



75 YEARS FROM THE DEATH OF GRAND BENEFACTOR GARABED MELKONIAN

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Garabed Melkonian, the youngest of the three sons of Artin H. Melkonian, was born in the Lousavoritch quarter of Caesarea in 1849. The only education he received was in the Gumushian Elementary School. Together with his second brother, Krikor, in 1878 they settled in Romania for two years, whilst in 1880 they moved to Egypt, where they opened tobacco factories (in 1882 in Alexandria and Zagazig, in 1888 in Fayoum and Assuan, and in 1893 in Cairo, which in 1900 became the largest tobacco factory of the Middle East), and quickly became amongst the richest tobacco traders of their time. The Armenian Genocide did not leave the two benevolent brothers apathetic: urged by Adana Bishop Moushegh Seropian, they mutually decided to establish a school for the orphans of Genocide. After the death of Krikor in 1920, Garabed (a well-known benefactor, e.g. for the 6.000 pounds he donated to the Greek community of Alexandria, for which action he was also decorated) sold all his belongings, accumulating 500.000 Egyptian or 600.000 English golden pounds, which he granted for the foundation and maintenance of the Melkonian Educational Institute, which first-operated in January 1926.

Over the following years, Agha Garabed Melkonian proudly supervised the progress of the students of the “Armenian Orphanage”, as the Melkonian Educational Institute was known during its first years of operation, and divided his time between Cyprus and Egypt. In Cyprus he resided only for a few months, mainly in his villa to the north of the girls building, also having a summer residence in Kakopetria. In July 1934, at the advanced age of 85 years, he was summering in Alexandria, where on the 23rd July he left for the other world. The late benefactor’s first funeral took place on Wednesday, 25 July 1934, celebrated by His Beatitude the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, Torkom Koushagian, who went to Egypt specifically for this purpose.

However, according to Garabed Melkonian’s own wish and after permission by the colonial government, his relic was brought to Cyprus on 16 August, accompanied by Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I, and it arrived in Nicosia at around 21:30. The double coffin was temporarily placed in the Sourp Boghos chapel at the old Armenian cemetery, and was transferred to the Sourp Asdvadzadzin church in the Armenian quarter on Saturday evening, 18 August. On Sunday morning, 19 August 1934, at the customary Divine Liturgy at the church of the Virgin Mary, a devout memorial was also performed in memory of Garabed Melkonian. At around 15:30 on the same day, the funerary mass of his second funeral began in the church packed with people.



Since midday, a dense crowd of people had flooded the streets around, Armenian-Cypriots as well as Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. The Autocephalous Church of Cyprus was represented by the Abbot of Saint John Chrysostom monastery, Archimandrite Hippolytus, the private secretary of the ill Locum Tenens Leontios, Chr. Agapiou, and tens of priests. Also present were the Turkish religious authorities, the temporary Chief Judge Mr V. Sertsios, the Commissioner of Nicosia Mr Montague, the Director of Education Mr Kalleen, the Mayor of Nicosia Mr Themistocles Dervis and other officials. Heading the majestic funeral were His Holiness the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, Sahag II Khabayan (who had already been summering for a month at the Magaravank), His Holiness the Coadjutor Catholicos, Papken I Gulesserian, and His Eminence the Armenian Archbishop Cyprus, Bedros Saradjian. Because of his advanced age (he was born on the same year with Garabed Melkonian), elder Catholic Sahag II only blessed the coffin. The Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I performed the rest of the service, and he delivered a beautiful eulogy exalting the God-pleasing work of the celebrated Garabed Melkonian.

Exiting the church, the oak coffin was placed in the church yard, where the large crowds were gathered, and eulogies were said by theologian Onnig Mahdessian - on behalf of Parekordzagan - teacher Mrs Torikian, Mr Der Megerditchian, and others. At around 16:45 began the modest procession of the relics to their burial, headed by the Institute's Band, which stroked up dead marches under the conduction of well-known musician Vahan Bedelian. The relics were transported by a carriage with four horses, accompanied by Coadjutor Catholicos Papken I, the students of the Institute - who arrived from Akhiropiitos monastery, where they were summering - and a large crowd of people. At around 18:15 they reached the Institute, and the coffin was placed in a special tomb in the centre of the schoolyard, between the twin buildings. The sepulchral speech was delivered by the Headmaster of the Institute, Krikor Giragossian, stirring the souls of the crowd, while a farewell speech was recited by a male and a female student and an alumna of the school. Before depositing the coffin, His Holiness Papken I delivered a short speech, in which he advised the Orphanage's inmates to show the proper appreciation for the great donation of the late grand benefactor through their assiduity for their courses and their good conduct.

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Nine months later, Krikor Melkonian's relics were also brought here. On 24 April 1954 the foundation stone of the present marble monument was placed by Armenian Archbishop of Cyprus Ghevont Chebeyan, the work of sculptor Leon Mouradoff and architect Mardiros Altounian, which was inaugurated on 15 January 1956, also by Archbishop Chebeyan. The fine marble monument with the busts of the benefactors had been for half a century the favourite spot for commemorative photographs and ceremonies. From there, the immortal benefactors remind us of their unparalleled achievement, which played an essential role for Armenianism everywhere, cultivating the Armenian language, culture and history and strengthening Armenianness and Armenophony, also being a cultural beacon and an ambassador of our martyred Cyprus. Without a shred of respect, Parekordzagan unilaterally decided to close down this historical institution in June 2005.

From up there where they are, looking at us, it is certain that the two benefactors have filled the rivers of paradise with their tears of grief. When Garabed Melkonian made his enormous donation, he had said the following words: *"I am building this school to take avenge my nation. The Turk decimated us. He first killed our leaders and then our entire helpless nation. These young orphans must rebuild their patriarchal homeland, and we must make leaders out of them. **It is my wish that the existence of the Melkonian Educational Institute be perpetuated for centuries to come and that it serves as hearth of enlightenment that train productive and honest men and women for the Armenian nation, the Armenian homeland, and all of humanity**".* May his memory be eternal...