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IN SEARCH OF ARMENIAN NOBILITY: FIVE ARMENIAN FAMILIES OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The importance of the nobility in Armenia before the loss of its independence cannot be overestimated, but the history of this nobility was characterized by a steady decline in the number of families of which it was composed. From about fifty in the fourth century A.D., the number of Armenian princely houses steadily dwindled to some forty-two in the fifth century, to thirty-five in the sixth, and to twenty in the eighth.¹ Ultimately, only seven Armenian noble families are known for certain to have survived the fall of the last Armenian monarchy in 1375.² Of these, five continued to exist in Georgia³ while three others, the House of Artsruni, the House of Siwni, and the House of Orbelian, survived on Armenian soil, the first until the Turkish occupation of Van; the remaining two under Persian and, later Russian rule.⁴

For all this, however, there are not lacking some Armenian families of the Ottoman Empire who claim descent from the princely houses of the Armenia of old, and some of these families have played a conspicuous role in modern Armenian history. The basic problem in dealing with their claims lies in proving their legitimacy on grounds other than those of the family's own traditions, which valid though they may possibly be, by their very nature cannot always be verified. In the egalitarian world of Islam, and especially in the Ottoman Empire (which, unlike Russia, recognized no hereditary nobility beyond the imperial house itself), the lack of official recognition of nobiliary descent leaves us with very little support for nobiliary claims. Anyone in such a social milieu is free to claim descent from anyone he or she pleases.

In this essay, an attempt is made to examine the claims to princely descent of five Ottoman Armenian families, each of which based its pretensions on different grounds. It should be noted that there is no intention here of writing a coherent history of these supposedly noble families nor even of plumbing original source materials to validate or

invalidate their claims. My purpose is much more modest, but nonetheless important, namely, to establish some criteria for evaluating such claims other than those offered by the families themselves.

THE DADIANS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The eleventh-century Byzantine settlement of lands in Cappadocia upon Armenian royalty of the Bagratuni and Artsruni houses,⁵ and the subsequent disappearance of these dynasties during the Turkish deluge which swept over eastern Anatolia in 1071, have left us with the open question as to whether or not any scions of these houses survived in the region. This is especially true in view of the magnetic pull the Cilician Armenian kingdom exerted on any survivors which lasted until 1375. For this reason, we must approach with an open mind the possibility that certain Armenian families of the Ottoman Empire might actually have been of Artsrunid or Bagratid descent.

One family claiming just such an origin was that of the Dadians of Constantinople, a house that from the end of the eighteenth century held the important position of *barutçubaşı*, or chief powdermakers, for the Ottoman army. Highly placed, powerful, influential, and very, very rich, the Dadians were among the foremost members of the *amira* class (moneyed aristocracy) which dominated the Armenian community of Constantinople (and hence the entire Armenian *millet* within the Ottoman Empire), until the reforms that took pace in the middle of the last century.⁶

The evidence of the claim of the Dadians to have been of royal Artsrunid descent consists of a single document, Armenian MS 239 of the Bibliothèque Nationale, which, while remaining unpublished, has been fully described by Frédéric Macler.⁷ Containing the history of the Dadian family and of two of its branches, the Zedayans and the Berozians, this document was written by Seraphim Berozian in November, 1858, and includes a short introduction by the Catholicos Matt'ëos Izmirlian (1858-1865) guaranteeing the authenticity of the genealogy it contains.

According to this document, a member of the Dadian family, Dad Ařak'el Amira, wrote to the priests of the town of Akn in Western Armenia asking them to verify the origin of his family through a consultation of the archives in the church at Kamarkap (Gamarkab), a village near Akn from which his ancestors had hailed. The result of this search was a genealogical list tracing the family back four generations. Later, Hovhannës Amira Dadian, son of Dad Ařak'el, wrote back to a *vardapet* Petros of Akn asking him to make a further search to determine whether or not the ancestry of his house could be pushed

back still further. According to the story, vardapet Petros located a Gospel in the possession of another vardapet named Geōrg containing the genealogy of the related family of Berozian compiled in 1758 by Archbishop Pōghos of Akn and bearing his seal.⁸ Having verified this genealogy with the local priests and other notables, vardapet Petros sent it to the amira Hovhannēs with a letter dated at Akn, 23 January 1851. The genealogical list in the Gospel reads as follows:

	<u>Flourished</u>
1. Beroz	?
2. Mihrdat	1350 A.D.
3. Vahram	1378
4. Zadah	1410
5. Beroz	1440
6. Kostandin (Constantine)	1461
7. Dad (Tat) Aṛak'el	1495
8. Simon	1530
9. Mkrtich'	1576
10. Mahtesi ⁹ Harut'iwn	1621
11. Mahtesi Aṛak'el	1661
12. Mahtesi Astuatsatur	1686
13. Mahtesi Nikoghos (Nicholas)	1713
14. Mahtesi Dad (Tat)	1753

Having examined this document, I noted the following points:

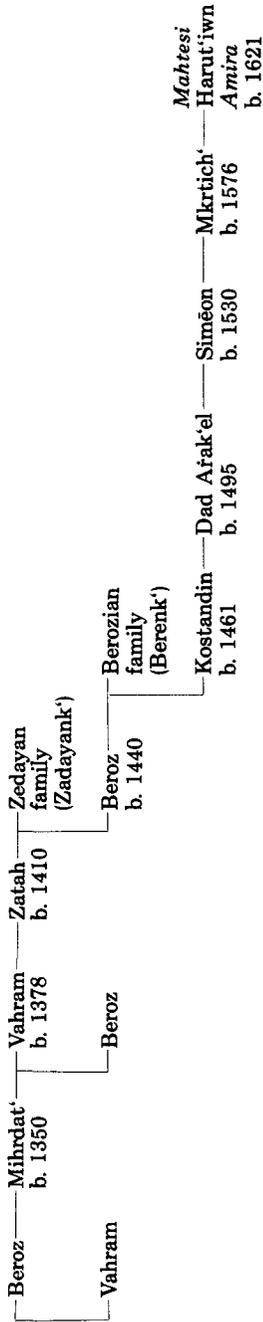
1. At the end of the list is a statement asserting that the family of Beroz or Berozian was related to that of Senek'erim Artsruni who had settled in Akn, that is, to King Senek'erim-Hovhannēs of Vas-purakan (1003/4-1021), who, having felt the first blows of the Turkish onslaught, had ceded his kingdom to the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (963, 976-1025) in return for domains within the Byzantine Empire in Cappadocia, specifically in the region of Sebastia (Sivas).¹⁰

2. From Zadah, number 4 of the list, was descended the Zadayank' or Zedayan family. From one of the Berozes, probably number 5, or possibly from the brother of Vahram (Chart I), was descended the Berenk' or Berozian family. These families—Zedayan and Berozian—would thus have been collateral lines of the Dadians.¹¹

3. The last-named on the list, Mahtesi Dad Aṛak'el Amira, migrated from the district of Akn to Constantinople and was named Imperial Powdermaker by Sultan Selim III on 17 June 1795.¹²

4. The colophon further asserts that it was Mahtesi Harut'iwn, a wise and wealthy man who had built the first bridge across the

Chart I. The Dadian Family of Akn and Constantinople



Euphrates just below Akn, who moved to Gamargab (*sic*, i.e., Kamar-kap) having by his munificence provoked the jealousy of the Muslims.¹³

5. Besides the Gospel in question that was sent to Amira Hovhannēs in Constantinople in 1853, there is another indirect testimony to the Dadian family found by Archbishop Hakob of Akn in 1856 in an old manuscript called by the local people *Sasnts'i Awetaran* (the Gospel of Sasun). This was a colophon stating: "I, Count [*sic*: probably Baron in the original] Vahram, have acquired this Gospel in memory of my parents, and of my brother Beroz, and of my son and of all the members of my family living and dead."¹⁴

6. The genealogical list in the Paris document is continued from Mahtesi Dad Aṙak'el Amira to the middle of the nineteenth century, probably by its author Seraphim Berozian, who in November 1858 edited the information received from Akn. The genealogy was then certified by Catholicos Matt'ēos who, as we have seen, guarantees its authenticity in the opening lines of the MS text. The information in Chart I on Yakut', daughter of Grigor Dadian, was drawn by me from her obituary notice in an Armenian-American newspaper published in Watertown, Massachusetts, after her death in New York in 1962.

What are we to make of these claims on the part of the Dadians and their collaterals to royal Artsrunid descent? Obviously, it is not impossible that the claim is valid, but certain points raise doubts. First of all, despite the antiquity of the earliest individual in the list (c. 1320), nearly three centuries separate the early eleventh-century King Senek'erim-Hovhannēs from the first Beroz. Second, the skimpiness of the stemma, with not a single brother or nephew cited, makes it look suspiciously like a bare list deliberately prepared for no other purpose than to supply the Dadians with a suitable antiquity. Third, our knowledge of dynastic history has taught us to be extremely wary of any stemma that can trace itself from father to son without a single break for more than ten generations. In a time of high infant mortality and among a people not given to polygamy, it is very likely that at least one of the men on the list would be childless, and that the family descent would pass through a nephew. Fourth, there is the late date of the colophon itself, inscribed in a thirteenth-century Gospel to be sure but dated 1758. How, one wonders, was this genealogical data preserved during the five centuries prior to that year? Might it not have been deliberately invented to supply the Dadians with an appropriate genealogy for which the good priests and prelates of Akn may very well have been handsomely rewarded?

There are, however, certain points that speak in favor of the authenticity of the tree. For one thing the colophon of 1758 concerns a related family, the Berozians, not the Dadians themselves, which suggests that

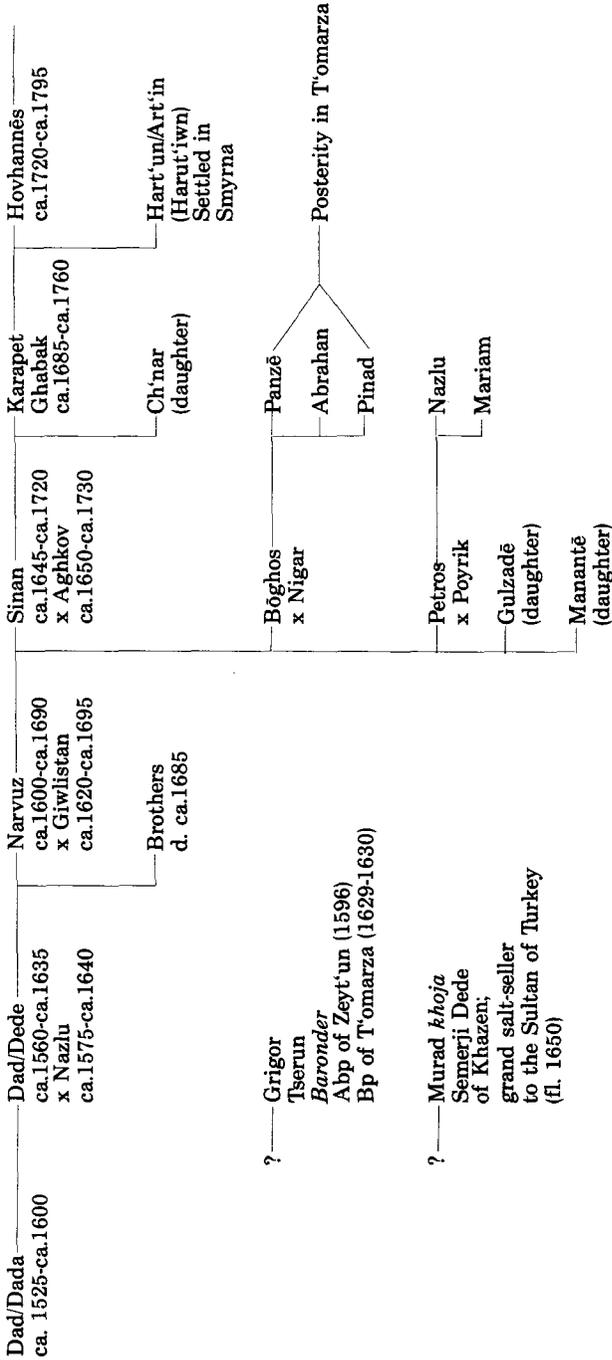
it was not expressly composed for the latter. For another, a forged genealogy designed to prove royal descent might be expected to carry us all the way back to the royal ancestors in question, and not leave us with the nearly three-hundred-year gap noted. Again, between Mihrdat, the first dated figure in the list on page 95, and Dad Ařak'el, the last, there is a space of 403 years (1350-1753) embracing thirteen generations. Allowing thirty years to a generation—the standard genealogical average—we find that thirteen generations should occupy some 390 years, and this is close enough to the 403 years which we actually have in our list to support this validity. Finally, the genealogical list does not actually state that the descent was strictly from father to son (although Macler assumes this to have been the case), so that my third argument for a fraudulent claim is perhaps undermined. In short, the Dadian evidence, while late, lacks many of the characteristics we might expect to find in a deliberate forgery. At the present time then, the claim of the Dadians of Constantinople to royal Artsrunid descent must remain a moot one. It might be valid or it might be not. Here a serious inquiry into any other records that might survive concerning the families in question (and also the history of the Armenians of Akn) might well be in order.

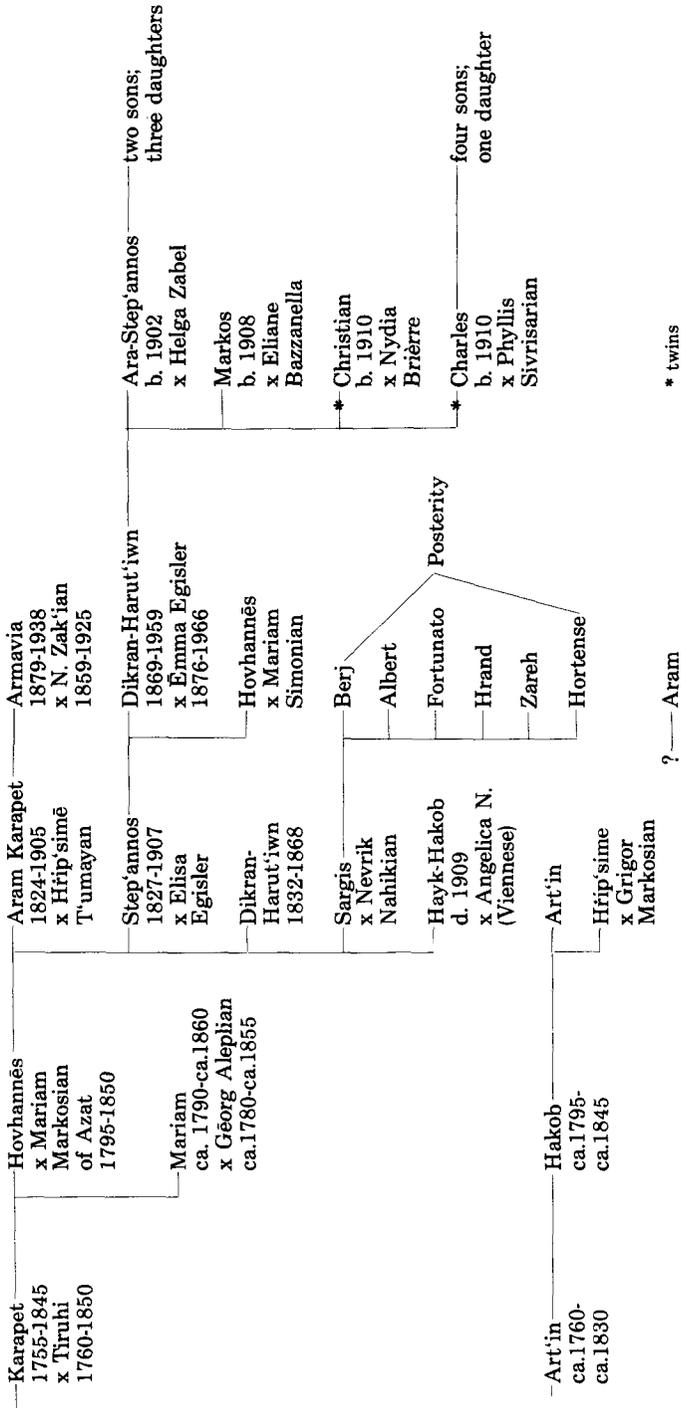
THE DEDEYANS OF T'OMARZA

In 1971 the public was apprised of the existence of an Armenian family of hitherto unsuspected noble origin describing itself as being of the “Princes of Thomarza” (*sic*) (i.e., T'omarza), a large village lying some forty kilometers southeast of Kayseri in Cappadocia (Chart II).¹⁵ While one family tradition existed which linked this clan to the Dadians of Constantinople (as well as to the Dadiani princes of Mingrelia in the West Georgian kingdom of Imeretia!),¹⁶ the preferred tradition of the Dedeyans was one of descent from the same Artsrunid Senek'erim-Hovhannēs from whom, as we have just seen, the Dadians of Constantinople traced their origin.¹⁷ The most purely Armenian form of the name is offered as Tserun, Tserunian, or Tseranian (all *sic*), which M. Christian Dédéyan bases on the Armenian word *tserun* (old man), which he takes as a term of respect and which he suggests may be a play on the name Artsruni.¹⁸

According to C. Dédéyan, the Dedeyan family was descended from princes of T'omarza who had been the “chiefs of emigration” at the time when the Armenians fleeing the Seljuk Turkish invasion had settled within the Byzantine Empire in various parts of Cappadocia.¹⁹ He quotes Aghassi,²⁰ the historian of Zeitun, to the effect that the chiefs of emigration of this period were “princes of royal families” (i.e.,

Chart II. The House of Dedeyan: Chiefs of T'omarza





apparently of Artsrunid and Bagratid origin, the only Armenian royal families that settled in Cappadocia). Quoting Alpöyajian,²¹ Dédéyan lists the names of thirteen “princely” families settled in T’omarza, among whom the Dedeyans are cited first. Referring to the reputed Assyrian ancestry of the Artsrunids—an obvious chimera of the early family based on their reading the Old Testament after their conversion to Christianity²²—Dédéyan then (1) cites Grousset’s²³ suggestion that names ending in *uni* are of Hittite origin, (2) adds the wholly gratuitous statement that the Armenians were formed by a fusion of the Galatian or Phrygian conquerors with the autochthonous Hittites, and (3) concludes this excursus by asserting that traces of the Hittite morphology are to be found in the Dedeyans themselves.

The principality of T’omarza, we are told,²⁴ originally consisted of an area of 400 square kilometers but was reduced in modern times—apparently the decades preceding World War I—to 170 square kilometers. There, the princes of T’omarza had the right to judge cases, to raise troops, and to levy the taxes paid to the Ottoman government.²⁵ The four families that governed the various quarters of T’omarza were recognized by the local Armenians as being princely, the order of succession passing from father to eldest son or, lacking a son, to the prince’s brother.²⁶ All this, of course, reminds us of the status of the Meliks of Eastern Armenia under Persian rule, and, indeed, the “princes” of T’omarza appear to have been something on the order of what might be called “Ottoman Meliks.”²⁷ Certainly, if they shared the rule over so insignificant a town with other “princely” families, their power could not have been very substantial. According to Dédéyan, it was only in 1908, as a result of the reinstatement of the abortive Ottoman Constitution of 1876, that the princes of T’omarza lost their administrative functions.²⁸

Let us attempt to evaluate the evidence brought forth above:

1. Despite the impressive data adduced by C. Dédéyan to demonstrate the eminence and status of his family, his sources fall short when they are required to provide the links between the Dedeyans and the Artsrunids of old. Admitting that little is known of “Prince Artsruni,” who supposedly founded the house, it emerges that this “chief of emigration” settled in T’omarza only in the fifteenth century, and that the emigration in question was one from elsewhere to T’omarza and had nothing to do with the great migration of the Artsrunids from Vaspurakan to Cappadocia no less than four centuries before! Dédéyan states that Prince Artsruni came “sans doute” from Agn (*sic*) but offers as proof only the fact that “the Armenian nobility” settled there after “the fall of the kingdom.” Which kingdom—Vaspurakan, Ani, Kars, or Cilicia—Dédéyan does not say.²⁹ Here Dédéyan

relies upon Armenian MS 239 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, cited above, where he makes his Prince Artsruni a descendant of "Count" Beroz—a title which Dédéyan adds to the data found in the genealogy contained in this source, and which has no meaning whatsoever in an Armenian context! Dédéyan then speculates that "it is probable" that Artsrunids were already reigning at T'omarza long before, which would explain why other Artsrunids would have come to T'omarza in the fifteenth century with their vassals (the latter being a fresh addition to the story), a land already belonging to their ancestors.³⁰ The silence of history in regard to the four centuries that separate the Artsrunid princes who settled in Cappadocia in the eleventh century from the founder of the Dedeyan family in T'omarza in the fifteenth is passed over—appropriately enough, perhaps—in silence. Nor does Dédéyan seem to be aware that the Armenian dialect spoken in T'omarza was a subdialect of the dialect of Kayseri to the northwest and is not connected to that of Akn.³¹

In actual fact Dédéyan is able to produce a demonstrable ancestor of the Dedeyan family only from the late sixteenth century, when we hear of a Grigor Tserun (d. 1636) styled "*baronder*" (baron lord), who was Bishop of Zeitun in 1590, and Archbishop of T'omarza from 1629 to 1630.³² As for a connected genealogy, this is adduced by Dédéyan only from the early seventeenth century, when we hear of a family of Dede or Dada at T'omarza, whose name Dédéyan identifies with *Dzerun* (*sic*) (Tserun), which he calls its "literary form." Apparently, we are being offered the equation Dede = Dada = Tserun = Artsruni! Whatever the relationship between the individuals surnamed Dede or Dada with those called Tserun, close to five and one half centuries separate the heirs of King Senek'erim-Hovhannēs Artsruni, who settled in Cappadocia, from the Archbishop of T'omarza who died in 1636.

3. No link exists between the Dadian family of Constantinople and the Dadiani of Mingrelia beyond the purely fortuitous similarity of the names.³³ That "firm" tradition existed linking the Dedeyans to either or both of these families—again solely because of the similarity of the names—shows how readily such "firm" traditions can spring from mere homophonological fancy.

As support for the statement that the Dedeyan family was also known as "Dedian," Dédéyan offers only the use of this alternate form in a two-volume work published by Khacher Dedeyan in 1957-58.³⁴

4. The assertion that traces of the Hittite morphology are recognizable in the Dedeyans is meaningless since the so-called Armenoid type, of which the Hittites, from their sculptures, are certainly representatives, is widespread not only among the Armenians but among many other Old World peoples as well.³⁵ It was, incidentally, not the

“Galatians or Phrygians” who conquered the Hittites. The Galatians entered Asia Minor long after the fall of the Hittite Empire.³⁶

5. The suggestion that the form “more purely Armenian” of the name Dedeyan, that is, Tserun, Tserunian, or Tseranian, is based on the Armenian word *tserun* (old man, used as a term of respect) and that it is perhaps a play on the name Artsruni, as well as his suggestion that the name T’omarza is a contraction of that of an Artsrunid prince, T’ovma Artsruni (not the historian of that name), suggests the level of linguistic evidence which Dédéyan has brought to bear upon the subject at hand.

6. Not surprisingly, be it repeated, the documentary links of the Dedeyan family to its illustrious ancestors are deficient, the most ancient genealogical source for the family’s origins being a memorial from the last quarter of the seventeenth century—six centuries after the Artsrunids of Cappadocia are last heard of! A century after this a member of the family removed to Smyrna, where the Dedeyans quickly intermarried with other notable families of the city.³⁷ Not surprisingly, given the Dédéyan criteria for princely origin, all of these families are discovered to have been noble as well: the Hayrapetians³⁸ and Egislers³⁹ are reported to be Bagratids; the Baboyans related to the Meliks Babo;⁴⁰ the Markosians being “counts”;⁴¹ and the Keuleyans—incredibly—being noble as descendants of a priest “according to Armenian law”—an obvious elaboration on the use of the term *tēr* (lord) as a form of address for both nobles and clergymen.⁴² Only the Dedeyan intermarriages with the Shahumian family, actually descended from Melik Shahum the Red of Meghri, who lived in the late seventeenth century, and whose own descent is unknown to us,⁴³ appears to connect the family with anything approaching nobility.

Most notably lacking among the sources for the Artsrunid origin of the Dedeyans (and for that of the Dadians of Constantinople, as well) are epigraphic materials. Written documents can be easily forged. Tombstones and other inscriptions are difficult to falsify and, moreover, are usually contemporaneous with the individuals to whom they refer.

None of the above is to be taken as a negative assessment of the Dedeyan family itself, for there is no doubt whatsoever that the Dedeyans were a most prominent family in nineteenth-century Smyrna, and C. Dédéyan has no trouble in adducing several members who distinguished themselves in one line of endeavor or another.⁴⁴ The only question at issue here is the validity of the family’s claim to royal Artsrunid descent, and this, as we have seen, is very dubious indeed.

Considering the apparently pressing need of C. Dédéyan to style himself a prince, his attempts to find a suitable origin for his family

are clumsy and not very convincing. Ultimately, however, the real damage comes not from the Dédéyan pretensions, which, however childish, are harmless enough, but rather from the way he has abased the criteria and muddled the methodology for determining the validity of serious claims to noble descent, the investigation of which might help us uncover some of the "lost history" of the Armenians between the fall of the Cilician Kingdom and the nineteenth century.

THE NOUBARIANS OF SMYRNA AND CAIRO

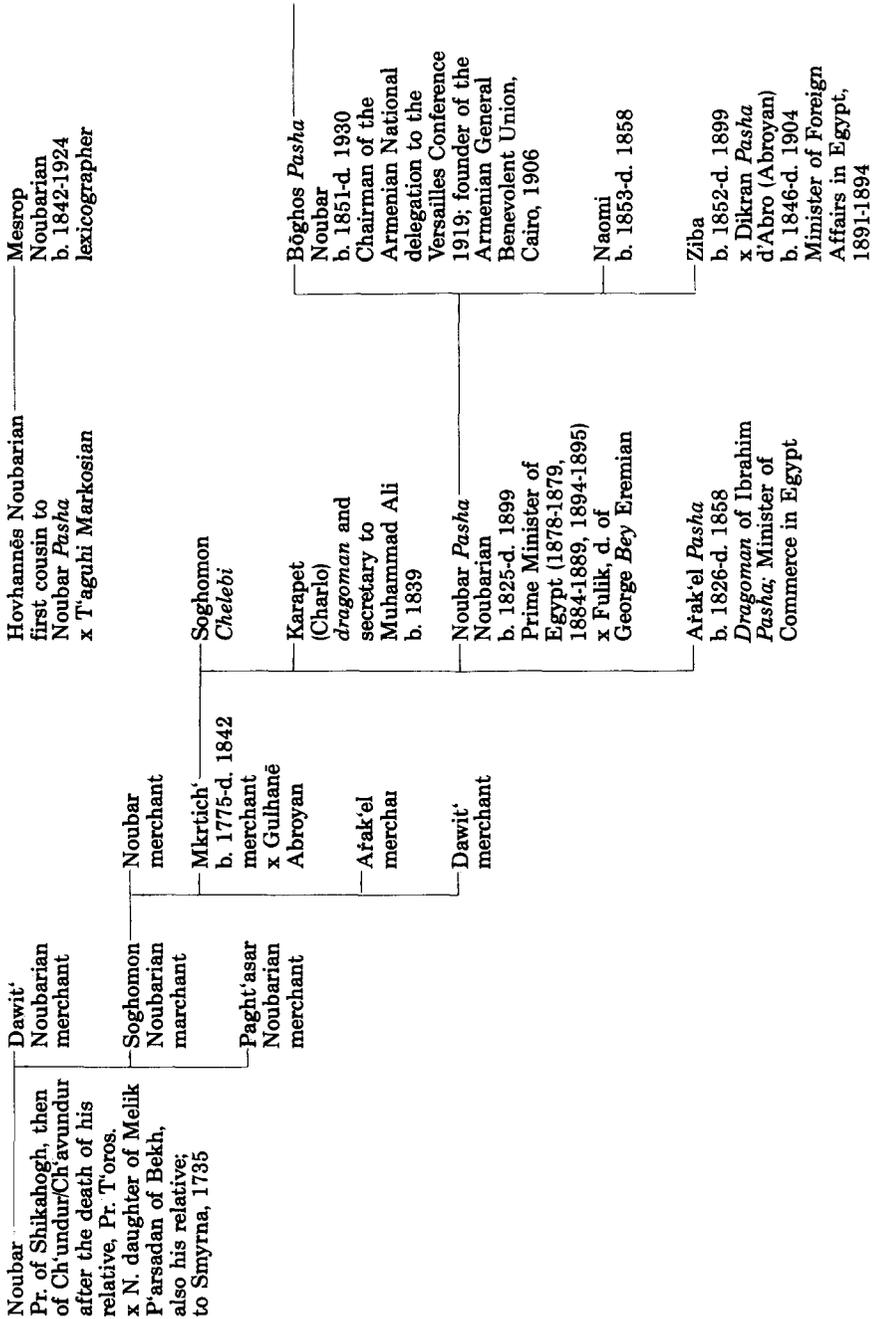
A third Armenian family of the Ottoman Empire claiming noble descent has much better credentials for doing so than either of the two considered so far, namely the house of Noubar Pasha Noubarian, one of the most important and influential Armenian families of modern times. The Noubarians trace their descent from Prince Noubar of Shikahogh, a village near Bekh in southern Siwnik'; he was a relative of Melik T'oros of Ch'avundur.⁴⁵ Noubar was one of the more prominent figures in the campaigns of the Armenian general David Bek against Ottoman attempts to impose Turkish rule in Siwnik' after the collapse of Persian authority in Eastern Armenia brought about by the fall of the Safavid dynasty at the hands of Afghan invaders in 1722. Noubar married the daughter of Melik P'arsadan of Bekh to whom he was also related.⁴⁶ Given the strictness of Armenian ecclesiastical law, the relationship could not have been close. Noubar appears to have been a first, or perhaps a more distant cousin of his father-in-law. In any case, the proximity of Shikahogh to Bekh and Noubar's princely title make it clear that he must have been of P'arsadanid and hence possibly of Orbelid origin.⁴⁷ Through the marriage of Prince Noubar to the daughter of Melik P'arsadan, his descendants were descended also from the Meliks of Meghri.⁴⁸

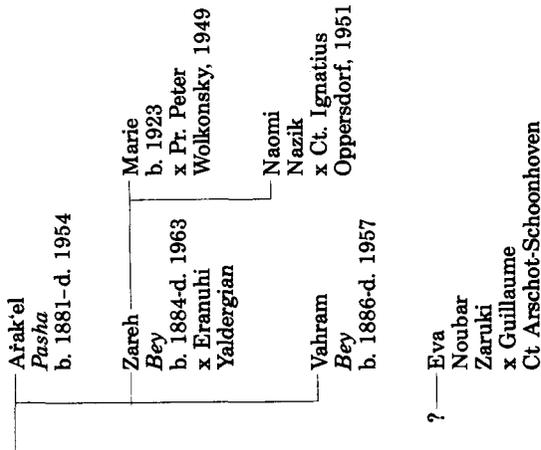
After the collapse of the Armenian uprising in 1730, Prince Noubar left Siwnik', and in 1735 settled at Smyrna in the Ottoman Empire. Three sons survived him there: Dawit', Soghomon, and Paght'asar.⁴⁹

From Soghomon were sprung four sons (see Chart III), one of whom, Mkrtich' (1775-1842), was the father of Noubar Pasha Noubarian (1825-1899), Prime Minister of Egypt and one of the most influential Armenians of his day.⁵⁰ His brother, Karapet (Charlo) (d. 1839), was the first Noubarian to migrate to Egypt, where he became dragoman (interpreter) and secretary to the Khedive (viceroys) Muhammad 'Ali. Another brother, A'ak'el Pasha (1826-1859), also went to Egypt, where he served as dragoman to Muhammad 'Ali's son, Ibrahim, and then as Egyptian Minister of Commerce.⁵¹

Noubar Pasha's son, Bōghos Pasha Noubar (1851-1930), a noted

Chart III. The House of Nobarian





philanthropist, founded the Armenian General Benevolent Union in Cairo in 1906, an organization that quickly rose to become perhaps the foremost cultural and philanthropic society of the Armenian world. Bōghos Noubar also served as President of the Armenian delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 and founded the Bibliothèque Noubar in Paris, the largest Armenian library in Europe excluding those of the Mekhitarists at Venice and Vienna.⁵²

Noubar Pasha also had two daughters, one of whom, Ziba (1852-1899), married Dickran Pasha d'Abro (Abroyan) (1846-1904), who was for a time Minister of Foreign Affairs for Egypt (1891-1894).⁵³

Bōghos Pasha Noubar had three sons: Afak'el (1881-1954), the last Armenian to bear the title pasha, Zareh Bey (1884-1963), and Vahram Bey (1886-1957).⁵⁴

The achievements of both Noubar Pasha and his son Bōghos, coupled with their princely origin, served their descendants well. Zareh Bey's daughter Marie (b. 1923) married a Russian prince, Peter Wolkonsky; her sister Naomi Nazik married Count Ignatius Oppersdorf. Another member of the family, Eva Noubar Zarouhi married Count Arschoot-Schoonhoven, and their daughter Ghislaine (b. 1912) married Prince Joseph Windisch-Graetz in 1934.⁵⁵

Other prominent members of the Noubarian family include Hovhanēs Noubarian, a first cousin of Noubar Pasha, who married T'aguhi Markosian, daughter of another prominent Armenian family of Smyrna. Their son was the lexicographer Mesrop Noubarian (1862-1924) who died unmarried.⁵⁶

All in all, there appears to be no reason to doubt the princely descent of the Noubarians. The links to Prince Noubar are well attested and whatever the origin of his ancestors, his connection with the P'arsadanids may suggest a princely Orbelid, and through it, Mamikonid origin. In dealing with the Noubarian claims we are in the world of the Meliks of Eastern Armenia, a different milieu entirely from that which produced those of the Dadians or Dedeyans.

THE ABROYAN FAMILY (D'ABRO)

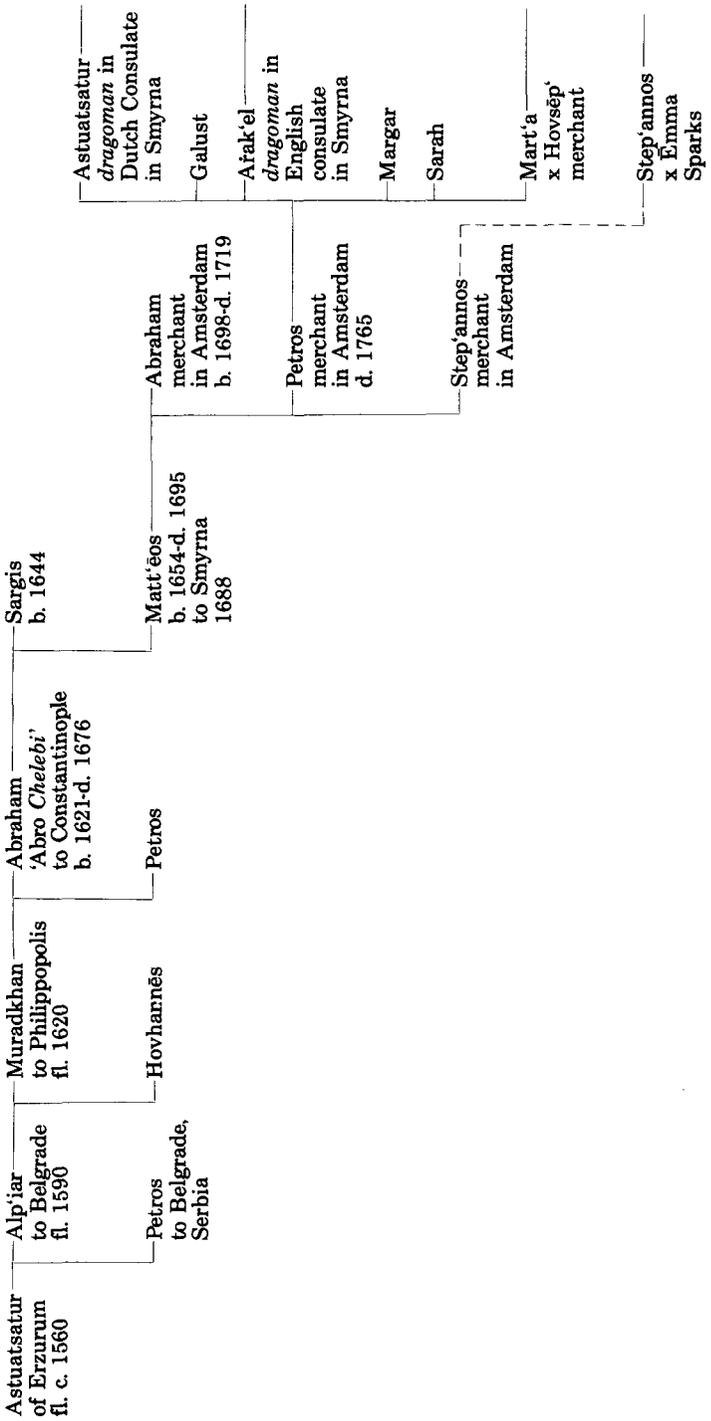
Another Armenian family that became prominent in Egypt in the nineteenth century was that of Abroyan or d'Abro, in Italy *d'Abro Pagratide*, which, as the last form asserts, claimed royal Bagratuni descent.

The history and contributions of the Abroyans have been decribed in detail by Adalian⁵⁷ and need only be summarized here. First heard of in the early sixteenth century, the Abroyans descend from an Arme-

nian of Erzurum named Astuatsatur, one of whose sons, Alp'iar, migrated to Belgrade where he established himself as a merchant. From one of Alp'iar's grandsons, Abraham (d. 1676), who migrated to Constantinople, the family became known as Abroyan, or, in its Italian (or *lingua franca*?) form: d'Abro. Abraham's son Matt'ēos settled in Smyrna in 1688, where his sons prospered in trade, operating in Amsterdam, and in 1717 receiving permission from Peter the Great to conduct commercial operations in Russia which were tax exempt. One of Matt'ēos's sons, Step'annos, was the ancestor of Dikran Pasha d'Abro (1846-1904), who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs for Egypt (1891-1894), and whose brother Aslan (1848-1917), under the name Don Aslan d'Abro Pagratide, was recognized as a prince in Italy in 1882. Another son of Matt'ēos's, Petros, had a daughter, Mart'a, who married a certain Hovsēp', an Armenian merchant of Kayseri who had settled in Smyrna in the mid-eighteenth century. Their son, Bōghos—Bōghos Bey Yusufian—(1775-1844), served as Minister of Commerce for Egypt under Muhammad 'Ali, and was the most distinguished Armenian in the Egyptian Armenian community. The Yusufians maintained close connections with the Abroyans, and when Bōghos's son Petros died childless, he left his entire fortune to his second cousin, Afak'el Bey d'Abro (1832-1875), an advisor to Noubar Pasha who also served as Egyptian Governor of Massawa in the Sudan. The various ramifications and intermarriages of the Abroyans can be followed on the accompanying charts (III and IV). One scion of the family, not shown, was Sahak d'Abro, a prominent Constantinople journalist of the mid-nineteenth century.

Despite its greatness and its wealth, the Bagratid claims of the Abroyan family rest upon very weak foundations, and Adalian does well to treat them with skepticism. Ani fell to the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century, and the Bagratids who went west had already settled in Cappadocia; the Abroyans turn up in Erzurum no less than five centuries later! A mercantile family, they had done well for themselves first in Serbia and then in Bulgaria, but began to achieve real importance only in Constantinople and greatness finally in Egypt. Educated, no doubt, on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mekhitarist histories, the sudden discovery that their ancestors were as illustrious as they themselves, is a predictable stage in development of the Abroyan self-image—especially as they entered the charmed circle of the Noubarians, who were, in fact, of true princely descent. Though put forward with more sobriety than the claims of the Dede-yans, the Bagratid chimera of the Abroyans is even less likely to have its origins in anything more than an educated imagination.⁵⁸

Chart IV. The Abroyan Family (d'Abro)



THE ADOIANS OF VAN

The family of the noted Armenian-born painter Arshile Gorky (1904-1948), né Vosdanig Adoian, also claimed nobiliary descent.⁵⁹ The Adoians, who hailed from Khorkom in the valley of Hayots' Dzor near the town of Van, were said to have been descended from a certain Adom Gnuni mentioned in Eghishē's *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*. Unfortunately, the Adoians had only the family tradition to support this claim of princely Gnunid descent, and nearly 1400 years separate the Adom Gnuni in question from Gorky's grandfather Manuk Adoian (d. p. 1863).⁶⁰

On Gorky's mother's side, the Tēr Martirosians, a respectable family of Vosdan (Gevash), closely associated with the monastery of Charahan Surb Nshan (which it was said to have founded in the fifth century), the claim is of Āshtunid descent, possibly through the later Artsrunids who succeeded them as rulers of the area in the early Middle Ages. Here the claims were based on data contained in bibles (now lost) and on khach'k'ars which may or may not still be standing.⁶¹

Claims such as these are not presently subject to either verification or disproof. The House of Gnuni is last heard of in c. 914;⁶² that of the Āshtuni in the Arab period (seventh-ninth centuries).⁶³ Obviously, however, the descendants of these ancient families could not have been totally obliterated, and it is not at all impossible that some of them may have preserved a knowledge of their ancestry and that they handed this down within the family circle. The Sefedinian branch of the Artsrunids, we know, survived until the late fifteenth century in the Van region,⁶⁴ and the Kurjibēkian branch until the sixteenth.⁶⁵ Nor is it impossible that the local people may have recognized that certain families in their midst were of noble origin, and may have extended that recognition through certain courtesies and other signs of respect. That the details of such descent would be remembered clearly, that the misunderstandings would not have occurred, that there might not be contaminations drawn from literary sources, that intermarriage with lesser mortals could be avoided, that the claims might be valid only in the female line—these are all issues of another kind which at the present state of our researches must remain open, but which ultimately will have to be addressed before the traditions of families such as those of Arshile Gorky's parents can be recognized as historical facts. Far too little is known about the internal life of the various Armenian communities under Ottoman rule for us to dismiss every claim to noble descent as totally invented. On the other hand, traditions of this kind, resting on evidence so incapable of verification, would make it possible for any Armenian to claim noble and even royal descent from anyone at all.

CONCLUSION

The decline in the position and influence of the nobility since 1789 and its almost complete eclipse since World War I, coupled with the increasingly egalitarian nature of Western society, have led to the emergence of a certain disdain for both the nobiliary class as an institution and for those individuals who belong to it. Whatever the causes or the justification for the historical movement away from the concept of an aristocracy of birth and lineage, it is unwarranted for modern historians to project this present attitude back to those historical periods and geographical areas in which the role of the nobility was as decisive as it was important. No true understanding of medieval Europe, ancient Iran, ancient and medieval Caucasia, or feudal Japan can be had without a thorough knowledge of how the nobiliary class arose, how it was structured, and what role it played vis-à-vis the central authority. The study of the nobility is thus as obligatory as it has been neglected.

For these reasons, it is equally important to understand also how and why the nobility declined, and, in cases where it did survive, how it was able to maintain its wealth and position or to transmute them into a viable form under conditions so different from what they had previously known. Among the Armenians, where the nobility ultimately lost entirely its station as a land-owning and warrior aristocracy, it is especially important to understand how its traditional sense of self-respect and of obligation to the nation was transformed into new terms—commercial, military, educational, philanthropic—required by new conditions in Armenia or in the lands to which the surviving nobility migrated. The accuracy of our understanding of this transformation requires, first of all, that when discussing a prominent Armenian family of supposedly noble descent, we be absolutely certain that the claimed descent is genuine. In this way, we can see that the Dadian, Dedeyan, and Adoian claims rest on weak evidence, those of the Noubarians are reasonably strong, and those of the Abroyans hardly credible. In particular, we must be especially on our guard against criteria that rest on a faulty understanding, not only of the Armenian past and of the history and nature of Armenian society both before and after the Turko-Mongol invasions, but also on an ignorance of the basic principles of family history and of genealogical research.⁶⁶

NOTES

1. C. Tbumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, 1963), pp. 228-229; idem, *Manuél de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de la Caucasic chrétienne* (Rome, 1976), pp. 227-229; R. H. Hewsen, "The Meliks of Eastern Armenia: A Preliminary Study," *Revue des études arméniennes* (Paris), 9 (1972), 286.
2. The houses of Artsruni, Bagratuni, Kamsarakan, Khořkhořuni (?), Mamikonian, and Siwni.
3. The houses of Bagratuni with three branches (The Royal Houses of K'art'li, Kakhet'i, and Imeret'i), Kamsarakan (i.e., the Pahlavids, with three branches: P'alavandid, Mkhargrtzelid, and Sumbatid), and Mamikonian (with two branches: The T'umanids and the Liparitid-Orbelids).
4. R. H. Hewsen, "The Meliks of Eastern Armenia, Part III, *REA*, 11 (1975-76), 219-243.
5. Charles Dédéyan, "L'immigration arménienne en Cappadoce au xi siècle," *Byzantion* (Brussels), 45 (1975), 41-117.
6. For the *amira* class in general see V. H. Artinian, "The Role of the Amiras in the Ottoman Empire," *The Armenian Review* (Boston), 34, 2 (June 1981), 189-195.
7. *Document relatif à la famille arménienne Dadian* (Paris, 1923).
8. The manuscript of the Gospel described is dated 667 according to the Armenian calendar which means that it was copied in the year A.D. 1218. Written in the city of Tarsus during the reign of King Leon I of Lesser Armenia, after passing from hand to hand it was brought to Akn by Archbishop Pōghos who appears to have been an antiquarian of sorts.
9. The term *mahtesi* is used in Armenian to indicate someone who has made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It is thus the equivalent of the Muslim honorific *haji* for a believer who has made the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca.
10. Macler, p. 148. See T. Vardanyan, *Vaspurakani Artsrunyats' t'agavorut'yun* (Erevan, 1969).
11. Macler, p. 149.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
15. For T'omarza see Hovhannēs T'omarzats'i (H. Torossian), *Patmut'iwn Hay T'omarzayi*, 3 vols. (Beirut, 1959-1969); and Stephen Hill, "The Early Christian Church at Tmarza, Cappadocia: A Study Based on Photographs Taken in 1909 by Gertrude Bell," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (Washington), 29 (1975).
16. Christian Dédéyan, *Les Dédéyan, leurs titres, leurs alliances* (Venice, 1971), p. 15 (not to be confused with his nephew Charles, a recognized scholar [R.H.H.]).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
20. Aghassi, *Zeitun* (Paris, 1907).
21. A. Alpōyajian, *Patmut'iwn Hay Kesarioy* (Cairo, 1937), p. 855.
22. Tbumanoff, *Studies*, 199.
23. René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071* (Paris, 1947), but Dédéyan does not indicate the page and Grousset is not indexed.
24. Dédéyan, "L'immigration arménienne," p. 17.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

27. Hewsen, "Meliks," I, II, III.

28. Dédéyan, "L'immigration arménienne," p. 21.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

30. *Ibid.*

31. H. Adjarian, *Classification des dialectes arméniennes* (Paris, 1909); G. B. Jahukyan, *Hay barbaragitut'yan neratsut'yun* (Erevan, 1972).

32. Dédéyan, *Les Dédéyan*, genealogical charts.

33. For the origin and descent of the Dadiani of Mingrelia see Toumanoff, *Studies*, pp. 267-269; *Manuél*, pp. 186-202; and his *Maisons princières de la Géorgie* (Rome, 1983), p. 34.

34. Khach'er Dedeyan, *Armenian Religious Music*, 2 vols. (Venice, 1957, 1958) (in Arm.).

35. R. Khérumian, *Les arméniens* (Paris, 1941); *idem*, *Introduction à l'anthropologie du Caucase les Arméniens* (Paris, 1943).

36. C. Burney and D. M. Lang, *Peoples of the Hills: Ancient Ararat and Causasus* (New York, 1972), I. D'ikanov, *Prehistoria armyanskogo naroda* (Moscow, 1972), Engl. trans. L. Jennings, *Prehistory of the Armenian People* (Delmar, N.Y., 1984).

37. Dédéyan, *Les Dédéyan*, genealogical charts.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. Hewsen, "Meliks III," pp. 231-233.

44. Dédéyan, *Les Dédéyan*, *passim*.

45. I am indebted to A. H. Kardashian, Librarian of the Bibliothèque Noubar in Paris, for most of this information on the Noubarian family. See Kardashian's bibliography at the end of this article.

46. Hewsen, "Meliks III," p. 232.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 228-230.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

49. See n. 45, above.

50. In 1863, Noubar Pasha was sent to Paris where he negotiated the differences between the French and Egyptian governments relating to the Suez Canal then under construction. Returning to Cairo in 1865, he served briefly as Minister of Public Works and as Minister of Foreign Affairs, after which he returned to Paris (1866-1869) where he secured from the Ottoman Sultan a firman, or decree, granting Egypt administrative autonomy, the right to negotiate customs agreements with European nations, and the title Khedive for the Egyptian ruler, who, while virtually autonomous since the beginning of the century, was still in theory, only a viceroy for the sultan.

Returning briefly to Egypt for the opening of the Canal in 1869, Noubar Pasha went back to Europe and there spent another six years, with rare visits to Egypt where he concerned himself with negotiations for judicial reform, a subject that remained the chief concern of his public life. Although well recompensed for his services to his government and fortunate in his investments, it has been shown that Noubar's fortune at his death amounted to a mere 300,000 pounds, and that there was no truth to the accusations that he had made himself a millionaire at Egypt's expense. (For all this see the letter from Bôghos Pasha Noubar to Wilfren Scawen Blunt in the latter's *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt*, [London, 1922], Appendix IV, pp. 14-15).

The fact that Noubar Pasha held so high a position has led many Armenians to glorify him, although to some Egyptian observers he represents a British puppet and

an example of the evils of imperialism. In actual fact, however, Noubar Pasha, though certainly pro-Western and leery of Egyptian nationalism like all members of the essentially alien (Turkish, Albanian, Circassian, Armenian) landowning and bureaucratic aristocracy to which he belonged, was hardly pro-British, and, while working to use British influence as a force to hold in check the pressures of Egyptian nationalism, he, at the same time, strove to keep under control the power of the British adviser to the Egyptian government. (See Robert L. Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt 1882-1914* [Princeton, 1966], I, 174-75).

On the one hand, although prominent in the Egyptian government from the 1860s, being Prime Minister twice (1884-1888, 1895) and responsible for, among other things, the introduction of the Mixed Tribunals and other judicial reforms, Noubar could not speak Arabic, the language of the nation he served, and so possessed little influence over public opinion. On the other hand, the charges that he was responsible for the exorbitant loans contracted by the Egyptian government (Blunt describes Noubar Pasha as the "Khedive Ismail's worst counsellor and evil genius . . . second only to Ismail in the financial ruin of Egypt" accusing him of obtaining huge loans at enormous commissions estimated at 14-15,000,000 pounds sterling [ibid.]) have been refuted by his son Bôghos in the letter to Blunt.

Apart from his service to Egypt, Noubar Pasha was also an Armenian patriot and a man of literary interests. The famed two-volume *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie* (Paris, 1880), e.g., was published under his auspices.

51. See n. 45, above.

52. Ibid.

53. Rouben Adalian, "The Armenian Colony of Egypt during the Reign of Muhammad Ali (1805-1848)," *The Armenian Review* (Boston), 33, 2 (1980), 115-144, an especially valuable study bringing forward much information not otherwise available outside of Armenian sources.

54. See n. 45, above.

55. C. Tumanoff, private communication drawn from his extensive archives.

56. See n. 45, above.

57. Adalian, "Armenian Colony."

58. A characteristic feature of the claims of modern Armenian families to nobiliary origin is the ease with which—once the family has achieved a certain distinction—it is able to obtain ecclesiastical support for its chimeras. We have already seen how the Dadians secured no less a personage than Catholicos Matt'êos Izmirlian to endorse their princely origins. Christian Dédéyan, likewise, got Bishop G. Amadouni (a fellow princely scion?) to write the introduction to his book. The Abroyans, too, had similar support from a church authority. In the Italian *Libro d'Oro* index to the nobility, no less a dignitary than his Beatitude, Gregory-Peter XIII Terzian, Armenian Catholic Patriarch of Cilicia, provided an attestation of the princely origin of the family for the Italian kingdom dated 18 May 1929, authenticated by Cardinal Sincero, Secretary for the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, and deposited with the royal heraldic office by Monsignor Nazlian, Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Tarsus.

It is interesting that the *Libro d'Oro* entry adds curious details to the known history of the Abroyans. They are said to have come directly to Constantinople from Erzinjan (not to the Balkans from Erzurum) in the mid-eighteenth century, and to have held the lordship of Erzinjan before they left. Obviously, the story has grown in the telling besides having become somewhat confused.

59. Karlen Mooradian, *The Many Worlds of Archile Gorky* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 11-22.

60. Ibid., p. 13.

61. Ibid.

62. Tumanoff, *Studies*, p. 205.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

64. R. Hewsen, "Artsrunid House of Sefedinian: Survival of a Princely Dynasty in Ecclesiastical Guise," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, I (1984), 133-137.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

66. I recall meeting an elderly Armenian woman who claimed nobiliary descent on the grounds that her father came from Kayseri where "all the Armenians were of noble descent." When I asked her how it was possible for these noble Armenians to exclude their non-noble compatriots from settling in Kayseri during the several centuries of Turkish rule, she became somewhat flustered and not a little displeased. Her nobiliary descent, by the way, was from the Khořkhořunis—otherwise last heard of in the fifth century! Her evidence: her father's family had lived in the same house for 800 years! When I inquired as to whether these 800 years were calculated by counting them before the present day, or before she had the story from her late father, or before her father's time, she was once again flustered, and, of course, even more displeased. I knew people, however, who, not thinking to ask these questions, accepted the good woman's claims at face value. In this way are myths perpetuated and converted into historical fact.

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