

**JERUSALEM THROUGH THE EYES OF ARMENIAN PHOTOGRAPHERS:
GARABED KRIKORIAN, JOHANNES KRIKORIAN, ELIA KAHVEDJIAN**

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The article is dedicated to the development of the art of photography in Jerusalem, the foundation of which was laid by Armenians. The three presented photographs reflect the episodes and realities of the daily life of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the first half of the 20th century – until the beginning of the Second World War. The authors are Garabed Krikorian, Johannes Krikorian and Elia Kahvedjian. The work of Armenian photographers is a special documentary material about Jerusalem at the end of the 19th century – the beginning of the 20th century, becoming an important contribution to the history of Jerusalem. They are the pioneers of photography in the Middle East. The Armenians of Jerusalem connect their history with the history of the Jewish people, since both peoples suffered many trials, including genocide. However, both peoples survived and continue to coexist side by side in the Old City, bringing them together and uniting them.

Key words: Armenian photographers, Jerusalem, Garabed Krikorian, Johannes Krikorian, Elia Kahvedjian, Ottoman Empire, Old City.

Introduction

One of the first Armenian-Jewish connection can be traced back to the pre-Christian period. During the 1st century BCE, Armenian King Tigran the Great expanded the borders of Armenia, stretching it from the Caspian Sea all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean, by conquering parts of Cappadocia, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, Syria, and Palestine. During his reign, he forced a significant number of Jews to settle in Armenia, increasing the Jewish population in Northern Mesopotamia.¹ It is widely known and accepted that since this first connection there has been an Armenian presence in Jerusalem, a city where people belonging to various cultural and religious backgrounds lived next to each other. As the Armenian population in the city grew significantly during the 4th and 5th centuries CE, the Armenian Quarter was already established, and became one of the four main principal sections of the Old City. Being Christian, the Armenians consider the Armenian Apostolic Church a national institution, for it is not possible to be part of the church without being part of the Armenian nation. This gives a unique feature to the Armenians, thus separating them from the other Christians, leading them to have their own Quarter

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in the city.² In 638 CE, following the Arab conquests, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem had already reached a stature that was equal to that of the Greeks. The community had great freedom in exercising their national and religious customs and rituals up until the conquest of Jerusalem by the Ottoman Turks from the Mamluks.³ Thus, throughout the history of the city, Jerusalem's Armenian community has witnessed the main historic events that took place in the region, and has made a positive contribution to the Holy City.

Among one of its greatest contributions to the city by this group was occasioned by the introduction of photography. If one wishes to explore the lifestyle of Jerusalem during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, it is useful to look at old photographic images dating from that time. In the Ottoman Empire, photography was considered something to be practiced by "unbelievers," for creating images of humans was against Moslem belief. Thus, only certain minorities found within the Ottoman Empire practiced photography – mainly Christians. With the gradual expansion of European missionaries in Istanbul, and with the birth of the Armenian Literary Renaissance in the 1840s, the Armenians were encouraged to take up many arts and crafts practices, as well as photography. The Armenian Abdullah brothers were the most widely recognized photographers in Istanbul, to the point where they became the official photographers of the Sultan's palace, and they had no significant competition for this industry in the city. Thus, Armenians turned to Jerusalem in order to experiment with photography there, making them the pioneers of this profession in the region.

The first photography school was opened in the Sourp Hagop (Saint James) Monastery by Armenian Patriarch (and practitioner of photography) Yessai Garabedian in 1859. This establishment trained many Armenian photographers, who dominated the photography market in the Middle East up until the first half of the 20th century.⁴ The object of this paper is to discuss three significant photographs taken by three different Armenian photographers in Jerusalem, Garabed Krikorian, and his sons Johannes Krikorian and Elia Kahvedjian. Each of these images has its own story, related to the history of the personal lives of the photographers and also that of the city of Jerusalem. The first photograph to be discussed is the portrait of Mrs. Krikorian at the American Colony of Jerusalem (Fig. 1) taken by her husband. The role of the colony will be discussed in greater depth, as well as its contributions to the city of Jerusalem. This will be followed by the portrait of Najla Krikorian (Fig. 2), which explores an interesting story that happened for the Krikorian family relating to their profession of photography. The third photograph is by Armenian Genocide survivor Elia Kahvedjian, representing Jews praying in front of the Western Wall (Fig. 3). Through this last photograph, the paper aims to represent the situation of the Jews in this part of the world at a time when their existence was endangered in certain parts of Europe, thus analyzing the degree of importance of Jerusalem for the Jews. The paper will conclude by summarizing the Armenian photographers' contribution to Jerusalem.

Garabed Krikorian

Garabed Krikorian was an Armenian resident of Jerusalem. After the opening of the photography institute by the Armenian Patriarch, Krikorian, he, along with his brother, joined the school and stood out as one of the best students. During the 1870s, he opened his own photographic studio on Jaffa Road, where he started taking pictures of pilgrims, tourists, and prominent local figures. He devoted himself mainly to portraiture. He gained much recognition after becoming the official photographer of German Kaiser Wilhem II when the latter was on a visit of the Holy Land in 1878.⁵ His studio was the first of its kind in the region, making him an important figure, whom people from different parts of the Middle East came to in order to be photographed.

In the photograph chosen we see Krikorian's wife seated in a swinging chair, knitting. Her location is identified as the American Colony house of Jerusalem. The photograph is believed to have been taken around 1900-1920, the years preceding the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Those were also the years when the American Colony was the most active in Jerusalem. Established in the 1880s, members of the American Colony would engage in various educational, charitable, and commercial projects. The members were mainly European and American missionaries and entrepreneurs who brought with them their experiences in various skills, such as trading, agriculture and domestic crafts. The American Colony had its own agricultural fields, weaving rooms, woodworkers and blacksmiths, and animal raisers, making it a large fully self-sufficient community. It also functioned as a hostel for foreign (mainly European) visitors. After the First World War, the Colony created an orphanage for children whose families were ravaged during the war.

Many of the younger members of the Colony were photographers and had their own department, which was created in 1898. They produced prints, photograph albums, postcards, panoramic photos of Jerusalem, as well as lantern slides, which were sold via the Colony's store. They provided help for visiting photographers. They performed various other tasks as well, such as producing "biblical" scenes of the Holy Land, which usually did not depict people, but rather only landscapes of Jerusalem and its surroundings; mosques, churches, village-homes, streets, and documentation of Jerusalem as a whole were their focus. The department had also collaborated with local photographers, most notably with Garabed Krikorian and his main competitor at the time, Khalil Ra'ad. These two were usually hired by the American Colony to record important events and school graduation ceremonies. Other than that, they would sell images (especially in the form of postcards) created by the local photographers. One of the most common subjects of photography in the case of Krikorian was taking pictures of local residents who came to him dressed formally and photographed, either as a whole family, or as separate members of a family (one of the spouses, for example). The objective was for a family to show its high "bourgeois" social status and wealth through magnificently captured photographs.⁶ As this demonstrates, the relationship between Garabed Krikorian and

the American Colony is significant. This can give us a reasonable explanation of why we have a photograph of Mrs. Krikorian weaving while she is in the American Colony house. Since on the one hand there was the American Colony which arranged for volunteer work in many aspects of life, and on the other hand they were also collaborating with Garabed Krikorian and helping him in selling and distributing his photographs, it can be interpreted that his wife would have decided, in her turn, to lend a hand to the American Colony herself, by becoming a member of the weaving room. This was probably her way of expressing gratitude towards the American Colony, for the organization was providing great help and contributing a lot to the people of Jerusalem when the entire region was facing serious hardships due to ongoing political instability in the Ottoman Empire, followed by the First World War. Also since, as mentioned above, there was a tradition of being photographed in such a manner or in such a place which suggested high social status, it can be argued that Krikorian wanted to take a photo of his wife in the American Colony House in order to show that his family was in close contact with a foreign establishment that was highly respected throughout the region.

Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the British Mandate of Palestine, Jerusalem saw an era of growing urbanization, as well as technological advances, brought from Europe. At this time photography became much more significant as it was a sign of modernity in the region. A new urban class emerged within Palestinian society, which adopted a more European lifestyle, and started to perceive Bedouins and other so-called peasants as people with exotic Oriental traits, to which they did not belong. Thus, such photos were produced from the studios, with models dressed as Bedouins and/or villagers in order to represent this unique oriental character that was now already understood as something not part of British Palestine. It also became a trend for these aristocratic families to be photographed dressed in such costumes. The studios such as Krikorian's had a reserve of such traditional costumes in order to satisfy their customers' demands.⁷

Johannes Krikorian

The second photograph of this paper represents Najla Krikorian dressed as a Bedouin. This is one of the classic examples that demonstrates the demand for Oriental themed photographs. This image, however, has a unique story of its own. It is true that while Armenians brought photography to Jerusalem first, they were also the ones who trained Arabs as photographers. When Garabed Krikorian opened the first photography studio in the city, he trained the first Arab photographer, Khalil Ra'ad. He was born in 1854 in the Lebanese village of Bhamdoun. His father, having converted to Protestantism, fled the village, for his compatriots were staunch



Fig. 1. Garabed Krikorian, *Mrs. Krikorian at the American Colony of Jerusalem, 1900-1920*



Fig. 2. Johannes Krikorian, *Najla Krikorian as a Bedouin, 1921, Jerusalem*



Fig. 3. Elia Kahvedjian, *Jewish Pilgrims praying to the Western Wall, 1935, Jerusalem*

Maronite Christians who considered his act a sin, and would not accept him as one of them. After his father was killed in 1860 due to sectarian conflict in Lebanon, Khalil Ra'ad and his sister were taken to Jerusalem by his mother, where they finally settled. Eventually Ra'ad grew up and became an apprentice in Krikorian's studio. Later on, he opened his own studio right in front of his former apprentice. This led to heated competition between student and teacher. It reached the point where both family members would not talk to each other. In 1913, Garabed Krikorian's son, Johannes – who returned to Jerusalem from Germany after having studied photography – put an end to the rivalry between the two families by marrying Najla, who was Khalil Ra'ad's niece.⁸ Najla was considered the “peace bride” between the two families. After the marriage, Johannes Krikorian, having taken control of his father's studio, started collaborating with Khalil Ra'ad. His wife, represented in the photograph, is dressed as an Arab Bedouin, but at the same time bears an Armenian family name, creating a harmony between the two families.

Elia Kahvedjian

The Krikorian family's tradition of photography continued in Jerusalem. However, they were not the only Armenian photographers. A more recent figure was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. As a consequence of Turkish Pan-Turkic dreams and the timing of the first World War, the Ottoman Empire took advantage and with a carefully planned methods managed to exterminate nearly one and a half million Armenians who were driven out of their ancestral homeland. The survivors of these atrocities found refuge in neighboring countries and cities.⁹ Jerusalem, in its part, was a haven for Elia Kahvedjian, who later became a prominent photographer. In his words, he and his family walked for months in the Syrian Desert. His mother gave him to a Kurdish family who was passing by in order to save his life. He was raised in this family, and then put on the street, until he was taken to an orphanage in Nazareth by the American Near East Relief Organization.¹⁰ There, by helping a teacher who was also a photographer, he learned that profession. Later on, he went to live in Jerusalem, where he opened a photography shop.¹¹ His works dating from the late 1920s and the 1930s are well known. One of the most notable ones is the representation of Jews praying in front of the Western Wall. The image was taken in 1935, which was a period that represents the struggle of the very existence of the Jews in Palestine and in the world. In Europe, the 1930s saw the founding of an Anti-Semitic political ideology, Nazism, under the rule of Adolf Hitler, signaling the endangerment of the Jewish existence in lands under Nazi control. This was the beginning of the preparation of another Armenian Genocide-like scenario, but this time the victims were the Jewish people. Concurrently, in the late 1920s riots took place in Jerusalem, where Arabs attacked Jewish property in order to claim the Western Wall as part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Thus, feelings of nationalism and religious expression were awakening in the hearts and minds of every Jew. The faith towards their religion increased, as well as their attachment to

the Holy Land. Many of the Jewish people concluded that their only salvation was the return to the homeland of their ancestors, after being scattered around the world for centuries. This idea of repatriation to the “promised land” had started since the 16th century. However, the peak of Jewish influx into Palestine occurred in the 1930s. This group had to resist both anti-Semitist ideologies and anti-Jewish sentiments.¹² Elia Kahvedjian’s photograph representing Jews praying at the Western Wall expresses all of these ideas and thoughts. Such a photograph speaks to the hearts of many Jews who survived the Holocaust. Being a Genocide survivor himself, Kahvedjian knew and felt what were his Jewish friends were going through during the same period. It was a dark moment for everyone. Survivors of the Armenian Genocide still had not recovered from the Turkish criminal acts committed upon them. Jews were now about to face the same persecutions that the Armenians had faced.

Conclusion

These Armenian photographers, along with their works and productions, are an inseparable treasure of Jerusalem. Their production can be considered as important historical documents describing the lifestyle of Jerusalem during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The analysis of these three images from three different Armenian photographers revealed important knowledge. First of all, it showed the presence of an important humanitarian organization, the American Colony of Jerusalem and its contribution to the expansion of photography in the region. Also considered in this analysis are the various thoughts and approaches to modernity at the time of the British Mandate after the First World War was understood through the portraits of wealthy Europeanized Jerusalemites dressed as peasants and Bedouins. And finally, this discussion uncovered the rise of Jewish nationalism during the decade preceding the Second World War, a crucial time for the Jewish people. The role of the Armenian photographers of Jerusalem is undeniably one of the important contributions to the history of Jerusalem.

The Armenian Quarter, although the smallest of the four districts, continues to be an important contributor to the Old City, through its unique Church, through the arts and crafts practiced by Armenian Jerusalemites, and through the heritage left behind by the Armenian pioneers of photography in the Middle East. Armenians of Jerusalem relate the story of their ancestors with that of their Jewish compatriots: both nations were conquered and ruled by different foreign powers; both endured many difficulties when they were faced with certain death; and both of them witnessed a wide-scale state-organized Genocide. And yet, in the end, both nations survived and continue to exist up till this very day, side by side, by practicing their religions in a city that brings them next to each other.

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ԵՐՈՒՍԱԴԵՄԸ ՀԱՅ ԼՈՒՍԱՆԿԱՐԻՉՆԵՐԻ ԱՉՔԵՐՈՎ. ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏ ԳՐԻԳՈՐՅԱՆ, ՀՈՎՀԱՆՆԵՍ ԳՐԻԳՈՐՅԱՆ, ԷԼԻԱ ՔԱՎԵՋՅԱՆ

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Հղման համար. Հերկելեան, Հերագ: «Երուսաղեմը հայ լուսանկարիչների աչքերով. Կարապետ Գրիգորյան, Հովհաննես Գրիգորյան և Էլիա Քահվեջան»: *Արվեստագիտական հանդես*, N 1 (2022): 256-264. DOI: 10.54503/2579-2830-2022.1(7)-256

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իրենց պատմությունը կապում են իրենա ժողովրդի պատմության հետ, քանի որ երկու ժողովուրդներն էլ կրել են բազմաթիվ փորձություններ՝ ընդհուպ ցեղասպանություն: Սակայն երկու ժողովուրդներն էլ գոյատևեցին և շարունակում են կողք կողքի համագոյակցել իրենց մերձեցնող և միավորող Հին քաղաքում:

Քանալի քաղեր^{*} հայ լուսանկարիչներ, Երուսաղեմ, Կարապետ Գրիգորյան, Հովհաննես Գրիգորյան, Էլիա Քահվեջյան, Օսմանյան կայսրություն, Հին քաղաք:

ИЕРУСАЛИМ ГЛАЗАМИ АРМЯНСКИХ ФОТОГРАФОВ: КАРАПЕТ ГРИГОРЯН, ОВАНЕС ГРИГОРЯН, ЭЛИЯ КАХВЕДЖЯН

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Статья посвящена развитию искусства фотографии в Иерусалиме, основа которого была заложена армянами. Представленные в статье три фотографии имеют цель показать эпизоды и реалии повседневной жизни иерусалимских жителей в первой половине XX в., до начала Второй мировой войны. Авторами этих фотографий являются Карапет Григорян, Ованес Григорян и Элия Кахведжян. Творчество этих фотографов являет собой своеобразный документальный материал об Иерусалиме конца 19 – начала 20 веков, ставший важным вкладом в историю Иерусалима. Армянские фотографы стали пионерами фотографии на Ближнем Востоке. Армяне Иерусалима связывают свою историю с историей еврейского народа, поскольку на долю обоих народов выпало немало тяжких испытаний вплоть до геноцида. Но оба народа выжили и продолжают сосуществовать бок о бок в городе, который их сближает и объединяет.

Ключевые слова: армянские фотографы, Иерусалим, Карапет Григорян, Ованес Григорян, Элия Кахведжян, Османская империя, Старый город.

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