expense. Displeased with such willfulness, the local bishops, archimandrites and friars went to the prior of the monastery of Stepanos Nakhavka and entered a protest against him. Accompanied by the entire monastic community, the Very Reverend Father came to Astapat and expelled Archimandrite Poghos.

Catholicos Melikset launched a severe persecution against the archimandrite, demanding that he abstain from delivering his senseless sermons and immediately leave for his native Moks. Unable to prevent his activity, the Supreme Father applied to the Persian authorities with a request to move away that intriguer from the religious affairs of the country, but he failed to gain the shah's support and turned to Amir Guni Khan of Yerevan.

The khan sent for Archimandrite Poghos and had him brought to Yerevan guarded by a soldier. On his way from Agulis to the khan's residence, his prayers healed the disabled hands of Muslim child to the great surprise of his family and fellow villagers. When they reached Yerevan and the khan learnt about this miracle from the soldier, his anger abated and he entitled him to continue his preaching. Amir Guni Khan even suggested that Catholicos Melikset should get reconciled with the archimandrite.

Accompanied by the same soldier, Archimandrite Poghos returned to Goghtan. On their way from Shorot Village of Yernjak to Goghtan they came across a large herd of deer near a spring. The soldier immediately arranged his arrow to kill a deer, but the archimandrite forbade him to do so and called upon the escaping animals to come to him. They came back and stared licking his hands. He caressed the animals and said to them, "Go, graze quietly in the young green grass of the field and live in peace!" Later the delighted soldier told everybody that the archimandrite even had the power of subduing wild animals.

For a long time, Archimandrite Poghos stayed in Agulis, where he enjoyed the local people's kind hospitality and continued his preaching and educational activity without encountering any obstacles.

The Holy See of Echmiatzin, however, did not stop the persecution against him. Unable to endure their hostile attitude any more, he secluded himself in Metz Anapat, where he lived until his death, spending his days in prayers and repentance.¹⁶¹

Education in Verin (Upper) Agulis

Another field to which the Armenians of Agulis manifested special care and attention was that of education. Apart from the general striving of gaining literacy, this sphere was especially vital for the offsprings of the wealthy merchants of Agulis, as

¹⁶¹ Առաքել Գավրիիժեցի, idem, pp. 267-283; Աբեղիան Մ., Հայ գրականության պատմություն, հ. Բ, էջ 442-459. Abeghian thinks that Davrizhetsy's religious education was far from satisfactory. A superstitious person, he himself believed in the trustworthiness of this story of miracle working.

they could not be successful in the commercial field if they did not receive proper education.

The Armenians of Goghtan made every possible endeavour to raise the level of education offered in their district: this is attested by the fact that Bishop Thomas Vanandetsy, the Prior of Sourb Khach Monastery of Vanand located near Agulis (according to Alishan, he was also the spiritual leader of Goghtan District and a prominent intellectual) planned to open a school of higher education where the younger generation of the district could get instruction matching the contemporary standards accepted in Europe. In order to carry out this intention, Thomas Vanandetsy consulted Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsy IV and left for Europe in 1675 to study the possibility of opening such a school locally. During this trip, he realised that first and foremost he needed Armenian teachers educated in European universities; therefore, he returned to select young men eager to study in Europe, where they could receive education in the advanced countries of the West: this would enable them to teach in the future Armenian higher school he planned to open. Thomas Vanandetsy, however, succeeded in taking only his two nephews to Europe (he stayed in Lisbon and Madrid for several years to keep an eye on the process of the education of these young men).

It goes without saying that the future school was to have its own textbooks and manuals of instruction so that Bishop Vanandetsy also went to Amsterdam to continue the difficult task of printing books in the Armenian language, something that Archimandrite Voskan, a clergyman of high standing, had already commenced.

The bishop and his relative Matthew were joined by Ghukas and Michael, who had completed their course of higher education, and this team of intellectuals, led by Thomas Vanandetsy himself, printed a great number of important books that were to be used at the school he planned to open.

Up until his very last breath, the ninety-one-year-old bishop dreamt of moving his printing house, as well as his already published books to Armenia and found the planned school. The cruel death, however, prevented him from fulfilling his great plans.

Records relating to the activity of Bishop Thomas and educational work in Agulis are preserved in the history of the martyrdom of Priest Andreas. From this source we also learn that the latter himself opened a school in the large courtyard of St. Hovhannes Mkrtych under the guidance of his teacher and famous scholar Movses Tatevatsy. The institution was intended for the offsprings of the families dwelling in the southern and central quarters of the village.

There are no available records as to who continued Priest Andreas' work after his tragic death, but certainly, his martyrdom did not put an end to its activity. When I still lived in Agulis, the large and light classrooms of this school were still preserved, with many notes on their walls left by the pupils.

The monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle had a school the exact date of whose foundation remains unknown. I made my first steps of school at this ancient institution when a child of seven: instead of the clergymen formerly teaching there, now its staff

comprised trained pedagogues¹⁶² some of whom were graduates of Gevorgian Seminary, Nersissian School and other institutions of higher education: David Kalantarian (University of Leipzig, Germany), Rostom Zorian, Christopher Michaelian, Garegin Khazhak, Khachatur Malumian (E. Akuny), Raffi, Perj Proshian, Ruben Melik-Musian, Harutiun Kalantarian, my father Martiros Hakhnazarian, Hakob Ter-Hakobian, both of them graduates of Gevorgian Seminary and many other men- and women-teachers with higher, or secondary education. I remember that Seminary graduates Arshak Atomian, Yeprem Sargissian and others who had come from distant locations lived in the rooms once occupied by the monks. Some of our young teachers later married the young girls of Agulis and took up permanent residence in our village.

As attested by historical records, during the reconstruction of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle in 1636, a school of 200 to 250 pupils opened in its south-eastern part (the courtyard of the sanctuary and its large garden lying in the east were equally used by both the schoolchildren and the clergymen). This school was also to train priests for the villages of Goghtan Diocese.

Indeed, the monastery carried out prolific educational activity even before its reconstruction, training clergymen to copy, or create manuscripts and scientific works in general.

The parish school of Agulis had two separate sections, one intended one for boys (founded in 1846), and the other for girls (dating from 1861). If regarded separately, these two schools were the first institutions of primary education throughout Eastern Armenia and Caucasia in general. The parish school, which stood in the heart of the village adjoining St. Christopher Church, was built through Avetik Ter-Mkrtchian-Terian's financial assistance. Up until 1908 it was a purely female school, but that year it turned into a unisex one, and I moved from the school of St. Thomas the Apostle to its second class.

This school was not large, but it was housed in a comfortable building and had a separate hall with a stage where school parties were generally held and amateur theatrical performances shown with the participation of the local inhabitants (they were such a great success that the people often asked to repeat them several times). During summer months, the amateurs were frequently joined by Ovi Sevumian, a native of

¹⁶² In general, already in those times, a secular type of education was offered to the pupils studying at church or monastic schools. With this respect, I would like to quote a remarkable record by Gurgen Janibekian: "One day I saw a poster on the wall opposite the bridge. That being a novelty for me, I approached and read it. It was approximately of the following contents, 'For charitable purposes, vaudevilles are to be shown on the stage of the school located in the courtyard of St. Christopher Church. The roles performed by Michael Manuelian, Ovi Sevumian and some of the local amateurs.' To tell the truth, I do not remember the titles of the plays staged, but having never seen a performance, I went to see it with my parents...

"That performance made a deep impression on me: all night those two characters stood before my eyes. Later I learnt that the shorter of them was Michael Manuelian, and the taller Ovi Sevumian: they had come to spend summer in Agulis and had willingly accepted the suggestion of participating in the performance" (**Ջանիբեկյան Գ.**, Իմ աշխարհից, Երևան, 1977, էջ 37-38).

Agulis, who occasionally came to the village with his wife and entire troupe, bringing cheer and vivacity to its theatrical life.

The hall of this school also served for the organisation of public meetings, the elections of Boards of Trustees and later their meetings as well as those of Agulis Women's Union, which was actively involved in the relations of the school with the pupils' families. The first meetings of the Pupils' Unions, when the schoolchildren of Agulis studying in foreign secondary schools returned to their native village for their summer holidays were held in this hall.

The school was governed by its Board of Trustees who were members of the rich families of the village. It was they who elected a headmaster for the school and approved the teaching staff proposed by the latter.

The children of the wealthy families of Agulis did not confine themselves to only five-year course of primary instruction and as a rule, continued their studies in the secondary and higher schools of Russia, or Caucasia. Very few of them chose Gevorgian and Lazarian Seminaries, Nersissian School of Tiflis, or the Diocese School of Yerevan.

In 1908 Gurgen Janibekian, my friend of childhood who was later to become an actor renowned throughout Soviet Armenia, entered the primary school of Agulis, where he studied for several years (his father worked as the secretary of the Justice of the Peace of Verin Agulis). In his memoirs he writes the following regarding the educational life of Agulis: "Hundreds of pupils and students studying in Moscow, Petersburg, Tiflis, Baku and even Paris often visited their birthplace. Most of the Armenians of Agulis were occupied with trade and that enabled them to provide their children with higher education. There were a great number of students of polished demeanour in the village town: they organised various evening parties as well as special walks in the local park."¹⁶³

Outstanding Persons and Families. Yervand Lalayan, who made research trips to all the villages of Goghtan District in the first years of the 20th century, published a list (1904) of those young inhabitants of Agulis and the adjacent villages who had received education in Russian and European universities.¹⁶⁴ Some of these people later became prominent personalities in the literary, scientific, as well as national and public life of the Armenian people.

First of all mention should be made of the Terians-Ter-Mkrtchians, a family of prospering merchants who had not only succeeded in accumulating riches thanks to their commercial activity but also used their fortune for the welfare of the Armenians of Agulis and Goghtan in general. Particularly famous was Avetik Terian-Ter-Mkrtchian, who financed the construction of the parochial school of Agulis. The entrance of this school bore a plaque commemorating this noble deed (we could read it every day when studying at this institution). Avetik Terian-Ter-Mkrtchian also provided means for the construction of a stone bridge of large dimensions spanning the river Gilan, as well as another bridge across the same river in Bist Village.

¹⁶³ Ջանիբեկյան Գ., idem, p. 22.

¹⁶⁴ Լալայեան Ե., idem, pp. 281-282.

Avetik Terian-Ter-Mkrtchian was buried in the narthex of St. Christopher Church, near the school he himself had built.

Another representative of the same family, Grigor Terian, graduated from the University of Moscow during the '60s of the 19th century and founded a library, also serving as a reading-hall, in Agulis with his own means.¹⁶⁵ He was also engaged in translations from foreign languages, but his untimely death put an end to that most useful work.

Below follow the names of the other members of the Terian-Ter-Mkrtchians' family who received education at Moscow University: *Martiros Terian*: he graduated from the Law Department and dedicated himself to his father's business; *Mkrtich Terian*: he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, settled down in Moscow and founded his own mental hospital there; *Christopher Terian*: he was a graduate of the Faculty of Natural Science; *Stepan Terian*: he graduated from the university and took up residence in Moscow. A. Terian, who graduated from the University of Paris having majored in mathematics, taught at Gevorgian Seminary.¹⁶⁶

This list may still be continued, but we shall mention only its very last representative whose name was Shasha Agha. He had two sons and six or seven daughters. One of his sons studied medicine and settled in Tiflis. His daughter Arusyak was my school-mate at the five-year primary school of Agulis, after which she was sent to Tiflis to receive secondary education there.

Shasha Agha and his wife died in Agulis. His daughters survived the last massacres of Agulis and were taken to Tabriz.

Christopher Michaelian was born in Verin Agulis on 18 October 1859 in a family of modest means. Their house, that represented a simple small single-storey house with a courtyard bare of vegetation (the windows of its kitchen and basement overlooked the eastern wall of our house), was located in the quarter of Khendzadzor in the lower part of the village.¹⁶⁷

A door opening from the kitchen of Christopher's house connected it with the kitchen of the neighbouring house belonging to a widow who was his parents' close relative. She had two sons studying at a Russian school in Baku (they failed to complete their studies there). This woman, who was very quarrelsome, also had a married daughter living in Agulis.

Twenty steps below this house stood a large and fine-looking residence belonging to another family bearing the surname of Michaelian.¹⁶⁸ In front of it extended a spa-

165 «Կոռնկ հայկական աշխարհի», 1892, № 5-9, էջ 130; Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 282.

166 Լալայեան Ե., idem, pp. 281-282.

167 When I still lived in Agulis, their house was inhabited by a poor family from Dastak: the husband of this family whose name was Stepan (he was also known by the name of Avro Tepan) was a second-class *zurna* player addicted to drinking. The only breadwinner of the house was Stepan's wife who earned their living by doing the laundry of their neighbours and baking bread for them. They did not have any children.

168 The Michaelians were among the oldest inhabitants of Agulis. One of their representatives was poet Karen Michaelian, who lived in Moscow (I met him in Tseghna in 1922).

cious garden separated from ours by only a low wall: it stretched up to a narrow street opposite the church of St. Hakob the Supreme Father.

The Michaelians' family comprised several brothers: the two of them had permanent residence in Agulis together with their families, and the others were engaged in commerce in Tiflis and Moscow (in general, the Michaelians were quite wealthy and prospering). In 1912 the former moved to Tiflis, consigning their property to their servants' care. Sometimes in summer-time one of the Michaelians visited Agulis to check the condition of their houses and gardens.

Christopher was a thin boy of poor constitution with a slight limp, but he was a very prudent child with exceptional mental abilities. Orphaned at a very young age, he received primary education in his native village,¹⁶⁹ after which, at the age of 15 (in 1874), he moved to Tiflis and entered a Russian Teachers Training Seminary (despite his grave financial predicament, he completed his course with honours).

When still a pupil, Christopher became member of the Russian Revolutionary Party of Narodnaya Volya (i.e. the Russian equivalent for People's Will), but it was his teaching practice in his native village (he assumed it after finishing his secondary education) that moulded his world outlook and completely changed his views. His colleagues at the school of Agulis were Garegin Khazhak,¹⁷⁰ who had been banished from Moscow, as well as other prominent people devoted to the field of education. During their long-lasting meetings in Agulis was shaped the national and political ideology of the biggest party ever established in the Armenian reality, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

Having immediate contact with the common people both in Agulis and the other villages of Goghtan, these three young devotees saw with their own eyes all the violence exercised against them and the privations they had to suffer. They witnessed the

169 Christopher and my father Martiros Hakhnazarian were of the same age and as neighbours, they often played together in their birthplace. After leaving the village school, Father continued his education in Gevorgian Seminary: the lack of proper means of communication hindered him from visiting his native village often during his studentship so that he gradually lost ties with his friend of childhood. As for Christopher, the Russian school of Tiflis alienated him from his Armenian compatriots during the first years of his studies.

170 Garegin Chagalian (1867 to 1915) was a prominent political figure and a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Party. In 1903 he assumed the post of editor of the "Mshak" and also started teaching in Nersissian School. In 1906 he commenced the publication of the "Haraj" and "Alik" dailies together with A. Aaronian and Ye. Topchian. Garegin Khazhak fell victim to the great Genocide of Armenians in 1915 (Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 4, Երևան, 1978, էջ 703). Khachatur Malumian (1860 to 1915) was an outstanding publicist and public figure. In the late 1880s he collaborated with the "Mshak." After becoming member of the Dashnaksutiun, he started working as the correspondent of the "Droshak" (Geneva), the official press organ of the party, in Caucasia (Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 7, Երևան, 1981, էջ 165). Celebrated public and political figure Stepan Zorian (1867 to 1919) was one of the founders and active leaders of the Dashnaksutiun Party. Between 1892 and 1895, he worked as the editor of the "Droshak." Zorian was of a pro-Western orientation and thought that the Armenian nation would be able to gain freedom and independence only through the support of the West (Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 3, էջ 707).

Russian and Turkish officials representing the local and district authorities abusing their power and high positions in every possible way, and all this left indelible imprints on their future revolutionary activities.

The summer of 1881 found young Christopher in Tiflis, where for the first time he spoke with his friends sharing his viewpoints about the necessity of devoting themselves to the liberation of the Armenian nation. At that time one of Christopher's followers was his fellow villager Abraham Dastakian, who was destined to become a prominent public and national figure.

While in Tiflis, Christopher had contact with immigrant workers from Moosh, Sasun, Erzurum, Van and other districts and cities of Western Armenia, and for the first time in his life, became aware of the unspeakable hardships the Armenians lived through under the blood-thirsty Turks' rule. Deeply impressed by what he hears from the Western Armenian workers, Christopher initiated the establishment of a circle for the self-education of those wretched people, his final goal being to gradually indoctrinate them with the ideas of the Armenian National Cause.

In 1885 26-year-old Christopher left for Moscow to continue his higher education at the local university. We have at our disposal a letter Raffi (1835 to 1888) wrote to famous public figure Melkon Panian, a wealthy man from Agulis who lived in Moscow. The outstanding Armenian prose writer, who knew Christopher from the years he taught at the school of Agulis and appreciated his merits highly, was asking Panian to support Christopher in that metropolis and help him find private pupils from the local Armenian families so that he would be able to earn his living and continue his education. In this letter Raffi stresses what hardships this young orphaned man had to endure during his studentship at the secondary school of Tiflis. In Moscow Christopher made close friends with Simon Zavarian and later the two of them formed an inseparable trinity together with Rostom.

In 1888 Christopher was once again in Tiflis, where he attempted to establish an underground printing-office with Stepan Zorian, but the lack of means prevented him from achieving his aim. Although in those times both of them were in exile from Moscow due to their participation in student rallies, they continued their propaganda and the training of the younger generation. Christopher and his friends succeeded in gathering around them devoted Armenian intellectuals together with whom they founded the Party of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in 1890.

The secret police of the Tsarist Government persecuted these young men devoted to the Armenian Cause everywhere: in 1891 they arrested Christopher and banished him to Besarabia, his friends Simon Zavarian, Rostom, Hovsep Arghutian and a group of other intellectuals sharing this fate. Christopher, however, continued his revolutionary activities even in exile. He secretly moved to Romania, where he organised the publication of the third issue of the "Droshak." Christopher also took part in the First General Assembly of Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun, during which the participants discussed and worked out the main policies of the party and elected a central body, with Christopher assuming a leading position in it.

Through Christopher's own efforts, the Dashnaksutiun organised the operation of Khanasor against the Kurdish tribe of Mazrik, who had become puppets in the hands of the Turkish authorities.

The Second General Assembly of Dashnaksutiun entrusted Christopher with the post of the editor of the "Droshak." While abroad, he also initiated the establishment of the Union of the Armenian Students of Europe and founded the "Pro Armenia" newspaper devoted to the Armenian Cause.

However, Christopher was not destined to spend his life in peaceful work. When the Turkish bandits, supported and incited by the Tsarist authorities, started attacking the defenceless Armenians of Caucasia, Christopher organised the famous act of Potorik. For a long time, it kept the wealthy Armenians in terror, for they had to provide means to purchase arms and start the organisation of the self-defence of those Armenian places of Caucasia and Eastern Armenia that had Turkish populations.

After the Third General Assembly of the Dashnaksutiun, Christopher Michaelian resigned from his post of the editor of the "Droshak" and entirely dedicated himself to the realization of a plan that was of the utmost importance to him. For many years, he could not reconcile himself to the thought that the Armenian nation was being gradually exterminated in Western Armenia. When the Assembly approved the suggestion that the "Red Sultan" should be exterminated, Christopher committed himself to its fulfillment: he made up the plan of the attempt on the sultan's life, chose the people with whom he was to carry it out and started preparing for this decisive action.

Destiny, however, had another course of events predetermined for Christopher's life: on 17 March 1905, he was killed together with his collaborator Vramshapuh Kendirian during the testing of a bomb at the heights of Vitosh near Sofia, Bulgaria. He consigned his soul to God without being able to punish that criminal, but he handed down to the coming generations his ideology and spirit, which were kept alive in the party he himself had founded and were a source of inspiration during the Armenians' struggle for liberation.

Christopher's death put the entire Armenian nation and, especially, those who were aware of his far-reaching but dangerous plans into deep mourning. The Party and the Armenian people lost their noble, selfless leader at the time when the situation was becoming more and more dangerous in the cities and villages of Caucasia, when the persecution and violence the Ottoman Government and Kurds exerted against the Armenians was growing even more unbearable. Prominent Armenian poets Siamanto, Michael Varandian, E. Aknuny, Khazhak and many others expressed their bitter pain and profound regret over this irretrievable loss in their works.

Christopher Michaelian was not only a party authority: he was an irreplaceable leader for the entire Armenian nation. He was able to righteously realise the imperative of his times, i.e. the necessity of educating the Armenians who had been living in slavery throughout many centuries and teaching them that their only way of overcoming the danger of their extermination was relying on their strength and struggling. He understood that the Armenians were to be freed from their obedient way of thinking in

order to “earn” their freedom and retain their self-esteem and national dignity just as the Serbs, Greeks, Rumanians and Bulgarians did.

Without neglecting the great role Christopher’s two merited friends played in the foundation of Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun, we have to point out that the birth of this Party was largely the result of his own efforts and enterprising mind.

He was infinitely devoted to the Cause of the liberation of the Armenian nation: he sacrificed everything, including his personal happiness, to selflessly commit himself to this work.

Christopher Michaelian was neither an attractive orator nor a skilled publicist. He was not in the habit of delivering speeches from high tribunes. He was a modest, taciturn intellectual who inspired respect amongst the people surrounding him even when still very young thanks to his deep knowledge, decency, and righteousness.¹⁷¹

Avetik Araskhanian was born in Verin Agulis¹⁷² on 13 February 1857. Initially, he received education in his native village with teacher Hayrapet Kalantarian, after which he entered the local primary school, where his teachers were Perj Proshian, Ruben Jalalian and Raffi. Later he wrote in his yet unpublished memoirs that these great personalities made an indelible imprint upon his mind.

In 1870 Avetik’s parents sent him to Tiflis, where he attended a Russian Real school and took up living with Stepan Palasarian and K. Ter-Astvatzatrian, who infused him with love for Armenian culture and literature.

In 1872 Avetik Araskhanian wrote his first article («Արհեստանոցի հարցը Ագուլիսում») (*The Issue of the Workshop in Agulis*).¹⁷³ which was followed by the publication of a work by Doctor Bock entitled *Practical Advice for Children at Home and at College* (1873).

After he had completed his course at the Real School with honour, his rich parents sent him to Europe, where he studied at the universities of Paris, Leipzig and Strasbourg. He accomplished his studies in 1882 with a Ph.D in science.

Returning to Tiflis, Avetik Araskhanian started teaching at the female schools of Nersissian and Gayanian. During his work, he prepared a textbook of the Ancient History of Oriental Peoples that was published in 1891.

Parallel with his teaching activities, Avetik Araskhanian delivered a great number of public lectures in Tiflis. In 1885 he gave up teaching and was engaged in the study of the economic state of peasantry in Caucasia. He made research trips to the districts of Nukhi and Aresh, the data gathered during this time becoming the basis of a study that was published in the Russian language: *Materials for the Study of the Economic Conditions of State Peasantry in Caucasia*.

171 **Վարանդյան Մ.**, Գաշնակցության պատմություն, Երևան, 1992:

172 Their house, which stood in the central quarter of the village (it was mostly inhabited by rich families), was a fine-looking building with a beautiful garden of various flowers in front of it. This house either stood unoccupied most part of the year or was inhabited by tenants. Once Avetik Araskhanian himself came to Agulis with all his family (he was rather a strange-looking man), and Father and I went to welcome them (when I went to Yerevan in 1920, I met his daughter, a true beauty who had come to this city to study at the university).

173 «Մշակ», 1872, № 28:

For a short time, Avetik Araskhanian resumed his teaching activity and also held special courses on Industry and Commerce organised on his own initiative. After having been entitled to publish the “Murj” magazine, he closed these courses, gave up teaching altogether and entirely dedicated himself to his new work. For twelve years, he worked as the editor of this most important magazine, collaborating with many intellectuals and experts on Armenian literature. Then he handed down this work of the utmost significance to Levon Sargissian, an outstanding figure in the field of education born in Tseghna.

Hovhannes Kalantarian studied at the primary school of Agulis, after which he went abroad. In 1860 he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine of London University and took up living in the coastal city of Scarborough, England. Hovhannes Kalantarian is the author of several inventions in Medicine.

After the primary school of Agulis and Khalibian School, *David Kalantarian* entered the University of Leipzig. Completing his studies there, he returned to his native village and devoted himself to teaching. Apart from the school of Agulis, he also worked in the Diocese School of Yerevan and Gevorgian Seminary of Echmiatzin, after which he moved to Turkey and founded his own school in the city of Broosa. David Kalantarian was a true devotee to the field of the education of his nation.

Another representative of the Kalantarians’ family, *Hayrapet Kalantarian*, started his education at the primary school of Agulis, after which he received further instruction at Khalibian School and Gevorgian Seminary. Throughout forty years he worked selflessly for the educational institutions of his native village. All his sons received higher education.

Alexandre Kalantarian, who was born in Verin Agulis on 20 September 1855, received primary education from his father Hayrapet Kalantarian, then moved to Baku and entered a secondary Russian school. From Baku he went to Moscow, where he received technical education. In 1879 he graduated from the Higher School of Agriculture of Petrovsk.

When still a pupil, he commenced writing for the “Mshak”: during his further literary activities, he published his translations of a great number of valuable works as well as others written by himself.

Between 1882 and 1883, he travelled in Europe to study dairy industry and veterinary medicine there on an assignment given by the Russian authorities. After his return, he published more than fifty works on agriculture and related sciences.

Alexandre Kalantarian also became active in the field of public oratory and collaborated with his fellow villager Avetik Araskhanian in the publication of the “Murj” magazine.

In 1893 he was elected editor of the “Mshak” periodical and successfully held this post of great responsibility for many years. At the same time, he also worked as Chairman of Tiflis’ Armenian Printing Company and held membership of the Board of Trustees of Nersissian School.

Avetis Kalantarian was a graduate of the Higher School of Agriculture of Moscow. Unfortunately, there is very little information about him.

Arsen Kalantarian, who was a graduate of the Higher College of Agriculture of Germany, lived in Tiflis. He is the author of several translations.

Anushavan Kalantarian studied chemistry at the University of Berlin and collaborated with the “Murj” magazine and “Mshak” daily.

Tigran Kalantarian was a graduate of the Faculty of Veterinary Science of Kiev University.

The Hakhnazarians and Abians jointly owned a large commercial company in Moscow and had its branches in Baku, Astrakhan, Yerevan, as well as in the Persian cities of Babol, Sabzvar, Nishabur, Torbat, Maragha, etc.

Sargis Hakhnazarian, who was a graduate of Khalibian Secondary School, made a great contribution to the welfare and prosperity of his native village. For many years, he was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of one of the schools of Agulis, also serving as a verger in several of the local churches. He was mainly occupied with commercial activity.

Over many years, *Harutiun Hakhnazarian*, a man of rare individuality and wide knowledge, ran the Moscow Branch of the aforementioned commercial company. Later he moved to his native village, where he became a person of immense influence in the national and public life of the Armenians.

Martiros Hakhnazarian, the father of the author of this work, was a graduate of Gevorgian Seminary. He dedicated his whole life to teaching. Having worked in the Seminary as a teacher and senior inspector, he later moved to Agulis, where he at first taught at the local school. Some time later, he worked as a teacher and inspector for the villages of Tanakert and Kaghakik.

Christopher Abian, who was a graduate of Petersburg’s Higher College of Agriculture and Forestry, lived in Astrakhan.

Khachatur Abian, who was a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine of Moscow University, lived and practised his profession in Tiflis.

Mushegh Abian, who represents the younger generation of the outstanding Armenians of Agulis, studied at the Higher School of Moscow. After his banishment to Persia, he ran his family’s commercial affairs for some time. Mushegh Abian is the author of a number of research works. His son Smbat received university education in Persia and America and took up living in the USA, where he was a renowned specialist in mathematics. Mushegh Abian’s daughter Gohar graduated from Teheran’s Higher State School of Music and later worked as a piano teacher in the same institution.

The Nersissians were a very respected and honoured family in Agulis. They had a rich library of rare books and manuscripts all of which fell prey to the massacres of 1919.

Mentor Nersissian was a graduate of the Higher School of Mineralogy of Freiburg, Germany.

Another representative of this family was *Doctor Avetis Nersissian*, who was murdered by a treacherous Turkish criminal during the Armeno-Tatar fights.

Hovhannes Ter-Michaelian, who was a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine of Kharkov University, practised his profession and lived in the same city. During sum-

mer months, he visited Agulis and kept the health care of the local population under his control.

Hayk Ter-Michaelian, who was a graduate of the Higher College of Technologies of St. Petersburg, lived in Baku. He collaborated with the “Mshak” daily and “Murj” magazine.

Another member of this family who represented the younger generation, was *Aram Ter-Michaelian*, who was member of the National Council of Agulis. He fell victim to the slaughters of Agulis in 1919.

Hakob Ter-Janian was a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris University and lived in Tiflis.

Minas Mkrtchian, who was a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine of Kiev University, lived in Tiflis, where he founded a clinic of gynecological diseases.

Shmavon Aghamalian, who was a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine of Moscow University, lived in Baku.

In 1888 *Mkrtich Barkhudarian* started the publication of a semi-annual literary and historical journal named “Handes” (Moscow). Occupied with this work until 1896, he then founded a printing-office where he worked for quite a long time, publishing a great number of works in the Armenian language.

Another representative of this family, *Arshak Barkhudarian*, completed a course in the Law Department of Moscow University and took up residence in Moscow.

The graduates of this university also included Grigor Gevorgian, Alexan Mnatsakanian, Arshak Hakobian and Tovmas Aslanian.

Agulis is also the birthplace of *Levon Tadevossian*, a famous figure who was known under the pseudonym of Papasha; renowned national figure and revolutionary *Samson Tadevossian*, who particularly extended his activities in Salmast; national figure *Hovsep Tatossian*, one of the three brothers (the nephews of Christopher Michaelian) who founded the “Alik” daily; *poet Christopher Tadevossian*; *Doctor Garegin Atabekian*, *dentist Shushanik Ter-Nikoghossian* and tens of other intellectuals. Agulis Armenians’ striving for education grew particularly stronger in the first and second decades of the 20th century, when hundreds of young men did not confine themselves to the parish school of their native village and moved to Caucasia, Russia and Europe in order to receive secondary and higher education.

Zakaria Aguletsy

Zakaria Aguletsy, who was born and reared in Agulis, provides most reliable information relating to the history, public life, customs and economic life of his native village, as well as the religious festivals and church ceremonies held there, together with the health condition of the local inhabitants, various epidemics that often spread death there, the relations with the representatives of the state, the taxes collected there and the oppression the local Armenians had to suffer in the hands of various conquerors. As an eye-witness who lived in Agulis throughout all his life and died there, Aguletsy, who travelled much in Europe as well as Turkey and Iran, provides records that are

unparalleled in their reliability. Although his diary covers only a span of thirty-four years (1657 to 1691), it covers most different aspects of the life of Agulis, including the commercial activities of Agulis Armenians. Indeed, there exist a great number of sources attesting to the great role the merchants of this small city had in the transit trade between Asia and Europe, but his account gives a most real and vivid picture of their immense share of contribution to the international economic and commercial relations during the 17th century, as well as the great role they played in the social and public life of Agulis.¹⁷⁴ Zakaria Aguletsky's diary also dwells upon the national and political issues and affairs of his time.¹⁷⁵

Zakaria Aguletsky, who was born in the family of Aghamir Brdonts in Verin Agulis in 1630, received primary education with his uncle's son, Priest Melkon, whom he considers a wise man.¹⁷⁶

His diary begins with a description of the routes he covered during his commercial activity.

The main part of his work comprises his travelling notes including all the important events that occurred in the places he happened to be on business between 1647 and 1681.

The last part of the book represents a chronology of the history of the family of the Brdonts.

Zakaria Aguletsky wrote his diary in the vernacular of the Eastern Armenian merchants of his time, which was a mixture of *Grabar*, the classical Armenian language, and the dialect of Hin Jugha.¹⁷⁷ The book also includes a great number of words used in the dialect of Agulis, as well as idioms and set expressions which only enrich it and add to its value firstly because it is one of the oldest works written in the modern Armenian language, and secondly, it represents a thesaurus of rich material for specialists engaged in linguistic and dialectal studies.¹⁷⁸

As righteously stated in the introduction to the diary, the available historical sources relating to the events of the 17th century are very poorly studied and even ignored to some extent.¹⁷⁹ The author of this work fully realises the importance of his records, which is evident from his own words, "And again, my dear brothers, although I do not pursue any profit, my work is to the utmost benefit of those who will read it."

Alexandre Kalantar embarked upon publishing the manuscript diary, but he failed to pay the owner of the printing-office in time, and the latter sold the already printed pages of the work as scrap-paper by weight. Fortunately, the original manuscript and a copy of the printed book were saved. "After the Sovietisation of Armenia, Kalantar's

174 See Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, p. 123.

175 Աճառեան Հ., Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան, հ. Բ, էջ 199-200:

176 Չաքարիա Ազուլեցու Օրագրությունը, էջ 93:

177 Idem, p. 6.

178 Աճառեան Հ., Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան, հ. Բ, էջ 199-200: With this regard, mention should be made of an interesting work by V. H. Kazhian (Կաժյան Վ., Բայը և նրա խոնարհման համակարգը Չաքարիա Ազուլեցու «Օրագրությունում», «ՊԲՀ», 1977, № 2, էջ 137-150).

179 Չաքարիա Ազուլեցու Օրագրությունը, էջ VII:

son Levon handed Zakaria's manuscript work, consisting of 98 pages, to the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment...: the work also had some additions made in different handwritings which the publishers took into consideration."¹⁸⁰

At the age of 15, Zakaria decided to devote himself to commercial activity, and on 5 March 1647, he set out for the coastal city of Izmir (Smyrna), a large commercial centre for the trade of silk. The young merchant, who was accompanied by his uncle's son Nikoghos, carried a load of silk there.¹⁸¹

Covering his way from Agulis to Khanagha, thence to Der and Verin and Nerkin Aza, Zakaria reached Yerevan via Ejin,¹⁸² Lehram¹⁸³ and Nakhijevan, the trip taking him eight days. After several days' sojourn in this city, he joined a caravan and went first to Erzurum via Kars and Kaghzvan, and thence to Tocat. It took him about five months to reach his final destination, the city of Izmir, but Zakaria does not write what he had to experience and suffer on his way there.

In Izmir the young merchant knew some tradesmen from Agulis who helped him sell his silk successfully (he sent most of the money he had earned to his father and brother through another merchant from Agulis). Taking 70 *marchils*¹⁸⁴ with him, Zakaria moved to Broosa, where he stayed for three months. From this city he left for Istanbul, where he began his activities as a small trader, getting acquainted with the various aspects of commerce in practice. This continued for two years and added greatly to his experience as a merchant, enabling him to save 32 tumans. In April 1649, he started for Agulis by the same route and reached his native village on 6 June.

While engaged in commercial activity, Zakaria travelled many times to Tabriz, Maragha, Isfahan, as well as Izmir and Istanbul. At the age of 24, he married a 15-year-old girl, but their marriage did not prove a happy one, for they soon lost their newly-born daughter: nor did his wife live long. Some time later, he married a 21-year-old girl who gave birth to five to six children (some of them later fell victim to various infectious diseases).

The status of being married did not bind Zakaria's hands and he soon re-embarked upon his commercial trips which took him from Izmir to Italy (1658) and thence to Amsterdam, Leiden and other cities of Holland via Germany. After a sojourn in this

180 Idem, p. VI. The original manuscript of the diary represented a hodgepodge of writings so that the publishers had to arrange it in chronological order. They also supplemented it with a brief glossary which is, however, far from being all-embracing, for it includes only a very small part of the Persian and Turkish words, as well as those from the dialects of Agulis and Hin Jugha that are used in the manuscript.

181 The peace treaty signed between Persia and the Ottoman state in 1639 restored tranquility in the Middle East, which secured safety for the conducting of transit trade in which, as we have already mentioned, the merchants of Agulis had their great share of participation. Zakaria made his first steps in commerce taking advantage of these favourable political circumstances.

182 It is the present-day Turkish village of Yaji located on the bank of the Arax, within an *aghaj* (7 kilometres) of Aza and Der, as stated by Zakaria Aguletsy.

183 The township of Nehram, which is Turkish-inhabited nowadays.

184 The word derives from the Italian word 'marsili' and denotes a European silver coin.

country, he moved to Portugal, Spain, visited a number of coastal cities in Asia Minor and, finally, returned to his native city via Smyrna.

Indeed, we cannot present an account of all the trips made by Zakaria Aguletsy, for it will deviate us from our main purpose. We shall only confine ourselves to stating that apart from widening his trading skills, his travels also enabled him to develop his mental horizon: he saw and got acquainted with many countries and peoples the contact with whom added to his knowledge and prudence. Thanks to this great experience gained when still so young, Zakaria soon became very popular in his native city, always taking an active part in its national, public, cultural and spiritual life.

Zakaria kept record of all the significant events that took place either in his native city or other Armenian and foreign cities and countries, turning his diary into an invaluable source relating to the Armenian national history, as well as the economic and commercial life of the 17th century.

Zakaria Aguletsy was a person closely attached to the national and religious customs and festivals of his nation: in his diary he put down the exact dates of all the feasts observed in Agulis and provided a detailed description of their celebrations, in which he always took an active part. Moreover, he also made donations to the renovation of the local churches. We read in the pages of his diary that he himself made a money box, probably, with a lock he had brought from Europe, for the church of St. Christopher and collected money for the needs of the sanctuary during the religious service of Saturday. Despite his modest financial means, he himself made his share of contribution to the sanctuaries of Agulis.¹⁸⁵

Despite his young age, he boasted such great influence in the national and religious affairs of his native city, that Bishop Petros, the Prior of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle and the leader of Goghtan District, as well as Archbishop Michael, a very honourable man who acted as Vicar of the Patriarch, often consulted him in connection with different issues.

From the standpoint of national customs, it is interesting to note that Zakaria Aguletsy's diary does not contain any reference to the holiday of New Year. It is the feast of Theophany that is repeatedly mentioned in his work, but he does not refer to it as Feast of the Nativity and Baptism of Christ; instead, he describes the solemn ceremony of the blessing of the water of the river or any of the springs of the village that was always performed under the music of *naghara* and *zurna*.

Of immense importance are the records relating to the Armenian historical monuments, particularly, churches and monasteries. A fervent believer, Zakaria could not be compared with those merchants whose only purpose in life was to accumulate riches and engage in usury. He often went on pilgrimage to the sanctuaries of Goghtan with all his family and even friends and acquaintances. With this respect, his diary is a very important source on the state of the Armenian religious monuments located in Agulis

¹⁸⁵ It was Zakaria who suggested that his brother Simon thoroughly reconstruct the church of Khor Virap and the dungeon where Grigor Lusavorich (Gregory the Enlightener) is said to have spent the years of his arrest.

and Goghtan in general, particularly with reference to those villages and townships that used to represent prospering Armenian places and were only later inhabited by Turks. Zakaria Aguletsy, who made pilgrimages to a great number of sanctuaries in Goghtan, Yernjak, Nakhijevan, Yerevan, Echmiatzin, Syunik and many other places, also provides his readers with the names of the priors of these sanctuaries. In the account of his pilgrimage to the church of St. Sargis, he speaks with high praise about its priest, Voskan the Archimandrite, who was in Europe and was engaged in the printing of books in the Armenian language. He speaks with great delight about the Bible already published through this clergyman's efforts.¹⁸⁶

Zakaria Aguletsy was well-aware of all the events of the Armenian religious life. He particularly dwells upon the activity of Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsy IV, mentioning the visits he and his Vicar Michael the Archbishop made to Agulis (the aim of these visits was to collect gifts and church taxes in this thriving city in order to pay some of the Supreme Father's debts that made up rather a large sum). He provides absolutely reliable information concerning Hakob Jughayetsy's struggle against Patriarch of Jerusalem Yeghiazar and Bishop Onoprios. He even reports the death date of Archbishop Michael, at the same time expressing great regret over that loss.¹⁸⁷

Of great importance are Zakaria's records relating to the economic state and industrial development of Goghtan District. From his diary we learn that Agulis, Meghri, Nehram as well as Shorot Village of Yernjak District did not belong to any landowner, but were directly dependent on the central government of the country (the villages having this status were called '*khalise*'). The *khalise* villages of the northern districts were under the sway of the contractors, or supervisors appointed by the vice-royalty of Atropatene. These officials oppressed the people severely: thus, the Governor of Agulis, as well as all his family and relatives lived at the expense of the local Armenians. Sometimes their behaviour became so unbearable that the inhabitants of Agulis had to turn to the representatives of the central government with a complaint against them. As a rule, however, the central government sent these cases to the hearing of the Governor of Yerevan, who always extorted large bribes from the supervisors to defend their interests and retract their protests. Similar cases of power abuse are also reported in other villages of Goghtan.

In the 17th century, the khans of the country, or other foreign invaders were still in the habit of gathering young girls and boys for their seraglios. Zakaria Aguletsy writes that in 1653 a certain Agha Latif came to Agulis with an armed detachment intending to take 16 girls and boys to the harem of the shah, but the local Armenians paid heavy bribes to remove that calamity from their families.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Zakaria Aguletsy was acquainted with the contemporary Armenian scholars among whom he mentions famous scholar Grigor Tatevatsy (**Զարգրիս Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 42).

¹⁸⁷ Archbishop Michael also served as Prior of the monastery of St. Stepanos Nakhavka (Darashamb), where he consigned his soul to God on 6 March 1680, as attested by Zakaria Aguletsy. This date is also fixed in some historical documents preserved in this monastery.

¹⁸⁸ **Զարգրիս Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 41:

Besides, the Armenians of Agulis were also to provide workers for the reconstruction of the state buildings and forts destroyed by earthquakes or other natural disasters. They had to work without any payment until the work was fully completed.

Although Zakaria Aguletsy considers any tragedy and calamity that befell Agulis as divine punishment for the local inhabitants' sins, his records of the losses caused by various infectious diseases and epidemics particularly spread amongst infants are filled with regret and grave pain. Although the Armenians of Agulis were famous for their cleanliness and had several tens of springs of potable water, they were powerless to struggle against these diseases. As attested by Zakaria, during the raging of infant diseases, you could not find a house that had not suffered the loss of several children. In those times, vaccination remained undiscovered and there were no medicines to overcome various diseases; this is the reason why the epidemics took away the lives of countless children both in the towns and in the villages.

It was particularly the plague, cholera as well as typhus and typhoid spreading from the southern countries that were unsparing for their victims: in these cases, the people would go to the hotbeds of infection with crosses and gonfalons to ask the Saviour for mercy, without realising that they only increased the danger of the spread of the epidemic.

Zakaria Aguletsy's diary also contains interesting and absolutely reliable information relating to the relations of Persia and the Ottoman Empire. He even dwells upon the units of measure and weight that were used in those times, together with the contemporary monetary units, different types of taxes exacted from common people, including customs tariffs levied on the roads, as well as the statutes of various administrative bodies, etc.

During his numerous trips, Zakaria visited a great number of cities and villages the names of which are mentioned in his work: he also counts the distance separating these places. Particularly valuable are the names of the Armenian villages of Goghtan District, given the fact that their names underwent some changes after they were re-inhabited by Turks.

We learn from Zakaria's diary that common people spoke not *Grabar*, but modern Armenian, that was a mixture of the dialect of Goghtan and the Persian language. The author himself avoided writing in the vernacular of Agulis, choosing a language that would be easy to understand for a wider circle of readers.

Generally speaking, but for the foreign rulers' oppression that had become a commonplace, Aguletsy's times were not distinguished for any political or military upheavals. We may state that during the period covered in his diary Agulis was more of an industrial city with commercial ties with Europe that helped the local merchants to retain their important role in silk industry and its export.

Although still very young, Zakaria Aguletsy succeeded in creating a prospering life for himself thanks to his hard work in the field of commerce. Although he was the youngest brother in the family, he enjoyed great influence and power so that his elder brother always turned to him for advice. Thanks to the thriving living conditions that

were the fruit of Zakaria's diligence, his father was able to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, something requiring great financial means in those times.

Zakaria does not write anything concerning the last years of his life: apparently, he lived through hard times and privations which possibly caused his untimely death: he yielded up his spirit to God at the age of 61 in 1691, bequeathing his famous diary to the coming generations as the only relic in his memory.

With the publication of his work, one of the most important sources of the 17th-century history of the Armenian nation was saved from oblivion, at the same time perpetuating the memory of that prominent Armenian of Agulis.

NERKIN AGULIS (DASHT)

South of Verin Agulis, in the same gorge lies Nerkin Agulis, or Dasht ('Desht' as pronounced in the dialect of Agulis). It is situated only four kilometres below Verin Agulis so that the gardens and arable lands of the two villages merge together. The part of the gorge where Nerkin Agulis is located is quite wide and smooth, this perfect flatness being broken by only a bare hill called Konglash and rising at the southern extremity of the village. At the foot of this hill flows a river that comes from Verin Agulis and forms the boundary between Nerkin Agulis and Ordubad.

In the rear of the gorge rise bare mountain chains that descend from Verin Agulis. One of these ranges that towers quite near the village is named Kojeghnots as one of its peaks looks like a stub: 'kojgh' is the Armenian equivalent for 'stub.' In the east extends a plain where some unnamed hills rise in a small cluster.

The aforementioned river, that runs down from Verin Agulis, does not flow through Dasht, but bypasses it from the south-east and continues its course southwards at the foot of the hill of Kanglash and disappears in the sand stretching towards the Arax river-side. Although the river water became rather abundant early in spring as a result of precipitation and caused some damage to the adjacent fields and gardens, it was of great use for irrigating the arable lands and fields lying south of the village. Generally speaking, the lack of water was rather acute in Nerkin Agulis: in summer-time, the river water dried up so that both its northern and southern gardens were mostly irrigated by the water of springs conveyed from afar.

The highway coming from Julfa and Ordubad extended through the village of Dasht. There was another, mountainous road that was shorter and more convenient for pedestrians: it ran near the cemetery of Bey Oghli, extending at the southern edge of Verin Agulis and descended to Dasht by a mountainous path.¹⁸⁹

189 When the carriages bringing passengers from Julfa to Agulis stopped at the spring of Dasht to let the exhausted horses drink, they were all surrounded by 12 to 15-year-old boys who immediately started inquiries to find out who the passengers were and where they were going, who their relatives in Verin Agulis were. Having learnt everything, they ascended the aforementioned mountain road almost running, trying to reach the village before the carriages and convey the happy news to the given families. We often saw these young boys who were still under age, completely out of breath and covered with sweat from head to foot, coming to our village in all speed, for if they managed to tell the news before the arrival of the carriage, they usually got some small gift in return.

The springs of Dasht imparted liveliness and vigour to the village. Drinking water was provided by that flowing in the village proper, near the highway: the women and men took the cold water of this spring to their homes in large pitchers placed on their shoulders. The villagers also used it for the irrigation of their farming plots.

Dasht represented a purely Armenian village which had a population of 200 houses with 990 inhabitants, as shown by the results of the population census carried out in 1897.¹⁹⁰

According to Yer. Lalayan, in the early 20th century, the local population represented the following picture: 105 houses with 397 male and 342 female inhabitants who totaled 739.¹⁹¹

The Armenians of Dasht were mainly occupied with farming, gardening and vegetable-growing. Apart from various sorts of grapes, it was also famous for its fine apple, pear, peach, almond as well as sweet melon and watermelon. Most of the annual income of the villagers was received through silkworm breeding. Although the lack of water hindered the local Armenians from expanding their agricultural activity (a large land lying in the south of the village remained barren for this reason), they somehow succeeded in creating prospering lives for themselves, becoming totally independent and self-sufficient.

Almost every family in Dasht had domestic animals. In addition, some of the wealthy houses had beasts-of-burden and cattle that also served their fellow villagers.

Like the other Armenian villages of Goghtan, Dasht was deprived of regular wide and straight streets. It was only the highway passing through the village that was comparatively wider and straighter, but it was not paved or asphalted and was always covered with dust due to the passage of carriages. Nor could Nerkin Agulis boast the luxurious houses and prosperity of Verin Agulis. Despite this, however, Dasht gave birth to a great number of intellectuals and prominent national figures.

Dasht had a three-grade primary school. Some of the rich families also sent their children to the school of Verin Agulis, after which they continued their education abroad.

At the north-eastern extremity of Dasht rose **the church of Sourb Yerrordutium (Holy Trinity)**, which represented an arched building having a fine dome and resting on six circular and fourteen quadrangular pillars. It had three apses beneath the two of which the bemas were located. In the west, it had a domed narthex which used to be connected with the church through three arched openings (later they were closed).

North of the church of Sourb Yerrordutium stood another church of the same dimensions called **Amarayin (Summer) Church**. According to Lalayan, these two churches were between 38 and 39 metres long, 24 metres wide, and about 27 metres high. Like the aforementioned sanctuary, it had three apses but it was domeless. These two churches retained several ancient tombstones engraved with epitaphs.

190 Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 336.

191 Լալայան Ե., idem, p. 314.

Amarayin Church was fortified with ramparts, the top of whose arched gateway was adorned with a fine cross-stone dated 1603. These fortified walls that were adjoined by the village school were about 3 metres wide. East of these ramparts were placed several khachkars one of which bore inscriptions still waiting for decipherment.

An underground opening in the yard of the church branched into three ways leading one to the bema of the church, and the second to a nearby spring. The third one was closed and it remained unknown where it led.

In the south-east of Nerkin Agulis stood **the chapel of St. Minas**, which represented a small building of wooden roof and a simple narthex. Its altar was placed near its northern wall, which retained the font.

This small chapel did not have an altar, but only a single door whose arch was carved with inscriptions. Both in the yard and in the narthex of St. Minas lay numerous graves with epitaphs.

In the south-east of Dasht, at the foot of the hill of Konglash **the church of St. Sargis** was located. Although called a church, it actually represented a small domeless vaulted chapel, with its altar placed in its northern part.

St. Sargis was a beloved place of pilgrimage that was visited by a great number of believers on the feast day of St. Sargis the Commander. On that day, a large procession moved from Verin Agulis to this church to be present at the religious service held there. The unmarried young girls and men pinned great hopes on Commander Sargis, believing that he would make all their dreams come true.

There are very few preserved historical records relating to the past of Dasht. The earliest reference to it dates back to the '90s of the 16th century, when the representatives of several Caucasian peoples, including the Armenians, moved to Persia and applied to Khudabanda's successor Shah Abbas I (1587 to 1628) and asked for his military intervention for the purpose of driving the Ottoman Turks away from Caucasia. The delegation that had left for Persia comprised a number of influential Kurdish, Georgian and Armenian spiritual and secular dignitaries, including Melik Shahnazar and Melik Haykaz from Keshtagh. With this regard, a record states, "They applied to the shah, for they were aware that he was planning to go to Armenia... and the reason the inhabitants of Dizak and Dasht went to him was the heavy taxation, oppression and merciless slaughter of the Christians."¹⁹²

However, both the Armenians of Dasht and their compatriots in Hin Jugha, who showed such a cordial welcome to Shah Abbas the Great in 1603, were to go through severe disappointment a short time later, when this monarch decided to annihilate and burn most of the districts of Western Armenia, together with a number of large cities and villages of the Ararat Valley, and deport their populations to Persia.

The inhabitants of Dasht did not escape this deportation and had to leave their native hearths, being reduced to fugitives.¹⁹³ Those who were able to cross the river

¹⁹² Առաքել Գարդինեցի, idem, p. 15; Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, pp. 72-73.

¹⁹³ A cemetery in Nor Jugha retains a great number of tombstones with epitaphs carved in memory of Dasht Armenians, which attests that the residents of Dasht suffered this deportation, too.

Arax resettled in the village town of Nor Jugha, near Isfahan, where they founded their own quarter and named it after their birthplace (it is still known by this name).

The name of Dasht is also mentioned amongst the other villages of Goghtan Diocese in an inscription (1634) carved on the entrance tympanum of the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Zakaria Aguletsy mentions the village of Dasht in connection with some discrepancy between Father Superior of St. Thomas the Apostle Bishop Petros and the local inhabitants: the latter blamed the former for having taken sides with the head of their village Melkum, a cruel man who had been oppressing them throughout 30 years. They wanted to replace him by another, righteous man, but the prior did not agree to it.¹⁹⁴

In his further references to Dasht, Aguletsy writes that Shah Abbas the Great permitted some of the Armenians of Dasht to return to their native village, thus escaping the refugee's status.¹⁹⁵

The fact that some tradesmen from Dasht in origin later took up living in Livorno and Venice attests that this village was well-represented in Europe thanks to its famous merchants. However, it is still to be found out whether they moved to this continent from their native village or from Nor Jugha. Some of these tradesmen were celebrated benefactors and made lavish donations to Sourb Khach Church of Venice.

In the subsequent decades of the 17th century, part of the Armenians of Dasht were able to return to their native village and reconstruct it. It was in those times that the local people, who were supported by Mahtesy Melkon Serian, conveyed spring water from the depths of some remote mountains to their village. This spring that was later called after Mahtesy Melkon, ran near the local market.

On his way back from the ceremony of the coronation of Nadir Shah (1736) in the Plain of Mughan, Catholicos Abraham of Crete visited Dasht and later wrote the following relating to his sojourn there: "...and from there on 6 April we reached the big village of Dasht.

"On 7 April, at the Feast of the Annunciation, we were invited to lead the Divine liturgy. Obliging their request, we performed the Holy Sacrament."¹⁹⁶

The revival of Dasht continued in the 18th century as well: through the financial assistance of the Yarghulians, the church of Amarayin and the chapel of St. Mesrop were reconstructed.

Another family, the Vardazarians, proved of immense importance in the re-organisation of the economic life of the village: in 1860 they imported a steam-engine from Moscow that was to be used in drawing out thread from the silk cocoon. Indeed, this work was of great benefit to the Vardazarians,¹⁹⁷ but it also was a great contribution to

194 **Չարսրիս Ազուկեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 77:

195 *Idem*, pp. 77-78.

196 The Chronicle of **Abraham of Crete**, p. 124.

197 The offsprings of the Vardazarians' family were the brothers Stepan and Pilipos: the former was a graduate of the Higher Technological College of Moscow, and the latter was the publisher of the "Murj" magazine and the "Horizon" daily. Besides, he was the co-founder of a modern leather-processing mill that he had opened in Tiflis together with the Zargarians.

the development of silkworm breeding; besides, the import of this steam-engine created new working places for the local inhabitants.

Priest Hakob Ter-Andreassian, who served in Dasht Village between 1855 and 1878,¹⁹⁸ also working as a teacher and practising folk medicine there, reports important information relating to the harsh conditions the Armenians of Nerkin Agulis and Goghtan District in general lived through between the 18th and 19th centuries. Thanks to his constant contact with common people, he put to paper whatever stories, fables and legends he heard from the aged people of Agulis in their own dialect. In his journal¹⁹⁹ he speaks about the privations and persecution the Armenians had to endure under the khans' domination, writing that a great number of farmers, particularly those from Dasht, proved unable to endure this oppression and left their houses and belongings, moving elsewhere. He also speaks about the harrowing losses inflicted by various infectious diseases and other calamities that befell the Armenian nation while they suffered the yoke of foreign invaders.

Priest Hakob also makes references to 18th-century Armenian Meliks Gyulambar, Stepan and Hovhannes, who served as the heads of Dasht Village, but were puppets in the hands of the khans and beys of Ordubad and Nakhikjevan. They supported these foreign rulers, oppressing and indirectly robbing the defenceless Armenian villagers.

After the heavy losses caused by the plague that raged in Goghtan in the late 18th century, and the famine that followed it, Khan of Nakhijevan Kyor Karbala managed to take possession of a number of *khalise* villages, including Dasht, through beating and torture. Persian Prince Abbas Mirza, who visited Goghtan some time later, was surprised to see the former thriving Armenian villages of the district in such a state of devastation and neglect. In response to his inquiries about the reason for that drastic change, some Armenian villagers plucked up courage and told him about the pressure and violence exerted by the local khans. Abbas Mirza called them, gave them orders to return some of the money collected from the common people on behalf of the khans and the Persian state, and ordered them to return the peasants' arable lands and real estate to them.

In those days Abbas Mirza also purchased the village of Dasht with funds provided by the local inhabitants, and after this it was renamed Nerkin Agulis.

When after the conclusion of the Treaty of Turkmenchai (1828) Goghtan shifted into the possession of the Russian Empire, Ordubad was restored in its position of being the administrative centre of the district. The representatives of the former authorities such as Ehsan Khan and Sheikh Ali Bey had betrayed the Persian troops and taken sides with the Russians facilitating their conquest of Ordubad and Nakhikjevan, resumed their high ranks thanks to their new allies. Although cases of violence and abuse were observed under the Russians as well, the inhabitants of

198 Հայաստանի ազգային դիվան, ք. 56, գ. 12, գ. 38, քք. 12-13:

199 Hakob Ter-Andreassian's grand-son Levon Sargissian made use of his grandfather's journal while preparing the second volume of his study of the dialect of Agulis. The priest's son, Mkhitar Ter-Andreassian, gave a copy of this journal to Yervand Lalayan when this researcher visited Dasht.

Goghtan now found themselves in comparative safety. During this period, a group of Armenian repatriates moved from Persia and resettled in Dasht, adding to the number of the local population.

In the late 19th century, the Caucasian railway was extended to the city of Julfa located on the Russo-Persian border. From this city a motor-road was built leading to Nerkin and Verin Agulis, these two major improvements in the infrastructures of the country creating a link between the remote, isolated villages of Goghtan and the large Caucasian and Russian cities. Although those engaged in commercial activity continued their travels to foreign countries, the farmers of Goghtan remained clung to their native villages and land.

Prominent Personalities. In the late 17th and early 18th century, Nor Jugha witnessed the activity of poet and bibliographer Stepanos Dashtetsy, the son of a family that had been deported from Dasht by Shah Abbas the Great in 1604 and resettled in Dasht Armenians' Quarter of Nor Jugha.²⁰⁰

This scholar characterised himself as “a worthless junior worker of philology named Stepanos Basilios Shir Palankian, Aspahan’s descendant from Dasht [Village] of Goghtan.”²⁰¹

Addressing Archbishop Alexandre Jughayetsy, who later became Catholicos of All Armenians, Dashtetsy wrote that he considered himself “the religious son of your state...”²⁰²

Stepanos Dashtetsy wrote the following about himself: “I am an Armenian belonging to the people of Hayk. I am the son of Priest Barsegh, the offspring of Khoja Melkum also known by the name of Shir Palang... from Dasht [Village] of Goghtan. I was reared and educated by the doctrines of the Armenian church.”²⁰³

While preparing for joining the clergy, young Stepanos studied philosophy and theology in Nor Jugha, after which he was ordained deacon.²⁰⁴ Later, however, he left the Armenian Church and decided to move to Rome to receive higher education there. He travelled in Asia and Europe extensively, claiming: “I am not an archimandrite but a secular person, although I continue studying.”²⁰⁵

During his long travels in India, a number of other Asian countries as well as Europe, Dashtetsy got acquainted and had contact with the representatives of various religions such as Protestantism, Calvinism, Catholicism, etc. Studying the doctrines of various religions, he eventually adhered to Catholicism, becoming one of its most fervent preachers. Stepanos Dashtetsy is the author of a number of important works in the Armenian language some of which were written for the purpose of spreading Catholicism amongst the Armenians.²⁰⁶

200 Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, p. 460.

201 Մատենադարան, ձեռագիր № 8111, էջ 194ա; Հովհաննիսյան Ա., ibid.

202 Տաշեան, Մայր ցուցակ, էջ 132:

203 Մատենադարան, ձեռագիր № 9049, էջ 180բ; Հովհաննիսյան Ա., ibid.

204 Հայկական տվետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 11, Երևան, 1985, էջ 134:

205 Տաշեան, Մայր ցուցակ էջ 132; Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, pp. 460-461.

206 See Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, pp. 461-463.

Dashtetsy could not put up with the bitter privations and intolerable experiences that fell to the lot of the Armenian nation. In his works, that are distinguished for the fine Armenian language, he expresses deep sadness at the severe persecution and tyranny the Armenians were subjected to throughout many centuries, particularly dwelling upon the suffering that befell them in Iran in the late 17th century: “Sometimes they were totally stripped of all their belongings and driven away from their farms and residences. Particularly great was the number of those who lost their sons, daughters and wives.”²⁰⁷

Summarising the poetry and prose of Stepanos Dashtetsy, we may state that he supported the idea that only the European Catholic countries and the Pope of Rome were able to save the Armenian nation from the foreign invaders’ yoke. At the same time, he did not praise the Armenians highly for their large-scale activity in transit trade, for he believed his nation was to find its proper place in the field of arts, at the same time establishing such political order that would enable the Armenian intellectuals“ to serve as notaries, or other important officials at the court.”²⁰⁸

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Tsarist Government attempted to confiscate the estates of the Armenian Church and close the national Armenian schools throughout the Empire, but neither these attempts nor the Armeno-Turkish fights of 1905 to 1906 hindered Dasht from making further progress. In the second half of the 19th century, the local Armenians founded a three-grade school there, following the example of their compatriots of Verin Agulis. Indeed, most of the inhabitants of Nerkin Agulis were engaged in husbandry and needed a great number of working hands, but the education of their children was a moral imperative for them. As already mentioned, some families sent their offsprings to Verin Agulis to continue their education there. After completing their course of primary instruction at the school of this village, the children of wealthy families went abroad to receive secondary and higher education there.

Later some of these clever and able young men became celebrated and outstanding people such as *Ter-Andreassian* and *Mesrop Rostomian*, who were graduates of the Higher Technological College of Moscow. Mention should also be made of *Karapet Stepanian*, who graduated from the Faculty of Medicine of Moscow University and took up living in Tiflis. For many years, he was member of the Board of Trustees of Nersissian School and was also elected member of the Administration of the Armenian Printing Company of Tiflis.

Dasht also gave birth to writer *Levon Manvelian*; literary critic *Harutiun Tumanian*; *Doctor Rostom Zargarian*, *Soghomon* and *Hayk Soghomonian*; party-affil-

²⁰⁷ Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, p. 462.

²⁰⁸ Հովհաննիսյան Ա., idem, p. 464. It is remarkable to note that unlike his theological works, that were written in *Grabar*, Stepanos Dashtetsy wrote his couplets in the contemporary Armenian language, that was easy to understand for common people. In these versified works he righteously exposed the wealthy merchants of Nor Jugha who exploited the people severely. He also criticised them for their conservatism and egoistic aspirations. In some of his works Dashtetsy condemned the high-ranking Armenian clergymen, clearly reflecting the common people’s dissatisfaction and indignation with them.

iated national figures *Aram* and *Minas Makarian*, as well as many others who honored the name of their native village.

Levon Manvelian was born in a wealthy family living in Dasht on 3 December 1864. His father was a prudent man who appreciated education highly, and it was from him that Levon had inherited his longing for knowledge. He received primary education in his native village, after which he moved to the school of Verin Agulis, where among his teachers were celebrated writers Raffi and Perj Proshian (1837 to 1907).

When Levon completed his course at the school of Verin Agulis, his father sent him to Tiflis, where he continued his education in a Russian gymnasium. In 1886 he entered the Faculty of History and Linguistics of Moscow University, from which he graduated in 1890 and returned to Tiflis.

In 1891 Levon Manvelian began working in Gevorgian Seminary of Echmiatzin as a teacher of the Russian language and literature. Later he also taught at Nersissian School of Tiflis and the Diocese School of Shushi. On the order of Caucasian Vice-Roy Golitsin, Manvelian was dismissed from Nersissian School and continued teaching activities in Baku, Alexandropole and other cities with large Armenian populations where he also worked for the press, particularly devoting himself to the “Murj” periodical.

Levon Manvelian, who is the author of a number of poems, dramatic works, historical tragedies, short stories, novels, articles as well as a major work entitled *History of Armenian Literature*, died in Tiflis at the age of 54 in 1918.²⁰⁹

The Manvelians also gave birth to other outstanding personalities of higher education including *Stepan Manvelian*, who opened a course in accounting in Tiflis after his graduation and trained several generations in this field. Stepan’s brother *Arshak Manvelian* was a graduate of the Higher College of Commercial Science, Moscow. *Avetis Manvelian* was a graduate of the Higher College of Mountain Architecture, Moscow.

Another devotee to Armenian literature was *Harutiun Tumanian*, a native of Dasht and a graduate of a Teachers’ Training Higher School who was the author of several poems. He taught the Armenian language at Hovnanian Female School and also collaborated with the “Zoki Jroyg” newspaper (Tiflis) published in the dialect of Agulis together with Doctor Rostom Zargarian (he worked for this newspaper until it ceased being published in 1920).

Harutiun Tumanian rendered many of Hovh. Tumanian’s and other Armenian poets’ works into the dialect of Agulis and also wrote his own works in the same vernacular.

Doctor Rostom Zargarian played a significant role in the health care of the children of Nerkin Agulis. In addition, he was also of immense instrumentality in the spread of the dialect of Agulis and the literature written in it: during the literary soirees

209 For further details on Manvelian’s life and activity, see Հայ նոր գրականության պատմություն, հ. 4, Երևան, 1972; Լեռ. Ռուսահայոց գրականությունը, Վենետիկ, 1904; Փափազյան Վ., Պատմություն հայոց գրականության, Թիֆլիս, 1910.

and evening parties held in Tiflis, as well as in Agulis and other villages of Goghtan poems were recited not only in the literary Armenian language but also in the dialect of Agulis. Even theatrical performances were held in this vernacular, the plays staged being mainly written by Doctor Zargarian and Harutiun Tumanian.

Another representative of the Zargarians' family was *Mentor Rostomian*, who was a graduate of the Higher Technological College of Moscow.

In the last years of World War I, *Hayk Soghomonian* was held in high esteem in Dasht: he had moved from Moscow to his native village to escape the chaos reigning in pre-revolutionary Russia. In those years of political instability, Dasht needed the presence of a great intellectual like Hayk Soghomonian, who was an even-tempered person of high merits ready to serve his people selflessly.

Soghomonian was a shrewd and prudent man. In due time did he realise that the bigoted Turks of Ordubad were a grave danger to the inhabitants of Dasht. Moreover, west of Dasht was located the large township of Dastak whose criminal residents breathed with bitter hatred for the Armenians.

Hayk Soghomonian proved a true leader for the Armenians of Dasht. It remains unknown what profession he had, or what education he had received, but his exceptional prudence helped him gather around himself especially the young inhabitants of Dasht and arrange the self-defence of the village. Within a short time, his small number of forces organised the protection of their birthplace in such a way that nobody dared to disturb its peace for a long time. Thanks to the proper measures taken by Hayk Soghomonian as well as his close friend Ashot Melik-Musian and a number of other wise leaders, Dasht was saved from the danger of Khalil Bey's invasion.

However, the defeat of Germany and its allies and the withdrawal of the Turks did not mean that the Armenians of Dasht could now breathe a sigh of relief. Moreover, their situation grew more serious when the Musavatist Government of Baku incited the Turks of Sharur and Nakhijevan to rise in rebellion against the Armenian authorities, and aggravated even further when the Turks of Zangezur flooded into Goghtan from Okhchi-Shabadin and the gorge of Geghi.

Unfortunately, in those days of grave danger, the Armenians of Dasht lost their devoted leader: Hayk Soghomonian was killed by a stray bullet shot by his fellow villager, a wealthy landowner rather advanced in years and, allegedly, mentally ill. His death put the entire village into deep mourning: after his body had been interred, the local Armenians sentenced the criminal to death, but the reasons for his crime remained obscure.

On the eve of the massacre perpetrated in Verin Agulis, on 23 December 1919, the Turks of Ordubad and the neighbouring Turkish villages, united with thousands of armed Muslim barbarians from Okhchi-Shabadin and the gorge of Geghi, encircled Dasht. There were only between 60 and 70 armed young men in the village: they resisted the Turkish mob until the fall of night, after which the inhabitants of the village started retreating under their defence by a mountain path, extending in the rear of the village, towards Verin Agulis. Fortunately, unlike their compatriots in Verin Agulis,

they were not tempted by the false promises of the Turkish officers and successfully moved to Tseghna with very few losses, keeping order and discipline and even taking with them some Armenians from Verin Agulis (the latter had refused to consign themselves to Ediff Bey's "care").

Among the intellectuals born in Nerkin Agulis, a particular mention should be made of the *two brothers Makarian, Aram and Minas*. During the short existence of the First Republic of Armenia, the former proved of immense instrumentality to the country as a skilled specialist in economic and financial affairs. After the Sovietisation of Armenia, the newly-established authorities of the country turned out unwilling to make use of his knowledge and wide experience. We lack further details relating to his life, but we know that he was martyred in exile, in one of the prisons of Siberia, sharing the fate of many Armenian intellectuals.

Aram's younger brother *Minas Makarian* was born in Nerkin Agulis in 1889. Studying at the local school for several years, he moved to Tiflis, where he continued his education at a secondary Russian school. While still in this institution, he became affiliated to Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutium and devoted himself thoroughly to national revolutionary activity. In 1912 Minas Makarian, who was one of the most celebrated personalities among the young Armenians of Tiflis, was arrested by the Tsarist authorities and banished to Rostov. Returning from exile, he entered the Law Department of Petersburg University, but in 1914 he had to leave his studies incomplete and join the Armenian volunteers who were to fight on the Caucasian front.

In the last years of World War I, Minas worked in Armenia, but soon he again moved to Tiflis, where he undertook prolific activity, becoming one of the leading personalities in the national and party affairs of those times.

As a representative of the left wing of the Dashnaktsutium, he collaborated with the Soviet authorities of the country for some time together with Koriun Ghazazian, Tigran Avetissian and Rostom's brother Zori Zorian.

In 1922 Minas Makarian took most active part in the premeditation and organisation of the attempt upon the life of Jemal Pasha, the Turkish Minister of the Interior. As a result, he was arrested together with hundreds of other Armenian intellectuals and sent into exile in Siberia, where he suffered the Soviet prisons for 17 years. In 1948 Minas went to Berlin, whence he moved to Teheran. On 3 December of the same year, he passed away in one of the hospitals of this Persian city.

Indeed, the village of Dasht gave birth to many other intellectuals and celebrated personalities, but, unfortunately, I personally do not know them.

TSEGHNA

This village has been named Tseghna since time immemorial, but the Turks called it Chananab, apparently finding its original name difficult to pronounce. Interestingly enough, when Goghtan shifted into the Russians' possession in 1828, the newly-established authorities adopted the Turkish version as the official name of the place.

Goghtan District had several tens of prospering villages of which only five still survive thanks to the heroic resistance they showed to the almost daily attacks of the Turkish bandits between 1919 and 1921: Tseghna, Ramis, Paraka, Bist and Alahi Khust. This last one is the uppermost Armenian township of Goghtan whose inhabitants gradually abandoned it, leaving it to the Turkish nomads.

Tseghna, which is the central village of the gorge, is surrounded by lofty mountains from three sides. The river, which is not so very abundant especially during summer months, flows through the village, dividing it in two parts. A stone bridge built in the centre of the village connects its banks. The houses of Tseghna are located along the gorge, on both banks of the river: the rear ones are nearer to the foot of the mountain and occupy a more elevated position as compared to the others.

A Historical Introduction. Arakel Davrizhetsy mentions Tseghna in connection with the martyrdom of Priest Andreas. Learning about the expected visit of Shah Abbas the Great to Agulis in 1617, the head of Tseghna, Khoja Andzrev, hurried there with his wife. When all the attempts to save the selfless clergyman proved futile, his wife interfered and turned to the shah, who respected her greatly and addressed her as ‘Mother.’ Unfortunately, however, even her entreaties failed to move the ruthless monarch.

Missionary H. Willord Hisusian, who stopped in Tseghna for some time in 1691, mentions it as a prospering village in his memoirs, particularly stating that it had a population of more than 300 Armenian families. He also writes about a fine-looking church where he had seen the representations of Sts. Grigor Lusavorich and Seghbistros. The village to which it refers as Tseghna belonged to Georgian Prince Davut Mirza together with the other villages of the neighbourhood.²¹⁰

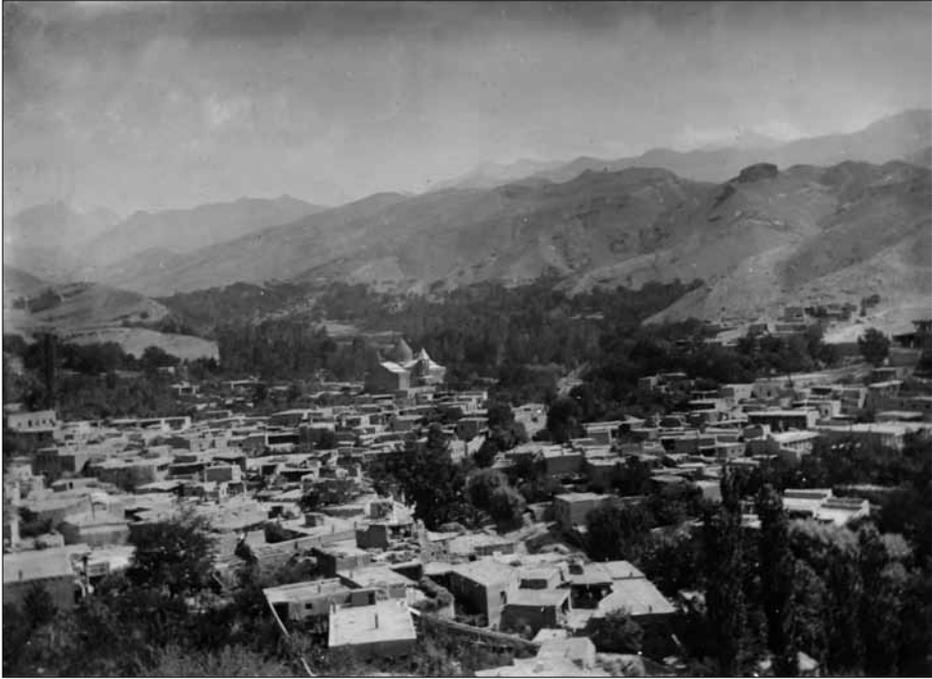
A record dating from 1549 mentions the head of Tseghna, “God-loving and pious” Daniel Tseghnayetsy, who governed during a period of bitter persecution by the Ottoman rulers. Despite the grave political situation, however, he was able to obtain a precious Gospel by paying quite a large sum which he donated to the “fine and holy church of Astvatzatzin, where the Lord dwelled, in memory of his parents and dear ones.”²¹¹

According to Zakaria Aguletsy, before 1675 and later Tseghna belonged to Georgian Bey Parsadan. He exploited the local inhabitants and abused his position to such an extent that they had to send a delegation of 7 to 8 people to Isfahan to complain to the shah. The latter, however, took sides with the bey, who was in this city at that time, and declared that their protests were groundless. He even ordered to chain them, take them back to the village and put them under trial there. Moreover, he imposed a fine of a thousand tumans upon Tseghna.

When the news reached Agulis that Parsadan Bey had crossed the Arax and got to Dasht, the monks of St. Thomas the Apostle, joined with the spiritual leader of

210 The French original reads: “Cest un fort gros village habité par plus 300 familles Arméniennes. Le Prince Géorgien (Daut-Mirza)en était le seigneur, sussi bien que des autres villages d’alentour.” Voyage d’un Missionnaire, p. 148 (taken from: Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 342).

211 Ալիշան Ղ., ibid.



Tseghna. The village from the south-west (photo by Grigor Movsissian, 1920s)

Goghtan and some ten influential people went to welcome him. The bey had come with the aforementioned delegates, who were in chains: they were put to prison, where they suffered torture for several months, being released only after the bey was paid the fine.

Zakaria also writes with bitterness that Parsadan Bey as well as his entire family and brothers lived on account of the Armenians of Tseghna, subjecting these people to unspeakable suffering and privations.²¹²

Some insignificant references to Tseghna are found in the Brief Chronicles, but these records do not add anything remarkable to the history of this ancient village.

In an elevated site on the left bank of the river is situated the ancient church of Sourb Astvatzatzin distinguished for its large dimensions. Alishan makes only a passing reference to this sanctuary, stating that “it is large and has a high dome.” He also mentions that it was repaired by Catholicos Movses, but he does not write when this was done.²¹³

Voskian, who conducted circumstantial research into the churches and monasteries of Goghtan, somehow ignored this magnificent church.²¹⁴

212 **Զարգարիա Ազուղեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 126:

213 **Ալիշան Վ.**, idem, pp. 342-343.

214 **Ոսկեան Հ.**, Վասսպուրականի եւ Վանի վանքերը, հ. 3, էջ 732, ծանոթ. 242:



Tseghna. The village from the south-west (photo by Hovik Hovhannissian, 1970s)

Metz Guno (Myuzgyuno, Metsgun) Monastery of St. Stepanos. About 2 to 6 kilometres south of Tseghna,²¹⁵ the pilgrimage site of St. Stepanos was located: it was also called Myuzgyunts Vank after an Armenian village that lay devastated in its neighbourhood.

Bishop Thomas Vanandetsy mentions this monument as St. Stepanos Monastery of Metsgun.²¹⁶

Catholicos Abraham of Crete visited the sanctuary on his way from Tseghna to Hin Jugha: "...I departed from there and arrived in Ts'ghnay, at the monastery of Miwzkiwnay."²¹⁷

Zakaria Aguletsy writes that on the feast of the Ascension celebrated on 19 May 1664, a large group of believers from Agulis went on pilgrimage to the monastery of Metsgun.²¹⁸

The year of the foundation of this monastery remains unknown.

The Armenians of Tseghna were mostly occupied with animal husbandry and gardening. The village boasted well-cultivated arable lands as well as orchards of all sorts

²¹⁵ South of Tseghna, in the gorge of the same name lay the Turkish village of Dyuklun, or Diylun, whose name was the distorted version of its original Armenian name, as attested by Alishan (Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 343). Before my reaching Tseghna in the days of the massacres of Agulis (1919), its Turkish inhabitants had left it, and it did not pose any danger to the Armenians.

²¹⁶ Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 322; «Ճոսարդ», 1860, էջ 136; Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 343.

²¹⁷ The Chronicle of Abraham of Crete, p. 124.

²¹⁸ Ջաքարիա Ագուլեցու Օրագրությունը, էջ 63; Ալիշան Ղ., ibid.

of fruit-trees. The mountains surrounding it were richer in vegetation—this was, probably, due to heavy precipitation—including various useful plants that grew in abundance particularly on the north-east-facing slopes. In the chapter of his work dedicated to Tseghna, Alishan writes that while travelling in these mountains on 21 June 1890, European researcher G. Radde gathered 60 types of plants and saw various species of wild birds there.²¹⁹

According to the results of the population census carried out in 1873, Tseghna had a population of 76 houses with 800 inhabitants, but according to Alishan, this information is far from reliable.²²⁰ I lived in this village for several months (1919 to 1920) after I had had a narrow escape from the massacre of Agulis, and my impression was that it comprised at least 300 houses. As for the local people, some of them lived abroad and visited the village only in summer.

One of the wealthy inhabitants of Tseghna founded a silk factory there in the 19th century so that those inhabitants of the village who were engaged in breeding silkworms could no more concern themselves with the problem of selling their cocoons.

Almost every family in the village had dairy cattle that served their everyday needs. The richer houses also owned horned cattle and beasts of burden for the cultivation, tilling and threshing of their fields (they also rented out these animals to their fellow villagers).

As compared with the inhabitants of the adjacent Armenian villages, the residents of Tseghna had more ties with the outside world. Usually after completing their course at the village school, the representatives of the younger generation left for Yerevan, Tiflis, Baku and even remoter places to continue their education there. After graduation, they assumed work in these cities and established themselves there, growing detached from their birthplace in the course of time. Our compatriots from Tseghna who visited Teheran told us that these young men sometimes came to the village only because their parents were alive: they came to help them in the fields, or just to spend their holidays there and enjoy the air and water of their native village.

A great number of merchants from Tseghna travelled in different countries in order to accumulate riches. Alishan mentions tradesmen Hakob and Panos' son Soliman, who lived in Venice between 1688 and 1699.²²¹

Arakel Davrizhetsy speaks about Khoja Hayrapet from Tseghna, who was in Tabriz together with several other merchants from Goghtan in the early 17th century. It was there that he happened to be present at one of the most interesting sermons of Archimandrite Poghos and invited him to his native village to preach for his people and educate them.

Another dealer from Tseghna named Margara moved "...the right hand of the Holy Enlightener that Catholicos Pilipos had left with Safariants in Nor Jugha..." to Echmiatzin and handed it to the Catholicos "...in 1638."

219 Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 342.

220 Ալիշան Ղ., ibid.

221 Ալիշան Ղ., ibid.

Several bulls issued in the first quarter of the 17th century mention Khojas Aghom and Paghum from Tseghna, who lived in Angora for some time. We learn from these documents that they made lavish donations to the churches of this city, for which the church authorities blessed their parents' memory.

The Armenians of Tseghna always attempted to be on good-neighbourly terms with the local Turks, but the latter did not support their peaceful intentions; instead, they robbed and killed several armless Armenians and also participated in the slaughter of the Armenian residents of Kaghakik and Tanakert. In order to make the road leading from Tseghna to Paraka and Ramis safer, as well as to strengthen their rear in case of any Turkish attack, the Armenians of Tseghna had to drive away the Turkish inhabitants of Ustup. Later, however, they returned under the auspices of Nakhijevani authorities.

The same is true of Tseghna, which was re-inhabited by rather a great number of Turkish families, this resettlement being encouraged by Nakhijevan's Turkish authorities (some of them took up living in the Armenians' houses).

Unfortunately, Tseghna gradually lost its image of being a typically Armenian village. The system of collectivisation came to strengthen the local Armenians' desire to look for other places of residence, for their real estate as well as gardens and fields now became part of the collective property and they had no more rights to them.

Tseghna was Goghtan's only village speaking the dialect of Agulis²²² that did not fall prey to the criminal plots premeditated by the Turkish bandits, and that only thanks to its heroic self-defence.

The contemporary means of communication brought Tseghna closer to the cities, thanks to which it boasts a greater number of intellectuals, as compared to the other villages of the district where the people are still mostly occupied with husbandry.

Before completing this part dedicated to this glorious village, I cannot help expressing my admiration for the valour, solidarity and devotion of the local fighting forces. The Armenians of Tseghna had decided to fight to their very last breath and not to surrender under any circumstances. During the self-defence of the village, an important role was played by those who had fought on the fronts of World War I. Among these veterans mention should be made of my relative Kapit, who had reached the Carpathian mountains and become a battle-hardened soldier in the proper sense of the word. Our fighters did not know horror and fear at all. Generally, the defenders of Tseghna were almost always supported by their compatriots of Paraka and Ramis who rushed to their rescue in due time, helping them repel the Turks.

Prominent Personalities. Tseghna gave birth to numerous outstanding people among whom special mention should be made of great scholar and philologist *Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian*. We read in the pages of his autobiography that he was born in Tseghna Township of Goghtan District, the ancient cradle of Armenian minstrels, in March 1866.

222 This dialect was also spoken in Ramis, Paraka and Bist.

Karapet's father Martiros Ter-Mkrtchian practised trade in the city of Nukhi, where many Armenians from Goghtan lived. The future great scholar received primary education under his mother's care, at the parish school of his native village. Completing his course there, 12-year-old Karapet left for the city of Zakatala obeying his parents' wish and studied at a Russian district school there for a short time. The following year he moved to the city's Armenian parochial school where he completed his studies with honour. In Zakatala Karapet lived with his uncle, Archpriest Aristakian. A clever and able boy, in 1880 he entered Echmiatzin's Gevorgian Seminary at the special request of this parish school. In 1888 he accomplished his course in this institution.

Makar I (1885 to 1891), then Catholicos of All Armenians, decided to send some of the most promising graduates of the Seminary to Europe to receive further education and major in Armenian studies and theology. The most merited student to be included in this group was Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian, who had become member of the monastic community of Echmiatzin and ordained deacon, a prerequisite for receiving scholarship in Europe. In 1889 he left for Germany and commenced studying philosophy and theology at the University of Leipzig. Completing his course within three semesters, he moved to the University of Berlin and started majoring in the fields he had chosen. In 1893 Karapet moved to the University of Tubingen, where he continued his studies of philosophy and theology. In 1894 he graduated from the university with honours, having been awarded the scientific degrees of Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Theology. For the doctoral degree, Karapet defended a thesis on the sect of Paulicians,²²³ which was highly appreciated in the scientific circles of Germany and many other countries; moreover, it inspired some foreign scholars to conduct new investigation into this issue.

In late 1894 Karapet returned to his homeland and was ordained coenobite together with five other deacons who were graduates of Gevorgian Seminary. During the ceremony of ordination, which took place over the grave of the founder of Gevorgian Seminary,²²⁴ Karapet made an exciting speech on behalf of his friends relating to their further plans. In the same year, he was invited to teach theology and philosophy at the Seminary and assume the post of Assistant Inspector of this institution.

In 1895 Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian became member of the editorial staff of Echmiatzin's "Ararat" magazine, assuming a leading position in its department for religious issues. From 1907 he also worked as editor-in-chief, although at certain intervals. His scientific articles on philology that were published in this magazine show how knowledgeable he was and how deep his insight into various matters went.

On 25 February 1895, Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian was ordained archimandrite. In 1897 he was awarded the Cross for his selfless devotion to the Armenian church.

223 Die Pawlikyaner in der byzantinischen Kaiserreich und die gleichbedeutende sektiererische Erscheinungen in Armenien (The Paulicians in the Byzantine Empire and the Other Sects in Armenia). Translated into Armenian by Dr. Artashes Abeghian («Պալիկեանք Բիւզանդական կայսրութեան մէջ եւ մերձաւոր հերձուստային երեւոյթներ Հայաստանի մէջ»). Jerusalem, 1938.

224 Catholicos Gevorg IV - translator.



Tseghna. Sourb Astvatzatzin (Holy Virgin) Church from the north-west (late 19th century)

In 1899 Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian replaced K. Kostanian in the post of the Inspector of the Seminary, which he held for three years. During this period, he succeeded in building a comfortable hospital for the students and teachers of the Seminary (it had a permanent staff consisting of a doctor and nurses) through the financial assistance of Tumanian Company.

In 1903 and the subsequent years, when the Russian authorities attempted to appropriate the lands and estates of the Armenian Church, Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian was appointed Vicar of Ararat Province. He performed his duties perfectly well and manifested his true devotion to his nation and church even in the tumultuous period of the Armeno-Tartar fights.

For some time, Karapet again devoted himself to teaching and scientific activity. In 1907 he was appointed spiritual leader of Atropatene Diocese (in north-western Iran). In 1908 he presented for publication the first part of his work entitled History of the Armenian Church, but later he proved unable to complete its second part due to his busy schedule.

In 1909 Archimandrite Karapet was ordained bishop and remained as the leader of his diocese until 1912, in compliance with a request his flock had made to the Catholicos. The years of his bishopric coincided with the outburst of the First Persian Revolution, but he succeeded in keeping his community away from any tumult and

calamity; moreover, he did everything within his power to improve the educational level and cultural life of the Armenians under his charge.

Between 1912 and 1914, Bishop Karapet devoted himself entirely to research and published two scientific works in Armenian: «Սուրբ միսննի օրհնութիւնը» (*The Consecration of the Holy Chrism*) and «Կնիք հաստանյ» (*The Imprint of Faith*).

In 1914 Catholicos Gevorg V appointed Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian leader of Shamakhi Diocese, but he hardly occupied this post for a year and a half: while being operated for appendicitis, he was exposed to some infection and died in the municipal hospital of Baku. His untimely death in the full swing of his activity in the field he had chosen was a great loss to Armenian philology.

According to Bishop Karapet's close friend, Catholicos Garegin Hovsepien, his scientific works constitute the core of his activity. Apart from the aforementioned research into the Paulicians, he also published another on the sect of the Thondrakians that was entitled *Die Tondrakyaner heutzutage (The Thondrakians Nowadays)*.²²⁵

While returning to his homeland via Constantinople in 1893, Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian got acquainted with the Collection of Letters in Antonians Repository and later published several of the letters of Catholicoses Babken, Nerses and Komitas with the necessary comments, casting light upon the history of the Armenian Church of the 6th to 7th centuries. The young scholar could not sit with his arms folded even during his travels and used even the times of short rest to make any contribution possible to the development of science.²²⁶

I remember Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian from Echmiatzin and Gevorgian Seminary: he was a finely-built, stout, tall man whose stature was even more manifest in his garment of archimandrite. He was imbued with inexhaustible zeal for working and his death put all of us in grave mourning.

Bishop Karapet was my father's close friend and they were in constant correspondence with each other. While abroad, he sent my father a fine geographical atlas from London as far as I remember (I always looked through it with admiration). He also sent us his thesis on the sect of Paulicians that was written in German.

When Father took me to the Seminary to take the entrance exams, Bishop Karapet appeared and declared solemnly that Martiros Hakhnazarian's son was to enter that institution without any exam, and his words were a great encouragement to me.

Another remarkable event is connected with the years of my university studies. While in Prague, I attended a lecture delivered by Bidlo, a teacher and specialist in Byzantine Studies who was well-known throughout Eastern Europe. When he was enumerating the scientific sources relating to the theme of his lecture, he suddenly turned to me, pronounced in syllables a family name and asked me how to pronounce that difficult word that began with five consonant sounds: it was the surname of Ter-Mkrtchian.

225 Die heilige Trenaues Schrift zum Erweisen der apostolischen Verkündigung. "Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte," 1895.

226 For further details about the scientific works published by Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian, see the Armenian original of this work, pp. 250-253.

I explained to him that among those consonants, in two syllables was a vowel sound which was pronounced, but not written. Bidlo expressed his delight with the author of the doctoral thesis on the Paulicians about whom he spoke for over 45 minutes.

While I was in Tseghna, I got acquainted with Bishop Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian's brother, who had come to his native village to escape the political chaos reigning in Russia, but later had proved unable to go back, since the roads were unsafe. Although a little shorter, he was very fat and stout like his celebrated brother. The shortage of fine food was unbearable for this man: getting thinner and thinner day by day, he eventually fell victim to the famine raging in Tseghna in the aftermath of the massacres of Goghtan.

A year after the birth of Bishop Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian, in 1867 one of the greatest sons of Tseghna, Rostom (Stepan Zorian) was born: his life and activity glorified not only this village but also the entire district of Goghtan.

For a long time, I hesitated about writing even the brief biography of this great Armenian, for I was not sure whether I could cope with that difficult task, despite my sincere wish to do my best. On the other hand, I would not forgive myself if I dared to ignore this outstanding intellectual while speaking about the prominent personalities of Tseghna.

Indeed, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to create at least an outline of the moral image of this great Armenian. The more I read about him, the greater my veneration for him becomes. How infinite should one's devotion to his people be, how strong should his willpower be and how selfless does one need to be to completely neglect the blessings of life and devote oneself to the just cause of his nation up to his very last breath so as to teach his compatriots to defend their rights and save themselves from slavery?

Rostom, who was born in a wealthy patriarchal family in Tseghna Village on 18 January 1867, spent his childhood and early youth in his native village. He had not finished his studies at the primary school yet when he moved to Tiflis together with his parents. For some time, he took a preliminary course at Bekzadian Private School, after which, in 1882 he entered a secondary Russian school. He completed it with honours in 1886, having distinguished himself as one of the cleverest and most promising pupils and manifesting a particular keenness on mathematics and natural science. Despite the Russian-imbued environment, young Rostom showed great interest in the Armenian language and the history of the Armenian nation, and thanks to his parents' efforts, he also did well in the subjects relating to Armenian studies.

Rostom's class-mates attest that he was a very prudent and peaceful young man: he did not like the noisy school games and read and thought much instead of taking part in them.

Finishing this school, Rostom entered the Higher Seminary of Agriculture of Novo Alexandria (near Warsaw). Because of his participation in student rallies, he was arrested and banished to his native village under a special police escort, being thus stripped of the right to continue his studies in this institution.

In Tseghna Rostom succeeded in obtaining a passport under the surname of Abrahamian, with the help of which he left for Tiflis a short time later. We read in Christopher Michaelian's memoirs that the two of them attempted to found an underground printing-office in this city, but they failed due to the shortage of finances.

From Tiflis Rostom went to Baku, where he graduated from the local real school under the aforementioned false name. In 1889 he moved to Moscow, where his pseudonym helped him enter the local Seminary of Agriculture (his fellow students in this institution were Simon Zavarian²²⁷ and Avetik Sahakian). Rostom took an active part in the secret meetings of the Armenian and Russian students, but during a rally he was again arrested and exiled into Tseghna.

His term of banishment coincided with the Founding Assembly of Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation); this is the reason why he could not participate in the establishment of the party. Like the first time of exile, Rostom thought of some way of leaving Tseghna and again found himself in Tiflis, where he entered into close collaboration with Christopher Michaelian and Simon Zavarian, becoming one of the most important persons in the Dashnaksutiun.

After the tragic deaths of these two celebrated personalities, Rostom assumed the entire responsibility of the organisation of the Party's activity, as well as the national and public life of the Armenians. Moreover, this steadfast man found enough strength and willpower to resist the entire cruelty of the anti-Armenian policies of the Ottoman Turks and Tsarist authorities.

As the Speaker of the Party and the founder of the "Droshak," for many years Rostom was always in the hotbeds of events, distinguishing himself for his infinite enthusiasm and great organising skills. He was a devoted leader who served his nation until the merciless disease put an end to his life in Tiflis in 1919. Zabel Yesayan is absolutely right when she states that "Very seldom can a person leave such indelible imprint upon the people's minds and such bright memories that his self continues being dominant upon their morals even after his death."

Rostom was not only a compatriot for me: he was also a close relative of mine on the maternal side, and when he was in Tiflis, my mother and her sisters were very close to his mother. While in Tseghna, he was always a desirable guest in our house. Although I was still very young in those days and remember him only vaguely, Mother told me a lot about him. Rostom's brother Zori Zorian arranged my sister's marriage with his assistant Michael Kassian. When I went to Yerevan between 1920 and 1921, Rostom's other brother Hovhannes Zorian—as far as I remember his name—was of great help to me. The entire family of the Zorians was devoted to the national and public life of the Armenians.

227 Simon Zavarian (1865 to 1913) was a prominent Armenian political and public figure. In 1890 he founded the party of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun) together with Christopher Michaelian, Rostom and others, and remained member of its Central Bureau until his death (Հայկական սովետական հանրապետութիւն, հ. 3, էջ 661-662).

For the last time I met Zorian with a group of his friends in their secret hide-out in Tiflis two days after the attempt on the life of Jemal Pasha.

Another celebrated personality from Tseghna is playwright *Anushavan Vardanian* (1879 to 4 July 1954, Yerevan).

USTUP

North of Tseghna, midway between Ramis and Paraka was located the large village of Ustup with single-floor houses built of mud and stone. The mountains surrounding it were shrouded in rich vegetation, but the village itself was bare of gardens. It was enclosed in fields of wheat and barley. Precipitation in Ustup was generally heavier than in Tseghna.

One of the available historical sources makes the following reference to this village: “The inhabitants of Ustup came and started arguing that the fields of the spring of Smbat were theirs. We had much fuss [over this issue] and for 2 years incessantly went to the Beylarbey...”²²⁸

PARAKA

Location and Geographical Environment. This purely Armenian village was situated on a small hill rising in the valley of one of the tributaries of the river Giran (Azat Giran), west of Ramis.

Voskian locates Paraka east of an Armenian village called Bekhrut, within 3 kilometres of it.²²⁹

Within some distance of the village, some lofty mountains tower: they are far enough not to turn it into a low gorge. The river continues its course south-westwards without entering the village.

Along the river-side the gardens and arable lands of Paraka extended, but part of them were always dry due to heavy precipitation. As compared to Tseghna, this village had a milder climate, but it was warmer here than in Ramis. The local people, who were mostly occupied with farming and animal husbandry²³⁰ like the other Armenian villagers of Goghtan, grew cherries, plums, pears, apples, nuts and mulberries. Thanks to the wide variety of flowers, many of them were also engaged in bee-keeping. The industrious Armenians did everything within their power to earn their living in this mountainous village and they *did* succeed in making it a prospering place (like the other Armenian villages of the district, it had clean houses), but we do not know anything about its present-day state.

Prominent European botanist G. Radde, who conducted research into the flora and fauna of Paraka in 1890, mentions a great number of useful plants on the adjacent mountains.

²²⁸ Մանր ժամանակագրություններ, հ. Բ, էջ 525, 537:

²²⁹ Ռսկեան Հ., idem, pp. 734-735.

²³⁰ During summer months, the domestic animals were kept in the mountain encampments.



Paraka. A general view of the village (photo 1928)

The available sources do not contain many records relating to Paraka, but its name is connected with some ancient monasteries, which attests that it is a village of a remarkable history.

In 1719 Deacon Petros, the son of Gharam, who is mentioned as coming from one of the villages of Goghtan, most probably, from Paraka, copied a manuscript now kept in Yerevan's Repository and Research Institute of Manuscripts (No. 604). As a scribe, he left a colophon attached to this manuscript (pp. 198-199) in which he presents a chronology and most trustworthy eye-witness accounts of the events that took place in his birthplace and the other villages of Goghtan between 1703 and 1719. Although he did not arrange these events in a proper chronological order, his colophon, which contains records relating to the violence exerted by the local governors, the land disputes occurring between neighbouring villages, etc., is of special value from the standpoint of the study of the history of Goghtan.²³¹

The oldest sanctuary of Paraka is the monastery of St. Hakob built of finely-finished reddish stone. Its Roman arches rest on four circular pillars and eight pilasters creating a circle which is surmounted by a fine dome of 12 low and narrow windows. It has an arched bema and two vestries with secret recesses. It has an arched door. The heaps of ruins indicate that St. Hakob used to be fortified by ramparts.²³²

²³¹ Մանր ժամանակագրություններ, հ. Բ, էջ 508:

²³² **Լալայան Ե.**, idem, p. 332. This publication is accompanied by a photograph of the monastery taken from Lalayan's work (**Լալայան Ե.**, idem, p. 331; **Ոսկեան Հ.**, idem, vol. 2, p. 736).

According to Smbatian, the monastery of St. Hakob was built through the efforts of the Armenians of Paraka in 1701.²³³

Another record states: “In Paraka a monastery was built or renovated in the early 18th century through the attempts of the local residents and dedicated to St. Hakob the Supreme Father. It hosted Catholicos Abraham, when the latter came to Shorot on his way to Tevi.”²³⁴

Voskian confirms Alishan’s words, according to which the monastery dates from a period earlier than 1701 and was only renovated in the 18th century.²³⁵

The sanctuary was a centre of prolific cultural activity. In 1638 “...the copy of Girk Hartsnants [A Book of Inquiries] was completed within the walls of the monastery of St. Hakob, in the village of Paraka.”²³⁶

According to a record preserved in the monastery, “In 1700 we embarked on overhaul in the church of St. Hakob the Supreme Father.” Probably, among those who initiated this work was Archimandrite Ghazar, for his epitaph bears the following text: “*January 1140 (1691). In this grave reposes Archimandrite Ghazar, who served St. Hakob*”²³⁷

Published in: **Փափագեան Մ.**, Հնութիւնք վանօրէից, գիրք 4, Վաղարշապատ, 1891, p. 296.

The monastery of St. Hakob had large lands and estates the income of which helped sustain its community.

In 1653 a certain Martiros, who was probably a clergyman, wrote a prayer-book “...within the walls of St. Gevorg called Dzoro Vank [i.e. Monastery of the Gorge], in a village called Paraka, in the land of the Azagiran (Azat Giran)... in the days of the leader of Goghtan Diocese, Archimandrite Khachatur.”²³⁸

Paraka had another church dedicated to St. Shmavon, but Voskian thinks it must have been a monastery. According to an inscription of 1706 preserved in this sanctuary, the princes and priests of Paraka willingly committed themselves to giving one-tenth of the income yielded by their lands and estates to the churches of their village.²³⁹

This inscription also mentions the boundaries separating the estates of those churches and monasteries that were situated near each other, something that is highly important from a topographical point of view. In addition, it also tells us that Paraka had its own ruling princes and church dignitaries.

Alishan mentions a village named **Buhrat (Bekhrut)** located several kilometres south of Paraka. According to him, the territory between these two villages was well-

233 **Սնքառեան Մ.**, Երնջակ, էջ 489-490:

234 **Ալիշան Ղ.**, idem, p. 345. Cf. The Chronicle of **Abraham of Crete**, p. 125.

235 **Ռսկեան Հ.**, idem, vol. 2, p. 737.

236 **Ալիմեան Ե.**, Հասար. Յիշատ., Երեւան, էջ 621:

237 The Armenian original of the epitaph reads: «ԹՎ. ՌՃԿ (1691) Յունար: Այս տապան Ղազար վարդապետին. սա ծառայել սուրբ Յակոբին»:

238 **Աճառեան Հ.**, Տոցակ հայերէն ձեռագրաց Նոր Բայազետի, Վիեննա, 1924, էջ 30:

239 **Փափագեան Մ.**, idem, p. 296; **Ռսկեան Հ.**, ibid.



Paraka. The monastery of St. Hakob the Supreme Father (photo 1928)

cultivated and covered with the fields and gardens belonging to the Armenians of Paraka.²⁴⁰

Another source that refers to this village by the name of Pekhrut states that it lay west of Paraka, on the road leading to Nakhijevan.²⁴¹

Eprikian, who mentions the village by the names of Bukhrut, Bekhorot and Buhrut, states that it was one of the Armenian villages of Goghtan, which was, however, later re-inhabited by Turks.

The name of Buhrut is also mentioned in a list of villages belonging to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle in the times when it was the centre of Goghtan Diocese. This shows that in those times, Buhrut was an Armenian village forming part of the aforementioned diocese.²⁴²

Priest Stepanos Kafayetsy wrote down the tragic story of a young man from Bekhrut named Sahak. At the age of 17, Sahak left his birthplace for Azov City of the Crimean Peninsula located on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Attracted by this tall handsome young man, the local Tatars decided to make him repudiate his Christian faith at any cost. Failing in their attempts, they slandered Sahak before the local authorities stating that he had allegedly promised to convert to Islam, but now refused to do so.

²⁴⁰ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 528-530.

²⁴¹ Մանր ժամանակագրություններ, հ. 2, Երևան, 1956, էջ 525-537:

²⁴² Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 315.



Paraka. The church of the monastery of St. Hakob the Supreme Father from the west (photo 1928)

Sahak was put to prison where he was subjected to cruel torture so that he would eventually yield up, but in vain. Despite his young age, Sahak manifested surprising moral strength and remained firm in his faith, declaring that no suffering could force him into renouncing his God. In response to his statements, the judge of the city

ordered to behead him, but the executioner who had been moved by the young man's unusual courage could not hit him with the sword, for his hands were shaking. Seeing that, the Tatars ordered him to slaughter the poor young man like a lamb.

The author of this hagiography concludes his story with the following words: "On 15 October 1715, holy martyr Sahak was tortured to death for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen."²⁴³

Paraka did not escape the disastrous deportation by Shah Abbas in 1604.

Generally speaking, the Armenians of Paraka were closely attached to their native land. Many of them often travelled for commercial purposes. Alishan makes reference to "Father Voskan's son Manuel," a merchant who lived in Venice as of 1653. He is known to have donated an expensive carpet to the church of this city.

The younger people of the village constantly manifested a strong desire to go to foreign cities to study or work. In this way, they became of great financial help to their parents and themselves learned a lot abroad. I always admired the able and shrewd young people of Paraka among whom a special mention should be made of one named Avetis. He left his birthplace when still very young and became member of various municipal organisations of workers. Avetis gained wide experience by collaborating with the Armenian national bodies and parties. He could be characterised as a valorous soldier of an unusually great ability to defend his viewpoints at any cost. I was particularly surprised with the fact that he could speak such fine Armenian and discuss current issues with sound logic and competence without any higher education. Avetis was a born orator and at the same time a very amicable person so that when he was in Agulis, we made good friends.

When Agulis was the centre of Goghtan District, but did not have sufficient armed forces to organise its self-defence, District Head Ashot Melik-Musian and Commander Movses Gyulnazarian ordered to move between 50 and 60 young men from Paraka and other villages there. Avetis, who was the leader of these recruits, served under the command of Movses Gyulnazarian. All these young men lived in fine conveniences in the archimandrites' rooms of St. Thomas Monastery.

When the Turks occupied the village of Tanakert lying between Agulis and Tseghna and thus severed communication of Agulis with the other villages of Goghtan, the soldiers who had come from Paraka abandoned the village in the shroud of night, taking the arms and ammunition they had been given in Agulis. We could never forgive these deserters, for it was after their escape that our village was obliged to surrender, stripped of the necessary means of defence.

TEVI (DIVA)

The name of this originally Armenian village is mentioned in a list of the villages of Yernjak and Goghtan Districts provided by historian Orbelian²⁴⁴ showing that it was

²⁴³ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 345.

²⁴⁴ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 315.

one of the oldest villages in Goghtan, although we do not find its name in the list of the villages belonging to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle during the period when it was the residence of the spiritual leader of Goghtan Diocese.²⁴⁵

According to Alishan, in 1387 a pious person whose name is not mentioned sold his *kapa* and hood and bought a Gospel from some Turkmans for 500 *dahekans*. He donated this Gospel to the church of Masrevan Village in memory of Archimandrite Mesrop, but later, in the mid-17th century, it was taken to Tevi.²⁴⁶

Catholicos Abraham of Crete, who visited this village in 1733, left the following record about it: “From there [from Paraka] we traveled to the village of Tiwi, where there stood the abandoned and uninhabited monastery, while the nunnery had only seven nuns.”²⁴⁷

Abraham of Crete, however, does not mention the names of either the monastery or the nunnery. Lalayan supposes that the latter is the convent of St. Stepanos of Navash, which seems very probable, since this sanctuary was situated very close to Tevi.²⁴⁸

According to Voskian, in the neighbourhood of Tevi, near the village of Navash there was a vaulted church built of finely-finished black stone. An inscription carved on its arched door attests that it underwent repair in 1677.²⁴⁹

The nunnery of St. Stepanos of Navash remained standing until recently, but its rooms and ramparts were gradually reduced to ruins due to neglect.²⁵⁰

When I was returning from Julfa to Agulis by a mountainous road in the spring of 1919, the already Turkish village of Tevi still existed, and its inhabitants lived as peaceful neighbours with the Armenians. Later, however, the latter’s efforts to retain their good-neighbourly relations proved futile and when the Armeno-Turkish relations aggravated throughout Goghtan, the Turks of this village blocked the road of Bist-Paraka and killed several Armenians. In response to this aggression, Ghazar Kocharian and hayduk leader Vasil occupied this village, suffering several victims. The local Turks escaped southwards through mountainous roads and found safer places of abode.²⁵¹

BIST (BUST)

Location and Geographical Environment. The Armenian village of Bist was situated at the confluence of the rivers Nasirvas and Azat Giran, amidst the mountain branches of the range of Zangezour, at the south-western foot of Kaputjugh (Syunik).²⁵²

245 Ալիշան Ղ., *ibid.*

246 Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, p. 319.

247 The Chronicle of Abraham of Crete, p. 125; Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, p. 330.

248 Լալայեան Ե., *idem*, p. 330.

249 Ոսկեան Հ., *idem*, p. 773.

250 Ոսկեան Հ., *ibid.*

251 The authorities of the present-day Autonomous Republic of Nakhikjevan returned these Turks to their villages and even established Turkish communities in the formerly Armenian-inhabited villages of Goghtan.

252 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 2, Երևան, 1976, էջ 445:

The village lay on a hill extending from the north to the south. From the left side of this hill the village gardens descended towards the bank of the abundant mountainous river Azat Giran. On the right, stretched a very deep gorge shrouded in rich vegetation and serving as a pasture for the village. On the rear of this gorge rises a branch of Kaputjugh which surrounds the village like remote natural ramparts.

A winding road running on the slope of this lofty mountain ascends towards Shorot, Aprakunis and other villages of Yernjak District.

The historical river Azat Giran, which is the longest and most abundant river in Goghtan, takes source in the slopes of Kaputjugh, then merges into the river Nasirvas and flows southwards covering a distance of about 50 kilometres. Running by the Armenian village of Aza, lying on the Arax river-side, it merges into this river. The Azat Giran provided water for a great number of Armenian villages, now, unfortunately, already Turkish ones, established along its banks.

Talented Armenian writer Sero Khanzadian provides a most vivid description of the course of this river: “The river of Bust takes source in the Masis-directed fissures of Mount Kaputjugh and runs through the narrow canyons of the land of Goghtan until it falls into the all-embracing Yeraskh [Arax].”²⁵³

Thanks to its length and abundant water, the course of the Azat Giran has been definitely and clearly fixed in Armenian cartography.

The mountains rising in the neighbourhood of Bist abounded in useful plants some of which were used as medicinal herbs. On their slopes were found wild birds, sheep, chamois and pigs. These mountains particularly teemed with wolves.

Economic Life. Situated in the farthest mountainous zone of Goghtan District, Bist was characterised with rather cold weather and long-lasting winters. Its harvest did not differ from that of other mountainous villages: wheat, barley, haricot, peas, beans and Jerusalem artichoke. The local people also grew cherries, mulberries, pears, apples and nuts. Due to heavy precipitation, part of the local fields did not need any irrigation at all.

The Armenians of Bist were mostly occupied with animal husbandry, vegetable-growing and bee-keeping. Formerly almost all the well-to-do houses had their own bee-hives kept both for their needs and for purposes of sale (I myself witnessed this when in Bist). Every family kept domestic animals, but the richer ones also had hooved ones.

A Historical Introduction. It is assumed that Bist existed long before Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet, came to Goghtan to spread the Armenian letters there (for his seclusion he chose the village of Mesropavan located near Bist). Unfortunately, however, no records have come down to us relating to this period.

According to historian Orbelian, Bist is the first village mentioned in the list of the villages of Yernjak and Goghitan Districts, but surprisingly, its name is not mentioned

253 **Խանզադյան Ս.**, Թբիսնորի մեռունը, Երևան, 1935, էջ 19: «Սովետական գրականություն», 1977, № 4:

in another list of the villages belonging to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle during the period of its being the residence of the diocese leader.²⁵⁴

Population. From a tax list of Tatev Monastery we learn that for several centuries, Goghtan was within the jurisdiction of Syunik Diocese. During this period, Bist represented a small village of some 20 to 30 families. The number of the local population considerably increased between the 15th and 18th centuries so that in the late 19th century, the village had over 1,263 inhabitants.²⁵⁵

Bist, which was the central village of Northern Bstadzor, was at the same time the most populous Armenian village there. According to Alishan, in the late 19th century it had a population of 100 Armenian houses with over 600 inhabitants,²⁵⁶ while Eprikan counts only 52 houses there. During the same period, the village also had 930 Turkish inhabitants.²⁵⁷

Another source states that in the early 20th century Bist had an Armenian population of 633.²⁵⁸

Before my final departure from Goghtan, I made several visits to Bist, where I found no Turkish inhabitants. It represented a purely Armenian village with more than 700 to 800 residents.

The number of the local inhabitants slightly increased when the Armenians of the adjacent Armenian villages moved to Bist.

In the centre of Bist stood St. Stepanos Church,²⁵⁹ which used to be a monastery according to Voskian.²⁶⁰

When I saw this monument, it represented a simple domeless church, adjoined by a school and the large house of the local priest.

Within a walking distance of two hours of the village stood the monastery of Sourb Nshan (i.e. Holy Sign), which was not very large. It was fortified by ramparts, but the monks' cells had already gone to ruins when I saw it.²⁶¹

As legend has it, Sourb Nshan was founded in St. Mesrop Mashtots' times and later renovated in 1668 under the supervision of Bishop Petros.²⁶² Before this overhaul, the sanctuary was a centre of prolific cultural activity. Among the works written here can be mentioned a Gospel belonging to the pen of Grigor Arevshat, as well as another written under the auspices of Bishop Azaria, the leader of Goghtan District. Indeed, the list of books and Gospels created in Sourb Nshan is not limited to only these two.

Most probably, one of the scribes who worked in the monastery of Sourb Nshan was Archimandrite Hakob, the disciple of prominent scholars Hovhannes Vorotnetsy

254 Ալիշան Վ., idem, p. 315.

255 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 2, էջ 445:

256 Ալիշան Վ., idem, pp. 344-345.

257 Էփրիկեան Մ., idem, հ. Ա, Վեմետիկ, 1903-1905, էջ 452:

258 Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 328.

259 For the photograph of this monument, see Ալիշան Վ., idem, p. 345.

260 Ոսկեան Հ., idem, vol. 2, p. 729; Փարիզեան Մ., idem, p. 296.

261 Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 328; Փարիզեան Մ., էջ 286:

262 Սմբատեան, idem, pp. 490-491.

and Grigor Tatevatsy. The latter wrote a book entitled *Pokr Hartsnants*, i.e. *Minor Inquiries*, at the request of his pupil: “Written at the request of Raba Hakob, who lives in Bust of Goghtan. May his memory be blessed.”²⁶³

A colophon of 1708 states that Father Ghukas from Bist went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem together with Father Pilipos from Agulis and others.²⁶⁴

Catholicos Abraham of Crete visited Bist on his way from Agulis to Echmiatzin: “...I left the same day and arrived in the large village of Bust, where there was an excellent church.

“After visiting the church, I climbed up to the monastery, which resembled a dove and was like heaven. It was [situated] in a beautiful and lofty place, with many irrigated gardens and fertile earth, with clean and life-giving air. My heart was filled with happiness and I forgot the difficulties of the journey. Their superior, Vardapet Petros, a wise and gentle priest, as well as the monks and brothers received me with love and humility. I stayed there for two days.”²⁶⁵

In 1670 the monastery of Sourb Nshan received another prominent visitor, Zakaria Aguletsy: “...its Prior was Archimandrite Alexan from Bist.”²⁶⁶

Voskian identifies the monastery of Sourb Nshan with the cloister of Kopatap, where Tovmas Arjishetsy wrote a Gospel in 1336, leaving the following record in its colophon: “In the cloister called Kopatap and situated opposite the village of Bist, in the land of Goghtan.”²⁶⁷

Having visited Bist for several times, I can state that the local Armenians were faithful to their national and rural traditions and the customs of patriarchal life. Most of them lived in single-storied houses, moving to the *tonratun* in winters (they protected themselves against the cold by covering themselves with *kursies*). The more or less well-to-do families lived in double-storey houses and heated their rooms with wood stoves.

Like the inhabitants of the other mountainous Armenian villages of Goghtan, the people of Bist, who were tall, stout and healthy unlike their compatriots living in villages of lower position, kept their houses and surroundings very clean. They were unusually hospitable, and I witnessed this when I visited this village for the first time in 1918.

That year I completed my course at Gevorgian Seminary and took my graduation certificate, but instead of going home, I volunteered for the armed forces of Julfa that

263 Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 344.

264 Ալիշան Ղ., ibid.

265 The Chronicle of Abraham of Crete, p. 125; Ալիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 342-343; Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 432.

266 Լալայեան Ե., ibid; Մմբատեան Մ., idem, p. 211; Զարթրիա Ազուլեցու Օրագրությունը, էջ 95:

267 Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 158. Another source mentions the monument by the name of Kopatos. See «Արարատ», 1911, էջ 86; Ոսկեան Հ., idem, vol. 2, p. 731. Smbatian writes that in 1489 a clergyman named Hakob from Goghtan District was in the cloister of Bust (Մմբատեան Մ., idem, p. 275).

were being organised by Kharazian at that time. By that time, one of my best friends, Karapet Hambardzumian, another graduate of the Seminary, had already started working in this city.

Staying in Julfa for some time, I at last succumbed to my mother's entreaties to go home—she could not reconcile herself to the thought that I had volunteered for service in the army—and took a short-term leave-of-absence together with Karapet. Accompanied by a friendly officer, we first visited Karapet's parents in Nerkin Aza, enjoyed their kind hospitality for some time and then left for our place in Verin Agulis by carriage with several soldiers.

After about a one-week sojourn in our house, my two friends and the soldiers accompanying us departed for Julfa under the convoy of a heavy mounted escort, while I stayed in Agulis for some more time, meeting Mother's entreaties.

Among the soldiers accompanying us was one from Hin Jugha. This young man whose name was Panos was betrothed with one of our neighbours. When we were at last returning to Julfa, the highway leading to this city was blocked by the Turks of Ordubad, Dastak and Dyagh so that we decided to go there via the villages of mountainous Goghtan and Yernjak. Spending the night somewhere in Tseghna—I do not remember exactly where—we reached Bist on the evening of the second day and found the local people sitting on logs and talking peacefully in the square of their village.

Upon seeing us, all of them expressed their kind desire to host and treat us in their houses. They were still arguing over whose guests we were to be that night, when one of them asked my family name, for the gun hanging down from my shoulder and the arms I bore were not compatible with my age at all. They were surprised that my parents had allowed me to wander in the gorges and mountains in those dangerous days. I tried to appease their curiosity and at the same time made inquiries about the location of the house of the local priest's son Rubik, who had been my fellow student at the Seminary.

In the meantime, upon hearing my surname and father's name, one of the villagers who was wearing a huge cap of sheep's wool hugged me like a bear and started kissing me warmly. He declared that I was his uncle's son and definitely must go to his place. By this time, my friend Rubik had already found us: he started persuading my relative to take the soldier accompanying me to his house so that he himself would be able to take me to his place. My cousin, however, would not listen to his arguments and took me to his house. They were poor people and lived in the *tonratun*. After we had had some talk and tea, he, finally, agreed to keep Panos and let me spend the night with Rubik and his father.

It was the first time I had visited Bist. Later, when Andranik retreated from Revanduz to Julfa and suffered defeat against the outnumbering Turkish forces in Nakhijevan, he withdrew his troops to Mountainous Goghtan and from there to

Lernahayastan. Together with Andranik's army units, we had to retreat from Julfa. The entire district of Nakhijevan, including Hin Jugha, Kznut and numerous other prospering villages, was totally devastated and stripped of its Armenian inhabitants. It was during this retreat that I again found myself in Bist on my way to my birthplace, Verin Agulis.

I can never forget that ominous withdrawal. The fugitives accompanying Andranik's troops had grown savage and brutal after all their sufferings and due to the famine raging amongst them, and now they were spoiling everything they saw on their way. The green fields that had not been reaped yet were being trampled under the horse hooves, but nobody dared to speak against them. I remember them uprooting a whole cherry-tree in Bist and devour its fruits up to the very last cherry, as if the Armenian villagers were to blame for the calamities that had befallen them. When I came to this village, my cousin took me to their garden lying off the road and made me climb a cherry-tree and eat cherries right on the tree.

The cherries of Bist were distinguished for a delicious taste which I still remember. At that time, life was tranquil in the district and nobody could believe that the secret Turkish agents had already begun spreading the spirit of hostility against the Armenians to the local Turkish villages.

For the third time I went to Bist in the early days of spring already orphaned and having lost my dear ones, reduced to a wretched refugee without even warm clothes, when the snow of the adjacent mountains had not melted yet.

Despite the war-time, the parish school of the village continued its regular classes under the supervision of my friend Rubik and his father, who was a priest. This school was founded through the local inhabitants' efforts in 1895. On my friend's and his father's suggestion I visited this institution and saw that it had a great number of pupils, both boys and girls. It was distinguished for order and discipline.

KHURST

Location. This village lay at the northern extremity of Bstadzor, in the neighbourhood of Tezlah and Mesropavan.

Its name is not mentioned in the list of the villages of Yernjak and Goghtan Districts provided by historian Orbelian, but we find it in another list of the villages belonging to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle during the period of its being the residence of the diocese leader.

Alishan mentions the toponym of Khars as referring to a "devastated" village site in a wooded area.²⁶⁸ Another source provides almost the same description: "A ruined village in Bstadzor [that is in] Goghtan District of Syunik."²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Ալիշան Ղ., idem, p. 315.

²⁶⁹ Էփրիկեան Ս., idem, p. 212.

Generally speaking, the Armenian villages located in Upper Bstadzor continually suffered the incursions of various nomadic Turkish tribes. Their sufferings grew to the uttermost particularly during the Armeno-Tatar fights of 1905 to 1906. Most presumably, this is the reason why the Armenian inhabitants of a number of prospering villages gradually abandoned their houses, moving to safer places.

MIRZA JAFAR-DIZA

This was an insignificant village lying between Nerkin Agulis and Handamej. Early in the 20th century, it had a population of 3 houses with 18 inhabitants.

BELEV

Location. This ancient village, which is also known by the name of Bilev²⁷⁰ (now reduced to a Turkish place), is situated south of Bist, in the same gorge.

Its name is found in the aforementioned list of the villages belonging to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle.²⁷¹

According to Alishan, Belev had a population of more than 120 houses, but the “Nor-Dar” magazine confirms that in 1890 it represented quite a populous village with 500 families.²⁷²

South of Bilav is situated the large Turkish village of Diza. There are some other large and small Turkish villages north of Bist, but we do not find it expedient to mention their names in this work.

MESROPAVAN

The village referred to in this passage is identical to Mesropavan, which was called Nasirvas in Russian.²⁷³

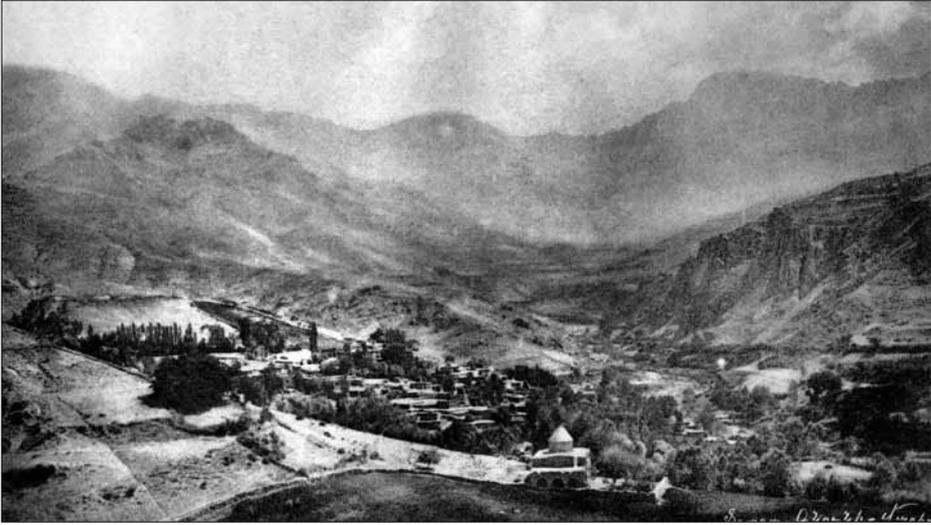
According to Koriun, the author of the biography of Mesrop Mashtots, when Mashtots was ordained and moved to Goghtan to devote himself to preaching the word of God, he was greatly supported by Armenian Prince Shahib. For his seclusion he chose one of the northern villages of the district which was later called Mesropavan in his memory.

270 Davrizhetsy calls it Beghevi (**Առաքել Գալիթեցի**, idem, p. 288).

271 **Ալիշան Ղ**, idem, p. 315.

272 **Ալիշան Ղ**, idem, pp. 345-346.

273 We are inclined to think that the toponym of Mesropavan, when spelled by the rules of *Grabar*, the classical Armenian language («Մեսրոպաւան»), consists of the words ‘Mesrop’ and ‘avan,’ the Armenian equivalent for ‘township.’ Therefore, Mesropavan may be interpreted as ‘Mesrop’s Village.’ Gh. Alishan, H. Voskian and Ajarian write it in the contemporary spelling («Մեսրոպալւան»), in accordance with which, it is understood as ‘Mesrop’s Monastery,’ ‘van’ being perceived as the Armenian word ‘vank,’ the equivalent of ‘monastery.’



Mesropavan. A general view of the village from the west (photo late 19th century)

Alishan writes the following about this village: “...in a wild plateau ...lies the village of Nasirapat, which had 18 Armenian houses with 200 souls and 11 Tatar houses in 1873.”²⁷⁴

Alishan places Mesropavan on the bank of the river Arax, close to Vorduut, in the neighbourhood of Anapat. According to the results of a statistical survey, in 1873 it had 8 houses of Tatar inhabitants, but now (1890) it contains 30 Armenian families. It has a ruined church dedicated to St. Stepanos, built with undressed stone and having khachkars and a stone font.²⁷⁵

This quotation shows that Alishan, who had not visited these areas himself, does not attest to the veracity of the information he reports.

Referring to Alishan and some other unreliable records, Voskian mentions Mesropavan as “Monastery or Cloister after Mesrop.” It was also called Masrevan, Meservanis, Mesrobavan, or Amasro Vank and was located “on the bank of the Yeraskh, within the diocese of Vorduut.”²⁷⁶

Lalayan, who travelled in the villages of Goghtan in the early 20th century, provides reliable information about the location of Mesropavan: “The village of Mesrobavan (Meservanis), also called Nasirabad, or Nasirvaz in Russian, lies at a distance of hardly 5 versts east of Allahi. It is historically accepted that in this very village St. Mesrop founded a small church and extirpated the last remnants of idolatry. It was called Mesrobavan or Meservanis after its founder.”²⁷⁷

274 Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, p. 344.

275 Ալիշան Ղ., *idem*, p. 320.

276 Ռսկեան Հ., *ibid.*

277 Լալայեան Ե., *idem*, pp. 323-324.



Mesropavan. The church of the village from the north (late 19th century)

Ajarian, who visited Mesropavan in 1932 to conduct linguistic studies there, had some talks with the local people. He writes: “The dialect of Agulis should be regarded as spoken in the villages from Nerkin Agulis to Paraka. The more northerly villages such as Bist, Allahi and Meservanis have nothing to do with it and belong to the dialect of Karabakh.”²⁷⁸

Voskian provides the following description for the church of Mesropavan: “In a small plain lying on the right bank of the tributary Alagyaz, in the west of the village stands the small monastery where the Great Translator [Mesrop Mashtots] spent his days in prayers. The church represents a building of ordinary stone. Its Arabic arches, resting on four pillars and eight pilasters, bear a big dome of eight windows which is adjoined by another, smaller dome. It has a font and other similar niches nearby and opposite it. The number of the sacristies is two, and that of the windows, which are rather narrow and low, three on each wall. The only entrance of the church opens from the west into a vaulted narthex resting on four columns. The church is 6 sazhen long, 3 sazhen and 2 arshin wide and a little more than 3 sazhen high. A cross memorial on the left of the altar is engraved with the following inscription: «Թադոսի և մայրս Գոհարի և հայր Ազիզ Բեկի և Ամիրջանի, Սիրանակի, թ ՋԹ (1460)» (transl.: *To Tados and my mother Gohar and my father Aziz Bek, Amirjan, Siranak. In the year 1460*).

²⁷⁸ Աճառեան Հ., Քննութիւն Ազուլիսի բարբառի, էջ 4:

“On the lower part of a cross on the left of the altar the following is carved: «Խաչս յիշատակ Մարտիրոսի Գիլլատանին թւ. ՌԿԷ (1618)» (transl.: *This cross is in memory of Martiros, Gyulistan. 1618*). On the lower part of another cross memorial on the right of the altar: «Խաչս յիշատակ է Պօղոսին թւ. ՌԿ(1611)» (transl.: *This cross is in memory of Poghos. 1611*). The following inscription can be read left of the narthex: «Արդ յիշեցէք վանքիս միաբանքն աներայստ ատր վանացս տր Ղազար քահանայն իւր աշակերտ տր Գրիգոր և գեղիս օրհնեալ քահանայն տր Ազարիան...» (transl.: *May you remember monk of this monastery... Priest Ghazar, his pupil, Father Grigor and the blessed priest of the village, Father Azaria*). Right of the narthex: «...սր. ածածին քեզ յինի հովանի, պահապան... դպիր սուտանուն Դաւիթ որդի տր Գրիգոր սր Ածածին, գրուեցաւ թին ՌՃԾԷ (1708)» (transl.: *...May the Holy Virgin protect and guard you... worthless sexton David, Father Grigor's son. Sourb Astvatzatzin. Written in the year 1708*).»²⁷⁹

“As legend has it, it was built by Prince Shabit, who wished to inter St. Mesrop’s remains here, but Vahan Amatuny buried the great son of Hatsekats in Oshakan.”²⁸⁰

Mesropavan is not found in the list of historian Orbelian,²⁸¹ but he mentions Amasro Vank, which was one of the oldest sanctuaries in this village.

ALLAHI

Location. Allahi, which is one of the northernmost Armenian villages of Goghtan, is situated west of Kaputjugh, in the upper basin of the river Azat Giran (Gilan), north of Bist.

Nature has generously endowed this village with splendid vegetation, flower-rich fields and fertile pastures. The local inhabitants are mainly occupied with farming, stock-breeding and bee-keeping. In former times, it was famous for its honey and milk cream. So favourable were the conditions for bee-keeping offered in Allahi that the inhabitants of the southern villages used to bring their hives here during summer months.

Due to the severe climactic conditions, the village cannot boast an abundance of fruit trees. Its fields and mountains are rich in a wide variety of useful plants.

The toponym of Allahi is not found in either of the aforementioned lists. Nor do we come across any reference to it in Alishan’s and Voskian’s works.

According to Lalayan, in the early 20th century, the village had an Armenian population of 347.²⁸² We suppose that their number shrank down in the aftermath of the Armeno-Turkish fights of 1905 to 1906.²⁸³

279 Լալայեան Ե., idem, pp. 325-326; Փափազեան Մ., idem, p. 296; Ռսկեան Հ., idem, p. 728.

280 Մովսէս Խորենացի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, Տիղիս, 1913, էջ 357; Աիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 312, 319; Տաշեան, Մայր ցուցակ, էջ 76; Մնրատեան, idem, p. 491.

281 The omissions observed in this list may, perhaps, be attributed to the fact that Orbelian himself did not ever visit Goghtan and Yernjak, and based his list on that of church taxes. Nor is this village mentioned among those belonging to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle.

282 Լալայեան Ե., idem, p. 323.

283 My aunt lived in Allahi, and I remember her husband often visiting us with his neck in bandage due to the wounds he had got in the days of these fights.

H. Ajarian, who visited Allahi for linguistic studies in 1932, found only several Armenian families there. According to this great Armenian researcher, most of their members were repatriots from Muzhambar, Gharadagh and Salmast who had moved to Allahi in 1828.²⁸⁴

In 1971 it had 76 Armenian and Azerbaijani inhabitants.²⁸⁵

In times of peace, a three-grade primary school functioned in Allahi.

DER, VERIN AZA, NERKIN AZA

Geographical Position and Means of Communication. These three villages are situated at the confluence of the rivers Gilan and Arax. Verin Aza and Der lie on the highway of Julfa-Ordubad, while Nerkin Aza extends in a more southerly direction. The cotton fields and arable lands of Verin and Nerkin Aza almost reach as far as the Arax riverbank. South of Nerkin Aza, along the left bank of the Arax runs the railway line of Julfa-Baku.

The villages of Verin Aza and Der are connected with each other through a five-span stone bridge constructed over the river Azat Gilan. This bridge, dating from 1843, was built by benefactor Avetis Ter-Mkrtchian's means with the help of some Greek masters.

These three villages differ from the other places of Goghtan in their geographical position and climatic conditions. They lie in a spacious plain and almost merge together with their gardens and fields: some bare mountains extending from the north-west separate these villages from Yernjak District. At present a highway leading to Tseghna connects Verin and Nerkin Aza with Northern Goghtan. Another road built during the times of the Tsarist authorities, with one of its branches running to Ordubad, serves these villages as a link with Verin and Nerkin Agulis.

Situated quite close to the Arax river, Verin and Nerkin Aza are characterised with almost tropical climate and do not generally see severe winters. At nights strong winds blow from the direction of the desert, and the weather cools only thanks to the river.

Economic Life. Apart from cereals, the local inhabitants grow large quantities of cotton. It remains unclear whether the dam built on the river Arax in the district of Yernjak reaches these villages: if this were the case and the local farmers did not have shortage of irrigation water, their fertile soil could also yield a goods harvest of rice.

These villages also have orchards, including vineyards and large mulberry orchards which are essential for the development of silkworm breeding. They are famous for their sweet melons and watermelons.

The residents of these villages are mostly occupied with farming, fruit-growing, silkworm-breeding and partly vegetable-growing.²⁸⁶

284 Աճառեան Հ., Քննութիւն Ազուլիսի բարբառի, էջ 7-8:

285 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 1, էջ 134-135:

286 Ալիշան Ղ., idem, pp. 346-347.

Besides various domestic animals, the inhabitants of Der as well as Verin and Nerkin Aza breed different hoofed and horned animals. Particularly famous is the buffalo which yields delicious milk, cream and butter.

Due to these villages' close location to the marshes of the Arax, the local people often suffered from fever. In former times, spirits were in wide use in these places.

These three villages are among the oldest historical places in Goghtan District. Supposedly, they lie in the site of a city named Azat which was devastated in the aftermath of invasions and was rendered uninhabited.²⁸⁷ Most probably, this city and the adjacent villages neighbouring Hin Jugha, did not escape the deportation by Shah Abbas between 1603 and 1605. It is highly probable that Azat was stripped of its residents during this very period, but there are no available historical records to confirm this. Zakaria Aguletsy, who mentions Aza and Der as the first places where he stopped on his way from Agulis to Europe in 1641, refers to the former by the name of Azat. He even calculates how long the distance separating these two villages was, but he does not say anything about their being derelict and uninhabited.²⁸⁸

The name of Aza probably derives from the toponym of Azat.²⁸⁹

Before the massacres of Agulis, every year on Red Sunday almost the entire population of Aza went on pilgrimage to Agulis, dressed in coloured garments and sitting on carts driven by oxen or buffaloes. The provisions the pilgrims generally took with them for an entire week included animals for sacrifice. So large was the number of believers that the spacious yard of the monastery and its rooms could not accommodate all of them. It had become common knowledge for the Armenians of Agulis that the Red Sunday was the feast of their compatriots from Der and Nerkin and Verin Aza.

The ancestors of the Armenians of these three villages were Armenian immigrants from the districts of Khoy and Salmast who moved to Goghtan in 1828 having retained their vernaculars.

In 1971 Aza had a population of 235.²⁹⁰ Alishan counts 130 houses in Verin Aza,²⁹¹ but when I visited this village before its destruction in 1920, it had more than two thousand inhabitants.

In former times, Verin and Nerkin Aza had their school and church, but the latter is in ruins nowadays.²⁹²

The historical monuments preserved in Aza include the aforementioned bridge dating back to 1843, as well as some Islamic tombs dating from the 12th century.²⁹³

North of Verin Aza and Der are the ruins of the ancient city of Geran (called Kharaba Gilan by the Turks).

287 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 1, էջ 95:

288 **Չաքարիա Ագուլեցու** Օրագրությունը, էջ 7:

289 **Ալիշան Վ.**, idem, pp. 346-347.

290 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 1, էջ 95:

291 **Ալիշան Վ.**, idem, p. 346.

292 Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 1, էջ 95:

293 Ibid. For information on these Islamic tombs, see **Ալիշան Վ.**, idem, p. 346.



Nerkin Aza. A bridge built by Armenians (photo by Artak Vardanian, 1980s)

I remember that in the years of World War I, a poor shepherd unearthed a large pitcher of Arabic gold coins in some ruins extending over a lofty hill in the north of Aza (allegedly, one of the most important Arabian castles used to tower on this hill). My father bought some of these coins to send them to the museum of Echmiatzin. This discovery made tens of villagers go to this site with spades and shovels to search for treasure. They unearthed quite a large number of copper vessels until the Russian authorities banned these self-proclaimed “excavations.”

Alishan refers to Der by the name of Ter (Tear), but the Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia refers to it by the name of Der.²⁹⁴

THE HEROIC SELF-DEFENCE OF DER AND AZA VILLAGES AND THEIR RETREAT TO TSEGHNA

None of the villages of Goghtan District showed such heroic resistance to the Turkish invaders that could match that put up by the villages of Der, Verin (Upper) Aza and Nerkin (Lower) Aza. The forces gathered from the neighbouring large township of Yaji, Dastak, the city of Ordubad, as well as from numerous nearby and remote villages, joined with the bigoted Tartar barbarians who had fled from Okhchi-Shabadin District of Zangezur, kept the Armenians huddled up in encirclement in these three Armenian villages for several months. This mob, that fought with the arms seized from

²⁹⁴ Հայկական սովետական հանրագիտարան, հ. 3, էջ 359:

the withdrawing Russian troops, was led by Turkish military specialists and officers. They threatened to repeat the carnage of Agulis here by putting all the local inhabitants to sword, taking captive their young women and girls, and plundering their belongings that they had accumulated with the sweat of their brow throughout many years.

Der and Aza were at least within 18 to 20 kilometres of Goghtan's mountainous village of Tseghna. During their unequal struggle against the enemy, they received absolutely no outside aid from the mountainous villages of Goghtan firstly because the latter themselves were subjected to almost daily attacks; secondly, the inhabitants of every village were only as patriotic as to fight for their own place of living, and none of them was ready to sacrifice his life for the defence of any other Armenian village. The leaders of the self-defence forces, Movses Gyulnazarian as well as Vasil and Ghazar Kocharian, failed to organize the work in such a way as to be able to rescue the adjacent and remote Armenian villages. These are the reasons why the Turks managed to easily occupy Tanakert and mercilessly slaughter the unarmed and helpless people of Kaghakik as well as Verin and Nerkin Agulis.

Verin and Nerkin Aza shared the same bitter fate together with Der. We should give the fighting forces of these three villages, scarcely reaching two hundred, their due: having absolutely lost any hopes of outside aid, they manifested unsurpassed valour in their unequal struggle against thousands of Turkish fanatics who were armed to the teeth. These Armenians who had risen to defend their lives and honour were in desperate need of food and ammunition. They used their last resources of cartridge against the intense fire of the enemy, but there was no sense in carrying on the resistance, or shifting to cold steel, for the handful of Armenian warriors faced a large multitude of blood-thirsty, bigoted Turks. In their rear were old men, women and children, and it was of the utmost importance to save their lives and honour at any cost. This is the reason why they decided to retreat to Tseghna without knowing whether the inhabitants of this village were in their homes or had moved elsewhere. In the meantime, the enemy moved the people of Nerkin Aza to Verin Aza for the purpose of making the circle of siege smaller. The Turks attacked almost incessantly so that the Armenian warriors were compelled to fight day and night: those guarding in the positions were absolutely unable to sleep or rest down at least for a short while.

The only way of escaping this grave situation was to leave the native hearths and retreat to the north of Goghtan, but in order to do so, the Armenians had to break through the siege and fight their way out towards the north. Several tens of daring, experienced fighters took advantage of the night darkness and went beyond the line of encirclement, thus securing the removal of the women and children, their rear, as well as their right and left wings being protected by armed warriors. Fighting selflessly through all night, they reached the approaches to Tseghna in the morning. The Armenian patrol of Tseghna were surprised to see that only 200 fighters had retreated regularly, without any panic, and moved the defenceless people to the village in safety, without any losses.

In Tseghna, however, these people were stricken by famine, for the local inhabitants kept the scanty stores of food they had for a rainy day. They were accommodated only in the buildings located in the yards of the village school and church. Some of the refugees hired rooms in private dwellings to live there until spring, when they would be able to surmount the heights of Kaputjugh and move to Zangezur. Their meagre food stocks lasting for only a few days, the wretched fugitives passed on to the cats and dogs of Tseghna. Some of them moved to other villages of Goghtan hoping to somehow earn their living there: in most cases, they exchanged their arms for food hoping that a better future awaited them. Despite this, however, many of these people starved to death.

In these sinister days, I met my close friend Karapet Hambardzumian, a graduate of Gevorgian Seminary with whom I had worked as a volunteer soldier in Julfa. He had succeeded in saving his parents and young wife. A couple of years later, when we were on our way to Iran via Zangezur, I again came across him in the village of Meghri and he sheltered me in his house for some time. He had lost his wife under circumstances which I failed to find out. Later, between 1922 and 1923, he returned to Nerkin Aza together with his parents.

THE MASSACRES PERPETRATED IN AGULIS AND THE NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES ON 24 AND 25 DECEMBER 1919

In order to give an all-embracing picture of the formidable carnage committed in Agulis and the adjacent villages, I have to look into the circumstances that preceded these tragic events.

During World War I, in February 1917, Russia was stricken by a revolution which came to overthrow the Tsarist authorities. After this revolution, Turkish administrative bodies were set up in Goghtan District, but Agulis and the neighbouring villages refused to recognize the former Tsarist legal system and elected their own executive bodies—in some places, unanimously with the local Turks—which were to attend to all the local matters.

While the Russian troops fought on the Caucasian front, free traffic was maintained on the highways, and still functioned the railway connecting Goghtan with the major cities of Caucasia. Life was tranquil in the district, and at least outwardly solidarity was felt in the inter-relations of the local Armenians and Turks. However, this was not the case in places like Shahtakhti, Ordubad, Yaji, Nehram and Nakhijevan, where the Tartars were already displaying their hostile attitude towards the Armenians.

When after the November Revolution the Russian army units pulled out of the Caucasian front, the Transcaucasian Government ordered the representatives of the newly-established Armenian armed forces to take charge of all the depots of the local garrison located on the river Arax. In order to establish control over this important military post, the Armenian servicemen set up special companies of young Armenian recruits from Hin (Old) Jugha, Kznut, Aprakunis and Aza. These units also included

Armenian officers and soldiers who had retired from the Russian army. All the principal depots of the left wing of the Russian forces stationed in the cities of Khoy, Dilman, Van and Revanduz were now concentrated in Julfa.

Although the Armenian military authorities—their leader was Kharazian—did not ever manifest any hostility against the Turkish inhabitants of Goghtan District and kept assuring them that the newly-established Armenian units were only to defend the country against the advancing Turkish troops, these people, especially, the Turks of Nakhijevan, Sharur, Yernjak and Goghtan, did not reconcile themselves to the fact that the aforementioned rich depots had shifted into the possession of the Armenian troops with such ease. In their turn, the Turkish army leaders, who strove to facilitate the conquest of Caucasia in any way, started inciting the local Tartars against the Armenians through special agents. They also started training them in the use of arms, these actions being particularly promoted by the Musavatist Party, whose centre in this district was in the city of Nakhijevan.

The situation played into the hands of the Turks: the withdrawing Russian soldiers sold their arms and ammunition to the local Tartars at meagre prices. The railway line of Julfa-Nakhijevan-Shahtakhti had turned into a vast market: the Turks did not spare means to acquire any kinds of arms. They even secretly bought the entire artillery of an army unit that had reached Julfa with all its equipment and horses. Before the Armenian military authorities could take any steps to prevent its acquisition, it was hurriedly moved to the Turkish village of Yaji—several guns were later taken to Nakhijevan from this place—accompanied by several Russian gunners who were unwilling to return to their homeland together with the ordinary soldiers who had broken the military discipline. Besides, they were dazzled by the lavish payment the Turks had promised them.

Yaji represented a large, purely Turkish village lying on the river Arax, to the south-east of Julfa. Its inhabitants lived a very prospering life owing not only to their fertile soil, but also to the illicit trade carried out on the Russo-Iranian border.

This artillery was to become a true scourge for the Armenians of Goghtan District and Nakhijevan. Apart from it, the Turks of Shahtakhti also acquired—sometimes by force—a great number of arms, bombs and machine-guns from the retreating Russian troops. These arms made Yaji a fortified citadel endangering the highway leading from Julfa to Aza and Agulis. Moreover, the railway line of Julfa-Nakhijevan-Yerevan was put out of function by the Turkish villages established along it. This perilous situation also spread to the Armenian villages situated in the valleys of the rivers Yernjak and Gilan, and broke the tranquility reigning there. The Armenian villagers were to be accompanied by armed groups to be able to move safely from one place to another, to work in the fields, or graze their animals in the pastures.

In its turn, Ordubad cut off the communication of Goghtan District with Arevik and Zangezur. The Turks who had occupied all the important posts along the bank of the Arax easily kept in touch with the outer world through the Muslims living on the other side of the river.

We have already dwelt upon the geographical position of Agulis and now, for the sake of avoiding unnecessary repetition, we shall confine ourselves to only saying that in late 1917 and early 1918, this township started seriously thinking about its self-defence, taking into account the highly unfavourable political situation that was aggravating even further with every single passing day. A special tax was imposed on the local inhabitants—“with the exception of the poor”—and the means accumulated in this way were spent on buying arms and ammunition. On the order of the Local Self-Defence Body, the former servicemen and non-commissioned officers of the Russian army commenced training the local young men in patrol and the use of arms. Unfortunately, only some arrogant people succeeded in poking their noses into the leadership of this work, and later they proved of much harm to the self-defence of the village.

Despite all these measures, the peaceful and civilised people of Agulis did not spare efforts to retain good relations with their Turkish neighbours, trying to convince them that the measures of self-defence they were taking at that time were not directed against the Turkish people, that they did not have the slightest intention to attack them. Moreover, the Armenians even assured the local Turks that they were ready to defend them in case it was necessary, and as the further events showed, they proved the sincerity of their attempts in actual fact.

Agulis lived through this tension until early 1918, but fortunately, no serious incidents occurred. Despite their numerical superiority, the Turks of Nakhijevan suffered a total defeat in the internal fights, and the victory won by the Armenian villages lying in the valleys of the Yernjak and Gilan considerably suppressed the Turks of Ordubad and the district of the same name.

Early in the summer of the same year, Andranik went to Julfa via Nakhijevan. Without launching any military action against the Turkish inhabitants of Nakhijevan District, his troops, accompanied by thousands of unarmed followers, moved to Iran via Julfa, hoping to join the English army stationed in Mesopotamia. Shortly afterwards, however, the great commander returned to Julfa together with his soldiers and followers, for he had proved unable to break through the Turkish siege—afterwards he left Julfa for Nakhijevan.

By this time, Armenia and Turkey had signed an agreement in compliance with which a railway line of 25 kilometres was to be yielded up to the Turks. The national bodies of Nakhijevan decided to take advantage of their superiority against the local Turks, as well as the presence of Andranik and his troops to defy this agreement and put up resistance against Khalil Bey's army. In the meantime, Andranik decided to occupy the large Turkish township of Nehram in order to secure the safety of his rear and that of the railway line of Nakhijevan-Julfa on the eve of the impending Turkish assault. He, however, suffered a fiasco; moreover, after a sanguinary battle of 24 hours, Khalil Bey defeated his army units, composed of Nakhijevan's armed forces, and thus compelled the Commander to leave Nakhijevan.

Part of the Armenians of Nakhijevan joined Andranik's retreating army and his followers. The rest of the inhabitants of the city stayed in their homes and surrendered to

the Turks, the large, purely Armenian village of Astabad following their example. Suffering great losses, the populations of Kznut and the Armenian villages lying in the valley of the river Zarjur (Yernjak) abandoned their thriving hearths one after another and joined the vast multitude of refugees. The inhabitants of Hin Jugha found haven in Iran mainly by crossing the river Arax.

Shortly afterwards, the Armenians who had stayed in Nakhijevan and were subject to all kinds of humiliation and persecution were removed under the plea of being taken to Astabad. They, however, were tortured to death on their way to this place. The young inhabitants of Astabad, several hundred in number, were forced into working on different railway lines and highways for many months, after which they were put to sword. On the suggestion of the Armenian authorities, the rest of Nakhijevan Armenians were exchanged with the Turkish inhabitants of Yerevan District, thus being saved from the imminent slaughter.

Andranik moved his troops from Nakhijevan to Julfa. On his way from the latter town to Goghtan, he occupied the large village of Yaji, which had been blocking movement on the highway of Julfa-Aza for more than a year, its barbarous inhabitants invading that territory with unbridled fury. The Commander's troops and the defenceless people who were following them reached safely the mountainous villages of Goghtan District. Andranik set up headquarters in Tseghna and took up temporary living in this village. He had decided to gather together his scattered forces and get rid of Ordubad City, which had been blocking the road leading to Goghtan and the district of Arevik. His final goal was to move the armless people that were accompanying his troops to Zangezour through a smooth road extending along the Arax river-side.

The Turkish inhabitants of Ordubad and Agulis District were horror-stricken at the presence of Andranik and his army units. They had particularly grown terrified after the unexpected blitzkrieg against the township of Yaji—as has already been mentioned, it possessed guns and large armed forces—and its quick conquest. The Turkish National Council of Ordubad hurried to send a delegation to Agulis with a request that the local Armenians should save them from the imminent danger. The Turks promised a one-month sustenance of Andranik's troops and the people following them on condition that they should not launch any hostility against their Turkish neighbours. They also pledged themselves to move away from the road of Ordubad-Karjevan.

Agulis lived through hard times. After his fiasco in moving south and joining the Englishmen, and after the defeat of Nakhijevan, Andranik had decided to return via Lernahayastan. While advancing, he was paving way for his soldiers and the armless people by removing the obstacle posed by the village of blood-thirsty Turkish bandits. He was advancing rapidly, without ever stopping anywhere for a long time, and had absolutely no desire to defend Goghtan. As had been the case with Yaji, after his attacks against the Turkish villages, the local armed men either fled to the mountains together with the women and young fellows, or found refuge in Iran by crossing the Arax. However, once Andranik's troops were away, they returned to their places, for-

tified their positions and resumed their raids against the Armenian villages, this time with a stronger longing for revenge.

After the conquest of Yaji, when Andranik was expected in Ordubad, too, the local wealthy Turks and part of the women moved to the other side of the Arax. In case of any attack, the rest of the local population was either to seek shelter in the mountains or to cross the river to its Iranian bank. Then, it is clear that if Andranik moved away from Goghtan after his attacks and the devastation of Ordubad, the district would certainly pay a heavy price for it, especially if we take into account Khalil Bey's approaching army.

A delegation of Agulis Armenians, led by Ashot Melik-Musian, begged the Commander to leave at least 1,500 soldiers in Goghtan for the defence of the district, but he shut his ears to their entreaties. Facing his flat refusal, they asked him to give up his intention of destroying Ordubad and the Turkish villages of the district: they hoped that in accordance with the agreement they had reached with the local Turkish inhabitants, they would be able to prevent the impending massacres. In the meantime, the Armenians of Agulis also decided to meet the request of Ordubad's Turkish national authorities and show generosity and noble attitude towards their centuries-old Turkish neighbours.

Utterly displeased with the intercession of Agulis' National Council, Andranik eventually decided not to touch Ordubad. Some time later, he moved to Zangezur via the mountains of Kaputjugh, the Armenian refugees, who had grown unspeakably exhausted and emaciated, suffering great losses while crossing that lofty mountain chain.

A short time after Andranik's departure, Khalil Bey, accompanied by some fifteen to twenty officers, arrived in Ordubad, apparently for assuming leadership of the offensive planned against Lernahayastan. Clung to their impregnable mountains, the brave villagers of Arevik and Zangezur selflessly defended their ancient homeland against the Turks and Tatars, far outnumbering them. After Khalil Bey's arrival in Ordubad, when the attacks against Arevik grew even severer, a military company of one hundred villagers from Zangezur and the mountainous parts of Goghtan secretly left Agulis under the leadership of a certain Tovmas from Lijk. Without the local inhabitants' knowledge, they took with them most of the arms and ammunition of Agulis.

Now Agulis and the Armenian villages of the district of the same name were in a severe plight: the local forces were not enough to put up a proper resistance against the advancing Turkish army. With their scanty forces, the villagers of Zangezur, Arevik and Mountainous Goghtan were hardly able to defend themselves against the incessant enemy attacks. No longer there existed the thriving villages of Nakhijevan: their inhabitants had been either killed in their unequal struggle against the Turks, or had moved to Lernahayastan. The situation was critical from any standpoint; this is the reason why the Armenians of Agulis, led by Ashot Melik-Musian, decided to act prudently and reach a peaceful agreement with Khalil Bey. In order to prove his peaceful

disposition, Khalil Bey appointed Ashot Melik-Musian—he had stayed there, unwilling to leave his native village in danger—Head of Agulis and the Armenian villages of the district, demanding that he should disarm the local Armenians.

After considering this demand with the national bodies, Ashot Melik-Musian delivered between 40 and 50 old arms and a certain number of cartridges to Khalil Bey to have at least formally fulfilled his order: the new arms were hidden in safe places. In the meantime, the National Council of Agulis invited Khalil Bey, together with some ten to twelve officers and several influential Turks from Ordubad and Agulis, to a dinner party to weaken the tension of their relations.

Khalil Bey and his officers were delighted and struck at the luxurious, European mode of life of the Armenians of Agulis, as well as their beautiful houses and gardens. While drinking a toast during the dinner, the bey gave a solemn promise to defend Agulis at any cost. He assured those present that Turkey [Tajkistan] had already signed peace with Armenia, and added that the fact that the Armenians of Agulis had taken sides with the local Turks in the days of Andranik's arrival there obliged him to do everything within his power to keep Agulis in safety. He made this speech in Turkish, then in French and German, the intellectuals of Agulis translating it into Armenian.

On the whole, Khalil Bey's visit to Agulis proved to be of good token: it put an end to the frequent cases of murder and violence on the roads, and the Armenians were even allowed to buy provisions from the Turkish villages, this alleviating considerably their grave economic situation. This Turkish commander's sojourn in Ordubad lasted till October of 1918. During this period, he asked for several skilled craftsmen from Agulis to make shoes and clothes for his young wife, lady Rakhshande, who was the daughter of Mohammed Ali Khan, an influential wealthy man from Nakhijevan City. Two Armenian craftsmen went to Ordubad to fulfill his request and returned to Agulis after having done their work. At the beginning of autumn, after the general retreat of the Turkish troops, Khalil Bey and his family left Nakhijevan.

Several years after his return to Turkey, Khalil Bey died of cancer, and his wife moved to her father in Tabriz together with her three daughters in 1926. Mohammed Ali Khan had taken up residence in Tabriz after the establishment of the Bolsheviks' rule in Caucasia and worked in the local Railway Department. His daughter started working as a charity nurse with a female doctor named Manije: the latter was from the princely family of the Ghajars.

I gave this brief history of Khalil Bey's family to provide documentary evidence against the concocted materials issued in the Diasporan Armenian press that contain unreal charges against the Armenians of Agulis. Allegedly, in order to arouse Khalil Bey's compassion, they "added young immaculate victims" to their expensive presents and "threw Tamar and Anush, two beautiful young ladies selected from among the most charming girls of Agulis, into the arms of the lustful bey."

All this is only the product of the author's unhealthy imagination: never did such a thing happen in Agulis, and as an eye-witness to all the events described above, I

deny it flatly. Up until the day of the massacres of Agulis, perpetrated on 25 December 1919, no Turkish officer or any of the local Turks ever demanded anything like that. Nor did the Armenians of Agulis ever yield up their children or young girls to the Turks for the sake of saving their skin.

Further in this work, in the account of the dreadful days of the carnage committed in Agulis, you will see that Thamar, a young girl then hardly 17 to 18 years of age, was kidnapped by the Turks together with many other young women and girls. Only some of them were later lucky enough to be moved to Tabriz via Ordubad and to be set free by a certain amount of ransom, after which they were put under the charge of Archbishop Nerses Melik Tangian of blessed memory, the leader of the Armenian Diocese of Atropatene. After a short sojourn in Tabriz, most of these ladies and girls returned to their relatives in Caucasia or Russia. Others stayed in Tabriz and married Agulis Armenians living in Iran.

Furthermore, the name of Anush referred to in the aforementioned article does not correspond to reality. The true name of this girl, who was only 12 years old during the massacres, was Khanush: she stayed in Tabriz and later took up permanent living in this city by getting married here.

Miss Thamar moved to Caucasia and married Doctor Afsharian, who had come to Agulis before the massacres as a representative of the Ministry of Public Health Care of the Republic of Armenia. He saved Turkish officer Ediff Bey from pneumonia—he had caught this disease in Ordubad—and this helped him escape the slaughters. After a short stay in Ordubad, he was moved to Tabriz together with the freed women and children. After the Sovietization of Caucasia, Thamar's brother, whom the author of these lines met in Yerevan several years after the massacres, sent to prison the Turkish youth who had kidnapped his sister. This fellow was notorious for his debauched life, fierceness and loathsome crimes. He was one of the chief organizers of the carnage of Agulis and himself had shot to death hundreds of men, women and children. A short time later, however, the “just” Soviet authorities set free this mean criminal.

Many years ago, meeting the request of a group of Agulis Armenians and having their support, we wrote a large-scale article to deny the aforementioned concoction, which bore the following signature: “Yer. Sen.” The much respected staff of the “Husaber,” however, made certain wilful, unnecessary abridgements in the text of this material, that was published in about 10 to 15 issues of their daily.

I want to remind my readers that after Khalil Bey's return to Turkey, this Ediff Bey stayed in Ordubad with a small number of Turkish forces. Turkish soldiers were stationed in the adjacent Turkish villages as well: they enjoyed free movement to Agulis and elsewhere.

Once, when Khalil Bey was still in Ordubad, I was walking in a devastated territory, lying among Agulis and the Turkish villages of Handamej and Nusnus, with my close friend Karo Ter-Zakarian. Suddenly we caught sight of a telephone wire stretching on the ground: most probably, it provided communication with the secret Turkish body established in Agulis.

On the night of the same day, we took a field phone and went to test this wire, accompanied by one of our friends who was more skilled in such matters than us. Working under candlelight, we connected up that wire to our hand phone: by a strange coincidence, we heard some voices and started listening to quite a long conversation from Nakhijevan to Ordubad. From it we learned that the Germans and the Turks had suffered defeat, and the Turkish army units were to leave Caucasia immediately. We could not believe our ears and could not even find words for several seconds.

In the morning Karo and I went to the market to meet Ashot Melik-Musian. Our bright countenances were a token of good news: he was highly pleased with what we told him, but ordered us not to make it public until the Turks themselves made an announcement about it. The sad faces of some high-ranking Turks clearly showed that certain very important events had taken place. We were keeping up with the course of events for several nights until it became indisputable that Khalil Bey was soon to leave Ordubad. Now we were convinced of the truthfulness of what we had heard. The Turks changed their arrogant behaviour, the tension alleviated, and free movement was to some degree restored among the villages.

Early in March 1919, some 6 to 7 English officers paid an unexpected visit to Agulis by the highway of Julfa-Agulis. The Armenians gave them a splendid welcome. The Englishmen were fascinated with the magnificent monastery of Agulis, as well as the numerous fine churches and the almost European way of life of the local people. They simply could not believe that an out-of-the-way place like Agulis, surrounded by bare mountains, could represent a place of civilised people among whom you could even find some fluently speaking English and French. Moreover, they were dazzled by the beauty of the women and young ladies of Agulis...

Although these military figures had only a very short sojourn in Agulis, their visit proved of favourable influence not only in this township but in the neighbouring Armenian villages as well. The people now believed that the war had truly come to an end and the highly desirable days of peace were soon to come. They breathed a sigh of relief, and their fears and despondency were dispelled.

A short time after the general withdrawal of the Turkish army and the return of the English officers, when the district of Nakhijevan became part of the newly-established Republic of Armenia, Governor General of the district Gevorg Varshamian visited Agulis among other places. The inhabitants of the township gave a splendid welcome to the first representative of the Republic of Armenia to have ever visited them. Vahab Effendi, who, as we have already mentioned, worked as a teacher in the Turkish quarter of Agulis, conveyed the obsequious obedience of all the local Turks to the Armenian authorities.

We shall later dwell on this base man indoctrinated with Turkish ideology, who proved one of the chief organisers of the massacres of Agulis. On the day of that carnage, he made numerous appeals to his fellow Muslims to spare their bullets and kill the innocent people with cold steel.

Ashot Melik-Musian left Agulis for Yerevan together with the aforementioned English officers to procure some aid for his native village. Soon he came back, having been appointed head of the district of Goghtan. Choosing Agulis as his residence, the new district head directed his efforts towards alleviating the tension reigning there.

Several weeks later, Agulis received officer Movses Gyulnazarian, the police chief of Goghtan District, who later manifested great devotion to the defence of mountainous Goghtan. He was accompanied by Ivan Antonian and Doctor Afsharian: the former was to work as justice of the peace, and the latter as head of the Public Health Care Department. The local people were very happy about the fact that the ancient district of Goghtan now formed part of the Republic of Armenia: they believed that a more tranquil and safer life awaited them in the future, but unfortunately, the peace did not last long...

Shortly after the arrival of the representatives of the Republic of Armenia at Agulis, the Musavatist authorities of Baku incited the Turks of Sharur and Nakhijevan to rise in rebellion against the Armenian state. The Armenian forces, fighting under the command of General Shelkovnikian, had to retreat to Daralagyaz. The innocent, peaceful civilians who had returned to their homes after Nakhijevan District had been included within the borders of the Armenian Republic were again, for the second time, reduced to refugees. Those following the withdrawing troops were able to reach Daralagyaz safely, whereas those who had lagged behind, several thousand in number, were brutally slaughtered near the Turkish village of Sust by the local inhabitants as well as the Turkish armed forces of Nakhijevan that were chasing the retreating Armenians.

The surviving villages of Goghtan now found themselves in a heavy predicament: they could keep in touch with the outside world only through the lofty mountain chain of Kaputjugh-Alagyaz rising between Goghtan and Zangezur, but it became impassable during winter months. Hundreds of people were lost in different parts of this mountain pass while attempting to move to Arevik and Zangezur, or while trying to bring therefrom wheat or other provisions on their backs. Anyway, using this road, that was extremely difficult to surmount, the Armenians of Agulis and the representatives of the Republic of Armenia in Goghtan endeavoured to inform the central Armenian authorities about their grave situation, asking for aid from Yerevan.

During the summer months of 1919, the Turks of Goghtan, led by some Turkish officers and soldiers who had stayed in the district, launched severe attacks against the local Armenians, who were now huddled together in the villages of Allahi, Mesropavan, Bist, Paraka, Tseghna, Ramis, Kaghakik, Tanakert, as well as Verin and Nerkin Aza. The impregnable mountainous villages could put up more successful resistance thanks to the exceptional military skills of their inhabitants, as well as the fact that they were near each other and one could help another in times of danger. The warriors fighting on the heights of Kaputjugh defended their rear.

The same cannot be said about Verin and Nerkin Agulis, Tanakert and Kaghakik. Even graver was the situation in Der, and Verin and Nerkin Aza: situated on the Arax, between 18 and 20 kilometres away from the nearest Armenian villages, they were

absolutely isolated. Their long fights of self-defence can be compared with the heroic defence of Mount Musa ('Musa Dagħ' in the original Armenian text: 'dagħ' is the Turkish equivalent for 'mountain').

The forces of the belligerents were highly unequal: the armed forces of Ordubad City and tens of Turkish villages of Nakhijevan, united with the infuriated Turks from Okhchi-Shabadin and the gorge of Geghi, launched a bitter fighting against a group of Armenians who were all by themselves. The enemy forces were led by Turkish servicemen of wide military experience: among them was Ediff Bey, who held command of the forces of Ordubad and the district of the same name.

The first target of the enemy attacks was the beautiful village of Kaghakik, a purely Armenian-inhabited prosperous place. In those days, the lives of the local people were in permanent danger due to the village's position between the Turkish villages of Obovanis and Trunis, whose residents were notorious for their blind bigotry. Even accompanied by armed forces, the Armenians of Kaghakik were unable to go to Agulis and Tanakert, that was not very far. They did not hope for any outside aid: the village relied only on its own forces that were very small in number and did not have a skilled leader.

The premeditated enemy attack was like a bolt from the blue. A young man from Kaghakik who had escaped these fights and taken up living in Meghri, later told me that in those days, the leaders of the armed forces of the village had mainly focused their attention on the mountain positions defending it from the north-east and north-west; that is why, they did not have enough forces to concentrate them on the roads stretching from the river-side and gardens.

Taking advantage of the foliage-rich gardens, surrounding Kaghakik from all sides and obstructing the view of the warriors in the mountain positions, the large enemy forces attacked the village at dawn and soon took possession of it. The defenceless people, mainly women and children, could hardly shelter themselves in the church and the adjacent newly-built school house, that were located a little outside the village, to the north-east of it.

Killing those who had not managed to leave their houses in due time, the Turks plundered the local dwellings and then set them alight.

The small number of warriors defending the mountain positions were unable to render any aid to the village. Instead of returning and moving those huddled up in the church and school to the mountains, they opened fire, something that was of no avail, and some time later, left their positions, ascending to loftier heights (some of them were with their young wives and sisters who provided food and water for the warriors). The Turks did not chase these men so that they easily overcame the lofty mountains and retreated to either Zangezour or the mountainous parts of Goghtan. Gradually encircling the school house and church, the Turkish forces demanded that the people within their walls should surrender, promising them safety of their lives. These people, however, did not meet their demand at once and attempted to resist them, probably, hoping that they would be somehow rescued. Gathering a large amount of wood and

hay and arranging them on the lower floor of the school, the Turks got the building alight. Horrified at the fire, the innocent civilians, who were now on the verge of suffocation, were obliged to yield up to the Turks' false promises.

The enemy first of all disarmed those bearing arms and killed them with cold steel. Singling out the young women and girls, they stripped the other women, children and aged men of their clothes and mercilessly hacked them to pieces...

On that day, the author of these lines went to the fields lying in the neighbourhood of Dasht Village to guard the people who were threshing and winnowing wheat there. They were afraid of working without armed protection, for murders and kidnapping were committed even in broad daylight. I acted as their so-called protector and often spent nights in the threshing-floors.

Around midday I suddenly saw very long columns of smoke rising up to the sky in the north of our village, beyond the mountains. I understood at once that Kaghakik was in flames. Fortunately, I had a horse which I mounted at once and returned to Agulis, totally horror-stricken. Without going home, I informed my friend Karo Ter-Zakarian that Kaghakik was burning down: Agulis lying in a gorge, nobody had noticed anything. We took several of our home-made bombs and rushed to rescue Kaghakik together with another of our friends who was by no means second to us in craziness.

Soon we reached the Turkish village of Tronis, which could not be left behind without fighting. We threw a couple of bombs over the houses, but nobody appeared to resist us: the explosion of the bombs made the Turkish cowards leave their homes and ascend the mountains, or shelter themselves in the northern part of the village, apparently thinking that we were large in number.

Reaching the centre of the village—thence the road led to Kaghakik—we heard crying voices from the nearby cellars and stables. The doors were locked and fastened with chains from outside. We immediately broke the locks and opened them: between 40 and 50 women and young ladies, brought here from Kaghakik, rushed out in tears, still crying for help. At this moment we were joined by a group of young men from Tanakert: consigning these tortured women to their care so that they would be taken to Tanakert, we hurried to Kaghakik, some of the women joining us to search for their dear ones. Horrified at this formidable scene, but happy that we had managed to save at least these 40 to 50 women and girls, we moved on.

We did not come across any Turks outside Tronis: the whole village seemed to have died away. At first we were advancing through the gardens and could not see anything, but the more we neared Kaghakik, the better we could see and feel the smoke. When we eventually reached the village, we found most of the houses totally emptied and in ashes: apparently, the bandits had left as soon as they were through with the carnage and plunder. My aunt lived in this village, so I hurried to find her house and extinguish the fire, but the women accompanying us hurried us to reach the church and school house where they said the people had huddled together.

Upon reaching the school yard, we stood petrified at the harrowing scene that opened before our eyes. The school and church were in flames, while the yard was

covered with what had remained from tens of aged men, women and children who had been brutally hacked to pieces with cold steel. Among those slaughtered I recognized one of my aunt's daughters together with her newly-born child: even this suckling had been stripped of his clothes. The babies of the pregnant women had been torn out of their mothers' bellies and now lay over these killed women. Some of the victims still breathed. Throughout all my life, never had I witnessed a scene more blood-curdling and heart-rending than this one. How very merciless and brutal the Turks were! I stood wondering about the reasons for such bitter hatred and enmity towards the Armenians who had always helped the Turks financially and never caused them any harm. These people had been tortured to death in an unspeakably cruel way. Only the Turks could be so merciless and blood-thirsty.

There was no time left: taking spades and mattocks, we started digging a common grave for these martyrs. It was getting dark, and the Turks could take us unawares at any time. Those wounded had breathed their last breath under the scorching sun. We buried all of them and left this once beautiful and prospering village with our heads hung, and a great pain rending our hearts. We again passed through Tronis with great caution, at some distance from each other. The village was shrouded in absolute silence: this is always the case with the Turks who are brave while dealing with defenceless people, but have their hearts in their mouths when facing armed people.

With no news from me all day long, my sick mother had grown very anxious about me. Returning home, I told her about the carnage of Kaghakik. As it turned out, my aunt's youngest daughter had been in the mountains together with her husband and both of them had found refuge in Zangezur. Several months later, escaping the massacres of Agulis, I somehow found myself in the large township of Meghri, where I met them and was told about the attack launched against Kaghakik and the resistance of its inhabitants that turned out a total failure.

Now the turn had come for Tanakert, which lay midway between Agulis and Tseghna, and through which these large townships maintained communication. Once Tanakert was occupied, Agulis would be severed from the outside world and appear in total encirclement by the Turks. After the devastation of Kaghakik, the Turkish forces launched a regular campaign against Tanakert under the command of Ediff Bey. Taking into account the significance of the village, the leaders attending to the military and national affairs of the district, Ashot Melik-Musian and Movses Gyulnazarian, concentrated some warriors recruited from the other Armenian villages of the district there. This action, however, proved of fatal consequences: these people, who fought heroically for the defence of their own villages, turned out indifferent to the fate of Tanakert and fled from some of the most important positions during the very first attack. These soldiers manifested sheer discrimination against the inhabitants of the village which was not their native place: troubled for only their own village and houses, they were not predisposed to sacrifice their lives for some other place so that they took to retreat upon the very first offensive.

Nevertheless, the struggle for Tanakert lasted rather long, the local forces, as well as Ashot Melik-Musian and Movses Gyulnazarian doing their utmost to defend it. Gradually, however, they lost all the important positions and were thus rendered unable to endure the pressure exerted by the outnumbering Turkish forces.

Through the efforts of Ashot Melik-Musian and Movses Gyulnazarian, the armed forces of the village managed to move the defenceless civilians to Tseghna without suffering heavy losses. The people were saved, but this prospering village shared the fate of Kaghakik, which had been consigned to history.

In its efforts to help the inhabitants of Tanakert, a small group from Meghri covered a distance of about 70 kilometres, crossed the hardly accessible mountain chain of Kaputjugh-Alagyaz and attacked the Turkish village of Obovanis-Onis under the command of David Vachian. This group included Hovakim Malumian, the brother of Aknuny, who enjoys immortal renown. They, however, were late: Tanakert and Kaghakik had already been levelled with the ground, and now heavy fights were launched for Der, as well as Verin and Nerkin Aza situated on the Arax river-side.

We have already spoken about the heroic resistance of these three villages, but now we shall give a brief account of it to provide a complete picture of the tragic devastation of most of Goghtan District.

Parallel with the fierce attack against Tanakert, a vast mob, comprising both bigoted Turks and armed soldiers, attempted to quickly take control over these villages with cannon and machine-guns. They remained under siege for rather a long time: it was not an easy task for the enemy to suppress the selfless Armenians' resistance and conquer them. The local forces, that constituted a meagre number, repelled the enemy, far outnumbering them, for many days. What happened particularly in the last days of siege was nothing but true trench warfare. The shortage of ammunition, however, put these valorous countrymen in a grave plight so that they gradually retreated to the northern quarters of Der and Verin Aza. Breaking through the siege, they resorted to regular withdrawal and managed to move the armless civilians to Tseghna, lying about twenty kilometres north, without panic and confusion.

The unexpected fall of Tanakert put Verin and Nerkin Agulis in a tragic situation. Half of the populations of these villages comprised Turks; besides, they appeared as kind of enclaves among the surrounding Turkish places so that it would be absolutely senseless to try to show any serious resistance with but several tens of young men - the 40 to 50 soldiers who were under the command of a certain Avetis from Paraka had secretly left at night, taking with them, just like Tovmas from Lijk did, the arms and ammunition that had been entrusted to their charge.

It so happened that Ashot Melik-Musian and the other leaders left Agulis, and this township was actually left without an influential military leader. Several villages of mountainous Goghtan were exposed to constant danger. The local forces, that were extremely limited in number, could not re-conquer Tanakert; nor did they even attempt that important step. All their appeals for help, secretly addressed to Zangezour,

remained without response. Agulis lost its formal status as the centre of the district authorities: this function was again vested in Ordubad City.

The Turkish authorities of Nakhijevan appointed Abbas Ghuli Bey Tayerov head of the district. One of the chief organisers of the massacres of Goghtan, this man was notorious for his bitter hatred towards the Armenians. Under the Tsarist authorities, he was the police chief of Ordubad District, and the everyday guest of the lavish dinners held by the Armenians of Agulis. In his turn, Abbas Ghuli Bey Tayerov appointed Mustafa Monshiyev, an ordinary clerk in Yerevan's Tsarist Court, police chief of Agulis and the district of the same name. Arriving at Agulis, this man, who had an instinct for killing, settled down in the splendid house of the Terians, a family of wealthy landowners.

The former post office of Agulis started functioning as the administrative centre of these new authorities. Police units were formed of the most brutal Musavatist Turks who breathed with hatred for the Armenians—many of them were notorious bandits and murderers. It was to their “charge” that Agulis was consigned to on the eve of its depopulation.

The Armenians of Agulis and, especially, those representing the conservative class pinned all their hopes on the fact that they had defended the Turks of Goghtan from Andranik's attacks, and that their neighbours would mutually help them in time of danger. The Turks did not spare unreal promises to lull them into a false sense of security.

After the establishment of Turkish rule, the Armenians of Ordubad District formed two bodies—this action was approved by the district head—one of them comprising twelve members, and the other six. The former were to attend to the local national affairs, and the latter were to act as mediators for peace in case the Armenians of mountainous Goghtan or Zangezur launched any hostility against the Turks.

The Turks did not keep their promises to defend Agulis at any cost, and gradually nocturnal acts of robbery and murder became more and more frequent there. The kidnapping of people from the fields of Nerkin Agulis had become a commonplace: it had practically become impossible to leave the village. Particularly heavy damage was inflicted upon the houses located in the remote parts of Verin Agulis: almost every night several of them were plundered and their inmates killed if they did not manage to resist properly or run away in due time.

The more active inhabitants of the village made every possible endeavour to inform—through secret messengers—the national authorities of the northern villages of Goghtan and Lernahayastan, as well as the representatives of the Republic of Armenia about their grave situation. They, however, did not receive any aid: the only information they got was that Ashot Melik-Musian had left for Yerevan, and fidayi (‘fidayi’ was a name used with reference to Armenian combatants fighting mainly in the mountains against the Turkish oppressors) leader Ghazar Kocharian (otherwise known as *Kachal*, *Bald* Ghazar) had come to Goghtan to head the self-defence of its mountainous villages.

The situation especially aggravated when the military bodies of Zangezur decided to get rid of a number of Turkish villages that had become a true scourge for the Armenian places of the district. Particularly severely were punished some Turkish villages of Okhchi-Shabadin District whose inhabitants repeatedly attacked the defenceless civilians from Western Armenia, as well as those from Nakhijevan following Andranik's troops.

On 25 November 1919, the armed forces of Zangezur, led by Commander-in-Chief Garegin Nzhdeh, quickly took control over the villages of Shabadin, Okhchi, Pirdovdan, Aralekh and others lying in the gorge of the Okhchi.

On 1 December 1919, after a fierce resistance offered to the attacking forces of Lernahayastan, the Tatar barbarians—they were between five and six thousand in number—inhabiting the Turkish villages lying in the gorge of Geghi, at the source of the river Vorotan, retreated to the districts of Nakhijevan and Yernjak without heavy losses, but starving and thirsty. Their eviction created a true hell in Kaghakik, Tanakert and both Agulises, that were now left completely defenceless. The Turks of these districts did not welcome their almost savage, dirty and lice-ridden compatriots and did not even help them financially. They found it highly undesirable that their fellow Muslims should take up living in the abandoned Armenian villages adjoining Nakhijevan City. In order to get rid of them, they directed them towards Agulis, inciting their wild instincts with the rich trophies and beautiful women awaiting them there. For certain Musavatist elements, the events of the gorge of Geghi were a golden opportunity to exterminate the Armenians of Agulis with the help of these savages, and in the meantime, appear absolutely innocent: it should be said that they succeeded in their plan perfectly.

Before the aforementioned eviction, on demand of the Turkish authorities of Ordubad, a delegation of three members was sent from Agulis to Nzhdeh to prevent any further attacks against the Turkish villages of Lernahayastan; otherwise, they threatened that Agulis would pay for that. This delegation had a secret mission to inform the national authorities of Lernahayastan about the tragic situation of Agulis. In the township of Meghri, these people met the representative of Garegin Nzhdeh, but the Armenians of Agulis remained unaware of the results of these talks, for the men they had sent were treacherously killed by the Turks of Ordubad on their way back, their corpses being thrown into the Arax. The blame for this loathsome act was cast on the Turkish refugees...

As we later learned, the military authorities of Lernahayastan had rejected the request of Agulis Armenians, declaring that their shrewdness would certainly help them escape danger... The devastation of the villages of the gorge of Geghi, however, proved fatal for our unfortunate township, which did not have even some several hundred warriors: in fact, their resettlement in Agulis was the last nail in its coffin.

The Armenians of Karjevan, Meghri and Kakavaberd, situated near Ordubad, attempted to come to an agreement with the Turks and put an end to the enmity existing between the two nations. For this purpose, a delegation, comprising a group of

influential people and led by the priest of Karjevan, was sent to Ordubad. However, after the talks, when the Armenian delegates were on their way back to their native village, they were killed by some bigoted young Turks right in the centre of the city, just a few steps away from the place of the negotiations.

Thus, the Armenians of the aforementioned villages had no other alternative but to rely on their own arms and forces.

Indeed, we knew that every district had its own serious problems. We also knew what a scourge the Turks of Okhchi and the gorge of Geghi were for Lernahayastan. Their incessant attacks had put Ghapan and Arevik in constant danger; moreover, these people had become important “allies” for the Musavatists in their plans to totally devastate Lernahayastan.

We do not aim at presenting a history of the events that took place in Lernahayastan: this is the business of future historians. Nor do we desire to lay the blame for the tragedy that struck our unsurpassed township on others. Still, as eye-witnesses to all these events, we repeat that this prospering township, boasting a high level of civilisation and rare cultural and historical values, fell victim to the mean intrigues of the Turkish dens formed out of the inhabitants of Okhchi-Shabadin and the gorge of Geghi. But for these events, it would, perhaps, be possible to save Agulis, especially given the fact that once, in the days of Khalil Bey, when Armenia faced a situation far more perilous, it had already escaped depopulation, being actually on the verge of final fall.

The barbarous Turkish savages flocked in the market of Agulis, as well as in the houses of the outskirts and the Turkish quarters. Realizing that something should be done to somehow save the situation that was fraught with grave danger, and having already lost all hopes of getting aid from the outside world, Aram Ter-Michaelian, one of the national leaders working in the township, asked Ediff Bey to move to Agulis to defend the village from within. Aram had lived in Constantinople for many years, knew Turkish and was on close terms with this man.

Meeting his request, Ediff Bey came to Agulis with some 15 to 20 soldiers and took up living in his [Aram's] house. His soldiers accommodated themselves in the adjoining house whose proprietors were not in the township at that time. Several times a week Ediff Bey went to Ordubad to attend to the affairs there. We cannot blame this Turkish officer for any direct outrage against the Armenians either during his sojourn in Agulis or before it. In those days, the lives, property and honour of Agulis Armenians depended solely on him, and nobody could hinder him from doing whatever he wished. He, however, outwardly manifested restraint, although evidently, he had that deceitfulness and flattery that characterize all Turks. Some time earlier, a number of outstanding people were arrested or taken to Ordubad under various pleas, and, indeed, this was done with his knowledge. They were charged with having secret relations with the Armenian authorities outside Goghtan. Although these accusations were absolutely groundless, most of them were tortured to death in prison or treacherously killed on their way from Ordubad to Agulis by criminals who remain unpun-

ished. Ediff Bey, who did not bother himself to protect these people, justified himself by saying that his small forces were unable to resist the multitude of blood-thirsty Turkish refugees and the local anti-Armenian elements.

After mid-December 1919, it became utterly difficult to leave houses in daylight: the Turkish refugees and their fellow Muslims that had gathered in Agulis from everywhere for plunder and devastation waited in ambush for the opening of the large gates of the village, ready to burst in at every moment. Their outrages were prevented only thanks to the Turkish soldiers and policemen.

Dasht Village of Nerkin Agulis was even more defenceless, and taking advantage of this, the wild mob of Turks attacked it in the shroud of night on 20 December. Unable to properly resist this vast throng, the Armenians of Dasht suffered several victims and abandoned their houses for Agulis, although the armed forces of this village insisted that they had better retreat to Tseghna by fighting.

Beginning with 23 December, the situation aggravated even further: the pressure exerted by the Turks who had surrounded the village and thronged its market intensified to such an extent that Ediff Bey suggested that the civilians gather in the central quarters where his small forces would be able to defend them more easily.

The morning of 24 December found the roads extending from Ordubad and the nearby villages to Agulis thronged by huge multitudes of Turks armed to the teeth. They hurried to this defenceless township to appease their insatiable longing for plunder and blood with animals that were to carry their trophies. Having absolutely lost their heads, the panic-stricken inhabitants of this village town, about two thousand in number, left all their belongings in the hands of these human-like beasts, trying to save only their lives in the central quarter with Ediff Bey and his soldiers.

By 9 o'clock in the evening, the Turkish vandals had already filled the remotest quarters of the village: breaking into house after house, they killed the sick and aged people who had not managed to run away, then seized whatever they saw, loaded their loot onto the animals and set the dwelling alight.

We lived in our ancestral house, which was located not far from St. Hovhannes Church, in Khetsadzor, the southernmost quarter in Agulis. My father, who was the only son of his parents having many daughters, had renovated it and added a second storey to it. Leaving the secondary parish school of Agulis, he, a hard-working pupil who had made great progress there, entered Gevorgian Seminary of Echmiatzin. When he graduated from this institution with honour, it was offered to him to continue his studies in Germany on condition that upon his return, he would enter the priesthood. Father, however, did not accept this suggestion: he stayed at the Seminary, where he taught and worked as senior inspector for many years.

Prominent Armenian linguist Hrachia Ajarian remembers my father with great warmth in his memoirs: "Coming out through the half-open door [of the inspectors'

common room at Gevorgian Seminary], I saw Martiros Hakhnazarian, who worked as senior inspector there. He was a modest, decent and kind man from Agulis, already advanced in years. He knew the vernacular of his birthplace well, and since I was then occupied with the study of various dialects, I made friends with him and embarked upon compiling a dictionary of Agulis dialect (later I included it in my Etymological Dictionary of Roots in the Armenian Language [*Hayeren Armatakan Bararan*] and *Study of Agulis Dialect*. Years later, while in Tabriz, I was deeply grief-stricken to hear that this noble man had fallen victim to the Turks' barbarities during the Armeno-Turkish fights.

"...Immediately after the highly unpleasant reception shown to me by Karapet Kostanian, Martiros Hakhnazarian approached me and asked: 'Have you come for the lessons of Turkish?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Wait a little, please. I shall now ring the bell, gather the pupils together, and then you will go to your lesson.' ”²⁹⁵

The preface of the *Study of Agulis Dialect* reads: "We embarked upon the study of Agulis vernacular in Echmiatzin between 1899 and 1900, and compiled the dictionary of Agulis Dialect (it is thoroughly attached to my book) together with Martiros Hakhnazarian from Verin Agulis, who taught at Echmiatzin's Gevorgian Seminary and was martyred during the massacres of Agulis, on 24 December 1919."²⁹⁶

Resigning from his post at Gevorgian Seminary, Father continued his teaching practice in his native village. After having worked in Agulis for more than fifteen years, he had some conflict with the conservative trustees of the local school and failing to come to an agreement with them, started working as a teacher and inspector for the schools of Kaghakik.

My grandfather had bequeathed to us a large garden and arable lands which secured our means of existence so that we lived quite a prospering life and my parents were able to help others, too.

Before getting married, Mother lived with her elder sister in Tiflis for a long time. When my sister left the secondary school of Agulis, she was sent to Tiflis' Hovnanian Female School. After her departure, Mother was unwilling to stay in Agulis and wanted all our family to move to Tiflis. Father, however, opposed this: he did not wish to do anything other than teaching and preferred to stay in his native village. Probably, Mother had a premonition of the impending danger and always felt unhappy in Agulis.

After the destruction of Dasht on 23 December 1919, the armed Turkish mob gathered in front of the large gates built on the approaches to Agulis, threatening to burst into the village at any moment. We were all in utter despair without knowing what to

295 Աճառյան Հ., Կյանքիս հուշերից, Երևան, 1967, էջ 202:

296 Աճառյան Հ., Զննություն Ազուլիսի բարբարոսի, էջ 5-6:

do, where to go and how to save our lives from certain death. Several days earlier, we had hidden all our valuables in built-in closets, hoping naively that the bandits would not find anything and we would come back as soon as peace was restored.

At those moments of unspeakable despondency, I felt utterly sorry for my poor parents as well as my younger brother and sisters. Throughout many years, they had established a household with the sweat of their brow, had given birth to children, and now they stood at a loss unable to decide how they were to save their offsprings from the imminent peril. I did not think about our belongings: I was ready to sacrifice everything for the salvation of my dear ones.

After a night spent in fear and horror, broke the sinister day of 24 December. It was impossible to stay home any longer: the armed Turkish barbarians who had already broken into the remotest houses either via the gardens or by breaking the gates were now killing those who had not managed to escape yet. We had absolutely no time and had to hurry. We locked our door, put the key beneath it and left our house to God's mercy. Hardly had half an hour passed when the bandits plundered and burnt away our paternal house, that had come into being throughout long years of hard work... Alas, what plans we had been making relating to that house.

Father suggested that we go to our fellow villagers gathered in the central quarter and share whatever was to befall them. I, however, disagreed with him, for I knew that they would not receive me with my arms, while I could not put them aside in those dangerous times; besides, I did not trust the Turks at all, especially given the fact that they were nursing a grudge against me.

All in tears, we started away, each of us carrying a small package. A little above our house extended a large yard in which had mostly gathered the poor families of the quarter and a large group of Armenians from Nerkin Agulis. Several young men stood on guard at its entrance to prevent any surprise attack by the enemy. They welcomed us and said they were waiting for darkness to cross the mountain to Tseghna. These people did not wish to go to the central quarter and consign themselves to Ediff Bey's or any other Turks' mercy. In the depth of my heart, I approved of this decision greatly and suggested that we should join them. Mother, however, had been ill for a long time and could hardly drag herself; that is why, Father found it impossible for her to overcome the mountain heights. Mother insisted upon our leaving her alone and saving ourselves, but my sisters, who were hardly 10 to 12 years old, could not take care of her. My brother, who was about 15 and had been looking after Mother all that time, could not use arms.

Finally, Father suggested that we go to his cousin Harutiun Hakhnazarian and consult him about our future actions. I abstained from disagreeing with him at that hard moment; besides, it would be very difficult for me to assume all responsibility for the whole family. Father was the head of the family and he was to decide how we were to act. He was to bear all responsibility for our lives. I was afraid of taking them to the mountains with me, for I was not sure if they would be able to endure all the hardships and would not remain midway. I did not want to be the one guilty of any disaster that

might strike them on the way: the Turks could attack us unexpectedly, engaging us in a desperate struggle for life.

Motivated by this reasoning, I agreed with Father and we moved towards my uncle Harutiun's house.

Harutiun Hakhnazarian, whom we called our uncle, was a man already rather advanced in years. One of the wealthiest people in Agulis, he had a big business in Yerevan, Eastern Iran, Moscow, as well as a number of other Russian cities together with his brothers and nephews. In the autumn of his life, he had returned to Agulis to enjoy a merited rest after many years of large-scale activity.

Uncle Harutiun enjoyed high authority with the national bodies of Agulis, but he was a very conservative person and as such, opposed any military action. Indeed, I did not mind living in good neighbourly relations with our Turkish fellow villagers, but it had become evident to me that they did not wish to live side by side with us: their only aim was to exterminate the Armenians just as they had already done in Nakhijevan City and the entire district of the same name. The Turks had only a single desire: to drive away the Armenians from Goghtan either by violence or peaceful means, take possession of their real estate and movable property, and to exterminate them altogether, if possible.

It was mostly through uncle Harutiun's efforts that Andranik cancelled his planned military action against Ordubad City. Having lost both his wife and his daughter together with her husband, he now lived all by himself in a large, magnificent mansion: his only son was studying in Moscow and very seldom visited Agulis.

Harutiun's house was located in a spacious and well cultivated garden on the way to the market. He received us through the door opening from the side of the garden, as the houses adjoining its principal entrance were already being robbed. Having hardly stayed there for half an hour, we heard reports coming from Harutiun's neighbour Hovhannes Ter-Zakarian's house: the latter had stayed there together with his son and another man, and now the three of them were offering a fierce resistance to the Turks attempting to take the house.

Leaving uncle Harutiun's mansion through the garden door, we appeared on the road leading to the market. Father and his cousin decided to take us to the central quarter, which now sheltered the majority of the local population. Hardly had we made several steps, however, when we came across a group of our fellow villagers returning from this quarter, where there was no more space to accommodate them. Perplexed and at a loss, we stood on the road for some time. All of a sudden, somebody suggested going to Usta Poghos' house situated at the foot of the mountain, a little above the place we were at that time. He was a much respected and honourable person in our village. His two sons, Petros and Karapet, who were veterans of World War I, were renowned for their valour and wide military experience. They were married, their families living together with their parents in the same house.

They received us cordially and we were able to take a short rest in their place. Taking advantage of the good opportunity, I suggested that Petros and Karapet should

leave their house together with their parents and families and lead us to Tseghna at least by fighting. We were to proceed by ascending the mountain rising behind Usta Poghos' house: I thought we could find other armed people among the escaping civilians who would help us in our efforts to defend the rear of the retreating people and save at least this handful of innocent villagers.

The brothers, however, turned down my suggestion. They were unwilling to leave their house: besides, their parents were very old and could not ascend the mountain. They had decided to defend themselves against the bigoted Turkish mob at any cost and escape captivity, even if they had to sacrifice their lives for that.

And they *did* fulfill their decision, fighting heroically against the Turkish policemen, soldiers and armed throng for two days. Eventually, they ran out of cartridge and were wounded in several parts of body. In the meantime, the Turks managed to pull down the rear wall of their house, fill it with hay and set the building alight. Seeing that this was the end, their parents and wives took poison, while they themselves committed suicide and left this vain world.

The weeping of the children and women grew louder and more bitter, and this could attract the Turkish policemen's and soldiers' attention. We had no time: it would soon strike midnight, and we had no other alternative but to seek refuge on the mountain and make for Tseghna. Father knew all the roads very well.

Uncle Harutiun asked me to take his bag and help him ascend the mountain: he was very fat and his winter coat restrained his free movement altogether. However, first of all I had to help up my sick mother: my brother and I were carrying her upwards by holding her by the arms. I promised Harutiun to come back for him as soon as we reached the summit with Mother, but as we shall later see, a surprise attack by the enemy made this utterly impossible.

When I returned to Agulis from Tabriz in 1922, I stayed with a Turkish friend of mine for two days. He was a very noble young man who could not put up with the carnage perpetrated in my native village and even reproached his fellow Muslims for their meanness and brutality with tears in his eyes. He told me about the tragedy that had befallen Harutiun Hakhnazarian after he had proved unable to surmount the mountain. He fell behind and was caught by the policemen who first seized his bag, demanded that he should undress and then killed him with cold steel. The robbers entered into an argument over the package and were even about to kill each other for it, but eventually they agreed to divide it. About three or four policemen divided equally over two thousand rubles in gold, some more money, as well as certain valuable things—later they crowed about the riches they had gained...

I was deeply moved to hear this story. Uncle Harutiun had spared nothing to help the Turks, and his only wish was to see the Armenians and Turks living side by side in peace. Nobody had bothered himself to bury his tortured body so that it had become prey to hungry dogs and wild beasts.

It was difficult to ascend the mountain in dark. Alternating with my father and brother, I was slowly taking Mother upwards by holding her by the arms. For several times, she asked us to leave her and save ourselves, but we kept encouraging her on and on. The people around us gradually grew numerous, while the wails and weeping of the women and children were becoming more and more bitter. It was not an easy task to establish order and discipline among these wretched people. Halfway between the foot and summit of the mountain, we heard shots from below and were ordered to go back. We attempted to quicken our steps and cross the mountain as soon as possible: we naively thought that we had extricated ourselves from the human-like beasts, but we were badly mistaken.

Only some twenty to twenty-five steps separated us from the summit when some Turks, waiting in ambush for us right at the top, started showering us with bullets and attacked us in a chain, this being like a bolt from the blue to us. No pen can describe the formidable panic and horror that permeated through our terrified people. About sixty years have passed since that fatal night, but I still hear the wails, screams, cries for help and heart-rending sobs... Father and Mother were silently knocked down, while my brother and sisters were lost in the crowd and slid downwards from the steep slope. I cannot explain how the enemy bullets whistled past me without touching me. I immediately threw myself on the ground, overpowered with such deep despair that I even directed my revolver to my temple in an attempt to commit suicide. I did so not because I was afraid to fall into the hands of those mean beasts, but because I could not put up with the treacherous plot to which I had become witness. Fortunately, I quickly pulled myself together, considering it faintheartedness and cowardice to succumb to the instantaneous thought of suicide. I was imbued with a feeling of vengeance and I decided to die only fighting. I do not know whether the bullets shot from my gun did take revenge for my poor parents and fellow villagers, but when I ran out of cartridge and took to my revolver, I found myself all alone around the corpses of the martyrs.

Throwing away my gun—there was no time to charge it—I started shooting from my revolver and ran towards a gorge extending on my left. I again lay down on the slope. The bandits in the positions above me started firing in my direction: the bullets whistled over my head, but darkness hindered the Turks from locating me exactly. For several times I fired in their direction, but then I decided to stop shooting and crawl away from that hell. Seeing that I did not fire any more, the Turkish brigands decided that I had been killed and ceased firing, too. Now I had to find a more convenient hiding-place for me so that I would be able to defend myself in case anybody approached me from below or from above. I crept forward and hid myself below a large block of stone.

The desperate screams and awful panic were followed by deadly silence. Those who had fallen down the mountain were either killed or taken captive. From below I could hear Usta Poghos' sons' incessant firing. Suddenly I heard my sisters' voices

who were endlessly calling me by name and asking me down. I did not hear my brother's voice, but was happy that at least my sisters were still alive... Poor little creatures! How very horror-stricken and tearful their voices were... Well, but how could I answer their calls if the Turkish patrol were standing right above my head, between twenty to twenty-five steps away, with guns in their hands? Besides, the policemen guarding below could learn my place, come towards me and engage with me again, while I could not fight them, as my sisters were their hostages. What was I to do? To go down meant to directly fall into the Turks' hands. I was overpowered with unspeakable despair: sixty years have already passed since that sinister day, but I still hear their terrified voices which rend my heart cruelly. Throughout all my life, I have suffered terribly from the thought that I did not have the necessary valour and determination to save my brother and sisters from the Turks.

When I returned to Agulis in 1922, my noble Turkish friend told me I had been right in my decision not to go down to my sisters: the Turkish policemen and an Arab soldier serving them had made them call me down so that they would get even with me at once. Upon sunrise on the second day, the policemen had ascended the mountain and failing to find my corpse near those of my parents, they had regretfully understood that I had escaped falling into their hands.

Huddled up below a big stone, I was pondering about what I was to do to extricate myself from that infernal place. In the darkness of night, I heard the crowd of bigoted Turks break into house after house, and several minutes later my ears caught the martyrs' wails and cries for help. Evidently, not all of the local inhabitants had managed to leave their houses and join those in the central quarter: the house employees, as well as the aged and the children had stayed home and were now exposed to formidable butchery by the human-like Turkish beasts. Agulis had been reduced to a true hell, and no pen can describe the tragedy that had fallen to its lot.

The light coming from the burning houses lit the mountains, and at every moment the Turkish patrol could find my hiding-place. The sense of imminent danger forced me into determination and I decided to creep up the mountain slope and go to Tseghna passing by the enemy patrol to ask for help for Agulis, that now lived the last moments of its existence.

First of all, I threw away the package I had been carrying on my back: later, however, I was to regret this imprudent action, for it could be of great help to me at the moments of starving. When exposed to extreme peril, man is not able to reason properly, for to him life is above everything: besides, I thought that no material wealth could be of any interest to me after I had lost all my dear ones. I also threw away my coat and cap of black fur that uncle Harutiun had given to me upon our leaving his house. I began creeping upwards. The most dangerous thing was, indeed, to leave the Turkish patrol

behind without being noticed by them. They were not large in number: I could clearly hear their talking voices. The darkness and sleet were a great help to me: creeping like a snake, I left them very quietly and was soon quite far away from their view. I breathed a sigh of relief and was filled with belief that I had escaped those monsters.

Approaching the Turkish village of Vanand, I heard the ringing of bells hung from the necks of mules and other quadrupeds. I jumped off the road and hid below some bushes. A short time later, I saw a large group of Turks who were returning from Agulis talking to each other, their loot loaded onto these animals.

I was overpowered with unspeakable vexation and sorrow: how could I allow these people to pass me so easily after they had slaughtered thousands of innocent men with their own hands? I had an instantaneous desire to take them unawares, knock down several of them, to at least in this way take vengeance for our magnificent village and its people who had been tortured to martyrdom. I, however, restrained myself, for the row of the muleteers and stablemen was too long: I could kill only some of them, while the others would either run away or hide in the mountains, thus hindering my movement forward. Moreover, the Turkish patrol, who were within just some hundred steps of me, could surround me from all sides, whereas I could not fight them with my pistol. Thus, I hearkened to the voice of prudence and waited until they had left me behind. Then I directed my steps towards the newly-destroyed village of Tanakert through mountains and gorges—for the sake of caution, I moved off the road to avoid meeting any Turks.

Advancing amidst the mountains and ravines for more than two hours, I descended to a place of densely-standing trees. I could hear the babble of the abundant river Trunyats from afar: understanding that I had reached the neighbourhood of Tanakert, I took off my shoes and crossed the river, the cold water vivifying my exhausted feet. I entered the village gardens and moved on, my pistol in my right hand. Suddenly, my foot sank down into something soft and I fell down. The sound of my falling down made a group of wild dogs or, perhaps, wolves run away frightened from that place. I thought the wolves had come to devour the bodies of the animals that had been killed or had died there. However, peering through the darkness and touching whatever fell at my feet, I understood that around me lay naked corpses of men and women and was horror-stricken. One of my shoes had come out of my foot during my falling down: getting up and paving my way with caution amidst the dead bodies, I sat down a little far from them, put on my shoe and attempted to leave that dreadful place, that had terrified me beyond imagination, as soon as possible.

I do not wish to go into much detail about the feelings and physical and psychological torture that I lived through all my way. My pistol imparted courage to me, but I was particularly invigorated by the thought that I had to hurry to Tseghna and bring some aid for my fellow villagers: I could not believe that the people gathered in the central quarter were in danger and hoped that I would manage to save at least them.

Filled with these depressive feelings, I quietly entered the village through a narrow street: it was still shrouded in the smoke rising from the burnt houses. I hurried to tra-

verse the village in a south-northerly direction and ascend the mountains: I was afraid to meet Turkish soldiers in the local positions, but at the same time, I was sure on that day all the Turks were busy plundering the riches of Agulis so that I could hardly find any of them in this village.

Here, however, the mountains were loftier and the gorges deeper; that is why, they were tiresome and very difficult of access. The day would soon break, putting me in rather a dangerous situation so that I pulled up the last remnants of my strength and overcame all the obstacles. The sleet had soaked through my head and clothes.

Eventually, having walked for many hours and surmounted several mountains and gorges, I found myself in a deep ravine, with a rockier mountain rising right opposite me, a fact that drove me to despair. I decided to take some rest underneath the nearby bushes: I felt drowsy and could hardly resist the temptation of lying down and going to sleep, but I knew once I did so I could freeze in that cold weather of December or become prey to hungry wolves. I quenched my thirst by eating some snow. When I suddenly put my hand in my pocket, I found I had some dried fruit there: it could somehow vivify me before I reached the village and found bread.

The sun had already risen. I started studying my surroundings and suddenly caught sight of several human shadows on the summit of the lofty mountain: they kept walking to and fro, evidently, thus trying to protect themselves against the cold and wind. From the place where I was, however, I could not hear their voices. A short time later, in broad daylight I saw that they were armed guards defending a position there.

It still remained obscure to me in what place I was at that time: it could be a Turkish one. I had not been to Tseghna previously and could only guess at its exact location. I thought that if it was an Armenian village, I would certainly soon hear the peal of its church bells. In case it was a Turkish one, the mullah would soon begin his morning preaching. Never had I waited for the ringing of church bells so impatiently. I strained my ears and started waiting. Hardly had half an hour passed when I heard the toll of the bells from afar: never had it seemed so sweet and encouraging to me.

In those days, I was not in the habit of keeping a diary, and today, when sixty years have passed, I am consigning to paper my bitter experiences and psychological torture only from memory. Despite this, however, I remember clearly how happy, enthusiastic and hopeful the chime of bells made me. At that moment I felt my sufferings had not been futile and believed I had been saved from the carnage of Agulis. I immediately rose to my feet, as if vivified by the toll of bells: the mountain opposite me did not seem that lofty any more and I started ascending it quickly, although my shoes had completely worn out on the way I had covered. Advancing a little, I whistled loudly for several times to attract the guards' attention: in the meantime, I also started gesticulating wildly so that they would see me.

A short time later, the patrol noticed me, and several of them came down rapidly, with their guns ready to shoot at any time for the sake of caution. Being able to see the mountain path in the daylight, I moved to meet them. It took them a quarter of an hour to reach me. Learning that I came from Agulis, they told me they had seen the smoke

of its burning houses and had thus learned that a great calamity had befallen our village. They did not know exactly what had happened to our village: I was actually the first person to escape to Tseghna.

After I had had some rest on the mountain top, one of these guards led me to the village. It was still very early in the morning; that is why, I decided not to disturb anybody and sat down near a bridge in the village square. Seeing that I was really saved, only now did I understand what a grave disaster had struck me and what heavy losses I had suffered.

The Armenian patrol who had led me to the village told Movses Gyulnazarian, the commander of Goghtan's armed forces, about the massacre perpetrated in Agulis and my narrow escape from it. Assuming that some other inhabitants of Agulis might have run away to the mountains, he ordered a group of soldiers to move towards Agulis to find and lead the survivors of that carnage to Tseghna.

I was standing near the bridge in the square of the village when Movses Gyulnazarian came to see me. I knew him from Echmiatzin's Gevorgian Seminary: he was my senior by a few years but his brother was my class-mate and I went to their house in Oshakan for several times, where I enjoyed the kind hospitality of their family.

When the Seminary closed due to the outburst of the war, Movses entered a Russian Officers' Training School, after which he assumed service in the Russian army for a short period. When the Russian troops abandoned the Caucasian front, Movses voluntarily put himself under the control of Yerevan's newly-established authorities. When the Turkish forces withdrew from Caucasia and the Allied Powers were victorious in the World War I, Movses Gyulnazarian came to Goghtan together with Ashot Melik-Musian, who had been appointed head of the district, while he himself was to serve as the chief of the local military and police forces.

When the Turkish mob devastated the prospering village of Kaghakik thus putting the innocent civilians of Tanakert, lying between Tseghna and Agulis, on the verge of grave danger, Movses Gyulnazarian and Ashot Melik-Musian moved to this village to personally organise and supervise of its self-defence. With the enemy having concentrated a large number of forces against Tanakert, these two devotees were hardly able to support and defend the retreating population and move them safely elsewhere.

Later Ashot Melik-Musian went to Yerevan to ask for additional forces for the defence of Goghtan and, especially, Agulis, while Movses stayed in Tseghna to lead the self-defence of several villages until the arrival of the expected aid.

Thanks to his unusual valour and devotion to the cause of the salvation of his people, Movses organised the local forces in such a way that they successfully repelled the almost daily attacks of the enemy.

Seeing my inconsolable state, Movses immediately took me to the house where he himself stayed. The hosts who were noble and well-to-do people gave me a most cordial welcome, provided me with a new shirt and warm clothes, then suggested that I wash and have breakfast with them. Then we again went to the village square, for we were told that some other survivors of the massacre of Agulis had reached Tseghna.

In the square I saw one of my best friends, Karo Ter-Zakarian and a couple of armed young men who had helped several families, including a few aged people, get to Tseghna.

One of the wealthy inhabitants of the village who owned a silk factory took my friend and several others to his place, the other residents of Agulis being accommodated in his friends' and relatives' houses.

Mrs. Ter-Gevorgian, who was a relative of mine on the maternal side (she was the mother of Sergei Ter-Gevorgian, who lived in Teheran), sent Karapet (he was called Kapit for short) to Movses for permission to move me to their place. Unwilling to become a burden for Movses, especially taking into account the fact that he himself was a guest in the house where he lived, I decided to go to my relative's. Mrs. Ter-Gevorgian, an elderly woman dressed in the ancient costume of Agulis, welcomed me with such warmth and affection that for a moment I forgot the unspeakable torture I had lived through the previous night. However, we were unable to reconcile ourselves to the thought that we had lost Agulis beyond restitution together with all our dear ones, some of whom were tortured to death right before my eyes.

Among the Armenian refugees who had found refuge in Tseghna was Karapet Baghdian who had reached this village together with his elder brother's wife Sofik. They had been in the same group with my parents and me. When the Turks waiting in ambush at the top of the mountain attacked us unexpectedly, the retreating people were unspeakably panic-stricken: as has already been mentioned, most of them slipped down to the foot of the mountain suffering injuries. In that chaos and panic Mrs. Sofik lost her two-year-old twin daughters: their loss put her into inconsolable mourning, and now nothing could comfort her, although her son had been saved and got to Tseghna with her.

Karapet Baghdian told me that he had seen my brother and two younger sisters at the foot of the mountain. As I have already written, the Turkish armed forces had encircled all those who had fallen down from the top and demanded that my sisters call me by name loudly. However, as I have already said, I could neither answer their calls or go down due to the closeness of the enemy.

So we took up living in Tseghna. To avoid becoming a burden to our hosts, my friend decided to make a cloth-weaving machine so that we might be able to earn our living in that way. While in Agulis, he had made one with his father's help and worked it successfully. It took him a long time to make another loom all by himself, but he managed to accomplish the task. By that time, both of us had moved to a house that Kapit had put at our disposal free of charge and as soon as the machine was ready, we started our work to test our skills in the field.

In those days, prominent fidayi Ghazar Kocharian (known as Kachal Ghazar), the Commander General of the Armed Forces of Goghtan, visited Tseghna and came to see us in our new workshop. He liked our way of working very much and recruited us into the army so that we would weave cloth for his soldiers. He allotted a special food portion to us, promised to provide us with the necessary amount of wool and help improve our loom.

Destiny, however, had another unpleasant surprise in store for us. We knew that the Armenians of Nerkin and Verin Aza were fighting selflessly against the large number of Turkish forces that had encircled them from all sides. Running out of ammunition and food, the warriors of these villages decided to break through the circle of siege: fighting heroically against the enemy all over their way that was about 20 kilometres in length they managed to move the unarmed civilians to Tseghna almost without serious losses.

Among these wretched people who had been reduced to refugees I found my old friend Karapet Hambardzumian, who was as an elder brother to me in Gevorgian Seminary and later in Julfa, where both of us served as volunteers in a military body established in that border city (it was under the jurisdiction of the central government of Yerevan).

The inhabitants of Tseghna accommodated these people, amounting to more than a thousand, in the buildings in the neighbourhood of the local church as well as in the church and school-house proper, but they proved unable to provide them with food as well: cut off from the outer world and busy with only the organisation of their self-defence, they had run out of provisions during the winter months, and even if some people still had anything stored, they kept it for a rainy day.

With the arrival of the inhabitants of Verin and Nerkin Aza, Tseghna found itself in still a graver plight: the famine-stricken refugees ate even all the cats and dogs of the village. When gradually the weather grew warmer, these starving and emaciated people flooded into the nearby fields and mountains that were now covered with vegetation, trying to appease their hunger with plants and vegetables. Some of them were careful enough to “enjoy” this unusual food provided by nature only after washing and cooking it, but most of them ate whatever fell into their hands right in the fields, without even knowing if it was edible or not. Many of these miserable souls paid a heavy price for their imprudence, for they fell seriously ill. In the aftermath of this vegetarianism, the faces and bodies of the refugees grew green.

In order to somehow overcome the danger of starvation and provide meat for the armed forces, every village had set up a group of daring young men who went to the rear of the nearby Turkish villages every night, attacked the shepherds unexpectedly and took several head of animals fit for slaughter to their villages together with the shepherd. Besides, there were also special groups of young men who could endure the cold: in winter months they crossed the mountains of Kaputjugh and moved to Zangezur, whence they brought wheat and other cereals on their backs for the army and refugees. All these, however, could not eliminate the ghost of famine which grew graver with every single passing day.

When the weather grew warmer and the snowstorms raging on the mountains of Kaputjugh separating Goghtan from Zangezur abated a little, a number of families attempted to surmount these mountains, which were over 5,000 feet high, and move to Zangezur. However, only the young and the strong among them were able to overcome the hardships of the route, whereas numerous aged men and, especially, women were buried alive under the perpetual snow of these mountains.

In those days of the utmost despair and severe predicament, on 20 March 1920, Tseghna had the honour of receiving Commander Garegin Nzhdeh, the leader of the armed forces of Lernahayastan, who had arrived from Zangezur via the mountains of Kaputjugh, whose height totaled more than 4,000 metres. With his unexpected arrival, the surviving four to five Armenian villages of the district, which were in a tight encirclement and fought desperately against the Turkish hordes, were filled with great hopes.

Nzhdeh planned to do what Andranik intended to carry out in 1918, namely to launch a blitzkrieg against Ordubad and conquer it together with the Turkish villages of its neighbourhood. In this way, he would be able to lift the blockade of the highway leading from Karjevan and Meghri to Goghtan, and put the still intact Armenian villages under his protection. In case he started an attack against Ordubad, the army of Lernahayastan would rush to support him from Karjevan, Meghri and other villages of Arevik District.

Nzhdeh was to launch the attack planned for 21 March from the neighbourhood of Paraka, and my friend Karo Ter-Zakarian and I were to go there. Almost without encountering serious resistance, the Armenian armed forces occupied a number of villages within a single day and entered Vanand. Upon reaching there, my friend and I searched for female Armenian captives who might be brought there from Agulis, but the local Turkish inhabitants had totally abandoned the entire village, even taking their animals along.

From Vanand we directed ourselves to the Turkish village of Tronis, where the Armenian warriors had met with resistance. At the top of a mountain rising nearby we came across Garegin Nzhdeh and Movses Gyulnazarian: from this height an Armenian mountain gun was bombarding the village lying below. The gunner was an officer named P. Papikian, a young serviceman from the Bulgarian army: the shells of his gun, however, exploded on the opposite mountains instead of falling over the village, causing Nzhdeh and Movses to laugh heartily.

When we reached there, we were charged with guarding the gun, and the two army leaders descended towards Tronis without any body-guards to personally lead its conquest, which took us rather a long time. Among the Turkish forces were several skilled gunners who hindered the Armenians from occupying the northern parts of the village. Several Armenian fighters had already fallen victim to their shells; others had fallen seriously ill due to the overeating of meat and drinking the cold river water. It was now vital for the Armenian troops to finish the conquest of this village in all haste and move to the front of Agulis.

When Nzhdeh and Movses were descending the mountain towards Tronis, the Turks opened fire on them. Although the distance separating these two leaders and the village was great, Nzhdeh sometimes bent down or lay on the ground and rose to his feet again when the shower of bullets had abated a little. Movses, however, was extremely indifferent to the intensity of fire; moreover, he went forward and even mocked Nzhdeh for his carefulness and joked with him endlessly. Many years have

passed since then, but I still remember this valorous officer, whose courage served as an example for the young men of Tseghna. From the very first moments of fire he hurried to the positions and kept the particularly heavily endangered lines under his constant attention.²⁹⁷

Reaching the village, Nzhdeh and Movses led their fighters against the resisting buildings and positions, and within a short time, the surviving Turks were compelled to withdraw to the mountains. The bombardment stopped, and we started preparations for moving our gun to the front of Agulis.

Seeing how exhausted we were—we had not had a sleep throughout the night and had walked from one village to the other—suggested that we have some rest until we were ordered to advance.

We had probably slept for several hours when Nzhdeh and Movses, who had returned without reaching Agulis, woke us up and ordered to load the gun onto the horse and go back to Tseghna. They told us that our compatriots fighting in the mountains of Agulis had encountered resistance and a prominent serviceman from Paraka who was one of our best friends had been shot to death in the forehead.²⁹⁸ Besides, Nzhdeh had received an urgent letter asking him to return to Lernahayastan immediately to repel a major Turkish attack against Zeyva.

We loaded the gun onto the horse and returned to Tseghna in low spirits, for we had failed to punish the Turks of Agulis and Ordubad for the harrowing carnage they had perpetrated in our native village.

As far as I remember, on 26 March Movses went back to Yerevan with Nzhdeh, who was hurrying to Lernahayastan. Although now Tseghna was left without a commander-in-chief, we did not yield up and continued resisting the enemy during their repeated offensives. After Nzhdeh's return, the Turks launched several attacks against Tseghna to gain revenge for their losses, but every time they were met with a strong resistance and had to run away panic-stricken, suffering still more casualties.

During the massacres of Agulis, several private individuals put up a truly heroic resistance against the enemy. Apart from Usta Poghos' sons Karapet and Petros, my friend Karo's father Hovhannes Ter-Zakarian fought bravely against the Turkish bandits. His elder son Yeghishe, a retired officer from the Russian army, lived in a splendid house in the central quarter (it belonged to the girl with whom he had got betrothed). In the last days of the village's existence, he took his four sisters there, but his father refused to leave his house, his younger son Karo, then a youth some 17 to 18 years of age, staying with him.

²⁹⁷ Movses Gyulnazarian was shot in the forehead near the bridge of the river Hrazdan during the February Revolt, in 1921. The entire city of Yerevan mourned over the loss of this brave, devoted officer.

²⁹⁸ According to Avo, the Armenian warriors wounded during the fighting of Agulis included Ghazar Kocharian, but a short time later, we met him safe and sound in Bist (**Աւօ**, «Նժդեհ», կեանքն ու գործունեությունը, նշարներ և վկայություններ, Բէյրութ, 1968, էջ 98).

About half an hour after we had gone to uncle Harutiun's in the evening, we heard sharp reports from Hovhannes Ter-Zakarian's house, that was located in his immediate neighbourhood. During the firing, Karo and his father were joined by another person—I do not remember his name. When the enemy attack grew fiercer, Hovhannes made Karo run away over their roof (he eventually found refuge in Tseghna).

After the firing that lasted all night, Hovhannes continued his resistance on the following day (25 December) as well, killing several Turks notorious for their brutality. During the offensive, the enemy bullets caused several wounds to both Hovhannes Ter-Zakarian and his aid, while the Turks managed to ascend to the roof of the house from the street, destroy its ceiling, fill it with hay and set it alight. Knocking down several blood-thirsty Turks, Hovhannes was buried in the ruins of his own house together with his comrade-in-arms.

The enemy met with resistance by Panos, a soldier from Hin (Old) Jugha, who had got married in our village and lived in the house of his father-in-law. In the last days of Agulis, he spent nights in his garden together with his wife to guard it against any attacks. His wife being pregnant for already several months, they could not run away through the mountains so that they hid themselves in their wine press. The light of their lamp, however, gave them away. When the Turks entered the garden and demanded that they should surrender, they were met with gun shots, and a long, heavy fighting ensued. Eventually, the enemy turned to their mean method: gathering dry wood and hay in the garden, they heaped them near the entrance of the wine press and made a fire by pouring oil onto them. Almost suffocated to death, Panos and his wife attempted to leave their hiding-place by fighting, but both of them were shot to death right at its door. Only the Turkish barbarians can answer the question whether Panos did take vengeance for their lives and their unborn child.

On the night of 24 December, when the armed Turkish throng was plundering and burning away house after house in the township, the people gathered in the central quarter were highly endangered. When the infuriated Turks threatened to attack these desperate and depressed villagers, Ediff Bey declared that his small number of soldiers and policemen would not be able to restrain the furious crowd and defend them any longer. In those days, he was even said to have been injured by a bullet, allegedly, because of defending the Armenians.

Taking into account this perilous situation, he ordered his men to move these defenceless people, perhaps, more than a thousand in number, to several Armenian houses adjoining the Turkish quarter (he promised to soon move them to a safer place). Surrounded by soldiers and policemen, and incessantly hearing threats by the Turkish crowd, which had been joined by even Turkish women, these people were taken away to the aforementioned dwellings, where they were joined by other Armenian families that had had a miraculous escape from the carnage (now the bandits were free to plunder the wealthy Armenian houses of the central quarter as well). Huddled together in several houses (in one of them lived notorious bandit Vahab Effendi), these people lived through a formidable ordeal until the following day, 25 December. Soon district

head Tayerov and the sheikh of Ordubad City, who was the leader of the crowd of bigoted Turks, came to Agulis, apparently, to finally determine the fate of the local Armenians.

Before dinner, at about 11 o'clock, Ediff Bey declared that he was to accompany the sheikh, the district head and several other influential Turks to meet Turkish Commander Ali Ehsan, who was allegedly coming to Ordubad from Tabriz. During his absence, police chief Mustafa Monshiyev and Vahab Effendi were to replace him. It was evident that by leaving Agulis, he was consigning the poor, innocent civilians to slaughter by the blood-thirsty Turkish monsters.

Left all by themselves, these people were subjected to unspeakable torture. Firstly, all of them were stripped of their clothes under the plea of search and were thus robbed of all the jewelry they had. Then the men were singled out and taken to the yard of the opposite house inhabited by notorious bandit Mustafa, a runaway from a prison in Siberia. He lived there with his wife, who worked as a maid in my uncle Yarvelian's house. Upon leaving Agulis, they temporarily put it under her charge, but the keys to its rooms and chests were kept with Father, and we often went there to check the condition of the rooms and furniture.

While moving the men to the yard of this house, Mustafa Monshiyev hid his former chief, judge Ivan Ter-Antonian, in a closet in the room where only the women had been left. These women dressed a man named Sergei Meserkhanian in female clothes and hid him in the closet where Ter-Antonian was. When they were gradually moved out of the room, and the men shot to death in the opposite yard, these two men jumped out of the room by rather a high window overlooking the rear garden. Passing through house after house and paving their way amidst numerous corpses, they reached the gardens located outside Agulis and hid there. While the Turks were busy slaughtering the innocent people in the darkness of night, Ivan Ter-Antonian and Sergei Meserkhanian wandered in the mountains and, eventually, reached Tseghna. Becoming witness to all the harrowing ordeal the Armenians of Agulis passed through, walking amongst the burnt houses for many hours, passing by several hundred hacked bodies some of which still breathed, these two survivors conveyed most important and unquestionable information relating to these events: we ourselves have learned many details personally from them.

When I was in Tseghna, on 26 December, the aforementioned Armenian guards found these two men exhausted and emaciated, while conducting reconnaissance in the mountains, and brought them to the village. After long wandering, Sergei Meserkhanian went to Tabriz, where he found his German wife and two children—they had been taken there from Ordubad. Ivan Ter-Antonian went to Yerevan and presented a detailed account of the massacres of Agulis to the authorities of the Republic of Armenia.

When the men were separated from the group and taken to the yard where butcher Mustafa lived—he was from Tronis Village—it was declared to them with all cruelty that Ali Ehsan Pasha had ordered to exterminate all the local Armenians.

Under the supervision of Vahab Effendi, the Turkish soldiers, policemen and the armed Turkish young men moved their victims out of the ground floors, arranged them in rows and started shooting them to death. Alexandre Zazian, a man who had a miraculous escape from this massacre and found refuge in Tseghna, told us that Monshiyev and Vahab kept shouting in Turkish that they had better kill them with daggers and spare the bullets...

When the men were being arrayed, Zazian started running through the garden towards the wall of the neighbouring yard, the bullets fired after him escaping him by miracle. Reaching a low wall, he jumped over to its other side, left behind the gardens of the other house and hid somewhere for a while. After it had got dark, he passed through the ruins of the local market and ascended the mountains. Wandering throughout the night, he reached the gardens in the neighbourhood of Tseghna: it was here that the Armenian guards found him half dead and brought him to the village. When he told us the details of the horrible blood-shed committed in Agulis, his survival seemed nothing but a miracle. His experiences made him a daring, valorous warrior: every time he heard gun shots from the mountain positions of Tseghna, he was the first to rush to the patrol's aid at lightning speed. Later he moved to Babolsar City of Iran, where his father lived, and got married there, giving birth to three daughters. Unfortunately, he was not destined to live a long life and left this vain world while still young, unable to forget those harrowing days and the loathsome crimes of the Turks. I did not manage to meet him in Iran in his life-time.

The massacre continued until the evening of 25 December, the slaughter of the men being followed by that of the aged women and children. In that blood-soaked yard, Monshiyev himself killed tens of children with his own hands, before the very eyes of their parents. After the Sovietization of Nakhijevan District, this mean beast moved the female captives of Agulis to Tabriz and sold them to the Patriarchate of Tabriz Diocese at a gold coin for each of them. When I met him in Tabriz, he still kept two Armenian women in his house.

This base criminal was in the habit of standing in Istanbul Street of Tabriz, and every time I passed by him, he moved his hand towards his pocket, as if to take out his pistol and direct it against me, if I attempted to somehow harm him.

The Turks did not confine themselves to slaughtering the men, aged women and children: they perpetrated formidable massacre among the young ladies as well, seeing that they could not decide among themselves which of them was to take possession of these innocent victims.

With tearful eyes, Alexandre Zazian told us the following about Miss Barkhudarian—I do not remember her name—one of the most beautiful young ladies in Agulis. When she was brought forth to be shot to death, the Turks started an argument, for all of them wanted to take her. A Turkish policeman whose father owned a large tea house in Agulis' market demanded that the girl be yielded up to him, but the others did not agree. Seeing that it was useless arguing further, they ordered the poor girl to start running along the yard. Hardly had she begun doing so when she was shot in the back. The confusion and argument that ensued gave Alexan [i.e. Alexandre] a good opportunity to run away, escaping the shower of bullets fired after him.

This carnage as well as the kidnapping and raping of beautiful women and young girls went on throughout 25 December, and only several people were able to escape that slaughter-house by miracle.

During this blood-shed, on the night of 24 December, between 80 and 90 Armenians, living chiefly in the southern quarters along the right bank of the river, decided to seek refuge on the ground-floor of a church named Entzayats Luys and adjoining the Turkish quarter (this quarter was connected with the rest of the township by a wooden bridge). Although the reports of the firing of the following day reached them, they decided to send somebody for information about what was going on outside their hiding-place. This person, however, did not come back and it remained obscure whether he was killed or found haven in Tseghna.

Unable to endure their state of uncertainty as well as the intolerable hunger and thirst, on the morning of 26 December, the members of the group decided to leave their hiding-place, thinking that their fellow villagers were in safety. The noise they made as well as the children's cries woke up the Turks and they attacked these starving and emaciated people who had not had sleep for several nights. During this confusion, the Turkish bandits were joined by policemen as well as some local Turks and Turkish refugees who tortured to death the men, elderly women and children, kidnapping the beautiful young ladies. This was the epilogue to the harrowing massacres perpetrated in Agulis. For many months, the corpses of the wretched martyrs remained scattered unburied in the streets, amidst the ruins, and at the foots of the mountains, becoming prey to wild animals and hungry dogs. Two sisters who later found home in Iran were the only survivors of, and witnesses to, this loathsome carnage.

When I returned to Agulis in 1922, my Turkish friend told me with great pain in his heart that in the days of this butchery and afterwards, the kidnapped children and women were taken to their homes and forced—under death threats—into telling the bandits the places of their secret closets. Wringing out all the information they needed from their victims, the Turkish barbarians killed them with cold steel.

My younger brother, 15-year-old Mkrtych, whom we called Mikich for short, shared this bitter torture. A day after his stomach had been torn open with cold steel, he was taken to our house by force and made to show them the place of our safe. I do

not know particularly what they spoke on that day or what my brother showed them. I only mentally move there and imagine the entire ordeal that he went through while holding his belly by hand so that his bowels did not come out and later, when he was trampled underfoot and beaten to death right there.

With my hand leaning on the destroyed wall of our house, I asked my poor brother to forgive me for having left him all alone. My heart is rent to pieces whenever I remember his unspeakable torture. I lament over his harrowing death, unable to find pardon for myself.

Ignoring the danger threatening my life, in 1922 I left Tabriz for Tseghna Village of Goghtan District. After a two-day sojourn in this township, I decided to move to the Turkish village of Vanand, where I thought I could find my two sisters: I had been told they had been taken there.

My dear friend Kapit, who had sheltered me in his house for several months after I had had a miraculous escape from the massacres of Agulis, refused to let me go alone and joined me. We left Tseghna for Vanand with a burden-carrying animal, as if we were going to buy provisions in that village.

Near a tea house in the square of Vanand, I came across the head of that village and asked him to help me find my sisters. He, however, denied emphatically that any Armenian child or woman lived there. I told him I was not going to move away my sisters against their will; I only wanted to have some talk with them. Nevertheless, my request proved futile: he continued denying the existence of any Armenian child or woman in his village.

Depressed and despondent, we left Vanand and advanced towards Agulis. Never can I forget the sorrowful and dismal scene that opened before our eyes as we reached the summit of the mountains surrounding Agulis. Only the ruins of the village were preserved in the ravine extending for several kilometres: all the gardens had been uprooted and devastated, and that within but two years.

This town repeatedly saw depredation and slaughter. For many times, its inhabitants were taken captive and sold in the markets of foreign countries. Every time, however, it found strength and vigour to rise from ashes and revive, although in the course of time, it was reduced to village. I wondered whether Agulis would again come back to life and restore its former position, just as it had been the case in the former times. Perhaps, this could come true only if Goghtan and Nakhijevan became parts of Armenia, for I did not believe that the Turkish authorities of Nakhijevan would be of any instrumentality to our township, now merely representing a heap of ruins. The Turks can only destroy. They can never build.

Our tearful eyes directed towards the devastated village, we went to the local market, which was extremely filthy, with all its Armenian shops ruined and plundered. Where could I find the once busy market of Agulis, which shone with cleanliness and where trade was always in full swing? We could not find even an apology for it. It was the Armenian merchants of Agulis who taught the Turks how to handle commercial affairs. The Turks of this township owed their more developed and civilised mode of

life—as compared to their fellow Muslims living in other villages— only to their close relations with the Armenians. The women of wealthy Turkish families entrusted the making of their clothes and shoes only to the Armenian craftsmen.

Wherever I looked, I saw only total devastation. The Turks who were talking at the moment I entered the market now stood petrified and looked at me in amazement. They were at a loss. None of them dared approach me; nor did I greet any of them. Crossing the market in silence, Kapit and I descended towards a bridge and turned to the Turkish quarter.

I intended to spend two days with my Turkish friend: he was on close terms with Karo as well, and as I have already said, he was the only Turkish young man who did not take up arms against the Armenians in the days of the massacres and even reproached his fellow Muslims for their meanness and loathsome acts.

He did not believe his eyes when he saw me standing in his doorway. He had officially got married to a young Armenian lady whom he had saved from certain death, and now they had a small boy. His wife was one of my class-mates, but I did not know anything about it. I felt as if I was in the house of people who were infinitely dear to me. It was almost dinner-time, so they immediately knifed a hen and made a special meal for us. My friend's father came to see us.

After dinner I said I wanted to see the ruins of our house. Accompanying Karo and me, my Turkish friend led us there by the river-side.

Everything was ruined and burnt away: the bandits had destroyed all the gardens of the district. Only two years had passed since the massacres, and during this time, the Turks had only spread devastation everywhere, for they are not able to build.

While I was in Tseghna, on 26 December, this village provided refuge for those Armenians whom we had met a little above our house: they had reached Tseghna after two days' wandering in the mountains. They had ascended the mountain rising in their rear after it had got dark and had managed to reach the mountains in the neighbourhood of Tseghna, having had some minor skirmishes with the Turks on their way. The Armenian warriors conducting reconnaissance in the mountains had found them and led them to Tseghna.

Throughout my life, I have been suffering greatly from the thought that I did not have the necessary determination to oppose Father and join this group with my family, instead of being caught up in the enemy trap. The Turkish patrol did not guard all the mountains surrounding Agulis; that is why, the Armenians of the lower quarters managed to surmount these mountains easily and reach Tseghna.

Sixty lengthy years have passed since those sinister days and now, rather advanced in years, I am attempting to analyze and understand the formidable tragedy that struck us. I cannot forgive myself the lack of determination which hindered me from either saving my family and fellow villagers from most lamentable martyrdom or sharing the bitter experiences that fell to their lot.

Holding me by the arms, Kapit and my Turkish friend raised me and took me away from the ruins of our house. I asked them to accompany me to St. Hovhannes Church of our quarter, which was not very far from our house: I was in bad need of spiritual comfort after the horrible tragedy I had lived through. For many years, my father had worked for the churches of this quarter, but St. Hovhannes was particularly dear to our hearts. Its dome and belfry had been destroyed, and the door removed. The church had been thoroughly plundered and then pulled down. Its yard and two large gardens had been totally devastated, just like the houses and other gardens adjoining it.

Returning from St. Hovhannes, we headed for St. Christopher Church. Walking quickly through the ruined houses of the village for about twenty minutes, we reached it and found it reduced to a cellar. The school house adjoining it—I received five-year secondary education there—had been thoroughly burnt away. I do not know by what chance only a single house had survived the wide-spread destruction in the central quarter. I cannot imagine how they managed to totally devastate this once prospering, magnificent township within such a short period of time.

All the houses located along the road leading to the monastery of St. Thomas the Apostle had been pulled down. Finally, we reached the semi-ruined monastery: I was deeply moved to see this once magnificent sanctuary in that state. Its main gates and both doors had been burnt away, thus enabling the mob of bandits to get access of the rich monastery and rob it of its books, manuscripts, vestments and vessels. By that time (1922), the enemy had not found the treasury of the sanctuary yet. Hearing that the guardian of St. Thomas had escaped the massacres and found refuge with his son living in Sari City of Iran, a group of Turks from Agulis went to Teheran to find him and bribe him into telling them the place of the monastic treasures. Fortunately, however, that person had already died.

I cannot say anything about the present state of this monastery, but in the days of my visit, I saw its dome and belfry burnt away. The enemy had proved unable to destroy its walls, but they had uprooted its gardens and destroyed all the nearby houses and gardens. That quarter used to have several churches all of which had been demolished.

To my great surprise, while walking in the lower rooms of the monastery, I saw one of the renowned intellectuals of Agulis: he had somehow escaped the massacres and taken up living in an empty cell together with his sister (unfortunately, I have forgotten their names). As far as I remember, this man, who was a graduate of the High Commercial School of Moscow, had a good command of English and French and always acted as an interpreter whenever foreign guests arrived at Agulis. I could not understand how they eked out their existence in the monastery. Already a little advanced in years, they had decided to spend the rest of their lifetime in this sanctuary and never parted with each other. They were the only Armenians living in Agulis at that time.

We hurriedly walked about the cells of the monks and Father Superior and also entered the repository of manuscripts: the sanctuary had been robbed to its very last vessel.

All the 12 churches of Agulis boasted considerable fortune so that after the massacres, a countless number of church vestments, vessels, manuscripts, old printed books, thousands of books from many private collections, as well as expensive carpets and jewelry appeared on sale in the market of Tabriz. The wealthy Turks of Ordubad, Agulis and other places had bought them at meagre prices and brought them to Tabriz to sell them through the local merchants. For many months, these treasures were being sold to either the Armenians or the foreigners. Among the people buying them was the late Hakob Ter-Hakobian, the former inspector of my school in Agulis, who purchased a number of photographs as well as manuscripts and old publications. Later he presented me with a photo of the school of Agulis which also showed my father and brother. This photo and another, where I am a two-year-old child with my sister, are the only remnants of our belongings, and I am keeping them as sacred relics.

Some years later, I bought a manuscript from one of my former pupils (his father had purchased it in the market of Tabriz, where it was on sale together with other valuable items stolen from Agulis). Although it was of religious contents, I decided to buy it, notwithstanding its high price, for it bore the seal of the library of Agulis.

It was rather late when Kapit, our Turkish friend and I bade farewell to the aforementioned intellectual and his sister and returned to our Turkish host's, with our spirits sunk. Our Armenian hostess had made a good supper for us, but the story of my brother's tragic death and the dismal ruins of my village had depressed me to such an extent that I did not have appetite for anything. My despair and pain grew to the uttermost when my friend's father unexpectedly came in, accompanied by several of the chief perpetrators of the massacres of Agulis, Vahab Effendi, a certain Hamze and two wealthy, influential Turks (I do not remember their names). My friend's father said they had come to give me a welcome.

After the establishment of the Soviet rule, that criminal Vahab had "changed his colour" like a chameleon and declared himself Bolshevik, assuming a leading position in the administrative life of the village and the district.

Before the destruction of Agulis, Hamze, who had learnt from the Armenians how to bake bread in the Russian way, had his own bakery and also dealt in flour. His clients were mostly Armenians and owing to his frequent dealings with them, he spoke the vernacular of Agulis quite fluently.

It was Vahab who spoke almost all the time, shedding crocodile tears and trying to assure me with his eloquence that the Turks of Agulis and Ediff Bey had done everything in their power to suppress the savages of Okhchi and the gorge of Geghi, but in vain. He did not say any word of justification in behalf of Ali Ehsan Pasha, who had agreed with the sheikh of Ordubad upon the slaughter of all the Armenians of Agulis without distinction.

I felt utmost contempt for that mean hypocrite and chameleon. Unable to listen to his base excuses and justification any longer, I told him about those two people who

had been hidden in a closet in the house—he himself lived there—where the victims were kept to be soon stripped of their clothes, robbed and eventually killed. I said that these two people, who had extricated themselves by jumping over the rear window and reaching Tseghna, had seen police chief Monshiyev and Vahab himself robbing the people. I also told Vahab about Alexandre Zazian, who had miraculously escaped the shower of bullets and run away from the yard of the neighbouring house, where lived notorious bandit Mustafa, and where first the men, then the women and children were lined up and shot to death. With his own ears had Zazian heard “you crying ‘Kill them with daggers. Kill them with daggers. These giaux [infidels] don’t deserve bullets.’ We know everything. It is absolutely senseless now to justify yourself.”

Indeed, they did not know how and why I had arrived at Agulis, and had visited me first of all to find out if I had come to investigate the circumstances of the massacres. Their suspicions told them I might have been sent by the authorities and could, therefore, endanger their positions.

Now they were in a harsh predicament. That loathsome criminal Vahab kept wiping away the sweat from his forehead and face all the time. I could not confine myself to what I had already said and became more aggressive in my speech. Shaking with vexation, I told them how I wanted to leave everything in their hands and leave the village together with my friends and a handful of civilians, including Harutiun Hakhnazarian, who had saved the Turkish villages and towns from Andranik’s attacks. “You, however, had placed guards on the summit of the mountain and treacherously killed all these innocent people so that only several of them were able to escape. Even if there is no living witness, the mountains and ravines of Agulis remain as silent witnesses to that harrowing carnage that you perpetrated in a most organized and wild way, exterminating a whole village. What did you gain by devastating Agulis and slaughtering its inhabitants?” I asked in irritation and added: “Of course, some people accumulated a great fortune by plunder, but how can they take pleasure in it? Don’t they feel remorse for having grown rich by slaughtering people like sheep? How can you live amidst these ruins, in this huge grave-yard where several thousand people were tortured, children were slaughtered and women kidnapped? Wasn’t life more peaceful and beautiful formerly, when this magnificent village was still alive and the Armenians and Turks lived side by side in peace? Don’t you regret the loss of those developed and civilised people who taught so much to the Turks, promoting their progress to such an extent that they were even more advanced than their fellow Turks in Ordubad? Didn’t the Armenians of Agulis save you by preventing Andranik’s attack?”

I turned to Hamze: “Haven’t you learnt the baking of bread from two Armenian brothers for whom you were making dough? You began your business after their death, when their shop closed, didn’t you?”

He confirmed my words. Then telling them about my impressions of my visit to the market of Agulis, I asked them whether they preferred the slump of those days to the former busyness of commercial life, when the market abounded in all kinds of products as well as most different people occupied with peaceful work. “Where are the

beautiful gardens that boasted tens of sorts of fruits? Who has uprooted their trees and vines? Do you remember the nice, merry evenings the inhabitants of Agulis spent in the parks adjoining the market? Are today's ruins and deadly silence more attractive than your former happy existence side by side with the Armenians?"

I spoke for long, suffering gravely all that time. Eventually, my friend's father saved the situation by changing the topic of the conversation. Having had another cup of tea, they left, probably, regretting their visit. I apologised to my friend and his father for that unpleasant incident with which they did not seem very displeased, for they were even better aware who were to bear responsibility for the destruction of our unfortunate township and its innocent inhabitants.

Another surprise awaited me the following day. Learning about my arrival, Hajji Ghurban, who was leasing our arable lands, lying in the south of Agulis, came to me and said he wanted to buy them from me. First of all, I demanded that he return our cow and calf that Father had consigned to his charge before our departure from Agulis, on the morning of 24 December. He, however, told me that on the same day, upon his going to the other side of the gates, some Turkish refugees had given him a good beating right before the very eyes of the guards, seized the animals, slaughtered them and divided their meat among themselves.

I refused to sell him anything saying that they might be seized from him during the collectivisation of lands, but he insisted upon his proposal. In those times, I was in bad need of money so that I eventually sold those lands that constituted the entire heritage left by Mother to that man at a meagre price, taking only some gold ware instead. He also gave me a bull-calf: Kapit liked it very much so that I gave it to him. As for the jewelry, later I shared it equally with my sister.

Before that, while I was in Tabriz, several Turkish inhabitants of our district applied to me with a proposal to buy our large arable lands of Vanand and the neighbouring villages bequeathed to me by Father, but Ruben Ter-Minassian advised me against selling them. Later, however, I lost them during the collectivisation of lands...

In order to conclude an official agreement, Hajji Ghurban brought a mullah who made up a deed of purchase, and we both signed it. Buying some wheat and provisions from Hajji Ghurban, we loaded them onto our donkey, bade farewell to my friend's wife and moved towards Tseghna, our calf following the donkey. My Turkish friend accompanied us to the top of the mountain, where we parted with him. Casting a last glance over our grief-stricken village, we went forward.

Later I visited Goghtan District for several times, but I was never able to go to Agulis again. Throughout the sixty years of my lifetime, I have been to many countries and places, but I was not predestined to once more see my native village, where I had spent the happiest years of my childhood and youth. My sister, who was studying in Tiflis in the days of the massacres, visited the ruins of Agulis while already rather advanced in years, together with our aunt's daughter. They also saw Kaghakik and Tanakert and felt the bitter sorrow of seeing them levelled with the ground. In Tanakert they found several inhabited houses whose inmates, however, were mostly

aged people. Agulis and Kaghakik were still more ruined, and in some parts totally annihilated.

The genocide that was committed in Agulis and the neighbouring villages was not something out of the ordinary: great is the number of the villages and cities in our historical homeland that were mercilessly ruined and reduced to ashes. Only several decades ago, they were imbued with the spirit of the creative, industrious Armenian people, whereas now the dismal shadow of death reigns over their ruins.

The centuries-old enemies of the Armenian nation did not confine themselves to only destroying the greater part of our homeland and exterminating the innocent, defenceless Armenian civilians. Moreover, they drove the survivors of this unprecedented genocide to deserts and steppes, consigning them to most certain death. They did not lose the opportunity of subjecting the largest part of Western Armenia to the same bitter fate, and what Agulis and the adjacent Armenian villages went through was just a tragic episode in the Great Genocide of the Armenians premeditated and perpetrated according to an infernal plan. Never had the innocent Armenians of this township fired a single bullet against their Turkish neighbours. Never had they had their hands stained with the Turks' blood. On the contrary, they had saved the Muslims in times of danger, but despite this, they fell victim to that meanness and treachery that only the Turks can weave.

However, the Turks did not succeed in their diabolical plan of exterminating the Armenian nation up to the very last suckling: the Armenians rose from ashes after the Great Genocide, during which more than half of them had been tortured to death. They proved to the entire mankind that they do merit living and creating more than their centuries-old enemies who have earned the notorious name of mean criminals and blood-thirsty beasts in the history of manhood.

Once the historical Armenian homeland, where you can hardly find a place unstained with the blood of innocent Armenians, is restituted to its proper owners, i.e. the creating and building Armenian people, it is to be restored and revived as quickly as possible, despite the extermination of most of its native population.

Many of the former inhabitants of Agulis and the other destroyed villages of Goghtan now live in Armenia, as well as in different parts of Caucasia and Russia. We still do hope that some day they will be reconstructed, again joining their historical motherland from which they have been partitioned off in a most unjust manner.

This is the end of the brief account of the formidable carnage perpetrated against the civilised people of this prospering district. We do not claim that we have provided a most comprehensive and all-embracing picture of the tragedy that befell Agulis and Goghtan. We have written only about what we ourselves were predestined to see with our own eyes, as well as what we were able to learn from other survivors both in the Armenian homeland and abroad. This account, which has not been written down so far, can be considered the continuation of the Great Genocide of April...

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