

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Posted on March 15, 2015 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



C.K. Garabed, NJ, 15 March 2015

Some time back I was struck by how many Armenians didn't know the meaning of their last names. It  was a pleasure to conduct research and pass the results to those who were interested. Through research I came to appreciate the diverse nature of Armenian surnames, which appear to cover the gamut of our ancestors' activities in the Old Country.

I began collecting surnames about 40 years ago. I now have over 7,000 names. I have various dictionaries (Armenian-English; Armenian-Turkish; Turkish-English; Persian-English; Arabic-English; and Kurdish-English) and a book on Armenian names from Armenia.

C.K. Garabed, NJ, 15 March 2015

Some time back I was struck by how many Armenians didn't know the meaning of their last names. It  was a pleasure to conduct research and pass the results to those who were interested. Through research I came to appreciate the diverse nature of Armenian surnames, which appear to cover the gamut of our ancestors' activities in the Old Country.

I began collecting surnames about 40 years ago. I now have over 7,000 names. I have various dictionaries (Armenian-English; Armenian-Turkish; Turkish-English; Persian-English; Arabic-English; and Kurdish-English) and a book on Armenian names from Armenia.

The Armenian language has been influenced by interaction with Turkish, especially in the formation of surnames. It should be borne in mind that Ottoman Turkish borrowed heavily from Persian and Arabic. Lt. Col. Harry Sachaklian, a U.S. Air Force officer stationed for many years in Turkey told me that the truly Turkish vocabulary is made up of military terms, and the rest is borrowed. It wasn't until the Turkish language was modernized by the scholar Hagop Martaian, at the behest of Mustafa Kemal, who afterwards bestowed upon him the title of "Dilachar" which means "tongue-opener," that the Turkish language was divested of many of those borrowings.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the Jews of Germany and the Armenians of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Sometime about the eighteenth century, the rulers of those countries mandated the adoption of family names in the language of the governing countries. Whereas the German Jews were permitted to select their names, the Ottoman Armenians were often assigned names by local officials. Thus Jews adopted beautiful names: Morgenthau (morning dew); Schoenberg (beautiful mountain); Blumenthal (blooming dale); Mandelbaum (almond tree). The Armenians were often encumbered with uncomplimentary names: Topalian (lame, crippled); Chirkinian (ugly); Dilsizian (mute, without a tongue); Jambazian (acrobat, swindler); Tekirian (marked with spots); Zulumian (cruel, oppressive).

Name Origins:

Lineage:

Abahuni; Amaduni; Ardzruni (Armenian dynasty; possessing eagles); Arshaguni (royal house of King Arshag); Darduni; Kachaznuni (valiant, son of the brave); Marduni; Pakraduni (created/given by god-Mihr); Rshduni (Armenian dynasty).

Trade:

Carpenter: Adaghtsakordzian; Doghramajian; Dulgerian; Marangozian; Najarian.

Comb-maker/comb-seller: Darakjian; Sandrakordzian.

Jeweler: Javahirjian; Koharian; Kouyoumjian.

Miller: Chaghatsbanian; Deirmenjian.

Smith (black/gold/lock/tin): Chilingirian; Demirjian; Haddad; Kalayjian; Nalbandian; Tarpinian; Vosgerichian.

Tobacconist: Tombekjian; Tutunjian.

Geographic location:

Lachinian; Marashian; Shamlan; Stamboulan; Terjanian.

Description:

Aznavourian (titan, hero); Khachadourian (given by the cross); Mangasarian (headmaster of children); Manougian (youth); Melekian (angel); Melikian (king).

Proper names:

Davidian; Garabedian; Hagopian; Sahagian.

Name variants:

Bohajian from Boyajian; Jafarjian from Javahirjian; Kahaumjian from Kouyoumjian.

Other interesting or unusual names:

Adjeledjian (Turkish): Someone always in a hurry.

Altiparmakian (T): One with six fingers.

Arnavoudian (Albanian): From an area in Istanbul called Arnavoudkoy. It's named after its Albanian (Arnavoud) settlers who embraced both Christianity and Islam.

Bajaksuzian (T): Legless; short man.

Boynubouroukian (T): One with a twisted neck.

~~Chekjian (T): Weighmaster. Derives from 500 lbs for measuring firewood – a horseload.~~

Chakmakjian (T): Chakmak meant the steel used to strike flint such as the trigger of a flintlock gun. Therefore, a chakmakji was someone who worked on firearms.

Tchapararian (Armenian): Measurer, abbreviated to Tchaparian=Chaparian=Jabarian.

Chukhasuzian (T): Without a winter overcoat. Chukha in Turkish is a broadcloth used in the manufacture of heavy coats, and thus by extension synonymous with winter overcoat. The suffix 'suz' means without.

Dilimetin (T): Firm, strong tongued; trustworthy.

Geuzugeutchugian (T): Small or deep-set eyes.

Iguidbashian (T): Iguid: Variation of Yighit (brave) and Bash (head; leader of brave men). Formerly, a man who carried out the regulations of a guild.

Kanayan (T): Blood. From Khudaverdi in the Lake Urmia region came five brothers to Igdir. They were a rough crowd who became respectable .

Kantzian (Ar): Treasure. However, also a corruption of Khantzian (T), a native of village of Khan near Sepastia.

Kavazanjian (Persian/T): Staff, cane. Gav + asa =a prod to urge cow on path to meadow.

Kiledjian:(T): Weighmaster. Kile: Measure of capacity just over a bushel.

Mghtsavanchian (Ar): Nightmare.

Oulouhojian/Wolohojian (T): ulu: high, great; Hoja: Moslem teacher, priest (Avak Kahana).

Soghanyemezian (T): One who does not eat onions.

Tazian (T): Greyhound (Retriever for Turkish hunters).

Terlemezian (T): One who does not sweat. Legend has it that an invading

shah of Persia taxed the citizens of Van so severely that when they met every fresh demand of his he was prompted to say, "Don't these people sweat?" Terlemezian is a Turkification of Talamazi (Armenian): those with long-hair in the current sense of intellectual, who were also advisors to the Armenian rulers.

Tololian (Ar): Corruption of Tel Volor (thread spinner).

Vapurciyan (T): Vapur: steamship, vapurji: S.S. builder, owner, operator, crewmember.

You might ask why people perpetuate strange, unusual or even uncomplimentary names. After all, it's easy to change them. I've known Armenians who have done so: Fourounjian to Baker;

Baghchajian to Gardner; Kaprielian to Gabriel; Terzian to Taylor.

People often are attached to their names because it gives them a sense of continuity. They also want to honor our martyrs by perpetuating the memory of their identity as Armenian Christians. We should be grateful to our fellow Armenians for having retained them as historical testimony to the oppression suffered by the Armenians at the hands of the Turks.

#

For over 25 years, C.K. Garabed has been a regular contributor to the Armenian Weekly. He produces a weekly column called Uncle Garabed's Notebook, in which he presents an assortment of tales, anecdotes, poems, riddles and trivia of interest to Armenian American readers. For the past 15 years, each column has contained a deconstruction of an Armenian surname.

