Tigran • Amiryan
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Address: •
Balat • Orphanage

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Temporal Communities ×CSN Lab

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The series is a project of the eponymous hub for networked and transdisciplinary projects conceived within the framework of the Cluster of Excellence 2020 *Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective* at Freie Universität Berlin. Entering into close dialogue with cultural institutions such as museums, theatres, archives and libraries, *CONSTELLATIONS* conjoins methods and perspectives from scholarship, the arts and knowledge formations beyond the university.

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Tigran Amiryan
Arsen Abrahamyan

Address: Balat Orphanage

Tracing the Multiple Pasts of an Armenian School in Istanbul

Translated into English by
Mariam Yeghiazaryan

Textem Verlag

Fig. 1: Digital reconstruction of the façade of the Khorenyan.

Fig. 2: Digital reconstruction of the building's arched entrance, with the inscription "Khorenyan Co-Educational School, founded in 1866, Balat".

Authors' note

This essay was written in three cities: Istanbul, Yerevan, and Berlin. Many years ago, we embarked on a major project entitled "Balat: Living Together", dedicated to the borough of Balat in Istanbul and to the exploration of the forms and narratives of coexistence within this small yet profoundly multi-ethnic space. Over the course of our cross-disciplinary investigation, we delved into the everyday practices that permeated the life of Balat: the oral histories, the architecture, the linguistic blend, the crafts, the folklore, and many other things besides. Back then, it seemed to us that together with invited authors, we would be able to say all we had to say about that unique *vivre-ensemble*, but we proved to be mistaken. The inscriptions in the Chora Monastery overlooking Balat's streets and alleyways provided us with a fitting metaphor for the neighbourhood, namely that of a container of the uncontainable: it turned out to hold so many layers of cultural heritage that no single research project could hope to fully encompass its palimpsest of the past. Already at that time, it was evident that Balat was not only, and not simply, a place of memory preserved in autobiographies and travelogues, but also a space inextricably associated with childhood, prompting us to study the local Armenian school together with its Jewish and Greek counterparts. In a word, barely had we published *Balat: Living Together / Բալաթ. ապրել միասին* (edited by Tigran Amiryan, Sona Kalantaryan, and Gizem Kıygı, CSN Lab, 2023) when we entered another phase of research that ultimately resulted in the present volume.

Our reflections were nourished by new ideas thanks to the Hrant Dink Foundation and the Balat Foundation, which invited us to Istanbul and granted us access to the school's recently digitised archive. That said, the digitisation process was still underway, and we unexpectedly ended up joining the archival team for a short period of

time. The archive, according to late twentieth-century philosophical critiques, is not simply a static collection of artefacts, and this is exactly what we experienced: we encountered the archival record not as a definitively catalogued, inert relic of the past, but as what can only be described as a living organism. Together with volunteers from the Armenian community—including Karin Şeşetyan, Antranik Avitoğlu, and many others—İren Bıçakçı, Lara Çakmak, and Deniz Derya Dertli meticulously sifted through vast collections of documents on a daily basis, digitising and organising them. This was more than a scholarly examination: the work conducted represented a form of archival co-existence and, at the same time, an integral part of community life, an act of care for a shared past. Many of the thousands upon thousands of pages of archival material had been in very poor condition for decades or even centuries, appearing yellowed and partially damaged due to exposure to cold, moisture, and sunlight. The task was further complicated by the fact that the Armenian language has undergone extensive and numerous transformations over the centuries, and some documents were written in Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish, and French, necessitating extensive linguistic research. We sincerely believe that the tremendous effort of the Hrant Dink Foundation's archival team deserves to be honoured in a dedicated book, which is yet to be written. For the time being, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to the entire archival department as well as to our friend and colleague Talin Süzme, responsible for the Turkey-Armenia dialogue programme, for the opportunity to participate in this process and gain a unique experience that, although brief, was immensely valuable.

In parallel with our archival research, one of us engaged with the neighbourhood through the eyes of an architect and urbanist, while the other approached it through the stories and memories of local residents and literary narratives of the past. Throughout our fieldwork, we were comprehensively supported by the Balat Foundation and the Surb Hreshdagabed (Saint Archangel) Church. We extend our deep appreciation to the Foundation and to the church's clergy, who opened to us the doors of the last stronghold of Armenian life and memory in the borough. Never to be forgotten is the day when, busily gathering oral histories, conducting urban analysis, and exploring archival documents, we were invited to witness the Easter liturgy at Surb Hreshdagabed, where, over several hours, the singing of the children's choir filled the very space studied by us as a place of childhood from which children's voices were conspicuously absent.

As we observed the digitisation of the Khorenyan School's archive, different thoughts crossed our minds. On the one hand, the community's determination to safeguard memory against the ravages of time was evident; on the other hand, as the documents were increasingly transformed into numbers and digital files, we became ever more concerned about the fate of the physical space that embodied the neighbourhood's past. One of the places where earth and stone still keep alive the memory of the Armenians of Balat is the Edirnekapı Cemetery: here, one can still see tombstones carrying the toponymic marker 'Balateci' that for two centuries have preserved not only the names of the Khorenyan's renowned founders and benefactors, but also those of teachers and pupils, the most modest participants in the educational process. This vast archive, engraved into stone, would merely be an archaeological site, were it not for the devotion and hard work of its guardian and archivist, Romanos Vartkes Cezveciyan, who has dedicated nearly half of his life to documenting the fate of Balat's Armenian community. An alumnus of the Khorenyan, he knows the institution from his own lived experience rather than from archival documents; he does not simply gather information about the past one tiny piece at a time, he preserves the very space that embodies it. This essay, as well as our broader research project on Balat, would not have been possible without Romanos and his generous assistance.

In 2024, we carried from Istanbul new knowledge, priceless experiences, and the aspiration to create a new book. Back in Yerevan, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Cultural & Social Narratives Laboratory team, the impressions and inspirations, the ideas and facts we had brought with us slowly took on a concrete form. But this dream could only be realised thanks to the invaluable support of two institutions: Freie Universität Berlin and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. In 2025, one of the authors, Tigran Amiryan, was invited to a fellowship at the Cluster of Excellence *Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective*; the latter also kindly agreed to publish the present volume in its con·stel·la·tions series overseen by Anne Eusterschulte, Kristiane Hasselmann, Andrew James Johnston, and Anna Luhn. Being able to conduct our work within the Cluster's stimulating environment was a true privilege, and we are particularly grateful to Susanne Frank, whose trust in the project afforded us the opportunity to make the most of the material gathered in Yerevan and Istanbul. The original draft was extensively revised over the course of several months in close collaboration with

colleagues in Armenia and Germany, and readying the manuscript for publication would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of Barbara Bausch and Martin Bleisteiner. Versions of this book in Eastern and Western Armenian are currently being prepared with the support of the Gulbenkian Foundation, which means that we will continue our daily work across different languages and contexts.

The present text was translated from the Armenian by our esteemed colleague Mariam Yeghiazaryan. We thank Mariam not just for her tireless commitment to accurately conveying the essay from one language to another, but also for her indispensable help in transforming it into its final shape.

Tigran Amiryan and Arsen Abrahamyan
Yerevan and Berlin, at the end of 2025

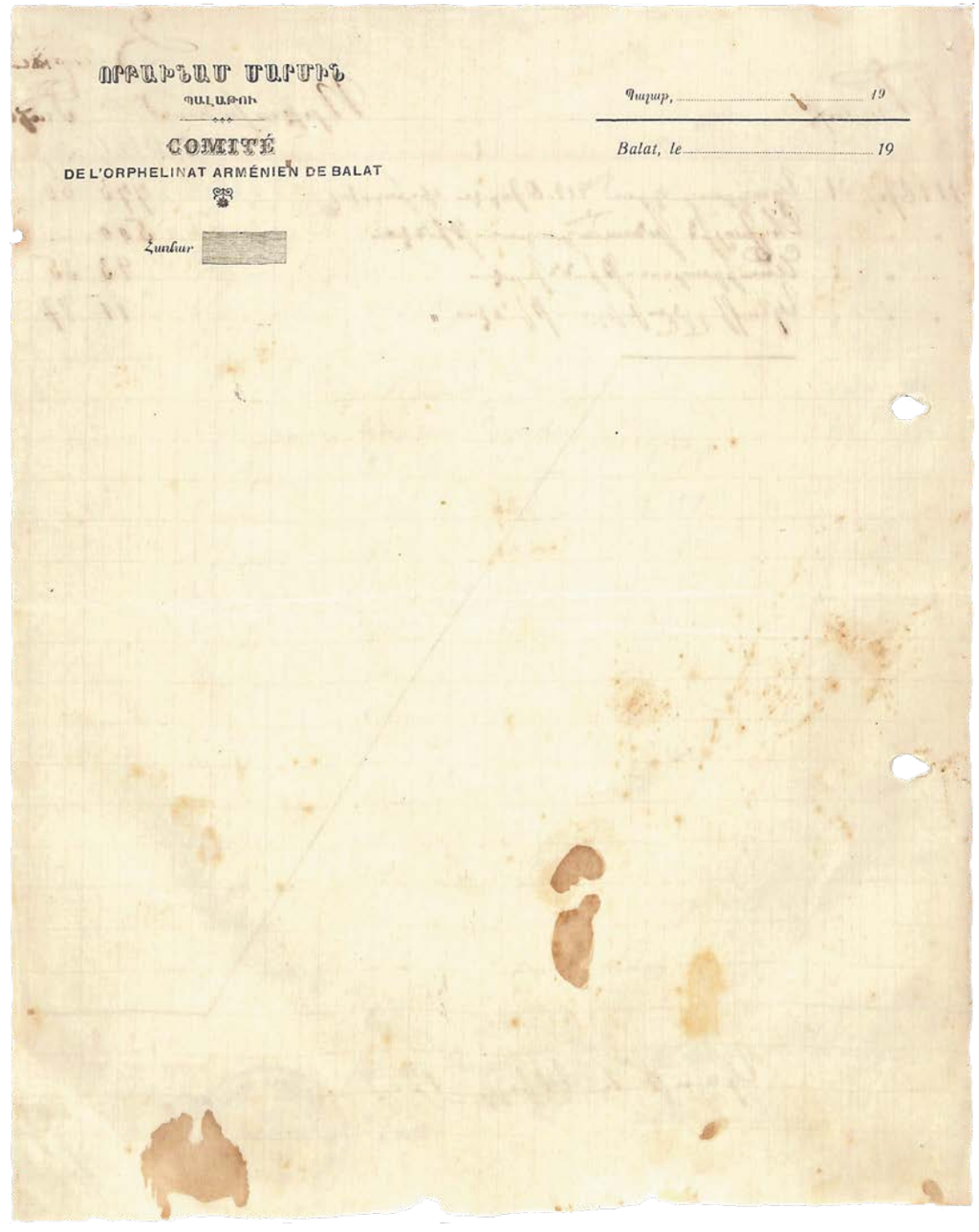


Fig. 3: The bilingual (Armenian–French) “Orphan Care Body of Balat” letterhead, used on administrative documents of the Khorenyan Orphanage.

“The Orphan Care Body of Balat” — addressing the complexity of a place’s memory

Never forget this small building where you first put your trembling fingers upon the ABC, its flickering, fragile, yet pure light that illuminated your minds, O children.
— Farewell letter to graduates of the Khorenyan, 1924[1]

In the pages before you, we discuss the past (and its echo in the present) of the Khorenyan, an Armenian educational establishment in Istanbul’s Balat neighbourhood, that, over the course of its history, served purposes extending far beyond the remit of a traditional school by operating as an orphanage and a communal centre in the widest sense of the word. “The Orphan Care Body of Balat” is a literal translation of the printed heading on some of the Khorenyan’s archival documents, “ՈՐԲԱԽՆԱՄ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ ՊԱԼԱԹՈՒ”, a letterhead that appeared and disappeared in the middle of a drastic disruption in the life of the institution.[2] Characteristic of bureaucratic terminology

1 Quoted from the farewell letter from the administration of the Khorenyan School to the graduating class of 1924, in: *Ընդամեայ տեղեկագիր Խորէնեան Երկսեռ Վարժարանի,* Թերզեան եղբայրներ տպարան, 1933, էջ 9. [*Five-Year Bulletin of the Khorenyan Co-Educational School*, Terzean Brothers Printing House, 1933, p. 9.]

2 The archive concerning the Armenian community of Balat, the Surb Hreshdagabed Church, the Khorenyan School, and the Khorenyan Orphanage comprises more than 2,000 documents, mostly dating from the early nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century. It includes materials relating to the Khorenyan School and the Khorenyan Orphanage, such as correspondence, accounting records, information on members of the institutions, as well as internal regulations. These documents exhibit recurring features among which the “Orphan Care Body of Balat” letterhead, appearing after 1915, is particularly notable. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Surp Hreshdagabed Church and Khorenyan School Collection, OA5K5Y0.

from the late Ottoman and post-World War I era, the phrase also stands as a metaphor for the Armenian community during that dark period, whose entire existence was suddenly condensed into a single entity with the sole task of looking after its most deprived members.[3] The Khorenyan’s chequered past could be approached from many angles. Yet in what follows, it is precisely this aspect we want to focus on: its history as both a physical space and an intangible infrastructure of care sustained across generations — a perspective that grows from the tribulations experienced by the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Republic of Turkey, as well as from that community’s persistent efforts at self-support and self-assertion.

Our approach revolves around documents and narratives produced by Armenians, honouring their legacy as agents in the telling of their own (hi)story. In the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, archives primarily served the needs of the imperial bureaucracy; yet the Khorenyan’s archive also became a form of self-preservation — after all, it was compiled and safeguarded by the inhabitants of Balat themselves. The Khorenyan Orphanage, despite — or maybe because — of its appearance and disappearance over a brief period of time, forms an essential part of the neighbourhood’s cultural identity: it captures the very moment when the local community became traceable through documentation and institutionalisation, or, in the words of Jan Assmann, the physical embodiment of its memory.[4] “The Orphan Care Body of Balat” — in the fabric of thousands of archival documents, the printed heading is not only a common thread that ties together the Khorenyan’s legacy before and after the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century; it is also a constant reminder of the shattering of the Armenian community’s future. If this essay foregrounds the fate of one particular institution, the Khorenyan was not an isolated phenomenon: at the beginning of the twentieth century, similar places of care began to emerge all over the region in cities such as Athens, Cairo, Aleppo, Alexandropol, and

3 Due to the flexibility of the Armenian language, the English phrase ‘caretaker of orphans’ can be expressed with a single adjective — *vorbakhnam* (որբախնամ). In the everyday parlance of the early twentieth century and for a long time thereafter, the term ‘Khorenyan’ referred not only to a school, but also to an orphanage (մանկատուն, literally ‘a house for children’).

4 Assmann, Jan: “Communicative and cultural memory”. In: *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, 2008, pp. 109–18, here p. 111.

Tbilisi.[5] At the same time, our reference to a specific 'address' is an invitation to regard this essay as part of a broader engagement with local history that we began years ago with our book *Balat: Living Together*.[6]

Any study dedicated to the memory of the Armenian community in today's Turkey inevitably becomes an attempt to understand the matrix of oblivion woven from the threads of thousands of individual narratives and memories that have survived in family and state archives. In our endeavour to uncover the (hi)story of the Khorenyan School in its manifold entanglements, we ask: Who remembers the School? What exactly is being remembered? In what forms and expressions is this memory constructed and/or deconstructed? Not only is memory inherently precarious—that of the Armenian community in the former Ottoman Empire is historically torn. Over their long and convoluted trajectory, recollections of the past have undergone a prolonged process of transformation, encompassing both the fusion and disjunction of narratives. We define this particular form of memory as the memory of memory, in which the community remains a living, active element of the present while simultaneously bearing a memory of the past—a memory that has evolved beyond even the stage of what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory".[7]

An integral part of contemporary society in Turkey, the Armenian community remains marked by its marginalisation within the broader realm of memory, but also by its specific positionality, and, more precisely, its condition of exotopy within that sphere.[8] As an ethnic

5 A detailed analysis of the politics surrounding orphans, abandoned children, and vagrants can be found in Maksudyan, Nazan: *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Syracuse University Press, 2014. For an in-depth discussion of the orphan care body in the city of Alexandropol including its establishment, subsequent displacements and reorganisations, as well as the fragmentary records preserving the memory of its inhabitants and employees, see: Nercessian, Nora: *The City of Orphans: Relief Workers, Commissars and the "Builders of the New Armenia". Alexandropol/Leninakan, 1919–1931*. Hollis Publishing, 2016.

6 Amiryan, Tigran et al. (eds.): *Balat: Living Together / Բալաթ. ապրել միասին*, CSN Lab, 2023.

7 Hirsch, Marianne: *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 1–25.

8 Rather than employing Liapunov's translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *vnenachodimost* as 'outsideness' (see: Bakhtin, Mikhail M.: "Author and hero in aesthetic activity". In: *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays,* edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, translated by Vadim Liapunov [ca. 1920–1923, first published in Russian 1979], University of Texas Press, 1990, pp. 4–255), we prefer to render the term as 'exotopy'. This choice reflects the

minority, it is engaged in a constant struggle for rights and freedoms. Moreover, the presence of this post-traumatic entity in the social and cultural life of modern Turkey keeps raising questions pertaining to the past—in a sense, it constitutes a physical body that constantly remembers and reminds. In one of his interviews, the journalist Hrant Dink (1954–2007), while discussing the Remembrance Day of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, mentioned various expressions commonly used to describe what happened to the Armenians at the beginning of the twentieth century: 'tragic events', 'displacement', 'genocide', 'massacres', and so on. Dink preferred another term: for his own generation, his ancestors, and his descendants, he argued, remembering the Armenian community meant remembering its 'destruction' across space and time.[9] Our exploration of how a particular Armenian school in Istanbul is remembered therefore cannot be confined to merely bringing to the surface past events, names, and faces: any attempt to formulate a retrospective narrative about Armenians in Turkey inevitably encounters a point at which the various temporalities involved refuse to obey the logic of sequentiality, demanding instead an approach more akin to an *assemblage*.

Balat's Armenian population forms part of one of Istanbul's most multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and thus also of a veritable mosaic of narratives. Describing a community's historical connection to a place along with its past and present concerns would be a much easier task in a more homogenous environment. In the case of Balat, however, we must take into account the fact that the Armenian community was never economically or politically dominant, nor was it rooted in a broad institutional network. Among the few remaining landmarks that attest to the Armenian presence in the area are the Surb Hreshdagabed Church, the nearby Edirnekapı Cemetery, the long-closed Khorenyan School, and the Kefeli Mosque (formerly the St Nicholas Church). Located in the immediate vicinity of Jewish synagogues, Greek and Bulgarian churches, and many other culturally significant sites, these architectural remnants bear witness to the interactions that once united the neighbourhood's diverse communities in a vibrant *vivre-ensemble*—a geography of coexistence between

position of the Armenian school and community in Balat, which existed within the neighbourhood and actively participated in its interethnic and intercommunal life. While peripheral in relation to the dominant culture, they were not excluded from local history; they were not outside, but inside.

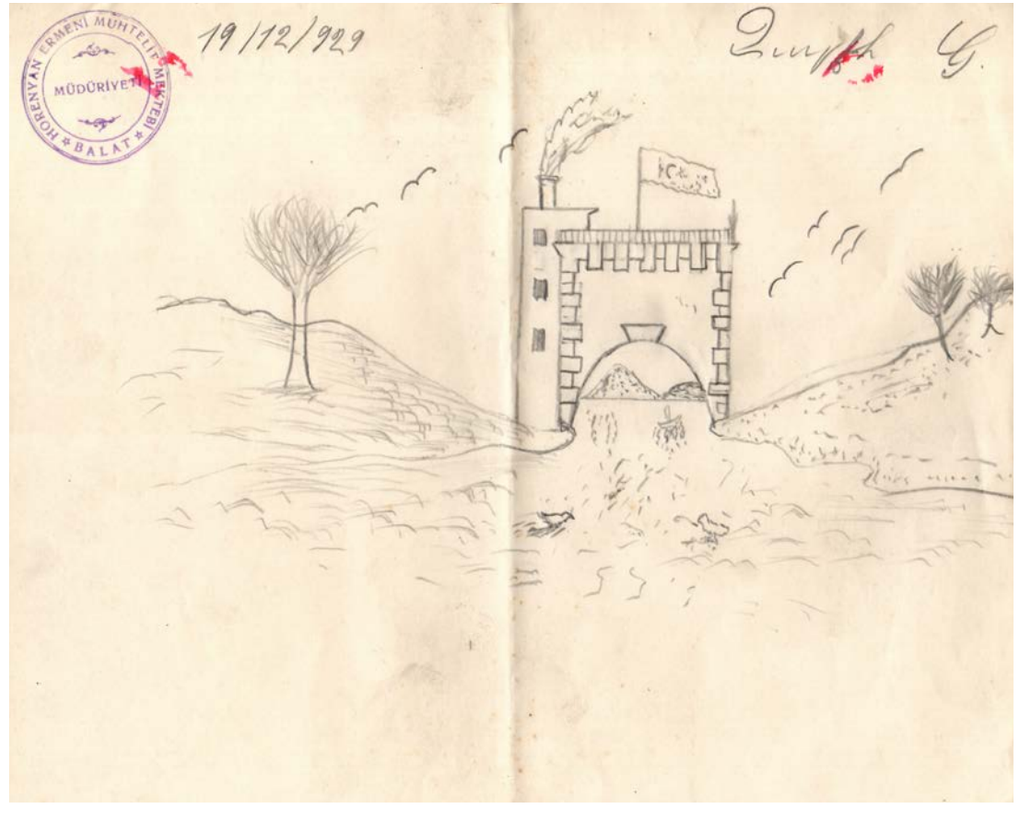
9 Çandar, Tuba: *Hrant*. HDF Publications, 2023, p. 502.

minorities that began to unravel in the early twentieth century in a drawn-out process that lasted until the 1960s.[10]

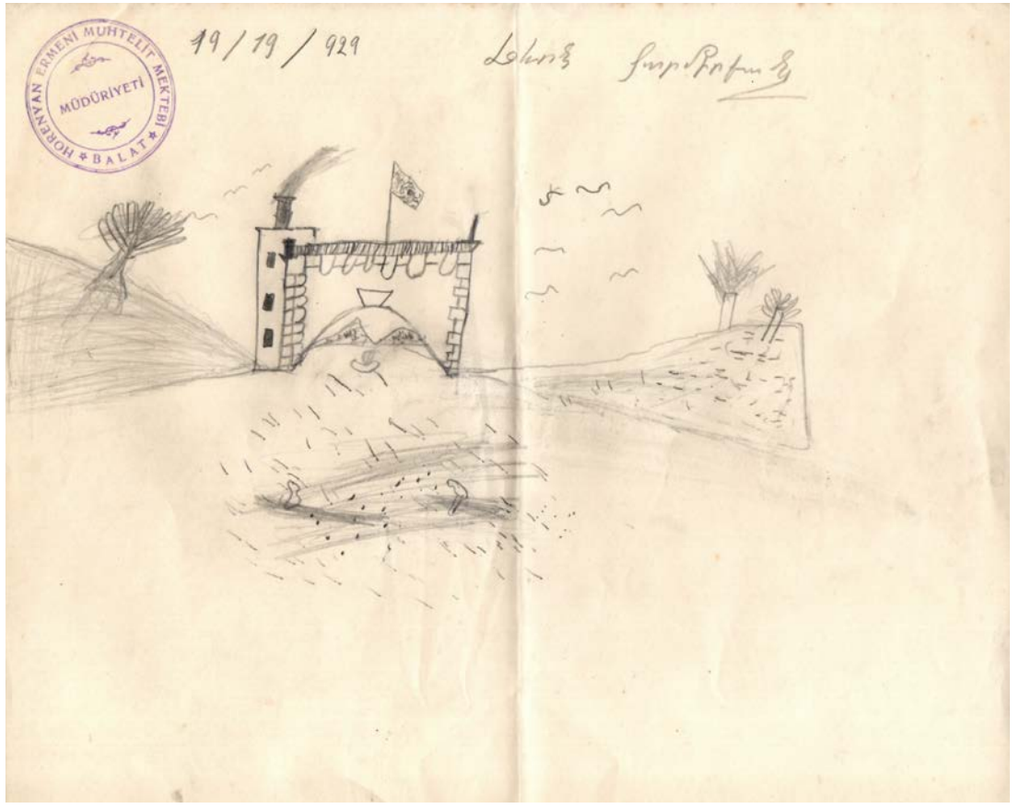
With its manifold spatial entanglements, Balat seems to continuously grow and expand, transforming into a symbol of the lost past of Istanbul and, at times, the entire region. The neighbourhood's polyphony of cultures, along with a mutual understanding regarding matters of language, economy, and politics, now belongs to the realm of history: today, the era of 'living together' primarily survives in rare architectural traces in the urban landscape, bringing to mind Pierre Nora's famous dictum that "memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists."[11]

10 Our understanding of the uniqueness of this interethnic milieu is based on the concept of 'living together' as elaborated in Roland Barthes' *Comment vivre ensemble: Simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976–1977).* Edited by Claude Coste, Seuil/IMEC, 2002. For further details, see Amiryan et al. (eds.): *Balat: Living Together*, p. 376. One article in the volume is dedicated to the Khorenyan School and the Surb Hreshdagabed Church, with a particular focus on the twentieth century: Yayloyan, Diana, Mete Ulutaş, and Leon Aslanov: "Tracing the memory of Armenian Balat: Khorenyan School and Surb Hreshdagabed Church". In: *Balat: Living Together / Բալաթ. ապրել միասին*, edited by Tigran Amiryan et al., CSN Lab, 2023, pp. 122–77.

11 Nora, Pierre: "General introduction: between memory and history". In: *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 3, edited by Pierre Nora et al., Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 1–20, here p. 1.



→ Fig. 4–16 (pp. 19–31): An album of drawings by students of the Khorenyan School from the 1929/1930 academic year. The drawings all feature the same motif: a double-peaked mountain resembling Mount Ararat, with a river, likely the Aras, flowing at its base. The mountain is viewed through a gateway topped with the Turkish flag. Ceded to Turkey after the Treaty of Kars in 1921, Mount Ararat would later become a key symbol of Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia and the city of Yerevan, located on the opposite side of the mountain. All sheets bear the School's official Turkish stamp, "Horenyan Ermeni Muhtelit Mektebi, Balat" (Khorenyan Armenian Co-Educational School), with "Müdüriyeti" (Administration) inscribed at the centre. The album contains twelve drawings, each signed by a pupil and dated 19 December 1929.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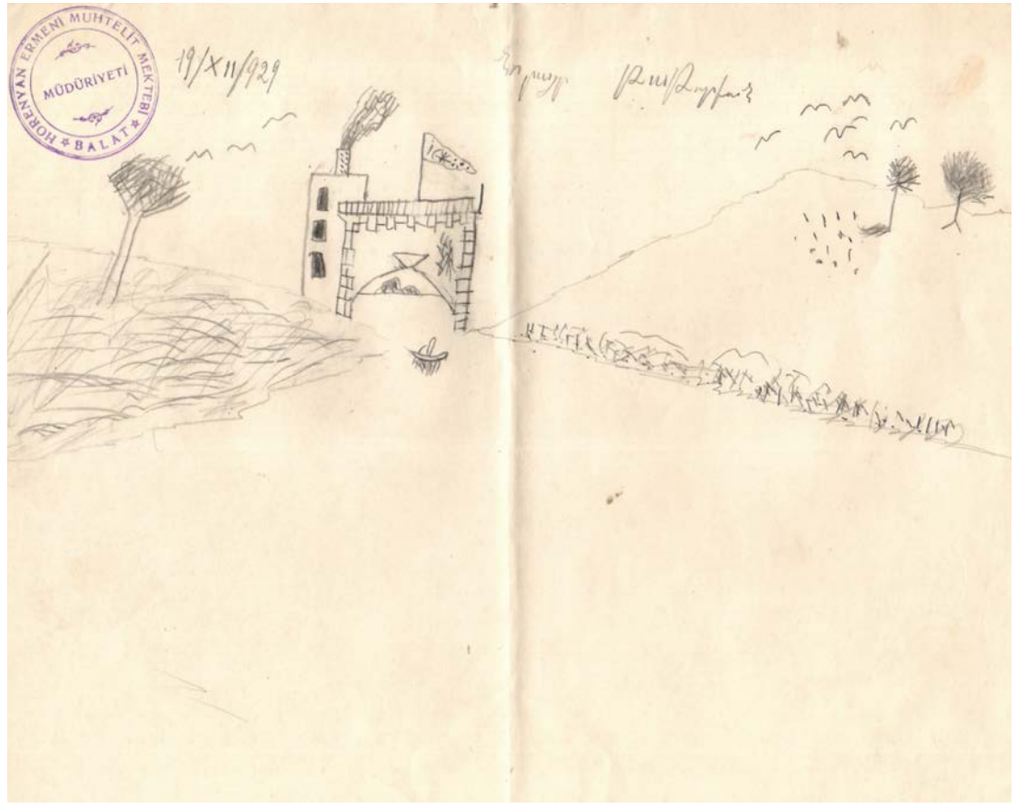
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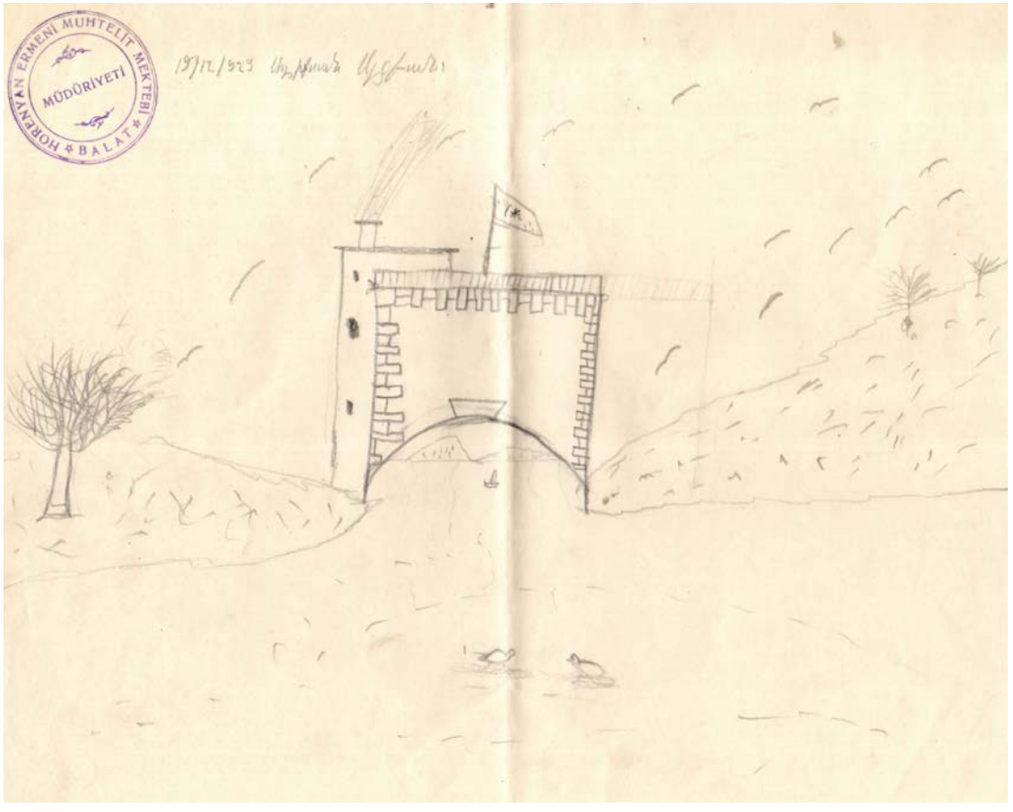
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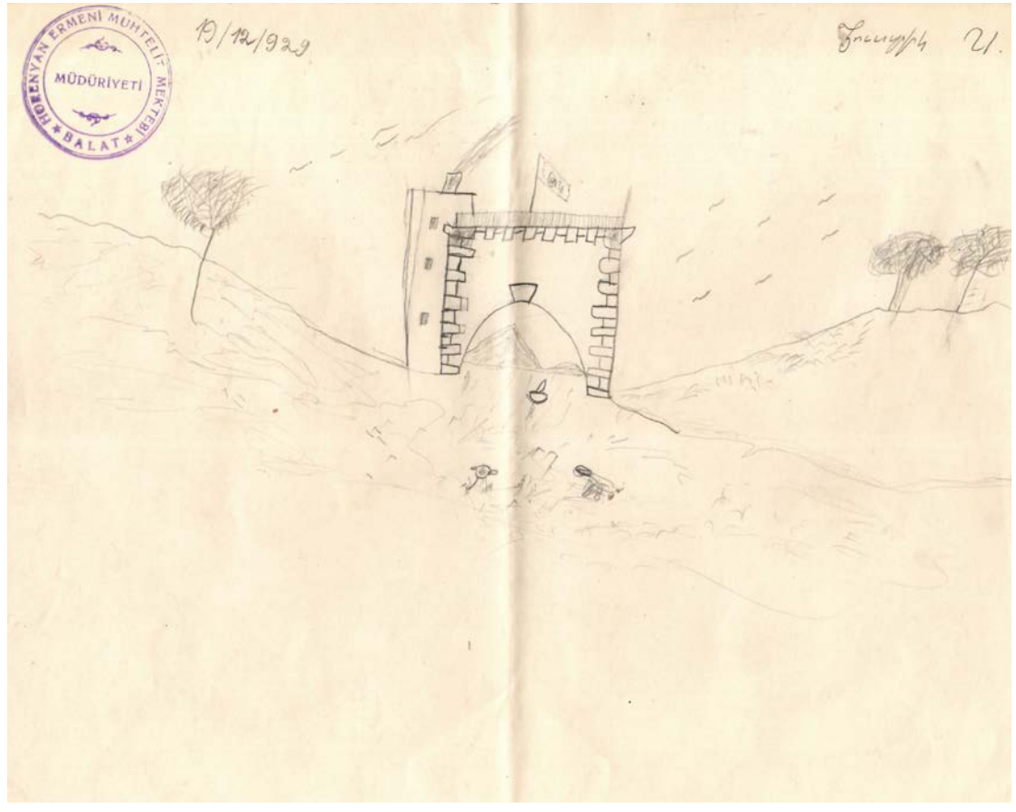
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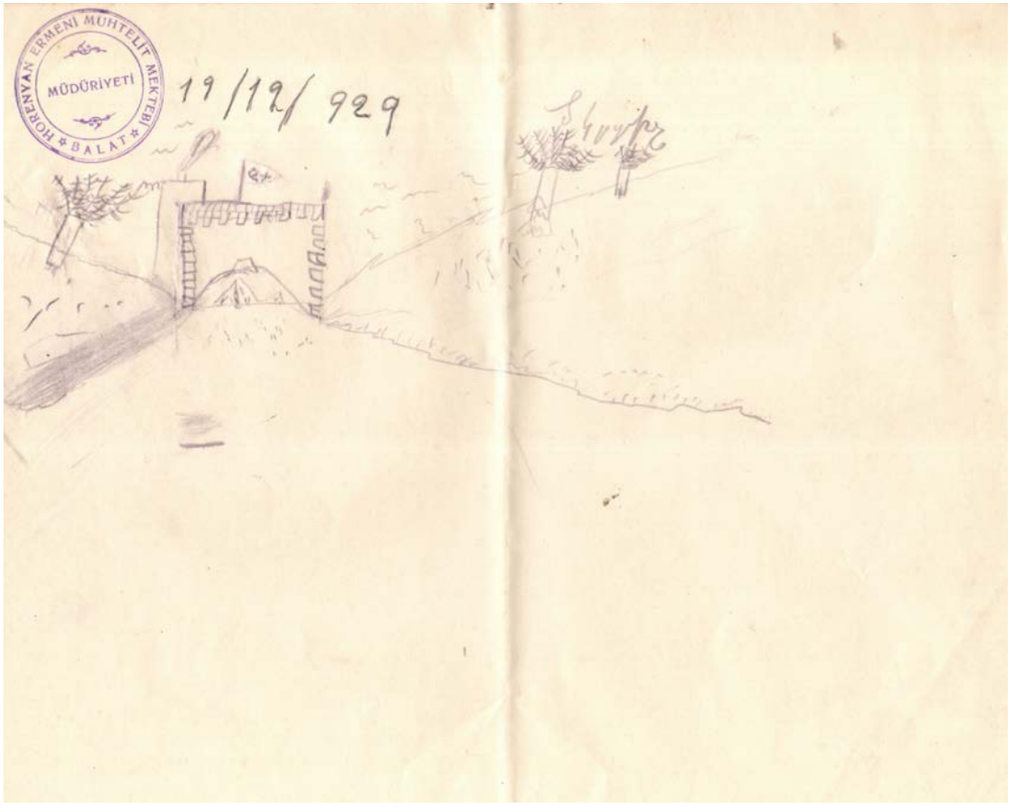
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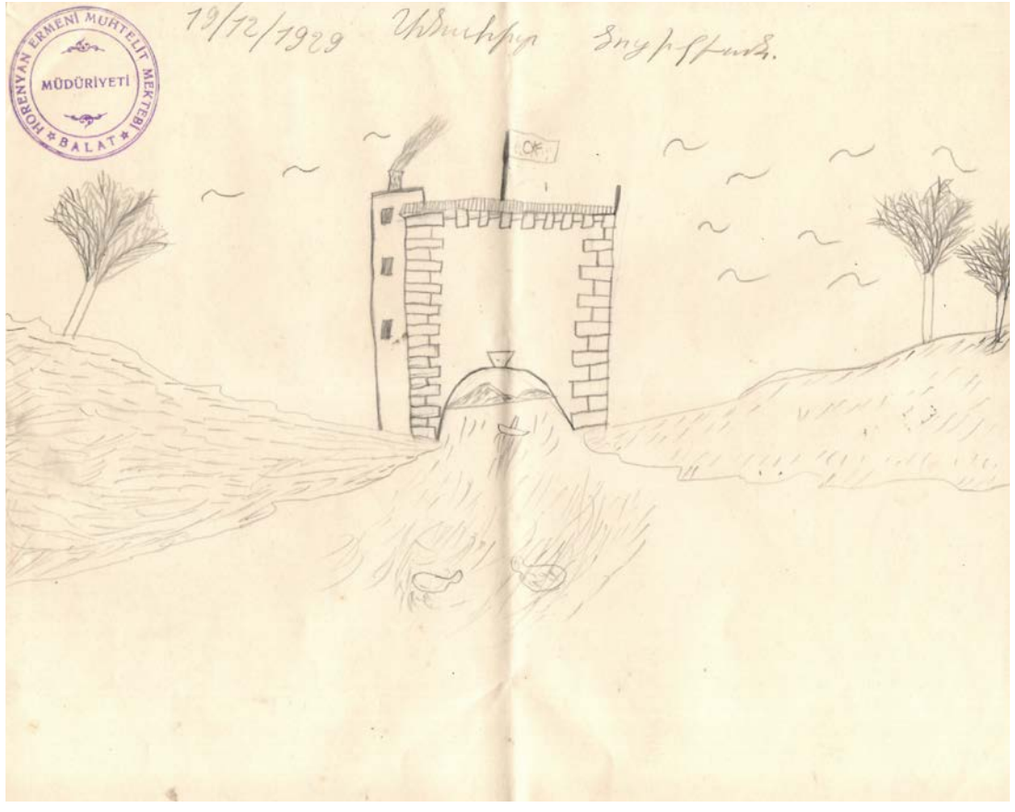
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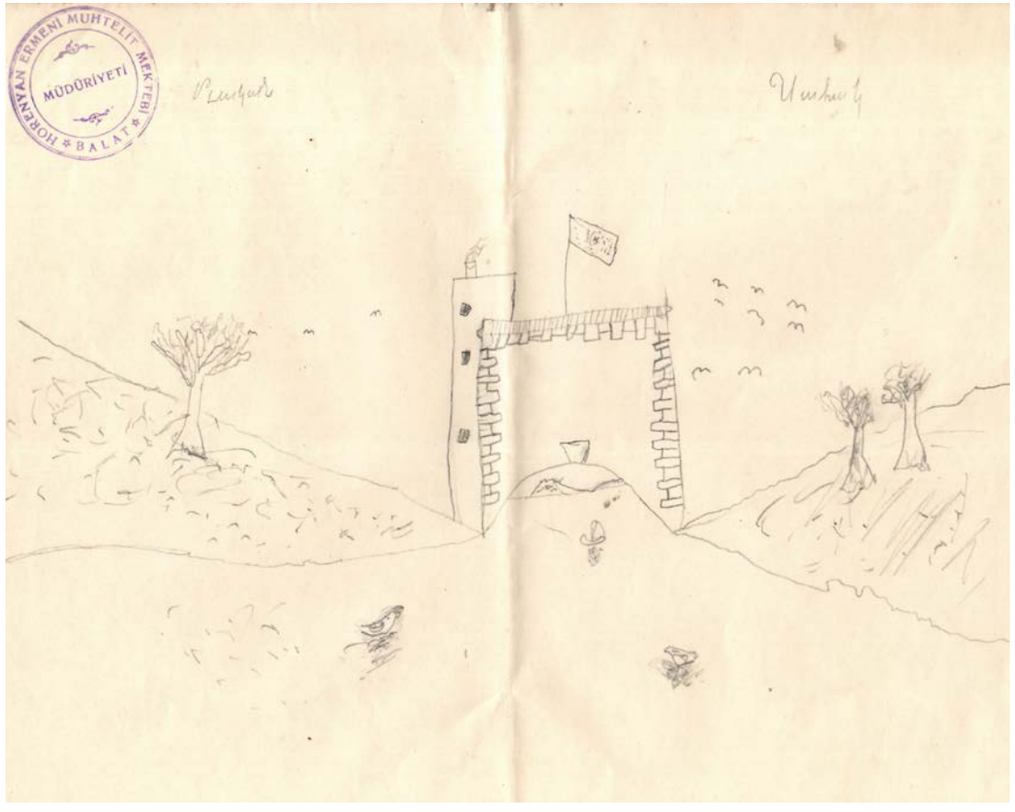
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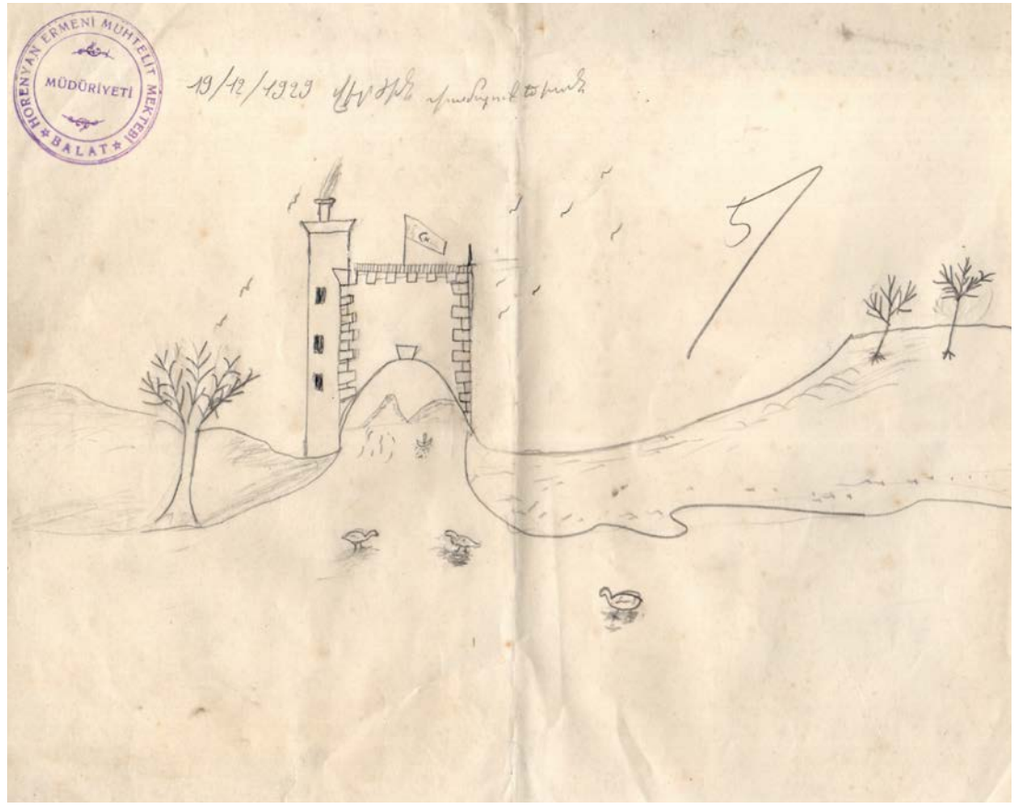
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Conflicting roles — approaching a school's ambiguity

How to unravel, how to reconstruct, a communal memory? The last graduates of the Khorenyan School are now of advanced age, and even if we managed to weave together the gradually eroding and increasingly fragile threads of individual recollection, the building's interior has been almost completely destroyed, leaving only speculation as to where the halls and classrooms once were and how daily life unfolded within its walls. Archival materials can, at least to a certain extent, testify to the School's past, but they are also documents of silence, pointing to all the stories and memories lost. As Pierre Nora has pointed out, it is the absence of memory within social groups (*milieux de mémoire*) that engenders places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*).[12] This is very much the case with the Khorenyan School: imbued with myriad silent/silenced stories and a mostly forgotten history, the empty and decaying building embodies the community's conspicuous absence from the neighbourhood; and the disruptive silence surrounding this site of remembrance echoes with questions tied to the past, questions that continue to unsettle and provoke the societies of Turkey and Armenia today. The (hi)story of the Khorenyan is itself a fragment of a broader narrative of knowledge, language, and educational institutions, as well as a tale of catastrophe and destruction. The ruined building resounds with the imaginary voices of the many orphans for whom the place was more than just a school: even though it sheltered only a fraction of the tens of thousands of children left without parents by the violent upheavals of the early twentieth century, the Khorenyan is indelibly linked to memories of shelter and refuge.[13]

12 Nora, Pierre: "Between memory and history: les lieux de mémoire". *Representations* 26, 1989, pp. 7–24, here p. 7.

13 Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, the Armenians of Balat began to establish numerous confraternities, foundations, and associations aimed at supporting the sick, the homeless, and orphaned children, many of which continued to exist until the 1920s; nearly all of them directed their efforts toward the Khorenyan School, providing books, clothing, linen, food, fuel, and other essential supplies. In order of foundation: Eastern Philanthropic Union (1861), Philodemic Union (1861), Arshakunian Union (1866), Balat Trade Union (1869), Khorenyan Student Union (1875), Grasirats Union (1883), Armenian Benevolent Union (1884), Khorenyan Relief Union for the Poor (1884), Khorenyan Union for Future Welfare (1885), Relief Union for the Poor (1885), Benevolent Union (1887), Izmirlian Hayrik Union (1908), National Liberal Progressive Union (1908), Sasun Gymnastics Union (1912), Khorenyan Sbor Club (1918), Orphan Care Union (1918), Goghtan Girl's Union (1919). See: *Handes Amsorya* 3–6, March–June 1956, pp. 266–82.

To better understand these memories, one must move from the brick walls of that particular Armenian school to another shore of the Golden Horn, to a white building that counts among the most significant *lieux de mémoire* for Istanbul's present-day Armenian community: the memorial celebrating the life and work of Hrant Dink.[14] As visitors walk past the screens and exhibits, Dink's own voice is a constant companion, narrating the story of Armenian schools and emphasising the right to education. Why are educational institutions so important to the Armenian community, both as an idea and as physical spaces? The answer to this question can be found in Dink's biography, which begins with his childhood spent in one of Istanbul's orphanages. The author's life story reflects the familial and communal (post)memory of tens of thousands of Armenians, one where trauma is followed by orphanhood. Almost every Armenian school has served as an orphanage at some point in its history. The shelter they provided is the shared memory of a big family of orphans who have always remembered, have always shared their stories, and have always fought to preserve the institutions that helped them. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, the Armenian community was striving to reclaim the right to protected spaces. Hence, for Armenians, the history of orphanhood is part of the history of a much broader struggle for autonomy and cultural rights.

The recollections of those who were personally involved with the Khorenyan School, such as students and teachers, are gradually fading. Therefore, our project is less about personal experience than it

14 The 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory is located in the former offices of *Agos* newspaper, the place where the journalist was assassinated on 19 January 2007. Named in honour of Dink's seminal "23.5 April" article, the memorial preserves his legacy and plays a vital role in public discourse. Through exhibitions and various programmes, it reflects key events in Turkey's modern history, aiming to foster dialogue and mutual understanding.

is about the site's symbolic importance for the Armenians of Istanbul, which becomes tangible through the trauma of its destruction. In addressing the cultural memory associated with the institution, we do not aim merely to restate the evident fact that the School itself, the books it harboured, and the knowledge it fostered were of crucial importance to the Armenian community of Balat. Rather, we argue that the entire neighbourhood, with its rich tapestry of interwoven cultures, can be considered a key element of Istanbul's diverse heritage. Aleida Assmann notes that "the reproduction of culture is not passed down genetically from generation to generation; it is ensured through symbols, which are continually passed on to the next generation and solidified through family, schools, and mass media."[15] Since in our case, the focus is largely on a setting where familial memory has been disrupted by orphanhood and other sources of information are strictly censored, the School, which for many had turned into a home, is effectively the only source of cultural memory, as well as the only means of preserving it. Herein lies the reason why the Armenian community in Istanbul cares so deeply about schools; and this is also why the ruined building of the Khorenyan has become such a potent symbol of fading cultural memory.[16]

When we explore the institution's past, we must keep in mind the ruptures, contradictions, and overlaps that permeate it. The Khorenyan, like other schools, constituted a liminal space on the threshold of the private and the public sphere, of care and control, of identity and assimilation. As such, its role was never singular but plural and ambiguous, shaped both by local needs and the interests

15 Assmann, Aleida: *Formen des Vergessens.* Wallstein Verlag, 2016, p. 206. Quote translated by Mariam Yeghiazaryan.

16 In *Balat: Living Together*, we describe the district of Balat as a site of constant tensions, interferences, and negotiations between external and internal memory. On the one hand, there exists a city-wide recollection of Balat that was shaped by external actors — non-residents — who have long represented the area as dangerous, unsanitary, crime-riddled, and populated by the alien Other. Yet there is also the social and cultural memory of those who remember Balat from within, which differs fundamentally from this overwhelmingly negative image. It is articulated through narratives of coexistence and solidarity, collective efforts to cope with hardships imposed from the outside, and the social, economic, and cultural richness of local life, structured around a strong sense of community in which local belonging often outweighs ethno-religious identity. As an integral part of Balat, the Khorenyan can also be situated within this dynamic of internal and external memory. See: Amiryan, Tigran: "Container of the uncontainable: notes on Balat's spatial memory". In: *Balat: Living Together / Բալաթ. ապրել միասին*, edited by Tigran Amiryan et al., CSN Lab, 2023, pp. 18–67, here pp. 42–44.

of the dominant majority. From the late Ottoman era to the present day, schools operated by the Armenian community have functioned as spaces that preserve and pass on language and culture, serving as social anchor points and symbols of collective memory.[17] Schools remain core signifiers of belonging, similar to birthplace and/or place of residence (region, city, neighbourhood).[18] That said, they have undergone fundamental transformations in the past and continue to do so today within the Turkish educational system, often being employed as instruments for government intervention into community life.[19] In light of this dual and perhaps contradictory role, Armenian schools could be described as mediators between the poles 'closed/private/communal' and 'open/public/national'.[20]

If the dual nature of educational institutions is central to analysing their impact on the lives of Armenians in Turkey, then it becomes necessary to examine the overarching political processes with an eye to understanding how the various ethno-religious groups were classified in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Republic of Turkey, what role these communities played in the changing governmental discourse, and, accordingly, how educational institutions were instrumentalised in order to influence them. Shaped and reshaped within ever-evolving contexts and situated in the multi-ethnic environment of Balat, the Khorenyan School can serve as an emblematic case study for the resulting interplay between education, politics, culture, and community life.

In the late Ottoman era, from the second half of the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were regarded as a non-Muslim *millet*.[21] This system categorised ethno-religious minorities and granted them

17 Cohen, Anthony P.: *Symbolic Construction of Community*. Routledge, 2013, pp. 97–109.

18 "Alumni of Khorenyan", "Alumni of Esayan", "Alumni of Gedronakan", and similar expressions can serve as lines of demarcation between 'us' and 'them'. Barth, Frederik: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Waveland Press, 1998, p. 38.

19 Melkonyan, Ruben: "About the educational problems of Turkey's Armeniancy". *21st Century* 1 (9), 2011, pp. 75–81.

20 Lee, Minji: *Views from the Varzharan: Negotiation of Social Identities Through Armenian Schools*. Master's thesis, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2019, pp. 5–7.

21 The term *millet* originates from the Arabic word *milla* (ملة), which literally translates as 'nation'. In the Ottoman Empire, it designated a religious community. See: Bosworth, C. Edmund et al. (eds.): *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. 7, Mif–Naz., E. J. Brill, 1993, pp. 62–64.

partial autonomy to preserve their language, religion, and institutions.[22] Systematic use of the term began in the nineteenth century, when the Empire's non-Muslim subjects were divided into three officially recognised groups: Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Armenian.[23] Within this structure, the semi-autonomous Armenian *millet*, headed by the Armenian Patriarchate, offered a certain sense of belonging and ensured that at least some of the community's needs, including education in the Armenian language, were met.

However, this model of social classification was soon altered in the wake of the Tanzimat reforms implemented in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1856, the Ottoman Empire issued a decree that redefined the role of the *millets* and promised equal rights to all subjects, aiming to foster the formation of a unified imperial identity. According to the principles set forth in the edict, there were to be no more differences between *millets*, as the only legitimate political identity was now the Ottoman one.[24] This shift marked the beginning of a long and intermittent process of assimilation. Education, in particular, became a strategically important venue for the desired ideological transformations. As a result, in 1869, the Ottoman Ministry of Education set regulations that placed the educational centres of minorities, including Armenian schools, under state control. Although these regulations still permitted the teaching of the Armenian language in primary schools, restrictions were gradually imposed, with Turkish being promoted as a central component of the curriculum.

Contrary to how it was initially presented, the decree effectively constituted a "mechanism for controlling the educational process rather than bringing social equality",[25] seeking to align the activities of educational institutions with Ottoman values. In the process of shaping this unified identity, language was of fundamental importance, as it was viewed and used as a tool for building the nation and inciting nationalism, which in turn was considered an essential element of Ottoman citizenship. With Foucault, we might describe these phenomena as manifestations of 'governmentality'

22 Coakley, John: *Non-territorial Autonomy in Divided Societies*. Routledge, 2016, pp. 13–15.

23 Ágoston, Gabor and Bruce Alan Masters: *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*. Infobase Publishing, 2009, p. 383.

24 Gencer, Mustafa: "Geç Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun modernleşmesi cerçevesinde kimlik sorunsalı [The identity question in the context of the late Ottoman Empire's modernization]". In: *Kimlikler Lütfen*, edited by Gönül Pultar, ODTÜ Yayincilik, 2009, pp. 67–78, here p. 71.

25 Hurewitz, Jacob Coleman (ed.): *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: 1535–1914.* Yale University Press, 1975, p. 317.

(*gouvernementalité*): language and educational institutions become instruments of 'state-building', aimed at the 'transparency' of society and the rationalisation of the lives of men and women living within state borders.[26]

In line with the new regulations, prayer in churches was conducted in Turkish, the share of lessons in Turkish gradually increased, and in some communities, fines were imposed on those who did not speak the official language.[27] These circumstances are reflected in the Khorenyan School's archival record, which demonstrates how Ottoman Turkish and later modern Turkish gained a more and more dominant role in the curriculum.[28] Regarding the polyphony of Balat, where the languages of daily life included Greek, Armenian, and Ladino, and where interethnic communication often involved French (in written form) and Turkish (in spoken form), the enforcement of Turkish as the dominant language of instruction can be understood as a process of fragmentation, separating the 'real' identity of its inhabitants from the state-imposed reality.[29]

As early as the 1860s, policies of rationalisation and gentrification were implemented not only through legislative and bureaucratic measures, but also in physical and spatial terms. As Nazan Maksudyan's research has demonstrated, one of the consequences of the Tanzimat reforms was the establishment of *islahhanes* (إصلاحخانه), a network of Ottoman vocational orphanages, whose primary purpose was to gather impoverished children living on the streets into a single, centralised institution.[30] One of the poorest neighbourhoods

26 Foucault discusses the role of language as a tool of biopolitics and state formation starting with *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* An especially vivid description of how the 'other language' is excluded from the state can be found in the philosopher's lectures from the 1970s. Foucault, Michel: *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978.* Translated by Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 (first published in French, 2004), pp. 108–09.

27 Akar, Rıdvan: "Cumhuriyet dönemi azınlık politikaları [Minority policies in the Republican Era]". In: *Modernleşme ve Çokkültürlülük [Modernity and Multiculturalism]*, edited by Nazan Aksoy and Melek Ulagay, İletişim Yayınları, 2001, p. 18.

28 Several archived course plans from the 1860s to the 1960s attest to this transformation. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y.

29 This distinction between the real *(le réel)* and reality *(la réalité)* was proposed by Luc Boltanski in his reflections on the formation of disciplinary societies in the nineteenth century. See: Boltanski, Luc: *Enigmes et complots. Une enquête à propos d'enquêtes.* Gallimard, 2012, pp. 60–65.

30 Maksudyan, Nazan: "Orphans, cities, and the state: vocational orphanages (islahhanes) and 'reform' in the Late Ottoman urban space". *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (3), 2011, pp. 493–511.

of Constantinople, Balat was commonly portrayed as a chaotic and foul-smelling area inhabited by economically disadvantaged groups from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Maksudyan argues that the centralised system of orphanages was primarily aimed at the "beautification and sterilisation of urban centres" through the segregation of parentless and abandoned children and youth.[31] Later on, after the massacres of 1894–1896, when numerous Armenian orphans reached Constantinople from various regions of the Empire, protracted struggles over the custody of these children ensued between the Ottoman authorities, the Armenian Patriarchate, and Western missionaries. Maksudyan portrays the state of the Armenian community at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century as one in which "the fathers were killed by the state, while their children came under the influence of foreigners."[32]

Amid the various competing forces, school-orphanages like the Khorenyan gained significant political and economic importance. The Armenian Patriarchate sought to safeguard at least partial autonomy for the institution, but could not shield it entirely from the interference of state authorities, particularly the Ottoman Ministry of Education. The School's archive contains evidence of an increasingly busy indirect correspondence at the turn of the twentieth century, with the Patriarchate's Educational Council acting as an intermediary between the Khorenyan and Ottoman bureaucracy. In these exchanges, the question of the former's compliance with official regulations became increasingly pressing. The circulars from 1903 to 1909, for instance, addressed by the Patriarchate's Educational Council to the Balat Parish Council, demanded detailed statistical reports on the number of pupils, the credentials of teachers, the use of approved textbooks, the oversight of pedagogical assemblies, and the constitution of school boards.[33] They also insisted on adherence to established protocols for hiring and dismissing teachers as well as the regularisation of salaries. These exchanges were not limited to reporting: they also included information about negotiations over the

31 Maksudyan: "Orphans, cities, and the state", p. 132.

32 Maksudyan: *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 147.

33 Covering the period between 1903 and 1909, the correspondence between the Armenian Patriarchate's Educational Council and the Balat Parish Council preserved in the Khorenyan's archive includes circulars, directives, and statistical requests concerning the implementation of the educational regulations and the school's administrative compliance. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y.

interpretation of official rules,[34] alongside warning letters in which the Patriarchate explicitly cautioned the Balat Parish Council that continued disregard for the regulations and failure to implement agreed measures would compel it to "act in accordance with the law".[35]

Archival records for this period reveal a tightening framework of bureaucratic oversight, where the Patriarchate's demands mirrored, and at times enforced, the state's regulatory agenda. The already difficult conditions of the early twentieth century grew even harsher with the rise of the Young Turks, a political force driven by a vision of national unity in which institutions operated by minorities were seen as serious threats.[36] Armenian schools, in particular, were excluded from the officially constructed reality, as well as deliberately marginalised in the dominant narrative. Such discriminatory notions eventually evolved into new regulations, and by 1913, standardised guidelines for primary education were imposed, placing heavy emphasis on Turkish language instruction and stripping Armenian schools of the relative autonomy they had previously enjoyed.

The escalating social and political tensions eventually erupted with devastating force. During the tragic years of the Armenian Genocide, many of the institutions preserving the community's heritage ceased to exist: from 1915 to 1922, economic, administrative, and cultural assets, including schools, were systematically seized and shut down. Banu Karaca has characterised the late Ottoman period and the early years of the Republic of Turkey as an era of "rights deprivation" for non-Muslim communities, contending that "[s]ystematic dispossession not only deprived these communities of their economic foundation but severed them from resources of cultural production

34 Letter from the Armenian Patriarchate's Educational Council to the Balat Parish Council regarding agreed date for negotiations, 13 August 1905. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K6Z2B02.

35 Warning letter from the Armenian Patriarchate's Educational Council to the Balat Parish Council, 30 September 1905. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K6Z2B17.

36 Nazan Maksudyan notes that, following the massacres in the years 1894 to 1896, Armenians faced a catastrophic socio-economic crisis, which was reflected in the policies of child-related institutions. Alongside efforts to preserve at least limited autonomy for the schools, the Armenian Patriarchate made every possible attempt to save the rapidly increasing number of orphans. It was during this period that charitable funds, associations, and similar initiatives, alongside civic and communal bodies, began to emerge, thereby establishing a new infrastructure for child care. See: Maksudyan: *Orphans and Destitute Children in the late Ottoman Empire*, p. 132.

and reproduction."[37] Due to their role as essential spaces for cultural reproduction, schools were particularly affected, leaving communal memory at significant risk of fragmentation and deterioration.

Historical sources show a constant variation in the reported number of Armenian schools due to the governance structure of the educational institutions. Many were under the authority of the Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic Churches; however, by the late Ottoman period, there were also secular schools operating independently of religious affiliations. According to some sources, in 1914, there were 1,996 Armenian schools in Turkey, with over 170,000 children enrolled.[38] As a result of the catastrophic events at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was primarily the schools based in Istanbul that managed to continue their operations. Nevertheless, under the harsh circumstances of the time, out of the 64 schools recorded in 1914, only 47 had survived by 1923.[39]

In the newly formed Turkish state, built upon the ruins of the Empire, the situation improved with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which officially recognised Armenians, Jews, and Greeks as minorities and granted them the right to maintain their schools.[40] That said, their educational assets remained under the strict control of the Turkish Ministry of Education and were subject to periodic state interventions. The Declaration on the Rights of Minorities appeared to be a step toward positive developments; however, alongside it, discriminatory regulations were imposed on various minority communities.[41] One example of this was the Law on the Standardisation of Education adopted in 1924, which centralised all educational institutions under the control of the Turkish state, mandated a national curriculum and prioritised the teaching of Turkish history

37 Karaca, Banu: "'When everything has been said before…': art, dispossession, and the economies of forgetting in Turkey". In: *Women Mobilizing Memory*, edited by Ayşe Gül Altınay et al., Columbia University Press, 2019, pp. 285–303, here p. 287.

38 Kévorkian, Raymond: *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History*. I. B. Tauris & Company, 2011, pp. 272–78.

39 Özdoğan, Günay Göksu et al.: *Turkey'de Ermeniler: Cemaat-Birey-Yurttaş [Armenians in Turkey: Community-Individual-Citizen]*. İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009, p. 194.

40 Գույումճեան, Սիլվա, *Ակնարկ մը՝ ստանպուլահայ վարժարաններու իրականութեան,* Արաս Հրատարակչություն, 2010, էջ 24. [Kuyumcuyan, Silva: *A Brief Overview of the Reality of Istanbul-Armenian Schools*. Aras Publishing House, 2010, p. 24.]

41 Çandar: *Hrant*, p. 505.

and language in the schools of all minorities.[42] Instruction in the Armenian language was permitted; however, to avoid state oversight, subjects such as Armenian history and religion were often taught in unauthorised settings under the shroud of secrecy.[43]

Today, 16 Armenian schools operating exclusively in Istanbul serve as gravitational centres for Turkey's Armenian community. Despite systematic political repression, heavy restrictions on the teaching of Armenian history,[44] and growing threats from Turkey's nationalist circles, which have contributed to a significant drop in student numbers,[45] these institutions continue to foster a sense of collective identity. Yet their significance lies not only in what they preserve, but in how they do so, namely through a continuous negotiation between the private and the public, between the spheres of the community and the state—in fact, it is precisely this complex in-between position that has enabled these schools not only to endure, but to actively resist. Deeply embedded within the urban fabric of Istanbul, they are as indelible a part of the city's landscape of memory as the community's churches and cemeteries. Accordingly, the discourse about the city within the Armenian community frequently revolves around schools such as Esayan, Getronagan, Karagyozyan, Surb Khach, Sahakyan, and others. Long removed from the rhythms of daily life, the Khorenyan School is now rarely referenced, but it continues to mark the city through its architectonic presence. Closed in the 1960s, abandoned, emptied, and stripped of its primary role as an educational institution, the building has transformed into a unique site of memory, or in other words: into the spatial embodiment of communal recollection.

42 İnce, Başak: "Citizenship education in Turkey: inclusive or exclusive". *Oxford Review of Education* 38 (2), 2012, pp. 115–31, here pp. 119–22.

43 Tchilingirian, Hratch: "The 'other' citizens: Armenians in Turkey between isolation and (dis)integration". *Journal of the society for Armenian studies* 25 (4), 2017, pp. 123–55.

44 Lee: *Views from the Varzharan*, pp. 95–96.

45 Ազգային Կեդրոնական Վարժարան, *Հայ Դպրոցը. Անցեալէն դեպի այսօր,* 2017, էջ 94. [Getronagan Armenian High School: *The Armenian School: From the Past to Today*, 2017, p. 94.]

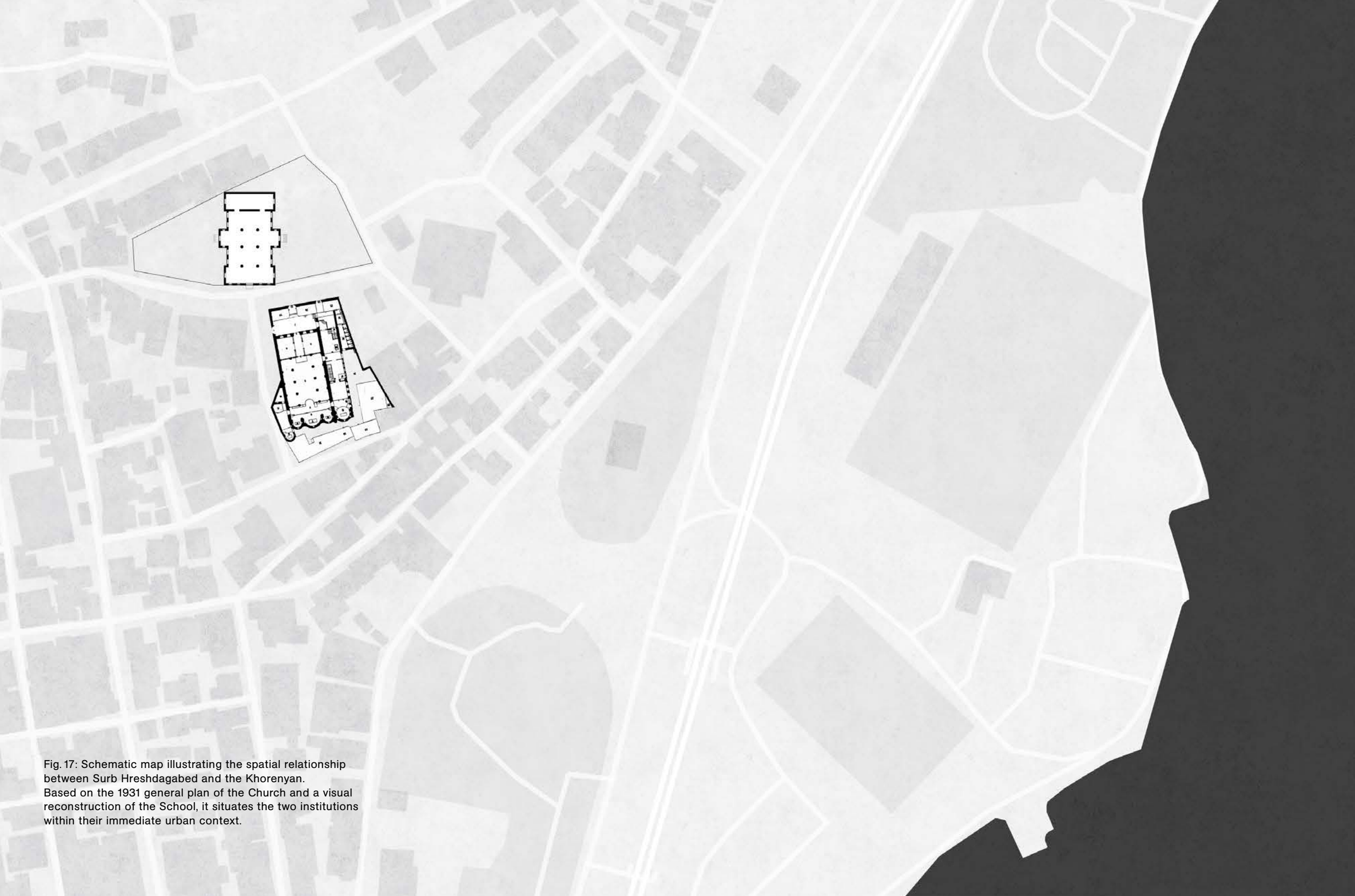


Fig. 17: Schematic map illustrating the spatial relationship between Surb Hreshdagabed and the Khorenyan.
Based on the 1931 general plan of the Church and a visual reconstruction of the School, it situates the two institutions within their immediate urban context.

→ Fig. 18: General plan of the Surb Hreshdagabed Church, published in Melgon-Asatur, *Three-Century History of Surb Hreshdagabed Church in Balat (1627–1931)*, 1931. Dated 2 November 1931, it depicts the layout of the building and its immediate surroundings, including the (much smaller) New Khorenyan School that was relocated to within the premises after 1924.

GENERAL FLOOR PLAN OF THE
SURB HRESHDAGABED CHURCH AND
ITS SURROUNDINGS, BALAT

1. EXTERNAL CHURCH ENTRANCE
2. COURTYARD
3. MAIN ENTRANCE
4. NARTHEXES
5. ENTRANCE TO THE NAVE
6. NAVE
7. SOLEA
8. SANCTUARY
9. ALTAR
10. ALTAR OF THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD
11. ALTAR OF SAINT MINAS
12. RELIQUARY OF SAINT GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR
13. VESTMENT CLOSET
14. SACRISTY
15. RELIQUARY OF SAINTS PAUL AND PETER
16. HOLY BAPTISMAL FONT
17. TABLE OF INTERCESSION
18. SACRED FOUNTAIN OF THE MARTYRED DESCENDANTS OF ARTEM
19. HISTORICAL IRON DOOR
20. TOMB OF BISHOP THADDEUS
21. STAIRWAY LEADING TO CHAMBER
22. COUNCIL HALL & BANCAL
23. EXTERNAL DOORS
24. PRIEST'S AND SEXTON'S ROOMS AND KITCHEN
25. ACOLYTES' CLASSROOM
26. GARDEN
27. NEW KHORENYAN SCHOOL
28. LIGHT SHAFT
29. OLD TREASURY AND CANDLE ROOM
30. EXTERNAL ENTRANCE OF THE K. SCHOOL
31. SHOPS
32. RESTROOMS
33. DRINKING FOUNTAINS

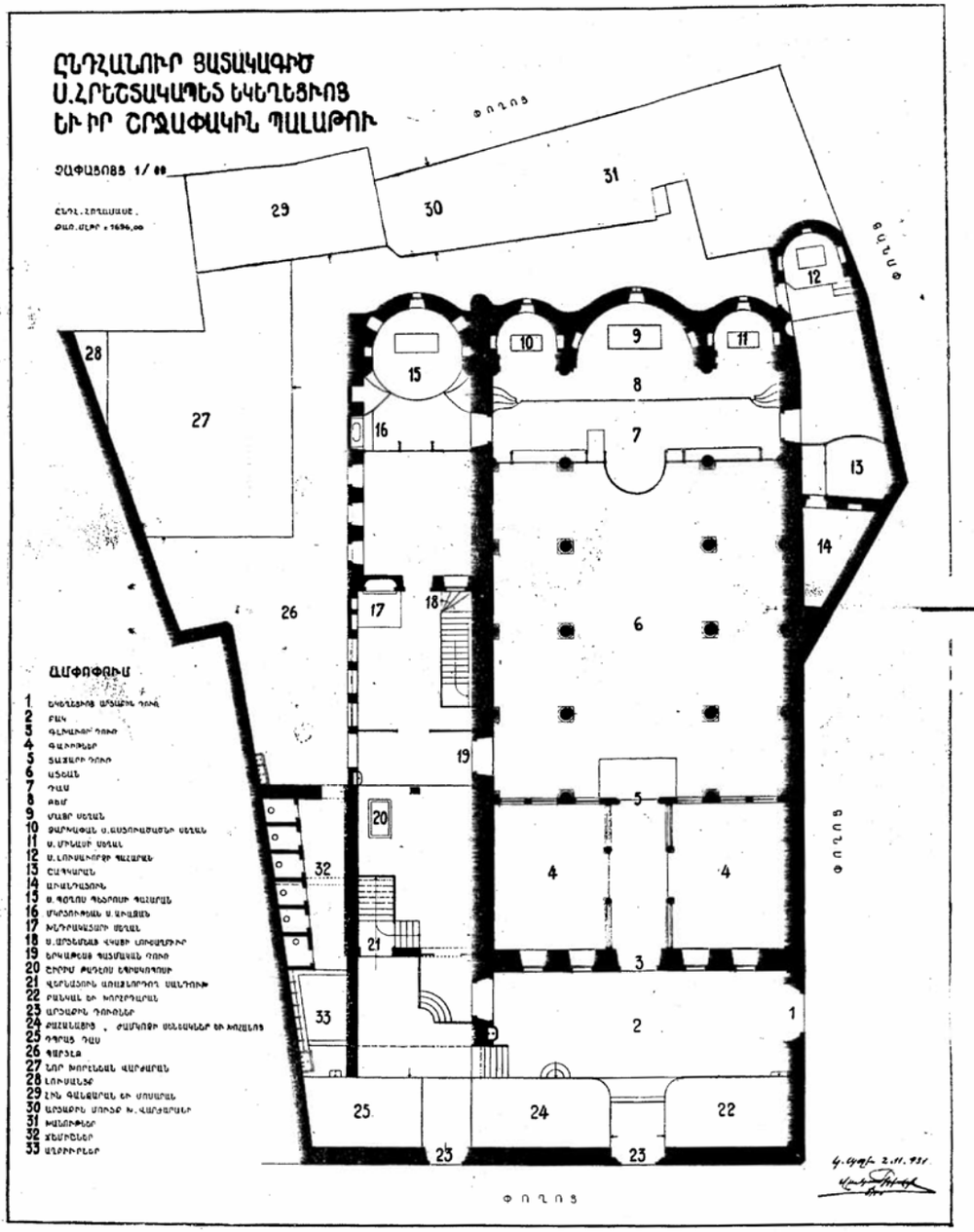


Fig. 19: Schematic map of the eastern part of Balat, depicting the location of Surb Hreshdagabed and the Khorenyan in relation to the Golden Horn.

Fig. 20: Schematic map highlighting the Edirnekapı Armenian Cemetery, Surb Hreshdagabed, and the Khorenyan on the western bank, and the Hrant Dink Foundation and the 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory on the eastern bank of the Golden Horn.

Making space — walking through the life of an institution

On the western shore of the Golden Horn, near the bus stop of the same name in Istanbul's Balat neighbourhood, a wall formed by densely clustered buildings is bisected by a street known as the Balat Kapısı, the Gates of Balat. This short street ends with an apricot-coloured building adorned with brick arches, along which Leblebiciler Street extends. A few steps to the left lead to Kasablar Street, a narrow alley filled with cafés easily overlooked on satellite maps. The alley soon crosses Lavanta Street and cuts off upon reaching Düriye. At this point, turning left again, westward, takes us to a twisted street. It is here, in the middle of Kamış Street, that the gates of the last functioning Armenian institution in Balat, Surb Hreshdagabed Church, can be found. Continuing along the curved path and passing the gates of the Hreshdagabed, a building arises as if by revelation, aligned with the very axis of the street. Amid the bustle of Balat, its half-ruined walls convey a sense of emptiness; the bricks, revealed through fissured plaster, indicate neglect; and the shattered windows, exposing the unlit interior, point to irrevocable loss.

Above the arched entrance of the crumbling edifice, the inscription "Khorenyan Co-Educational School, founded in 1866, Balat" remains visible. As a locatable, identifiable site, the building constitutes a rare vestige of the "spatialisation and localisation of memory"[46] enacted by the neighbourhood's Armenian community. Yet it represents much more than a mere architectural record: the School's nearly two-century-long history encompasses both grand and small narratives, reflecting the status of Istanbul's Armenian community across various historical periods, as well as its struggle to preserve its

46 Smith, Anthony. D.: *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity.* Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 134.

identity. Home to collective pedagogical efforts rooted in the desire to provide care, education, and cultural continuity, the institution was never confined to its physical walls.

However, if the inscription above the entrance to the Khorenyan building is to invoke the memory of the local Armenian community, it must be noticed by those who traverse this part of the quarter, moving upward and deeper into the dense urban fabric or descending to the shore of the Golden Horn, where both poverty and multiethnicity have been erased by time and carried away into the Bosporus. As de Certeau writes, memory exists in the trajectory of alterity. For memory to emerge from monolithic oblivion, it is necessary to become aware of the presence of the 'other', in our case, the inscription in Armenian letters. Yet at the same time, the 'other' can also be the one who arrives from the outside — searching, walking, setting memory in motion, as does the researcher of the past, as do the few former pupils of the School who still attend Sunday services in the nearby church. In the words of de Certeau,

> [p]ractical memory is regulated by the manifold activity of alteration, not merely because it is constituted only by being marked by external occurrences and by accumulating these successive blazons and tattoos inscribed by the other, but also because these invisible inscriptions are 'recalled' to the light of day only through new circumstances.[47]

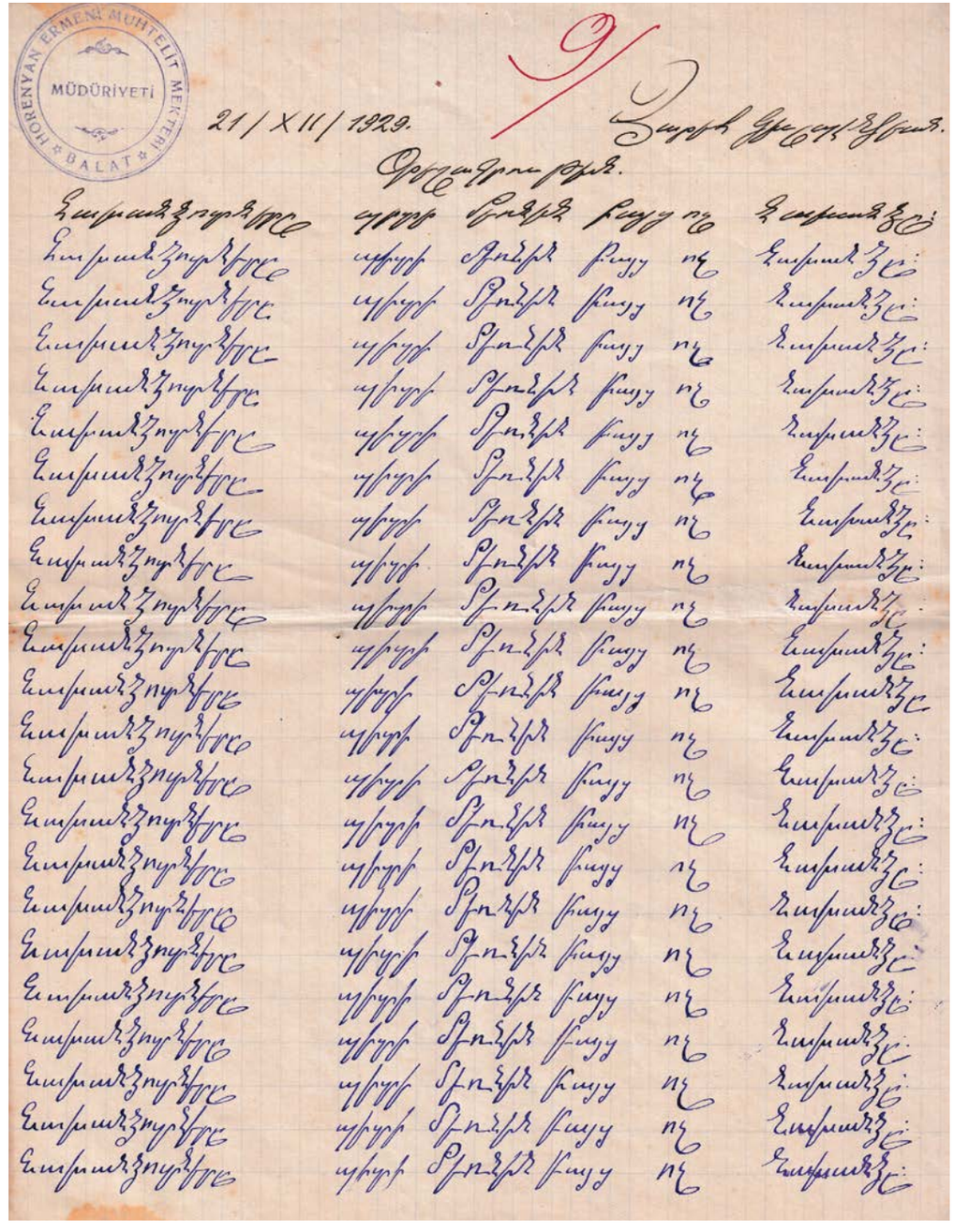
Since the Khorenyan could easily be taken for one of the many abandoned houses in this part of the city, and since the Surb Hreshdagabed Church is almost entirely concealed by a high wall, the memories they enshrine can only be 'recalled' by the inscriptions above their gates. Fortunately, curious flaneurs have another opportunity to activate the memory of Balat's lost Armenian community if they proceed to the Edirnekapı Cemetery, where the tombstones, like archival pages, have gathered and preserved the names of its members across several centuries. Armenians of all professions and social strata are buried here, from bishops and prominent cultural figures — such as famous historians and scribes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — to humble school staff. "Srbuhi Seferyan, a distinguished caretaker of the Balat Khorenyan School. Born

47 De Certeau, Michel: *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall, University of California Press, 1984 (first published in French, 1980), p. 87.

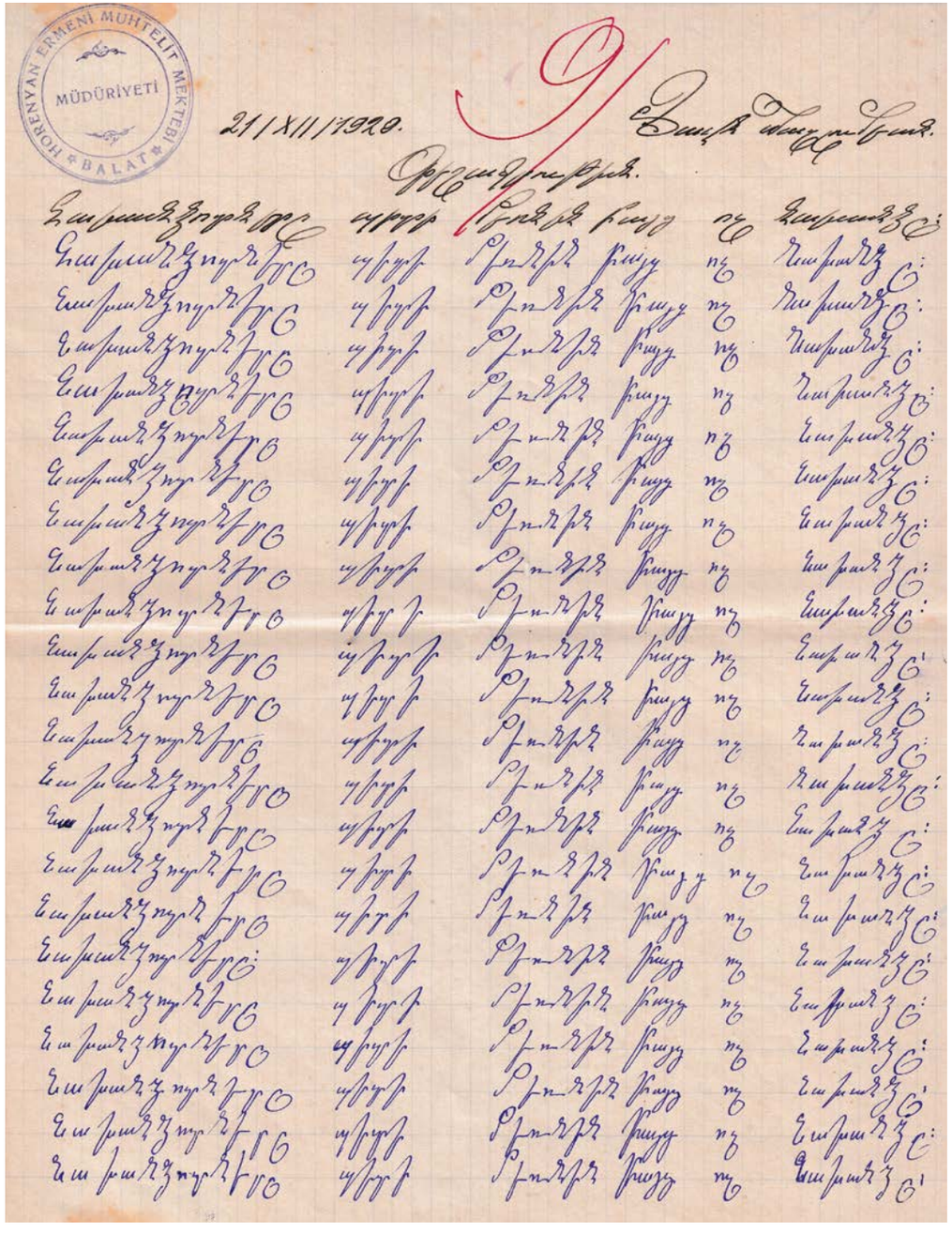
1898—died 19[…]"—inscriptions like this create the circumstances for the "art" of memory to flourish.[48]

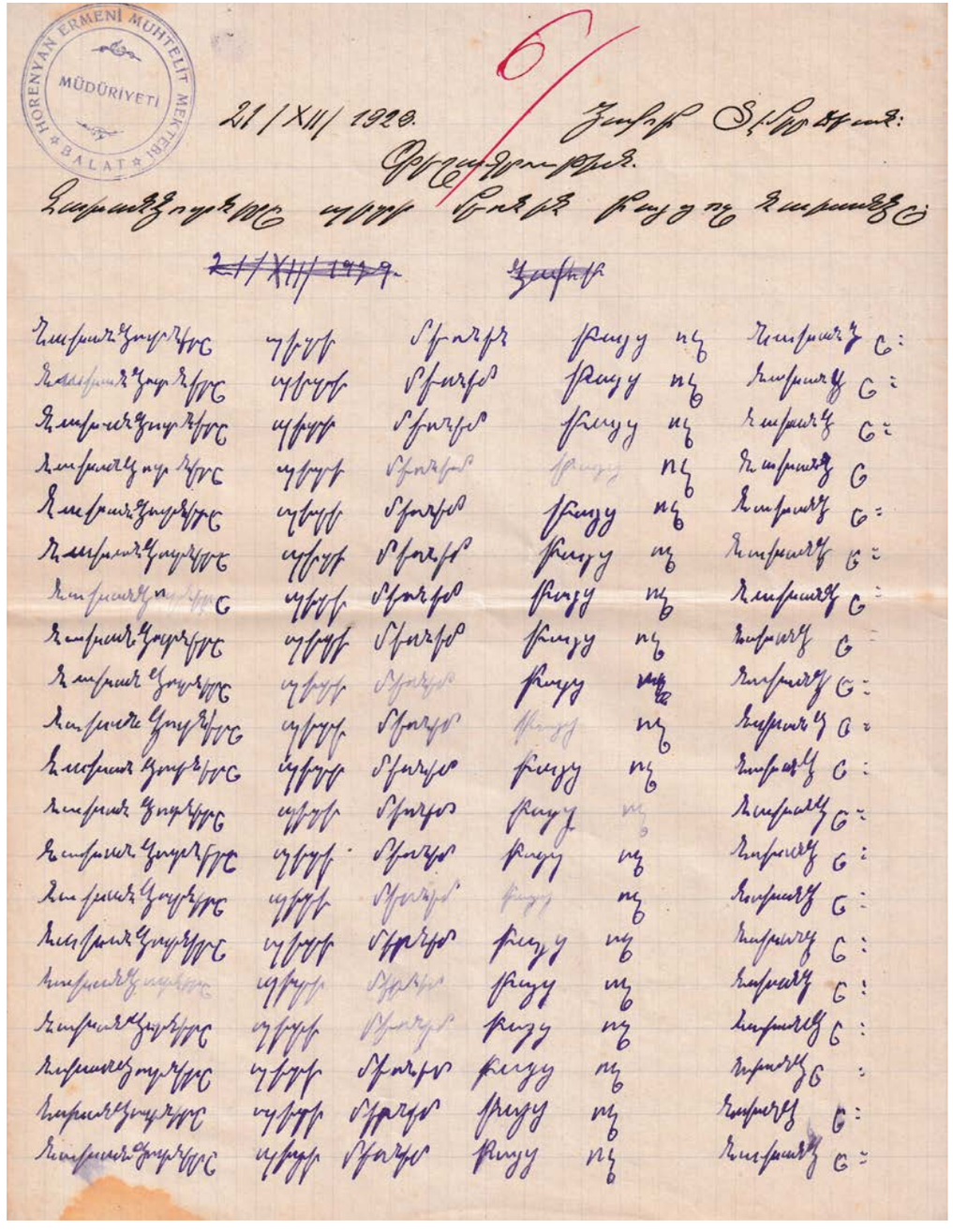
Given that the past of the Khorenyan School can only be encountered in fragile and dispersed archival traces, in snippets of testimony, or inscribed in the crumbling architecture of Balat's streets, any attempt to reconstruct a linear (let alone complete) history would be futile; rather, what is called for is an act of remembering that bridges individual shards of memory and opens up a space for multiple temporalities to coexist. This is a past defined not by continuity but by interruption and loss, and it is precisely within this layered, shifting terrain that the life of the School begins to unfold—as memory.

48 De Certeau: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 87.



→ Fig. 21–34 (pp. 53–66): A series of calligraphy exercises by students of the Khorenyan School, repeatedly transcribing the sentence "People driven by ill will eventually pass away, but ill will itself does not." Each page is individually signed by a student and includes a mark of evaluation. The documents bear the School's official Turkish stamp and are dated 21 December 1929.


HORENYAN ERMENİ MUHTELİT MEKTEBİ
MÜDÜRİYETİ
BALAT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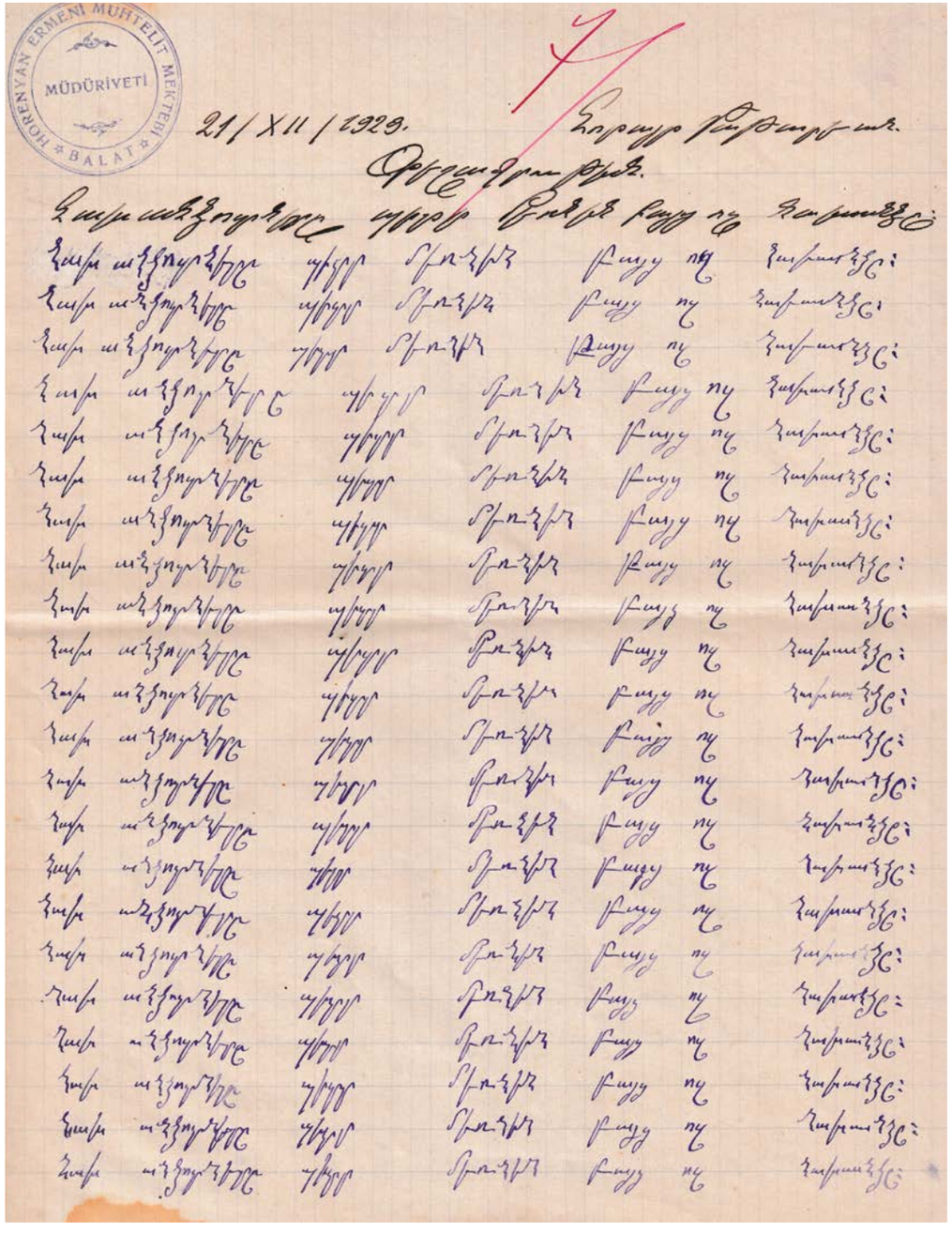
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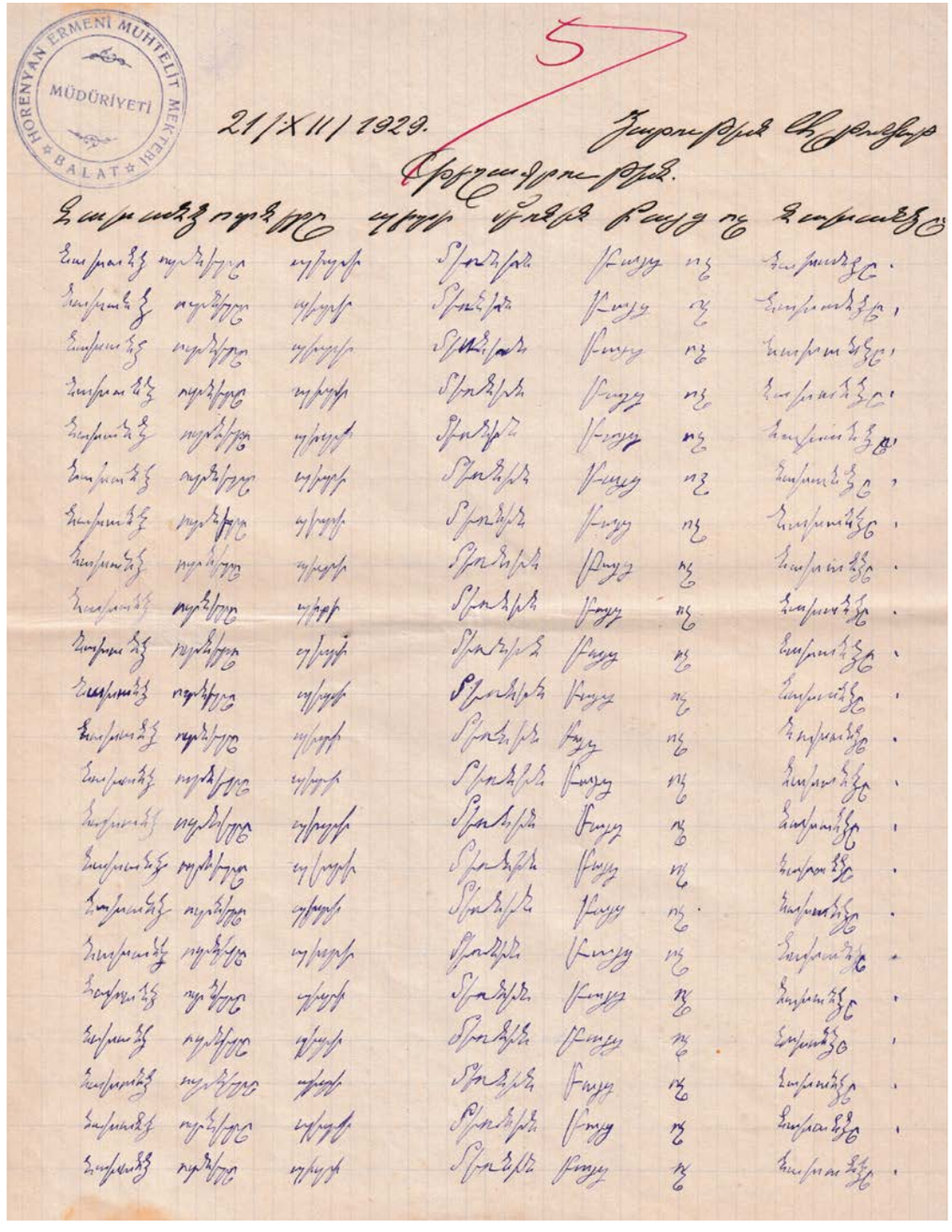
HORENYAN ERMENİ MUHTELİT MEKTEBİ
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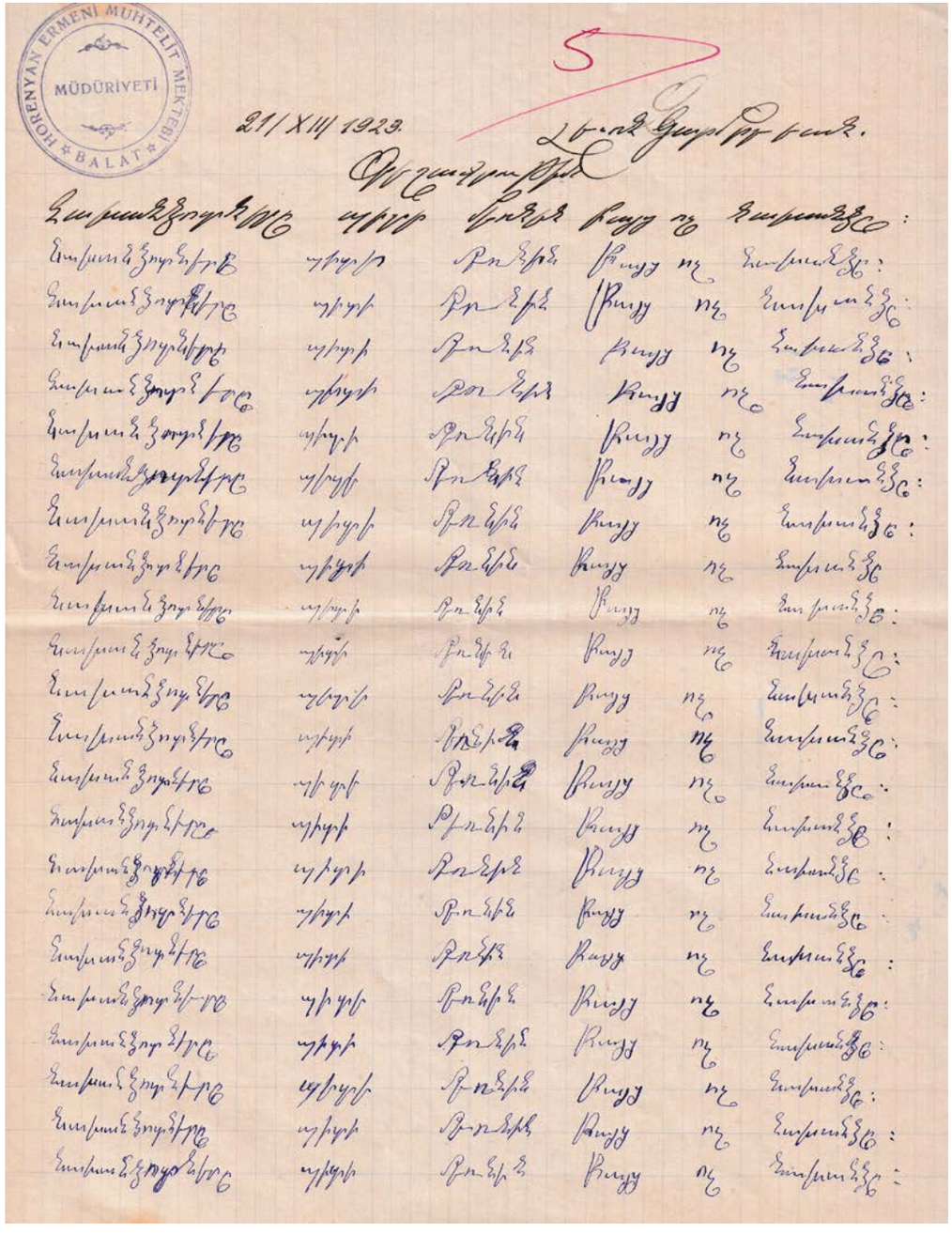
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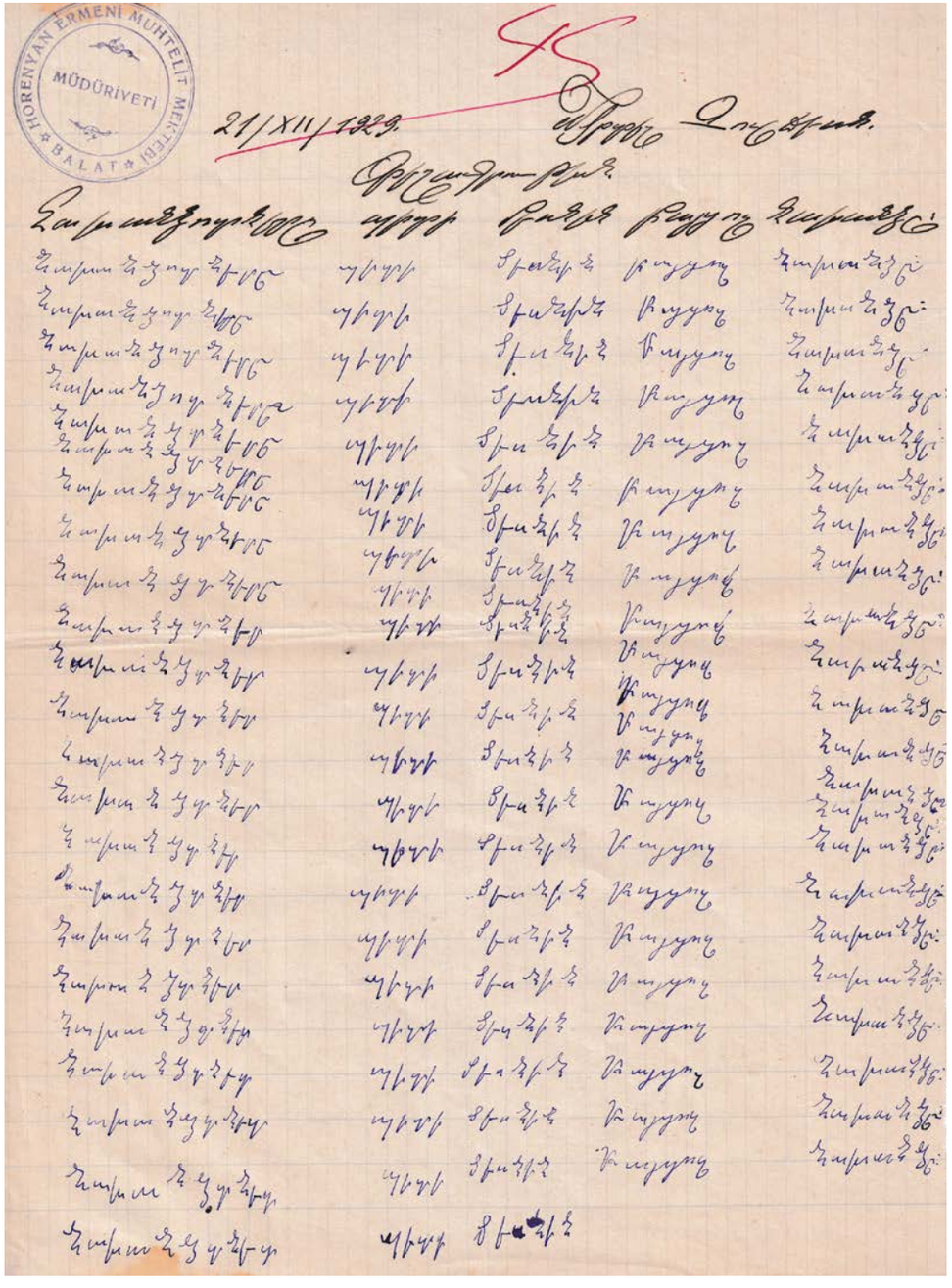
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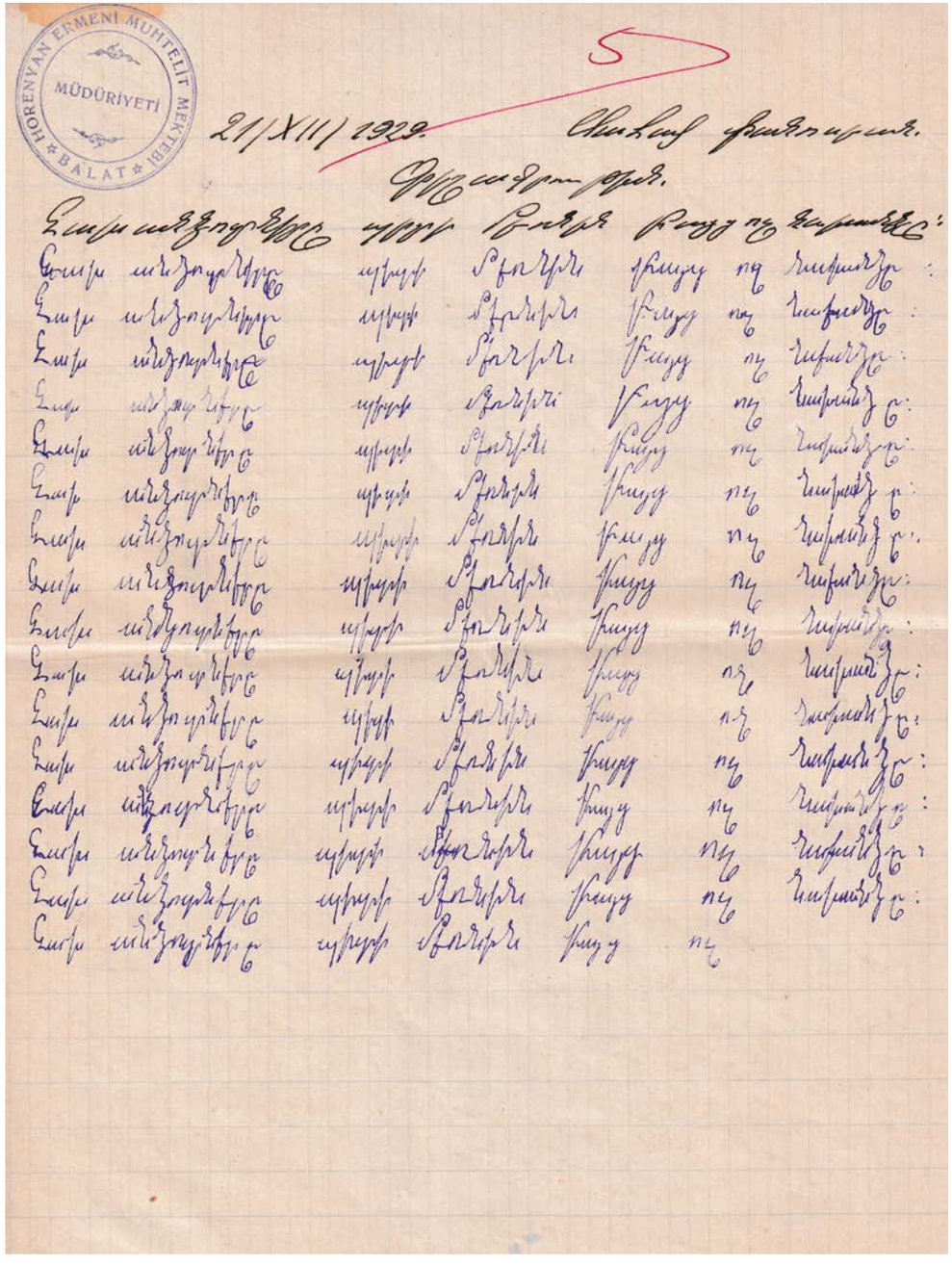
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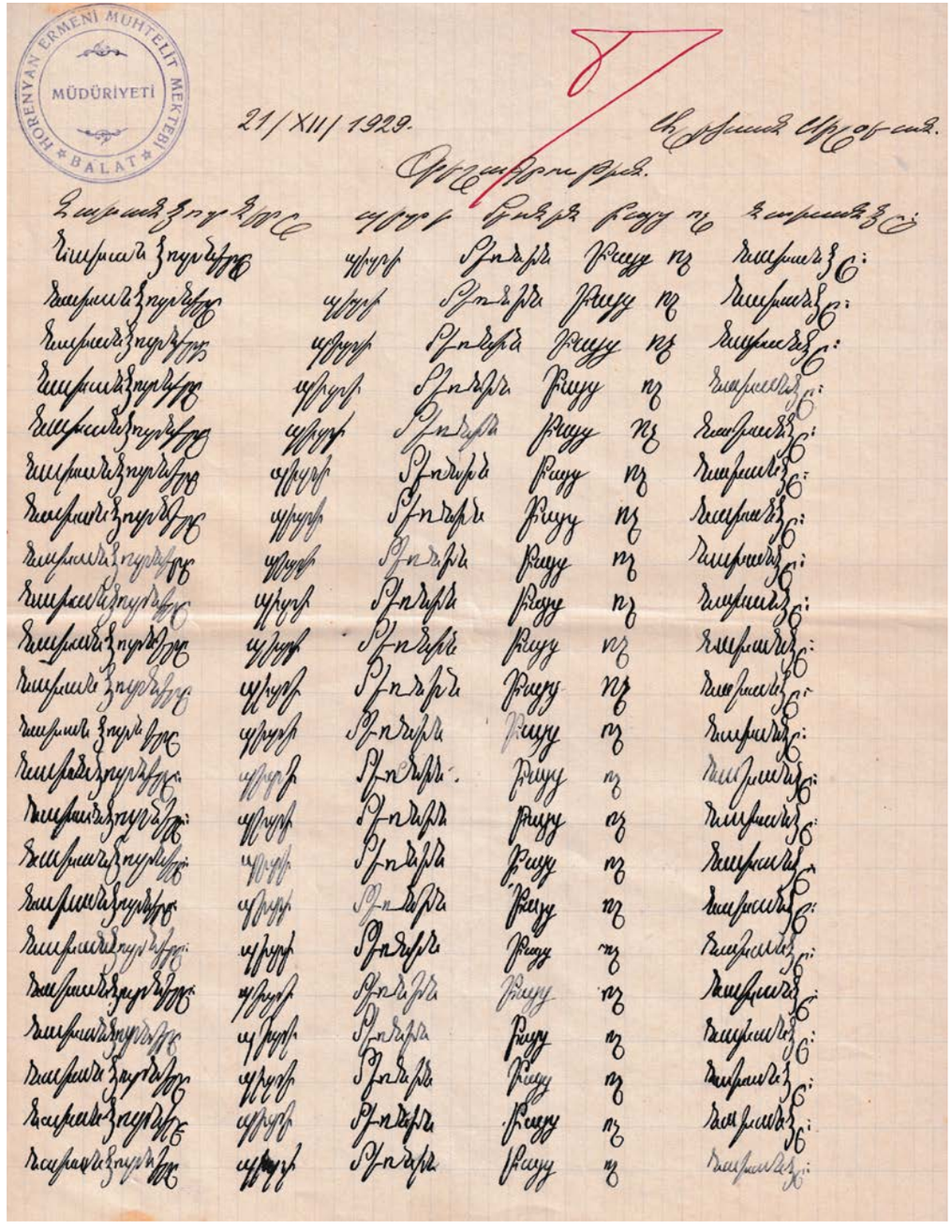
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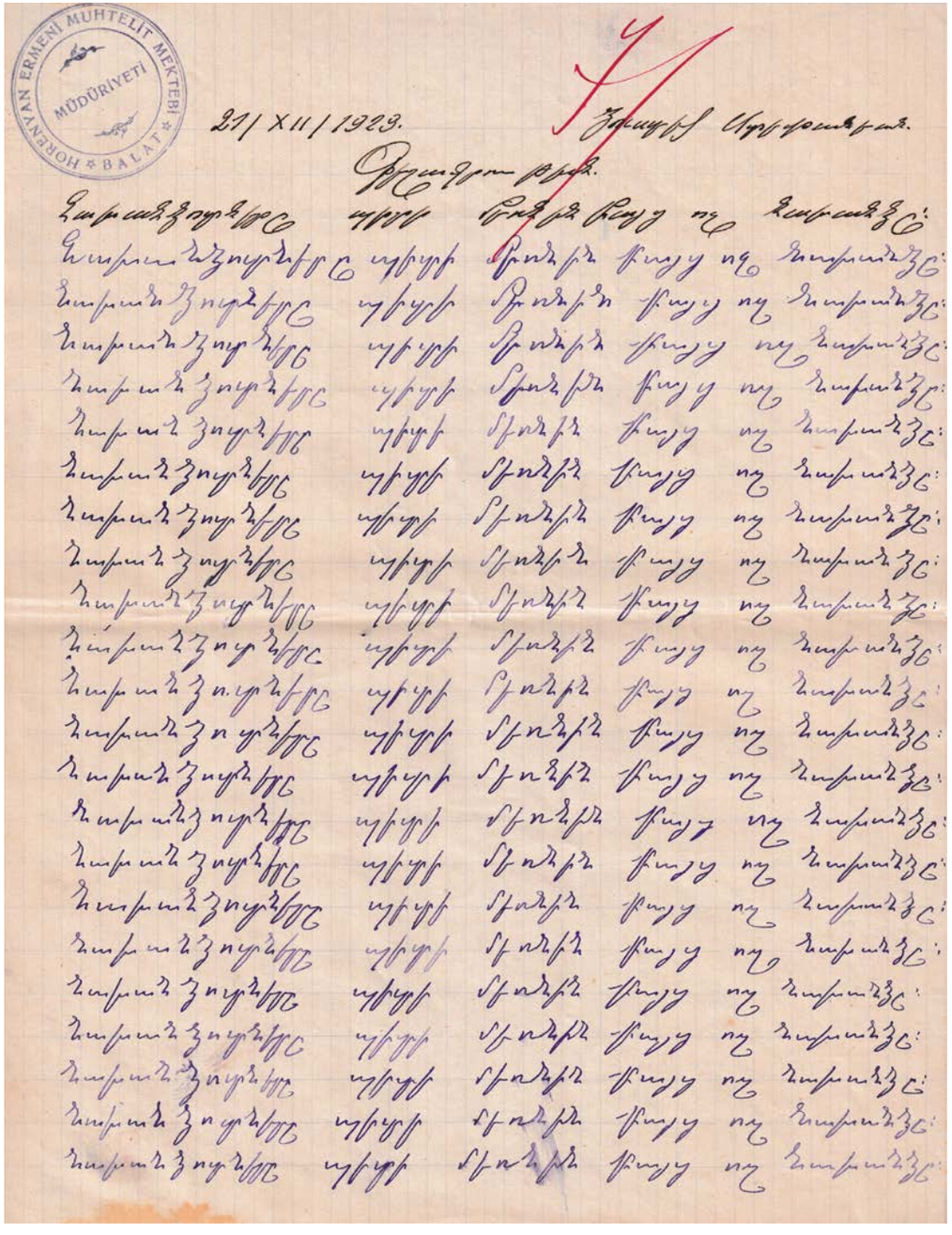
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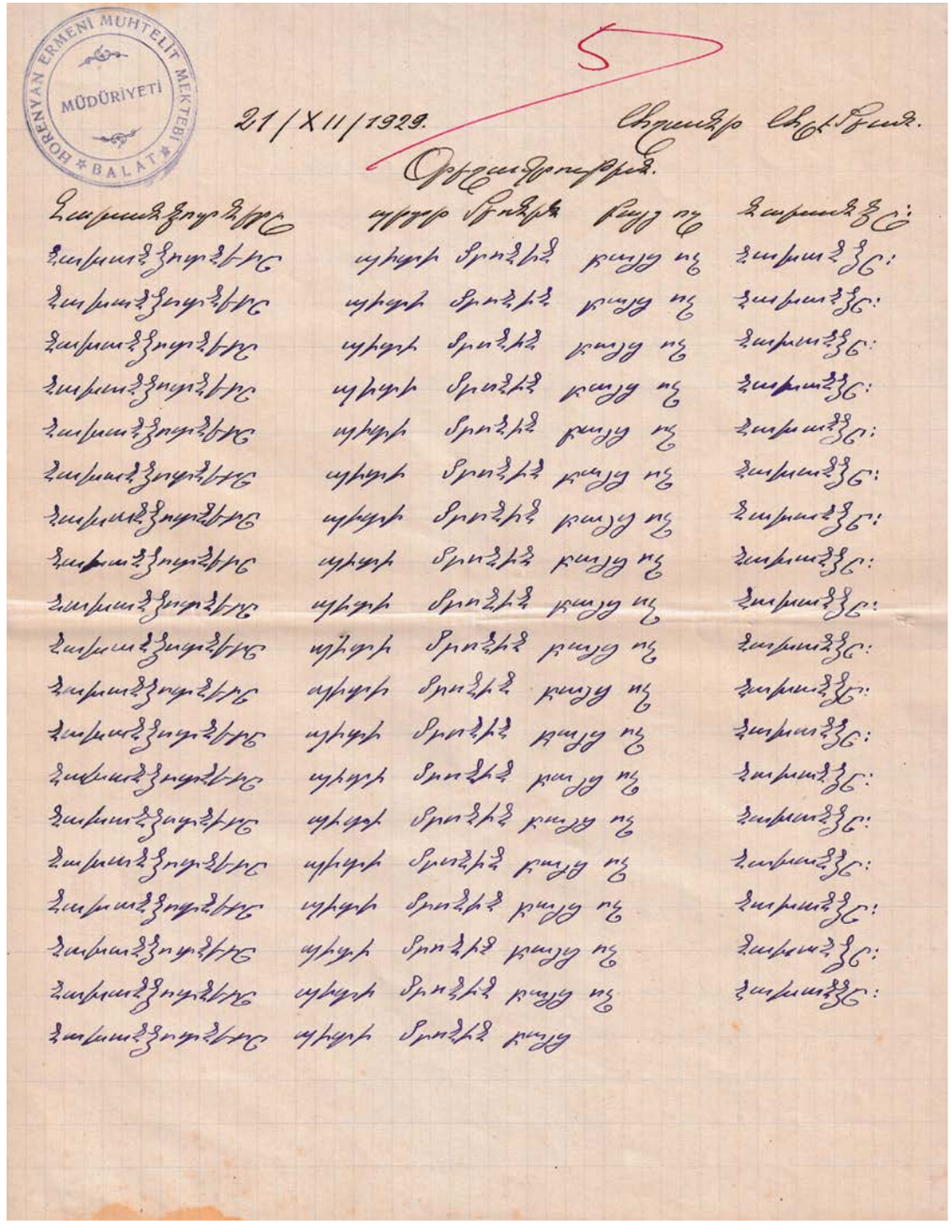
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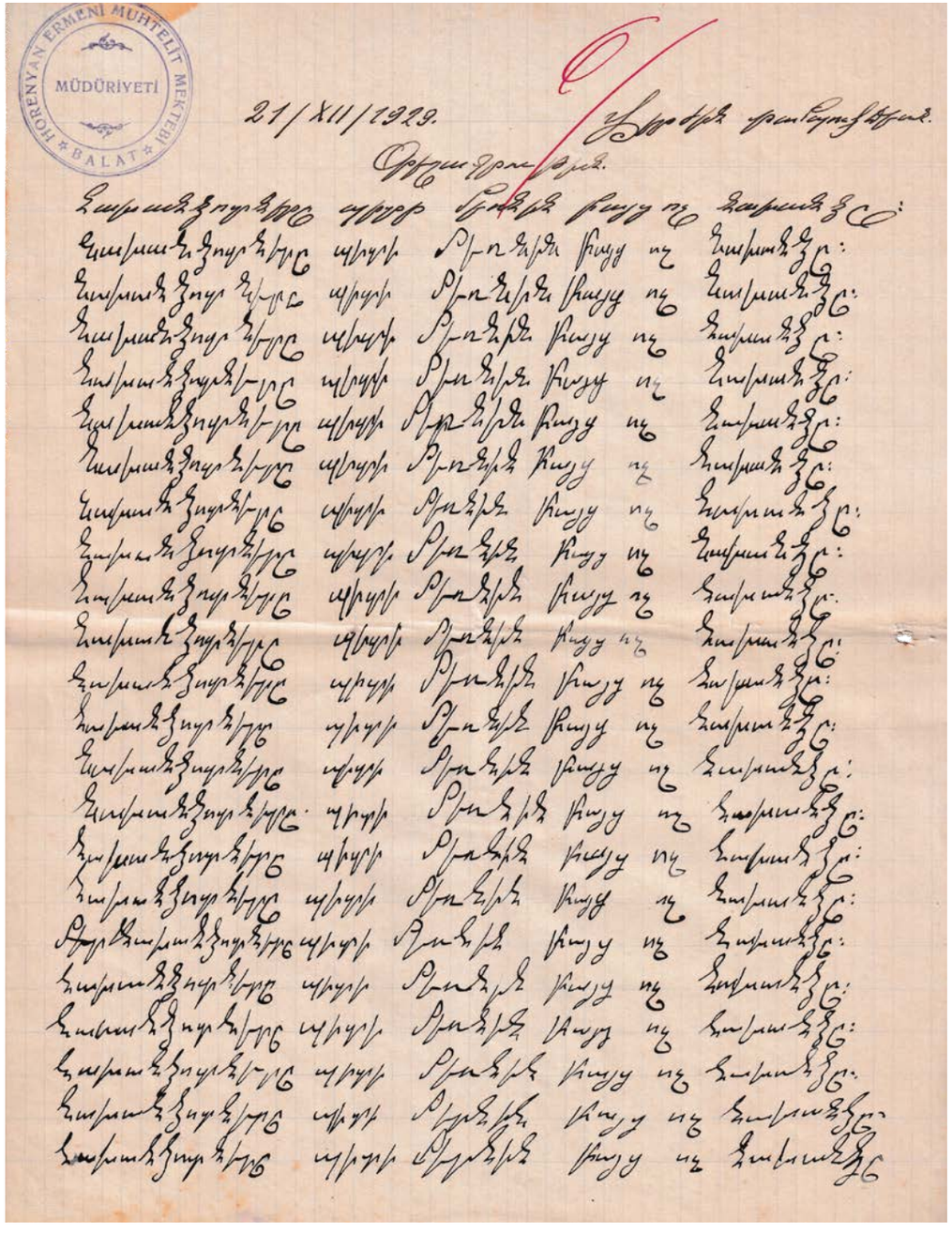
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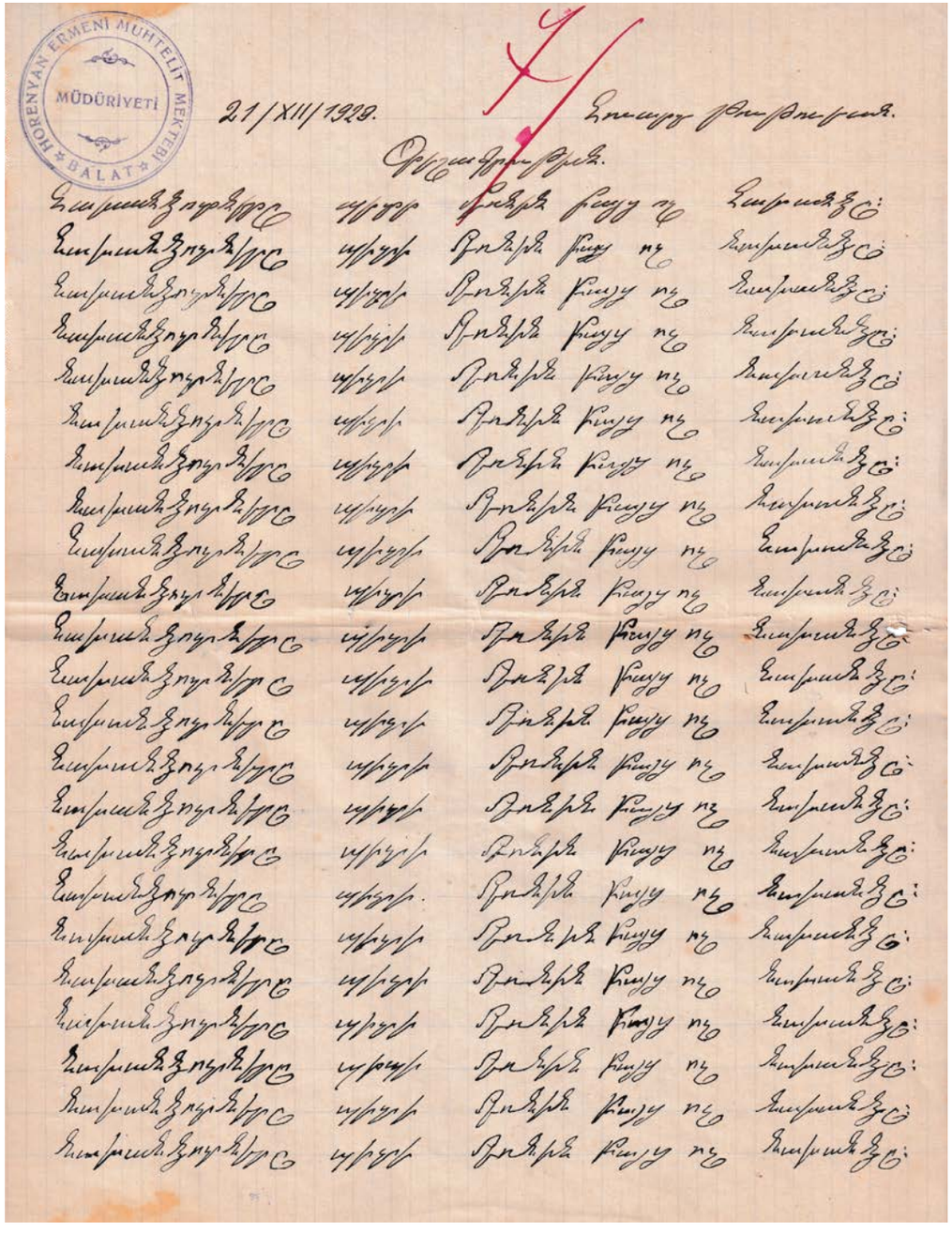
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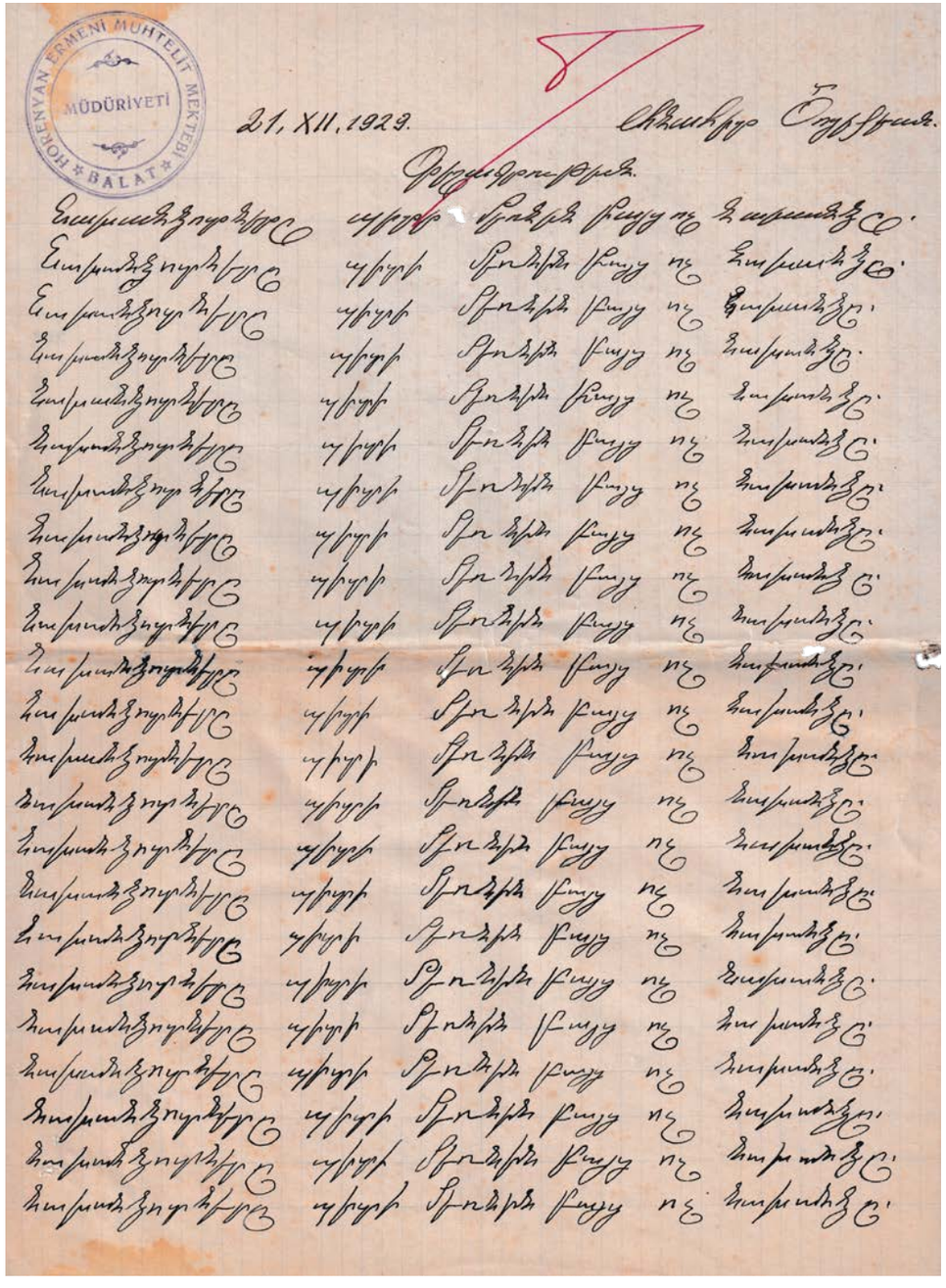


ADDRESS: KHORENYAN SCHOOL

Founded in 1866 parallel to turbulent political transformations, the Khorenyan School was a result of the gradual secularisation of education and the growing necessity to engage intellectuals in activities beyond the Church. The developments of the mid-nineteenth century led to the establishment of numerous schools in Turkey, including the Üsküdar Seminary, the Kalfayan School, the Nubar-Shahnazaryan, Kumkapı Bezjian, Galata Central, and Esayan schools, as well as the Khorenyan.[49] The second half of the nineteenth century also saw the foundation of Greek and Jewish schools—for example, the National Ioakeimeion Girls' High School of Constantinople, planned since the 1860s and opened in the early 1880s. Although the Phanar Greek Orthodox Lyceum had long existed, its new red-brick building was likewise completed at the beginning of the 1880s. Through the efforts of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, two Jewish schools were opened in Balat: a boys' school in 1875 and a girls' school in 1882. The need for local schools was primarily engendered by economic factors, as it was nearly impossible for the quarter's poor inhabitants to send their children to be educated elsewhere. The double function of school and orphanage applied not only to the Armenian institution, but also to those of other communities in the neighbourhood: descriptions of the Jewish schools noted that almost half of the pupils were orphans, while the families of the others also lived in poverty. A similar picture of deprivation emerges from archival records pertaining to the pupils of the Khorenyan School during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[50] In the landscape of the westernising city, these emerging entities introduced a new architectural language and typology, reflecting the stream of radical transformations taking place at the time.[51]

When engaging with the history of the Khorenyan School, it is crucial to consider it in conjunction with the nearby Surb Hreshdagabed Church. Education in the Armenian communities of the Ottoman Empire was primarily organised through churches. In the case of

49 Ազգային Կեդրոնական Վարժարան, *Հայ Դպրոցը. Անցեալէն դեպի այսօր*, էջ 14. [Getronagan Armenian High School, *The Armenian School: From the Past to Today*, p. 14.]

50 On the Jewish schools of Balat, see Ammour, Laurence: "Education among the Jewish Community of Balat through the archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle 1875–1911". *Bulletin* 14, 1998, pp. 15–32.

51 Kuruyazıcı, Hasan: *Armenian Architects of Istanbul in the Era of Westernization*. Hrant Dink Vakfi Yayinlari, 2010, pp. 10–11.

Balat, it was under the control of Surb Hreshdagabed, which was established in 1627/1628 in a building formerly used as a Greek church. Although the School functioned as a separate institution, it remained closely tied to Surb Hreshdagabed, collaborating with and receiving support from it in various ways.

If we go back in time beyond the '1866' chiselled into the façade of the current building, it is important to note that before the establishment of the Khorenyan School, itself dating back to the mid-eighteenth century, there was another noteworthy institution operating in the area known as the Orphanage of Balat.[52] The Khorenyan archive contains calendars and schedules, fundraising correspondence, and detailed registers of income and expenses dating from between 1815 and 1862. These materials reveal the institution's active role in the educational and communal life of Balat decades prior to 1866—clearly, the School's formal foundation was both part of the broader processes unfolding in the Empire and a natural continuation of the local community's development. The Orphanage of Balat is associated with one of the neighbourhood's most prominent scholarly figures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Brabion Notar Palateci (1750–1835),[53] who, alongside Paghtasar Dpir, Simeon Yerevantsi, Abgar Dpir, and Matheos Dpir,[54] devoted her life to writing, creating numerous priceless manuscripts while also educating the children of Balat for many years.[55] A notable female scribe, Brabion Palateci played an important part in the establishment of "the first school for girls in Constantinople", whose roots can be traced back

52 As pointed out above (see note 3), the Armenian word մանկատուն does not refer exclusively to a shelter for orphans; it literally translates as 'house of children', and indeed the institution also catered to children who came from poor families or were otherwise in need.

53 Together with her brother, Matheos Palateci, Brabion Notar Palateci was a renowned specialist in calligraphy and the transcription of both secular and ecclesiastical texts. Just like Gevorg Palateci and many other cultural and educational practitioners related to Surb Hreshdagabed, she is buried in the Edirnekapı Cemetery. See: Chookaszian, Levon: "Brabion Notar Palateci". In: *Saur Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon* 13, K. G. Saur, 1996, pp. 498–99.

54 In the Armenian Apostolic Church, *dpir* is a minor clerical rank encompassing several junior orders. Historically, the term was also used to denote a master scribe. Many *dpirs* were skilled copyists, often combining their ecclesiastical duties with teaching and literary work.

55 Զարդարեան Վահան, *Յիշատակարան. հայ երեւելիներու կենսագրութիւնները, լուսանկարները, ձեռագիրները, գրութիւնները եւլն. եւլն., 1512–1912*, Գրատուն Վահան Զարդարեան, 1910, էջ 71. [Zardarean, Vahan: *Memory Book: Biographies, Photographs, Manuscripts, Writings, etc. of Armenian Notables, 1512–1912*. Gratun Vahan Zardarean, 1910, p. 71.]

to 1816.[56] These premises, already known as 'Khorenyan', were in use until 1862, at which point they underwent a major renovation and were entirely reconstructed as a school designed to meet all official standards and requirements.[57]

On the ground floor of the building, there were two utility rooms, two large dining halls, and a deep cistern for collecting rainwater. The mezzanine level, where the School's entrances were located, contained four classrooms, two spacious hallways, as well as restrooms and storage closets. The upper floor of the Khorenyan housed, among other things, the principal's office and four additional classrooms.[58] Apart from its main entrance, the three-story building (there was also an attic) had two side doors that permitted egress into the lush gardens surrounding it.[59] The property was enclosed by a metal fence, and above the School's main double-door portal, just beyond the gates, one could discern the now weathered inscription bearing its name and date of foundation.

As we can see from archival records, the Khorenyan served as an educational centre not only for Balat, but also for the nearby neighbourhoods of Fener, Salma Tomruk, Eyüp, Lonca, Hasköy, and other districts of Istanbul. The School offered a comprehensive three-tier education—primary, middle, and high—covering subjects as diverse

56 Մելգոն-Ասատուր, *Երեքդարեան պատմութիւն Ս.Հրեշտակապետ եկեղեցւոյ Պալաթու (1627–1931)*, Կ.Ն. Մագասճեան, 1931, էջ 192–93. [Melgon-Asatur: *Three-Century History of Surb Hreshdagabed Church in Balat (1627–1931)*, K. N. Magaschean, 1931, pp. 192–93.]

57 Both official historiography and archival sources indicate that the Armenian community of the neighbourhood already maintained an active intellectual life well before the opening of the Khorenyan School in 1866. Hagop Baronian, in his *A Walk in the Quarters of Constantinople* (1880), devotes an entire chapter to Balat, noting the existence of not one but two Armenian schools, see: Baronian, Hagop: *A Walk in the Quarters of Constantinople*. Armenian Publishing Union of Tiflis, 1900. Among many other items, archival library catalogues of the Armenian church and printing house dated to the 1830s list "manuscript books", "printed books", "books in Greek and Latin", including textbooks printed in large runs. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K6D11. See also Յակոբեան Գէորգ. Պ., *Պատմութիւն հսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու*, Փարոս, 2016, էջ 370. [Hakobyan, Gevorg P.: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*. Paros, 2016, p. 370.]

58 Մելգոն-Ասատուր, *Երեքդարեան պատմութիւն Ս.Հրեշտակապետ եկեղեցւոյ Պալաթու*, էջ 192–93. [Melgon-Asatur: *Three-Century History of Surb Hreshdagabed Church in Balat*, p. 192–93.]

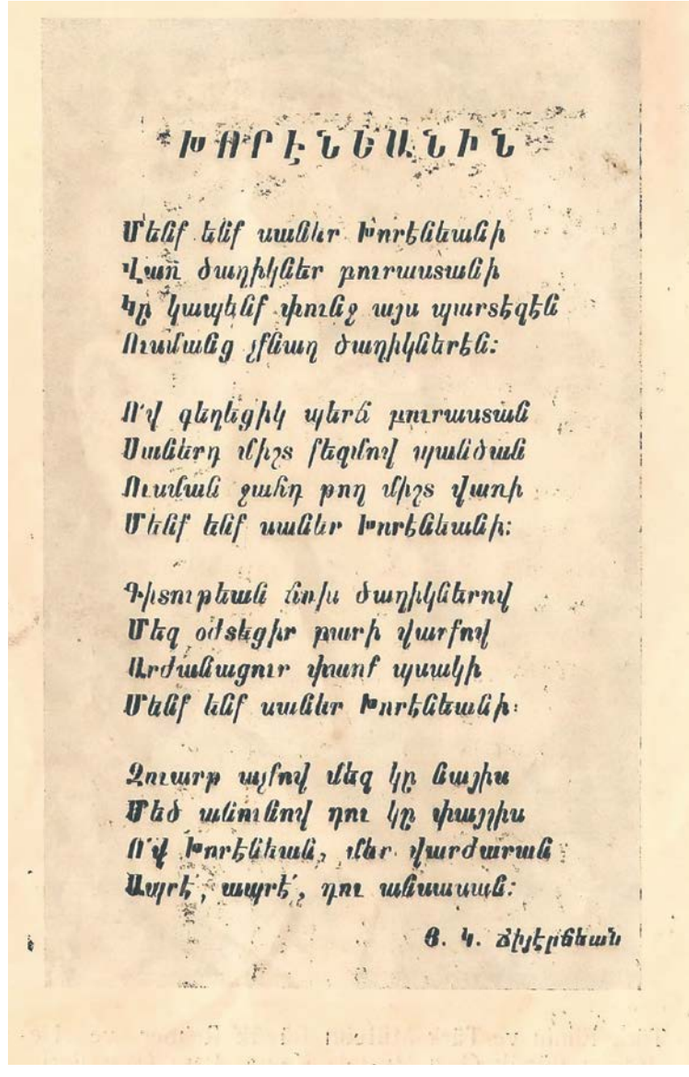
59 This description of the school can be found in Romanos Vartkes Cezveciyan's personal archive, which contains unpublished material pertaining to the Armenian Edirnekapı Cemetery, Istanbul.

as religion and ethics, Armenian language and law, French, economics, history, geography, natural sciences, drawing and calligraphy, handicrafts, music, and physical education.[60] In 1871, the Khorenyan's preschool enrolled 111 children, while the primary school had 165 students, 92 girls and 73 boys.[61] Like other Armenian educational institutions in Istanbul, the School operated according to the mandates of the National Central Administration's Educational Council under the supervision of the Patriarchate's Educational Council. The School's administration and the Balat Parish Council collaborated closely with the Armenian Patriarchate to ensure that all school-age children had access to learning, in line with the principle that "no child should be deprived of an education".[62] This joint effort

60 Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4M, OA5K5D.

61 Յակոբեան, *Պատմութիւն իսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու*, Էջ 370. [Hakobyan: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*, p. 370.]

62 Circular of the Armenian Patriarchate's Educational Council, sent to the Parish Council of Khorenyan School and Surb Hreshdagabed Church, 20 August 1909. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K6Z2B15.



→ Fig. 35: Anthem of the Khorenyan School, written by H. K. Chiyerjian.

TO KHORENYAN

We are the students of Khorenyan
Radiant flowers in the orchard
We tie bouquets from this garden
From the splendid flowers of education.

O beautiful and radiant garden,
Your students proudly bear your name,
May learning's torch forever shine,
We are the students of Khorenyan.

With learning's generous flowers,
You shaped us with care and virtue,
Leading us to the wreath of honour,
We are the students of Khorenyan.

With bright gaze you watch over us,
Your name shines clear and strong,
O our school, O Khorenyan,
Live, live, steadfast through time.

H. K. Chiyerjian

involved employing qualified teachers, supplying a sufficient number of textbooks, maintaining proper sanitary and hygienic conditions, and providing medical oversight. Throughout the Khorenyan's time of operation, one of the most pressing concerns for the Balat Parish Council remained the recruitment and remuneration of the teaching staff.

The success of the Khorenyan School depended not only on its formal administrative structures, but also on the sustained support of the broader Armenian community. The Surb Hreshdagabed Church, philanthropic foundations, and individual benefactors all played a vital role in keeping the institution stocked with food, fuel, learning materials, and other necessities.[63] Alumni often renovated the building before the start of a new academic year. Some even served as teachers themselves, establishing connections between successive generations that endured for the entirety of the school's official existence. Among the Khorenyan's former students with whom we conducted interviews in 2020 and 2024 was Garbis Khorasanjyan, who had spent nearly his whole life teaching Armenian at various schools. In a photograph featured in the *Five-Year Bulletin of the Khorenyan Co-Educational School*, 1933, Khorasanjyan's mother, Nuard Trturyan, appears alongside the director, underscoring the family's decades-long ties to the School. Khorasanjyan recollection that several local families had supplied teaching staff for generations is borne out by our field work at the Edirnekapı Cemetery.

For more than five decades following its official foundation, the School withstood countless challenges and uncertainties, adapting to shifting political and social conditions while continuing to serve the needs of its students and community.[64] Yet despite its remarkable resilience, the Khorenyan was not left unscathed by the political storm at the beginning of the twentieth century that plunged the School and the entire multi-ethnic neighbourhood into turmoil. The archival records, which up until the 1910s attest to the continuous evolution of the institution as well as to the vibrant economic, educational, and cultural life of the Armenians of Balat, suddenly become fragmented, as though unable to capture the rapidly changing reality. The looming disaster appears to have induced a sense of confusion

63 See the records of donations to the Khorenyan School and expenses in Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4M.

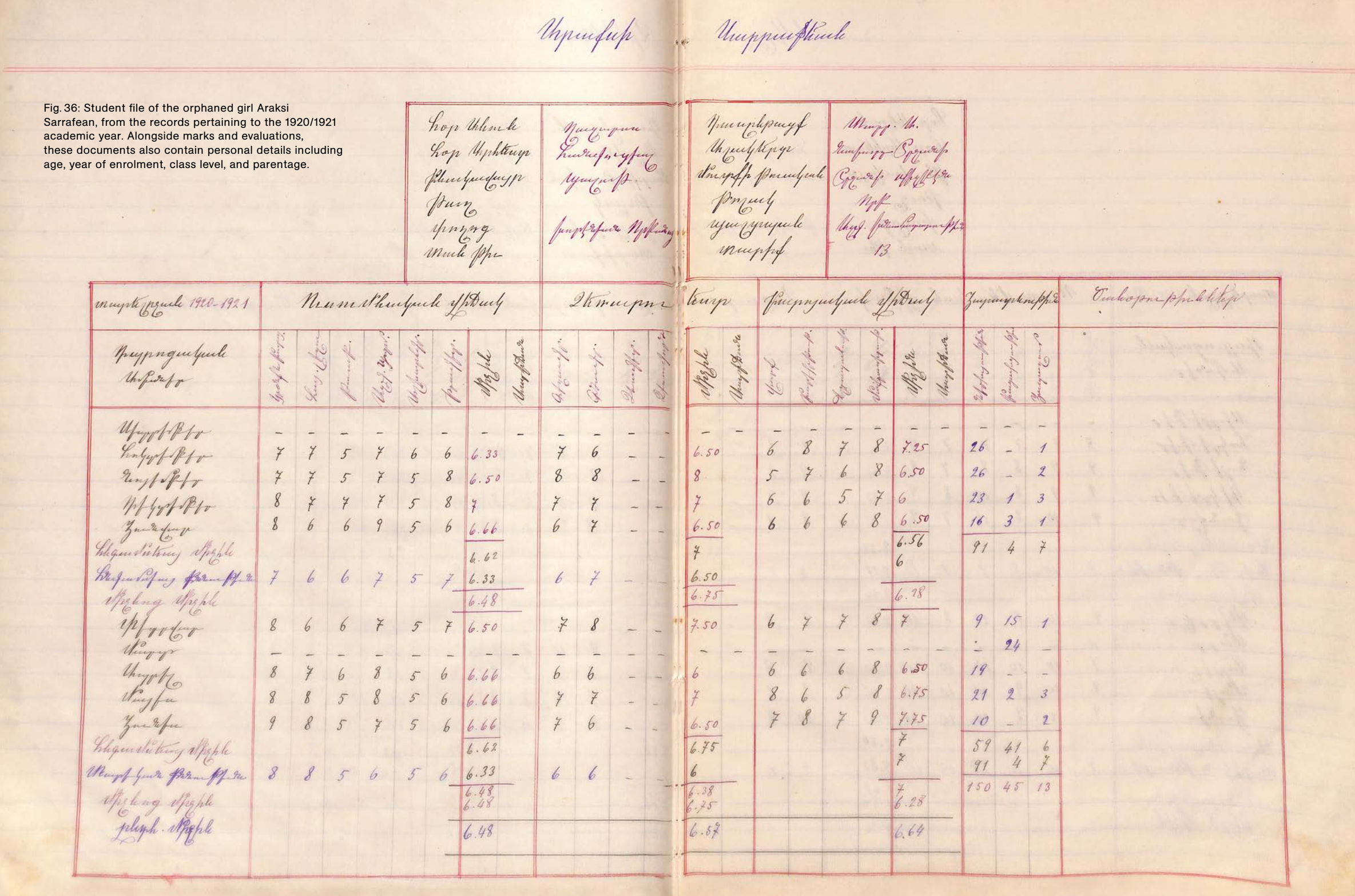
64 Letter from the Khorenyan School and the Surb Hreshdagabed Church Parish Council addressed to the Armenian Patriarchate's Educational Council, 22 May 1907. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K6Z2B07.

and paralysis within the community, a sudden dread that manifests in a deluge of desperate messages such as the following:

> It is necessary to immediately obtain the state licenses for all national schools. We urgently request that the Patriarchal Council provide us with a special list of the national schools by the upcoming Monday, June 2nd. The list should include the district, street, neighbourhood, name, and level of each school, as well as the names of the male and female teachers working there, and whether they are substitute teachers or permanent staff members. Along with this list, please send their teaching certificates in Ottoman to be presented to the Government. [...] We do not doubt that the Patriarchal Council realises the great importance and urgency of this matter, and will promptly and accurately carry out our request. Should any negligence occur, the responsibility will fall upon the Council.[65]

65 Circular from the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople with the heading "urgent", sent to the Patriarchal Council, 27 May 1914. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y01.

Fig. 36: Student file of the orphaned girl Araksi Sarrafean, from the records pertaining to the 1920/1921 academic year. Alongside marks and evaluations, these documents also contain personal details including age, year of enrolment, class level, and parentage.



ADDRESS: KHORENYAN ORPHANAGE

The Khorenyan Orphanage, officially established on the premises of the Khorenyan School in 1919, did not emerge in isolation: it was merged into, and functioned as a part of, the School itself. The building's walls, once echoing with pedagogical rhythms, now absorbed the urgency of collective survival. As communal infrastructure collapsed across the Empire in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, the Khorenyan School became something else, not by abandoning its previous function, but by intensifying it. With thousands of displaced Armenian children beginning to arrive in Constantinople, Balat became a site of refuge, a place of "maternal care" provided by the local community.[66] At first, orphans found shelter in Armenian and sometimes also in Turkish families.[67] By 1918, the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, supported by the Committee for Armenian Orphans, began to formalise this scattered solidarity, assuming the immediate responsibilities of sustenance, health, and education, and attempting to reweave a communal fabric that had been violently torn apart.

As the number of children sent to Constantinople continued to rise while many of the orphans temporarily taken in by Turkish families had to be rehoused, the Armenian Orphan Care Committee called upon Armenian families to assume responsibility for children who had found refuge in the city's orphanages so that the new arrivals could be accommodated.[68] Yet the situation soon escalated to a point where it became impossible to help all the children affected. It was against the backdrop of this acute crisis that the Khorenyan School declared its readiness to take in orphans while continuing its educational activities, to which the Central Administration of National Welfare responded as follows:

> We are glad to hear of your willingness to dedicate the Balat neighbourhood's school to sheltering the growing number of orphans. [...] We kindly ask that immediate measures be taken to make the building ready for use as soon as possible.[69]

66 Amiryan: "Container of the uncontainable: notes on Balat's spatial memory", pp. 18–67.

67 Letter from the Armenian Orphan Care Committee to the Balat Orphanage, 10 February 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B234.

68 Circular instruction from the Armenian Orphan Care Committee, 2 April 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B229.

69 Letter from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Balat Orphan Care Committee, 31 May 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1B135.

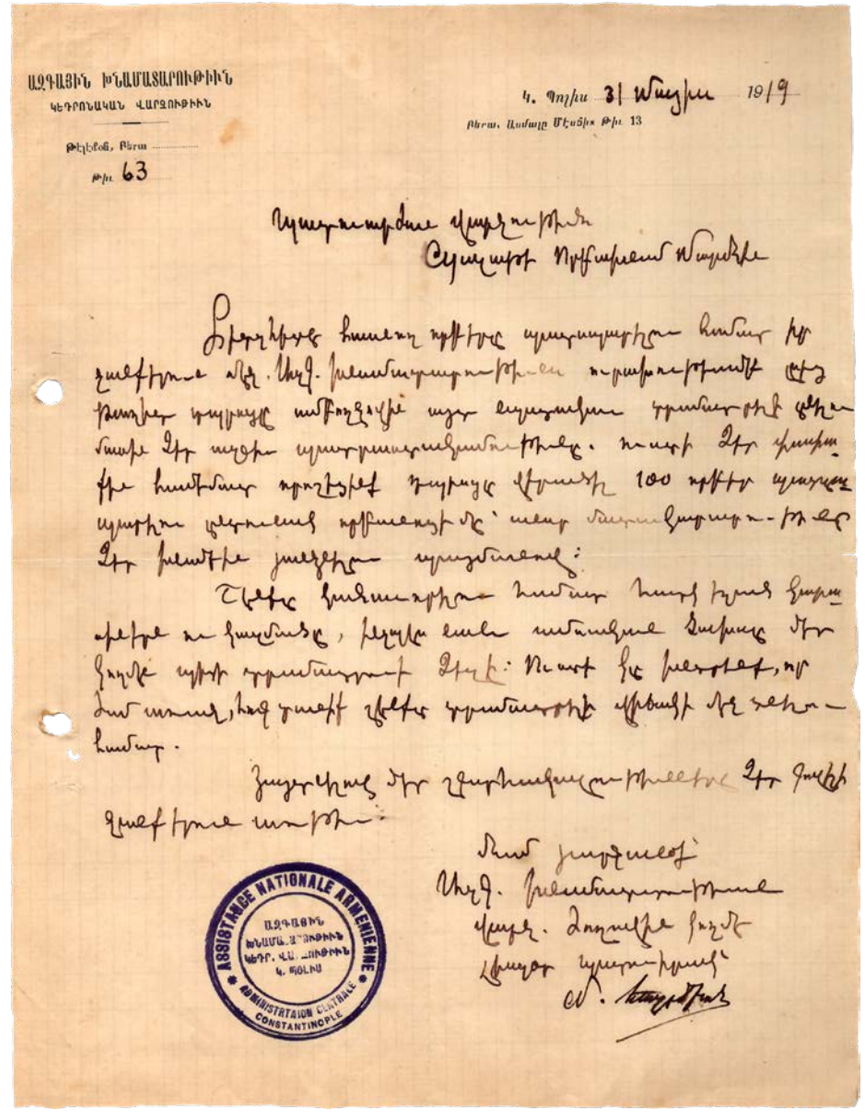


Fig. 37: Letter from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Balat Orphan Care Committee requesting to convert the Khorenyan School into an orphanage capable of receiving an initial hundred children, 31 May 1919.

By 1919, the streets of Balat, once full of the hustle and bustle of multi-ethnic coexistence, were brimming with violently orphaned children. On 20 August 1919, the Khorenyan Orphanage was officially opened in the presence of the Armenian Patriarch, Archbishop Zaven I Der Yeghiayan,[70] triggering an immediate and overwhelming response from the community. The Khorenyan archive for 1919 contains more than 60 letters requesting aid, shelter, and admission, many of which with long lists of names attached.[71] Almost over night, the Khorenyan became a new home to 176 children from among the thousands orphaned as a result of the Armenian Genocide.[72]

Can a place or an institution hold a memory? Opening its doors to orphans, the Khorenyan School certainly remembered and reinhabited the role it had played as a space of refuge during the nineteenth century in a metamorphosis that was also reflected in the way the institution began to document itself. The intensity of the moment found its way into the archives: internal records reveal a momentous shift, not only regarding the number of children, but also the form of their enrolment. Alongside the usual lists of pupils, student files containing personal details begin to surface.[73] And ever more frequently, the column stating the occupation of the child's father was filled with a single word: 'deceased'.

According to archival material from 1919, orphaned children were allowed to participate in the School's educational activities, resulting in a significant increase in the number of students, which reached around 350.[74] Teaching so many children quickly became a challenge. Due to the limited space and staff available, the School struggled to

70 Invitation from Armenian Orphan Care Committee for the opening of the Khorenyan Orphanage, 20 August 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B001.

71 Correspondence between individuals, community representatives and the Khorenyan administration, 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1.

72 Պօղոսեան Եփրեմ Հ., *Պատմութիւն Հայ Մշակութային Ընկերութիւններու,* Մխիթարեան տպարան, 1957, էջ 500–51. [Poghossian, Ephrem H.: *History of Armenian Cultural Associations*. Mekhitarist Publishing House, 1957, pp. 500–51.]

73 Circular from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Balat Orphanage, instructing that printed identity forms be completed for each orphan, recording not only name and age but also losses suffered during deportation, physical characteristics, and distinguishing marks; to be updated each time an orphan enrols or leaves the Orphanage, and, if possible, accompanied by individual or group photographs, 2 August 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1B135.

74 Յակոբեան, *Պատմութիւն իսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու*, էջ 374. [Hakobyan: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*, p. 374.]

enrol all orphans in regular classes. Letters from the archives indicate that pupils attended lessons in shifts, with some in the classroom and others waiting outside.[75] Further records testify to the fact that the policy of granting orphans equal access to the School's educational programme placed an enormous strain on the institution's financial resources, to the extent that non-orphans could only receive a curtailed education as a "cost-saving measure".[76] At the same time, erasing the distinction between school and orphanage carried significant symbolic value: in the most difficult of times, the Khorenyan did its utmost to offer care and protection for Armenian children even if it brought the institution itself to the brink of collapse.[77]

The Orphan Care Committee of Balat, operating under the guidance of the Central Administration of National Welfare, was tasked with managing all matters related to supplies, healthcare, and organisation. The records are filled with questions that underscore the magnitude of the problems with which it had to contend:

> What kinds of diseases have been recorded among the orphans so far? How many have been sent for treatment, and where? How many have recovered, and how many have passed away? How many classrooms are there in the Orphanage? Which subjects and fields of study are included in the curriculum? How many hours per day are allocated to studies? Please provide information regarding the craft classes and workshops. Aside from the crafts, do the orphans participate in internal duties? What is the relationship between the staff and the orphans? How is the emotional well-being of the orphans? How many orphans have absconded from the Orphanage so far?[78]

75 Letters from Balat Orphanage director Kalipso Khostikian to the Balat Parish Council, describing the difficulties of including all orphans in regular classes and the decision to organise lessons in shifts, 1920–1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1.

76 Letter no. 653 from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Board of Trustees of the Balat Orphanage, 30 September 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1B055.

77 Archival accounting records from 1919 to 1923 reveal intensified negotiations and concerns over the School's maintenance, extending beyond the salaries of teachers and staff, or the provision of textbooks and other educational supplies. They also document an urgent need for basic necessities such as food, clothing, fuel, and even repairs to the building itself. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2.

78 Letter from the Central Administration of National Welfare addressed to the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, 28 August 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B036.

The day-to-day operation of the Khorenyan Orphanage was supported by various donors, including the Central Administration of National Welfare (textbooks), the Central Storehouse of National Welfare and the National Financial Commission (food), the Artisans' Union of National Welfare and the Sbor Club (clothing and linen), the American Relief Committee of Ortaköy (cocoa), the Nestlé factory (dairy products), and others.[79] The National Hospital, the Red Cross Hospital, and the Surp Pırgiç Armenian Hospital also played a crucial role by providing medical care to orphans who had experienced severe hardship. Between 1919 and 1922, in addition to treating acute illnesses and injuries, these institutions recorded the condition of each child upon entry and departure.[80] Especially during epidemic outbreaks, they operated under extreme pressure, strictly monitoring the sanitary conditions at the Orphanage,[81] restricting the children's contact with the outside world,[82] and even providing necessary medical care on site.[83]

The existing records contain several frequently recurring names: Azniv, Armenouhi, Vergine and others. These are the names of the women who managed the Orphanage's internal affairs. While much of the preserved material focuses on administration and logistics, a few scattered documents offer a fragmented yet vivid glimpse at the institution's inner life. This small group of women collectively carried

79 In the archival correspondence, the Sbor club appears frequently; it was founded in 1918 by alumni of the Khorenyan School. The club operated under the name of a gymnastics club while also actively engaging in cultural activities, including organising theatrical performances and various charitable initiatives for the benefit of the Khorenyan Orphanage. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B289, OA5K5Y0B290, OA5K5Y0B291.

80 Correspondence between the Balat Parish Council and the Khorenyan Orphanage regarding regular updates on the condition and well-being of orphans, 1919–1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0.

81 Letter no. 1098 from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Khorenyan Orphanage, instructing that, given the danger of epidemics and the spread of contagious diseases such as scabies and favus, cleanliness must be strictly supervised, 24 October 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1B050.

82 Letter no. 1276 from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Khorenyan Orphanage, instructing the administration to take all possible precautions against outbreaks of smallpox, plague, cholera, and typhoid, to ensure vaccination of orphans by the Orphanage's physician, to limit outside contact, and to prohibit visits to the Orphanage, 11 October 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1B029.

83 Letter no. 1468 from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Khorenyan Orphanage, stating that the National Hospital and the Red Cross Hospital can provide necessary medical care within the Orphanage, 25 November 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y1B022.

the responsibility for tending to the manifold needs of children who had lost not only their parents, but often their entire families. According to an archived letter, their duties as employees were as follows:

> Overseeing supplies, food preparation, meal distribution, maintaining cleanliness in the Orphanage (including beds and linen), washing and mending children's clothing and linen, implementing measures for making new garments and linen, and taking immediate action to ensure that no orphan is left unclothed.[84]

Mrs Azniv cared for sick children, Mrs Armenouhi oversaw the making of the orphans' beds each morning, maintained discipline, and ensured compliance with the class schedule, while Miss Vergine managed the cloak room, oversaw supplies, and supervised the children until bedtime. The daily routines of these women, recorded in archival documents, underscore the dire poverty of Balat during the crisis and the shortage of resources at the Orphanage. It was only through tremendous personal efforts and unwavering dedication that these problems could be addressed.

Even though the Khorenyan's corridors were still filled with children's voices, they were now of a different kind than before, many speaking from the abyss of trauma. The inscription above its entrance remained the same, yet the institution's essence had changed. It had assumed a deeper responsibility that went beyond imbuing pupils with literacy and discipline: its new task was to prepare scarred and uprooted children for survival beyond the shelter of the Orphanage. Since the average age of admission was ten, both boys and girls were expected to complete their education by the age of fifteen.[85] As one letter noted:

> At that age, they must step out into the world; otherwise, learning a craft will become very difficult. Preparing for life is far more essential and wise; anything else would be murderous.[86]

84 Letter from the Balat Orphan Care Committee to the Khorenyan Orphanage, 15 March 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B017.

85 Regulations reflected in the correspondence between the Khorenyan Orphanage and the Central Administration of National Welfare, 1919–1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2.

86 Letter from the teachers of the Khorenyan to the chairman of the Orphanage, Mr. Telemak Kazanjian, 13 September 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B087.

In order to reach that goal, the School integrated crafts into the curriculum. At the request of three students, physical education was also added.[87] Caretakers made efforts to ensure that the "children's free time was spent meaningfully",[88] often by sending them to workshops outside the Orphanage where they acquired practical skills and earned small incomes, part of which went towards transportation costs accrued in the process.[89] There was a lively exchange with other institutions, with regular invitations to public events, performances,[90] and exhibitions.[91] Teachers and senior girls were offered opportunities to attend external activities and training courses.[92]

Archival records reveal that even in 1919, a particularly difficult time for both the Armenians and Balat as a whole, local communities did all they could to sustain the intercultural and intercommunal life of the neighbourhood, an effort in which the children also took part. Evidence of this includes the invitations received by the Khorenyan administration from the Zionist sports club to participate in competitions,[93] as well as an invitation to attend the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the National Jewish School in Balat.[94] These letters from Jewish organisations, along with numerous receipts, business cards, and other items exchanged with the Greek community, demonstrate

87 Letter from Khorenyan Orphanage students Harutyun, Michael, and Poghos to the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B220.

88 Letter from Sister Aveduhi and Mrs Klee Hastings from Near East Relief to the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, 1 September 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0243.

89 Letter from the Central Administration of National Welfare to the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, 21 August 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0323.

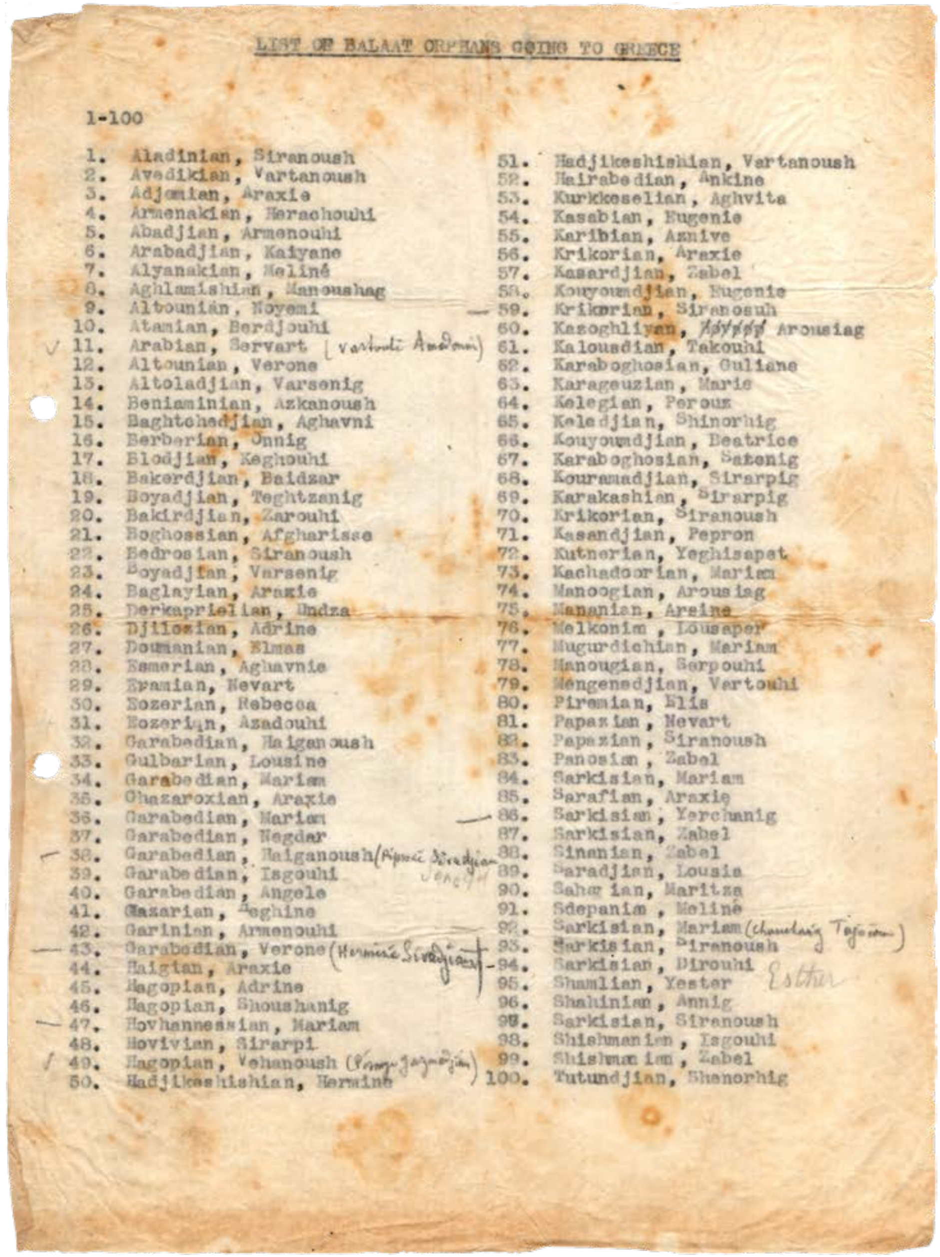
90 Letter from the Goghtan Young Women's Union to the Khorenyan Orphanage, inviting the orphans of Balat to a performance, 4 April 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B154.

91 Invitation from the Scout Committee of the Armenian General Union of Physical Education to the Balat Orphanage for an exhibition to be held within a camp, 5 September 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0269.

92 Invitations from Young Women's Christian Association to the Balat Orphanage, informing about a physical training and games course for interested teachers, 1 December 1921. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0279.

93 Invitation letter from the Maccabi Zionist Gymnastics Association, 15 December 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B210.

94 Invitation letter from the Balat Jewish School Construction Committee, 8 September 1919. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y0B287.

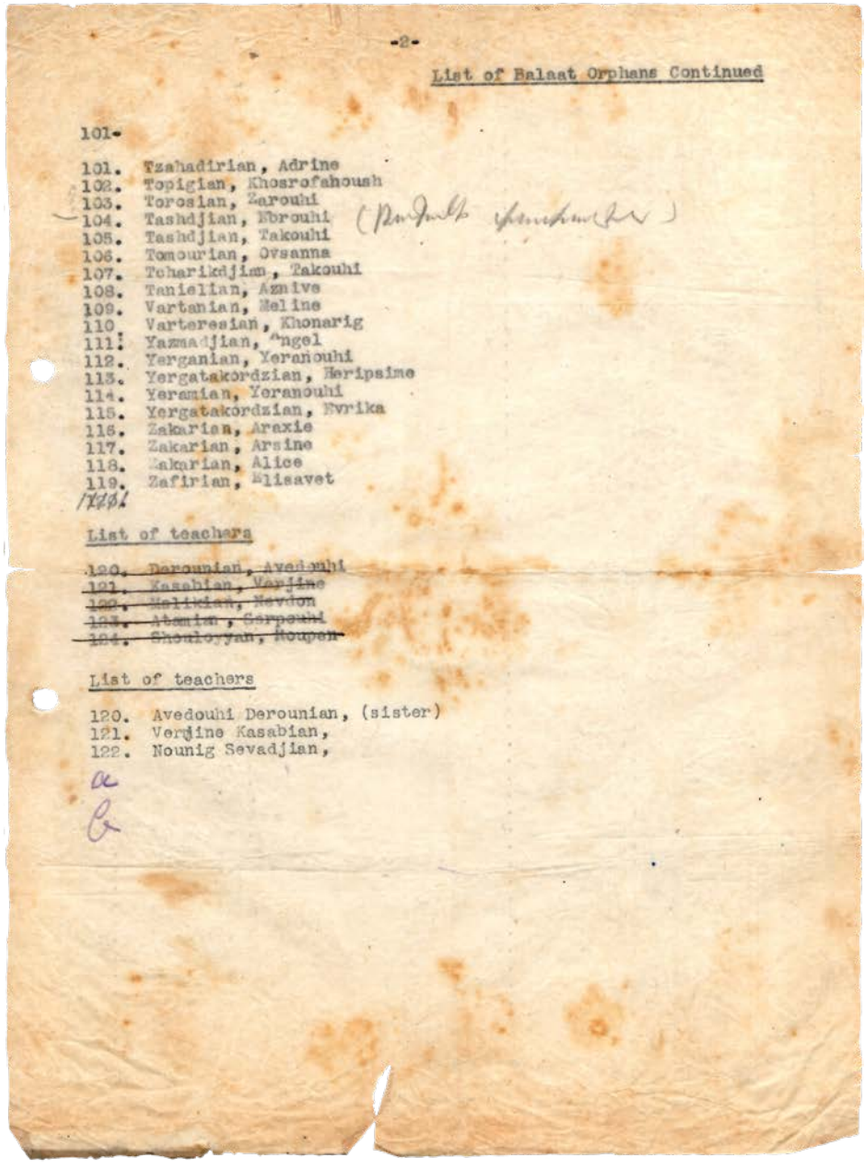


LIST OF BALAAT ORPHANS GOING TO GREECE

1-100

1. Aladinian, Siranoush
2. Avedikian, Vartanoush
3. Adjemian, Araxie
4. Armenakian, Herachouhi
5. Abadjian, Armenouhi
6. Arabadjian, Kaiyane
7. Alyanakian, Meliné
8. Aghlamishian, Manoushag
9. Altounian, Noyemi
10. Atamian, Berdjouhi
11. Arabian, Servart
12. Altounian, Verone
13. Altoladjian, Varsenig
14. Beniaminian, Azkanoush
15. Baghtchedjian, Aghavni
16. Berberian, Onnig
17. Blodjian, Keghouhi
18. Bakerdjian, Baidzar
19. Boyadjian, Teghtzanig
20. Bakirdjian, Zarouhi
21. Boghossian, Afgharisse
22. Bedrosian, Siranoush
23. Boyadjian, Varsenig
24. Baglayian, Araxie
25. Derkaprielian, Undza
26. Djiliozian, Adrine
27. Doumanian, Elmas
28. Esmerian, Aghavnie
29. Eramian, Nevart
30. Eozerian, Rebecca
31. Eozerian, Azadouhi
32. Garabedian, Haiganoush
33. Gulbarian, Lousine
34. Garabedian, Mariam
35. Ghazaroxian, Araxie
36. Garabedian, Mariam
37. Garabedian, Negdar
38. Garabedian, Haiganoush
39. Garabedian, Isgouhi
40. Garabedian, Angele
41. Gazarian, Aeghine
42. Garinian, Armenouhi
43. Garabedian, Verone
44. Haigian, Araxie
45. Hagopian, Adrine
46. Hagopian, Shoushanig
47. Hovhannessian, Mariam
48. Hovivian, Sirarpi
49. Hagopian, Vehanoush
50. Hadjikeshishian, Hermine
51. Hadjikeshishian, Vartanoush
52. Hairabedian, Ankine
53. Kurkkoselian, Aghvita
54. Kasabian, Eugenie
55. Karibian, Aznive
56. Krikorian, Araxie
57. Kasardjian, Zabel
58. Kouyoumdjian, Eugenie
59. Krikorian, Siranosuh
60. Kazoghliyan, Arousiag
61. Kalousdian, Takouhi
62. Karaboghosian, Guliane
63. Karageuzian, Marie
64. Kelegian, Perouz
65. Keledjian, Shinorhig
66. Kouyoumdjian, Beatrice
67. Karaboghosian, Satenig
68. Kouramadjian, Sirarpig
69. Karakashian, Sirarpig
70. Krikorian, Siranoush
71. Kasandjian, Pepron
72. Kutnerian, Yeghisapet
73. Kachadoorian, Mariam
74. Manoogian, Arousiag
75. Mananian, Arsine
76. Melkonim, Lousaper
77. Mugurdichian, Mariam
78. Manougian, Serpouhi
79. Mengenedjian, Vertouhi
80. Piremian, Elis
81. Papaxian, Nevart
82. Papazian, Siranoush
83. Panosian, Zabel
84. Sarkisian, Mariam
85. Sarafian, Araxie
86. Sarkisian, Yerchanig
87. Sarkisian, Zabel
88. Sinanian, Zabel
89. Saradjian, Lousia
90. Saharian, Maritza
91. Sdepanim, Meliné
92. Sarkisian, Mariam
93. Sarkisian, Siranoush
94. Sarkisian, Dirouhi
95. Shamlian, Yester
96. Shahinian, Annig
97. Sarkisian, Siranoush
98. Shishmanian, Isgouhi
99. Shishmanian, Zabel
100. Tutundjian, Shenorhig

Fig. 38: List of the last pupils of the Khorenyan Orphanage, prepared for transfer to Greece, 4 December 1922.



-2-

List of Balaat Orphans Continued

101-

101. Tzahadirian, Adrine
102. Topigian, Khosrofahoush
103. Torosian, Zarouhi
104. Tashdjian, Ebrouhi
105. Tashdjian, Takouhi
106. Tomourian, Ovsanna
107. Tcharikdjian, Takouhi
108. Tanielian, Azmive
109. Vartanian, Meline
110. Varteresian, Khonarig
111. Yazmadjian, Angel
112. Yerganian, Yeranouhi
113. Yergatakordzian, Heripsime
114. Yeramian, Yeranouhi
115. Yergatakordzian, Hvrika
116. Zakarian, Araxie
117. Zakarian, Arsine
118. Zakarian, Alice
119. Zafirian, Elisavet

List of teachers

~~120. Derounian, Avedouhi~~
~~121. Kasabian, Verjine~~
~~122. Melidian, Nevdon~~
~~123. Atamian, Garpouhi~~
~~124. Shoukoyan, Roupen~~

List of teachers

120. Avedouhi Derounian, (sister)
121. Verdjine Kasabian,
122. Nounig Sevadjian,

Fig. 39: List of the last pupils of the Khorenyan Orphanage, prepared for transfer to Greece, 4 December 1922 (second page).

not only the comparatively unconstrained interethnic and interfaith coexistence in Balat, but also the institutional connections between the organisations for children, which collectively sought to sustain their cultural and educational activities in the face of enormous challenges.

Preparations for the life ahead was concrete and purposeful; when the time came to move on, the Khorenyan often provided guidance and direction. The destinies of the children from all over Turkey who had found refuge in Balat, Istanbul, varied greatly: some managed to locate surviving family members, others were adopted with the School's permission, a few married upon reaching adulthood, and others moved abroad, often to America or American orphanages in Greece.[95] Some of the orphans themselves became caregivers at the institution, looking after the new arrivals who succeeded them.[96]

At the height of the crisis, the Khorenyan Orphanage concluded its operations in two phases. First, on 10 April 1920, all male orphans were sent to the Guleli Central Orphanage.[97] Two and a half years later, following a sudden order from the Central Administration of National Welfare, a list of the remaining female orphans was compiled, and on 4 December 1922, they were expatriated to Greece, an emotionally charged moment that marked the end of an intense chapter in the institution's life.[98]

> On the evening before they left, a farewell dinner was organised by the Balat Guardianship Committee. The principal, Harutyun Gharipian, delivered an emotional message to the girls on the occasion of their departure. Moving scenes unfolded, and tears flowed from everyone's eyes. The chairman of the Guardianship

95 Letter no. 2052 from the Central Administration of National Welfare regarding the marriage of orphan Annik Mahikian, sent to the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, 23 May 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0390, and letters from the Central Administration of National Welfare regarding the relocation of orphans, sent to the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2.

96 Letter no. 2412 from the Central Administration of National Welfare regarding the employment of Taguhi Galustian by the Khorenyan Orphanage, 27 May 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0383.

97 Յակոբեան, *Պատմութիւն իսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու*, էջ 374. [Hakobyan: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*, p. 374.]

98 List of orphans departing from Balat to Greece prepared by the administration of the Khorenyan Orphanage, November 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0181, OA5K5Y2B0182.

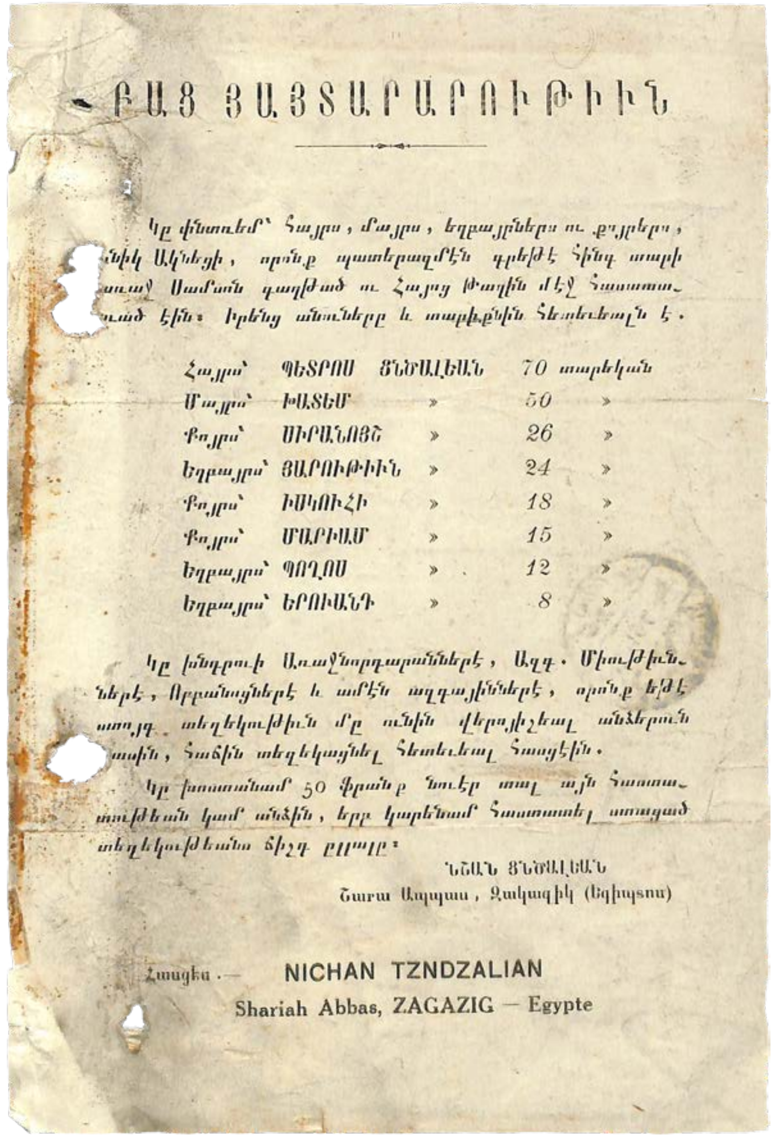
Committee, Telemak Kazanjian, was so overwhelmed by the unexpected departure of the orphans that he handed his prepared speech to the secretary to read aloud. In this atmosphere of deep emotion, the orphans were transferred abroad.[99]

With the girls' departure, the Khorenyan was almost emptied. What remained was not merely silence, but a profound sense of absence. However, the displaced children still populate the stories told by the few remaining students who have become guardians of that memory, and they linger as sometimes unexpected traces in the archive:

> The Parish Council of Surb Yeghia Church in Eyüp requests the return of their pots, as they have been informed that the Orphanage has been relocated and the pots are no longer needed.[100]

99 Յակոբեան, *Պատմութիւն իսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու*, էջ 375. [Hakobyan: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*, p. 375.]

100 Letter from the Parish Council of Surb Yeghia Church in Eyüp to the Orphan Care Committee of Balat, 8 December 1922. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K5Y2B0160.



ԲԱՑ ՅԱՅՏԱՐԱՐՈՒԹԻՒՆ

Կը փնտռեմ՝ հայրս, մայրս, եղբայրներս ու քոյրերս, [illegible]ինկ Ակնեցի, որոնք պատերազմէն գրեթէ հինգ տարի [illegible]աջ Սամսոն գացած ու Հայոց Թաղին մէջ հաստատ-[illegible]ւած էին։ Իրենց անունները և տարիքնին հետեւեալն է.

Հայրս՝	ՊԵՏՐՈՍ ՑՆԾԱԼԵԱՆ	70	տարեկան
Մայրս՝	ԽԱՏԵՄ »	50	»
Քոյրս՝	ՍԻՐԱՆՈՅՇ »	26	»
Եղբայրս՝	ՅԱՐՈՒԹԻՒՆ »	24	»
Քոյրս՝	ԽՍԿՈՒՀԻ »	18	»
Քոյրս՝	ՄԱՐԻԱՄ »	15	»
Եղբայրս՝	ՊՕՂՈՍ »	12	»
Եղբայրս՝	ԵՐՈՒԱՆԴ »	8	»

Կը խնդրուի Առաջնորդարաններէ, Ազգ. Միութիւններէ, Որբանոցներէ և ամէն ազգայիններէ, որոնք եթէ ստոյգ տեղեկութիւն մը ունին վերոյիշեալ անձերուն մասին, հաճին տեղեկացնել հետեւեալ հասցէին.

Կը խոստանամ 50 ֆրանք նուէր տալ այն հաստատութեան կամ անձին, երբ կարենամ հաստատել ստացած տեղեկութեանս ճիշդ ըլլալը։

ՆՇԱՆ ՑՆԾԱԼԵԱՆ
Շարա Աբբաս, Զակազիկ (Եգիպտոս)

Հասցէ.— NICHAN TZNDZALIAN
Shariah Abbas, ZAGAZIG — Egypte

Fig. 40: Search notice issued by Nichan Tzndzalian after his transfer to Egypt. The document lists the names and ages of his family members and appeals to the Patriarchate and Armenian community organisations to disclose any information they may hold regarding the fate and whereabouts of his parents and siblings.

ADDRESS: SMALL KHORENYAN

With the Orphanage closed, the Khorenyan did not fall silent at once. For a while, the building was in limbo. The once-vibrant space of care and education began to absorb a different energy: not one of abrupt abandonment, but of slow, almost imperceptible collapse. This was not merely the result of a declining number of students; it was the consequence of broader political pressures and an increasingly hostile environment that gradually pushed the Armenian community out of Balat. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, political upheavals, the rise of nationalism, and the instability and uncertainty that ensued created an atmosphere in which minorities in Constantinople did not feel safe.[101] In the late 1910s and early 1920s, the city's Armenians began to emigrate en masse. In the case of Balat, there was a dual crisis, as members of the local community were not only leaving the country altogether, but also attempting to relocate to other neighbourhoods that were considered safer, a process that continued into the 1970s. Almost all of the former students with whom we managed to establish contact had moved with their families to other districts of the city or to other countries, such as the United States. The common narrative we encountered was tinged with nostalgia and regret: 'It became too difficult for us to live there because there were no more Armenians, everyone was leaving, the Jews and the Greeks also left.'

The community's gradual disintegration was accompanied by the unravelling of its institutional life. As the foundations of Armenian communal life began to erode, the School fell largely silent. Having lost its *raison d'être*, it stood as a semi-abandoned shell stripped of its function. A brief attempt to repurpose part of the building as a seminary lasted only three months, quickly succumbing to economic and political pressures.[102] In 1924, a pivotal event occurred: a fire erupted in the immediately adjacent prelacy building of Surb Hreshdagabed Church, causing not only material destruction but also a complete reconfiguration of spatial and institutional boundaries. Faced with scarce resources and a fading community, the Balat

101 Içduygu, Ahmet, Şule Toktas, and Bayram Ali Soner. "The politics of population in a nation-building process: emigration of non-Muslims from Turkey". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31 (2), 2008, pp. 365–69.

102 Մելգոն-Ասատուր, *Երեքդարեան պատմութիւն Ս.Հրեշտակապետ եկեղեցւոյ Պալաթու,* Էջ 256. [Melgon-Asatur: *Three-Century History of Surb Hreshdagabed Church in Balat*, p. 256.]

Parish Council took the consequential measure of renting out the school building, hoping to use the proceeds to repair the prelacy and resettle the Balat School.[103] The School, which had stepped out from under religious authority in the mid-nineteenth century and had operated as a distinct institution ever since, returned—both literally and figuratively—into the arms of the Church.

It was there, in the churchyard, that the 'Small Khorenyan' emerged, its name gesturing towards the School's much-reduced size,[104] and, by extension, the memory of a grander past—one of which the 'Big Khorenyan', transformed first into a tobacco plant and then, in the 1990s, into a soap factory before eventually serving as a shelter for the homeless,[105] was a constant and tangible reminder. This drastic change marked not only a physical degradation and the loss of institutional autonomy, but also a decline in the quality and scope of teaching. In the absence of sufficient resources and amid the gradual disappearance of the community, middle- and higher-grade classes could no longer be sustained. As a result, the Armenian children of Balat were compelled to enter the workforce after completing the primary level.[106] Education, which once had held out the promise of cultural continuity and economic advancement, had been reduced to a bare minimum. The only exception were the children of a few wealthy families who were able to attend secondary schools on the outskirts of the neighbourhood.[107]

Given its dwindling enrolment figures, the Small Khorenyan managed to meet the community's modest needs. Yet, with political tensions mounting, the neighbourhood emptying, and resources drying up, the inevitable followed: in 1928, the Balat Parish Council, acting on a petition from the Educational Administration dated 21 June,

103 Յակոբեան, *Պատմութիւն իսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու,* Էջ 376. [Hakobyan: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*, p. 376.]

104 In a letter to the Balat Parish Council dated 5 November 1964, the Khorenyan School administration had to go so far as to request permission to use the nave of the church for PE lessons due to lack of space. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y18.

105 From the interviews of the authors with Garbis Khorasanjian, the last graduate of Khorenyan school living in Balat, Istanbul, August 2024.

106 Letter from the Khorenyan School administration to the Balat Parish Council reporting on the dire financial situation of the school and the necessary lowering of educational standards, 17 May 1926. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y22.

107 Letter from the Khorenyan School administration to the Balat Parish Council requesting donations to enable the reopening of higher grades, 3 August 1964. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y26.

had to close the Khorenyan.[108] But not for long. According to the bulletin prepared by the Khorenyan School administration, thanks to the immense efforts of the Council, it was only a year later, in 1929, that the Small Khorenyan reopened, bringing together 61 pupils, both boys and girls. The overall situation gradually improved from the 1930/1931 academic year onward. Alongside Grades A and B, Grade C was introduced (raising enrolment to 89 students), followed the next year by Grade D (97 students). In 1932/1933, Grade E was established.[109] Despite all adversities, the School, drawing on its long history of continual reorganisation, once again rediscovered its inner strength. As the archives record, "thanks to the care of the local community, it rose year by year, striving to regain its former state".[110]

This fragile revival carried more than the promise of educational continuity; it was also a beacon of hope in a moment of profound uncertainty. The reopening of the Small Khorenyan constituted an effort to reweave the torn fabric of Armenian communal life in Istanbul. In the broader context of post-genocide survival, it signalled a refusal to let the community's presence dissolve, addressing questions that were on everyone's mind: Would the Armenian community remain part of the city's future or vanish forever? Would layers of memory continue to accrete in the space of Balat, or would its history be erased, overwritten, and forgotten? To persevere, to rebuild, to teach again was to insist on belonging, not only to a building or a district, but to the urban fabric of Istanbul itself.

Alas, the reawakening proved to be temporary. The promising growth of the Khorenyan came to a halt in the 1940s and 1950s, as continuous emigration of the Armenian population from Balat once again led to a decline in student numbers. By the 1954/1955 academic year, enrolment had fallen to just 41 pupils, declining further to 34 by the year 1960, 16 girls and 18 boys.[111] Yet the drop in numbers was only part of the crisis. Archival records reveal that by the 1960s, many Armenian families in Balat were struggling to afford their children's

108 Յակոբեան, *Պատմութիւն իսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու,* էջ 377. [Hakobyan: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*, p. 377.]

109 *Ընգամեայ տեղեկագիր Խորէնեան Երկսեռ Վարժարանի,* էջ 8. [*Five-Year Bulletin of the Khorenyan Co-Educational School*, p. 8.]

110 Մելգոն-Ասատուր, *Երեքդարեան պատմութիւն Ս.Հրեշտակապետաց եկեղեցւոյ Պալաթու,* էջ 261. [Melgon-Asatur: *Three-Century History of Surb Hreshdagabed Church in Balat*, p. 261.]

111 Lists of students for the 1954/1955 and 1960/1961 academic years. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y24, OA5K4Y06.

education. The Khorenyan administration repeatedly petitioned the Parish Council regarding pupils whose parents were unable to pay tuition fees, in some cases warning that if free attendance was not granted, families would withdraw their children from the School altogether.[112] There were also persistent difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers, compounded by the inability to provide adequate salaries and working conditions.[113]

In 1969, the gradually fading Small Khorenyan embarked on its final phase, being transformed into a boarding school called Պալաթի Մանկանց Բոյն – the Nest for the Children of Balat. Once again, the building opened its doors to orphans, this time to boys from the earthquake-stricken regions of Muş and Sason, returning to one of its earliest and most vital functions: to offer shelter.[114] Though the Armenian community around it had nearly disappeared, the building briefly regained its pulse, not through education alone, but through the provision of refuge. This moment marked a last attempt to preserve the institution. Ultimately, the Khorenyan School closed its doors in the 1976/1977 academic year – in the end, only four students remained.[115]

Then, one day in 1994, flames consumed the Small Khorenyan, erasing the building forever. Left behind was irreversible loss: the loss of an architectonic anchor of memory and community, the loss of a future that could no longer be claimed. Thus, the institution of the Khorenyan stands as a powerful symbol for the trials and transformations experienced by Istanbul's Armenians – from a place of childhood and belonging, it evolved into a site of spatial compression and

112 Letters from the Khorenyan School administration to the Balat Parish Council, 1964/1965 academic year. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y20.

113 Letters from Irma Ajemian and H. T. Andresian on behalf of the Teachers' Union to the Balat Parish Council, outlining the difficult living and working conditions of teachers and urging salary increases, 1961–1967. Hrant Dink Foundation Archive: Balat Collection, OA5K4Y.

114 The 6.8 magnitude earthquake that struck eastern Turkey in 1966 caused major devastation, particularly in the settlements around Lake Van. See: Gedik, Erdoğan. "The impact of the 1966 earthquakes on migration and social change: a case study of Varto (Türkiye)". *Folklor/Edebiyat* 30 (120), 2024, pp. 1183–208. Following the disaster, hundreds of orphaned children were brought to Istanbul, with some of the Armenian orphans finding refuge at the Khorenyan. Յակոբեան, *Պատմութիւն իսթանպուլահայ ուսումնական կեանքի եւ կրթական հաստատութիւններու,* էջ 378. [Hakobyan: *History of the Educational Life and Institutions of the Armenians in Istanbul*, p. 378.]

115 Yayloyan, Ulutaş, Aslanov: "Tracing the memory of Armenian Balat", p. 137. The last head of the school was Ani Akşehirli (Khoubesserian).

finally of ruination. What remained would live on in fragments: in the scattered memories of students, in precarious archival documents, in the hollowed-out body of the remaining building. The destruction of the School in the fire marked a final moment of metamorphosis, one from physical into mental space, from lived reality into the archive, and from presence into trace.

→ Fig. 41–52: A series of commemorative photographs documenting school life, collective excursions, and gatherings of students, teachers, and administrators of the Khorenyan Primary School in Balat. The photographs, signed and annotated by İ. Subaykan, one of the teachers at the Khorenyan, date from the period between 1946 and 1949.

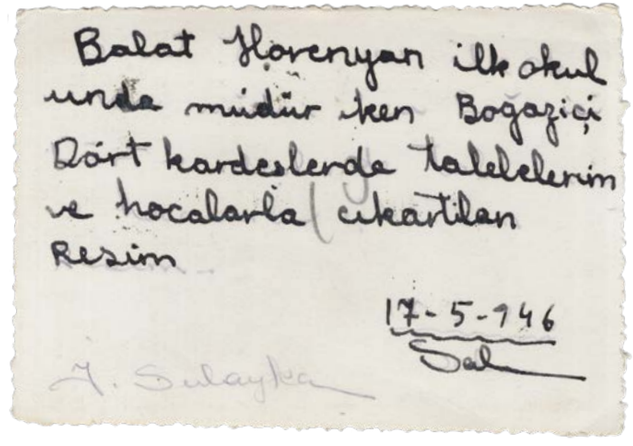


Fig. 41/42: “Photograph taken with my students and fellow teachers at Dört Kardeşler on the Bosporus, during my tenure as principal of the Balat Khorenyan Primary School. 17 May 1946 (Tuesday). — İ. Subaykan”

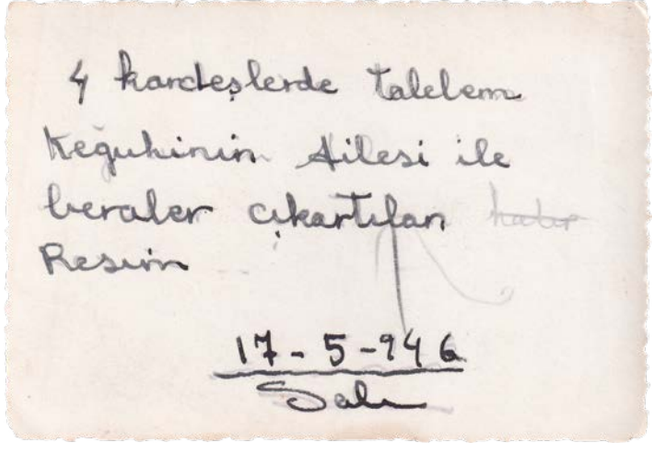


Fig. 43/44: “Photograph taken with my student Keğuhi and her family at Dört Kardeşler. 17 May 1946 (Tuesday).”

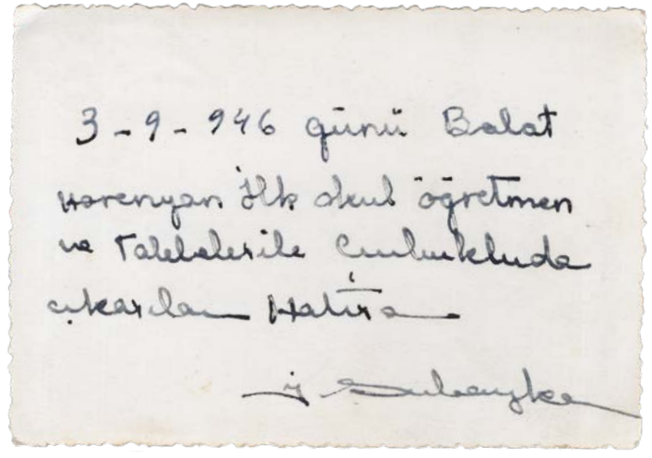


Fig. 45/46: “Commemorative photograph taken with the teachers and students of the Balat Khorenyan Primary School in Çubuklu. 3 September 1946. — İ. Subaykan”

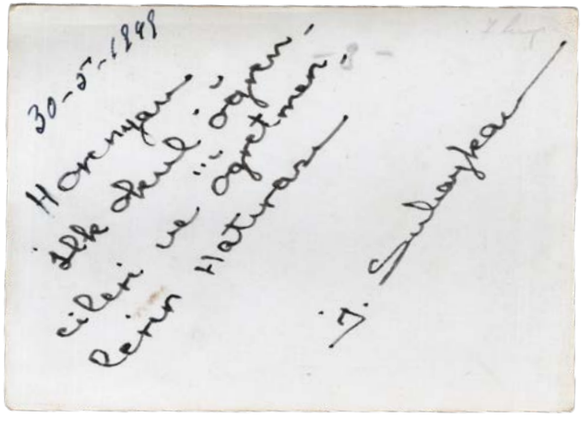


Fig. 47/48: “Commemorative photograph of the students and teachers of the Khorenyan Primary School. 30 May 1949. — İ. Subaykan”

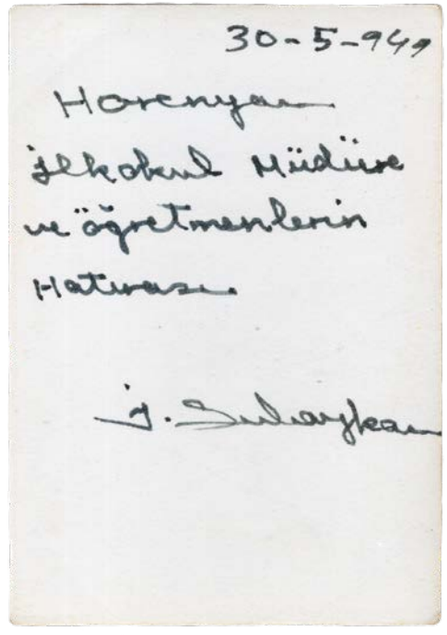


Fig. 49/50: “Commemorative photograph of the principal and teachers of the Khorenyan Primary School. 30 May 1949. — İ. Subaykan”

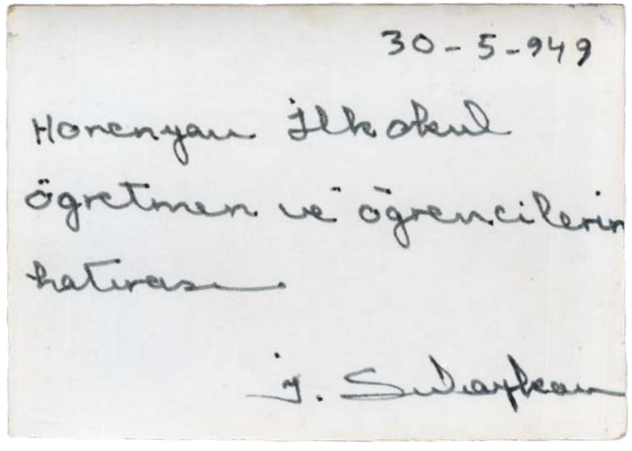


Fig. 51/52: “Commemorative photograph of the teachers and students of the Khorenyan Primary School. 30 May 1949. — İ. Subaykan”

Vanishing traces – the memory of memory

After the devastating fire, what remained of the Khorenyan was a handful of rare scholarly texts, miscellaneous papers, lists, and reports, some faded photographs, and scattered testimonies. One thing that becomes eminently clear from the surviving material is that the community centred around the institution — students, teachers, trustees, benefactors, and the clergy of Surb Hreshdagabed — consistently strove to rebuild and revitalise it in the wake of each crushing setback endured by the Armenians of Balat. This remarkable persistence was the expression of a longstanding commitment to this site of care and support that spanned generations and resurfaced time and again in moments of grave peril.

With the help of the Khorenyan’s archive, a fragile ensemble of thousands of time-worn pages that chronicle its daily life and changing fortunes, a temporal-historical body of the institution can be pieced together. This is an archive that constantly transforms its language, shifting from Western Armenian to Ottoman Turkish, from Turkish to French, from French occasionally to English, and eventually back to Armenian. In chronological order, it first documents the long decades of the Khorenyan School’s existence, followed by the shorter yet no less significant history of the Khorenyan Orphanage. The archive preserves the names of pupils, class schedules, lists of books donated to the school, as well as photographs of students and teachers; it holds teachers’ correspondence with the school administration, letters exchanged with other Armenian schools, communications between Jewish schools, Greek schools and churches, and the Khorenyan’s administration, as well as letters addressed to benefactors and the Armenian Patriarchate; and it contains an abundance of documents concerning financial management, donations to the school, salaries, provisions of food and clothing for the orphans,

announcements in local newspapers inquiring after the missing relatives of children on their way from Anatolia, decisions on sending orphans abroad, and much more besides.

All these names, details, and figures seem to fill the emptiness that the neighbourhood has inherited along with the forsaken shell of the School. When comparing the archival records from the Orphanage's brief years of operation with those from the institution's other periods of existence, it is striking that the volume of materials is nearly the same. During the years when the Khorenyan served as an orphanage, reality itself seemed to compress and accelerate, and the volume of correspondence increased dramatically. To understand the community's sense of alarm and the extremity of its struggle for survival, it is not necessarily the details contained in these countless pages that matter, but the very intensity with which these letters were written, mirroring the lived reality of their authors.

Throughout its nearly two-century-long existence, the Khorenyan, repeatedly shifting its role and purpose from an educational institution to a refuge for orphans and eventually back to a school, drew the vital force that enabled its constant renewal from the well of its own memory. Today, however, almost all of those who once carried and embodied this social memory are gone: as of 2026, only one alumnus remains in Balat, the sole person who can share recollections of his school life and his childhood in the neighbourhood alongside children from Greek, Jewish, and Turkish families. He, along with the few other Armenians left in Istanbul who attended the School, forms the thin thread that connects the centuries-old archive of its memory to the present, to life in the here and now.

→ Fig. 53–54 (pp. 101–102): Group photographs of pupils and teachers of the Khorenyan Armenian School, Balat, Istanbul, 1950/1951.

Garbis Khorasanjian—a former pupil of the Khorenyan and later a long-serving teacher of the Armenian language in other educational institutions—is one of the few individuals still residing in Balat whose life trajectory is directly intertwined with the fate of the School. Yet in recent years, Khorasanjian's ability to recall the past has been increasingly compromised by Alzheimer's disease: his testimony is marked by gaps and interruptions, as his unstable and fragmentary memory is no longer activated primarily through recollection, but through external prompting. Former students continue to visit Khorasanjian in his Balat apartment, often seeking to sustain a connection to the past by asking whether he remembers them, whether he recalls his own years as a student, or whether the names and faces of classmates still linger in his mind.

Among the regular visitors is his close friend and former classmate from the period of the Small Khorenyan, Romanos Cezveciyan. For decades, Cezveciyan has worked within the administration of the Edirnekapı Cemetery, in which capacity he was involved in the restoration of its grounds in the early 1990s. In parallel, he has been assembling an extensive private archive devoted to the documentation of the Armenian presence in Balat: deciphering tombstone inscriptions, collecting descriptions of Surb Hreshdagabed and the school building, and preserving scattered materials related to communal life. Together, Cezveciyan's sustained care for his friend, his long-term engagement with the cemetery, and his systematic archival work constitute a practice of communal self-preservation. What is more, the volatile memories that surface in the halting conversations between former classmates momentarily reactivate the archival record, maintaining a modicum of continuity in the face of loss and displacement.

In their recollections, former students often refer to the School as the Khorenyan, but it is important to keep in mind that these memories pertain to a time when the Armenian community had already lost the original building, and classes were being held in the Small Khorenyan, a much humbler edifice adjacent to Surb Hreshdagabed. In the community's social memory, the re-purposed Big Khorenyan stood as a powerful marker of a space that no longer existed. For the students who attended the Khorenyan after the 1924 fire, their school had a disconcerting dual presence: each day, after finishing their lessons in the Small Khorenyan and stepping out of the church gates, they would confront the façade of the 'real' school, a tangible testament to the life of a once-thriving community.

For this generation of Armenian children in Balat, including Khorasanjian and Cezveciyan, the Khorenyan remained a living embodiment of the past within the present. Not only did it linger in hazy recollections or on dusty shelves, it also persisted physically in reduced form. What we are dealing with, then, is not merely a form of postmemory (Hirsch) in which the past is transmitted with additions and the overlay of 'other' narratives. Nor is this entirely a case of indirect, symbolically mediated memory (Nora), or an instance of memory condensation (Assmann).[116] Rather, the students' fragmented and imprecise recollections represent a memory of memory—a multi-layered form of remembering in which the School exists simultaneously in lived experience, collective consciousness, and the cultural imagination.

According to Aleida Assmann, cultural memory is shaped by the successive interplay of remembering and forgetting: over time, it surrenders parts of the past to oblivion, making room for what is yet to be remembered.[117] As Assmann points out, both remembering and forgetting can manifest either as active or passive processes. For decades now, the building erected to house the School has stood empty and abandoned—it no longer fulfils its intended function, nor has it been honoured with a memorial to the life it once held.[118] Once the last remaining witnesses are gone and the thin threads of personal memory have been severed, recollections of the Khorenyan will remain confined to the archive, approachable only through intentional efforts. In other words: the Khorenyan's failure to achieve musealisation, or what Assmann terms canonisation, is about to remove it from the realm of active memory.

116 Hirsch: *The Generation of Postmemory*; Nora: "Between memory and history"; Assmann: "Communicative and cultural memory".

117 Assmann, Aleida: "Canon and archive". In: *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 97–108.

118 There have been sporadic cultural interventions, such as our own book *Balat: Living Together*. Another example is the memory tour organised in December 2024 by Hafıza Merkezi (Truth Justice Memory Center) with contributions from the CSN Lab team, which guided participants through Balat's multi-layered history and heritage, including sites tied to the Armenian presence such as the Khorenyan School. See: *Hafıza Merkezi*, 2025, online: hakikatadalethafiza.org. Another notable initiative is artist Delal Eken's video artwork *KIYIYA İTİLMİŞ IŞIKLARIN MUTLULUĞU* (The happiness of lights pushed to the shore; 2024), which engaged with the physical decay and layered memories of Balat's architectural landscape, evoking themes of absence, loss and resilience. See: *KIYIYA İTİLMİŞ IŞIKLARIN MUTLULUĞU*, 2024, online: yikintilararasinda.org.

With Assmann, the Khorenyan's plunge into oblivion can be understood as an active form of forgetting accompanied by destruction and neglect. Not only have its interior walls, the staircase leading up to the classrooms, and the intermediate floors all crumbled away, giving it the appearance of a carcass stripped of its organs—in an even more poignant act of deliberate non-remembrance, waste collectors have been piling up refuse from various parts of the neighbourhood in the gutted building. In effect, the ruin has become a vessel for discarded objects, a place that holds what has been cast aside by the present, the final destination for remnants left behind in Balat's old Jewish, Greek, and Armenian houses. The Khorenyan's paradoxical nature is once again revealed through its ambivalence: a site of memory consigned to effacement, it is flooded with the newly accumulated debris of the very past it embodies. Even though its walls still stand, the Orphan Care Body of Balat, the address to which countless pleas for help and support were sent, has vanished; and it is only through documenting our attempts at reconstruction, only in the memory of memory, that the chasm between past and present can be bridged.

Editorial note

This volume emerged from Tigran Amiryan's stay as a Fellow at the Cluster of Excellence *Temporal Communities* at Freie Universität Berlin in the summer of 2025. Conceived in cooperation with the Cultural & Social Narratives Laboratory (CSN Lab) based in Yerevan, of which both Amiryan and his co-author Arsen Abrahamyan are members, the present essay is dedicated to an institution that played a pivotal role for Istanbul's Armenian community over the course of nearly two centuries: the Khorenyan School and Orphanage in the neighbourhood of Balat, which closed its doors in the late 1970s. In examining the Khorenyan's history and cultural memory, it draws on a veritable treasure trove of archival material. These documents, along with items from other Armenian school archives, are currently being digitised by the Hrant Dink Foundation in Istanbul. The archive was only accessible to scholars for a brief period in 2024, when Amiryan and Abrahamyan were given the opportunity to study its collections, supported by the Balat Foundation and the Surb Hreshdagabed Church. The result of this research is a publication with no fewer than three manifestations: complementing two editions in Eastern and Western Armenian (both CSN Lab, 2026), this book constitutes a thoroughly revised exploration of the Khorenyan's past for English-speaking readers, offering intriguing insights into material that, for the time being, remains otherwise unavailable.

Tigran Amiryan works on literature, migration, memory politics, and cultural diplomacy in post-Soviet and Eastern European contexts. He holds a PhD in World Literature and specialises in semiology and contemporary cultural anthropology. In 2018, he founded the Cultural & Social Narratives Laboratory (CSN Lab) in Armenia, which has since collaborated with cultural organisations such as ifa and the Goethe-Institut, participated in regional conflict transformation, and engaged with international memory studies and cultural rights networks. He has been a visiting lecturer and postdoctoral researcher at Sciences Po, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, and Freie Universität Berlin.

Arsen Abrahamyan is an architect and cultural researcher based in Yerevan, Armenia. A doctoral candidate at ASCA — Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (University of Amsterdam) and a member of the CSN Lab, he focuses on cultural analysis and urban studies. His research interests include migration, environmental colonisation, the transformations of urban landscapes, and the politics of memory. He holds a bachelor's degree from the National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia (NUACA) and a master's from the NUACA and the Politecnico di Milano.

Mariam Yeghiazaryan, currently a research fellow at the CSN Lab, is a cultural researcher and translator. Spanning academic, artistic-poetic, and policy-oriented texts, her work is grounded in environmental studies, gender studies, and memory studies. She received her bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Journalism at Yerevan State University and her master's degree from the Caucasus School of Multimedia Journalism and Media Management at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs.

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Fig. 53 & 54: Romanos Vartkes Cezveciyan Personal Archive;
Fig. 55 (pp. 106–107): © Arsen Abrahamyan, CSN Lab Archive.

09

“The School’s nearly two-century-long history encompasses both grand and small narratives, reflecting the status of Istanbul’s Armenian community across various historical periods, as well as its struggle to preserve its identity. Home to collective pedagogical efforts rooted in the desire to provide care, education, and cultural continuity, the institution was never confined to its physical walls.”

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