

ARMENIAN MASSACRES, GENOCIDE, FREEDOM-FIGHTING AND ARMENIAN ARTISTS AT THE END OF THE 19TH AND BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

The Armenian massacres, Genocide organized in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, Armenian-Tatar** (Azeri) clashes in the early 20th century, were real catastrophes for the Armenian people. The loss of the essential part of the historical homeland, deportation and organized mass killings of people, the appearance of thousands and thousands of orphans, the loss of property and cultural monuments, the loss of historical memory were very painful for the survivors during many decades. The armed resistance of the inhabitants of certain cities and villages are heroic pages of the Armenian history of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Numerous Armenian artists portrayed in their artworks the tragic and heroic events of that period. Certain artists miraculously heard the stories of sufferings from refugees, the others miraculously survived escaping arrests, or lost family members, many children saw the deaths of their parents and relatives inside paternal houses or during the death marches in Syrian deserts, and some of those who grew up in orphanages, became artists. Thus, the Armenian massacres, Genocide and national liberation struggle became the subjects of the Armenian painters and sculptors during many decades.

Keywords - massacres, Genocide, National liberation struggle, refugees, orphans, Armenian-Tatar (Azeri) clashes, movement of Armenian volunteers, freedom-fighters, Komitas.

Introduction

The massacres perpetrated against the Armenian people in the 1890s, Armenian-Tatar** (Azeri) clashes in the early 20th century, *pogroms* in Cilicia and, finally, the Great Genocide Large-scale brutal massacres aroused deep emotion and indignation in Armenian intellectuals and induced Armenian artists to produce numerous works of art

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on those themes. Some artists addressed the theme using their own imagination, while at the same time proceeding from eyewitnesses' accounts, whereas others personally went through those horrors. The pain accompanied them all their lives. Those who were far away from the homeland lost their families and friends and mourned those losses throughout their lifetimes. Each of them being an emigrant was obliged to adapt himself to a new milieu, in the meantime living with memories of lost homeland. They had to live with nostalgia in their hearts for their devastated homeland.¹ The pain and memories of survivors were inherited by their children and other generations. Unfortunately, up to now it was impossible to collect all artworks which reflect massacres and the Genocide and were created by different generations of Armenian artists. During the first decades of the Soviet period the artists in Armenia were not allowed to portray the catastrophe of the nation. Only in the beginning of 1950s did the first artworks related to that start to appear. The artists in the Armenian Diaspora were not facing such a problem and so most of the artworks concerning the national catastrophe were created in other countries. The Iron Curtain existing between Soviet Armenia and other countries was an essential obstacle for Soviet Armenian art critics to acquaint themselves with the artworks of their compatriots and their culture generally speaking. Due to this, the Armenian art historiography did not explore that phenomenon thoroughly, having no accessibility to the necessary information.

First Armenian artist who portrayed the Armenian massacres

Harutium Shamshinian (1856-1914)² was one of the first of the Armenian artists to portray the Armenian massacres. A pencil sketch called *Year 1897 in Turkey* was the first among this kind of his works. It depicts Turkish soldiers entering houses in an Armenian village and killing Armenians. The painter pictures a janissary who slashed a child to death at a doorstep and who was carrying away the child's naked mother. He also portrayed another Turkish soldier preparing to brutally kill a woman, who was clasping a child to her bosom and a group of the perpetrators of the massacres rushing to the yard through a gate to take part in those crimes. The sketch is completed with the tragic figure of a woman sitting next to her slain husband.³ The acts of violence and inhuman barbarism perpetrated against Armenians during the Armenian-Azeri clashes in 1905-1906 were reflected in the artist's paintings *Armenian massacre* and *Predators*. The first of the two depicts the terrible carnage of unarmed Armenian peasant women perpetrated by Azeri Turks. The Turks are shooting those women, disregarding the latter's entreaties to spare their lives. Seeing that their entreaties fail to arouse the butchers' compassion, one of the women is throwing a stone in despair at the Turks. The murderers are slaughtering their victims in a forest, away from the

¹ See Khachaturian Sh., The Color of Pain, The Reflection of the Armenian Genocide in the Armenian Painting, Yerevan, 2010, p. 11 (in Armenian).

² See Aghasyan A., The Ways of the Development of Armenian Fine Arts of the XIX-XX centuries, Yerevan, 2009, pp. 45-46 (in Armenian).

³ Martikian Y., *History of the Armenian Fine Arts. 17th-19th cc.*, Book 2. Yerevan, 1975, p. 25 (in Armenian).

village, which is seen at a distance, as is a cupola of its church. The *Predators* painting depicts vultures tearing apart the corpses of the Armenians.⁴

Vardges Sureniants (1860-1921),⁵ too, was among the first artists to address those tragic events. The Armenian massacres that were organized in 1895-1896 in Turkey by Sultan Abdul Hamid found their staggering reflection in his artwork. The painter turned to the theme of the planned mass destruction of the Armenian people on the eve of those massacres, as evidenced by *The Homeless* picture (1894).⁶ The fate of tens of thousands of orphans that survived the dreadful mass massacres caused deep anxiety to the artist and in that painting he portrayed a small homeless orphaned girl that was left to the mercy of fate and who curled up near a church door. The closed door of the temple symbolizes the total rejection of the girl there, whereas a small and meager bundle lying in front of her symbolizes her being on the verge of infinite misery. The small homeless girl “hung her head despairingly and was crying bitterly,” arousing viewers’ compassion.⁷ The disconsolate orphan is depicted in front of a magnificent doorway. The ornamented sections of the walls and a fine-spun ashlar-embedded khachkar are painted with distinct, extreme accuracy. The artist meticulously reproduced in his painting one of the masterpieces of the Armenian medieval wood carving, as the beautifully carved 15th-century door in the Sevan monastery. This work of art, as well as the church walls and a gravestone sumptuously decorated with carvings, and which lie on the ground in front of the orphan, are meant as reminders. They are reminders of the illustrious past of the centuries-old Armenian civilization and of the creative spirit and magic hands of the masters in that civilization, and they are used to set off the beauty of those marvelous works of art against the wretched situation of the Armenian nation that was on the verge of martyrdom. The artist targets the entire civilized world with that painting. It seems to alert everyone that the nation that has created such wonders is subjected to extermination, which is carried out before the very eyes of the civilized countries. This idea of the artist was further developed in his *Sanctity, Trampled* (1895), *Year of 1896* and *Massacre of Virgins* (1899), *The Abandoned* (1899), and in some other paintings⁸ that were displayed at the artist’s exhibitions held at different times. The topic for the *Sanctity, Trampled* was prompted by the 1895 looting of the St. Nshan church in Varak Monastery, located not far from Van in Western Armenia. The artist portrayed the event imaginatively and reached a broad generalization. V. Sureniants’s painting depicts the inside of the Armenian church raided by Turkish plunderers.⁹ In the background of the painting, the artist portrayed a murdered clergyman lying on the floor near the church altar and an open and empty chest for liturgical paraphernalia, whereas the scattered ancient parchment manuscripts and a censer and candles lying next to them are depicted in the foreground of the painting. The fallen and torn-asunder curtain of the church altar completes the

⁴ See *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵ See Aghasyan A., *Op. cit.*, p.48-51.

⁶ See Khachaturian Sh., *Op. cit.*, p. 39, ill.1.

⁷ See Sargsian M., “The reflection of the massacres in painting.” *Bulletin of Social Sciences*, 1965, 4, p. 113; Martikian Y., *Op. cit.*, pp. 55-57, ill. 6.

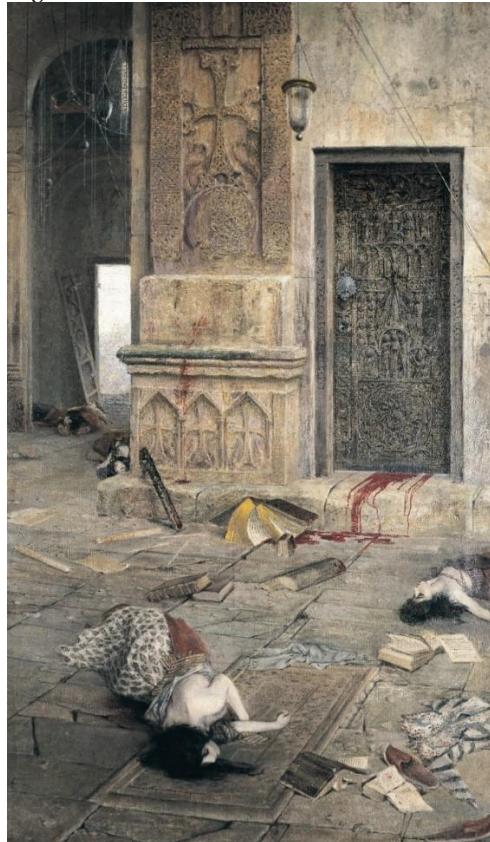
⁸ See Sargsian M., *Op. cit.*, p. 113; Aghasyan A., *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁹ See Ghazarian M., *Vardges Sureniants*, Yerevan, 1960, pp. 31-34 (in Armenian); Sargsian,1965, p.113; Y. Martikian, *Op. cit.*, p.57-59, ill.7; Khachaturian Sh., *Op. cit.*, p. 7, ill. 5.

scene of the sanctuary that has been subjected to plunder. A nacre-inlaid door of the sacristy, a beautifully executed khachkar stationed on a pedestal, and an image of a seemingly surprised saint (probably replicated from the miniatures in the Etchmiadzin Gospel of 989 (Yerevan, Matenadaran, MS.2374) give an acute heartache.

It stresses that the nation that has supreme cultural accomplishments is being butchered, while its creations are being defiled and trampled on. Most likely, the painter managed to express the idea that Turkish thugs were not only slaughtering the Armenians but also wiping out the centuries-old civilization of great cultural value. V. Sureniants expressed and further developed that idea in his painting *Massacre of Virgins*.¹⁰ It seems that half-naked, tortured young girls who have fallen prey to the beastly lust of the blood-stained massacres and who are lying on the church floor next to a finely hewn khachkar (cross-stone) and a superbly carved wooden door continue the theme of the previous painting. With these and other paintings, the artist condemns not only the crime of taking away the lives of innocent people but also the massacres perpetrated against the creative and ingenious spirit (Fig.1).

Fig. 1



¹⁰ See Sargsian M., Op. cit., pp. 112-113; Y. Martikian, Op. cit., pp. 72-73; A. Aghasyan, Op. cit., p. 49; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 7, ill.2.

V. Surenians addressed the theme of the national catastrophe also in his painting *The Abandoned*.¹¹ In it he depicted a young girl that furtively approached a church at the sunset. This girl is clinging with her tender hand to the church wall, while holding on to the window with the other hand as if asking for strength and is kissing the sculptures of the lifeless wall of the sanctuary. It is a traditional, God-fearing Armenian female that has reached the depths of despair, a victim of unprovoked violence who has come to ease her grief in solitude.¹² Like thousands of other insulted Armenian women, this young girl is an incarnation of a crippled life. Her entreaty and the degree of her piety show the intensity of her mental anguish. The thorn bushes, which surround the church, symbolize not only a hard and perilous life that befell the young Armenian girl, but also the thorny path of the Armenian nation in general.

Alongside the famous painter of sea-scenes H. Ayvazovsky, Surenians and G. Gabrielians took part in the illustration of the collection of literary works *The brotherly assistance to the Armenian that have suffered in Turkey*, compiled by G. Djanshian published in the late 19th century in Moscow. The major part of the book design, *viz.* the decoration of the cover, was V. Surenians' doing.

V. Surenians who knew only too well and witnessed his nations' sufferings gradually became more sensitive about human distress. In his painting *Grief* he depicted probably one of the many tortured and abandoned Armenian women.¹³ A broken-hearted young woman with loose hair, bare breasts, and her head lowered in sadness and despondency is the incarnation of total pain. The movements of the woman's head and hands make viewers share in her misery.

We see the ultimate manifestation of the painter's civic sentiments in his paintings of 1915. Surenians prepares several posters (of which the *Petrograd to Armenians* piece is particularly stupendous) for a three-day meeting organized in February that year in Petrograd for the assistance and benefit of the Armenians that suffered in Turkey. The success of this work of art is evidenced by the fact that in 1915 the Board of the Russian Writers' Society that helped the war victims published that poster in the charitable anthology *Writers' and Painters' Nevsky Almanac to the War Victims* that also contained works of famous Russian painters such as E. Repin, V. Makovsky, B. Kustodiev, and others.¹⁴ The poster depicts an Armenian woman playing a t'ar* in a street. Standing at her side, a barefoot, famished boy is singing in expectation that passersby will throw coins into a hat that he is holding in his hand. The child's song seems to be a soul-harrowing cry that would not leave anyone indifferent.¹⁵ After the Genocide, hearing about the tragedy of Western Armenians, in October 1915, Surenians went to Etchmiadzin to create paintings of Armenian refugees who had fled from the massacring Turks. About forty paintings created by the artist there, as well as in Oshakan, Ashtarak, Yerevan, and other places, portray Armenian villagers that are on the verge of destitution as they have lost everything fleeing from the regions of Vaspurakan, Shatakh, Moks, Sassoun, Erzrum, etc. At present, his sixteen paintings

¹¹ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., pp. 73-74, ill. 16; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 7, ill. 3.

¹² See Martikian Y., Op. cit., p. 73.

¹³ See Ibid., ill. 18, pp. 92-93.

¹⁴ See Ghazarian M., Op. cit., pp. 16, 48-49.

¹⁵ See Ibid., pp. 16, 48-49 Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p.7, ill. 8.

done in tempera and describing refugees are kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia.¹⁶ These works of art as well as pencil drawing depicting Armenian refugees from Turkey are staggering documents of the martyrology of the Armenian people.¹⁷

The 1895-1896 massacres orchestrated by Abdul Hamid aroused deep indignation also of the world-famed painter of seascapes, *Hovhannes Ayvazovsky* (1817-1900).¹⁸ The outbursts of his perturbed spirit found their expression in his sketches *Massacre of Armenians in Trapizon in 1895*¹⁹, *Armenians are embarked on Turkish ships*, and *Turks are throwing Armenians alive into the Sea of Marmara* (entitled by Sh.Khachaturian *Night. Tragedy at the Sea of Marmara*) (1897).²⁰ Those sketches were published in the above-mentioned collection of literary works *The brotherly assistance to the Armenian that have suffered in Turkey* compiled by G. Djanshian. The first sketch portrays a slaughter of innocent Christian population perpetrated at the seaside in the city of Trebizon, once inhabited by Armenians. The Turks are torturing and murdering unarmed Armenian men, women, and children. The serenity of the unruffled surface of the peaceful sea emphasizes the tragedy of the massacre carried out at a moment when Nature is at peace. The seashore and water reddened with the blood of innocent martyrs, the dead bodies strewn on the sand, and numerous black seagulls resembling carrion-crows further intensify the gloomy impression of the massacre scene. Ayvazovsky displayed that work as well as a number of others at the art exhibitions in Odessa (1897), Moscow (1898), and some other cities, thereby exposing Turkey's ruling clique's policy of mass murder of Armenians and triggering a wave of indignation of various social groups.²¹

The above-mentioned painting *Night. Tragedy at the Sea of Marmara* (Fig.2) that bears Ayvazovsky's signature is in the collection of the Armenian National *Nshan Palanjian* Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon.²² It depicts how Turks are throwing Armenians into the sea. A city visible in the background of the painting is, in all likelihood, Trebizon.

¹⁶ See Mikayelian M., *Vardges Sureniants*. Yerevan, 2003 (in Armenian); Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., pp. 46-47.

¹⁷ See *Navassard*, 1924, Bucharest, Volume 1, Issue 10-11, pp. 359-371 (in Armenian); *Sassna tsrer*, Volume 1, edited by M. Abeghian with collaboration of K. Melik-Ohanjanian, Yerevan, 1936, p. 81 (in Armenian); Ghazarian M., Op. cit., pp. 38-39, 92-93, illustrations; Martikian Y., Op. cit., ill. 27; Kazarian M., *Sureninats*, Moscow, 1962, ill. 22 (in Russian).

¹⁸ T'ar is an Armenian national (as well as Eastern) stringed musical instrument.

¹⁹ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., pp. 23-25.

²⁰ See Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 33, ill. 5.

²¹ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 25; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 29., ill.1.

²² See Sargsian M., Op. cit., pp. 114-118, ill.2.

²² See Aghasyan, A., Op. cit., p. 25; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 29., ill.1.

Fig. 2



Alongside the paintings related to the Armenian massacres, the anti-Turkish sea battle-pieces are also numerous in the painter's legacy. In those works of art (that number of one hundred), he portrayed the Turkish troops' and navy's defeats. The better-known of those works are *The Battle of Chesmen* (1848), *The Battle of Sinop* (1853) and *The Explosion of a Russian Mine Under a Turkish ship* (1878), that laud the victory of Russian troops.²³ Ayvazovsky was also inspired by the national liberation struggle waged by the Greek people against the Ottoman tyranny.²⁴ One of the less-known of his works on that theme is a painting, which is now kept in the State Museum in Athens and which depicts the story of the burning of a Turkish ship by a group of pirates headed by famous Greek revolutionary Kanaris. The burning of the battleship, under the command of infamous massacrer Mehmet Ali, that arrived from Egypt and entered the Greek territorial waters occurred at night and is one of the prominent events in the national-liberation struggle of the Greek people.²⁵ The anti-Turkish theme was recurrent for Ayvazovsky throughout his life. His painting *The Explosion of a Turkish Ship* (1900) that he drew on the last day of his life is well-known.²⁶

In *The Capture of the City of Kars* (1878), the artist expressed his indignation about Turkey's policy of persecution of Armenians and directed the public opinion to the protection of the Armenian interests.²⁷ Not only did H. Ayvazovsky turn his art into

²³ See Sargsian M., Op. cit., p. 116; Martikian Y., Op. cit., pp. 142-14, 176, ill. 2; Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 24.

²⁴ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., pp. 156-157.

²⁵ See Yessachanian L., "The paintings of marinist Ayvazovsky in the Athens Museum." *Hayastani Kochnak*, New York, 1932, # 32, pp. 817-818 (in Armenian).

²⁶ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., pp. 189; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 37, ill. 105.

²⁷ See Sargsian M., Op. cit., pp. 114-118.

a weapon for the struggle and use it to serve the interests of his people, he also supported the people with his own money. He gave material support to Armenian refugees by providing them with shelter in his country estate in the Crimea and with means of sustenance. He also transferred to the relief fund for the Armenians (that were driven out by massacres perpetrated by Turks and that barely escaped those massacres) the proceeds from his art exhibitions organized in Odessa, Moscow, and Petersburg and from the sale of some of his paintings.

Renowned painter Gevorg Bashinjaghian (1857-1925),²⁸ too, was extremely concerned about the destiny of the Armenians, who were oppressed and exterminated in Ottoman Turkey. As far back as the 1890s, prior to painting on the subject of the Armenian massacres, he wrote short stories with disturbing images of the Armenians who fled Turkey, in particular of the lives of homeless and orphaned children.²⁹ In 1882, he painted *Famine in Armenia* and *The situation of Turkish Armenians* paintings,³⁰ while in the early 1900s, *Setting an Armenian Village on Fire* (1919) that portrayed the burning of the Armenian settlements by Turks.³¹ The latter painting is owned by the National Art Gallery of Armenia.

Oil painting *Setting an Armenian Village on Fire* (Fig.3) depicts fire that was started on the outskirts of a village that is in the background of the painting. That fire will gradually consume the village houses in the forefront of the painting, the carefully collected haystacks, and the monastery rising to the left.

Fig. 3



²⁸ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 37-38; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., pp. 50-51.

²⁹ See Sargsian M., *Gevorg Bashinjaghian*. Yerevan, 1957, pp. 124-125 (in Armenian); L. Chookaszian, "Bashinjaghian Gevorg." *Saur Allgemeines Kunstlerlexikon, Die Bildenden Kunstler aller Zeiten und Volker*, Bd.6, Munchen-Leipzig, 1992, S. 364-365.

³⁰ See Gayfejian V. and A. Sargsian, *Gevorg Bashinjaghian*. Yerevan, 1957, p. 19 (in Armenian).

³¹ See Ibid. p. 25; Sargsian A., Op. cit., p.118; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 51.

The Armenian nation's going through Golgotha is presented in the paintings *In Turkish Armenia* and *The Way of Refugees* done by Bashinjaghian in 1915 and displayed at his personal exhibition held in 1916 in Tiflis.³² In his *Turkish Armenia* landscape, Bashinjaghian presented an image of Western Armenia ablaze. The smoke billowing from the small town covers the skies. The moon, the color of blood, is reflected in the river that flows through the gorge, making the scene look even more tragic. The ancient Armenian monastery, which stands at the foot of the hill, near the riverbank, is a silent witness to the tragedy of the nation that built it.³³

In his painting *The Way of Refugees* or as they call also *Armenians in Exile* (1910), the artist portrayed a small caravan of the refugee Armenians that miraculously escaped from the massacres perpetrated by Turks. They find themselves in a blizzard, and fighting against the indomitable forces of Nature, they are trying to get through the mountaintop in the hope of finding a secure shelter and salvation.³⁴ G. Bashinjaghian also addressed the Young Turks-organized terrible carnage of Armenians in his large-format oil painting *The Flight of Armenians from Erzrum* (1920) that he produced later and that reflects the theme of a loss of the historical homeland.³⁵

Painter *Grigor Gabrielian* (1862-1898)³⁶ also did not remain indifferent to the plight of his fellow Armenians. His paintings *Turkish Armenian Porters* and *Turkish Armenian Worker* made in Tiflis date back probably to the late 1880s.³⁷ Those pictures portray two long-suffering men that left their homes in Western Armenia and came to the Caucasus and that, like thousands of other Armenian refugees, were forced to work as unskilled laborers in big cities just to scrape enough money to secure their own and their families' livelihoods. These laborers that became wayfarers because of the intolerable situation faced by Armenians in Turkey are depicted with minute details of their dresses. Their worn-out and poor clothes, bast-shoes and their entire exhausted look bespeak their miserable state.

As it was mentioned already, G. Gabrielian also contributed to the design of the collection of literary works *The Brotherly Assistance to the Armenian that Have Suffered in Turkey* that was published in Moscow. That volume contains a re-print of his painting *An Armenian is Praying at a Khachkar*. The artist depicted in it a villager from Turkish Armenia standing at a khachkar at the edge of the road and praying bare-headed. With great awe at that moment, he tries to find consolation through prayer. Not finding comfort in real life, this believer cherishes hope of finally being awarded one day the God's mercy and rescued from misfortunes that keep befalling him.³⁸

The bloodshed organized by Ottoman Turks in Western Armenia, the uprisings in Sassoun in 1896 and 1904, and the movement of Armenian volunteers that emerged

³² See Sargsian M., *Gevorg Bashinjaghian*, p. 113; Idem., *The reflection of the massacres...*, p. 118; Martikian Y., Op. cit., p. 255.

³³ See Sargsian M., *Gevorg Bashinjaghian*, p. 113; Idem., *The reflection of the massacres...*, p. 118; Martikian Y., Op. cit., p. 256.

³⁴ See Sargsian M., *Gevorg Bashinjaghian*, paintings (s.l.); Martikian Y., Op. cit., p. 256; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., 2010, p. 50.

³⁵ See Sargsian M., *Gevorg Bashinjaghian*, p. 114; Idem., *The reflection of the massacres...*, p. 118.

³⁶ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., pp. 46-47.

³⁷ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., pp. 32-33, ill. 10,12.

³⁸ See Ibid, pp. 36-37, ill 11.

during World War I were also reflected in *Arshak Fetvadjian*'s paintings (1866-1947).³⁹ One of his first works on the subject is *Woman of Sassoun* (sometimes also called *Infant Armenia*), which was displayed for the first time at the artist's personal exhibition organized in Tiflis in the spring of 1908. At present, the painting is in the collection of the National Art Gallery of Armenia (Fig.4). It depicts a woman of Sassoun who is armed with a rifle and protecting her newborn baby at the edge of a cliff over a gaping abyss. Pinning her hopes on the rocks of her homeland, this barefoot Armenian woman is looking fixedly into the distance, tensely following the enemy's advance. Clasping her baby to her bosom, this valiant woman of Sassoun, who has lost everything, symbolizes the liberation struggle of the nation that arose for the sake of its future.⁴⁰

Fig. 4



The portraits of the founders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaktsutiun) political party, Christapor Mikayelian, Rostom Zorian, and Mikayel Zavarian, done in oil by Arshak Fetvadjian, are kept in the editorial office of *Hayrenik* magazine in Boston, Massachusetts (USA). The portraits have never been published, and the dates of their production are unknown to us. Probably, they are the oldest

³⁹ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 39-40; Kurkman G., Armenian Painters in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1923, vol.1, Istanbul, 2004, p.375-383; 2011; Chookaszian L. Arshag Fetvadjian, Yerevan, 2011 (in Armenian with Summary in English and Russian).

⁴⁰ See Yezekian A. M., "Exhibition of Fetvadjian's paintings." *Mshak*, Tiflis, 1908, 2 March, p. 2 (in Armenian); Chookaszian L., "Unforgettable heritage." *Sovetakan Hayastan* magazine, 1985, # 12, pp. 17-20 (in Armenian); Idem., "Fetvadjian Arshak Abrahami." *Saur Allgemeines Kunstlerlexikon, Die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Volker*, Bd.39, Munchen-Leipzig, 2003, S. 235-236.

portraits of the nation's prominent public figures. It is difficult to say with absolute certainty whether those portraits were done during their lifetimes or later.

In the years of World War I, the patriot artist designed a cover page of the *Dzitenie* publication (Tiflis, 1915) that depicts a lifeless body of an Armenian warrior and his wife mourning over him.⁴¹ At the same time, A. Fetvadjian designed the album *Armenian Volunteers: 1914-1916* (Tiflis, 1916, published by M. Shatirian) that had two editions. In a central section of the cover page of the album there is a picture (in a round framework) of an Armenian volunteer wounded in his head and wearing a sheepskin hat. The volunteer is depicted seated, with a child in his lap, while under his feet there is a snake, which is cut in many pieces, and which symbolizes Turks. The warrior is holding with one hand a barefoot orphan girl in a torn dress. Depicted right behind him is a crying woman who covers her face with her hand. This woman who placed her hand on the shoulder of the volunteer as her only hope is a collective image of many thousands of Western Armenian refugee women. On the left side of the picture, there are two volunteers firing shots from the trenches. A body of the dead Armenian warrior is lying next to them in a pool of blood. There is an inscription beneath the fallen soldier and filled with his blood, "Death is the same everywhere; it is only once that man dies." In the right section of the painting, there are three more volunteers. One of them is killed and is lying on his back, while the other two keep firing. The inscription below says, "Blessed are those fallen for their nation's freedom." That inscription, too, is stained with the blood of the fallen soldier depicted above. In the background of the picture there is a blood-red horizon, with the outline of the Armenian mountains below. In fact, the painting provides a concise depiction of tormented and fighting Armenia drawn into the world war. Owing to its romantic pathos, to a combination of pain and mourning, and to underlying heroism, the picture is one of the more pronounced expressions of patriotism in the new Armenian painting.⁴² It is noteworthy that subsequently a postcard was printed with the picture from the cover page of the album. A considerable print run of the postcard was disseminated among people.⁴³

The artist served his nation selflessly, and not only with his paintbrush. Whenever necessary, he took a very active part in public affairs. In 1905 in Odessa, he headed a task force that collected a huge number of clothes and shoes and sent them to the Caucasus for further distribution to the Armenians that suffered from the Armenian-Azeri clashes.⁴⁴ Following the request by the Western Armenian Security Council, Fetvadjian in 1917-1918 joined a body whose mission was to find volunteers and to send them to the frontlines to fight the Turks.⁴⁵ In 1918, the painter did paintings of the Armenian women refugees. Those paintings, alongside the paintings of the Armenian women he did earlier, present not only the patriarchal image of the Armenian woman but also her dress with all the important details. As a result of the Armenian Genocide

⁴¹ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 40.

⁴² See Teodik, *Amenun taretsuys*. Constantinople, 1916-1920, p. 107 (in Armenian).

⁴³ See Hayduk 1862-1912, Testi di G. Pacifici, *Cronologia storica essenziale Ter-Minassian A.* (Skies and Lands 2, Collana diretta da H. Vahramian), San Lazzaro-Venezia, 1984, s.p.

⁴⁴ See Editorial, "Arshak Fetvadjian." *Hayrenik*, Boston, 11 October 1947, p. 4 (in Armenian).

⁴⁵ See Ibid.

of 1915 and of the ordeals that befell the Armenian nation in other years, many objects that had exceptional significance for Armenian cultural anthropology disappeared and were destroyed. Fetvadjian's paintings of Armenian women are still special, invaluable testimonies of those relics, including numerous specimens of Armenian dresses.⁴⁶

After the establishment of the Republic of Armenia on May 28, 1918, the government of the independent Armenian state made a decision that postage stamps of the tsarist Russia be used for postal services. Armenian letters and symbols were printed on those stamps, and then the latter were put to lawful use. At the same time, the Government commissioned Fetvadjian to design new Armenian postage stamps as well as new paper money to be put into circulation inside the country. The painter was entrusted with the task of getting those bills printed abroad.

In 1919, Fetvadjian got postage stamps printed in Paris by *Chasepau Printing*. Some of them have a picture of an eagle in a frame holding a double-edged sword in its right claw, while destroying a snake with its left claw. The artist selected "a wonderful revolutionary symbol. It is a well-known fact that eagle and snake belong in the arsenal of ancient Armenian mythology and reflect a theological orientation of ancient Armenians. The Bible interprets it as a symbol of eternity and as something that inspired the Gospels (traditionally, reading-stands were made of statues of eagles with spread wings). Here the motif is revived Christian Armenia, which is represented with yet another Christian symbol, *viz.* the sword of justice. With it, the eagle kills snake that traditionally personifies a monster," which under the circumstances symbolizes the Turks.⁴⁷ Those motifs were more than adequate for the postage stamps of the newly established Republic that had been fighting against Turks since its foundation day. That was the reason why A. Fetvadjian used the same images to decorate a 100-ruble bill designed by him. He had that bill as well as bills of other denominations printed in London in 1920-1921. An image of a sword-bearing angel trampling on the monster (with which the artist decorated a 250-ruble bill) was also symbolic for the Armenian Republic that was fighting for its independence.

The mass-scale massacres of Armenians were also reflected in *Panos Terlemezian*'s artwork (1865-1941).⁴⁸ The young artist who joined the liberation struggle since adolescent years had an active participation in the activities of clandestine national political parties that existed in Van. He maintained close ties with Armenian freedom fighters and was thrown into prison several times. Back in 1897, he was arrested in Estonia following Sultan Hamid's demand and was held first in prison in Revel and then transferred to Metekh prison in Tiflis to be finally exiled to Persia. An exceptional sharpshooter, he was fighting with a weapon in his arms and was among the leaders that had a key role in the self-defense battles in Van. In the early 1900s, he did paintings, with massacres of Armenians being their main theme. Those are *Mother*

⁴⁶ See Chookaszian L., "Unforgettable heritage," pp. 17-20.

⁴⁷ See Pedersen A. S., "Armenian Freedom issues." The American Philatelist, 1977, September, vol. 91, No. 9, p. 708, fig.I; Zhakian Kh. A., Saltikov S. A. I. Post and postage stamps of Armenia, Yerevan, 1988, pp. 85-90, picture 23 (in Russian).

⁴⁸ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 40-41; Kurkman G., Op. cit., vol.2, p.804-810; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 54-55.

looking for her son among dead bodies (or, according to Y. Martikian, *Armenian massacres*), *Calamity of War, Refugees Mourning for their Homeland* and some other works that remained at a sketch stage.⁴⁹

In the *Mother Looking for her Son among Dead Bodies* painting, he depicted a woman mourning over a lifeless body of her son that is lying among the dead bodies of Armenians slaughtered by Turks.⁵⁰ In his *Refugees Mourning for their Homeland* (or, according to Y. Martikian, *Armenian Refugees Mourning for their Homeland on a Moonlit Night*) sketch (which is kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia) several bunched up Armenian women refugees are mourning in the moonlight over their relatives and over the loss of their homes and lands. The picture makes a strong impression due to the cumulative power of the silent pain of the people. It is indeed so powerful that it is capable of making even foreigners understand the entire injustice and inhumanity of the barbaric acts perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks against the Armenian people.⁵¹ In his oil painting *Calamity of War* (1929), which is kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia, P. Terlemezian depicted a desolate scene of a battlefield, obviously having in mind the destiny that befell Western Armenia. He shows, against the backdrop of crimson-colored sky enveloped with fires and smoke, rapacious griffons that seated themselves on dead bodies that were not interred. The painter uses the images of the vultures as a vehicle to convey a ghastly breath of war.⁵²

P. Terlemezian addressed the theme of Armenian refugees as far back as the early 1900s. It is evidenced by a *Refugee* painting done in oil (1907) and currently owned by the National Art Gallery of Armenia. It depicts a barefoot man in torn trousers who is reclining on the earth and that is holding his hand on his chest as if wounded. It seems like this homeless person would shortly stretch out his hand to passers-by asking for alms. Probably, P. Terlemezian depicted one of his compatriots that survived the Armenian-Azeri clashes.

An unfinished painting *The Autumnal Song of Armenian Refugees* reflects a hapless situation of thousands of refugees that lost their homes, became wanderers, and gathered in Etchmiadzin in the fall of 1915. As Y. Martikian correctly noted, the shelterless refugees that gather under a tree add their melancholy song to the depressing autumnal weather.⁵³ This mournful song of the homeless who have lost their motherland is an acute anguish in the artist's soul over the native land that has become irrevocably distant.

In 1923, Terlemezian in New York executed a portrait of a national avenger Soghomon Tehlerian, who heroically killed Talaat Pasha, one of the bloodthirsty organizers of the Armenian Genocide. The artist succeeded in creating a true-to-life image of the hero, of a resolute and reflective young Armenian man endowed with great willpower.⁵⁴ While living in the USA, in 1925, the artist did a portrait of General

⁴⁹ Sargsian M., "The reflection of the massacres....", pp. 120-121; Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, 1983, pp. 57-58.

⁵⁰ Sargsian M., "The reflection of the massacres....", p. 121; Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, p. 58.

⁵¹ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, p. 58.

⁵² See Ibid.

⁵³ See Sargsian M., "The reflection of the massacres....", p. 121; Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, p. 69.

⁵⁴ See Sargsian M., "The reflection of the massacres....", ill. 4.

Andranik.⁵⁵ The artist skillfully expressed in that portrait a charismatic essence of the people's leader, or, as A. Tchobanian put it, "the body that contains a fiery soul." General Andranik's portrait makes visible the rare moral beauty of the national hero and *his charm* that affected people's souls. The portrait is in fact monumental. The freedom-fighters' great commander, who devoted his whole life to a sacred struggle of freeing his nation from the Ottoman yoke, is depicted here with density and solemnity almost amounting to a monument.

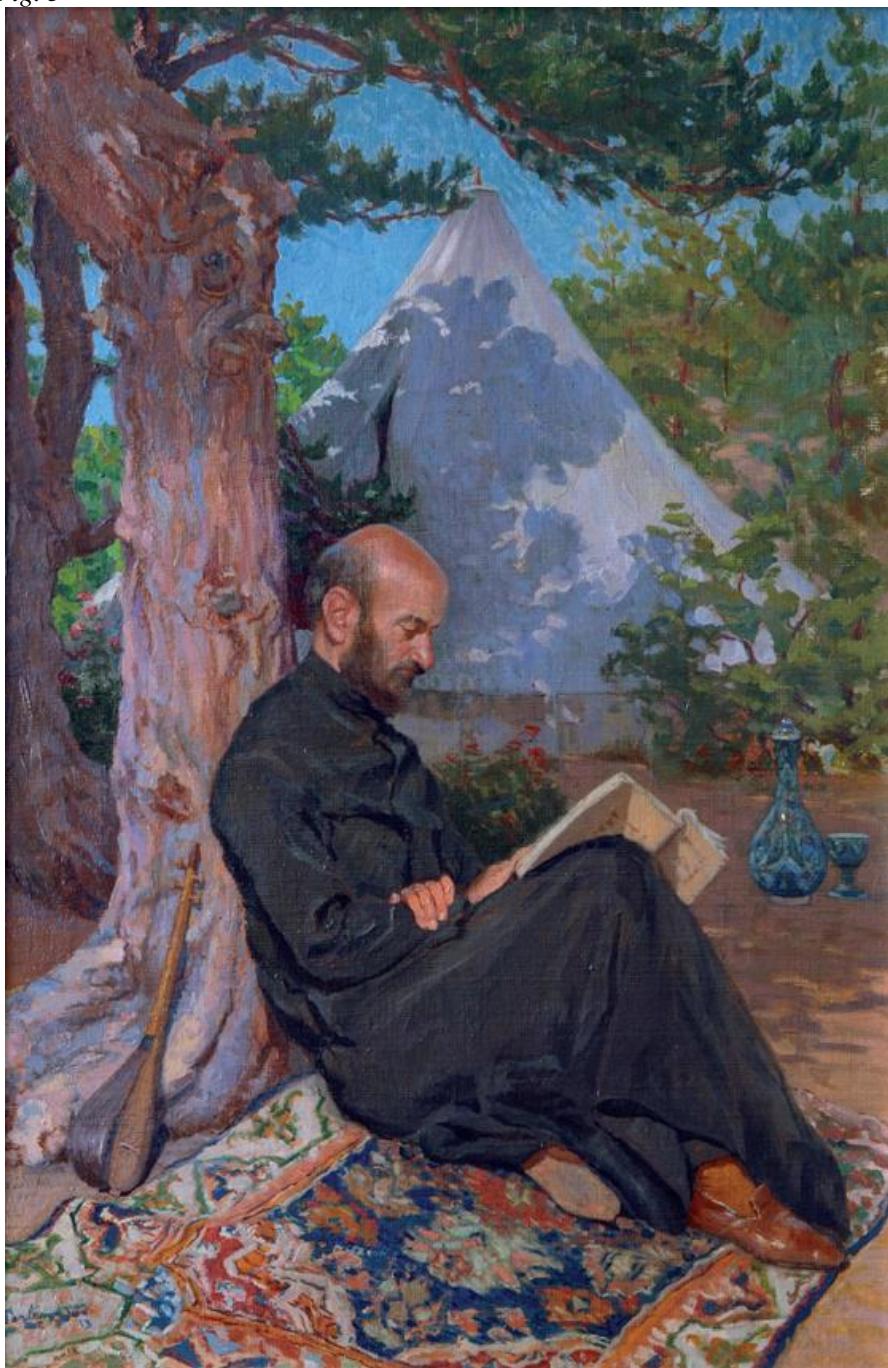
Terlemezian also did self-portraits. His first self-portrait that is known to us is a small-size pencil drawing done in the prison in Revel, when he was a young man. It shows a jailed young freedom-fighter with disheveled hair and in prison clothing. The drawing presents a steadfast revolutionary with a rebellious character who voluntarily devoted his life to the liberation of his nation. The late Harutium Hazarian, a prominent Armenian-American connoisseur and collector of works of art, was one of the closest friends of the painter. When he was visiting Yerevan many years ago, he told me that the drawing was in his possession. The artist's other self-portrait is kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia. It is an oil painting, of a bigger size and done decades later (in 1930) than the previous one. The portrait depicts him at the time when he had already moved to Soviet Armenia. It is the same steadfast patriot that has gone through numerous trials and tribulations, seen a loss of his native land, done the maximum for the liberation of his nation, had first-hand experience as a stateless person living in a foreign land and of the ensuing fatigue, and obtained wisdom due to the experience of many years. An attentive, searching, and penetrating look of his eyes meets the viewer's eyes as if telling about his valiant life and urging to live thus.

As he was close to Komitas, Terlemezian did a painting of the great composer of songs. It is one of the rare portraits that were done during the musicologist's lifetime. It is kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia (Fig.5) and is rightly considered to be the best painting depicting him.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, ill. 18.

⁵⁶ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, ill. 15, p. 64; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 54.

Fig. 5



The painting was done in 1913, and it depicts Komitas dressed in a cassock and sitting on a carpet under a tree at the moment reading, with a *saz*⁵⁷, a glass and a jug with water at his side. It seems that the structure of this painting is thought-out and symbolic. Leaning against the tree, Komitas seems to be gaining strength from the latter or resigning himself to it. A triangle-shaped tent that can be seen in the background of the painting makes an impression of a mountain. It rises right above the head of the composer of songs as if reminding and intimating that Komitas' significance for Armenians is great as a mountain.

It was due to Terlemezian's painting that precisely such an image of Komitas emerged and remained in the Armenian nation's perceptions. Although bald, but with a head of a delicate intellectual, tall and thin, the image of the great composer of songs became for the Armenian nation for decades to come a collective symbol of sorts of an enormous cultural loss and the loss of the outstanding men of letters that fell victims to the Genocide. Through simple and reserved means, the well-thought-out structure of the painting and the right selection of the Komitas' position, Terlemezian was able to create a magnificent depiction of the great personality entirely devoted to the Armenian music.⁵⁷ Also kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia is the artist's other, undated small-size oil painting done on pasteboard and titled *Komitas on a Riverbank*. The painting depicts the artist's friend, the composer of songs, in a semi-recumbent position on a riverbank, with his back leaning against a tree with a thick trunk.

The disastrous situation of the Armenian people is also reflected in the paintings *The Midday Dinner* (1896),⁵⁸ *On the Way to Forced Wandering* (1896) and *The advent of death* (1897)⁵⁹ by Yeghishe Tadevossian (1870-1936).⁶⁰ Three small-size watercolor sketches of the painting *The midday dinner*, which are kept at present in the National Art Gallery of Armenia, give an idea as to what the painting was in reality. The first sketch depicts a sad and despondent orphan girl standing at a wall of a village hut and next to her there is some personage that is not seen clearly through the doorway. Yeghishe Tadevossian drew on the same pasteboard another orphan girl's face with almost tearful eyes. The second sketch depicts a small girl that fell flat on her face. The third sketch portrays a woman or an adolescent girl that, too, fell on her face and a figure of some person sitting not too far on the ground.

It is surprising that Y. Martikian should write a totally different thing about *The Midday Dinner* painting.⁶¹

Tadevossian's painting *On the Way to Forced Wandering* or as they call also *Towards Exile* (1895) (which is currently held in the National Art Gallery of

* *Saz* is an Armenian national (as well as Eastern) stringed musical instrument.

⁵⁷ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, ill. 15, p. 64.

⁵⁸ See Drampian R.G., *Yeghishe Tatevossian*. Moscow, 1957, pp. 31-33 (in Russian).

⁵⁹ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book C, pp. 122-123.

⁶⁰ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 38-39; Sh. Khachaturian, Op. cit., pp. 56-59.

⁶¹ Y. Martikian writes about *The Midday Dinner* painting that it is known today due to a small-scale replica produced from memory in 1925. It depicts orphans sitting at a wall of a village hut and not too far from them a small girl that fell flat on her face while bringing them dinner in a pot. Further aside there can be seen hens pecking the spilled food and the broken pot. The artist managed to give a tragic touch to an otherwise casual, probably even routine, incident by stressing a dramatic nature of orphanhood. See Ibid, Gorian P., *Yeghishe Tatevossian*. Yerevan, 1973, p. 10 (in Armenian).

Armenia)⁶² describes a scene, which is occurring in an old cemetery. A father and a son came to visit the grave of the person dear to them for the last time before leaving for distant lands. The sobbing son kneeling before his mother's tombstone, his bareheaded father standing next to him, and the deathly solitude of the cemetery present a sad image that troubles a viewer and fills him or her with sympathy not only for the characters in the painting but also for thousands of individuals that are forced to leave their homeland.⁶³ In all likelihood, that painting was created in 1895-1896 in connection with the tragedy of numerous Armenians leaving their homeland because of the massacres organized by Sultan Abdul Hamid.⁶⁴

The artist started painting *The Adoration of the Cross* (which is currently held in the National Art Gallery of Armenia)⁶⁵ in 1894-1895 and finished it in 1901. A poor elderly villager kisses a khachkar, setting his hopes on that sacred stone and perceiving it as his intercessor with the Lord. It is his hope that his misery and suffering will become known to the Most High and that fate will finally be more benevolent to him. Even though a viewer cannot see the face of this Armenian man who is profoundly transported at this moment of infinite veneration, the latter's wrinkly and crude hands furrowed by backbreaking work help get a fairly accurate idea of the course of his life.⁶⁶ Over the period of 1914-1920, Y. Tadevossian created few pictures compared to earlier years. Like many other Armenian painters, he, too, found himself in acute mental anguish that frequently inhibited his creative imagination.⁶⁷

His painting *Moonlight at the Seashore in Beirut* (1915) (which is done in oil and is currently held in the National Art Gallery of Armenia)⁶⁸ pertains to the 1915 events. It depicts ill-fated Armenian refugees who have been driven out of their homes and from their native land by Turks and who have ended up on a ship near the Lebanese seashore. The ship is taking them to an uncertainty, to a new life in the country that they do not know. The expressions on the exiles' faces are not seen clearly in the darkness of the night. However, the artist uses the way they sit with their heads hanging to get viewers to surmise the state of mind of those people. The moonlit part of the sea-water seems to convey the painter's idea that eventually there will be a ray of hope for the miserable homeless refugees and the night will be over.

Y. Tadevossian became one of the founding members and chairperson of the Union of Armenian Painters established in Tiflis in 1916. That Union identified assistance to refugees from Western Armenia with the money raised through art exhibitions and donations. It is known for the fact that Y. Tadevossian approached his Russian friend painter V. Polenov with a request to donate one of his paintings for that purpose.⁶⁹

On more than one occasion, Y. Tadevossian created paintings of Komitas. This survivor of the Armenian Genocide and great composer experienced a nervous breakdown and spent the last sixteen years of his life in a mental hospital. He never

⁶² See Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 57.

⁶³ See Gorian P., Op. cit., Yerevan, 1973, p. 10.

⁶⁴ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, p. 120, ill. 28.

⁶⁵ See Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 56.

⁶⁶ See Drampian R.G., Op. cit., pp. 37-38; Martikian Y., Op. cit., book 3, p. 124, ill. 29.

⁶⁷ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., book 3, pp. 130-132.

⁶⁸ See Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 58, ill.3.

⁶⁹ See Drampian R.G., Op. cit., p. 72; Martikian Y., Op. cit., book 3, p. 132.

recovered. Y. Tadevossian was probably the first to paint the prominent artist. His first work of art on Komitas dates back to 1894 and is kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia). It portrays Komitas sitting at the lakefront in Etchmiadzin. The great composer is depicted with his back to the viewer.⁷⁰ A large painting of Komitas, which was done in 1935 (and which is also kept in the National Art Gallery of Armenia), is better known.⁷¹ It had been started earlier and was finalized in 1935, probably in connection with the death of the composer.⁷² The National Art Gallery of Armenia also has two small sketches of that painting. There is also another piece (kept in the Y. Charents Museum of Literature & Arts), which is in fact a portrait of Komitas as a young man.⁷³ For Tadevossian and other Armenian painters to represent Komitas in Soviet times amounted to raising, albeit indirectly, the issue of the Armenian Genocide.

Y. Tadevossian also did a portrait of Hovhannes Tumanian, an outstanding poet who expressed the Armenian grief. The portrait is kept in the Y. Charents Museum of Literature & Arts. It is one of the best paintings that depicts the poet and portrays him against the background of the majestic landscape of the homeland's mountains striking a chord with viewers and bringing to their minds the poet's famous poem *In the Armenian Mountains*. The poet who took so very close to his heart the problems of the refugees, and especially of the orphans, that survived the Genocide and who did his best to help them was loved and respected by the Armenian people more than other writer of that time due to his literary works and to his humanitarian activities. Tadevossian succeeded in conveying adequately the image of that bright personality. The poet is depicted with a serene smile on his face radiating infinite kindness. Flooding Hovhannes Tumanian's face with light, the painter thereby creates his magnificent image and gives him look of a saint.

The massacres perpetrated by Abdul Hamid and the resulting flow of refugees and orphans and the emergence of the fedayin* and, in general, of the national-liberation movement, induced Armenian artists to concern themselves more often with national issues. These calamities also encouraged them to express their civic sentiments. The above-mentioned paintings by Shamshinian, Gabrielian, and especially by Sureniants, Ayvazovsky, Bashinjaghian, and Fetvadjian made a strong impact on the creation of pieces on similar themes by the Armenian painters and sculptors of the early 20th century. The artists grew more and more aware of the importance of the works of art on national themes from the perspective of enhancing the people's patriotism.

In this sense, it is a small wonder that sculptor *Mikael Mikayelian* (1879-1943)⁷⁴ produced a model for a monument to be erected at the grave of G. Djanshian, a compiler of the above-mentioned literary works collection *The Brotherly Assistance to the Armenian that have Suffered in Turkey*. The picture of the model was reprinted in

⁷⁰ See Drampian R.G., Op. cit., pp. 15-17; Martikian Y., Op. cit., book 3, p. 119; Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 58. ill. 4.

⁷¹ See Khachaturian Sh., Op. cit., p. 59, ill. 5.

⁷² See Drampian R.G., Op. cit., pp. 81-89; Gorian P., Op. cit., p. 16, ill. 7.

⁷³ See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, ill. 30.

* i.e. freedom-fighters

⁷⁴ See Aghasyan A., Op. cit., p. 69-70.

the 1 June 1902 issue (p. 35) of *Geghunee* magazine of the Armenian Catholic Mekhitharist's Congregation of Venice.⁷⁵

The model of the monument to G. Djanshian represents a bust of the prominent humanist attached to a medium-sized obelisk. A woman sculpted at the top of the obelisk (probably the symbolic personification of Mother Armenia) places a wreath on the deceased in solemn recognition of the service he performed for the nation. Below, to the left of the philanthropist's bust, there is a sleeping winged lion with an appropriate inscription engraved on its side. A sculptural group in the right corner reminds one of all those numerous orphanages that were founded with the proceeds from the sale of the two editions of the collections compiled by Djanshian. By conceiving the idea of the monument to the great philanthropist, M. Mikayelian made a significant contribution to perpetuating the memory of G. Djanshian.

The consolidated issue # 1-10 of the same *Geghunee* magazine in 1903, includes a re-print of a pencil drawing titled *A Heroic Woman from Sassoun is Throwing Herself into a Gorge*. The publishers of *Geghunee* note that the drawing was given to them as a gift by Mkrtich Khan Yeremian from Tabriz. There is, however, no indication of the authorship of that piece (pp. 5 and 9). The pencil drawing depicts a woman from Sassoun with a rifle on her back, grasping her child and throwing herself into a gorge to avoid mistreatment at the hands of the enemy. The creation of this seemingly somewhat simplistic work of art was inspired by real events from the 1894 Sassoun uprising. This piece enjoyed great popularity both in the early 20th century and later.

Portraying the themes of Armenian martyrdom and liberation struggle, Armenian artists expressed their pain and their deep patriotic feelings. Their works represent great collective, documentary power, demonstrating the waves of emotions that engulfed the artists of the entire nation. Taken together, these creations have a combative nature, they are a weapon in the hands of today and future generations. In one or several articles, it is impossible to mention all the pictures or sculptures, and monuments that are related to the theme of national tragedy and struggle. These works are countless and, in many cases, neglected or forgotten. The documenting of these dramatic works of national art and the study of civic, patriotic activities of Armenian painters and sculptors is still in progress and needs many efforts.

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⁷⁵ Y. Martikian does not describe that monument correctly and he is wrong in saying that its description is given in *Mshak* magazine. See Martikian Y., Op. cit., Book 3, p. 213.

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List of figures

Fig.1. Massacre of Virgins 1899, painter Vardges Sureniants, National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.

Fig. 2. Night. Tragedy at the Sea of Marmara, 1897, painter Hovhannes Ayvazovsky, Armenian National Nshan Palanjian Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon.

Fig. 3. Setting an Armenian Village on Fire, 1919, painter Gevorg Bashinjaghian, National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.

Fig. 4. Child Armenia, painter Arshak Fetvadjian, 1903, National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.

35. Fig. 5. Komitas, 1913, painter Panos Terlemezian, National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.