

THE MOUNTAIN, THE LAND, AND THE RUINS

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"Ararat rises to a height of almost seven thousand feet in a large kingdom called Armenia. To get there one must cross Biologestan, then the sea, then part of Asia Minor and Anatolia. It will be a long journey."

"Antranik and the Mystic Mountain," an Armenian folk tale.

"I am very fond of ruins, ruins I love to scan."

Popular song.

Anatolia...the wilderness of Kurdistan...Armenia...Noah's Ark and vineyard...Mt. Ararat...the Garden of Eden: the travelers to the East had reached the beginning of time and place...

From time immemorial, the holy mountain and the adjacent regions have fascinated the imagination of mankind. The merchants and adventurers who traveled on the Old Silk Road sometimes reported about their adventures in these regions; so did several of the generals and legionaries who were seeking or escaping the great battlefields of antiquity. Medieval travelers, missionaries sent by Rome, and merchants, for their part, on their return confirmed the account in Genesis that Mt. Ararat was the very mountain on which Noah's Ark had come to rest. By the nineteenth century, the news had also reached countless European and American children through Sunday school how, once upon a time, the waters of the Flood had carried that archetypal traveler Noah to Mt. Ararat; the Armenians called the mountain Masis. Noah stayed in this new land, and, after the waters of the Flood had abated, planted the first vineyard on the slopes of the mountain and started human history all over again. All this happened in a country that was called Armenia.

Other "travelers" came to the land around Mt. Ararat, liked it, and settled down. Timur Lenk certainly did not display any great love for the country and its people when he made the rivers flow with human blood, but his son Scharoch appreciated the countryside and enjoyed to live there. The latter's Bavarian slave, Johannes Schiltberger who was captured in 1394 on the battlefield of Nikropolis, shared his master's appreciation of "this beautiful country". An independent Armenia did no longer exist, and Schiltberger was quite aware that the Christians living in the three Armenian kingdoms of Tiflis, Sis, and Ersingen had to pay tribute to their heathen conquerors.¹ The

Bagratunis had gone; so had the Rubinians and Hetumians of Lesser Armenia that comprised most of Cilicia on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean (1080-1375). The Armenian kingdoms had slowly been crushed in the conflict of power between Byzantines, Seljuks, Crusaders, Tartars, Mongols, Turkomans, and all the other conquerors who left their bloody mark on the region.

Traveling through Asia Minor has always been difficult and dangerous. Still, there was merit in the thought of the Western traveler or pilgrim of having visited in his lifetime the holy ground where God had made His covenant with the new generation of man. By the end of the eighteenth century when European taste had discovered the virtues of the sublime in art and nature and the beauty of mountains, Mt. Ararat came to be considered by many travelers to be worth all the trouble of a tedious and dangerous journey.

The plain of Mt. Ararat was beautiful in the new taste; even the refined taste of the French botanist and professor for medicine Joseph Pilton de Tournefort who was traveling in behalf of the Sun King was more than pleased by this beautiful countryside. Tournefort was much taken with the spring flora of the upper Euphrates valley and marveled that the flowers which Parisian gardeners considered to be their pride and joy were here growing in the wild.² The Armenian plateau in autumn presented a picture of pastoral abundance, and the heart of Captain Richard Wilbraham back in 1837 was cheered by the bountiful and gay harvest he witnessed.³ The popular Austrian travel author Armand Freiherr von Schweiger-Lerchenfeld a few years later fell under the spell of the lovely landscape around Lake Van, but for him the pastoral peace of the land was destroyed by the burning and robbing Kurds who had the Armenian population of that district at their mercy.⁴

These very same Kurds with their picturesque hamlets and castles situated along the "auburn oak-covered slopes" of the shores of Lake Van acquired in the eyes of Mrs. Bishop "an air of medieval romance", and enchanted the lady whose taste and sensibility must have been formed by Mrs. Radcliffe's Gothic tales.⁵ Banditti were simply necessary in a picture appreciated by a connoisseur of these tales and did not necessarily need to arouse any outcry against social or political injustice. These banditti were picturesque--and so were the Kurds, especially when seen from afar. The Kurds, the intruders in the pastoral landscape--and most travelers speak of Mt. Ararat and the region around it in terms of a pictorial composition, as we shall see later--did not disturb many travelers, or the men from the West simply did not notice the blight left by the robbing Kurd and the oppressive Turk who ruled the country.

When the travelers were within sight of the holy mountain, the present very curiously receded in importance. Most of them remembered their Sunday-school lesson that this soil, according to tradition, was hallowed. Like Osmond, the hero in James Morier's novel *Ayesha*, they asked themselves the question: "Could this have been the chosen garden of Eden?"⁶ For most of them, there was no doubt, and if one used his imagination a bit, one could still see traces of paradise. The land could be fertile, water and snakes were abundant, and the biblical geography fit. Once the traveler Marco Polo had observed that the snows and glaciers of the mountain sustained the abundance and fertility of the region and the many rivers. According to ancient tradition, Armenia, "traversed by some of the noblest rivers in the world", the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the biblical Pison and Gihon, had been "the tract allotted to our first parents" and had thus been the Garden of Eden.⁷ No question, these were the rivers of paradise! The Armenians, who were reputed to be good gardeners, in the opinion of several of the travelers, were worthy of having inherited such hallowed ground.

The exact location of that first garden still aroused controversy; nevertheless, it had been located somewhere in the region around Mt. Ararat. Perhaps the eyes of the Armenian faithful were generous; the eyes of the German geologist Edmund Naumann did discover plenty of water, but what he saw was a far cry from Eden "where God had made many trees grow that were fruitful and pleasant to look at." For his part, he did not see any trees at all; the height of the mountain was not at all impressive after Mt. Fujiama--Naumann had taught at the University of Tokyo--still, what a grand and "magnificent and bewitching picture" it was!⁸

According to Armenian tradition, it was not Mt. Ararat but Bingham Dagh, the mountain of thousand lakes, that was man's first home. This mountain was off the beaten track of the ordinary traveler, and in the 1840s Karl Koch, another German professor, deplored the fact that no European had conquered this pristine mountain, yet he was not even tempted to do so himself, for there was a curse on it, as on so much else in this ancient land. The mountain had been profaned before and that led to the final loss of paradise, and the professor tells the legend. When God had driven Adam and Eve from the mountain, the innocent animals continued to live on its slopes, and many white swans nested on the shores of its lakes. God appointed a guardian to protect the garden against evil men. One day, an evil hunter climbed the mountain where he found the garden unprotected. After he shot the loveliest of the swans, he returned to the haunts of men where he boasted about his great deed. In the meantime, the guardian returned and found the spilled lifeblood of his pet swan. He prayed and pleaded with God, and God brought the swan back to life. Again the hunter shot the beautiful bird upon which God became truly

angry. The lakes dried up so did the rivers, and the earth turned to dust. In time, the evil hunter died and with him the greater part of mankind--and so did the innocent animals and flowers of the beautiful garden. For a long time, God remained deaf to the prayers of men to lift the curse. Eventually God did relent, and wherever a drop of blood of the holy swan had fallen, the earth opened to a bubbling and life-giving spring.⁹

Paradise on Binghol Dagh or Mt. Ararat?--perhaps; certainly it was a post-lapsarian Garden of Eden. This definitely was the experience of the travelers who were on the road during the long and harsh Armenian winter. The weather could be capricious and unpredictable; many times they were surprised by winter and snowstorms when in more temperate regions it had turned summer; Strabo and Xenophon already anticipated the frustrations of generations of travelers. The other seasons did not have much to recommend themselves either. Summer and harvest time came later to Armenia than to any other known country of the ancient world, and Lucullus's legionaries almost starved to death in the green wheat fields of Armenia when, according to the calculation of the general, the grain should have been on the threshing floor. However, there was one consolation for the Roman warrior-gourmand: in Armenia he had discovered the cherry and the apricot. These must have been some of the fruits of paradise! And Lucullus took some saplings from the cherry and apricot trees with him back to Rome.

Many travelers, among them the Russian poet Pushkin, have praised the dry air of Armenia; dryness, in the opinion of other travelers, has been the curse of Armenia. There are rivers and the soil is fertile, but without irrigation the fields are barren and desolate, the geographer Lynch observed.¹⁰ For Robert Curzon, all of Armenia was "a wild and mountainous district."¹¹ Dr. Humphry Sandwith, assisting medically the Turkish side in the defense of Kars in 1854 against the Russians, could see in Armenia "nothing on which the eye can rest with pleasure. True, the scene is often, nay, always grand; but it is a desolate grandeur, palling upon the senses; it is like a world without life." The landscape is so desolate, he concluded, that "you may imagine yourself the Last Man wandering over the blank of an unpeopled world."¹² No wonder that the painter Eugène Flandin when he was traveling with the French ambassadorial party to Teheran was glad to get away from this sad and barren place with its savage mountains and its ferocious population.¹³

Depressing and sad, there is nothing pleasing and grand about the mountains, and Mt. Ararat that might have made up for all the ugliness around it one never sees: these were the complaints of Max von Thielemann.¹⁴ Tsar Nicholas I must have more than complained. After the region around Mt.

Ararat in 1828 had become part of Russia, His Imperial Highness made a special pilgrimage to pay homage to the holy mountain. Mt. Ararat, in turn, was not impressed. Throughout the visit, it stubbornly hid its venerable head behind a veil of clouds. The Tsar was insulted by so much impunity, declared that if Mt. Ararat wanted to play it that way, the mountain was the loser by not having seen the venerable face of God's anointed, and left Armenia.

Even hidden behind clouds, the mountain presented a grand sight. "Ararat, attracting the clouds, seems...the abode of storms, and almost every day the atmosphere puts on a threatening aspect; while upon the gloomy veil of dark vapors, the rapid lightening is frequently seen darting across, or a majestic rainbow is displayed." The sensitive soul of an artist or a religious man--and the Tsar was probably neither--"is elevated by a scene so awful, and his feelings are the more intense, as the result of impressions not unmingled with terror."¹⁵

Sometimes the clouds lifted and Ararat appeared in its entire sublime splendor. Such a view repaid all the trouble and frustration the travelers had endured. Sir Robert Ker Porter, like many other travelers, was overcome with emotion at the sight; his eyes were so dazzled by the blinding glory of the white mountain, and "this bewildered sensibility of sight being answered by a similar feeling in the mind, for some moments I was lost in a strange suspension of the powers of thought."¹⁶ The American missionary Eli Smith in 1831 on his way to Echmiadzin also fell under the spell of the mountain. He had traveled much, but never had he seen a mountain

"whose majesty could plead half so powerfully its claims to the honor of having once been the stepping-stone between the old world and the new. I gave myself up to the feeling, that on its summit were once congregated all the inhabitants of the earth, and that, while in the valley of the Araxes, I was paying a visit to the cradle of the human race."¹⁷

Wherever the pilgrim to the holy mountain went in Armenia, Mt. Ararat seemed to follow him. The Baedeker travel guide for 1897 assured its readers that Erevan was worth a visit because of the grand view of Mt. Ararat that could be enjoyed from there. The visitors of the town had all along been praising the view of the mountain from the fortification of the Sardars of Erevan. One suspects that C. von Hahn's duties in the schools of Tiflis included the teaching of drawing from the way he composed the view of Mt. Ararat: "The beautiful windows of the alcove of the palace form a very effective frame for the sublime view of Mt. Ararat which appears from this location at its best advantage. This is a view which is hard to forget."¹⁸ Thielemann finally did catch a glimpse of the mountain through the same window and was impressed. What he saw was truly sublime; the sun was setting behind Mt. Ararat, and "for

a moment the mountain was hidden by the vapors arising from the plain, then the mountain appeared again bathed by the light of the rising moon, pale like a specter".¹⁹ Lit.-Colonel Charles Stuart, too, paid the fortification a visit and saw from there the mountain "in all its majesty, from the small plain at its foot to the snow-covered peak, round which a light mist-wreath floated, like a chaplet of lilies on a hoary brow". This mountain was "worthy of having been the resting-place of the ark, and imagination readily pictures to itself the world's grey fathers assembled at its base, to watch the sacred sign 'that first spoke peace to man,' the rainbow."²⁰ Friedrich Bodenstedt, too, was overcome with reverence as he contemplated Mt. Ararat through the same window.²¹

The scene had associations with the Old Testament and was sublime; therefore it was appropriate to experience there the ferocious beauty of a thunderstorm. Dr. Moritz Wagner, another German professor and an expert alpinist to boot, had never seen such a grand thunderstorm anywhere else.²² Set against the rising sun, the sight of the mountain was elevating: "It was a glorious sunrise over Ararat, the soft, purple twilight of the hills becoming pink, and then resplendent with golden hues, and finally all dazzling in full light of the mighty scene."²³ Equally glorious was the sight of its "snowy summit" glowing under the "last brilliant rays of the retiring sun. Apprehending that I might never again see its features so advantageously illumined, I hastily sketched an outline, with that kind of reverential "feeling which one experiences when about to take leave of a venerated acquaintance," the Rev. Justin Perkins, missionary to the Armenians, observed.²⁴

Captain Richard Wilbraham was similarly overcome with emotion as he sketched the mountain that he hardly noticed the band of "picturesque and lawless predatory" Kurds who were about to kidnap him. He saved himself and his sketch; the English diplomat James Morier traveling in 1809 almost lost his fingers from the cold as he tried to capture the likeness of the mountain. The mountain climber Parrot and all those traveling artists who provided the illustrations for the numerous travel books of the nineteenth century usually finished their sketches in peace and in somewhat more clement weather. With the advent of photography, this effort was no longer necessary, and we see how Paul Willi Bierbaum's trainload of Swiss compatriots after they climbed the mountain in 1912, like a swarm of locust, descended on the displayed picture postcards.

Yet the mountain did not turn them along with their sketches and picture postcards into stones; the old legends that spoke of the curse that would follow any conqueror of the holy mountain proved to be false. The holy mountain could be climbed with impunity, and the Doubting Thomases of this

world were no longer hindered from touching the wood of Noah's Ark, should they be able to find it. Major Stuart, a veteran of the Crimean War--the gentleman who had waxed poetic at the sight of Mt. Ararat--was a striking refutation of these superstitions. His Kurdish guides refused to climb the holy of holies, but when the British expedition reached the summit without any guide and were not turned into stones, the Kurds confessed to having seen a miracle. Then Queen Victoria's warrior commented with British nonchalance that a Britisher was simply allowed to do many things that were forbidden to a Kurd.

For many centuries, the idea of climbing mountains had not excited and challenged the minds and sensibilities of men. Mountains were merely obstacles on the straight and even road to man's goal and salvation. Every god-fearing person would avoid them; did not the Devil hide behind them, and were they not a constant reminder of man's sin? Had not the beautifully flat earth convulsed at Adam's expulsion from paradise? Sin had thus brought forth all the mountains on earth.

That Mt. Ararat is a high mountain, at least seven miles high, could be read in Sir John Mandeville's travel account. Such a monstrous height would scare away even the most intrepid mountain climber. The Franciscan monk Oderich was an exception. He saw the mountain in 1316, was not impressed by its height, and feared neither God's nor the mountain's anger. He would have gladly climbed the mountain, but his travel companions refused to wait for him, and he was afraid to travel alone.²⁵

The Kurds and the Armenians living in the region had always been climbing the slopes of the mountain to fetch pieces of the supposed wood of the Ark which they then used themselves or sold as medicine against poisoning. The French traveler Tournefort thought since the slopes of Mt. Ararat had once served Noah and his animals as ladder, the Patriarch, more than likely on his way down, dropped the seeds of many unusual plants that he had saved from before the Flood. Therefore, the Frenchman and his party decided to climb the mountain up to the snow line; to go further would have tempted God's anger, the pious botanist feared. The result of the expedition was very meager, and he did not enjoy the outing at all; especially the descent from the mountain had been so dangerous that Tournefort thought he had suffered enough to become canonized as the champion saint of the science of botany.²⁶

In 1829, Dr. Friedrich Parrot, professor of natural sciences at Dorpat University in Estonia, undertook to climb Mt. Ararat. Neither the flora nor the Ark attracted him; he was a man of science who wanted to measure the mountain and carry out various meteorological experiments. He failed two times; on the third attempt he succeeded together with his party of three Armenians and two Russian soldiers. Now one of the glaciers on Mt. Ararat is named after him. On September 27, 1829, they reached the summit. He had

climbed the mountain to work; that he and his companions did for forty-five minutes. Then he allowed his eyes "drunk with joy" to feast on the view. Though the whole valley of the River Araxes was covered with haze, he could make out Erevan and Sardarabad; in the south he imagined Bajasid; mountains towered over mountains--and far away to the north/east was the beautiful blue Lake Sevan--that was enough of gazing, for serious German professors should never get carried away and waste time on emotions when there is work to be done.²⁷

The Armenian church authorities did not believe that Parrot had climbed their holy mountain; and the "Armenian Patriarch at the neighboring convent of Echmiadzin refuted the Professor's assertion with the same pious indignation with which the Pope rejected the system of Galileo, for the Armenian Church devoutly believes that no mortal foot can profane the summit of the Holy Mountain."²⁸ Their conviction was based on the story of St. Jacob with which the Armenian clergy entertained their visitors and warned them away from the summit. God did not allow even his holy man to reach the top of the holy mountain, how then could ordinary mortals presume to go where saints feared to tread?

The Armenian monks had told the story of St. Jacob and his relic so often and had embellished it so that a rich tradition had grown up around the holy man. This tradition had also been amply documented by the travelers to Ararat throughout the centuries. For instance, Faustus of Byzantium had chronicled it, in 1255 Guillaume de Ruysbroeck followed suit, Vincent of Beauvais in 1259, Sir John Mandeville in around 1360, and Sir John Chardin in the early 17th century. The legend tells how the pious monk wanted to see with his own eyes Noah's Ark which tradition placed on the mountain top, despite omens and admonitions from his fellow brothers. Then, in the words of Vincent of Beauvais:

When he had climbed part of the way, he would fall asleep on account of his tired limbs, and on waking he would always find himself at the foot of the mountain. Finally, however, the Lord gave in to his persistence: He harkened to the monk's vows and prayers and so instructed him by His angel that he might ascend the mountain on one occasion--but for the future he would not seek to do so again. Thus he safely made the ascent, and when he returned he brought one of the beams from the Ark back with him. At the foot of the mountain he built a monastery in which he faithfully placed this same beam as a holy relic.²⁹

Monkish tales did keep many mountain climbers away, but not the enlightened traveler of the nineteenth century. Dr. Hermann Abich, also professor at Dorpat, ascended the mountain in 1845. Dr. Moritz Wagner

succeeded too; so did James Bryce in 1876. Since then there have been many others who left their flags and plaques and crosses and bones as mementos of their success behind. At times the mountain struck back at so much presumption. Dr. Koch, professor of natural sciences at Jena, had wanted to add his name to the group of learned alpinists, but within sight of the mountain he came down with a serious sickness. Was this a sign of God's displeasure? His kind hosts at the monastery of Echmiadzin were sure of it.³⁰ Perhaps it was the Holy Mountain striking back when on the 20th of June 1840 (old style) Mt. Ararat erupted, and a powerful earthquake destroyed the village of Arguri or Ahora--the site of Noah's altar and vineyard and rainbow--and the monastery that St. Jacob had built. It killed almost two thousand people and left a huge chasm behind.

This ancient village had been such a pleasant and picturesque place. "They boasted not only of the Patriarch's vine, bearing grapes delicious to eat, but which Heaven, in memory of the fault they betrayed him into, had forbidden to be made into wine; but also of an ancient willow trunk, which had sprung from one of the planks of the Ark." Then came the disaster.

Towards sunset...the sudden shock of an earthquake, accompanied by a subterranean roar, and followed by a terrific blast of wind, threw down the houses of Arghuri, and at the same moment detached enormous masses of rock with their superjacent ice from the cliffs that surround the chasm. A shower of falling rocks overwhelmed in an instant the village, the monastery, and a Kurdish encampment on the pastures above. Not a soul survived to tell the tale. Four days afterwards, the masses of snow and ice that had been precipitated into the glen suddenly melted, and, forming an irresistible torrent of water and mud, swept along the channel of the stream and down the outer slopes of the mountain, far away into the Arras plain, bearing with them huge blocks, and covering the ground for miles with a deep bed of mud and gravel.

When Bryce came to the Araxes valley almost forty years later, he could still see where the mud had flowed; the Arguri Gorge was a yawning black abyss.³¹

The good people of Noah's hamlet had from almost the beginning of time been living at the edge of the precipice, for they really lived on land that was under a curse. According to Armenian tradition, it was in the Arguri Gorge that the haughty Prince Ardavazd came to an ungodly end, and his father's curse was fulfilled. There is "a well-known legend among the Armenian peasantry that Ardavazd is imprisoned and chained in a cave in the Arguri Gorge, and that some day he might emerge to create disorder in the world if the Armenian blacksmiths stop hammering their anvils."³² Perhaps this was the

fault of lazy Armenian blacksmiths, or the anger of the mountain, or God's anger, or just one of the frequent earthquakes of the region that destroyed the village and the shrine with all its relics.

Portents like these did not scare away the enlightened mountain climbers from the West, nor are the modern-day seekers of the Ark discouraged from their quest. After studying the geological history of Mt. Ararat, Lynch, too, conquered the mountain and remained for forty minutes "upon the summit; but the dense veil never lifts from the platform, nor does the blast cease to pierce us through." No matter; there, on the "airiest pinnacle" where the "patriarch alighted on the face of an earth renewed," Lynch's eyes became prophetic: "And the ancient mountain summons the spirits about him, and veils a futile frown, as the rising sun illumines the valleys of Asia and the life of man lies bare. The specters walk in naked daylight--Violence and Corruption and Decay. The traveler finds in majestic Nature consolation for these sordid scenes."³³

Like Lord Byron or Thomas Gray, the traveler could also seek consolation from all the sordidness of the world in the graveyards that dotted the countryside back at home and here in Asia Minor. Sir Ker Porter could not get rid of the feeling that he was constantly "treading over some vast tomb...for here the first fathers of all the families of the earth were buried; here immense empires rose, and crumbled into dust." Here he found "the remains of cities, whose founders died in the infancy of the world; and the monuments of people, sank so long ago into the depth of time, that the name of their nation is no more remembered."³⁴ It was enjoyable to indulge from one's vantage point of the nineteenth century in those pleasingly melancholic reveries, reflect in the "romantic" manner on the passing of time and life, and raise the obligatory question "*ubi sunt?*" about the illustrious Armenian kings whose ashes had long ago been scattered from their opened sepulchers to all the corners of the world.³⁵ "*Et in Arcadia ego*"; the traveler reflected, his artistic sensibilities having been formed by Poussin's scenes, landscapes in which he stumbled over *mementi mori*: the occasional skull or the funerary gifts some Armenian swain had left at the grave of a beloved person.³⁶ Armenian graveyards could be such picturesque places: "the tall headstones of a disused" Armenian cemetery that had been so dear to the Armenians of previous generations also pleased the traveler. "Even as we stood in admiration of this charming scene"--it was a burial ground--"an active Kurd in a showy dress stepped into the path." Nothing happened, it was as if for a moment Lynch had stepped into a Poussin or a Salvador Rosa composition.³⁷

The *mementi mori*, however, were not always so charmingly removed in time and feeling; the picturesque Kurd threatened not just the peace of a pictorial composition but the lives of actual people, even that of the travelers.

The evidence of such encounters could be seen in many places in Asia Minor and the Caucasus. Austen H. Layard, the archeologist and politician was certainly no stranger to secrets hidden away in graves, was shocked when once confronted with the evidence of Kurdish activities. He had seen the bed of a river filled with the "skulls of all ages, from the child unborn to the toothless old man. We could not avoid treading on the bones as we advanced, and rolling them with the loose stones into the valley below." The Kurds had recently massacred these inhabitants of a whole Christian village, and there had been nobody left to bury the dead since out of a population of one thousand, only one person had survived. These bones were the remnants of Nestorians,³⁸ but many an Armenian village had suffered or was to suffer the same fate.

But for the great majority of the visitors from the West, the contemplation of the *champs des morts* remained in the realm of the aesthetic. "When traveling in a foreign country...it is no more than a man's duty to go and see the graves of his countryman," wrote William J. L. Maxwell in 1871 as he was inspecting the Beirut waterworks and was studying the possibility of constructing the Euphrates Valley Railway.³⁹ These almost obligatory visits usually took the visitor to Armenian graveyards. Since no Christian could be buried in a Muslim cemetery--his presence there would for all times to come desecrate its hallowed ground--and the Greek Orthodox clergy also had their objections to both Catholics and Protestants alike, the Armenians were usually so gracious to grant the final resting place to the unfortunate person from the West who had died away from home. The weeping willows and the tomb stones dedicated to the memory of Henry Martyn, one of the early British missionaries to the heathen, in the Armenian cemetery of Tokat had become a landmark. On the vast Armenian graveyard of New Julfa, the Armenian town at the outskirts of Isphahan, a little colony of deceased Europeans and Americans had assembled through the centuries. In Morier's time, their graves could be seen at the "extremity of the burial ground...the tombs of the Dutch, English, French, and Russians, who died here during the time the European nations had factories and merchants settled in Persia."⁴⁰ The most colorful character of this group was a certain Randolph, a German Protestant, who had refused to become a Muslim and therefore lost his life. The Armenians of New Julfa venerated him as a saint through superstitious customs that offended several travelers. Dr. Heinrich Brugseh tells how he buried in 1860 one of his close relatives in these consecrated grounds;⁴¹ Lit. James Edward Alexander wrote back in 1827 how he and his traveling party "performed a very melancholy but sacred duty, consigning to the earth the mortal remains of Mr. Rich, Dr. Taylor, Mr. George Malcolm, and Mr. Stuart."⁴² Claudius James Rich, scholar and member of the East India Company, had died in 1821 at Shiraz and had first been buried there

in his garden. Several Armenian priests were at that funeral, but Dr. Jukes who had tended the sick man on his deathbed had requested Mr. Fraser to read the funeral service, and not "these" priests, "for I think that in foreign countries, and especially where Armenians are not much respected, these ceremonies should be performed by ourselves,"⁴³--and he conveniently forgot that only the courtesy of "these priests" had made the funeral possible.

Quite a bit could be learnt about the Armenians and their customs and culture by visiting their churchyards. That the Armenians were a superstitious lot the traveler had been told by almost every other traveler before him, and this assertion he himself found confirmed by their strange behavior among the graves. For example, at Erzeroom any child that was unable to speak could be cured if it would crawl under one of the strange looking tombstones in the shape of a ram that were peculiar to very old Armenian places of burial. The authority on this custom, a man with anti-feminine prejudices, felt compelled to add that very few girls ever had to submit themselves to this treatment.⁴⁴

The Armenians believed in praying for the dead, an article of faith that made a good Protestant visitor like the Rev. T. Milner shudder, and he reflects that "the inscriptions on the Armenian tombs give evidence of the prevalence of much religious error and superstition."⁴⁵ They believed that the souls of the suffered departed somewhere in purgatory; therefore during Lent they prayed for the dead and brought food and drink as offerings to the graves. This latter custom could easily lead to excesses, especially on Ascension Day when the whole religious rites of the season "terminate in a welcome and abundant feast. Wine flows like water, in libations to the memory of the deceased; while shouts of revelry mingle with cries and lamentations. The women always bear their part in these anomalous orgies of Bacchus and the Angel of Death; as frightful a union, as ever could come into the heads of cross-witted men, to bring together."⁴⁶

To the travelers, this type of behavior was scandalous. Miss Pardoe was shocked when she witnessed "an orgy" in the Armenian cemetery at Pera just outside of Constantinople. It was such a romantic spot of earth, but "these Armenians" had corrupted it completely. In one corner, their dead were being buried while at the same time the rest of the graveyard was turned into a vast country fair ground. Tents and fringed blankets covered the graves, Armenian merchants tried to make a fast deal between the graves, food was piled high on "the stately monument of some departed Armenian." Several irreverent Armenians lounged on some graves, gorging themselves and smoking water pipes; others danced like elephants to jarring music while yet others laughed at the rude jokes of a buffoon or got drunk. The festival in this Armenian *champ des morts* lasted for three days and ended with a drunken brawl; the "Catholic

and schismatic sects terminated their sports with a regular fight." Who could respect such a people? Certainly not Miss Pardoe who vented her disgust and generalized:

I never saw a set of people who bore so decidedly the stamp of having been borne to slavery as the Armenians...they have no high feeling, no emulation, no enthusiasm, no longing for 'a place among the nations;' no aspirations after the bright and beautiful; no ideas...their dreams are all piasters; they have no soul.⁴⁷

As the travelers watched the Armenians bury their dead, the Miss Pardoes of this world shuddered again at the total lack of respect and sentiment "these" Levantines showed for their late friends and relatives. True, according to Schiltberger, the Armenians dressed their young people for their last journey in silks and velvet and decorated them with jewelry,⁴⁸ but all this was merely for show. Mrs. Damer had been told of a very beautiful child "richly dressed, with flowers in its little hand, but...after the service was performed, it was stripped of everything, save an inner vest, and placed in a wooden box, preparatory to being consigned to the earth."⁴⁹ The narrator of H. G. Dwight's short story "The Place of Martyrs", the story of a tragic Armenian Juliet, saw with his own eyes at Pera how the beautiful corpse was carried on a bier covered with a red pall. "I saw them stop, put down the bier, take off the pall, lift the body, and drop it out of sight--like that, without any covering. It was horrible."⁵⁰

At times, these funerals could be grotesque as in the case of the lucky corpse that did have a coffin but whose grave was too short; "instead of setting themselves to lengthen it, they actually cut off several inches from the end of the coffin, completely exposing the feet of the deceased."⁵¹ Who could like people who behaved in such a manner? Who buried their friends in such "horrible" places as the Catholic Armenian cemetery at Chichli just outside the Ottoman capital, a place "fit for the poor, for criminals" where Loti's beloved servant Achmet-Mirhan was laid to rest.⁵²

There were, however, some travelers who took a more charitable view of what they saw of the burial grounds at the outskirts of Constantinople, especially the one at Pera, "an eminently beautiful spot, a tract of high rugged land overlooking the dark blue waters of the Bosphorus." Like all Christians in Turkey, the Armenians were not allowed to plant cypress trees near their tombs--that privilege was monopolized by the Muslims--but the turpentine tree that was allowed them did give a pleasant fragrance and a "remarkably pleasing appearance to this resting place of the dead." These generations of living and dead Armenians must have been great bird lovers who even from the grave took

care of the poor thirsty birds, must have been sympathetic people like the Minnesinger Walther von der Vogelweide whose tombstone resembles theirs. The Rev. Milner was impressed by the many little bird-baths cut into these tombstones.⁵³ Dr. Walsh, too, was delighted with this custom, and, unlike Miss Pardoe, was not at all disturbed by the social visits the Armenians paid their departed friends and relatives: "Here, whole Armenian families, of two or three generations together, are constantly seen sitting round the tombs, and holding visionary communication with their departed friends...Easter Monday is the great day on which they assemble." After prayers for the dead and giving alms to the poor, they "retire to some pleasant spot near the place, where provisions had been previously brought, and cheerfully enjoy the society of the living." Dr. Walsh adds that he frequently "joined these groups without being considered as an intruder; and, I confess, I have always returned pleased, and even edified, by the pious though mistaken practice."⁵⁴

The contemplation of tombstones, too, could be edifying as well as educational. At Erzeroom, a good number of them had been recycled and used as building material for the new cathedral. Lynch tells how the priests had "urged their flock to bring in the tombstones of their ancestors; and the response was so warm that there was quite a rush of able-bodied Armenians, carrying tombstones from the graves of their families on their backs."⁵⁵

Most of the travelers thought that these Armenian tombstones, wherever they might be, were striking. Yet their taste was often too fastidious to be pleased, like that of Thielemann who thought that the stone crosses he saw in Kars were nicely executed but grotesquely decorated "in the Armenian manner" with small crosses and inscriptions.⁵⁶ Other travelers, like the Italian Edmondo de Amicis, decided that most of these inscriptions were "regular and elegant." Of great interest were the grave stones of the more recent past that showed "some figure to indicate the trade or occupation of the deceased....the banker is represented by a pair of weights and scales, the priest by a mitre, the barber has his basin, the surgeon a lancet."⁵⁷ These ornaments were not at all unique; similar emblems could be found in Swiss burying grounds, Wilbraham pointed out.⁵⁸ Some of the more recent inscriptions, together with the accompanying emblems that one could see in Pera, shed much light on the social position of many of the rich Armenians in the Ottoman capital who paid for their riches with their head. For instance, de Amicis saw carved on one stone a head detached from the body which was streaming with blood; on another there was a hanged man. The epitaph explained the fate of the deceased. Charles White in 1844 reflected on this custom:

The sufferers' families, not considering this death to be ignominious, but regarding them as martyrs, adopted this indirect mode of recording the injustice to which their parents or brothers had fallen victim. There is scarcely a single Armenian family of rank or antiquity that has not been deprived, at one time or another, of some relative by these acts of despotism.⁵⁹

Much more enigmatic were the ancient tombstones, those figures of rams, sheep, or horses, half submerged or toppled, that were cluttering most Armenian grave yards throughout the Ottoman Empire and Persia, stones that invited superstitious practices. They attracted the attention of Ker Porter: "The most magnificent graves...present the figure of a ram rudely sculptured. Some have merely the plain form; others decorate its coat with strange figures and ornaments in the most elaborate carving. The form of this animal appears to have been a favorite type in sepulture throughout Armenia after the introduction of Christianity." With his pencil he captured the likeness of one of these "uncouth" beasts he had found in New Julfa. He describes this "strange" memorial: "On one of the sides, the legend of St. George slaying the dragon, is most curiously carved; and on the other, some second champion, followed by three walking personages bearing a long pole. The tail also is honored with the figure of an equestrian saint, bound round with a scroll stamped with Armenian letters. A sort of net-work covers the neck of the animal."⁶⁰

Strange, too, was the whole funeral service, especially that of a suicide. John Fryer, traveling in the latter part of the seventeenth century, reports that in the houses in which the corpses of such unfortunate persons were found "the Wall is broken down to make a Passage to their Graves...throwing them unconcernedly and unpitied into any Pit, like the Burial of a Dog, without any Solemnity."⁶¹

Strange were also the funeral customs connected with bishops. The Bavarian slave Schiltberger tells that these dignitaries were buried sitting on their throne. For three days following the funeral, a little soil was added every day, then the still hollow grave was closed.⁶² Victor Langlois was to "visit" an assembly of six late Armenian patriarchs buried in this manner in the crypt of the Armenian monastery of Sis. The Frenchman had come to this former Armenian capital to do research in the library of the monastery. But the bishop, an uncooperative man, wanted to keep the researcher away from the documents and together with the clerk Bethros plotted to lure Langlois at night to the "secret" archive in a deep and remote oubliette. Langlois was foolish enough to trust this guide, and the account of his nocturnal search into, what seemed to him, the infernal regions of death reads like an episode in a Gothic novel.⁶³

THREE YEARS
IN
CONSTANTINOPLE;
OR,
DOMESTIC MANNERS
OF
THE TURKS IN 1844.

BY CHARLES WHITE, ESQ.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
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1845.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENTS.

the Balykly cemetery; the second may be seen upon a similar monument in that of Pera.



Here repose the mortal remains of

ERGANYAN ARETIN,*

Banker to the Sublime Porte.

His virtues were refulgent as the gold

He amassed by industry and fair dealing.

His charity was boundless, his word inviolable,

And his piety transcendent.

He gave to all, and owed to none.

He bade adieu to his weeping family

Upon the 7th July, 1795,

Trusting to Almighty Grace,

And blessing the hand that opened for him

The Gates of PARADISE.



* Long Paschal's son.

Of great interest were the caves and inscriptions in the rocks high above the city of Van; the golden treasure buried there had, of course, vanished long ago. Not far away, on the Island of Aghtamar stood what looked like a very precious gilded and enameled Limoges treasure box: the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross. King Gagik in 915 had commissioned the monk Manuel to build the church as part of the royal palace. After the king and his palace and the kingdom had vanished, the Church of the Holy Cross remained and for many years played an important role in Armenian church history. In 1850, Austen Henry Layard had "discovered" the island and the church for the travelers, but it lay somewhat off the beaten track of the travelers and therefore we do not hear very often about it. When Mrs. Bishop made her journey to the East in the late 1880s, the island was still inhabited by eleven monks and their pupils. The island, along with its gardens and tombstones and church and crumbling monastery had "its own enchantment, and all is as fair as fair can be." The conception of the church was typically Armenian, "a cruciform building, with a hexagonal tower and a conical terminal at the intersection of the cross." Mrs. Bishop was not impressed with the "simple interior" that was "decorated with some rude pictures" and the gilded throne of the patriarch, but plain as the interior of the church may have been, "the exterior is most elaborately ornamented with bas-reliefs, very much undercut. Three of the roofs rest on friezes on which birds and beasts in singularly vigorous action are portrayed, and there are besides two rows of heads in high relief, and a number of scripture subjects very boldly treated, in addition to some elaborate scrollwork, and bands of rich foliage." The local Christians as well as the Europeans living in the area frequently found refuge on the peaceful island with its church and ruins from the marauding Kurds; Mrs. Bishop felt even during the "peaceful" times of her visit that "the shadow of the Kurd is over this paradise."⁶⁴

She was right. Not very many years after her visit, the monks and their pupils were brutally murdered by Turks and Kurds and the church and its monastery ruined. The church and the island are no longer a refuge, and those modern travelers who are attracted by the beauty of this unique building and its history are carefully guarded by their travel companions, soldiers with their submachine guns slung over their shoulder, all eye and ear for the activities of the visitors. Should any of their charges show signs of undue interest in the culture and fate of the Armenians who have once lived here, the doors of the notorious jail of Diyarbakir will open to receive them.⁶⁵ The island of Aghtamar located in Lake Van is part of modern Turkey.

Even in previous centuries it was not always wise to show too much interest in the history and culture of the region since the imagination of the peoples of the Levant, including that of the Armenians, saw a treasure hidden

under almost every stone. They would not shrink from murder to protect what they thought was rightfully theirs. The sad fate of the traveler-scholar Schulz at the hands of the Kurdish chief Nur Ullah Bey provided the bloody exemplum. In their hearts, all of our travelers knew--though at times they might boast that they enjoyed the complete confidence of Turks, Kurds, or Persians--that these peoples distrusted the travelers. The Rev. Henry Lobdell's case, he was an American missionary at Mossul, typifies their situation. He was told that the Kurds in whose territory he was healing the sick longed to "butcher" him as they had done to George Schulz because "his skin was covered with gold".⁶⁶

That was no idle threat. George Schulz, the geologist who had to poke his nose into every mine, the archeologist who uncovered troves of antiquities, the linguist who deciphered ancient inscriptions, this man in the minds of the Kurds must have had his skin also "covered with gold" as well. He had figured out the inscriptions in the ruins and caves of Van and therefore must have gained power over the spirits of the place, so the Kurds reasoned. They could not tolerate that; the spirits and the treasures of the place belonged to them.

To Schulz, this was all superstition. He was a leading orientalist and professor at the University of Giessen and had been sent to Turkey and Persia to examine their "stores of literary wonders". His academic activities were successful, but it seems he was not a prudent man. He was intelligent, bold and aggressive, yet naive enough to trust Nur Ullah Bey, a ruthless and treacherous Kurdish leader. The Bey invited the German to his castle, feasted him there, and gave him an escort for his return, all along planning murder. The Kurdish guides led Schulz to a dark valley, shot him in the back and killed the faithful servants as well. To hide the dastardly deed and not to dirty their hands with *giaur* blood, the murderers kidnapped several Armenian peasants to bury the evidence. The Armenians later confessed to their priest who did not observe the secret of the confessional. In time, the Persian crown prince Abbas Mirza, a good friend of the late Schulz, heard the news. He vowed revenge and sent a threatening message to the Bey who protested innocence but returned the dead man's possessions. The princely revenge came to naught since the plague was decimating the ranks of Persians and Kurds alike. The image of the martyred scholar, however, entered the iconography of the travelers. Yet there can be a negative aspect even to the most saintly life as Edson L. Clark's account of the murder suggests:

It was a dark and evil deed; but under the circumstances, need have occasioned no surprise. Schulz traveled with much pomp and a great deal of baggage, gave rich presents to the chiefs, took notes and specimens of all that he saw, and openly avowed himself the agent of a European sovereign. It was very natural that the jealous Kurds should regard him as a spy sent to explore their mines in the interest of a foreign power, and...be incited to take his life.

The picture of the swaggering and unpleasant Schulz, unfortunately, also represents the likeness of many other travelers; this fact, however, very few of them ever realized.

It was difficult for the people of the region to understand the mentality of the traveler and his enthusiasm for antiquities, and they stared "with astonishment at men flying with impatience from town to town, exploring ruins; measuring...groping in dark caves...carrying off mutilated gods and goddesses; packing up common stones and pebbles, as if they were rubies and diamonds," as one of the Britishers who was himself affected by this disease observed.⁶⁷

Such a charge did not prevent the early archeologists, especially Austen H. Layard, from hunting down ancient palaces and winged bulls on Mesopotamian and Armenian terrain.

The land around the holy mountain was like one vast outdoor museum, a "cabinet of curiosities," Schweiger-Lerchenfeld described Armenia.⁶⁸ There the traveler could indulge in the illusion that these fields of ruins over which he walked had once been great cities, that these vineyards had once been Noah's, that he had returned to the place where it all began.

The ruins were everywhere; wherever he looked, ruined cities "mingled...with the habitable parts" of the towns,⁶⁹ Armenian kings lay buried here and there, ruined churches grew like huge rotten mushrooms on the plains, Armenian monasteries crumbled, and ancient castles looked picturesque; the whole scene was worthy to be painted by a romantic landscape artist: "A castle stood once on this precipitous cliff...The light of the moon transformed the grotesque rocks into the strangest shapes and their shadows seemed to move. On the other cliff, across from it was another venerable edifice but hidden by darkness; it stood there empty and desolate." Over this memento of time and decay towered Mt. Ararat.⁷⁰ Who could remain unmoved at such a sublime picture?

Interesting were also the many decaying churches the traveler saw on his way; "today," on the slopes of Mt. Ararat, "we were riding past many a beautiful church that has been turned into a heap of stones," wrote Heinrich von Poser during the 1620s on his pilgrimage to the holy sites of the East.⁷¹ Abich, traveling about two centuries later, saw even more ruined churches of which the tooth of time, earthquakes, and the "enemies of Christianity" were taking their toll. Something had to be done to arrest the decay of these monuments; Abich, therefore, drew the attention of the Armenian church authorities to this need and volunteered his own help. He was sure that future travelers would be grateful to him.⁷² The decline of these edifices, especially in the Turkish part of Armenia, has not been arrested. Declined or not, the heart of many a twentieth-

century traveler has also "hankered" to see these ruins, like, for instance, that of the charmingly eccentric missionary Father Chantry-Pigg of Rose Macaulay's novel *The Towers of Trebizond*. On his rambles through eastern Anatolia, he had "observed several ruined Armenian churches about the landscape which he would like to see closer." Following his inclination, he wandered absentmindedly into Soviet Armenia.⁷³

The ruins of the circular church of Zwartnotz--built between 643 and 653, destroyed about four centuries later--certainly have been worth a visit, especially after the site was excavated in 1902. Fridtjof Nansen's respect for the accomplishments of the ancient Armenians grew when he saw the ruined church. These old Armenian architects had perfected their art at a time when in Europe church architecture was still in its infancy, Nansen marvelled.⁷⁴

Many modern visitors of the village and fortification of Garni have been fascinated by the Hellenistic temple built by the Armenian king Tiridates. At first a pagan temple, then a royal summer residence, it was totally destroyed in 1679 by an earthquake and thus, unlike today, the traveler only saw a heap of stones. Morier describes the scene:

This place is situated upon the brink of an immense chasm, on the opposite side of which arises an arid perpendicular mountain...immediately upon the brink of a precipice, are the remains of a building of the Ionic order, of the architecture of the middle ages, bearing every mark of Roman workmanship, and quite foreign to anything Persian or Armenian. It struck me as the remains of a small temple, although, from its complete dilapidation, it would be impossible to decide with precision what was its original shape....all its remains, were in perfect good taste, and still so well preserved as to show it was a highly finished building.⁷⁵

Professor Wagner, too, was impressed by the beauty of the temple that his imagination reconstructed for him.⁷⁶ A few years before, in 1843, the Swiss architect F. Dubois had suggested that the temple should be rebuilt. This happened in our century.

The sad remnants of the past glory of Armenia one could see everywhere. For example, Lori, once one of the strong capitals of ancient Armenia, a city that then numbered six thousand houses, the residence of a king, a fortified town that lasted through a siege of seven years, now was a miserable hamlet of thirty hovels. That has often been the fate of mighty cities, and the learned traveler from the West could recall his Ovid: "*Iam seges est ubi Troja fuit*" ("Now there are fields where Troy once was"). The houses were small and miserable but of recent date. Dr. Eduard Eichwald thought that at least the church was old. So was the fortification and the inscription in

Armenian letters above the old city gate. No one of the population was able to read it, and it was too high on the wall for the professor to be able to make it out and to copy it correctly.⁷⁷ Professor Koch, in turn, was not sure about the exact location of the ancient capital of Lori; nevertheless, he busily copied Armenian inscriptions from walls and churches. Unfortunately he lost all his notes during his sickness.

There were many more mementos in stone to the past glory of Armenia. Anavarza, not very far from Tarsus, St. Paul's town, had been compared in the twelfth century by the Arab geographer Edrisi of Damascus; in the nineteenth century its ruins motivated the German traveler Ernst Lohmann to trace the relationship of medieval Armenia and the Holy Roman Empire.⁷⁸

But why spend so much time on minor ruined piles when one could visit the site of Ani? Thus several travelers decided to "have a rest, and give the camel a chance to relax, before pushing on to visit Ani, the ancient ruined Armenian capital...on which," as we know, "Father Chantry-Pigg had set his heart."⁷⁹ William J. Hamilton, during the 1840s "Secretary to the Geological Society" in London, was so excited to see the ruins that the night before the excursion was to take place he could hardly sleep. For Monday, June 13, 1835, he reports in his diary: "What between my anxiety to see the ruins of Ani and the annoyance of vermin, I was unable to close my eyes all night."⁸⁰ What if the ruins were not worth the bother after all?

At the beginning of last century, few people in the West had read in their history books about this old town, Ani, seat of the Bagratunis, Ani with its thousand churches, thousand gates, and its population of one hundred thousand. Not too many Europeans, and still fewer Americans, had by the middle of the nineteenth century visited that barren, dangerous, and godforsaken spot. There was no danger that Thielemann would meet a traveling fellow German there, and he was glad about that prospect. Even if this "giaour city" had been better known, it would not have been overrun by "tourists" since already by the middle of the eighteenth century it had acquired the reputation of being "the headquarters of all the thieves and rogues in the country" though, once upon a time during its flourishing days, Ani was "described as having been the seat of a people more civilized and prosperous than any of those which now occupy the soil."⁸¹

Some of the European travelers knew that once the fate of nations had been decided there, and general books on geography like Ritter's *Geographie* and Ungewitter's *Die Türkei* briefly informed about the history and location of the place, that "it was once a fortified town, ten miles from the city of Kars. Many of the old city walls and towers can still be seen. There are also the ruins of a...castle which had often been used as royal treasure house. This

monumental palace used to be the favorite residence of Armenian kings; now it is in ruins like the city which once had a population of 100.000."⁸²

Captain Richard Wilbraham's brief historical sketch helped to locate Ani in time:

The city of Ani was built in the early part of the sixth century, and continued for several hundred years to be the capital of Armenia. It fell several times into the hands of those fierce conquerors who during the middle ages overran the East, and experienced the most cruel treatment of them. The old historians inform us that, when Ani was captured by Alp Arslan, the slaughter was so great, that the streets were choked with bodies and the river crimsoned with the blood of the slain.⁸³

That was in 1064. Events like these overtook Ani time and again--the aggressors changed their identity, the methods remained the same, the population each time was either killed or fled, and during the short respites between massacres civilization flourished again. In 1239, Genghis Khan besieged the city, sacked it, demolished many of the splendid buildings, and massacred most of the inhabitants. But life in Ani continued till 1319 when the last faithful burghers fled after a very strong earthquake had destroyed whatever the scourge from the East had left. Ani was forgotten, then slowly became the perfect goal of the traveler, historian, geographer, and archeologist--and the local banditti. Ani was a dead town, yet Ani was never forgotten by the descendants of the people that had once lived in this old capital of the Bagratunis. Ani was dead, yet strangely fascinating and enduring, an emblem of Armenia herself:

She was Armenia's heart,
a mountain fortress
eyed by Baghdad and Byzantium....
But neither wind nor snow
nor numbing blows of time
erase the interrupted songs....
The broken heart breathes quietly.⁸⁴

There had always been the occasional traveler who did pass through Ani since the town was located very close to one of the busiest trading routes that connected Europe with the Middle and Far East. On the 2nd of February 1255, the Flemish monk Guillaume of Rhysbroeck was in Ani. He met there five Dominican monks whom he discouraged from going any further east. He mentions that there were one thousand churches in Ani, and he thought that the location of the town was strategically important.⁸⁵ On April 7, 1624, Heinrich von Poser was delighted that he was allowed by the authorities of the region to

visit the decaying city; he saw there the still beautiful ruins of about two hundred churches.⁸⁶ Tavenir mentions Ani; Dubois in 1834 had wanted to visit the site which then was under Ottoman jurisdiction, however, the Swiss traveled under Russian protection and therefore could not reach his goal. Through the accounts of Morier, Porter, and Hamilton, the Western reader had heard something about this great graveyard of Armenian history and civilization.

It was a rough and dangerous trip but worth the bother. For the Austrian art historian Joseph Strzygowski in 1913, it was decidedly the high point of his archeological expedition.⁸⁷ The view before the traveler was stark and breathtaking: a huge field dotted with stones and at its end a mighty city with walls and towers and churches and palaces--only without any sign of life; nothing but stones as far as the eye could see; behind the skyline of the ruins the rough crags of the mountain ranges--and all this stony desert surmounted by the snow-capped pyramid of Mt. Ararat.⁸⁸ Breathtaking, yes; but dead and melancholy and lonely. The deserted churches reminded the traveler that a very powerful Christian nation here sank beneath the repeated attacks of the most barbarous tribes of Asia, the bitterest foe of "civilization and Christianity."⁸⁹

The traveler had come to an absolutely dead town. "No massive doors cracked upon their hinges; we rode through empty archways into a deserted town."⁹⁰ The towers and walls looked so cyclopean that Abich felt that they were mightier than the fortifications of ancient Rome.⁹¹ A few of the travelers noticed the plaque with the carved lion of Ani: "Over the center gate was sculptured a leopard or lion-passant,"⁹² and wherever one looked, there were crosses to be seen, often vandalized by the Muslim conquerors like so much else in this former stronghold of Christianity, so Thielemann, Abich, and Wilbraham complained. There were very many inscriptions covering pillars, houses, walls. Abich and Wilbraham soon gave up the task of copying them. It would have taken them years to finish such an undertaking. Eugène Boré in 1838 showed more perseverance and copied many of them and sent his learned discourse on these inscriptions to the Académie des Inscriptions in Paris. Unfortunately, the essay and the copies were lost in the mail.⁹³

There was so much beauty to be appreciated among these broken remnants of Armenian culture. Many of the crumbled buildings "display much splendor and architectural beauty, and the fretwork of some of the arches is very rich," commented Wilbraham.⁹⁴ Sir Ker Porter admired the "masterly workmanship of the capitals of the pillars, the nice carvings of the intricate ornaments, and arabesque friezes, surpassed any thing of the kind I had ever

seen, whether abroad, or in the most celebrated cathedrals of England."⁹⁵ Abich had never seen such perfectly executed masonry,⁹⁶ and Thielemann thought that the color combination of the various rocks that had been used in the building of the city was perfectly tasteful.⁹⁷

There was so much to be seen in Ani; so much, in fact, that Hamilton completely overlooked the ruined citadel, but Thielemann noticed the shortcoming of his predecessor.⁹⁸ Several observers looked beyond the buildings and speculated on the social injustices that must have prevailed in medieval Ani, for the living quarters of the great masses were cramped and of poor quality,⁹⁹ while the churches and the palaces of the rich were vast and must have been equipped with the latest of medieval luxuries. There were the remnants of the royal palace, "a building worthy the fame of this old capital." It must have been so huge that it still "seems a town in itself; and so superbly decorated within and without, that no description can give an adequate idea of the variety and richness of the highly wrought carvings on the stone, which are all over the building; or of the finely-executed mosaic patterns, which beautify the floors of its countless halls."¹⁰⁰

There were so many churches; the ancient chronicles tell us that at the height of its glory Ani had one thousand and one. Not all of them had left traces, yet all the ruins that the traveler saw bore witness to the power the Armenian church enjoyed, especially during the tenth century. Hamilton liked to look particularly at one chapel; it had a "beautiful arched roof" and was "divided into several compartments, filled with mosaics of various patterns...and having its walls covered with rich carvings and sculptured arabesques."¹⁰¹ The travelers visited many ruined buildings; the most outstanding of them all was the main cathedral. By European standards, it was perhaps a bit small; "it is nevertheless a stately building. It bears the imprint of that undefinable quality, beauty, and can scarcely fail to arouse a thrill of delight in the spectator." Lynch continues to give us a detailed description of the edifice.¹⁰² Thielemann was favorably impressed by the ornamentation and the harmonious proportions of this church. Nevertheless, he was "prosaic" enough to invite his fellow travelers and his Turkish guides to partake with him of a breakfast *à la fresca* within the roofless ruin of this "venerable" building.¹⁰³

Hamilton, too, was attracted by the cathedral "built in the form of a Latin cross" and all the inscriptions that covered its walls. He could not do much close inspecting because "the church was full of cattle, which had taken refuge there from the mid-day heat."¹⁰⁴ When Wilbraham visited the church, a

"solitary Koordish shepherd" and his goats had found shelter around a fire he had kindled on the ruined altar of the church. Ruins, sheep, and shepherd "would have furnished a subject worthy of Salvator's pencil," Wilbraham reflects.¹⁰⁵ Abich saw the ruined cathedral too, but he was not reminded of a landscape done in the romantic manner. The view aroused in him sentiments of melancholy; it bothered him to contemplate the sad remnants of a once flourishing Christian culture and people and to see the despoilers go free and continue their brutal work of destruction with the blessings of a Christian Europe.¹⁰⁶

Ani reminded them of a huge outdoors museum that contained many artifacts; it no longer harbored any life. There was the occasional picturesque Kurd with his herd, the pigeons and ravens that fluttered in and out of the blind windows, and the few flowers that the traveler picked and pressed in his diary. Thielemann and Porter saw no sign of life. Lynch heard the owls hoot and was greeted by an old feeble Armenian priest "with the demeanor of a man who is awaiting death." This old man was the "only custodian of these priceless architectural treasures." He lived in constant fear of the Kurds. Not too long before Lynch's visit, he had been attacked in his house by a gang of Kurds, beaten, stabbed, and robbed of everything he owned.¹⁰⁷

Very few of the travelers were foolhardy enough to want to overnight in the deserted town. For there was another Ani, the vast subterranean town about which the travelers speculated during the daytime yet feared since it awoke at night. Throughout the nineteenth century, it sheltered bands of thieves and outcasts that terrorized the regions around Mt. Ararat. The idea of banditti on a picture or in the flesh, but seen from a distance, was intriguing, but they could be very dangerous and did not shrink from killing the innocent Westerner when it was convenient--and the traveler remembered the fate of Schulz and shuddered or made the sign of the cross. Many of these picturesque Kurds infested the nocturnal city. Porter imagined these "banditti, issuing from the dark and tomb-like heaps of the city, where, in the daylight, appeared only silence and desolation."¹⁰⁸ Morier knew subterranean Ani to be the "head-quarter of all the thieves and rogues in the country" where a "man's head would not be worth a para." Osmond, the hero of Morier's novel *Ayesha*¹⁰⁹, naturally was brave enough to venture into Ani at night, to the main cathedral, where the Kurdish criminal and voluptuary Cara Bey wanted to involve the young Briton in his fiendish plots.

The courage of the hero of fiction was superior to that of all the daytime visitors of Ani put together. He did visit "the Specter City" Ani out of his free will. What he saw there was truly sublime; nocturnal Ani was "the capital in the land of elves and fairies" on which he feasted his eyes and imagination:

There was not sufficient light to exhibit every detail of ruin, and an ignorant observer might have mistaken what he saw for a flourishing city, the inhabitants of which had suddenly been smitten by the plague, or with one consent had abandoned their homes and fled. The silence which prevailed was fearful, and struck involuntary horror. House succeeded house in sad array, and not a sound was heard. A magnificent structure, looking like a royal palace, lifted up its walls and towers, cutting the clear blue vault of heaven with its angular lines, and lighted up by the moon by its splendour.

Eventually the brave hero was taken to meet the Kurdish Bey in the cathedral that was "built in the form of a cross...a form of architecture so like a European place of worship, that Osmond could scarcely believe that he was far away from the blessings of his own Christian country, and in the midst of ruthless barbarians."

Osmond could make out by the flickering light of the torches that the church was full of picturesque Kurds. The din of their infernal music and their vulgar dance and the presence of the fiend Cara Bey desecrated the ruined church, the "ancient altar...the sacred emblem of the cross." It still was a sublime picture, only a bit too close for comfort. And Osmond, a good Christian, shuddered at "all this abomination...in what has once been a Christian church!"

As the fairy-tale prince Antranik had been told once upon a time by the royal geographer, though to Ararat and back it was a long journey, it could be profitable. The prince found and returned with a piece of the wood from Noah's Ark that restored his father's health; Osmond overcame the wicked Cara Bey and rescued the distressed Ayesha who turned out to be a British girl and his relative; the other travelers brought the relics and books and data which they had collected--or simply their memories of a very ancient holy place--away with them. They all agreed that the region around Mt. Ararat was a strange and savage yet romantic "new continent", a memento of man's glory and transitoriness, and, for a while, they all had as actors animated and participated in the type of picture that graced the walls of their parlors back home. What a sublime pictorial composition they had experienced! Unfortunately, on closer observation, the aesthetic and moral composition was frequently jarred by the people that were indigenous to this sublime backdrop of Ani, Noah's Ark, Mt. Ararat, and the Garden of Eden--the Armenians.

ENDNOTES

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ԼԵՈՒԸ, ԵՐԿԻՐԸ ԵՒ ՀՆՈՒԹԻՒՆՆԵՐԸ
(Ամփոփում)

ԻՆԿՐԻՏ ԼԷՅԸՐ ՍԸՄԱՆ

Անատոլուն... Քիրտիստանի կուսակաճությունը... Հայաստանը... Սոյեան տապանը եւ այգին... Արարատ լեռը... Եղեմի պարտեզը՝ վայրեր ուր հասան Արեւելք ճամբորդող ճանապարհորդները, մարդկութեան ժամանակի եւ տեղի սկսնաւորման իրենց փնտրտուքին մէջ...

Անյիշելի ժամանակներէ ի վեր Սուրբ Լեւոն ու անմիջական շրջակայքը հրապուրեր են մարդկութեան երեւակայութիւնը:

Ուսումնասիրութիւնը կը ծանրանայ ԺԹ. դարու կէտերէն մինչեւ Ի. դարու սկիզբը առասպելական այս վայրերը այցելած ճանապարհորդներուն– ուխտատուներուն տպաւորութիւններուն, ճեպագրութիւններուն, նկարագրութիւններուն, տեղական բնութեան ու բնակչութեան հետ իրենց շփումներուն, եզրակացութիւններուն, եւ իրենց այս խորհրդաւոր ուխտագնացութեանց վերաբերող գրութիւններուն–գիրքերուն:

Այս օտարերկրացիներուն ողիսականը ի յայտ կը բերէ նաեւ շրջանի բնակչութեան կենցաղին, առօրեային, անցեալին բնակած մեծ ու հսկայ քաղաքներուն, ինչպէս Անիի, Կարսի, Վանայ Լիճի Աղթամար կղզիին ճարտարապետական նուաճումներէն եւ ներկայի ճակատագրէն դրուագներ: