EXILE, TRAUMA AND DEATH: ON THE ROAD TO CHANKIRI WITH KOMITAS VARTABED

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Category: Opinions

By Aram Andonian

Translated, edited and annotated by Rita Soulahian Kuyumjian MD, FRCP(C). She is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at McGill University in Montreal and the director of the Outpatient Psychiatry Department at St. Mary's Hospital.
The book is a Joint publication of the Gomidas Institute (London) and Tekeyan Cultural Association (USA)

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Part of "Trilogy - April 24, 1915" this work is a translation of 25 articles written by Aram Andonian in Armenian. Andonian was commissioned to write them by the publishers of Arevmoudk for their special edition dedicated to Komitas Vartabed's 75th birthday. These articles were published in Arevmoudk during a seven month period from December 1946 to June 1947. The articles were called "Komitasi hed. Inch baymannerou dag aratchatsav Komitasi mdki daknabu" (With Komitas: the circumstances which precipitated his mental turmoil). As the title implied, it was intended to highlight the Armenian composer's tragedy after his arrest and during his journey to exile. But the articles had unclogged the suppressed memory of those years in the author and the few articles that had been planned turned into a series that went beyond their initial mandate and covered the circumstances of not only Komitas' fate, but also the fate of all those intellectuals who were arrested during that same fateful night. Therefore, the initial title did not reflect the content of the series anymore. Each article was finished with the phrase "to be continued." The 25th article, despite the same ending, "to be continued", was to be the last instalment. They left the reader suspended in air and wanting closure.
To transform the articles to a book required some additions and editorial intervention. A new title had to be adopted to reflect the content of the final work. The chapters were also given titles instead of numbers. The book also included a short epilogue. The annotations were used to give the reader an appreciation for the names mentioned in the articles. The pictures of the individuals mentioned added a welcome visual dimension to the verse. Everything else, including the unequal length of the chapters, were left as they were in the original series.

The other two titles of "Trilogy - April 24, 1915" are Rita Soulahian Kuyumjian, Teotig: Biography, with "A Monument to the Martyred Intellectuals" (transl. by Ara Stepan Melkonian) (vol. 2), and Rita

Soulahian Kuyumjian, The Survivor: Biography of Aram Andonian by Rita Soulahian Kuyumjian (vol. 3).

Also by Rita Soulahian Kuyumjian, see Archeology of Madness: Komitas, Portrait of an Armenian Icon

"A captivating journey" writes The Gazette of Montreal.

The most popular Armenian classical composer of his time, Komitas (1869–1935) is still on every concert program of classical Armenian music. Komitas's creative work was cut short by the Armenian Genocide of 1915–16. After surviving a death camp, Komitas developed a severe form of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and spent twenty years in virtual silence in mental asylums.

In this thoughtful biography, Rita Kuyumjian examines three seldom-addressed aspects of the composer's life: his relationship with an Armenian singer, Margaret Babayan; his mental illness; and his relationship with the Armenian church.

In this gently flowing narrative, based on extensive archival research, the fragile sanity of Komitas's mutilated soul comes to life, engulfing the reader in the tempest that once roared in the great Armenian composer's afflicted mind.

Beside the elucidation of the complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, the author's meticulous exploration of Komitas's private life, love, fears, and demons paints a picture of a delicate creativity trapped in a painful solitude.

"A pioneering achievement." --Vahé Oshagan

"A unique and fascinating book, both in terms of Komitas's biography . . . and also the emergence of a clear, new, diagnostic category of PTSD psychosis." --Dr D. Turkington, Senior Lecturer and Consultant Psychiatrist

"Original. . . . It brings to relief the psychiatric dimension of the toll of the Armenian Genocide." --Vahakn N. Dadrian

"A thoughtful and enlightening book. . . . A fascinating history of a psychiatric illness." -- Joel Paris, M.D., F R C P. (C), Chair, Department of Psychiatry, McGill University

"Komitas's relationship with Margaret is both fascinating and movingly told." --Jirair Libaridian, Ph.D.

The Books can be obtained from Gomidas Institute