

# THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN MUSA DAGH, 1919-1939

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The Armenian Apostolic Church of Musa Dagh, as an integral part of the centuries-old Armenian Apostolic, Gregorian or National Church, underwent reform from the promulgation of the Armenian National Constitution in 1863 in the Ottoman Empire until the start of World War I in 1914. A number of difficulties, however, slowed down progress. To begin with, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the state-installed authority over the internal affairs of the empire's Armenian *millet* (religious community), and the church-recognized supreme institution within the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church—in this case, the Catholicosate (Pontificate) of the Great House of Cilicia headquartered at Sis (modern-day Kozan, Turkey) in the Ottoman province of Adana—often remained at odds with each other as to which had the right of running the people's religious and civil business.<sup>1</sup> The Aleppo Diocese, to which Musa Dagh belonged for certain periods of time, functioned under the tutelage of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. The historical Diocese of Antioch, on the other hand, had ceased to exist at the time despite calls for its revival. The Vicarage of Latakia, administratively affiliated with the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, also figured in the mix as some vicars sometimes oversaw the churches in Antioch and Musa Dagh. In short, a jurisdictional-administrative uncertainty prevailed in the region before World War I.<sup>2</sup>

The shortage of especially high-ranking clergy, who could be tasked with the introduction of changes in Musa Dagh and other rural communities in the area, posed another problem. Yet the various church headquarters alluded to somehow managed to dispatch or assign celibate priests (*vartabeds*) or ordinary, married priests (*kahanas*) whenever feasible to implement the constitutional mandate in northwestern Syria. As for local parish priests, with few exceptions, they were illiterate and lacking in the necessary aptitudes for their vocation. Besides, their selection for ordination was sometimes determined according to the whims of village notables seeking to assert their

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<sup>1</sup> Avedis K. Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities in Syria under Ottoman Dominion*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA: 1965, chapters 2 and 3; Hagop Cholakian, *Badmagan Andioki yev Shrchagayits Pnig Hayern u Mius Havakaganutiunnere* (The Native Armenians of Historical Antioch and Environs and the Other Collectivities), Publishing House of the IAE, Yerevan, 2023, pp. 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> Vahram L. Shemmassian, *The Armenians of Musa Dagh: From Obscurity to Genocide Resistance and Fame 1840-1915*, Armenian Series Number 11, The Press, California State, Fresno, CA, 2020, pp. 95-102.

authority or in fierce competition with each other. Lastly, the parishioners themselves were poor, crude, ignorant, undisciplined and mired in perpetual socioeconomic conflicts. Notwithstanding these problems, parish councils were ultimately formed through elections, thereby ushering in a period of some tangible change in the running of churches and fulfilling the religious-spiritual needs of the faithful.<sup>3</sup>

Such were matters, when World War I erupted in 1914. The conflagration proved catastrophic for the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire as they became victim to a genocidal campaign planned and executed by the Ottoman government. A few pockets of resistance existed, however; Musa Dagħ was one of them. After defying the government's deportation order for about six weeks through self-defense, two-thirds of its 6,300 population was rescued by units of the French Mediterranean fleet and transported to Port Said, Egypt, where they stayed in a refugee camp for four years, from mid-September 1915 until fall 1919. The remaining one-third was deported, mostly to the Syrian town of Hama and the surrounding countryside. The latter group could obviously not conduct religious services and at one point many even converted to Islam (nominally) by governmental order in order to save themselves from extermination. The situation at Port Said differed as the refugees were free to worship under British protection.<sup>4</sup>

The first mass at the Port Said refugee camp took place in the open, beginning at 6:00 a.m. on Sunday, September 26, 1915.<sup>5</sup> In less than a month, it was decided to hold services later in the morning so that the tiny Armenian colony of Port Said city, which did not have a church of its own, could also attend.<sup>6</sup> On October 24, Primate Torkom Kushakian (Torgom Gushagian) of Egypt celebrated his first mass at the camp. In addition to the large crowd of refugees, including the more than 1,000 students of the Sisvan School, present were Armenian and non-Armenian dignitaries such as British officials, twenty-plus French naval officers led by the Vice-Admiral of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mediterranean Squadron, Suez Canal Company director Mr. Dumont and his wife, the directors of Messageries Maritimes, French Post, Cr dit Lyonnais and other important establishments, etc. At the end, the Primate led a procession—including two bearers of the Red Cross flag that had saved the people of Musa Dagħ—to the adjacent hospital to bless the wounded and the sick. The

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-108.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Chapter 7 and the Epilogue.

<sup>5</sup> *Arev* (Sun) (Alexandria), September 29, 1915.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., October 13, 1915.

ceremonies concluded with the crowd shouting “Vive la France, Vive l’Angleterre, Vive les Alliés” and singing a patriotic song.<sup>7</sup>

Given worship services were held in a tent, Primate Kushakian in February 1916 spent eight days in the camp to spur the construction of a more proper, wooden church.<sup>8</sup> Its inauguration took place two months later, on Palm Sunday, April 16, with the Primate officiating. A large number of the worshippers stayed outside because the sanctuary was not spacious enough to accommodate all. On this auspicious occasion, the five Musa Dagħ priests donned new vestments.<sup>9</sup> On Easter, April 23, Fr. Apraham Der Kalusdian of Yoghun Oluk delivered the sermon in the Musa Dagħ dialect.<sup>10</sup> By early June, all the essential church objects had been acquired.<sup>11</sup> In November 1916, the Primate, on his way to pay a pastoral visit to Armenians in India and the nearby islands of Jakarta and Sumatra as the nuncio of the Catholicos of All Armenians Kevork V Surenians, headquartered at Echmiadzin, Eastern or Russian Armenia, passed by the camp and officially designated Fr. Apraham Der Kalusdian as locum tenens of the refugee population.<sup>12</sup>

When other Genocide survivors arrived in the camp from Palestine, Transjordan and elsewhere beginning in late 1917,<sup>13</sup> the few high-ranking clergymen and ordinary priests among them got actively involved in religious, educational, and orphan affairs.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiayian of Constantinople and his retinue on February 16, 1919 arrived in Port Said city from exile in Iraq (Mesopotamia) to a warm reception by British, Greek, and Armenian representatives. Although his tight travel schedule back to his headquarters in the Ottoman capital prevented him from visiting the camp, a camp delegation including Fr. Der Kalusdian met him at Port Said to wish him

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., October 27, 1915; *Husaper* (Hope-Bearer) (Cairo), October 26, 1915.

<sup>8</sup> *Arev*, February 16, 1916.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., April 21, 1916.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., April 26, 1916.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., June 7, 1916.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., November 3, 1916; *Husaper*, December 8, 1916.

<sup>13</sup> Vahram L. Shemmassian, “The Population, Setup, and Administration of the Armenian Refugee Camp of Port Said, Egypt 1915-1919,” in Antranik Dakessian, ed., *Armenians of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia/1: Proceedings of the Conference (12-13 April and 29-30 May 2018)*, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, 2022, pp. 251-54.

<sup>14</sup> Archpriest Der Nerses Babayan, *Pages from My Diary*, Yervant Babayan, ed., Aris B. Sevag, trans., ABRIL Printing, Los Angeles, 2000, p. 26; Ardashes H. Kardashian, *Niuter Yekibdosi Hayots Badmutian Hamar*, III, *Badmutiun Yekibdahay Parerarneru yev Grtagan Hasdadutiunneru* (Materials for the History of Armenians of Egypt, vol. 3, History of Egyptian Armenian Philanthropists and Educational Institutions), St. Lazarus Press, Venice, St. Lazarus Island, 1987, pp. 263, 276; *Husaper*, March 6, 1918.

well.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Catholicos (Pontiff) Sahag II Khabayian of Cilicia in April 1919 sojourned at the camp for three days on his return from exile in Damascus, toured the various sections, blessed the involved organizations, presided over church services, and encouraged the refugees in general.<sup>16</sup> All these activities came to an end when the refugees returned home by late 1919 and the camp was dismantled.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE JURISDICTION

The diocesan affiliation of the Apostolic Church in Musa Dagħ continued to remain uncertain after repatriation from Port Said and Hama in 1919. This had to do with the tribulations and unsettled state of the Catholicosate of Cilicia itself. As Armenian Genocide survivors returned from the Arab Middle East to their homes, mostly in the Ottoman provinces of Adana and Aleppo at the end of World War I,<sup>17</sup> the Catholicosate endeavored to regroup and revive its dioceses as well as establish orphanages and schools under very difficult and threatening conditions.<sup>18</sup> This episode lasted about three years, from early 1919 until late 1921, when Sahag II and the institution he led were forced to seek safe haven in Syria following the Armenian population's exodus in 1920-21 resulting from the withdrawal of French troops from Cilicia and its occupation by Mustafa Kemal's Turkish Nationalist forces.<sup>19</sup> The Catholicosate thus faced a new reality: how to manage and guide its followers, now refugees, in an alien land facing myriad problems. Choosing a new headquarters constituted another dilemma that was resolved only nine years later, in 1930, when Sahag II, after commuting back and forth between Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, and Zahle, finally decided to settle at Antelias, some 5 kilometers (3 miles) to the north of the Lebanese capital.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Husaper*, February 20, 1919.

<sup>16</sup> *Arev*, April 16, 1919.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Vahram L. Shemmassian, "The Repatriation of Armenian Refugees from the Arab Middle East, 1918-1920," in Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian, eds., *Armenian Cilicia*, Mazda Publishers, Inc., Costa Mesa, CA, 2008, pp. 419-56.

<sup>18</sup> Pizant Yeghiayian, *Zhamanagagits Badmutiun Gatoghigosutian Hayots Giligio 1914-1972* (Contemporary History of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia 1914-1972) Printing House of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon, 1975, pp. 69-102.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-66; Vahé Tachjian, "The Cilician Armenians and French Policy, 1919-1921," in Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian, eds., *Armenian Cilicia*, Mazda Publishers, Inc., Costa Mesa, CA, 2008, pp. 550-55.

<sup>20</sup> Yeghiayian, pp. 207-77; Simon Payaslian, "The Institutionalization of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias," *Armenian Cilicia*, pp. 563-67.

Very Rev. Movses Vosgerichian, vicar general of Latakia/primate of Antioch from 1911-1914,<sup>21</sup> returned to the region after the war, engaging mainly in relief efforts to fend off famine among the Armenian survivors.<sup>22</sup> Given his preoccupation with humanitarian assistance, he did not seem to have much time to focus on church affairs during his very brief stay. Accordingly, resorting to the pre-World War I practice of letting Latakia take care of Antioch and vicinity, Sahag II on March 18, 1922 asked the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for the new Superintendent of the Latakia Vicarage, Very Rev. Nerses Dolabjian, to also act as the primate of the Antioch-Musa Dagh region. The Patriarchate, considering the “sad situation” and the need for a “spiritual shepherd” there, accepted the pontiff’s request and within a week informed Dolabjian of its decision.<sup>23</sup> Having received this positive response, Sahag II took immediate action by keeping the French High Commissioner of Syria and Lebanon abreast of this arrangement so he could facilitate Very Rev. Dolabjian’s activity in his new post.<sup>24</sup> The latter proved a negligent clergyman in this case. He rarely visited Musa Dagh, and law and order in the communities he was assigned to lead continued to deteriorate.<sup>25</sup> For example, he left the area before finding a remedy to the bloody Bitias-Haji Habibli internecine feud, which departure was criticized by Fr. Harutiun Yesayian, the locum tenens of the Aleppo Prelacy, in no uncertain terms. According to Fr. Yesayian, Dolabjian ought to have stayed in Musa Dagh for several months, formed a reconciliation council including representatives from Antioch and Musa Dagh, expelled the troublesome and “poisonous” families from both villages to Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut or elsewhere, and thus have pacified the region. Fr. Yesayian maintained that the Armenians themselves ought to have solved their problems instead of letting the Mandatory French government do their bidding.<sup>26</sup> Very Rev. Vahan Kevorkian, also of the Latakia Vicarage and a

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<sup>21</sup> Shemmassian, *The Armenians of Musa Dagh*, pp. 101-02.

<sup>22</sup> Vahram L. Shemmassian, *The Musa Dagh Armenians: A Socioeconomic and Cultural History 1919-1939*, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, 2015, pp. 6, 10, 17, 22, 24.

<sup>23</sup> National Archive of Armenia (NAA), Yerevan, Fond 1421, Index 1, Work 15, Patriarch Yeghishe Turian of Jerusalem to Very Rev. Nerses Dolabjian, March 24, 1922.

<sup>24</sup> Sandro Behbutyan, comp., *Vaverakrer Hay Yegeghetsu Badmutyan*, Book IV, *Sahag P. Khabayian Gatoghigos Giligio 1891-1940 TT*. (Documents for the History of the Armenian Church, Book IV, Pontiff Sahag II Khabayian of Cilicia 1891-1940) “Vosgan Yerevantsi” Publication, Yerevan, 1997, pp. 371-72.

<sup>25</sup> Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia (ACGHC) Archives, Antelias, Lebanon, File 22/1, *Jebel Musa-Svedia 1920-1940*, Fr. Vartan Varteresian to Catholicos Sahag II Khabayian, September 9, 1923; Fr. Apraham Der Kalusdian to Sahag II, March 5, 1924.

<sup>26</sup> NAA, Fond 1421, Index 1, Work 18, Fr. Harutiun Yesayian to Very Rev. Nerses Dolabjian, June 8, 1922.

native of Haji Habibli, succeeded Dolabjian from 1927-1929. Fr. Der Kalusdian heard the news of this transition on the evening of July 28, 1927 and invited the new appointee forthwith to Musa Dagh.<sup>27</sup> Very Rev. Kevorkian, it seems, like his predecessor, remained distant and therefore inconsequential.<sup>28</sup> In short, all these years, until 1932, church affairs remained unsettled.

Sahag II himself visited Musa Dagh for the first time in late August and early September 1922, not to make administrative arrangements on the spot per se, but rather to intervene in the bloody conflict between the villages of Bitias and Haji Habibli and reconcile the antagonists. He failed.<sup>29</sup> Taking advantage of the pontiff's presence, Fr. Der Kalusdian, in his capacity as locum tenens having been appointed as such at the Port Said refugee camp, had an audience with him in order to clarify his (Fr. Der Kalusdian's) rights and to have his authority reaffirmed. He also expressed his desire to see Musa Dagh attached to the Aleppo Diocese. Information is lacking about the outcome of this tête-à-tête. The Aleppo *Suriagan Mamul* (Syrian Press) newspaper, which reported the encounter, in turn suggested that Musa Dagh become a distinct diocese with a capable administrator at its helm and a supporting body consisting of elected village representatives.<sup>30</sup> In an editorial, the paper also criticized the pontiff and the Armenian national authorities in Syria for not making Musa Dagh a first priority, thereby greatly damaging its peaceful existence.<sup>31</sup>

In August 1927, that is, after a hiatus of five years, Sahag II, unable to visit the parishes of Musa Dagh and Latakia due to advanced age and declining health, dispatched the Very Rev. (*Dzayrakuyn Vartabed*) Khat Achabahian to the region in order to settle conflicts, restore dissolved parish councils through elections, urge priests to effect church reform, and tackle educational matters. During his two-month itinerary, he also read the pontiff's August 17 encyclical (*gontag*), which exhorted the faithful to live in harmony, cling to the Church and reject the intrusion of various "newly-emerged currents" and their adherents such as Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists (*Shapatabahs*), Spiritualists (*Ruhjës*), and Lovists (*Muhabbetjës*). The nation was already divided among various denominations and political parties and therefore needed unity and cohesion in order to persevere.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Fond 1421, Index 1, Work 62, Fr. Apraham Der Kalusdian to Very Rev. Vahan Kevorkian. July 28, 1927.

<sup>28</sup> In Sahag II's correspondence with Very Rev. Kevorkian, there is not even a single mention of the Antioch region, whereas there are references to other Armenian communities under the latter's jurisdiction. See Behbutyan, pp. 476-98.

<sup>29</sup> Shemmassian, *The Musa Dagh Armenians*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>30</sup> *Suriagan Mamul* (Syrian Press) (Aleppo), June 1, 1923.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., September 13, 1923.

<sup>32</sup> *Yeprad* (Euphrates) (Aleppo), January 28, 1928.

Although the parish council of Antioch appealed to the catholicosate multiple times “to endow this region with a regular Nation[al] church body,” and despite the pontiff’s efforts, no lasting or tangible results were achieved.<sup>33</sup> One such attempt involved the Very Rev. Yeprem Dohmuni, Vicar General of Latakia, whom Sahag II dispatched further north to systematize the region’s religious affairs. He arrived in Antioch on April 15, 1929 and for two days held meetings with the parish council and other community leaders. His next destination was Musa Dagh. He stayed at Bitias for five days, from the 17<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, then went to Haji Habibli, where he succeeded in reconciling a divided parish. It was here that rumors began to circulate about an alleged affair that he had had while in Antioch.<sup>34</sup> Upon the urging of the pontiff, and simultaneously acting on their own initiative, the Antioch parish council investigated the veracity of the hearsay and found Very Rev. Dohmuni at fault. Accordingly, a team of three notables was dispatched to Haji Habibli to demand his immediate departure from the district.<sup>35</sup> His mission thus cut short, he left for Kirik Khan, awaiting the pontiff’s decision regarding his fate.<sup>36</sup> The pontiff apparently chose not to take any (known) disciplinary action, for Very Rev. Dohmuni regained his post at Latakia.<sup>37</sup>

Given the above scandal, Very Rev. Dohmuni could obviously not serve as the primate of a future diocese encompassing one church in Antioch, two churches in Kesab, and six churches in Musa Dagh. And should this vacuum continue to persist, the consequences would be very grave. Accordingly, the Antioch parish council and other Armenian notables in town reached an agreement with their counterparts in Latakia, Kesab, and Musa Dagh to elect a Provincial Assembly (*Kavaragan Zhoghov*) according to the provisions of the Armenian National Constitution and decide on a suitable primate with the permission and approval of the pontiff, even if it meant the candidature of Very Rev. Dohmuni, although his return in that capacity would be “quite difficult” to conceive.<sup>38</sup> There is no indication that the request for election was granted.

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<sup>33</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 23/1, *Andiok 1914-1940* (Antioch 1914-1940), Chairman Dr. H. Der Boghosian and Secretary H. Khacherian of the Antioch parish council to Catholicos Sahag II, May 21, 1930.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., File 21/2, *Aleksandret yev Shrchanner 1920-1940* (Alexandretta and Environs 1920-1940), Very Rev. Yeprem Dohmuni to Sahag II, April 28, 1929.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., File 23/1, Chairman Dr. H. Der Boghosian and Secretary Garo Hamparian to Sahag II, June 3, 1929. The three envoys sent to Musa Dagh to demand Very Rev. Dohmuni’s departure were Yesayi Kazanjian, Garo Hamparian and Movses Der Kalusdian.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., File 21/2, Very Rev. Yeprem Dohmuni to Sahag II, April 28, 1929.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., File 23/1, Chairman Dr. H. Der Boghosian and Secretary H. Khacherian of the Antioch parish council to Sahag II, May 21, 1930.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

As seen, irregular periodic visits failed to yield a lasting impact. In this vein, the Beirut *Aztag* (Factor) newspaper, as late as mid-1932, bemoaned the fact that people in Musa Dagh had begun to show “signs of indifference” towards the Church, because the religious authorities had not concerned themselves (persistently) with that community for quite some time. Moreover, the latter was still in the dark as to which diocese it belonged or would belong to. Church rules were likewise being “trampled” on, and some places of worship were closed down due to the lack of priests.<sup>39</sup>

Things began to change that same year. From March 8-14, 1932 an important Episcopal (*Yebisgobosagan*) meeting took place at Antelias with an agenda that included five items: 1. Diocesan organization; 2. Marriage regulations; 3. Educational matters; 4. Ecumenical relations; 5. Issues raised by primates. In its second sitting, the gathering dealt with “the completion of the organization of dioceses and the necessity of establishing a uniform administrative system.” After the primates of Aleppo and Lebanon presented their detailed reports, the deliberations revolved around the status of the Cyprus, Damascus, and Latakia dioceses, focusing on the necessity to complete their constitutional councils as well as find solutions to existing structural, population, and budgetary issues. In the end, the bishops made the following recommendations to the catholicosate. First, to remove the Sanjak of Iskenderun/Alexandretta autonomous Syrian region including Antioch and Musa Dagh from the jurisdiction of the Aleppo Diocese, attach it to the Latakia Diocese, and designate the new, reshuffled geographical area by its erstwhile historical name, Prelacy of the Antioch Diocese. Second, to detach the districts of Hama, Homs and Selimiyye from the Aleppo Diocese and join them to the Damascus Diocese. Third, it was left to the discretion of the catholicosate as to how to bring about uniformity among these dioceses.<sup>40</sup>

In order to eliminate the “various unexpected difficulties” that had hitherto hampered the organization of the two dioceses, Vicar General (*Gatoghigosagan Pokhanort*) (now) Bishop (*Yebisgobos*) Khat Achabashian of Damascus and Vicar General (now) Bishop Yeprem Dohmuni of Latakia were switched in their posts to lead the newly-formed and/or expanded dioceses of Antioch and Damascus, respectively. Before assuming their duties, the two met with Coadjutor Catholicos Papken Giuleserian—who had been appointed as such in 1929 to assist the ailing Sahag II and secure uninterrupted succession—from August

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<sup>39</sup> *Aztag* (Factor) (Beirut), July 16, 1932.

<sup>40</sup> “Bashdonagan Zeguys Giligio Gatoghigosutian Yebisgobosagan Zhoghovin” (Official Report of the Episcopal Meeting of the Cilicia Catholicosate), *Hasg. Havelvadz Mardi Tivin* 1932 (Ear of Corn: Addendum to the March 1932 Issue), Antelias, Lebanon, pp. 15-16.

21-27, 1932 to receive “verbal and written instructions, encyclicals, and recommendation papers addressed to official personalities.” Bishop Achabahian arrived in Latakia on August 29 to a warm welcome by the local as well as surrounding Armenian communities. He then traveled to his seat at Antioch on September 5. Armenian dignitaries welcomed him outside the city and led him to Hotel Hovian for a reception. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, he and attorney Garabed Izmirlian paid an official visit to the French delegate in the Sanjak and local governors, who expressed interest in the new diocese with Antioch being its headquarters. As a first step to implement his mandate, Bishop Achabahian formed a seven-member temporary council, which in turn rented a spacious house to function as prelacy, church (damaged during the 1909 massacres), and school until a private space could be acquired. The temporary council would also assist the Vicar General in the diocesan organization and the subsequent election of local councils according to the provisions of the Armenian National Constitution.<sup>41</sup>

Within the flurry of the above activities, Coadjutor Catholicos Papken from September 8-October 5, 1932 paid a pastoral visit to twenty-two Armenian communities in northwestern Syria, including those in the Sanjak of Iskenderun and the six villages of Musa Dagħ. People received him with open arms and listened to his messages on “essential matters” that he conveyed in public and private meetings. He “reconciled those at odds with each other, mitigated the passions, [and] brought together people drifted [from national/church life].” He also underscored the importance of “The Armenian individual, Armenian home, Armenian society, Armenian school, Armenian church, Armenian-Christian honest citizen,” thereby uplifting and consoling his audiences. Last but not least, he met with high-ranking government officials and representatives of the various religious denominations.<sup>42</sup>

Just as the Antioch Diocese appeared to be on the right track, a new challenge arose in Musa Dagħ. It was spearheaded by Yoghun Oluk native Dr. Serop/Serge Matosian (Keghart Sharayian), a prominent local Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) figure, who in 1933 had formed an Armenian National Union (ANU) with representatives from his own party, the Social Democrat Hnchagian Party (SDHP), and the six villages acting as the Central Executive. The ANU’s program covered four areas: Administration, Education, Economy, and Relations. Administration meant “eliminating all [domestic]

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<sup>41</sup> “Temeru Gazmagerbutiune” (The Organization of the Dioceses), *Hasg*, September-October:1933, pp. 44-45. The seven members of the Temporary Council were: Garabed Izmirlian, Feruz Khanzadian, Yesayi Kazanjian, Garo Hamparian, Vahan Keshgegian, Pizant Tiufengjian, and Vahan Kochunian.

<sup>42</sup> *Hasg*, August-September-October:1932, p 42.

misunderstandings and overseeing the people's peace, security and prosperity," forming village chapters, and seeking the government's support if needed. Communism had no place in Musa Dagh. Education meant strengthening the schools, maintaining high standards, sponsoring needy students, enlightening the people through lectures, cultural programs, libraries, etc., gradually getting rid of alien customs that had crept into society, and improving health conditions. Economy meant boosting existing occupations, taking new initiatives, and bolstering tourism. Relations meant establishing contacts with Armenian and foreign entities within the framework of the said areas.<sup>43</sup>

Dr. Matosian kept the Armenian Protestant leadership in Aleppo, the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate in Beirut, and the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias abreast of the ANU's creation, and asked the Apostolic pontiff, as the preeminent authority, to give his nod. The latter declined.<sup>44</sup> Dr. Matosian decided not to share the pontiff's rejection with the other members of the ANU and instead sent him an explanatory letter hoping to change his mind. Dr. Matosian stated that the ANU was "faithful to the regulations of our national-church organization and that we consider supporting them our sacred duty." He then contradicted himself by claiming that Musa Dagh did not have any parish councils as envisaged in the Armenian National Constitution, yet, he averred, such councils existed in the six villages and had formed a Central Body (or Executive), the members of which held incompatible views. Therefore, the ANU sought to replace the latter and bring about harmony.<sup>45</sup> It was perhaps in reference to this "union" that Vicar General Achabahian reported to the pontiff saying that it was "formed on denominational grounds" to achieve internal reconciliation and that thanks to its efforts Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) chapters had been established in four of the six villages of Musa Dagh. He further maintained that, although political parties continued to vie for autarchy, mutual hatred to the extent of committing vengeful acts including

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<sup>43</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, President Dr. Serge Matosian and Secretary I.KH. Mardirian to Coadjutor Catholicos of Cilicia (Papken Giuleserian), May 13, 1933. A copy of the ANU program is attached to this letter. The members of the ANU Central Executive were: From the ARF: Dr. Serge Matosian, George Kazanjian, Sarkis Kalusdian; from the SDHP: Isgender Mardirian, Boghos Garbushian, Hovhannes Kartunian; independent village representatives: Hetum Filian (Bitias), Hovsep Dudaklian (Haji Habibli), Dikran Kuyumjian and Bedros Aprahamian (Yoghun Oluk), Rizkalla Kuyumjian (Kheder Beg), Manuel Shemmassian (Vakef), Giragos Kesablian (Kabusiye).

<sup>44</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 23/1, Dr. Matosian to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken, July 5, 1933.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

murder had virtually disappeared.<sup>46</sup> The pontiff must have wanted to distance himself from political rivalries and/or opposed any other group meddling in church affairs or operating alongside the Antioch Diocese now that it was established and running as reported by Vicar General Achabahian in January 1934.<sup>47</sup>

Bishop Achabahian continued his organizational activity as he paid a working visit to Musa Dagħ from June 28-July 23, 1934, during which he succeeded in forming parish councils. He expressed “great hope” that their members, mostly experienced and devout men, would be able to strengthen the Church as well as spur educational advancement. This positive forecast was possible also because past “enmities, hatred, and spirit of vengeance” had largely run their course as people were preoccupied with work, considered the best way to prevent malfeasance. Equally important, Bishop Achabahian sought the long-planned ordination of priests for the Vakef, Bitias, and Yoghun Oluk churches.<sup>48</sup>

With the establishment of the Antioch Diocese, the Armenian Apostolic Church in Musa Dagħ entered a period of jurisdictional certainty and closer cooperation with Antelias. This relationship proved mutually beneficial. Sometime in late 1935 or early 1936, for example, Coadjutor Catholicos Papken during a visit had observed that the picture of St. Mary in the churches of Bitias, Haji Habibli, Yoghun Oluk, Kheder Beg, and Antioch was done in non-Armenian style and in watercolor, and accordingly commissioned Arakel Badrig, art teacher at the Melkonian Educational Institute in Nicosia, Cyprus, to oil paint her image after the one found on the main altar in the Holy Mother of God Church in town. The pictures, made possible with the beneficence of a local couple, an individual, and the pontiff himself, were delivered to Vicar General Achabahian to be hung in the five churches mentioned above.<sup>49</sup> In another instance, the parish councils of Bitias and Haji Habibli donated 500 and 350 Syrian piasters (Sp) respectively towards the acquisition of the Antelias properties.<sup>50</sup> On the occasion of the blessing of the Holy Chrism in 1936, Musa

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Bishop Achabahian to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken, October 12, 1933.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., January 29, 1934.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., July 25, 1934. See also *Yeprad*, July 13, 1934.

<sup>49</sup> *Hasg*, January-February:1936, p. 12. The request for pictures by the parish councils of Antioch and Musa Dagħ had actually been made to Vicar General Achabahian three years before the pontiff’s belated initiative. See ACGHC Archives, File 23/1, Bishop Achabahian to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken, October 12, 1933.

<sup>50</sup> *Hasg*, May:1936, p. 55. For the Bitias contribution, see also ACGHC, File 22/1, Chairman Krikor B. Keshishian and Secretary Bedros S. Andekian of the Bitias parish council to Vicar General Achabahian, not dated (the amount was received at Antelias on March 26, 1936).

Dagh sent the Catholicosate aromatic resin and incense as well as a beeswax comb (for candle-making).<sup>51</sup> In March and April 1937, the celibate priest Rev. Terenig Poladian paid a pastoral visit to the Sanjak of Iskenderun communities on behalf of the pontiff. He celebrated mass on Easter in his birthplace of Kesab, blessed homes, and for two weeks consoled the parishioners. He then traveled to Musa Dagħ, where he stayed for nine days, preaching in each of the six villages. He returned to Antelias on April 14 after stopping over at Antioch, Iskenderun, and Aleppo.<sup>52</sup> During his itinerary, he also raised funds for the purchase of the Antelias real estate, Musa Dagħ contributing a total of 12,246 Sp.<sup>53</sup> On a different note, Coadjutor Catholicos Papken sent a letter of gratitude to Franz Werfel, author of the historical novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagħ*, commending him for his “pro-Armenian pure feelings” that he had manifested through his bestseller as well as during his “wonderful speech” delivered in Vienna on the 1,600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian translation of the Bible.<sup>54</sup> With this general backdrop, a focus on each village church is in order.

#### THE SURP ASDVADZADZIN (HOLY MOTHER OF GOD) CHURCH OF HAJI HABIBLI

Fr. Vartan Varteresian in 1919 relocated to Dört Yol from the Port Said refugee camp instead of going to his native Haji Habibli together with his flock. To be sure, he did visit Haji Habibli two or three times to study conditions on the spot, but returned disheartened as he found his house uninhabitable, the church dilapidated, and the repatriates, mostly widows and orphans, decimated. He accordingly pleaded with Bishop Torkom Kushakian, Primate of the Egypt Diocese, twice to find him a church in Egypt to continue his service and to give his children a decent education. He similarly met with Sahag II in Adana with the same request. Both leaders declined, the primate citing the unavailability of vacant pulpits and the catholicos stating that not much could be done at the moment.<sup>55</sup>

The absence of a priest for two years rankled the parish council of Haji Habibli. On May 2, 1921 they wrote Sahag II cautioning him about the possibility of the faithful deviating from the church, especially when even the dead could

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<sup>51</sup> *Hasg*, March-April:1936, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, April:1937, p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52. The individual villages participated with the following amounts (in Syrian piasters): Bitias, 1,200; Haji Habibli, 1,100; Yoghun Oluk, 3,823; Kheder Beg, 1,500; Vakef, 1,218; Kabusiye, 3,405.

<sup>54</sup> *Hasg*, January-February:1936, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Armenian Prelacy of Egypt (APE) Archives, Cairo, Egypt, File 2,031, *Surio Hay Kaghut*, Fr. Vartan Varteresian to Bishop Torkom Kushakian, May 15, 1920, Haji Habibli, January 8, 1921, Dortyol.

not be buried with religious last rites. Fr. Varteresian's return to Haji Habibli would therefore be most useful.<sup>56</sup> With the last Armenian evacuees from Cilicia, he regained his native village on New Year's day, January 1, 1922. The dismal living conditions that he had witnessed during his earlier visits had not changed a bit. Because his house was not in good shape, he and his large, eight-member family occupied another residence, ate only once a day, did not get paid by ordinary folks who were poor themselves, received very little from those who could afford to compensate him, did not have land to cultivate and benefit from, was unable to borrow money given the prevailing economic crisis in general, and was caught in the bloody feud raging between Haji Habibli and neighboring Bitias. Besides, not conducting religious services, especially on Sundays, was "one thousand [times] better than conducting them, when they are only for show." In short, he felt submerged "in a swamp," from which he desperately needed to be rescued and reassigned elsewhere.<sup>57</sup>

Apparently not having received a satisfactory answer, Fr. Varteresian kept writing to the pontiff. In a letter, dated September 1, 1922 he reiterated the above concerns with some elaboration. First, he felt the Haji Habibli-Bitias fratricide dangled over him like the Sword of Damocles, "because I love truth and justice and I do not wish at all to follow the notables' whims-intrigues, which dictatorially usurp people's rights and pitilessly and unscrupulously dominate everyone." Even commuting to Bitias to render religious services such as weddings and baptisms had become problematic. Second, he criticized members of the parish council as "self-appointed, anger-prone and hot-blooded" men, who deceived the people in collecting money ostensibly for church repairs. They additionally disparaged the priest in an atmosphere of mutual mistrust. Third, if in the past there was a tradition of people extending clergymen a pittance, it had now disappeared with some exceptions.<sup>58</sup> Sahag II's response disappointed Fr. Varteresian yet again. He now asked the pontiff to give or lend him 10 Ottoman gold liras or 25 Syrian liras to be able to prepare for his daughter's wedding scheduled to take place on St. Sarkis Holiday in 1923. He would be able to repay the loan in the summer just by selling Mekhitarist Catholic Fr. Mikael Chamichian's four-volume *History of Armenia* from his library.<sup>59</sup>

Fr. Varteresian's demarches continued in 1923. By September he had received only 75-80 mejidiyes (an Ottoman silver coin worth 20 piasters) from

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<sup>56</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Chairman Khacher Mardirian and Secretary Hovnan Isgenderian of the Haji Habibli parish council to Sahag II, May 2, 1921.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Fr. Varteresian to Sahag II, July 6, 1922.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., September 1, 1922. For commuting to Bitias and performing baptisms, see also idem, February 22, 1923.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., December 20, 1922.

the parishioners. In Haji Habibli, he met with and explained his situation to Fr. Der Kalusdian, who secured him some monetary pledges. He also traveled to Kesab on foot to see Sahag II there on a visit during the (Easter) holiday season, but returned disappointed because the pontiff had already left. Fr. Varteresian wondered why a deputation from Musa Dagh had not greeted Sahag II at Kesab and invited him to their mountain, where he could spend a week per village to console them. "We do not have a primate to be intimately cognizant of our problems and make the necessary arrangements," he further remarked, adding that the name of Very Rev. Nerses Dolabjian was being mentioned, but he had appeared in Musa Dagh only once. All the while, ill feelings between Fr. Varteresian and some members of the parish council continued to simmer.<sup>60</sup>

Sahag II stopped responding to Fr. Varteresian, but the latter persisted in writing to him. On May 8, 1924 he informed the catholicos that, although he and his detractors had made peace, "plots and snares" were being set up against him and promises were not kept. They similarly branded him with "shameful adjectives" when he criticized the staging of a drama inside the church as sacrilege. Many parishioners stopped attending church even though he celebrated mass on Sundays and performed the daily services regularly. Offerings, as a result, dwindled, reducing him to "a beggar." People started questioning his ability to act as a priest, and advised him to leave the place.<sup>61</sup>

Under pressure, Fr. Varteresian in mid-July 1924 tendered his resignation and moved to Egypt supposedly for good. In reporting to Sahag II, the parish council now mentioned the priest's "many defective aspects and dishonorable conduct." Needless to say, the church was closed, thereby rendering the Apostolic community open prey to Catholic and Protestant encroachments, something that the pontiff would definitely not want. Accordingly, a request was fielded to have a new priest that could satisfy the "demands of the time." He had to be pious and dedicated to the church and the nation, in addition to being a good preacher and administrator. In any case, there was a prospective candidate, but they needed the pontiff's permission to have him ordained, especially when that person had been married twice and had divorced his first wife because she was sterile. Having a priest as soon as possible would also benefit Bitias, which did not have a resident clergyman at a time of bloody clashes between the two villages.<sup>62</sup> The village council, the parish council, and more than seventy signatories filed a petition vouching for Zeytun native Hagop Kermanigian's good character, guaranteeing his income and future and asking

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., September 9, 1923.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., May 8, 1924.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Chairman M. Andonian and Secretary Mardirian of the Haji Habibli parish Council to Sahag II, July 30, 1924.

for his ordination.<sup>63</sup> Kermanigian was anointed as Fr. Khachadur just before the end of 1924.<sup>64</sup>

Hardly had Fr. Kermanigian assumed his new position than Fr. Varteresian showed up in Haji Habibli on January 1, 1925. He considered the above petition in support of Kermanigian's candidature for the priesthood as illegitimate, claiming that it included fake and forced signatures as well as young boys' names to show substantial backing. Furthermore, he saw a fissure within society due to a dual occurrence: while Kermanigian was being sent for ordination, Fr. Varteresian had purportedly received a letter from Fr. Der Kalusdian asking him to return to Haji Habibli and resume his duties. Be that as it may, Fr. Varteresian's return split the parish into two: his faction consisted of 128 families, while Fr. Kermanigian's backers included "barely 45-50 households." "The two of us live with love and take turns in performing our duties," wrote Fr. Varteresian, however, Fr. Kermanigian "is in servitude of his supporters." In addition, he harshly criticized, as before, an operetta that Fr. Kermanigian had staged in the church while he (Fr. Varteresian) was absent on a visit to Aleppo. In keeping the catholikos abreast of the situation, Fr. Varteresian professed that he was "neither an informant nor a troublemaker" and that he could not be held responsible for any wrongdoing. Thus, proclaiming innocence, he rejected what he considered to be unfair criticisms directed at him, wondered how a "village which could not sustain one priest could keep two," and, referring to Fr. Kermanigian's activity, suggested that "the snake must be killed while an infant; what is the use [of killing it] after its growing up and poisoning [people]?" In order to cope with the difficulties surrounding him, he had elected to exercise patience.<sup>65</sup>

Fr. Kermanigian offered his perspective on the situation. It is true that Fr. Der Kalusdian had cabled Fr. Varteresian asking him to come back to Haji Habibli, but the message had not reached him because of an address mix-up, so he had learned about the invitation after his return to the village. In other words, Fr. Varteresian had returned on his own, not knowing beforehand that he was invited. At the same time, the above petition was not vouched for by Fr.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Village Headman Krikor Kelemian, parish council Chairman Haji Khacher Mardirian, Secretary M. Andonian, Treasurer G. Giragosian, and Member at Large Sarkis Giudeshian to Sahag II, September 10, 1924. The list of signatories was attached to this letter.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Fr. Madteos Giuzelian of Kabusiye, in a November 6, 1924, postscript to the above letter, specifies the residency and financial terms offered to Fr. Kermanigian: a two-room house would be built for him, and 200 mejidiye per year would be paid (in addition to his "priestly rights") until such time when an allocated orchard would start bearing fruit for income, after which the 200 mejidiye payment would stop.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Fr. Kermanigian to Sahag II, October 8, 1925.

Der Kalusdian, because people who took it to him to obtain his signature could not find him at home, twice. In any case, as soon as Fr. Varteresian arrived in Haji Habibli, he persuaded his relatives and neighbors to side with him, thereby pitting one parish council against another and one sexton against another, “without the approval of the general population” and in order to bring them under his subjection “to satisfy his tummy.” Furthermore, Fr. Varteresian intervened in the village headman elections causing a number of (resentful) families to embrace Catholicism. Although Fr. Kermanigian’s parish was the smaller of the two, it comprised people from the “honorable and well-to-do” class. This fact, however, did not necessarily improve his livelihood as the parish failed to meet its financial obligations. Apparently intent on calming the passions at Haji Habibli, Sahag II arranged for Fr. Kermanigian to relocate to Karaduran village near Kesab, where a similar fractious conflict existed. Fr. Kermanigian, however, elected to stay put in Haji Habibli until further notice.<sup>66</sup>

In hopes of pacifying Haji Habibli, Fr. Der Kalusdian and Fr. Harutian Yesayian from Aleppo in June 1926 met with twenty-four notable converts to Catholicism and persuaded them to rescind their decision and return to the Apostolic fold. On this occasion, a single parish council comprising nine members was formed from the two existing ones, with Fr. Varteresian appointed as president. Fr. Kermanigian’s name was conspicuously absent from the list.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, as a token of or “dowry” (*ozhid*) for their reconciliation, the parish council gifted Sahag II six silken handkerchiefs.<sup>68</sup> Fr. Der Kalusdian, in turn, asked the catholicos to write an encyclical to the parish council both commending them for their willingness to reconcile and warning them to refrain from resuming their old quarrels, because there were still some provocateurs. As for the two priests, Fr. Der Kalusdian asked for a similar encyclical exhorting them to live in peace and harmony. At the same time, though, Fr. Der Kalusdian, knowing full well that they would not be able to coexist, tried to assign Fr. Varteresian to the Bitias parish, but the latter refused to accept him.<sup>69</sup> At long last, he left Haji Habibli sometime in the second half of

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., April 10, 1926. See also *Suriagan Mamul*, September 16, 1925.

<sup>67</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Fr. Der Kalusdian to Sahag II, June 28, 1926, August 11, 1926. The parish council members were: Fr. Vartan Varteresian, President; Haji Khacher Mardirian, lay deputy to the priest (*yerets pokhan*); Krikor Kelemian, Chairman; Garabed Jehurian, Vice-Chairman; Avedis Mardirian, Secretary; Movses Teghosian, Vice-Secretary; Movses Khalulian, Treasurer; Iskender Taslakian and Hagop Panosian, members at large.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Lay Deputy to the Priest Haji Khacher Mardirian, Chairman Krikor Kelemian, and Secretary Avedis Mardirian of the Haji Habibli parish council to Sahag II, August 9, 1926.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Fr. Der Kalusdian to Sahag II, August 11, 1926.

1926 for Aleppo, never to return, while Fr. Kermanigian was assigned to Bitias.<sup>70</sup>

A word about Fr. Varteresian's subsequent activities is in order. After arriving in Aleppo, he was assigned as priest and teacher for the Hama community. That appointment lasted only one year as he returned to Aleppo in 1927 and was dispatched to Arap Punar as an itinerant shepherd for the surrounding parishes as well. In 1931, he assumed the pulpit of the small church of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Aleppo, concurrently serving other congregations in the area. He went to Qamishli in northeastern Syria and other places that same year. Unable to sustain his large family with his meager income, he moved to Beirut in 1937, hoping to have a better life. Not much is known about his activity and financial situation in the Lebanese capital. At long last, he and his family relocated to Soviet Armenia in 1946, but he could no longer function as a clergyman because of the heavy religious restrictions imposed by the atheistic communist regime. He died in 1953.<sup>71</sup>

Despite his human frailties and seeming inability to hang onto a steady position, Fr. Varteresian remains one of the most unique clergymen of the epoch, not just in Musa Dagħ, but across Syria. He was a bibliophile par excellence. His love for, if not obsession with printed matter, stood out from before World War I as he had built a sizeable personal library, mastered the art of bookbinding, and improved his proficiency in *krapar/grabar*, that is, classical Armenian. During the war years, at the Port Said refugee camp, he continued to correspond with Armenian centers in Europe and the Caucasus, seeking numerous tomes and periodicals.<sup>72</sup> Between the two World Wars, he incessantly wrote to the pontiffs and members of the Supreme Spiritual Council at the Mother See of Echmiadzin requesting, sometimes in multiple copies, large amounts of books of religious, historical and cultural nature, various issues of *Ararad*, the official journal of the See, regular and pocket calendars, musical scores of hymns and the liturgy, and pictures of catholicoses, patriarchs of Constantinople, and even the cauldron of chrism.<sup>73</sup> He pledged to pay for

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., October 12, 1926.

<sup>71</sup> Archpriest Husig Setragian, *Vark Kahanayits Perio Temi 1850-2005* (The Department of Priests of the Aleppo Diocese 1850-2005), vol. II, Publication of the Aleppo Armenian Diocese/Isfahani Printing House, Aleppo, 2012, pp. 93-97.

<sup>72</sup> Shemmastian, *The Armenians of Musa Dagħ*, pp. 106-07; Shemmastian, *The Musa Dagħ Armenians*, pp. 348-49.

<sup>73</sup> NAA, Fond 409, Index 1, Work 4739, Fr. Varteresian to Catholicos Kevork V Sureniants, January 2, 1926, Haji Habibli; idem, Work 4745, Fr. Varteresian to Kevork V and five members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, January 30, 1929, Aleppo, two attached lists of requested books, etc.; idem, Fr. Varteresian to Kevork V, August 22, 1929, Aleppo, two attached lists of the requested books, etc.; idem, Work 4747, Fr.

his orders through the Patriarchate of Constantinople, pontifical nuncio in Europe Bishop Grigoris Balakian, the American Near East Relief, the AGBU Central Committee in Paris and or Yesayi Garigian, a well-to-do compatriot from Kabusiye then living in France.<sup>74</sup> At one point, he offered to send 5-10 kilograms of chrism produced in his native Haji Habibli in lieu of money.<sup>75</sup> Although he received approval for his orders, he oftentimes complained that the promised packages did not reach him.<sup>76</sup> In any case, not only were the needed items necessary for his own intellectual growth as a man of God and educator, but also for “historiography” and other research purposes such as conducting a survey of national religious figures and institutions and assisting others like Fr. Arsen Ghazigian, an erudite member of the Armenian Mekhitarist Catholic Order in Venice, Italy in their studies.<sup>77</sup> He himself prepared a useful treatise on the “Holy Chrism and the Blessing of Chrism” to be circulated among his confreres in Syria for their advancement.<sup>78</sup> In short, Fr. Varteresian was one of the most learned priests of his time.

Back in Haji Habibli, the vacancy created by Fr. Varteresian’s departure to Aleppo in 1926 had to be filled as soon as possible. An initial search considered a church servant named S. Dermishian, but an influential community and church leader, Haji Khacher Mardirian, opposed his candidature arguing that “he is a drunkard and sick and is not fit for the priesthood.” He further stated: what must be sought ought to be the “Man for the job, not the job for the man.”<sup>79</sup> A year later, in December 1927, a large number of villagers avowing unanimity submitted to Sahag II the name of Tavit Kelemian, a local silk weaver, as their chosen candidate for the priesthood. He was not very learned, they

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Varteresian to Kevork V, February 4, 1930, Aleppo, three attached lists of the requested books, etc.; idem, Fr. Varteresian to Supreme Spiritual Council of the Mother See of Echmiadzin, May 18, 1930, Aleppo, three attached lists of requested books, etc. The list goes on.

<sup>74</sup> NAA, Fond 409, Index 1, Work 4745, Fr. Varteresian to Kevork V, August 22, 1929, Aleppo; idem, Fr. Varteresian to Yesayi Garigian, January 30, 1929, Aleppo; idem, Fr. Varteresian to Kevork V and five members of the Supreme Spiritual Council, January 30, 1929, Aleppo.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Work 4751, Fr. Varteresian to Locum Tenens Archbishop Khoren Muradbegian of Echmiadzin, September 20, 1932, Aleppo.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Work 4745, Fr. Varteresian to the Supreme Spiritual Council of Echmiadzin, May 18, 1930, Aleppo; idem, Fr. Varteresian to Locum Tenens Archbishop Khoren Muradbegian, of Echmiadzin, November 19, 1930, Aleppo; idem, Work 4751, Fr. Varteresian to the Supreme Spiritual Council of Echmiadzin, May 16, 1931, Aleppo.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Work 4745, Fr. Varteresian to Locum Tenens Archbishop Khoren Muradbegian of Echmiadzin, November 19, 1930, Aleppo.

<sup>78</sup> Archpriest Setragian, vol. II, pp. 98-99.

<sup>79</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Haji Khacher Mardirian to Sahag II, December 15, 1926.

admitted, but 1) “our people does not need a highly educated priest [but one] who can [also] have [good] exterior relations,” 2) “We do not have a more suitable one,” and could not maintain an outsider.<sup>80</sup> After a physical examination and a bill of good health issued by Dr. Artin Der Ghazarian in Aleppo,<sup>81</sup> Kelemian was ordained at the end of 1927 as Fr. Hagop.<sup>82</sup> He also carried a popularly-ascribed sobriquet, Der Hmbalus, meaning, Father Myrtle, perhaps because he craved that fruit.<sup>83</sup> Fr. Kelemian did his utmost to perform his duties in a harmonious way, for which he was commended. Notwithstanding his efforts, “certain clannish and partisan problems” persisted. Although the “opposing currents” had sworn in the church to live in peace, they did not honor their pledge. Accordingly, the parish council beseeched Sahag II to send a high-ranking clergyman to settle the disputes.<sup>84</sup> Information is lacking about the Haji Habibli parish for the rest of the period under study.

#### THE SURP ASDVADZADZIN CHURCH OF BITIAS

Until 1926, that is, for seven years after repatriation from Port Said in 1919, the Bitias Apostolic community did not have a priest of its own. Instead, locum tenens Fr. Apraham Der Kalusdian tasked available clergymen from neighboring villages, especially Haji Habibli, to fulfill the religious needs of Bitias. This arrangement must have mitigated the “absolute” pain that the parishioners felt in the absence of a resident spiritual leader, for they continued to follow their “traditional customs” unabated and “stood firm” and “wholeheartedly” behind their “mother church.”<sup>85</sup>

Sometime in late winter 1926, Fr. Khachadur Kermanigian relocated from Haji Habibli to Bitias, where he stayed for seven years, until fall 1933. Two main achievements marked his tenure: the building of a hotel to benefit the church and the school (see below), and, like in Haji Habibli, the promotion of culture through the theater/operettas. According to a participant observer, Fr. Kermanigian “truly was a great artist. He was preparing the [drama about the] battle of Vartan [Mamigonian]... I was barely 13-14 years of age. He made hats

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, illegible signatories representing the parish council and the village council as well as a large number of ordinary folks to Sahag II, December 1, 1927.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Dr. Artin Der Ghazarian, health certificate issued to Tavit Kelemian, December 12, 1927, Aleppo.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Mayreni Kelemian Sarkisian, July 6, 1989, Los Angeles, California. Mayreni was Fr. Kelemian’s daughter.

<sup>83</sup> Shemmastian, *The Musa Dagh Armenians*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>84</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Haji Habibli Parish Council Chairman Hovsep Dudaklian and Secretary Garabed Juhurian to Sahag II, September 4, 1928.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Chairman Bedros Keshishian and Secretary Sarkis S. Kendirjian of the Bitias parish council to Sahag II, August 2, 1926.

for the actors from gourds [grown] in our village. He could make anything with his hands. He could dismantle and reassemble the whole piano [that he owned and used in Mass and cultural activities].”<sup>86</sup>

Seven years of service at Bitias seemed to have run their course for Fr. Kermanigian. He now considered himself a “self-invited,” “temporary” and “parenthetical” priest, one who was not ordained in that village anyway, therefore, an alien. For him, “staying longer means losing its value.” Leaving on good terms before problems could complicate matters would be the right thing to do; otherwise he “would be left out in my old age and my children would be rendered miserable...” It was already very difficult to feed them as he had personally explained to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken and the Primate of the Aleppo Diocese, Bishop Ardavazt Siurmeian, on several occasions, but the latter had responded that Fr. Kermanigian did not fall within his jurisdiction. So he beseeched the pontiff to make him part of the Aleppo Diocese, an arrangement that would enable Bishop Siurmeian to place him in a vacant post.<sup>87</sup>

The pontiff did not oblige, prompting Fr. Kermanigian to write him again, this time enumerating six reasons as to why he should leave his post at Bitias and be assigned elsewhere. First, he underwent “financial crisis and unimaginable familial difficulty” for the sake of his calling and duty. Second, being deprived of “all worldly pleasures,” his only gratification would be to see “love of God, love of church, love of the Nation, and love of the Fatherland” among the parishioners, sentiments that, according to him, did not exist and were impossible to “inculcate in the skull brain of this people.” Third, he asked whether “it was convenient for a faultless clergyman to adapt to local customs and characters, become a tool [in the hands] of an individual or a group, and betray his noble calling and conscience only for a piece of dry bread.” Fourth, people “appreciated” his work only with “hatred of the Nation, hatred of clergy and miserliness” instead of venerating the Church. Fifth, as a father, he fed his children stone instead of bread, thereby leading them “towards darkness[,] towards the abyss[,] towards perdition.” Sixth, in order to maintain his dignity in this awful situation, it would be desirable to be associated with the Aleppo Diocese and assigned to a church in Iskenderun, Kirik Khan, Antioch, Cyprus, or Latakia.<sup>88</sup> In short, Fr. Kermanigian, because of his meager income insufficient to sustain his family, fatigue with the human environment in which he lived and performed, and uncertainty about his future, leveled heavy—at

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<sup>86</sup> Shushanig Chaparian Papakhian, letter to the author, May 19, 1990.

<sup>87</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Fr. Kermanigian to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken, April 22, 1933.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., May 28, 1933.

times unfair—criticism at the people of Bitias before parting ways. In any case, Vicar General Achabashian in fall 1933 reassigned him to the church at Antioch.<sup>89</sup>

Fr. Kermanigian's departure coincided with a time when fierce antagonism and rivalry among Armenian political parties in Syria and Lebanon, indeed in the entire Armenian diaspora, held sway and the partisan press made vile attacks on each other. Church bodies were not spared as the following besmirching of the Bitias parish council amply demonstrates:

The Parish Council of Bitias consists of a few notables who seem unblemished outwardly, one or two simple-minded persons, and a chairman with a feminine way of talking and movements, who can be considered the nest of all scandals and lowliness. What do you expect of a parish council composed of men with such character, church and school.... It is because of this stupid parish council that they are at each other's throat and the Protestant community wants to secede from the Apostolic community, by deciding on a separate mukhtar [village headman] for village and government issues....

...This separation issue is carried out very vigorously and includes also the package of dissatisfaction against the political party group. Because Apostolic tashnag [ARF] leaders wish to be ranked among Hitlers.<sup>90</sup>

In any case, for about ten months after Fr. Kermanigian's departure, Fr. Hagop Kelemian of Haji Habibli satisfied the religious needs of Bitias.<sup>91</sup> During this period, the candidature of a 46-year-old Bitias native, Sarkis Kendirjian, was considered for the priesthood with the mediation of the village headman Sahag Andekian.<sup>92</sup> Because pro-Fr. Kermanigian sentiments lingered on among some parishioners, Kendirjian demanded unanimity for his acceptance of the offer.<sup>93</sup> His request being granted, Vicar General Achabashian on Sunday, July 15, 1934 ordained him at the Holy Savior church of Kheder Beg with the new name of Fr. Vahan. In reporting to the pontiff, the Vicar General described Fr. Vahan as an honest, devout, and faithful person with some teaching background—virtues that remained unblemished throughout his dedicated service well into his nineties in Anjar, Lebanon.<sup>94</sup>

Speaking of the Surp Asdvadzadzin Apostolic church of Bitias, its four walls, built between 1912 and 1914 with the munificence of Antioch notable Sahag

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., File 23/1, Bishop Achabashian to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken, August 2, 1934.

<sup>90</sup> *Lipanan* (Lebanon) (Beirut), May 20, 1934.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., July 25, 1934.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Yeprem Kendirjian, July 7, 2020, Woodland Hills, California. Yeprem was one of Fr. Kendirjian's sons.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Arakel Izanian, December 28, 1991, Sunland, California.

<sup>94</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 23/1, Bishop Achabashian to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken, July 25, 1934; *Hasg*, September:1934, p. 76.

Aramian, stood on the ruins of an ancient monastery named St. Meletios.<sup>95</sup> After the war, due to abject poverty, the locals could not shoulder the heavy financial burden to complete the building and make it functional.<sup>96</sup> In order to rectify this situation, a Church-Lovers' Association (*Yegeghetsasirats Miutiun*) was formed in 1924 aiming to finish the Apostolic church roof. The idea was perceived by Hrant Chakerian, a native of Zeytun then teaching at the AGBU Sisvan School in Bitias. The founding group comprised the following six members: Movses Makhulian, Avedis Stanbulian, Sarkis Keoseian, Garabed Keoseian, Hovhannes Keosheian, and Sarkis Kendirjian (later Fr. Vahan). Eventually membership reached seventy. The first executive committee consisted of Avedis Stanbulian, Chair; Hrant Chakerian, Secretary, Misak Filhannesian, Treasurer. At its start, the Yegeghetsasirats Miutiun acted secretly, 1) because they were afraid of failure; 2) to avoid friction with the Protestants, who constituted about 35% of the village population. The latter fear had no basis as several Protestants also joined the Association to be of help.<sup>97</sup> In January 1926, a women's auxiliary was formed, with Azniv Makhulian and Nvart Chakerian acting as Chairwoman and Secretary, respectively. Their meetings took place Sunday afternoons.<sup>98</sup>

Funds for the project were raised through several channels. Dramas constituted an important means. *Gaidzer* (Sparks) was the first to be staged, followed by *Vartanants* (the Armenian-Persian battle of 451 A.D.), *Antranig* (Ozanian, a revolutionary hero), *Arshin Mal Alan* (The Cloth Peddler), *Charshili Artin Agha* (A Merchant Called Artin Agha), *Tzayn me Hnchets* (A Voice Sounded),<sup>99</sup> *Miutian Okude* (The Benefit of Unity),<sup>100</sup> etc. Christmas caroling, embroidery and raffle ticket sales, and soliciting outright donations from households during the harvest season also became sources of income.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> APE Archives, File 2,031, Fr. Vahan Kendirjian to Primate Bishop Mampré Sirunian of Egypt, September 9, 1937. See also *Yeprad*, June 13, 1928.

<sup>96</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Fr. Khachadur Kermanigian, Chairman Garabed Keoseian, Secretary Hagop Makhulian, and Treasurer Arakel Yegharian of the Bitias parish council to Sahag II, December 15, 1927.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Movses Makhulian, August 10, 1977, Anjar, Lebanon.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Azniv Makhulian, August 10, 1977, Anjar, Lebanon. The first chairwoman was actually Vartuhi Stanbulian, but because she never showed up at the meetings, she was replaced by Azniv Makhulian.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Bedros Frankian, July 8, 1977, Anjar, Lebanon; interview with Movses Makhulian.

<sup>100</sup> *Piunig* (Phoenix) (Beirut), May 7, 1924. For theatrical performances in Musa Dagħ in general during the interwar years, see Shemmassian, *The Musa Dagħ Armenians*, pp. 253-60.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Movses Makhulian; interview with Azniv Makhulian.

Collecting taxes from the populace on behalf of the government for a commission generated some additional cash.<sup>102</sup> Despite all the efforts, income from these activities amounted to 96 Ottoman gold liras.<sup>103</sup> This sum constituted only 16% of the 600 liras needed for the completion of the church roof.<sup>104</sup>

The parish council, then, hoping to garner support from a larger pool of compatriots and friends, in December 1927 issued copies of the church picture and requested the pontiff's approval for their distribution in anticipation of donations.<sup>105</sup> In order to make the pontiff more aware of the pressing need, the parish council and the Yegeghetsasirats Miutiun explained that inaction could have serious consequences not only by keeping the faithful alienated, but also pushing them towards Protestantism with its "*propaganda*" already set in motion to attract new followers.<sup>106</sup> When Fr. Kermanigian and parish council Chairman Kevork Chaparian met with the pontiff in the first quarter of 1928, the latter asked for, and soon after obtained, the church's floor plan necessary to kick-start construction.<sup>107</sup> In a further push, the pontiff on January 13, 1930 gave permission to the parish council to launch a fund-raising drive among Armenians living outside Musa Dagħ, not only regionally, but also abroad. Having thus received the green light, the parish council prepared a petition for potential donors, dated February 1, in which it explained the situation: The Surp Asdvadzadzin church—measuring 24 meters long, 13 meters wide, and 8 meters high—was partially built before World War I and needed a roof expeditiously before natural causes could further damage the structure. A picture of the church, with the pontiff's handwritten message appearing on the back in red ink, accompanied the document.<sup>108</sup> As a show of additional support,

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Movses Makhulian.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ardashes Kardashian, private papers, Paris, Bitias Parish Council circular addressed to "Respectable Compatriot[s]," February 1, 1930. The circular is signed by Fr. Khachadur Kermanigian, Chairman Hovhannes Filian, and Secretary Kevork Chaparian.

<sup>105</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Fr. Khachadur Kermanigian, Chairman Garabed Keoseian, Secretary Hagop Makhulian, and Treasurer Arakel Yegharian of the Bitias parish council to Sahag II, December 15, 1927.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Chairman Kevork M. Chaparian and Secretary Movses H. Makhulian of the Bitias parish council and Chairman A.M. [?] Keshishian and Secretary Movses H. Makhulian of the Yegeghetsasirats Miutiun to Sahag II, May 29, 1928.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Unfortunately, the church floor plan could not be found in the archives.

<sup>108</sup> Kardashian, private papers, Bitias parish council circular, February 1, 1930. The pontiff's message on the back of the picture is dated January 11, 1930, and is stamped with the official seal of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. See also *Yeprad*, February 12, 1930.

the pontiff in early July visited Bitias to oversee the progress achieved to date and made a personal donation.<sup>109</sup>

The parish council and the Yegeghetsasirats Miutian also came up with an innovative idea: to reach an agreement with Aharon Izmirlian, a restaurateur from Antioch, whereby they would lease him a church foundation for ten years with the understanding that he would build a hotel on it for summer vacationers and relinquish it to the community to be used as a school facility during the remainder of the year. Hotel Aharon, beginning in 1932, became a multi-purpose center serving as an inn, a school, a venue for public events such as lectures, dramas, concerts, and celebrations, and a source of income.<sup>110</sup>

Donations were also made in lieu of wedding gifts. The following cases demonstrate that trend in summer 1937. Two individuals contributed 50 Syrian piasters each to the Bitias church construction fund when caricaturist-actor Diran Ajemian tied the knot with Yolande Giulbengian. Four persons gave a total of 200 piasters on the occasion of the marriage of Aram Amasian and Satenig Sarafian. And four acquaintances chipped in 200 piasters combined as Aram Sarkisian and Sirvart Poladian exchanged their vows.<sup>111</sup>

When Fr. Kendirjian became the village priest, he was determined to complete and use the church. With a special ledger given to him by Bishop Achabahan,<sup>112</sup> he toured the Armenian villages of Musa Dagh and the communities in the Sanjak of Iskenderun, and appealed to émigré compatriots in the United States for support.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, in September 1937 he sent two batches containing 100 raffle tickets each to Egypt to be sold in the Armenian community. The first batch generated 1,010 Egyptian piasters within less than two months; it was transmitted to Bitias via Crédit Lyonnais.<sup>114</sup> The fate of the second batch remained uncertain even after a year.

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<sup>109</sup> *Aztag*, July 8, 1930.

<sup>110</sup> Shemmassian, *The Musa Dagh Armenians*, pp. 232, 258, 271.

<sup>111</sup> *Aztag*, September 3, 1937. The donors were Aleppo and Musa Dagh ARF leaders such as Yetvart Dasnabedian, Hrach Papazian, Suren Papakhian, Serovpe Sherbetjian, and Moses Der Kalusdian.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Yeprem Kendirjian.

<sup>113</sup> Archpriest Vahan Kendirjian, compiler, *Havakadzo Endir Krvadzots* (Anthology of Selected Writings), [Catholicosate of Cilicia Press], Antelias, Lebanon, 1985, pp. 16-17.

<sup>114</sup> APE Archives, File 2,031, Fr. Kendirjian to Primate Sirunian, September 9, 1937; Primate Sirunian to Fr. Kendirjian, November 1, 1937, December 30, 1937. The first batch was actually sent to benefactor Sahag (or Isahag) Aramian—who had been living in Egypt for a long time—via the Cairo Prelacy, but because he was dead at the time, the raffle tickets were given to his son, Hagop, to be sold.

Bishop Achabahian, too, was actively involved in seeing the completion of the church. On July 24, 1937 he announced his departure from Antioch to Bitias to issue “the necessary orders” for the project.<sup>115</sup> In a follow-up report a month later, he stated that construction workers had already been on site for a week, that the sanctuary would have 10 columns lined up on two sides (facing each other), that a dome would rise on four of the central columns, and that 600 Syrian liras had already been secured, 200 of which from summer visitors on Holy Mother of God Holiday.<sup>116</sup> By September 1938, that is, a year later, a “Kabu” type roof stood on the designated columns still to be plastered with cement and adorned with a dome.<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately, because of the exodus from the Sanjak of Iskenderun in July 1939, the parish was unable to enjoy the fruits of their hard labor as no mass was celebrated at Surp Asdvadzadzin.<sup>118</sup>

#### THE SURP ASDVADZADZIN CHURCH OF YOGHUN OLUK

When the people of Yoghun Oluk returned from Port Said, they found the Surp Asdvadzadzin church in a state of disrepair. Fr. Apraham Der Kalusdian, himself, was lacking enough vestments, hymnals, a guidebook for the interment of aging priests like himself, and other necessities.<sup>119</sup> Even as late as 1925 the church remained bereft of pertinent books and had a single hymnal.<sup>120</sup> What little supply of chrism he had brought with him from Port Said for the Musa Dagħ churches was similarly depleted and therefore needed replenishment.<sup>121</sup> In time, those necessities were procured.

During his tenure, Fr. Der Kalusdian got involved in the church affairs of all Musa Dagħ parishes implementing Sahag II’s instructions. For instance, he in late 1924 summoned the priests to a meeting, at which they prepared a schedule for the upcoming holiday season and posted it in the market places for all to see and follow.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, he in the same year toured the villages and solicited donations for the catholicosate’s “Orphans’ Sunday” totaling 42 Syrian liras or 102 silver mejidiyes, as follows (in mejidiyes): Kabusiye, 30; Yoghun Oluk, 24; Kheder Beg, 20; Bitias, 20; Vakef, 8. For an unspecified reason, the Haji Habibli community declined to participate.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 23/1, Bishop Achabahian to Pontifical Locum Tenens Archbishop Bedros Sarajian, July 24, 1937.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., August 27, 1937.

<sup>117</sup> APE Archives, File 2,031, Fr. Kendirjian to Bishop Sirunian, September 9, 1938. The second batch was sent to Egypt with Azaduhi Balekjian, a summer vacationer at Bitias.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Yeprem Kendirjian.

<sup>119</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Fr. Der Kalusdian to Sahag II, March 15, 1921.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., July 27, 1925.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., March 15, 1921.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., January 10, 1925.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., January 10, 1925, July 4, 1925, July 27, 1925, September 7, 1925.

Fr. Der Kalusdian also assisted the Armenian communities of Kesab and Antioch in finding solutions to their predicaments. After several petitions from Kesab, for example, he in fall 1921 visited them with some skepticism, but was pleasantly surprised when the Protestants also welcomed him warmly, claiming that they had returned to the Apostolic fold. Meanwhile, at the neighboring hamlet of Karaduran, a Catholic padre was trying to lure the faithful to his church. Fr. Der Kalusdian asked Sahag II to assign capable priests expeditiously in order to seize the moment to tie the Protestants down and get rid of the padre from the area.<sup>124</sup> As for Antioch, it had neither a church nor a clergyman until 1924, when Fr. Der Kalusdian went there, rented a house to be used as a temporary worship venue, appointed a parish council, and had a priest from Aleppo, Urfa native Fr. Harutiun Zhamgochian, dispatched as their spiritual leader, hoping that he would be able to demolish the old church that was greatly damaged during the 1909 massacres and build a new one on its site.<sup>125</sup>

Although Yoghun Oluk was one of the most conservative villages of Musa Dagħ, its women were encouraged to get involved in church and school life. To this end, Fr. Der Kalusdian sometime in the early 1920s announced the formation of a women's organization called Takuhi Miutiun (Queen Association) from the pulpit and read the names of its initial five members, whose number grew to some 25-30 married and single females.<sup>126</sup> When Sahag II in 1922 went to Musa Dagħ to put an end to the bloody Haji Habibli-Bitias conflict and reconcile the antagonists, he also visited Yoghun Oluk and lodged at the home of Fr. Der Kalusdian. Taking advantage of this propitious moment, the latter presented the pontiff with Takuhi Miutiun's membership list and read "a paper." As a token of encouragement the pontiff for his part donated 1 Ottoman gold lira to the nascent group.<sup>127</sup> Shushan Kabaian on behalf of the association sent a letter to Sahag II only two years later asking for his approval of the by-laws, without mentioning the reason for the delay.<sup>128</sup> The association met Sunday afternoons listening to sermons, *sharagans* (hymns), and exhortations by the priest.<sup>129</sup> It also purchased a mulberry orchard, sold the leaves for the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., November 1, 1921.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., May 5, 1924.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Isguhi Der Kalusdian, June 14, 1976, Anjar, Lebanon. See also "V'jagakrutiun Jebel Musayi Hay Kiugherun" (Survey of the Armenian Villages of Musa Dagħ), *Suriahay Daretsuyts* (Syrian Armenian Almanac), 2<sup>nd</sup> Year:1925, p. 241.

<sup>127</sup> Archpriest Moses Shrikian, letter to the author, April 25, 1977.

<sup>128</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Shushan Kabaian to Sahag II, Saturday, no day, month or year mentioned. The seal of the association is stamped twice, but unfortunately the year of its formation is blurred and illegible. The two-year delay is not explained.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Kohar Kalusdian, July 4, 1977, Anjar, Lebanon; Interview with Isguhi Der Kalusdian.

feeding of silkworms during the sericulture season, merchandized hand-made embroideries, staged dramas, loaned money with interest and, together with the funds raised and the membership dues collected, bought a house to convert to a school for girls and the wherewithal to sustain it.<sup>130</sup> It is not clear if this project materialized. Takuhi Miutiun ceased to exist sometime before or right after Fr. Der Kalusdian's death in 1928, and its accounts were handed over to the parish council.<sup>131</sup> For their part, the women's Shaké chapter of the SDHP donated a lamp to the Apostolic church.<sup>132</sup>

Internal divisions marred the Apostolic church in Yoghun Oluk in the mid-1920s. The adherents of the SDHP, as an expression of their dissatisfaction with some politically-motivated educational issues, wanted to become Catholic. Fr. Der Kalusdian chose not to meet with them; he instead spoke with the women and mothers secretly, and waited to see whether the Catholic padre would visit the families over their Christmas (December 25) to take action. The padre fell ill, and Fr. Der Kalusdian for Armenian Christmas (January 6) visited all homes, thereby securing an overwhelming church attendance. He previously had warned the Protestants, both in writing and in person, that their "fraternal tie" would be severed should they accept a conversion petition by the above SDHP group.<sup>133</sup>

Fr. Der Kalusdian's mediations aimed at finding solutions to church matters across Musa Dagħ were sharply criticized by four notables—one from Haji Habibli, one from Kabusiye, and two from Kheder Beg—who aired their grievances. Fr. Der Kalusdian, they falsely claimed, was a "self-appointed locum tenens" and "the only responsible [person] for all evils and incidents." The "destruction and moral decline" in Haji Habibli were the result of the "intrusion of the black finger" of the ARF and its "unbridled" activity. Fr. Der Kalusdian, they further argued, belonged to the ARF and, as such, had the backing of his son, Movses, Musa Dagħ's governor, whose constant "persecution of Haji Habibli notables and families" was the cause of their conversion to Catholicism. Moreover, Fr. Der Kalusdian's proposal to the catholicos of a candidate for the priesthood in Haji Habibli—perhaps referring to Fr. Kermanigian—was nothing but another vile means to further worsen the situation in the village. In Kabusiye, notable Kevork Baljian's adherence to Catholicism was similarly attributed to father and son Der Kalusdians' modus

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid; interview with Yeranuhi Kazanjian, July 19, 1977, Anjar, Lebanon; Archpriest Movses Shrikian, letter. For the goal of the association, see also "Vijagakrutiun Jebel Musayi Hay Kiugherun," p. 241; *Piunig*, February 14, 1925; *Aztag*, July 9, 1927.

<sup>131</sup> Archpriest Movses Shrikian, letter.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Bedros Hergelian, March 29, 2002, Burbank, California.

<sup>133</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Fr. Der Kalusdian to Sahag II, January 10, 1925, October 20, 1925.

operandi. “Solidarity[,] love and union” lacked in the remaining communities as well, thereby adversely affecting “the people, church and school.” The letter’s four signatories asked the catholicos to treat it with utmost secrecy and to find a remedy to the overall abysmal situation in Musa Dagh.<sup>134</sup>

The limited anti-Fr. Der Kalusdian campaign must have subsided by summer 1927 as *Aztag* wrote: “There are not confessional battles in this [Yoghun Oluk] village. The Apostolics are already so strong that the other denominations are not in a position to fight against them.” The numerical superiority was also evident: of the total 1,129 inhabitants, 906 (80%) were Apostolic, 115 (10%) were Catholic of the Latin rite, and 108 were Protestant (10%).<sup>135</sup> The same article elaborated further: “Two years ago the Hnchagians tried to destroy the Apostolic church by throwing themselves into the bosom of Catholicism. But this game did not last long, because the antireligious and anti-national low minds hidden behind it were quickly revealed. Although until today they continue to send their children to the *pêrēs*’ school, nevertheless it is apparent that they have resigned from their desire to create denominational quarrels.”<sup>136</sup>

Sahag II in 1925 elevated Fr. Der Kalusdian, for his many years of meritorious service, to the rank of archpriesthood.<sup>137</sup> He died three years later, on March 28, 1928. A charismatic and fearless leader, he was eloquent and endowed with strong administrative skills. Considered the “patriarch” and a “Pillar” of Musa Dagh, he devoted his time and energies to resolving and improving religious and national affairs in the region, including Antioch and Kesab. Despite some of his detractors, he commanded respect among the vast majority of his compatriots.<sup>138</sup>

Two of the Kabusiye priests conducted church services in Yoghun Oluk alternately after Fr. Der Kalusdian’s passing. According to a Yoghun Oluk native, Fr. Madteos Giuzelian and Fr. Margos Keshishian were sympathizers of the SDHP and the ARF, respectively. Fr. Giuzelian at some point was sidelined by the ARF, and the SDHP faction of the village reacted by disallowing Fr. Keshishian to bless their homes.<sup>139</sup> There is no other evidence to corroborate

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Kevork Baljian (Kabusiye), Melkon Kuyumjian (Kheder Beg), Khacher Azabian (Kheder Beg), and Haji Khacher Mardirian (Haji Habibli) to Sahag II, January 12, 1927.

<sup>135</sup> *Aztag*, July 3, 1927.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> *Suriagan Mamul*, September 16, 1925.

<sup>138</sup> Ghazar Charek, “Der Apraham Khn. Der Kalusdian 1865-1928” (Fr. Apraham Der Kalusdian 1865-1928), H. Balian, ed., *Siuriahay Darekirk* (Syrian Armenian Almanac), First Year 1929, Aztag Printing, Beirut, 1929, pp. 278-80; Archpriest Setragian, *vol. I*, pp. 363-69.

<sup>139</sup> Boghos Armenag Lakisian, *Musa Leran Voghchuyn* (Greeting to Musa Dag), “Orenk yev Iraganutian” Printing, Yerevan, 2005, p. 273.

this claim. Whatever the reality, in fall 1933 there seemed to be a candidate for the priesthood for Yoghun Oluk, but he was recuperating from an illness in Aleppo (and ultimately could not come).<sup>140</sup> Be that as it may, the village continued to remain without a resident clergyman for another five years.

Yoghun Oluk finally had its resident priest in 1938, that is, a whole decade after Fr. Der Kalusdian's demise. Yesayi Shrikian, on his way back to his native Yoghun Oluk from Ethiopia in December 1936, while visiting his sister in Tripoli, Lebanon, became aware of the Sanjak of Iskenderun crisis that portended an uncertain future for Musa Dag. He and his family accordingly decided to stay in Tripoli, opened a novelty shop, and subsequently engaged in comb-making in partnership with his brother-in-law. When the latter moved to Beirut, Shrikian began to search for a new home and a workplace. It was at this juncture that he received oral and written invitations from the Yoghun Oluk parish council to become their priest upon popular demand. He accepted the offer and returned to his birthplace. It was originally understood that he would study at the seminary of the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias for a year or two before assuming his new position. However, given the escalating Sanjak crisis, it was deemed more expedient to ordain him sooner rather than later, the reasoning being that a clergyman rather than a lay person would be a better fit to lead the people under the ominous circumstances. He was accordingly sent to Haji Habibli to be mentored by Fr. Hagop Kelemian. During his three-month stay there, Shrikian became acquainted with the liturgy, church traditions, rituals and important holidays, and read Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian's *Azkabadum* (History of the Armenian Nation).<sup>141</sup>

Shrikian, then, according to church tradition, spent forty days—a period called *Chllo* in local parlance—in isolation at the parish school back in his native village for contemplation, praying, singing hymns, and reading the Bible. District priests took turns in visiting and assisting him, while his eldest son, Kevork, a future priest himself (Fr. Nareg), delivered food prepared daily by different families of the community. During this transitional period from secular to religious life, Shrikian could not even see his wife. Once this episode ended, he on July 24, 1938 was ordained priest in the local church by Vicar

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<sup>140</sup> ACGHC, File 23/1, Bishop Achabahan to Coadjutor Catholicos Papken, October 12, 1933.

<sup>141</sup> Archpriest Movses Shrikian, private papers, Montebello, California, "Hushakrutium Movses A. Khny. Shrikiani (Avazani Anun, Yesayi)" (Memoirs of Archpriest Movses Shrikian, Baptismal Name, Yesayi), pp. 74-75; Archpriest Nareg Shrikian, private papers, Montebello, California, "Husher" (Memoirs), pp. 67-68. For the invitation to be ordained priest, see Archpriest Movses Shrikian, private papers, Yoghun Oluk parish council Chair Dikran Kazanjian, Secretary S. Hanisian, and sixteen other prominent individuals to Yesayi Shrikian, December 12, 1937.

General Khat Achabahian, who anointed him as Fr. Movses. He celebrated his first mass at the ruins of Sultumu (St. Thomas) church, a popular pilgrimage site some 20 minutes walking distance to the east of Yoghun Oluk. Present were over a thousand people from the six villages of Musa Dagħ as well as Greek Orthodox and even Alawi neighbors from the nearby plain of Svedia. Priests and Protestant pastors partook in the service. Also on that solemn day, Fr. Shrikian's wife, who had been in isolation herself in their home, was brought out by friends to Sultumu, where the husband-priest placed seven veils on her head before reading the Bible. According to tradition-superstition, the seven layers of cover would prevent the wife from hearing what was read from the Scripture, otherwise it could portend a bad omen. During the week following his first mass, Fr. Movses Shrikian visited and blessed the families of his parish one by one.<sup>142</sup>

Within less than four months following his ordination, Fr. Shrikian oversaw the election of a new parish council. On November 10, 1938, he announced the winners to Vicar General Achabahian. The latter approved the election results as legitimate, and exhorted the officials as follows: "To take care of the amelioration and illumination of the church as the sole protector of the Armenian people and the citadel of National preservation"; "To keep a close eye on the school's regular process and progress for the sake and care of the national education and upbringing of the children from both genders; "To be careful about internal conflicts...that will [or may] occur from time to time and, without taking sides, to deal with them mildly and with fatherly exhortations to invite them to their senses, so that in this way it becomes possible to preserve peace and calm in the village."<sup>143</sup>

Fr. Shrikian emerged as a key figure in working out a settlement for Musa Dagħ's future in the precipitous Sanjak crisis. Four local opinions existed as to what position to adopt. Because a number of families had already begun to migrate to Aleppo, one group felt comfortable with the idea of letting the movement take its course and think about the rest later. Others were adamant about staying put and not abandoning their ancestral homes. A minority contemplated taking up arms and fighting the Turks just like in 1915. Fr. Shrikian opted for a fourth solution: to consult with the French in order to avoid panic and coordinate efforts towards a solution. The French initially advised the

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<sup>142</sup> Archpriest Movses Shrikian, "Hushakrutian," 75-76; Archpriest Nareg Shrikian, "Husher," pp. 68-69.

<sup>143</sup> Archpriest Movses Shrikian, private papers, Bishop Khat Achabahian to the newly-elected parish council of Yoghun Oluk, December 6, 1938. The elected members were: Garabed Tashjian, Chair; Hagop Chemenian, Secretary; Hagop Aprahamian, Treasurer; and members at large Krikor Bursalian, Bedros Gharibian, Hovhannes Hergelian, and Sarkis Kamberian.

Armenians not to leave the area. However, given the 1915 resistance and the fear of punishment for it, the overwhelming majority decided to exit Musa Dagh. A delegation consisting of Fr. Shrikian, Fr. Kelemian, and representatives from the six villages met with Col. Philibert Collet, the French officer in charge of the Armenians' exodus. He wanted to deal with Fr. Shrikian alone, asking him to prepare lists of the population and their fixed and movable belongings including animals. He also asked the Armenians to submit their monies to the French and receive them back after crossing the Turkish-Syrian border for safety.<sup>144</sup> Fr. Shrikian thus served as the liaison between Musa Dagh and the French during this critical and fateful episode.

What is perplexing about the Yoghun Oluk Apostolic church is the fact that many liturgical objects which could be carried were left behind at the time of the exodus from Musa Dagh in summer 1939. While in Anjar, Fr. Shrikian, without providing an explanation, on October 27, 1941 listed the following items that had remained in the Surp Asdvadzadzin church of his native village: 2 large St. Mary pictures; 2 big golden crosses; 1 small cross; 1 censor; 1 (corner?) stone (*vemkar*); 3 plates; 2 long wooden candleholders; 2 big metal candleholders; 10 small metal candleholders; 2 curtains; 1 fire pit; 1 pliers; 1 clarion (*gochnag*); 1 washing tub; 1 flask; 12 choir vestments; silken covers (quantity not mentioned); lanterns and candleholders (quantities not mentioned); 1 *mas* cutter. While their loss was unfortunate, they indicated the kinds of objects that were used for religious services.<sup>145</sup>

#### THE SURP PRGICH (HOLY SAVIOR) CHURCH OF KHEDER BEG

The Kheder Beg Surp Prgich (Holy Savior) church had one priest during the entire period under study: Fr. Harutiun/Artin Sherbetjian, a native by the lay name of Panos. A poor farmer, he was ordained in Sis in 1900 at the age of forty.<sup>146</sup> He joined his people during the 1915 resistance, then stayed at the refugee camp of Port Said for four years, and repatriated to Kheder Beg in 1919. Reporting to Sahag II in 1926 on the status of the church, the parish council maintained that, thanks to devout people, it had assumed "a very bright color," thereby keeping the Catholic church in the village at bay.<sup>147</sup> In turn, in 1933, Fr. Sherbetjian wrote to the pontiff about the 10 francs annual subscription fee that he had sent for the pontificate's official journal *Hasg* (Ear

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<sup>144</sup> Archpriest Movses Shrikian, "Hushakrutian" pp. 77-79.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., private papers, List of Objects Remaining in the Yoghun Oluk Holy Mother of God Church in Musa Dagh, October 27, 1941, Anjar, Lebanon.

<sup>146</sup> Shemmastian, *The Armenians of Musa Dagh*, p. 104.

<sup>147</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, President Fr. Harutiun Sherbetjian, Chairman Yesayi Aprahamian, and Secretary Hovhannes Markarian of the Kheder Beg Parish Council to Sahag II, August 12, 1926.

of Corn), at the same time reminding him of a promise he had made regarding the picture of Holy Mother of God (to be gifted to the Holy Savior church).<sup>148</sup> No other documents regarding the Kheder Beg church are found in the catholicosate's archives. Even so, we learn that Fr. Sherbetjian served the Vakef church periodically when needed (see below). He also celebrated mass at Damlajik on Musa Dagħ's summit each September from 1924-37 in observance of the 1915 resistance,<sup>149</sup> passing the torch to Fr. Movses Shrikian of Yoghun Oluk in 1938.<sup>150</sup> He died in Anjar in 1940.<sup>151</sup>

#### THE SURP ASDVADZADZIN CURCH OF VAKEF

For more than four years after returning from Port Said, the parish of Surp Asdvadzadzin church of Vakef remained without a resident priest. Instead, Apostolic clergymen from the neighboring villages alternately filled that lacuna. By 1924, Fr. Sherbetjian could no longer commute from Kheder Beg to Vakef because of advanced age. At the same time, the Kabusiye people, "due to miscellaneous considerations," stopped sending one of their two priests. The need for a permanent shepherd, therefore, became imperative, especially when the Capuchin monks returned to Kheder Beg and the "nightmare of Latinization" of the people loomed.<sup>152</sup>

In early 1924, Krikor Aroyian, the superintendent of the AGBU Sisvan schools network in Musa Dagħ, recommended Kabusiye teacher Arakel Geokjian as a candidate for priesthood for Vakef. He was 38 years old, married with children, and with an "unblemished" character. As a plus, he could serve as the teacher of the local school while performing his religious duties. The proposal was enthusiastically accepted, and on March 6, 1924 Geokjian was ordained in Antelias by Sahag II as Fr. Khoren.<sup>153</sup> He celebrated his first mass

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., Fr. Sherbetjian to Sahag II, May 1, 1933.

<sup>149</sup> *Husaper*, September 16, 1924, September 30, 1926, November 29, 1927, September 22, 1937; *Piunig*, September 24, 1924;

<sup>150</sup> Archpriest Movses Shrikian, "Hushakrutiun," p. 76. He maintains that the marking of the 1915 resistance at Damlajik was initiated by Archpriest Apraham Der Kalusdian.

<sup>151</sup> Archpriest Setragian, *Vark Kahanayits*, vol. II, p. 82.

<sup>152</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1., Chairman Manuel S. Shemmassian, Secretary Panos M. Ayntabian, Member Vanes Babigian, and Member Bedros Sekkaian of the Vakef parish council, and Village Headman Tomas T. Ayntabian to Sahag II, February 9, 1924. The veracity of the letter's content was vouched for by Fr. Der Kalusdian.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.; Shemmassian, Babigian and S. Manjian to Sahag II, February 24, 1927; Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI), Yerevan, Armenia, Tateos Babigian, "Husher. Tebker u Temker" (Memoirs: Events and Profiles), Istanbul, 1992, p. 61.

on Easter, April 11, 1924.<sup>154</sup> Alongside his religious and educational activity, he installed looms in Vakef to teach women the art of carpet weaving.<sup>155</sup>

Fr. Geokjian's livelihood depended in part on his teaching salary, which stopped when the AGBU withdrew its sponsorship of the Sisvan schools at the end of the 1924-25 scholastic year. For the following term, the parish council agreed to pay him 30 Syrian liras—admittedly insufficient—but could raise only half of it. This prompted Fr. Geokjian to quit teaching altogether effective 1926-27. The parish council then contemplated asking Sahag II to issue “a letter of blessing” as a “moral consolation” for the priest. But the situation took a different turn when he, while returning there from Aleppo on personal business, performed a wedding at Antioch without permission and received an offering of 5 liras. The religious council of Aleppo with the pontiff's order defrocked Fr. Geokjian for fifteen days and confiscated the money as punishment. Fearing for his loss and the negative impact that it would have on the community, the Vakef parish council beseeched the pontiff to rescind the penalty.<sup>156</sup> Information is lacking about the outcome of this petition.

Shortly thereafter, in early March 1927, Fr. Geokjian wrote to Sahag II asking him to find a remedy to his predicament. He spoke of incidents that had ostensibly threatened his and his family's life. Unknown assailants had thrown stones and shot at his residence with Mauser guns late at night. He sent his son to the nearby home of the influential Shemmassian brothers to report the occurrence, but they and others did not dare to come to his aid. Although he and the village headman officially reported the matter to Musa Dagħ governor Movses Der Kalusdian, he failed to investigate it. Fr. Geokjian was thus compelled to go to Antioch and lodge a complaint with the French authorities. He also claimed that the priests of Haji Hasbibli and Kheder Beg were similarly shot at.<sup>157</sup> Fr. Geokjian suggested an unlikely motive based on “a concocted, illogical lie” endorsed by the ARF: an intoxicated orphaned suitor, prevented from marrying an orphaned girl entrusted to Fr. Geokjian's custody by a Near East Relief representative was the cause of the rage described.<sup>158</sup> According to Tateos Babigian, the Turkish-installed last governor of Armenian Musa Dagħ and an active member of the SDHP chapter of Vakef, those incidents were the machinations of the ARF, which pressured the priest to leave applying such

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<sup>154</sup> AGMI, Babigian, “Husher,” p. 61.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Shemmassian, Babigian and Manjian to Sahag II, February 24, 1927.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., Fr. Geokjian to Sahag II, March 7, 1927.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., File 23/1, Fr. Geokjian to Sahag II, March 7, 1927, March 28, 1927.

tactics as hurling insults, cussing and stealing his chickens donated by the villagers.<sup>159</sup>

The parish council responded to the priest's allegations as it wrote to Sahag II: "Had the stoning case of Fr. Kh. Geokjian's house been a serious and important issue, we would already have felt responsible to report the incident to your beatitude in time." As soon as the event was reported to the village headman and the parish council, they sent people around that same night to find the culprits, but to no avail. They cautioned the priest to pursue the case first through the Musa Dagħ governor, because circumventing him would be illegal. Notwithstanding the counsel given, Fr. Geokjian with "his false and fabricated" account went ahead and filed a very negative report with the French regarding alleged widespread unrest across Musa Dagħ, something that did not exist. His true intention, therefore, according to the parish council, was to come up with an excuse to leave Musa Dagħ together with his thirteen-member family, which he was unable to care for despite all the efforts by the council to keep him satisfied.<sup>160</sup>

From Antioch Fr. Geokjian wrote to Sahag II that the local parish council wanted to retain him as their priest. Although an incumbent cleric existed, every effort was made for good severance compensation in order not to hurt his feelings. Fr. Geokjian reportedly considered such treatment of his confrere as "absurd and untimely." While pretending to be empathetic, he claimed at the same time that "the black hands," i.e., the ARF, of Musa Dagħ instigated their comrades in Antioch as well as Aleppo Primate Arđavazt Siurmeian to create turmoil and confusion in order to prevent him from assuming his new position. Sahag II also opposed his stay in Antioch and asked him to relocate to Kesab, but he refused to comply citing danger awaiting his life just like in Musa Dagħ. He did not trust the French government either, and castigated the "dictator governor" of Musa Dagħ for his dereliction of duty and machinations. In the face of these challenges, and in order to find peace, he planned to move to Iskenderun and engage in sericulture. At the same time he asked the pontiff to find him a church in a non-political milieu.<sup>161</sup>

Fr. Geokjian lost his case having failed to produce any evidence supporting his allegations respecting the Vakef events.<sup>162</sup> It appears that he did not leave Antioch forthwith either. According to a group of notable Armenians in town, Fr. Geokjian, who was "expelled" from Vakef, himself a member of a political

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<sup>159</sup> AGMI, Babigian, "Husher," p. 61.

<sup>160</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, the village headman and seven members of the parish council of Vakef to Sahag II, March 27, 1927.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., File 23/1, Fr. Geokjian to Sahag II, March 28, 1927.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., File 22/1, village and parish council members of Vakef to Sahag II, April 12, 1927.

party, and a troublemaker, enjoyed the support of the “illegal” local parish council. As such, he was allowed to celebrate mass occasionally disregarding the fact that the incumbent priest, “a good-natured and responsible man,” performed his duties well and that one priest was already more than enough for the small community.<sup>163</sup> In any case, Fr. Geokjian in early 1928 was assigned to the Hama church.<sup>164</sup> Two years later, in 1930, he moved to Lyon, France and thence to Soviet Armenia in 1933, where he left the priesthood and lived as Mr. Arakel Geokjian until his death in 1942.<sup>165</sup>

The Vakef church remained without a permanent priest for more than seven years after Fr. Geokjian’s departure. As before, the two priests of Kabusiye took turns in performing the religious services. In May 1932, the parish council considered Hovhannes S. Kartunian, a native, as a prospective spiritual leader. On Sunday, May 29, they met with Kartunian’s wife to obtain her opinion and came out “hopeful.” On the following day, May 30, they consulted with the candidate himself to learn of his terms, which were two: to be sent to the Antelias seminary for six months, and to have the title deed of an orchard that a certain woman had offered to give to the church registered in his name.<sup>166</sup> The parish council agreed to the first condition but declined the second one, and instead proposed an unspecified sum as remuneration.<sup>167</sup> In September, new negotiations took place. Kartunian now asked for 2 (Ottoman gold?) liras (monthly or annually?) and the liberty to hammer out a deal with the orchard’s owner hoping to purchase the property himself. The parish council declined the latter condition because the new acquisition would be a source of income for the church. Should Kartunian accept just his asking fee of 2 liras, he could be ordained priest, otherwise his name would “absolutely” be off the table.<sup>168</sup> The negotiations dragged on inconclusively for two years, until August 1934, by which time a second candidate, an outsider, had surfaced.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., File 23/1, twelve Antioch notables to Sahag II, July 12, 1927.

<sup>164</sup> Archpriest Setragian, *vol. II*, p. 411.

<sup>165</sup> AGMI, Babigian, “Husher,” p. 56. The fact that Fr. Geokjian left the priesthood in Soviet Armenia is reported by *Ararad* (Beirut), March 4, 1938.

<sup>166</sup> Mekhitarist Armenian Catholic Order Archives, Vienna, Austria, “Nor Shrchan. S[ocial] T[emograt] Hnch[akian] Gusagtsutian Vakefi Masnajiughi Artzanakrutian Dedrag, 1928[-38]” (New Period: Notebook of Minutes of the Vakef Chapter of the Social Democrat Hnchagian Party, 1928[-38]), Executive Committee Meeting, May 28, 1932. The minutes also contain information regarding events that occurred on May 29-30.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., Membership Meeting, September 4, 1932. The asking price for the orchard by the owner was 6 liras.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., Executive Committee Consultative Meeting, August 3, 1934.

On Sunday, November 25, 1934 Vicar General Achabahian ordained Aintab native Yeghia Bakamjian priest for the Vakef church, renaming him Fr. Mesrob.<sup>170</sup> He spent about three weeks of his forty-day mandatory sequestration for solemn meditation and prayer in Aleppo and the remainder in Vakef to get acquainted with their “internal spiritual life, church needs, [and his] religious duties.” While reporting the exciting news to Sahag II, the parish council also asked him to provide them with religious books and a copy of the official journal *Hasg* (Ear of Corn), all published by the catholicosate, ten copies of newly-released hymnals for the church choir, and, if possible, tomes printed at the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The purpose of this request was to educate and enlighten the “impoverished” Vakef church.<sup>171</sup>

Despite the great anticipation created by Fr. Bakamjian’s ordination, he left a negative image during his two-year tenure. According to a native eyewitness, the villagers referred to Fr. Bakamjian as “Wicked Mesrob” (*Char Mesrob*) primarily for his overindulgence in food. He frequently went to the town of Levshiye in the plain of Svedia, feasted on barbeque and imbibed *oghi* (an aniseed alcoholic beverage), and had the eatery bill the Vakef parish council. Vicar General Achabahian during one of his visits to the village caught Fr. Bakamjian off guard while he was returning from Levshiye, literally whipped him for his transgression, and eventually assigned him to Latakia.<sup>172</sup> His biographer maintains that his transfer to that coastal town was due to health issues.<sup>173</sup> After his departure, the parish council in fall 1937 finally agreed to have Kartunian ordained. He thus became Fr. Ghevont. His SDHP comrade, Tateos Babigian, maintains in his memoirs that the new priest “was not a very capable person,” but gives him credit for serving faithfully not just the Vakef church, but also those of Kirik Khan and Iskenderun for many years.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Aleppo Prelacy Archives, Aleppo, Syria, Section A, Dossier 7, *Sdatsvadz Namagner Andioik 1909-1939* (Incoming Correspondence [from] Antioch 1909-1939), Bishop Khat Achabahian to Primate of Aleppo Archbishop Ardavazt Siurmeian, November 26, 1934; ACGHC Archives, File 23/1, Bishop Achabahian to Sahag II, November 28, 1934; *Hasg*, December:1934, p. 114. Archpriest Setragian, vol. I, p. 311, specifies November 15 as Bakamjian’s ordination date, which is incorrect. Bakamjian was ordained in Antioch.

<sup>171</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, Vakef parish council Chairman Manuel S. Shemmassian and Secretary Kh. Kartunian to Sahag II, December 12, 1934.

<sup>172</sup> Sarkis Penenyan, *Hushabadgerner Musa-Daghen yev Modig Antsialen* (Memorial Scenes from Musa Dag and the Recent Past), SARKO Printing, Los Angeles, CA, 1993, pp. 70-71. See also *Ararad*, March 4, 1938.

<sup>173</sup> Archpriest Setragian, vol. I, p. 312.

<sup>174</sup> AGMI, Babigian, “Husher,” p. 56.

## THE SURP SARKIS (SAINT SARKIS) CHURCH OF KABUSIYE

Kabusiye was one of the three original Armenian villages of Musa Dagħ. Its Surp Sarkis (Saint Sarkis) church, therefore, was one of the oldest. In 1911, rival factions in the village sent two candidates to Sis to be ordained by Sahag II: Fr. Margos (lay name Serop) Keshishian or Yeretsian and Fr. Madteos (lay name Manuel) Giuzelian. Both were deported together with almost the entirety of their flock in 1915, ending up in and around the Syrian town of Hama. They returned to Kabusiye in 1919 after experiencing untold hardships in exile.<sup>175</sup> Upon arrival, they found the church and the school in partial ruins; the French navy in 1915 had bombarded them because they were used as a munitions depot and military post by the Ottoman army. One of the school walls had collapsed, while shrapnel had caused heavy damage to the columns, walls, and roof of the church. The school was renovated rather early upon the urging of the AGBU for children to start classes in 1921 under its patronage. The restoration of the church, however, began only six years later, but remained unfinished as late as May 1936.<sup>176</sup> Not much else is known about Saint Sarkis throughout the interwar years, except that, as seen above, the two priests assisted other churches in the area alternately when their pulpits were empty. Both migrated to Anjar in 1939.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The Apostolic Church in Musa Dagħ between the two World Wars suffered a good deal from the lack of clergymen and human imperfections. While Kabusiye and Kheder Beg had their resident shepherds for the entirety of the period under study, the remaining four churches did not. The Vakef pulpit remained vacant for a total of thirteen years (1919-24, 1927-34, 1936-37), that of Yoghun Oluk for ten years (1928-38), that of Bitias for seven years (1919-26), and that of Haji Habibli for two years (1919-1921). Visiting local priests filled those gaps to a certain extent. There was also an uneven distribution of priests: while Kabusiye and, for a while, Haji Habibli had two priests each, the remaining villages had one each when not devoid of them altogether. Speaking of the native and non-native clergy, with the exception of Fr. Varteresian, the natives withstood the hardships of local conditions and stayed put, whereas the outsiders, unaccustomed to a tough mountainous life and people, chose to leave after serving for certain intervals. As for ability and preparedness, only a few

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<sup>175</sup> Shemmassian, *The Armenians of Musa Dagħ*, pp. 103-05, 331, 397-412.

<sup>176</sup> ACGHC Archives, File 22/1, President Fr. Madteos Giuzelian, Chairman Samson Bayramian, and Secretary Fr. Margos Keshishian of the Kabusiye parish council to Sahag II, August 6, 1926; idem, Chairman Sarkis Bayramian, Secretary Aleksan S. Tujerian, and members at large Dmiteos Keshishian, Serop Giuzelian, and Hagop Sarkisian of the Kabusiye parish council to Catholicos Papken, May 3, 1936.

fit the bill for priesthood. The recruits for spiritual service were mostly humble peasants. Three months of studying the liturgy, rituals and related activity under fellow priests, as well as forty days of sequestration, seemed to be the norm. Ordinary folks did not mind these practices. Themselves of limited educational background, they did not deem it necessary to have enlightened priests for spiritual nourishment; the bare minimum of satisfying religious needs would suffice. There certainly was the desire to attend the seminary of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia on the part of some candidates, but evidence is lacking as to whether two of the prospects actually studied there.

The populace in general and the parish councils in particular, like in all comparable societies, did not always live harmoniously. Haji Habibli, in particular, was a prime example of a dysfunctional community. Factional bickering of a socioeconomic nature caused some voluntary conversions to Catholicism. Fierce rivalry between the two existing political parties, the SDHP and the ARF, likewise disturbed church life. Along with some introspection, those concerned with the welfare of the Apostolic church also blamed perceived Catholic and Protestant “man hunting” encroachments for their problems. In reality, American Protestant missionaries did not resume their pre-World War I activity in Musa Dagħ after 1919, nor did the local Protestants engage in proselytism.<sup>177</sup> As for the Capuchin monks, who regained their stronghold of Kheder Beg only five years after repatriation, they did not make a special effort to lure potential converts. On the contrary, their parish had dwindled to about half of its prewar size, and no new members were registered.<sup>178</sup> It is true that the Capuchins especially provided free education in their Kheder Beg school, thereby attracting Apostolic children for the most part. Still the Apostolic community shared some responsibility for not being able to subsidize and sustain their own schools at all times to fight alien inroads, a topic that needs to be explored. In the final analysis, despite the described individual and collective shortcomings, the deeply entrenched Apostolic Church of Musa Dagħ remained a bastion of faith and national identity preservation for the majority of the people.

## SOCIOLOGICAL GIVENS

There are detailed records, albeit partial, pertaining to marriages, baptisms, and deaths in Bitias and Yoghun Oluk that shed light on some aspects of the social fabric of Musa Dagħ. During his five years of service at Bitias, from July 1934-August 1939 (including at Ras al-Basit), Fr. Vahan Kendirjian officiated at 30 weddings. Fr. Hagop Kelemian of Haji Habibli blessed another marriage in

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<sup>177</sup> Vahram L. Shemmassian, “The Armenian Protestant Church in Musa Dagħ, 1919-1939,” *Haigazian Armenological Review*, 42/2:2022, pp. 73-95.

<sup>178</sup> Vahram L. Shemmassian, “The Saint Paul Capuchin Mission in Musa Dagħ, 1919-1939,” *Haigazian Armenological Review*, 43/1:2023, pp. 387-408.

Bitias, for a total of 31, because Fr. Kendirjian, as the father of the groom, in all likelihood must have preferred to be present just as a witness, although church canon did not necessarily prevent him from participating in the ceremony. Meticulous records kept include information regarding the name/surname of the couple, their father's name, place of birth and residence, age/birthdate, occupation, status (single/widow), and wedding date. The number of marriages taking place each year was as follows: 2 in 1934; 4 in 1935; 3 in 1936; 8 in 1937; 8 in 1938; 6 in 1939, for an average of 6 weddings per year. While most couples were native to Bitias, some were born elsewhere: 3 grooms were from Haji Habibli; 1 groom was from Yoghun Oluk; 1 couple was from Aleppo; 1 groom was from Sepastia/Sivas (living in Aleppo); 3 brides were from Yoghun Oluk; 2 brides were from Haji Habibli; 1 bride was from Fartisli (to the south of Iskenderun); and 1 bride was from the USA (her family hailed from Bitias). One wedding took place en route to exile to Ras al-Basit, and 3 weddings there. In all four cases, the birthplace is not mentioned. The statistics thus show that most marriages were endogamous, with Bitias being their place of residence. The exogamous unions pertained to suitors/brides from Haji Habibli, Yoghun Oluk, Aleppo, Iskenderun, Antioch, Zeytuniye (in the plane of Svedia), and Kirik Khan.<sup>179</sup>

Of the total 31 marriages, the age/birthdate of 13 cases is not mentioned, without an explanation given. Similarly, while the age of one groom is included, his bride's is not. The average age of grooms was 30 and that of brides 22, for an eight-year difference between the two genders. The largest age gap between a married couple was 20 years, and 3 wives were older than their husbands (one by 11 years). The youngest bride was 13, whereas the husband of the oldest couple was 51 and his wife 53. Interestingly, a column in the statistical chart is headlined "virgin or widow." In this context, the term "virgin" is construed to mean not married before/single. In any case, 27 couples are listed as virgin, 2 men as widower, 1 woman as widow, and 1 woman as divorced/widow.<sup>180</sup>

The occupation of the newlyweds is similarly specified, with the exception of a couple and two women, whose corresponding spaces in the pertinent column are left blank. A third woman's inscribed profession is illegible. In the case of females, 25, that is, the majority, were embroiderers, 1 was a school teacher, and 1 was a silkworm cultivator. Men were listed as follows: 7 spoon makers; 5 laborers; 3 cart drivers; 3 gardeners; 2 charcoal makers; 2 weavers; 1 municipality guard; 1 land cultivator; 1 herder; 1 stone cutter; 1 porter; 1 muleteer; 1 barber, 1 mason.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Archpriest Vahan Kendirjian, private papers, "Dedrag Amusnutian" (Notebook of Marriage).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

Naturally, baptisms also took place. In all, 167 baptisms are recorded, but 9 are either crossed out or underlined in the chart without attendant explanation and accordingly are not counted here for our purposes. Therefore, the following details are based on 158 cases. There were 10 baptisms in 1934; 42 in 1935; 39 in 1936; 15 in 1937; 28 in 1938; 21 in 1939, for an average of 31 per year. There were 3 sets of twins, each of which was obviously christened at the same time. The boys and girls numbered 81 and 77, respectively. The birthdate of 14 babies is not mentioned, but all baptismal dates and the godfathers' names are. While the majority was born in Bitias, 5 were born in Nor/New Zeytun, a League of Nations agricultural settlement for Armenian refugees situated near Bitias; 5 in Aleppo; 3 in Soghuk Oluk, a summer resort in the vicinity of Iskenderun; 2 in Qamishli, northeastern Syria; 1 in Antioch; 1 in Beirut; 1 in Ras al-Basit, Syria. All christenings were done by Fr. Kendirjian except for one, by a certain Fr. Khachig.<sup>182</sup>

Fr. Kendirjian officiated at 43 funerals during his incumbency. Another interment of a Musa Dagħ woman who had died at Latakia while in exile was overseen by Fr. Mesrob Bakamjian, formerly of Vakef. There were 8 deaths in 1934; 10 in 1935; 2 in 1936; 6 in 1937; 10 in 1938; and 8 in 1939, for an average of 9 deaths per year. Therefore, deaths exceeded marriages by 3 per year. Bitias is mentioned as the native place of 41 cases. The rest hailed from Haji Habibli, Jarablus, and Urfa. As for gender, 20 were male, and 24 were female. Of the total 44 cases, the age/birthdate of 8 is not mentioned, and one's date of birth is registered as 1971, certainly an inadvertent error. Of the rest, 7 were newborn or several months old; 9 were children between 1 and 4; 2 were in their teens; 3 were in their 20s; 1 was 31; 2 were in their 40s; 2 were in their 50s; 3 were in their 60s; 2 were in their 70s; 3 were in their 80s; 2 were in their 90s. In short, about half were babies, children, and teenagers, and the other half included age groups distributed more or less evenly.<sup>183</sup>

Not one illness or health condition constituted the main cause of death. Pleurisy (*sattlejan*) claimed 7 lives; old age, 5; high fever (*dent*), 4 (including one who is also described as "mute"); fever, 2; diarrhea, 2; type of cold, 2; childbirth, 2; stroke, 2; dysentery, 2; cripple (*hashmantam*), 2; drowning, 1; burning, 1; epilepsy, 1; a certain type of cough, 1; tuberculosis, 1; foot wound, 1; intestinal disease, 1; ear ache, 1; unknown, 1. The cause of death for 5 other cases is not mentioned. Interestingly, the chart also indicates the duration of the illnesses or health conditions that took those lives. As for their occupations, nothing is mentioned for 20 people, and 3 did not have work. Of the remaining 21 departed, 6 were housewives; 4 toddlers; 2 laborers; 2 land cultivators; 1

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., "Dedrag Mgrdutian" (Notebook of Baptism).

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., "Dedrag Taghman" (Notebook of Burial).

carpenter; 1 embroiderer; 1 stone cutter; 1 baker; 1 shepherd; 1 student; 1 midwife.<sup>184</sup> In conclusion, marriages, baptisms, and deaths reflected the sociological aspect of the majority Bitias Apostolic community during its last quarter of existence between the two World Wars.

In Yoghun Oluk, Fr. Movses Shrikian kept similar records during his one year of service, from July 1938-August 1939. The number of marriages amounted to 10. The names/surnames of the bride and the groom, their respective parents, and godfathers are given. The average age of grooms was 26, the youngest being 22 and the oldest 29. One bride's age is not indicated. The remaining nine got married at the age of 21.5 on average, three of them being teenagers. Therefore, the age difference between husband and wife was four and a half years. One couple had the same age, 24. Only one bride was Catholic, the rest of the couples were Apostolic. All grooms were from Yoghun Oluk, whereas 6 out of 10 brides were from Kheder Beg. This indicates that intermarriage between Yoghun Oluk and Kheder Beg was quite common. The house number (address) of each bachelor and bachelorette is also recorded.<sup>185</sup>

The records also show that Fr. Shrikian christened 16 children, 11 of them boys and 5 girls, all, presumably, in the presence of their parents and godfathers, whose names also appear. Of the total baptisms, 9 took place in 1938 and 7 in 1939. The house number of each child is similarly indicated. As far as deaths were concerned, 9 occurred, of which 4 in 1938 and 5 in 1939. In terms of gender, 4 were male and 5 were female. They all hailed from Yoghun Oluk, but 2 women were married in Kheder Beg.<sup>186</sup> Of the deceased, 3 were infants under one, 1 was one and a half, and the rest ranged from 20 to 85 years of age. In these cases house numbers are included as well.<sup>187</sup> Unfortunately, marriage, baptism, and death records of the remaining villages of Musa Dagħ, indeed the Bitias records for 1919-1934 and those of Yoghun Oluk for 1919-1938, are nowhere to be found. An inquiry at Vakef has yielded no results. Its church records, if extant, may have been kept at the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul.

#### THE CHURCHES IN ANJAR AND VAKEF POST-1939

When the Armenians exited Musa Dagħ before July 23, 1939, they sojourned at Ras al-Basit, on the Mediterranean coast between Kesab and Latakia, for about seven weeks, during which they continued to celebrate mass albeit in the open.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Archpriest Movses Shrikian, private papers, "Y[oghun] Oluk (J[ebel] Musa) dedr[ag] mgrdutiants, amusnutiants yev maheru" (Notebook of Yoghun Oluk [Musa Dagħ] baptisms, marriages and deaths).

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

In Anjar, in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, where they finally settled, the first liturgical service took place on Sunday, September 24, 1939 by the water spring situated on the northern edge of the refugee encampment proper. It coincided with the Holy Cross Holiday and the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1915 resistance. A *hokehankisd* or repose of the souls of the eighteen fighters who had fallen on the battlefield and the distribution of the blessed food of *harisa* constituted integral parts of the ceremonies. For about a year and a half thereafter, the village priests, who had accompanied their flocks, took turns in conducting the religious services in a large black tent. Starting with February 1941, the rituals continued at the Dikranian Hall of the newly-built national school.<sup>188</sup>

A proper, single church building for the entire Apostolic community of Anjar—instead of the six sanctuaries that existed in Musa Dagħ—would be built more than two decades later, the long delay being caused by persistent poverty and the lack of funds. In 1959, a five-member building committee met in Beirut under the auspices of Primate Archbishop Khoren Paroyian of the Lebanon Diocese to come up with an architectural plan and raise funds. The deliberations dragged on for seven months, from March 23–October 29, without much progress.<sup>189</sup> Soon after, however, Fr. Nareg Shrikian (ordained in 1956) and architect Kevork Emmiyan laid the foundations of the church, which was completed in 1960 and consecrated on October 1. Named St. Paul, the church measured 32 meters by 15 meters; as such, it became the largest Armenian Apostolic church in Lebanon. Interior augmentations and decorations continued to take place in subsequent years. On July 3, 2016, after major renovations, St. Paul was re-consecrated.<sup>190</sup> Today, several structures and edifices stand on its premises: a resistance monument complex; the busts of Rev. Dikran Antreasian and Movses Der Kalusdian, both of whom had played significant roles in the 1915

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<sup>188</sup> Vahram L. Shemmassian, "The Armenian Religious Communities in Anjar (1939–1944)," in Christine Babikian Assaf, et al., eds., *Les Arméniens du Liban. Cent ans de présence*, Presses de l'Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut, 2017, pp. 132–35; idem, "The Settlement of Musa Dagħ Armenians in Anjar, Lebanon (1939–1941)," in Antranik Dakessian, ed., *Armenians of Lebanon (II): Proceedings of the Conference (14–16 May 2014)*, Haigazian University Press, Beirut, 2017, p. 146.

<sup>189</sup> Archpriest Nareg Shrikian, private papers, minutes of the Anjar Church Building Committee. Four sessions took place in 1959: on March 23, April 3, June 2, and October 29. The committee members were: Fr. Shrikian, the only representative from Anjar; Misak Azirian, Chair; Piužant Tiutjunjian, Secretary; Khosrov Shamlian, Treasurer; Boghos Najarian, member at large.

<sup>190</sup> Fr. Miuron Avedisian and Yesayi Havatian, eds., *Huysi yev Luysi Dajar* (Cathedral of Hope and Light) (Beirut: Hamazkayin Vahe Setian Printing House, 2016), pp. 18–31. See also M. Kushakjian, "Musa Lertsik Aynjari mech" (The Musa Dagħians in Anjar), in Mardiros Kushakjian and Boghos Madurian, eds., *Hushamadian Musa Leran* (Memorial Book of Musa Dagħ), Atlas Press, 1970, Beirut, pp. 524–26.

fighths; a bust of Fr. Vahan Kendirjian; a cemetery for clergymen; a community hall; a *khachkar* (cross stone); and a memorial fountain.<sup>191</sup>

Meanwhile, some 68 families/384 persons had elected to stay in Musa Dagħ at the time of the exodus in 1939. They, mostly from Vakef, constituted about 6% of the total population. The Vakef parish council lost no time in pledging allegiance to the new Turkish regime. Fr. Kartunian continued to serve the church till his death in 1992. He was succeeded by Fr. Serovpe Gulian. For eleven years after the latter's passing in 2002, the village remained without a permanent clergyman because the Patriarchate of Istanbul did not have enough priests to even accommodate the many churches in that metropolis. In the interim, some priests visited Vakef on certain occasions. This situation ended when Fr. Avedis Tabashian in 2013 became the shepherd of Iskenderun and Vakef, commuting between the two communities on alternate Sundays but residing in the former place. In the larger picture, successive patriarchs have kept Vakef in their purview, paying annual pastoral visits, especially on Holy Mother of God Holiday in mid-August and Holy Cross Holiday in mid-September. Many Armenians from elsewhere in Turkey and abroad also gather in the village to participate in those traditional celebrations.<sup>192</sup>

Besides priests, the other pressing issue was the physical condition of the church structure itself. Built in 1910, it had gradually deteriorated over time and faced imminent collapse. The Turkish government failed to grant permission for repairs for several years, although the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, obligated Turkey to respect minority rights in the country. The green light for restoration finally came as Turkey entered negotiations for integration with the European Union. The consecration of the reconstructed church took place on Sunday, August 9, 1997, with Patriarch Karekin Kazanjian officiating together with high-ranking clergymen and many priests. Some 600 pilgrims attended from various parts of Turkey, Armenia, Europe, the United States, and Australia.<sup>193</sup>

Unfortunately, strong earthquakes in February 2023 across large swaths of Turkey, including the southern province of Hatay, where Musa Dagħ is located, damaged 75% of the houses in Vakef. As for the church, its "stone walls had fallen down and the baptismal font was broken. An altar cloth with embroidered

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<sup>191</sup> Fr. Avedisian and Havatian, *Huysi yev Luysi Dajar*, pp. 25-28. Refer also to the various postings on Mousaleranjar Facebook.

<sup>192</sup> Vahram L. Shemmassian, "Vakef Köy of Musa Dagħ: The Sole Armenian Village Remaining in Turkey," in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian Communities of the Northeastern Mediterranean: Musa Dagħ—Dört-Yol—Kessab*, Mazda Publishers, Costa Mesa, California, 2016, pp. 288-94.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 292-94.

pictures of Mary and Jesus was strewn with pieces of paint from the ceiling.” While intent on restoring the buildings, the community fears for its future.<sup>194</sup>

The other churches in Musa Dagh met different fates after 1939. The Bitias Apostolic church was purchased by a Greek Orthodox Arab and, as private property, left intact. The Protestant church, however, was converted to a mosque with the addition of a minaret next to it. The Haji Habibli church was similarly transformed into a Muslim worship place. While the Yoghun Oluk Apostolic church interior was left untouched, a mosque was built on its roof. The Apostolic church of Kheder Beg was flattened to the ground. Lastly, the Kabusiye church was utilized as a mosque.<sup>195</sup>

### ՀԱՅ ԱՌԱՔԵԼԱԿԱՆ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՆ ՄՈՒՍԱ ԼԵՌԱՆ ՄԷՋ, 1919-1939

(ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ)

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Մուսա Լեռան Հայ Առաքելական եկեղեցին, դժուար բարեկարգուեցաւ 1863էն՝ Օսմանեան կայսրութեան մէջ Ազգային սահմանադրութեան հաստատումէն, ետք: Եկեղեցիին ենթակայութեան իրաւասութիւնը անորոշ մնաց - Կիլիկիոյ կաթողիկոսութեան ու Երուսաղէմի պատրիարքութեան միջեւ - մինչեւ 1932, երբ Մուսա Լեռը ի վերջոյ ունեցաւ իր թեմը, Անտիոք նստավայրով, եւ գործեց Կիլիկիոյ կաթողիկոսութեան իրաւասութեան ներքոյ: Մուսա Լեռան 6 գիւղերուն եկեղեցիները դժուարութիւններ ունեցան միջպատերազմեան՝ 1919-39 շրջանին, պարբերաբար կրօնատրի բացակայութեան, թէ անոնց մարդկային տկարութեանց պատճառով: Մանաւանդ դուրսէն պաշտօնակոչուածները չկրցան տեղական պայմաններուն յարմարիլ, եւ կաթոլիկութեան փոքրաթիւ յարումներ եղան: Բայց, քաղաքականութիւնը փոքր դեր մը խաղաց կրօնական կեանքը ընդհատելու, եւ - որոշ կանոնաւորութեամբ - թաղականութիւններ կազմուեցան: 2 գիւղերու պսակի, մկրտութեան եւ թաղման արձանագրութիւնները, որոշ լոյս կը սփռեն մուսալեցիներու այդ երեսակներուն վրայ: Դժբախտաբար, այդ տուեալները ընդհատումներ ունին, իսկ միւս չորս գիւղերուն արձանագրութիւնները ցարդ անգտանելի են:

Մուսալեցիներու մեծամասնութիւնը վերաբնակելով Այնճար, 1939ին, անմիջապէս վերականգնեց իր կրօնական կեանքը: Այդուհանդերձ, գաղթականներուն չքաւորութեան պատճառով, Ս. Պօղոս առաքելական եկեղեցին կառուցուեցաւ անոնց հաստատուելէն շուրջ երկուսասնամեակ ետք: Իսկ Մուսա Տաղ մնալ ընտրած փոքրաթիւ հայերը, շարունակեցին իրենց կրօնական աղօթքները Վաքըֆի Ս. Մարիամ Աստուածածին եկեղեցիին մէջ: Մուսա Տաղի միւս եկեղեցիները կա՛մ մզկիթներու վերածուեցան, իսկա՛մ նորաբնակներուն կողմէ, կա՛մ քանդուեցան, կա՛մ - մէկ եկեղեցիի պարագային - արաբ քրսիտոնեայ ընտանիք մը գնեց զայն ու անվնաս կը պահպանուի:

<sup>194</sup> Ece Toksabai, “Turkey’s Last Armenian Village Fears for Its Future after Quake,” online article, retrieved September 18, 2023.

<sup>195</sup> Telephone interview with Fr. Mesrob Karkazian, Granada Hills, California-Anjar, Lebanon.