

Armenian Culture in Anatolia: Dishes, Weddings, Funerals and Holidays

In Anatolia's rich history, there have been many periods where cultures met and interacted. One of these periods is the early 20th century, particularly the last period of the Ottoman Empire and the founding years of Turkey. Throughout the Ottoman Empire and the Republican period, Armenians continued to exist as one of the most important ethnic and religious groups in Anatolia. In the Ottoman Empire, Armenians lived in various regions and engaged in different fields such as trade and crafts. The Armenian community played a significant role in the economic and social life of the Ottoman Empire.

During the Republican era, the Armenian population decreased significantly. The Armenian Genocide of 1915 is one of the darkest events in the history of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of these events, many Armenians were forcibly deported and killed. The Armenian Genocide of 1915 marks a profound and tragic turning point in Armenian history. The surviving Armenians went through great trauma and were forced to leave their ancestral lands. After the Genocide, many surviving Armenians were compelled to migrate abroad, settling in various countries such as Europe, America, and the Middle East. Despite facing language and cultural barriers during this process, the Armenian community endeavored to preserve its cultural heritage. In Turkey, the small remaining Armenian community underwent significant changes. The nation-state policies of Turkey during the Republican era influenced the lives of the Armenian community and led to an assimilation process. The number of Armenian speakers decreased, Armenian schools and churches were closed, and the state seized properties and disregarded foundations' legal status. This situation presented challenges for the Armenian community to preserve their identity and cultural heritage. However, despite difficulties, the Armenian community in Turkey continued to sustain its cultural heritage. Particularly in Istanbul, the Armenian community strived to preserve their cultural identity through churches, associations, and cultural events. Elements such as the Armenian language, literature, music, dance, and traditional handicrafts hold significant places in Armenian life. Today, the Armenian community in Turkey continues its efforts to preserve its cultural heritage and promote social participation. Armenian foundations, associations, and cultural events keep the solidarity and cultural fabric of the Armenian community alive. However, the deep pain and losses caused by the genocide still have a lasting impact on the Armenian community and hold a significant place in their collective memory.

Introduction:

This research is based on oral history interviews conducted to provide information about the cultural heritage of Armenians who lived in different regions of Turkey. The interviews were carried out with Armenians who lived in the cities of Hatay, Sivas, Istanbul, Diyarbakır, and Kayseri, and subsequently settled in Istanbul or abroad. The interviews focused on topics such as holidays, weddings, culinary culture, migration stories, and Armenian language practices. Each region has its unique cultural practices and different Armenian dialects. The interviews conducted in cities like Hatay, Sivas, Istanbul, Diyarbakır, and Kayseri demonstrated the diverse aspects and richness of the Armenian community.

Armenian cuisine is known for its rich and varied flavors. According to the information collected in the interviews, there are both similar and different recipes and regional flavors



among the Armenian communities in Hatay, Sivas, Istanbul, and Kayseri. The interviews provide information about the characteristics of Armenian food culture, and the preparation of traditional dishes, and special dishes for festive occasions.

Weddings are an important role in the social and cultural life of the Armenian community. According to the interviews, weddings are carefully planned and include many traditional rituals and ceremonies. Elements such as marriage preparations, the wedding ceremony, dances, music, and entertaining guests are an important part of Armenian weddings.

Holidays also hold an important place in the Armenian community's significant celebrations. Traditionally, during holidays, church visits, prayers, and special moments spent with families are observed. In discussions, the meaning of holiday celebrations, special meals, and traditional games have been emphasized.

Finally, in the discussions, the migration stories and funeral ceremonies of the Armenian community have also been addressed. Migration has been a significant turning point in the history of the Armenian community, and the experiences and efforts to adapt during this process hold great importance. Funeral ceremonies, on the other hand, reflect the cultural and religious values of the community and are carried out alongside commemorative rituals.

Throughout history, Armenian language practices in Anatolia and Istanbul have undergone various interactions and transformations. The Armenian language comprises different dialects and variations. These dialects have changed over time due to regional differences, migration movements, and interactions. Especially in the Eastern Anatolia region, there are different accents among Armenian speakers. These dialects have gradually interacted with Turkish and other local languages, leading to changes in vocabulary, grammar structures, and accents. This indicates the diversity of Armenian spoken in Anatolia. For example, there is a distinct linguistic usage between an Armenian living in Hatay and one living in Sivas due to regional dialect differences.

Armenian language practices should be considered a significant element of the language and cultural identity of the Armenian community in Turkey. The preservation and transmission of this language to future generations hold immense importance in sustaining the cultural richness of the Armenian community.



“Weddings were usually done with big celebrations.”

In Armenian society, weddings are special ceremonies that reflect a rich cultural heritage. These weddings are marked by religious rituals, traditional dances, music, and delicious food. Armenian weddings are of great importance in terms of preserving cultural heritage, reinforcing a sense of belonging, and passing it on to future generations. There may be some differences between weddings in Anatolia and Istanbul. These differences may vary mostly in terms of the traditional foods or ceremonies of the region in which they take place.

R.Ç., 83, Women, Diyarbakır

“In 1957, I got married in Lice. We were engaged for one year. At first, I was avoiding my husband, but he would secretly look at me all the time. Our families were getting to know each other, and they were going to marry my sister, but then they chose me. During the engagement, we couldn't meet each other much; maybe once a week, it would happen or not. Back then, there was no church in our village, so we had to go to Diyarbakır from the village for the church, but it was difficult. After we got married, my husband went to the military. After 10 years, we had our church wedding. My husband and his family came to pick me up on horseback; I had left the house like that. It was a very crowded wedding, and we had it in the village. They didn't serve alcohol to women at that time; only men would drink. My grandmother (Yayam) used to make very good wine. There was wine and raki. They made stuffed meatballs, stuffed vegetables, water pastry, and meat dishes; there was a very crowded table set up.”

B.P, 62, Women, İstanbul

“There was also the ceyiz [pronounced djeyiz, meaning dowry]. It would be taken on the Thursday, two or three days before the wedding, they would go to the bride's future home, her close relatives/friends would come to see her dowry. In the dowry there would be the groom's pyjamas, socks, slippers. There would be a separate bundle for the groom. The girl's things, kitchen items, clothes, underwear. Also underwear for the groom, etc. The Maid of Honour would arrange all those in the drawers and closets. Then they would sit together when it was all done, and have tea together. Tea for the attendees, there would be some food prepared for them too of course, which would be served with tea. And then they would leave.”

“And on Sunday they would have the wedding. The bride and groom would not see each other, but now they can see each other. They miss each other. For them to miss each other, they wouldn't see each other. We were like that. We didn't see each other for a week. But young people today see each other; they tell us this is an old tradition.

“On the wedding day, the bride would go to the hairdresser with the Maid of Honour and her close ones. The hairdresser would wrap her hair [i.e. put her hair up] then, I'll tell you what we did at my wedding, then we would come home to get dressed, then the hairdresser would come home to fix the hair, etc. Later the Maid of Honour would come, knock on the door a few times, it's not opening, we would say. Three times.



After that, she would put something in the envelope, money or gold, whatever she preferred, the groom's side, I mean the Maid of Honour. After the third time, the door would open, the bride would kiss the Maid of Honour's hand, then they would all sit for a little while, then they would go to the church, the Maid of Honour would sit in the car with the bride. The groom would wait at the church, that is how it is now. The Best Man and the groom wait for the bride at the church. The bride waits at the church hall, until it's time [for the ceremony]. Then the guests would arrive and sit in their places. The bride's side sit on the left, the boy's side sit on the right. Then the church bells ring, and before the bride, her relatives come in, then the bride on her father's arm. The groom walks to the centre from the other side, kisses [her] father's hand, and takes the bride by the hand, and goes to the alter. They go forward and the ceremony begins."

"When it finishes, everyone, all those close to them, give them their gifts. They would stand next to each other, the Best Man, the bride's mother and father, the Maid of Honour, and they would give their gifts. Then the remaining guests would give their gifts, and if they hadn't been given a sweet/wedding favour before, they would give it then, then everyone would go home. Or if there was a wedding banquet somewhere for all the close people, they would go there. The bride and groom would be photographed, etc. This is how weddings would end."

T.K, 56, Women, Vakıflı

"For weddings, we would have dolma [stuffed vegetables], ishli keofteh, such things. The ishli keofteh is made of bulgur, the outside is minced meat and the inside ground and meat with onion. The dolma we prepare here always has meat inside, ground meat. Rice, parsley, mint, different spices are added, tomato paste, pepper paste, oil, that's how we prepare the stuffing. In Vakef, we continue the old traditions"

C.Ç, 72, Erkek, Hatay

"Weddings were usually done with big celebrations. For example, on Saturday there was the kina gecesi [pronounced kena kedjesi, hen's night at the bride's house where the groom and relatives also attend]. Yes, there they do the drum and zurna [a woodwind instrument] etc a little, and the wedding is done on the following day, the Sunday, and after the wedding drum and zurna, eating and drinking etc, like that yes. The bride comes and thumps dough on the door to go in. I don't know, during the wedding she steps on the groom's foot or the groom's friends come and pick the groom with needles, to tease him a bit, let's say. They do such jokes. I think the dough symbolises prosperity. You know the dough at home grows/increases everything, it raises the bread etc etc I think they do this in that sense. Or when the bride gets out of the church, the young cut her road off and ask her for oghi [arak], ¹for money, I don't know, for meze [food], such things, such jokes. I mean there are such games. The Mother and father wed the bride and groom, the groom's friends come and pick him with needles, tease him, yes like this."

In various regions of Anatolia, Armenian weddings are celebrated with unique rituals and traditions. These weddings reflect a historical and cultural background. In the Armenian

¹ Oghi: Raki in Armenian



community, weddings usually begin with a church ceremony. It is an important step that reinforces the religious faith of the wedding couple and symbolizes the acceptance of the community. In the church ceremony, prayers are recited, wedding rings are exchanged and the couple's commitment to each other is demonstrated. Food also plays an important role in Armenian weddings in Diyarbakır and Hatay. Local and Armenian cuisine is prepared. These dishes include kebabs, dolma, stuffed meatballs, lahmacun, pastries and various appetizers. Armenian weddings in different regions of Anatolia are important events where deep-rooted traditions are kept alive and cultural richness is displayed. These weddings contribute to the preservation of the Armenian community's identity and cultural heritage, while also reflecting the multicultural nature of Anatolia. Ancient Armenian weddings were usually celebrated in a more traditional and religious manner. While the church ceremony was at the center of the wedding, religious rituals were of great importance for the bride and groom. These ceremonies symbolized community approval and blessings, as well as strengthening the bond of marriage. Today, the Armenians living in Vakıflıköy, the last Armenian village in Turkey, still carry on the old Armenian traditions.

“We have not forgotten our traditions and festivities here.”

The holidays of the Armenian community are part of a rich cultural and religious heritage and are a way for the community to come together, keep traditions alive and preserve its cultural identity. These holidays have both religious and national significance and reinforce the unity and solidarity of the community. The Armenian community, which has existed in Anatolia for a long time, stands out with its rich cultural heritage. Over the years, the Armenian community has lived in different regions of Anatolia and continued to pass on its unique traditions, rituals and food culture as a memory. Today, Armenians are mostly known for their "topik" appetizer, but on special occasions, they also cooked many different dishes. These included dishes such as kebab, lahmacun, dolma, water pastry and pilaf. The interviews mostly focused on the meals and rituals that were practiced during weddings, holidays and New Year's Eve.

T.K, 56, Women, Vakıflı

“Let’s start from New Year’s. At New Year’s, on the 31st, the 31st of December morning, very early in the morning before sunrise, we start a big fire with bay tree branches. The meaning of that is to send off the old year and welcome the new year. After lighting the fire, the youngsters visit the houses to wish a Happy New Year. At night, after dark, the youngsters visit the houses again with bags tied with a rope. They hang the bags on the door handles, knock on the door and hide. The landlords open the door, and put sweets and things in the bags. There’s such a tradition which we continue.”

“Then on Christmas Day, on the 5th of January, the youngsters gather in groups in front of the church and say the Avedis [good news] prayer, then they visit all the houses, all the homes of Armenians, and they say the Avedis prayer. “Christ was born and has appeared”, they say the Avedis prayer. Again, they give them money there, they give them sweets. Then after visiting all the houses, they gather and share the money and the sweets amongst each other. We also continue that [custom]. At Vartavar, after church, the youngsters prepare themselves for spraying each other with water. Like they do it in Armenia, they celebrate that in the same way here also.



We celebrate Palm Sunday in a nice way as well. On Palm Sunday, a cross is prepared with olive leaves, and olive branches are given away at church. Three days before Easter, on Wednesday, the youngsters collect flowers. They soak seven types of flowers in water, and they wash their faces with that water every morning until Easter day. That is one of the customs of our village, they wash their faces with flower water. They gather seven types of flowers found in our village and soak them in water. They soak them in clean water, and they wash their faces with that water. On Paregentan [Carnival], we prepare keombeh, we call it koumbou keombeh. It's a kind of pastry. Now they put oil, two kinds of oil, then there's molasses, sugar, flour, walnuts, pistachios, there are such things, finely chopped. That sweet turns into a very hard pastry. That is divided into eight parts, no, into as many parts as there are family members. It's a round pastry. Let's say the family has five members, it is divided into five parts, and then they have a symbol on each one. One is the house, one is the land, one is the machine, let's say."

The holidays of the Armenian community celebrate various religious and cultural events. Christmas is of great significance in the Armenian community. It is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ and special services and prayers are organized in churches. Christmas brings families together, giving gifts to loved ones and preparing special meals. Easter is an important religious holiday in the Armenian community and celebrates the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The holiday is celebrated in churches with special services, prayers and worship. Families also prepare and distribute Easter buns. Easter represents resurrection and hope after death. Vartavar is the summer holiday of the Armenian community and is known as the water festival. On this holiday, people have fun throwing water at each other and seek coolness. Vartavar is celebrated as an event where families and the community come together to have a good time and water fights take place in the streets.

The holidays of the Armenian community strengthen the social bonds of the community, preserve cultural identity and ensure the continuity of traditions. These holidays encourage the community to come together and celebrate together. They help the Armenian community preserve its ties of history, language, religion and culture, and play an important role in the transition between generations.

A.Ç, 32, Man, Istanbul

"Let me give you a few examples of these special dishes. For example, I've heard a lot about a dish called pehli. This is one of the dishes made on special occasions, like weddings or big gatherings. If there was a big event at home, pehli was always prepared. What kind of a dish is it? First you cut sweet potatoes into thin round slices and fry them a little bit. Then again, meat from sheep, especially big chunks, with bones. They would first boil them, to take the broth, that is very important. Then they would fry them, and of course they didn't have ovens back then, and that is why they would put them in big trays and cook them over a fire, turning the tray around continuously."

S.F, 80, Women, Kayseri

"Everyone would also prepare basterma [air-dried cured beef]. Our financial position was not so great, my father had passed away. We were left three - four orphans, we went through some difficulties, many. In this season, everyone would prepare



basterma, sujouk. They would dry the meat, the basterma meat. Then they would put it in chemen [fenugreek]. Almost everyone made that. You couldn't buy it from anywhere."

"Then on Christmas, they called it khesh [a stew made of animal feet and stomach], ishkembeh [the animal's stomach], not only ishkembeh but also with the whole thing, the feet of the animal etc. They would cook that on Christmas, everyone would make that at home. But next to it, definitely some macarna, some meat. This was our food. They were very tasty dishes. The meat back then was of course not like it is today, it was tasty."

Interviews with people from different regions revealed that each region has its own food and celebration rituals. For example, Armenians living in Vakıflı, Hatay celebrate Christmas and the Grape festival with enthusiasm and culture. In all regions, there is almost no dish that does not contain meat. Holidays celebrated together around a crowded table and special dishes cooked together are still a part of Armenian culture.

A.Ç, 32, Man, Istanbul

"I know this, on such important occasions, I mean being together around large tables, sitting, eating and drinking. But there is also something like, that is how they always told us, I mean since their poorer days. One shouldn't imagine something grand, I think, no fancy tables, dishes etc. Because yes, it is a poor region, and it had poor menus after all [menus with cheap food]. But nevertheless, being together, not only on such festive days etc, but also being together at weddings etc. In a way, even if there's nothing, in a way, whatever there is, they would fill the table and eat and drink together, I think that was the most important thing, and that is what I have learned. Because I think when they came here, they continued to do that. That is why I can explain it better, that we tried to continue this. For example, at Easter etc, my eldest uncle who is from Uskudar, every Easter Sunday, we go to Uskudar from the morning, and all the relatives from my father's side, we sit, eat and drink together."

Forced to migrate from Anatolia, the Armenian community continued to take their culture and rituals with them wherever they went. The holiday tables set around crowded tables, multi-course meals cooked in large pots, and memories continue to be passed on. In the passage above, A.Ç, who was born and raised in Istanbul but whose family migrated from Sivas, is one of the best examples. They have passed down the rituals of being together on holidays and the old crowded tables and rituals from generation to generation.

Easter is an important religious holiday when Armenians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Armenians prepare various traditional foods as part of Easter. One of them is the Easter bun, known as "choereg" in Armenian. An Easter bun is a sweet, spicy pastry, often decorated with eggs and dried fruits. Egg dyeing is also an Easter tradition. Armenians use natural materials to dye Easter eggs. For example, they can use onion skins to make brown colored eggs. They can also use natural ingredients such as red beet juice, spinach juice or purple cabbage juice to get different colors. The eggs are often decorated with patterns or ornaments and shared with family and friends during the holiday.

For Armenians, Easter is an important celebration where families come together, religious services are held and traditional foods are shared. Easter buns and dyed eggs are one of the



highlights of this holiday. Easter marks the end of the great fast of 49 days. Easter week is a holy week for Armenians and services are held in the church every day during that week. A fish dinner is eaten the day before Easter. On Easter morning, prayers are said in churches and the community participates in the service. On Easter day, people celebrate Easter by saying to each other "Jesus Christ rose from the dead" and in response they say "Happy resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

B.P, 62, Women, Istanbul

"At Easter, it was my uncle's nameday, Artin [short for Haroutyun i.e. Resurrection]. In Besyol, at Easter, they would prepare very nice tables. My late aunt, we lost her very early, [she prepared] very nice tables, everything, the food, dolma [stuffed vegetables], topik [chickpea and potato ball], she used to prepare all the Armenian dishes, midye dolma [stuffed mussels]. On top of everything, kebab, pilaf, whatever was traditional, we would do it."

"We used to knead cheureg [Easter brioche] at Easter. Of course, before Easter, we would knead cheureg, and take them to the bakery in trays. There was a bakery in Besyol, we would bake them there and bring them [home]. I also remember that. When I came here where I got married, there were also bakeries like that here, where we would knead [the dough] or take all the ingredients and they would knead [the dough] and bake them. Then they would inform us, to go and pick up [our cheuregs]."

"During Easter, you asked about my childhood, at Easter time, my aunt [father's sister] lived in Samatya, my eldest aunt, on Easter [day] we used to go to Samatya. We used to have so much fun. There would be horses, carriages. We would sit on horses. We used to tap colourful eggs [the traditional Easter egg tapping game]. It was very nice times. On the street, the street in front of the church. In front of St. George church, I mean on top of that thing, on the pavement of that street, we would have a very good time. There would be weddings. Sometimes I would stay with my aunt, we would see the brides entering [the church], we would watch them."

H.Ç. 83, Women, Diyarbakır

"I remember we used to celebrate Easter in the village. My pedestrian used to make buns, we used to dye eggs, my pedestrian used to make his own wine, they used to drink it. We didn't make sweet buns back then in the village, we learned that much later. We used to make salty buns and we used to give them the shape of a cross, we used to distribute those buns to relatives and neighbors, but some dacik [Muslim people] neighbors wouldn't buy them because they had a cross on them. We also dyed eggs, it was a tradition in the village. There was a plant in the village that had red stems, we would collect it, then boil it and put the egg in it, the redness would transfer to the egg, that's how we used to dye the egg, and some people would make a cross on it."

Surp Asdvadzadzin, one of the 5 major holidays of the Armenian community, has long been celebrated with enthusiasm in the village of Vakıflı in Hatay. Grapes have a special place in Armenian culture. Grape blessing ceremonies, which have symbolized fertility since pagan times, changed their form during the Christian era and became connected to the Virgin Mary's day and turned into a church feast. The feast of the Virgin Mary, or Surp Asdvadzadzin in



Armenian, is also known as the Feast of the Grapes. It is celebrated on August 15th or on the Sunday close to August 15th. This feast is also known as the Feast of Grapes. Today, this tradition is still practiced in Vakıflı village.

T.K, 56, Women, Vakıflı

“The Saint Asdvadzadzin Day [the Feast of Virgin Mary] is the name day of our village church. On that day, people from all over the world, especially our fellow villagers, want to come on that day. In recent times, many people came from Armenia, because here we have not forgotten our customs, our festivities. They want to experience those traditions with us, they want to spend those days with us, they want to see that warmth; that is why a lot of people come for that day. We prepare for three days. The first day, before the Asdvadzadzin Day, on Friday we give food to all the visitors to our village, specifically pork is cooked. On Saturday, we make the preparations for the harissa; the women clean the wheat, the men clean the meat and cut it. The younger men carry wood to the church yard. The streets are cleaned, cleaning takes place everywhere. The whole village, along with visitors, work like ants. When dark falls, the fire pit is prepared. Music starts in the centre of the village with davul [drums] and zurna [woodwind instrument]. Everybody dances and has fun. The fires start burning in the church yard late at night, and the harissa starts cooking. In the morning, the church [ceremony] starts, we prepare the grapes, the blessing of the grapes takes place, the harissa is blessed, the grapes are blessed. Now when our [ancestors] went up the mountain, before going up the mountain, they knew that there were massacres in other places, so that they wouldn't stay hungry, they took the animals with them, they took wheat with them, they went prepared to the mountain. How are they going to feed so many people? They had slaughtered animals, and by mixing the meat with the wheat it turned into harissa. The harissa fed the whole population. That is why it is very important, we slaughter the sacrifices on that day, we promise them for that day. And we cook the harissa with the meat of that sacrifice, in memory of that day. And we always cook in seven [copper] cauldrons, in the name of each village we cook one cauldron. Starting from our village, Vakef, Kheder Beg, Yoghunoluk, Haji Habibli, Bitias, Kabusiye, Kessab.”

“We would build a fire on Asdvadzadzin”

“We, the people of Everek (Develi, Kayseri), used to have this tradition: In August, we would climb this smaller mountain to the South of Fenese, called Mount Khach, on Saturday eve before the day of the Asdvadzadzin Feast, and we would build a fire while up there. People from Everek would be on this side, and those from Fenese would be on the other. Everyone would go up on their roofs to watch that fire. Villagers would prepare torches from long rods, and small children would shout: 'the wooden cross is on fire!' Turks would accompany us, adopt the holiday, and call it 'kindle alight.' Everek folk would also climb up Mount Erciyes that day, and would build a fire there.”²

² <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/history-program/1380-from-the-oral-history-grape-and-asdvadzadzin>



"They used to light a fire on the Khach Mountain. Why did they light a fire? That fire was lit at night when the color of the grapes changed. They gathered there, prayed, took some rubber tires there and set them on fire."³

“After the funeral, the remaining helva is taken home, and given out to seven different families.”

The Armenian community is a society that performs funeral rituals in a religious and cultural context. When a person passes away, close family members and friends announce the death to the community. This is usually communicated to the family and close circle by phone or in person. Also, in some cases, obituaries may be published in local newspapers of the Armenian community. For example, Agos, Marmara and Jamanak newspapers. Relatives of the deceased have the opportunity to express their condolences and condolences to the people attending the funeral at the funeral home. At the funeral home, close friends and relatives often gather to pray and support the family. An important part of funeral rituals are church services. In the church, the priest reads prayers, prays for the soul of the deceased and expresses the Christian hope of resurrection and eternal life. After the church service, the burial of the deceased takes place. According to Armenian tradition, they are usually buried in the family graveyard in the cemetery. In addition, the name of the deceased, date of birth and date of death are inscribed on the tombstone. These rituals aim to bring the community together, express solidarity and respect for the soul of the deceased.

B.P. 62, Women, Istanbul

“Funerals don’t have too many customs. After someone passes away, they take the deceased to the church morgue. There they decide which day the funeral will take place, and the close relatives wash the body. Then they put him/her in a coffin which is then placed in the centre of the church. His/her acquaintances attend the funeral service. After the service, they take the coffin to the cemetery, usually the men go, and the women sit in the church hall. Coffee is served to the attendees. Then the men come and sit. They also drink coffee, they serve them coffee. Before, it was like that. Pilaf and kebab were served. What I’m saying was on the Saturday Eve. On Saturday Eve, the priest would come home to pray and helva [a type of confectionary with semolina] was served. Now the helva is also given to everyone who comes to the church hall.”

A.Ç, 32, Man, Istanbul

“Helva [a type of confectionary with semolina] is also very important. Irmik [semolina] helva. With pistachios for sure. That is very important. They prepare several kilos of that, and again they give it out after the funeral. I have never understood why they don’t prepare smaller quantities of helva, so that they don’t have too much leftover. And then they start thinking of what they can do with all the leftovers. I remember something, again a tradition, but I don’t know if everyone does it. After the funeral, the remaining helva is taken home, and given out to seven different families. I remember that being done in plates, or other containers, giving helva to the neighbours or the grocer opposite the house, etc. Sharing it with seven

³ <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/history-program/1380-from-the-oral-history-grape-and-asdvadzadin>



different families is very important apparently, families outside their circle of relatives. Yes, that is why helva is very important. Then you eat that helva again for many days, if there is much left. Or you continue sharing it with relatives. Look, there's still many kilos of helva left, please take some home with you, etc. Then you start thinking of ways to use it. What shall we do? Let's eat some with ice cream. Let's eat it warm, etc. But helva, yes, it is eaten and given away, giving it away is also important. And you put cinnamon in the shape of a cross, like that."

Helva is a symbolic food of funeral rituals in Armenian society. Helva is prepared and served at funerals to perpetuate the memory of the deceased and to express respect for the deceased. In Armenian society, helva is a dessert made by the family and relatives after the death. It is usually prepared using simple ingredients such as wheat flour, butter, sugar and water. The role of helva in funeral rituals has many different meanings. On the one hand, helva is served to people who offer condolences and share the family's grief. The distribution of helva is meant to honor and honor the memory of the deceased. In Armenian funeral ceremonies, helva is served on a table where the family and relatives gather to say goodbye to the deceased and recite prayers. After the ceremony, the helva is usually distributed and shared with those who attended the funeral. In this way, helva remains an important and meaningful part of Armenian funeral rituals.

“There is a good reason to die, and since we will die, let us fight and die with honour.”

A deep wound in the history of the Armenian community, the year 1915 represents the painful period of the Armenian Genocide. This event resulted in a systematic policy of extermination targeting the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, resulting in the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians. In the aftermath of this horrific process, the surviving Armenians left behind their homes, families and lands in search of a new life. Many surviving Armenians were forced to migrate to Europe, America and Latin America.

The few Armenians who survived the genocide were converted to Islam in order to survive, or continued to live with their identity intact. However, increasing economic, cultural and social difficulties forced the remaining Armenian community to migrate to Istanbul after a certain period of time. One of the important details of this was the Tibrevank school, which was established in 1953 as a seminary in Istanbul/Üsküdar. The Patriarch of the time traveled from village to village in Anatolia, bringing children to Istanbul and providing them with Armenian language education. Among those who came from Malatya, Sivas, Kayseri, Kayseri, Diyarbakır, Hatay, Hatay and other provinces to study at this school were Hrant Dink, who was murdered in 2007 in front of the Agos Newspaper, which he founded; Yetvart Tomasyan, the founder of Aras Publishing, which publishes books on Armenian culture in Turkish and Armenian; Armenak Bakır and Garbis Altınoğlu, who left their mark on the history of socialist politics in Turkey; and many others who served as spiritual leaders under the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey. Armenian children from Anatolia, after their education at the Tibrevank school, played an active role in the cultural and artistic platforms and politics in Turkey and followed a vision that guided the Armenian community.

Armenians who migrated to Istanbul tried to build a new life here. While many of them tried to make a living through manual labor, others came to the fore as an educated and intellectual class. Istanbul became an important platform for both economic opportunities and the continuation of a cultural heritage for the Armenian community. The exodus of the Armenian



community from the dark period of 1915 is full of painful memories as well as examples of hope and solidarity. This migration is one of the examples of the Armenian community's resilience and efforts to preserve its cultural identity.

B.P, 62, Women, Istanbul

“We spoke Armenian, we always spoke Armenian. We also spoke Armenian on the street with my mother, but my father would say switch [languages], this is Turkey, speak Turkish, he would tell us. But at home, we would speak Armenian with my mother. My husband also knows Armenian, we spoke Armenian. I had a neighbour, when my daughter was born, she was growing up, when she learns Turkish I will hug/kiss her she would say. Sabahat teyze [aunt Sabahat] would say that. We have always spoken Armenian at home, I have always spoken Armenian with my children.”

T.K, 56, Women, Vakıflı

“The children don't know each other. Everyone, they were born in Belgium, and my children here, so they are unknown to each other. Why did I return to this village, when we lived in Armenia, we didn't forget our village habits, we preserved our language. We used to speak the village language, we continued the village traditions. When we came here as tourists, my family, my aunt [father's sister], my grandmother, my grandfather used to live here. I didn't feel it was a foreign place, I felt close to it [like home]. That's why I decided to live here. I got married here. Here we also continue the same traditions, we teach our children. We want them to speak our village language, for them not to forget our traditions. Thanks to the church, we preserve those. We are happy with the village; we hope that the young return. My children as well, we want them to return after they graduate from their studies, to live in the village again, for life in the village to continue, we hope.”

B.P, 62, Women, İstanbul

“My father was a Turkish speaker, but when my daughter was born, he learned Armenian, of course by hearing it from others, so he spoke to her in Armenian. Later when my son was also born, his Armenian improved with him. But when he got older, he switched back to Turkish of course. He used to say something to you, “Breh breh bresdan, yellank yertank elbisdan, gagak perim yes oudim kezi chedam”. This is something in the Sebastia dialect, a song from Sebastia, that I never forget. “Breh breh bresdan, yellank yertank elbisdan”, let's go to elbisdan. “Gagak” means eating food, in my father's language. “Gagak” is food. “Gagak perim yes oudim kezi chedam” [let me bring food, eat it, and not give you any].”

After 1915, the practice of speaking Armenian in daily life decreased even more. The Armenian language spoken in daily life on the streets and in villages evolved to be spoken mostly inside the houses, and children started to say "mother" instead of "mama" in Armenian outside. This situation actually continued as a method of hiding the Armenian identity developed after 1915. There were other dialects spoken in the villages, and the only place where Armenian and Turkish are spoken together is Vakıflı village in Hatay. The population in the village is quite small. Vakıflı is one of the villages that lived through 1915 and showed resistance. There are also a group of people from Vakıflı who migrated to Europe and America but come back to live in the village during the summer months and continue their



traditions and language. There is also a population who settled in Vakıflı after living abroad for a long time and make a living through cooperatives.

S.F., 80, Women, Kayseri

“I was born in Everek. I was born in Everek. I think we came in 1950, from Everek. I was not even 11 years old then. There in Everek, I have seen the nice things, then everyone left, there was no one left, that is why we came too of course. The Armenian population came here, and our church collapsed on its own, finished. It was a nice place. With nice weather, nice water. The Armenians back then, from Erciyes [pronounced Erjiyes in English], more than half of it, they brought the water for it to be distributed to everyone in Everek. Then they were in exiled, it stayed like that, the water stayed like that for many years, then about 30 years ago, the Turks brought the water back down again, the beautiful water from Erciyes. On the Erciyes [mountain] summit, there is snow in summer and in winter. On the Erciyes summit, there is snow also in the summer, and from that snow there would be water. Before the exile, the Armenians started bringing that water down, they brought more than half of it. The Armenians were mostly tailors, hairdressers/barbers, shoemakers, merchants. Most people in Everek knew Armenian, in Kayseri no one knew Armenian, but their predecessors knew apparently, but that ended. The language of Everek is different, of course their Armenian dialect is very different. For bekmez [carob syrup] they say “ouroup”. But one day, Archbishop Shanan said ouroup in his sermon. There are many differences in the Everek dialect. Instead of “Inch ga, inch genes gor” [what’s up, what are you up to], they would say “Inch ga genes”. But at least they still spoke Armenian. There was a large Armenian population in Everek. It was very nice, everyone got along, they followed their customs, their religion, especially their religion. They followed their religion in every way. In the winter, Lent would never end. One would end, the following week the other one would start. We were young, they made us follow them as well. Sourp Sarkis [St. Sarkis], Sourp Hovhannes [St. John], whatever name there was. When we came here it all ended. In Erevek, they didn’t use olive oil. Without olive oil, those Lent periods, in the winter, three out of the four months let’s say, we observed Lent.”

“Now during the exiles, my father was 13 or 14 years old apparently. They also had two sisters at home, two daughters. During the exiles, they came and told them come on, you have to leave. My grandmother said, “But I have milk on the stove/heat, let it cook and after that”. No, it’s not possible, leave it, they told her. So my grandmother, her two girls, and my father were exiled. But they didn’t see their father’s face at all, whatever they did to him. Perhaps they killed him there. They were exiled, but my father was exiled separately. My grandmother was with her two daughters. And one of the girls died, only one was left, and she was 12 years old apparently.”

“So they walked until Syria. The priest was with them apparently. Because they were not [originally] from Everek, they were from a village near Everek, but it had only Armenian residents. It was an Armenian village. It had a priest, a church. They knew all the customs. After that, after walking there [to Syria], my grandmother begged for some bread from an Arab man, to feed our hunger. Come, they told her, look after this garden and feed your hunger. And she stayed there, looked after the garden. Then when her daughter was better off, she told her mother, “We will go to Jerusalem, mum”. The mother told her, “My daughter, it was so difficult for us to come here, sit



where you are, we don't have money." They were going to walk for three days to reach Jerusalem. Then the priest told them, "Come on, I will take you". There was also another girl, apparently, I think two other girls, and also my aunt [father's sister]. They walked to Jerusalem, they didn't have five kurush [Turkish coin i.e. they didn't have any money]. I still don't understand how they went there. They went to Jerusalem, the women there cleaned them up, washed them, my aunt became so pretty, she was still 12 years old then, afterwards one of the women said, "I will take this one with me for my son". But she said she would wait one more year, for the girl to grow up a bit."

The genocide that began in Istanbul and various villages in Anatolia caused many Armenians to leave their homeland, homes and families. In order to escape the genocide, they took to the mountains, had to walk for many kilometers in caravans under difficult conditions, and resisted.

C.Ç, 72, Man, Hatay

"The escape of the locals here were slightly thanks to the help of Urfa and Marash Armenians. For example, here they had heard that they will be relocated, not killed on the roads, that there wasn't such a thing. That is why some agreed to get on the road, to be transported but later a priest came from Urfa, from Marash, and brought the news and had said that that is not relocation, it is massacre, and they were convinced. And then they heard more details and a lot of them gathered, they gathered a few times and had many discussions about this, I mean they argued a lot and finally they decided that since they will die, there are two kinds of dying, there is a good reason to die, and since we will die, let us fight and die with honour. So they went up the mountain. And back then, my grandfather was 35 five years old, my father's father, my father was 13 years old, and they had fought for 40 days. But how? My grandfather used to tell us that during the day, on that border, there was one road anyway, that was lucky for us Armenians, to go up the mountain, back then they used to call it "tikhtsenits handi" in our dialect, meaning the peach trees trench, and on both sides there were twisting ivy bushes, etc, as if you were walking through a tunnel. It was such a dark and narrow road that two people couldn't walk next to each other."

Conclusion:

The Armenian community has been forced to endure hardships, massacres and forced migration throughout history. The painful memories passed down from generation to generation are still fresh in the Armenian community today. The Armenian community, which has a rich culture and language, is still trying to maintain their lost languages and cultures in Istanbul and the Diaspora, albeit with difficulty. In the above-mentioned research, a total of 6 people were interviewed from various cities, men and women, and people of different age groups. Among these people, we interviewed people who were born and raised in Istanbul, but who learned their own culture and traditions after their family migrated from Anatolia and continued their traditions in Istanbul. The reason why I chose a younger interviewee was to better understand how the community that migrated from Anatolia passed on their culture and traditions to the new generations. A.Ç., who was born in Istanbul, educated in an Armenian school and whose family comes from Sivas, said, *"But still, being together, not only on holidays, etc., but also at weddings, etc. I think this was the most important thing and this is what I learned. Because I think they continued to do that when they came here. So I can*



explain it better, we tried to keep it going." With these sentences, he explained how the Armenian community stayed together after the migration, how they continued their traditions and how he learned this.

The interviews show that the Armenian community maintains a culture of coming together and solidarity through festivals, weddings and other social events. This is indicative of a social dynamic where social ties and a sense of belonging are strong. In addition, the wedding stories told in the interviews also reflect that rituals, symbols and traditions function to preserve and transmit the cultural identity of the community. In Armenian society, weddings, holidays and other social events play an important role in strengthening social ties and maintaining social solidarity. Sociologically, these events support the community's values of togetherness, sharing and solidarity, ensuring social integration and the sustainability of social relations.

When we look at the interviews as a whole, one of the most prominent elements is the idea of being together, social solidarity and the continuation and transmission of culture as a heritage, no matter what. *"Everyone would also prepare basterma [air-dried cured beef]. Our financial position was not so great, my father had passed away. We were left three - four orphans, we went through some difficulties, many. In this season, everyone would prepare basterma, sujouk. They would dry the meat, the basterma meat. Then they would put it in chemen [fenugreek]. Almost everyone made that. You couldn't buy it from anywhere.."* The interviewee, who was born and raised in Kayseri, whose family was exiled, experienced financial hardship, but still tried to preserve their culture and local food. The point emphasized by the phrase *"you can't buy it anywhere"* is that these traditional foods can only be shared and acquired within the community. This shows that these foods are part of social bonds and do not only have a material value. At the same time, the uniqueness and value of these traditional foods form part of the cultural heritage of the community. This sentence includes sociological and cultural elements such as material hardship, solidarity, the importance of traditional foods, and the ability of the community to act together.

As a result, we see that despite all the sufferings of the Armenian community, despite all the cultural and religious losses, they continue to keep their traditions, weddings, funerals, food, and language alive through the cultural memory passed down and taught by their families.

