

THE HEROIC BATTLE OF MOUSSA LER ACCORDING TO THE TESTIMONIES OF THE EYEWITNESS SURVIVORS

Dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of the Moussa Ler Heroic Battle

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The Amanos Mountain range of the Taurus mountain system stretches from the east of Southern Cilicia; on the south-western foot of the Amanos Mountains soars Moussa Ler (Moussa Mountain) with its triangular Damladjek summit (1355 m.). Its south-eastern and south-western sides slope abruptly down to the Orontes plain and to the Mediterranean Sea.

A tributary of the Orontes River flows in the east of Moussa Ler (Moussa Dagħ), while the vast Orontes plain is spread out in the south.

Moussa Ler¹ is situated about 20 km west of the great historical city of Antioch. Earlier, it was called Seleucia Pieria (later Suedia)².

The following popular dainty legend tells about the appellation of Moussa Ler: *“The Armenians have lived in our Moussa Ler since a very long time, even since the days of Tigran the Great. The ancient metallic coins excavated from these places testify to that fact. Subsequently, following the fall of Ani, a great number of Armenians have come in groups and settled here and have laid the foundations of the Armenian Roubinian Dynasty. The Crusaders, who have reached Jerusalem to find the Sepulcher of the Christ, have seen, when passing through our dwelling places, our villages buried in emerald-green orchards stretched at the foot of the Taurus Amanos mountain. On one*

¹ It is Armenian appellation; Jebel Moussa – Arabic appellation; Moussa Dagħ – Turkish appellation. A number of legends about the toponymic name of Moussa Ler have been included in: Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեռ, Հայ ազգագրություն և բանահյուսություն, հ. 16, Երևան, 1984, Վկայություն (այսուհետև՝ Վկ.) 45-50, էջ 110-116:

² The ruins of the historic town of Seleucia are found in these regions. The appellation form of Suedia (according to Tigran Andreassian) is the echo of that ancient locality. For the subsequent historical facts we have assumed as a basis: Անդրեասյան Տ., Զեյթունի անձնատվությունը և Սվեդիո ինքնապաշտպանությունը, Կահիրե, 1915:

*side, the Orontes River has hugged like a silver belt the vast Orontes plain, on the other side is the blue-violet colored Mediterranean Sea with its calm ripples. Fascinated by this rapturous scene of nature, they said: "This is a real mountain of the Muses!" Accordingly, the name of the location remained Moussa Ler*³.

On the northern slopes of Moussa Ler six Armenian villages were spread from east to west, namely, Bitias, Hadji-Habibli, Yoghun-Oluk, Kheder-Bek, Vakef and Kabousié at the foot of the mountain on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

The testimonies of Armenian and foreign historians provide us grounds to assume that still during the domination of Tigran the Great (1st century B.C.) the Armenians have lived in those localities.

In 1375, the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia was in decline, as a consequence of the invasions of the Mamluks. Subsequently, the Ottoman Turkic tribes invaded the territory and, in the middle of the XVII century, the Avshar Gozan oghlu tribe ruled there, almost arbitrarily. Written information about that anarchic period is practically missing, since everything was committed to the flames⁴.

Referring to the Armenians living in the mountainous regions of Cilicia, Dr. H. Ter-Ghazarian has noted: "...Following the fall of the Kingdom of Cilician Armenia, the Armenian peasantry living in the field regions has moved away from these territories, driven by the pursuits of the invading hordes, and has settled in the inaccessible mountain forests and the unapproachable crevices of canyons in order to avoid persecutions. Zeytoun, Hadjn, Vahka, Kapan, Androun and their environs were inhabited by Armenian peasants, who had their peculiar provincial dialects, monasteries and houses of worship. Impelled by a free internal instinct to lead a fearless life, they had chosen those secluded places, if only, to maintain their semi-independent existence"⁵.

The popular folkloric relics I have written down in the various dialects of Cilicia (Zeytoun, Hadjn, Marash, Moussa Ler, Kessab, Beylan, etc.) also testify to that fact.⁶

Subsequently, as a consequence of forced migrations periodically organized from various localities, the Armenians were replenished and they rallied also around Moussa Ler⁷.

³ The legend was communicated to me by Grigor Gyouzelian (b. 1903, Kabousié village), which I have written down in 1976, in the Nor Kilikia district of Yerevan. Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա. Արևմտահայոց բանավոր ավանդությունը, Երևան, 1994, Վկայություն (այսուհետև՝ Վկ.) 71, էջ 81:

⁴ Գալուստյան Գ., Մարաշ կամ Գերմանիկ և հերոս Զեյթուն, Նյու Յորք, 1934, էջ 697:

⁵ Տեր-Ղազարյան Հ., Հայկական Կիլիկիա. Տեղագրություն, Բեյրութ-Անթիլիաս, 1966, էջ 65:

⁶ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեռ, «Հայ ազգագրություն և բանահյուսություն», հ. 16, Երևան, 1984, 215 էջ: Idem, Կիլիկիա. Արևմտահայոց բանավոր ավանդությունը, Երևան, 1994, 408 էջ: Idem, Հայոց ցեղասպանություն. ականատես վերապրողների վկայություններ, Երևան, 2011, 850 էջ:

⁷ Ալպոյաճյան Ա., Պատմություն հայ գաղթականության, հ. Ա, Կահիրե, 1941, էջ 105-121: Անդրեասյան Տ., Սվեդիայի բարբառը, Երևան, 1967, էջ 291-351:

The 6-thousand-plus inhabitants of this cluster of villages were engaged in cattle-breeding, agriculture, silkworm-breeding and bee-keeping. They had elementary schools and churches. They have lived in peace and led a creative life⁸.

In the second half of the 19th century, the spirit of the national-liberation struggle of the Balkan peoples had inspired also the Western Armenians, who were languishing under the yoke of Ottoman tyranny. The Armenians' hopes pinned on the Congresses of San-Stefano and Berlin (1878) had not been justified. The spirit of liberation of the rebellion of Zeytoun was gathering a new impetus.

The young people, who were educated in Constantinople, Greece, Bulgaria, Russia, etc., had, on their return to Moussa Ler, not only propagated literacy, but had narrated about the events, which had occurred in those countries, had taught patriotic songs, had illuminated the minds of generations with the ideas of love of freedom. They have left their appreciable effect on the 1895 and subsequently on the 1909 national-liberation movements of the Moussa Ler people.



Tonik Tonikian
(1898, Moussa Dagħ)

The inhabitants of Moussa Ler have always kept high their honor and dignity. A former inhabitant of Moussa Ler, the eyewitness survivor and repatriate **Tonik Tonikian** (b. 1898, Kabousié village⁹) has testified to that fact: *"Respect and honor are the highest values in the world. We, the people of Moussa Ler, love to live our lives with respect and honor"*¹⁰.

At the same time, that did not prevent the people of Moussa Ler to be filled with indignation and to rise in rebellion against iniquity and violence, as in 1895, during the Hamidian massacres, they have courageously fought against the Turkish slaughterers, who had attacked them and have even gained a certain degree of autonomy. It was in the days of those historical events that the military march *"In the Villages of Moussa Ler"* was created:

*"Only Armenians live
In the villages of Moussa Ler,
The Armenian braves have taken on
The duty for law and order.*

*May the Armenians always live!
Long and forever may they live!
All these stranglers of armies
Have become braves and heroes.*

⁸ Գուշագճյան Մ., Պատմություն Անտիոքի և շրջակայքի, Հուշամատյան Մուսա Լեռան, Բեյրութ, 1970, էջ 448: See also: Գյոզալյան Գր., Մուսա Լեռան ազգագրությունը, Երևան, 2001, 280 էջ:

⁹ Village – henceforth: v.

¹⁰ Սվազլյան Վ., Հայոց ցեղասպանություն..., Վկայություն (այսուհետև՝ Վկ.) 285, էջ 468:

*We swore an oath for our path,
We scattered right and left;
May the Lord Himself protect
The Armenian soldiers...*¹¹

The inhabitants of Moussa Ler have displayed the same heroic attitude also in 1909, when the town of Adana and its environs were ablaze. During the massacres of Adana, dozens of Armenian towns and villages were ravaged and burnt down, while Moussa Ler, Deurtyol, Hadjn, Sis, Zeytoun, Sheikh Mourad, Fendedjak and a number of other localities stopped the attacks of tens of thousands of Turks due to their heroic self-defense and were saved from the slaughter.

As the above-mentioned inhabitant of Moussa Ler, **Tonik Tonikian**, has testified: *"...The massacre of Adana started in 1909. The Turks attacked the Armenians' houses, shops. They plundered, killed, slaughtered, and raped. They did such things, one could not think of them! We, the Armenians of the seven villages of Moussa Ler, took precautions; we assigned guards at night. ...After that, we were more careful, for the Turks could assault us, too."*¹² Therefore, reuniting once again, the Moussa Ler people managed to send the Turkish hordes of brigands into a panic near the village of Hadji-Habibli and to deliver their fellow-countrymen from the impending danger.

In point of fact, the Adana massacre was the beginning of the Armenian Genocide, when the Young Turks, assuming as a basis the resolutions of the secret meeting of the "Ittihat ve Terakki" party held in Salonica, in 1911, were hastily getting ready to completely



Poghos Soup Koukian
(1887, Moussa Dagħ)

exterminate the Armenian people, waiting for a propitious opportunity; this opportunity was provided, when World War I broke out. Turkey entered the war having predatory objectives and with the monstrous plan to realize the total extermination of the Armenian people.

The eyewitness survivor **Poghos Soup Koukian - Ashough** (Minstrel - Arm.) **Develli** (b. 1887, Hadji-Habibli v.), a participant of the heroic battle of Moussa Ler, who, as a chronicler of those events, has presented, in his own dialect, not only the inexpressible sufferings endured by the Armenian people in 1915, but also the tragedy fallen to the lot of the Armenians of Cilicia in the form of historical

epic poem *"Kilike balen"* (The Calamity of Cilicia):

*"The Turk pashas Enver and Talaat
Instigated the exile*

¹¹ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեռ, Վկ. 165, էջ 130. This march was transmitted to me by Karapet Akhoyan (b. 1895, Kabousiè v.), which I have written down in 1976, at the 10th Sovkhoz of the Hoktemberian (now: Armavir) region, in Armenia. The author of the march is Ashough (Minstrel) Gevorg from the village of Kheder-Bek.

¹² Սվազլյան Վ., Հայոց ցեղասպանություն..., Վկ. 285, էջ 469:

*And totally exterminated the Armenian nation;
 Why did they order with their evil tongue?
 In the year 1915
 Was the massacre of the Armenians of Cilicia?
 What was the sin of the little infants?
 If only those sword-holding hands were broken!
 How can we forget the Armenian children?
 They threw themselves into the water with their sisters.
 No one protected the Armenian nation,
 How can we forget the calamity of Cilicia?
 The order reached our seven villages:
 "All the villagers will be exiled."
 What was our sin, the sin of our Moussa Ler?
 How can we forget the condition of the Armenians?...¹³*

And, indeed, "no one protected the Armenian people," who, leaderless and unarmed, helpless and desperate, were being driven out on the treks of deportation and exile.

The deportation and the massacre undertaken by the Young Turk tyranny had, in the course of a few months, assumed an extensive character in Western Armenia, Cilicia and Asia Minor (Anatolia). One after the other, Svaz [Sebastia], Shapin-Garahissar, Harpoot [Kharbert], Malatia, Diarbekir, Izmit, Bursa, Ankara, Konia and the other Armenian-inhabited localities of Asia Minor were also being deserted one after the other.

During these tragic days, however, the bold spirit of heroism, coming from the depth of centuries and inherited with the blood, reawoke in the soul of the Armenian people, who preferred "cognizant death" to slavery and decided to withstand violence with joint forces.

Under the circumstances of the extensive slaughter organized by the Young Turks, the Western Armenians were able to organize, in a number of regions, an uneven combat against the superior forces of the Turkish army, but these self-defensive battles were fought without a definite plan, in a spontaneous manner and isolated from one another. Nevertheless, as a result of those heroic battles, tens of thousands lives were saved from the Young Turks' atrocities in Van, Shatakh and elsewhere.

In the beginning of World War I, the Moussa Ler people were compelled to submit to the Turkish order of mobilization and to pay the war taxes, but they did not obey the order of deportation and exile, and defended with arms their life and honor.

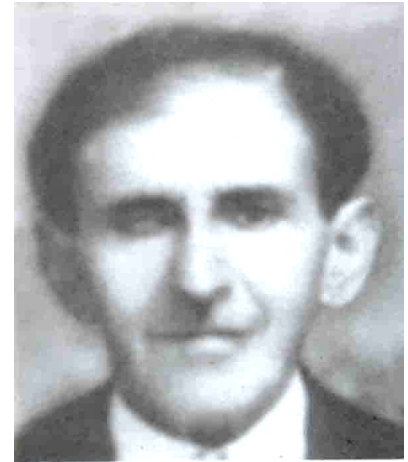
¹³ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեր, Վկ. 161, էջ 128:



Serob Gyouzelian
(1882, Moussa Dagh)



Anna Davtian
(1888, Moussa Dagh)



Movses Balabanian
(1891, Moussa Dagh)

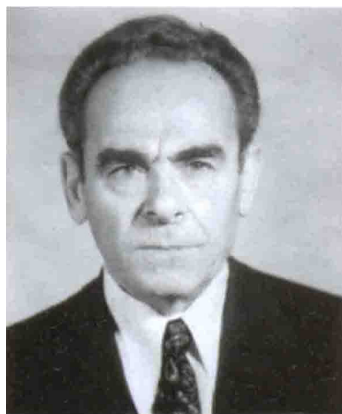


Hovhannes Ipredjian
(1896, Moussa Dagh)



Missak Yaralian
(1902, Moussa Dagh)

The participants of the heroic self-defensive battle of Moussa Ler **Serob Gyouzelian** (b. 1882), **Movses Panossian** (b. 1885), **Poghos Soupkoukian - Ashough** (Minstrel - Arm.) **Develli** (born in 1887), **Anna Davtian** (b. 1888), **Movses Balabanian** (b. 1891) and **Hovhannes Ipredjian** (b. 1896), **Missak Yaralian** (b. 1902), **Iskouhi Koshkarian** (b. 1902), **Tovmas Habeshian** (b. 1903), **Davit Davitian** (b. 1905), **Sargis Adamian** (b. 1906) and others have related about those historical events¹⁴.



Assatour Makhouljian
(1911, Moussa Dagh)

Assatour Makholian from Moussa Ler (b. 1911, Bitias v.) has narrated: *"...When World War I began, the Turkish government collected all the Armenian men and took them into the army. Only women, children, and the old people were left. When the deportations started, Rev. Tigran Andreassian*

¹⁴ The songs and memoir-testimonies of the Moussa Ler eyewitnesses have been published in my following books: «Կիլիկիա. Արևմտահայոց բանավոր ավանդությունը» (Ե., 1994, Վկ. 1397-1403, էջ 268-292) and «Հայոց ցեղասպանություն. Ականատես վերապրողների վկայություններ» (Ե., 2011, Վկ. 281-297, էջ 463-492).

lived and worked in Zeytoun. When the Turks deported the Armenians, his family had been among them. Tigran Andreassian had presented himself to the Turkish officer and, because religious leaders (Protestant) were allowed to come out of the caravan of the exiles, he was freed with his family. He returned to his birthplace, Moussa Ler, and explained to the people what had been taking place with the Armenians all over Turkey. And he suggested that it should be much better to ascend the mountain than die”¹⁵.

On July 26, 1915, an order for deportation of the Armenian population was received in the neighboring town of Kessab. Feeling that their turn would soon arrive, the Moussa Ler people organized, on July 29, in the village of Yoghun-Oluk, a general meeting with the representatives of the six villages. During the deliberation, some clergymen and rich notables of Moussa Ler, trusting the false promises of the government, preferred to be deported rather than to ascend the mountain. The former inhabitant of Moussa Ler, Lebanon-based **Tovmas Habeshian** (b. 1903, Yoghun-Oluk v.) has testified about that fact: “...Rev. Nokhoudian was against ascending the mountain. He persuaded the people to be deported. Most of the inhabitants of the village of Kabousié were exiled. Only 17 families went up the mountain. All in all, some six thousand people ascended the mountain”¹⁶. Those, who preferred to be deported, were not only the Pastor of the village of Bitias, but also Reverend Nokhoudian, the wealthy notable of Kabousié, Samson Agha, the priests Ter Markos and Ter Matevos, and they were massacred on the exile trek together with many others.

In contrast, the majority of the participants of the Moussa Ler meeting had made the right decision and had not obeyed the deleterious order of deportation, especially when Yessayi Yaghoubian’s, the person enjoying a high prestige among the Moussa Ler people, inexorable decision resounded during the deliberation. The epilogue of the epic poem of the above-cited participant of the Moussa Ler heroic battle, **Poghos Soupkoukian - Asough Develli** informs us about this fact:



Yessayi Yaghoubian

“Yessayi Yaghoubian’s words resounded:

“Let us all go up the mountain,” he said to the villagers,

“We will not bend our necks before the enemy,

Let us strike, be stricken and die on our land!”¹⁷.

The native land is sacred, and the Moussa Ler people were ready “to strike, to be stricken,” but “to die on their land” of ancestors’.

On July 30, the governor of Antioch Marouf ordered all the Armenians to leave their houses and properties and to join the deportation groups. However, the Moussa Ler people

¹⁵ Սվազլյան Վ., Հայոց ցեղասպանություն..., Վկ. 297, էջ 489-490:

¹⁶ Ibid., Վկ. 291, էջ 484-485:

¹⁷ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեր, Վկ. 161, էջ 128:

had already taken decisive steps.

Everybody was filled with the feeling of protest and vengeance. Men and women, children and old people left their homes and orchards and ascended the inaccessible summit of Moussa Ler, carrying with them their cattle and provisions, to heroically withstand the attack, to fight against the innumerable soldiers of the enemy, to fully defend their honor and dignity.



Tigran Andreassian

All, without exception and without delay, started, in an orderly manner, to build huts from the forest trees, to dig trenches, to build ramparts with solid walls, leaving small embrasures from the inside to fire at the enemy. In some places, they cut down the thick forest to be able to see the enemy. Even the little boys worked as signal-men. The women organized the food, the girls and the young brides carried water for the fighters from afar. A special military council was created under the command of Yessayi Yaghoubian, whose members were the Reverend Tigran Andreassian, Petros Dmlakian, Khacher Doumanian, Petros Doudaklian and others.



in the center Petros Dmlakian

A special attention was given to the defensive positions. The fighters were about 600 in number, who had altogether 132 hunting rifles and a limited quantity of bullets. The defense of the mountain was divided into 4 regions, namely, Ghezeldjay, Gouzdjegahaz, Damladjek and Ghaplan-Douzakh, where the self-defensive detachments were positioned. Moussa Ler had become the stronghold of the front.

During this period, the popular martial song *"We are Courageous Moussa Ler Braves"* has also inspired and encouraged the Moussa Ler people:

*"We are courageous Moussa Ler braves,
We are all well-trained gun-carriers,
The Turks want to deport us
And exterminate us in the deserts.*

*We do not wish to die like dogs,
We wish to leave a good memory,
To die with glory is an honor for us,
To be martyred is our nation's praise.*

*We are mountaineers, all of us braves,
We will not bow before the enemy,
We will fight courageously like lions
And will scatter the army of the Turks.*

*Is it proper for the Moussalerian
To be cut to pieces like a sheep by the wolf?
As long as we have swords and weapons in hand
We'll smash the wolf's muzzle..."¹⁸*

The Moussa Ler people had not yet completed their preparatory work on the mountain, when the enemy launched the first attack.

On August 7, 200 Turkish soldiers under the leadership of the prefect of Svedia, Khalid, started the attack. According to above-sited **Tovmas Habeshian**: *"On the mountain, each family built a hut of wood, as there were no bricks or stones. Young boys erected barricades. They held two meetings: one was administrative and related to*



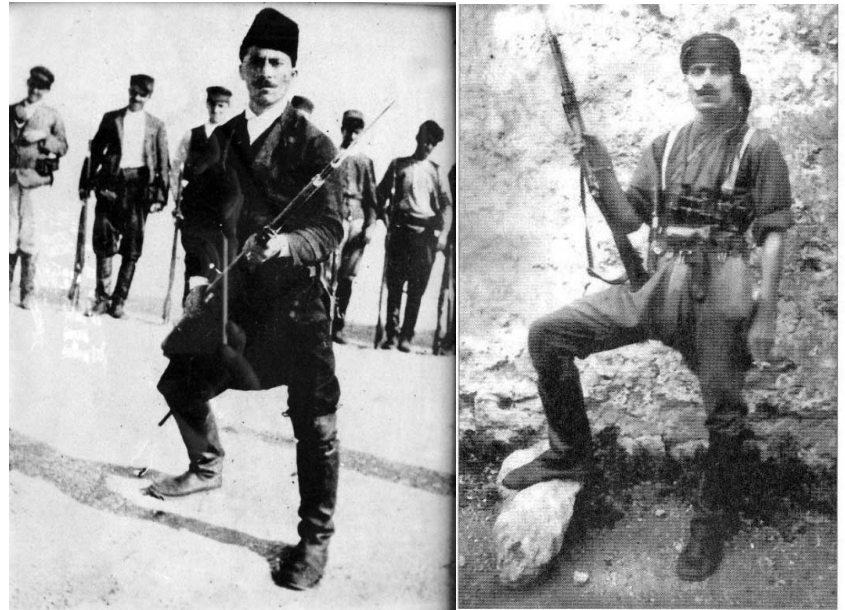
Sargis Kharikian
(1897, Moussa Dagħ)

*the internal life of the mountain, the other to organize military forces. The battle commenced. The first bullet returned was fired by Sargis Gabaghian. The battle continued. The enemy met strong resistance and retreated"*¹⁹. Thus, the Turks met an obstinate resistance and after an unsuccessful fight, which continued for six hours, they retreated suffering a number of losses.

¹⁸ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 402, էջ 157-158:

¹⁹ Սվազլյան Վ., Հայոց ցեղասպանություն..., Վկ. 291, էջ 485:

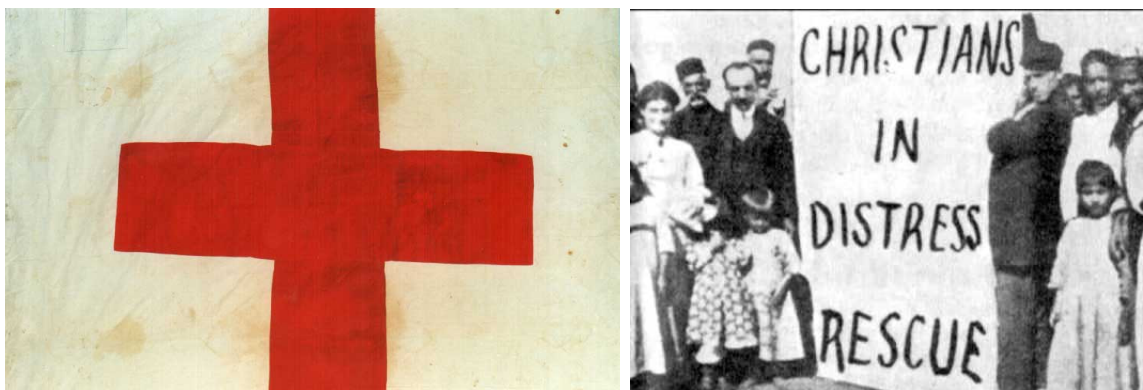
On August 10, the enemy, reinforced by 5.000 soldiers and cannons, launched the second attack. The battle lasted for twelve hours under a pouring rain, but the Moussa Ler people resisted bravely.



On August 19, the enemy attempted a new attack with 9.000 soldiers under the command of

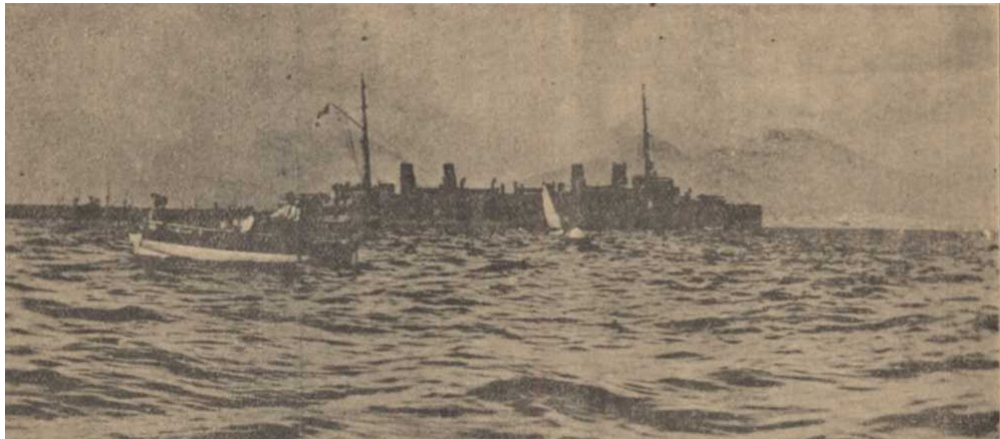
Fakhri pasha. The combat went on for two days. The Turks tried to break through the defensive line, but the courageous Moussa Ler people were able to stop them, maintaining their positions. The Turks retreated once again, leaving 1.000 dead soldiers on the field. Coming down from the mountain heights, the Moussa Ler fighters seized hold of a fair amount of ammunition.

The Turks did not launch a new attack, but thought of encircling the mountain with a view to make the Armenians starve to death. The enemy concentrated 15.000 soldiers at the foot of Moussa Ler and besieged the mountain on its three sides, hoping that the Armenians' provisions and ammunition would soon be consumed and they would surrender, but the will of the Moussa Ler people was inflexible.



The enemy concentrated new forces to chastise the rebellious Armenians. The provisions and armaments of the Moussa Ler people were exhausted. The heavy rain had rendered the three hundred shot-guns they had, all in all, unfit for use. Being in despair and hoping to receive aid from the sea, they tied white bedsheets together, they wrote on one of them *"The Christians are in danger, save us!"* and on the other they drew the sign of the Red Cross and displayed them on the mountain slope overlooking the sea. At night, they built bonfires around them, so that the ships would notice them from afar.

For a long time, however, no ships were visible on the horizon. The Turks exhorted, several times, the Armenians to surrender, but the Moussa Ler people refused maintaining their positions.



The French warship "Guichen" along with several cruisers in the rescue of some 4,000 Armenians who had taken shelter and fought on Moussa Ler.

On the 5th of September, the French battleship "Guichen" passing on-shore in the Mediterranean Sea noticed them and slowed down its course. The 75-year-old Movses Kerekian, with a small tin box containing a petition hanging round his neck, jumped into the sea. He reached the ship swimming, knelt and crossed himself



Louis Dartige du Fournet



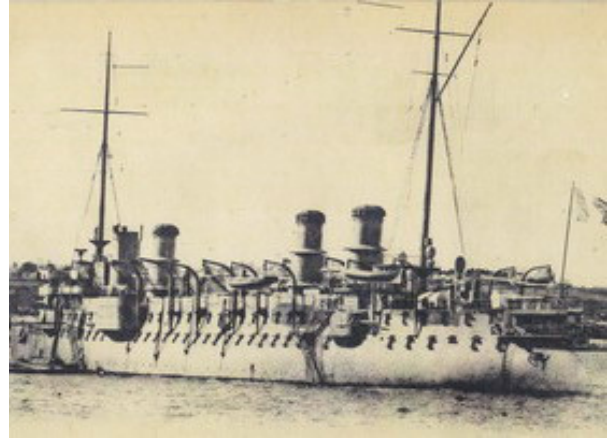
Tiran Tekeyan

before the captain of the ship, Louis Dartige du Fournet, and handed him the petition in English, where it was written: "...We have found shelter here from the Turkish barbarities, savageries, massacres and death. ...We appeal to you in the name of civilization against this enemy of civilization and we beseech you to save our lives and honor. Do not let us perish, save our lives, save our honor, before it is too late"²⁰. The Armenian navy officer Tiran Tekeyan was also on the French ship and acted as a translator.

The commander of the battleship bombarded the Turkish positions and departed promising, according to the decision of his county's government, either to bring arms or return within eight days to deliver the Armenians.

²⁰ Անդրեասյան Տ., Զեյթունի անձնատվությունը..., էջ 44:

On September 9, the commander of the Turkish army, Rifat, demanded from the Moussa Ler people to surrender within two hours, otherwise he threatened to attack and massacre them all. The Moussa Ler people had not managed to answer, when the Turkish artillery began to thunder and a new dreadful battle started. The Moussa Ler people, who were tempered in four combats of the heroic battles, unleashed a crushing counter-attack against the Turkish soldiers from their positions and annihilated most of them, while those, who remained alive, fled panic-stricken. Thus, the valorous Moussa Ler people waged 4 serious battles in the course of 40 days against the Turks and defeated them.



On September 13, the French battleships “Guichen” and “Jeanne d’Arc” appeared in the depth of the Mediterranean Sea. Soon it was declared that the French government had promised to transfer the Armenians to Port-Saïd.

On September 15, about 4.200 Armenians from Moussa Ler were transported by small boats to the French battleships anchored at a distance, which then headed for Port-Saïd. The Armenian community of Egypt, under the leadership and care of the



Davit Davitian
(1905, Moussa Dagħ)

President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, Poghos Noubar, had already ensured the comfort of the Moussa Ler people at the local tent-camp. The Armenian officer serving in the French Navy, Tiran Tekeyan, has also greatly contributed to those life-saving operations.

Davit Davitian (b. 1905, Kabousié v.), the participant of the Moussa Ler heroic battle, living in Paris, has recalled: *“...When the battle of Moussa Ler started, I was ten years old and I watched it with my own eyes. Father had come back home and they gathered everyone saying that we must ascend the mountain. Father took us up the mountain. When the Turks attacked, we were defending ourselves from behind the rocks of the mountain, a little beyond where the Orontes River flowed. When the Turkish attack started, we occupied positions that were far from each other to give the impression that there were many fighters. The Turks began to advance. ...My father had a small weapon. Others had old style hunting rifles, but it was difficult to load them. They had to put the rifle on a stone and fill it with gunpowder called chakhmakhlu. Our people fought with those hunting rifles. I saw with my own eyes Turks falling down and dying. Our Moussa Ler people were brave; they fought with all their might. ...Large scale battles took place. My father and other men*



*fought. The fighters hid behind stones and rocks, but there was a shortage of cartridges. Several times, I took ammunition to the first frontline. I was young but fearless. I saw all that with my own eyes. I took water to the fighters. I helped them. I took messages from one to the other. Our battle lasted more than forty days*²¹.

The eyewitness survivor **Iskouhi Koshkarian** (b. 1902, Moussa Ler) has also testified:

*"Thousands of Turks attacked us, but we resisted and did not surrender. On white covers we had drawn a flag and beside it we lit a fire"*²².



Movses Panossian
(1885, Moussa Dagħ)

The memoir-testimony of the 105-year-old participant of the heroic battle of Moussa Ler **Movses Panossian** (b. 1885, Hadji-Habibli v.), gives a more detailed and circumstantial description: *"I am the last participant of the heroic battle of Moussa Ler and I am here, alive... On the 13th of July, 1915, the Turkish government issued an order, telling: "In seven days all the Armenians must leave." The elders of our seven villages met in Yoghun-Oluk and said: "I was born here, I will die here. I will not go as a slave to die with tortures under the enemy's order; I will die here, with a gun in my hand, but I will not become an emigrant." And so we did. We ascended the mountains. Everyone took*

*whatever he had with him: mattresses, quilts, pots, pans, animals, and chickens. We took everything to the mountain...*²³.

As a participant, Movses Panossian, has at first, referred to the historic grounds of the Moussa Ler heroic battle: *"The world was as mixed up then, as it is now. Before the battle of Moussa Ler, our Hnchaks of Kheder-Bek had gone to fight the Turks in Zeytoun with Mr. Aghassi Toursargsian. That was why when our Moussa Ler battle began, Mr. Aghassi said: "These are the seeds I have sown." Until the battle of the mountain, my father used to go to the training by night, and mother used to say to my grandfather: "Your son goes to the training by night, comes in the morning, takes the*

²¹ Սվազլյան Վ., Հայոց ցեղասպանություն..., Վկ. 292, էջ 485-486:

²² Ibid., Վկ. 288, էջ 473:

²³ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 1397, էջ 268:

plough and goes to the fields. He never stays at home.” My grandpa said to his daughter-in-law: “We must always be ready like that”²⁴.

Then the participant related the details of the heroic battle: *“So, well organized, we climbed up the mountain. Our two corporals, Sabintsian and Minas’ grandfather (he was a master of silk worms) split us into groups. ...Tshents Poghos was there. He had been a soldier of the Turkish army. The English had shot and wounded him. He could play the bugle. He could transfer the news well and he could understand the meaning of the Turk’s trumpets: whether the signal meant something good or bad. That trumpeter Poghos said to us: “Go forward, but the Turkish bullet can kill you. It enters as a small bullet, but the wound is big, be careful!”²⁵*

Thereupon, the participant of the heroic battle, **Movses Panossian**, referred to the old and scanty arms they had to wage the fight, but, all the same, they had put the enemy to flight: *“What I had was a hunting rifle, and the bullets were filled from the end of the barrel. It was difficult to use it. I did not have a regular gun to fight the Turks the way I wanted. There Mardjimag was wounded. I saw it, but was afraid and changed my place. The son-in-law of Blagh Agoup remained there. A bullet shot him and he died before my eyes. My brother Davit was 30 years old; he died there. We buried him with military honors. There were many boys from Hadji-Habibli, as were the fighters from Yoghun-Oluk. We shot the Turkish commander and their trumpeter. Seeing that, the Turkish soldiers ran away. After the fight, we went down the mountain and saw their corpses on the ground. The Turks left behind their animals and provisions and ran away”²⁶.*

Movses Panossian recalled how a great number of women and even children (the so-called “telephone boys”) distinguished themselves, equal to the male fighters, with their devotedness and heroism: *“...The Turks attacked us four times, but each time got their answer. Our boys of Moussa Ler fought well: the women and girls helped us; they brought us water to drink in water jugs. Several women, rifle in hand, fought with us. One of them was Nashalian; she was very brave... The children had become messengers: they carried news from one front to the other... All of them were at work. One day a Turk had come to the mountains to plunder. The women had caught him and killed him with stones. Good for you, women!”²⁷*



Vardouhi Nashalian

Poghos Soupkoukian - Ashough Develli has also

²⁴ Ibid..

²⁵ Ibid., Վկ. 1397, էջ 268-269:

²⁶ Ibid., Վկ. 1397, էջ 269:

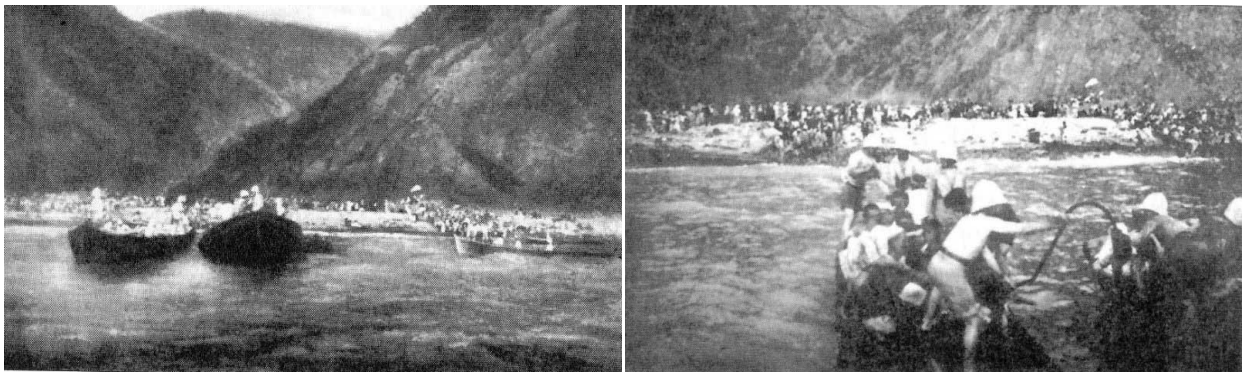
²⁷ Ibid.

referred to the women, who distinguished themselves with their feats during the heroic battle and has dedicated an ode to the heroine Vardouhi Nashalian:

*"She had tied a rope to her waist
And hung a rifle on her shoulder,
She had an axe in her hand
And toppled huge stones.*

*She blocked the enemy's way
And said from the bottom of her heart:
"I do not want my bullet to miss the target,
Let it pierce the enemy's chest."*

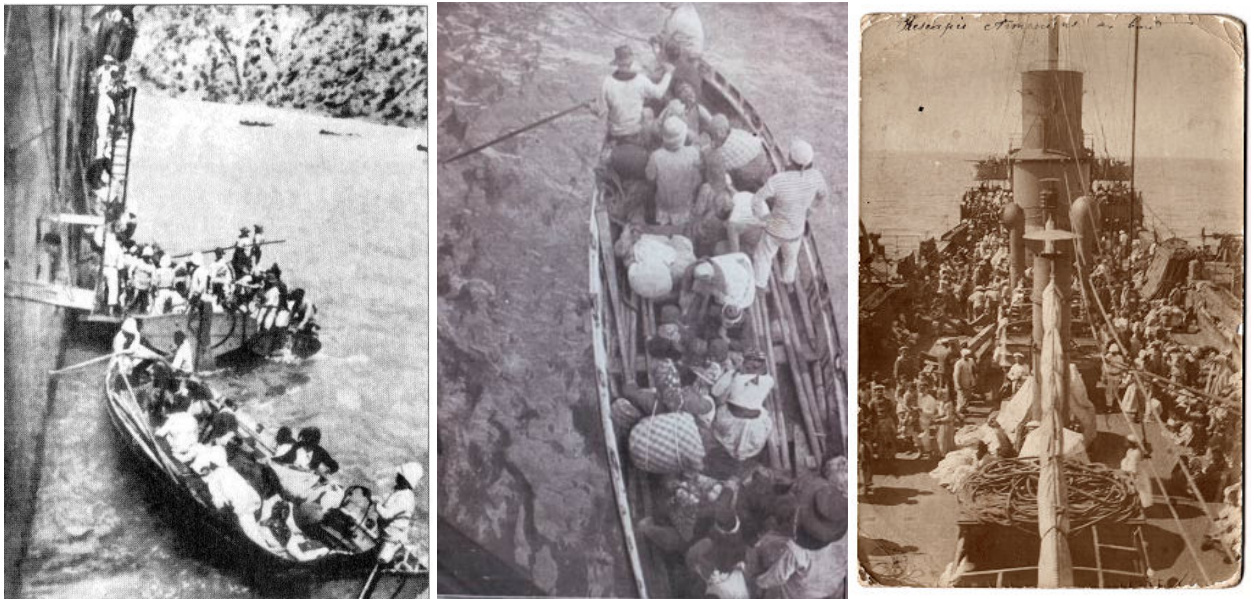
*...Young and old fought heartily
And struck with faith,
They knocked down many enemy soldiers
And retained their freedom."²⁸*



Thereafter **Movses Panossian** recollected the feelings and concerns they experienced during the heroic battle and the unflinching faith they had in their victory: *"There was always a white cloud, something like mist, on our mountains. One could say that God had sent it specially to help us, for we could see the enemy from above, but the enemy could not see us. The Turks tried to come up, but whoever did so, was killed... The Turks could hardly stand this for two hours and then they fled... It often rained in the mountains; the raindrops pierced our body. Once, when it was raining, we entered under a rock for shelter. Sheikh Panos' son was with us. He had a book and it always was under his arm. We said: "Open your book. Let's see what our future will be." Sheikh Panos' son opened the book and began his prediction: "A ladder will come down from Heaven and we'll be rescued." He said this, but we did not believe him, because*

²⁸ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեռ, Վկ. 163, էջ 129:

*we had been fighting for more than forty days, day and night; we were exhausted. Our food and the ammunition were getting less and less...*²⁹.



The participant of the heroic battle **Movses Panossian** remembered also the details of the subsequent important events: *“The Mediterranean Sea was behind us. At night, we lit a fire for the passing ships to see us and come closer. During the day, Reverend Andreassian had drawn a Red Cross on a bed-sheet and displayed it on the mountain slope... A few days passed and finally a ship was seen far out at sea. The Kerekians’ son was a good swimmer; he dived into the sea and swam to the ship. There was a small metal box hung from his neck, containing a letter written in foreign language. From the ship, they had been watching with field glasses; they had seen him. They helped him to get on board the ship. Movses had knelt, crossed his face to make them understand that he was a Christian, for he could not speak French. He had given the captain the written letter; they had read it, understood that about five thousand Armenian Christians of Moussa Ler were waiting for God’s salvation”*³⁰.



²⁹ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 1397, էջ 269:

³⁰ Ibid.

Then the survivor **Movses Panossian** continued: *"The captain had asked where they were, where the enemy was, how long they could withstand: "You resist for 8 more days, let me get permission from my government, either we'll bring you weapons or come and rescue you." They did not bring us any weapons, but they came with warships and rescued us. As Panos' son had said, they lowered ladders from the ship, and we went up on board the ship. What he had said was always in my mind, and I never lost hope, and we were rescued..."*³¹.



Subsequently **Movses Panossian** has truly recollected the peculiarities of the ensuing historical events: *"When the Turks attacked us again for the last time, the French had already found us. This time Fakhri pasha had come with fifteen thousand Turkish soldiers, but we had already descended to the seashore. His arrival gave no advantage to the Turks. The English had a school near the town of Lavshia, and the wounded had been transported there. The French ship came to take us on board. Petros Dmlakian and Khacher Doumanian went and spoke to the French. We had asked the French ship to bombard the town of Antioch, but the captain refused, saying: "I can use one thousand bullets for one soldier, but I can't fire even one bullet on a town." At that time, an order came from our commander, Yessayi Yaghoubian, to make haste, for the Turks had been surrounding us from three sides. When we were leaving Damladjek, we left everything - beds, pots, pans on the mountain. Those who had animals - chickens, cows, goats, etc., killed them so as not to leave them to the enemy. I had a herd of goats. I could not slaughter them, but they shelled them from the ship in*

³¹ Ibid.



order not to leave anything to the enemy... We were already on board the ship. Smoke was rising from the funnel. Petros Dmlakian was signaling on how things would go...

The Turks were firing at the ship's masts... Sand was filled in sacks and arranged on each other like a rampart to defend us from the enemy's bullets... The bullets of the Turks came, entered the sand sack; they did not reach us... The ship moved from the shore into the open sea and cast anchor. The enemy's bullets could not reach us anymore. We showed the captain the places to shell. There was a cannon on the ship; they began shelling the military barracks of Lavshia. The shells flew over and exploded there... There were no more sounds from the Turkish side. At

that time, if the French had given us arms and let us attack the Turks, we would have raised them to the ground...³².

The eyewitness **Iskouhi Koshkarian** (b. 1902) has also testified: *"In eight days, French ships came and lined up in front of us. The French came in small boats that took us to the big ships. We saved only our lives. My father, Hayrapet Polisian, watched the roads. We descended to the seashore... Yessayi Yaghoubian, who was our Godfather, got on board the ship the last."*³³



Poghos Soupkoukian - Ashough

Develli, as a chronicler-eyewitness, has presented in his own dialect, that occurrences in a historical epic poem *"The Heroic Battle of Moussa Ler"*:

*"An order to be fulfilled in seven days was written,
The decision of the meeting reached the villages,
The people of Moussa Ler became freedom fighters,
They rose and stood against the enemy government,
And held the front aided by mothers and sisters,
They fought for forty days heartily and with faith,
Thousands of soldiers attacked,
The valleys thundered with the people's shells,*

³² Ibid., վկ. 1397, էջ 270:

³³ Սվազլյան Վ., Հայոց ցեղասպանություն..., վկ. 288, էջ 473:

*Moussa Ler became a fortress of seven villages,
That caused a great pain to the enemy government,
They attacked with cannons and mausers,
They left hundreds of corpses and departed,
The French ships came by chance,
Dmlakian,* Dumanian* and Abadjian* went
And sent a telegram to Poghos Noubar pasha,**
They brought new life to five thousand people.³⁴*



The Moussa Ler people, who have struggled for freedom, have artistically expressed their feat in the following popular, historical epic poem-song, which, out of spite of the enemy, has been created in Turkish language. Hence I present it in translation:

*"I drew my sword and struck the stone,
The stone split from end to end,
Live a thousand years, Moussalerian!
Wake up, Moussalerian, wake up!
You became famed all over the world!*

*The Ottoman soldiers invade,
The braves of Moussa Ler,
The rifles in thousands and thousands,
Wake up, Moussalerian, wake up!
You became famed all over the world!*

The Ottoman bombs blast,

* Heroes of the self-defensive battles of Moussa Ler in 1915.

** Poghos Noubar – the Founding-Chairman of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (1906, Cairo), who greatly assisted the heroic Moussa Ler people, rescued by the French ships, to survive during 4 years in the sandy tent-town of Port-Saïd.

³⁴ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեր, Վկ. 162, էջ 128-129:

*The ramparts of Moussa Ler,
The cannons in thousands and thousands,
Wake up, Moussalerian, wake up!
You became famed all over the world!*

*The French steamships,
The prayers of the Moussa Ler people,
The brides, the girls and the children,
Wake up, Moussalerian, wake up!
You became famed all over the world!”³⁵*

Apart from the Turkish language, a bold epopee has also been woven in Armenian by **Ashough Karo Blaghian**, from Hadji-Habibli village:

*“Our Moussalerians are all heroes,
They are encouraged looking at each other,
They never know the meaning of fear,
Since they have you, Moussa Ler.
Hey, Moussalerians, dear ones,
We kept high the Armenians’ honor!*

*Our Moussa Ler was all covered with trees,
It was also called Little Armenia,
Hey, Moussalerians, dear ones,
We kept high the Armenians’ honor!*

*We rose, all seven villages, to the mountain top,
We didn’t bow before the enemy,
We had many victims in forty days,
We kept high the Armenians’ honor.
Hey, Moussalerians, dear ones,
We kept high the Armenians’ honor!...”³⁶*

The 105-year-old participant of the heroic battle **Movses Panossian** has remembered also the life of the Moussa Ler people in Port-Saïd: “*Women, children – all of them were on board the ship. The ship weighed anchor and moved. After sailing for several hours, the French captured a German ship. We moved to the German ship, and it took us to Port-Saïd... We landed on Egyptian soil. The yellow sand of the desert burned our feet. We saw tents; they had erected tents for us, with beds, everything... At that time, Poghos Noubar was one of the great men of Egypt. God bless his soul. He*

³⁵ Ibid., վկ. 172, էջ 132:

³⁶ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., վկ. 403, էջ 158:

helped us very much, as well as the Armenian orphans of Der-Zor. There, our children used to write the Armenian alphabet on sand, learned Armenian, until Sisvan School was opened in a tent, and next to it, was founded a hospital. English captains came there and started training us - one, two, right, two... And we marched. An English officer said to us: "Leave the French and come to our side." We said: "The French rescued us; we'll be on their side." Mleh came there and found us. Then we were enlisted as volunteers for the French army and laid the foundation of the Armenian Legion. Armenian volunteers came from Harpoot, Sebastia, Arabkir, and Houseinik and everywhere in Cilicia. They joined us; we went to the front at Nablous. We fought and won... The English said to our Armenian leaders: "You're wealthier than our king, that you have such brave valiant soldiers..."³⁷.



Poghos Noubar

In Port-Saïd, the adult males of Moussa Ler earned their families' living by making wooden combs and spoons, while the women and the young girls fascinated the foreign tourists by their delicately knitted embroideries and ornamented rugs.

Referring to the historical events, it should be pointed out that still in the days of World War I, in 1916, two of the Allied countries, England and France, had signed a secret agreement (Sikes-Picot) that, in case of the defeat of Turkey, Cilicia, having 2.600.000 hectares of arable and fertile lands, would pass under the supervision of France. The English and French authorities had earlier agreed with the Armenian National Delegation, that, if the Armenian volunteers fought against the German-Turkish forces, the Armenians would enjoy ample political rights after the victory and the Armenian volunteers would constitute the garrison of the towns of the newly formed Autonomous Armenian Cilicia.



Consequently, Armenian young men hardly survived from the roads of exile and other places and even from America (natives of Moussa Ler, Ayntap, Marash, Kessab, Hadjn, Houseinik, Chengoosh, Sebastia, Harpoot, Arabkir and other localities) were enlisted in the French army, creating the Oriental (Armenian) Legion. The Armenian volunteers, filled with a feeling of vengeance for the innumerable innocent martyred kinsfolk and defying death, defeated the Germano-Turkish armies and won the

³⁷ Ibid., ԳԼ. 1397, էջ 270:

magnificent victory of Arara, near Nablous³⁸ (Palestine). These great historical event, too, has found its artistic reflection in popular songs:

*“One by one I counted four years,
The Armenian soldiers took Nablous,
They were one thousand five hundred in number,
The English and the French were amazed.”³⁹*



And indeed, the French and the English commanders-in-chief praised the brave Armenian legionaries. On the 12th of October, 1918, General Allenby sent a telegram to the President of the Armenian National Delegation, Poghos Nubar, saying: “I am proud to have the Armenian regiment under my command. They fought courageously and had a great share in the victory”⁴⁰.

Thereafter **Movses Panossian** has added. *“Each of us was given award, as we had triumphed at the battle of Arara...”⁴¹*

However, during the four years those people lived in Port-Saïd, the return to Moussa Ler remained a dream, which was changed into a song:

*“...I prayed to the Lord
To ride a saddled horse,
To go to Moussa Ler,
To pick figs from the fig-tree
And walnuts from the walnut-tree”⁴².*



³⁸ The Armenian legionaries took the impregnable positions of Nablous during the battle of Arara, in 1918.

³⁹ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 534, էջ 187:

⁴⁰ Քելեշյան Միսաք, Սիս-Մատյան, Բեյրութ, 1949, էջ 592:

⁴¹ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 1397, էջ 270:

⁴² Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեռ, Վկ. 173, էջ 133:

Movses Panossian has related also about the wandering life of the heroic Moussa Ler people: *“In 1919, everybody was given the right to go back to his place, and we went to Moussa Ler. We saw our houses were burned, destroyed, ruined... We began to build, to erect, to plant vineyards, trees and grow vegetables. Then we built a monument on Moussa Ler to commemorate the ship that had rescued us. There was a cross on it... We lived comfortably until 1939, when the French and the English forgot the big promises they had given to the Armenians and presented the Sandjak of Alexandrette to Turkey. Moreover, they handed over Moussa Ler. Eh, what can we do? Could we live with the Turks? We gathered everything and set off to the Syrian seacoast - Passit Field. That night it rained. What rain! It poured and everything was wet... Our people did not know where to go; there were no trees for shelter. We started dancing in the rain in order to get warm. We danced the whole night. In the morning, many people were ill, and died soon after. Then they took us to Aynjar; it was also an open field. We began to build our new houses, plant new orchards. We channeled water and, in a few years, we turned it to a paradise. We grew oranges, lemons ... whatever you could think of, was grown there...”*⁴³



⁴³ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 1397, էջ 270:

Poghos Soupkoukian - Ashough Develli, who had also participated in the heroic battle of Moussa Ler and in the subsequent historical events, has woven on his saz⁴⁴, as a chronicler, the epic poem *“For Those Who have Left Moussa Ler”*, describing the hard wandering life of the Moussa Ler people:



*“We left our home and belongings,
We set foot on the land of Passit⁴⁵,
We see the summits of Moussa Ler over yonder,
Tell me, mothers and sisters, who won't cry?*

*We set out in the Turk's car,
We had confidence in Europe,
We left deserted our house and field,
Tell me, fathers and brothers, who won't cry?*

*We shall reach the land of Lebanon,
We shall learn new laws over there,
What was our sin, villagers of seven villages?
Tell me, grandfathers, who won't cry?*

*When we shall see the roads to Armenia open,
We shall all direct our steps there,
We will take the name of Moussa Ler with us,
We shall always gratify our Armenia⁴⁶.*

And a new popular song of the newer times was woven on the basis of the previous song:

*“I prayed to the Lord
To embark the ship ‘Pobeda’,*

⁴⁴ Armenian national musical stringed instrument.

⁴⁵ A town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

⁴⁶ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեր, Վկ. 164, էջ 129-130:

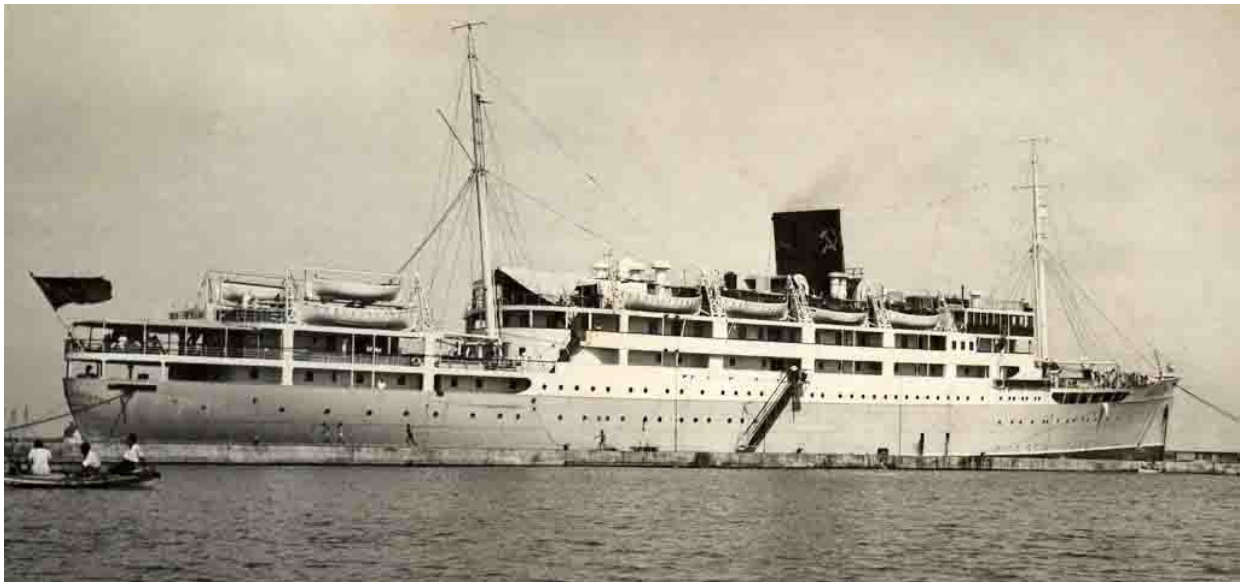
*To go to Armenia,
To attend school,
To acquire knowledge and grace,
And to flourish our Homeland*⁴⁷.



At the end of his memoir-testimony, the participant of the Moussa Ler heroic battle, **Movses Panossian** is already presenting the new life in Armenia: "...In 1946, news came from Armenia saying that all those who wished could settle in Armenia. Let's increase, unite in order to take back our lands from the Turks. We left everything - houses, orchards - and came to Armenia"⁴⁸.

And the farewell "Song of Joy" was woven in those days:

*"Lay the tables abundantly,
Fill the glasses with spirits,
Drink to your heart's content
To the health of the youth going to Armenia!"*⁴⁹



⁴⁷ Ibid., Վկ. 173, էջ 133:

⁴⁸ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 1397, էջ 270:

⁴⁹ Սվազլյան Վ., Մուսա Լեր, Վկ. 174, էջ 133:





The valiant combatants of Moussa Ler were the first to link their and their generations' lives to the Motherland, Armenia.

Those sailing to Armenia were singing in the ship:

*"Hey caravan, dear caravan, keep going your way,
I yearn for my Homeland; I've lost my sleep.*

*I call you at moonlit night, and you don't hear me,
I yearn for my dear brother; I've lost my sleep.*

*Drive on beyond the desert thorns,
I yearn for the Mount Masis; I've lost my sleep.*

*Deliver us from the narrowness of Dardanelles,
I yearn for my sacred soil; I've lost my sleep.*

*The ship came from Armenia to Lebanon,
It carried the Armenians from Lebanon to Armenia.*

*Hey caravan, dear caravan, keep going to Armenia,
I yearn for my Homeland; I've lost my sleep"*⁵⁰.



Ghapan, town of Nor Moussa Ler and elsewhere.

Following their repatriation in 1946-1947, the Moussa Ler people settled in Yerevan and in its newly built districts [Nor (New) Kilikia, Nor Aresh, Nor Sebastia, Nor Malatia, Shahoumian, Haghtanak], as well as in different regions of the Armenian SSR: in Edjmiadsin (now: Vagharshapat), Hoktemberian (now: Armavir), Ashtarak, Ararat, Leninakan (now: Gyumri), Kirovakan (now: Vanadzor), Alaverdi,

⁵⁰ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 610, էջ 204:



Movses Panossian also settled down and began to work and create with his family in the Nor Malatia district of Yerevan: *"In the district of Malatia, there were not many houses then. My wife Iskouhi, my five sons and two daughters, and I, began building a new, two-storeyed stone house. I was working at the nearby kolkhoz (collective farm). My sons were builders. They worked on all the big buildings in Yerevan, such as the Matenadaran, TseKa⁵¹, the buildings on the Square, the Sports Palace and many other buildings. When the Sports Palace was burning (and we saw it from our house), my son Smbat wept like a child; after all, he had put his skill and energy into it... Now, all of us live around the same courtyard. Each of my sons has his house, his family. I am happy with my grandchildren, great-grandchildren, thank God! Look, we have a garden as well. My wife is busy there. She sows and waters. I, in my turn, take away the stones from the parcel of land on the street side. See, I have sown greens there: it is a shame to leave the earth unused... I am already 105 years old. I am healthy yet. Every year, I wait impatiently for the harrissa⁵² day, in September, so that all those from Moussa Ler and their children come to the new Monument, cook harrissa through the night and distribute it to all those present, so that each one eating it may know that we fought for our liberty united as the wheat grains in the harrissa dish."*⁵³



Iskouhi Panossian
(1901, Moussa Dagħ)



Petros Safarian
(1901, Moussa Dagħ)



Assatour Soupoukian
(1901, Moussa Dagħ)



Grigor Gyouzelian
(1903, Moussa Dagħ)

At that period, the Great Patriotic War (World War II) had just ended, and there was not a family in the Motherland, who had not an extinguished light, a victim sacrificed to the victory over fascism. The repatriates came to put a balm over the wounds of the Homeland, to restore, hand in hand with the local population, the ruined

⁵¹ The building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, which is now the building of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.

⁵² Armenian national dish consisting of wheat-meal porridge with chicken.

⁵³ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 1397, էջ 270-271: In the spring of 1990, the last participant of the heroic battle of Moussa Ler, Movses Panossian died without seeing the beginning of Armenian Independence.

country. Despite the grave post-war economic conditions, a monetary credit was given to every family, and a plot of ground was allotted to build a house.



Sghomé Pashayan
(1903, Moussa Dagh)



Mariam Baghdishian
(1909, Moussa Dagh)



Gevorg Chiftchian
(1909, Moussa Dagh)



Garoun Antonian
(1910, Moussa Dagh)

However, the transfer of the repatriates from the temperate shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the Motherland having abrupt climatic changes was not only a geographical shift, but it assumed, first of all, a new public-political, socialist mode of life, with its peculiar public system... In spite of all these hardships, a new life-period started for the repatriated Moussa Ler people on the native land. They displayed, here again, new, brilliant examples of heroism; the former land cultivators became “labor heroes” of the communal fields. They irrigated with their sweat every inch of the native land in order to obtain from the Armenian grapes the frothy wine called “Moussa Ler” among the other renowned wines of Armenia. While the new generations of the one-time land-cultivators, gaining higher professional education in the native land, became also “mind-cultivators”, providing the Motherland with eminent and meritorious men of science and culture, well-known scientists and political figures.



Hovhannes Doudaklian
(1910, Moussa Dagh)



Sima Doudaklian
(1912, Moussa Dagh)



Artashes Balabanian
(1926, Moussa Dagh)



Dshkhouhi Doudaklian
(1934, Moussa Dagh)

The spirit of freedom and heroism, inherited with the bloodlines and imbibed with the maternal milk, would flash and blaze and, becoming a spiritual fire, would create.

And the repatriated Moussa Ler people settled in a village on the road to Edjmiadsin (in the Armavir Province of the Republic of Armenia), it became a town which was named Moussa Ler. On its height they constructed with their saved up financial means and with their creative and talented hands, the eagle-encrusted memorial-monument and the adjoining museum, which soars



Onnik (b. 1932) and Ervand (b. 1925) Varouzian brothers

up the sky and symbolizes the spirit of the heroic battle. Every year, in September, the Moussa Ler people and numerous visitors from Armenia and from the various countries of the world gather around the monument, on a sacred pilgrimage, and celebrate, with the bold tones of the ancient drums and zournas⁵⁴, reminiscent of the days of the heroic battle, with their original songs and dances, also with the traditional harrissa, the Day of the Heroic Battle of Moussa Ler, transformed into a pan-national fete on the New Moussa Mountain, on the native land of Armenia...



Memorial to the Moussa Ler heroic battle (1915), in the town of Moussa Ler

⁵⁴ Armenian national musical wind instrument.

* * *



Franz Werfel

The heroic battle of Moussa Ler shook the world. It demonstrated to the mankind the immense capabilities of a handful of people who have heroic traditions and unanimous will power.

In his historical novel "The Forty Days of Moussa Dagh," the notable Austrian writer Franz Werfel has artistically depicted in vivid colors the exploit of the Moussa Ler people. However, the world did not pay attention, in due time, to the alarm raised by the great Austrian writer, and a greater evil, Fascism, was born and following it, at present, international terrorism.

While the Moussa Ler people, who were forged and had gained sagacity in the heroic battles for survival, have formulated their feat very concisely: *"Freedom is on the tip of the rifle"*⁵⁵, that is to say, freedom can be obtained only by the force of arms, which is followed by: *"Freedom is on the tip of the flag"*⁵⁶, that is to say, statehood is the guarantee of freedom.

As a part of the Armenian nation, the Moussa Ler people, in particular, have felt, following the fall of the 300-year-old flourishing statehood of Cilicia and during the 600 years of absence of power, the necessity of regeneration of the national statehood, its meaning and value...

*"...For six centuries our whole nation
Was prisoner to the foreigner,
But our eyes are staring
At Ardahan and Kars..."*

*Kars and Ardahan will
Soon be returned to us,
So that we transform
These waste lands into a paradise"*⁵⁷.

The great historic feat of the Artsakh Armenians has also become a creative source of inspiration for the Cilician Armenians:

*"Our small Artsakh
Is part of the Armenian world,
Why shall we leave it to the foreigner
When the Armenians are native there?"*⁵⁸

And the popular song resounds as a precept of the struggle for pan-national unity:

"Armenian brothers, we've kept silent enough,

⁵⁵ Սվազլյան Վ., Կիլիկիա..., Վկ. 613, էջ 207:

⁵⁶ Ibid., Վկ. 612, էջ 207:

⁵⁷ Ibid., Վկ. 611, էջ 204:

⁵⁸ Ibid.

*We have waited enough with patience,
They have bereaved us of Artsakh,
Now that we've power, let's take it back again!"⁵⁹*

For the Artsakh Liberation War embodies also the unrealized dream of the Western Armenians for the liberation of the forcefully seized Land...

Today, when the national statehood of the newly-independent Republics of Armenia and Artsakh has become a reality, the Armenian people address prayerful lines to God:

*"Our Lord, keep unshakable
Our heroic Mother Armenia,
Grant us long-lasting peace,
Life and sun, liberty,
With our Armenian State flag
May the Armenian Nation live forever!
Amen."⁶⁰*

* * *



Verjiné Svazlian writing down the memoirs and songs narrated by the eyewitness survivor from Moussa Ler, Mariam Baghdishian (b. 1909, Hadji-Habibli)

I express my deep gratitude to those representatives of the heroic Moussa Ler people, who, valorously facing the cruel circumstances of life, have retained in the abysses of their memory and communicated to me what they had seen and remembered, thus, saving from a total loss and transmitting to the coming generations their peculiar dialect and folkloric relics, in order that I donate what is Yours to You, my Armenian people!

⁵⁹ Ibid..

⁶⁰ Ibid., Վկ. 1391, էջ 250.