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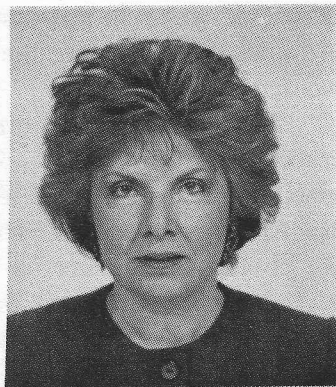


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# Khrimian Hayrik and Van Provincial Literature

By Rubina Perroomian

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«Հայր մեր որ յերկինս ես...: Աստուած փառեալիս մեղաւորս, Տէր ներող Տէր ողորմեա ... չտանես ահն մտէն, չտանես ամօթն երեսէն ... զամէն անձարոց ծարիկն անես ապա մէ: ... շախաթաթախ աղօթեալն դու բարի կամաթ հասուցես. մայր մեր մայր Զրիստոսին քէ եմ կանչէ, կամաւոր ժամեր պատարագներ դուք հիմտատ կայնէք. զամէն կարիպ-կուրպաթի բանին գործին յաջողութեն տաք, ինոնց սատաղէն մեր կարիպներուն ... իմ ձեռքիկ ձագերաց ձենիկ դառնաս ... հացին էմնութեն, ջրին առատութեն, անձրևի շատութեն ... հայոց ձոյերաց սէր միաբանութեն, հայոց ազգին ազատութեն ... Աստուած քէ փառք, ումուտս քէ եմ արէ: Հայր մեր ...»<sup>1</sup>

In loose translation: Our Father, who art in Heaven .... God, save this sinner, God forgiving, God merciful .... Don't take fear away from thoughts, shame from faces .... May You remedy all those in despair, then remedy us .... O Mother of Christ, I call upon You. Help things go well with our migrant *gharibs* .... May bread be cheaper.

water abundant, rain plentiful .... May you bring love and unity among the Armenian headmen and freedom for Armenians. God, glory onto You. I put my hope upon You. Our Father...

This excerpt from «Վանայ պառաւազ աղօթքը», (The prayers of the old woman of Van), in the dialect of Van, is a sampling of Van Provincial literature. Although, no doubt, regional dialects embody and convey the characteristic outlook and world view of the people of the region, however, what places this piece within the realm of Van provincial literature is not the dialect but the amalgamation of all its attributes, which in this case consist of the manifestation of the frame of mind, the desolation, the anxieties, the hopes and aspirations of the women of Van.

This paper will the attributes and characteristics of provincial literature (գաւառական գրականութիւն), what this literature represents, and what influence it had on the development of modern Western Armenian literature. The paper will particularly concentrate upon the provincial literature of Vaspurakan and the role Khrimian Hayrik played in promoting and disseminating that literature.

In the second half of the 19th century, Western Armenian Renaissance literature had already made headway in terms of form, content, and ideology. Its language, although still mainly *Grabar* (classical Armenian), was, however, in the process of secularization. This glorious language of the Armenian holy scriptures and masterpieces of the Golden Age, in spite of staunch proponents still fighting for its prominence, was losing ground. The gradually enriched and refined Western Armenian vernacular, based on the dialect of Constantinople, was on its way to become the principal medium of oral and written literary expression and the language of Western Armenian artistic creations.

The literary milieu in Constantinople permeated with the ideas of revival and progress. The French Revolution, the idealistic goals of freedom, equality, and justice, had become the source of inspiration and motivation for the Armenian literati. In order to be able to reach the masses, to disseminate these ideas, and spread enlightenment and revival, the renovation of the literary language was a stern necessity. It is in this atmosphere that Mkrtich Khrimian entered the literary arena of Constantinople.<sup>2</sup>

Mkrtich Khrimian was not just an addition to the Constantinople literati. In fact, in terms of novelty of thought, literary style, form, and language, he had little to offer. Nonetheless, he had brought the fresh air of the province of Van and a passionate love of homeland,

Armenia. Threading every corner, during his year-long journey in and out of Armenia, falling in love with every rock and every river, drawing inspiration from villagers and townsfolk, sharing their pain and sufferings, their joy and pride, he had ended up in Constantinople with his heart full of love and tenderness. He was a favorite guest of the Armenian higher circles. His stories, adorned with the beauty of Armenia, were so much impregnated with the sufferings of the Armenian folk in the provinces, that he came to be known as «Հայաստանի ցաւերի պատմիչ» (the teller of the pains of Armenia). He passed on his compassion; he transplanted his love and ardor into the hearts of the people of Constantinople, especially the intelligentsia and the literature they produced. His long poem (with a foreword in prose) entitled *Hravirak Araratian* (Ararat's Invitation), written in 1848 and published in 1850, reflected his adoration of Armenia and his dream of a future free homeland. These were sentiments which, along with his fervid devotion to Christianity, manifested in *Hravirak Erkrin Avetiats* (The Invitation of the Land of Tidings),<sup>3</sup> dominated his temperament and led him through his vocation as a teacher, a clergy and a catholicos of all Armenia.

His sojourn in Constantinople had made a difference; his two poems, despite their shortcomings and want of artistic quality, were definite sources of influence and inspiration.

In 1852 Khrimian returned to Van only to find his mother, wife, and daughter dead. His life was changed completely. In this new predicament, he decided to follow his calling to serve his people with all his love, his time and effort as a spiritual leader. He was ordained *vartapet* in Van.

Back in Constantinople, Mkrtych Vartapet Khrimian accomplished several missions for the patriarchate, mainly traveling to various areas of Armenian concentration within the Ottoman Empire, gathering data on their condition, thus, also augmenting his knowledge on the land and the people. Khrimian's main preoccupation was the people of the provinces not only because of heavy Armenian concentration, but also because of widespread misery, deplorable living conditions, and continuous sufferings, about which the cosmopolitan Armenians knew very little and cared very little.

In June of 1855 Khrimian began publishing *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (The Eagle of Vaspurakan). Khrimian was a proponent of Grabar—he had written poetry in Grabar; and while other periodicals of the time were mostly in Ashkharhabar (the vernacular), he insisted on using Grabar for most of the articles in *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. The main reason for this



choice of language was the contempt he felt for the crude and ugly vernacular. He did not believe that the vernacular used in Constantinople would be acceptable to Armenians in Armenia or to the Russian-Armenians, to whom Grabar would undoubtedly sound prettier and far more familiar than the language of Constantinople-Armenians.<sup>4</sup> Later on, however, his zeal to educate people and to fight against ignorance and servitude made him compromise his principles and his love for Grabar. He, too, wrote mainly in vernacular and worked toward the progress and refinement of the language intelligible to most Western Armenians.

*Artsvi Vaspurakan* became a repository of Khrimian's own passionate depictions of various regions of Armenia and meticulous recordings of abandoned, half-ruined, or still working churches and monasteries («Տեսարանք հայրենի աշխարհաց»), didactic articles of morality and piety («Բուրաստան բարոյական առաքելութեանց»), articles imbued with patriotic love, sentimental calls for the liberation of the homeland, sad stories of sufferings of *pandukht*-s. Khrimian had a special interest in this last topic that had arisen major concern and had become nothing less than a national dilemma. Being a *pandukht* himself, he shared the pain of these poor *gharib*-s; he sympathized with their predicament. It was under the pressure of ever deteriorating economic situation in the provinces, that many Armenian youths left their home, their loved ones and migrated to the big cities, mostly to Constantinople. They hoped to earn some money and return someday, but very few succeeded. Most of them dragged their wretched life under the heavy burden of financial deprivation and longing for their families until they died unnoticed in a corner of a street. Khrimian's recipe to remedy this sad situation and to keep these people from coming to Constantinople was to give an economic boost to the provinces by way of introducing profitable enterprises, and, what is more important, to educate people, arm them against exploitation and persecutions. He believed that until such time when financial opportunities are created in Armenia and education and enlightenment are spread, there is no way to deal with this problem («Մինչև որ Հայաստանի մէջ ալ շահաւէտ դրոներ չբացուի կրթութեան ուսմունքը չտարածուի ազգի մէջը՝ հնար չկայ ասոր դէմը առնելու»)<sup>5</sup>

Mkrtich Khrimian took the first step in this initiative. He decided to return and take his *pandukht* Eagle with him.<sup>6</sup> And enduring many hardships, he transported his printing press to the Monastery of Varag at the shores of Lake Van. After a lapse of a year and a half, *Artsvi Vaspurakan* resumed publication (January, 1958) as the first printed

periodical in Van. The migrated eagle had returned from his exile of Byzantium to his homeland Vaspurakan, he announced («Ռարձ Արծ-  
ւոյն պանդխտելոյ ի Բիւցանդիոնէն Աշխարհն իւր հայրենի Վասպու-  
րական»)7. *Meghu*, a periodical published in Constantinople, reported  
Khrimian's audacious venture, "As a new Gutenberg, carrying the  
torch of enlightenment, trampling on ice and snow, he arrived in Van"  
(«Իբրև նոր Կիւթեմպերկ՝ աշխարհի լուսաւորութեան ջահը իր  
առաջին ձգած ձիւները և սառերը կոխկոտելով հասաւ Վան»)8.  
However, the local Armenian authorities were not very enthusiastic  
to receive him. "He talks and talks, and I wonder what he is talking  
about. He has brought some unworthy stuff (nicknack) and calls them  
printing press" («Եկեր կը խօսէ, կը շօսէ, ես ալ կ'ըսեմ ինչ է. քանի  
մը փետ-փետուր քերեր լեցուցեր և մամուլ, մամուլ կը կանչէ»), a  
vanetsi agha said.<sup>9</sup> Archbishop Gabriel, the Primate of Van, likewise,  
went against Khrimian and refused to grant him permission to estab-  
lish himself in Varag and turn the monastery into a center of learning  
like Venice.

Eventually, Khrimian was able to overcome all the difficulties. He  
settled in Varag and resumed the publication of *Artsvi Vaspurakan*.  
The periodical was published until 1864 with some interruption.<sup>10</sup>  
Khrimian also initiated the publication of *Artsvik Taron* (Little Eagle  
of Taron) when he was appointed the prelate of Taron in 1862.<sup>11</sup>  
Significantly, both *Artsvi Vaspurakan* and *Artsvik Taron* were vic-  
tims of the same fate. Both were shut down as anti-government publi-  
cations.

Along with the printing press, Khrimian established in Varag the  
Zharangavorats. That was the first school in Vaspurakan with mod-  
ern pedagogic methodology, functioning without the benefits of beat-  
ing and torture, the old Armenian methods of teaching. In spite of the  
lack of a formal education, Khrimian was an innate teacher. He trained  
teachers to treat students with love and understanding, to create a  
pleasant atmosphere for them to learn, and, more importantly, to in-  
culcate in them patriotism and attachment to the homeland. He en-  
couraged the preparation of language and history textbooks, with these  
principles as their purpose and the lore of Vaspurakan as their ve-  
hicle. With these textbooks the Armenian folklore and the literature  
of Van opened their way, for the first time, in the school curricula.

With the Zharangavorats school, Khrimian set the example of  
modern education and became the driving force behind the burgeon-  
ing of a network of schools in Vaspurakan. In these school generations  
of intellectuals were trained to assume the leadership of the educational

and cultural life in Vaspurakan. When the Ottoman persecutions became unbearable, these intellectuals spearheaded secret organizations of self defense and of struggle for the betterment of the Armenian lot. Among those intellectuals were many prominent leaders of emancipation and revolutionary movements like Mkrtich Portugalian, Khoren Khrimian, Mesrop Papazian, Poghos Natanian, and Mkrtich Avetissian.

The Zharangavorats school and *Artsvi Vaspurakan* complemented each other in the campaign for enlightenment. *Artsvi Vaspurakan*, was perhaps the first channel through which the Constantinople intelligentsia became aware of the situation in Armenia. It echoed the uprising of Zeitun in 1862, praised the national pride and the courage of the Zeituntsis as an example to follow. In a long article Mer Gorts Noren Sksenk (Let's Begin Our Work Again), Garegin Srvandztian, the young student of Varaga School, admonished people not to give up, stop shedding tears pitifully and work hard.

With the stories of the past glories of Armenia, *Artsvi Vaspurakan* inspired national pride and self-esteem, love of freedom, and patriotism («Անուծ արտերու կենդանութիւն տուող ազգային պատմութիւնն է միայն»). It propagated moral values, the importance of education and religious devotion, criticized backward customs and superstitions hindering progress and modernity. It was through the endeavors of Khrimian and the Vanetsi students of his Varaga school, Tigran Amirjanian, Ghevond Pirghalemian, the brothers Eremia, Aristakes, and Setrak Ter-Sarkissians (Tekvants), Arsen Tokhmakhian, and, most notable among all, Garegin Sravadztian, that the Van provincial literature attained substantial heights and opened its way into the Western Armenian literature. These young devotees and their teachers toured the province, visited every village, collected ethnographic data, recorded the physical, topographic, and demographic characteristics of the region, prepared comprehensive reports and statistics, which were then published in *Artsvi Vaspurakan*. They recorded and published the popular tales, songs, the folklore; they wrote poetry and prose reflecting the joys, the tears, the traditions, the festivities, the life of Vaspurakan. They lived the life and transmitted the lore in its absolute authenticity.

Parenthetically, it is worth noting, that interest toward ethnic folklore was a new phenomenon even in Europe, and these busy bees were doing in Van what the European folklorists had embarked in only a few decades before. No doubt, Khrimian and his disciples were unaware of this movement in Europe.

Khrimian's students followed their teacher's motto, "with the people,

for the people," and spearheaded the revival of the people of Vaspurakan. They created the provincial literature of Van. They contextualized the folklore of Van as it occurred in the live, organic milieu.

In the 1860s provincial literature was a new phenomenon and a new source of inspiration and innovative influence for Western Armenian formal literature forging ahead in Constantinople. The Western Armenian literati came to know the provincial literature that was characterized first by its locus, its place of belonging. Provincial literature emerged from Hayastan, from the historic Armenian lands under the Ottoman occupation, the Armenian provinces in the Ottoman Empire, from Western Armenia. The second characteristic of the Armenian provincial literature was its essence. It mirrored the traditional Armenian life, which at the time was still continuing in the provinces with heavy Armenian concentration. It reflected the regional traditions, popular beliefs, rituals, proverbs, songs, tales, legends, etc., which were preserved and passed on through centuries in that region. It echoed people's hardships, grievances, joys, hopes, and aspirations.

The two branches of Western Armenian Literature, the formal literature, or the *belles lettres*, and the literature of Constantinople and other Armenian cultural centers of the western world was more form and style with sophisticated phraseology and versification, influenced by European literary movements. It was basically cosmopolitan and drew its themes and its livelihood from the life of the city people, the urbanized Armenians. The homeland it aspired was a romantic dream, far removed from the real life in the Armenian Provinces. The life it described did not encompass the feelings, the needs, and the aspirations of the real people, Armenians who lived attached to their ancestral lands. Its lexicon was limited, drifted away from Grabar and dependent on the European languages for words to express all aspects of life, like agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts, etc. The Armenian provincial literature, on the other hand, was simple, even simplistic in structure and content but stayed close to the people and bore the imprint of various genres of folk creations. It portrayed the life, the pain, and the destitute of the peasants constantly exploited, looted, and abused. It mirrored life in Armenia. The calamitous situation in the homeland and the ever-increasing Turkish and Kurdish atrocities gave the provincial literature political overtones. Armenian grievances and the urge to rise against oppression ran as a subtext in provincial literature, and, for that matter, in the literature of Van.



The province of Van was the first to enter into the Western Armenian literature, bringing along the heart and the spirit of the homeland, its people's political aspirations for freedom and justice and their commitment to national struggle. With the inception of this process, developed a complex relationship inextricable and symbiotic between Van provincial literature and the so-called high culture of Constantinople. It also offered the colorful vocabulary of the vanetsi dialect to enrich the literary language. To make up words lacking in the literary language, Garegin Srvandztian advised the cosmopolitan intellectuals to either go to the original source, the classical Armenian, or to the people and their dialects, instead of seeking the help of foreign dictionaries. "We are perplexed by the need of so many different words to describe different parts of a ship," he writes for example. "Go to the village of Avants in Van. Listen to the village seamen and learn."<sup>12</sup> Srvandztian showed how the folk songs, tales, and proverbs could impart freshness and liveliness to literature. He gave the example of Narekatsi's Tsnndian Meghedin (The Melody of Birth) and *Harutian Taghe* (The Song of Resurrection) inspired by the style and spirit of popular songs.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, Khrimian's and Srvandztian's views on Armenian ethnic literature (Հայոց տոհմային գրականություն) needed some time to sink in and a fertile ground to seed. They had set the examples of how themes of everyday life in Armenia could be developed into literary works. In one instance Srvandztian reported on the Vanetsi peasants' heartrending predicament, but the emotion and spontaneity he put into that plain and unadorned description turned the piece into a well-wrought leitmotiv for a human tragedy. He wrote, "Without a shirt on their backs, in the summer heat, in the winter storm, they tumble in the ashes, trample on the thorns; they herd cattle, gather wheat and barley; they face fear and pain; they tend the houses of their masters. They never say 'I am ill.' That is shameful. That is not acceptable. They it millet and barley. Wheat is for paying back the unending debt to their masters. They toil constantly, but they are always miserably poor."<sup>14</sup>

The conditions following the Russo-Turkish war of 1878, the Armenian appeals for reforms, Khrimian's call for armed struggle—the famous iron ladle analogy<sup>15</sup>—filled the Constantinople literary milieu with new enthusiasm to embrace what came from the province. In the 1880s and 1890s Tlkatintsi, Melkon Giurjian, and Levon Bashalian had already become established writers whose literature gave flesh and blood to the provinces and in whose literature the legacy of Khrim-



ian and Srvandztian was revived and reevaluated. Simple chronicles from Armenia began to manifest themselves in artistically wrought forms and colors, embellished with profound meaning and plot. *Hayrenik* daily, published in Constantinople, wrote in 1893, "It is an accepted truth for us that our ethnic literature should have its firm roots in the provinces."<sup>16</sup> What today's literary scholar would add is that provincial literature, impregnated with folkloric elements, imparted verisimilitude to the representations of regional settings of literary narrations. And in this phenomenon lies an important aspect of the impact of Van provincial literature on Western Armenian belles lettres.

Indeed, Western Armenian literature was drawing closer to the source of life. Universal in its concept and ideology and national in its spirit and source of inspiration, Western Armenian literature was pacing steadily toward excellence when, with the Genocide of 1915, life in Western Armenia and Western Armenian culture, for that matter, came to a halt.

*Artsvi Vaspurakan* had long stopped publishing, but a generation was ready to continue the tradition. Srvandztian's *Manana* (Manna) is the Province of the best of its times. It is the lively portrayal of the hustle and bustle of the thriving city of Van, Aigestan and the villages of Vaspurakan, the sum of all characteristic traits of the region: the Vanetsi customs, mores, songs, proverbs, popular beliefs, curses and blessings, trades and tradesmen, the housewives, their cooking practices, and their chores, the pain of separation suffered by multitudes of *pandukht*-s and their families left behind, all wrought skillfully with that special folkloric style vanetsis had lovingly preserved from Narekatsi's times. Srvandztian textualized and eternalized the province of Van in *Manana*. As Emma Kostanian asserts in her monograph on Srvandztian, today when there are no Armenians left there any more, *Manana* remains as a living memory of Van.<sup>17</sup>

Srvandztian's recording of Van and other regional folklores became an invaluable source for future writers. The example of Armenian national epic, David of Sassun, which Srvandztian first discovered in the Taron region, is out of the scope of this paper, but the story of Siamanto and Khejé Zaré is a good example to cite. Srvandztian recorded the story that was alive in the mountains of Sipan, on the shores of Lake Van. The story depicted a tragic love between an Armenian shepherd, Siamanto, and the daughter of Kurdish chieftain, Daughter of Zaré. This oral folk tale, published in *Hamov Hotov* (Delicious and Fragrant) was later used by Hovhannes Shiraz, or rather

the entire plot was absorbed and rewritten as a beautiful literary narration in a long poem. Another example is *Dezhico*, again recorded and published by Srvandztian. Two renowned twentieth century Armenian writers, Hovhannes Tumanian and Derenik Demirchian, used this popular folktale and created masterpieces in the genre of socio-political satire; both titled their work after the name of the protagonist, *Kaj Nazar* (Nazar the Brave), but the raw material in their hands obtained two very different shapes. These masterpieces, are examples of the usage of folktales as raw material for artistic creations. And that is a representation of another important role of Van provincial literature.

Despite his devotion to his birthplace Van, Srvandztian always envisioned the entire picture, Armenia. He chastised those, whose patriotism reached only the boundaries of their hometown, "I Karintsi, I Vanetsi." In another extreme were Armenians living in the Ottoman cities outside Armenia, for whom the idea of homeland was there they earned their bread (որտեղ հաց, այնտեղ կաց),<sup>18</sup> Srvandztian dreamed of a free nation, and the only means to reach that goal, he believed, was through national struggle against all oppressors. Even before the Russo-Turkish war, Srvandztian admonished Armenians not to rely on others, but to unite and take up the struggle on their own. Even before Raffi's famous reproach of the Armenian clergy preaching subservience and obedience, Srvandztian blamed them for the people's passivity. Bitterly he cited their argument: "Jesus Christ taught us, 'if someone hits you on the cheek, turn your other cheek. If someone wants your shirts, give him also your overcoat.'" When they were criticized for reinforcing in Armenians that kind of mentality, their justification was: "What can we do, Jesus Christ did not give us orders to hit back."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, this misinterpretation of Christian teachings represented the frame of mind of the majority of the clergy in Vaspurakan. Arsen Tokhmakhian, a Zharangavorats student, later attested to this reality: "Until the 1850s, the clergy of Vaspurakan were a bunch of imbeciles, always praying and preparing themselves for the next world .... Khrimian and his students came to preach nationalism and change the mentality of the people of Van."<sup>20</sup> Naturally, the activities of Khrimian and his disciples, especially Srvandztian, could not go unnoticed. They stirred animosity among Armenian conservatives and invited the government's suspicion. Both Khrimian and Srvandztian were under constant surveillance, their activities were censured and restricted.

In 1871, Khrimian Hayrik, now the patriarch of Constantinople,

dispatched Srvandztian to Van to see about the implementation of the Constitution.<sup>21</sup> Khrimian's letter to his faithful disciple spoke of his distress in view of the frame of mind still prevailing in Vaspurakan. "Go, lament the slavish spirit of the people of Van," he wrote "Tear open the shrouds of slavery of these dead people .... Pull down the veil blinding their eyes."<sup>22</sup> Khrimian continued his letter encouraging Srvandztian to preach love of freedom, to enlighten people against deep rooted superstitions and conformity, to speak about the past calamities that befell the nation, to make them think about ways to prevent new catastrophes, to urge them to prepare themselves and wait for the proper moment.<sup>23</sup>

Irritated and aggravated by the unfavorable outcome of the Russo-Turkish war of 1878, the ensuing San Stefano treaty, and the Berlin Conference, the Ottoman government intensified the oppression of its Armenian citizens. Censorship on Armenian life, on cultural and educational institutions grew heavier. To restrict the Armenian school activities and put a stop to the burgeoning network of Armenian schools in Vaspurakan, the government increased the number of Turkish schools and levied heavy taxes on Armenian and other minority schools called *milet miktebi*.<sup>24</sup> The teaching of Armenian history was not allowed. Using the word "Hayastan" was forbidden in all of the Empire. Turkish inspectors visited the schools every so often to make sure nothing out of the ordinary happened. In one of these visits, sometime in 1891, the Turkish inspector spotted a notebook with a title beginning with "H" in Armenian. What is this? Hayastan? He asked a student. You are learning the history of Hayastan? And in fact it was a book on Armenian History, *Hayots Patmutiun*. "No"! The student replied calmly. "No Efendim, *Hatsi Patmutiun*. It is on agriculture."

Persecutions were on the rise. Consorship was not limited to cultural life alone. Sultan Hamid had decided to solve the Armenian Question his own way: by massacre, forced migration, persecutions, incarcerations, forced conversion to Islam. To avoid the Armenian reform bills that the European governments imposed on him, he was getting rid of the Armenians. The situation was worse in Van, where, even before the war the looting and burning of the Armenian marketplace and the continuous attacks of Kurdish chieftains, like Jaleddin, on Armenian villages, had taken thousands of lives and had caused heavy financial losses.

The new catastrophes gave birth to new literature, literary responses in the genre of lamentation. *Vanguyzh* (A Lamentation for Van) was Khrimian's response to Kurdish atrocities, the pillage and burn-

ing of Van marketplace in 1876. *Hayguyzh* (A Lamentation for Armenians) bemoaned the massacre of 15,000 Armenians in Bayazet and Alashkert in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war. The morbid question kept ominously hanging throughout: How could your neighbors who shared your bread and lived on the sweat of your forehead desecrate your generous table with blood. In spite of the genre of lamentation, very much in line with Khorenatsi's «Ողբամ զԲԵԿ Բայոց աշխարհ» (I lament on you, Armenia), Khrimian's wail of woe carried political implications, a contemplation of a way of the calamity, resort to arms. "This is the law of the nature," he wrote. "...You will be slaughtered more and more if you are like sheep, if you do not have the horns of a bull to fight back, .... if you are unarmed. Did you think you could get the freedom you aspired without blood?"<sup>25</sup>

Srvandztian's response to the renewed calamities followed. In the wake of the great famine and increasing persecutions in the aftermath of the war, Nerses Varzhapetian, patriarch of Constantinople, sent him to Vaspurakan to report on the plight of the disaster stricken Armenians, to comfort and assist them and to urge them not to give up. In 1879 both Khrimian and Srvandztian were in Van. One was the prelate; the other, his assistant. Van had become the center of secret organizations, formed as a reaction to the devastating governmental policy against Armenians, to defend the nation any way they could. The two great sons of Van were fighting their own battle by way of writing and preaching.

*Toros Aghbar, Hayaztani Chambord* (Toros Aghbar the Traveler of Armenia), a two-part literary piece in prose, embodied Srvandztian's impressions of Armenian life under the dark shadow of escalated terror. It is the lamentation of an imaginary bird, whom Srvandztian calls Toros Aghbar (brother Toros), flying over the ruins of Armenia, depicting the intolerable situation, preaching the need to fight back and to struggle for freedom and justice. In this lamentation, Srvandztian bewails the loss of the Armenian statehood, as the symbol of Armenian power and physical perpetuation. With equal intensity, he laments the loss of erstwhile glory of the Armenian Church, as the symbol of Armenian spiritual strength. In spite of the hopeless situation in Armenia, abject poverty, absence of safety of life and belongings, continuous prejudice, discrimination, and persecution, Srvandztian reprehends those who leave the homeland for a better life outside. Toros Aghbar significantly refuses to visit these Armenians abroad, and Srvandztian agrees. "Yes! You are right," he says. "Go! Deplore! Move people's hearts! Seek the loss where it was lost."<sup>26</sup>



Khrimian Hayrik's *Papik ev Tornik* (Grandpa and Grandson), a work of similar nature, was published in 1894, probably written in the same year or the year before, when Khrimian Hayrik was exiled to Jerusalem to serve as the patriarch, away from the heart of the Armenian resistance movement. The situation had been incomparably bad. Turkish and Kurdish aggressions and violent assaults on Armenians were soaring; on the other hand, the non-interference of the government to stop the atrocities or the participation of the newly formed Hamidieh government troops<sup>27</sup> in the carnage were indications of a pernicious plan underway. In spite of all this, Khrimian was still trying to strengthen his fellow Armenians' hearts to endure hardship and not to abandon their ancestral lands for safety. Paradoxically, when there were strong indications of imminent calamities, Khrimian was urging Armenians to cling to their native soil, no matter what would come upon them.

Khrimian's *Papik ev Tornik* is the fetishization in literature of the Armenian village and the peasant with the purity of his soul, his simplistic life, his desires, sufferings and aspirations. It is a call toward the Armenian village, as the ultimate patriotism, in line with what Eastern Armenian writers, Abovian, Raffi, Nalbandian, Muratsan, Proshian and others had achieved. In fact, Khrimian's *Papik ev Tornik* draws closer to Eastern Armenian գիւղագրութիւն (literature about the village),<sup>28</sup> which was initiated under different circumstances, with a different purpose, and followed a different path than the Western Armenian Գաւառական Գրականութիւն (provincial literature).

In this brief survey of Van Provincial Literature, special emphasis was laid on Khrimian's legacy, his contribution to and his support of Van provincial literature; however, the work and contribution of Garegin Srvandztian were discussed, at a comparatively greater length. In all conscience, If Khrimian Hayrik was the moving force, the teacher, the promoter, the pivotal element for Van Provincial literature to be born, to grow, and thrive, Srvandztian was the central figure, the principal creator of that literature.

The Armenian Renaissance had dawned with the influence of European thought, but it returned to the Armenian past for strength and inspiration. It took its impetus from the proud achievements of the past to revive Armenians from their torpor of servitude and ignorance and to inspire them with national pride, self-awareness, and aspiration for a better future. In such an atmosphere Srvandztian's work, especially Hamov-Hotov, Manana, and Toros Aghbar, recreate Armenia, the rivers, the mountains, the people past and present, the sky.



the sky, the soil, come alive to invoke and spur what the harbingers of the Armenian Renaissance labored to achieve. And this another important role of the provincial literature.

Khrimian's literature is hardly read today, except for its inherent political insinuations, or for descriptions of some particular place's erstwhile Armenian character. Khrimian's literature can not stand the scrutiny of a critic seeking artistic quality and aesthetic value. These are not the merits of Khrimian's literary legacy. Khrimian's legacy is Armenia itself, Armenia lost. Its ideology is patriotism, the historic land of Armenia, whose memory, whose love was fading in the hearts even in the Khrimian's days. In all intends and purposes, Khrimian's literature is *littérature engagée*, to use Jean Paul Sartre's terminology. It ostensibly pursues the goal of igniting the souls with the love of homeland, he himself had so fervently embraced, transmitting the spirit of Armenia, he himself had discovered, promoting the need to struggle for enlightenment, emancipation, and freedom. But above all, Khrimian's literature is Van-Vaspurakan with her glories of the days of yore, her yearnings for her sons drifted away. It is the materialization of Khrimian's unsurpassed urge to eternalize the existing. Did he foresee the sinister future? Even if so, he could never imagine the Van of 1916.

Khrimian's literature is the nucleus of Van-Provincial Literature to evolve in the rich legacy of his disciples, particularly that of Garegin Srvandztian, and to nurture Western Armenian literature with the living of Armenia.

**The above article is the lecture by Rubina Peroomian at the Van Vasbou-ragan international symposia, which commenced at UCLA on May 17-18, 1997 and was arranged and directed by historian Mr. Richard Hovanessian.**