

# ART

## ТВОРЧЕСТВО АРМЯНСКИХ АШУГОВ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ГОРОДСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ АСТРАХАНИ

*Арутюнян А.Г.*

*Центр арменоведческих исследований Ширака НАН РА,  
г. Гюмри Кандидат искусствоведения, доцент*

## CREATIVITY OF ARMENIAN ASHUGS IN THE CONTEXT OF URBAN CULTURE OF ASTRAKHAN

*Harutyunyan H.*

*Shirak Centre for Armenian Studies of NAS RA,  
Gyumri PhD in Art, Associate Professor*

### АННОТАЦИЯ

Статья посвящена традициям центра армянских ашугов города Астрахани, где еще в средние века существовала армянская община. Важную роль для развития профессиональной музыки ашугов играла городская культурная среда, где функционировали ремесленные цехи и купеческо-торговые ряды. Творчество ашугов был очень популярным и носил в себе сакральные черты национальной идентичности армян.

Работа выполнена при финансовой поддержке Комитета по высшему образованию и науке Министерства образования, науки, культуры и спорта Республики Армения. Код: 21Т-6Е197, тема “Искусство армянских ашугов в историко-критическом свете”.

### ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the traditions of the center of Armenian ashugs in the city of Astrakhan, where an Armenian community existed in the Middle Ages. The urban cultural environment, where craft workshops and merchant and trading rows functioned, played an important role in the development of professional music of the ashugs. The creativity of the ashugs was very popular and carried sacred features of the national identity of the Armenians.

The research was carried out with the financial support of the Higher Education and Science Committee of Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport Republic of Armenia. Code: 21T-6E197, subject title “Armenian ashug art in a historical and critical light”.

**Ключевые слова:** ашуг, городская культура, Астрахань, армянская община, традиция, ремесло, профессиональное творчество.

**Keywords:** ashugh, urban culture, Astrakhan, Armenian community, tradition, craft, professional creativity.

Since the end of the 13th century, an Armenian settlement existed in the capital of Zolotoy Hordes - Saray-Berke. After the collapse of the Horde, the Volga Armenians resettled to the Astrakhan Khanate. In the 1630s–1640s. Armenian guest courtyard is under construction and in Astrakhan. Since 1717, Astrakhan was the center of the Armenian church diocese uniting all Armenians living in Russia. Until 1841, a special Code of Law of the Astrakhan Armenians was in force. Over the years, Armenian newspapers were published in Astrakhan, an Armenian theater troupe, a society lovers of Armenian literature and art, N. Ababayan School.

“From this time until the middle of the 18th century. Armenians living in Russia, spiritually submitted to the authority of the Armenian spiritual center -Etchmiadzin. Huge role in socio-political and cultural. The life of the Astrakhan Armenians was played by the Armenian Apostolic Church. This order was disrupted in 1749, when the Armenian diocese of Russia began to submit to the Gandzasar patriarchate and the Mother See seemed to have lost its influence on the Armenian dioceses of Russia (in Karabakh (ancient Armenian

Artsakh province) there was a special church organization. At the head of the local. The Armenian church was headed by the Agvan or Albanian Catholicos, to whom the Armenian clergy of the neighboring regions also obeyed. He lived in the Gandzasar monastery and was therefore called Gandzasar). Alarmed by this Armenian Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi (1763–1780) in 1766 special by letter introduces Empress Catherine II (1762–1796) to the existing situation. He writes that despite the fact that Armenia is under the rule Turkey and Persia, however, in both states the Armenians are spiritually subordinate the Mother See of St. Etchmiadzin”. (1)

The appearance and settlement of Armenians in the South-East of Rus' is closely connected with the history of the Lower Volga region. Armenians belong to the oldest inhabitants of this region. Already in 1262, soon after the appearance of the Mongols in Armenia, many of the Armenians were forced to move to the Lower Volga region.<sup>1</sup> Later, in 1331, the Mongols forced the inhabitants who remained after the devastation of the Armenian city of Ani to settle in present-day Astrakhan. But their stay here, apparently, was short-

lived, since at the time of the conquest of Astrakhan by the Russians there were almost no Armenians there. The author of "Medical Topography of the City of Astrakhan" Oldekop connects their disappearance with the plague that raged in Astrakhan shortly before its conquest, and with the destruction of the city by the Crimean Tatars that soon followed.

After the Volga region joined Russia, a new stage began in the history of the region. Transition in the middle of the 16th century, the entire course of the Volga under Russian rule, Russia's access to the Caspian Sea and the eastern Ciscaucasia, the establishment by the Russians of direct contact with Transcaucasia, Iran, and Central Asia - all this not only radically changed the balance of political forces in the region, throughout Eastern Europe and Western Asia, but it also created favorable economic and political preconditions for reviving economic life in the region, for transforming the mouth of the Volga into a hub of important trade and strategic routes and for attracting active people from both the interior of Russia and the countries of the East. Along with other Asian peoples, Armenians began to come to the Lower Volga region. The population of Armenia and other areas that were under the rule of Iran and Turkey also received a new direction for exodus from foreign oppression. This created favorable preconditions for the settlement of significant groups of the Armenian population in the Lower Volga region, in particular in Astrakhan.

The transition of the Volga region under the rule of a stronger and, moreover, Christian state, the prospects for stabilization of economic life - all this served as an incentive both to consolidate the Armenian population in Astrakhan, and to attract new groups of Armenians from Transcaucasia and Iran there.

The situation of the eastern settlers, including the Armenians, began to improve noticeably after the Time of Troubles, which dragged on in Astrakhan until 1614, when Ataman Ivan Zarutsky and Marina Mnishek were expelled from the city. End of Polish and Swedish intervention and increased attention. The Russian government's commitment to Caspian trade (especially after the Swedes captured the Baltic coast) contributed to the revival of the Volga trade route and the economic life of the country in general.

The first Armenian settlers grouped in Astrakhan at the Gilyan Gostiny Dvor, had trading and warehouse premises there, built and purchased their own houses. Over time, they began to settle more east of the Astrakhan Kremlin, as well as outside the settlement, outside the walls of the so-called White City. It was there, on Garden Hill, that the Armenian settlement began to form.

The Armenians enjoyed the right to complete freedom and the patronage of the Russian government, which foresaw the benefits for trade and industry from the appearance of new settlers. Thanks to this, the Armenian population of Astrakhan soon increased significantly.

The economic activity of the Astrakhan Armenians began to actively develop in the first decades of the 18th century. Several factors contributed to this. The

intensification of Russia's eastern policy and the Persian campaigns of Peter I led to the strengthening of Russia's position in the Caucasus and the Caspian region, and to the expansion of Armenian-Russian political ties. Russia's economic and trade ties with the Transcaucasus, North Caucasus, Iran, Central Asia, and India have expanded.

Julfa company at the beginning of the 18th century, continued to play a very important role in eastern trade, the provisions of the 1667 treaty remained in force, which had a positive impact on the situation of the Astrakhan Armenians. The government of Peter I did not lose attention to this area of economic and foreign policy life, fully aware of its importance. In March 1711, the above-mentioned decree of Peter I was issued, the 9th paragraph of which formulated the principles of Russian trade policy in the east and the attitude towards the Armenians for many decades: The Persian trade should be multiplied and the Armenians should be caressed and facilitated as much as possible, in what is proper, in order to encourage more of them to come. At the same time, it was decided to extend benefits to trade not only in silk, but also in jewelry. (4)

In May 1711, the Governing Senate issued a decree that confirmed the privileges of the Julfa Company and the need for strict implementation of the treaty of 1667. The publication of this decree was caused by complaints from Armenians about numerous violations of the treaty - repeated collection of duties (in Astrakhan, and in Moscow, and in Arkhangelsk, and in other places), restrictions on the transportation of goods, forced to rent expensive premises for living and storing goods, etc. The privileges of the Armenians were also confirmed by decrees of February 20 and December 5, 1712. Russia's encouraging policy towards the Julfa Company had a positive effect on the economic situation of the Astrakhan Armenians.

But at the same time, the trading company in Russia did not bring the desired result. At times it became significantly livelier, as, for example, in 1712, when in the month of April alone, Armenian merchants transported over 2.5 thousand pounds of raw silk through Astrakhan, that is, more than in any year in the entire previous history of Russian-Iranian trade - out connections. However, the further deepening of the internal political crisis in Iran, and on the other hand, the benefits of direct silk trade with European merchants in the ports of the Mediterranean Sea, all this led to periods of stagnation and decline of the Volga route. This forced the Russian government to resort to further strengthening of protectionist legislation, as well as diplomatic measures. In 1715, the embassy of A.P. Volynsky was sent to Iran, to which the tsar gave instructions emphasizing the need to demand that the shah's authorities strictly fulfill the agreements between Russia and the Julfa Company. Of the 12 points of the instruction, two points (6th and 7th) were devoted to the issue of reviving contracts with the Armenian company.

Astrakhan Armenians in the 18th-19th centuries, were actively involved in commercial and industrial activities, which required them to receive appropriate education.(3)

The only city in the region in which there were pockets of Armenian education during the period under review was Astrakhan. There were no Armenian schools in other cities, since very few Armenians lived there, and they mostly studied in Russian schools. If they wanted to give their children an Armenian education, parents could send them to Astrakhan. The rapid development of trade and industry in this city, in which Astrakhan Armenians took an active part, required the organization of appropriate education to train qualified specialists. To engage in trade, it was necessary not only for Armenians to know various languages, but also for other peoples to know the Armenian language. By decrees of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs of June 28 and the Statskontora of September 4, 1753, it was ordered in Astrakhan to accept six students for the teaching of Turkish, Persian, Tatar and Armenian languages and, assigning them to the teaching of those languages and writing, to teach them. The publication of these decrees confirmed the fact that Astrakhan was a connecting center between Russia and the countries of the East.

Later, the teaching of the Armenian language was introduced at the Main Public School opened in Astrakhan. In 1795, by order of the military governor Gudovich, a special class of Kalmyk, Tatar, Turkish, Persian and Armenian languages was opened at the school for boys from soldiers' children. However, four years later, the teaching of these languages was canceled - "due to the limited success of students in eastern languages"<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the attempts of the Russian administration to create their own personnel who speak Eastern languages were unsuccessful. Armenians continued to play the main role as translators and intermediaries in eastern trade.

17-18 centuries the fairly high rate of development of urban life in Astrakhan was a result of the relatively safe situation in which this region, which came under the rule of Russia, found itself, a security that enabled the local Armenian population not only to ensure its lifestyle in a normal way, but also created unprecedented favorable conditions for urban construction, as well as for the progress of economic life. (2)

It is known that the city is an open cultural system and quickly adapts to the new. This also applies to the city of Astrakhan. Along with the many traditional elements of its domestic cultural complex, the urban culture soon accepted, perceived and expressed the external phenomena in a new way, giving them new qualities that were manifested in everyday life. However, it was difficult for new values to enter here, which was due to the ethnic and confessional diversity of the urban population, as Tatars, Georgians, and Gypsies lived next to the predominant Armenians. The Armenian artisans and merchants who settled in the city, who were the bearers of traditional Armenian urban culture, tried to create their own urban environment in the new cultural field, often rejecting local customs.

The aforementioned facts showing the cultural life of Astrakhan Armenians allow us to conclude that in the 18th century, the Armenian population of Astrakhan lived a spiritual life united to the entire Armenian people, and felt that it was an integral part of that people.

Armenians took an active part in the development of the cultural life of Astrakhan. In the description of one of the Russian travelers, it is said that Armenians are ardent fans of music. They like to go on city walks with songs and dances. It is also said that most of the theater-loving society of Astrakhan was composed of Armenians. It is no coincidence that in 1816-17 The patron (entrepreneur) of the Strakhan Theater was an Armenian by nationality, lieutenant Gruzintsov, and later, until 1883. That theater operated in the house of Armenian Uglev.(1)

For the Armenian population of Astrakhan, the most important component of the national identity was musical art in its various manifestations. Armenian songs and music played during all celebrations and weddings. Singing has been taught at the Aghababyan school since its foundation. At the beginning of the 19th century, a choir was formed in the city, the head of which was Serovbe Patkanyan, the teacher of the Armenian language and singing at the Aghababyan school /Rapayel Patkanyan's grandfather/.

Many Armenian groups lived and worked in Astrakhan. Among them are the famous Turinj /Toros 1790-1875/, Ivan /Hovhannes 1800-1864/, Melikset /Alexander 1810-1885/, Jahel-oghlan /Haryut 1820-1850/, Mayif /Haryut 1825-1881/, Lalan /Karapet. /, Durgyar /Karapet/, two groups with the same names: Yaghub-ogli, one of which was Karapet, the other Mkr-tich. Both are known to have died in 1847. Ashugh Cherkez-oghli made the kanon instrument throughout his life in Astrakhan, which, along with other national instruments such as saz, kamancha, and tar, was very popular in the musical life of the city.(3)

Thus, there are all grounds to claim that the herds-manship, which was typical in Armenian cities, also developed under the conditions of a trade-craftsman environment. is one of the unique forms of social coexistence.

Back in the Middle Ages, the main task of the artisan brotherhoods and associations formed in large Armenian trade centers (Ani, Dvin, Karin, Van, etc.) and settlements (K. Polis, Tiflis, Lviv, Nor Jugha, etc.) was to regulate the social, economic and social conditions of the city's population. the harmony of domestic relations.

19th century one of the major Armenian researchers, Soghomon Yeghiazaryants, professor of law at Kazan University,<sup>1</sup> while studying the co-stone structure of Transcaucasia and Armenian cities in particular, draws interesting parallels between medieval European "muds" and the latter. According to Yeghiazaryantsi, both western and eastern corporate structures, apart from solving economic problems, had social-regulatory functions, which received their legal formulation in the statutes approved by the highest authorities.(4)

Yeghiazaryants rightly sees the sympathies as a part of the social structure of the urban community, on which internal and external connections were built. It should be noted here that there are significant differences between the external relations (government-community) of the mentioned corporate structures. they are the result of the existence of different forms of land ownership in the West and in the East. If the famous

medieval European artisan and trade cities were the property of a large feudal lord, and their inhabitants were considered suzerain subjects (free cities were an exception), the situation in the East was different.(5)

Here the cities were the property of the state, i.e. the monarch, and the inhabitants were subjects of the state and taxpayers to the state treasury. European "muds", based on the subordination of members of their community, regulated relations with the feudal-suzerain, and the Eastern Hamkarans were in the same legal relationship with the king-state. In the case of the Armenian sympathies of the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the new era, we are dealing not with our own, but with foreign (Ottoman, Persian, Polish, Russian, etc.) state structures and the Armenian community.

In the case of Armenian sympathies, another important "duty" is added to all the functions mentioned above: the protection of the community and the guarantee of its livelihood. Formed on the basis of emigration from the western Armenian artisan and trade centers, Alexandropol inherited all the Hamkar traditions from the Middle Ages, which were specific to Karin, Kars and Bayazet.

**CONCLUSION:** 19th century of the end and XX century. As a result of the early all-Russian liberal reforms, the socionormative and regulatory functions of the co-operatives were significantly reduced, but a large number of corporate traditions continued to live

up to the establishment of the Soviet order and after that. Thanks to the efforts of the new authorities, the guild traditions and the traditional means of community management in the 20th century. 30's were almost completely uprooted in the beginning.

### References

1. Amirjanyan H.O. The activities of Russian Armenian Diocese in Astrakhan as a representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Russia (The end of the 18th century)// Armenians in the history and culture of Russia of the 18th – 20th centuries. Moscow, 2016. (in russian)
2. Освободительное движение армянского народа и армянская колония Астрахани в XVIII веке.- // Армянское освободительное движение XVI-XVIII вв. и армянские поселения./Сборник статей/. Ереван. 1989.(на армянском языке).
3. Армянский театр в Астрахани в конце XIX-начале XX в.. "Вестник общественных наук", Ереван. 1991. (на армянском языке).
4. Армянские общины России. Ереван. 1993.
5. Из истории армянского театра в Астрахани /Новые архивные"-материалы/.-. "Арвест", 1993, N 3-4. (на армянском языке).
6. Армянская печать в Астрахани. // Страницы из истории армянских поселений", Лиссабон. 1995. (на армянском языке).