

A PUBLICATION OF THE COMPATRIOTIC UNION OF HABOUSI

A VILLAGE **R**EMEMBERED

The Armenians of Habousi

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Contents

Foreword	vii
Preface to the Armenian Version	ix
Acknowledgement	x
The Armenians	xiii
A VILLAGE REMEMBERED	
The Region and Its People	5
The Foundation of Habousi	11
Historical Fragments	13
The Location and the Springs of Habousi	17
Agriculture and Produce	25
Trade and Trades	29
Household Economy	35
Administration	37
Family and Holidays	41
Engagement and Wedding	45
Baptism	48
Interesting Remedies	50
Proverbs	52
Songs, Puzzles, Games and Curses	55
Folk Idioms	59
The Aghas of the Village	62
The School and the Church	63
The Missionary Movement and the School	71
On the Eve of the 1895 Massacres	77
The Massacres and the Victims	83
1915 Genocide and Deportation	91
Resilience and Resurrection	109
The Patriotic Union of Habousi	115
The Holy Cross Church of Lawrence	129
Ararat Armenian Congregational Church	133
Epilogue of the Armenian Version	137
Overview of the Compatriotic Union of Habousi	139
WORLD HABOusetzies	143

F oreword

In May of 1995, members of the Compatriotic Union of Habousi decided to embark on the project of translating the *History of the Village of Habousi* from Armenian into English. Both young and old members hoped to make accessible to all generations a sense of our history and a better understanding of our culture. What we did not realize at the time is that this project would become so much more.

The original *History of the Village of Habousi* was published in 1963. As the reader will learn in the 1963 preface, the contributors were aware of the historical, geographic and ethnographic significance of their undertaking. The moral obligation that compelled them to compile a history of the village, destroyed by the genocide, for posterity and to honor the people and community devastated by the massacres was not only courageous but wise. It is true that Habousi geographically no longer exists, and the land is submerged in water, as a result to the construction of the Kevan dam by the Turkish government in this region. However, through this document the reader will soon learn that the spirit of this village of Kharperit will continue to thrive from generation to generation. For equally important to the geographical and historical information is the knowledge of Habousetzies' love for education, human values, their piety, entrepreneurial spirit, self defense, and strong community spirit.

This English version is not a literal translation. The Book Committee and the editor deemed it necessary to rid the English version from repetitions, to abbreviate certain chapters while expanding others, to include maps and a historical sketch by Christopher Walker and David Marshall Lang, and where noted to anglicize some of the original names. All this was done to enable the reader to better comprehend the History of Habousi while maintaining the spirit and sense of pride from the original authors.

Finally, we hope to bridge readers not only with the past but with a new generation of Armenia. Habousetzies, once again, have the opportunity to contribute to the prosperity of an independent homeland. This new homeland's strength is encouraged by our support while we pay homage to our ancestors.

In spite of the historical significance of this document, for some readers this book will be a personal journey. For beyond the written text, the voices of your parents, grandparents or great grandparents may suddenly awaken and the stories become familiar. Once again, the Compatriotic Union of Habousi felt a moral obligation to insure that these voices were heard and not forgotten. Hence our decision to translate the original document into English.

In 1963, when the History of the Village of Habousi was published, our ancestors left a legacy to their descendants that identified the hardships and challenges of the past. In 1996, we hope that the reader not only understands those hardships but also appreciates the spirit in which the challenges were overcome. Habousetzies' respect for human dignity and perseverance transcend time and are qualities that make both Armenians and non-Armenians proud.

Compatriotic Union of Habousi

Preface to the Armenian Version (revised in 1993)

Our birthplace Habousi was destroyed and its indigenous Armenian population devastated during the horrible genocide of 1915, like other numerous lively cities and villages of Western Armenia. The Turkish massacres and deportation claimed the lives of most of our villagers—the aged, women, children. Those who survived have kept Habousi alive in their souls. They have remembered its beautiful scenery and its brave and hardworking people whose lives, customs, and traditions remain a valuable legacy for us all.

When the Compatriotic Union of Habousi decided to prepare and publish the history of the village, they were aware that it would be a difficult task—a task that would demand dedicated work and financial sacrifices from its members. But the notion of a moral obligation to complete this project urged us forward for two major reasons.

First, there was the desire to establish a monument in honor of our destroyed village and our compatriots who were killed by the Turkish yataghan (sword) or who perished on the road to exile. We hope that present and future generations learn through this book about Habousi which today lays in ruin, its creative villagers, workers, mothers, and children forever deprived of tombs.

Second, there was the demand to write down the customs, proverbs, values, desires, and efforts of many generations of villagers, as a complementary part of the ethnographic history of the Armenian people.

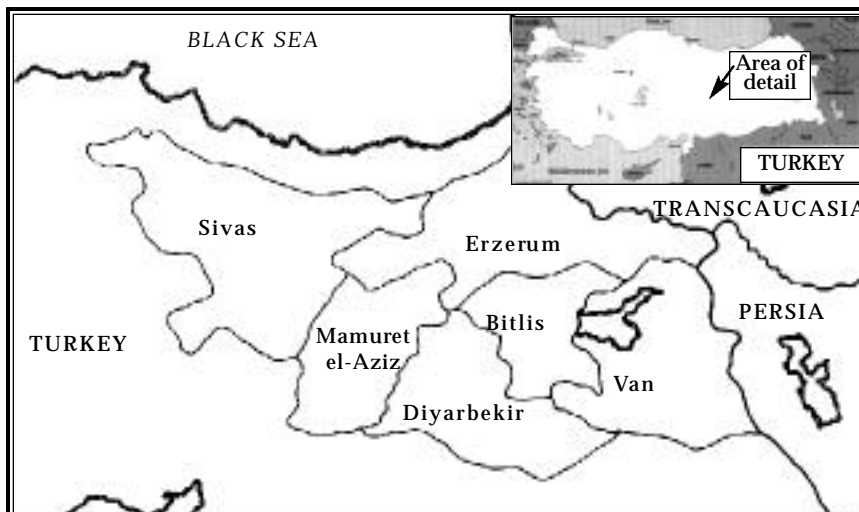
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Central Committee
Compatriotic Union of Habousi

The Region and Its People

Habousi was a village of Kharpert, a province in Western Armenia renamed Mamuret-el-Aziz by Ottoman rulers. Armenia, in ancient times, was an extensive land (300,000 square kilometers or 115,000 square miles), neighbored on the west by the Byzantine Empire and on the east by the Persian Empire. After the fall of the last Armenian Cilician kingdom in 1375, six Armenian provinces—Van, Paghesh (Bitlis), Garin (Erzerum), Sepastia (Sivas), Dikranagerd (Diyarbakir), and Kharpert—and a certain portion of Cilicia fell under Ottoman Turkey, while the Persians ruled Eastern Armenia.

Kharpert was surrounded by the Taurus Mountain Ranges, com-



The administrative division of Western Armenia in late nineteenth century.

prised of three plains known as Oulou Ova (Big field), Deoz Ova (Plain field) and Keoz Ova (Sheep field). In the heart of these plains, atop a hill some 5,000 feet height the city of Kharpert (Harput in Turkish) was built. The city was surrounded by about 365 villages, one of them being Habousi. At the foot of the hill, about three miles distant, was Mezre, the government seat of the province.

The Aradzany River (known as the Eastern Euphrates or Murat River)¹, flowing from the east, passed along the eastern boundary of Oulou Ova, turned north and cut the Taurus Ranges, thus dividing Kharpert from Dersim. Then again it changed its course and flowed southward into the Euphrates River near Malatia. Other rivers and tributaries passed through the plain also. Some came from the hills of Khacho Melik or from the Lake of Soorsoory; all were bound for the Euphrates River. Thus the plains of Kharpert formed a peninsula, abundant with water and ideal for growing crops. The lower hillsides were covered with vineyards, nut groves, fruit orchards, and mulberry trees. The fields were prolific with cotton, wheat, sesame, and all types of cereal grains and melons.

Kharpert was famous for the quality and quantity of its wine grapes. However, due to Turkish government policies, the shipping of wine grapes out of the province was kept to a minimum. The extensive acreage of mulberry trees did offer a medium for the raising of silk worms and gave impetus to a limited manufacture of silk goods for local and neighboring consumption. The manufacture of stamped cotton goods became almost an art. Various plants, leaves, nut shells, and roots were the source of fast natural dyes. Tanneries were common in many villages. Sheep and cattle raising were also important industries.

The villages which surrounded Kharpert were, for the most part, populated entirely by Armenians. In general, the Turks and Kurds inhabited villages in the mountainous regions north of Kharpert, which extended as far as the Euphrates River. Mezre was populated by both Armenians and Turks. It was on the outskirts of Mezre that silk factories were established in the mid to late nineteenth century.

1- By the source of the Aradzani the Armenian army had its headquarters in the fourth and the fifth centuries; it was near Aradzani that Tigran the Great, King of Armenia, defeated the Roman army in the first century B.C.; and it was told that King Trdades, his army, and Armenians at large were baptized in Aradzani when they adopted Christianity as the state religion in 301 AD.

The climate of Kharpert was dry and healthy. Only during a certain season of the year did humidity prevailed on the plains. The seasons were distinctly marked, each bringing with it special labors and enjoyment to the countryfolks. Kharpert was beautiful in the spring time, with its verdant fields and hillsides; beautiful in the heat of summer, with its fields of ripening grains and fruits; beautiful in the autumn, when the hills and countryside turned crimson and gold under nature's brush and young and old gathered with laughter and song to harvest the luscious grapes, fruits, grains, and nuts which filled the countrymen's larders for the coming winter days; beautiful in the winter when its cities and hamlets were covered with a mantle of snow and ice. Winter was the season for some work, but more so for rest and enjoyment.

The community life of Kharpert was closely interwoven with the change of seasons. Kharpert may well be called a patriarchal community. Families were closely knit. Grandparents, parents, and children all lived under one paternal roof. Marriages were consummated on the basis of family background and the suitability of the various families. It was jokingly said that when Kharpertsies met they invariably turned out to be relatives or at least *khenamis* (in-laws). Thus the community behaved like one large family. Each person was willing and ready to help his neighbor in the field or in the home. Dear in the memory of the Kharpetrtsie housewives were the bread-making days. On those days the whole neighborhood would get together to bake a six months' supply of bread for each family. Then came the season for crushing grapes. Crushed grapes were used to make wine, syrup, rojig, and pasdegh. Late in the fall was the time for melting butter fats and making *khavoorma* (pieces of meat cooked with bones and salted for preservation). Countless household duties were performed cheerfully, each for the other. Plowing, reaping, and shearing all turned into community projects complete with the attendant joy-making.

In spite of the ever present shadow of fear that hung over the Armenians, the inhabitants of Kharpert were happy and jovial. Birthdays, name days, feast days, engagements, and weddings were all occasions for gaiety. When the chilling blasts blew on the long winter days, the family would gather around the *koorsi* (the heating device). Grandparents told fantastic fairy tales to the little ones; maidens silently and diligently worked on intricate needlework and laces; mothers brought in trays laden with delicacies; and the menfolk spoke in low tones of their hope for the day when they would be free from oppression.

This was Kharpert before the tragic days of 1915, before the Turks brought total desolation and havoc and turned a happy and contented community to a barren wilderness.

The city of Kharpert offered great educational leadership to the wide vicinity of neighboring villages. Love of education was inherent in the young. In proportion to its size, Kharpert had many educational institutions, including kindergartens, primary schools, intermediate and high schools and three fine colleges, one French, one German, and one American, all established by their various nations for the purpose of bringing education to a worthy Christian people. The missionaries who labored zealously to bring the light of education were dear to those who studied under their untiring efforts. Non-missionary schools fell primarily under the jurisdiction and the sponsorship of the churches. Even the humblest farmer made the necessary sacrifices to insure his children receive an education. Every year, hundreds of young graduates journeyed out into the neighboring villages to teach and carry the torch of learning to others.

Turks, filled with religious fanaticism and racial hatred, looked with disfavor upon these Christian institutions. They did not take advantage of the educational opportunities of these foreign-run facilities and were content with their few mediocre schools and religious *medresses* (schools), where the teaching of the Koran and its loud recital seemed to be of highest importance. Taxes were levied on the Armenian population for the upkeep of these schools. The standard of education of the Armenians was far superior to that of the Turks, which perhaps explains why so many important positions were filled by Armenians (with the exception of military and police offices).

There was a Central High School located in Mezre. The French and German schools were also in Mezre, as well as many grade schools. The High School was co-educational. In the city of Kharpert were the St. Hagop Central School and Euphrates College, founded in 1878 and supported by an American endowment. Euphrates College was an imposing structure, comprised of two wings, with six large and small buildings, located on a hill surrounded with nut and fruit trees. The college had a well-rounded curriculum and also offered nursing and medical courses. One of its presidents, Dr. Atkinson, built the American Hospital in Mezre.

The enrollment of the schools of Mamuret-el-Aziz was about 35,000. Four-fifths of this number were Armenian, the balance was Turkish.

These numbers include the enrollment in Turkish *medresses* and the military academy. There is no doubt that the high level of education provided by these institutions raised the standard of living among the Armenians and in a measure affected the Turks positively also.

The educational advancement of the Armenian youth of Kharpert gave way to the gradual emigration from their homeland. For one reason, the opening of new vistas spurred them to establish higher goals; and the other—perhaps even stronger—motivation, was the growing sense of insecurity the people of Kharpert felt under Turkish rule. Emigration out of Kharpert and the neighboring villages started in the late nineteenth century. As the persecution and oppression increased, so did the numbers of those trying to find refuge and opportunity in other lands. Many came to the United States.

According to a census taken in 1870's by Armenian clergymen, there were nearly 118,900 inhabitants in Kharpert and the surrounding plains and hillsides. A little over fifty percent of the inhabitants were Armenians, twenty-seven percent Kurds, twenty-one percent were Turks, and one percent were Syrians. In the late 1890's, however, these numbers were not quite as favorable to the Armenians due to massacres and emigration, but Armenian birthrates were generally higher, so the population mix of the region remained stable until the genocide of 1915.

The vilayet of Mamuret-el-Aziz was divided into three provinces, Kharpert, Dersim, and Malatia. According to an unofficial census taken by Turkey, the population of the three combined was between 450,000 and 525,000. The majority were Armenian. Mezre had a population of about 16,000, half Armenians and half Turks. Business was mostly in the hands of the Armenians. Real estate was equally divided. The silk factories were Armenian owned.

Many Armenians in Kharpert were landowners. At the beginning of the last quarter of the last century, three-fourths of the land belonged to Turkish aghas, but by 1908 more and more Armenians had become property owners. No doubt the money earned by family members who had emigrated to the United States helped bring about this change.

In spite of many government restrictions and discrimination, the Armenians took advantage of opportunities. As real estate passed into the hands of the Armenians, their superiority grew also in business, industry, arts, and crafts. Of course the lack of shipping and transporta-

tion limited trade, and the supply of goods and services fell short of the demand. The standard of living among the Armenians was higher than that of the Turks in the region. No doubt a large measure of the credit for this goes to their educational institutions and training.

The mountain Kurds had little effect on the economic life of Kharpert. They lived isolated in their natural domain and enjoyed a lower standard of living than even the Turks. They had little to do with the rest of the population of Kharpert. They came down to the town and villages occasionally to trade. They were content with their nomadic life as sheep herders and dairymen. Many of them worked as the caretakers of large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle that belonged to wealthy Turkish Aghas and Armenians living on the plains. Periodically they received lambs, wool, cheese, and butter in payment for their labors.

In the early 1890's matters took a turn for the worse in Kharpert. Villages were plundered, cattle were stolen, Armenian homes were pillaged, and their lives threatened. The *Khojabashis* (tax collectors) made periodic visits to every village and hamlet to collect taxes, and woe to those who could not comply with the government's demands. The villagers were subjected to all types of physical torture. The specters of massacre and persecution hung over the heads of the Armenians.

Life in Kharpert was changing fast. Gone were the relatively peaceful days of their fathers. Now they lived as strangers in their natural homeland, torn by fear and suspicion. The pillaging and atrocities of 1895 drove them nigh to frenzy; and anyone who could get away was anxious to escape, even if it meant leaving their homes, goods, cattle, and other possessions behind and facing a strange world almost penniless.

After the massacres of 1895, when nearly 300,000 Armenians were slaughtered during the reign of Sultan Hamid¹, Armenian emigration took a pronounced upturn. However, when in 1908 the Turks declared a Constitutional Government, the Armenians became more hopeful of a peaceful existence and the association of the Turks and Armenians became temporarily more friendly. A light of hope shone on the horizon; maybe the Armenians would not have to forsake their homeland. But

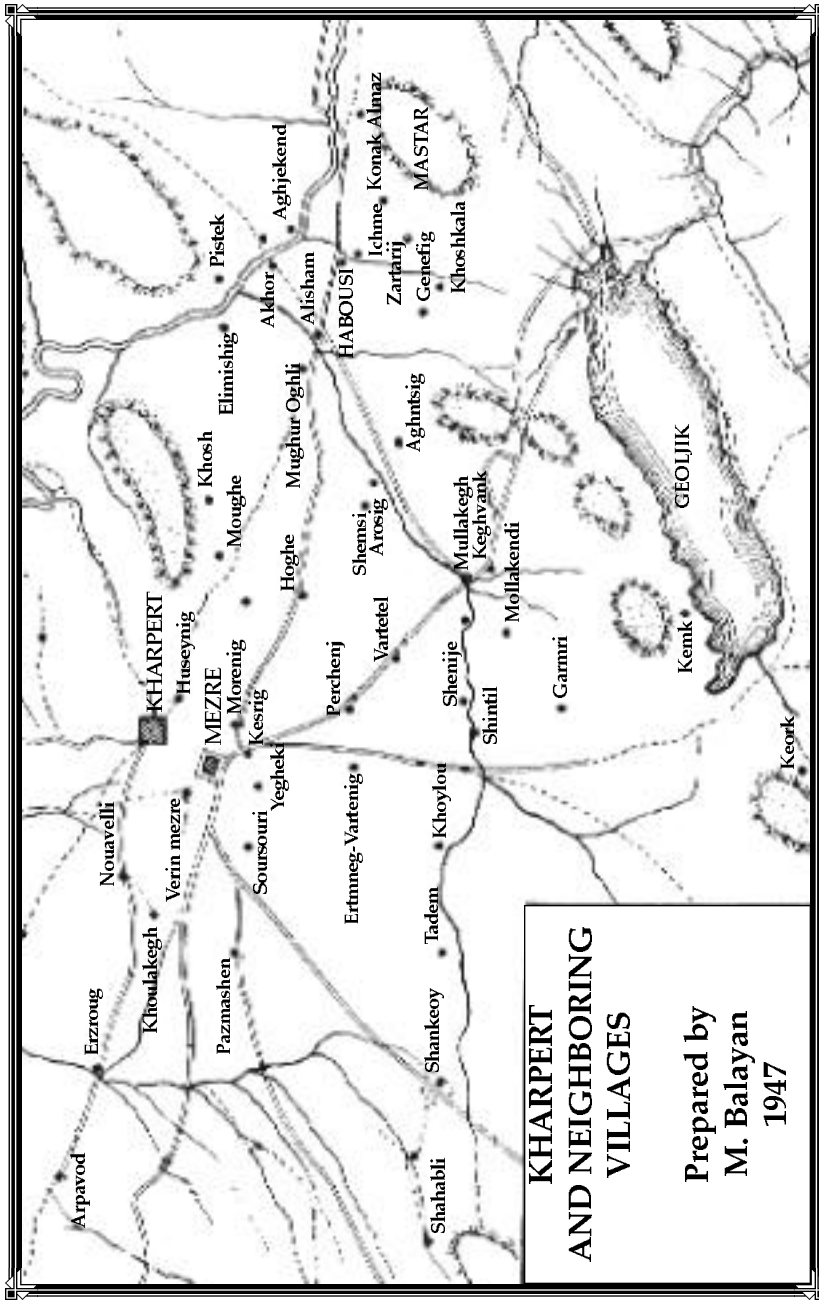
1- Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (1842-1918) became the 34th ruler of the Ottoman Empire in 1876, and under his rule the empire lost more than half of its European possessions. He organized the Kurdish Hamidieh troops and armed them against the Armenians. He was often called Abdul the Damned or Bloody Sultan.

hardly a year passed before the Young Turks¹ in 1909 killed 30,000 Armenians in Adana. This barbaric slaughter again plunged the Armenians into hopelessness. The lack of faith in the Turk became more deeply rooted. Emigration again increased until the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, when Turkey entered the war as an ally of Germany and Austria. Then all methods of escape were cut off.

The Turks were waiting for an opportune time to wipe out the Armenian nation, and their golden opportunity came in 1914, with the eruption of World War I. The Armenians who survived the 1915 death marches through the burning deserts of Der Zor, and the unimaginable tortures planned by the Turkish government, sought refuge in Aleppo (Syria), Beirut (Lebanon), Greece, Egypt, France, and any part of the world where a safe haven was offered.

About 300,000 refugees reached the boundaries of present-day Armenia. Many of the Armenians housed in refugee camps in other lands returned to this new Armenian homeland. Many villages were built and named after those from which their new inhabitants had been driven. Today, a visitor will find in Armenia a New Kharpert, New Malatia, New Arabkir, the Habousi Quarter in Nubarashen, and others.

1- During the late 1890's, small groups of officers and students banded together secretly and in 1908 led a revolt against Abdul-Hamid, forcing him to restore constitutional government. Mustafa Kemal (later known as Ataturk) was one of the young officers whose group merged with others and formed the Committee of Union and Progress, which ruled the empire beginning in 1909 and planned for the total annihilation of Armenians.



Habousi and neighboring villages.