

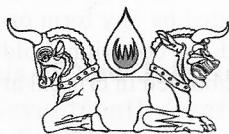
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ATRPATAKAN AS A BASTION IN THE ARMENIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT

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Aspirations for political, economic, and social freedom for Ottoman Armenians and armed struggle as the last resort to reach that goal marked the final phase of the nineteenth-century Armenian Renaissance. The movement under the circumstances was intended in the first instance for the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire. However, as persecution grew intense in the Russian incorporated Armenian lands and as the awareness of the Persian Armenians of their own plight gradually increased, the movement enveloped a larger geographic area. It virtually encompassed the oppressed masses of Armenians living in their historic homeland now apportioned among three empires. The multitude of memoirs, letters, and documents concerning that momentous era in the history of the Armenian struggle for emancipation is yet to be collected and a comprehensive and objective history of this movement is yet to be written.

This treatise is intended to shed light on a page of that history, to explore the movement in Persian Azarbayan (Armenian: *Atrpatakan*), beginning in the late nineteenth century. This was at a time when the Armenian armed struggle was elevated from a preliminary stage of sporadic and individual initiatives to a structured and organized effort. This historical period in centuries-old Armenian communities in Atrpatakan can offer a representative view of Armenian social and economic life in Iran/Persia (*Parskastan*). But more important for this study is the place of Atrpatakan as a bridge because of its proximity to the Russian Armenian and the Ottoman Armenian communities and as a beehive of preparative activities, political and paramilitary, in the Armenian liberation movement. Atrpatakan also provided the unique sociopolitical milieu to give birth to Raffi (Hakob Melik-Hakobian),

the revolutionary novelist, and harbinger of the Armenian liberation movement. Raffi plotted the map of the Armenian struggle for freedom, with Atrpatakan at its core. In fact, the importance that Atrpatakan gained later was to a large extent by virtue of Raffi's design.

When in the Ottoman and Russian empires Armenian secret cells were multiplying to advance the Armenian Cause – each one according to its own vision – Atrpatakan Armenians were still dormant. The masses were submerged in ignorance, living in their own socioeconomic predicament, while the so-called community leadership, religious and secular, was busy with petty feuds among themselves.¹ The lifestyle of an average Armenian family was a mélange of an Armenian traditional, patriarchal one internally, a Muslim facade externally, and very primitive in terms of living standards.² Even in the relatively secure and prosperous times of Fath-

¹ In my search in the National Archives of Armenia, I came across dozens of letters of complaint written by the primates of Atrpatakan to the catholicoses in Echmiadzin complaining about insignificant issues which, however, disturbed community life and disseminated disunity.

² Hovsep Movsisian, whom André Amourian (Amurian) identifies as the first Iranian Armenian revolutionary, depicts his childhood in Tabriz in the 1870s, the very primitive lifestyle there, and his grandfather's iron rule over the patriarchal household. He also attests that Armenian women had to cover themselves in *chadors* or *charshavs* outside the house like Muslim women. And it must be remembered that this was life in Tabriz, the capital city of the province of Azarbayjan. The population in smaller towns and villages lived in the Dark Ages of a barbaric feudal system.

Hovsep Movsisian penned his memoirs in 1897 but only in 1933 did he give them to A. Amourian (André Ter-Ohanian, a reputable Iranian Armenian intellectual) to rewrite and publish. The book was published many years later, as Amourian explains (p. 9), for its detailed chronicling of the Kukunian Expedition, led by Sargis Kukunian (Sarkis Gougounian) and made up largely of Armenian students from St. Petersburg and elsewhere, as well as the later exploits of Yeprem Davtian (subsequently known as Yeprem Khan) as the champion of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. Hovsep had met young Yeprem in 1890 in Tiflis, and, together with like-minded men looking for a way to cross into historic Armenia (*Hayastan*), they joined Kukunian and participated in his expedition to Western Armenia. Before breaching the border, the group was ambushed by Russian Cossacks, arrested and imprisoned and then exiled to Sakhalin Island in eastern Siberia. A few of them managed to escape, Hovsep and Yeprem among them. After months of unspeakable hardship, the two entered Iran and kept together until Yeprem moved to Rasht. See A. Amourian, *Heghapokhakan Epremi odisakane* [The Odyssey of Revolutionary Yeprem] (Tehran: Alik, 1972). For a description of life in Tabriz in the 1870s, see page 17.

Raffi gives a similar account of Armenian life in Tabriz. He writes in his travel notes that Armenian men had to wear a certain type of a cloak (*ghabro*) in a color different from the Muslims so that Muslims could recognize and avoid them. Jewish men, too, wore a *labada* over their clothes to be recognized as Jews. Non-Muslim men

Ali Shah and Mohammad Shah (early nineteenth century) in Iran, Armenians were deprived of the opportunities of enlightenment, although the period brought about some socioeconomic improvements in Armenian life.³

Raffi's Portrayal of the Situation

Reckoning the progressive signs of revival in Russian and Turkish Armenia – better living conditions, schools, periodical press, and so forth – Raffi argued that Armenians of Persia and especially those in Atrpatakan were far behind, still living under the yoke of an oppressive regime and within the devastating reality of continuous wars between local chieftains. Indeed, with the weakening of the Persian shahs, beginning two centuries before Raffi's time, the local khans had a free hand in dealing with their subjects, Muslims and Christians alike. They exploited them and kept them under constant threat, assaults, and plunder.

An abhorrent practice was the custom of offering beautiful virgins to the shah every time a khan (title of a high-ranking government officer or a rich landlord) paid a visit to him. The gathering or rather the abduction of girls, Muslim or Christian, was a most dreaded occurrence. Raffi eternalized in his short stories this practice – called *ghizyazan* in Turkish and *kusagrutiu* in Armenian (meaning enlisting of virgins) – and its traumatic impact. The miserable life of these girls, abducted to be offered to the shah or for the pleasure of the khan himself, and the tragic struggle of their families trying to rescue the defiled girls and bring them back are depicted in Raffi's stories such as “*Geghetsik Vardike*” (The Beautiful Vardik), “*Kusagrutiu*” (Enlistment of Virgins), “*Anbakht Hripsimen*” (The Unfortunate Hripsime), “*Harem*” (Harem), among others.⁴ The practice was abandoned only sometime during the reign of Nasserreddin Shah (1848-96).

It is significant that Raffi wrote his first novel *Salbi* (Salbi) with the intention of informing Armenians elsewhere about the plight of Armenians in Iran and specifically in Atrpatakan. And, as he explained

had to have a certain haircut and were prohibited from wearing certain color shoes. See Raffi, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu* [Collected Works], vol. 8 (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1963), pp. 355, 481-86.

³ See Raffi's preface to his novel *Salbi* [Salbi] (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1911), p. 20.

⁴ Raffi, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, vol. 1 (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1955).

in the preface, in order to make his reporting easier to read, he chose to write it in the genre of fiction. He wrote the novel titled after Salbi, the heroine, and subtitled it as *Azgayin vipasanutium parskahayots kiankits* (A National Novel from the Life of Persian Armenians).⁵ The events in this novel occur in a remote village in Atrpatakan, and the underlying theme is the prevailing abject poverty, the exploitation of the poor by the rich, the backwardness, ignorance, and superstition inflicting added misery and injustice. More perilous than the socio-economic plight was the constant danger of Kurdish assaults, the slaughtering and the ransacking of villages, and overall, the treatment of Armenians as non-believers and unworthy creatures whose only right to live was to work for the Muslim landlord. Hearing about a pure-bred, beautiful horse that Rustam, Salbi's fiancé was riding, the Persian khan had declared: "I will snatch the horse from Rustam. What, is an Armenian to ride a horse? A miserable donkey is plenty for him."⁶ Raffi depicts how the assailants carried away men and women to use them or sell them as slaves.⁷ Many a time, rich Armenians of the neighboring towns had to buy them back and send them home.

As the Russian Empire began to expand to the south, a series of wars was waged against the Persian and the Ottoman empires, mainly on the historic lands of Armenia, causing more hardship for people caught between the battling armies. In the aftermath of the 1826-28 Russo-Persian War by terms of the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the Russian army evacuated parts of its occupied Atrpatakan and by special arrangement and permission of the Russian government, the forlorn Armenian populace was allowed to follow the army and cross the new Russo-Iranian border to settle in the Russian Empire.⁸

⁵ Raffi began writing this novel in 1856, when he left his studies in Tiflis and returned to Payajuk, his native village in Salmast. The novel was only partially published in the journals during his lifetime. It was published in full posthumously in 1911. Raffi wrote this novel first in the classical Armenian language, *Grabar*, but later, inspired by the idea of developing a modern literary language advocated in *Hiusisapayl* (a periodical published in Moscow), he rewrote it in the vernacular *Ashkharhabar*.

⁶ *Salbi*, p. 130. The translation of this citation and all others from Armenian sources are mine.

⁷ Slave trade in Iran was practiced until the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi and was abolished by the parliament's anti-slavery legislation in February 1929.

⁸ According to the data in *Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran* [Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia] vol. 1, entry "Atrpatakan" (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1974, p. 664), 8,250 families from the regions of Maku, Salmast, Khoy, Urmieh, and Gharadagh (Qaradagh), and from the cities of Tabriz and Ardabil migrated to the

Analyzing the situation in hindsight and the hardships to which the migrating Armenians were subjected, Raffi viewed the exodus as a disastrous event, evidence of canny Russian politics, with a permanent negative impact on those who migrated and on those who stayed behind.⁹ As a result of this mass migration and the thinning of Armenian population in Atrpatakan, Kurdish and Turkish villagers had a freer hand to usurp the Armenian lands left behind.

Raffi's accounts of the situation make it clear that discriminatory laws and oppressive rule against the Armenian minority in Iran were as bad as in the Ottoman Empire, and the Shiite law, which especially prevailed among the Turks of Atrpatakan prohibiting any communication with Christians, made matters even worse. The only relief was the fact that Armenians of Atrpatakan were not subjected to wholesale massacres as were those in the Ottoman Empire, and their movements and activities were not monitored as strictly as in the Ottoman Empire. This is to say that the Persian government had a more benign policy vis-à-vis the Armenians. The main problem lay in the uncontrolled excesses of local khans and chieftains.

Raffi, a native Persian Armenian, came to see the true picture of the country and the condition of Armenians in that environment during his long journey through Atrpatakan and beyond in the year 1857. Having lived in Tiflis (Tbilisi) from 1847 to 1856, where he had gone to pursue a higher education, he had standards by which to compare. Besides the novel *Salbi* and short stories, he wrote fifty letters to *Mshak* (a periodical published in Tiflis), describing what he had seen and experienced. He hoped to publish these "letters" in a separate volume.¹⁰ His exposure of the ignorance and despotism of Persian bureaucrats shaped the synthesis of his impressions of Persia: "Persia! How easy it is to pronounce the name. ... But she breathes with all the

Russian occupied lands, to be called informally Eastern Armenia. As a result of this exodus, the Monastery of Surb Stepanos Nakhavka, once an operating church, lost its adherents who populated the village of Darashamb (Khoy region). The monastery remained abandoned until it attracted the revolutionaries because of its proximity to the Turkish border.

⁹ See Raffi's preface to the novel *Salbi*, p. 22.

¹⁰ Twenty-four of these 50 letters were published in a summarized form in *Mshak* [Cultivator] in 1872-73, beginning with the third issue of the periodical. They were titled *Baron Raffii ughevorutunits Parskastanum* [From Mr. Raffi's Journey in Persia] and were signed Aleksandr Raffi. The letters were published as a whole posthumously in 1913, together with his travel notes, and were titled *Parskakan patkerner* [Persian Images]. Then, they were included in the eighth volume of his collected works. For this testimony, see Raffi, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, vol. 8 (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1963), p. 310.

terror of Asiatic tyranny.”¹¹ To earn a living and support his family, Raffi began teaching Armenian language and history in the Armenian school in Tabriz (1875-77) but was not able to endure the prevailing mindsets, ignorance, and backward methods of teaching, so he quit.¹²

Raffi encountered the slavish frame of mind of most of the village priests, their interpretation of the Christian tenets as a call for absolute obedience and servitude toward the Turkish and Kurdish oppressors. He could not stand their propagating that idea among the ignorant peasants: “Jesus Christ tells us ‘*Aratsia zochkhars im*’ (Graze my sheep). Such words mean that Christian Armenians should behave like sheep to be able to deserve the kingdom of heaven.”¹³ He could not stand the ignorant clergy’s interpretation of calamities as God’s punishment for one’s many sins – a persisting reflection of the traditional Armenian response to national catastrophes. The deplorable reality drove him to fight with his pen and try to change what was popularly thought to be the fate of the Armenian nation. Raffi described the situation and at the same time delineated the road to liberation. With his fiery articles in *Mshak*, he exclaimed: “Freedom is given to nations who can defend it with their swords. There is no freedom without blood, as there is no salvation without sacrifices.”¹⁴

Attempting to Draw the Roadmap of a Possible Solution

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the massacre and ransacking of Armenian villages on both sides of the Iran-Turkey border by Sheikh Jalaleddin’s armed contingents (1877) turned Raffi’s attention toward exploring ways to remedy the Armenian plight.¹⁵ He had come

¹¹ Ibid., p. 311.

¹² Raffi’s innovative ideas about the school curricula and methods of teaching met utter opposition and even personal harassment. He was forced to leave the school and the country and settle in Tiflis for good. He lived in Tiflis from 1879 until his death in 1888.

¹³ Raffi, *Erkeri zhoghoviatsu*, vol. 8, p. 320. The meaning of this biblical *Grabar* sentence is “Feed my sheep,” which is erroneously interpreted as “Graze my sheep.”

¹⁴ Norayr Sarukhanyan, *Arevelyan Hayastani Rusastanin miatsman probleme minchheghapokhakan hay patmagrutyun mej* [The Problem of Eastern Armenia’s Adjoining Russia in the Armenian Pre-revolutionary Historiography] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1971), p. 58. The author cites Raffi’s article in *Mshak*, no. 22, 1872.

¹⁵ The terror Sheikh Jalaleddin spread is best described in Raffi’s novel, *Jalaleddin*. See also Hovsep Movsisian’s memoirs about his aunt, one of the few survivors of the massacres in Mianduab (Miandoab). She fled to Tabriz and recounted the ravages of Sheikh Ibadullah, and how her son was murdered in her arms. Sheikh

to believe that none of the European powers would help the Armenians, and the retreat registered in Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin regarding Ottoman reforms was further proof of the unreliability of those powers. He had come to believe that Armenians were not prepared to take advantage of what the negotiations offered in the period between the initial favorable treaty of San Stefano (Article 16) and the revision at Berlin in 1878. He advocated preparedness because he knew the time would come again and history would offer other opportunities.¹⁶ *Khente* (The Fool, 1881), *Kaitser* (Sparks, 1883), and *Jalaleddin* (1884) were his fictionalized responses to the Armenian predicament and the conceptualization of his probe into the ways to freedom. In these novels, he depicted that process of preparation; he constructed the character of the future Armenian freedom fighter who would carry on the struggle for the nation's liberation. There was no other way than self-defense and armed struggle: "They burn his house down, right before his eyes. They char his children in the fire, snatch away his wife and daughter. The man witnesses all this, and with total obedience puts his neck out to the enemy's sword. Damn you! Man! You are a human being too. Kill! And then die!"¹⁷ Indeed, Sarhat, Vardan, Aslan, Karo, Farhat, Vorsord Avo, the protagonists of *Jalaleddin*, *Khente*, and *Kaitser*, who fought to defend Armenians against Turkish and Kurdish tyranny and who harbored and propagated lofty ideas of freedom and justice for all, became household names for Armenians in numerous communities. They read these novels with enthusiasm and were inspired by the courage and determination to emulate, to act, to take their fate and the fate of their nation into their own hands. Raffi's spirit was gradually inculcating the masses and bringing up an elite generation ready to act.

Many individuals took the initiative to cross the Russian border into Persia, entering Atrpatakan to pass into the Ottoman Armenia (*Hayastan* or *Erkir* as the Western Armenian homeland was called) to assess the situation and seek ways to advance the Cause. These pioneers, who were referred to as *ukhtavors* (pilgrims), would take with them copies of Raffi's works which were avidly read. The slogan

Ibadullah was leading the Kurds of Iran charging toward the Turkish border to help the Ottoman army against Russia and was wrecking Armenian villages on his way. Movsisian states that Armenians of Miandub and Souldouz suffered the most. See Amourian, *Epremi odisakane*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Sarukhanyan, *Arevelyan Hayastani miatsman probleme*, citing Raffi's article in *Mshak*, no. 126, 1879.

¹⁷ Raffi, *Khente* [The Fool] (Boston: Hairenik, 1937), p. 10.

often used for this movement was “with the people, for the people.” Some reached their destination; others succeeded only after several attempts. For still others, their dedication to the nation and to the Cause took another direction after the first failed attempt. Nikoghayos Melik-Tangian, the future renowned and much revered Archbishop Nerses Melik-Tangian, prelate of Atrpatakan, was one of these dedicated young idealists, who after graduating from Gevorgian Jemaran, followed the motto of the beloved patriarch Khrimian Hayrik, *Paykar lusavorelots enddem khavarelots* (Struggle of enlighteners against ignorance), and began teaching in his native village school.¹⁸ It must be remembered that even assuming a teaching position in a remote village was a sacrifice for the educated youth of the 1880s, and shaping the young minds, imbuing them with the ideas of freedom and justice, and preparing them to stand for their rights were considered to be revolutionary activity. Nikoghayos continued teaching in Shushi in Karabagh (Gharabagh), but he aspired for more. Together with two other young teachers, he attempted to cross the Arax River by way of Nakhichevan to go on to Surb Stepanos Nakhavka Monastery, from where they heard activists were passing over to Van. Their journey was aborted. Caught in a battle with the Turks of Varmazan village near the monastery, they had to retreat and return to Shushi. It is significant how this setback for the young Nikoghayos changed his destiny from perhaps a devoted political and paramilitary activist to an educator again, a career that nevertheless did not last long.

Because of a misunderstanding with Bishop Karapet Ayvazian, the retrogressive prelate of Karabagh, he left the school and went to Baku for two more years of teaching. But when in 1895 the tsarist government closed the Armenian schools in the Caucasus, Nikoghayos decided to pursue higher education in St. Petersburg. He graduated in 1890, and as a mature young man, following the path of Khrimian Hayrik, he chose the cloak of a clergyman to serve his nation. He was ordained a priest in Echmiadzin and a year later a *vardapet* as Nerses Vardapet Melik-Tangian. Khrimian Hayrik sent him to the Tatev monastery in Siunik, where he was more than an assistant to the prelate, but a true revolutionary standing with the

¹⁸ Nikoghayos was born in 1866 in Brnakot, a village in the Zangezur region. For the most detailed biography of Melik-Tangian’s life and early years in Tabriz, see Hayk Achemian, *Ter Nerses Arkepiskopos Melik-Tangian* [Archbishop Nerses Melik-Tangian] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1926), published on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of his socio-religious activities, 1886-1926.

people against the 1903 tsarist expropriation of the Armenian Church and school properties and the externally enflamed Armeno-Tatar conflict of 1905-07. He was declared persona non-grata, arrested, and exiled to the Crimea. After his return, he maintained his revolutionary spirit as a reformer in Echmiadzin, a progressive prelate of Atpatakan beginning in 1912, a supporter of reforms in education and the sociopolitical life in Atpatakan, a guardian during the most tragic times, personally attending to the dire needs of surviving Atpatakan Christians after the Turkish massacres beginning at the end of 1914, sheltering and feeding 25,000 Armenian and 15,000 Assyrian refugees. Then, a year later, the same care and support was shown to the Vanetsi refugees fleeing from the Turkish massacres of 1915. Ordained archbishop in 1914, Melik-Tangian served in Tabriz until his death in 1948.

In the 1890s, Armenian political parties were already engaged in armed struggle for freedom of the Ottoman Armenians, and Atpatakan gradually gained importance as a facilitator of this movement. But living conditions had not improved. Atpatakan Armenians lagged behind their fellow compatriots abroad. They still lacked the sociopolitical and economic norms and standards of a viable community. The population was still not ready mentally to embrace revolutionary ideas and actions. The atmosphere did not lend itself to the activities of the committed youth based in Atpatakan. A circular-letter from the Dashnak (used for short of Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun, Armenian Revolutionary Federation or ARF) Komite (Committee) in Tabriz, circa 1893, described the distressing conditions and how difficult it was to work "in this swamp called Persia, in a suffocating and incapacitating atmosphere."¹⁹

A report by two laymen, Voskan Pakesian and Petros Harutiunian, apparently two elders of the community, written to Catholicos Mkrtich Khrimian that same year, painted a similar picture. It particularly concerned the region of Urmieh (Urumieh/Urmia) with the town of that name and thirty-five villages with a mostly Armenian and Assyrian mixed population. There was an appalling lack of schools and the few village churches had no priests. The Armenian inhabitants spoke very little Armenian, communicating largely in Turkish or Assyrian. In such a state of no Armenian schooling and no religious

¹⁹ *Divan H. H. Dashnaktsutian*, [Archives of Armenian Revolutionary Federation], vol. 1, Simon Vratsian, ed. (Boston: ARF Central Committee of the USA, 1934), p. 108. The editor's note on this undated circular puts it in the year 1893.

guidance, Armenians in this region did not have a strong sense of national identity or adherence to the Armenian Church. They could easily abandon their Orthodox (Apostolic) faith and follow the preaching of missionaries. Armenians had to go to an Assyrian priest for religious services. Even the town of Urmieh did not have a regularly functioning school because the community could not afford to pay a teacher's salary.²⁰ In such circumstances, disseminating political ideas was farfetched, and visiting fieldworkers would leave the region frustrated and disappointed. Obviously, only those with strong dedication to the *Surb Gorts* (Holy Endeavor), struggle for the Armenian Cause, could stand the deplorably poor living conditions and spend years in remote villages.

In an article in the second issue of *Astagh Arevelian* (1896), a new weekly in Tehran, the author discusses the absent ingredients which could provide the necessary environment to achieve a progressive society. He expects assistance to come from abroad but believes that Iranian Armenians are *merats tarr* (dead element) for their fellow compatriots in other countries. They are not interested in the fate of Armenians in Iran, never think of helping them, giving them a boost, a start on the road to cultural revival. The author extols the role of the periodical press, salutes the inauguration of this new weekly, and laments the fact that Persian Armenians were thus far deprived of such an important instrument of progress.²¹ Another article in a later issue speaks of the shortage of Armenian teachers in all of Iran. Graduates of local Armenian schools are not qualified, and the community cannot afford to pay a decent salary to attract teachers from abroad. Besides, the living standards are not attractive for intellectuals outside Iran. The author finds the solution in sending selective groups of students to be educated in Armenian learning centers of the Caucasus and Moscow in order to prepare good teachers who would return to their birthplaces to heal the nation's sick body (*hivand azgayin marmin*).²²

The picture, however, was not that grim. In fact, the last decade of the nineteenth century marked a boost in the socio-cultural life in

²⁰ National Archives of Armenia, 56/15/296, pp. 46-47. The report lists all the 35 villages of Urmieh region and the number of households in each. There were 1,066 households in all.

²¹ *Astagh Arevelian* [Oriental Star] (Jan. 10, 1896). This weekly began publishing on January 3, 1896, with Makar Makarian as the editor in chief. Twenty-five issues were published.

²² *Ibid.*, March 20, 1896.

Atvpatakan. The steps taken the years before were bearing fruit—new schools in towns and villages, libraries, lecture halls, theater, and so forth. By the efforts of Nazar Goroyants, Arshak Nazarbekian, and Aleksan Ter-Ohanian the first all-girls school named Avarayr was founded in 1879, in the Ghala quarter of Tabriz. Two years later, the school was combined with the Aramian school which was originally named Nersessian, founded by the efforts of Bishop Sahak Satuniants, Prelate of Atvpatakan in 1850. In 1887, the Tumanian brothers had built the co-educational Tumanian (later Haykazian-Tamarian) elementary school in the Lilava quarter of Tabriz.²³

The progress picked up. Benevolent and patriotic societies were founded to assist the communities in their cultural and socioeconomic strides. Striking is the special emphasis on women's advancement. Atvpatakan Hayuhias Baregortsakan Enkerutium (Atvpatakan Armenian Women's Benevolent Association), with its center in Tabriz, was established in 1895. According to its bylaws, the association aimed to help underprivileged women, raise their living standards by teaching them basic crafts such as sewing and cooking, and provide financial assistance to female students in schools and encourage them to pursue higher education in order to assume important positions in the society.²⁴ Aside from the routine activities, the association undertook relief work of Vanetsi refugees escaping the Hamidian massacres in the 1890s. The report for the fiscal year 1897-98 shows the main undertaking to be the feeding and sheltering of these refugees. Significantly, the association received financial aid from the local Persian administration for this purpose.²⁵

The founders of the Atvpatakan Armenian Women's Benevolent Association believed that ignorance was the cause and the source of the prevailing grim situation. The 1898-99 annual report analyzed the situation and showed that most of its revenues of 31,023 qiran (ghran in Armenian pronunciation) had been allocated for the enhancement of education in the newly established schools in Mujumbar and

²³ Ghala and Lilava – these two Armenian quarters of Tabriz have their own history that are of interest. Lilava is the distorted form of Leiliabad. Legend has it that a Muslim girl named Leili fell in love with an Armenian boy, and in order to escape the fury of her coreligionists, she fled to an Armenian neighborhood which later expanded and was named after her. The Armenians of Lilava were mostly working and middle-class people. The richer Armenians lived in Ghala or Ghaleé, meaning “fortress” in Turkish and Farsi, and looked down on Lilavatsis. The quarter used to be called Berdatagh which literally means the “fortress quarter” in Armenian.

²⁴ National Archives of Armenia, 56/14/43, pp. 4-10.

²⁵ Ibid., 56/17/22, pp. 349-53.

Maragha, and financial aid for students at Surb Anna all-girls school and female students at Aramian school in Tabriz. The association also established a new school in Gardabad of Urmieh that year.²⁶ With the same goal of raising the intellectual level of the populace, at least in the center of Atrpatakan, another initiative was launched in March 1898. The Tavrizu Lsaranakan Enkerutium (Association of Leadership in Tabriz) pledged to design and organize public lectures once every two weeks in both schools in the Ghala and Lilava Armenian quarters, with a variety of topics pertaining to science, literature, history, pedagogy, health, and so forth.²⁷

The region of Gharadagh (Qaradagh), the historic Armenian Paytakaran, was also a beneficiary of the gradual cultural emancipation in Atrpatakan. In the early 1890s, a few schools were opened in various villages of the area. Many successful merchants in Tabriz with roots in Gharadagh provided the necessary finances to improve the educational and cultural life of their native villages. Among them were the Tumanian brothers, who owned numerous properties, villages, and offices, and maintained a work force in the region.

*The Emergence of Armenian Political Organizations
The Armenakans*

The Armenakan party, initiated in Van in 1885 by Mkrtich Portugalian's students – following his ideas and under the influence of Khrimian Hayrik's teachings – was the first to penetrate Atrpatakan. Young activists, such as Vardan Goloshian, Hovhannes Aribasian, and Avedisian (Mkrtich Terlemezian), all from respected families, left their comfortable lives and visions of a successful future and came to Salmast to disseminate enlightenment, lay the foundation of village schools, and preach the ideas of political emancipation. And Salmast was ready to embrace the first Armenian political organization, the Armenakans. In a very short time Atrpatakan, and especially the region of Salmast, became the second Armenakan center, or *shajanak* (circle) after Van, as noted in the memoirs of Armenak Ekarian (Yegarian).²⁸ In fact, the first local Armenakan

²⁶ Ibid., 56/14/195, pp. 87-91. Qiran was the old denomination of the Persian currency, almost equal to one rial with a value of about 10 British pence at that time.

²⁷ Ibid., 56/17/22, pp. 343-48.

²⁸ Armenak Ekarian states that in early stages of Armenakan activities in Atrpatakan, fieldworkers of that party used the name *Hayrenasirats Miutium Hayots* (Patriotic Union of Armenians), the organization founded by Mkrtich Portugalian in

chapter was organized in Haftvan, the largest Armenian village in the Salmast region, continuing as the only Armenakan foothold in Atrpatakan even after the competing Hnchakian and the Dashnak parties were organized in the region.²⁹ Many Armenakan intellectuals, such as Gevorg Otian, Panos Terlemezian, Armenak Ekarian, escaping Ottoman persecutions took refuge in Atrpatakan, most of them assuming teaching positions in Salmast, Tabriz, and Urmieh and surrounding villages.

Armenak Ekarian notes in his memoirs, that to avoid too much exposure in populated areas of Atrpatakan, he and four fellow Armenakans decided to settle in the monastery of Derik (Derek), which was four to five hours distance from Haftvan and three to four days' journey from Van.³⁰ There was no *vanahayr* (abbot) in that once thriving center, and a local Persian landlord had confiscated and turned it into a warehouse. The group was able to reclaim the monastery, and the repair work began in cooperation with the Dashnaksutin. Soon many more Dashnak activists gathered there, among them Bagrat Vardapet Tavakalian, the same old *fedayi* or freedom fighter named Zaki, as the *vanahayr* of the monastery. There began the competition, personal attacks, and accusations from both sides. Each one blamed the other for failures and took credit for successes. One of the issues of discord was the Armenakan project of building high walls around the monastery. The Dashnaks finally gave in, and the construction began. Sure enough, it attracted the Turkish consul's attention who demanded that the Persian government intervene. Father Tavakalian (Zaki) was ousted. The Armenakans blamed the Dashnaks for acting ostentatiously. Dashnaks blamed the

1885 in Van. The members of this organization, though, were called Armenakans after *Armenia*, the periodical Portugalian published in Marseilles beginning in 1885. See *Husher Armenak Ekariani* [Memoirs of Armenak Ekarian], Levon Achemian, ed. (Cairo: Nor Astgh, 1947), p. 25.

²⁹ This is according to Arsen Kitur, ed., *Patmutiun S.D. Hnchakian kusaktsutian, 1887-1962* [History of S. D. Hnchakian Party, 1887-1962] (Beirut: Shirak Press, 1962), Hnchakians predominated in the village of Payajuk (Raffi's birthplace) with a few party cells in Savra, Sanamerik, Vardan, and Seydavar. Dashnaks prevailed in Ghalasar and Mahlam. This same source maintains that the relationship between the three parties was tense, even inimical, from the beginning.

³⁰ Derik or Derek, meaning small monastery in Kurdish, was situated on the brink of the deep Dushman valley where Vorsort Avo's house used to be. The romantic aura of this Raffi-esque character spread over the monastery which attracted the early revolutionaries and became a link to the Erkir. The monastery of Derik was not entirely isolated from the Armenian communities. There were about 300 Armenian households scattered in mixed villages surrounding it.

Armenakans for having unrealistic plans like building high walls around the monastery.³¹

As the importance of the monastery increased, so, too, increased the Turkish measures to have the Persian government or Kurdish chiefdoms eliminate the revolutionary bastion. Occasionally, on Turkish demands, government officials visited the monastery and checked on the “residents” for their papers. In such instances, the fedayis, who naturally had no proper identification papers, would hide in a nearby Armenian village. The local Kurds were also incited to attack the monastery to loot and murder, but the fedayis were there to defend the stronghold. During the frequent battles, many devoted men fell, among them Shero in 1896. The stories of Shero and Chato, two devoted comrades, always together, participating in many expeditions transporting arms and ammunition to Van, are little gems in the history of Armenian liberation movement.³²

Sevkaretsi Sako, too, spent years in Derik and later in his memoirs describes the battles including one of which in May of 1892 seventeen fedayis were confronted with more than 400 Kurds, all paramilitary *Hamidieh* horsemen. They intended to wipe out everyone in the monastery and avenge the Kurdish losses of an earlier battle. The seventeen fedayis resisted heroically, stresses Sako, and compelled the *Hamidieh* forces to retreat back to Turkey. Sako extols Miss Tsaghik (Satenik Matinian), one of the first ARF woman activists,

³¹ See respectively, *Husher Armenak Ekariani*, p. 43, and Mikayel Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun* [History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation], vol. 1, 2nd print. (Tehran: Alik, 1981), pp. 144-45; first published in Paris in 1932.

Peto (Agheksandr Petrossian), a Dashnak fedayi, who was stationed in Derik before being sent to Van, also writes about the initial cooperation and later skirmishes between the two parties. In a letter dated September 20, 1892, he expressed his delight to have met his old friend, the Armenakan Garegin Manukian, in Derik but also speaks about the disagreement over building a wall around the monastery. See *Divan H. H. Dashnaksutian*, p. 109.

³² Shero and Chato ran numerous expeditions to Van and took part in many battles defending the monastery of Derik. One day, while cleaning his rifle, a stray bullet struck Chato and killed him. Shero was devastated, as though he was impatiently waiting to join his beloved friend in death. A year later, in another battle in the Dushman valley, with Nikol Duman leading the troop, Shero was injured. He kept fighting and dragging his bleeding body back until he reached the place where Chato was buried. Faint and exhausted, he collapsed on Shero’s grave and breathed his last. See Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun*, p. 49. For a more detailed account, see A. Norian, *Drvagner H. H. Dashnaksutian gortsuneutiuunits, Ayb tasnamiak* [Episodes from the Activities of the ARF, First Decade] (Boston: Hairenik, 1917), pp. 184-87.

who mobilized local women and led them in helping the fighters and cleaning and distributing bullets.³³

Despite the enthusiasm among the revolutionaries, local Armenians were not too enthused by their activities, except a few, such as Harutiun Poghosian (penname Anibal) of Mujumbar. Ekarian attests that there was no organization or armed troops to take in Armenian volunteers who came from all over the world, inspired by Raffi and other progressive writers such as Rafayel Patkanian, and Tserents (Hovhannes Shishmanian), to cross into Hayastan and devote their lives to its freedom. Many returned disappointed and frustrated.³⁴

Of course, things changed over time. Many Atrpatakan Armenians developed a sense of sympathy toward the *Surb Gorts* and patronized the activists with financial means and by intervening with the government when they were in trouble.³⁵ The names of the Manaserian family in Payajuk and the Arzumanian family in Ghalasar often appear in memoirs of the activists as benefactors, supporters of the movement and providers of shelter and financial assistance. Ruben (Ter-Minasian) recalls being sheltered and fed by Manaserian family in Payajuk when joining Nikol Duman's troop on his first attempt to venture into the Erkirk.³⁶

One of the most prominent Armenakans in Atrpatakan was Mkrtich Terlemezian, known as Avetisian or Mkrtich Avetisian. He arrived in Atrpatakan in the early 1890s for a short stay as a reporter for *Armenia*, the periodical Mkrtich Portugalian published in Marseilles, and as a party fieldworker. He was cordially received by the Armenakan group. He returned to Atrpatakan in 1893 and settled in Salmast, also assuming a teaching position and later to become superintendent of Armenian schools. He was one of the early activists in bringing enlightenment to Armenian towns and villages of Atrpatakan, assisted by his fellow Armenakan Grigor Bozikian and Arsen Vardapet Vehuni, the pro-Armenakan prelate of Salmast.³⁷ One of the exploits of Avetisian and his Armenakan group in Atrpatakan

³³ See Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun*, pp. 148-49.

³⁴ *Husher Armenak Ekariani*, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42

³⁶ Ruben, *Hay heghapokhakani me hishataknere* [The Memoirs of an Armenian Revolutionary], vol. 1, 2nd print. (Beirut: Hamazkayin, 1972), p. 285. It was at Manaserian's residence that Ruben met Armenak Aftandilian, Gaspar Hakobian, and Ervand Frangian, who were teachers in Payajuk and who were to become leaders of the Atrpatakan Armenian revolutionary and intellectual life.

³⁷ For Prelate Vehuni's activities and his eventual ousting from Salmast, see *Astgh Arevelian* (May 15, 1896), p. 2.

was the liberation of Haftvan from Ghala Khan, who terrorized the people and extracted heavy taxes. After that, Haftvan came under the jurisdiction of the central government of Tabriz and was immune from the khan's repressions and exploitations.³⁸ Avetisian, who remained in Atrptakan until the end of 1895, organized party cells and kept close ties with the party leaders in Van/Vaspurakan. Armenak Ekarian worked with him as a messenger between Van and Atrpatakan.

In his accounts of revolutionary life in Salmast, Malkhas (Artashes K. Hovsepian), an ARF fieldworker stationed later in that region, has written that Avetisian's aura prevailed well after his victimization in 1896. The Armenakans maintained small units in Haftvan and Mahlam, and their influence and a negligible presence persisted in Atrpatakan until 1904, long after the Armenakan activities had ceased.³⁹ During the initial period of revolutionary activism, many Armenakans seeking more intense involvement in the movement joined the Dashnaktsutiun. Dr. Kristapor Ohanian, a graduate of the University of Geneva was one of them. He participated in the Khanasor Expedition and served as the physician of the group.⁴⁰

Armenakans worked very cautiously not to incite the suspicion of the Persian and Turkish authorities and the local Kurdish chieftains. Their transport of arms and literature to Van was limited, and they always chastised the risky operations of the Dashnaktsutiun. Their first venture in this field had left bitter memories. In May of 1889, the Ottoman soldiers had intercepted the group attempting to cross the border. Hovhannes Agripasian, one of Mkrtich Portugalian's students, on a mission in Atrpatakan, was returning to Van together with Karapet Goulaksezian, a Vanetsi intellectual, and Vardan Goloshian, a teacher in Haftvan. Agripasian and Goloshian were killed. Goulaksezian was able to escape and save some of the papers, documents, and letters the group was carrying.⁴¹ Goulaksezian's accounts of the bloody encounter with the Turks stirred emotions and,

³⁸ The Persian Crown Prince, who traditionally owned Atrpatakan and resided there, had sold that village to Ghala Khan for additional revenue. See *Husher Armenak Ekariani*, pp. 58-59. A different version of this story is given by Mikayel Natanian, *Armenakan kusaktsutiune* [The Armenakan Party] (Cairo: Nubar, 1990), p. 33 note 8, but since Ekarian was a participant in the event, his account is utilized here.

³⁹ Malkhas, *Aprunner* [Experiences] (Boston: Hairenik, 1931), p. 148.

⁴⁰ The Khanasor Expedition is discussed below.

⁴¹ Vardan Goloshian and Hovhannes Agripasian had taken up residence in Salmast in the late 1880s. Goloshian had secretly entered the Erkir in 1887 and visited Mush; then he went to the Caucasus and back to the village of Haftvan. There, he worked as a teacher and political fieldworker training the youth.

according to Mikayel Natanian, aroused feelings of rage and revenge among the Vanetsi youth, inciting them to organize armed groups to hold the Turks and Kurds at bay and to defend the Armenian villages of Vaspurakan. Natanian also notes that Tigran Teroyan (Vazgen), a staunch Armenakan at the time (he later joined Dashnaksutium), composed a song in Vanetsi dialect, an elegy to the first Armenakan victims.⁴² Incidents of such interceptions, confiscation of the precious merchandise and the killing or arrest of the “porters” were frequent, but that was, as the Dashnaksutium argued, the price to pay for the sake of the *Surb Gorts*, which entailed arming Ottoman Armenians and preparing them for self-defense to attain eventually the supreme goal of liberation.

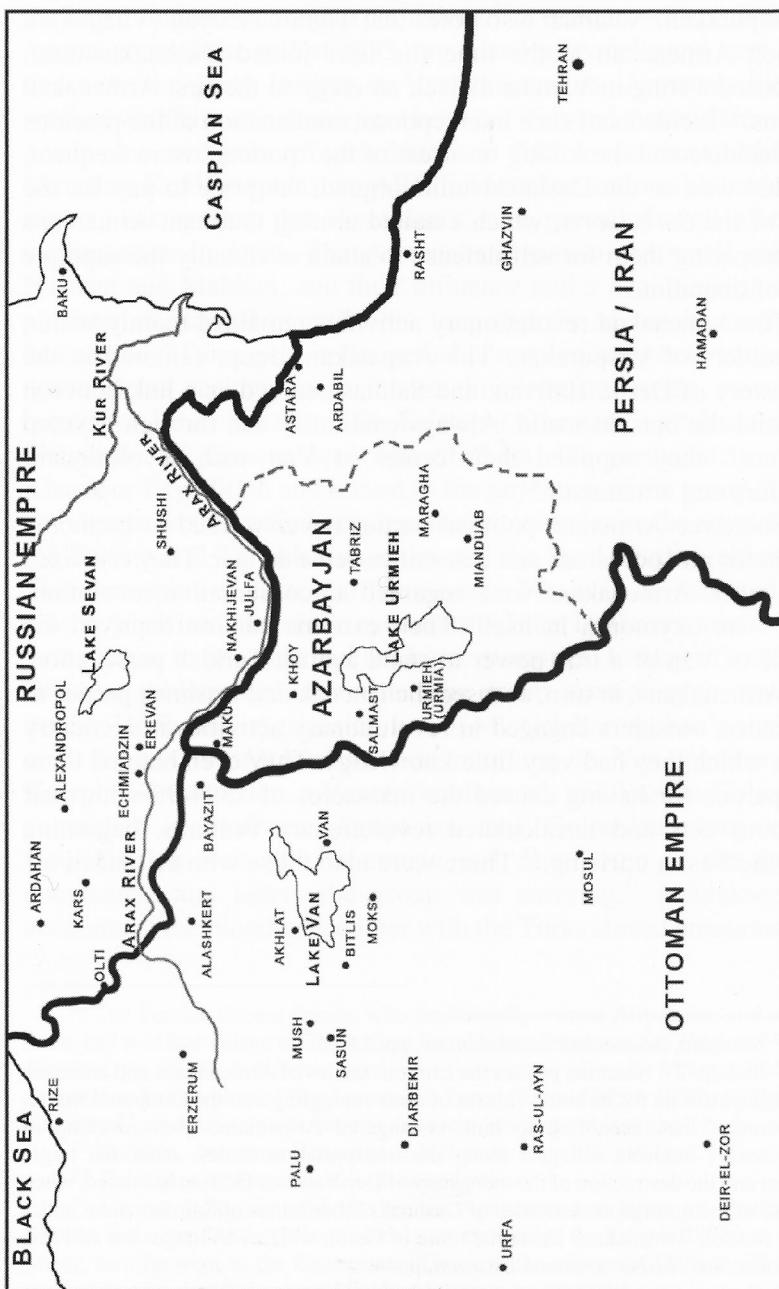
The Armenakan revolutionary activities remained mainly within the borders of Vaspurakan. The Atpatakan group, centered in the monastery of Derik, Haftvan, and Salmast, served as a link between Van and the outside world. Always cautiously and through devoted “porters,” they supplied their center in Van with revolutionary literature and armaments.⁴³

The three Armenian political parties never worked in harmony, except for rare occasions and cases of extreme danger. They criticized each other. Armenakans were regarded as conservative revolutionaries – an oxymoron in itself. Their extreme caution deprived the people of Van of a true power to stand against Turkish persecution. The Armenakans, in turn, accused the Hnchak and Dashnak parties of ignorance, outsiders engaged in revolutionary activities in a country about which they had very little knowledge. They even blamed these two parties for having caused the massacres of 1894-96 with their pompous acts and uncalculated revolutionary ventures, beginning with the Sasun uprising.⁴⁴ There were also those who criticized all

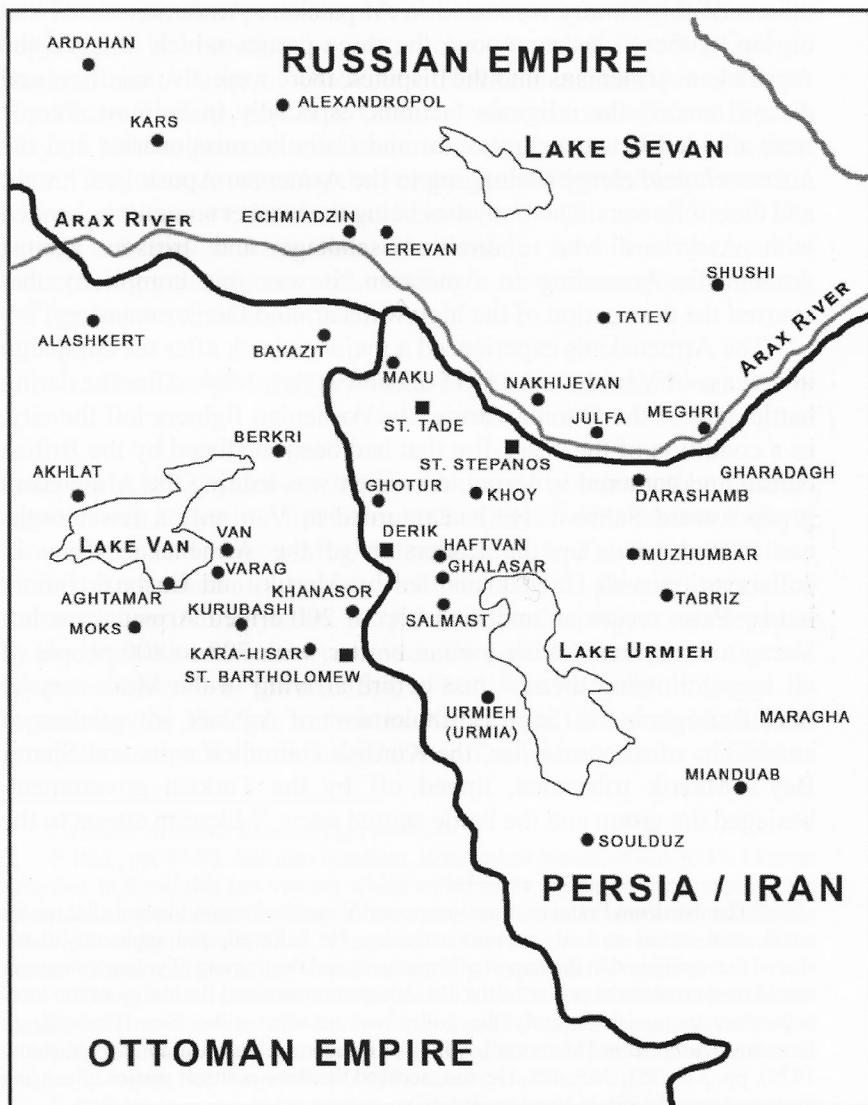
⁴² Natanian, *Armenakan kusaktsutiune*, pp. 22-23.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 27. Natanian praises the cautious tactics of Armenakans and criticizes the Dashnaksutium for its bold ventures of arms smuggling into the Ottoman Empire, an operation that, according to him, endangered Armenians, even resulting in massacres of innocent villagers along the transportation routes. After the tragic incident and the destruction of the monastery of Derik and, as Ekarian has noted, when because of the outrageous activities of Dashnaks other routes of Salmast came under heavy control, Armenakans chose the route of Gotol, which was longer but still less dangerous. See *Husher Armenak Ekariani*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ *Husher Armenak Ekariani*, pp. 61-62.



Azarbayjan at the Crossroads of Three Empires (Rubina Peroomian)



Azrbayjan at the Crossroads of Three Empires (Rubina Peroomian)

three parties, believing that Armenians in the Ottoman Empire did not need activities that only provoked the sultan's regime.⁴⁵

This antagonism and enmity was aroused sometimes because of personal conflicts; other times the differences were ideological or, as mentioned earlier, in tactics used and goals pursued. To be sure, the effects of this enmity resonated in Atpatakan. Amourian states that on top of these clashes among the three parties which dragged the Atpatakan Armenians into the disputes, there were also conflicts and discord among the religious factions, especially in Salmast. People were divided between Protestant and Catholic missionaries and the *lusavorchakan* clergy (belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church) and their followers. The Catholics being the weaker sometimes banded with Assyrians who committed sabotage and treason against Armenians. According to Amourian, it was this complicity that spurred the destruction of the high walls around Derik monastery.⁴⁶

The Armenakans experienced a major setback after the campaign in defense of Van, June 3-11 (15-23 new style), 1896. After the daring battle against the Ottoman army, the Armenian fighters left the city, as a condition of the cease-fire that had been mediated by the British consul and gathered in Varag. Avetisian was leading the Armenakan group toward Salmast. He had returned to Van only a few months earlier and taken up the leadership of the Armenakan troop in collaboration with Hnchakians, led by Martik, and Dashnaksutiun, led by Peto. Avetisian and his troop of 200 armed Armenakans left Varag toward the Turkish-Iranian border, with 700 to 800 people of all ages following them.⁴⁷ Just before arriving in the Monastery of Surb Bartoghomeos (Saint Bartholomew) of Aghbak, in violation of conditions of the cease-fire, the Kurdish Hamidieh units and Sharaf Bey's Mazrik tribesmen, tipped off by the Turkish government, besieged the group and the battle started anew.⁴⁸ Ekarian attests to the

⁴⁵ Hambardzum Eramian, a well-respected Vanetsi educator, blamed all three for uneducated tactics and adventurous activities. He believed, and apparently many shared that opinion, that the imported armaments and the training of young volunteers would never match the power of the Turkish government and the ability of the local authorities to punish severely the guilty and innocent alike. See Hambardzum Eramian, *Hushardzan* [Memorial], vol. 1 (Alexandria: Aram Gasapian Publishing, 1929), pp. 348, 351, 365, 428. He, too, accused the three political parties of causing the massacres of 1896 in Van (pp. 365-67).

⁴⁶ André Amourian, *H. H. Dashnaksutiunum Parskastanum* [The Armenian Revolutionary Federation in Persia] (Tehran: Alik, 1950), p. 19.

⁴⁷ Eramian, *Hushardzan*, p. 369.

⁴⁸ Natanian, *Armenakan kusaktsutiume*, p. 38.

dedication of the Armenians in Salmast, men and women alike, their eagerness to do everything they could, donating money and jewelry and organizing an armed force to assist Avetisian. But it was too late. The few survivors who reached Salmast brought the news of the demise of the group and Avetisian's martyrdom.⁴⁹

The Armenakan party was revived to some extent by leaders who happened to be abroad at the time, such as Armenak Ekarian, Garegin Bagheshtsian, Grigor Bozikian, Hovhannes Panoyan, Grigor Ararktsian (Farhat), and Trpe (Manuk) who had set off from Van in May of 1896 to procure arms and muster volunteers in Iran. On their return, they were arrested by the Persian authorities and imprisoned in Khoy and thus were unable to participate in the defense of Van.⁵⁰ The party's activities in Atpatakan continued for a while in the vein of indoctrinating the masses and instilling a revolutionary spirit among the Persian Armenians.

*The Emergence of Armenian Political Organizations
The Hnchakians*

Founded in 1887 in Geneva, the Hnchakian party was another political organization active in Atpatakan in the 1890s.⁵¹ Hnchakians Rafayel Movsisian⁵² and Hagop Meghavorian came to Tabriz in 1890 and toured Atpatakan to recruit volunteers and procure arms for transportation into Hayastan, the Erkir. After the project was dropped by the Hnchakian Central Committee, they joined Simon Nadirian and Alexan Rustamian from Tiflis, who were already engaged in organizing the Hnchak branch in Atpatakan. The first Hnchakian group came together in January 1891 in Tabriz at the home of Ghukas

⁴⁹ *Husher Armenak Ekariani*, pp. 94-95.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 91-93. See also Natanian, *Armenakan kusaktsutiune*, p. 39. Ekarian describes in detail this last venture which ended in the killing of the group and the arrest and imprisonment in Khoy of the survivors. He talks about the unbearable conditions of the prison in Khoy. The group was set free upon the intervention of the Prelate Vehuni and a large amount of bail paid by Atpatakan Armenians.

⁵¹ During a conversation in Tiflis in 1887, Raffi is said to have praised the founders of Hnchakian party for having formed an all-Armenian organization instead of joining the Narodniks or Marxists as did the educated Armenian youth in Russia and the Caucasus. See *Patmutiun S. D. Hnchakian kusaktsutian*, p. 81.

⁵² Rafayel was the elder brother of Hovsep Movsisian (mentioned earlier). Hovsep and Rafayel were teenagers when in the late 1880s the family moved from Tabriz to Tiflis. The two brothers were imbued with revolutionary ideas, but their paths diverged. Rafayel crossed over into the Erkir and worked as a teacher in Mush, becoming a member of the Hnchakian party.

Malintsián, who was also the principal of Haykazian-Tamarian school. Rafayel Movsisian remained in his native Tabriz the rest of his life and organized party branches throughout Atrpatakan, also working in Haykazian-Tamarian school as a music teacher.⁵³ Hnchakians were quite influential during this time in Tabriz, controlling the school with a Hnchakian principal and members of the faculty. Bishop Stepanos Mkhitarian, the prelate of the time (known by his revolutionary name Arabo) was also a Hnchak sympathizer and encouraged their activities.

Hnchakians aimed to liberate the Armenian historical lands within the Ottoman Empire, the Caucasus, and Atrpatakan in Persia and ultimately to establish a free and independent republic. They preached their goal and disseminated their socialist ideology in these regions. They were also engaged in paramilitary activities, especially in the Erkir. Martik (Martiros Sarukhanian), born in Shushi, came to Tabriz in 1894 as a Hnchakian fieldworker before going on to Van in the winter of 1895. Although a newcomer in Van, he was entrusted the leadership of the Hnchakian group in the defense of Van in 1896. Hnchakian activities in Atrpatakan mostly consisted of propaganda, but the Hnchakian contribution in elevating the spirit of the Armenian masses and instilling in them the revolutionary ideology is undeniable. To fortify their presence beginning especially from 1894, directives were given to establish party branches throughout Atrpatakan. A Hnchakian chapter was founded in 1896 by Levon Shahbazian, a Hnchakian teacher-activist in Ardabil. Maragha was the next town with a Hnchakian party cell founded by Haik Khazhak of Alexandropol in 1896. He was the brother of Garegin Khazhak, a famous Dashnaktsakan. The Hnchak Center also sent Tiflis-born Tsolak the Deacon to Payajuk in 1895 as the leading fieldworker of the Salmast region.⁵⁴ He had the support and assistance of Raffi's sister, a revolutionary spirit named Javahir. Tsolak organized and trained the "Shant" group consisting of nearly eighty young revolutionaries to pass to Van. They were all from the Caucasus with only two local fedayis among them. The group was housed and fed by the locals and especially the family of Nazar Ghoukasian in Payajuk. By the time the group began moving to cross the border, the 1896 events of Van

⁵³ *Patmutiun S. D. Hnchakian kusaktsutian*, pp. 200-02.

⁵⁴ Statistical information provided by Hnchakian activists in the late 1880s shows the Salmast region to consist of 60 villages, 5 of which were Armenian: Haftvan (400 households), Payajuk (325), Mahlam (200), Ghalasar (120), and Sara (80). See *Patmutiun S. D. Hnchakian kusaktsutian*, pp. 206-07.

occurred. The Armenakan, Hnchakian, and Dashnak troops defending Van were slaughtered on their way to Salmast, and the “Shant” group remained stranded near the border.⁵⁵ Turkish persecution and control over the borders grew more intense after the massacres of 1896. Reza Bey, the Turkish consul in Khoy, personally came to Salmast to pressure the local Persian officials to conduct house-to-house searches, confiscate weapons, and arrest and expel all the outsiders.

After the discord at the party congress of 1896, the reorganized Hnchakian Center sent Paramaz (Matteos Sargsian) to Salmast to gather fighters and activists and go to Van to take Martik’s place as the Hnchak leader of Vaspurakan. Paramaz established a military committee to oversee and arrange the sending of troops to Hayastan. It was at this time that Tsolak the Deacon was killed by two men he had punished for their unruly conduct. His loss was greatly felt within the community, hindering also Paramaz’s activities. An expedition to Van finally materialized in 1897 with forty armed men supported by the same Nazar Ghoukasian of Payajuk, who donated 5,000 qirans (rials) to cover expenses. Paramaz was later replaced in Salmast by Haik Felekian (Arshaloys Khazhak).

Hnchakian fieldworkers mostly stayed in Atpatakan temporarily and returned to Tiflis or continued their principal mission in Van. Two locals, Rafayel Movsisian and the renowned writer Atpet (Sarkis Mubahajian) were to carry the load of the Hnchakian activities. The party’s influence in Tabriz picked up again in 1903 when Ruben Khanazad and Atpet were invited to the Aramian school in Tabriz as principal and teacher. Simultaneously, Alexander Ter-Vardanian, having graduated from the Gevorgian Jemaran of Echmiadzin, returned to Maragha, his birthplace, and became the principal of the school there while also reorganizing the dwindling Hnchak followers. His three-year presence in Maragha and the Hnchak propaganda in the school resulted in a generation of young activists. Arsen Kitur, the compiler and editor of the history of the Hnchakian party, mentions in particular Avetik Mikayelian who later became the Communist International’s representative in Iran and a trusted militant of the Soviet Communist party. Another local Hnchakian who turned into a staunch Communist in Soviet Armenia was Artsruni Otian, born in Salmast. His father, Vanetsi Tigran Otian (Aso), an important Hnchakian activist, had wedded the daughter of the Hnchakian priest of Salmast.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 210-11.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 205-06.

There was a time when being a nationalist patriot was synonymous with being a Hnchakian. Despite all this, the Hnchakians did not gain hegemony in Atrpatakan, and this is most likely because they did not attain much significance in Van. Atrpatakan with its very close relationship with Van displayed the same pattern of distribution of influential zones for the three political parties of the time. Natanian asserts that Hnchakians gained some momentum and were recognized as a party in Van only when in the winter of 1895, Shushetsi Martik (Martiros Sarukhanian) came to Van. Natanian notes; “Hnchakians in Van were never able to gain the popularity and the influence that the Armenakans and later the Dashnaks achieved.”⁵⁷ Hnchakians persevered especially in the village of Payajuk, where they had a party cell up until 1904.⁵⁸ The internal party discord of 1896 and the ideological debates and disunity in 1905 paralyzed Hnchakian endeavors and weakened the authority and popularity of the party.

The sharp rift within the party was also reflected in the Hnchakian organization in Iran and, of course, Atrpatakan. During this period until the tumultuous years of World War I, the Hnchakians of Atrpatakan, and Iran in general, were engulfed in petty squabbles among party factions internally and unrelenting criticism of the Dashnaktsutiun and its “crude and brutal” fedayi soldiers, who did not shun from committing atrocities against the enemies of the party. According to the Hnchakian historian, Tabriz, with its two Armenian quarters, was divided into two: Dashnaktsakan Lilava and Hnchakian Ghala. In a letter dated January 31, 1904, Matteos Vardapet Achemian, the newly appointed prelate of Atrpatakan, reported to Catholicos Khrimian Hayrik about the sad situation he had come to witness. The whole community in Tabriz was involved in a Hnchak-Dashnak conflict. In the Lilava section of the town, the school board was entirely Hnchak, and, with the support of the pro-Hnchak priest Ter Eghishe, it was hiring Hnchak teachers. This had created friction with the Dashnak faculty, and the tension had descended into the streets of Dashnak Lilava. According to Prelate Achemian, Hnchak-Dashnak political differences were artificially exacerbated by newcomers from the Caucasus and refugees from the Ottoman Empire while the locals were espousing one or another without much thought and being used by both sides.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Natanian, *Armenakan kusaktsutiune*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Malkhas, *Aprunner*, pp. 150-51.

⁵⁹ Matteos Vardapet Achemian’s letter is preserved in National Archives of Armenia, 56/14/218, pp. 8-9.

As it may have been, political ideologies and orientations were imported phenomena for Atrpatakan Armenians as necessary tools for societal growth, yet too soon to digest. Atrpatakan Armenians were merely climbing the steps of enlightenment, progressing in the socioeconomic sphere, establishing networks of schools, and forming cultural and benevolent associations. What seems to be the case, however, is that more often than not the antagonism and rivalry between visiting political activists would drag the whole community into the fray, sometimes even ending in physical altercations and murder. Despite all this, in terms of education and cultural life, the Armenian network of schools established by the efforts of intellectuals from abroad was far more advanced than the Persian school system or the lack of it, especially in the rural areas, to the extent that the Armenian model was often the subject of Persian envy and emulation.

The Emergence of Armenian Political Organizations
The Dashnaktsutiu

Atrpatakan was also an important base for the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, Dashnaktsutiu) and a major link between the Ottoman Armenian provinces and the Caucasus. Even before the party's founding in 1890, the *Eritasard Hayastan* (Young Armenia) secret organization (beginning of 1889) and its paramilitary cells called *Droshak* (Flag) spread beyond the Caucasus into some areas in the Ottoman Empire and also into Atrpatakan.⁶⁰ Between 1890 and the ARF's second General Congress in 1898, the founding members each took charge of a region with Armenian concentration to propagate the goals of the newly established political party and to rally Armenians behind its tenets and activities. Shushi-born Honan Davtian was in charge of Iran and particularly Atrpatakan where he lived for years. He and his Swiss wife Hortense were both devoted members of the ARF, educators and promoters of cultural life in Tabriz.⁶¹ They both died of tuberculosis (1916 and 1917).

⁶⁰ The years 1888-89 marked a period of intensified activities within the Armenian communities of Tiflis and Baku by Armenian students from Moscow and St. Petersburg universities. Kristapor Mikayelian, Simon Zavarian, Ishkhan Hovsep Arghutian, Martin Shatirian, and others initiated *Eritasard Hayastan*, which later merged with the Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries (later Armenian Revolutionary Federation) in 1890 in Tiflis.

⁶¹ Honan and Hortense married in Geneva in 1895 and came to Tiflis from where they were sent to Tabriz as fieldworkers. Honan Davtian also served as the principal of Haykazian school. Hortense learned Armenian and became an active member of

According to Amourian, Movses Ishkhanian of Karabagh was the first ARF activist who went to Derik in 1890 and took charge of the monastery's administration. Together with Armenakans already in place, they rebuilt the monastery which attracted many other Dashnak activists, among them Hovsep Arghutian (Ishkhan, born in Sanahin in the Lori district) and Satenik Matinian (Tsaghik, born in Karabagh).⁶² The activities in the monastery aroused suspicion among the local Kurdish tribes. They attacked to kill the inhabitants and ruin the monastery. Movses Ishkhanian died in the battle.⁶³ Nikol (Nigol) Duman, too, was one of the first Dashnak activists to arrive in Tabriz (1891) and settle in Ghalasar.⁶⁴

Evidence of Atrpatakan's importance for the Dashnaksutiun is the fact that until 1895 the party's ruling body in this region was named *Tavrizi buro* (Bureau of Tabriz). Malkhas asserts that the ARF Central Committees of Erevan and Atrpatakan (Tabriz) were the two strongest bulwarks of revolutionary activities, 80 percent of which were devoted to the Erkir.⁶⁵ The Atrpatakan Central Committee was symbolically named *Vrezh* meaning revenge which also was a homonym to Davrezh (Tavrezh), an old Armenian pronunciation of Tabriz. The ARF ranks gradually grew stronger in Tabriz and dominated the cultural and political life of the community. The school administrations and faculty consisted of well-educated male and female Dashnaks who introduced modern curricula and methodology. The ARF had its trusted local members. One of them was Nerses Balayan, whose house was named *paponts tun* (a colloquial way of saying paternal house), where informal meetings were held and where

Armenian community and a teacher in Tamarian school and later in the newly opened Central School.

⁶² Satenik Matinian was the first female fieldworker to come to Atrpatakan. She served as a teacher in Tabriz and Salmast. A member of Tabriz ARF Komite, she organized groups of Armenian women and involved them in the cultural and political life of Atrpatakan, the "Maro" group being one of them. Satenik continued her political activities in Tiflis after 1897 and married Hovsep Arghutian in Moscow in 1899.

⁶³ Amourian, *H. H. Dashnaksutiune Parskastanum*, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Nikol Ter-Hovhannessian led numerous expeditions to Van and many battles against Kurdish chieftains obstructing the operations. Samson describes a battle in October 1895 in which Nikol displayed extraordinary courage, warding off the Kurds and successfully reaching Van with the precious merchandise. Samson believes that it was in this battle that he earned the moniker Duman or Ghara Duman, meaning tempest or black tempest, from his Kurdish adversaries. Quoted in Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun*, pp. 151-53.

⁶⁵ Malkhas, *Aprunner*, p. 109.

all newcomer members or volunteers were welcome to stay until they were dispatched to their assigned areas or their destination across the border in Hayastan.⁶⁶

The three major routes of arms transport at the time consisted of Erevan-Surmalu, Alexandropol-Kars, and one passing through Atpatakan.⁶⁷ The political parties were also engaged in fortifying these three routes with concentration of manpower and munitions. As a result, cultural and community life in these places was bolstered. In this context, Atpatakan Armenians became beneficiaries of an increasing national awareness, cultural awakening, and educational development. *Astgh Arevelian* reports on a commemorative event in Tabriz, the celebration of *Vardanants paterazm* or *Vardanank* (the war of Vardan Mamikonian against Yazdegerd II, the Persian Sasanian king, in 451 A.D.) and how the invited Persian and Turkish officials sat there to witness the intense political atmosphere that the youth had created and the patriotic spirit that prevailed.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See Amourian, *H. H. Dashnaksutiune Parskastanum*, pp. 45-48, where the author lists the names of important local individuals, educators, activists, and influential merchants and entrepreneurs, all supporters of or participants in the movement.

Upon the recommendation of Zakaria Nazarbekian, a prominent individual in Tabriz, Dr. Harutium Ter-Stepanian became the Crown Prince's personal dentist. He was educated in United States and had come to Tabriz in 1902 to dedicate his time to revolutionary activism. Through the close relationship he developed with the Crown Prince (the future Mohammad Ali Shah), he was able to gain favors for the ARF in difficult situations (p. 48).

Amourian describes an incident that shows the popularity of the ARF in Tabriz: The pro-Hnchak Vardapet Muradian, newly appointed prelate, invited Ruben Khanazad, the noted Hnchakian leader to take the post of principal of the Haykazian-Tamarian school to replace the Dashnak principal Rashmajian. The students protested outside the school building shouting "we don't want him" and blocked Khanazad's entrance. The demonstrations became violent and continuous, so the school was shut for the year 1904. Finally, the prelate yielded. The school board, the principal, and the faculty were appointed anew, all Dashnaks and political activists at the same time. In 1909, the first Armenian high school, a longtime dream of Atpatakan educators, opened its doors in Tabriz for all the graduates of all Atpatakan Armenian schools (p. 47). The school was named Atpatakan Kentronakan Dprots (Atpatakan's Central School).

⁶⁷ The border regions of Kars were major routes for the supply of arms and ammunition, fedayis, and fieldworkers for Alashkert, Karin (Erzerum), Khnus, Akhlat, and Sasun. For a discussion of these routes and preparative activities, itinerant intellectuals and fedayis in Kars, see Rubina Peroomian, "Kars in the Armenian Liberation Movement," in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian Kars and Ani* (Costa Mesa CA: Mazda Publishers, 2011), pp. 245-72.

⁶⁸ *Astgh Arevelian*, March 6, 1896.

For a long time, the Atrpatakan routes were favored for being relatively safe because of the neutrality of the Persian government. Activists using these routes were able to avoid the severe persecution of the tsarist government on the Russo-Turkish border. The Persian authorities often turned a blind eye on the movement. After all, the Armenian paramilitary troops in the Ottoman Empire were fighting against the Sunni Turks, archenemies of the Shiite Persians and Turks of Azarbayjan. Persian support went as far as the consul in Tiflis giving official recommendation letters to ARF fieldworkers to enter Persia and work there without any problem.⁶⁹ There were, of course, incidents of arrest and murder by local officials, but these reactions were incited by neighboring Turkey and Russia: "The land of the shahs, mostly played the role of a refuge and a training post for decades for us, and that was a relief on our path full of obstacles and difficulties," wrote Mikayel Varandian.⁷⁰

Many revolutionaries who came to Atrpatakan to carry out a mission remained there, formed a family, and dedicated their time and life to political activism. One such person was Yeprem (Eprem) who had just returned from exile in Siberia. In 1896, he took a teaching position in Gharadagh (Aghaghan village). He was the first Dashnak there to disseminate revolutionary ideas. A year later, he was in Salmast to take part in the Khanasor Expedition as a mere corporal. He then returned to Aghaghan, resuming his mission for two more years after which he went to Rasht (in the Gilan province) and worked there until the Constitutional Revolution.⁷¹

Stepan (Tseruni Harutiunian, born in Erevan), better known as Balajan, was another devotee, a member of the ARF Central Committee. He was a participant in the Kukunian Expedition and an exile, along with Sargis Kukunian and others, on the island of Sakhalin. After unspeakable ordeals in Siberia, in the labor camps of Sakhalin, and several years of hardship as an escapee, then a refugee, he ended up in Atrpatakan together with Yeprem and Hovsep

⁶⁹ Amourian, *H. H. Dashnaksutiuine Parskastanum*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun*, p. 139.

⁷¹ As the revolutionary movements in the Caucasus in the 1900s intensified, the Gilan and Mazandaran provinces and their seaports, Enzeli, Rasht, and Astara, gained importance and provided relatively secure routes for troops, individual activists, and especially revolutionary literature from the European centers to Baku and all of the Caucasus. These routes were even used by the Russian revolutionaries to smuggle literature into Russia.

Movsisian and settled in Tabriz, where ultimately, he operated a photography shop.⁷²

ARF fieldworkers, stationed in different towns and villages throughout Atrpatakan, usually also served as teachers in the local schools and relied on their meager salary to support their family or to support volunteers who came from all over, stayed in these towns and villages, received training, and waited for an opportune time to cross the border into Hayastan. Obviously, financial issues were a big problem, even endangering the party's existence in the area. In the circular-letter of 1893, discussed above, the members of the ARF Komite in Tabriz wrote of their dilemma in coping with the financial crisis caused by heavy borrowings from the community. They asserted that, if not remedied, the situation could cause the collapse of the Dashnaktsutiun in Atrpatakan which they equated to the end of the party altogether.⁷³ Father Zaki, a co-signer of the letter, was not the only clergyman in the service of the *Surb Gorts*. Gevorg Tsayragoyn Vardapet Nalbandian (Entsayr),⁷⁴ Daniel Vardapet Zadoyan, two abbots of Surb Tadéi Vank (Monastery of Saint Thaddeus the Apostle, named Menavor in ARF literature), Archbishop Sahak Ayvatian, the prelate of Iran-India diocese, and still others were the clergy of

⁷² Malkhas speaks highly of Stepan. In fact, he was the first person Malkhas met when he set foot in Iran. For an account of Stepan's saga, see Malkhas. *Aprunner*, pp. 128-41.

⁷³ See *Divan H. H. Dashnaktsutian*, pp. 102-08. The circular-letter was signed by Father Zaki (Bagrat Vardapet Tavakalian), Miss S. Dzaghikian (Satenik Matinian), Ishkhan Hovsep Arghutian, Nanoyan (Honan Davtian), Farhat (Sarkis Ohanjanian), and Erko Gaylakerian. The ARF Komite had borrowed money from the Tumanian brothers, but with the meager salaries of its member teachers, it was unable to repay the loan.

⁷⁴ Tsayragoyn Vardapet (Very Reverend) Gevorg Nalbandian (Entsayr) was born in Sgherd (Siirt). He was ordained a celibate priest and sent to serve in the monastery of Aghtamar. His inclination toward revolutionary activism and Rostom's recommendation took him to Surb Tadé. He took charge of storage and dispatch of weaponry to Hayastan. Being fluent in Kurdish, he was able to befriend the Khan of Maku and the surrounding Kurds, which helped his revolutionary activities to go unnoticed. He was instrumental in the renovation of the monastery, establishing a school and library in Khoy and accomplishing other educational projects. He hosted Ruben in the monastery in 1904, and the two became close associates. Ruben devotes pages in his memoirs to describe this man of strange character, who had chosen the cloak of clergy to serve his people but took directives from the Dashnak revolutionary leaders rather than his own religious superiors (Ruben, *Hay heghapokhakani me hishataknere*, pp. 316-33). After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, he returned to his native Sgherd but was murdered there in 1915 along with his parishioners.

revolutionary spirit. They followed the ARF decisions and local policies and showed absolute dedication to the Cause.

Atrpatakan was also well known for its plants for the manufacture of arms, established by Rostom in Tabriz in 1891 and in Salmast (Minaret in revolutionary literature) the next year. Disassembled weaponry was smuggled from far away arm depots of Russia, or else broken and rusted pieces were brought in, repaired, or reassembled in these plants. New arms were also manufactured from raw materials procured locally or brought from Russia. Stepan Tadeosian (Samson) of Agulis, Kristapor Mikayelian's nephew, oversaw the Tabriz plant named *Khariskh* and managed the arms transport. Karo (Aristakes Zorian, Rostom's brother) was another young intellectual devoted to the Cause, an expert in the arms maker's workshop and a sharpshooter. He was one of the casualties in the Khanasor Expedition. It is impressive how many key leaders of Dashnaktsutiun, in addition to humble fedayis, were involved in arms production and transport. This certainly speaks of the initial enthusiasm and firm belief in organizing the self-defense of the Ottoman Armenians up until a general uprising against the oppressor was possible.⁷⁵

The success of the defense of Van in 1896, and consequently the Vaspurakan Armenians evading the widespread Hamidian massacres, was to a large extent thanks to the revolutionary base the three political parties had established in Atrpatakan, the preparatory work and the flow of weaponry and manpower to strengthen the Vaspurakan Armenians in spirit and resolve. Even at the onset of the events at Van, when the danger on the Iran-Turkey border was at its peak, two troops headed by Petros Seremchian (Bulgaratsi Peto) and Sheko, crossed the border to participate in the defense of Van.⁷⁶

Although the defense was successful, the Turkish government broke the ceasefire agreement and organized the ambush and murder of hundreds of fighters and unarmed youth withdrawing to Persia. This was a treachery that the Dashnaktsutiun could not tolerate. The organization had lost its finest fedayis, including Peto, the group's leader. Peto (Agheksandr Petrossian, born in Kars or Alexandropol, based on two different sources) had come to Tabriz and was one of the first volunteers for the transport of arms to Van. As a political activist

⁷⁵ See Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaktsutian patmutiun*, pp. 140-55.

⁷⁶ Upon Rostom's recommendation, Petros Seremchian, known as Bulgaratsi Peto (his revolutionary name) joined a Bulgarian troop in a battle against the Turkish army on the Turko-Bulgarian border. He was arrested by the Turks and hanged in Adrianople in 1901.

in Van, he was able to recruit the Vanetsi youth such as Vazgen (Tigran Teroyan), who had enthusiastically joined the ranks of Armenakan party but had been disillusioned and left.⁷⁷ Peto strategized the Dashnak participation in the defense of Van and was among those who fell victim to Turkish perfidy.

The Khanasor Expedition of 1897 was to take revenge on Kurdish Sharaf Bey and his Mazrik tribe, which had attacked and murdered the retreating fedayis from Van. The project was Nikol Duman's brainchild, who advocated a change in tactics—strike, be the first to attack, instead of engaging in self-defense which often ends in massacres.⁷⁸ ARF historiography and memoirs of individual participants assess the operation as a major achievement for the Atrpatakan ARF activists. It entailed months of preparatory work, engaging also the local Armenians in spirit and practical assistance. Just the presence of renowned fedayis such as Vazgen, Petros, Karo, Vardan, Satenik, Sev Karetzi Sako, Ter Grigor, Nikol Duman, and many others was inspirational and exciting for the populace.⁷⁹ Nakho (Avetis

⁷⁷ Vazgen became Peto's right hand man during the defense of Van, and after Peto's martyrdom near the Iranian border in Kara-Hisar (Garahisar) while retreating toward Salmast, he took charge of the ARF in Van to defend the population from the government's fury after the Khanasor Expedition. Informed by Armenian spies about his activities in Van, the government threatened the Armenian population to have sheltered him and began a massive house to house search in the meantime asking the French and British consuls to intervene. The consuls demanded his surrender and promised to secure his freedom. To stop further persecutions, Vazgen and two other fedayis secretly left the city in the winter of 1897, but the government sent an army of 200 soldiers to catch the fedayis. Besieged and under fire, the fedayis fought and were killed in the valley of Kurubashi. See Norian, *Drvagner*, pp. 448-50.

⁷⁸ Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun*, p. 197, quoting Duman's letter, dated August 10, 1896.

⁷⁹ Each one of these devotees of the Armenian Cause deserves at least a short exposé of their life and sacrifice. Karo is one. Karo and Maro's story lives as a testimony of an extreme devotion to Hayastan transcending, overpowering personal feelings. Twenty-six-year-old Karo was in love with Maro (Mariam Makarian), a member of Dashnaksutian since its inception and a teacher, a revolutionary activist, an organizer of women's groups in Tabriz and Salmast. They had met each other during the arms transportation operations and fallen in love. A short time before the Khanasor Expedition, Maro noticed Karo's hesitation to participate in the venture. She assumed that it is the love between the two hindering Karo from fulfilling his duty toward his homeland. She committed suicide and left a note addressed to no one, encouraging participation and extoling the *Surb Gorts*. Karo took part in the expedition, but as his comrades-in-arms attest, as if he was seeking death. He fought fiercely and fell in the battle. He was one of the 19 mortal casualties of the 320 participants. For a brief chronicle of Maro's suicide and the letter she left behind see

Aharonian's *Khaye*) also had come to join Duman's troop.⁸⁰ Samson was transferred from Tabriz to the Salmast plant to manage the production and transportation of arms needed for the Khanasor Expedition. Galust Aloyan (Toros) was also a master ironworker in that plant and a member of the Atrpatakan Central Committee. He played a major role in the preparatory activities, participated in the expedition, and later composed the popular song, *Karkut teghats* (Hail Poured), to eternalize the exploits of his martyred fellow-fedayis.⁸¹

Many of the volunteers came from well-to-do families in Tehran, Ghazvin (Qazvin), Hamadan, and Karabagh. As Malkhas attests, the procurement of more than 300 rifles and 112,000 bullets was challenging both in terms of funding, which was very hard to get in those times, and the difficulty of buying them, mostly from remote arms depots in Russia, then transporting them either through Karabagh or Julfa to Tabriz and then to Salmast. It was also difficult to recruit 320 volunteers, clothe and feed them, give them some military training, and discipline them for the operation. The plants in Tabriz and Salmast were working full blast to produce the necessary armaments. Atrpatakan Armenian merchants brought their financial contribution and local volunteers their participation in the expedition. One of many local volunteers was Salmastetsi Sargis Sarukhanian, Samson's close friend and assistant. The ladies league of Atrpatakan had taken charge of providing for the needs of the volunteers.⁸² The battle itself was stormy, intense but quick. The fedayis had to do their

<https://hairenik.com/vfp/maro/> a translation of the piece published in *Droshak* on February 22, 1897.

⁸⁰ Nakho participated in the fights in Boghazkisan and Khanasor. He was murdered and beheaded in 1898, together with eight other fedayis in the Mahlam village in Salmast, when the group was trying to escape Turkish pursuit.

⁸¹ Malkhas, *Aprunner*, pp. 109-10. Two lines in this song is demonstrative of fedayi's moral character, "Don't be afraid *baji jan* [dear sister]; stay calm./The vengeful, brave fedayi will never hurt a woman." It has come, that when panic struck the Mazrik camp and men were being shot and killed by Armenian bullets in every direction, the leaders specifically ordered not to fire on women and children.

⁸² There are many accounts of the Khanasor Expedition. I have used Malkhas, *Aprunner* (pp. 161-70); Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun* (pp. 194-207); Norian, *Drvagner* (pp. 294-324).

Extoling Nikol Duman's role in this operation, Malkhas states: "Unfortunately, Dashnaksutium only had a Nikol Duman once in its entire history" (p. 169). Norian's narrative is more detailed than the others. Here the author describes the flag that the "Maro" group of women activists had specially woven for the expedition. Its inscription read, "Behold brother, a flag for you/With my hands I sewed it," taken from Mikayel Nalbandian's "Mer Hairenik," a song used by the revolutionaries as their hymn.

job and retreat quickly as a 2,000-man Turkish armed force was on their heels.

The Khanasor Expedition, July 25, 1897, was undoubtedly a boost to spirits after the devastating massacres of 1896, a comeback after the added bloodshed of the revolutionaries. The expedition, however, came under severe criticism by leaders of other Armenian political parties before and after the event. Mikayel Natanian notes that Armenakans tried hard to persuade the Dashnaks against their decision made in Tiflis *Shrjanayin zhoghov* (Regional Meeting). They even dispatched Armenak Ekarian to Salmast to try to forestall the venture, which according to their assessment was “a complete failure and a cause of increased persecutions and massacres.”⁸³ Arsen Kitur, the Hnchakian historian, views the “unsuccessful venture” as a result of the pressure by Russian Armenian Dashnak leaders and believes that the Vanetsi Dashnaks participated only reluctantly.⁸⁴ The reports of the last consultative meeting in Salmast and the pro and con views about the expedition, however, do not reflect such a deep contradiction among the ARF leaders, especially with Harutun Shahrikian, the supreme Bureau’s representative, moderating between the sides.⁸⁵ Yet Mikayel Varandian, too, suggests that if the Vanetsi Dashnaks had gone along wholeheartedly and more cooperatively, the expedition would have been more successful.

Artak Darbinian of the later Ramkavar party also undermines the Khanasor Expedition. He considers it to be overly praised and glorified in the Dashnak press and unworthily commemorated every year. To him, the expedition was nothing but a failure. He parallels this “over-exaggeration” with Hnchakian glorified reporting of the 1894 Sasun uprising, which he considers another failure. With this, he concludes that the future historian should be very cautious when using the partisan press as a source of history of Armenian liberation movement.⁸⁶ The problem is that his views are not free of partisanship

⁸³ Natanian, *Armenakan kusaktsutiune*, p. 51. For the Armenakan version of the Khanasor Expedition, see *Husher Armenak Ekariani*, pp. 115-18. Ekarian does not stop with this event. His staunch anti-Dashnak stance trickles down in a series of accusations pertaining to the post-1896 Armenian liberation movement with the darkest colors of treason, terror, and criminal activities. He also questions and criticizes the Dashnak participation in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (p. 136) “against a government that had always treated Armenians with leniency.”

⁸⁴ *Patmutiun S.D. Hnchakian kusaktsutian*, pp. 210-11.

⁸⁵ Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaksutian patmutiun*, pp. 195-99.

⁸⁶ Artak Darbinian, “*Vaghvan patmichin hamar*” [For the Future Historian], *Baikar* (Boston: Baikar, 1947), New Year’s Special Issue, pp. 35-39.

themselves. The antagonism among the Hnchak, Dashnak, and Armenakan parties, the harsh criticism and name calling in their press and memoirs, and later the differing versions in their respective party histories have been noted above. The Ramkavar party publications downplay the activities and achievements of all three.

Reaction to the Khanasor Expedition was nevertheless positive abroad, and that is despite the official correspondence labeling it as the work of bandits and brigands, with some Armenian clergy, Patriarch Ormanian of Constantinople among them, joining in to anathematize the venture. The British consul general in Iran, as if to counter that stigmatization, reported the event as a brave act taken out of desperation. His report was included in the British Blue Book of 1897 where, as if trying to ward off the notion of its being the work of crude, uneducated hotheads, he concluded: "This expedition, about whose desperate heroism I reported to you, generally consisted of youth coming from civilized and respected circles." Hans Fisher, a German reporter, extolled the Armenian heroism in an article titled "An Armenian Victory," published in *Die Zukunft* magazine in Berlin.⁸⁷

The grudge and sense of revenge burned in Sharaf Bey and drove him to resort to every intrigue, such as inciting the Turkish consul to intervene. The tragic incident in Mahlam, the beheading of nine fedayis in 1898, was a result of the Turkish consul pressuring the Persian authorities to pursue and punish the fedayis who had participated in the Khanasor massacre. Most of the participants had already returned to their places, and it was impossible to track them down, except for nine fedayis who were waiting arrangements to leave the country. Quoting a report in *Droshak*, Amourian gives the details of the incident ascribed to traitors informing the government about the hiding place of the fedayis in Mahlam, which had a mixed population of Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians. Following the strict orders never to shoot at a Persian soldier, the fedayis surrendered. The Turkish consul demanded that the detainees be killed. Their cadavers were beheaded by Kurdish villagers. Amourian states that the traitors did not go unpunished. They were all assassinated by the ARF as a lesson to everyone.⁸⁸

It is customary to call the early stages of the Armenian revolutionary movement as the romantic period in which enthusiasm

⁸⁷ Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaktsutiun patmutiun*, p. 194; Norian, *Drvagner*, pp. 321-24.

⁸⁸ See, Amourian *H. H. Dashnaktsutiune Parskastanum*, pp. 29-30.

overshadowed logic, and miscalculations of the strength of the enemy and the potential of the Armenian people resulted in a series of unfortunate blows, beginning with the Kukunian Expedition to the Hnchakian noisy demonstrations and the first years of Dashnak efforts to pour arms and fighters into Hayastan to prepare the populace for a general uprising down to the Khanasor Expedition. But romanticism was the temperament of the time, and it only helped these disciples of the Armenian Cause in fierce battles on all the fronts. And in that struggle, those who deserted or betrayed were not forgiven. Sometimes, the decisions to punish the coward or traitor came not from the leadership but rather individual fedayis who took retribution into their own hands. For example, Huno an old fedayi assassinated Father Arsen Tokhmakhian (1891), the Vanetsi abbot of the Monastery of Surb Stepanos Nakhavka and a student of Khrimian Hayrik, because rumors circulated that he had been sent by the Ottoman government to report on the revolutionary activity in Atrpatakan and the Caucasus.⁸⁹

The transport of arms and volunteers entering Hayastan continued. Troops led by Shasho in 1899, by Pokhik (Vahram Hovhannesian of Shatakh) up until the 1900s, and others pulled off many successful operations.⁹⁰ The period between 1899 and 1903 marked a significant abatement in Armenian revolutionary activities; then it picked up again. In 1904, Nikol Duman recruited volunteers in Erevan to pass to Sasun and help in the Sasun uprising. Ruben had linked up with his men as well. He dreamed to cross the border to Van and devote his life to the revolution.⁹¹ Nikol Duman's troop safely crossed the Iranian border to Arablu, then to Khoy. After long preparations and procurement of weaponry, the seventeen mounted

⁸⁹ Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaktsutian patmutiun*, pp.102-03.

⁹⁰ The success of these operations and others to come in 1904 depended to a great extent on local groups or individuals fully familiar with the area as well as the mountainous roads and passages away from Kurdish and Turkish sight. Many a time, Dashnaktsutium used trustworthy Kurds to guide the troops. Malkhas mentions one such Kurd from Salmast named Mustafa Rahim Oghly, nicknamed Msto, who guided many troops, sometimes taking them all the way to their destination in Van/Vaspurakan, while at other times fighting the attacking Kurds and guiding the troop back. Kerbela Abbas, another Kurd from Salmast, served as a messenger for many years taking secret letters back and forth safely on his horse loaded with various merchandise. See Malkhas, *Aprunner*, pp. 175-76.

⁹¹ See Ruben Ter-Minasian, *Kensagrakan gtser* [Ruben Ter-Minasian, Biographical Sketches] in a reprinting of Ruben's *Hayastan, mijtsamakayin ughineru vra* [Armenia on Inter-Continental Roads], 2nd print. (Tehran: Ani, 1982), p. 1, first published in Beirut in 1948.

fedayis advanced toward the Turkish frontier, passing Sanamerik, Payajuk, and Ghalasar. Msto, the well-known Kurdish guide was leading the way toward the border when the surrounding Kurds attacked and placed the troop under fire. After an intense two-day battle, the survivors managed to retreat safely. The paths of Nikol Duman and Ruben then parted in Khoy. Duman went to Tabriz, whereas Ruben left for the Surb Tadé Monastery, awaiting another opportunity to pass over to Van.⁹²

The aborted missions in 1904, some ending with loss of men and arms, were forcing the revolutionaries to think twice when planning the transports. Nikol Duman's unsuccessful attempt was a lesson from which to learn. But Vanetsi Dashnaktsakans were asking the Atpatakan ARF to send assistance. Ruben attests that Nikol Duman was against this venture, because of the recent incidents, tight border control, and frequent Kurdish assaults. But he was overruled. He was not a Vanetsi, they thought, and thus could not fully appreciate the dire situation in Van. In October 1904, Pokhik made his last attempt to cross the border to Van. Msto was accompanying Pokhik's troop again, but that was his last venture, too. Msto fought with the troop of fourteen horsemen and fell on the battlefield with them.⁹³

After 1904, the ARF Central Committee of Atpatakan dropped the tactic of dispatching groups with large loads of arms. Instead, the method of absorption (*tstsman eghanak*) was taken up.⁹⁴ The change of tactics was because of a lack of financial means to fund large operations and the tightening of Turkish control over the border. But perhaps more important, the reason for changing the tactic was also the fact that during years of penetration in Hayastan with the supply

⁹² For details of Ruben's joint venture with Nikol Duman, the battle, and Ruben's stay in the monastery, see Ruben, *Hay heghapokhakani me hishataknere*, vol. 1, pp. 242-339.

⁹³ For a detailed description of Pokhik's last mission and the fateful battle, see Ruben, *Hay heghapokhakani me hishataknere*, vol. 1, pp. 330-33. Malkhas, too, speaks of this last expedition and how Pokhik, an irreplaceable fedayi, made that trip reluctantly, not because he was married and settled in Salmast, but like Nikol Duman he believed that this strategy of arms and troops transportation to Van was outdated. See Malkhas, *Aprunner*, pp. 255-59.

⁹⁴ The method of absorption entailed sending arms and ammunition by individual "porters" – fedayis, Armenian merchants, or Kurdish villagers who were familiar with the area and were paid for their service. This method attracted less attention and thus allowed a certain degree of secrecy and security. According to Malkhas, p. 251, the idea of the method of absorption came from Koms (Vahan Papazian, born in Tabriz from Vanetsi parents), an experienced political activist, who was in Van since 1903 and well aware of the situation and the dangers involved.

of revolutionary activists, propagandists, and fedayis, a generation of committed youth was now in place, and there was less need for the outside assistance.

With the absorption method, operations were carried out through individual porters, Armenian or trustworthy Kurds and even Turks. Sometimes, important documents and arms and ammunition were sent by caravans of “merchants,” with a number of mules loaded with the precious merchandise and topped with trading goods to be sold on the Turkish side of the border. Poghos and Petros Piroomian, two devoted Dashnaksakan brothers ran this route many times from Surb Tadé, until the famous *Davo-i davachanutiun* (Davo’s treachery). That was in 1908, a few months before the Young Turk Revolution. The Turkish gendarmes and Kurdish Hamidieh were sweeping Vaspurakan in search of hidden weapons, committing atrocities and looting Armenians in towns and villages. Petros was in the city of Van at that time and Poghos was in Khachan village (Berkri region). He was trying to hide the armaments he had just smuggled in from Iran when the district governor or *kaymakam* and the Kurd Kemal Bey, the infamous *giavur* (infidel) slayer, caught him. Aramayis describes in detail how they tortured Poghos, and to break his silence, they grabbed his son, twelve-year-old-Sarkis (Vazrik) and had horseshoes nailed on the soles of his feet. Poghos died under horrendous torture. The wounds on Sarkis’ soles never healed.⁹⁵

Atrpatakan – An Important Link to the Erkir

For a long time, Atrpatakan served as a safe haven for Armenian revolutionaries of all parties. The Persian officials were lenient unless pressured by the Turkish and Russian governments to exert forceful

⁹⁵ The tales of these two brothers’ bravery and the scene of Poghos’ torture and death are described in Aramayis (Misak Ter-Danielian), *Azatutian Arshaluisin, Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiune Vani mej, 1900-1909* [At the Dawn of Liberty, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in Van, 1900-1909] (Tiflis: Nor Hosank, 1913), pp. 390-408. Malkhas fictionalized the torture and death of Poghos and the horseshoeing of his son in *Zartonk* [Reawakening], vol. 2 (Beirut: Hamazkayin, 1956), pp. 266-81.

Poghos was the grandfather of my husband, Neshan Peroomian, and Sarkis was his uncle who, devastated physically and emotionally after this demonic torture, was sent to the United States in 1912. Sarkis died in 1969 in Oakland, California. Every now and then, the wounds on his soles would ooze with puss and give him terrible pain. He never recovered from the psychological trauma he had gone through. He used to scream loudly in his dream. The scene of the torture and death of his father visited him often in his nightmares.

measures against the revolutionaries. The transportation of arms through the routes of Atrpatakan, Salmast to Vaspurakan (through the monastery of Derik) or Maku to Vaspurakan (through the Monastery of Saint Thaddeus) thrived until 1899 and continued with a slower pace until 1904.

Indeed, Atrpatakan was the gateway to Vaspurakan. And curiously, there was a spiritual link between the two communities beyond their geographic proximity – as though the two locales were spreading an aura over the movement, one as the birthplace of Raffi, and the other as the birthplace of Khrimian Hayrik, the two forebears of the Armenian liberation movement. Perhaps, it was this spiritual bond that prompted future historians of the movement to call the early activists *arajin arakialner* (the first apostles).

The period of downturn after 1899 was broken by Tsar Nicholas II's decree of June 12, 1903 to confiscate the properties of the Armenian Church and curtail the schools, as part of the imperial policy of Russification of the Russian Armenians. The strong and resolute stance of Catholicos Khrimian Hayrik and the Russian Armenian communities reverberated among the Armenians of Atrpatakan, which was traditionally under strong Russian influence. The reaction was the spread of anti-Russian sentiment, revisiting the Russian curricula in schools and the fashionable usage of Russian language in business and within the families of higher society. The result was the strengthening of Armenian identity and a stronger inclination toward the Armenian national agenda.

Atrpatakan had changed over the years. Malkhas, who replaced Samson as the ARF leader in Salmast in 1903, gives a memorable account of life in Atrpatakan, which was a far cry from what Hovsep Movsisian and others had described. Malkhas saw Tabriz as a relatively Westernized city with modern schools, theater, and cultural centers. Armenian families lived a better life. Of course, that was not for the volunteers or revolutionary activists waiting in Atrpatakan for their call from the Erkir. Malkhas, a frail and cultured young man, endured the life of a revolutionary in Salmast and penned the most beautiful account of his life and work in that region.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Malkas wrote and published his autobiography *Aprunner* [Experiences], when he had permanently settled in the United States. Against the backdrop of contemporary events, places, people, politics, and ideas, he depicted in detail and in an engaging narrative his life as a revolutionary activist. As an accomplished novelist, Malkhas also wrote the multivolume *Zartonk* [Awakening] which is the fictionalized

The region of Salmast, with the city of Salmast as its center and several villages around it, was the most advantageous choice for communication with the Erkir, and that was because of the relatively dense Armenian population and geographical features – mountainous setting, difficult roads and many places to hide, a long border with Turkey, a relatively short distance through mountain passes toward Aghbak through Upper Hayots Dzor to Shatakh, Kavash, Moks, and Van.⁹⁷ With these attributes, Salmast had become the most important link to the Erkir and a center of the Armenian liberation movement. Raffi's fictitious fedayis had in fact become real with the emergence of political activists such as the Armenakans Avetisian, Goloshian, and Agripasian, and the Dashnak leaders such as Samson, Malkhas, Vazgen, Petros Seremchian (Bulgaratsi Peto), Khan, and Dr. Karapet Pashayan.⁹⁸ After the massacres of 1896, with the devastation of Aghbak, Salmast lost its centrality as a route for arms transportation. But the route was still in use, and many experienced fedayis led their troops loaded with armament across the border into Hayastan. However, the practice was becoming more and more dangerous. Many times, Russians would inform the Kurdish tribes and the Turkish army about the secret mission and the troop would be attacked and murdered and the precious merchandise confiscated.⁹⁹ The practice was abandoned after experiencing substantial losses during unsuccessful attempts to get assistance to Sasun in the uprising of 1904.

version of his revolutionary experiences and an artistic representation of the Armenian freedom movement.

⁹⁷ The Armenian population of Aghbak suffered greatly during the raids of Jalaleddin but survived to fall victim to the massacres of 1896.

⁹⁸ Dr. Karapet Pashayan, ophthalmologist, was a graduate of the Medical School in Istanbul, but the urge to serve his people through revolutionary activism had thrown him into Atrpatakan as an ARF fieldworker. He also rendered medical service to the Persian Court for which he received many awards. After the Constitutional Revolution in the Ottoman Empire in 1908, he returned to Istanbul and was elected a member of the Ottoman Parliament. Along with other Armenian intellectuals, he was arrested in 1915 and murdered on the way to the Ayash prison. Brandishing Dr. Pashayan's watch and gold chain, his murderer, Khurshid Chavush, boasted of having gouged his eyes first and then cutting off his head.

⁹⁹ See Ruben, *Hay heghapokhakani me hishataknere*, pp. 126-30, 310, 334. Amourian also attests to the Russian government's interfering and pressuring the Persian government to take action against Armenian revolutionaries crossing the Iran-Turkey border. See Amourian *H. H. Dashnaktsutiune Parskastanum*, p.12. Hambarzum Eramian, too, speaks of Russo-Turkish conspiracy when discussing Russian policy against the Armenian revolutionary movement. See Eramian, *Hushardzani*, p. 332, where he writes, "banded together, Cossacks and Askers were slaughtering the freedom fighters on the border."

The battle of Sasun, led by Andranik, with Gevorg Chavush and Sebastatsi Murad at his side, had inspired hope. Armenians everywhere and those in Atrpatakan were excited over Sasun and its people's brave struggle for their rights against a huge army. Armed contingents were organized, new and old fedayis were getting together to go to help the Sasuntsis. Clearly, every fedayi still in Atrpatakan dreamed of reaching Sasun to help Andranik. But the aborted expedition of Nikol Duman and unsuccessful attempts after that dampened the enthusiasm.

At this time, the Surb Tadé Monastery was gaining importance, attracting revolutionaries who still dreamed of going to Hayastan to devote their life to the movement. Surb Tadé was the best-situated place in Khoy (known as Avarair in revolutionary literature) and Maku. Unlike the Armenian villages in these regions, this monastery was not surrounded by Persian and Kurdish settlements. The significance of Khoy also lay in its centrality linking Russian Armenia to Salmast and Surb Tadé. The monastery and its surrounding complex remained an important base of revolutionary activities up until 1908 Constitutional Revolution in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁰ The contribution of Gevorg Tsayragoyn Vardapet Nalbandian (Entsayr) to the *Surb Gorts* and Ruben's four-month stay in the monastery have been summarized above. Entsayr was replaced by Daniel Vardapet Zadoyan, another unique revolutionary serving in Van and appointed the abbot-vanahayr of Surb Tadé in 1907.¹⁰¹ Like his predecessor, he was in charge of admitting and sheltering the new recruits and the transient fedayis, arming them and sending them to the Erkir. Khoy was also a link to the Erkir by way of Julfa to Surb Stepanos Nakhavka, to Khoy, to Var, to Ghoturi until finally crossing the border over Seydavar.

Tabriz, Salmast, and Khoy, therefore, were important stations for revolutionaries before passing to the Erkir. In later years, Urmieh (Kaputan) and Gharadagh (Paytakaran) also gained importance. According to Amourian, the Armenian population of Gharadagh region was the least advanced, living a life of oppressed subordinates under the feudalistic system the Kurdish and Turkish landlords had imposed. It was essential to teach these poor peasants to relinquish

¹⁰⁰ Malkhas, *Aprunner*, p. 146.

¹⁰¹ During the Stalinist purges in Soviet Armenia, Catholicos Khoren Muradbekian of Echmiadzin was strangled by the Cheka (April 5, 1938), and several clergymen were purged. Daniel Vardapet was among the victims.

their slavish mentality and defend their rights.¹⁰² The Tumanian brothers, entrepreneurs, and activists like Yeprem, as mentioned earlier, were major figures in this campaign.

The use of the route passing from Urmieh over to the Erkir was a later phase for the ARF. Despite the presence of individual party members, mostly engaged in education and dissemination of Dashnak ideology, and frequent visits of ARF fieldworkers, party cells were formed there only in the early 1900s. In 1904, the party's Eastern Bureau (*Arevelian Buro*) in Tiflis and the Tabriz Central Committee began to deliberate the possibilities of opening this route to Hayastan, and in that respect, Kurdish cooperation was crucial. Malkhas and then Hayrapet Panirian were the emissaries to conduct negotiations. Malkhas records his perilous journey through Kurdistan, east of Iran-Turkish border, to relay the Dashnaksutiun's proposal of cooperation with Sheikh Mehmed Sadegh against the Turkish despotic regime.¹⁰³ However, because of the overwhelming Kurdish dominance in the area and the reluctance of the Kurdish chieftain to cooperate and to guarantee the safety of the routes from Urmieh to the Turkish border, negotiations were interrupted. The ARF organization in Urmieh and its routes gained importance during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

Significantly, when the reverse traffic began, that is when it was necessary to send fedayis from Atpatakan to the Caucasus to help defend Armenian towns and villages in the Armeno-Tatar conflict beginning in 1905, the enterprise was conducted "legally." Each fedayi was given a false Persian passport that the ARF had obtained through its ties with government officials. The fedayis traveled as tradesmen without arousing the suspicion of the Russian government.

The revolutionaries embraced the motto "Liberty or Death" with utmost devotion, and the road to reaching the goal of liberty for the Ottoman Armenians passed through Iran's Atpatakan. Mikayel Varandian made the following comparison: "Italian revolutionaries had France as a refuge, Macedonians had Bulgaria, and the Poles had Galicia, Iran became one for Armenian revolutionaries, alas not as the

¹⁰² See Amourian, *H. H. Dashnaksutiune Parskastanum*, pp. 90-95, for a detailed description of the situation in Gharadagh up to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

¹⁰³ Sheikh Sadegh happened to be the son of Sheikh Ibadullah, whose bloodshed in Armenian villages of Atpatakan was referred to above. This was not and would not be the only time when for the sake of the Cause the Dashnaksutiun would shake the hand of a brutal enemy of the Armenian people. For details of Malkhas' journey and negotiations, see his *Aprunner*, pp. 177, 187-214.

unrestricted base as France and Bulgaria were for Italians and Macedonians.”¹⁰⁴

*The Ripple Effect of the Revolutionary Past During
the Iranian Constitutional Movement*

Although discussion of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran is beyond the scope of this essay, a brief overview of the Armenian perception of it would serve to complete the evolution of Armenian political thought in Atrpatakan.

The large-scale demonstrations in the summer of 1906 and *bast* (sit-in) in the gardens of the British Embassy in Tehran against the despotic regime and the Constitutionalists propounding their ideas of needed reforms and a democratic government forced Mozafareddin Shah to capitulate. On August 5, 1906, a series of reforms was proclaimed, elections were held, and in October the *Majles* (Parliament) was inaugurated. *Anjomans* (revolutionary societies) were established throughout the country, with Armenian representatives participating. The movement spread in Atrpatakan and discussions ensued among the Armenian leadership whether or not to support the ongoing movement.

Armenians could not remain indifferent. The oppressive regime of the Ghajar (Qajar) shahs and their chief ministers (*vezirs*) was just as ruinous for the Armenian minority. Along with Persian intellectuals and young nationalists, they, too, witnessed the corruption and ineptitude of the ruling circles. They witnessed the backwardness of their beautiful country, the prevailing ignorance, the lack of proper education and cultural innovations, the absence of a sound and progressive society that could withstand the encroachment of foreign powers and the whims of the ruling circles. They came to witness the political upheaval in the country divided into Russian and British zones of influence (Anglo-Russian Convention, August 1907), a phenomenon that threatened the very existence of their homeland. Even the Ottoman rulers seriously considered taking advantage of the tumultuous situation in Iran to usurp its western territories.

The Constitutional Revolution attracted the Hnchakian branches of Atrpatakan. As recorded by Arsen Kitur, Hnchakian cooperation with Persian revolutionaries began in 1908 by providing arms to Sattar Khan, the opposition leader from Atrpatakan. Hnchakians even

¹⁰⁴ Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaktsutian patmutiun*, p. 139.

ventured onto joining the leftist Persian revolutionaries in Tiflis and forming the first Persian Social Democrat party. The clandestine military council in Tabriz had a mixed Persian and Armenian membership: Sattar Khan and Bagher Khan with Rafayel Movsisian of the Hnchak party, Rostom Gharakhanian (Rostom or Stepan Zorian) of the Dashnaktsutiun, and Sedrak Banvorian, of the Social Democrat organization. The Hnchak collaboration with Persian revolutionaries was expanded to the extent of initiating a Hnchak branch with Persian membership. In order not to arouse Muslim antagonism, the Persian members of the Hnchak party suggested lifting the name Hnchak, and in January 1911 the name was changed into Social Democrat group of Persia.¹⁰⁵ The Hnchakian branches of Atrpatakan were also in touch with the Russian Social Democrat Labor Party with the prospect of joining them in the fight for socialism. Many Hnchak leaders actually joined that party and became the future communist leaders of Soviet Armenia. The accentuated socialist ideology of the Hnchakian party propelled them to cooperate and even merge with Persian, Assyrian, and Russian political groups. Arsen Kitur explains this phenomenon as follows: "The Hnchakians, as a socialist party, pursue not narrow nationalistic goals but rather its calling is to fight against all oppression and to defend all the deprived and exploited without discrimination of race and religion."¹⁰⁶

In the first stages of the constitutional movement, perceptions and views varied in the ranks of the Atrpatakan Dashnaktsutiun. Some were against participating in the movement, reasoning that it would consume and exhaust the energy intended for the Erkir. Rostom supported participation, believing that a constitutional regime in Iran could have a positive effect on neighboring Turkey. In the autumn of 1906, a Regional Congress was convened in Tabriz by the Vrezh Central Committee. Yeprem came to Tabriz as the Gilan ARF representative, bringing his region's favorable stance for participation. The resolution in support of participation was sent to the ARF Fourth General Congress, convened in Vienna, February 22 to May 4, 1907, where among several critical issues, the situation in Iran and the possibility of the movement turning into a major sociopolitical event impacting Iran and the entire Middle East were discussed. The Congress recommended that the ARF bodies and members in Iran

¹⁰⁵ *Patmutiun S.D. Hnchakian kusaktsutian*, pp. 401-02.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

support the movement and try to instill in it elements of the Dashnak ideology – the spirit of liberty and democracy.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, Mozafareddin Shah's death on January 7, 1907 proved to be a major setback for the establishment of a constitutional regime. His son, Mohammad Ali Shah, a determined anti-Constitutionalist, began his machinations against the Parliament and the proponents of a constitutional regime. The country was in tumult with unbridled persecutions.

Upon the ARF Bureau's recommendation, Rostom traveled to Tehran to assess the situation and examine the prospect of ARF involvement. The negotiations with a group of influential Constitutionalist parliamentarians began on December 30, 1907 and lasted until January 4, 1908. Hovsep Mirzayan, a local activist, accompanied Rostom. Among the issues discussed were the stability of the Constitution, the Russo-British accord of August 1907, Iranian defenses against Ottoman encroachments, and the support and participation of the ARF in upholding the Constitution. Rostom reported that the Persian representatives, all educated in France, were fluent in French in which language the negotiations were conducted. He mentions that the Constitutionalists valued and desired the support and participation of prominent Iranian Armenian figureheads such as Hovhannes Khan Masehian and Mirza Melkon Khan, which became possible through the ARF's mediation. The Dashnak representatives assured the Persian members of Parliament that the Armenians would muster paramilitary assistance against the Turkish army, as it was evident that the Persian regular army was in disarray and incapable of assuming such a critical task alone. They also promised to use their connections in Europe in favor of the Constitutional Revolution.¹⁰⁸ The ARF's assistance to the revolution began with this last point. Many European officials, intellectuals, and human rights activists were rallied to support the Iranian cause.¹⁰⁹

Mohammad Ali Shah and the huge army of staunch monarchists continued their fight and enjoyed the support of tsarist Russia. In June

¹⁰⁷ The resolution was published in *Droshak* in 1907, no. 5, cited in André Amourian, “Atrpatakan 1908-1909,” in *Rostom, mahvan vatsunamiaki aritov* [Rostom, on the Occasion of the Sixtieth Anniversary of His Death] (Beirut: Hamazkayin, 1979), p. 271.

¹⁰⁸ After each meeting during the negotiations, Rostom and Hovsep Mirzayan consulted with three local leaders, Dr. Harutun Ter-Stepanian, Aleksandr Tuman, and Alek Jalalian. See *Rostom*, pp. 164-69, for Rostom's full report to the ARF Bureau.

¹⁰⁹ For more details on these meetings and Persian participants, see Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaktsutian patmutiun*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Alik, 1981), pp. 262-65.

of 1908, the shah's army aided by Russian Cossacks besieged and bombarded the Majles.¹¹⁰ The Parliament was disbanded, arrests were made, and the conflict between the two sides spread all over the country.

Naturally, after the suppression of Tehran and the waves of protest fomenting in Tabriz, the sentiments of Atrpatakan Armenians were with the dissidents. But this was still only within the bounds of passive sympathy. The danger for the Armenians was substantiated when the reactionary monarchists began their brutal attacks against the Constitutionalists of Atrpatakan and massacred and looted entire Armenian villages along the way. Seventy thousand Armenians in the country, with major concentration in Atrpatakan and Isfahan, needed protection.¹¹¹ The danger had heightened when at the onset of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, Sultan Hamid II, as if to turn the attention of his subjects away from the revolutionary actions, assaulted the border regions of Atrpatakan and advanced his army into certain territories in the Salmast and Urmieh regions. It seemed that Mohammad Ali Shah was ready to cede some land to the sultan in exchange for help to crush the uprising in Azarbayan. This Turkish threat was one of Rostom's concerns discussed with the Persian Constitutionalists.

Tabriz had become the center of the pan-Iranian revolution against monarchy. Azarbayan was fighting to establish the Constitution and Iran's independence. And the champion of this campaign was an old brigand named Sattar. Armenians could not afford not to get involved. The fire of revolution was burning in Tabriz. The ARF Central Committee of Atrpatakan and the Eastern Bureau supported direct participation beyond moral support.

In these trying months of Turkish pressure on the Iranian border, the triumph of the Young Turk Revolution was a blessing. The Turkish threat seemed to dissipate. The Iranian revolutionaries could concentrate on internal affairs and, encouraged by the Young Turks' success, organize a general uprising in Iran. The structure of the ARF and the line of command from the Tabriz Central Committee to the Komites of Tehran, Rasht, Gilan, Salmast worked to muster the full

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 257.

¹¹¹ In the first decade of the twentieth century, the provinces of Azarbayan and Isfahan, with centers in Tabriz and the city of Isfahan, had the densest Armenian populations. There were also smaller Armenian communities in Tehran, Rasht, Ghazvin, Shiraz, and Hamadan. Armenians lived in other cities mixed with the local population. See *ibid.*, p. 255.

cooperation of the Dashnak rank and file and help to mobilize the scattered and unorganized Persian revolutionaries. In the autumn of 1908, Rostom came to Tabriz and began talks with Sattar Khan on full collaboration with the movement which later evolved into participation in military operations. Rostom was also in charge of manufacturing explosives and even rockets and mines to terrify and scatter the enemies attacking Tabriz from all sides. They were led by Ein-ol-doleh (prime minister), Rahim Khan of Gharadagh, and several other khans with large or small contingents and included the Kurds of Maku. On October 1908, the Dashnak committees of the Caucasus sent Keri (meaning uncle, a nickname Erzerumtsi Arshak had earned during his long career as a revolutionary) to give advice and assistance to the Atpatakan revolutionaries. Together with twenty-five horsemen, he crossed the Arax River and reached Tabriz. The troop joined Sattar Khan's army and engaged in defensive and offensive operations. Simultaneously, the ARF troops, all consisting of local youth led by Smbat in Urmieh, Samson in Salmast, and Zulumat in Khoy, joined the uprising. Contrary to promises of Sattar Khan and his allies, however, the ARF's military operations were not financed, thus leaving the burden on the local Komites and the ARF structures abroad. Financial aid was forthcoming from the ARF Eastern and Western Bureaus and even from the United States of America, Bulgaria, and Egypt.

The Russian intervention and de facto occupation of Tabriz in 1909 was detrimental to the revolutionaries.¹¹² Although the Constitutionalists in Tabriz and their Anjomans were working beyond their prerogative and acting almost independently to ward off the assaulting monarchists and secure the safety of the population, external intervention was a setback for them. Rostom mulled over this serious new development, finding solace in the fact that the ARF cooperation with the Constitutionalists of Azarbayan saved the Armenian population of Tabriz, Salmast, Khoy, and Urmieh from looting and massacres. He consoled himself thinking that at least the Constitution was established in Iran and people outside Azarbayan

¹¹² In order to protect foreign subjects, consulates, and offices in Tabriz under siege by the monarchist army, and in accord with the British, the Russian army entered Tabriz on April 30, 1909. Negotiations for the Russian withdrawal dragged on because of the Russian government's making demands to which the Parliament refused to accede. This was a pretext for Mohammad Ali Shah to disperse the Majles and side with the Russians. The Russian occupation of Tabriz lasted until the end of February 1918, with a short interruption during World War I.

could benefit from it, and maybe Azarbajian too in the far future.¹¹³ The Dashnaktsutun tried to keep its neutrality during this period of Russian presence in Tabriz. But persecutions were rampant. Gallows were set in the town square and members of the Anjomans who resisted the Russian occupation were hanged. Petros Melik-Andreasian, who had fought in Yeprem's army against the monarchists in Rasht, was among them. Meanwhile, Yeprem and his small revolutionary army, having subdued the monarchists of Rasht, Enzeli (Anzali), and Ghazvin, entered Tehran (June 22, 1909).

The role of Yeprem and his loyal Armenian comrades in arms, old fedayis such as Keri and Khecho played in the realization of the final victory over the monarchists and their foreign supporters cannot be elaborated in this discussion. Suffice it to state what is inscribed in the history of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, that Yeprem was a hero, the only person in that period of history to be bestowed with *Sardaré yeganeyé vatan* (The sole commander of the homeland) title. He was extolled by his contemporaries, and his death on May 8, 1912 was deeply mourned by every person, Muslim or Christian alike, with aspirations for a free and democratic Iran. He was deemed irreplaceable for the Constitutional movement by American and European officials and media. What should be added, however, is that Yeprem was criticized by some Armenian intellectuals and even fellow Dashnaks who thought that he had gone too far. So much involvement, they maintained, was not endorsed by the initial ARF resolution. Mikayel Varandian speaks of months-long debates and even altercations in Tabriz and Tehran among Yeprem's supporters and critics. The latter believed that Iran had lost its independence and the new Majles was a reactionary institution caught in the middle of Russian and British political games. They maintained that the monarchists were not subdued, and the Constitutionalists had not fulfilled their promise of freedom for the people and improvements in their socioeconomic condition. In such a state of the affairs, the participation of the ARF in support of an inept and externally weak government harmed the party's reputation and went against its ideology and beliefs. This conduct also created controversy in the party's rapprochement with the Social Democrat elements in Iran.

The intervention of the *Arevmtian Buro* (Western Bureau) put an end to these disputations by siding with Yeprem's supporters who believed that the ongoing confusion and the dictatorship that the

¹¹³ Cited from Rostom's letter to the *Arevmtian Buro* (Western Bureau) in Varandian, *H. H. Dashnaktsutian patmutiun*, vol. 2, pp. 281-82.

government employed in order to establish peace and order in the country was only temporary and that Armenians should wholeheartedly continue in their struggle side by side with their Muslim brothers. This rationale pretty much explains the ARF's objective and resolve in its participation in the political negotiations and military operations during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, which Varandian formulates as follows: "To liberate a huge country that was an ancient cradle of civilization, to free millions of people from the yoke of unbridled Asiatic tyranny, unite with blood two neighbors of centuries, Armenians and Persians, Christian and Muslim, and offer a living example for all of the Islamic Orient, especially Turkey."¹¹⁴

The Road Traveled – The Process, the Impact

Participation in the Constitutional Revolution by intellectuals, fighters, financial and moral supporters, women and men activists behind the battlefronts is an indication of a significant upsurge in the development of political thought among Iranian Armenians, especially in the newly burgeoning Tehran community and in old Atrpatakan.

The Iranian Armenian or more specifically the Atrpatakan Armenian reawakening began at a slow pace toward emancipation, enlightenment, and education. These objectives were propagated by young idealistic activists, Armenakan, Hnchakian, and Dashnaktsakan, who arrived from far and near to cross into Hayastan, the Erkir, coming to stay and work with the people, knowing that strengthening the sociopolitical and educational base of Atrpatakan was essential to building a powerful bridge between the centers of the Armenian revolutionary movement and Hayastan for whose sake the movement had been launched. The first steps of cultural and educational emancipation were followed by political activism, which perhaps occurred a bit prematurely for the Atrpatakan Armenians. Party cells were hastily formed while the objective and the ideology had not yet sunk in. Atrpatakan Armenians were dragged into conflicts and misunderstandings when these were mainly the result of personality clashes between the externally imported civic, political, and religious leadership.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 308.

In many memoirs, letters, and documents that these leaders left behind, there is this tendency to underestimate or belittle the local intellectual, political, and paramilitary participation at the same time seeking and praising the local financial support. The local conditions – living standards, level of knowledge and education – are painted in gloomy colors, and there is a sense of pity and even contempt for the people. As expressed in the article in *Astgh Arevelian*, Iranian Armenians were a dead element for Armenians in other places. The result was something like a lasting inferiority complex among Atrpatakan Armenians vis-à-vis Western and Russian Armenians and equally an unfounded sense of superiority coming from the other side.

As to the place of Atrpatakan in the Armenian liberation movement, the region as a locale and as a community entered the movement as a transitional station, a bridge of transportation of arms and manpower. But Atrpatakan soon established its indispensable role at the heart of the movement for Armenians and for all oppressed citizens of Iran.

Raffi's design had come full circle.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ This discourse may seem heavy with names of fedayis, political activists, and revolutionary fieldworkers. Unfortunately, many of them remain consigned to old memoirs and books, but they are deserving of recognition as idealists dedicated to raising the Armenian people from lethargy to espousing the Cause, the *Surb Gorts*, of liberation. Years ago, in 1931, Malkhas wrote in *Aprunner* (p. 146): "This magnificent band of devotees, deserving the veneration of the Armenian nation, is fading and gradually disappearing in our unpleasant and cunning environment. Whereas, for nations living in a healthy and well-adjusted environment, they would be the treasures of these nations' National Pantheon."



Raffi (Hakob Melik-Hakobian)



Monastery of Derik



Dashnaktsutiun Central Committee, Tabriz,
1897



Vazgen's Contingent,
1896



Commanders of Khanasor Expedition



Monastery of Saint Bartholomew



Honan and Hortense Davtian



Malkhas (Artashes K. Hovsepian)



Satenik Matinian (Tsaghik)



Arms Manufacturing Plant, Tabriz



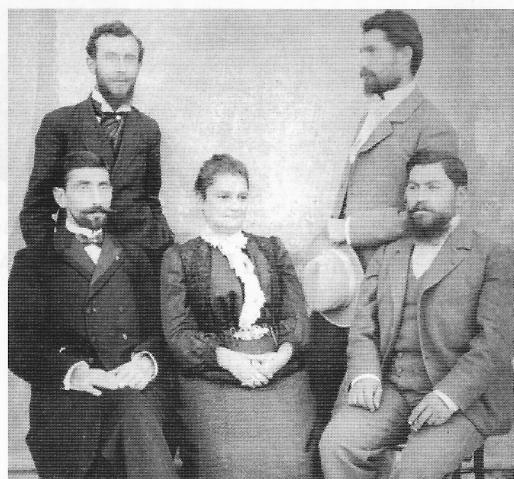
Armenak Ekarian



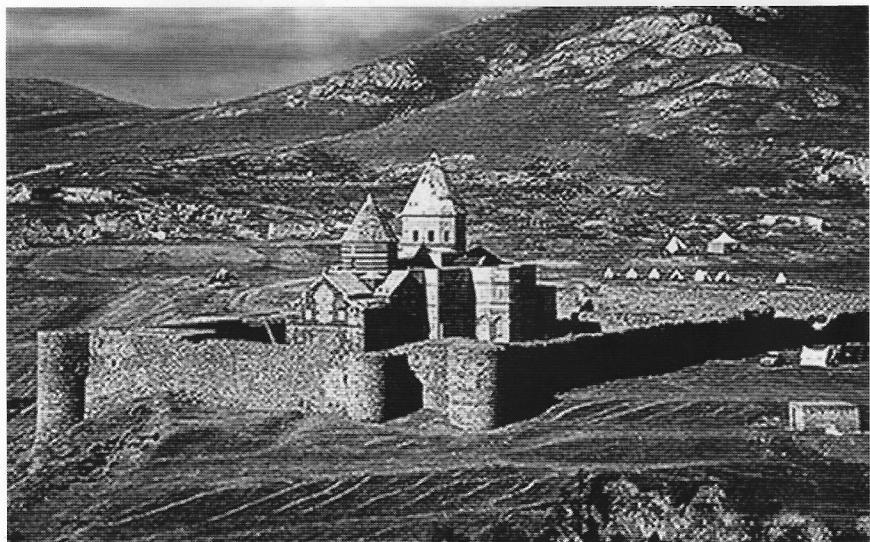
Nikol Duman's Contingent, 1904



The Maro Women's Group



Atpatakan Activists



Saint Thaddeus (Tadé) Monastery



Yeprem and His Revolutionary Armed Force