

GOR YERANYAN

THE KURDISH-SPEAKING  
ARMENIANS OF THE OTTOMAN  
EMPIRE: IDENTITY, LANGUAGE  
AND PRINT



Հատորը հրատարակվում է «Հայագիտական ուսումնասիրությունները  
ֆինանսավորող համահայկական հիմնադրամ»-ի և  
«ՋԵՅ ԹԻ ԱՅ ԱՐՄԵՆԻԱ» ՓԲԸ-ի ֆինանսավորմամբ:  
Մատենադարան Մեսրոպ Մաշտոցի անվան հին ձեռագրերի ինստիտուտը  
և «Մատենադարանի բարեկամներ» բարեգործական հիմնադրամը  
երախտագիտություն են հայտնում աջակցության համար

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MATENADARAN  
MESROP MASHTOTS INSTITUTE OF ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

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This monograph is dedicated to the pre-Genocide history of the Kurdish-speaking Armenians of the Ottoman provinces of Bitlis and Diyarbekir (Tigranakert). The history of this unique and often overlooked population is examined in the wider sociopolitical contexts of Ottoman and Western Armenian life. For the first time, a detailed district-by-district demographic picture is provided of the area of Kurdish-speaking Armenian habitation. There follows a discussion of several questions relating to Kurdish-speaking Armenians' identity, including their self-conception, description by other Armenians and foreign travellers, and the place of linguistically assimilated Armenians amid competing religious and linguistic paradigms of national identity during the late Ottoman period. A separate chapter is dedicated to efforts to educate Kurdish-speaking Armenians in their ancestral language: their driving motives, their results, and their reflection of the aspirations and hardships characteristic of Armenian life in the Kurdish-speaking provinces at the turn of the 20th century. The final chapter presents a bibliographical list and discussion of all known Kurdish-language books printed in the Armenian alphabet.

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This new edition has been revised by the author.

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## Acknowledgments

I had not planned to write a book on the history of Kurdish-speaking Armenians; as a researcher at the Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), my initial undertaking was a study of the Armenian-script Kurdish manuscripts kept in the Matenadaran archives. It was in the course of this inquiry that I became convinced of the need for a more comprehensive work reflecting on the spread of the Kurdish language in historical Armenia and the history of Kurdish-speaking Armenians. As a historian, I have found this topic to be of great interest in itself. Another significant personal experience also contributed to the evolution of my initial research into a broader study: I was born and raised in the village of Darakert in the Ararat province of the Republic of Armenia, where a significant part of the local population (not including my own family) are descended from Kurdish-speaking Armenians who settled there in the 1940s.

On this occasion, I would like to express my gratitude to the Matenadaran, which has afforded me the chance to undertake this project. Concurrently, while working on the monograph, I engaged in discourse with the elderly Kurdish-speaking Armenians of Darakert, some of whom shared their personal memories or passed on written memoirs, for which I express my profound gratitude. It is worth noting that a number of these individuals have passed away in recent years, may God rest their souls.

During this period, I engaged in constructive discourse on various issues with my scholarly friends and colleagues, to whom I also extend my sincere thanks. Most of all, I must express my deep gratitude to my wife and parents for their unwavering support and assistance throughout my academic journey.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the translator of the book, Thomas Toghramadjian, for his exemplary professionalism, meticulous work, and productive collaborative discussion.

## Translator's Note

In translating this rich and thorough study, which draws extensively on both Eastern and Western Armenian primary sources, we have found it impractical to adhere to one single system of Armenian transliteration. Rather, we have employed Eastern or Western Armenian phonetic transliteration as the context demanded. Our objective in all cases has been to provide a readable and accurate phonetic equivalent of the original term. For the sake of consistency and clarity the following rules have been maintained:

1. We have generally followed the 2023 Library of Congress Armenian Romanization Table, which avoids the special characters used in other Armenian transliteration systems (*kh* rather than *x*, *gh* rather than *ġ*, *sh* rather than *š* or *ş*, and so on). Only the special character *ě* is employed as an equivalent for the Armenian *Է* (IPA /ə/, as in the English until). Except when providing Armenian terms in parentheses, we have omitted the apostrophes used to represent aspirated sounds, as well as the dotted *ř* used to distinguish the rolled *Է* from the soft *Է*.
2. For sources in classical Armenian orthography, the letter *Է* is transliterated *ye* in initial position, *e* in medial and final position, and *y* when forming a part of the diphthong *luy*. Similarly the letter *Է* is transliterated *h* in initial position, *y* in medial position, and omitted when silent at the end of a word. The standalone *լ* is transliterated *v*, the diphthong *լւ* is rendered *yu*, and *ու* (*oo* as in boot), is transliterated *u*.
3. The names of Armenian authors and historical figures are presented in their most commonly accepted English form. In cases of conflict or names not widely referenced in English-language sources, we have determined whether to use Eastern or Western Armenian spelling based on the individual's place of origin and primary

milieu. The distinction is generally marked by the use of the -ian suffix for Western Armenian surnames and a -yan suffix for Eastern Armenian surnames. Hence Peniamin Zhamgochian rather than Beniamin Zhamkochyan, Mgrdich Dikranian rather than Mkrtych Tigranyan, and so on.

4. Historical Armenian toponyms have been consistently transliterated according to the Eastern Armenian standard, which more closely corresponds to the classical pronunciation. Hence Tigranakert rather than Dikranagerd, Karin rather than Garin, Taron rather than Daron, Baghesh rather than Paghesh, Nprkert rather than Nprgerd and so on. In quoting source materials, we have elided simple differences in Eastern and Western Armenian spelling; for instance, Պիթլիս and Բիթլիս both become “Bitlis,” Սղերդ and Սղերս both become “Sghert,” and so on. As a rule, however, we have transliterated names directly, preserving the variety in usages such as Kharzan/Gharzan, Silvan/Slivan, Rêndvan/Rdvan, and Bashnegh/Bashnik.
5. Aside from proper nouns, all Armenian words, including the names of periodicals and newspapers, have been transliterated according to the Eastern Armenian standard. Hence *Avetaber* rather than *Avedaper*, *Azatamart* rather than *Azadamard*, and so on.

The names of hundreds of Armenian and Assyrian villages appearing in the text and appendices present a special challenge, as these refer in practically all cases to locales that no longer exist under their former names, if at all. Such minor toponyms have been transliterated phonetically in agreement with the Armenian standard (Eastern or Western) of the source in which they are mentioned. In an overwhelming majority of cases, this has entailed Western Armenian transliteration. However, it appears that the editors of the 1985 edition of Arisdages Devgants’ *Visit to Armenia*, a key source of demographic information, introduced certain features of Eastern Armenian phonology into the spelling of toponyms, for which reason we have found it necessary to exercise a degree of independent discretion. For the reader’s convenience and in order to avoid unnecessary distortion, we have provided the original Armenian spelling of the villages listed in the appendices.

A still greater challenge was the proper romanization of Kurdish text in Armenian script—in effect, producing a transliteration of a transliteration. For various reasons, the basically phonetic approach adopted throughout the remainder of the book was deemed unsuitable for this task. The author himself has provided two transliterations of all titles and extracts of Armeno-Kurdish books discussed in Chapter 4. In each case, the first transliteration strictly follows the Hübschmann-Meillet system, based on classical Armenian pronunciation, which has the virtue of using a single character to represent each separate Armenian letter. The second transliteration follows the Western Armenian pronunciation of consonants (corresponding to the authors' own usage), and employs the Hawar alphabet currently used for representing the Kurmanji language. It should be emphasized, however, that this Hawar transliteration emulates the texts' original Armenian spelling rather than modern Kurdish orthography and pronunciation. Again, for the sake of accuracy and convenience, the original Armenian has been maintained alongside the transliteration.

Citations of Armenian sources are provided first in parallel English and Armenian, and subsequently in English. Very occasionally, for unattributed and untitled newspaper articles, we have simply listed the publication, date and page in English. For repeated citation of press materials, we have preferred redundancy over abbreviation so that the reader interested by a particular passage may find the source without losing time in search of the initial citation.

**Thomas Toghramadjian**

## PREFACE

This monograph represents an inquiry into the history of Kurdish-speaking Armenians, their identity in the late Ottoman period, and Kurdish-language literature printed in the Armenian alphabet. Before turning to the history of Kurdish-speaking Armenians themselves, it is necessary to first outline a general account of the formation of this cultural-historical environment: the origins of Armenian-Kurdish relations.<sup>1</sup>

The first incidental contacts between Armenians and Kurds, in all probability, began during the period of Arab rule during the 8th-9th centuries, but intercommunal contact became more pronounced and more visible during the 10th-11th centuries. The mass migration of Kurdish tribes, however, is not always recorded in primary sources; Kurds entered Armenia not only as armed invaders, but as herders as well. Perpetual migration and the vital necessity of finding new grazing areas induced tribes of pastoral nomads to move towards Armenia.

It was most likely the movement of the Seljuks out of the depths of Iran toward Atropatene (Iranian Azerbaijan) that obliged the region's large Kurdish population, in turn, to move toward Mesopotamia and Armenia. This migration of Kurdish tribes took place along two primary vectors: from Atropatene toward Vaspurakan (the vicinity of Lake Van), and from Mesopotamia toward Arzanene (between western Tigris and the eastern Taurus Mountains). The weakening and gradual breakdown of Mongol rule

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding initial Armenian-Kurdish contacts, see **Leo**, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, Yerevan, 1967, pp. 635-641 (**Լեո**, *Երկերի ժողովածու*, հտ. 2), **Asatrian G.**, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds*, "Iran and the Caucasus", vol. 13, 2009, pp. 1-57, **Margaryan, H.** The tradition of the origin of the Zakaryans in medieval Armenian historiography, *Patma-Banasirakan Handes*, 1992 № 2-3, pp. 139-152 (**Մարգարյան Հ.**, *Չաքարյանների ծագման ավանդությունը միջնադարյան հայ պատմագրության մեջ*, «ԳԲՀ»). See also: **Поладян А.**, *Курды в VII-X веках (по арабским источникам)*, Ереван, 1987, **Poladyan A.** *The Kurds in the era of the Abbasid Caliphate (X-XI centuries)*, Yerevan 1999. (**Փոլադյան Ա.**, *Քրդերը Աբբասյան խալիֆայության ժամանակաշրջանում (X-XI դդ.)*).

during the 1330s proved a decisive factor in the establishment of local Kurdish dominion, creating the opportunity for Kurdish tribes to assume sovereignty in the southern regions of the Armenian Highland. Immediately following the end of the Mongol period, Kurdish tribes established rule in Bitlis (the Rojki or Ruzki tribe) and around the basin of Lake Van (the Shamo or Shambo tribe).<sup>2</sup> It is not incidental that the oldest known Kurdish text, a 15th-century prayer in the Armenian alphabet, was written at Arjesh (Erciş) in the vicinity of Lake Van. This may be considered the earliest attestation of the knowledge and use of the Kurdish language in an Armenian environment.

After these regions' accession to the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, the local authority of Kurdish tribes was consolidated by the Ottoman administrative system. In the decentralized Ottoman system of governance, the administrative units called “*yurtluk*,” “*ocaklık*” and especially “*hükümet*”<sup>3</sup> would become the hereditary property of local Kurdish rulers—a circumstance which left an indelible stamp upon the historical fate of these regions and their inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> By the late Ottoman period, Armenians and Kurds constituted an absolute majority in the aforementioned regions (encompassing the southern and southwestern areas of the “Eastern Anatolia” and “Northeastern Anatolia” regions of the

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<sup>2</sup> During the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the domains of the Shamo or Shambo (Hakkari) Kurds extended over Julamerk, Gavar, Aghbak, Van, and Vostan. The domain of the Rojki encompassed Baghesh (Bitlis) Khlat (Ahlat), and the neighboring regions. For further information on these semi-autonomous Kurdish principalities, see Levon Khachikyan's treatment of the subject in: **Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the 15th century**, Part II (1451–1480), Comp. L. Khachikyan, Yerevan, 1958, pp. LIV-LVIII (**ԺԵ դարի հայերեն ձեռագրերի հիշատակարաններ**, Մասն երկրորդ). Concerning the Shambo Kurds see also **Khachatryan, A.** Regarding the problem of the formation of the Hakkari Kurdish principality (14th century), *The Countries and Peoples of the Middle East*, № 13, Kurdish Studies, Yerevan, 1985, p. 134 (**Խաչատրյան Ա.**, Հարցարի քրդական իշխանության կազմավորման հարցի շուրջ (ԺԵ դար), Մերձավոր և Միջին Արևելքի երկրներ և ժողովուրդներ).

<sup>3</sup> In the Ottoman administrative system, the districts known as “*yurtluk*,” “*ocaklık*” and “*hükemet*” differed from ordinary, classical Ottoman cantons by virtue of the various special privileges they enjoyed. See **Agoston, G.** “A Flexible Empire: Authority and its Limits on the Ottoman Frontiers”, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9, 1 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 15-31.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding relations between the Kurdish emirs and the Ottoman central authorities see: **Özçoşar, İ.** Sultan Ve Mir: Osmanlı Kürt İlişkilerine Giriş, Osmanlı Devleti Ve Kürtler, edit. İbrahim Özçoşar-Shahab Vali, İstanbul, 2017, pp. 9-35.

modern-day Republic of Turkey), with the Turkish demographic element being practically inconsiderable, sometimes expressed only in the presence of Ottoman officials. These areas also were home to significant Assyrian and Yezidi minorities.

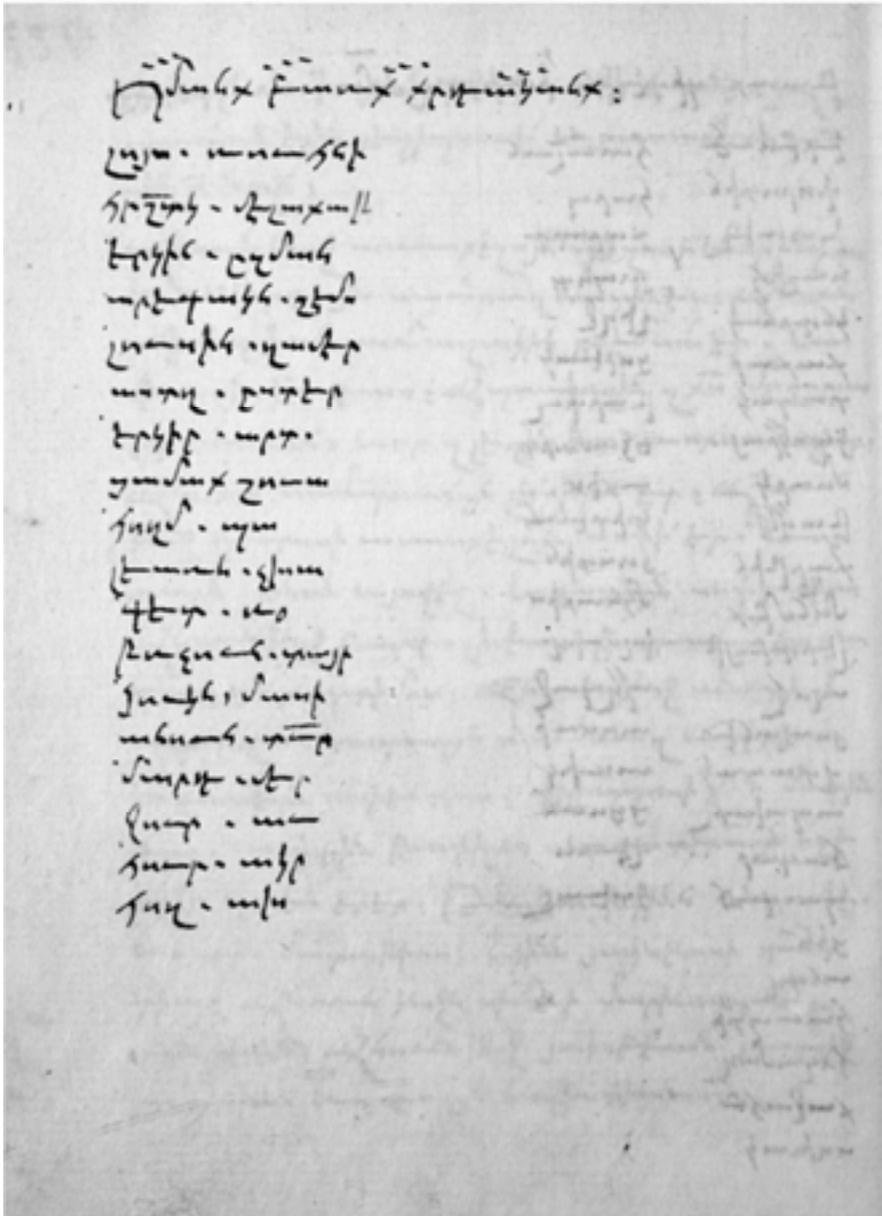
It was only in one small belt of the general region of Armenian and Kurdish habitation that the local Armenian population became Kurdish-speaking. Cut off from the centers of Armenian spiritual life and constituting isolated islands in a Kurdish sea, these Armenians gradually forwent the use of their native language and adopted the idiom of their surroundings.

Naturally, the process of forgetting Armenian and adopting the Kurdish language required a considerable length of time. By the early 20th century, the Kurdish-speaking character of certain districts was regarded as “having taken root over the course of centuries.”<sup>5</sup> In an 1806 book concerning the Tatik district of Bitlis, Ghukas Inchichian writes that “they speak Kurdish, having forgotten Armenian.”<sup>6</sup> Since Tatik constituted the northern extremity of the Kurdish-speaking Armenian regions, it is possible to say in all confidence that the more southern regions had also become entirely Kurdish-speaking at least by the time of Inchichian’s writing. The fact of the matter is that, by the beginning of the 19th century, these Armenian-populated districts were already entirely Kurdish-speaking, in the strict sense of the word—Armenian speakers were simply nowhere to be found.

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<sup>5</sup> **For the Kurdish-Speaking Armenians**, Farghin, *Azatamart*, Constantinople, 1911, № 641, p. 3. (**Քրտախօս Հայերուն Համար**, Ֆարդին, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>6</sup> **Inchichian, Gh.** *Geography of the Four Parts of the World: Asia, Europe, Africa and America*, vol. I, Venice, 1806, p. 180. (**Ինճիճեան Ղ.**, Աշխարհագրութիւն Չորից Մասանց Աշխարհի՝ Ասիոյ, Եւրոպիոյ, Ափրիկոյ և Ամերիկոյ, Մասն Առաջին. Ասիա, հտ. Ա.).



Attempted composition of an Armenian-Kurdish dictionary,  
MM Ms № 771, 18th century

It is necessary, at this juncture, to provide a terminological clarification. In saying “Kurdish” we refer in the first instance to the

Kurmanji language; therefore the term “Kurdish-speaking” may be understood to mean “Kurmanji-speaking.” In referring to “Kurdish-speaking Armenians” we mean that portion of the Armenian population which had forgotten the Armenian language and spoke only Kurdish. With respect to the process by which Armenians became Kurmanji-speaking, consideration should also be made of the Yezidi communities which periodically existed in close proximity to the Kurdish-speaking Armenians, particularly in the regions of Sghert and Diyarbekir.

One central concern of this monograph is to clarify the boundaries of Kurdish-speaking Armenian habitation during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Insofar as our discussion pertains to the late Ottoman Era (from the 19th century until the Armenian Genocide), we will base our presentation of Kurdish-speaking Armenian districts on the Ottoman administrative divisions of this same period. Drawing upon the information presented in a wide variety of sources, we have reconstructed a demographic picture of Kurdish-Armenian provinces, cities, and clusters of villages, indicating the extent of their Armenian population.

In certain cases, sources present conflicting information regarding the predominance of the Kurdish or Armenian language in a given region. We have considered it proper to extend our review to these “disputed regions” as well, undertaking as far as possible to understand and reconstruct the linguistic mosaic once extant in these areas.

However much the Kurdish-speaking Armenian districts may have presented the appearance of isolated communities, they did not fail to take part in broader trends affecting of the Ottoman Empire; accordingly, the history of Kurdish-speaking Armenians must be examined both in the overarching context of the Ottoman Empire and its eastern provinces, as well in relation to the particular situation of Western (Ottoman) Armenian communities. This monograph dedicates particular attention to the identity of Kurdish-speaking Armenians, their self-description and description by outsiders, and conceptions of this community in Armenian-speaking and foreign circles. We simultaneously examine the ideological ferment among Western Armenians during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the definition and re-definition of their collective identity, and attempt to locate the place of the Kurdish-speaking Armenian within these general currents.

The third section of the monograph describes the inception and course of various initiatives to teach the Armenian language to Kurdish-speaking Armenians, their motives, and their religious and national components. We have singled out two comparatively major, large-scale efforts to this end. The first such effort, called the “Kurdistan Mission” (*Krdstani misia* or *Krdistani gorts*), was undertaken by in the 1860s by Armenian Protestants living in the regions of Tigranakert (Diyarbakir) and Kharpert and having an immediate familiarity with Kurdish-speaking Armenian communities. The second initiative was linked to an educational organization based in Constantinople, the United Armenian Society, (*Hayots' miats'yal ênkerut'tyun*), which founded primary schools, academies and other provincial educational institutions for the benefit of the Kurdish-speaking Armenians of Tigranakert and Sghert.

One consequence of the prolonged interrelation between Armenians and Kurds was the emergence of Kurdish manuscript and, later, printed literature in the Armenian alphabet. The concluding section of this book presents for the first time a comprehensive bibliographic catalogue of Kurdish-language books printed in the Armenian alphabet, along with details unearthed about the circumstances of their publication and certain observations regarding their linguistic-stylistic features.

It is necessary to emphasize that although a large part of the Kurdish-speaking Armenian population was massacred and deported during the Armenian Genocide, Kurdish-speaking Armenians constituted the one segment of the Western Armenian population that continued to live, more or less collectively, in their previous places of habitation until the 1930s, and in certain cases (i.e., in Kharzan-Bsharik) until the beginning of the 1940s. Gradually departing the Republic of Turkey mainly in the 1930s, Kurdish-speaking Armenians later took up residence in Syria (primarily in Qamishli). After the Second World War, from the 1940s until the 1960s, a part of the Kurdish-speaking Armenian population established itself by stages in Soviet Armenia. Descendants of Kurdish-speaking Armenians remaining in the vicinity of Kharzan (Garzan, Kurtalan), Bsharik (Beşiri) and Sghert (Siirt) lived within the bounds of Kurdish or Islamic identity,

although some maintained the memory of their Armenian origin.<sup>7</sup> Massacres of Kurdish-speaking Armenians during the Armenian Genocide and their post-genocide history are, however, beyond the scope of this work.<sup>8</sup>

We may permit ourselves to observe that there exists to date no comprehensive scholarly work dedicated to Kurdish Armenians as such, aside from Hrachya Acharyan's brief discussion regarding the area of their habitation.

In sum, this monograph is an attempt to reconstruct the history of Kurdish-speaking Armenians, an inquiry whose central concerns are to outline the linguistic micro-landscape in which they resided, to examine the particular features of Kurdish-speaking Armenian identity, to determine the place of Kurdish-speaking Armenians within the broader frame of Armenian identity, and to analyze Kurdish-language books printed in the Armenian alphabet.

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<sup>7</sup> There is a pressing need for scholarship concerning the identity and history of Kurdicized or Islamized Armenians who remained in their previous areas of habitation after the Armenian Genocide.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding massacres of Kurdish-speaking Armenians, see **Kevorkian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide, A complete History*, London, New York, 2011, pp. 339-40, 367-368. Regarding massacres in the district of Sghert, see: **The Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey: Survivor Testimonies, Collected Documents**, Vol. II, Bitlis Province, Yerevan, 2012, pp. 107-121. (Հայոց ցեղասպանությունը Օսմանյան Թուրքիայում, Վերապրածների վկայություններ, Փաստաթղթերի ժողովածու, հտ. II, Բիթլիսի նահանգ).

# Chapter I

## KURDISH-SPEAKING ARMENIAN PROVINCES

*“It is our Kurdish-Armenian populace, the Armenian-Kurdish milieu, found in Mesopotamia and along the entire expansive and fertile Tigris river valley, who are deprived of their mother tongue—as in Kharzan, Nakhiban, Sghert, Rēdvan, Slivan, Bsheri, Zērēkan, Baravan, Shervan, Bohtan, and elsewhere.”<sup>9</sup>*

### **Kurdish as a lingua franca**

During the late Ottoman period, the population of the Armenian-inhabited vilayets of the Ottoman empire, particularly Bitlis (Baghesh), Van, Diyarbekir (Tigranakert) and, to an extent, Erzurum (Karin) as well, was comprised primarily of Armenians and Kurds. As the Marseille newspaper *Armenia* stated 1907: “It must be understood that the population of Turkish Armenia (*Tachkahayastan*) consists absolutely of Armenians and Kurds [...] Although there are also Turks in a few central cities, their number is comparatively small and they are for the most part government officials.”<sup>10</sup> In his notes on an 1888 journey to “Turkish Armenia,” (*T’yurk’ats’ Hayastan*) Levon Sargsyants observed that north of Bayburt (Baberd) and Ispir (Sper), the populations of Turks, Greeks, and Laz

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<sup>9</sup> The text reads “Bontan,” evidently a misprint for “Bohtan.” E., **The Necessity of a Kurdish Literature**, for the Kurdish-speaking Armenian regions themselves as well. *Azatomart*, 1910, № 266, p. 2. (Է., Քրտական Գրականության Մը Պէտքը, Նաեւ Բուն Իսկ Քրտախօս Հայ Շրջանակներու Համար, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>10</sup> **Vahe**, *The District of Aghpak, Armenia*, Marseille, 1907, № 19, p. 1. (Վահէ, Աղբակի Գաւառը, «Արմէնիա»).

increased, while Armenians lived primarily in the towns and cities.<sup>11</sup> Contrarily, to the south of Erzurum, the number of Turks decreased and they were found exclusively in cities, while the population of Armenians and Kurds became more substantial in the Bitlis and Van vilayets.<sup>12</sup> A foreign travel writer makes a very similar observation: “From Erzurum to Persia, as well as in the historical lowland of Mesopotamia, Armenia is truly divided between Kurds and Armenians...The Christians have taken the lowlands, while the Kurds are perched in the mountains.”<sup>13</sup> Taking this circumstance into account, Byuzant Kechian (1859-1927), the editor-in-chief of the Constantinople newspaper *Byuzantion* coined the expression “Armeno-Kurdish provinces.”<sup>14</sup> The belt of “Armeno-Kurdish” provinces, beginning from the border regions of the Russian and Ottoman Empires, from Alashkert-Bayazet, extended south to the Gordyene (Corduene) mountains and Mesopotamia. From there, it continued on to Tigranakert and further, in the western direction, reached Karin, and almost as far as Kharpert and Yerznka, encompassing the watershed of Lake Van, the plains of Mush, and the ancient province of Aghdznik (Arzanene). Turkish was a language seldom used in these regions, where the idiom of everyday communication, the *lingua franca*, was primarily Kurdish. In many provinces of the Empire, Turkish was considered “a language as foreign and unfamiliar as Chinese.”<sup>15</sup> In 1914, for instance, when Ottoman soldiers

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<sup>11</sup> Sargsyants employs the term *Tachik*, a word which, similarly to “Turk” in English, has traditionally been used by Armenians to refer not only to Turkic peoples, but also to Muslims in general. In this case, Sargsyants is referring to Ottoman Turks. It should also be observed that terms such as *Tyurkats Hayastan*, *Trkahayastan*, and *Tachkahayastan*, all of which may be translated “Turkish Armenia,” connoted the six Armenian vilayets of the Ottoman Empire: Van, Erzurum (Karin), Mamuret-ul-Aziz (Kharpert), Sivas, Bitlis (Baghesh), Diyarbekir (Tigranakert).

<sup>12</sup> **Sargsyants, L.** A Visit to Turkish Armenia (Memoirs of an Armenian Tourist), Tiflis, 1890, p. 224. (**Սարգսեանց Լ.**, Այց Թիւրքաց Հայաստանին (Հայ Տուրիստի Յիշողութիւններից)).

<sup>13</sup> **The Armenian Problem**, doubled taxes, Kurdish banditry, *Ardzagank*, Tiflis, 1895, № 48, p. 2. (**Հայկական խնդիր**, Կրկնակի Հարկեր, Քիւրդ Աւազակ, «Արձագանք»). Translated from *The Daily Telegraph*.

<sup>14</sup> **Kechian, B.** A new phase of life in the Armenian and Kurdish districts, *Byuzantion*, Constantinople, 1914, № 5334, p. 1. (**Բիւզանդ-Քէչեան**, Կեանքի Նոր Երջանը Հայեւքուրդ Գաւառներուն Մէջ, «Բիւզանդիոն»).

<sup>15</sup> **Soghigian, G.M.** The persecution of the Armenian language, *Yeprat*, Kharpert, 1911, № 5, p. 68. (**Կ. Մ. Սողիկեան**, Հալածանքը Հայերէնի Դէմ, «Եփրատ»).

entered the town of Hayni in the Diyarbekir vilayet, and said in Turkish that a general mobilization (*seferberlik*) had been announced, the local Armenians did not understand the word.<sup>16</sup>

The rural population of Vaspurakan,<sup>17</sup> then, was almost incapable of speaking Turkish.<sup>18</sup> This was an entirely natural state of affairs, since Turks did not live in this region, nor were there government schools. The British parliamentarian and traveler H.F.B. Lynch (1862-1913) was apparently astonished to find that there was practically no trace of Turkish habitation in either the city of Van or the surrounding districts. Among the city's Muslim residents he identified six families or clans, each consisting of about 50 persons, as having Turkish origin. These families primarily constituted the local Ottoman administration.<sup>19</sup> Vahan Papazian (1876-1973, also known by the pseudonym "Goms," "Count") a prominent Armenian Revolutionary Federation activist in the Van-Vaspurakan area, wrote that there were very few Turks in the province, meaning the districts surrounding the city of Van.<sup>20</sup> On the eve of the Genocide, according to Joseph Orbeli, only three or four families Turkish officials resided in the town of Moks (Müküs).<sup>21</sup> Naturally, neither the local Armenians nor the Kurds understood Turkish. Orbeli concludes that any description of the Armenian language spoken in Moks would be incomplete without a study of the local Kurdish dialect.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> **Zhamgochian, P. G.** *Hayni*, Beirut, 1952, p. 282. (Ճամկոչեան Բ. Կ., Հայնի). In Hayni, proficiency in Turkish was sufficient to enjoy the reputation of a well-educated individual. See *ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> The name of Vaspurakan, a province of Ancient Armenia and the center of an eponymous kingdom ruled by the Artsruni dynasty during the 9th-11th centuries, remains in currency among Armenians to denote the regions surrounding Lake Van.

<sup>18</sup> "The villagers of Vaspurakan are almost fully incapable of speaking Turkish, and the town-dwellers [know] very little." **S. Ch.** *Revolutionary Vaspurakan, Part II, Hairenik*, Boston, 1906, № 31, p. 2. (Ս. Չ., Յեղափոխական Վասպուրականը, Բ., «Հայրենիք»). Arabic was the primary language of the town of Mardin, while Kurdish was spoken in the marketplaces and Turkish used only in the context of government matters. See **The Missionary Herald: Containing The Proceedings Of The American Board Of Commissioners For Foreign Missions, With A View Of Other Benevolent Operations, For The Year 1875**, vol. LXXI (71), Cambridge, 1875, p. 291.

<sup>19</sup> **H. F. B. Lynch**, *Armenia, Travels and Studies*, vol. II, London, 1901, pp. 83-84.

<sup>20</sup> **Papazian, V.** *My Memoirs*, vol. I, Boston, 1950, p. 185. (Փափազեան Վ., Իմ Յուշերը, հտ. Ա).

<sup>21</sup> **Орбели И.А.**, *Фольклор и быт Мокса*, Москва, 1982, с. 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 42.

Within this broad context, large towns constituted the exception. For instance, while the villagers of Vaspurakan did not know Turkish, the residents of the city of Van more or less spoke the language.<sup>23</sup> In Mush and Baghesh, there also existed a certain Turkish population apart from the local Turkish Ottoman officialdom.<sup>24</sup> The residence of Turks in these cities is primarily explained by the presence of Ottoman officials, as well as by the phenomenon of Turkification among the Kurds. Lynch alludes to the rejection of Kurdishness and assimilation to the dominant Ottoman Turkish element among non-tribal Kurds in Van.<sup>25</sup> The Dashnak Ruben (Ruben Ter-Minasyan, 1882-1951) who operated in Mush, Sasun, and the surrounding areas, likewise observes that in Duran-Bardzravandak (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's party designation for the aforementioned region), the Turks (*Tachikner*) were primarily Kurdish in origin, and lived in the large towns of Mush, Bitlis, and Khlat, as well as in one other village.<sup>26</sup> Their everyday language was Kurdish-inflected Turkish. The presence of Turkified Kurds in the city of Sghert also did not escape Ruben's discerning gaze.<sup>27</sup>

The Armenians of the city of Tigranakert knew Turkish as well, but outside of the city limits the language was not widely used. "Among all the natives of Slivan and Bsherek, as far as Sghert and Jezir, as far as Mount Dorshangar and Amida [Diyarbekir], there were not ten people who knew the Turkish language. There was no one who spoke Turkish."<sup>28</sup> Particularly in Kurdish-speaking Armenian districts, Turkish was an incomprehensible

<sup>23</sup> **S. Ch.** Revolutionary Vaspurakan, Part II, *Hairenik*, Boston, 1906, № 31, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> See **Marzbed**, Baghesh: descriptive and demographic notes, *Azatamart*, 1914, № 1490, p. 1. (**Մարզպետ**, Բաղէշ, Տեղեկագրական Եւ Ազգագրական Ծանօթութիւններ, «Ազատամարտ»). See also **Kaprielian, M.** Baghesh and Mush, *Avetaber*, Constantinople, 1909, № 46, pp. 998-999. (**Միհրան Գաբրիէլեան**, Բաղէշ Եւ Մուշ, «Աւետաբեր»).

<sup>25</sup> **H. F. B. Lynch**, vol. II, p. 84.

<sup>26</sup> **Ruben**, *Memoirs of an Armenian Revolutionary*, vol. III: The Province of Taron (1906). Third edition, Tehran, 1982, p. 11. (**Ռուբէն**, Հայ Յեղափոխականի Մը Յիշատակները, հւ. Գ, Տարօնի Աշխարհը (1906), Գ. հրատարակութիւն).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> **Collected Memoirs**, vol. 14, Yerevan, 2011, p. 282. (Հուշագրական ժառանգություն, հւ. 14).

language: “beyond Tigranakert, the Kurdish-speaking people in a great many districts do not understand a single word of Turkish.”<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, Armenians in the greater Armenian-Kurdish area were proficient in Kurdish: “Without exception, all Armenians living among the Kurds know the Kurdish language.”<sup>30</sup> According to the travel notes of Manuel Mirakhorian, in Aghbak, (a *kaza* or subdistrict within the southeastern part of the Van vilayet from 1889 until 1923), the local Armenians knew Kurdish well, and many could not be distinguished from Kurds at all if one did not overhear their Armenian speech.<sup>31</sup> In the mountain province of Sasun, the population likewise consisted of Armenians and Kurds: “In these places, there is no other element apart from the Kurds: neither Assyrian, nor Yezidi, nor Turk. The people of Sasun see Turks only in those exceptional cases when the government sends its functionaries and officials.”<sup>32</sup> We read in an 1894 issue of Tbilisi’s *Mshak* periodical that the Armenians and Kurds of Sasun had assimilated one another’s languages, with Armenians speaking Kurdish and Kurds speaking Armenian. The article’s plainly well-informed author states that “even today, many members of the Kurdish *ashirets* of Sasun continue to speak Armenian.”<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, natives of Mush and the neighboring provinces who migrated to Aparan in Eastern Armenia amid the upheavals of the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829, continued to speak Kurdish. An 1872 issue of *Mshak* describes the residents of Aparan in the following terms: “this people entirely resembles the Kurds, in their dress, in their lives and, in many places, in their language. Although the Kurdish language is not widely in use, all of them know it well, and have even given a Kurdish note to their pronunciation of Armenian.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> **Soghigian, G. M.** The persecution of the Armenian language, *Yeprat*, Kharpert, 1911, № 5, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> **E.**, The Necessity of a Kurdish Literature, *Azatomart*, 1910, № 266, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> **Mirakhorian, M.** A Descriptive Journey in the Armenian-inhabited Districts of Eastern Turkey, Part II, Constantinople, 1885, p. 55. (**Միրախորեան Մ.**, Եկարագրական Ուղեւորութիւն Ի Հայաստանի Գաւառս Արեւելեան Տանկաստանի, Մասն Բ).

<sup>32</sup> **Kalantar, A.** Sasun, Tiflis, 1904, p. 22. (**Ա. Քալանթար**, Սասուն).

<sup>33</sup> **V—tsi**, Sasun, *Mshak*, 1894, № 106, p. 1. (**Վ—ցի**, Սասուն, «Մշակ»).

<sup>34</sup> **Pahlavuni**, Letter from Yerevan, *Mshak*, 1872, № 17, p. 2. (**Պահլաւունի**, Կամակ Երևանից, «Մշակ»).

It was natural as well that Kurds in the general belt of Armenian-Kurdish regions, would understand and speak Armenian. A Greek doctor from Constantinople whose professional duties had carried him to Erzurum, Mush, and Van during the second half of the 19th century, and who himself learned Armenian, states that Armenians made up the greater part of the population in the vilayets of Erzurum, Bitlis, and Van, so that other ethnic groups had no choice but to speak Armenian.<sup>35</sup> The Kurds of the Shego clan, who lived in Sasun, along with others such as the Balaki and the Bidri tribe (Eşîra Bîdrî), are referred to in period Armenian sources as “Armenian-speaking Kurds.”<sup>36</sup> We read that in the Khut district of Sasun “all of the resident Kurds, the Balak, the Khut, the Shego clan, and so on, all speak Armenian as freely as they do Kurdish.”<sup>37</sup> For this reason, the Kurds supposed that the Balak were Armenians and crypto-Christians, while the Armenians considered them to be Kurds and Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Kurds living in the mountainous parts of Aghbak did not speak Armenian, while those living in the plains of Aghbak did.<sup>39</sup> In certain villages of Bitlis, Kurds living among Armenians had even forgotten their mother tongue and become Armenian speakers.<sup>40</sup> Mkrtych Andranik, reporting on his travels in Dersim, writes that the local Kurds generally knew Armenian, and would speak it when they encountered an Armenian.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> **Sargsyants, L.** A Visit to Turkish Armenia, pp. 63-64.

<sup>36</sup> **Alboyadjian, A.** Armenian and Kurdish ethnic relations II, *Byuzantion*, 1913, № 4953, p. 1. (**Արշակ Ա. Ալբոյաճեան**, Հայ Եւ Քիւրտ Տեղագրական Յարաբերութիւններ, Բ., «Բիւզանդիոն»): “In the Tsovasar-Maratuk region of Sasun the Kurds speak Armenian and Arabic and do not know their own language.” **Ruben**, *Memoirs*, vol. III, pp. 23, 54.

<sup>37</sup> A Few Striking Facts Regarding ‘Khafirutyun,’ *Azatomart*, 1910, № 450, p. 1. (Մէկ Քանի Յայտուն Փաստեր Խաֆիրութեան Մասին, «Ազատամարտ»):

<sup>38</sup> **The World of Mush:** the Lorik people. *Luma*, Tiflis, 1897, № 2, p. 131. (**Մշոյ Աշխարհ**, Լորիկներ, «Լումայ»):

<sup>39</sup> **Epikian, S.** An Illustrated Dictionary of our Native Land, vol. 1, Venice, 1902, p. 94. (**Էփրիկեան Ս.**, Պատկերազարդ Բնաշխարհիկ Բառարան, հտ. 1):

<sup>40</sup> **Mko**, The District of Baghesh, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 35, p. 542. (**Մկօ**, Բաղէշ Գաւառը, «Արձագանք»):

<sup>41</sup> He is referring, in all probability, to the Zaza people. **Andranik, M.** *Dersim: Travels and Notes*, Tiflis, 1900, p. 199. (**Անդրանիկ, Մ.** Տէրսիմ, Ճանապարհորդութիւն Եւ Տեղագրութիւն). Regarding Kurdish tribes’ comprehension of the Mirakian Armenian dialect, see **Gaydzorig**, The natives of Dersim, *Banaser*, Paris, 1899, Vol. 1, № 1, p. 74). (**Կայձօռիկ**, Տէրսիմցիք, «Բանասեր», 1899, Հտ. Ա., Գիրք Ա):

It was possible in various other provinces to find Kurds who more or less understood Armenian. Mirakhorian met an Armenian-speaking Kurd during his travels in the area of Manazkert (Malazgirt).<sup>42</sup> In the village of Khëvner, Ruben was approached by a Kurd named Hasano who, seeing that the visitor did not know Kurdish, began to speak in broken Armenian.<sup>43</sup> The Kurdish chieftain Murtullah-Beg of Moks also read and wrote Armenian fairly competently, and spoke the Moks Armenian dialect.<sup>44</sup>

Returning to our main subject, we may observe that in the late Ottoman period there existed provinces where Armenians did not merely know Kurdish, but were Kurdish speakers in the strict sense, having forgotten their native Armenian. Regarding these Kurdish-speaking regions, Hrachya Acharyan writes the following: “Kurdish is a language widespread across Southern Armenia, but it has become native within only a small perimeter: this [encompasses] the villages of Khizan, the Kharzan and Shirvan subdistricts in the province of Baghesh, the subdistricts of Mufarghin or Slivan, Bsheri, and Bohtan in the Tigranakert province, and Samsat (ancient Samosata) in Cilicia, more than 100 villages in all.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Southern Armenian, Kurdistan, Kurdish Armenia**

Hrachya Acharyan’s summary correctly delineates the demographic boundaries of the Armenian world, insofar as the regions he identified were both the Armenian-populated areas of his time, and the southern regions of historical Armenia. Listing the Kurdish-speaking provinces identified by

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<sup>42</sup> **Mirakhorian, M.** A Descriptive Journey in the Armenian-inhabited Districts of Eastern Turkey, part III, Constantinople, 1885, p. 58. **Միրախորեան Մ.**, Նկարագրական Ուղեւորութիւն, Մասն Գ).

<sup>43</sup> **Ruben**, Memoirs of an Armenian Revolutionary, Vol. II: To the Land, Van, Lernapar, Taron. Third edition Tehran, 1982, p. 248. (**Ռուբէն**, Հայ Յեղափոխականի Մը Յիշատակները, հս. Բ, Դէպի Երկիր, (Վան, Լեռնապար, Տարօն), Գ. հրատարակութիւն)

<sup>44</sup> **Hafêz**, The mudir of Moks under the Constitution, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 227, p. 2. (**Հաֆէզ**, Մոկսի Միւտիքը Սահմանադրութեան Հովանիին Տակ, «Ազատամարտ»)). See also: **S.Z.**, Armenian-Kurdish relations, *Azatamart*, № 613, p. 1. (**Ս. Չ.**, Հայ-Թիւրք Յարաբերութիւնները, «Ազատամարտ»)). **Papazian, V.** My Memoirs, p. 573.

<sup>45</sup> **Acharyan, H.** Foreign-speaking Armenians, *Emin Ethnographic Anthology*, vol. VIII, 1911, p. 33. (**Աճառեան Հ.**, Օտարախօս Հայերը, Էմինեան Ազգագրական Ժողովածու, հս. Ը).

Acharyan, Kharzan (Kurtalan) was historical Aghdzink (Arzanene), Shirvan was Mokka', and Eruh (or at least certain portions of it) was part of the province of Corduene. Both these historical provinces and contemporary Kurdish-speaking regions were customarily referred to as "Southern Armenia" or as the southern part of Armenia. For instance, Constantinople's *Masis* newspaper stated in 1881: "In various provinces of Southern Armenia, there are thousands of native Armenians, surrounded by Kurds on every side, who are on the point of gradually becoming Kurdicized."<sup>46</sup> A letter from Constantinople to the Tbilisi newspaper *Ardzagank* refers to "the Armenian people mingled with the Kurds in Dikranagerd, Sghert, Baghesh, and in this southern region in general."<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere we read that "in the southern part of Armenia, Sghert and so on, the Armenians are Kurdicized"<sup>48</sup> or that "a raiding party of Kurds set foot on the southern borders of Vaspurakan and annihilated the populous Armenian provinces [sic] of Bohtan, Khizan, and Sparkert."<sup>49</sup>

In particular, the extreme southerly parts of the Armenian Highland, as well as those adjacent to Diyarbekir, bore the name of "Kurdistan" in the Armenian popular imagination; here, the Kurds lived in large numbers, and had serious political influence. The Kurdish-speaking Armenian provinces also entered into this general region, being equated in the Armenian conception with Kurdistan itself. Ghukas Inchichian (1758-1833) observed that the southern portion of Greater Armenia (Mets Hayk') was widely called "Kurdistan."<sup>50</sup> Mgrdich Dikranian (1815-1872), the prelate of the Palu diocese, also styled himself the prelate of "Kurdistan," and termed Kurdish-speaking Armenian children the "children of Kurdistan."<sup>51</sup> The

<sup>46</sup> **Kurdish Armenians**, *Mshak*, 1881, № 23, p. 2. (Reprinted from *Masis*). (Քուրդահայք, «Մշակ»). London's *Hunchak* newspaper reported in 1889 that "During recent months the bandit chief Musa Bek, together with his band, has committed the most barbaric robberies." **Armenian Life**, *Hunchak*, London, 1889, № 3, p. 15. (Հայոց Կեանքը, «Հնչակ»).

<sup>47</sup> **Vaghinak**, Letter from Constantinople, *Ardzagank*, 1887, № 3, p. 42. (Վաղինակ, Նամակ Կ. Պոլսից, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>48</sup> **A.-Ashot**, Tempests in Skulls IV, *Hairenik*, Boston, 1904, № 272, p. 1. (Ա.-Աշոտ, Գանկերու Մէջ Փոթորիկներ, IV, «Հայրենիք»).

<sup>49</sup> **S. Ch.** Revolutionary Vaspurakan, Part II, *Hairenik*, Boston, № 31, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> **Ichichean, Gh.** Geography, vol. I, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, the following book title: **Dikranian, M., Rev.** Kurdish and Armenian Alphabet Primer composed for the needs of the children of Kurdistan by the Reverend Mkrdich Dikranian, prelate of Palu and Kurdistan, Constantinople, 1860. (Այրբենարան

same usage was more pronounced among Armenian Evangelicals, perhaps in imitation of foreign missionaries accustomed to refer to “Kurdistan.” Concerning the settlement of Rëndvan in the subdistrict of Kharzan, the Evangelical newspaper *Avetaber* stated: “the town called Rëndvan is in the middle of Kurdistan, as [the region’s] center.”<sup>52</sup> The same terminology is employed in a later letter addressed from Rëndvan to the paper *Azatamart*: “Our birthplace is a small town in the barren corners of Kurdistan.”<sup>53</sup>

It was sometimes difficult to geographically distinguish these southern regions of Armenia from Kurdistan; for this reason, Southern Armenia and Kurdistan were often described as the same region of the Ottoman Empire,<sup>54</sup> or mentioned in concert with one another: “The United Societies and the Khizan Society continue to carry out exceedingly salutary work among [our] poor and ignorant countrymen in Armenia and Kurdistan.”<sup>55</sup> In another case we read: “These carpets are made in the southern parts of Armenia, as well as in Kurdistan.”<sup>56</sup> It was unsurprising, then, that these closely associated names would become amalgamated into the term “Kurdish Armenia” (*Krdahayastan*),<sup>57</sup> or that a view would emerge that Ancient Armenia had become demographically transformed into modern-day Kurdish-Armenia.<sup>58</sup>

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Քիւրտերէն եւ Հայերէն, Ալիֆայէնիւզ Գուրմաննի ու Արմէնի, յօրինեալ ի պէտս մանկանցն Քիւրտիստանցոց ի Տ. Մկրտիչ վարդապետէ Տիգրանեան յառաջնորդէ Քիւրտիստանու եւ Բաղուայ, Կ. Պոլիս, 1860). It must be borne in mind that during this period (1847-1867), Dikranian’s diocese constituted a part of an Ottoman administrative unit called the Kurdistan eyalet.

<sup>52</sup> **Letters**, The work of the Gospel in Kurdistan, *Avetaber*, 1887, № 3, p. 22. (Նամակներ, Աւետարանի Գործն Ի Քրդաստան, «Աւետարեր»).

<sup>53</sup> **A Native of Rndvan, Fr. Garabed Muradian**, A Silent Corner of Kurdistan, *Azatamart*, 1912, № 987, p. 3. (Բնիկ Ռնտուանցի, Կարապետ քին. Մուրատեան, Քիւրտիստանի Խուլ Անկիւնէ Մը, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>54</sup> **Nahigian, Kh.** The future of Turkey, *Yeprat*, № 10, p. 166. (Նահիկեան Խ. Գ., Տանկաստանի Ապագան, «Եփրատ»).

<sup>55</sup> **Masis**, Constantinople, 1884, № 3750, p. 531. («Մասիս», Կ. Պոլիս, 1884).

<sup>56</sup> **Noradounkian, M. H.** Carpet-marking, *Masis*, № 3904, p. 400. (Միքայէլ Յ. Նորատունկեան, Գորգագործութիւն, «Մասիս»).

<sup>57</sup> In a letter from Mush, the United Society school inspector Margos Natanian reported that the ancient province of Aghdznik was locally referred to as *Krdahayastan*, a term which he also employs himself. See **Natanian, M.** A View of the Province of Aghdznik, *Masis*, 1886, № 3818, p. 868. (Մարկոս Նաթանեան, Տեսութիւն Մը Աղձնեաց Նահանգին Վրայ, «Մասիս»).

<sup>58</sup> Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, ROS 715, p. 24.

# VILAYET OF BITLIS (BAGHESH)

## District of Sghert (Siirt)

*The sanjak (district) of Sghert within the Bitlis vilayet (province), contained several areas densely populated with Kurdish-speaking Armenians. These were the subdistricts (kazas) of Kharzan, Eruh (Bohtan), and, to a lesser extent, Shirvan and the city of Sghert itself. For this reason, the Armenian press at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th customarily referred to Armenians living in the southern subdistricts of the Bitlis vilayet as the “Kurdish-speaking Armenians of Sghert.” Presented in this section are the Armenian-speaking subdistricts and communities of the Bitlis vilayet.*

From the time it fell under Ottoman rule until the 19th century, Sghert was governed by the yurtluk-ocaklık system, meaning that it was left to be governed under “Kurdish laws” by Kurdish tribes, in exchange for the rendering of military services. The district’s special administrative status may be regarded as one major cause of the linguistic assimilation of the local Armenian population. In 1637, Sghert was briefly joined to the Van eyalet; subsequently it remained within the structure of the Diyarbekir eyalet until the 19th century.<sup>59</sup> On December 13, 1847 an edict was published in *Takvim-i Vekayi* regarding the establishment of the Kurdistan eyalet, which existed until 1867. During this period Sghert was a *liva* (or district) of the Diyarbekir vilayet.<sup>60</sup> In 1880, the province of Sghert contained the following districts together with their subordinate *nahiyes* (groups of villages).<sup>61</sup>

1. Subdistrict of Rëndvan, including the Beshiri nahiye.
2. Subdistrict of Shirvan, including the nahiyes of Zërki, Khizan, and Rëzki.

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<sup>59</sup> **Babaoğlu, R., Çelik, A.** Cumhuriyet İdaresine Geçiş Sürecinde Siirt’te Demografik Göstergeler, *Journal of History School* (JOHS), 2018, Year 11, Issue XXXIV, p. 532.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> In the Ottoman administrative system, especially post-Tanzimat, a nahiye was a discrete administrative unit for areas smaller than a subdistrict. In Armenian it was generally translated *gyughakhumb*, “village-group.”

3. Subdistrict of Eruh, including the nahiyes of Dergul and Pervari.
4. Subdistrict of Sasun, including the nahiyes of Kharzan and Khiyan.<sup>62</sup>

In 1881, Sghert was removed from the Diyarbekir vilayet and joined to the Bitlis vilayet instead.<sup>63</sup> At that time Sghert encompassed the areas of Eruh, Rëndvan, Kharzan, Shirvan, and Pervari.<sup>64</sup> Soon thereafter, Rëndvan was joined to Kharzan once and for all, so that the district of Sghert comprised the subdistricts of Kharzan, Shirvan, Eruh, and Pervari.<sup>65</sup> We will take this late Ottoman-era administrative division as a framework for discussing the Kurdish-speaking Armenian population of the regions in question.



Map from “Houshamadyan”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Çelik, A. XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Siirt Sancağının İdari Ve Sosyo-ekonomik Durumu, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Siirt, 2019, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> Babaoğlu, R., Çelik, A. Cumhuriyet İdaresine Geçiş Sürecinde Siirt’te Demografik Göstergeler, s. 532. A dictionary of Ottoman toponyms dates Sghert’s transfer from Diyarbekir to Bitlis to 1880. See **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, Hazırlayan Tahir Sezen, Ankara, 2017, p. 683.

<sup>64</sup> Babaoğlu, R., Çelik, A. Cumhuriyet İdaresine Geçiş Sürecinde Siirt’te Demografik Göstergeler, s. 533.

<sup>65</sup> Çelik, A. XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Siirt Sancağının İdari Ve Sosyo-ekonomik Durumu, s. 40.

<sup>66</sup> See <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-bitlispaghesht.html>.

## THE SUBDISTRICT OF KHARZAN

(Kurtalan, Khërzan, Garzan)

*“... half the inhabitants are Kurds, and half are Armenians, who are indistinguishable from the Turks [i.e. Muslims], since the Armenians wear the same white cap as the Turks do and do not pay taxes as they do in other parts of Kurdistan.”<sup>67</sup>*

Kharzan<sup>68</sup> (in ancient times Arzn or Arzan), was a canton (*gavar*) of the Aghdznik province of historical Armenia, and the probable site of the capital city of Tigranakert constructed by King Tigran the Great (95-55 B.C.). Thomas Sinclair has convincingly substantiated Heinrich Kiepert’s hypothesis regarding Tigranakert’s location in the ruins of Arzan.<sup>69</sup> Vazgen Ghazaryan has also defended the theory of Tigranakert’s location at Arzan, considering its “most serious support” to be the discovery of an amphitheater 80 meters in diameter at the site.<sup>70</sup> The Kurds referred to the ruins near the settlement of Bozhüyük by the name of Kharabazhar (lit. “city of ruins”), which is striking in the context of trying to place the royal capital. This popular toponym may be viewed as a testament to the lingering memory of the ancient capital among Kurdish-speaking Armenians.

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<sup>67</sup> **Ichichean, Gh.** Geography, vol. I, p. 232.

<sup>68</sup> It is also called Gharzan in Armenian sources. In 1938, as a result of the policy of Turkification of toponyms, Kharzan was renamed Kurtalan, a name it bears until today. Kurtalan is now an ilçe (district) in the province of Siirt, with a population of about 60,000.

<sup>69</sup> The ruins of Arzan may be seen in the following video: Antik Erzen Kenti Kalıntıları. (Amfi Tiyatro- Kale Surları) Siirt-Kurtalan Bozhöyük Köyü, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhXIMGlat3M>.

<sup>70</sup> **Sinclair, T.** The Site of Tigranocerta (I), RĒArm., t. 25, 1994-1995, pp. 183-253, **Sinclair, T.** The Site of Tigranocerta (II), RĒArm., t. 26, 1996-1997, pp. 51-117, See also **Ghazaryan, V.** Concerning the site of the capital of Tigranakert, Lectures from the second international conference on Armenia and Eastern Christian Civilization, Yerevan, 2017, pp. 153-164. (**Ղազարյան Վ.**, Տիգրանակերտ մայրաքաղաքի տեղորոշման շուրջ, Հայաստանը եւ Արեւելաքրիստոնեական քաղաքակրթությունը Բ միջազգային գիտաժողովի զեկույցներ).



As supplementary evidence for this theory, Ghazaryan presents Russian maps from 1903 and 1913, in which a Christian-populated village named Kyrda (Кырда) is marked in the place of the ruins of Arzan. He does not consider it out of the question that this is a corrupted version of the name “Tigranakert,” preserving the final syllable.<sup>71</sup> The view that the name “Kyrda” has no connection to the word “Kurd” and may be considered a corruption of the name “Tigranakert” is supported by the fact that there was a village of Kurdish-speaking Armenians and Assyrians in the same area, among the ruins of Arzan, known by the name of Kerdashen.<sup>72</sup> We find the same village referred to also by the form “Grtashen.”<sup>73</sup> In all probability, Kyrda, Gertashen and Krtashen are names of the same village. The

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

<sup>72</sup> **National Archives of Armenia** (NAA), fund 412, register 1, file 1856, p. 10. (Hereafter NAA, 412, 1, 1856). (Հայաստանի ազգային արխիվ (ՀԱԱ), ֆ. 412, ց. 1, գ. 1856, թ. 10).

<sup>73</sup> **Surhandak**, Letter from Turkey, *Armenia*, 1896, № 80, p. 1. (Մուրհանդակ, Նամակ Թիւրքիաէն, «Արմենիա»).

researcher Tigran Martirosyan also considers the name Godeşin Tepe (Godeşin Hill, see image above) to be derived from “Gerdashen.”<sup>74</sup>

Modern-day descendants of Kurdish-speaking Armenians from Kharzan living in the village of Darakert in Ararat Province refer to their ancestral province as Khərzan. Natives of Kharzan also occasionally referred to the province, or a portion of it, by the name of its most influential Kurdish tribe, the Rashkotan, whom they identified with the Armenian noble house of Rshtuni. In his unpublished memoirs “A brief sketch of the customs, occupations, character and migrations of the clan,” the Kharzan native Aram Sargsyan (1937-2021) writes: “In 1894 grandfather Sargis moved with his family to the village of Zëvëng in the Rshtunyats (Rshkota) district.”<sup>75</sup>

Gegham Badalyan writes regarding Kharzan that “although by administrative division the district was included in the sanjak of Sghert, it was traditionally regarded as a constituent part of Sasun (the Sasun Plain, or Inner Sasun).”<sup>76</sup> Kharzan’s two large Kurdish-speaking regions, Bsherik (Beşiri) and Silvan, more or less coincided the lowlands, the plains and valleys, of historical Aghdznik. It was for this reason that during the late Ottoman era, in contrast with mountainous Sasun, these three districts were known as the “inner plains”<sup>77</sup> or as *Nerkin Dasht* (Inner Plain).<sup>78</sup> At the

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<sup>74</sup> **Martirosyan, T.** Kaza of Kharzan - Monasteries, churches and places of pilgrimage. Source of picture above. <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-bitlispaghesht/kaza-of-kharzan/religion/churches-monasteries-and-places-of-pilgrimage.html>.

<sup>75</sup> **Personal Archive**, p. 4a. (Անձնական արխիվ, թ. 4ա).

<sup>76</sup> **Badalyan, G.** The historical-demographic profile of Western Armenia on the eve of the Armenian Genocide, part 8: the historical-geographic province of Sasun and the city of Baghesh (Bitlis), *Vem*, 2017, № 2 (58), p. XXXVII. (**Բաղայան Գ.**, Արևմտյան Հայաստանի պատմաժողովրդագրական նկարագիրը Մեծ եղեռնի նախօրեին, մաս ութերորդ: Սասուն պատմաաշխարհագրական մարզը և Բաղեշ (Բիթլիս) քաղաքը, «ՎԷՄ»).

<sup>77</sup> **Azgayin, Arevelk**, Constantinople, 1900, № 4214, p. 3. (**Ազգային**, «Արևելք», Կ. Պոլիս, 1900.)

<sup>78</sup> “Located one and a half hours distant to the north is the fertile plain of Slivan, which is customarily named the Inner Plain.” **Ukhtavor**, Tigranakert and its villages II, *Ardzagank*, 1894, № 55, p. 3. (Reprinted from *Arevelk*). (**Ուխտավոր**, Տիգրանակերտ Եւ Իր Գիւղերը Բ., «Արձագանք»).

outset of the 20th century, Silvan, Kharzan and Bsherek were deemed “purely Kurdish-speaking districts.”<sup>79</sup>

In Gegham Badalyan’s view, during the 17th and 18th centuries Kharzan formed a part of the Kurdish principality of Hazo (Hzu), and had a self-administered status, since the local population was constituted, almost without exception, of Armenians, Assyrians (both Jacobite and Nestorian), and Yezidis.<sup>80</sup> The Turkish researcher Abdulhalim Durma writes that during the late 18th and early 19th century, Kharzan was governed by the Yezidis, with Muslims constituting a minority.<sup>81</sup>

These semi-independent Kurdish principalities disappeared as a consequence of the Ottoman policy of centralization. By 1840, Kharzan was already being mentioned in official Ottoman sources as a *kaza* (subdistrict) of the Diyarbekir eyalet.<sup>82</sup> As of 1869, the Kharzan subdistrict of the Sghert *sanjak* (district) contained three nahiyes: Rëndvan, Bsherek, and Sasun. After receiving the status of subdistrict in 1870, the former nahije of Sasun was removed from Kharzan,<sup>83</sup> while Bsherek became a separate *kaza* of Diyarbekir.

As stated above, in 1881 as a result of administrative changes, Sghert was removed from Diyarbekir and joined to the Bitlis vilayet. Accordingly, at the end of the 19th century, the subdistrict of Kharzan primarily occupied the eastern portion of the Bsherek plain, although it was more mountainous than Bsherek proper.

The Armenians of Kharzan were Kurdish-speaking. A 1905 press report provides a gloomy assessment of the prevailing situation in the subdistrict: “They have no priest, and an appreciable part of the people have

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<sup>79</sup> **Takhits**, News from Taron, *Mshak*, 1913, № 224, p. 1. (Թախիժ, Նորուրթիւններ Տարօսէն, «Մշակ»).

<sup>80</sup> **Badalyan, G.** Historical-demographic profile, part 8, p. XXXVII.

<sup>81</sup> **Durma, A.** *Evliyalar Şehri Siirt*, Samsun, 2014, p. 102.

<sup>82</sup> **Yılmazçelik, İ.** Diyarbakır Eyaleti'nin Tanzimat'a Dâhil Edilmesiyle Şehir Ve Eyalet Yönetiminde Ortaya Çıkan Meseleler, *Tanzimat'tan Günümüze Diyarbakır*, cilt 1, Editörler: Oktay Bozan, etc, Ankara, 2019. s. 42-45. As of 1864, Kharzan was a *kaza* of the Sghert *sanjak* of the Diyarbekir vilayet, and contained the nahiyes of Beshiri and Rëndvan. See **Gündüz, A.** 1914-1926 Yılları Arasında Bitlis, Siirt Ve Siirt'in İlçelerinde Yaşayan Aşiretler, *Türk-İslam Dünyası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Sayı: 10, Mart 2017, pp. 66-67.

<sup>83</sup> **Çelik, A.** XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Siirt Sancağının İdari Ve Sosyo-ekonomik Durumu, p. 42.

taken up residence elsewhere. The remainder are Kurdish-speaking, indifferent to their mother tongue and religion.”<sup>84</sup> Elsewhere we encounter the following description: “[Kharzan] has a fair number of villages, spacious plains well-suited for cultivation and farming. The famed monastery of St. Conon is in this district. The number of inhabitants is reckoned at 3,500, and they are Kurdish-speaking.”<sup>85</sup> As far as can be determined from currently available sources, only the Armenians of the central town of the Kharzan district, Zokh (modern-day Yanarsu) were Armenian-speaking. According to Mirakhorian, the language of Zokh was “quite alien to the [ordinary] Armenian spoken language.”<sup>86</sup> The idiom in question was most likely Armenian combined with Kurdish. Among 58 villages listed in an early 20th-century report from the Armenian diocese of Sghert, only Zokh was singled out as an Armenian-speaking community; Armenian is even noted as the majority language.<sup>87</sup> The Armenian writer Teotig (Teodoros Labdjindjian 1873-1928) reports that the Armenians of Kharzan’s Malafa village spoke in distorted Armenian.<sup>88</sup> It must also be noted that according to a Kurdish-speaking Armenian in 1911, Kurdish-speaking Armenians retained certain Armenian words, as well as Armenian grammatical forms in their speech.<sup>89</sup>

Like the natives of Bsharik, the inhabitants of Kharzan were primarily farmers; however, a number of them, having been deprived of their land, had become sharecroppers (*maraba*).<sup>90</sup> The exaction of tribute

<sup>84</sup> **Muradian, H.** Rural Dioceses (from our Myufarghin correspondent), *Byuzantion*, 1905, № 2776, p. 1. (**Յարութիւն Մուրաստան**, Գաւառային Թեմեր (Մեր Սիւֆարդընի Թղթակցէն), «Բիւզանդիոն»).

<sup>85</sup> **Mansur**, Sghert, *Byurakn*, Constantinople, 1898, № 37-38, p. 670. (**Մանսուր**, Սղերդ, «Բիւրակն»).

<sup>86</sup> **Mirakhorian, M.** A Descriptive Journey in the Armenian-inhabited Districts of Eastern Turkey, Part I, Constantinople, 1884, p. 75. (**Միրախորեան Մ.**, Նկարագրական Ուղեւորութիւն Ի հայասրանկ Գաւառս Արեւելեան Տանկաստանի, Մասն Ա).

<sup>87</sup> **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, p. 15b.

<sup>88</sup> **Teotig**, Golgotha of the Armenian Clergy and its Flock in the Cataclysmic Year 1915, ed. Ara Kalaydjian, New York, 1985, pp. 92-93). (**Թեոդիկ**, Գողգոթա Հայ Հոգևորականութեան Եւ Իր Հօտին Աղէտայի 1915 Տարին, խմբագրեց Արայ Գալայճեան).

<sup>89</sup> **Ghazarian, A.D.** A forsaken people: laments of a Kurdish-speaking Armenian, *Azatamart*, 1911, № 542, p. 1. (**Ա. Տ. Ղազարեան**, Լքուած Ժողովուրդը, Քրտայսու Հայու Մը Տրտունջները, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>90</sup> For more on Armenians’ *maraba* status and *khafirutyun*, see: **The Turkish-Armenian question III: The pain of the Armenian people**, *Horizon*, Tiflis, 1915, № 28, p. 3.

known to Armenians as *khafirutyun* was deeply entrenched in Kharzan. In an official church report on economic exploitation in the Sghert region, we read that “in order to keep themselves alive, [the Armenians] have taken refuge under the protection of powerful tribal chiefs, paying annual tribute (*khafirutyun*).”<sup>91</sup> Writing on “the situation in Silvan,” a correspondent to Constantinople’s *Arevelk* newspaper states in 1909 that “in the villages of Bsherek and Gharzan, the Reshkotan and Bekiran [Rashkotan and Bakiran] nomads continue to to levy their interminable tribute at the usual pace; today they want wheat, tomorrow barley, the next day cotton, yet another day money, and finally whatever else they might need.”<sup>92</sup> *Khafirutyun* supposed that the Kurdish recipient of the *khafir* tax in the course of a year could take sheep, as well as wood, cheese, tallow, and clothing from one family in both spring and autumn. In the event of an Armenian girl’s marriage, the Kurd was also entitled to a certain sum, and an Armenian returning from a sojourn as a *pantukhd* or migratory laborer was obliged to present his Kurdish master with money and new clothing. It was also the practice to present the family of a deceased Kurd with a sheep as condolence, and so on.<sup>93</sup> The recipient of the *khafir* tax considered the Armenian his own property, calling him “my Armenian”; “the Armenian’s house and land belong to the *khafir*, his possessions, his honor, and everything else, so that the home of an Armenian is kept ready for his *khafir*; whenever he wishes, [the Kurd] may carry away several sheep, take a sum of money, and generally use “his” Armenian to take care of all the

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(Թիւրքահայոց Հարցը Գ., Հայ ժողովրդի ցարը IV, «Հորիզոն»). See also: **The situation of Armenia** (Official report to the Patriarchate), *Droshak*, Geneva, 1901, № 1, p. 26 (Հայաստանի Վիճակը, Պաշտօնական Տեղեկագիր (Ուղղած Պատրիարքարանին, «Դրօշակ»). **A Few Striking Facts about “Khafirutyun,”** *Azatamart*, 1910, № 450, p. 1. **Shahbazian, H.** Kurdo-Armenian History, Constantinople, 1911, pp. 173-174. (Ճահպագեան Յ., Քիւրդօ-Հայ Պատմութիւն). **Ruben**, *Memoirs* vol. III, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup> Official Report on Economic Exploitation in the Sghert Region, *Azatamart*, 1911, № 494, p. 1. (Միւրդի Ծրջանի Հարսահարութեանց Պաշտօնական Տեղեկագիր, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>92</sup> **Tghtakits**, The Situation in Slivan, Myufarghin, *Arevelk*, 1909, № 6997, p. 3. (Թղթակից, Կացութիւնը Սիլվանի Մէջ, Միւֆարդին, «Արեւելք»). Kharzan was also home to the Kurdish Pencenari tribe (Eşîra Pencînarê). See **Azad**, Concerning the Kurdish tribes III: Bitlis Province, *Mshak*, 1915, № 42, p. 2. (Ազատ, Քիւրդ Աշայիրներու Շուրջը, III, Բիթլիսի կուսակալութիւն, «Մշակ»).

<sup>93</sup> **Khafirutyun**, *Azatamart*, 1914, № 1449, p. 1. (Խաֆիրութիւնը, «Ազատամարտ»).

needs of his house. The Armenians are distributed among the Kurds, and each Kurd may make use only of “his” Armenian.”<sup>94</sup>

Kurdish-speaking Kharzan was among the regions greatly harmed by the Hamidian massacres. The expression “the bloodbaths of Bitlis and Sghert” was not lightly applied.<sup>95</sup> “At the time, when a massacre was taking place in Bitlis, the provincial districts of Bitlis, near and far, were subject to fire and the sword as well: Datik, Khizan, Shnidzor, Shirvan, Gharzan. The Armenians of the rural districts were subjected to the ferocious attacks of the *ashirets* [Kurdish tribes] of Sheikh Seyid Ali and numerous others. In Sghert, as in Bitlis, the Armenian streets and churches were filled with corpses. The majority of the villages were plundered and burned. Every village had victims numbering in the hundreds.”<sup>96</sup> The Kurdish-speaking Armenians could not understand the reason for the calamity that had befallen them, since they had never had any connection with revolutionary movements.<sup>97</sup> In another source regarding the Hamidian massacres, we read that in 1895 more than 250 Armenian households were plundered in Kharzan’s villages of Milëkan, Këžëlan, and Shalmo, with significant loss of life, and that the survivors, after long wandering, eventually established themselves in Silvan and elsewhere.<sup>98</sup>

On the basis of a 1902 report compiled by the Sghert Prelacy, it is possible to conclude that the population of more than 60 Armenian villages was appreciably diminished as a consequence of the economic exploitation which took place in the years before and after the Hamidian massacres, and especially by the mass killings themselves. Aside from the death toll, many Armenians were obliged to emigrate or convert to Islam. Simultaneously, dozens of communities were emptied of Armenians, with one part of the population having fled and the remainder forcibly converted. Aside from this, the Kurdish tribes had appropriated the land, with Armenians becoming renters of their own former properties.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> **Ruben**, *Memoirs*, vol. III, p. 144.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp. 136, 142.

<sup>98</sup> **Tghtakits**, The provincial authorities regarding the land question, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 301, p. 4. (**Թղթակից**, Գաւառական Իշխանութիւնները Հողային Հարցին Հանդէպ, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>99</sup> **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, pp. 15-28.

Recounting the massacres in Sghert, Ruben writes that the Armenians had been presented with the choice of accepting Islam; those who did were treated with great solicitousness and care, while those who did not were unsparingly massacred.<sup>100</sup> The Kurdish-speaking Armenians of Kharzan sometimes preferred death to conversion, becoming martyrs for their Christian faith.<sup>101</sup> In Kharzan, as well as in many other locales, Christian girls were abducted and Islamicized.<sup>102</sup>

The Christians of the Sghert *kaza* and especially of Kharzan were not to have a reprieve. Following the massacres, total anarchy prevailed in the Bitlis vilayet and exploitation and murder of Christians continued, particularly in Kharzan.<sup>103</sup> Kharzan was featured in articles in the Armenian press concerning the issue of economic exploitation.

Following the Young Turk Revolution and the re-proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution, Armenians were excited with hopes that persecution would abate and freedom and equality would prevail. A similar apprehensive enthusiasm was apparent in Kurdish-speaking Armenian circles as well, but one press report from Kharzan casts suspicion on the Young Turks' proclaimed slogan of "Liberty, Fraternity and Equality," giving an indication of the depth of discouragement among the Armenians of the district. "The tyrannical oppressions and exploitations, without ever abating, continued at their usual pace, but we hoped at least that after a little while they would reach their end and we would be able to breathe freely. Alas, we were deceived in our hopes."<sup>104</sup>

There exist contradictory figures regarding the number of Armenians in Kharzan. A detailed report issued by the National Prelacy immediately following the Hamidian massacres states that 46 Armenian and Assyrian

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<sup>100</sup> Ruben, *Memoirs*, vol. III, p. 14.

<sup>101</sup> Surhandak, Letter from Turkey, *Armenia*, 1896, № 80, p. 1.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, pp. 1-2.

<sup>103</sup> In the course of a few years 15 murders took place in Shirvan, 15 in Eruh, and 16 in Pervari. 16 more people were killed in these district's immediate vicinity. See **The Region of Baghesh**, *Droshak*, 1907, № 10, p. 143 (Բաղէշի Ճրջանը, «Գրօշակ»).

<sup>104</sup> See Tghtakits, The Situation in Slivan, Myufarghin, *Arevelk*, 1909, № 6997, p. 3. The notion of equality before the law was alien to the Kurds, and even its discussion was enough to provoke violent reaction. See **Always two weights and two measures: incompetence or carelessness?** *Azatamart*, 1911, № 674, p. 3. (Միշտ երկու զաւի ու երկու կշիռ, Անկարող Թէ Անփոյոթ, «Ազատամարտ»).

villages had suffered, with some becoming entirely desolate, but the report was unable to present a complete statistical picture. Nonetheless, this report helps us to understand how many people lived in Kharzan before the massacres, since it presents the number of households in Armenian and Assyrian villages. Across 34 solely Armenian villages and one mixed Armenian-Assyrian village there were 1122 households, or approximately 9000 people.<sup>105</sup> This is necessarily an underestimate of Kharzan's Armenian population, since the compiler of the report, by his own avowal, was not informed about the situation in other villages, and does not count, for instance, the number of Armenians in the village of Bayibo, where he states that 24 Armenians had been killed.<sup>106</sup> It follows that there were undoubtedly more than ten thousand Armenians in the subdistrict of Kharzan.

According to an 1878 survey by the ethnographer A. Devgants (Arisdages Der-Sarkseants, 1844-1896), 8,282 Armenians lived in Kharzan and 2,975 in Nakhiban, making a total of 11,255.<sup>107</sup> Nakhiban belonged to the subdistrict of Kharzan during the late Ottoman period, which justifies the addition of these figures to form an estimate of the Armenian population of Kharzan. In the years following the Armenian massacres, according to a 1906 appeal sent to the National Prelacy, there were seven Armenian-populated villages in Nakhiban, 225 households, and approximately 1,800 inhabitants. "We, the [Armenian] nationals scattered across the seven individual villages subject to the Nakibi nahiye of Gharzan, numbering 225

<sup>105</sup> **Surhandak**, Letter from Turkey, *Armenia*, 1896, № 80, pp. 1-2. Seven Assyrian villages impacted by the Hamidian massacres contained 271 households, for a total population of over 2,168. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Kharzan, 8,282; Nazgiban (Nakhiban), 2,975; total 11,255. See **Devgants, A.** *Visit to Armenia*, Yerevan, 1985, pp. 126-127. (**Ա. Տևկանց**, Այցելութիւնն ի Հայաստան). The statistics provided here are somewhat problematic, for several reasons. First, Sasun's municipality of Hazo is included in the table for Kharzan. Second, Devgants's Armenian population figures for the villages of Kharzan, added together, do not correspond to his total. The same disparity is apparent in his population counts for other subdistricts. In an 1882 issue of the newspaper *Ardzagank*, Devgants provides the following statistical breakdown: "The district of Naghgiban [Nakhiban] has 13 Armenian, 3 Assyrian, 18 Kurdish, 2 *Arevordi* [lit. "Sons of the Sun," probably referring to Yezidis], and 22 mixed [villages]. The general population of Naghgiban is: 2,975 Armenians, 2,135 Kurds, 1,536 Assyrians, 747 *Arevordi*." **Ye. M.** Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, p. 136. (**Ե. Մ.**, Նամակ Սղերտից, «Արձազանք»).

households, have been long exploited and brazenly robbed by the Kurds of the Rashkotan ashiret and their chieftain Tamo.”<sup>108</sup> It is also possible that the Rēndvan, which at that time was still within the administrative boundaries of Kharzan, does not enter into Devgant’s survey.

Other sources, however, provide a lower estimate of the number of Armenians in Kharzan. Vital Cuinet, who traveled through the southern regions of the Bitlis vilayet in 1891, before Rēndvan’s unification to the subdistrict of Kharzan, regards Rēndvan and Kharzan as two separate subdistricts. According to him, there were 2,093 Gregorian (Apostolic) Armenians living in the kaza of Rēndvan, in addition to 413 Protestant Armenians,<sup>109</sup> while the number of Armenian Apostolic Christians in Kharzan was 3,600.<sup>110</sup> Accordingly, by the French geographer’s reckoning, the number of Armenians in Rēndvan and Kharzan was 6,105. His estimate is close to that of Vladimir Mayevski, according to whom the number of Armenians in Kharzan was 6,717.<sup>111</sup> Following the Hamidian massacres, in 1902, statistical tables compiled by the Sghert Prelacy indicate 58 Armenian-populated villages in Kharzan, amounting to 608 households,<sup>112</sup> or approximately 4,864 people.

The *Byurakn* monthly in 1898 notes a still lower number, 3,500.<sup>113</sup> Approximately the same estimate is given by *Droshak* in 1901: 530 households, approximately 3,000 individuals.<sup>114</sup> As we have seen, V. Cuinet provides a number in the same range, 3,600, but without counting Rēndvan as a part of Kharzan, since Rēndvan was added to the subdistrict

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<sup>108</sup> **The Situation in Sghert**, *Droshak*, 1907, № 2, p. 22. (Սղերդի վիճակը, «Դրօշակ»).

<sup>109</sup> According to Cuinet, Rēndvan had 111 villages and a total population of 11,000. See **Cuinet Vital**, *La Turquie d'Asie, géographie administrative, statistique, descriptive et raisonnée de chaque province de l'Asie-Mineure, tome deuxième*, Paris, 1891, p. 606.

<sup>110</sup> According to Cuinet, Kharzan had 138 villages and a population of 13,000, comprising 8,800 Muslims (Kurds), 3,600 Armenian Apostolic Christians, 258 Jacobite Assyrians, and 258 Yezidis. See **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, p. 612.

<sup>111</sup> According to Mayevski, Kharzan had a population of 26,400, including 18,583 Kurds, 6,717 Armenians, and 284 Jacobite Assyrians. See **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание Ванскаго и Битлискаго вилаетовъ, Тифлисъ, 1904, p. 222.

<sup>112</sup> Of these 608 Armenian households, 592 were Apostolic, and 15 Protestant. See **ՆԱԱ**, 412, 1, 1856, p. 12b.

<sup>113</sup> **Mansur**, Sghert, *Byurakn*, 1898, № 37-38, p. 670.

<sup>114</sup> **Report on the Sghert District**, *Droshak*, 1901, № 7, p. 118. (Տեղեկագիր Սղերդ Գաւառի, «Դրօշակ»).

of Kharzan only after his travels. The reason for such low estimates of the Armenian population of Kharzan was precisely this; the numbers presented sometimes pertain only to Kharzan itself, and sometimes to Kharzan along with its subsidiary nahiyes. For instance, the kaymakamate (district governorate) of Kharzan had 54 villages, while the nahiyes of Malafa, Barinj, and Rëdvan (Rëndvan) had 49, 43, and 36, respectively.<sup>115</sup>

In sources from the 1910s, the Armenian population of Kharzan once again appears numerous. The probable reason is that, taking advantage of comparatively favorable circumstances after the Hamidian massacres, a number of Armenians who had abandoned Kharzan and fled to more mountainous and inaccessible areas, to Silvan, or to the provincial capital of Bitlis, returned once again. Moreover, by this period the geographical boundaries of Kharzan and its subsidiary nahiyes had already become clear, eliminating the earlier tendency to count only the population of Kharzan itself.

According to data collected in 1913 by the Sghert Prelacy for the 1913-1914 census of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, there were 76 Armenian-populated communities in Kharzan, which, according to Raymond Kevorkian, amounted to 8,343 people.<sup>116</sup> A year later, by Teotig's reckoning, there were 992 Armenian households.<sup>117</sup> This figure of about 8,000 is closer to reality than the 1914 Ottoman census, according to which there were 4,332 Armenians in the province of Kharzan, of whom 4,225 were Apostolic and 107 Protestant.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> **The Vilayet of Bitlis:** An edifying exposition, *Azatomart*, 1910, № 231, p. 3. (**Պիթլիսի Վիլայեթը**, Շահեկան Վիճակագրություն Մը, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>116</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** The Armenian Genocide, p. 277. Kevorkian estimates an average household to contain 9 individuals. The likeliest number of Armenian villages in Kharzan is 34. See also: **Der-Garabedian, K.** Native province: six hundred villages, students and schoolhouses, *Azatomart*, 1910, № 305, p. 1. (**Գեղամ Տ. Կարապետեան**, Բնագաւառ, Վեց Հարիւր Գիւղեր, Դպիր Ու Դպրատուն, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>117</sup> This is our own estimate, based on the Armenian villages and numbers of households listed by Teotig. See **Teotig**, Golgotha, pp. 91-93, 539.

<sup>118</sup> **Karpat, K.H.** Ottoman Population, 1830-1914, Demographic and Social Characteristics, London, 1985, p. 277.

## Data regarding the Armenian population of Kharzan:

Source	Year	Armenian population
<b>A. Devgants</b>	1878	8,690 <sup>119</sup>
<b>Ardzagank</b>	1882	11,257 <sup>120</sup>
<b>V. Cuinet</b>	1891	6,105 <sup>121</sup>
<b>Armenia</b>	1896	1,122 households (8,976 individuals) <sup>122</sup>
<b>Byurakn</b>	1898	3,500 <sup>123</sup>
<b>Droshak</b>	1901	530 households, approx. 3,000 individuals <sup>124</sup>
<b>Sghert Prelacy</b>	1902	608 households (4864 individuals) <sup>125</sup>
<b>Mayevski</b>	1904	6,717 <sup>126</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Leaving out Devgants's population estimates for Hazo and its constituent villages of Upper and Lower Baldēm, the population of Kharzan comes to 6,267, and the population of Nakhiban to 2,423: this yields the total of 8,690 in the table above. See **Devgants, A.** Visit to Armenia, pp. 115-117, 120-121.

<sup>120</sup> We have added together the figures provided for Kharzan and for Nakhiban-Nakiban. See **Ye. M.** Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, pp. 135-136.

<sup>121</sup> As noted above, we have added the figures for Kharzan and Rëndvan. See **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, pp. 606, 612.

<sup>122</sup> This source lists the number of households in Kharzan's 34 Armenian and one Armenian-Assyrian village. We have added together these figures to arrive at a total number of households, and estimated the population by multiplying by 8. **Surhandak**, Letter from Turkey, *Armenia*, 1896, № 80, pp. 1-2.

<sup>123</sup> **Mansur**, Sghert, *Byurankn*, 1898, № 37-38, p. 670.

<sup>124</sup> The estimated population of 3,000 is given in the original source. See **Report on the Sghert District**, *Droshak*, 1901, № 7, p. 118.

<sup>125</sup> **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, p. 12b.

<sup>126</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 222.

<b>Sghert Prelacy, Armenian Patriarchate Census</b>	1913	8,343 <sup>127</sup> , 8460 <sup>128</sup>
<b>Ottoman Census</b>	1914	4,332 <sup>129</sup>
<b>Teotig</b>	1914	992 households (7936 individuals) <sup>130</sup>

<sup>127</sup> This first figure for the census total is provided by Raymond Kevorkian. See **Kevorkian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 277.

<sup>128</sup> The second figure for the census total is provided in by Robert Tatoyan. See **Tatoyan, R.** *The Number of Armenians in the Vilayet of Bitlis, Western Armenia, on the Eve of the Armenian Genocide*, Beirut, 2022, p. 158. (**Թատոյան Ռ.**, Արևմտեան Հայաստանի Պիլիսի նահանգի Հայ Բնակչութեան Թիւը Մեծ Եղեռնի Նախօրեակին).

<sup>129</sup> 4,225 Apostolic and 107 Protestant. The Protestants were presumably Armenians, considering the extensive activity of Armenian Evangelical missionaries in Rëndvan and its vicinity, discussed in Chapter 3 of this work. See **Karpat, K.H.** *Ottoman Population*, p. 174.

<sup>130</sup> The calculation is our own, adding up Teotig’s individual figures for 61 villages of Kharzan, excluding the final three which were in the central kaza of Sghert. See **Teotig, Golgotha**, pp. 91-93, 539.

## RĔNDVAN (RNDVAN, RĔDVAN REDWAN)<sup>131</sup>

*“There is no other district in Armenia so fertile as RĔndvan”<sup>132</sup>*



In 1889, RĔndvan lost its status as subdistrict and became a nahiye of Kharzan.<sup>133</sup> For this reason, RĔndvan was variously referred to in Armenian

<sup>131</sup> Image source: <https://www.jelleverheij.net/travel-snap-shots/ridvan.html>.

<sup>132</sup> T.S. RĔndvan, *Avetaber*, 1880, № 48, p. 191. (Պ. Ս., Ռընդվան, «Աւետարտեր»).

<sup>133</sup> RĔndvan was the central kaza of the Diyarbekir vilayet, and, as of 1852, of the Sghert sanjak. In 1856 it was a separate kaza of the Kurdistan eyalet, and from 1869-1871 it was a nahiye of the Kharzan kaza. In 1872 RĔndvan regained kaza status. In 1881 it was a separate kaza of the newly-formed Bitlis vilayet, and after administrative changes in 1889 it once more lost kaza status and became a nahiye of the Kharzan kaza. However, it is also described in Ottoman *salnames* from this period as being attached to the central kaza of the Sghert sanjak. From 1889-1923 RĔndvan underwent no further administrative reclassification. See **Çelik, A.** XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Siirt Sancağının İdari ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Durumu, pp. 38, 39, 40, 44, 45. Mayevski (1904) also notes that RĔndvan had previously been a separate kaza. See also **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 13.

sources as a village,<sup>134</sup> a “province” (*nahang*),<sup>135</sup> a district, and a subdistrict.<sup>136</sup> Even after being joined to Kharzan, Rēndvan was always regarded as separate. It is not incidental in this regard that elderly Kurdish-speaking descendants of Kharzan Armenians living in Darakert continue to identify themselves as natives of Rēndvan.

The regional center, the town of Rēndvan, attracted the attention of European travelers, whose interest was stirred by this forgotten and hazardous world. Rēndvan existed in the European imagination as the erstwhile seat of a small and semiautonomous principality of the mysterious Yezidi people.<sup>137</sup> This circumstance also played a role in the conception of Rēndvan as a distinct region.

During the first decades of the 19th century, during the governance of the Yezidi agha Mirza, the small principality of Kharzan grew in strength. The town of Rēndvan served as the center of this semi-autonomous principality, with the local Yezidi leaders residing in the fortress of the same name. Gegham Badalyan terms this a semi-autonomous Yezidi-Armenian (Christian) principality,<sup>138</sup> although both European sources of the time and later Armenian sources describe it as a Yezidi principality: “During the 1820s they had a separate principality in Rēndvan, where their prince Mirzēk resided. Being defeated by one sent by the Ottoman government, [Mirzēk] was captured and taken to Bolis [Constantinople]; later, when the government saw that this tribe was more Christian than Mohammedan, it initiated a great persecution against them, disposed of prince Mirzēk and scattered the tribe across various regions.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> **Report on Sghert**, 1, *Droshak*, Vienna, 1895, № 14, p. 10. (**Տեղեկագիր Սղերտի**, 1, «Իրօշակ»).

<sup>135</sup> **Dikranian, M.** *Mirror of Deeds and Works*, Constantinople, 1864, p. 7. (**Մկրտիչ Տիգրանյանի**, Հայելի Գործոց Եւ Աշխատութեանց).

<sup>136</sup> **The Armenians of Sghert**, *Ardzagank*, 1894, № 92, p. 3 (reprinted from Arevelk). (**Սղերտի Հայերը**, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>137</sup> In the early 19th century, J.M. Kinneir described the “castle of Redwan” as the “residence of a Zezidee [sic] chief.” **Kinneir, J.M.** *Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan in the years 1813 and 1814: with remarks on the marches of Alexander, and retreat of the ten thousand*, London, 1818, p. 414.

<sup>138</sup> **Badalyan, G.** *Historical-demographic profile*, part 8, p. XXXVIII.

<sup>139</sup> **Apro**, *Letters from Turkish Armenia XI*, *Mshak*, 1889, № 130, p. 1. (**Ապրօ**, Նամակներ Թիւրքաց Հայաստանից, XI, «Մշակ»).

It was Mirza agha himself who constructed (or perhaps rebuilt) the local St. Gevorg church for the Armenians of Rëndvan, as attested by a local inscription: “by the protection of the Yezidi Mirza agha.”<sup>140</sup> This fact was registered with interest by the English traveler and diplomat Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894): “The church stands on the slope of a mound, on the summit of which are the ruins of a castle belonging to the former chiefs of Redwan. It was built expressly for the Christians of the Armenian sect by Mirza Agha, the last semi-independent Yezidi chief, a pleasing example of toleration and liberality well worthy of imitation by more civilised men.”<sup>141</sup> Manuel Mirakhorian likewise records the fact of St. Gevorg’s construction by Mirza, and states that the Armenians, apparently as a sign of gratitude, had written on the front of the church “To Mirza the Yezidi, in eternal memory.”<sup>142</sup>

Ghukas Inchichian’s avowal that the Armenians of Rëndvan “boldly perform the rites of Christianity,” is in this case, perhaps no exaggeration.<sup>143</sup> Writing in 1876, one Armenian from Rëndvan not only depicts the period of Yezidi rule in a positive light, but describes a unified and harmonious mode of life,<sup>144</sup> which in this case is perhaps not merely an expression of nostalgia and the common tendency to idealize the past.

Against the rebellious Yezidis of Rëndvan there contended a certain Sheikh Kassim. Layard describes him as a religious fanatic notorious for his hatred of the Yezidis. His latest campaign before Layard’s arrival had not been met with success; he and his forces had been forced to retreat with heavy casualties.<sup>145</sup> The Ottoman government, however, did not tolerate

<sup>140</sup> A builder’s inscription on the structure reads ՌՄԿԳ (1814 A.D.). See **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, p. 8b.

<sup>141</sup> **Layard, A.H.** Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert: Being the Result of a Second Expedition Undertaken for the Trustees of the British Museum, New York, 1853, pp. 44-45.

<sup>142</sup> **Mirakhorian, M.** Descriptive Journey, Part I, p. 69.

<sup>143</sup> **Inchichian, Gh.** Geography, vol. I, p. 233.

<sup>144</sup> **Amirkhanian, B.** A letter from Rëndvan, *Avetaber*, 1876, № 20, p. 155. (**Պետրոս Ամիրխանեան**, Ռընտուանէն Նամակ Մը, «Աւետարեք»).

J. M. Kinneir, however, heard quite a different account of Armenian-Yezidi relations from his local interlocutors. See **Kinneir, J.M.** Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan, p. 414.

<sup>145</sup> **Layard, A.H.** Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert, p. 38.

the existence of this semi-autonomous territory, and it ceased to exist by the middle of the 1830s. A considerable number of the local Yezidis emigrated to Sinjar (Shingal) in modern-day Iraq.<sup>146</sup>

Another factor contributing to the exodus of Yezidis was their liability to compulsory military service in the Ottoman Empire, which violated the seclusion from the outside world essential to their traditional way of life.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, Yezidis still lived in Rëndvan and its vicinity as of 1876. “In the province of Tigranakert, in the rural town of Rëndvan and in the majority of the nearby villages, there is a devil-worshiping nation known as the Yezidi.”<sup>148</sup> Their number and influence, however, had declined. In Manuel Mirakhorian’s *Descriptive Journey*, printed in 1884, it is stated that Rëndvan had previously been known as a Yezidi village.<sup>149</sup> The Armenian community of Rëndvan, and of the entire surrounding region, was Kurdish-speaking, and it is possible that the Yezidis’ proximity environment played a certain role in the linguistic assimilation of the local Armenian population.<sup>150</sup>

“The language of society is Kurdish (Kurmanji); as everyone knows, this language has no script, and therefore no books, for which reason the gloom of ignorance in all its forms prevails over the public, making them worthy of the name of that country (Kurdistan), which has the meaning ‘savage’ or ‘uncouth.’”<sup>151</sup> This description of the Kurdish-speaking Armenians of Rëndvan comes from the Evangelical newspaper *Avetaber*, nearly the sole source of information on Rëndvan in the Armenian press of the late Ottoman period. Armenian Protestants paid great attention to Rëndvan as a spiritually needy community; subsequently, it would develop into one of the major centers of Armenian Evangelicalism. Taking

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<sup>146</sup> In an 1876 issue of *Avetaber* we read: “Twenty or thirty years ago, these parts were full of Yezidis and agriculture was flourishing.” **Amirkhanian, B.** A letter from Rëndvan, *Avetaber*, 1876, № 20, p. 155.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> **Mirakhorian, M.** *Descriptive Journey*, Part I, p. 67.

<sup>150</sup> **The Missionary Herald:** Containing The Proceedings Of The American Board Of Commissioners For Foreign Missions, With A View Of Other Benevolent Operations, For The Year 1871, vol. LXVII (67), Cambridge, 1871, p. 78.

<sup>151</sup> **Letters,** The work of the Gospel in Kurdistan, *Avetaber*, 1887, № 3, p. 22.

advantage of the weak presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Evangelicals actively proselytized among the local people.

J. M. Kinneir, who traveled through the area during the 1810s, recalls the town of Rēndvan as having a population of approximately 100 households, with the inhabitants being Yezidis, Armenians, and Chaldeans.<sup>152</sup> An 1865 issue of the weekly *Eaglet of Taron* mentions 60 households (probably Armenian Apostolic).<sup>153</sup> In 1880, *Avetaber* conveyed that the number of Protestants in Rēndvan was 160.<sup>154</sup>

At the outset of the 19th century, according to Inchichian, the Armenians of Rēndvan numbered 50 households. According to Ghevont Alishan, the provincial town contained 800 homes, of which 100 were Armenian and 700 Yezidi.<sup>155</sup> Layard conveys the same, counting about “eight hundred rudely-built huts” and noting that “the inhabitants are Yezidis, with the exception of about one hundred Armenian and forty or fifty Jacobite and Chaldean families.”<sup>156</sup> According to the 1846 Ottoman *Icmal Defter* (concise tax-register), 539 Yezidis, 461 Christians, and 261 Muslims lived in the town of Rēndvan.<sup>157</sup>

As we have seen, however, the Yezidis gradually departed from Rēndvan. According to Manuel Minakhoryan, as of 1884 there were 210 households in Rēndvan: 90 of Apostolic Armenians, 30 of Protestants, and equally small minorities of Assyrians and Yezidis.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> **Kinneir, J. M.** *Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan*, p. 414.

<sup>153</sup> **Letter**, *Artsvik Taron*, 1865, № 45, p. 81. (Նամակ, «Արծուիկ Տարօնի»).

<sup>154</sup> **Ablahadian, K.** *The Gospel in Kurdistan*, *Avetaber*, 1880, № 20, p. 79. (Գաւմէ Ապլա-հաստեան, Աւետարան Ի Քրիստոսեան, «Աւետարեք»).

<sup>155</sup> **Alishan, Gh.** *Survey of Greater Armenia*, Venice, 1855, p. 44. (Ղեւոնդ Ալիշան, Տեղագիր Հայոց Մեծաց) .

<sup>156</sup> **Layard, A. H.** *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert*, p. 45.

<sup>157</sup> According to the same source, there were 2,981 people living in Rēndvan, of whom 1,276 were Yezidi, 1,132 Christian, and 550 Muslim. See **Çelik, A.** XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Siirt Sancağının İdari ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Durumu, p. 127.

<sup>158</sup> Mirakhorian also notes a small number of Muslim and “Kildani Papist” (i.e. Chaldean) homes. (See **Mirakhorian, M.** *Descriptive Journey*, Part I, 67). According to another source, 122 Muslims and 374 Christians lived in the town of Rēndvan as of 1877. See **Çelik, A.** XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Siirt Sancağının İdari ve Sosyo-Ekonomik Durumu, p. 135.

One source from 1890 refers to an Armenian population of 300 or more, as well as 8 Muslim and 10-12 Assyrian households.<sup>159</sup> According to Cuinet, the overall population of Rëndvan comprised 200 households. During the Hamidian massacres of 1895, Rëndvan was razed and its population diminished. At the beginning of the 20th century, it had an Armenian population of 30-35 Armenian Apostolic households, according to *Byuzantion*,<sup>160</sup> while according to the Sghert Prelacy it had 50 Armenian households.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> NAA, 412, 1, 1856 p. 23b.

<sup>160</sup> Muradian, H. Rural Dioceses (from our Myufarghin correspondent), *Byuzantion*, 1905, № 2776, p. 1.

<sup>161</sup> Cuinet Vital, tome deuxième, p. 607.

## THE SUBDISTRICT OF ERUH (BOHTAN)

*“There is only one large Armenian village in the Kurdish-inhabited district of Jezireh, which is called Dêh and comprises 600 homes; while all of them are Kurdish speaking, they are nevertheless known as brave Armenians, undaunted by the Kurds, pious and strictly loyal to their native traditions and church; they are well-built, sturdy people, accustomed to the use of weapons.”<sup>162</sup>*

The other Kurdish-speaking subdistrict in the sanjak of Sghert was Eruh<sup>163</sup> (also known as Arvakh), located in the lower basin of Bohtan.

From the 16th to the first half of the 19th century, this subdistrict, which formed a part of the ancient Armenian province of Corduene, was at least partially subject to the semi-autonomous Kurdish principality of Jezireh (Jzire) or Bohtan (Botan). It was for this reason that, in later centuries, Bohtan was conceived of by Armenians as a Kurdish province. It is not incidental that Ghevont Alishan referred to Bohtan as Kurdish country (“Bohtan of the Kurds,” “Bohtan, the land of the Kurds”).<sup>164</sup>

During the first half of the 19th century, the Ottoman policy of centralization led to the elimination of the hereditary rule of the clan of Jezireh or Bohtan, provoking in response the forceful uprising of Bohtan’s Emir Badrkhan during the 1840s.

In 1881, by an Ottoman administrative redivision, Eruh was assimilated to the vilayet of Bitlis, becoming a *kaza* or subdistrict of the

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<sup>162</sup> **The Pontifical Diocese of Aghtamar**, *Ardzagank*, 1893, № 33, p. 2. (Աղթամարի Կաթողիկոսական Թեմը, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>163</sup> The historian Şeref Han Bitlisi records “Eruh” both as a toponym and as the name of Kurdish tribe. See **Şeref Han**, Şerefname, Arapçadan çeviren Mehmet Emin Bozarşlan, İstanbul, 1971, pp. 143, 470. The kaza of Eruh bordered Sghert to the north, Barvari to the northeast. See **Badalyan, G.** The historical-demographic profile of Western Armenia on the eve of the Armenian Genocide, part 7: the northeastern districts of the Bitlis Province, *Vem*, 2016, 4 (56), pp. XXVI-XXXVII. (Բադալյան Գ., Արևմտյան Հայաստանի պատմաժողովրդագրական նկարագիրը Մեծ եղեռնի նախօրեին, մաս յոթերորդ, Բիթլիսի նահանգի հարավ-արևելյան գավառները). Eruh is now a district (ilçe) of Turkey’s Siirt province.

<sup>164</sup> **Alishan, Gh.** Survey of Greater Armenia, p. 44.

Sghert sanjak.<sup>165</sup> However, it endured in the traditional Kurdish conception as the land of Jezireh-Bohtan (Cizîra Botan), the setting of innumerable legends and folktales, which encompassed Eruh (Bohtan), Shěrnak, and Jizre. The information conveyed by Armenian sources makes it clear that during the late Ottoman period this subdistrict was branded with the name of Bohtan in the Armenian imagination as well,<sup>166</sup> and its locals were known not as “Eruhetsi” but rather “Bohtantsi” or “Dehetsi.”<sup>167</sup> Deh was the center of Bohtan, and its most populous Armenian community. In his memoirs, Armenak Amrikyan describes the natives of Deh as being scattered across the regions of “Jzer Botan.”<sup>168</sup> For this reason, we consider it proper to use the toponym Bohtan in discussing the Kurdish-speaking Armenians of the administrative district officially known as Eruh.

A legend widely told in Bohtan itself, as well as in Shirvan and other neighboring Kurdish-speaking subdistricts, provides a distinctive account of the common origin of the Armenians and the Kurds, plainly expressing the socioeconomic basis of relations between these two peoples. One concise rendition runs as follows: “The Armenians and the Kurds were brothers, and they lived together as equals; the two major forces in daily existence were the *sword* and the *plow*. So it was that they wished to divide their labor; the Armenians chose to take the *plow*, and the Kurds the *sword*; today each of them enjoys the fruits of his decision.”<sup>169</sup> Interestingly, a different story emerged among the Armenians of the district, to the effect that the ruling Azizan clan of Jězra-Botan were Armenians who had converted to Islam.<sup>170</sup> At the same time, according to another tale, the Armenians living under their rule were forbidden to speak Armenian. It is difficult to say whether this story was devised later in order to explain the

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<sup>165</sup> **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 256.

<sup>166</sup> An account of an Armenian diocesan visit also refers to “Bohtan” rather than to Eruh. See **Rze**, Provincial Chronicle: Sghert, *Arevelk*, 1902, № 5097, p. 1. (ԲՊԷ, ԳԱՍԱՍՏԱՅԻՆ ՔՐՈՆԻԿ, Սղերդ, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>167</sup> Kurds have continued to refer to Eruh as “Deh” until the present day. It is possible that Kurdish-speaking Armenians used the name Deh to denote the entire kaza. One late 19th-century press item regarding Sghert refers to Eruh as “the district of Dēh.” See **Ye. M.** Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, p. 136.

<sup>168</sup> **Collected Memoirs**, vol. 14, pp. 279, 285.

<sup>169</sup> **Shahbazian, H.** *Kurdo-Armenian History*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>170</sup> **Collected Memoirs**, vol. 14, p. 285.

Kurdophony of the local Armenians, or whether the Emir Badrkhan had truly forbidden the use of the Armenian language.<sup>171</sup>

Pervari and Eruh provide classic examples of how the proclamation of Tanzimat, the Ottoman policy of centralization, and the rebellions of the Kurdish tribes shattered the patriarchal tranquility of the rural districts, finally resulting in the near-complete elimination of the Armenian population in regions that had contained sizeable Armenian communities at the outset of the 19th century.

In the chaotic wartime conditions of the middle 19th century, many residents of Bohtan departed for Constantinople. For the Armenians of the capital city, these newcomers from Bohtan were an incomprehensible anomaly; many could not believe that these Kurdish-speaking people in Kurdish dress were in reality Armenians. “It seemed strange to us to see these Armenians, who were so entirely Kurdish in their dress, language, and ways. Many did not even believe that they were Armenians, but, unfortunately, there is no people on the face of this earth which, concealing its own nationality, could find any attraction in pretending to be Armenian instead,” wrote Margos Natanian.<sup>172</sup> The traditional clothing of many Armenians of Bohtan from Deh, as described by Natanian, was very similar to that of the Kurds.<sup>173</sup> For this reason, there is possibly more than fancy underlying one story according to which Emir Badrkhan commanded the Armenians of the Bohtan district to dress in black, so that it would be possible to distinguish them from Kurds.<sup>174</sup>

Aside from Constantinople, Armenian emigrants from Bohtan also settled in Van during the middle of the 19th century. There as well, Natanian encountered migrants from Deh, including two priests who knew

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<sup>171</sup> **Ghazarian, A.D.** A forsaken people, *Azatomart*, 1911, № 542, p. 1.

<sup>172</sup> **Natanian, M.** Deh in Bohtan, *Masis*, 1885, № 3779, p. 1237. (Մարկոս Նաթանեան, Տեղ Ի Պօհոտան, «Մասիս»).

<sup>173</sup> The traditional dress of the natives of Bohtan or Deh, as described by Natanian, corresponds to what is generally called the Kurdish costume: “A large pointed wool felt cap covered in hundreds of *yazma*, the colorful and wide-legged *shalvar*, which might be considered the prototype of trousers; the extremely broad cuffs of their shirts draping practically to the ground, which serve for them as face-towel and handkerchief; a short wool coat which is known by the name of *kyazakhig*.” Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> It was said that Christians and Muslims alike dressed in white because of the heat. See **From the World of Suffering**, *Hairenik*, 1905, № 19, p. 3. (Տառապանքի Աշխարհէն, «Հայրենիք»).

neither Armenian nor Turkish. The priests did read the Gospel in Armenian in church, but Natanian found the Kurdish-speakers' Armenian disagreeable, saying that if this were considered Armenian, one could unhesitatingly call Japanese "sterling Armenian" as well.<sup>175</sup> All natives of Bohtan, without distinction, were Kurdish-speaking: "In the Kurdish-inhabited district of Jezireh there is only one large Armenian village called Dēh, comprised of 600 homes; while all of them are Kurdish speaking, they are nevertheless known as brave Armenians, undaunted by the Kurds, pious and strictly loyal to their native traditions and church; they are well-built, sturdy people, accustomed to the use of weapons."<sup>176</sup>

Armenian clergy occasionally remembered the spiritual needs of their "Kurdish-speaking Armenian compatriots of Bohtan." Nazaret Sarkisian, a teacher from the village school of Deh, who knew Kurdish well and could read the Gospel in Kurdish, was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Hovsep of Akhtamar. The bishop enjoined Sarkisian to make rounds and preach in the Kurdish-speaking Armenian villages of Bohtan.<sup>177</sup>

If the residents of Vozm were wool-combers by profession, the villagers of Deh were weavers; girls generally began to practice this trade from the age of five.<sup>178</sup>

The Kurdish-speaking Armenians of Bohtan were not spared the impact of the Hamidian massacres. In November 1895, armed Kurds from 48 surrounding villages entered Deh, killing 12 people and plundering Christian homes. The population fled to the mountains; the commander of the Ottoman gendarmerie of Deh announced that they could safely return

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<sup>175</sup> **Natanian, M.** Deh of Bohtan, p. 1240.

<sup>176</sup> **The Pontifical Diocese of Aghtamar**, *Ardzagank*, 1893, № 33, p. 2.

<sup>177</sup> "For the spiritual consolation of our Kurdish-speaking countrymen of Bohtan, the teacher of Deh, Mr. Nazaret Der-Sarkisian was ordained to the priesthood by His Eminence Bishop Hovsep of Akhtamar. Father Sarkisian is adept in the Kurdish tongue, able to read and explain the Gospel and Psalms to the people and pray in this same language. The episcopal vicar of Sghert has charged the new priest with making the rounds of those villages and towns where our Kurdish-speaking countrymen reside. [The bishop] intends to ordain several more priests to this same end. In various parts of the Sghert diocese, Armenians have remained entirely deprived of spiritual consolation, due to the insufficient number of priests. The Father Vicar will satisfy this need by sending five newly-ordained priests to these locales; there are villages where daily prayers have not been said for years." **Armenians in Turkey**, *Armenia*, 1906, № 8, p. 2. (Հայեր Ի Թուրքիա, «Արմենիա»).

<sup>178</sup> **Natanian, M.** Deh in Bohtan, *Masis*, 1885, № 3779, p. 1239.

to live in Deh if they accepted Islam. The Armenians of Deh duly descended from the hills, and formally converted. Several days later, however, they resumed practicing Christianity, and as a representative of the Christians of Deh told the British vice-consul J.H. Monahan, neither the local government nor the Kurds created any obstacle.<sup>179</sup> All the same, we read in one report concerning Sghert that during the events of 1895 approximately 200 people were Islamicized.<sup>180</sup> Elsewhere, it is noted that around 100 inhabitants of Deh, having been forcibly converted to Islam, were relocated to the nearby village of Aroh.<sup>181</sup> Following the Hamidian massacres, in 1902, the prelacy of Sghert compiled a register of the major Armenian communities of Bohtan, listing 11 Armenian-populated villages.

According to the pre-massacre official Ottoman statistics presented by Vice-Consul Monahan, 14,489 Muslims lived in the subdistrict of Bohtan along with 2,264 Christians. The latter number included 1,668 Armenians, with the remainder being Chaldeans, and Jacobite and Nestorian Assyrians.<sup>182</sup> As we will soon demonstrate, these official Ottoman statistics did not correspond to reality. Monahan is skeptical in this matter as well, noting that 260 families lived in Deh alone.<sup>183</sup> Regarding the population of Deh, Natanian writes that “it currently has 220 households of purely Armenian inhabitants, although it was previously thought to have contained 1,500 homes.”<sup>184</sup> The register of the prelacy of Sghert records 250 Armenian families in Deh in 1902,<sup>185</sup> and 300 households in 1903.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> **Monahan, J.H.** Report on a Journey in the Cazas Sherwan, Sairt and Aroh, May and June 1898 by Vice-Consul Monahan Series, BNA FO 195-2021, pp. 182v-190v, Available at: <https://www.jelleverheij.net/sources/1891---1900/journey-in-sherwan/monahan-1898-sirvan-182v-190v.html>.

<sup>180</sup> **Report on Sghert**, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1903, № 5, p. 71. (Տեղեկագիր Սղերդի, «Դրօշակ»).

<sup>181</sup> **Badalyan, G.** Historical-demographic profile, part 7, p. XXVIII.

<sup>182</sup> **Monahan, J.H.** Report on a Journey in the Cazas Sherwan, Sairt and Aroh, pp. 182v-190v.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> **Natanian, M.** Deh in Bohtan, *Masis*, 1885, № 3779, p. 1238.

<sup>185</sup> **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, p. 4b.

<sup>186</sup> **Report on Sghert**, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1903, № 5, p. 71. Deh is also mentioned as having about 200 Armenian households. See **Shahbazian, H.** Kurdo-Armenian History, p. 89.

Murders, forced conversions, and outmigration periodically occurred in the kaza of Eruh. It was reported, for instance, that although Armenians made up 40-50 households in Shërank, they lived under the perpetual risk of forced expulsion and loss of their properties.<sup>187</sup>

### Population data for Bohtan

Source	Year	Armenian population	Kurdish population	Assyrian population (Jacobite)	Yezidi population
A. Devgants	1878	6,221 <sup>188</sup>			
Ardzagank	1882	6,201	8,184	316 <sup>189</sup>	
V. Cuinet	1891	5,113 <sup>190</sup>	9,441	350	350
Byurakn	1898	5,000 <sup>191</sup>			
V. Mayevski	1899	5,624	10,385	385 <sup>192</sup>	
Byurakn	1900	5000 <sup>193</sup>			
Droshak	1901	3,000 (350 households) <sup>194</sup>			

<sup>187</sup> **The Diocese of Sghert**, *Zhamanak*, Constantinople, 1911, № 881, p. 3. (Սղերդի վիճակը, «Ժամանակ»).

<sup>188</sup> This figure of 6,221 which we derived by adding up the Armenian population of villages individually listed by Devgants, once again slightly differs from the demographer's own total of 6,201. See **Davgants, A.** *Visit to Armenia*, pp. 117, 126.

<sup>189</sup> The same figure provided by Devgants. (**Ye. M.**, Letter from Sgherd, *Ardzagank*, p. 136).

<sup>190</sup> This is Cuinet's figure for Armenian Apostolics. See **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, p. 611. **Mansur**, Sghert, *Byurakn*, 1898, № 37-38, p. 670.

<sup>191</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 222.

<sup>192</sup> **Emirian, T.** Sghert, *Byurakn*, 1900. № 19-20, p. 299. (Գ. Էմիրյան, Սղերդ, «Բիւրակն»).

<sup>194</sup> *Droshak* makes the population estimate of 3,000 based on the figure of 350 households. See **Report on the Sghert District**, *Droshak*, 1901, № 7, p. 118.

<b>Sghert Prelacy</b>	1902	Approx. 3,992 (439+60 households) <sup>195</sup>			
<b>Sghert Prelacy for Patriarchate Census</b>	1913	3,393 (R. Kevorkian) <sup>196</sup> , approx. 4,590 (R. Tatoyan) <sup>197</sup>			
<b>Ottoman Census</b>	1914	1,890	22,667 (Muslim)	714 <sup>198</sup>	
<b>Teotig</b>	1914	Approx. 5,376 (672 households) <sup>199</sup>			

<sup>195</sup> The Sghert Prelacy reported that the 50 villages of the district each had one or two Armenian households.. See **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, 5b. Natanian probably means the same when he writes that “there are supposed to be 60 more Armenian households in all of Bohtan, scattered here and there from Deh, who are all in the same condition as [those in] Deh, with the only difference that they have no clergy, sometimes die without baptism and are buried without priests.” See **Natanian, M.** Deh in Bohtan, *Masis*, 1885, № 3779, p. 1240. This is the basis for the addition of 60 households marked in the table above.

<sup>196</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** The Armenian Genocide, p. 277.

<sup>197</sup> **Tatoyan, R.** The Number of Armenians in the Vilayet of Bitlis, pp. 162-163.

<sup>198</sup> **Karpat, K.H.** Ottoman population, p.174.

<sup>199</sup> **Teotig**, Golgotha, pp. 91, 539. In reality, on the eve of the Genocide, the population of Bohtan was smaller than this, because Teotig’s figure of 600 households in Deh pertains to an earlier period, not to the year 1914.

## THE SUBDISTRICT OF SHIRVAN

(Shirwan, Shervan)

Shirvan,<sup>200</sup> which formed a part of the historical Armenian province of Mokka' was, in contrast to Kharzan and Bsharik, a mountainous area located in the northeastern part of the Sghert sanjak.<sup>201</sup> After the establishment of Ottoman rule in the 16th century Shirvan became subject to Kurdish tribes, and remained a land under Kurdish law for centuries to come. Although the Ottoman policy of centralization weakened the position of the Kurdish beys who had previously enjoyed almost total freedom, the researcher Jelle Verheij makes the well-placed observation that even at the end of the 19th century, Ottoman administration in Shirvan and Khizan largely existed in name only.<sup>202</sup> In 1881 Shirvan was removed from Diyarbekir and joined instead to the Bitlis vilayet. During the late Ottoman period, Shirvan constituted a kaza of the Sghert sanjak of the Bitlis vilayet.<sup>203</sup>

Available sources, mainly the period Armenian press, provide contradictory indications as to whether the Armenians of Shirvan spoke Kurdish or Armenian. The question necessarily arises: should Shirvan be

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<sup>200</sup> Medieval Armenian primary sources contain only a few references to Shirvan of Mokka'. One of these is provided by Azaria of Sasun, who mentions Shirvan along with Bohtan and Sghert in the colophon of a manuscript dated 1591-1611, See **Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of 17th century** (1601-1620), vol. 1, comp. V. Hakobyan and A. Hovhannisyan, Yerevan 1974, pp. 446-447. (Հայերեն ձեռագրերի ժԷ դարի հիշատակարաններ (1601-1620 թթ.), հտ. Ա, կազմեցին Հակոբյան Վ., Հովհաննիսյան Ա.). We also find Shirvan mentioned as “Shervan” and “Shiruan” (Շերվան, Շիրուան). **Akinian, N.** *The School of Baghesh, 1500-1704*, Vienna 1952, p. 322, fn. 1, p. 323. (Ակինյան Ն., Բաղէշի Դպրոցը).

<sup>201</sup> The kaza of Eruh bordered Sghert to the north and Barvari to the northeast. To the southeast, it was separated from Diyarbekir's Slopi subdistrict by the Judi (Ararad) mountain range, and to the west it bordered on the Midyat district of Diyarbekir. See **Badalyan, G.**, *Historical-demographic profile*, part 7, p. XXIV.

<sup>202</sup> **Jelle Verheij**, “The Year of the Firman”: The 1895 Massacres in Hizan and Şirvan (Bitlis vilayet), *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, 2017, 10(10), p. 130.

<sup>203</sup> For more detail, see **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, p. 729.

listed among the Kurdish-speaking Armenian regions of the Ottoman Empire, or not? In addition to presenting the evidence on either side, this section attempts to clarify the underlying reasons for the confusion in the primary sources.



Landscape viewed from Shirvan. Image credit to “Houshamadyan.”<sup>204</sup>

Moving on, we may observe that Shirvan was almost unfailingly listed among the Kurdish-speaking Armenian regions. For instance, Vardapet Georg Nalbandyan, the episcopal vicar of the Sghert Diocese, wrote: “I wish to call your attention to our compatriots in Arabic-speaking Sghert and the four surrounding Kurdish-speaking districts of Gharzan, Shirvan, Bohtan, and Bervar, who number 20,000 or more and, dispersed across 110 villages, are mixed with various Kurdish tribes and other

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<sup>204</sup> **Martirosyan, T.** Kaza of Shirvan - Monasteries, churches and places of pilgrimage. <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-bitlispagheshe/kaza-of-shirvan/religion/churches.html>.

nations.”<sup>205</sup> Shirvan was also considered a Kurdish speaking district by the Ottoman parliamentary representative Kegham Der-Garabedian, who was highly familiar with the Armenian-populated regions of the empire: “Remember, that in Kharzan, Shirvan, Slivan, Bësheri, and so on, there are more than 100 villages of Kurdish-speaking Armenians.”<sup>206</sup> A 1910 issue of *Azatamart*, discussing the “Kurdish-speaking Armenian population or the Armenian-Kurdish milieu,” once again mentions Shirvan among the other Kurdish-speaking districts.<sup>207</sup>

Shirvan was also ranked among the Kurdish-speaking districts by Arshag Alboyadjian<sup>208</sup> and Hrachya Acharyan.<sup>209</sup> Mayevski, who in all probability travelled through the villages of Shirvan, also considered the district to be Kurdish-speaking.<sup>210</sup>

However, alongside all this evidence concerning the linguistic assimilation of the Armenians of Shirvan, we find contrary assessments as well. The Constantinople-based *Byurakn* periodical, which allotted appreciable space in its pages to linguistic matters, especially those concerning rural dialects, states in one of its 1898 issues that “our fellow-nationals in this district [Shirvan] are Armenian-speaking.”<sup>211</sup> Three years later, we encounter an immensely interesting description of the Armenian speakers of Shirvan: “They speak a broken and impoverished Armenian.”<sup>212</sup> Teodig likewise considered Shirvan to be Armenian-speaking.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> **Nalbandyan, G., Rev.** For the education of Kurdish-speaking Armenians, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 297, p. 4. (Գէորգ Վ. Նալբանդեան, Բրտախոս Հայերու Արթուրեան Համար, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>206</sup> **Der-Garabedian, K.** Native province: six hundred villages, students and schoolhouses, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 305, p. 1.

<sup>207</sup> **E.,** The Necessity of a Kurdish Literature, *Azatamart*, 1910, p. 2.

<sup>208</sup> **Alboyadjian, A.** Armenian and Kurdish ethnic relations II., *Byuzantion*, 1913, № 4953, p. 1.

<sup>209</sup> **Acharyan, H.** Foreign-speaking Armenians, p. 33.

<sup>210</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 264.

<sup>211</sup> **Mansur, Sghert,** *Byurakn*, 1898, № 37-38, p. 670. Interestingly, the same issue of *Byurakn* contains an article by Hrachya Acharyan, in which he lists the Kurdish-speaking subdistricts of Shirvan.

<sup>212</sup> **Report on the District of Sghert,** *Droshak*, Geneva, 1901, № 7, p. 118.

<sup>213</sup> **Teotig,** Golgotha, p. 93.

Also of great relevance in this matter is the testimony of James Henry Monahan, the British vice-consul in Bitlis, who in 1898, in the aftermath of the Hamidian massacres, travelled through almost all of the Christian-populated villages of Shirvan. He writes that the Assyrians of the southern part of Shirvan spoke Syriac, while in Maden and in northern Shirvan in general, they spoke a “corrupt Armenian.”<sup>214</sup> Still earlier, before the Hamidian massacres, the Protestant missionary Alpheus N. Andrus, describing a visit to the village of Zenzek in Shirvan, writes that the local Assyrians had forgotten their own language and spoke Armenian and Kurdish.<sup>215</sup> Lynch also observed that the (Jacobite) Assyrians of Bitlis were Armenian-speaking.<sup>216</sup> It is worthy of interest that the Armenian-speaking Assyrians of Shirvan were frequently confused with Armenians. In Monahan’s account, “the Sherwan Jacobites or Syrians are generally confused with Armenians in Constantinople, and dress like Kurds or mountain Armenians, but have a darker complexion and more delicate type of face than the Armenians, and people of the country can easily distinguish between the two.”<sup>217</sup> Gegham Badalyan writes that Armenian primary sources, as a rule, regard these Assyrians as Armenian in origin.<sup>218</sup> In this context, we may understand the insistence of the author of a letter to the *Ardzagank* newspaper that the Armenians of the diocese of Sghert did not know Armenian and spoke Arabic, while the Assyrians spoke Armenian. “Can you solve this riddle?” he asks in his letter.<sup>219</sup> It would be possible to

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<sup>214</sup> **Monahan, J. H.** Report on a Journey in the Cazas Sherwan, Sairt and Aroh, May and June 1898 by Vice-Consul Monahan Series, BNA FO 195-2021, pp.174v-182. According to Andrus, the Assyrians of Maden spoke Arabic. See **The Missionary Herald**, The proceedings of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1892, vol. LXXXVIII (88), Boston, 1892, p. 408.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 407.

<sup>216</sup> **H. F. B. Lynch**, vol. II, p. 152.

<sup>217</sup> **Monahan, J.H.** Report on a Journey in the Cazas Sherwan, Sairt and Aroh, pp.174v-182.

<sup>218</sup> Badalian does not accept the Assyrian origin of these populations, rather contending that they were Armenians who adopted the doctrine of Nestorianism as a result of the Sasanian religious policy of the 5th-6th centuries. See **Badalyan, G.**, Historical-demographic profile, part 7, p. XXI. A Jacobite Assyrian clergyman bitterly related to Lynch that many of his co-ethnics were becoming Armenized. According to him, there were 1,500 Assyrians living in Sghert and Shirvan at this time. **H. F. B. Lynch**, vol. II, p. 153.

<sup>219</sup> The letter writer provides the following description: “our fellow [Armenians] read and do not understand, for they do not know Armenian; although all the Assyrians of the diocese

ignore this strange contention, if the letter-writer were not clearly quite well-informed about affairs in Sghert. Perhaps the starting point of this letter-writer's idea was precisely the Shirvan district, where there were villages of Armenian-speaking Assyrians.

Another circumstance promoting the confusion of Assyrians with Armenians was that the Armenian-speaking Assyrians of Shirvan had Armenian surnames; for instance, the “Assyrian Simon Janoyan” from the village of Zanzik and the “Assyrian Gulo Shaghoyan” from the village of Sermet.<sup>220</sup> We are therefore inclined to think the presence of Armenian-speaking Assyrians with Armenian names was one of the fundamental reasons for the emergence of the view that Shirvan was an Armenian-speaking district.

Monahan, for instance, calls Maden a village of Armenian-speaking Assyrians, but A-Do (Hovhannes Ter-Martirosyan, 1867-1954), basing his conclusions on a report of the Catholicosate of Aghtamar, considers it an Armenian-inhabited village.<sup>221</sup> It is highly suggestive that the Sghert Prelacy, in its registers of both 1902 and 1913, did not consider Maden to be an Armenian-inhabited village, excluding it from its statistical tables for the Sghert district. Accordingly, stray descriptions of Shirvan as an Armenian-speaking district are primarily expressions of an external perspective—either from Aghtamar or the capital, Constantinople—whereas an appreciable number of more immediate sources emphasize the Kurdish-speaking character of the Armenians of Shirvan.

Nevertheless, we do not believe that conflicting information regarding the spoken language of the Armenians of the district can be explained exclusively by the confusion between Armenians and Armenian-speaking Assyrians. The picture is completed by the missionary Andrus, who observes that the dominant language in the subdistrict was Kurdish and that the Armenians of Shirvan spoke better Kurdish than Armenian.<sup>222</sup>

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speak Armenian, the Armenians [speak] Arabic.” See Ye. M. Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, p. 135.

<sup>220</sup> **Always two weights and two measures:** incompetence or carelessness? *Azatamart*, 1911, № 674, p. 3.

<sup>221</sup> **A-Do**, *The Vilayets of Van, Bitlis and Erzurum*, Yerevan, 1912, p. 154. (Ա-Դօ, Վանի, Բիթլիսի և Էրզրումի Վիլայեթները).

<sup>222</sup> **The Missionary Herald**, vol. LXXXVIII (88), pp. 407-408.

It may therefore be inferred that at least a part of Shirvan’s Armenian population knew Armenian, but that they spoke Kurdish better. It is in this context that we may explain the previously quoted description of the Armenian dialect of Shirvan as “broken” (*aghchat*, also meaning “distorted,” “corrupted”) and “impoverished” (*aghkaghk*, also meaning “weak,” “insignificant”), an assessment corresponding to the linguistic situation we have postulated. We take certain other expressions encountered in the Armenian demographic literature of the period—*krdakharn* (“mixed with Kurdish”)<sup>223</sup> and *anhaskanali aghavaghyal* (“incomprehensibly corrupted”)—as referring, in the first instance, to Shirvan, and perhaps to certain neighboring regions as well.<sup>224</sup> In these conditions it was probably considered preferable to speak Kurdish; it was no accident that the episcopal vicar of the Sghert diocese included Shirvan in a list of Kurdish-speaking Armenian districts. Moreover, Shirvan’s encirclement by various Kurdish-speaking Armenian regions must have further promoted the reinforcement of Kurdish in the district.

The north of Shirvan, where Monahan noted villages of Armenian-speaking Assyrians, was occupied by the nahiye of Erun, also called Yeran or Iran.<sup>225</sup> The local Armenians might have likewise been Armenian-speaking. It is very tempting to conclude that the Armenians of Shirvan extending to Kurdish-speaking Kharzan and the Bohtan valley were, by and large, Kurdish-speaking, whereas the Armenians of the subdistrict’s eastern villages, like those of the villages of Khizan, were Armenian-speaking.<sup>226</sup>

<sup>223</sup> **Antreasian, H.A.** Kurdistan, *Avetaber*, 1877, № 6, p. 23. (Հ. Ա. Անդրեասեան, Քրդաստան, «Աւետարեր»).

<sup>224</sup> **Information from Turkish Armenia**, *Mshak*, 1889, № 20, p. 3. (Reprinted from Arevelk) (Տեղեկութիւններ Թիւրքաց Հայաստանից, «Մշակ»).

<sup>225</sup> **A worsening situation in the rural areas**, *Byuzantion*, 1911, № 4595, p. 3. (Կացութիւնը Կ’ձանրանայ Գաւառներուն Մէջ, «Բիւզանդիոն»). **Teotig**, Golgotha, pp. 93-94. Erun is sometimes mentioned alongside Shirvan, as a separate subdistrict. See **Garabedian, K.** The Land Issue in the Armenian-Populated Provinces, Constantinople, 1911, p. 41 (Կարապետեան Գ., Հողային հարցը հայաբնակ նահանգներու մէջ). In addition to Erun, a dictionary of Ottoman toponyms also lists Minar (1897-1923), Iskanbo (1897-1923) and Hasras as nahiyes of Shirvan. See **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, pp. 219, 380, 601. The same source also notes Zirki (Zırki) as a nahiye of Shirvan from 1878 to 1880. During these year, Shirvan was a part of the Diyarbekir vilayet. *Ibid.*, p. 837.

<sup>226</sup> As of 1864 Khizan formed a part of the district of Shirvan, and the linguistic situation in both regions was apparently the same. See **Gündüz, A.** 1914-1926 Yılları Arasında Bitlis, Siirt, Ve Siirt’in İlçelerinde Yaşayan Aşiretler, p. 67.

Kurdish and Assyrian were spoken in Shirvan's Assyrian village of Zivzek; the English vice-consul, however, puts "Assyrian" in quotation marks, presumably to indicate that the locals did not have a strong grasp of their mother tongue.<sup>227</sup> Of course for the natives of Shirvan, scattered among Kurdish tribes and having extremely little contact with the outside world, it must have been difficult to preserve their native languages. It seems that in late Ottoman-era Shirvan we are dealing with an unsettled, transitional linguistic situation.

The confusion of Armenian-speaking Assyrians with Armenians, and their being considered Armenian by a number of Armenian sources, further increases the difficulty of forming a precise estimate of the number of Armenians in Shirvan. According to Monahan, the kaza of Shirvan had 200 villages, the majority of which consisted of six or fewer households. He identified 28 Christian villages, of which 10 were Armenian and 18 Jacobite Assyrian.<sup>228</sup> In 1901 *Droshak* put the number of Armenian-populated locales at 11,<sup>229</sup> while the prelacy of Sghert listed 16 in 1902,<sup>230</sup> and Kegham Der-Karapetian 17 in 1910.<sup>231</sup>

Shirvan became yet another stage for the Hamidian massacres. The objective of Monahan's visit was to investigate the prevailing situation in the aftermath of the mass killings. Based on the information he presents, we can state that 169 Christians, both Armenian and Assyrian, fell victim to the massacres, including 151 men and 18 women.<sup>232</sup>

The report of the Sghert Prelacy notes the destruction and total abandonment of more than 10 Armenian and Assyrian villages in Shirvan itself, and in the Zêrêkan and Erun nahiyes of the Shirvan subdistrict. One of these, Derzni (Darzên) had 20 households of Armenians in 1895; during the Hamidian massacres they were converted to Islam, subsequently "re-Armenized" and, being unable to withstand the threats of their Muslim

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<sup>227</sup> **Monahan, J.H.** Report on a Journey in the Cazas Sherwan, Sairt and Aroh, pp.174v-182.

<sup>228</sup> Monahan also emphasized the size of the Christian villages in comparison to their Muslim counterparts. See *ibid* 157-165.

<sup>229</sup> **Report on the Sghert District**, *Droshak*, 1901, № 7, p. 118.

<sup>230</sup> The numbering in the original source is off, but 16 villages are listed. See **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, pp. 6b-8.

<sup>231</sup> **Der-Garabedian, K.** Native province: six hundred villages, students and schoolhouses, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 305, p. 1.

<sup>232</sup> **Monahan, J.H.** Report on a Journey in the Cazas Sherwan, Sairt and Aroh, pp. 199v-201.

neighbors, fled to Baghesh. It appears that all Armenians converted to Islam in Shirvan during this period subsequently returned to Christianity.<sup>233</sup> By Monahan's account, three villages in Shirvan continued to embrace Islam as of 1898, but several years later they are once again presented as Armenian villages in the report of the Sghert Prelacy.<sup>234</sup>

### Population data for Shirvan

Source	Year	Armenians	Assyrian (Jacobite)	Muslim
<b>A. Devgants</b>	1878	2,101 <sup>235</sup>		
<b>Ardzagank</b>	1882	2,048	2,023	12,701 <sup>236</sup>
<b>V. Cuinet</b>	1891	4,113	400	9,635 Kurds <sup>237</sup>
<b>Monahan</b>	1898	3,048 Armenians and Assyrians <sup>238</sup>		
<b>Byurakn</b>	1898	3,000 <sup>239</sup>		
<b>V. Mayevski</b>	1899	4,524	440 Jacobite	10,620 Kurds <sup>240</sup>

<sup>233</sup> NAA, 412, 1, 1856, p. 7.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, pp. 6b-8.

<sup>235</sup> The figure of 2,101 is our own, based on the sum of Devgants's population figures for Shirvan and Erun. Once again, Devgants's subtotals do not add up to the total he presents (Shirvan 1,569, Erun 479, total 2,048). See **Devgants, A.** Visit to Armenia, pp. 115, 121, 126, 127.

<sup>236</sup> As with Devgants, we have added up the subtotals for Shirvan and Erun. See **Ye. M.** Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, pp. 135-136.

<sup>237</sup> **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, p. 609.

<sup>238</sup> Monahan did not visit four villages, and estimated their populations by counting one household as six individuals. See **Monahan, J.H.** Report on a Journey in the Casaz Sherwan, Sairt and Aroh, pp. 157-165.

<sup>239</sup> **Mansur**, Sghert, *Byurakn*, Constantinople, 1898, № 37-38, p. 670.

<sup>240</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 222.

<b>Droshak</b>	1900	Approx. 1,000 (140 households) <sup>241</sup>		
<b>Sghert Prelacy</b>	1902	Approx. 1,472 (184 households) <sup>242</sup>		
<b>A-Do</b>	1912	2,380 (340 households) <sup>243</sup>		
<b>Sghert Prelacy Patriarchate Census</b>	1913	2,852 (R. Kevorkian), <sup>244</sup> 1,809 (R. Tatoyan) <sup>245</sup>		
<b>Ottoman Census</b>	1914	1,169	1109	15,181 <sup>246</sup>
<b>Teotig</b>	1914	Approx. 1,576 (197 households) <sup>247</sup>		

<sup>241</sup> This is the estimate provided in *Droshak*, See **Report on the Sghert District**, *Droshak*, 1901, № 7, p. 118.

<sup>242</sup> **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, pp. 6b-8.

<sup>243</sup> A-Do states that he took this data from a report of the Aghtamar Catholicosate. **A-Do**. The Vilayets of Van, Bitlis and Erzurum, Yerevan, 1912, p. 154. The population figure of 2,380 was probably produced by multiplying the number of households by 7. See *ibid*, p. 157.

<sup>244</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** The Armenian Genocide, p. 277.

<sup>245</sup> **Tatoyan, R.** The Number of Armenians in the Vilayet of Bitlis, p. 156.

<sup>246</sup> **Karpat, K.H.** Ottoman population, p. 174.

<sup>247</sup> The total figure is our own, produced by adding the number of households in Shirvan and Eruh and multiplying by 8. For a village-by-village breakdown see **Teotig**, Golgotha, pp. 93-94, 540.

## THE SUBDISTRICT OF PERVARI

(Barvar, Barvari, Parvar)

The other *kaza* of the Sghert district, Pervari, is likewise referred to in several instances as a Kurdish-speaking region. Van's *Ashkhatank* newspaper, for instance, alludes to the Kurdish-speaking status of the Armenians of Pervari: "And here is the world of eternal oblivion: Slevi,<sup>248</sup> Jizire, Sghert, Shirvan, Parvar, until the heights of Mokka—a people abandoned, enslaved, wounds on their breast, pain in their heart, [who] have forgotten their mother tongue, their native dialect."<sup>249</sup> It is worthy of mention that the episcopal vicar of Sghert, vardapet Georg Nalbandyan, considered Pervari to be one of the four Kurdish-speaking subdistricts of Sghert.<sup>250</sup> We also read in a 1915 issue of the *Arev* newspaper that "toward the south, the Kurdish-speaking Armenians of Barvar and Shirvan have been massacred."<sup>251</sup> Mayevski remains in doubt as to whether the villagers of Pervari were Kurdish-speaking, since he never had occasion to travel through the area.<sup>252</sup>

All the same, references to the Armenians of Pervari as Kurdish-speaking are fairly few, not comparable in number to those regarding Shirvan. Contrarily, various sources refer to the locals of Pervari as Armenian-speaking. *Byurakn*, for instance, writes that "The Armenians of this district are few in number, and their language is Armenian, while the Kurds in turn speak Kurdish."<sup>253</sup> Elsewhere we read of the Armenians of

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<sup>248</sup> Referring to the broader Silvan-Farghin-Nprkert area.

<sup>249</sup> **National Interests**, *Ashkhatank*, Van, 1910, № 5, p. 4 (58). (Ազգային Շահերը, «Աշխատանք»).

<sup>250</sup> **Nalbandyan, G., Rev.** For the education of Kurdish-speaking Armenians, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 297, p. 4.

<sup>251</sup> **The Situation of Armenians**, Fortunate Corners, *Arev*, Alexandria, 1915, № 81, p. 3. (Հայոց Վացութիւնը, Բարդաւար Անկիւններ, «Արեւ»).

<sup>252</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 264.

<sup>253</sup> **Emirian, T.** Sghert, *Byurakn*, 1900. № 19-20, p. 299.

Pervari that “They speak a distorted and mangled Armenian.”<sup>254</sup> Hrachya Acharyan also did not consider the Armenians of Pervari to be Kurdish-speaking.

It is known that Vozm, the village of Pervari with the largest Armenian population, was Armenian-speaking. In the recollection of Armenak Amrikyan, a native of Vozm, “many women or children of our village did not know how to speak Kurdish, and the boys did not know how to speak Kurdish until they went to [work at] cotton and wool-combing.”<sup>255</sup> Vozm, moreover, had its own distinctive dialect or argot: “The natives of Vozm are a brave, combative people; they go [to work at] combing wool and cotton, and they have their own separate argot-like dialect, which they use as necessary, apart from their own language.”<sup>256</sup> In this regard, Armenak Amrikyan writes: “The worst thing about us was our language, that in other places they wouldn’t understand our conversation. Elsewhere, outside of the district of Mokk’, they mocked our language, even though we spoke pure Armenian.”<sup>257</sup> This secret language was called “*dpogheren*.”<sup>258</sup>

The natives of Vozm, almost without exception, were renowned cotton- and wool-combers, and they travelled widely in the practice of their trade. Becoming skilled at their profession and seeming, to an extent, to segregate themselves from their surroundings, the Armenians of Vozm were known as strange people with their own provincial dialect, mores, and customs.<sup>259</sup> In a word, they were the “Zoks of Turkish Armenia.”<sup>260</sup> As Armenak Amrikyan recalls, “one of the great pillars of our village’s livelihood was *gzrarut’yun*, wool-carding or cotton combing, which we called *katan* (*կառուկ*). This was our source of livelihood from autumn until spring. Money didn’t come into our hands from anywhere else. We were

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<sup>254</sup> **Report on the Sghert District**, *Droshak*, 1901, № 7, p. 118.

<sup>255</sup> **Collected Memoirs**, vol. 14, p. 289.

<sup>256</sup> **Shahbazian, H.** Windows onto the province of Vaspurakan, information concerning several several Kurdish ashirets. *Azatomart*, 1912, № 982, p. 1. (**Յ. Շահապազեան**, Վասպուրականի Նահանգի Պատուհասները, Տեղեկութիւններ Մէկ Քանի Քիրտ Աշիրէթներու Վրայ, «Ազատամարտ»). See also **Орбели, И. А.** Фольклор и быт Мокса, с. 40-42.

<sup>257</sup> **Collected Memoirs**, vol. 14, Yerevan, 2011, p. 291.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.* Concerning the argot of Vozm, see also **Papazian, V.** *My Memoirs*, pp. 203, 577.

<sup>259</sup> **Letter from Turkey**, *Armenia*, 1902, № 19, p. 2.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.* “Zok” was a term for Armenians from the region of Goghtn, who were known in Eastern Armenia and Tbilisi for their incomprehensible dialect.

like ‘cross-thieves,’<sup>261</sup> but aside from the wool of the aghas and the wealthy, we wouldn’t lay our hands on anything else. We went to other places, for instance Mush, Manazkert, Alashkert, Khnus, and so on. The main reason was that the tyrannical aghas would not let us till and sow our mountains, we had no right to plant thousands of hectares of useful land, and Hamid’s government protected the aghas.”<sup>262</sup>

Vardapet Georg, who carried out a fruitful ministry in precisely this region, must have known better than anyone that Vozm was Armenian-speaking.<sup>263</sup> In this case we must ask why this clergyman, extremely well-informed about the district, would have considered the Armenians of Pervari to be Kurdish-speaking. Notably, in the pages of the late Armenian press we encounter more mentions of populous and well-known Vozm than all the rest of the kaza of Pervari combined. Although Vozm is occasionally described as a village of the Pervari kaza,<sup>264</sup> judging by these same press extracts, it was sometimes conceived of as an entirely separate community.<sup>265</sup> An impression arises that, following the traditional delineation, Vozm was often considered to be one of the villages of Mokk’. At the same time, the remaining Armenian villages of the kaza were not very populous; due to continuous persecutions, the Armenian presence in

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<sup>261</sup> The figure of the “cross-thief” (*khachagogh*), an itinerant bandit and confidence man of versatile capabilities and concealed origins, often masquerading as a clergyman, was immortalized in Raffi’s 1884 novel *Memoirs of a Cross-Thief*.

<sup>262</sup> **Collected Memoirs**, vol. 14, pp. 288-289.

<sup>263</sup> Naturally, he had personally visited the village of Vozm on numerous occasions. See, for example, **The wretched state of Vozim**, *Azatamart*, 1912, № 959, p. 3. (**ՈՂԻՄԻ ԹՇՈՒԱՆ ԿԱԳՈՒԹԻՒՆՆԸ**, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>264</sup> See, for instance, a reference to “the Armenian village called Vozm, in the Kskher governorate [*kaymakamutyun*, i.e. kaza], in the Sghert mutasarrifate [i.e. sanjak], in the province of Baghegh.” See **Bloody fighting in Vozim**: The Armenian villager’s self-defense, as related by an eyewitness, *Azatamart*, 1912, № 940, p. 1. (**ՈՂԻՄԻ ԱՐԻՆԱՏԻՆԵՂ ԿՐԻՒՆԵՐՆԸ**, Հայ Գիւղացիին Ինքնապաշտպանութիւնը Պատմուած Ականատես Վկայէ Մը, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>265</sup> “To the west of Aghbak there are found heavily Armenian-populated regions: Norduz, Moks, Khizan, Vozm, Gargar, and so on.” See **Letters from the Perso-Turkish Frontier**, IV, *Droshak*, Vienna, 1896, № 9, p. 67. (**ՆԱՄԱԿՆԵՐ ՊԱՐՍԿԱ-ՏԱՆԿԱԿԱՆ ՍԱԽՄԱՆԱԳՂԻՍԻԳ**, IV, «Դրօշակ»): “Especially in the mountainous districts—for example, Mamutank (Mamrtank), Vozm, Gargar, Khizan—after the [proclamation of] the Constitution, the Armenians were led into a worse situation than before.” See **Marzbed**, Pains of the Country: The Baghesh Region, I. *Azatamart*, 1909, № 124, p. 2. (**ՄԱՐԲԵԴ**, Երկրի Ցաւերէն, Բաղէշի Շրջանը, I., «Ազատամարտ»).

this region was gradually decreasing.<sup>266</sup> Added to this was the proceeding Islamification of the Armenians of Pervari and the surrounding villages: “And religious conversation, without slackening, continues in Rabanok, Heshad, Khaskher, Malig, Aguk, Shagamer, Segh, Armashad, Dzapants, Gujokhs, Dzardants, Daramaz and Khreb. There is no hope of their being Armenian any longer.”<sup>267</sup>

It is possible that in certain villages of Pervari, the same linguistic situation prevailed as in Shirvan; that is, the inhabitants knew Kurdish better than Armenian and perhaps were fully Kurdish-speaking. It is also quite possible that the adulterated (that is Kurdish-inflected) Armenian dialect of the locals contributed to the classification of Pervari as a Kurdish-speaking district. It should not be overlooked that the subdistrict was surrounded with Kurdish-speaking Armenian communities on almost every side. It is also possible to suppose that, by the early 20th century, Armenian had been entirely forgotten in the southern villages of Pervari. In 1912, the prelate of Sghert wrote to the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople that, in Vozm, as well as in the other villages of Pervari, “there is no one who knows how to read and write.”<sup>268</sup>

According to Cuinet, the number of Armenians in Pervari was 3,800.<sup>269</sup> In 1900, following the Hamidian massacres, the number according to *Byurakn* was 2,100,<sup>270</sup> while Mayevski placed it at 4,180.<sup>271</sup> The Ottoman census, as always, under-counted the Armenian population, giving the number as 1,326.<sup>272</sup> On the eve of the Genocide, by Raymond

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<sup>266</sup> For further information on the gradual decline of the Armenian population of Pervari, the villages of Pervari and their Armenian populations see: **Nahabedians, Gh. B.** The House of Parvar, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 13, p. 200-201. (Reprinted from Masis). (**Ղ. Ղ. Նահապետեանց**, Բարվարայ Տուն, «Արձագանք»). The anti-Armenian persecutions were continuous in nature, not confined to specific outbreaks. In the year 1911, for instance, ten Armenian families vacated Kaskher. See **Assorted News**, *Azatomart*, 1911, № 485, p. 3. (**Զանազան Լուրեր**, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>267</sup> **Irazek**, Correspondences, *Hairenik*, Boston, 1901, № 115, p. 3. (**Իրազեկ**, Թղթակցութիւններ, «Հայրենիք»).

<sup>268</sup> **The State of Sghert**: Vozim will be ruined, *Azatomart*, 1912, № 993, p. 2. (**Սղերդի Կացութիւնը**, Ոգիմը Պիտի Արուի, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>269</sup> **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, p. 615.

<sup>270</sup> **Emirian, T.** Sghert, *Byurakn*, 1900. № 19-20, p. 299.

<sup>271</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 222.

<sup>272</sup> **Karpat, K.H.** Ottoman population, p. 174.

Kevorkian's accounting, there were 15 Armenian-inhabited villages in the Pervari kaza, with an Armenian population of 2538.<sup>273</sup> Armenian speakers, at least the natives of Vozm, must have made up a large proportion of this total. In 1902, the Sghert Prelacy identified 11 Armenian villages in the subdistrict of Pervar, with a population of 263 households,<sup>274</sup> of which the greatest portion belonged to Armenian-speaking Vozm.

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<sup>273</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 277.

<sup>274</sup> **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, pp. 5b-6b.

## THE CITY OF SGHERT

While a majority of Armenians in the rural subdistricts of the Sghert sanjak were Kurdish-speaking, the Armenians of the city of Sghert, located to the south of Baghesh, near Bohtan on the eastern branch of the Tigris, were primarily Arabic-speaking. The city's Muslims (Arabs, Kurds, and Turks), likewise spoke Arabic, regardless of ethnic affiliation.<sup>275</sup> Why did the inhabitants of the city of Sghert, surrounded by Kurdish-speaking regions, instead speak the language of Islam? This circumstance appears to have had deep historical roots. Arabic speakers had lived in the city for centuries on end; even today, there are Arabic speakers in Sghert and the old city in particular is Arabic-speaking.<sup>276</sup> The Arabic language may have been reinforced by Sghert's status as an Ottoman sanjak, precluding dominion by Kurdish *ashirets*,<sup>277</sup> as well as by the presence of many madrasas during the Ottoman period, which necessarily provided instruction in Arabic.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Arabic was also spoken by the inhabitants of several villages in the vicinity. See **Journey to Armenia**, From Bitlis to Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1892, № 11, p. 3. (**Ճանապարհորդութիւն Գէպի Հայաստան**, Բիթլիսից մինչև Սղերդ, «Արձագանք»). The same newspaper, *Ardzagank*, also published a translation of travel notes by two Frenchmen originally published in *Le Temps* in 1890. See *ibid*, № 4, p. 1. The number of Armenians living on the outskirts of the city of Sghert was not large. According to a report from 1882, the combined population of the surrounding villages was 90 Armenians, 120 Assyrians, and 407 Kurds. **Ye. M.** Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, p. 136.

<sup>276</sup> For more information on Arabophony in Sghert and the city's modern Arabic dialect, see **Gabriel Biṭunā**, The spoken Arabic of Siirt: Between progress and decay, Arabic Varieties: Far and Wide, proceedings of the 11th International Conference of AIDA, Bucharest, 2015, editors George Grogore, Gabriel Biṭunā, 2016, pp. 147-154.

<sup>277</sup> **Turkish sources** regarding Armenia, the Armenians, and the other peoples of the Transcaucasus, translation from the Turkish original with introductory remarks, footnotes, and appendix, vol. II, comp. A. Kh. Safrasdyan, Yerevan, 1964, pp. 53-54. (**Թուրքական աղբյուրները** Հայաստանի, հայերի և Անդրկովկասի մյուս ժողովուրդների մասին, թարգմանություն թուրքական բնագրերից, ներածական ակնարկներով, ծանոթագրություններով և հավելվածով, հտ. Բ, կազմեց Ա. Խ. Սաֆրասյան).

<sup>278</sup> In an article concerning Arabic instruction in the madrasas of Sghert, Uğur Erman writes: "In examining the historical development of these madrasas, we observe continuous changes and developments. The only constant is the importance given to teaching Arabic

The Arabic-speaking character of Sghert may also be explained by the fact that the Kurds were not inclined to live in cities, finding urban environments unappealing. Until the middle of the 19th century, Kurds were practically absent from Mush and Van as well. The traditional Kurdish mode of life kept them far from urban communities, where the demands of the environment and available professions were foreign to their pastoral, migratory tradition and peripatetic inclinations. The few Kurds who appeared in the cities often were not recognized as such, either by their co-ethnics or by Christians. It was commonly supposed that a Kurd relocated to the city would become “Turkified”<sup>279</sup>; that is, the urban environment would erase his traditional Kurdish mode of life and, adopting the sedentary existence of a city-dweller, an ethnic Kurd would no longer appear as a Kurd to others’ eyes. The presence of ethnically Kurdish Turks, or Turkified Kurds, in the city of Sghert is well-documented.<sup>280</sup> It is not incidental that in the period under consideration, Turkish was the “domestic language” of at least a part of the Kurdish population of the city of Mush as well.<sup>281</sup>

Accordingly, there were a number of reasons why Sghert was not conceived of as a strictly Kurdish city: the predominance of the Arabic language, the presence of the Ottoman officialdom, and the generally disinclination of Kurds to live in cities. It is also interesting to note that the

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in these educational centers. This tradition is particularly well-preserved in the Siirt region.” See **Erman, U.** Siirt Medreselerinde Arapça Dil Eğitiminin Mahiyeti Üzerine, *e-Şarkiyat İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi/Journal of Oriental Scientific Research*, 2018, № 4 (22), p. 1456.

<sup>279</sup> “In Aghbak, authority (government positions) and wealth are in the hands of the Kurdish Sheikhs and Beys. In recent years they have begun, little by little, to become Turkified.” See **Memoirs of a Wanderer**, II, Mount Chukh, villagers of Aghpak, various inhabitants, *Armenia*, 1887, № 37, p. 2. (**Թափառականի Մը Ֆիշառակաները**, Բ, Չուխ լեռը, Աղբակի գիւղացիք, սարաստեո բնակիչները, «Արմէնիա».) We read, in an article concerning Arabs living in Turkey, that Arabs perceived the term “Turk” less as an ethnonym than as a signifier for the civilized, urbanized, population. Especially among the Arabs of Mardin, the term “Kurd,” while certainly retaining its ethnic significance, also more broadly connotated the rural, provincial population. See **Bulaç, A.** Türkiye Arapları, <https://www.haksozhaber.net/turkiye-araplari-11785yy.htm>.

<sup>280</sup> **Ruben**, *Memoirs*, Vol. III, p. 143.

<sup>281</sup> **Movsesyan, S.** The Kurds of the Province of Mush, (**Մովսեսյան Ս.**, Մշոն աշխարհի քրդութիւնը), Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, ROS 715, p. 24.

Muslims of the city of Hisnkeyf (Hasankeyf), not far from Sghert, were also Arabic-speaking.<sup>282</sup>

As early as the 17th century, the Ottoman traveller Kâtip Çelebi (Hājī Khalīfa), speaking of the Diyarbekir eyalet, which included the region of Sghert, remarks on the existence of Arabic-speaking Armenians.<sup>283</sup> The Arabic-speaking character of the Armenians of Sghert would subsequently be recorded by Ghukas Inchichian.<sup>284</sup>



View from old Sghert

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<sup>282</sup> **Kalhoketsi, P., Rev Fr.** *Asian Journey in the Fatherland*, Constantinople, 1881, pp. 56-57. (Պետրոս Ծ. Վարդապետ Կալիօկէցի, Ասիական Ճանապարհորդութիւն Ի Հայրենիս).

<sup>283</sup> **Turkish sources** regarding Armenia, vol. II, p. 57.

<sup>284</sup> “Their common dialect is the language of the Arabs” See **Inchichian, Gh.** *Geography*, vol. I, p. 231. Evangelicals preaching in Sghert also had to contend with the fact of an Arabic-speaking population. See **Giragosian, H. M.** *Undertakings in Sghert and in Baghesh, Avetaber yev Shtemaran Pitani Gitelyats*, Constantinople, 1868, № 259, p. 11, (subsequently ASPG), (Հ. Մ. Կիրակոսեան, Ձեռնադրութիւնք Ի Սղերդ Եւ Ի Բաղէշ, «Աւետարներ եւ Շտեմարան Պիտանի Գիտելեաց»).

Father Petros Kalhoketsi writes in his travel memoirs that the native language of the residents of Sghert was Arabic<sup>285</sup>; elsewhere we read that the Armenians of Sghert had lost their mother tongue and spoke Arabic instead.<sup>286</sup> A letter addressed from Sghert to *Azatamart* states that “Sghert is among those Armenian districts where Armenian identity remains only in heart and in feeling; we are Arabic speakers, like all of the races that surround us. Our customs and mode of life resemble theirs, and [we], this handful of people, have remained Armenian simply by saying ‘I am Armenian.’”<sup>287</sup> In another source, we read that the local Assyrians were Arabic-speaking as well: “The Armenians and the Assyrians all speak Arabic. Armenians are only distinguished as such by their church, their customs, their ceremonies, and their hatred of the Turks.”<sup>288</sup>

The unique Arabic dialect of Sghert<sup>289</sup> was sometimes described as “greatly corrupted”<sup>290</sup> or “extremely corrupted.”<sup>291</sup> The Arabic-speaking Armenians of Sghert often included Armenian words in their speech, for instance “*anizaz*” (*anitsats-* accursed), “*anskam*” (*anzgam-* unfeeling), “*badikhas*” (*patuhas-* calamity), “*khapisokh*” (*khabetso’ogh-* deceiver), “*khachherget*” - (*khach’erkat’*-lit. “cross-iron,” a folding metal pot-stand), “*patich*” (*patizh-* punishment) and so on.<sup>292</sup>

Although Sghert retained its reputation as an Arabic-speaking city until the beginning of the 20th century, a part of the city’s Armenian population nonetheless knew Kurdish or were primarily Kurdish-speaking.

<sup>285</sup> **Kalhoketsi, P.,** *Rev. Asian Journey*, p. 96.

<sup>286</sup> **Kapamajian, S.** *A Little Traveller in the Orient*, Constantinople, 1911, p. 90. (**Գաբա-ման Ս.**, Գամեր. Փոքրիկ Ճամբորդը Արևելքի Մէջ).

<sup>287</sup> **Mamigonian, A.** Call to our compatriots in Sghert, *Azatamart*, 1909, №155, p. 2. (**Արա Մամիկոնեան**, Կոչ Սղերդի Հայրենակիցներուն, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>288</sup> **Report on Sghert** 1, *Droshak*, Vienna, 1895, № 14, p. 10.

<sup>289</sup> Regarding distinctive features of the Arabic dialect of Sghert, see **Çıkar, M. Ş., Timurtaş, A.** Siirt Yöresi Arapçanın Temel Özellikleri, *Şarkiyat İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi/Journal of Oriental Scientific Research*, 2009, № 28, pp. 87-112. See also **Gabriel Biçunâ**, The spoken Arabic of Siirt, pp. 147-154.

<sup>290</sup> **The Armenians of Sghert**, *Ardzagank*, 1894, № 92, p. 3

<sup>291</sup> **Letter from Sghert**, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1897, № 6, p. 44. (**Նամակ Սղերդից**, «Դրօշակ»).

<sup>292</sup> **S. N.** A linguistic observation, *Byurakn*, 1899, № 8, p. 116. (**Ս. Ն.**, Լեզուաբանական Դիտողութիւն Մը, «Բիւրակն»).

In order to understand the reasons for the use of Kurdish among the Armenians of Sghert, it may be helpful to begin with a review of the city's ethnic composition at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. A number of Europeans who visited Sghert during this period contented themselves with only referring to Muslims without specifying their ethnic origin, especially since under Ottoman rule ethnicity was not generally emphasized, being subordinated to religious identity. This was more pronounced in the case of cities, where urban culture could easily elide the differences between different Muslim ethnicities. Accordingly, J.M. Kinneir wrote at the outset of the 19th century that the city was constituted of Christians (Armenians, Chaldeans, and Nestorians) and Muslims, without specifying the ethnic composition of the latter group.<sup>293</sup> Paul Müller-Simonis exhibited much the same approach at the end of the same century.<sup>294</sup> The universal use of Arabic further complicated the matter of discerning who was who. In one description of the city's inhabitants, we read that "A stranger cannot recognize to what nation and what religion [another] belongs, since all speak one language, Arabic, and wear the same costume,<sup>295</sup> the Kurdish."<sup>296</sup>

Our hypothesis concerning the scarcity of the Kurdish element in the city of Sghert is entirely contradicted by the 1836 account of the British Army officer Justin Shiel, according to whom Sghert had approximately

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<sup>293</sup> **Kinneir, J.M.** Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan, p. 409.

<sup>294</sup> **Müller-Simonis P.**, Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, A travers l'Arménie, Le Kurdistan et la Mésopotamie, Washington D. C., 1892, p. 336.

<sup>295</sup> "No less interesting is the costume of the inhabitants of the place, a mixture of the Persian and the Kurdish. The cap (*kyulah*) is made of felt, more than 75 centimeters in length and aggrandized with wrappings of various colors and forms. The jacket (*aba*) is an artificial short fur, the exterior of which is covered with thick long skeins of hair. The pants (*shalvar*) are formed like trousers, but they are extremely broad and adorned with varicolored designs. The shirts, aside from other strange and various forms, have fringes one and a half meters in length extending from the ends of the arms, while their shoes, aside from being so great in size that each might accommodate two feet, are studded with so many nails in the soles that one pair weights more than four *okha* [approximately 5 kilograms]. **Tiryakian L.**, Sghert, *Masis*, 1886, № 3833, p. 16. (**Լ. Թիրյակեան**, Սղերդ, «Մասիս»).

<sup>296</sup> **Arabian, B.** The first day of Great Lent in Sghert, *Masis*, 1886, № 3814, pp. 799-800. (**Պ. Արապեան**, Մեծ Պահոց Առաջին Օրն Ի Սղերդ, «Մասիս»).

1000 households, comprising Kurds, Armenians and Nestorians.<sup>297</sup> Another European who had occasion to visit the city confirms that Kurds lived there, as well as other Muslims.<sup>298</sup> Later, writing of his 1847 travels, Baranak Feruhkhan states that there were 2,500 homes in the city of Sghert, of which 1,800 belonged to Kurds, and the remainder to Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans.<sup>299</sup> As we see, he speaks neither of Arabs nor of Turks. It must be stressed that the term “Kurd,” retained its discrete socio-ethnic meaning until and throughout the 20th century, and it is not characteristic of Armenian sources to indiscriminately refer to all Muslims as Kurds. Following the Armenian Genocide, Armenak Amrikyan, the native of Vozm, recounts that a “large part” of Sghert’s population was Kurdish.<sup>300</sup>

At the beginning of the 1880s, the Austrian geographer Joseph Wunsch wrote that the majority of Sghert’s population were “Arab,” noting that only the officials were Turks (evidently using the latter term in its strict ethnic sense).<sup>301</sup> And yet, in an 1886 *Masis* article dedicated to the Armenians of Sghert we read that the majority of the city’s residents were Turks.<sup>302</sup> Most likely the word “Turk” was in this case used as a synonym for “Muslim.” A European who passed through Sghert near the end of the 19th century termed it an Arab city, although in speaking of the Muslim population he identifies *ashirs* and *reayahs*,<sup>303</sup> typically Kurdish social formations.

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<sup>297</sup> **Shiel, J.** Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Kurdistan, via Van, Bitlis, Seert and Erbil, to Suleimaniyeh, in July and August, 1836, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 8 (1838), p. 76.

<sup>298</sup> **Ainsworth, W.F.** Travels and researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia, vol. 2, p. 359.

<sup>299</sup> **Feruhkhan, P.** Travels in Babylon by way of Armenia in the year of our Lord 1847, Armash, 1876, p. 140. (Բարունակ Ֆերուհիսան, Ճանապարհորդութիւն Ի Բաբելոն Ընդ Հայաստան Յամի Տեւտն 1847).

<sup>300</sup> **Collected Memoirs**, vol. 14, p. 289.

<sup>301</sup> **The districts of Shirvan, Khizan and Tatik**, *Handes Amsorya*, Vienna 1890, № 8, p. 205. (Շիրուան, Խիզան Եւ Տատիկ Գաւառները, Հանդէս Ամսօրեայ).

<sup>302</sup> **Tiryakian L.** Sghert, *Masis*, 1886, № 3833, p. 16.

<sup>303</sup> See **Journey to Armenia**, From Bitlis to Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1892, № 11, p. 3. In Armenian sources referring to Sghert we often find that the Kurds of the city are distinguished from other Muslims, who were referred to under the general term “Turk,” (*tachik*). Thus, in one source from late 1895 recounting the Hamidian massacres, we read: “At three in the afternoon, the military trumpet sounded and the solders, passing over the

The aforementioned letter-writer to *Ardzagank*, who was evidently well-informed about matters in Sghert, repeatedly refers to the Turks of the city, saying that they spoke Arabic and read Turkish.<sup>304</sup> And yet he immediately adds: “It is superfluous to say that there are no Turks in this place, but rather all are Kurds.”<sup>305</sup> If Turks were indeed present in any significant numbers, the Turkish language, in all probability, would not have been forgotten in Sghert. Presenting the city’s population statistics, the letter-writer indicates only Armenians and Kurds.<sup>306</sup>

Another indication of Sghert’s multiethnic character is the presence of Shafi’i and Ḥanafī Muslims.<sup>307</sup> Such a motley environment, and probably the presence of “Turkified” or urbanized Kurds, obliged the demographer Devgants to coin a new term for Sghert’s inhabitants: the “Kurdo-Turk” (*Krdat ‘urk*) nation.<sup>308</sup> From all this, it follows that Sghert at the end of the 19th century was a Muslim city partly (or mainly) populated by Kurds, a locale distinguished first and foremost by its Arabic-speaking character, where ethnic affiliations were not expressed particularly strongly.

It is possible that the number of Kurds in Sghert increased after the 1840s, when the Ottoman policy of centralization and the consequent elimination of Kurdish principalities gave rise to internal migration. In support of this surmise, we may cite the fact that while J.M. Kinneir estimated a population of 3,000 in the early 1810s,<sup>309</sup> the city’s population had nearly quintupled by the end of the century.<sup>310</sup>

It is probable that Kurdish-speaking Armenians from surrounding rural areas also appeared in Sghert during these same decades, as well as in

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*Turks and Kurds*, fell upon the neighborhood of the Armenians, Assyrians and Protestants...” (emphasis added). See **Massacres, Sghert** (October 30, 1895 3:00-9:00), *Droshak*, Vienna, 1896, p. 46. (Կոտորածներ, Սղերդ (1895 թ. հոկտ. 30, ժամ 3-9), «Իրօշակ»).

<sup>304</sup> **Ye. M.** Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, p. 135.

<sup>305</sup> The same author also writes that “The Kurds, have for the most part appropriated the more fertile parts of the land, occupy themselves in different business: banditry, plundering, exploitation, violence and murder, so that they have little patience for cultivating the soil. They have only the choicest vineyards, which they force the Armenians to cultivate, taking the produce for themselves.” *Ibid*, p. 136.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>307</sup> **Arabian, B.** The first day of Great Lent in Sghert, *Masis*, 1886, № 3814, p. 799.

<sup>308</sup> **Devgants, A.** Visit to Armenia, p. 113.

<sup>309</sup> **Kinneir, J.M.** Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan, p. 409.

<sup>310</sup> See the table below.

later years. This influx, as well as the probable growth of the city’s Kurdish element, would explain the spread of the Kurdish language in the city’s Armenian circles. As early as the 1840s, *vardapet* Mgrdich Dikranian wrote in his 1864 book *Mirror of Deeds*, “they spoke Kurdish and Arabic in that place—not Armenian.”<sup>311</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that references to Kurdophony among the Armenians of the city of Sghert mainly date to a later period, the end of the 19th century. In an 1881 source, for instance, we read that “the natives of Sghert know not a word of Armenian; they speak Arabic, Kurdish.”<sup>312</sup> In 1894, it was stated of the Armenians of Sghert that “they are for the most part deprived of both their mother tongue and of government languages, as well as of reading and writing. They speak an extremely corrupted Arabic and a Kurdish resembling Persian, greatly removed from the Delmik (Zaza) language.”<sup>313</sup>



Sghert Armenians gathered around their priest  
Image source: Houshamadyan<sup>314</sup>

<sup>311</sup> **Dikranian, M., Rev.** *Mirror of Deeds*, p. 25.

<sup>312</sup> **Tokhmakhian, A.** *Turkish-Armenia, Mshak*, Tiflis, 1881, № 119, p. 1. (Ա. Թոխմախիանի, Թիւրքաց-Հայաստան, «Մշակ»).

<sup>313</sup> **The Armenians of Sghert, Ardzagank**, 1894, № 92, p. 3.

<sup>314</sup> Image source: **Noël Dolens**, “Ce que l’on voit en Arménie,” in *Le Tour du Monde, Journal des voyages et des voyageurs* (Paris), Nouvelle Série, 12e année, 1906), See **Tatoyan, R.**

The use of the Kurdish language by the Armenians of the city of Sghert is abundantly documented; in one report on the schools of the United Armenian Society it is noted that the Armenians of the city had lost their mother tongue and spoke Arabic or Kurdish.<sup>315</sup> Another source attests that “locals of all nationalities are generally Arabic-speaking and Kurdish-speaking.”<sup>316</sup> Despite these references to Kurdish, it is most likely that Arabic speakers constituted a greater number; for instance, we read in *Droshak* that the Armenians of the provincial city were Arabic-speakers, only “partly” speaking Kurdish.<sup>317</sup> An interesting case is presented by the dilemma of Vardapet Paren, the leading Armenian cleric of Sghert: he knew Armenian and Turkish, neither of which the people understood, while he in turn could not understand their Arabic and Kurdish.<sup>318</sup>

Şerif Demir writes that in Turkey’s early Republican period, aside from the educated classes and a few merchants engaged in trade with the western vilayets, nobody in the city of Sghert knew Turkish.<sup>319</sup> In 1926, Arabic and Persian instruction was discontinued in the schools of the Turkish Republic.<sup>320</sup> The government’s proclaimed linguistic revolution did not bypass Arabic-speaking Sghert, and great efforts were employed to

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District of Sghert—demography (Թաթոյեան Ռ., Սղերդի գաւառակ – Ժողովրդագրութիւն)

<https://www.houshamadyan.org/arm/mapottomanempire/bitlispagheshvilayet/kazaofsghertr/locale/demography.html>.

<sup>315</sup> **Turkish Armenia**, United Armenian Societies, School Report, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 14, p. 214, reprinted from *Masis*. (Տաճկական Հայաստան, Միացեալ Ընկերութիւնը Հայոց, Վիճակագիր Վարժարանաց, «Արձագանք»). Manuel Mirakhorian writes: “the Armenians are hospitable, and, having lost their mother tongue in the course of past persecutions, they speak Arabic, Turkish, and sometimes even Kurdish.” See **Mirakhorian, M.** Descriptive Journey, Part I, p. 65.

<sup>316</sup> **Tghtakits**, Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 42, p. 653. (Թղթակից, Նամակ Սղերտից, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>317</sup> **Letter from Sghert**, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1897, № 6, p. 44. See also **Misakian, V.** News from the Arab-Armenian region, *Van-Tosp*, 1913, № 11, pp. 124-125. (Վ. Միսաքեան, Իսապրիկներ Արաբսիս Երջաններէն, «Վան-Տոսպ»). The Sghert correspondent to the *Arevelk* newspaper also referred to the city as “Arabic-speaking Sghert.” See **National, Arevelk**, 1900, № 4393, p. 3. (Ազգային, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>318</sup> **Rze**, News from Sghert, *Arevelk*, 1899, № 4042, p. 2. (Րզէ, Սղերդէն Լուրեր, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>319</sup> **Demir, Ş.** Tek Parti Döneminde Siirt’te Arapça Kullanımı, *Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 2017, № 9, p. 285.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid*, p. 281.

ensure that the city's residents not only learned Turkish, but also used the language in public life.<sup>321</sup> Nonetheless, Sghert's Arabic-speaking character has, to a certain extent, endured until the present day.

### Population data for the city of Sghert

Source	Year	Armenians	Assyrians	Christians	Muslims	Protestants.	Total
<b>M. Kinneir</b>	1813						3,000 <sup>322</sup>
<b>J. Shiel</b>	1838						1,000 house- holds <sup>323</sup>
<b>Ainsworth</b>	1842						1000 house- holds <sup>324</sup>
<b>M. Dikranian</b>	1864	200 house- holds <sup>325</sup>					
<b>P. Faruhkhan</b>	1876			700 house- holds	1800 house- holds		2500 house- holds <sup>326</sup>
<b>A. Devgants</b>	1878	2,400 <sup>327</sup>					
<b>Mshak</b>	1881	5000- 6000 <sup>328</sup>					

<sup>321</sup> Ibid, p. 285.

<sup>322</sup> **Kinneir, J.M.** Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan, p. 409.

<sup>323</sup> **Shiel, J.** Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Kurdistan, via Van, Bitlis, Seert and Erbil, to Suleimaniyeh, p. 76.

<sup>324</sup> **Ainsworth, W.F.** Travels and researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia, vol. 2, p. 359.

<sup>325</sup> **Dikranian, M., Rev.** Mirror of Deeds, p. 25.

<sup>326</sup> **Feruhkhan, P.** Travels in Babylon by way of Armenia, p. 140.

<sup>327</sup> **Devgants, A.,** Visit to Armenia, p. 114.

<sup>328</sup> **Tokhmakhian, A.** Turkish-Armenia, *Mshak*, p. 1. Wüncb, who visited Sghert almost at the same time, was informed that the city had a population of 15,000, including more than 1,500 Armenians and 500 Chaldeans and Jacobites. See **The districts of Shirvan, Khizan and Tatik**, *Handes Amsorya*, Vienna 1890, № 8, p. 205.

<b>Ardzagank</b>	1882	120 households <sup>329</sup>					
<b>Ardzagank</b>	1882	350 households					3000 households <sup>330</sup>
<b>Ardzagank</b>	1882	2,400			4,012 <sup>331</sup>		
<b>M. Mirakhorian</b>	1884	230 households <sup>332</sup>					
<b>P. Müller-Simonis</b>	1892	250 Armenian Apostolic households, 4 Armenian Catholic households	99 Chaldean households, 50 Jacobite households, 8 Catholic households	3,000-4,000	1400 households.	30 households	12,000-15,000 <sup>333</sup>
<b>Mayevski</b>	1899	3652	1,650 Chaldeans, 550, Jacobites		6,648 Kurds 4000 Turks		16,500 <sup>334</sup>

<sup>329</sup> The data, in all probability, was compiled by the United Society. See **Turkish Armenia**, United Armenian Societies, school report, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 14, p. 214.

<sup>330</sup> **Tghtakits**, Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 42, p. 653.

<sup>331</sup> **Ye. M.** Letter from Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 9, pp. 135-136.

<sup>332</sup> **Mirakhorian, M.** Descriptive Journey, Part I, p. 64.

<sup>333</sup> **Müller-Simonis P.**, Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, A travers l'Arménie, Le Kurdistan et la Mésopotamie, p. 336.

<sup>334</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 222. The total population of Sghert between 1886 and 1892 is recorded as 15,000. See **Tiryakian, L.** Sghert, *Masis*, 1886, № 3833, p. 16. See also **Journey to Armenia**, From Bitlis to Sghert, *Ardzagank*, 1892, № 11, p. 3. According to *Droshak* in 1895, the total population of the city was 10,000, See **Report on Sghert 1**, *Droshak*, 1895, p. 10. A letter published in *Droshak* states that before the Hamidian massacres, the city of Sghert had an Armenian population of 550, very likely a misprint meaning 550 households. See **Letter from Sghert**, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1897, № 6, p. 44.

<b>Droshak</b>	1901	350 households	150 households of Chaldean, Catholic, and Protestant Assyrians. <sup>335</sup>		4,000 households		
<b>Sghert Prelacy</b>	1902	5,000	30 Assyrian households, 80 Chaldean households		4000 households <sup>336</sup>		
<b>Sghert Prelacy</b>	1913	4,437 <sup>337</sup>					
<b>Ottoman Census</b>	1914	2,218	775 Assyrians		27,649	412 <sup>338</sup>	

<sup>335</sup> The majority, if not all, of the Protestants were most likely Armenian. See **Report on the Sghert District**, *Droshak*, 1901, № 7, p. 118.

<sup>336</sup> The number of Armenians is based on government records, and is therefore likely an underestimate. See **NAA**, 412, 1, 1856, p. 1b.

<sup>337</sup> This figure includes the population of a few nearby Armenian villages. See **Kevorgian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 277. According to the compiler of survivor testimonies S.M Dzotsigian, approximately 6,000 Armenians lived in Sghert on the eve of the Genocide. See **Dzotsigian, S.M.** *The Western Armenian World*, New York, 1947, p. 672. (**Ծոցիկեան Ս. Մ.**, Արեւմտահայ Աշխարհ).

<sup>338</sup> **Karpat, K.H.** *Ottoman population*, pp. 174-175.

## THE VILLAGES OF KHIZAN

(Bitlis Province)

At the outset of the 19th century, in 1806, Ghukas Inchichian wrote of the region of Tatik: “In ancient times it was one of the canons [*gavarner*] of the province [*nahang*] of Aghdznik. Here there are villages of Kurds and of Armenians, who, having forgotten the Armenian language, speak Kurdish.”<sup>339</sup> Later primary sources are silent as to the linguistic assimilation of the Armenians of Tatik,<sup>340</sup> creating the impression that Inchichian’s description was merely anecdotal.<sup>341</sup> Instead, it is the villages of the district of Khizan that are occasionally referred to as Kurdish-speaking. For example, in an 1881 announcement of the Khizan Society of Scholars, founded 1877, we read that the Society had begun its educational work in the “heavily Armenian and expansive but greatly impoverished and Kurdish-speaking district” of Khizan, with the objective of “the recovery and advancement of [Armenian] nationality.”<sup>342</sup> Hrachya Acharyan

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<sup>339</sup> **Inchichian, Gh.** *Geography*, Vol. I, p. 180. In his travel memoirs, Petros Kalhoketsi provides the following topographical sketch: “One part of the district of Tatik is a valley region, and the other, a small round plain, an hours’ travel in diameter, and encircled by high-peaked mountains.” **Kalhoketsi, P., Rev.** *Asian Journey*, p. 35.

<sup>340</sup> At the end of the 19th century the Armenian press commonly referred to Tatik as a subdistrict (*gavarak*). See **Marzbeduni, K.S.** From Baghesh to Van II, *Arevelk*, 1901, № 4716, p. 1. (**Գ. Ս. Մարզպետունի**, Բաղէշէն Վան Բ., «Արեւելք»). See also **Derenik**, Provincial life: a genuine picture, *Arevelk*, 1899, № 3954, p. 1. (**Գերենիկ**, Գաւառական Կեանքէն, Իրական Պատկեր Սը, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>341</sup> In an 1899 issue, the newspaper *Arevelk* printed the correspondence between a father and daughter from Tatik’s village of Majgonis, written in the local dialect; this establishes that the village was Armenian-speaking. See *ibid*.

<sup>342</sup> **Announcement of the Khizan Society of Scholars**, *Arevelyan Mamul*, Smyrna, 1881, № 1 (January), p. 27. (**Յայտարարութիւն Խիզանու Ուսումնասիրաց Ընկերութեան**, «Արեւելեան մամուլ»). The United Society’s first school of 100 students, was opened in Khizan’s village of Khagev, and its second, of 150 students, in Sparkert. The selection of these villages was conditioned by the fact that they provided convenient access to the general population of Khizan. (See *ibid*, pp. 28-29). In a source from 1901, we read that the village school of Khizan had been reopened after a hiatus of 7-8 years. (**Masis Scrapbook**, *Masis*, 1901, № 4, p. 64). («Մասիս»-ի Յուշատետրը, «Մասիս»). The

likewise considered the Armenians of the villages of Khizan to be Kurdish-speaking.<sup>343</sup> Mayevski also writes of Kurdish-speaking Armenians in the villages of Khizan, and, judging by his manner of expression, had travelled there personally.<sup>344</sup>

By Ottoman administrative division, Khizan and Tatik were both contained in the Bitlis vilayet. Khizan was a subdistrict (kaza), while Tatik was a nahiye, a group of villages. In 1882 it contained 11 Armenian speaking villages,<sup>345</sup> while by 1910 only 8 are mentioned.<sup>346</sup> It is possible

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school's closure was most likely a result the Hamidian massacres: "Before this, a few young men from Khizan, who had completed their studies in Bolis and founded the Khizan Society of Scholars there, returned to their native country in order to serve the cause of her enlightenment, but one by one, they all fell victim to their own sense of patriotism and duty, prey to the bullets of the traitorous Kurds." (**Tghtakits**, News from the eastern provinces, *Byuzantion*, 1912, № 4882, p. 1. (**Թղթակից**, Լուրեր Արեւելեան Գաւառներէն, «Բիւզանդիոն»)). For further information on the activity of the Khizan Society of Scholars, see the following two articles: **Kurdish-Armenians** *Mshak*, 1881, № 24, p. 3. (**Քուրդահայք**, «Մշակ»). **Khizan Society of Scholars**, *Arevelk*, 1885, № 359, p. 3. (**Խիզանու Ուսումն. Ընկերութիւն**, «Արեւելք»)).

<sup>343</sup> **Acharyan, H.** Foreign-speaking Armenians, p. 33.

<sup>344</sup> **Маевский, В. Т.** Военно-статистическое описание, с. 264.

<sup>345</sup> For information of the villages of Tatik and their populations, see **Ye. S.**, Census and tax register of the Baghesh Diocese, *Ardzagank*, 1882, № 18, p. 278. (**Ե. Ս.**, Սարդաթիւ Եւ Հարկահամար Բաղէշոյ Վիճակի, «Արձագանք»)). The author of the report is most likely Arisdages Devgants.

<sup>346</sup> A 1900 source refers to eight villages in the "subdistrict" of Tatik, with an Armenian population of more than 300 households (possibly excluding the village of Khultig), and 45-50 Armenian-inhabited villages in Khizan. **Baghesh and its Environs**, *Luma*, 1900, № 1, p. 220. (**Բաղէշ Եւ Իւր Շրջակայք**, «Լումայ»), 1900, Գիրք Ա.). The well-informed Kegham Garabedian also writes about the eight villages of Tatik in a missive addressed to the founding council of the United Armenian Society, a number which, together with the villages of "Aghakert" (probably a misprint for Sparkert), added up to 32. (**Der-Garabedian, K.** Native province: six hundred villages, students and schoolhouses, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 305, p. 1. In a dictionary of Armenian toponyms, we read that the subdistrict was divided in name into two parts; Nerkin (Lower) Tatik and Verin (Upper) Tatik. According to the same dictionary, 11 Armenian-inhabited villages were attested as of 1915: Dzghgam, Gerkrh, Gyalhog, Khultig, Mojgonis, Shen, Vosdin, Bas, Sami, Sasig, Vanig, **Dictionary of Toponyms of Armenia and Neighboring Regions**, vol. 5, T. Kh. Hakobyan, S. T. Melik-Bashkyan, H. Kh. Barseghyan, Yerevan, 2001, p. 51. (**Հայաստանի եւ հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան**, հտ. 5, Թ. Խ. Հակոբյան, Ստ. Տ. Մելիք-Բախչյան, Հ. Խ. Բարսեղյան). In 1895, the Armenian population of the villages of Tatik was also subjected to massacre, with 50 killings in Khultig alone, according to one contemporary source. The Armenians of several villages in Tatik were saved thanks to their Kurdish neighbors. See **Massacres, Baghesh**, *Droshak*, Vienna, 1895, № 22, pp. 4-5. (**Կոտորածներ, Բաղէշից**, «Դրոշակ»)). For further information of

to surmise that Khizan and Tatik were sometimes conflated, so that in referring to the villages of Khizan, period sources might mean not only Khizan itself but also the villages of Tatik—especially if we take into account that Khizan and Tatik were separated by a single mountain.<sup>347</sup> Meanwhile, toward the south of this valley district, there lay the Shirvan’s Erun nahiye, which, like Shirvan in general, was referred to as both Kurdish-speaking and Armenian-speaking. This variable linguistic situation was likely characteristic of certain border villages of Tatik and Khizan as well. Nevertheless, we cannot confidently assert that certain villages of Tatik itself were Kurdish-speaking; it is not out of the question that there were also Kurdish-speaking Armenians in Khizan. It does not seem incidental that a 1913 issue of *Avetaber* includes Khizan and Tatik in a list of districts characterized as “Kurdish-speaking and Kurdicized in morals and manners.”<sup>348</sup>

In short, the available sources point toward the conclusion that Khizan and Tatik must have encompassed a small community of Kurdish-speaking Armenians. If all of the villages of Khizan had been Kurdish-speaking, we would certainly find it more often listed among the Kurdish-speaking Armenian regions of the Ottoman Empire; after all, Khizan, with its United Society schools, was hardly overlooked and forgotten by the general Armenian public. The aforementioned linguistic community must have been comparatively small, explaining why primary sources mention it rarely and without sufficient detail to distinguish which villages in particular were home to Kurdish-speaking Armenians.

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the village of Khultig, see: **Andreasyan G.** Khultig, *Ardzagank*, 1895, № 108, p. 3. (**Պ. Անդրէասեան**, Խուլթիկ, «Արձագանք»). See also **Tukhmanian, G.S.** The villager of Bitlis, *Ardzagank*, 1897, № 87, p. 3. (**Կ. Ս. Թուխմանեան**, Պիթիսի Գեղացին, «Արձագանք»). Regarding the Hamidian massacres in Khizan, see **Khizan, Droshak**, 1896, № 7, pp. 55-56. (**Խիզան**, «Դրօշակ»). See also **Massacres, Sparkert and Khizan, Droshak**, 1896, № 8, pp. 59-60. (**Վտտորածներ, Սպարկերտ և Խիզան**, «Դրօշակ»). Regarding the Armenian dialect of Khultig, see **Daronian, Ye.** The Dialect of the Village of Khultig in the Baghesh Province (with ethnographic notes), Antelias, 1961. (**Տարօնեան Ե.**, Բաղէշի Նահանգի Խուլթիկ Գիւղի Բարբառը).

<sup>347</sup> Khultig, for example, is described both as the center of Tatik and as a village of Khizan. See **The Pontifical Diocese of Aghtamar**, *Ardzagank*, 1893, № 33, p. 3.

<sup>348</sup> **Bedrosian, P.** The Armenian Evangelical Work in Kurdistan, *Avetaber*, 1913, № 13, p. 301. (**Բենիսմին Պետրոսեան**, Բիւրսիսթանի Հայ Աւետ. Գործը, «Աւետարներ»).

During the second half of the 19th century, until the early 1880s when it became a part of the Bitlis vilayet, Khizan was administratively joined to other Kurdish-speaking Armenian districts. This circumstance, as well as the proximity of the Kurdish-speaking subdistricts of Sghert, probably contributed to the linguistic assimilation of the Armenian population of Khizan. The geographer Sukias Eprikian (1873-1952) states that the Armenians of Khizan dressed in the Kurdish style,<sup>349</sup> while Ruben externally likened them to Kurds, calling them “half-Armenian.”<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> **Eprikian, S.** An Illustrated Dictionary of our Native Land, vol. II, Venice, 1907, p. 173. (Էփրիկեան Ս., Պատկերագարդ Բնաշխարհիկ Բառարան, հտ. 2).

<sup>350</sup> **Ruben,** Memoirs, vol. II, pp. 130-131.

## ISYAN

Writing at the end of the 18th century, Fr. Ghukas Inchichian notes regarding the district of Isyan (Iskyan), that few of the local Armenians spoke Armenian. The priest, long accustomed to a European environment, characterizes their dialect as “heavy and broken” [*tsanr u aghchatyal*]. For the remainder, the dominant language was Kurdish; “The inhabitants are nearly all Armenians, but there are few who speak Armenian—and this in a heavy and broken language—while their ordinary language is Kurdish.”<sup>351</sup> Inchichian’s account belongs to a period when the policy of centralization still did not threaten the Ottoman east; accordingly, the Mekhitarist scholar conceived of Isyan as a rebellious and headstrong province that defied subjugation by the pashas of Diyarbekir. The Ottoman pashas of Diyarbekir attempted to bring this mountainous region to heel at the end of the 18th century, but were met with failure time and again. Inchichian portrays Isyan as an inaccessible stronghold, defended by unified Kurdish-Armenian forces. The Kurds constituted the cavalry and the Armenians the infantry. The Armenians also served as bombardiers. The Mekhitarist recounts that children in Isyan were apprenticed to the art of war from the age of five; artisans and farmers were few, and the inhabitants sustained themselves more by banditry.<sup>352</sup>

We do not encounter a district named Isyan in other Armenian sources; it was also unfamiliar to the compilers of a dictionary of Ottoman toponyms, but its location is known. Inchichian places the large town of Kasken in Isyan,<sup>353</sup> a place also referred to in Ottoman sources as Jiska,

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<sup>351</sup> The “Banoktsi” referred to are the tribe known as Eşîra Banokî (Kurdish) or Banoki (Banuki) aşireti (Turkish). **Ichichean, Gh.** Geography, vol. 1, p. 242. Eprikian repeats nearly the same description: “[Isyan] has multiple villages whose inhabitants are nearly all Armenians, but few of them speak Armenian, in a heavy and corrupted dialect; the common language is Kurdish.” **Eprikian, S.** Illustrated Dictionary, vol. II, p. 74.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, p. 244. Gegham Badalyan characterizes Isyan as a united, autonomous Armenian-Delmik-Kurdish federation. See **Badalyan, G.** Historical-demographic profile, part 8, p. XXXVI.

<sup>353</sup> **Ichichean, Gh.** Geography, vol. 1, p. 245.

Jěskě, or Chěska (Trk. Cıska).<sup>354</sup> This allows us to securely contend that late medieval Isyan largely coincided with Sasun’s historic Gazke district, which in a later period would enter into the district of Khulp.<sup>355</sup> This same conclusion is supported by Inchichian’s referring to the district as “*Banoktsats yerkir*” [Country of the Banoktsi],<sup>356</sup> a toponym which emerged from the name of the Kurdish Banoki (Banuki) tribe. It is significant that in his work dedicated to the Kurdish lineages, the 16th century Kurdish historian Sharaf-khan Bidlisi considers Khulp as the center of the Banoki *ashiret*.<sup>357</sup> He relates that after the fall of the Marwanids, the Banoki along with their allies marched on Khulp, conquering it along with Jěska, Rěbat, Farghin, Genj, and other regions.<sup>358</sup> Sharaf-Khan Bidlisi presents the Banuki as one of the eight tribes constituting the Suleymani tribal union<sup>359</sup> Accordingly, it seems that Isyan, or the “country of the Banoktsi” mentioned by Inchichian, primarily encompassed the area ruled over by the Banoki ashiret.

The Ottoman tax registers (*tahrir defteri*) of the middle 16th century<sup>360</sup> provide useful information concerning Sasun’s district of Khulp. After becoming a part of the Ottoman Empire in 1514-1517, the sanjak of Khulp (Kulp) administratively allocated to the Suleymani Kurdish tribal union was governed according to the *yurtluk-ocaklık* system and was constituted of five nahiyes: Khulp, Jěska Ahiha, Rabat, and Boshat.<sup>361</sup> Based on the Ottoman tax register’s placement of a number of villages in the Khulp nahiyeh of the Khulp sanjak, it becomes evident that the nahiyeh encompassed the villages of the eastern portion of the Khulp subdistrict at the end of the 19th century. As a related matter, the villages of the western

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<sup>354</sup> **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 10.

<sup>355</sup> **Badalyan, G.** Historical-demographic profile, part 8, p. XXXVI.

<sup>356</sup> **Ichichean, Gh.** Geography, vol. 1, p. 245.

<sup>357</sup> **Şeref Han**, Şerefname, s. 294.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, pp. 293-295.

<sup>359</sup> The names of the remaining tribes were: Havedi, Dilkheran, Bochijan, Zilan, Besyan, Zikziyan, Berazan. Ibid. p. 294.

<sup>360</sup> *The tahrir defter* recorded collected taxes and registered the tax-paying population. They mainly fit into two categories: *mufassal* (expanded), which listed taxpayers by district, household, and even name, and *icmal* (concise) which generally contained information of a more general variety.

<sup>361</sup> **Bizbirlık, A.** 16. Yüzyılda Kulb Sancağı Hakkında Sosyal ve Ekonomik Bir Araştırma, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, cilt: 13, sayı: 13, 1993, s. 138.

part of Khiank were likewise a part of the Khulp nahiye of the Khulp sanjak. The villages of Saltan, Halin, and Fırka-i Büzürk mentioned in a 16th century Ottoman tax register must correspond to Khiank's villages of Saghtun (Sëltën), and Heghin, and Mets Pařka, respectively.<sup>362</sup>

According to the Turkish researcher Alpay Bizbirlik, the remaining nahiye the region in question, Jiska (the Kaske mentioned by Inchichian), is now called Aęaęlı<sup>363</sup> and is located approximately 30 kilometers to the west of the center of present-day Kulp (Pasur). In general terms, the nahiye of Jiska occupied the western portion of Khulp. The rural town of Pasur, which has now taken on the name of Khulp and is considered the center of the district, was likewise once a part of Jiska.<sup>364</sup>

Rabat is not a forgotten name either; according to Bizbirlik, this village, now called Yanıkkaya,<sup>365</sup> is located in the Kozluk district, to the southwest of Kulp.

The village of Ahiha listed in the 16th century *tahrir defter* must correspond to present-day Yakıt,<sup>366</sup> approximately 40 kilometers south of Kulp, toward Silvan.

Boshat, the other nahiye of the sanjak of Khulp, likewise extended toward the south. This name was also used by the local Kurds; today the area is called Boyunlu, and it is located in the district of Silvan, approximately 15 kilometers away from the district center. In the late Ottoman period it was referred to as a Kurdish-speaking Armenian village.<sup>367</sup> The Boshat nahiye also included Miyafarkin (Nprkert), which was a village at the time.<sup>368</sup>

In sum, the 16th-century Ottoman sanjak of Khulp, the area of Banoki Kurd conquests described by Sharaf-khan Bidlisi, and, most likely the “*Banoktats Yerkir*” mentioned by Inchichian, geographically coincided with the late Ottoman district of Khulp, along with the villages extending

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<sup>362</sup> **Bizbirlik, A.** H. 970 - 980 / M. 1564-1574 Tarihleri Arasında Kulp Sancaęı, Yüksek lisans tezi, Konya, 1992, s. 12-13.

<sup>363</sup> **Bizbirlik, A.** 16. Yüzyılda Kulb Sancaęı, s. 138.

<sup>364</sup> **Bizbirlik, A.** H. 970 - 980 / M. 1564-1574 Tarihleri Arasında Kulp Sancaęı, s. 18.

<sup>365</sup> **Bizbirlik, A.** 16. Yüzyılda Kulb Sancaęı, s. 139.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>367</sup> **Srvandztiants, G.** *Brother Toros*, Part II, Constantinople, 1885, p. 235. (**Սրբաւնծ-տեաւոց Գ.**, Թորոս Աղբար, Մասն Բ).

<sup>368</sup> **Bizbirlik, A.** H. 970 - 980 / M. 1564 - 1574 Tarihleri Arasında Kulp Sancaęı, s. 26.

south toward Silvan. Inchichian's description, therefore, may have pertained to the nearby Kurdish-speaking villages of Silvan, as well as Khulp itself. In the case of Silvan the matter is clear; it is well established that the Armenians of the town of Silvan, as well as the surrounding villages, were Kurdish-speaking.<sup>369</sup> It therefore remains to us to understand whether Kurdish-speaking communities can likewise be identified in the Gazke-Isyan district of Sasun, or, in other words, Sasun's Khulp subdistrict.

Until the end of the 19th century, Gazke-Isyan constituted a district to itself; toward the end of the century, in 1883, it was disestablished, and dissolved into Khulp, and along with neighboring Khiank entered into the Genj district of the Bitlis vilayet. It is not incidental that Khulp and Khiank are frequently mentioned together in Armenian sources.<sup>370</sup> Our problem is to clarify whether or not there is evidence of Kurdophony among the Armenians of Khulp and its environs. For centuries on end, Khulp and Khiank, in contrast to the central and eastern districts of Sasun, had maintained closer ties with Diyarbekir and neighboring Nprkert. Moreover, unlike the majority of Sasun, Khulp and Khiank, according to the 1869 *salname* (annual) of the Diyarbekir vilayet,<sup>371</sup> were administratively contained within the structure of Kurdish-speaking Silvan.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> It should be noted that the Banoki became widely dispersed, taking up habitation in other regions including Mush, Manazkert (Malazgirt), Khnus (Hınıs), Istanbul, and the vicinity of Mount Ararat. However, available sources indicate that there remain populations in the villages of the Silvan district who identify themselves with the Banoki tribe.

<sup>370</sup> **Kegham**, The St. Hovhannes Monastery of Mush, IV, *Byuzantion*, 1906, № 3141, p. 1. (**Գեղամ**, Մշոյ Ս. Յովհաննու Վանքը, Դ., «Բիւզանդիոն»). Silvan, Bsharik, and Lje are mentioned here as subdistricts of the Inner Plain of Sasun. See also: **N.B.M** A happy country, *Byuzantion*, 1913, № 5052, p. 1. (**Ն. Պ. Մ.**, Երջանիկ երկիր մը, «Բիւզանդիոն»). See also: **Characteristic Facts of 'Khafirutyun,'** *Gorts*, Baku, 1914, № 15, p. 3. (**Խաֆիրութեան Բնորոշ Փաստեր**, «Գործ»).

<sup>371</sup> A *salname* was an annual or yearbook published by the central or local Ottoman authorities beginning from the middle 19th century, which recorded important political, military, and economic in the Empire, or within a particular administrative area.

<sup>372</sup> **Demirtaş, M.** Silvan Kazasında Yerleşme Ve Nüfus (XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısı), *A.Ü. Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 2008, № 38, s. 303. According to an 1870-1871 *salname* for the Diyarbekir vilayet, Khiank, as a *nahiye* of the Sasun subdistrict, belonged, along with Kharzan, Bsharik, Rëndvan, Shirvan, and Eruh, to the *liva* (district) of Sghert. See **Kucak, Ö.** XIX. Yüzyılın Son Çeyreğinde Siirt ve Havalisindeki Vakıfların Arazi Varlıkları, *Siirt Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2016, Sayı 6, p. 15.

Although it is known that the natives of Sasun were Armenian-speaking, press excerpts pertaining to Sasun may also help us form a clearer picture of the linguistic mosaic existing within Khulp and Khiank as well. According to Marseille's *Armenia* newspaper, the Armenians of Sasun "speak a mixed language of Armenian and Kurdish."<sup>373</sup> A 1910 circular report regarding national schools in Taron, stated that with the aid of natives of Taron living abroad, it would presently become possible to open schools in Sasun, Khulp-Khiank, Khut-Brnashen, Manazkert, Bulanëkh, Genj, and Vardo, areas in which the Armenian language had already been to an extent forgotten.<sup>374</sup> In a 1910 issue of *Arevelk*, a writer under the pen name Dashtetsi avows that he "had the fortune in '95 to travel around the Kurdish-speaking districts Khulp, Kharzan, and Bsheri" in the course of his educational work with Kurdish-speaking Armenians.<sup>375</sup> Although the writer repeatedly uses the expression "the Kurdish-speaking districts of Sasun," it is difficult to determine whether he means only Kharzan, or Khulp and its environs as well. Another writer who exhibits a close familiarity with the districts of Sasun and the events of 1894, refers to Khulp and Khiank simply as "Armenian Kurdish-speaking districts."<sup>376</sup> It is interesting, however, that he regards Khiank's large Armenian speaking village of Berm, as well as Psank, as separate districts.<sup>377</sup> Dashtetsi treats them in precisely the same fashion.<sup>378</sup> Manuk Danielyan, a native of the village of Saghtun in Khiank, wrote in 1900 that "the people of Khiank

<sup>373</sup> **Kaytsik**, Rebellion in the mountains of Sasun, *Armenia*, 1889, № 24, p. 1. (Կայծիկ, Ապստամբութիւն Սասնոյ Լեռներին Վրայ, «Արմէնիա»).

<sup>374</sup> **Educational Work in Taron**, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 178, p. 1. (Տարօնի Կրթական Գործը, «Ազատամարտ»). A foreign press extract reprinted in *Ardzagank* describes the Armenians of Khut and Brnashen (Էռնաշեն) as Kurdish speakers. See **Some information regarding the mountaineers of Mush**, *Ardzagank*, 1892, № 113, p. 2. (Մշոյ Լեռնցիների Մասին Մի Քանի Տեղեկութիւններ, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>375</sup> **Dashtetsi**, The Armenian United Societies and Kurdish-speaking Armenians, *Arevelk*, 1910, № 7328, p. 1. (Դաշտեցի, Հ. Միաց. Ընկերութիւնը Եւ Քրդախօս Հայեր, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>376</sup> **The Sasun Events of 1894**, *Ardzagank*, 1895, № 3, p. 1. (Սասնոյ Անցքերը 1894-ին, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Dashtetsi writes: "[the] United [Society] will open a new teacher's academy in Karin, while Sasun's districts of Birm [Berm] and Psank continue to grope through the darkness of ignorance." **Dashtetsi**, The Armenian United Societies, *Arevelk*, 1910, p. 1.

speak their native language, very seldom having occasion to use foreign terms. We find among these peasants a copious stock of lovely and idiosyncratic provincial words. Their modes of thought and contemplation, artless expression of ideas, [verbal] styles, conversational forms and phrases are very attractive, and all characteristically Armenian.”<sup>379</sup>

However, returning to his native district in the course of a journey undertaken long years after departing from Khiank,<sup>380</sup> Danielyan observed, stopping in the village of Bahamta, that the local Armenians spoke a Kurdish-mixed dialect: “The inhabitants of the two Armenian neighborhoods of the village of Bahamta speak a Kurdish-mixed Armenian. Although their mores are characteristically Armenian, they are not devoid of Kurdish customs either. Being more numerous, the Kurds have influenced the customs of our own [compatriots].”<sup>381</sup> Shortly thereafter, he simply says of the Armenians of the neighboring village of Parka that they speak their mother tongue.<sup>382</sup>

Although it is doubtful that the rebellious and self-governed Isyan and armed Armenian population described by Ghukas Inchichian were merely figments of the writer’s imagination, the same characterization does not hold true for the Armenian population of Khulp at the end of the 19th century. We must, however, take into account that the Mekhitarist priest was writing not so much of the low-lying plains<sup>383</sup> as the mountainous areas. We do not contend that Inchichian had precisely Khulp in mind,

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<sup>379</sup> **Danielyan, M.** Regarding Khian, *Arevelk*, 1900, № 4463, p. 1. (**Մ. Դանիելյան**, Խիանի Շուրջը, «Արեւելք»). For information on the provincial dialect of Khian, see: **Danielyan, M.** The rural dialect of Khian, I., *Byurakn*, 1898, № 41-42, pp. 741-742. (**Մ. Դանիելյան**, Խիանի Գաւառաբարբառը, Ա, «Բիւրակն»).

<sup>380</sup> Danielyan’s travel notes were serialized in the *Arevelk* newspaper, beginning from the 1/14 issue of April 1903. See **Danielyan, M.** Travel notes I, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5219, p. 1. (**Մանուկ Դանիելյան**, Շինական Աշխարհէն, Ուղեւորին Յիշատակները Ա, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>381</sup> **Danielyan, M.** Travel notes, Khian, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5352, p. 1. (**Մանուկ Դանիելյան**, Շինական Աշխարհէն, Ուղեւորին Յիշատակները, Խիան, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> The following extract from Marseille’s *Armenia* newspaper regarding Silvan is worthy of attention: “The Armenians of this place are braver of heart, equal to the Kurds and Turks [in this regard]. The Armenians possess an influence equal with that of the Turks, and can, given the necessity, muster several hundred men under arms to serve their party. **Ashot**, The Situation of Armenians in Tigranakert, *Armenia*, 1887, № 14, p. 2. (**Աշոտ**, Տիգրանակերտի Հայերի Դրութիւնը, «Արմենիա»).

insofar as his description could easily apply to the Armenian population of the mountains of Silvan, which must have already been Kurdish-speaking at the time. All the same, the linguistic environment of Khulp-Khiank differed somewhat from the other parts of Sasun.

The Armenians did not share the Kurds' "sacralized" occupation of winning their daily bread by banditry, but, from an agricultural perspective, the district of Khulp presented perhaps the least suitable environment in all of Sasun. Khulp, along with Khiank, was among Sasun's most heavily Kurdish-populated areas.<sup>384</sup> Added to this was the circumstance that these areas bordered upon, and were integrated with, Kurdish-speaking Silvan. This is another reason why Kurdish influence in Khulp and Khiank was somewhat greater than in other districts of Sasun. This reality is perhaps echoed in the fact that, on a micro-demographic level, in private *Sasuntsi* circles in the village of Davtashen in the Talin municipality of Aragatsotn Province, the descendants of Armenians from Khiank are called "Kurds" to this day. As the historian Shavarsh Azatyan, a native of Davtashen, observes, this appellation likely stems from the Armenian dialect of their forefathers, which was rich in Kurdish expressions.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> According to an 1895 issue of *Hunchak*, the Armenian inhabitants of Khulp numbered 5,000, and the Kurds 12,000. See **Statistics on the Mush District**, *Hunchak*, London, 1895, № 1, p. 8. (Վիճակագրութիւն Մշոյ Գաւառի, «Հնչակ»).

<sup>385</sup> The author has had occasion to hear the expression "*Khiyana krder*" [Khian Kurds], employed in this regard.

## VILAYET OF DIYARBEKIR (TIGRANAKERT)

### District of Diyarbekir

*The Kurdish-speaking Armenians of the Diyarbekir vilayet lived primarily in the district of the same name, in the kazas of Silvan and Beshiri, as well as in the Jezireh (Cizre) kaza of the Mardin district.*

## THE SUBDISTRICT OF SILVAN

### (Nprkert, Farghin)

*Among the Kurdish-speaking districts, the most neglected and impoverished is Slivan, with its more than 100 Armenian-populated villages. The inhabitants are, for the most part, farmers, laborers downtrodden and made wretched by ignorance, working with primitive tools—hardworking but earning little, peasant sharecroppers enjoying little return to speak of. Violence has seized, and continues to seize, the very bread and soil from their hands, their hereditary traditions and language, and their most elementary freedoms, to such an extent that they are deprived of any consciousness of possessing “rights” at all.<sup>386</sup>*



Map source: Houshamadyan<sup>387</sup>

<sup>386</sup> **Muradian, K.** Among the Kurdish-speaking Armenians Myufarghin (Nprkert), *Byuzantion*, 1912, № 4805, p. 1. (**Գ. Մուրադեան**, Քրդախօս Հայոց Մէջ, Միւֆարդին (Նփրկերտ), «Բիւզանդիոն»).

<sup>387</sup> See <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayetdiyarbekir.html>.

During the 19th century, the former Nprkert canton of the historical province of Aghzhanik was among the best-known and most heavily Armenian Kurdish-speaking regions of the Ottoman Empire. It was situated southeast of Diyarbekir; to its northwest there lay another Kurdish-speaking region, Bsharik, and to its north, Sasun. During the later Ottoman era, the district was conventionally called Silvan or Slivan. Western Armenian sources of the 19th and 20th centuries refer to the district by these names, as well as by the traditional “Nprkert.”<sup>388</sup> The district center, in turn, was known to Armenians by the name of Nprkert or Farghin.<sup>389</sup>

In 1515, Nprkert was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, and gradually passed under the control of local Kurdish tribes,<sup>390</sup> being governed by the *yurtluk-ocaklık* system.<sup>391</sup> Accordingly, it constituted not an ordinary district under imperial rule, but rather an area where certain private privileges, or, in other words, “Kurdish law” held sway.

During the first half of the 19th century, Nprkert constituted a district (*liva*) of the Diyarbekir eyalet; it is recorded in government registers from 1831 as “Liva-i Mefarkin”, (Meyyâfârikîn).<sup>392</sup> From 1867 to 1923, it was a subdistrict of the Diyarbekir kaza of the Diyarbekir eyalet-vilayet,<sup>393</sup> encompassing an area of approximately 2,500 square kilometers.<sup>394</sup> In Armenian sources of this period it is variously referred to as a district

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<sup>388</sup> Vladimir Minorsky considers it extremely probable that, due to the m-v consonant shift typical of Kurdish, the name Slevan/Silvan arose from the name of the Suleyman Kurds. See **Minorsky, V.** Mayyâfâriqîn, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, 1927, p. 161. See also **Minorsky, V.** Caucasia in the History of Mayyâfâriqîn, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 1949, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1949), pp. 27-35.

<sup>389</sup> The odd circumstance that the general district was known as Silvan but this name did not come to apply to the district center itself must be explained by the absence of members of the Slivan tribe—or indeed, of Kurds in general—from the town’s environment.

<sup>390</sup> The local Suleymani Kurdish rulers were divided into two branches; the first held sway in Khulp and Batman, and the other in Nprkert. In 1520, Silvan is mentioned as a kaza of the Diyarbekir eyalet, and from 1632-1730 it constituted a sanjak of the same eyalet. See **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 685.

<sup>391</sup> **Kılıç, O.** Yurtluk-Ocaklık Ve Hükümet Sancaklar Üzerine Bazı Tespitler, *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 1999, № 10, s. 125.

<sup>392</sup> **Demirtaş, M.** Silvan Kazasında Yerleşme Ve Nüfus, s. 292.

<sup>393</sup> **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 685.

<sup>394</sup> **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, p. 470.

(*gavar*)<sup>395</sup> or subdistrict (*gavarak*).<sup>396</sup> In reality, this was an area where the central authority of the Ottoman Empire was very weak indeed, even following the Tanzimat reforms and the centralization policy. The subdistrict's true lords and masters were the Kurdish tribes, who did not hesitate even to overrun and ransack the kaymakam's office, the local center of Ottoman authority.<sup>397</sup>

According to the 1869 salname of the Diyarbekir vilayet, the subdistrict of Silvan, in addition to its central town of the same name, encompassed the nahiyes of Hazro, Mihrani, Hevidan, Badëkan, Khulp, and Khiyan.<sup>398</sup> The 1873 salname for Diyarbekir no longer mentions Khiank as a part of Silvan,<sup>399</sup> and in 1883 Khulp was joined to the Bitlis vilayet.<sup>400</sup> At the outset of the 20th century, the kaza of Silvan contained the nahiyes of Hazro, Diron, Hendif, Miraliyan, and Sheikh Davudan.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> **Danielyan, M.** Slivan, from an antiquarian perspective, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5271, p. 1. (**Մ. Դանիելյան**, Սլիվան՝ Հնախօսական Տեսակետով, «Արևելք»).

<sup>396</sup> **National News**, *Arevelk*, 1901, № 4665, p. 3. (**Ազգային Լուրեր**, «Արևելք»).

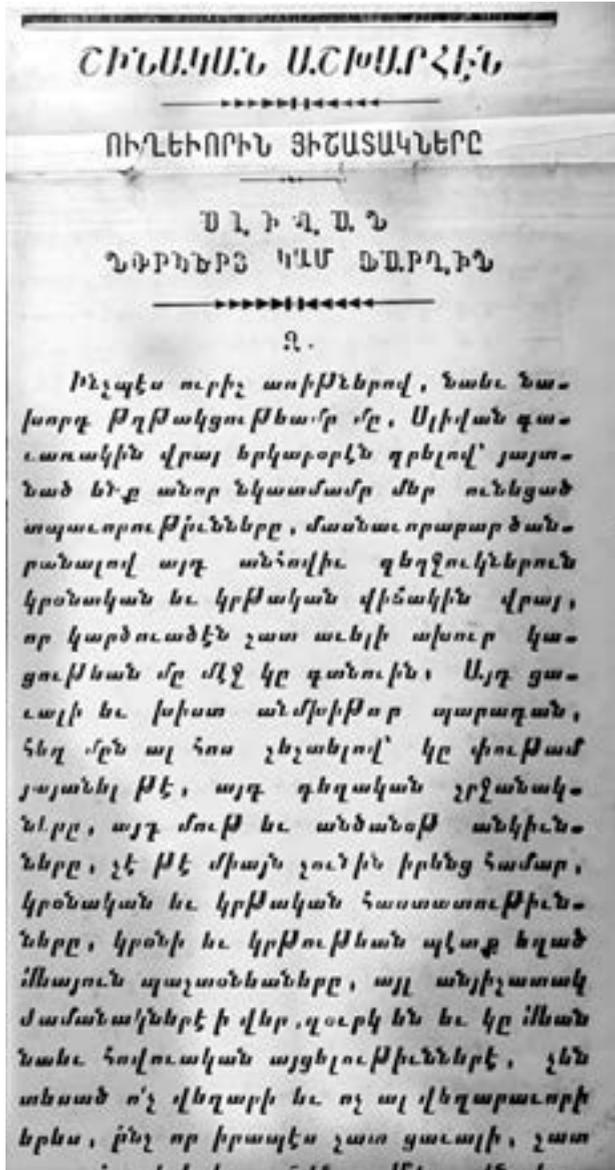
<sup>397</sup> **Demirtaş, M.** Silvan Kazasında Yerleşme Ve Nüfus, s. 294.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid*, p. 303.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid*, p. 305.

<sup>400</sup> **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 493. In 1891 Hevidan is not mentioned as a nahıye, while Badıgıyan, Hazro, and Mihrani remained as nahıyes of Slivan, together constituting the full subdistrict in records from that year. See **Alkan, A., Arınç, K.** Silvan Şehrının Kuruluşu, Gelişmesi Ve Fonksiyonları, *Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 2018, № 11, p. 73.

<sup>401</sup> **Arslan, H.** Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e (1839-1923) Diyarbekir Eyaleti/Vilayetinin İdari Teşkilatlanması, Tanzimat'tan Hünümüze Diyarbakır, cilt 1, Editörler: Oktay Bozan, etc, Ankara, 2019, s. 149. Hendif must be the same as the Armenian village of Hodnov. The name of Sheikh Davudan was added to the name of the local Kurdish tribe. In this connection, we read in *Droshak* that “the main Kurdish-inhabited nahıye is located on the eastern side and constitutes the region of the Shekhdodan ashiret; its boundaries reach as far as the Batman river, from which their begins the Archni [Ardzni?] kaymakamate. See **The state of the Nprkert region of the Tigranakert vilayet**, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1903, № 3, p. 40. (**Տիգրանակերտ Վիլայեթի Նփրկերտ Շրջանի Վիճակը**, «Դրոշակ»).



Slivan, Nprkert or Farghin, Arevelk, 1903

The Armenians of the rural town of Hazro in the subdistrict of Silvan spoke Armenian: “The Armenians of Hazro, like the people of Slivan, are not Kurdish-speaking; they speak their mother tongue, albeit with an

admixture of foreign words, mangled forms, and crude pronunciations.”<sup>402</sup> In the Armenian conception, Hazro, although a part of Slivan, was sometimes described as a separate region, or else as the center of the Zërëgan subdistrict: “Hazro-Avan [“Hazro-Town”] is considered to be the center of the Zërëgan subdistrict adjoining Slivan; here resides the *mudir* of the nahiye, subordinate to Nprkert governorate.”<sup>403</sup> The Armenian-speaking status of the Armenian population of the town of Hazro is established beyond doubt, but the same cannot be said of a number of surrounding Armenian villages. A question therefore arises as to whether some of these villages’ inhabitants were Kurdish-speaking.

Zërëgan is mentioned as a Kurdish-speaking subdistrict by *Azatamart*’s Farghin correspondent: “Over the course of centuries, the Kurdish language has become enrooted in our three subdistricts, Slivan, Zërëgan, and Bsherik.”<sup>404</sup> Manuk Danielyan, the Diyarbekir correspondent for the *Arevelk* newspaper who travelled in Slivan and Zërëgan, writes that schools must be opened in certain villages: “in order that they may at least learn to speak their mother tongue and receive a primary education.”<sup>405</sup> One of the villages listed in this connection, Bashnikh, was located in the Zërëgan subdistrict.<sup>406</sup> An impression is created that this was a Kurdish-speaking village. And indeed, we read in an 1894 source that the village’s inhabitants were Kurdish-speaking without exception.<sup>407</sup>

In a 1903 report to *Arevelk* on the district of Nprkert, Danielyan writes: “Among these hundreds of Armenian-inhabited villages, there are only two that understand and speak their mother tongue. These two villages both appear in the mountainous portion of Slivan: one is Hodnov, and the other is Hazro.”<sup>408</sup> Hodnov was a village in the near vicinity of Hazro, and, as we see, was likewise Armenian-speaking. If we take Hodnov and

<sup>402</sup> Danielyan, M. Travel notes, Hazro-Avan VIII, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5249, p. 1. (Մանուկ Դանիելյան, Ուղեւորին Յիշատակները, Հազրո-Աւան, Ը., «Արեւելք»)

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> For the Kurdish-speaking Armenians, Farghin, *Azatamart*, 1911, № 641, p. 3.

<sup>405</sup> Danielyan, M. Travel notes, Hazro-Avan VIII, *Arevelk*, 1903, p. 1.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> This, village also known as Bashnegh in Western Armenian, had 120 families, of which 10 were Assyrian and the remainder Armenian. *Ardzagank*, 1894, № 143, p. 3. («Արձագանք», 1894).

<sup>408</sup> Danielyan, M. Travel notes, Slivan, IV, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5232, p. 1. (Մանուկ Դանիելյան, Ուղեւորին Յիշատակները, Սլիվան, Դ., «Արեւելք»).

Bashnikh (Bashnegh)<sup>409</sup> as being representative of a more general distribution of Armenian- and Kurdish-speaking villages around Hazro, the following picture emerges: villages toward the north, such as Hodnov, were Armenian-speaking, while Kurdish was more strongly expressed in southern villages such as Bashnikh. Stepan Shmavonian of Hayni, who appears to have been in the village of Hodnov during the 1860s, proceeding from there to the village of Shēmshēm further northwest, notes in passing that the local Armenians and Assyrians spoke Arabic, but knew both Armenian and Kurdish as well.<sup>410</sup> It may be supposed that the Assyrians were the primarily Arabic speakers, while Armenian and Kurdish prevailed among the Armenian population. In any case, this is one more indication that Armenians in the villages north of Hazro had preserved their mother tongue. Based on this evidence, we may safely conclude that the Armenian language was predominant in Hazro.<sup>411</sup> Aside from this, although Hazro was a small subdistrict, there exist a significant number of contemporary references to its Armenian-speaking character, and little mention of Kurdish. The well-informed author of an 1887 article in *Armenia* titled “The situation of the Tigranakert Armenians” states plainly that “the Armenians in the district of Hazro speak Armenian.”<sup>412</sup> Garegin Srvandztiants writes that “the Armenians of Slivan, Bēsherik, and Bahram are Kurdish-speaking, whereas the remainder speak Armenian.”<sup>413</sup> The bishop and folklorist considered Hazro a separate diocese from Silvan; in

<sup>409</sup> Hodnov is today known as Koçbaba, and Bashnikh-Bashnegh as Bağdere. In 1876 Hodnov had 60 inhabitants, of whom 10 were Muslim and 50 Armenian. See **Shmavonian, S.** *Travels in Kurdistan, Avetaber*, 1876, № 26, p. 203. (Գ. Ստեփան Շմաւոնեան, Ճամբորդութիւն Ի Քիւրտիստան, «Աւետարեք»).

<sup>410</sup> Ibid. Shēmshēm (Shimshim, Shemshan) is today called Ormankaya and is among the neighborhoods of Hazro. In the 1870s it was a Christian-inhabited village of 60 Armenian and Assyrian households. Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Listed here are the villages of Hazro along with their numbers of households: Hazro (Հազրո) 176, Dadash (Տառաշ) 2, Ayndav (Այնտաւ) 2, Shekhan (Շեխան) 6, Rasul-aynē (Րասուլայնը) 12, Kuverjin (Թուվլերճին) 30, Akrag (Ագրակ) 45, Dersēl (Տէր-սըլ) 21, Bashnegh (Բաշնեղ) 70, Khējigan (Խըճիկան) 10, Piraman (Փիրաման) 6, Hayderigan (Հայտերիկան) 10, Kule-miran (Գուլէ-միրան) 11, Mahran (Մահրան) 6, Tērchil (Թըրշիլ) 5, Koman (Գոման) 2, See **Srvandztiants, G.** *Brother Toros*, Part II, pp. 236-237. According to Mgrdich Dikranian, Hazro contained 200 Armenian households. See **Dikranian, M., Rev.** *Mirror of Deeds*, p. 25. In 1890 the Armenian population of Hazro was listed as 300, likely meaning the number of households. **Diarbékir**, Le Haïasdan, Paris, 1890, № 11-12, p. 2.

<sup>412</sup> **Ashot**, *The Situation of Armenians in Tigranakert, Armenia*, 1887, № 14, p. 2.

<sup>413</sup> **Srvandztiants, G.** *Brother Toros*, Part II, p. 230.

an article dedicated to the dioceses of Diyarbekir, discussing the educational situation and existing schools in Lēje, Hazro, Farghin, and Derik, Srvandztiants refers only to Farghin as a Kurdish-speaking locale.<sup>414</sup>

Meanwhile, the Armenian population of Silvan proper was entirely Kurdish-speaking. In his memoirs, Bishop Mgrdich Dikranian refers to “the uncared-for and forsaken people of the province of Silvan [sic], who have neither churches nor the slightest knowledge of Armenian.”<sup>415</sup> One Armenian press source provides the following general portrait: “Sēlivan is a spacious district of mountains and plains; the greater part of its inhabitants are Armenians, Assyrians and Turks, who all dress after the same fashion and whose language is Kurdish. There are villages where Armenian is spoken. Here the Armenians are stouter-hearted, equal with the Turks and the Kurds.”<sup>416</sup> The *Ardzagank* newspaper states that “All of the Armenians found in Nprkert and the surrounding area are Kurdish-speaking, entirely deprived of their mother tongue.”<sup>417</sup> Still elsewhere it is stated that “the inhabitants of all the villages of Slivan, without exception, are and remain deprived of their native language; old and young alike speak in Kurdish dialect and with Kurdish enunciation.”<sup>418</sup>

The Armenians of Nprkert, the center of the district and the seat of the *kaymakam*, likewise did not know Armenian. A missionary of the American Oriental Society was apparently surprised to discover, upon arriving in the town in 1866, that all of the local Armenians spoke Kurdish.<sup>419</sup> The situation was the same at the outset of the 20th century:

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<sup>414</sup> **Papazian, H.** Educational Work in Diyarbekir, *Arevelk*, 1902, p. 1. (Յակոբ Փափագեան, Կրթական Գործը Տիարպեքիի Մէջ, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>415</sup> **Dikranian, M., Rev.** Mirror of Deeds, p. 24. Dikranian goes on to state that “the natives of Silvan do not know Armenian.” Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>416</sup> **Ashot**, The Situation of Armenians in Tigranakert, *Armenia*, 1887, № 14, p. 2.

<sup>417</sup> **M.D.** Nprkert, *Ardzagank*, 1894, № 122, p. 3. (Մ. Գ., Նփրկերտ, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>418</sup> **Danielyan, M.** Travel notes, Slivan, IV, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5232, p. 1. Danielyan, who travelled in Silvan and spoke with the locals, concluded, based on the histories related by its elderly inhabitants and on the absence of antiquities, that part of the population of the Silvan Plain most likely migrated during the late 18th and early 19th centuries there from the mountainous regions to the north, from Khulp, Khiank, and the neighboring areas. Arriving in a Kurdish environment these Armenians too gradually became Kurdish-speaking. See **Danielyan, M.** Slivan, from an antiquarian perspective, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5271, p. 1.

<sup>419</sup> **Proceedings at Boston and Cambridge**, May 22d, 1867, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 9 (1868-1871), p. XV.

“the native element of [the population of] Nprkert, the native Christians, are Kurdish-speaking, and, like the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, they understand nothing of their mother tongue.”<sup>420</sup>

The only Armenian speakers in Nprkert appear to have been those relocated from Tigranakert and Hayni.

As a consequence of intensifying economic exploitation, continual emigration, religious conversion, and especially the Hamidian massacres, the Christian population progressively dwindled. London’s *Hunchak* newspaper gave the following description of prevailing conditions in the aftermath of the massacres: “All the villages of Kharzan, Běsheri, Slevan [have] been plundered and demolished, hundreds killed, and there are entire villages that have accepted Islam in order to free themselves of this hopeless situation.”<sup>421</sup>

In another source we read that “the most harrowing situation has emerged in the districts of Ginj, Hayne, Lje, and Farghin where the sparse Armenian population has been subjected to despoilment and massacre, while a considerable portion have saved their skins by converting to Islam.”<sup>422</sup> In coming years a number of the Islamicized Armenians of this area would continue to live as Muslims, while others attempted to practice their religion out of sight to Muslim eyes and to secretly preserve their Christian-Armenian identity.<sup>423</sup> Especially frequent was the abduction and forcible Islamization of Armenian girls and women.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> **Danielyan, M.** Travel notes, Slivan, Nprkert or Farghin, VI, 1903, № 5242, p. 2. (**Մանուկ Գանիլեան**, Շինական Աշխարհէն, Ուղեւորին Յիշատակները, Սլիվան, Նփրկերս կամ Ֆարդին, Զ., «Արեւելք»).

<sup>421</sup> **Hrat**, The Massacres in Baghesh: Detailed description, great alarm in Mush, Sasun, Sghert and its surroundings. *Hunchak*, London, 1896, № 5, p. 36. (**Հրատ**, Բաղէշի Կոտորածը. Մանրամասն Նկարագրութիւն. Մեծ Տագնապ Մուշի, Սասունի, Սղերդի Եւ Իր Շրջականերու Մէջ, «Հնչակ»). See also **Le Soleil**, Paris, 1880, № 163, p. 1.

<sup>422</sup> **Ruben**, *Memoirs*, vol. III, p. 140.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>424</sup> **The state of the Nprkert region of the Tigranakert vilayet**, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1903, № 3, p. 42. Regarding the massacres in Silvan and Hazro, see **Avagyan, B.** Documents regarding the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896 (Bitlis province), *Armenological Issues*, 1, Yerevan, 2014, pp. 119-142. (**Ավագյան Գ.**, Փաստաթղթեր 1894-1896 թթ. հայկական կոտորածների վերաբերյալ (Բիթլիսի նահանգ), Հայագիտության հարցեր).

In 1880 Nprkert received official status as a town, which promoted the consolidation of the surrounding population.<sup>425</sup> Before the Hamidian massacres, Cuinet Vital estimated the town's population at 7,000, including 4,000 Muslims and 3,000 Christians.<sup>426</sup> However, the French geographer's information appears dubious in this case. The missionary George Knapp, who travelled the region about a decade later, named Farghin the center of the Kurdish-speaking Christian population, stating that in the prior eight to ten years many people had moved in from the outlying districts and established themselves in the town.



View from the town of Farghin/Nprkert,  
1911. Image source: Gertrude Bell Archive<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> In this connection, Danielyan reported that “20 or 25 years ago, Nprkert was an ordinary village, but, having recently become a kaymakamate, it has become more developed and expansive, so that today it presents the appearance of a rural town [*gyughak'aghak*]. The population numbers 500-600 households.” See **Danielyan, M.** Travel notes, Slivan, Nprkert or Farghin, VI, 1903, p. 2.

<sup>426</sup> 2,000 Armenian Apostolics, 426 Armenian Catholics, 24 Armenian Protestants, for a total of 2,450 Armenians and 550 Jacobite Assyrians. See **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, p. 471.

<sup>427</sup> The author expresses his thanks to Gila Haddad for assistance in finding this source.

By his account, the town of Farghin consisted of 900 households, of which at least 700 were Christian.<sup>428</sup> Information available from the Armenian press confirms that the city was primarily inhabited by Christians or by Armenians. One such source states that the city had 500 households, of which approximately 200 were Armenian, with the remainder being Kurdish and Assyrian.<sup>429</sup> In 1902 Farghin is mentioned as having a



Farghin/Nprkert, 1911. Image source: Gertrude Bell Archive

population of 2,500, including 700 Muslims, 1,500 Armenians and 300 other Christians.<sup>430</sup> In the same year a press dispatch from Farghin/Nprkert

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<sup>428</sup> **The Missionary Herald:** Containing The Proceedings Of The American Board Of Commissioners For Foreign Missions, With A View Of Other Benevolent Operations, For The Year 1903, vol. XCIX (99), Boston, p. 353.

<sup>429</sup> **M.D. Nprkert,** *Arzagank*, 1894, p. 3.

<sup>430</sup> **The state of the Nprkert region of the Tigranakert vilayet,** *Droshak*, Geneva, 1903, p. 42.

describes the city as having 300 Armenian households, consisting “for the most part” of Kurdish-speaking Armenians.<sup>431</sup>

Regarding the Armenian population of the larger Silvan *kaza*, it appears that sources of the period sometimes took into consideration only the town of Nprkert/Farghin adjoining villages, and that the subsidiary nahiyes were occasionally overlooked entirely. According to a 1906 issue of *Byzantion*, the subdistrict of Silvan with its 5 nahiyes contained 218 villages, of which 26 were inhabited solely by Christians, and 47 were mixed.<sup>432</sup> Reviewing the data contained in the 1913 census of the Armenian Patriarchate, Raymond Kevorkian comes to the following conclusion: on the eve of the Genocide, the Armenian population of the Silvan *kaza* amounted to 13,824 people, distributed across 70 Armenian-inhabited communities with 28 churches and monasteries.<sup>433</sup>

### Armenian population data for Silvan

Source	Year	Armenians
Le Soleil	1880	10,000 Christians <sup>434</sup>
G. Srvandztiants	1885	Approx. 7,296 (962 households) <sup>435</sup>

<sup>431</sup> **Papazian, H.** Educational work in the dioceses of Diyarbekir, *Arevelk*, 1902, № 5015, p. 2.

<sup>432</sup> **Tghtakits,** Agriculture in Diyarbekir Province, *Byzantion*, 1906, № 2922, p. 1. (Թղթակից, Տիարապէքիի Կուսակալութեան Երկրագործութիւնը, «Բիւզանդիոն»).

<sup>433</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** The Armenian Genocide, p. 276. A report submitted to the United Armenian Society in 1910 placed the number of Armenian villages in Silvan at 48, all of them Kurdish-speaking. **Der-Garabedian, K.** Native province: six hundred villages, students and schoolhouses, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 305, p. 1. In 1911, *Azatamart* described Silvan as having 57 Armenian villages, and Zërëkan 13. **For the Kurdish-speaking Armenians,** Farghin, *Azatamart*, 1911, № 641, p. 3.

<sup>434</sup> The figure probably refers to Silvan proper. See **Le Soleil**, 1880, № 163, p. 1.

<sup>435</sup> The estimate is our own, arrived at by multiplying the total sum of Armenian households in Silvan’s Armenian villages by a factor of 8. See **Srvandztiants, G.** Brother Toros, Part II, pp. 234-236. It should be taken account that Srvandztiants neglected to include a number of villages, including Hodnov and Shēmshēm. According to the same source, there were 414 Armenian households in Hazro and the 15 surrounding Armenian-inhabited villages, amounting to a population of approximately 3,312 Armenians. Therefore, based on Srvandztiants’s data, we may say that the dioceses of Silvan and Hazro had an Armenian population of more than 11,000.

<b>V. Cuinet</b>	1891	5,954 Armenians: 5,504 Apostolic, 426 Catholic, 24 Protestant <sup>436</sup>
<b>1881/1882-1893 Ottoman census</b>	1898	6,560 Armenian Apostolic <sup>437</sup>
<b>The Missionary Herald</b>	1903	1000 Christian households <sup>438</sup> (Approx. 8000 individuals)
<b>Droshak</b>	1903	13,000 (excluding the population of the town of Nprkert) <sup>439</sup>
<b>Sghert Prelacy, Patriarchate Census</b>	1913	13,824 <sup>440</sup>
<b>Ottoman Census</b>	1914	13,083 Armenians: 12,756 Apostolic, 327 Protestant <sup>441</sup>
<b>Teotig</b>	1914	Approx. 12384 (1,548 households) <sup>442</sup>

<sup>436</sup> **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, pp. 470-471.

<sup>437</sup> **Karpat, K.H.** Ottoman population, p. 132.

<sup>438</sup> The missionary George Knapp estimated that in the region of Farghin alone there were 54 Christian villages, amounting to 1000 households. See **The Missionary Herald**, vol. XCIX (99), p. 353.

<sup>439</sup> The state of the Nprkert region of the Tigranakert vilayet, *Droshak*, Geneva, 1903, p. 42.

<sup>440</sup> Figure calculated by Raymond Kevorkian. See **Kevorkian, R.** The Armenian Genocide, p. 276.

<sup>441</sup> **Karpat, K.H.** Ottoman population, 1830-1914, pp. 176-177.

<sup>442</sup> The estimate is our own, based on the sum of Armenian households in individual villages listed by Teotig, multiplied by a factor of 8. See **Teotig**, Golgotha, pp. 266-269, 550-551. Teotig acknowledged that the Armenian population of Slivan somewhat exceeded his own figures: "In other Kurdish-inhabited villages of Slivan, Bsherik, and Lje, there are a sparse number of Armenians, constantly subject to migration." Ibid, p. 269.

## THE SUBDISTRICT OF BSHERIK<sup>443</sup>

*“There is not a handful of uncultivated soil to be seen upon the entire plain of Bsherik; the people, of both sexes, labor away like bees on all sides, accompanying their work with the murmur of Kurdish-language songs and prayers which are the expression of their spirit.”<sup>444</sup>*

Bsherik was an isolated subdistrict on the southern extremity of the borderlands separating the Armenian Highland and from Northern Mesopotamia, a forgotten corner far from the routes of European travellers and often left entirely unmentioned. These fertile plains, spread over the foothills of the Taurus Mountains, were sustained by the Batman tributary of the River Tigris.<sup>445</sup> Located on the left bank of the Tigris, Bsherik was surrounded by districts of Kurdish-speaking Armenians, with Silvan to the northwest, and Kharzan immediately adjacent on the eastern side. Although Kharzan was administratively contained within the Bitlis vilayet, it geographically constituted the continuation of the same plain. Accordingly, Kharzan and Bsherik, together with Silvan, constituted the main belt of Kurdish-speaking Armenian districts. Bsherik had once formed a part of the historical province of Aghdzink.<sup>446</sup>

After its accession to the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, Bsherik remained consistently a part of the Diyarbekir eyalet.<sup>447</sup> At the beginning of the 19th century it constituted a separate sanjak of Diyarbekir,

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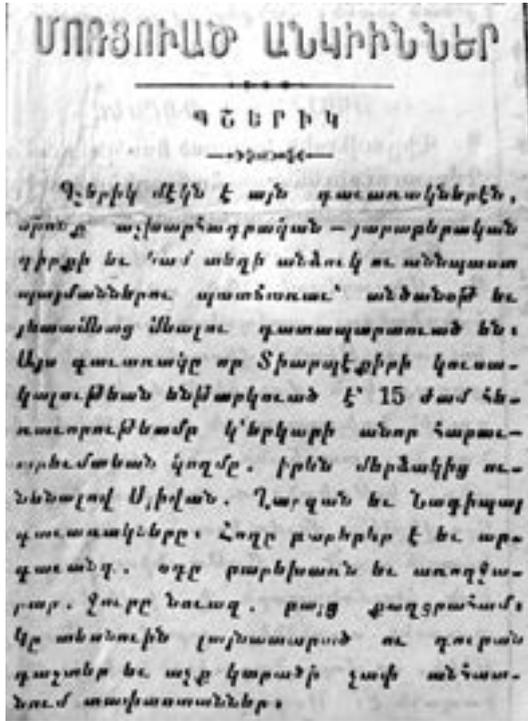
<sup>443</sup> Beşiri and Qubîn are, respectively, the Turkish and Kurdish names for the region.

<sup>444</sup> T. Forgotten Corners, Bsherik, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5304, p. 1. (Թ., Սոնցուած Անկիւններ, Պշերիկ, «Արեւելք»).

<sup>445</sup> Manuk Danielyan wrote that the soil of the Bsherik plain was unmatched in its fertility. See M.D. Nprkert, *Arzaganak*, 1894, № 122, p. 3.

<sup>446</sup> On rare occasions, Bsherik was also considered a part of Sasun. See **Igitpashi**, Sasun, *Arzaganak*, 1894, № 144, p. 1. (Իկիթթաշի, Սասուն, «Արձագանք»).

<sup>447</sup> **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 112. In the 1565 defter for the Diyarbekir eyalet, Beshiri is mentioned as a village of Diyarbekir. See: **Yılmazçelik**, **İ.** XVIII. Yüzyıl İle XIX. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Diyarbakır Eyaletinin İdari Yapısı ve İdari Teşkilatlanması, *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1996, cilt 18, sayı 29, p. 223, fn. 18.



Forgotten Corners, Bsherek, *Arevelk*, 1903

and later, in 1848, a kaza of the same eyalet.<sup>448</sup> From 1881 to 1887 Bsherek was affixed to the newly-established Bitlis vilayet, constituting a part of the Sghert sanjak. Subsequently however, as a result of another administrative revision, it was once more joined to Diyarbekir, this time as a nahiye. In 1896 Bsherek received the status of kaza, and was subsumed into the central sanjak of Diyarbekir,<sup>449</sup> retaining this administrative status until 1923.

The Armenian population of Bsherek was Kurdish-speaking across the entire district. One press report from 1867 states that “there are many Armenian-populated villages in the districts known as Silvan and Bisheri,

<sup>448</sup> Bsherek is particularly mentioned as a sanjak from the years 1820-1825, and as a kaza in 1848. See **Yılmazçelik, İ.** Diyarbakır Eyaleti'nin Tanzimat'a Dâhil Edilmesiyle Şehir ve Eyalet Yönetiminde Ortaya Çıkan Meseleler, pp. 42, 44. From 1856-1867 Bsherek was a kaza of the Sghert sanjak of the Diyarbekir eyalet, and in 1870 it was mentioned as a nahiye of the Kharzan kaza of the same vilayet. See **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, p. 112.

<sup>449</sup> **Arslan, H.** Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e (1839-1923) Diyarbakır Eyaleti/Vilayetinin İdari Teşkilatlanması, s.148.

whose inhabitants, having forgotten their mother tongue, understand no language but Kurdish.”<sup>450</sup> Decades later, in 1911, *Azatamart* describes the same reality “Over the course of centuries, the Kurdish language has taken deep root in our three subdistricts, Slivan, Zërëgan, and Bsherek...children grow up speaking Kurdish from the cradle, without ever becoming familiar with their nationality, they invariably maintain relationships with their co-linguals, the Kurds, and religious conversion is also ordinary in these areas.”<sup>451</sup> Still elsewhere, it is stated that “The people are completely Kurdish-speaking, and unlearned to the utmost degree. They are, in a general sense, entirely deprived of the consolations of religion and education.”<sup>452</sup> The Assyrians of Bsherek likewise spoke Kurdish: “it is painful to see how the Assyrians, as well as our own [people], have utterly lost their native language and have welcomed Kurdish in its stead.”<sup>453</sup>

It is stated in one source that the majority of villages in the subdistrict of Bsherek were Armenian-speaking before the Hamidian massacres.<sup>454</sup> The massacres of 1895-1896, however, fell heavily upon the Kurdish-speaking Christians of Bsherek. As Ruben Ter-Minasyan later recounted: “Even those Armenians who spoke a foreign language were massacred: the Kurdish speakers of Bsherek and Slivan, the Arabic speakers of Sghert, the Turkish speakers of Caesarea (Kesaria, Kayseri), and the Armenians of distant Yozgat, Konya, and the shores of the Black Sea who had almost no connection to the Armenian movement.”<sup>455</sup> It was a severe blow for Kurdish-speaking Armenians, many of whom were forced to leave their land and belongings, depart from their native communities, or convert to Islam. Many of the Armenians of Bsherek preferred death to conversion. Father Hovhannes, the priest of the village of Barësël, refused to convert in spite of torture and was martyred; the priests of Ilihan and Greserun, unable to endure the torture, accepted Islam instead. Their example was followed by the Armenian Christians of other villages of Bsherek.<sup>456</sup> Conversion to

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<sup>450</sup> **A Letter from Kharpert**, *ASPG*, 1867, № 245, p. 7. (Խարքերդէն Նամակը Աը, «ԱՃՊԳ»).

<sup>451</sup> **For the Kurdish-speaking Armenians**, Farghin, *Azatamart*, 1911, p. 3.

<sup>452</sup> **Papazian, H.** Educational Work in Diyarbekir, *Arevelk*, 1902, № 5028, p. 1.

<sup>453</sup> **T.** Forgotten Corners, Bsherek, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5304, p. 1.

<sup>454</sup> **M.D.** Nprkert, *Ardzagank*, 1894, p. 3.

<sup>455</sup> **Ruben**, *Memoirs*, vol. III, pp. 136-137.

<sup>456</sup> **Surhandak**, Letter from Turkey, *Armenia*, 1896, № 80, p. 2.

Islam was considered an existentially necessary but temporary resort; very often those who converted to Islam during the course of the massacre subsequently attempted to return to their Christian faith.

Following the Hamidian massacres the economic situation deteriorated as well, as farmland passed into the hands of the sheikhs and Kurdish tribal leaders; as a result the villagers very often became hired laborers on their own former properties. For instance, a 1910 article in *Azatamart* describes how Tamoye Ino, a Kurdish chieftain from the Rashkotan ashiret, establishing himself in Bsheri's village of Merinan, appropriated the lands of the local Armenians. Unable to withstand the unremitting exploitation and theft, many of the villagers emigrated elsewhere.<sup>457</sup> Later, Tamoye Ino abducted the daughter of an Armenian villager named Sarkis Garabedian, forced her to convert to Islam, and married her: "the girl's parents do not dare to turn to the government, and the poor woman remains a captive to this day."<sup>458</sup>

In an 1896 report presented to the National Prelacy, it is stated that 69 villages of Bsheri and Kharzan (52 entirely Armenian, 13 Assyrian, and 4 mixed Armenian-Assyrian) were left vacant as a result of the Hamidian massacres: "The houses have been burned and some of the inhabitants, those delivered by a miracle, have been left scattered across the land."<sup>459</sup> This report was written directly after the Hamidian massacres, before the survivors were able to return.

A 1903 article in the *Arevelk* newspaper, titled "Forgotten Corners" and dedicated to the region of Bsheri, states that the Batman River divided the subdistrict into the sections of Verin (Upper) and Storin (Lower) Bsheri.<sup>460</sup> Upper Bsheri was for the most part Kurdish-inhabited, while

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<sup>457</sup> **Hrachya**, The Rshkotan ashiret, an evil to the government and to the people: facts, Bsheri (Tigranakert), *Azatamart*, 1910, № 217, p. 3. (Հրաչյայ, Ռշքօթանցի Աշիրէթը, Չարիք Կառավարութեան Եւ Ժողովուրդին Գլխուն, Փաստեր, Պշտի (Տիգրանակերտ), «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> **Surhandak**, Letter from Turkey, *Armenia*, 1896, № 80, p. 2.

<sup>460</sup> **T.** Forgotten Corners, Bsheri, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5304, p. 1. In the same year, 1903, the Bsheri kaza is mentioned as having one nahiye is mentioned, with Behramki Tepe as its center. (**Öreñç, A. F.** 1867 Vilayet Düzenlemesinden I. Dünya Savaşı Başlarına Kadar Diyarbakır'da Mülki Yapı, Tanzimat'tan Günümüze Diyarbakır, cilt 1, Editörler: Oktay Bozan, etc, Ankara, 2019, s. 114). This nahiye remained a part of Bsheri until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. (**Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 749). The salnames for 1903-1905 also mention a nahiye of Bsheri called Bahems (Be-Khams). (See **Arslan, H.** Tanzimat'tan

Lower Bsherek was mainly populated by Armenians and Assyrians. The major 21 Armenian villages of Lower Bsherek—that is, of the entire subdistrict—were the following: Verin Kafarzo, Storin Kafarzo, Barēsēl, Bledër, Gresira, Kerëk, Daudi, Haznamira, Basork, Ĕshkhastak, Zerjël, Kredi, Gedug, Jnaskar, Veri Azëk, Storin Azëk, Mzrarash, Zevug, Elëha, Ermi, and Koja. The villages of Verin Kafarzo, Storin Kafarzo, Elëha, and Ermi had appreciable Assyrian populations, and in certain villages there also lived small numbers of Kurds.<sup>461</sup>

*Byuzantion* conveys that Bsherek consisted of two groups of villages or nahiyes,<sup>462</sup> totalling 140 villages of which 25 were Christian-inhabited, and the remainder mixed.<sup>463</sup> Another press report mentions 27 Armenian villages,<sup>464</sup> and in 1910 Bsherek was listed as having 36 Armenian-inhabited villages.<sup>465</sup> On the basis of the census of the Armenian Patriarchate, Raymond Kevorkian concludes that 5,038 Armenians lived in Kurdish-speaking Bsherek in the year 1914, occupying 40 individual villages and possessing 15 churches.<sup>466</sup>

### Armenian population data for Bsherek

Source	Year	Armenians
Official Ottoman data	1871	2,347 (Number of Christians in the Beshiri nahiye of the Kharzan kaza) <sup>467</sup>
A. Devgants	1878	4,524 <sup>468</sup>

Cumhuriyet'e (1839-1923) Diyarbekir Eyaleti/Vilayetinin İdari Teşkilatlanması, s. 149). A dictionary of Ottoman toponyms also lists Behams as a nahiye of Bsherek from 1897 to 1908. (**Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 81).

<sup>461</sup> Six of these villages, (Gresira, Bledër, Zerjël, Koja, Zevug, and Barēsēl each possessed their own chapel and priest. **T. Forgiven Corners**, Bsherek, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5304, p. 1.

<sup>462</sup> Probably referring to Behams and Bahramk.

<sup>463</sup> **Tghtakits**, Agriculture in Diyarbekir Province, *Byuzantion*, 1906, № 2922, p. 1.

<sup>464</sup> **For the Kurdish-speaking Armenians**, Farghin, *Azatamart*, 1911, № 641, p. 3.

<sup>465</sup> **Der-Garabedian, K.** Native province: six hundred villages, students and schoolhouses, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 305, p. 1.

<sup>466</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** The Armenian Genocide, p. 276.

<sup>467</sup> **Çelik, A.** XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Siirt Sancağının İdari Ve Sosyo-ekonomik Durumu, s. 133.

<sup>468</sup> Devgants refers to the district as Saghkan. In the case of Bsherek, Devgants's total population figure corresponds to the sum of the populations of the villages he lists. See **Devgants, A.** Visit to Armenia, pp. 21-122, 127.

<b>G. Srvandztiants</b>	1885	Approx. 5,776 (722 households) <sup>469</sup>
<b>Armenia</b>	1896	Approx. 8088 (1,101 households in 23 Armenian and Assyrian villages) <sup>470</sup>
<b>Report of Shakir Pasha</b>	1896	4,264 Christians <sup>471</sup>
<b>The Missionary Herald</b>	1903	Approx. 6272 (784 Christian households) <sup>472</sup>
<b>Sghert Prelacy, Patriarchate Census</b>	1913	5,038 Armenians <sup>473</sup>
<b>Ottoman Census</b>	1914	3,369 Armenian Apostolic, 58 Armenian Catholic, 1,393 Assyrian <sup>474</sup>
<b>Teotig</b>	1914	Approx. 5816 (727 households) <sup>475</sup>

<sup>469</sup> The estimate is our own, based a sum of households in the villages listed by Srvandztiants, multiplied by a factor of 8. **Srvandztiants, G.** Brother Toros, Part II, pp. 232-234.

<sup>470</sup> The list is incomplete, including only those villages impacted by the Hamidian massacres.

<sup>471</sup> According to this document, the Christian population of Bsherek was distributed as follows among four nahiyes: Iluh 1,307, Pazpun 1,261, Halili 1,058, Tepe 638. The overall number of Muslims in the same area was 9,791. See **Öreñç, A. F.** 1867 Vilayet Düzenlemesinden I. Dünya Savaşı Başlarına Kadar Diyarbakır'da Mülki Yapı, pp. 105-106.

<sup>472</sup> There were 52 Christian-inhabited villages in the region of Bsherek. See **The Missionary Herald**, vol. XCIX (99), p. 353.

<sup>473</sup> Calculations of Raymond Kevorkian. **Kevorkian, R.** The Armenian Genocide, 276.

<sup>474</sup> According to the census, there were 11,015 Muslims in Bsherek, and 82 Yezidis. See **Karpat, K.H.** Ottoman population, pp. 176-177.

<sup>475</sup> The calculation is our own, based on a sum of households in the villages listed multiplied by a factor of 8. See **Teotig**, Golgotha, pp. 270-271, 551. As noted in the main text, Teotig acknowledged that his Armenian population figures for Bsherek constituted an underestimate.

## BAHRAMK

(Bahramki, Pahramk, Bahram, Baravan, Paravan)<sup>476</sup>

Writing of the diocese of Tigranakert, Garegin Srvandztiants states that “the Armenians of Slivan, Bēsherik, and Bahram are Kurdish-speaking, while the remainder speak Armenian.”<sup>477</sup> Bahramk is elsewhere mentioned as one of the major Kurdish-speaking Armenian districts.<sup>478</sup> Located south of Bsherik, Bahram-Bahramki was a separate kaza of the Diyarbekir eyalet, only losing the status of subdistrict in 1870 and becoming a nahiye of the Diyarbekir vilayet. In the final years of the Ottoman Empire it belonged to the subdistrict of Bsherik.<sup>479</sup> Today, under the name of Tepe, it is a neighborhood of the Bismil district of Diyarbekir province.

The region, in all probability, received its name from that of the Berhamki (Bahramki) Kurdish tribe, just as the names of the Slivani, Rashkotan, Badēkan, and Khian tribes lent their names to the areas they inhabited. In 16th century Ottoman geographical texts, the name of the Berhamki is recorded in connection with the Mardin kaza.<sup>480</sup> A tribe of the

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<sup>476</sup> For more on Bahramk, see the online dictionary of toponyms compiled by Sevan Nişanyan: <https://www.nisanyanmap.com/?lv=2&y=Behramki&t=&srt=x&u=1&ua=0>.

<sup>477</sup> **Srvandztiants, G.** Brother Toros, Part II, p. 230.

<sup>478</sup> **Ukhtavor,** Tigranaker and its inhabitants, *Ardzagank*, 1894, № 54, p. 3.

<sup>479</sup> From 1856-1857, Bahramki was a subdistrict of the Diyarbekir eyalet, and until 1870 it was a subdistrict of the Diyarbekir vilayet. In a dictionary of Ottoman toponyms it is noted as a nahiye of the Diyarbekir vilayet from 1870-1897, and from 1911-1923 as a nahiye of Bsherik. As noted in the prior section, as of 1989 Bsherik was divided into 4 nahiyes: Bsheri, Behramki, Shark, and Garb. See **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, p. 749. For further information of Ottoman administrative revisions, see: **Karan, C.** Osmanlı Son Dönemindeki Bazı Coğrafya Ve Tarihi Kaynaklarında Diyar-I Bekr Vilayetinin Genel Durumu, *e-Şarkiyat İlmî Araştırmalar Dergisi/Journal of Oriental Scientific Research (JOSR)*, 2020, Cilt:12, Sayı: 4 (29), p. 1452. Regarding the history of Bahramki, see: **Göyünç, N.** XVI. Yüzyılda Mardin Sancağı, İstanbul, 1969, p. 61.

<sup>480</sup> Regarding the population of Mardin see: **Özcoşar, İ.** Osmanlı Modernleşmesi/Merkezleşmesi Ve Kriz: Mardin Ve Çevresinde Aşiretler Zamanı, *Kadim Akademi SBD*, 2019, cilt. 3, sayı. 2, p. 7. See also **Erpolat, M. S.** Tahrir Defterlerine göre XVI. Yüzyılda Mardin

same name is also mentioned in Raqqa.<sup>481</sup> It is conceivable that the same tribe migrated from Raqqa to Mardin, and proceeded from there on to Bsharik.

As noted, Bahramk became a nahiye in 1870, but for a certain period in continued to be regarded as an independent geographical unit apart from Bsharik; for this reason, it is occasionally mentioned as such, although in general its existence is not thoroughly attested in Armenian sources, not even appearing in dictionaries of toponyms. It is mentioned in an 1887 issue of *Armenia* as an independent subdistrict.<sup>482</sup> The author of the piece in question, who was well informed about the prevailing situation in Bahramk, Bsharik, and Silvan, writes: “Bahramk contains on the order of 50 villages, in the mountains and the plains, the inhabitants Kurds, Armenians, and Assyrians. The Armenians are Kurdish-speaking, and the Assyrians Kurdish- and Arabic-speaking. The religion of the Armenians is Apostolic [*lusavorakan*], and they associate with the Assyrians without discrimination, attending one another’s churches — although they lack dedicated church buildings, with daily offices [*zhamerkut ‘yun*] taking place in private homes. They have not seen a Divine Liturgy in years...[T]hey have never had schools, and in their dress and customs they are precisely like the Kurds.”<sup>483</sup>

Bahramki was also known by the name of Baravan. This is the name by which the district was known to the Constantinople scholar Arshag Alboyadjian.<sup>484</sup> The Armenian population of Bahramk-Baravan was greatly impacted by the Hamidian massacres: “Coming to the districts of Banok and Baravan, which have larger Armenian populations and more

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Sancağındaki Aşiretler, *I. Uluslararası Mardin Tarihi Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, İstanbul, 2006, p. 451.

<sup>481</sup> Regarding this ashiret, see **Başarır, Ö.** XVIII.Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Osmanlı Mali Uygulamaları Çerçevesinde Konargöçer Topluluklar, *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 54, 2 (2014), pp. 251-284.

<sup>482</sup> **Ashot**, The Situation of Armenians in Tigranakert, *Armenia*, 1887, № 14, p. 2.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid. According to the 1852 *jizye defter*, there were 139 Christians living in Bahramk. See **Kazım Kartal-Mustafa Uysal**, Cizye Defterlerine Göre 19. Yüzyıl Ortalarında Diyarbakır’da Yaşayan Gayrimüslimlerin Demografik ve İktisadi Yapısı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme, *Tanzimat’tan Günümüze Diyarbakır*, Editörler: İbrahim Özcoşar, etc, İstanbul, 2018, p. 244.

<sup>484</sup> **Alboyadjian, A.** Armenian and Kurdish ethnic relations II., *Byzantion*, 1913, № 4953, p. 1.

villages than those mentioned above, they were likewise entirely burned, razed, and left desolate. Many of the inhabitants were martyred, women and girls abducted, and the remainder subjected to the extremest affliction and consequently to a terrible death.”<sup>485</sup>

Armenians continued to live in Bahramk-Baravan after the Hamidian massacres. The region is mentioned by Kegham Der-Garabedian, writing for *Azatamart* in 1911.<sup>486</sup> In another issue of *Azatamart* from the same year, in an article titled “For the Kurdish-speaking Armenians” the paper’s Farghin correspondent reported that the United Society had undertaken to open a school in Bahramk.<sup>487</sup> On the eve of the Genocide, there were 136 Armenian households in the 12 Armenian-inhabited villages of this nahiye, more than 1,000 people.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> **Surhandak**, Letter from Turkey, *Armenia*, 1896, № 80, p. 2.

<sup>486</sup> **Der-Garabedian, K.** The land question, or a bloody, tearful dispute, *Azatamart*, 1911, № 488, p. 4. (**Գեղամ Տէր-Կարապետեան**, Հողային Հարցը Կամ Արուն-Արցունքոս Վէճը, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>487</sup> **For the Kurdish-speaking Armenians**, Farghin, *Azatamart*, 1911, № 641, p. 3.

<sup>488</sup> See appendix.

## THE SUBDISTRICT OF JZIRE

(Jezire, Jezirah, Cezire, Cizre)

Prior to the Ottoman policy of centralization, Jzire formed a part of the semi-autonomous Kurdish principality of Jazira-Bohtan. After the establishment of Ottoman administrative control, in the 1850s it became a kaza of the Mardin sanjak of the Diyarbekir province.<sup>489</sup> Extending south of Eruh, Jzire occupied an island-like position, enclosed by the left bank of the Tigris and its tributary, the Khabur River. In the late Ottoman period, this area was conceived of by Armenians as “Mesopotamia”<sup>490</sup> and “Kurdistan.”<sup>491</sup> The toponym Nerkin (Inner) Bohtan encountered in the pages of the Western Armenian press refers, in all probability, to the vicinity of Mount Ararad (Cudi Daği).<sup>492</sup> Today this area constitutes the Cizre district of the Şırnak province of the Republic of Turkey.

In an 1885 issue of *Arevelk* we read of the Armenians of Jzire that “the people do not know so much as a word of Armenian, but rather speak Kurdish.”<sup>493</sup> In another source they are mentioned as speaking both Kurdish and Arabic.<sup>494</sup> The reference to Arabic may be explained both by

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<sup>489</sup> **Osmanlı Yer Adları**, s. 160.

<sup>490</sup> **Jezire** (Mesopotamia), *Arevelk*, 1885, № 319, p. 2. (Ճէզիրէ (Միջագետք), «Արեւելք»)). See also **Kurdish-Armenians**, *Mshak*, 1881, № 23, p. 2.

<sup>491</sup> “On Nov. 16 Fr. Harutian, the priest of Jezira wrote to the Patriarchate that their village is located in the region of Kurdistan and perpetually subject to the tyranny of the Hamidiye soldiers, and for this reason they languish in the extremest degree of poverty.” Armenian News, *Zhamanak*, 1908, № 51, p. 2. (Հայկական Լուրեր, «Ժամանակ»)). See also **Feruhkhan, P.** Travels in Babylon by way of Armenia, pp. 62-63.

<sup>492</sup> “Aside from Jezire, in the nearby villages of Fëndêke, Hazakh and Sharnakh and in the region of inner Bohtan there are about 70 households’ worth of Armenians, some of them Kurdish-speaking and others speaking Armenian. See **Toro**, Forgotten corners, Jezire, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5248, p. 1. (Թորո, Մոռոցուած Անկիւններ, Ճէզիրէ, «Արեւելք»)).

<sup>493</sup> **Jezire** (Mesopotamia), *Arevelk*, 1885, p. 2.

<sup>494</sup> In this press report, the Armenians of Jzire are described as speaking Arabic and Turkish, as well as Kurdish. The reference to Turkish-speaking Armenians in Jzire was the result of simple confusion. See **Tghtakits**, Agriculture in Diyarbekir Province, *Byuzantion*, 1906, № 2922, p. 1.

Jzire's proximity to the Arabic-speaking world, as well as by the presence of migrants from the town of Sghert. A portion of Jzire's population hailed from Sghert,<sup>495</sup> with migrants from Deh being especially numerous.<sup>496</sup> The arrivals from the town of Sghert may well have been Arabic speakers, while the rural people, who were more numerous, would have been Kurdish-speaking. A part of the small Armenian population of Inner Bohtan is described as Kurdish-speaking, and another part as speaking Armenian.<sup>497</sup> Generally, the languages in use in Jzire were Kurdish and Arabic, as well as Syriac.

An 1885 article in *Arevelk* attests that the Armenian children of Jzire remained unbaptized, and that their dead were buried without religious ceremony. The article goes on to state that Armenians of the town of Jzire had neither a school nor a church, and that their priest had died.<sup>498</sup> Church and school were the foundations of Western Armenian identity; although the Armenians of Jzire had neither, *vardapet* Georg Nalbandyan, the prelate of the Sghert diocese, describes them as appearing zealous in their efforts to remain Armenian.<sup>499</sup> Later, a certain goldsmith named Avedis was persuaded to become a priest, "for the sake of the scattered Armenian families of the town and surrounding villages."<sup>500</sup>

The number of Armenians in Jzire was not large: European travellers who visited the town and surrounding district either omitted to mention, or satisfied themselves with a passing reference to the existence of Armenians in the area.<sup>501</sup> In his 1892 book, Paul Müller-Simonis refers to the rural town of Jzire as a large village consisting of 800 households, including 120

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<sup>495</sup> "The Armenians of Jezire are migrants from Sghert." See **Instances of religious conversion in the Sghert region**, *Azatomart*, 1912, № 994, p. 3. (Կրօնափոխութեան Գէպեր Սղերի Շրջանին Մէջ, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>496</sup> **Teotig**, Golgotha, p. 91.

<sup>497</sup> **Toro**, Forgotten corners, Jezire, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5248, p. 1.

<sup>498</sup> **Jezire** (Mesopotamia), *Arevelk*, 1885, p. 2.

<sup>499</sup> **Instances of religious conversion in the Sghert region**, *Azatomart*, 1912, № 994, p. 3. Another source comments: "if only we knew of the radiant piety of the people of these two dioceses, and especially of Bsharik..." **Papazian, H.** Educational Work in Diyarbekir, *Arevelk*, 1902, № 5028, p. 1.

<sup>500</sup> **Toro**, Forgotten corners, Jezire, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5248, p. 1.

<sup>501</sup> **Kinneir, J.M.** Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan, p. 453. Ainsworth, recounting his travels through Jzire, does not mention the local Armenians. See also **Ainsworth, W.F.** Travels and researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia, vol. 2, p. 345.

of Christians and 10 of Apostolic Armenians.<sup>502</sup> According to one 1903 assessment, the town had 600 households: “Armenians, Kurds, Arabs, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Jews,” of which barely 30 were Armenian.<sup>503</sup> The prelate Georg visited the town in 1912, at which time it had “1000 households of Kurds, 30 households of Assyrians, 50 households of Chaldeans, 15 of Assyrian Catholics, 5 households of Armenian Protestants, and 29 Armenian Apostolic households.”<sup>504</sup> Aside from the town of Jzire, Armenians lived in 11 nearby villages on the eve of the Genocide: Arnadad, Mezer, Gundeksheykh, Têldar, Perek, Berebt, Jerahi, Hntuk, Jeder, Keoçer and, Zakho.<sup>505</sup>

### Population data for Jzire

Source	Year	Armenians	Assyrians
<b>V. Cuinet</b>	1891	3,750, including 1,500 Apostolics, 1,250 Catholics, 1000 Evangelicals.	6,250, including 2,150 Chaldeans, 1000 Jacobites. <sup>506</sup>
<b>Sghert Prelacy, Patriarchate Census</b>	1913	2,700 <sup>507</sup>	
<b>Ottoman Census</b>	1914	268 Armenian Apostolic, 90 Protestant <sup>508</sup>	
<b>Teotig</b>	1914	Approx. 960 (120 households) <sup>509</sup>	

<sup>502</sup> According to Müller-Simonis, the town of Jzire had 55 Chaldean households, 15 [Nestorian] Assyrian households, and 55 Jacobite Assyrian households. See **Müller-Simonis P.**, *Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, A travers l'Arménie, Le Kurdistan et la Mésopotamie*, p. 363, fn. 3.

<sup>503</sup> **Toro**, *Forgotten corners, Jezire, Arevelk*, 1903, № 5248, p. 1.

<sup>504</sup> **Instances of religious conversion in the Sghert region**, *Azatamart*, 1912, № 994, p. 3.

<sup>505</sup> See **Kevorkian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide*, pp. 378, 898, fn. 191.

<sup>506</sup> **Cuinet Vital**, tome deuxième, p. 512.

<sup>507</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide*, pp. 378, 898, fn. 191.

<sup>508</sup> The ethnic affiliation of the Protestants is not noted. The subdistrict had an overwhelmingly Muslim majority according to the census, with a Muslim population of 17,022, primarily Kurds. See **Karpat K.H.** *Ottoman population, 1830-1914*, p. 176.

<sup>509</sup> The estimate is our own, based on the sum of households in the villages listed, multiplied by a factor of 8. See **Teotig**, *Golgotha*, pp. 279, 552.

## JUDI DAGH (ARARAD)

### The Nomadic Armenians

Aside the occupants of the rural town of Jzire and the dozen surrounding villages, there also lived at the foot of Mount Judi (Cudi Dağı, Ararad) nomadic (*k'och'ar*),<sup>510</sup> or, it would be better to say, semi-nomadic Armenians, who lived in tents and pursued a transhumant, pastoral mode of life. Raymond Kevorkian describes them as “Armenian nomads” or “Kurdicized Christians.”<sup>511</sup>

A 1903 issue of *Arevelk* provides an exceptional source of information about this distinctive population: “Midway through June, they take their moveable furniture and possessions and, amid singing and dancing, depart for their summer residence in the northern districts; they reach as far as the vicinity of Van and Julamerk, where they remain for a duration of three months. After finishing their customary work, with the same ceremony and furniture, they return to their previous places—the environs of Jezireh—to spend the remaining seven or eight months of the year there in undisturbed labor.”<sup>512</sup> These Armenians, “the last remnant of a patriarchal people leading a nomadic life” are said to have lived “a Kurdish existence,” and in all probability constituted a separate Armenian “tribe” or clan unto themselves. They were Armenian speakers, with a rough, clipped intonation. After returning from their summer encampments, they occupied themselves in animal husbandry, farming, and grain-milling.<sup>513</sup>

At the beginning of the 20th century a few households from this Armenian “tribe” passed into sedentary residence, while others continued their cyclical pastoral lifestyle, albeit ceasing to live in tents and instead

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<sup>510</sup> The Armenian term *kochar*, meaning “nomadic” and particularly connoting pastoral transhumance, was widely used to describe the Kurds themselves.

<sup>511</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 378.

<sup>512</sup> **Toro**, *Forgotten corners, Jezire*, *Arevelk*, 1903, № 5248, p. 1.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*

establishing themselves in Kurdish villages. All the same, as of 1903 they continued to lead a semi-nomadic and “half-Armenian, half-Kurdish” life: “it is recounted that before they had a priest, their life was a perfect type of antediluvian existence, in that they knew nothing of baptisms, exequies for the dead, Holy Easter, fasts and prayer [...] polygamy and other such risible and deplorable acts had become most ordinary as far as they were concerned; they truly continued to maintain hereditary customs traditionally passed down, but these gradually approached the point of disappearance.”<sup>514</sup> Before the Genocide these seminomadic Armenians numbered approximately 1,600.<sup>515</sup>

These, without a doubt, were the *Ermeni-Varto*, the Armenians of the Varto ashiret, or tribe. A member of this ashiret, Rakel Dink (the widow of Hrant Dink, founder and editor of Istanbul’s *Agos* newspaper), relates that the tribe’s name emerged from that of her father’s grandfather, Vartan. They arrived in the region of Mount Judi from Van.<sup>516</sup> In 1915, when the order arrived for the massacre and deportation of Armenians,<sup>517</sup> the Armenians of the Varto ashiret, with the assistance of an Arab Muslim tribe called the Tayan, concealed themselves in the caves and crevasses of Mount Judi, living there for many years.<sup>518</sup>

The first foreign visitor to sight and report on the Varto after the Genocide was probably the geographer Frödin, in 1944.<sup>519</sup> At that time they still maintained their former mode of life; Bruinessen considers them to have been pastoral nomads.<sup>520</sup> During the 1950s the last Armenians of the Varto ashiret gradually became assimilated to the Tayan tribe.<sup>521</sup> At this time the Varto had already forgotten Armenian and become Kurdish-speaking. Although they still had not become Muslims, they seem to have

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> **Kevorkian, R.** *The Armenian Genocide*, p. 378. The figure of 1,600 comes from Teotig. See **Teotig**, *Golgotha*, p. 279.

<sup>516</sup> **Rakel Dink**-100 yıllık Soykırım, see <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/11381/rakel-dink-100-yillik-soykirim>.

<sup>517</sup> The tribal Armenians referred to this order by the Kurdish name *Fermana me Xatibi*. Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> **Martin Van Bruinessen**, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, London, 1992, p. 118.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> Rakel Dink considers the Tayan to be an Arab tribe. See **Rakel Dink**-100 yıllık Soykırım.

had a fairly vague conception of Christianity.<sup>522</sup> Under the law on surnames adopted by the Republic of Turkey in 1934-1935, Rakel Dink reports that her father's surname, Vartanyan, was changed to Yağbasan<sup>523</sup>; it seems, however, that these last Armenians living in the vicinity of Mount Ararad lacked government registration.<sup>524</sup>

Another of the final surviving members of the Varto ashiret, Fidel Barkev Yalich, recounts that in 1968, a half-Assyrian, half-Armenian boy named Orhan Bakır embarked to Istanbul on military service. This resulted in the opening of contact between the ashiret and the Armenian Patriarchate and the remaining Armenian Varto began to migrate to Istanbul, which became a point of departure for their emigration to other countries. Possibly the only member of the tribe still remaining in Turkey<sup>525</sup> is Rakel Dink, the daughter of Siyamet *agha* born in 1959 on the southern slopes of Mount Judi.<sup>526</sup> Fidel Barkev Yalich relates that until 1968, the isolated Varto believed that they were the last Armenians remaining in the world: "We were only a few hundred people, and since Christianity was prohibited, we married our own relatives in order to preserve our identity and multiply."<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> **Martin Van Bruinessen**, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 118.

<sup>523</sup> **Rakel Dink**-100 yıllık Soykırım.

<sup>524</sup> **Vercihan Ziflioğlu**, Güneydoğu Anadolu'dan Avrupaya Ermeni Aşireti Varto'nun Hikayesi, see <https://hyetert.org/2011/01/17/guneydogu-anadoludan-avrupaya-ermeni-asireti-vartonun-hikayesi/> (Reprinted from Hürriyet Daily News).

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> **Rakel Dink** - 100 yıllık Soykırım.

<sup>527</sup> **Vercihan Ziflioğlu**, Güneydoğu Anadolu'dan Avrupaya Ermeni Aşireti Varto'nun Hikayesi.

## CERTAIN VILLAGES IN THE VICINITY OF DIYARBEKIR

The Ottoman-era Armenian press contains references to certain Kurdish-speaking Armenian villages near the city of Diyarbekir. One of these was the village of Baghchejik, which during the final period of Ottoman rule constituted a part of the central sanjak of Diyarbekir, and was located 30-40 kilometers away from the city of the same name. Today the village constitutes a neighborhood in the district of Sur in Diyarbakır province. In 1910, according to *Azatamart*, there were 40 households in the village of Baghchejik, half of them Kurdish-speaking Armenians and half Yezidi.<sup>528</sup> It does not seem, however, that we can attribute the Kurdish-speaking character of the local Armenian population to the presence of the Yezidis, especially since, according to the report in *Azatamart*, the Yezidis of the village had arrived at a later date. It seems more probable that Armenians had arrived in Baghchejik from other Kurdish-speaking regions; however, there is no available information to confirm this surmise. The Armenians of this Kurdish-speaking village had both a church and a school. According to Teodig, on the eve of the Genocide the village was entirely populated by Armenians, with a total of 12 families living there.<sup>529</sup>

Aside from Baghchejik, there were at least two other Kurdish-speaking Armenian villages in the Diyarbekir district in the vilayet of the same name; there were Bozpudri and Jrnik (Jěrněk). The same correspondent to *Azatamart* relates details concerning these villages in an article titled “A Kurdish-speaking village’s love of education.” An argument had arisen among the villagers concerning the payment of their teacher’s wages. One villager protested that they could not bear this burden any longer, while another replied that they could provide one part of the

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<sup>528</sup> **Geghchuk**, Village serfs, Tigranakert, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 335, p. 1. (Գեղչուկ, Ճոքրս Գիւղացիներ, Տիգրանակերտ, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>529</sup> **Teotig**, Golgotha, p. 265.

salary by making certain sacrifices and the other part with help from the “nation” in Tigranakert.<sup>530</sup>

“A fourth, entirely beside himself, took the wool cap [*kyulah*] from his head and hurled it to the ground, exclaiming in Kurdish “Brothers, there is still no rest for the Armenian peasant [*fellah*]. We work like captives as before; let our little ones at least not remain without reading and education. I will sell my *kyulah* and shirt, and give the money to the schoolmaster. Enough of this slavish, animal condition. The nation will not provide us any help.”<sup>531</sup> In the end the villagers decide to take up a subscription to provide the schoolmaster’s yearly salary and promise to build a room for him in the school.<sup>532</sup> On the eve of the Genocide, 25 Armenian families lived in Jrnik.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> **Geghchuk**, A Kurdish-speaking village’s love of education, *Azatamart*, 1910, № 348, p. 3. (**Գեղչուկ**, Քրտախօս Գիւղի Սը Կրթասիրութիւնը, Տիգրանակերտ, «Ազատամարտ»).

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

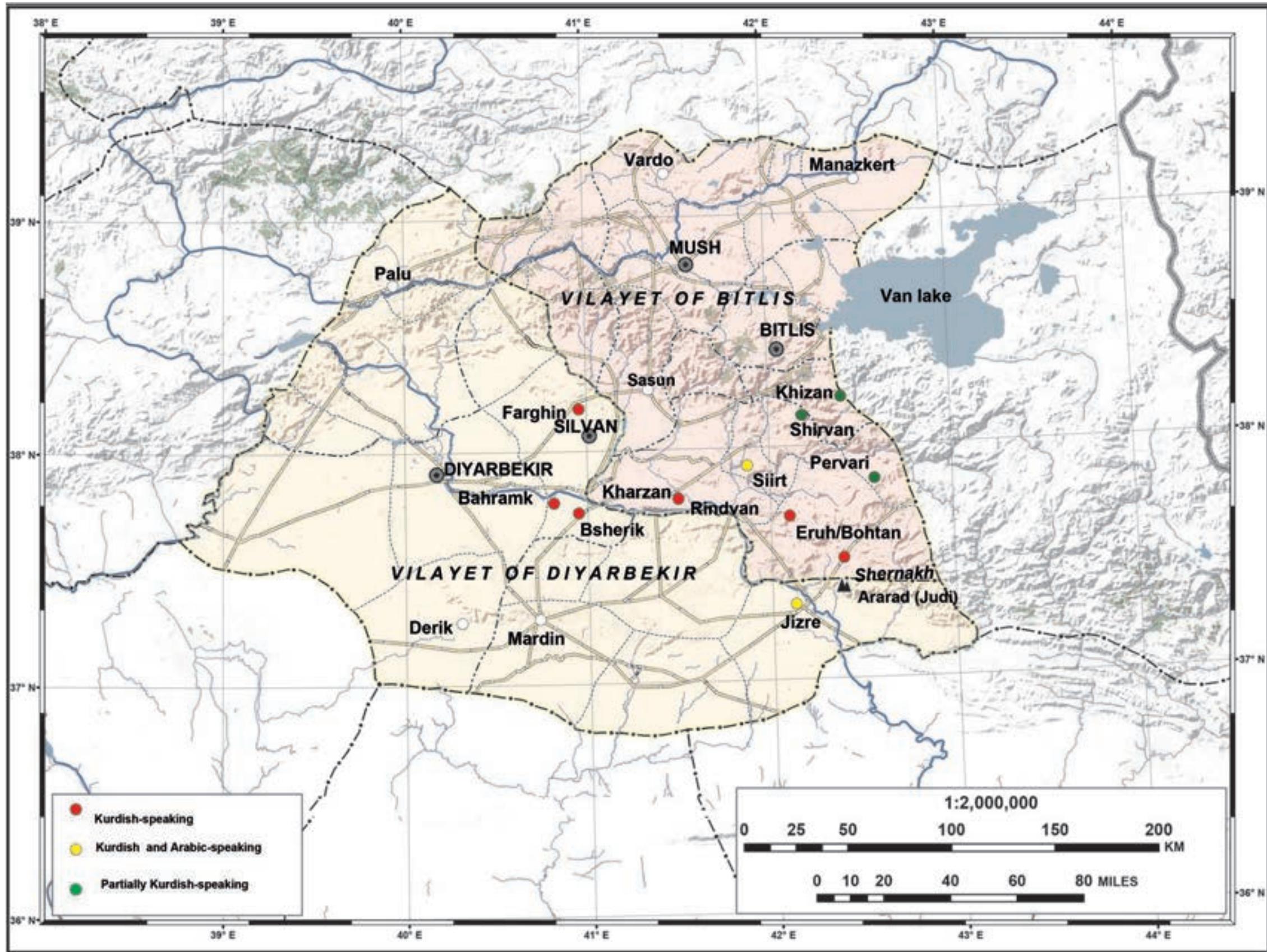
<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> **Teotig**, Golgotha, p. 265. If the village of Bozpudri mentioned in *Azatamart* is the same as the Boz-Punar included in Teotig’s list of villages, it had 12 Armenian households in the years immediately preceding the Genocide.

**REGIONS INHABITED BY KURDISH-SPEAKING  
ARMENIANS  
(MAP)**

**The administrative division of the Ottoman Empire  
according to R. Huber's map (1899)**

Author of the map: **Gor Yeranyan**  
Map compiled by: **Henrik Danielyan**



**GOR YERANYAN**

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