

GENOCIDE OF HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE AND CULTURE OF WESTERN ARMENIA *(Reflections on the tour to Western Armenia)*

Gevorgyan L. L.
Freelance Publicist

I was dreaming to travel to Western Armenia long ago and to see everything with my own eyes, whereof I had heard and read. Ideas were spontaneously born during the tour and put on paper after a while, which can be quite naturally framed with the phrase “itinerary” with an impulse of providing a peculiar and heartfelt interpretation for what one has seen and felt rather than in the traditional perception of tourism.

When making a pilgrimage in Western Armenia, a considerable part of the way to Aghtamar island is passing through the historic province of Kars and neighboring territories, the substantial parts of which, with the Ararat-Masis summit, are territories, annexed from Eastern Armenia by the unlawful treaties of Moscow (March 16) and Kars (October 16), concluded between the Bolshevik authorities and Kemalist Turkey in 1921.

When one enters the Turkish customs service on the Armenian land occupied by Turks as the result of the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923), the first impression is formed of Atatürk's pictures in every corner inside the walls and his monuments outside the walls, defiling the Armenian soil.

The heavy thoughts, full of tragic memories, become dense when approaching the coastal region of Van city.



**A quarter of the ancient Armenian capital of Van devastated
by Turks during the Armenian Genocide**

Lake Van causes plenty of contradictory feelings, too. If we compare the lake with Sevan, then we find a lot of similarities and contrasts at once. On one hand, the nature is the same, bald mountains. The altitude above the sea level reaches almost that of Sevan: if Sevan is situated at the height of about 1900 meters, then Van is at the height of 1670 meters. On the other hand, unlike sweet-water Sevan, Lake Van has sulphur-mixed water.



Van Lake

My old dream of seeing the land of our ancestors and, especially, lighting a candle in the Cathedral of Surb Khach (the Holy Cross, 915-921 AD) in Aghtamar became a reality.



The Cathedral of Surb Khach (the Holy Cross, 915-921 AD) - the unique survived pearl of Armenian medieval architecture in Turkish captivity

Lake Van's Aghtamar island appears wonderful from the boat: the Holy Cross is outlined more clearly when getting close to it. An imprisoned sanctuary.



The island of Aghtamar



Van fortress - the capital of the Armenian Ararat (Urartu) kingdom (9th-7th cc. BC)



Van fortress - the bastion of the self-defense of Armenians

In contrast to Van, where all the Armenian quarters have been completely destroyed, and the memories, particularly about Aigestan, can be restored by reading the historiographic and imaginative literature, Kars still has two-storied Armenian buildings, but abandoned and half-destroyed as well as at present subjected to demolition and damage.

In front of the Kars fortress is the church of the Holy Apostles (Surb Arakelots) of the 10th century. Newly built mosques are “pressing” it from both sides. This Armenian Church has been turned into a mosque.



The fortress of Van city, being the bastion of the self-defense of Armenians in 1915, is a place for tourism today and unfortunately a way to make money for conquerors. In front of the central entrance a large signboard is placed, “Ataturk Culture Centre” which Turkish authorities use cynically to disguise the genocide of Armenian Culture.



**The church of the Holy Apostles
(Surb Arakelots, 932-937)**



**The church of the Holy Apostles
at present turned into a mosque**

Forty kilometers away from Kars is Ani, more precisely, the ruins of the city of a thousand and one churches.

Near the entrance of Ani, in a corner of the high style walls a detailed signboard on the “creation” of Ani and its “history” is placed. “The historical happenings” are mentioned, but not a single word about the Armenians, Armenian origination and

Armenia - an ordinal demonstration of cultural genocide, carried out by the Turkish authorities.



The Ani Cathedral, 1001



The Church of the Holy Redeemer, 1035



A falsified signboard on the
“history” of Ani

And the so-called service is still limited with two policemen, one of whom sells tickets at the entrance, and the other checks their availability. That is all, no excursion guide is provided, for he/she could throw up suddenly from the mouth an “unnecessary” word about the Armenian origin.

We are advancing toward Igdir; Yerevan is about 40-50 km away; we are talking with our household and friends on cell phones as if we are, for instance, in Artashat or Ararat. Hence, there was a need to overpass 550 km to reach a place, located just 50 km away from Yerevan. The consequences of the Armenian Genocide...

The next station is “Doghubayazet” (the name belonging to the series of tens of thousands etymological falsifications because of Turkish authorities’ policy to distort and eliminate the Armenian toponyms), which is our old Daruynk of historical Kogovit province, having been renamed savagely. Ararat is turned to us on 180 degrees from here and brings to mind the Japanese Fuji in outward appearance; but if Fuji belongs to the Japanese regardless of the way taken to cast a look, Ararat is in captivity. The summit of Ararat appears so near from this point that it seems one can climb on it for a few hours.



Mt. Ararat-Masis

In fact, it is possible to climb Ararat for two to two and a half days if the best happened, especially, if weather conditions are favorable, about which I learned from the Austrian climbers, traveling to Aghtamar with us. They come from the Austrian Innsbruck, the most beautiful centre of Tyrol, and have obtained mountaineering skills on the Tyrolean Mountains, having almost half the height of Ararat. They knew that this is the historical Western Armenia and were informed of the 1915 Genocide, but they said they were not too familiar with our historical events. As concerns Ararat, the foreign tourists told us that this mountain is merely a biblical symbol for them and they were not very interested to know in which country's territory it is located at the moment.

Of course, it is easy for outsiders to think this way, while we, the Armenians, feel a severe pain of being conscious that the sacred summit of Ararat-Masis is in captivity...

***Translated from Armenian
by V. M. Gharakhanyan***