Η Αρμενική παρουσία στην ανατολική και κεντρική Ευρώπη

→ η σημερινή Διασπορά που προκάλεσαν η γενοκτονία του 1915, οι πόλεμοι στην αραβική Εγγύς Ανατολή (Λίβανο και Σύρια) και η κατάρρευση της ΕΣΣΔ δεν είναι άπαξ, καινούργιο φαινόμενο της πρόσφατης ιστορίας.

1. The Armenians of the Crimea

https://agbu.org/ukraine/armenians-crimea

An Uninterrupted Presence - By David Zenian

When a group of Armenian "pilgrims" visits the Crimea in August this year, they will trace the footsteps of their ancestors who first began settling the region more than 1280 years ago.

Their walk through history will give them a taste of one of the oldest Armenian communities in the Diaspora. They will witness not only the ancient Armenian heritage of the Crimea but also the post-communist renaissance of fellow. Armenians, including the survivors of the Stalinist era.

The Crimean peninsula, in the extreme southern part of Ukraine, has always held a special place in Armenian history. In three different waves, Armenians settled in the region from as early as the year 711, when an Armenian officer by the name of Vartan not only commanded one of the region's Byzantine Greek garrisons, but also—according to published historical records of an uprising in the Crimean town of Kherson—led a successful revolt against his opponents.

The "Chronicle" of Matevos Urhaetsi, shows that in 1065 Caesar Constantine convened a military conference of his Armenian contingents after which Armenian soldiers and officers were dispatched across the Sea of Azov to the banks of the Downriver to defend the outlying regions of the Byzantine Empire.

Research also indicates that an Armenian Noble man by the name of Galogir entered into negotiations on behalf of the region's Byzantine rulers with Prince Swadoslav of Kiev.

The Armenian military garrisons scattered across the Crimea attracted not only the families of soldiers and officers, but in the centuries that followed, Armenian traders, artisans and sailors, especially in the coastal regions of the peninsula— which were rapidly developing into a major trading center with Europe, thanks to tire Greek and Italian commercial presence.

Large numbers of refugees first settled in the Crimean coastal town of Sudak. Which, according to 12th century Slavic historical records, was often referred to as a predominantly Armenian-inhabited city.

A manuscript dated 1305 and written in Kaffa, which is now known as Teodossia or Feodossia, notes that an Armenian priest by the name of Father Avetik was instrumental in the construction of the Holy Trinity Church and part of the Saint Man' Monastery.

The presence of these at least two religious institutions is an indication that a large Armenian community had already taken shape in Kaffa well before the influx of Armenians into tire Crimea in late 1330's—the arrival of thousands of survivors from Ani, the 10th century capital of Armenia which was sacked by the Seljuk's and finally destroyed by the earthquake of 1319.

A tombstone dated 1027 and brought from Ani to Kaffa by refugees is preserved in the city's museum. It is known as the "Stone of Ani".

The growing number of Armenians and established settlem ents paved the w av for several Arm enian historians including Tavit Ghrimetsi (D avid of Crimeai, Nlartiros Ghrimetsi (Martiros of Crimea) who in 1627 wrote the "History of Crimea" starting with the Armenian immigration from Ani to the 17th century, and Khatchatour Kaffayetsi (Khatcha- tour of Kaffa) who chronicled the development of the Armenian communities in Crimea. Some of their manuscripts, which are extraordinary primary sources on the history' of the Armenian presence in the region, are now at the Manuscript Library (Matenadaran) in Armenia while others are in Moscow and Oxford, England.

Literan' works and early research materials based on these and other primary manuscripts, like records kept by the region's Genoese merchants, can also be found in the Holy See of Eichmiadzin in Armenia and the main library of the Armenian Mekhitarist Monastery of San Lazzaro in Venice.

According to these sources, the long history of Armenians in the Crimea has all but been tranquil. There have been ups and downs, but despite the difficulties, Armenians prospered, built dozens of churches, established schools, businesses and other enterprises.

The largest and most active of these Armenian communities was in the city of Kaffa where as early as 1316 there were three Armenian churches—an indication to the size and vitality of the Armenian presence.

According to a rare manuscript under the title of "Djar-endir which was written in Kaffa (Teodossia) in 1305—and presently found in the library of the Mekhitarist Monasters' in Venice—some of the church construction is credited to a local priest by the name of Avetik.

Other sources such as early records of the ruling Genoese merchants of the era, especially those compiled in vears 1290, 1313, 1316, 1414 and 1449 indicate the presence of a large. Armenian Catholic Diocese in Kaffa which controlled the entire city's water distribution rights.

Like in Kaffa, Armenians—according to Russian archeologists—also settled in Kherson in the Ukrainian mainland northwest of the Crimea, and Azov, along the northeastern coast of the Sea of Azov, where records dated 1341 already show that an Armenian church was in existence.

City after city, and town after town, the Armenians spread across the Crimea for hundreds of years building such a strong population base and trading infrastructure that by the first half of

the 15th century some Europeans were already referring to the Crimea as "Armenia maretima", or "Maritime Armenia".

Pope Eugenius IV, in a letter dated 1432 to the Armenian community of Sukhat—today's Staryy Krym—refers to the town as part of Greater Armenia, or, in his own words: "In partibus Armeniae majoris."

His remarks are supported by a September 6, 1455 document written by a group of Genoese merchants in Kaffa stating that "in these lands, the majority of the local population are Armenians".

Similar references are seen in the works of 17th century Armenian writers Tavit Ghrimetsi and Martiros Ghrimetsi who speak of an Armenian renaissance in the Crimea between the 14th and 15th centuries.

How many Armenians lived in the Crimea in that period, and where?

According to Genoese sources, out of Kaffa's 70,000 population, some 46,000 were Armenians. Combined with the other cities and towns of the region, it brought to more than 300,000 the size of the Armenian population in the Crimea, including farmers, peasants, soldiers, traders and noblemen.

The Armenian presence was so strong that a so-called "Northern Diocese" was established to look after the spiritual needs of a region which had dozens of Armenian churches. In Kaffa alone, there were more than 40 Armenian churches.

But life for the large Armenian population was not always easy. They were often caught in the ongoing conflict between Kaffa's powerful merchants from the Italian city state of Genoa and their rivals from Venice who controlled the nearby town of Soughta—much to the advantage of the ruling Mongols and the Golden Horde which heavily taxed the region it had invaded and occupied in 1239.

During this era, the powerful Armenian traders and craftsmen lived mainly in the coastal towns of the Crimea, engaging in business with Genoese partners who had entered into special arrangements with the Mongols under which they in effect "rented" the Black Sea to Genoese naval traffic.

The Crimea was on the crossroads of east-west trade, and the Armenians were very much part of this, importing goods from points as far east as India and China and exporting them to markets in Europe.

Meanwhile, Armenian peasants and farmers—a majority of the Armenian population—established themselves in communities further inland where they tended their vineyards and exported wine.

Early writings, including one dated 1431, about the daily life of Armenians in the era indicate the presence of several benefactors, including one who placed a large sum of gold in a Genoese bank with instructions that interest gained from the amount would be paid yearly to the Saint Anton Monastery in Kaffa.

Another 14th century literary manuscript, which is presently in Etchmiadzin, indicates the involvement of a long list of benefactors in the funding of the work. The list includes "Garabed the weaver, Melikset the goldsmith, Baronshah the shoemaker, Tateos the painter," and others.

Relations between the region's effective Armenian majority and the influential Genoese had its difficulties. There were hardships caused by heavy taxation on every type of work the Armenians were involved in—from fishing to industry, from salt production to private ownership of land and property.

The Armenians were in control of their community life and enjoyed a great deal of religious, cultural and ethnic freedom, producing a large number of scientists, historians, poets, and writers, including Hacob Ghrimetsi who died in 1416, Stepanos Tokhatetsi (1558-1623), and the poet Khasbig (1610- 1686).

But life for the Armenians in the Crimea also involved dealing with the region's various upheavals, the worst of which started with the Turkish Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453 and the closing of the only exit to the Mediterranean from the Black Sea, thus diminishing the strategic trade importance of the peninsula.

In 1475, the Ottomans attacked and captured the Crimea, crushing the once well-established power of the Genoese merchant class—and the Armenians who often depended on them for their livelihood—thus gradually enhancing the role of the ethnic Tatars who were subordinate to the Ottoman Sultan.

Popular Armenian poet and Kaffa resident Gharib Nerces, describing the invasion, laments the burning of Armenian churches and the massive destruction of the city at the hands of the invading Ottoman army.

"They had heavy guns," he wrote. "The city was terrorized, shaken by the thunderous roar of their artillery. Homes and churches were destroyed, children died from fear, and mothers screamed in terror."

According to his account of events, 400 Ottoman ships were involved in the massive invasion as thousands of ground troops came ashore. The battle was lost after five days of resistance only because the city's Tatar population sided with the invading army.

"The invaders rounded up and disarmed Kaffa's defenders. Some were massacred, others forced to convert (into the Islamic faith) while many more were exiled to Constantinople to serve in the Ottoman army," he wrote in one of his works describing the prevailing crisis of the time. According to his writings, an estimated 10,000 Armenian men were forced to serve in the Ottoman army.

During the years that followed the Ottoman invasion and occupation of the Crimea, many Armenians were executed and 16 of Kaffa's 45 Armenian churches and monasteries were converted to mosques, triggering the first serious exodus of Armenians from the region where they had lived for centuries.

Compounding the situation was the famine of 1560 in the Crimea which was caused by a long drought. According to Vertanes, another Armenian historian of the era, "people were forced to sell their personal belongings. They killed and ate domestic animals, even cats and dogs."

Occupation, famine, persecution and the loss of the Crimea's economic luster had its toll on the Armenian communities and the lives they had built for themselves over the centuries.

In the years that followed, the Armenians barely survived the shock. Their numbers were diminished and so too was their strength, but others stayed on and a new revival was witnessed in the second part of the 16th century as the Crimea regained part of its maritime status with increased trade through the region between east and west.

First hand documents, especially by Armenian historian Martiros Ghrimetsi, describe the arrival of a new wave of Armenian immigrants from Armenia, Turkey and Persia to enhance the beleaguered communities in the Crimea.

But even that was short-lived, and another—and crippling—exodus was to follow after the Crimea fell under effective Russian hegemony in 1774 as a result of the Kuchuk Kainarja Treaty which forced the Ottomans to accept the independence of the ethnic Tatar Khanate of the Crimea.

In an apparent attempt to further crush the economy before the total annexation of the region by Russia in 1784, the Armenians were encouraged by Catherine the Great to leave and establish their own community in New Nakhichevan, on the outskirts of Rostov-na-Donu, only a few miles from the northeastern shores of the Sea of Azov where Armenian soldiers had first gone in 1065 to defend the outer fringes of the Byzantine Kingdom.

On July 18, August 20 and September 28, 1778, an estimated 12,000 Crimean Armenians left their homes and began new lives in what is today known as Nor Nakhichevan on the outskirts of Rostov-na-Donu in the northern Caucasus.

The loss of one community led to the birth of another, and in August this year Armenian "pilgrims" from many parts of the world will get a glimpse of not only the Crimea's ancient Armenian heritage, but the re-birth of new communities in a part of the world which was once called "Maritime Armenia."

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2. The Rich History of Armenians in Ukraine - March 1, 2022 by Hagop Vartivarian

https://mirrorspectator.com/2022/03/01/an-overview-of-armenians-in-ukraine/

Ukrainian Armenians demonstrate on Armenian Genocide issue

MAHWAH, N.J. — According to the official Ukrainian census, 99,894 Armenians were permanently settled in Ukraine in 2001, not counting the large number of workers coming from Armenia and other republics to earn their livelihood. As a result of the precarious political situation in the Caucasus region in the post-Soviet period, the country's Armenian population has almost doubled by now, again not including a very large number of temporary Armenian immigrant laborers. Today, the Armenians of Ukraine compose the fifth largest Armenian diaspora community in the world.

Historical Overview

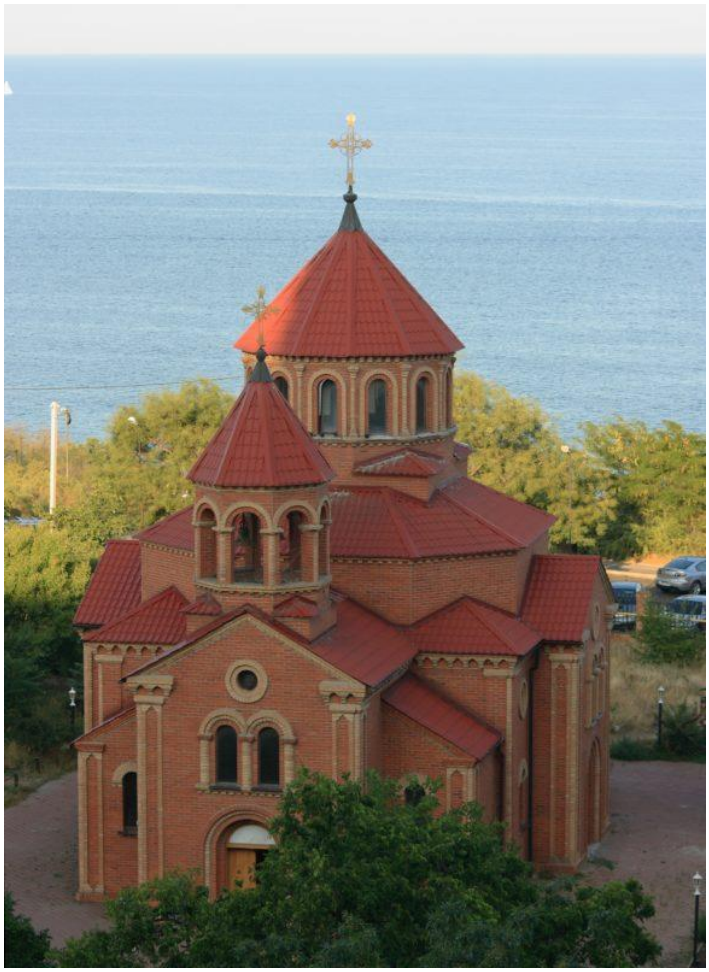
Armenians were first mentioned in Ukraine during the Kievan Rus period. In the tenth century, individual Armenian merchants and craftsmen worked in the palaces of various Ruthenian princes. However, large numbers of Armenian immigrants fled the Seljuk invasions and settled in southwestern Ukraine in the 11th century after the fall of the capital Ani, generally in the areas of Caffa (Feodosia), Sudak and Solkat in the Crimean peninsula. As a result, the peninsula began to be called Arminia Maritima [Maritime Armenia]. This number is recorded as having increased in the 12th-15th centuries after the conquest of the Mongol tribes. A smaller number of Armenian immigrants settled in central Ukraine, including Kiev, as well as in the western part of the country, near Potolia and Kalijina, near the city of Lviv, which in 1267 became the headquarters of the Armenian Church.

Feodosiya's Armenian Church of Archangels Michael and Gabriel, 15th century.

Restored in the 20th century. Exterior.

At the end of the 13th century, when the Armenian population migrated from the Crimea to the Polish-Ukrainian border, it brought with it the Armeno-Kipchak language, which until the 16th and 17th centuries was used within the Armenian communities of Lviv and Kamianets-Potilsk, which today is called Ukraine.

After the fall of Crimea to Ottoman Turkey in 1475, the Armenians of Crimea again took up the staff of exile and left Crimea, settling in the northwest of the country, where there was already a flourishing national life. The community gradually became integrated into the local Polish population, while maintaining the Armenian Catholic Church.



Odessa's St. Gregory the Illuminator Church

In the 14th century, Crimea fell under the influence of the Russian Empire, which encouraged the Crimean Armenians to settle in Russia. and large numbers of Armenians moved to Rostov-on-Don. Twenty years later, the Russians occupied the peninsula and a large number of new immigrant Turkish-Armenians settled there and formed new colonies.

The Armenian church in Yalta, Crimea

During World War II, in 1944, Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians and Tatars were deported from the Crimea as "anti-Soviet" elements. It was not until the 1960s that they were allowed to return to their homeland. During the Soviet era, Armenians came with other nationalities of Soviet rule to work in heavy industry factories in the eastern part of Ukraine.

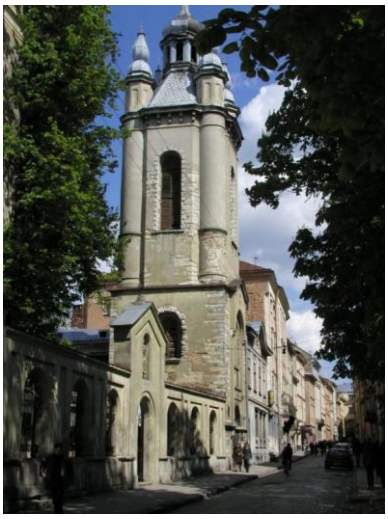
The Armenians of Ukraine Today

The largest number of Armenians living in Ukraine is concentrated in the Donetsk Oblast – about 16,000 Armenians. There are Armenian communities in Dnipro, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kiev, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhia and Odessa, where the great Ukrainian-Armenian artist Sargis Ortyan spent most of his life. The city of Lviv is considered to be the "spiritual center" of the Armenians, becoming the headquarters of dioceses of the Armenian Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches. However, after the Second World War, the Catholic Church did not use its church there, which remained under the authority of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Armenians continued to constitute a historical presence in Crimea until 2014, when the Russians occupied Crimea. Nine thousand Armenians make up 0.43% of the population of the region and are concentrated in large provinces such as Sevastopol. It should be noted that the great sea painter Hovhannes Aivazovsky lived and created in the city of Feodosia in the Crimean peninsula. Half of the Armenians are Russian-speaking, 43 percent are Armenian-speaking and the remaining 7 percent are Ukrainian-speaking.

The History of the Armenian Church of Lviv

St. Mariam is a small Armenian church built in 1363-1370 with the help of merchants from Caffa. It is said that it was built in the style of Ani Cathedral. In 1437 it was enlarged with different sections, but today only the southern part remains. After the fire of the city in 1527 left it in ruins, a new church was built in 1571 with a new stone structure. From the 17th century until 1945, the church was owned by the Armenian Catholic leadership of Lviv. During the Soviet era, the Armenian Catholic Church experienced difficulties.



Lviv's Armenian cathedral

Prior to the visit of Pope John Paul II, the local Ukrainian authorities handed over the cathedral to the Armenian Apostolic Church, on the condition that the Armenian Catholic and Apostolic Churches use it as a place of worship. The Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church was established in 1997 in Lviv.

The visit of Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II

On May 18, 2003, the cathedral was reconsecrated by Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II. The ceremony was attended by the Speaker of the Armenian National Assembly Armen Khachatryan, former President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk, the notables of the Armenian community of Ukraine, French-Armenian singer Charles Aznavour and his son, actor Armen Jigarkhanyan, and the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Ukraine Hrachya Silvanyan, as well as the representative of the Patriarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Augustin (Markevich).

The church has been undergoing renovations since 2009. Poland has been financially helpful to the renovation work conducted under Polish-Ukrainian supervision.

(Translated from the original Armenian.)

3. 650 years of Armenians in Poland, 1367-2017

https://skarbnica.ormianie.pl/en.php?idw=207

The privilege of king Kazimierz is written on parchment (dimensions of 30.5 × 16.5 cm). It is bearing the majestic royal stamp, wrung in white wax with a silk string dyed in yellow and red. Stamp shows the king on the throne with a scepter and an apple in his hand, curtain supported

by two angels in the background and the coat of arms of Kujawy region at his feet. The rim of the stamp had an insription, whose remnants remained to day.

The privilege of 1367 years was stored in the archives of the council of Armenian elders of Lvov with great care because of its importance to the community. This was reiterated by successive Polish monarchs. Only ten years after issuing it, a separate document confirmed it, issued by Wladyslaw Jagiello (1388). In 1641 it was presented in the royal office in Warsaw and entered into the Royal Register, and in 1731 - to the book of the Armenian nation in Lvov. Excerpts from the priviledge were first published by bishop Adam Naruszewicz in his History of the Polish nation, published in Warsaw in 1803 (Volume 4, p. 186).

After the liquidation of the Armenian self-government, including the council of Armenian elders of Lvov by Austria after the first partition of Poland, the priviledge of Kazimierz the Great she was stored in the archives of the Armenian Catholic cathedral. Bishop Franciszek Ksawery Abgaro-Zachariasiewicz was using it in 1842, while writing History of Polish Armenians. Then it dissapeared. It was found nearly 100 years later, in unusual circumstances. An inhabitant of Lvov bought an old desk on sale. When he was overwieving the desk at home, he saw a hiding place in it, with a document in Latin hidden inside. It was the privilege granted to the Armenian Church in 1367. In 1934 the document was bought by dr. Alexander Czołowski, director of the city archives, from the finder and the finding was described the the Armenian magazine "Gregoriana" (Precious monument, 1935, pp. 10-12). Wladyslaw Jagiello's document also survived.

The date when the privilege of 1367 was published is related to a particular and symbolic coincidence. The priviledge mentiones St. Agnes, a Roman virgin tortured to death about 304, usually displayed with a lamb, as an attribute of her holiness. Heraldic sign of Armenian communes in Poland, which began to emerge and grow from the mid-fourteenth century, also became a lamb, called lamb with labarum. Therefore, a lamb is referred to by Katarzyna Agopsowicz in an anniversary symbol designed by specially for the celebration of the 650th anniversary of the Armenian diaspora in Poland.

Andrzej A. Zięba

→ The Cultural Heritage of Armenian Traveler Simeon Lehatsi [Սիմէոն Լեհացի] from Poland to Ottoman Empire: Contribution to the History of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth - Publication at Faculty of Arts | 2020

https://explorer.cuni.cz/publication/592241?lang=en&query=Ottoman+empire

Armenian presence in the territory of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, well described by numerous sources, has made a significant contribution to the history of all above mentioned regions. During the whole 17th century (between years 1599-1699), countries in the immediate vicinity of the Ottoman border experienced major upheavals.

The chain of fortress, their defences and conquest as well as seizing captives and dragging them off (direction south) to Black Sea ports; all these attributes were integral part of notion of borderland, not excluding the emergence of stereotypical images and myths. Lehasdan – Լեհաստան (Poland) played a crucial role in Armenian imagery as the synonym for land full of plenty and it determined for several centuries the way in which Armenian community was seen. Within cultural orbit of Eastern Europe and Black Sea region, Armenian merchants were socially visible as international traders, translators, mediators and negotiators.

Their ability to cross borders determined the perception of Orientalism itself - even if it could be described as a highly stereotypized category, the figure of Armenian merchant foreshadowed the image of Oriental merchant as such. This stereotypical image served to mirror trends in literature and art in general, especially in the period of Renaissance and then Enlightement.

Central Europe represents a specific case, because here the figure of Armenian merchant could not be understood exclusively within connotations of alterity and idealized notion of Orient. On

the contrary, Armeniansheld the role of long-established and well known community, which itself crossed borders and entered into contact with the category of Orient.

Armenian perception of Orient or their description of Commonwealth thus show some attributes, characteristic for border identity - authors write simultaneously from their position of a foreigner and a local, other and native in the same time.

→ https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/352089/edition/324386?language=en

4. The Armenians in Moldova

https://agbu.org/armenians-hungary-moldova/armenians-moldova

From Near Extinction to a New Beginning

Moldova is not new on the map of the Armenian Diaspora, but despite its deep roots, the small Armenian community was dormant and near extinction until the breakup of the Soviet Union and the birth of an independent Moldova in 1991.

"I came here in 1957 as an officer of the Soviet Army, and in all the years I lived here, I had no contacts with other Armenians. I had no Armenian friends," says Ashot Hovhannes Assatourovitch, an 80 year-old retired army officer.

"Getting organized as an ethnic group was not accepted because it was seen as a form of nationalism. Our lifestyles were dictated by a system which had no room for national minorities," he said.

Moldova, which is a little larger than the State of Maryland, has a population of 4.4 million, of which only 64 percent are Moldovans. Ethnic Russians constitute 14 percent of the population along with an equal percentage of Ukrainians followed by a number of smaller ethnic groups like the Armenians.

It was this ethnic diversity that led to the birth of the self-proclaimed Trans-Dniester Moldovan Republic, where more than 60 percent of the population is Russian and Ukrainian. The breakaway republic has no international recognition, but nevertheless has a profound impact on Moldova as a whole because of its geographic location.

The breakup triggered a costly civil war in 1992 which ended in a ceasefire agreement that is now monitored by a commission made up of Russian, Moldovan and Trans-Dniester troops.

It is through this now-autonomous region in eastern Moldova that all fuel and gas pipelines pass—at an extra cost to the central government.

Still very much a predominantly agricultural based society, Moldova has no fuel and energy reserves, and consequently power outages are an almost daily occurrence.

A large billboard at Chisinau airport gives the following explanation:

"Energy is expensive! Maybe you can afford it, but Moldova cannot. Please save."

The energy crisis is further complicated by increasing fuel costs and a slow moving transition to a market economy which is primarily focused on the privatization of both rural and urban state owned enterprises.

Hundreds of factories have been closed in recent years while others are struggling to survive. Agricultural production has also slowed down due to aging machinery and the difficulties of reaching international markets.

While there are no reliable figures for unemployment, driving through the country creates a picture of a society which is constantly improvising to meet the challenges of the shift from state to private management.

Kiosks, small shops and open markets are everywhere, often replacing the once government-owned large department stores which were the pride of the old communist regime.

"People are slowly learning to take care of themselves," a Western diplomat explained.

"You can find a lot of highly trained people in the market place selling fruits and vegetables or other supplies in the kiosks around the city and countryside," he said.

For the thousands of Armenians who live in Moldova, the changing times have also meant a change in their fortunes.

One-time factory managers are now involved in business, mainly with the former Soviet republics. Retirees often depend on financial help from fellow Armenians and even charitable organizations who have stepped in to fill the gap between meager pensions and the soaring cost of living.

Assatourovitch, now a pensioner, was born in Karabakh and was an infant when the territory was annexed to Azerbaijan by communist dictator Joseph Stalin. He joined the Soviet Army as a teenager, studied at the Moscow Military Academy and served in the Soviet Army for 35 years. The longest portion of his military career was his service in Moldova which he calls home.

On a recent Sunday, Assatourovitch and fellow veterans, including 72-year- old Arshalouys Norhadian, gathered at Chisinau's only Armenian restaurant to reminisce the "old days" and discuss the future activities of the rapidly growing Armenian community.

Realizing that his first name triggered looks of disbelief, Norhadian explained that he was named after the first child of his parents, a baby girl, who died soon after birth.

"My mother was a very religious person. I was told she promised God that if she were to have another child, he or she would be named Arshalouys, which in Armenian means sunrise and is almost never given to a boy," he said.

Norhadian was born in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to parents who had moved there for work from Armenia.

"Many of us here were vagabonds. The Soviet Union was our country, and we moved from one city to another. I came here in 1952 as an engineer, but thank God, I had the opportunity to be assigned to the position of Deputy Director of the Armenian railroad and lived in Yerevan for ten years," he said.

Returning to Chisinau after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Norhadian immediately went about finding other Armenians.

"The change was very dramatic. Suddenly, hundreds of Armenians who had lived here all their lives were appearing out of nowhere. It was no longer a problem to belong to an ethnic group," he said.

One of the first people he came in contact with was Andranik Petrossian, an industrialist and longtime resident of the Moldovan capital who was later to become the President of the Armenian Community Council of Moldova.

"As individuals, Armenians have always been very respected here. At one point, the Assistant First Secretary of the Moldovan Communist Party was Armenian—a man by the name of Desmijian" Norhadian said.

Starting with a core group of less than a dozen, the Community Council has become a magnet, attracting Armenians from across the country.

"You cannot imagine what freedom does and means," Petrossian says.

In the short few years since its birth, the Community Council has organized chapters in most Moldovan cities, reclaimed the three remaining Armenian churches which were shut down during the communist era, started Armenian language classes and helped launch an Armenian Women's Association which is active in social work.

Several hundred Armenians have already joined the Council as dues paying members, and organized nation-wide elections for its governing body.

"Our churches are now open for the first time since the 1940's. A young priest from Yerevan is already here, and our old traditions now at least have a good chance to survive the test of time," Petrossian said.

A group of volunteers are busy organizing Armenian classes at one of the city's public schools whose headmaster is an ethnic Armenian. The old Armenian Church, which was built nearly 200 years ago—or to be more exact, in 1804—has been renovated, the missing bell restored, and opened for services.

Its adjacent building now serves as the headquarters of the Armenian Community Council which plans to expand the premises to house a Community Center to encourage the cultural activities of the thousands of Armenians that live in the city.

According to recent "unofficial" statistics, the pre-Soviet era community of 5,000 has swelled to nearly 30,000 after the arrival of new immigrants from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh.

"We are getting stronger every day," says Vinera Zakaryan, a music teacher from Stepanakert who founded the Women's Association after moving to Chisinau in 1993.

"I felt the absence of an organized Armenian community on my own skin. We had nowhere to turn to for help. We had no money and no friends. I don't want to see the same thing happen to others who come after us," she said.

Zakaryan has mobilized a group of close to 100 Armenian women who work as volunteers, helping new immigrants with jobs, taking care of the elderly, visiting the sick in hospitals and providing the community with the much-needed cultural activities it lacked during the communist era.

In recent months, the group has completed the landscaping work around Chisinau's St. Mary's Armenian Church, organized several fundraising events, including a concert by a visiting Armenian singer in one of the city's main halls.

"The men are too busy with other things, therefore it is up to us to reach out to the community." she said.

The Armenian Women's Association has already been recognized as an independent organization and invited to attend an international women's conference in the Moldovan capital.

"Imagine the joy when we got the invitation letter. The greater visibility we have, the better for the Armenian community," she said.

But activity is not confined to Chisinau.

In the Moldovan city of Beltsy, 100 kilometers northwest of the capital, another small group of Armenians are busy reclaiming the community's old heritage.

Yervant Kojoyan, who settled in Beltsy 18 years ago, said one of the community's first tasks was to get back the Armenian Church which was once used as a picture gallery.

"This church has not functioned as a religious sanctuary for 45 years. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of the independent state of Moldova, the church, which was built around 1904 on the site where the first Armenian sanctuary was built in 1816, was given to the city's small Catholic community.

"It took a lot of negotiating for the Armenian community to take it back— but on condition that we share it, at least for a while, with the Catholics," Kojoyan says.

Since the re-opening of the church, dozens of Armenian families have come forward because "they now have something Armenian they can identify with."

According to community sources, some 4,500 Armenians live in the Beltsy region of Moldova.

Across Moldova, the story repeats itself. Armenians from different backgrounds, old and young, are re-grouping in a community which first began several centuries ago.

"A lot of time was lost during the communist era. We can be an asset for Armenia, and it is our duty to organize and strengthen our institutions," Petrossian says.

At Chisinau's Armenian restaurant, the conversation often drifts back to the "old days", but only as a reminder that the future is what needs attention.

5. History of the Armenian community in Romania

https://www.uniuneaarmenilor.ro/the-history-of-the-armenian-community-in-romania/

The earliest proof of the presence of Armenians on Romanian land refers to the 10th century. Hungarian chronicles Simon de Kezai and Thuroczi, say that during the reign of duke Géza and of King Ștefan (997-1038), in the kingdom, settled along with Polish, Greeks, Spanish and others are a great number of Armenians who received privileges and noble degrees. By 1060, a small Armenian colony had been established in Moldavia. It comprised of immigrants that had fled the city of Ani, the capital city of Armenia at the time, were a big earthquake struck happened.

The Armenians who arrived in Moldavia were merchants and craftsmen; most of them wealthy, who, thanks to the privileges they obtained and the development of commerce in which they had a great impact on, brought a great deal of prosperity in Moldavia. **Nicolae Iorga**, a great Romanian scholar once said: “Principality of Moldavia was created through commerce, and those who did commerce became contributors in the creation of the national state in Moldavia. Therefore Armenians are, in some way, the parents of Moldavia”.

The charter by Alexandru cel Bun (1401)

The most important document, which can be considered as a ‘birth certificate’ for the Armenians settled on Romanian land, is the charter (*hrisov* in Romanian) dated 30th of July 1401,through which the Moldavian ruler **Alexandru cel Bun** (1400 – 1431, *Alexander the Good*) allows Armenians to have their own Bishop, his seat being in Suceava city, the capital fortress of Moldavia. He later issues another charter, dated 8th October 1407, through which he calls for Armenian merchants from Poland to contribute to the prosperity of the Moldavian cities in exchange for no custom duties and other local fees. About 700 Armenians settle in

Suceava city and another 3000 in seven Moldavian cities: Suceava, Botoşani, Iaşi, Galaţi, Vaslui, Dorohoi and Hotin. During the reign of **Ştefan cel Mare** (1457-1504, *Ştefan the Great*), an important figure in the Romanian history, around 10,000 Armenians settle in Moldavia, therefore the total number of Armenians on Moldavian land being around 20,000 people. 'The Armenian Carts', starting from Moldavian cities, carried cattle, cereals and a variety of cheeses to Europe and the Orient, bringing in return carpets, embroideries, silk and spices. We can find a good defining line in regard to Armenians in the writings of the Romanian scholar Nicolae Iorga: "Generally, during those times there was no Moldavian fair, therefore, commerce, without the Armenians."

In Transylvania, a document dated 1281 by **Ladislau IV** mentions Terra Armenorum and Monasterium Armenorum which belonged to Armenians. As for the existence of Armenians in Transylvania, the most notable event was the establishment of **Armenopolis** city ('Gherla' today) in 1700. The city was built near the **Gherla** village. The Armenians had been living in the area since 1672 and having king **Leopold I**'s (1657 – 1705) approval, they built the city (Armenopolis). The approval came at a cost of 25000 florins for the land alone. The design project of Armenopolis city was carried out by architect Alexanian. Around 3000 Armenians settled in this city which became an important manufacturing center in Transylvania.

Bishop Oxendius Vărzărescu (1655-1715)

The second city in Transylvania, where Armenians settled, is **Elisabetopolis** (**Dumbrăveni** today). An Armenian colony existed here since 1658. In 1799, through an imperial ordinance, Elisabetopolis and Armenopolis became 'free royal cities'. The Armenians living in this region, which at the time was ruled by the Habsburg Empire, became Catholic, under the Episcopate of **Oxendius Vărzărescu**. They received privileges and the right to have an autonomous administration. Also in Transylvania, Armenians lived in the following cities: Frumoasa, Sibiu, Oradea, Bistrița, Târgu Secuiesc, Sfântu Gheorghe.

It is remarkable that in those cities which had a major Armenian population, the locals would choose the mayor and the council of elders, but Armenians had their own court where the laws of judging were the first Armenian civil code by Mkhitar Gosh (13th century). Emperor **Franz**

Joseph (1848 – 1916) was once quoted as saying "Armenians are very important for the commerce".

Ioan Vodă Armenian (the Brave), Prince of Moldavia (1572-1574)

In Wallachia (*Țara Românească* or *Muntenia* in Romanian), Armenians arrived later, around 14th-15th centuries. Their presence was recorded in the cities: București, Târgoviște, Pitești, Craiova, Giurgiu and later in Dobrogea. A charter by ruler **Mihai Racoviță**, dated 15th February 1742, allowed the Armenians in Bucharest to build their own church on Săpunarilor Street. In 1820, through the ruler **Alexandru Șuțu-Vodă**'s *Carte de reorganizare a breslei* (Book of Reorganizing the Guild*)* Armenians received the permission to choose four trustees and a Guild leader to oversee the goods orders and settle any disputes between Armenian merchants. This eventually led to the creation of specific civil institutions to deal with Armenian affairs and manage relations with the Romanian administration.

In the sites they settled, the Armenians built their own churches. Some of them still exist today; among which are: in Moldavia: **Hagigadar Monastery** (Fulfilling of the wishes, 1512) and **Zamca Monastery** (1606), **Saint Simeon Church** (1513) and **Holy Cross Church** (1521) in Suceava; **Saint Mary Church** (1350), **Holy Trinity Church** (1795) and **Annunciation Church** (1884) in Botoșani, **Saint Mary Church** (1395) in Iași, **Saint Mary Church** (1609) in Roman, **Saint Mary Church** (1825) in Târgu Ocna, **Saint George Church** (1733) and **Saint Mary Church** (1780) in Focșani, **Saint Mary Church** (1858) in Galați; in Wallachia: **Saint Mary Church** (1872) in Brăila, **Saint Gregory the Illuminator Church** (1885) in Tulcea, **Saint Mari Church** (1880) in Constanța, **Saint John The Baptist Church** (1852) in Pitești. The Armenian **Cathedral Saints Archangels Michael and Gabriel** in Bucharest opened in 1915. It was built on the same site where another Armenian church existed in the 17th century. Its architectural style bears resemblance to the iconic **Etchmiadzin Cathedral** in Armenia.

In Transylvania, all the religious Armenian sites are Catholic: The **Holy Annunciation Church** known as **Solomon Church** (1724) and **Holy Trinity Cathedral** (1776) in Gherla, **Saint Elisabeth Cathedral** (1850) in Dumbrăveni, **Saint Mary Church** (1733) in Gheorgheni and **Holy Trinity Church** (1785) in Frumoasa. Throughout the centuries, there have been Armenian churches which were either destroyed or given to the Romanians, other ethnicities or religious cults due to a decrease number of Armenians living in those areas.

The first primer in Armenian

An important element for the survival of Armenians' identity is its language. The first wave of immigrants spoke the Armenian that was spoken in the Armenian land. This later changed by adoption of words from the Romanian language and other ethnic groups that were living in Romania such as the Polish, Turks and Tatars. This led to the birth of both the Moldavia and Transylvania Armenian dialects. However, these dialects were short lived and the main dialect at the beginning of the 20th century was Western Armenian, predominantly spoken by the immigrants who survived the Genocide by the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian language was kept alive and passed on through schools which were usually built near Armenian churches and monasteries.

The first Armenian ABC book *Cheul cetirii literelor mesrobiene* (The Key of Reading the Mesrobian Letters) was printed in Iași, at 'Albina' printing house, in 1847, under the supervision of **Gheorghe Asachi**, an important Romanian scholar of Armenian origin. Also, *Dogma creștinească după credința Sfintei Biserici armenești* (Christian Dogma According to the Faith of the Armenian Holy Church) was printed at this printing house.

In 1911 (Bucharest) began the publishing of 'Masis', a collection of children's literature. In Frumoasa (1938), the scholar **Mgrdici Bodurian** published, among other titles, an 'Armenian Encyclopedia'.

The work of the most important Romanian poet **Mihai Eminescu** was translated into Armenian, mostly by the historian and orientalist **H. Dj. Siruni**. This includes the well-known masterpiece 'The Evening Star' (Luceafărul).

The Armenian press has been very active over the last 100 years. More than 30 journals and newspapers with important roles in the existence of the Armenian community have been published. The first Armenian publication, in Hungarian language called 'Armenia' was published in Gherla between 1887 and 1907, under the supervision of the historian **Kristoff Szongott**. Later, a long list of publications followed, in both Armenian and Romanian, some of

them still exist today like 'Ararat' magazine – established in 1924 by journalist **Vartan Mestugean** – and 'Nor Ghiank' magazine (since 1950). Today they are published at the Union of Armenians in Romania location.

About the remarkable individuals of the Armenian community from Romania you can find out more by clicking **here**.

Dirair Mardichian

The Union of Armenians from Romania (UAR) was established on 25th January 1919, with the aim of helping the Armenian refugees that fled the Ottoman Empire after the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

Grigore Trancu–Iași was the honorary president of the Union, later succeeded by Armenag Manissalian, who devoted a great deal of his time helping over 10,000 Armenian refugees obtain the Romanian citizenship. UAR played a special role during the interwar period by supporting the opening of the Consulate of the first Armenian Republic in Bucharest in 1920.

Datev Hagopian

It financially supported Armenian schools and churches. It played a great role in bringing Armenian orphans during and after the Genocide (1915-1923) and housing them in an orphanage that UAR built in **Strunga**, a settlement in Iași County. After the occupation of Romania by the Soviet army, UAR ceased to exist. The only institution officially acknowledged by the Romanian state was the Armenian Church, represented by the Archiepiscopate of The Armenian Church in Romania. During the communist period, the Armenian community continued its activities, having the Armenian Church at its center. Between 1960 and 2010, Archbishop **Dirair Mardichian** occupied the highest rank in the Armenian Church of Romania and Bulgaria. Since 2010, Bishop **Datev Hagopian** is the the Primate of Romanian Diocese of the Armenian Church.

Armenian Community Post-1989

After the 1989 Romanian Revolution, the Armenian community got together and re-established the 'Union of Armenians from Romania'. On 8th February 1990, through a court decision, the UAR was established as a legal entity with the aim of preserving the cultural and spiritual heritage, and promoting the interests of the Armenian community in Romania. Shortly after its re-birth, more branches of UAR opened across Romania.

UAR has consistently been represented in the Romanian legislative assembly. In the Temporary Council of National Union (2nd February – 20th May 1990) UAR was represented by **Varujan Vosganian**, **Sergiu Selian** and **Nşan Bogdan Căuş**.

Varujan Vosganian

Between 1990 and 1996, Varujan Vosganian, elected president of the Union of Armenians from Romania, with a PhD in Economy and a graduate of the Faculty of Mathematics, was elected as UAR deputy in the Romanian Parliament. After 1996, UAR had a double presence in the Romanian governance: while V. Vosganian became senator representative of the Uniunea Forțelor de Dreapta party (*Right Wing Forces Union*) and the president of the Budget-Finance Committee of the Senate, still holding the presidency of UAR, **Varujan Pambuccian**, university lecturer at the Faculty of Mathematics of Bucharest, was elected as UAR deputy. In

the 2000- 2004 and 2004-2008 legislatures, V Pambuccian was elected president of the Committee of High Technology in the Romanian Chamber, a committee established by him which still functions today. Between 2006 and 2008, V. Vosganian was chosen Minister of Economy and Commerce, during prime-minister Călin Popescu Tăriceanu's cabinet. Starting April 2007 he took over the Ministry of Finance as well. During 2012-2013, V. Vosganian became for the second time Minister of Economy in prime-minister Victor Ponta's cabinet.

Varujan Pambuccian

UAR has always obtained more votes in elections for the national minorities than the electoral threshold. Since 1992, UAR has run the presidency of the National Minorities Group (excluding the Hungarian minority) in the Chamber of Deputies. After the legislative elections in 2016, V. Pambuccian reconfirmed his mandate of UAR deputy, V. Vosganian won a mandate of deputy as ALDE party representative in Iași County and **Lucian Eduard Simion**, UAR president of the UAR Tulcea branch, won a mandate of deputy from the PSD party, in Tulcea County.

UAR's activities and its two representatives in the Romanian Parliament have helped Armenians from Romania earn rights and highlight their presence among the Armenian Diaspora. UAR benefits from annual financial support from the budgetary law. Therefore, the community enjoys publishing of Armenian language books and running its weekend schools which are part of the official national educational network.

Through the Romanian Constitution and Electoral Law, UAR has the right to take part in local and Parliamentary elections. To this day, UAR has won a deputy position at every election. By tradition, the national minorities in Romania group choose as their group representative the UAR deputy. UAR has used its influence and promoted prefects and sub-prefects among its members in counties where the Armenian community has an important presence. The Romanian State provided financial support for renovating Armenian religious sites as well as funding cultural and religious activities. The leader of the Armenian Diocese in Romania and the Armenian priests are paid by the Romanian State for the services they provide to the community. The leader of the Armenian Diocese in Romania has a diplomatic status.

The monthly publication 'ARARAT' surfaced again after 1990. It used to exist in the interwar times as well. It is printed in Romanian language. The editors-in-chief, have been **Arșag Bogdan Căuș**, **Bedros Horasangian** and currently **Mihai Stepan-Cazazian**.

'Nor Ghiank' (New Life) is also a monthly publication, both in Armenian and Romanian language. Once a weekly magazine, it is had the most longevity in the Armenian Diaspora; enjoying an uninterrupted publication since the 1950s.
The Ararat Publishing House was established in 1994, under the leadership of the writer **Ştefan Agopian**. He worked along with **Mihai Pascu**, **Emanuel Actarian** and the current director **Sirun Terzian**. To this day, more than 300 books have been printed at the *Ararat* Publishing house.

When the Armenian Sunday School of Bucharest 'Misakian-Kesimian' reopened, the Armenian youth got the opportunity to continue learning the Armenian language and participate in cultural activities. Some of the activities include singing and theatre performances which mostly took place at the end of the school term or on certain religious celebration days. The school initially started as a Sunday school, but later extended to include Saturdays, due to a rise in the number of students. All of these activities – educational and cultural, were successfully conducted by **Ulnia Blănaru-Maganian**. For each of these events, the choir was accompanied by the pianist **Carmen Asfadurian**. Over time, the cultural activities began to diversify to enable the children to attend more classes such as: Dance and Stage Movement with **Izabela Bostan** and **Florin Kevorchian**, Technical drawing with **Paruhi Tepelichian**, History with **Siran Navrouzian**, Computer with **Mirela Pambuccian** and Armenian Dance with **Bela Martikian**. When **Bela Martikian** started the Dance classes, the dance group was called 'Hrestag'. Eventually, along with its members, the group renamed itself to 'Vartavar'. When **Ulnia Blănaru-Maganian** decided to stop her activity, **Arpiar Sahaghian** took over. Following, for a while, **Narine Bogdan-Căuș** taught Western Armenian. Today, **Arshaluis Paronian** teaches Eastern Armenian. For those Romanian speakers willing to learn Western Armenian language, **Ulnia Blănaru-Maganian** wrote the book 'Armenian Language' which can be found at the Publishing House *Ararat*. For those interested in the Eastern Armenian language, at the same publishing house you can find the book 'Learning Armenian Without a Teacher', signed by **Arsen Arzumanyan**.

The students of the Armenian School in Bucharest have had the chance to participate in different inter-ethnic festivals (Sighișoara, Sibiu, Tulcea, Cluj-Napoca, Bacău) where they presented the Armenian traditions and heritage. Along with the **Vartavar** dance group from Bucharest which had representations in various locations, including Armenia and Greece, the Armenian community is proud to be represented by dance groups in the country who, as well, have performed at various festivals: Hayakaghak (Gherla), Siamanto (Iași) and Nairi (Constanta).

With the support of the UAR, the students got the opportunity to visit Armenia through the *Ari Tun* and *The Summer Armenian Language School* programs, coordinated by the Ministry of Diaspora in Armenia. They also took part in the **Armenian Language Classes** in Venice, in voluntary programs through **Birthright Armenia** / **Depi Hayk** organization and internships programs through AGBU organization. Some of the Armenian youngsters choose to be students of the highly recommended Armenian School Melkonian in Nicosia.

Since 1993, 'Union of Armenians in Romania Awards' (here) has been awarded to Armenians from Romania who brought positive contributions to various sectors of life, thus sustaining the

prestige of the Armenian community in Romania. The UAR supports activities of both the Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic Churches.

UAR organized the popular **Armenian Street Festival** (here) in 2013-2015, 2017-2019 and 2023-2024. The festival sees attendance of around 10,000 people soaking up the atmosphere of the 3 day event. The festival consists of cultural performances, live music, Armenian cuisine, Armenian calligraphy and walks in the Armenian neighborhood. Some of the attendees are the Greeks, Jews and Rroma minorities.
In 2012 and in 2013, The Union of Armenians from Romania, in collaboration with the National Village Museum "Dimitrie Gusti" from Bucharest successfully organized **Armenian Cultural Days** in Bucharest.

FSA 2014

FSA 2018

In 2012, the Armenian Cultural Centre opened in Bucharest. It has since played host to numerous important guests from both Romania and Armenia. Among the guests were: **Hayk**

Demoyan the Director of the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute of Yerevan, Historian **Claude Mutafian** and Armenia's ex-prime-minister **Vazgen Manukyan**. Similarly, in the past, cultural evening events by *Ararat* Magazines were held at the Dudian Library. Some of the discussion topics were: *Eminescu and the Armenians* (Mihai Eminescu is considered the greatest Romanian poet), *Acterian family and the Romanian culture*, *Anda Călugăreanu* (Romanian singer of Armenian origin), activity and work of the great Baritone *David Ohanesian* and the similarities of Romanian and Armenian folk music. Among the guests were: Actors **Ion Caramitru**, **Dan Puric**, **Florian Pittiș**, Poet **Ana Blandiana**, Singer-songwriters **Tudor Gheorghe** and **Doru Stănculescu**, Scholars **Alexandru Paleologu** and **Barbu Brezianu**, Historian **Andrei Pippidi** and Academician **Răzvan Theodorescu**.

Some of the cultural manifestations at Dudian Library are the book premieres for the books published at *Ararat* Publishing House or other publishing houses where books on Armenian subjects were published. To be mentioned that some of these book premieres take place in different Romanian bookstores and universities from Bucharest and other Romanian cities, as well.

An invaluable book worth mentioning albeit not produced at Ararat Publishing House is 'Armenian Artistic Heritage in Romania and Between Exilic Nostalgia and Cultural Integration' written by an assistant professor **Vlad Bedros** from the National University of Arts in Bucharest. A must have photo album, which represents the Armenian community of Romania, is one by **Andreea Tănase**, 'Armenians in Romania' (here). As the popularity of Armenians grew, some students enlisted the support of the Armenian community to write their Master's thesis and/or PhDs on Armenian related subject and consequently, books were written and published on the matter.

Each year on 24th of April, the Armenian communities in Romania organize events for commemorating the Armenian Genocide which took place in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 to 1923. In the Romanian Parliament, Varujan Vosganian and Varujan Pambuccian always remember to mark this day, doing a permanent lobby for Romania to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Organised scientific conferences, exhibitions, concerts, summer schools, youth camps and many more activities take place in Armenian communities across Romanian cities.

To learn more about the activities of the Armenian community, check out the online monthly newspaper of the 'Armenian Union of Romania', *Ararat* (**www.araratonline.com**), in Romanian, and *Nor Ghiank* (New Life), in Armenian.

Translated by **Mariam-Hasmig Danielian**, **Armen Kanikanian** (UK) and **Ashley Juskalian** (USA).

6. Diaspora - Armenians in Transylvania, Hungary: Changing Identities – Changing Communities - June 09, 2017

https://horizonweekly.ca/en/armenians-in-transylvania-hungary-changing-identities-changing-communities/

By Leon Aslanov

The Armenian population which settled in the Carpathian Basin in the Middle Ages mainly consisted of merchant families. Later, in the 17th century, the region saw another significant influx of Armenians, and thereafter a handful of relatively large Armenian communities flourished. This led to issues regarding the management of these groups vis-à-vis the social, cultural and political milieu in which they found themselves. As is the case with any diaspora community, these Armenians conjured myths and historical narratives to reinforce and maintain their unique identity as opposed to the various ethnic groups living in the region. Nevertheless, there are evident discrepancies between the myths created for the (re)construction of identity and the historical accounts that tell the stories of these people. In this lecture, Dr Bálint Kovács sought to deconstruct the identities of the various Armenian communities of the Carpathian Basin by exploring the myths that they held on to and comparing them with the historical record.

Dr Bálint Kovács studied History and Theology at Péter Pázmány Catholic University in Budapest. Since 2008, Kovács has been a research fellow at the Leipzig Institute of East-Central Europe (GWZO) in a research project on the Armenians in East Central Europe. He was curator of the exhibition *Far away from Mount Ararat – Armenian Culture in the Carpathian Basin* (Budapest, 2013). Kovács defended his PhD thesis at Péter Pázmány Catholic University in 2010, and in October 2016 was appointed head of the new Department of Armenian Studies at the University. This lecture was organised by Dr Krikor Moskofian (Director of the Programme of Armenian Studies), and chairing the event was Adham Smart.

Preliminary history

Tradition has it that 3,000 Armenian families settled in Transylvania in the 17th century. However, no census records from that period remain, and so our current estimation relies on the

censuses of the early 18th century, according to which the proposed figure of 3,000 is massively inflated, 240 being a more realistic number. The story of 3,000 Armenian families migrating together to Transylvania is emblematic of the usage of myths to solidify national identity, and indeed, the number 3,000 appears in other myths native to the region. For example, according to the chronicles of Simon of Kéza, the most renowned Hungarian chronicler of the 13th century, the Szekler (a sub-group of the Hungarian nation) are descended from 3,000 Hun warriors of Prince Csaba army, who, after losing a battle, hid in the well of Czygla and went on to give rise to the Szekler people.

Chair Adham Smart

Historical accounts refer to at least four towns in Transylvania with significant Armenian populations and an Armenian church. Each town was known by four or five names in different languages (Latin, Hungarian, Romanian, German and Armenian), the most prominent of these towns being Armenopolis (Szamosújvár/Gherla/Armenierstadt/Hayakaghak). Transylvania was a semi-independent country within the Ottoman and Habsburg empires at the end of the 16th and during the 17th century, and the pull of the economically successful Carpathian Basin drew Armenian families from these four towns. Legend has it that the Prince of Transylvania invited Armenians, who were well-known as merchants in the region, to settle in the Carpathian Basin and gave them special privileges. However, this story is unverified.

An extremely important turning point in the formation of the unique identity of the Armenian communities of the Carpathian Basin was the union of the Armenian Church with the Roman Catholic Church. A significant figure in this regard was Oxendio Viriresco. Born around 1655 and Catholicised as child, he become a seminarist later in life, and first came to Transylvania as a priest. He would go on to be involved in the union of the Armenian Church in Hungary with Rome, and is often mentioned in Transylvanian Armenian historiography. His attempts to convert his “heretic” compatriots to Catholicism were met with resistance, and there are even accounts of Armenians interrupting the sermons at the church where Oxendio was a priest. Later, Oxendio received the support of a Hungarian Roman Catholic priest to gain control over an Armenian Apostolic church, after which he forbade the Armenians to perform *badarag*.

Contact with other ethnicities in the 18th century

Understanding the relations between Armenians and the host society in Transylvania is of utmost importance when exploring the nature of the development of Armenian identity in the region. Transylvania during the 18th century was a multiethnic region: its three main ethnic groups were Hungarians, Saxons and the Szeklers, who all had recognised privileges, while the Armenians and Romanians competed with these major ethnic groups for higher status, albeit unsuccessfully. The Armenians had volatile relations with both the Saxons and the Szeklers. In 1712 a plague epidemic broke out, afflicting the majority Saxon population of Bistrita; the Saxons blamed the Armenians for the plague, and the city council ordered all Armenians to leave the city within 24 hours. The Armenians left for Armenopolis, prompting Oxendio to send a letter to the mayor of Bistrita comparing the episode to the expulsion of the Jews from Egypt. As for relations between Armenians and Szeklers, tensions existed in the town of Gheorgheni, where Armenians enjoyed privileged social status and Armenian merchants were commercially successful. In 1726 the local authorities banned Armenians from the city marketplace before 8 AM in the summer and 9 AM in the winter, on the basis that Armenians were buying products at a low price early in the day in order to sell them at higher prices later on. Negative perceptions of Armenians are abundant in 18th century sources, and such suspicion and scapegoating is a common phenomenon in societies where a particular group plays a disproportionately large role in economic distribution.

Lecturer Dr Bálint Kovács

Despite these obstacles, Armenians increasingly began to integrate into the host society, thanks in large part to the religious union with the Catholic Church. In addition, Armenians in 18th century Szeklerland began to switch to the Hungarian language. More and more Armenians earned titles of nobility, and in the first half of the 19th century the liberal Hungarian nobility recognised Armenians as allies to collaborate with the Hungarian middle class. Two generals of Armenian descent, Ernő Kiss and Vilmos Lázár, played prominent roles in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, and were consequently executed by the Austrian Empire. They were members of the group of generals known as the 13 Martyrs of Arad who were executed for their involvement in the Revolution, and are regarded as Hungarian national heroes.

Ideology of Armenianism

Having found their place in Hungarian society during the 19th century, the intellectuals of the Armenian communities felt the need to explore their identities in order to construct an Armenian ideology in the face of assimilation. This ideology, called ‘Armenianism’, was formalised by

the Armenian intellectual Jula Mirza and propagated mainly through the periodical *Armenia*. In 1895, Jula Mirza delineated six areas which required attention in order to preserve Armenian identity in Transylvania: family, religion, piety, education and teaching, literature, and social and public life. Armenianism was defined as the proactive maintenance of these traditions with the aim of preserving the Armenian character, and Hungarian patriotism could thus be complemented by an Armenian way of life.

Jula Mirza's patriotic movement relied on heavy emphasis on Armenian history and the uniqueness of the Armenian people as distinguished from the Hungarians. Mirza felt that the main force behind the ongoing assimilation was the dwindling Armenian language, as more and more Armenians were switching to Hungarian as a native tongue. Mirza also considered the strengthening of Armenian Catholic identity to be key to the maintenance of Armenianness within Hungarian society, as it allowed for both national preservation on the one hand and religious integration with the host society on the other.

Besides Jula Mirza's efforts and the publication of *Armenia*, an Armenian museum was opened in Armenopolis in the late 19th century. It housed objects, library items and money linked to Armenia and its culture. Continuous efforts were made to collect memorabilia, and donations were regularly accepted by the museum to preserve this house of Armenian culture.

In addition, the enchanting power of the ancient city of Ani, symbol of a glorious bygone era, pervaded the consciousness of Armenians in Central and Eastern Europe, and has played an enormous role in the construction of their identity. The source of some of these sentiments was Minas Bjishkiants, a Mekhitarist monk who travelled to Eastern Europe in the middle of the 19th century. Though he himself had not seen Ani, he disseminated the knowledge of the history of the long-gone city which he had studied; in his travel account of 1850 he describes the six occupations of Ani and the origins of the exodus of Armenians. In Dr Kovács's opinion it is his travel account that inspired the Transylvanian Armenians to claim their descent from the inhabitants of Ani, and the city was thus established as a landmark in the collective consciousness of Transylvanian Armenians from the second half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, in real historical terms, it is highly unlikely that all the Armenians who settled in Transylvania would be able to trace their origins to Ani, since the population of is composed of the descendants of several waves of Armenian migrants from different geographical regions. Nevertheless, the ideological power of a common ancestry from a particular place provided some social cohesion to the Armenian community in Transylvania, which had lost much of its language and traditions.

Armenians in Hungary after the Genocide

The next large wave of Armenian migrants to the region came as a result of the Genocide. These migrants settled both in Hungary and in Transylvania, once it had separated from Hungary and become part of Romania. Mekhitarists in Transylvania looked forward to seeing Armenian blood in the region "refreshed", and to the founding of Armenian-oriented establishments, such as carpet shops, which would bring back an Armenian feel to cities like Gherla (Armenopolis).

Armenians in Budapest became renowned for their carpet-making skills, and Armenians walking around the city with carpets on their shoulders was a common sight. Armenians in the city were able to accumulate social capital thanks to the success of their endeavours in the economic and social life of Budapest, and the social networks that they built were crucial to their integration – Armenians lived not as complete foreigners, but were rather woven into the fabric of Budapest society. They were also very much in contact with other Armenian diaspora communities; at the Armenian Catholic Church of Budapest one may find Armenian newspapers from all around the world, suggesting that they were read by local Armenians.

The founding of a number of institutions of great import in the 1920s marked a turning point for the community life of Armenians in Budapest. The first Armenian institution established in Budapest was the Association of Hungarian Armenians, founded by migrants from Transylvania. The second was an Armenian-Hungarian commercial shareholding company established to bring money from the Armenian diaspora to Budapest. Alongside the company's commercial interests, it also provided scholarships to fund the studies of young Armenians. The Massis Association, important in the cultural life of Armenians in Budapest, published a just called *Nor Dar* ('New Letter'), which informed its readers of the conditions of Armenians around the world in the Armenian language.

Identity conflict between Transylvanian and 'new' Armenians

The Armenians who had arrived in Transylvania in the 17th and 18th centuries had been negotiating their communal identity vis-à-vis Hungarian society for centuries, and their identity, culture and mindset had undergone great changes since their exodus from their homelands. The arrival of Armenians after the Genocide brought with it tensions between the 'new' and 'old' communities which have persisted until today, and differing degrees of preservation of Armenian identity and assimilation into Hungarian society can still be observed. The old Armenians had more or less totally assimilated and adopted Hungarian as their native language by the time the new Armenians arrived, bringing with them their Armenian dialects. The old Armenians see Transylvania as their close homeland, with their distant homeland of Ani standing as the symbol of their core identity. In contrast, the newcomers still retain real memories of their homes in Anatolia and, of course, their experiences of the Genocide.

Some of the conflicts that arise within the different segments of the Armenian community in Hungary may be a consequence of the national law on minorities. Minority recognition requires the minority to know its mother tongue and to have been settled in Hungary for at least a hundred years. The status of a recognised minority would entitle Armenians to financial support from the state directed at communal activities that help to maintain cultural institutions.

The history of Armenians in the Carpathian Basin is one of different waves of migration, of a variety of experiences in relation to Hungarian society. The historical reality is that Armenians initially found it difficult to settle in Transylvania, and tensions between them and the local people were evident. Armenians felt the need to integrate into the host society, but many "Armenian elements", such as language, religion and traditions, were diluted or lost along the road to integration. The ideology of Armenianism propagated by Jula Mirza sought to revitalise Armenian identity in the Carpathian Basin through intellectual efforts, and in due course

Armenian institutions were established to revitalise and preserve the population's Armenianness. The second large wave of Armenian arrived as a result of the Genocide, and the newcomers found themselves at odds with those Armenians who had been integrating into Hungarian society for centuries. This division among the Armenians of Hungary exists to this day, and has expanded to include the Armenians from the Soviet Union who began to migrate to Hungary with the eruption of the Karabakh conflict. The issues of Hungarian-Armenian identity are a multilayered affair, and depending on the time of a particular group's arrival in Hungary, assimilation to Hungarian society exists in varying degrees

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