SCULPTOR'S SAGA--FROM MUSA DAGH TO BEIRUT

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Hamo Moskofian, Beirut, 22 February 2011

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Born in the last Armenian village of Khdrbeg in heroic Musa Dagh in 1936, three-year-old Tazian and his family settled in Anjar, the "little Armenia" of Lebanon. As a young man, he "tried his luck" in Beirut, where thousands of Armenians had emigrated to make it the 'capital' of the Armenian Diaspora from the '40s to the '70s. When Ashod moved to Beirut many Armenian residents still lived in refugee camps, following the scandalous transfer, in the late '30s, by the French, of their Protectorate (Sandjak) of Alexandretta to the "Ataturk-Inonu republic" of Turkey.

Experiencing poverty, but never losing hope, the young and talented Ashod opened a workshop and later a factory in Beirut. He had inherited his sculpting talent from his father and grandfather. The family's hometown of Khdrbeg was traditionally acknowledged as 'paradise' for artists and handicraft masters. Tazian held successful exhibitions in 1961 and in '63. In 1967 he decided to dedicate himself full-time to sculpting. He held further exhibitions at the “Vaspourakan” and “L'orient” galleries. He also found time to lecture on the 'art of flowers' at the Apotus, Chatalbashian, and Corunel schools, in addition to Anjar. His most successful exhibition was at the Solimar-Kaslik Gallery near the seaside town of Jounieh. A popular and humorous personality, he frequently appeared on Lebanese TV. As musician and dancer-star of Hamazgayine Cultural Union, he was celebrated during the golden age of Armenian Beirut.

Today, at the entrance of the Nor Marash quarter of Bourj Hammoud, Tazian's former buttons store has been transformed into an exhibition of his statues. Musicians, painters , intellectuals, and regular Armenians frequently visit this 'holy' corner, to enjoy the hospitality of Tazian and to admire his busts, and sculptures made from wood and stone.

“I always represent the heroes of my artistic life with a sad look and face. William Saroyan, Hagop Baronian, Komidas, Khrimian Hayrik, even Hrayr Morukhian or St. Charbel came from poor backgrounds, and even in their best days remained sad and in pain," explains Ashod. He promised that he would create miracles if he received the financial backing of his compatriots. The self-made son of Armenian refugees, his saga as sculptor, artist and patriot, Tazian will not end up in the former marshes and today's New Marash of Bourj Hammoud. His heart is in the mountains of Armenian Cilicia, where for three centuries the Armenian Kingdom and its Silver Age flourished long ago.