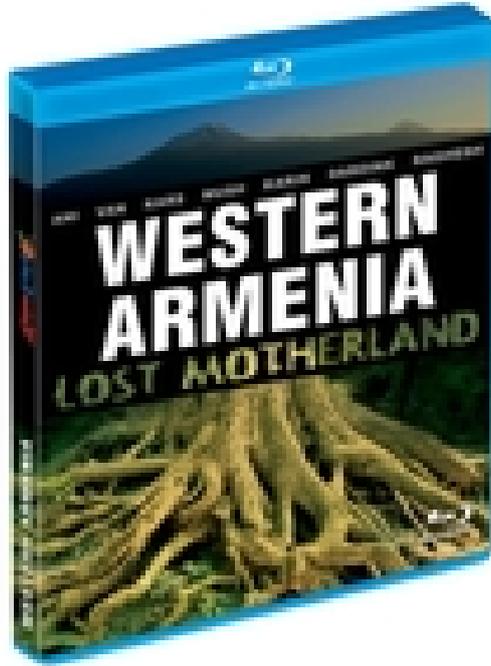


# "WESTERN ARMENIA: LOST MOTHERLAND"

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Category: [Opinions](#)



Produced and directed by Hayk Haroutyunyan, Review by Team Keghart, 31 December 2009

✘ "Western Armenia: Lost Motherland" is a 120-minute documentary about the historical Armenian land, west of present-day Republic of Armenia. It's also an account of a tour-- by a small group of Armenians-- to 12 of the main cities in Western Armenia. As the Armenian tourists tour their ancestral homeland in Kars, Ani, Van, Mush, Karin, Bitlis (Paghesh), Erzerum, and , of course, the majestic Ararat, the documentary features detailed descriptions of architectural monuments (fortresses, monasteries, churches, bridges), as well as colorful peculiarities of each region. The photography by Hagob Karanfilyan is spectacular.

No Armenian can watch this documentary without experiencing a tsunami of mixed emotions. On the one hand the monuments fill one's heart with pride, but on the other hand the constant reminder that Turkey occupies this larger part of our homeland tears one's heart apart. The pain becomes more severe when again and again we see churches turned to mosques, to prisons, to stables, to garbage dumps.

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The journey begins in Kars with stops at the city's famed fortress and then to the 10<sup>th</sup> century St. Arakelots Cathedral, now a mosque. The dome of the former church is overgrown with weeds and is topped by the Turkish crescent and star. A remarkable episode of the church stop occurs when the kindly imam allows the visiting Armenians to say "Hayr Mer" in the "mosque."

Another heart-wrenching scene is the childhood home of poet Yeghishe Charents. The building is now a decrepit shack surrounded by rubbish, weeds and ruin. At the Kars Museum, the narrator notes that the wooden gate of the building is an Armenian work with the crucifix carvings scraped.

Perhaps the saddest sight in Kars is the white train wagon where Turkey and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Kars thus handing most of Western Armenia to Turkey.

The next stop is Ani, one of Armenia's medieval capitals. At the approaches to the city an ugly Turkish monument is yet another example of Turkey's rewriting of history. The monument commemorates "Turks who were slaughtered by Armenians."

The ruins of the blood-red Armenian cathedrals and churches, familiar to most Armenians, stand nobly and unbowed in the middle of the dun prairie, a testimony to Armenian technical and artistic genius. But when the Kurdish shepherd offers to sell an ancient Armenian artifact for a single cigarette, the viewer is eager to leave for the next stop.

And the next stop is Lake Van and the monasteries, cathedral and churches surrounding the lake. Lake Van, like Lake Sevan, boasts blue and green hues not found on any palette. This is where the first Urartu kings established their dynasty. However, according to Turkish historiography, Urartu and its kings have nothing to do with Armenians.

One of the several ecclesiastical stops here is at the famed Varakavank, which at one time had seven churches. Now most of the monastery is used as a cattle shed. As in other cities, rampant architectural cannibalism is the rule here, as the visitor sees stolen parts of Armenian monuments used as construction material for Turkish and Kurdish homes and hovels.

A bright spot of the Van tour is the mini-documentary about the Van cats—the white felines which usually have green and blue eyes. The exterior of the Holy Cross Church has remained relatively intact. Wall carvings depict Armenian struggles against the Arab Vosdigan oppression, Adam and Eve, Samson and Goliath, and an ornate series of vines and fruits.

It's then off to Bitlis (Paghesh), 18 k. west of Lake Van. Once the urban jewel of the area, it's now a drab and gloomy town. Like other urban areas featured on the tour, it has few traces of 4,000 years of Armenian presence here.

Before heading to Mush (derived from the Armenian "mist"), the tourists go through the Nemrud Mountain. This is also a rare happy stop. Nemrud is a dead volcano, with hot springs and its own micro-climate/ecosystems. The mountain's crater, we discover, has three glittering lakes.

Mush (pop. 64,000) has 3,000 Armenian residents. It's here that an injured Kevork Chavoush was killed by a mob. The Armenian hero's tomb has been desecrated beyond recognition.

For this reviewer the most painful scene of the documentary was watching a beaming Kurd boast how Armenians were slaughtered. There's nothing left of the famed St. Garabed Church, which for centuries was a major destination for pilgrims.

The group also stops in Erzerum and drives around Ararat, the windblown, snow-capped and proud symbol of Armenia—another prisoner of Turkey.

Perhaps to relieve the agony of the tour, the narrator ends the documentary on an optimistic note, saying that although occupied by Turkey, the land "is still ours...You are the owner...we should bring the lost motherland back." Aahhh.

Copies of DVD may be obtained from:



