

SAVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

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Keghart.com interviews Vahé Tachjian, chief editor of Berlin-based**[Houshamadyan Project](#)**

26 October 2013

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KEGHART: When and where was it founded?

VT: Houshamadyan is the name of the non-profit association. It was founded in 2010 in Berlin. The Houshamadyan website plays a pivotal role in the association's activities.

KEGHART: How is it funded?

VT: Houshamadyan has no sources of revenue of its own. At present, our sources of finance are individual gifts. We have our main donors, whose names are mentioned in our website.

**KEGHART: How can someone take part in providing data to you and to donate money?**

VT: The essential thing is the reconstruction of the memory of an Armenian life that once existed in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, every item (old photographs, recorded testimony, songs, films, maps, diplomas, books, etc.) that in some way expresses the legacy of that period is of interest to us. We'd be glad if people share these items with us. Most of these things could be sent to us in their digital form, making the process easier for people who want to contribute to this research.

As for donating, it's possible to do it through Paypal or directly on our bank account. You can find all the information on donating on our website. Simply Google "Houshamadyan".

KEGHART: How long do you think it will take you to cover all of Western Armenia?

VT: Since this is a vast project, it's challenging to define a clear timeline or deadline. Of course, we hope to increase productivity. However, that's dependant on our funding.

KEGHART: What have you accomplished since Houshamadyan was established?

VT: We've made a lot of progress by and through establishing the website, which covers many of the once-inhabited Armenian cities, villages and regions of the Ottoman Empire. It has proven to be, at once, popular with the general community and respected in academic circles. In May of 2013 we successfully organized our first exhibition in Berlin. At the end of this year we'll be publishing our first book/album with more than 300 pages. But I think the most important achievement is that we managed to build a network that has its worldwide ramifications. Besides our visitors and their daily input in our project, we have a valued network of friends and volunteers. Houshamadyan has become a structure that's been built collectively. It's very motivating to see the websites' visitors gradually give more importance to our work by sending us digital copies of memorabilia and old photos.

KEGHART: Once Houshamadyan has accumulated the data it can reasonably gather, what's next?

VT: I think right now what's most important is to find safe and sustainable ways to preserve our digital data. Once we've secured this, we can plan ahead!

KEGHART: Does Houshamadyan have eventual aims to use the data for political purposes? If not, what's the purpose of the effort?

VT: We are an academic project. Our main objective is to understand a history, to reconstruct a scattered memory, to give a new value and scope to Armenian primary sources, and to raise awareness of that history among Armenians and non-Armenians.

KEGHART: Houshamadyan wants also to gather information from non-Armenian sources (Kurds, Turks, Assyrians, Greeks, etc.). Have you had any response from them?

VT: Since the establishment of our website, we've received many letters from Turkey, where people express their gratitude for our efforts. It would be desirable to have a Turkish version of our website.

We think it could be ideal if the civil society in Turkey would take part in funding this new section of our project.

KEGHART: What are Houshamadyan's goals for 2014?

VT: It will be 'business as usual': website/exhibition/workshop/publication. A particular attention will be given in 2014 to the Dersim region, and on personal and unpublished memoirs that some visitors of our website sent to us.

