

ARMENIAN SACRED AND FOLK MUSIC

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ԿՈՄԻՏԱՍ KOMITAS

Translated by
EDWARD
GULBEKIAN

Introduction by
V. N.
NERSESSIAN

 Routledge
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ARMENIAN
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MUSIC
K O M I T A S

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ԿՈՄԻՏԵԱՍ · KOMITAS



Ploughman in the fields

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Phonetic transcription of the Armenian alphabet
used in the English translations

Աւ	a	Յյ	y, h
Բբ	b	Նն	n
Գգ	g	Շշ	sh
Դդ	d	Ոո	o, vo
Եե	ē, ye	Ճճ	ch'
Զզ	z	Պպ	p
Էէ	e	Ջջ	j
Ըը	ə	Թթ	t
Թթ	t'	Սս	s
Ժժ	zh	Վվ	v
Իի	i	Տտ	t
Լլ	l	Րր	r
Խխ	kh	Ցց	ts'
Մմ	ts	Էւ	w, v
Կկ	k	Փփ	p'
Հհ	h	Քք	k'
Ձձ	dz	Օօ	ō
Ղղ	gh	Ֆֆ	f
Ջջ	ch	Ու ու	ou, v
Մմ	m	Էւ	ew, ev, yev

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EDWARD GULBEKIAN

Edward Gulbekian, Armenian scholar, died on April 27th 1994, aged 64. He was born in France on January 5th 1930. He was the author of a number of monographs and articles, published in *Le Muséon*, *Folklore*, and specialist Armenian journals mainly in the field of ancient Armenian history, particularly Moses of Khoren, but also on literary themes connected with the Armenian epic, *David of Sasoun*. He founded Harq Publications at his own expense, publishing among other monographs in this series — members of his nation having tragically personal involvement in the Genocide — a paper entitled *The European intellectual background to Hitler's racial policy*, presented at the Third Conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas, Denmark, 1992. This was an examination of a European idea which the society, and compatriots of H. S. Chamberlain, would no doubt prefer to forget.

He was born the only son of Archbishop Mashtots' Tajirian of Etchmiadzin and Hrip'simé, née Gulbenkian, an unusual circumstance — his father advancing to high office in a church which practises episcopal celibacy after divorce from his mother — which fostered in him a special interest in matters addressed in his well-researched monograph, *Clerical celibacy and the Church of Armenia*, 1966. He came to London with his mother in 1935, subsequently, after an obscure dispute within the notable Gulbenkian family, adopting a form of the surname without the medial *n*, preferring to interpret this from an (unattested) Persian origin as 'Rose Prince', somewhat woundingly connecting the usual form with Persian-Turkish *benek*, meaning a pimple or freckle (Persian-Turkish *gubâng* is actually a loud noise, variously the song of the nightingale, the muezzin's call to prayer, a Muslim war-cry,

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possibly here attached to an ancestor having something in common with Dzenov Hovan, the Stentor of the Armenian epic whose voice could be heard for a distance of forty days and was bound in seven ox-hides when performing to prevent him from bursting).

Edward graduated BSc and MSc in Chemistry from the City of London Polytechnic, and worked as an industrial chemist until 1972, when he took the postgraduate teaching diploma and thereafter taught mathematics in high schools for girls, retiring finally from Wallington Grammar School in 1991. He was active in the Armenian community of London, becoming a founder member of the Armenian Youth Society.

It will surprise no one who has had close contact with Armenian intellectuals (one thinks in particular of his own old friend Arshak Safrastian, and Dikran Garabedian, Haïg Berbérian, Jean Mécérian, to name but a few) that he had his own ideas on things; but why not? That is the stuff of often fruitful academic arguments.

He was a true son of the Armenian Orthodox Church, as well as being latterly much influenced by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. His nation has been the victim of frightening injustices, but he did not allow them to affect his own liberal attitude. When one Armenian preacher asked his congregation to pray for those Armenians fallen in the war waged in Nagorno-Karabagh, Edward demanded to know why no such thought was given to fallen Azerbaijanis.

He took a great interest in work carried out by all within the field of Armenian studies, and was always ready to help with research into matters that fell within his own interest and expertise. Many will miss this earnest, no-nonsense, but ever gentle and courteous man.

He is survived by his wife Shaké, his sons Vaché and Sevak, and his daughters Ashkhen and Salbi.

C. J. F. DOWSETT
Calouste Gulbenkian
Emeritus Professor of Armenian Studies
Oxford
1994

INTRODUCTION

Komitas was born in Kutahya, Turkey, on September 26th 1869, in the same year as the poet Hovhannes T‘umanyan, and was baptised Soghomon. His father Gēorg Soghomonian and mother T‘aguhi Yovhannisian were both gifted musicians. After the death of his mother in 1870 and his father in 1880, young Soghomon entered the local school in 1876 and graduated in 1880.

In 1881 the primate of the diocese Gēorg Vardapet Derdzakian had to travel to Holy Etchmiadzin to be ordained bishop. His Holiness Gēorg IV of Constantinople (1866-1882), who had in 1869 founded the K‘ework‘ian Theological Seminary, requested the bishop to bring with him an orphaned child to study in the seminary. On September 15th 1881 Soghomon entered the K‘ework‘ian Seminary and completed its course in the 1892-1893 academic year.

While in the seminary his beautiful voice and exceptional musical talents attracted the attention of His Holiness Gēorg IV, and under the tutorship of Sahak Amatouni he mastered the theory and practice of Armenian liturgical singing. When he had only just mastered the system of Armenian notation he set about collecting and recording the folk songs of the Ararat plain peasants and, having no knowledge of European music theory, harmonised these songs for performance with a student choir which he had formed at the seminary. His earliest surviving collection of folk melodies dates from 1891, in which year the official journal of the Catholicate *Ararat* published a choral ode by the self-taught composer.

In 1893 he was appointed music tutor and choir master of the cathedral of the Holy See. He published his research on Armenian church melodies in 1894. On September 11th 1894, by the express

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wish of His Holiness Khrimian Hayrik (1892-1907), Deacon Soghomon Soghomonian was ordained celibate priest. This was an emotional and momentous occasion in the history of the K'ework'ian Seminary. It had taken twenty years of hard work to produce the first batch of ordinands. The seven deacons, among them Komitas, were ordained at the Holy Church of Saint Gayanē by Archbishop Mesrovb Smbateants' in the presence of His Holiness Khrimian Hayrik. Prior to the ordination ceremony the seven deacons and the members of the Holy Etchmiadzin brotherhood assembled around the tombstone of His Holiness Gēorg IV and performed Memorial Service, at the conclusion of which Karapet Tēr Mkrtchian (1866-1915) delivered an eulogy in which he expressed his and his fellow ordinands' homage and appreciation to the founder of the seminary, saying :

“We express regret and sorrow that the founder of the seminary was not alive to witness the first fruits of his labour but will rejoice for, in the words of the Apostle, ‘I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God made things grow . . . It is all one who does the planting and who does the watering, and each will duly be paid according to his share in the work’ (1 Cor. III:6-7).”

Deacon Soghomon adopted the ordination name ‘Komitas’ in memory of Catholicos Komitas I Aghts'ets'i (615-628), a famous poet and hymnographer. In 1895 he published his *Shar Aknay Zhoghovrdakan Erger* (‘Songs from the Province of Akn’) as an appendix to Yovsep' Tjanikian's *Hnout'iwk' Aknay* (‘Antiquities of Akn’). In April 1896 through the intervention of Catholicos Khrimian Hayrik and the financial support of the Russian Armenian Alexander Mantashev, Komitas went to Berlin and, following the advice of the famous violinist J. Joachim, he entered the private conservatory of Richard Schmidt. In October of the same year he also enrolled at the Friedrich Wilhelm University under Oscar Fleischer. Apart from Richard Schmidt his teachers included F. Bellermann and G. Friendlander. He studied for three years between 1896-1899, during which time he produced a setting for Psalm CXXXVII, several *lieder* and Armenian folk song

INTRODUCTION

arrangements. He was among the first to join the International Musical Society, where he lectured on Armenian music while the first issue of the society's journal included an article by him signed under the name Komitas Keworkian, on the ekphonic transcription of Armenian church music.

In September 1899 Komitas returned to Holy Etchmiadzin and resumed teaching music in the seminary. He continued to collect songs in collaboration with seminary colleagues Manouk Abeghian, Eruand Tēr-Minasian, Garegin Lewonian, eventually accumulating around 1,200 songs. In recognition of his many years of work as teacher and choirmaster His Holiness Khrimian Hayrik by pontifical encyclical issued on January 15th 1902 granted Komitas permission to wear the floral phelonion.

By 1903, however, Komitas had not only his admirers but also opponents. Articles appeared in the Armenian press criticising his "secular" activities. The July 28th 1903 issue of the daily *Nōr Dar* published an editorial titled 'Refrain from extremes' directed against Komitas, which prompted his colleague Manouk Abeghian to reply in his defence, penning an article entitled 'Komitas Vardapet and his work' (*Nōr Dar*, July, nos. 119-121).

In 1906-1907 Komitas gave a series of concerts in Paris and several other European capitals bringing wide recognition to Armenian music. In the choir he formed in Paris he had the active participation of the opera singers Armenak Shahmouradian, Margarit and Shoushanik Babaian. The concerts at the Salle des Agriculteurs and l'Ecole d'Art received enthusiastic coverage in the Parisian musical press such as *Le Courier Musical*, *Le Mercure Musical*, *Le Monde Musical* and *L'Aurore*. Garegin Vardapet Yovsep'ian also published an extensive report in the monthly *Ararat* 10 (October 1907) on Komitas's travels in Europe in the service of Armenian music. Komitas returned to Holy Etchmiadzin in 1907, but the secular nature of his activities created animosity with the conservative clergy, particularly following the death of Catholicos Khrimian Hayrik in 1908.

On September 5th 1909 he wrote a letter of resignation from

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the Brotherhood to His Holiness Catholicos Matt'ēos II of Constantinople (1908-1910) complaining: "I am in thirst of noble work and I am being disturbed. I desire to escape — to close my ears in order not to hear, to close my eyes in order not to see, tie up my legs in order not to be tempted . . . I cannot do so." He ends his letter by requesting that he be released from the Brotherhood and be instead appointed abbot at the monastery of Sevan.

In 1910 Komitas left Etchmiadzin for Constantinople, then one of the largest centres of Armenian culture, where he founded a large choir he called 'Gousan'. He also organised choirs in Izmir, Alexandria and Cairo, and his concerts and lectures helped to encourage a feeling of national identity in the Armenian Diaspora of the Near East. In 1912 he completed his last version of the Armenian Divine Liturgy. On June 25th 1913 he made his final visit to Etchmiadzin by way of Batum. He paid a courtesy visit to His Holiness Gēorg V Soureneants' (1911-1930) and received a very cool reception. He stayed in Armenia for two months visiting his pupil, the composer Spiridon Melik'yan, recording over sixty folk songs. On August 12th 1913 he returned to Constantinople.

Komitas participated in the congress of the International Musical Society held in Paris between June 1st-15th 1914. His papers on Armenian music and a concert in the Armenian Church there, given under the auspices of the congress, and the release of gramophone records, all met with enthusiastic response. Back in Constantinople the reaction to Komitas's activities in Paris was not so favourable. The Religious Council held a meeting on June 18th 1914 condemning Komitas for "degrading and flouting the sacred songs intended for the holy temple of God, which through the availability of records are being performed in inappropriate places" and demanded that the Catholicos should reprimand Komitas for his activities. Komitas Vardapet on July 9th-22nd 1914 then gave an interview to the editor of the daily *Azatamart* defending his work which appeared under the title 'The triumphs of Armenian music'.

On April 11th-24th 1915, Komitas together with other Armenian intellectuals — Siamant'ō, Daniel Varouzhan and Grigor

INTRODUCTION

Zohrab — was arrested on the orders of the Young Turks in Constantinople and deported into the interior of the country. Many of his intellectual colleagues were brutally massacred by the Turks, which left irreversible scars on Komitas and which led eventually to a mental breakdown.

Through the mediation of Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador to Turkey (1913-1916), Komitas was returned from exile. From 1919 until his death on October 21st 1935 he resided in a mental hospital in the suburbs of Paris. On May 28th 1936 his remains were transferred to Erevan and interred in the Pantheon of Armenian Artists.

Komitas was a pioneer ethnomusicologist. He belonged to the generation of Eric von Hornbostel, Robert Lachmann and Ilmari Krohn. Whereas the German school tended to stress scientific measurements of musical melodies, Komitas turned his attention to the anthropological, sociological, and historical aspects of comparative musicology. He discovered examples of individual and of communal creation of folk music; he noted a certain correlation between physical labour and musical response, and described the role of music in its total social context.

In 1941 Rouben T'erulemyan collected and published Komitas's musicological articles and studies in a single volume entitled *Hodvatsner Yev Ousoumnasirout'youanner* (Erevan, 1941). More recently Abel Oghlougian has compiled an enlarged volume of Komitas's works based on the monthly journal *Ararat* 1890-1911, entitled *Grakan Nshkhark' Komitas Vardapeti Beghoun Grch'en* ('The literary works of Komitas', Montreal, 1994). The latter provides a detailed chronology of the life and career of Komitas based on R. S. Ghazarian's *Komitas : Met'odomenagitakan Niwt'eri Zhoghovatsou* ('Komitas : a methodo-bibliographical resource', Erevan, 1984).

A comprehensive bibliography compiled by N. A. T'eymurazyan, *Komitas (Soghomonyan Soghomon Gevorgi) Bibliografia* (Erevan, 1957) lists everything written by, on and about Komitas up to 1957. The late Professor Robert A. Ar'ayan, who dedicated his whole academic career to the study of Komitas, achieved his life's ambition by