

**ARMENIAN
LEGENDS
AND POEMS**

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Armenian legends and poems by Zabelle C. Boyajian

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ZABELLE C. BOYAJIAN

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AND POEMS**

ARMENIAN LEGENDS AND POEMS

ILLUSTRATED & COMPILED

by

ZABELLE C. BOYAJIAN



TIGRANES THE GREAT
KING OF ARMENIA

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE RIGHT HON. VISCOUNT BRYCE, O.M.

AND

A CONTRIBUTION ON "ARMENIA: ITS EPICS, FOLK-SONGS,
AND MEDIAEVAL POETRY,"

By ARAM RAFFI

LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.
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PREFACE

In preparing this book of Armenian Legends and Poems my principal object was to publish it as a Memorial to an unhappy nation.

The book does not claim to represent Armenian poetry adequately. Many gifted and well-known authors have been omitted, partly from considerations of space, and partly because of the scope of the work. For instance, I should have liked to include some of the *Sharakans* (rows of gems) of Nerses Shnohali; but the impossibility of reproducing their characteristic forms in another language, and doing them any justice, made me decide not to translate any of them. I have only given a few typical legends and poems, endeavouring, as far as possible, to convey the local colouring by adhering closely to the form, rhythm, and imagery of the originals in my translations. I have also largely based the decorative scheme of the illustrations upon Ancient Armenian Art as we see it in medieval missals and illuminations.

Should this anthology create an interest in Armenian literature the Armenian Muses have still many treasures in their keeping which cannot be destroyed; and another volume could be compiled.

In conclusion, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to Miss Alice Stone Blackwell, of Boston, U.S.A.—one of Armenia's truest friends—for allowing me to reprint several of her renderings of Armenian poems; to G. C. Macaulay, M.A., and the Delegates of the Oxford University Press, for permission to reprint the "Tale of Rosiphetea" from their edition of *Gower's Confessio Amantis*; to Mr. William Watson and Mr. John Lane for permission to reprint the sonnet on Armenia, "A Tria of Orthodoxy," from *The Purple East*; and to the heirs of Victoria Aganoot Pempilj for permitting me to reprint two of her poems, "Pasqua Armena" and "Io Vidi," from the *Nova Antologia*. I wish also to thank Mr. M. E. Galoustianz for designing the cover of this book.

The proceeds of the present edition will be handed over to the Armenian Fund.

ZABELLE C. BOYAJIAN.

INTRODUCTION

Severed for many centuries from Western Europe by the flood of Turkish barbarism which descended upon their country in the Middle Ages, and subjected for the last two generations to oppressions and cruelties such as few civilized people have ever had to undergo, the Armenians have been less known to Englishmen and Frenchmen than their remarkable qualities and their romantic history deserve. Few among us have acquired their language, one of the most ancient forms of human speech that possess a literature. Still fewer have studied their art or read their poetry even in translations. There is, therefore, an ample field for a book which shall present to those Englishmen and Frenchmen, whose interest in Armenia has been awakened by the sufferings to which its love of freedom and its loyalty to its Christian faith have exposed it, some account of Armenian art and Armenian poetical literature. Miss Boyajian, the authoress of this book, is the daughter of an Armenian elegyist, whom I knew and respected during the many years when he was British Vice-Consul at Diarbekir on the Tigris. She is herself a painter, a member of that group of Armenian artists some of whom have, like Aivazovsky and Edgar Chabine, won fame in the world at large, and she is well qualified to describe with knowledge as well as with sympathy the art of her own people.

That art has been, since the nation embraced Christianity in the fourth century of our era, chiefly ecclesiastical. The finest examples of ancient Armenian architecture are to be seen in the ruins of Ani, on the border where Russian and Turkish territory meet, a city which was once the seat of one of the native dynasties, while the famous church of the monastery of Etchmiadzin, at Vagarshabad, near Beivan, is, though more modern, a perfect and beautiful existing representative of the old type. Etchmiadzin, standing at the north foot of Mount Ararat, is the seat of the Catholicos, or ecclesiastical head of the whole Armenian church. There was little or no ecclesiastical sculpture, for the Armenian church discouraged the use of images, and fresco painting was not much used for the decoration of churches; mosaics, however, and other books of devotion and manuscripts of the Bible were illuminated with hand paintings, and adorned with miniatures; and much skill and taste were shown in embroideries. Metal work, especially in silver and in copper, has always been a favourite vehicle for artistic design in the Near East and is so still, though like everything else it has

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suffered from the destruction, in repeated massacres, of many of the most highly skilled artificers.

One of the most interesting features in the history of Armenian art is that it displays in its successive stages the various influences to which the country has been subject. Ever since it became Christian it was a territory fought for by diverse empires of diverse creeds. As in primitive times it lay between Assyria on the one side and the Hittite power on the other, so after the appearance of Islam it became the frontier on which the East Roman Christian Empire contended with the Muslim Arab and Turkish monarchies. Persian influences on the East, both before and after Persia had become Mohammedan, here met with the Roman influences spreading out from Constantinople. The latter gave the architectural style, as we see it in those ecclesiastical buildings to which I have referred, a style developed here with admirable features of its own and one which has held its ground to the present day. The influence of Persia on the other hand was seen in the designs used in embroidery, in carpets, and in metal work. The new school of painters has struck out new lines for itself, but while profiting by whatever it has learnt from Europe, it retains a measure of distinctive national quality.

That quality is also visible in Armenian poetry of which this volume gives some interesting specimens. The poetry of a people which has struggled against so many terrible misfortunes has naturally a melancholy strain. But it is also full of an unextinguishable patriotism.

Those who have learnt from this book what the Armenian race has shown itself capable of doing in the fields of art and literature, and who have learnt from history how true it has been to its Christian faith, and how tenacious of its national life, will hope that the time has now at last come when it will be delivered from the load of brutal tyranny that has so long cramped its energies, and allowed to take its place among the free and progressive peoples of the world. It is the only one of the native races of Western Asia that is capable of restoring productive industry and assured prosperity to these now desolated regions that were the earliest homes of civilisation.

BRYCE.

3, BRIDGESIDE GARDENS,
July 1916.

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