KEGHI'S BEAUTIFUL KHOUPS VILLAGE

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Category: Opinions

> ***Khoups-native Mehran Tourigian, who used the pen name Tourig, was a prominent community leader in Beirut, Lebanon. He published the below recollections in the "Aztag" daily (March 15 to 17, 1951). He died in 1959.--Editor.***

Mehran Tourigian, Beirut, 17 March 1951
Translated and abridged by **Vahe H. Apelian**, OH, 20 April 2016

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The Saint Garabed Church, built in 1845, was an impressive structure made of stone and a dome whose arches are supported by stone columns. It had an exclusive veranda for the women. The whole village adhered to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The two-storey school building, erected in 1880 through the support of the United Armenian Fraternal Organization, was also in stone. Adjacent to the church was the girls' school that had previously served as the boys' school.

Khoups is on the western side of Keghi and on the eastern side of Dersim. It is surrounded by hills, mountains and valleys. On the immediate northern side of the village rises the hill of Ge'ne'gne' (կԷնԷկնԷ). The villagers ascended to its top by a narrow passageway to bid farewell to their children who headed to foreign lands or to welcome them upon their return.

On the northeastern side rises the Seuri (Սիւրի) snow-capped mountain that embraced the village with two arms. The right arms extends at the same elevation to Ge'ne'gne', situated at its northern end. The left arm rises as it extends all the way to Saint Tavit embracing the eastern side of the village. There is a hill on the south of the village called Charrgood (Չարրկուտ) that acts like a guardian of the villagers' lands.

Nothing is known of the origin of Khoups. According to legend, before the massive 1610 earthquake Khoups was an Armenian village a little far from its present location. The village was destroyed during the earthquake. The survivors moved to the Keleghgian (Քելեղկեան) Monastery whose buildings had withstood the earthquake. Kurdish families, which joined them later, over time grew to 25 families but eventually vanished. The number of Armenians, on the other hand, increased fast with families settling in from Kharpert (Posdoyans); from Palou, (Khoshmatlians and Pashigians); from Dersim (E'le'sigians and Tourigians); and from other villages of Keghi (Hayrabedians) and other Armenian families from Herdif.

The Kurds, some of whom were Turkified, stayed until the middle of the 19th century under the protection of the village's *beg* (chief) who owned not only Khoups but also the surrounding villages.

The *beg* was responsible for the building a mosque. By the middle of the 19th century the Armenians had become so well off that they bought the entire possessions of the *beg*. The *beg*'s family, now landless, left the village. One branch of the *beg*'s family settled in the Ho'ghas village and the other in Sho'gher village. Thus the entire village ended up being inhabited by Armenians, save a few Kurdish households which were poor, if not destitute, and made a living by working for Armenians. Over time the unattended mosque was destroyed.

The inhabitants of Khoups barely eked a living because Khoups, much like the entire Keghi region, is mountainous. The rapid rise in the number of the inhabitants necessitated the villagers to send their young to the cities to ease families' financial burden. During the 19th century the Khoupsetsis leaving their settlement mostly went to Istanbul where they worked for pashas. After working for few years they would return to their village bringing with them furniture and other household necessities.

Immigration had a profound impact on the village life. First and foremost the young émigré's maintained a profound love for Khoups and nothing would sway them from their attachment to their village. Working for the pashas for many years, they established close ties with them and often secured their intervention in matters related to Khoups, often helping Khoups against the

encroachments of Kurdish tribes and even against corrupt Turkish officials as well. Living in Istanbul they participated in the Armenian social awakening and thus helped enlighten their village upon their return.

The Khoupsetsis, experiencing Armenian social awakening in Istanbul, founded The Haigazian Co-Educational School Association that greatly helped to improve education in Khoups and throughout Keghi. The Association levied dues in proportion to the income of the Khoupsetsis residing in Istanbul. Part of the income was used to buy textbooks and other scholastic needs in Istanbul and send them to Khoups.

The Haigazian Association allocated 235 Ottoman gold it had raised to build a school in Khoups. However, the inhabitants of Khoups declined the offer and took upon themselves to erect a two-storey stone building. The villagers--rich, poor, merchants, tradesmen and farmers, men and women--took part in the project. The rich donated land, wood or stone, tradesmen and laborers worked for free, while the women and the girls prepared food for the workers. Eyewitnesses and contemporaries would tell that early morning drumbeats signaled the start of the work day and ended with drumbeats in the evening. Within few months they erected the building.

From 1880 to 1895, under the watch of the Unified (*likely referencing to The Unified Armenian Association)*, the Khoups school experienced remarkable scholastic years. The first principal, Semeon Effendi from Terjan, was succeeded by Sarkis Garabedian from Palou, assisted by Hovhannes Haroutiunian from Kharpert, the famed Telgadentsi. The other noteworthy educators were Markar Shavarsh, Tavit Srabian, Haroutiun Ateyan, a Khoups native who had attained a higher education overseas; Bedros Srabian (Sheroyan) and Stepan Shehrerian (Klapigian) who were from the Keghi city.

Under the watch of the Unified, the Khoups school graduated future noteworthy people who attained prominent positions in their fields and secured for themselves a name recognition such as Dr. Moushegh Vaygouni (chemist), Dr. Haroutiun Tourkigian (physician), Boghos Poladian (chemist), and Megerditch Tovpelian (lawyer) and others. The school also graduated students from Khoups and Keghi who became respected teachers and community leaders, among them were Tateos Kaprielian, Vahan Sarafian, Melkon Delberian, Krikor Podoyan, Mikael Nalbandian, Drtad Posdoyan, Avedis Tosoyan, Yeranos Deroyan, Mesrob Agheyan, Sarkis Baronian, Arshavir Baronian, Arousiag Mouradian and others.

After the 1895 events, the Unified was dissolved. Khoups was ransacked and the village lost everything. For a decade long, Khoups could not recover. The sacking gave rise to immigration to America. By the first decade of the twentieth century every household in Khoups had one or two of its young in America. The principal concern of the Khoupsetsis in Istanbul also remained the state of the education in their village.

The Khoups Educational Association was founded in Providence, Rhode Island in 1900. Soon other

chapters were formed throughout the United States. Through the support of Armenian-Americans the school in Khoups was back in operation until 1909 when the Armenian Unified Association took over the administration of all the schools in greater Keghi starting with the schools in Khoups and in the city until Sultan Abdul Hamid abolished its operation.

Until 1908 there were no political organizations in Khoups, although after the 1895 and 1986 events, a large number of Khoupsetsis were exiled from Istanbul for their participation in the Bab El Ali and Bank of Ottoman demonstrations. Right after enactment of the 1908 Constitution a Tashnag committee was organized that took over the leadership of Khoups and eventually led the heroic struggle of Khoups in 1915. There were few Hnchag-leaning individuals in the area; they were unable to organize into a political entity.

All the inhabitants of the village adhered to the Armenian Apostolic Church and congregated around the Saint Garabed Church.

Until the 1895 ransack, our village competed with the city (*likely referencing Keghi)* in trade and in commerce. The city was not sacked while our village was completely plundered. After the sacking there was no capital left to resume commerce. The Kurds did not pay for what they had purchased before the sacking. Tradesmen had no longer the financial means to purchase tools to start anew. For a decade Khoups could not recover from the 1895 blow, until the Khoupsetsi youth in America, at an immense personal sacrifice, saving ever hard earned dollar they could, lent assistance to their parents and brethren and helped revive trade and commerce.

Before 1895, Khoups had trading ties with Yerzenga, Garin, Kharpert, from where Khoupsetsi merchants brought their goods to sell to Armenian and Kurdish inhabitants of the region. The regional trade was mostly centered in Khoups. But after 1895 ransack Khoups could not attain its former status in commerce.

Before 1895 Khoups also competed with the city of Keghi in trade: ironsmith, shoe-making, textile, painting, goldsmith, carpentry, weaving, tin, tobacco, making spirits. As I mentioned earlier the trades were hit hard as a result of the 1895 ravages. But by 1915 Khoupetsi tradesmen had risen again to give Khoups the impression of a small city.

The main reason for the prominence of Khoups in trades and in commerce was the fact that it was the seat of the region's most powerful Kurdish *beg* who owned the lands. The Kurds were his vassals. The region's feudal system dictated that Kurds come to Khoups to resolve their issues. This feudal state lingered to certain extent after the Kurdish *beg* left the village following the great Khoshmalian dynasty's purchase of the lands from him. Consequently the region's Kurds remained tied to Khoups not only for trade but also for resolving their matters, especially when Khoshmalian Mesrob *Agha* became the representative of the government (*mukhtar*) in the region.

Note: The picture of the Khoups Village and the Khoups School students were secured through Khoups related literature provided to me by George Aghjayan.

Khoups in 1895 and 1915
Translated and abridged by **Vahe H. Apelian**

> *Condensed from articles by Vahan Hayrabedian (**Վահան Հայրապետեան**) and Levon Baronian (**Լեւոն Պարոնեան**) in "Keghi, Khoups Memorial Album" (**Յուշամատեան Քղի, Խուփս**), Fresno (1968).*

The year 1895 is the "Year of Plunder" for Keghi, while for the rest of the Armenian inhabited regions it was the "Year of Massacre". The Turkish Kaymakam (sub-Governor) of greater Keghi had refused to obey Sultan Abdul Hamid's order. Instead he had demanded that the local Turks and Kurds safeguard the Armenians of Keghi.

The village Khoups was considerably far from the city of Keghi and was closer to the semi-independent Dersim region. Consequently the Kaymakam could not exercise the same influence over the Kurds and the Turks who lived closer to Khoups. That's why he sent a dozen or so soldiers to protect Khoups. Khoupsetsis, however, could not depend solely on them for the protection of their village and thus had no choice but to rely on themselves defending the village in case of attack. They possessed few rifles contrary to the reputation Khoups had built over the passing decades as a well-fortified city the Turks addressed as "Rebel City". The reason for attaining such a distinction was the fact that Khoupsetsis had often times in the past successfully defended the village against Kurdish brigands and even against the intrusion of unauthorized Turkish soldiers.

Kurds surrounded Khoups from September 20 to 22, 1895 and started attacking it. The Khoupsetis put a fierce resistance until October 9 resulting one casualty from Khoups and several from the attackers.

Khoups experienced a larger onslaught the next day, on October 10, headed by one of the Dersim area fierce Kurdish chieftain who along with his tribe had also assumed the command of the other Kurdish tribes that had already encircled the village. He led the attack on the village brandishing his sword. From the southern end of the village the Khoupsetsis responded with a salvo of gunfire. Many of the attackers fell, including the chieftain himself. His killing caused confusion among the Kurds who started retreating. Few attempted to retrieve his body but facing fire also fled. The Khoupsetis managed to tie a robe around his feet and drag his body into the village.

During the fighting it became apparent that the government forces sent by the Kaymakan were aiming their rifles towards the attackers but were firing over them instead of at them. The Khoupsetsis demanded that they leave the village fearing that at an opportune time they might join

force with the attackers against them.

On October 14 the Kurds resumed their attack on Khoups but hastily retreated facing the barrage of gunfire. During this time the noted Kurdish chieftain Haydar Beg, who was friendly to the Armenians, sent word to the Khoupsetsis letting them know that the Governor has assembled a large expeditionary force in Garin that was on its way to attack Khoups and advised the leadership to evacuate Khoups as soon as possible. Being repelled, the Turks had bypassed the Kaymakam and had sent a secret massage to the Governor of the province sitting in Garin (Erzurum) asking him to send force on the pretext of safeguarding the Turks in greater Keghi.

Upon becoming privy of the information, the leadership decided to evacuate the villagers early next morning and had them assembled in some homes at the far end of the village. When the Kurds realized that the Khousptesis have gathered together readying to evacuate the village, they attacked it again and succeeded entering the village but they remained preoccupied in plundering it instead of pursuing the retreating Khoupsetsis who managed to flee. Most of the villagers fled to city of Keghi with some fleeing to the Kurdish village Hoghaz that was ruled by the son of the former Khoups Kurdish Chieftain. The Khoupsetsis remained there, away from Khoups, until the spring.

The almost month long fight cost the lives of 8 khoupsetsis and 5 were wounded. But the well to do Khoups was sacked completely and left in total ruin. It would take almost two decades for the Khouptsesis to recover and rebuild their lives anew thanks to the selfless efforts of their compatriots living in the United States who saved every penny they could of their hard earned money and sent them to their parents and brethren in Khoups. But by then, another calamity awaited them.

In October 1914 the Turkish and the Russian governments declared war on each other. Turkey armed Turks and Kurds in the Armenian populated regions, who started threatening the very existence of the Armenians.

Khoupsetsis realizing the impending danger undertook preparations to defend themselves under the leadership of Aram Toros Arvanigian who had returned to the village in 1911 after a few years stay in the United States. A military council was formed under the command Aram Arvanigian, consisting of Mikael Nalbandian, a teacher; Ghougas Baronian, an ironsmith; Zakar Posdoyan, a merchant; and Dikran Delberian, a photographer.

The military council organized a census of the able-bodied villagers and organized them into groups and assigned a leader for each. Different positions were fortified around the village and were manned day and night. The council had 226 bullet-firing rifles under its disposition. There were also a few pistols and other muzzle guns that the elderly preferred to use.

On May 9, 1915 four representatives form the government arrived and ordered the villagers to prepare leaving Khoups in a week so that soldiers could escort them to Kharpert. Meanwhile

thousands of armed Turks and Kurds were encircling the village and threatening the villagers.

The Khoupsetsi held a meeting in the court yard shared by the church and the school. All the villagers attended the meeting during which Nalbandian and Arvanigian spoke. The latter presented the grave situation they were facing and asked the villagers whether they are willing to fight and die honorably or abide by the government's order and the leave the village to face an uncertain future. The villagers unanimously declared they'd rather stay and die defending themselves in their village.

Sarkis Jamgochian, a noted community activist from the Keghi attended the meeting. He conveyed the decision of the Khoups village to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Social Democratic Hnchag party leaders in the city of Keghi who called for a representative meeting from all the Armenian inhabited villages of greater Keghi. The government had forbidden communication among villages and monitored the roads. Consequently only representatives from 11 villages were able to attend. The other villages also had decided not to abide by the order of government and instead defend themselves. Later on they reneged on their promise.

On May 18, 1915 some 8,000 to 10,000 Turkish soldiers accompanied by armed civilians, under the leadership of the regional Turkish kaymakam, attacked Khoups. Under siege, isolated and with no help from outside, the Khoupsetsis put a fierce defense for the next seven days, until May 25 repelling the repeated attacks. Approximately 50 Khoupsetsis were killed defending the village.

Early May 25, the attack resumed. Khoupsetsis continued on putting a fierce resistance repelling the attackers who retreated leaving behind a number of dead whose bodies they did attempt to retrieve. A lull prevailed and the Turkish forces appeared retreating. The Military Council called for another meeting where the Military Council member Mikael Nalbandian and the leader Aram Arvanigian presented to the villagers the bare facts of their situation. Their stock of bullets had considerably diminished. Should the attacks resume they would not be able to defend themselves for an appreciable period of time. They decided instead to find a way through the mountain passes nearby and reach Dersim for their safety. Few young men took the responsibility surveying the mountain passageways and brought word that the passageways appeared safe for crossing.

In the evening of May 25, the Khoupsetsis started leaving the village on their way to Dersim through a neighboring friendly village whose Kurdish tribe spoke the local Dersim dialect and had refused to accept arms from the government against the Armenians. It would have taken them three hours to reach to their safe destination.

The retreat of the Turkish and Kurdish attackers proved to be a ploy. Barely twenty-five minutes after leaving the village, the attack resumed. A fierce fight erupted. Men, women, young and old Khoupsetsis put a fierce resistance that lasted all night long. By the morning of May 26 an eerie calm prevailed over the battleground. Of the 2151 brave Khoupsetsis barely 200 women and children had remained alive some of whom managed to reach Dersim for their safety.

The members of the Military Council along with their much beloved leader Aram Arvanigian, known more by his endearing moniker Vartabed, were killed fighting with the rest of the fallen Khoupsetsis. Their remains remained unburied between Khoups and the Armenian village Sakatsor, but their memories linger among the surviving Khoupsetsis and the rest of the Armenians.