



CYPRUS RELIGIOUS GROUPS



# THE **Armenians** OF CYPRUS



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*Cover photo:*  
*The Armenian Monastery (Magaravank or Sourp Magar)*

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THE  
**Armenians**  
OF CYPRUS





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# Foreword

Under the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, the Armenians, the Latins and the Maronites of Cyprus are recognized as “religious groups”. In a 1960 referendum, the three religious groups were asked to choose to belong to either the Greek Cypriot or the Turkish Cypriot community. They opted to belong to the Greek Cypriot community. The members of all three groups, therefore, enjoy the same privileges, rights and benefits as the members of the Greek Cypriot community, including voting rights, eligibility for public office and election to official government and state positions at all levels. Moreover, the Armenian, Latin and Maronite religious groups, which vote in the Parliamentary Elections as part of the Greek Cypriot community, elect also one Representative each from their ranks to the Cyprus House of Representatives. These non-voting Representatives attend meetings but do not participate in the House deliberations. Nevertheless, they are consulted on legislative issues of particular interest to their respective group.

The series of publications “Cyprus Religious Groups” is intended as a basic overview, an introductory profile, on the Armenians, the Latins and the Maronites of Cyprus. These short publications are by no means exhaustive on the subject and do not deal with differences of opinion and interpretation that may exist among scholars and other experts on issues related to the three groups.

This publication series, initiated by the Press and Information Office, has been undertaken with the close cooperation of the Representatives of the three religious groups in the House of Representatives, and their significant contribution is deeply appreciated. They kindly undertook the preparation of the text and also provided the photographic material. They, therefore, deserve the credit and are also responsible for the content. The Press and Information Office undertook the overall coordination and production of the publications including editing, designing and printing.

It is our hope that this series will stimulate more public and scholarly interest about the Armenian, the Latin and the Maronite religious groups of Cyprus.

Director  
Press and Information Office





## A Message from the Representative of the Armenian Religious Group in the House of Representatives, Mr Vartkes Mahdessian



**Dear reader,**

This short publication offers you an opportunity to get a glimpse of the long history and the rich culture of the Armenians, one of the oldest peoples in the world, and at the same time provide you with details about the diachronic presence of the Armenians in Cyprus.

Armenia or Hayastan, as it is known by the Armenians, is considered by many scientists and historians as the cradle of civilisation, the place where, according to the Bible, the repopulation of the Earth began after the Great Deluge. Armenia also happens to be the first country in the world to have adopted Christianity as its state religion in 301 AD. With the “discovery” of the Armenian alphabet in 405 AD by the classical scholar Saint Mesrob Mashdots, the Bible was translated into Armenian, enabling Armenians to produce great works of literature in their own language.

Having experienced periods of exceptional greatness and having endured tragedies, such as the first Genocide of the 20th century in 1915, the Armenian nation is today dispersed in small and big communities around the world. About 3,5 million Armenians live in the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, while around 5,5 million live in the Armenian Diaspora, part of which is our community living on our beloved island of Cyprus.

Today’s relatively small Armenian-Cypriot community consists essentially of the descendants of Genocide survivors; however, the Armenian presence in Cyprus dates back to 578 AD, during the Byzantine Era, when villages like Armenokhori and Arminou were created, while Armenian was one of the official languages in Cyprus during the Latin period. Although most of their traces are now long gone, the renowned Sourp Magar Monastery in Pentadaktylos, the Gothic cathedral of Notre Dame de Tyre in Nicosia, as well as the beautiful church of Ganchvor in Famagusta, bear witness to the existence of Armenians in Cyprus during the Frankish, the Venetian and the Ottoman Eras.

Nowadays, one can still find Armenian-Cypriots whose parents or grandparents had ancestors in Cyprus in the early or mid-Ottoman Era. For us, Armenian-Cypriots, Cyprus is the land where we were born and grew up in a multicultural environment of acceptance, tolerance and understanding.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the governments of the Republic of Cyprus since 1960, as well as to all my fellow Cypriots, for actively supporting the well-being of the Armenian community, thus safeguarding the preservation of our rich culture, heritage, language and religious identity.

## A Brief History



● The medieval church of Ganchvor in walled Famagusta (2004).

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**Byzantine Era:** There is a longstanding relationship between the Armenians and Cyprus, possibly dating back to the 5th century BC. However, Armenians have had a continuous documented presence on the island since 578 AD. During his campaign against the Persian King Chosroes I, Byzantine General Maurice the Cappadocian captured 10,090 Armenians in Arzanene, of whom about 3,350 were transferred to Cyprus. Judging by the strategic position of the colonies they established (Armenokhori, Arminou, Kornokipos, Patriki, Platani, Spathariko and perhaps Mousere), it is very likely that they served Byzantium as mercenary soldiers and frontiersmen.

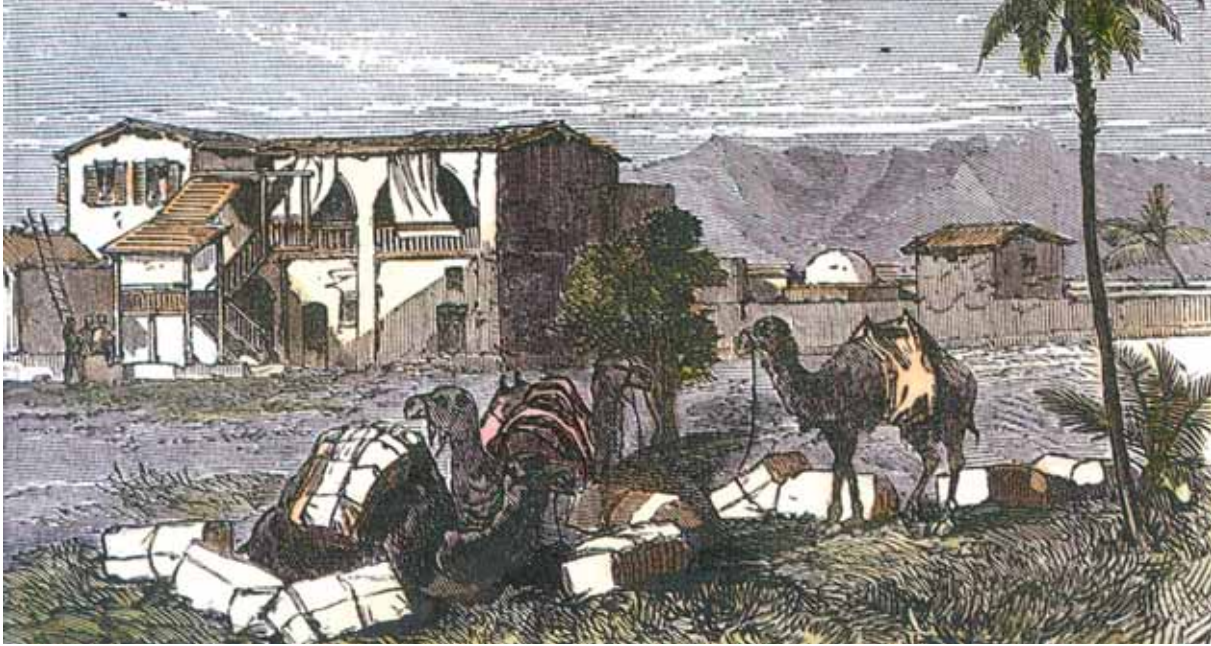
More Armenians arrived in the subsequent centuries, for political, commercial and military reasons. During the mid-Byzantine period, Armenian generals and governors served in Cyprus, like Alexios Mousere (868-874), Basil Haigaz (958), Vahram (965), Elpidios Vrakhamios (1075-1085) and Leo of Symbatices (910-911), who undertook the construction of Saint Lazarus' basilica in Larnaka. In 973, Catholicos Khatchig I established the Armenian Bishopric in Nicosia. After Isaac Comnenus' wedding to the daughter of the Armenian prince Thoros II in 1185, Armenian nobles and warriors came with him to Cyprus, many of whom defended the island against Richard the Lionheart (1191) and the Knights Templar (1192).



● Post-card showing the renowned Sourp Magar or Magavarank Monastery (1926).

**Latin Era:** After the purchase of Cyprus by the titular Frankish King of Jerusalem Guy de Lusignan in 1192, a massive immigration of Armenian and other bourgeois, noblemen, knights and warriors from Western Europe, Cilicia and the Levant took place, to whom fiefs, manors and privileges were bounteously granted. Because of their proximity, their commercial ties and a series of marriages, the Kingdoms of Cyprus and Cilicia became inextricably linked. In the subsequent centuries, thousands of Cilician Armenians sought refuge in Cyprus fleeing the Muslim hordes and attacks. Because of the continuous decline of Lesser Armenia, its last King, Levon V, fled to Cyprus in 1375. After his death in Paris in 1393, his title and privileges were transferred to his cousin, King James I de Lusignan, in the Saint Sophia cathedral in 1396; subsequently, the royal crest also bore the lion of Armenia.

During the Frankish and the Venetian Eras (1192-1489 and 1489-1570 respectively), there were Armenian churches in Nicosia, Famagusta, Spathariko, Kornokipos, Platani and elsewhere, while Armenian was one of the official languages in Cyprus. The Armenians of Nicosia had their Prelature and lived in their own quarter, called Armenia or Armenoyitonia. In Famagusta, a Bishopric was established in the 12th century and Armenians lived around the Syrian quarter; historical documents suggest the presence of an important monastic and theological centre there, at which Saint Nerses Lampronatsi (1153-1198) is said to have studied. By 1425, the renowned Magaravank - originally the Coptic monastery of Saint Makarios near Halevga - came under Armenian possession, as did sometime before 1504 the Benedictine nunnery of Notre Dame de Tyre or Tortosa.



- Engraving showing the mansion of interpreter Mikael Assadourian in Kythrea, which was visited by the first High Commissioner, Sir Garnet Wolseley (1878).

**Ottoman Era:** During the Ottoman conquest of the island (1570-1571), about 40.000 Ottoman-Armenian craftsmen were recruited. Many of those who survived the conquest settled mainly in Nicosia, where the Armenian Prelature was recognised as an Ethnarchy, via the millet institution. However, the Bishopric in Famagusta was abolished, as the entire walled city became forbidden for non-Muslims. Gifted with the acumen of industry, Armenians practised lucrative professions and in the beginning of the 17th century Persian-Armenians settled in Cyprus as silk traders, as did some affluent Ottoman-Armenian families in the 18th and the 19th centuries.

However, with the new order of things, the number of Armenians and other Christians dramatically declined due to the onerous taxation and the harshness of the Ottoman administration, compelling many Christians to become Linobambaki (Crypto-Christians) or to embrace Islam, which explains why former Armenian villages

(Armenokhori, Artemi, Ayios Iakovos, Ayios Khariton, Kornokipos, Melounda and Platani) were inhabited by Turkish-Cypriots at the end of the 19th century. Gradually, after the bloody July 1821 events, some improvements were observed during the Tanzimat period (period of fundamental reform of the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1876), resulting in the participation of the Armenian Bishop in the Administrative Council (Mejlis Idare) and the employment of some Armenians in the civil service. Additionally, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 benefited the Armenian and other merchants of the island.

**British Era:** With the arrival of the British in July 1878 and their progressive administration, the already prosperous yet small Armenian community of the island was particularly strengthened. Known for their linguistic skills, several Armenians arrived in Cyprus to work as interpreters and public servants at the consulates and the British administration. The



- The students of Vahan Kurkjian's orphanage (1899).



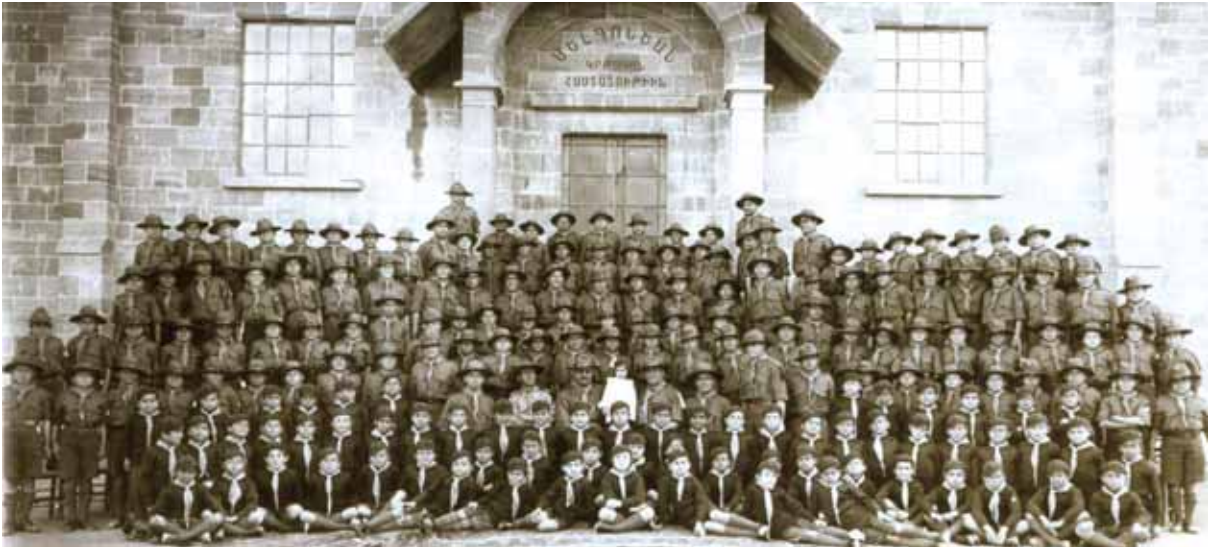
- The famous Melikian School Band (1930), founded by renowned musician Vahan Bedelian in 1926. The exiled King of Arabia, Hussein bin Ali, donated new musical instruments to it in 1927.



- Post-card showing the then newly-built Melkonian Educational Institute (1926).

number of Armenians in Cyprus increased significantly after the massive deportations, the horrific massacres and the Genocide perpetrated by the Ottomans and the Young Turks (1894-1896, 1909 & 1915-1923). Cyprus widely opened its arms to welcome over 10.000 refugees from Cilicia, Smyrna and Constantinople, who arrived in Larnaka and all the other harbours, some by chance, others by intent; about 1.500 of them made Cyprus their new home. Industrious, cultivated and

progressive, they brought a new life into the old community and did not need long to thrive and establish themselves as people of the arts, letters and sciences, gifted entrepreneurs and formidable merchants, unsurpassed craftsmen and photographers, as well as pioneering professionals who introduced new crafts, dishes and sweets to the island, thus significantly contributing to Cyprus' socioeconomic and cultural development.



● Group photo of the first scouts of the Melkonian Educational Institute (1932).



● Commemoration ceremony for the Armenian Genocide in front of the old Genocide Monument with Bishop Chevont Chebeyan (1948).

Law-abiding by nature, Armenian-Cypriots always had a high profile with the British administration and many became conscientious civil servants and disciplined policemen or were employed at the Cyprus Government Railway and Cable and Wireless. Throughout the 1920s-1950s, many worked at the asbestos mines at Amiandos and the copper mines at Mavrovouni and Skouriotissa, some of whom had been trade unionists. Some Armenian

● Saint Stephen's church in Larnaka (2009).





- The strong “Gaydzak” (Lightning) football team (1931). Established in 1930, in March 1931 it became the cup-holder team of Cyprus.



- AYMA's football team upon entering the Cyprus Football Federation (1955).



- Victoria street (now in the Turkish-occupied sector of walled Nicosia) used to be the centre of Armenian-Cypriot life until 1963.

-Cypriots participated in the 1897 Greco-Turkish War, the two World Wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) and the EOKA liberation struggle (1955-1959) against British colonial rule in Cyprus. Also, the Eastern Legion (later called Armenian Legion) was formed and trained between 1916-1918 in Monarga village. Some Armenian

refugees arrived from Palestine (1947-1949) and Egypt (1956-1957). The Armenian-Cypriot community prospered throughout the British Era (1878-1960), by establishing associations, choirs, scout groups, sports teams, musical ensembles, churches, cemeteries and schools, including the renowned Melkonian Educational Institute.

- *The numerous faithful outside the old Virgin Mary church on Victoria street, Nicosia (1960).*



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**Independence Era:** The 1960 Independence brought a new era for the Armenians in Cyprus, who were recognised as a religious group, opted to belong to the Greek Cypriot community and were now also represented in Parliament by an elected Armenian Representative. However, the population of the community had been reduced due to the emigration of about 900 Armenian-Cypriots to the United Kingdom, because of the emergency situation at the time of the EOKA anti-colonial liberation struggle (1955–1959). A second factor that contributed to the reduction of the community’s population was the emigration of about 600 Armenian-Cypriots to Soviet Armenia, as part of the Panarmenian movement for “repatriation” during the 1962-1964 period (nerkaght).

During the 1963-1964 inter-communal troubles, the Armenian-Cypriot community suffered major losses, as the Armenian quarter of Nicosia and the Ganchvor church in Famagusta were captured by extremist Turkish-Cypriots; in total, 231 Armenian-Cypriot families became victims to the Turks and hundreds of Armenian-Cypriots left for Great Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States. As a result of the 1974 military invasion of Cyprus by Turkey, the Armenian-Cypriot community suffered additional losses: about 75-80 families became refugees, while an Armenian-Cypriot lady has been missing since then; the renowned Sourp Magar monastery was taken by the Turkish troops, the Melkonian Institute boys building was bombed by the Turkish Air Force, while the Ayios Dhometios cemetery fell within the buffer zone. Consequently, many Armenian-Cypriots emigrated, mainly to Great Britain.





- Two Armenians escaping to the government-controlled sector of Nicosia after the 1963-1964 intercommunal troubles and their eviction from the Armenian quarter of the city.



- Archbishop Makarios III and Catholicos Khoren I inaugurate Nicosia's Nareg School (1972).

Despite its losses and with the unfailing support of the government, the small yet industrious Armenian community of Cyprus continued to prosper in the remaining urban areas, contributing culturally and socioeconomically to the development of Cyprus. On 24 April 1975, Cyprus became the first European country (and the second world-wide, after Uruguay) to recognise the Armenian Genocide with Resolution 36/1975 of the House of Representatives. Cyprus was also the first country to bring the issue before the UN General Assembly in 1965.

Over the past decades, the dynamics of the Armenian-Cypriot community have changed with the increased number of marriages with Greek-Cypriots and the arrival over the last 30-35 years of a large number of Armenian political and economic immigrants, because of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990), the insurgencies in Syria (1976-1982), the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq war (1978-1988), as well as after the Spitak earthquake (1988) and the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991). According to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe, Armenian was recognised as a minority language of Cyprus as of 1 December 2002.



- The first Genocide march in Nicosia (1975).

## Demographic Profile

Unfortunately, there is no available information as to the size of the Armenian population of Cyprus during the Byzantine and the Latin Eras. With regard to the Ottoman Era, it appears that, during its very first years, about 20.000 Armenians used to live in Cyprus. Their number, however, rapidly declined due to the harshness and the oppression of the regime, as well as the onerous taxation, forcing many to become Linobambaki (Crypto-Christians) or to embrace Islam; others were assimilated into the Greek-Cypriot community.

In the mid-19th century, the number of Armenians in Cyprus ranged between 150-200 persons, according to various censuses and estimations. The official censuses that took place between 1881 and 1960 provide fairly accurate data on the Armenian population of Cyprus. The table below shows the combined figures of those recorded as Gregorian and as speakers of Armenian. The map on page 33 shows the places of origin of the Genocide refugees, according to a survey conducted by Archbishop Bedros Saradjian in 1935; those refugees hailed mainly from Adana and Seleucia, with significant numbers originating from Aintab, Caesarea, Hadjin, Marash, Sis and Tarsus.

According to the official census data of 2011, the Armenian population of Cyprus is 2.600: 65% live in the capital, Nicosia, 20% in Larnaka, 10% in Limassol and 5% in Pafos. Over 95% of them speak Armenian and are Armenian Orthodox, while some 5% are either Protestants (mainly Evangelicals) or Catholics.

	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1946	1956	1960
Nicosia District	136	186	357	326	615	2.301	???	3.130	2.542
Limassol District	9	18	14	25	576	218	???	295	287
Famagusta District	4	11	24	13	57	105	???	198	157
Larnaka District	14	28	100	196	306	950	???	867	604
Pafos District	1	8	8	3	1	16	???	26	3
Kyrenia District	37	40	50	48	18	27	???	33	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>611</b>	<b>1.573</b>	<b>3.617</b>	<b>3.962</b>	<b>4.549</b>	<b>3.628</b>

Source: British Administration, Department of Statistics and Research of the Republic of Cyprus.

## Important Personalities

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Throughout their history in Cyprus, Armenians have made an important contribution to its growth and development, initially as soldiers and frontiersmen, later on as merchants and land owners and finally as craftsmen and entrepreneurs, as well as people of the arts, letters and sciences. There have been many Armenian-Cypriots with significant contribution in many fields both at home and abroad.

From the old Armenian-Cypriots, who were resident in Cyprus long before the Armenian Genocide, it is worth mentioning, among others, the landowners Boghos Eramian (1840-1918), Apkar Guvezian (1857-1922) and Artin Bey Melikian (1858-1921), entrepreneurs Dickran Ouzounian (1870-1957) and Movses Soutanian (1884-1977), as well as Vahram Levonian (1896-1976), Director of the Department of Water Development, Aram Kevorkian (1888-1976), Postmaster-General of Cyprus, and Apisoghom Utidjian (1853-1929), Chief Translator and Interpreter for the British administration.

From the numerous Genocide refugees, certain individuals have left their mark in the history of the island, such as: renowned musician and conductor Vahan Bedelian (1894-1990), journalist Georges der Parthogh (1923-2008), researcher and author of the book "Romantic Cyprus" Kevork K. Keshishian (1909-1996), photographers Haigaz Mangoian (1907-1970) and Edward Voskeritchian (1902-1990), Chief Scout Hagop Palamoudian (1910-1996), well-known cardiologist and Nicosia General Hospital's Director Dr. Vatche Kalbian (1923-1992) and the Director of St. John's Ambulance Brigade Sona Yeghiayian (1915-2007). Others excelled abroad, such as: famous violinist Manoug Parikian (1920-1987), journalist Shahe Guebenlian (1920-2007), Armenian Archbishop of Greece Sahag Ayvazian (1929-2003) and the Catholicos of Cilicia Khoren Paroyian (1914-1983).

From the younger generation, the descendants of the Genocide survivors, there are many distinguished personalities, both in Cyprus and abroad. One of them is prominent politician Marios Garoyian (1961- ), who during the period 2008-2011 served as President of the Cyprus House of Representatives and has since 2006 been the President of the Democratic Party (DIKO).



• The monument for the Armenian Alphabet at the Melkonian Institute.

## The Armenian Language

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Armenian, a rich and dynamic language, is spoken today by approximately nine million people in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and across the Diaspora. Armenian is an independent branch of the Indo-European family of languages, with its first traces lost in time. Originally, it was written in the Greek, Persian or Syriac scripts, until in 405 Saint Mesrob Mashdots – a monk, theologian and linguist - determined to translate the Bible into Armenian and after having travelled around Caucasus, invented a unique alphabet for the recording of Armenian, strongly influenced by the Greek one.

Said to be the product of a divine inspiration and originally made up of 36 letters, the new alphabet was welcomed by King Vramshabouh and Catholicos Sahag I, signalling the dawn of the “Golden Age” for the Armenian nation and ever since serving as a powerful factor in developing the national Armenian spirit to this day. Because of European influence to the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, two more letters were added in the 12th century.

Due to the division of the Armenian homeland between the Ottoman and the Russian Empires, since the 19th century vernacular Armenian is divided into two main dialects: Western Armenian and Eastern Armenian. The former - based on the Constantinople dialect - is spoken mainly by Armenians of the Diaspora in Europe, the Middle East (including Cyprus) and the American continent, while the latter - based on the Tiflis dialect - is mainly spoken in Armenia, the former Soviet Republics, as well as in Iran. Although largely mutually intelligible, there are noticeable differences in phonology, spelling, grammar and vocabulary.

## The Armenian Prelature

The Armenian Prelature of Cyprus was established in 973 by Catholicos Khatchig I and has ever since maintained a continuous presence on the island. Historically, the Prelature has been under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia and is currently headed by Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian (1997).

The Prelature has its own premises (1984), next to the Nicosia Nareg School and the Virgin Mary church. By initiative of Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian, its basement was renovated in 1998 and the “Vahram Utidjian” Hall took shape, from the proceeds of the auction in 1994 of the art collection that Vahram Utidjian had donated to the Prelature in 1954.

The Prelature’s consistory houses a collection of ecclesiastical relics, some of which were previously kept in the old Virgin Mary church in Nicosia or the Magaravank.

The Prelature’s Charter consists of 102 articles and, in its present form, applies as of 2010. Administration is exercised by the Armenian Ethnarchy (Azkayin Ishkhanoutiun) through the Diocesan Council (Temagan Joghov) and the Administrative Council (Varchagan Joghov). There are also local parish committees (Nicosia, Larnaka, Limassol), the committee for Christian instruction and the ladies’ committee. The Prelature receives an annual grant from the government.



● The Armenian Prelature (2003).



● The Virgin Mary cathedral in Nicosia (2012).



● Saint George's church in Limassol (1995).

## Places of Worship and Prayer

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**Armenians have their own churches and chapels in Cyprus, as follows:**

- In Strovolos, Nicosia, there is the cathedral of the Virgin Mary (Sourp Asdvadzadzin), built between 1976 and 1981. There are also the chapel of Saint Paul (Sourp Boghos), built in 1892 within the old Armenian cemetery, the chapel of the Holy Resurrection (Sourp Haroutiun), built in 1938 within the second Armenian cemetery, and the chapel of the Holy Saviour of All (Sourp Amenapergitch), built in 1995-1996 within the premises of the Kalaydjian Rest Home for the Elderly.
- In Larnaka, there is the church of Saint Stephen (Sourp Stepanos), built between 1909 and 1913 in memory of the Adana massacre martyrs.
- In Limassol, there is the church of Saint George (Sourp Kevork), built between 1939 and 1940.
- Since 2008, after the kind allowance of the Bishop of Pafos Georgios, Armenians in Pafos use a few times a year Saint George's chapel in Khlora.



- Panoramic view of the Armenian compound on Armenia street, Strovolos (Prelature, Virgin Mary church, Nareg School, Armenian Genocide Monument).

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**The following Armenian places of worship are located in the Turkish-occupied areas:**

- In walled Nicosia, there is the Gothic cathedral of the Virgin Mary. It was originally built in 1308 as the Benedictine nunnery of Notre Dame de Tyre or Tortosa, where Armenian-Catholic nuns also served. Sometime before 1504 it passed into the hands of the Armenian Apostolic Church and it had been the centre of the Armenian community of Cyprus until it was captured, along with the rest of the Armenian quarter, by Turkish-Cypriot extremists in January 1964. By the initiative of the Armenian Ethnarchy and the Office of the Armenian Representative and funding by the UNDP-ACT and USAID, it is being restored as of October 2009.
- Also in walled Nicosia, there is the small Armenian Evangelical church, which was built in 1946-1947. It is currently used, illegally, as a handicrafts centre.
- In walled Famagusta, there is the church of Virgin Mary the Caller (Sourp Asdvadzadzin Ganchvor), built in 1346. Left unused for nearly four centuries, it was repaired between 1937 and 1944 and it served the small Famagusta Armenian community from 1945 until 1963, when the walled city was taken by Turkish-Cypriot extremists. Today it is abandoned and in need of preservation.
- Of great importance is the Saint Makarios monastery (Sourp Magar or Magaravank), located in Halevga, on the Pentadaktylos mountain range. The monastery was originally established by Copts circa the year 1000 and by 1425 it had already passed into the hands of the Armenians. For centuries it served as a renowned place of pilgrimage, a place of rest and a way station for Armenian clergymen and pilgrims en route to the Holy Land. A large number of invaluable manuscripts were housed there, as was the miraculous icon of Saint Makarios, outside the monastery's chapel (1814). Until the Turkish invasion of 1974, the money from the exploitation of its vast lands (about 8,500 donums) and its 30,000 olive and carob trees constituted the Prelature's main source of income. By the joint initiative of the Office of the Armenian Representative and the Armenian Ethnarchy, annual pilgrimages to the monastery are organised every May, as of 2007. Left at the mercy of nature and vandals, today it is in a pitiful state.



● Nicosia's Nareg Armenian School. It shares its yard with the adjoining church of the Virgin Mary (2008).



● Larnaka's Nareg Armenian School. It shares its yard with the adjoining church of Saint Stephen (2009).



● Limassol's Nareg Armenian School. It shares its yard with the adjoining church of Saint George (2008).

## Educational Institutions

Armenians have always placed particular emphasis on education, which - in conjunction with the Church - is the foundation of their national and cultural heritage. As of 1972, Armenian Elementary Schools in Cyprus are called “Nareg”, in memory of the monk, theologian and philosopher Krikor Naregatsi. They have a single Headmaster and are supervised by an autonomous 11-member School Committee.

The Nicosia school is located on land granted by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. All three schools are adjacent to the local churches and have about 200 students in total; as of 2005, there is also the Nareg Gymnasium which is also in operation in Nicosia. The education they provide is tri-lingual (Armenian, Greek, English) and their curriculum is equivalent to the public schools' curriculum of the Greek Cypriot community

with additional lessons in the Armenian language, history and religion, as well as activities that cultivate and promote Armenology. Their budget is covered entirely by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Armenian schools have been operating in Nicosia since 1870, in Larnaka since 1909, while in Limassol since 1928. In the past, Armenian schools also operated at the Magaravank, in Famagusta, in Amiandos and elsewhere. Between 1897-1904, the renowned scholar Vahan Kurkjian (Pagouran) also operated the “National Educational Orphanage” in Nicosia.

The famous Melkonian Educational Institute was built between 1924 and 1926 after the generous and benevolent donation of tobacco trading brothers Krikor and Garabed Melkonian, initially to house about





● The 4th Cyprus Boy Scouts' Group of the Nicosia Nareg School (1976).

500 orphans of the Armenian Genocide. The grove in front of it was planted by those first orphans, in memory of their perished relatives. It evolved from an orphanage (1926-1940) to a renowned secondary school (1934-2005) with a boarding section. A unique and unparalleled achievement, the Melkonian was a beacon of hope and culture for Armenianism and Armenophony across the world, boasting an international membership of Armenian students from all over the globe and rightly called an ambassador of Cyprus to the world. In addition to its rich library and well-equipped laboratories, the Melkonian had a theatre and a dance group, a choir, a band, football, basketball and volleyball teams, as well as the historically important 7th Cyprus Boy Scouts Group and 9th Cyprus Girl Guides Company.

Also known as “an island within an island”, it had a great educational and cultural impact on the Armenian-Cypriot community, organising various events and publishing, amongst others, the famous “Ayk” magazine, the oldest Armenian secondary school magazine (1937-2006). The school was administered by the New York-based Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), which unilaterally closed it down in June 2005, notwithstanding Panarmenian and Pancyprian reactions. Thanks to the efforts of the Office of the Armenian Representative and the assistance of the Melkonian Alumni leaders, a permanent ministerial decree was issued by the government of Cyprus in February 2007, declaring 60% of its total area (12,4 hectares) as having a “special architectural, historical and social character and natural beauty”.



● The renowned “Sipan” dance group (2009).



● The champion and cup holder AGBU-Ararat futsal team (2007).

## Organisations

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**The Armenian-Cypriot community has a number of very active cultural and social clubs, including:**

- AYMA (Armenian Young Men’s Association). Established in Nicosia in 1934, it is the leading Armenian-Cypriot club. Its premises are located near the Virgin Mary church in Strovolos, Nicosia, on land leased by the government.
- AGBU (Armenian General Benevolent Union), with chapters in Nicosia (1913), Larnaka (1912) and Limassol (1936). The Nicosia AGBU is located next to the Melkonian, while the Larnaka AGBU is located opposite the District Archaeological Museum; the Limassol chapter currently has no club house.
- Armenian Club, which was established in Larnaka in 1931, is presently housed in rented premises opposite the Prelature of Citium.
- LHEM (Limassol Armenian Young Men’s Association). Established in Limassol in 1996, it currently has no club house.
- Nor Serount Cultural Association. Established in Nicosia in 2005, it is presently housed in rented premises on Aglandjia avenue.



● *The Kalaydjian Rest Home for the Elderly (2012).*

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**The following associations operate within AYMA's club house:**

- The Armenian National Committee of Cyprus (1965).
- The Armenian Youth Federation of Cyprus (1977).
- The “Azadamard” Armenian Youth Centre (1985).
- The Armenian Relief Society of Cyprus (also known as HOM, “Sosse” chapter, 1988).
- The Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Association of Cyprus (“Oshagan” chapter, 1999).

The community has a football team (AYMA: 1945) and two futsal teams (AGBU-Ararat: 1999 and Homenmen: 2006), a dancing group (Sipan: 2000), a junior dancing group (Nanor: 2008), a theatre company (Timag: 2000), a junior choir (Ardoudig: 2011) and the Sourp Asdvadzadzin church choir (1921). There is also the Kalaydjian Foundation (Larnaka: 1984) and the Pharos Arts Foundation (Nicosia: 1998). The Kalaydjian Foundation manages the Kalaydjian Rest Home for the Elderly (Nicosia: 1988), which also houses Greek-Cypriot elderly.

Various charity, cultural, educational and social events are organised, such as fund-raisers/bazaars, art/book exhibitions, dancing/theatre performances, camps/excursions in Cyprus and abroad, as well as lectures and commemoration ceremonies regarding Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, the Diaspora and the Armenian Genocide.

# Monuments

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**Despite its relatively small size, the Armenian-Cypriot community has several monuments to show:**

- In the courtyard of the Virgin Mary church in Nicosia there is the marble Genocide Monument (1991) and two marble ossuaries containing Genocide martyrs' bone remains from the Der Zor desert in Syria (2000).
- In front of the Virgin Mary church there is a marble khachkar (cross-stone), dedicated to the eternal friendship between Armenians and Greeks of Cyprus (2001), and the bronze bust of Archbishop Zareh Aznavorian (2005).
- In front of Nareg School in Nicosia there is the sandstone statue of Saint Krikor Naregatsi (1991).
- In front of the AYMA club there is a marble tomb containing Genocide martyrs' bone remains from the Der Zor desert in Syria (2002).
- In front of the Nicosia AGBU club there is the sandstone bust of AGBU founder Boghos Noubar Pasha (1991).
- Within the premises of the Melkonian Educational Institute there is the marble Mausoleum of the Benefactors (1956), the carved sandstone monuments for the Armenian Alphabet and Mother Armenia (1981), the marble bust of Alec Manougian (1990) and a series of sandstone busts depicting important pillars of Armenian history and letters (Hovhannes Aivazovsky, Hagop Meghabard, Gomidas Vartabed, Saint Mesrob Mashdots, General Antranik, Vahan Tekeyan and Movses Khorenatsi: 1990-1991).

- At the ancient Armenian cemetery in Nicosia there is a commemorative metal plaque containing the names of the 419 people buried there (2010).
- Adjacent to the Larnaka marina there is the bronze Armenian Genocide Memorial, marking the spot where thousands of Armenian Genocide refugees first set foot in Cyprus (2008).
- In front of the Saint George church in Limassol there is a tuff stone khachkar (cross-stone: 2008).
- In front of Saint Stephen's church in Larnaka there is a tuff stone khachkar (cross-stone), dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Adana massacre and the myriads of Armenian martyrs (2011).

**The following Armenian monuments are located in the Turkish-occupied areas of Cyprus:**

- Within the old Armenian church compound in Nicosia there is the first Armenian Genocide monument (1932), the second oldest of its kind in the world. Only its base survives.
- Within the square outside the Magaravank there is a stone column, dedicated to the visit there of Catholicos Sahag II (1933).
- On top of a hill overlooking the Magaravank there is a mortar obelisk, dedicated to Abbot Mekhitar of Sebaste, his visit there in 1695 and the 200th anniversary of the Mekhitarist Order (1931).



- Catholicos Aram I speaking during the unveiling of the khachkar (cross-stone) dedicated to the eternal friendship between Armenians and Greeks in Cyprus (2001).



- The Armenian Genocide Monument in Nicosia (2008).



- The Armenian Genocide Memorial on Larnaka's seafront (2008).



● Saint Paul's chapel and the impressive Gate of the old Armenian cemetery in Nicosia (2010).



● The Holy Resurrection chapel at the Ayios Dhometios cemetery (2010).

## Cemeteries

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### Armenians have their own cemeteries in Cyprus, as follows:

- In Nicosia there is the ancient cemetery, which operated from around 1810 until 1931 in the Ledra Palace area. Thanks to the efforts of the Office of the Armenian Representative, the cemetery and Saint Paul's chapel were restored between 2008 and 2009, with financial aid from the Ministry of Interior. In total, 419 persons were buried there, for whom a commemorative plaque was placed in 2010.
- The second Armenian cemetery of Nicosia, to the west of Ayios Dhometios, has been in operation since 1931. As of 1974, it is located within the buffer zone and visits there are allowed every Sunday noon. Its chapel is dedicated to the Holy Resurrection. In total, about 1.625 persons are buried there.
- The third Armenian cemetery of Nicosia, to the south of the Lakatamia-Ayii Trimithias road, has been in operation since 1998. It is located on land ceded to the community by the government. In total, about 150 persons are buried there.
- The Armenian cemetery of Larnaka, next to the Latin one, has been in use since 1897. In total, about 635 persons are buried there, including nine volunteers of the Armenian Legion.
- The Armenian cemetery of Limassol, to the west of the Limassol-Platres road, has been in use since 1960. In total, about 150 persons are buried there.
- There was also a small Armenian cemetery in Famagusta (1967-1974), located on land ceded by the government, with eight persons buried there. Since the 1974 Turkish invasion, it is located in the fenced area of Varosha.



- Armenian-Cypriot press from 1960 onwards.

## Mass Media

Since 1900, the Armenian community has a long history of magazines and newspapers to show for in Cyprus. Currently, Armenian-Cypriots have the following printed, electronic and online media:

- A radio programme (1953), currently broadcasted daily by CyBC 2 (17:00-18:00).
- Artsakank (Echo) monthly newspaper (1995).
- Azad Tsayn (Free Voice) monthly newspaper (2003).
- Keghart (Lance) bimonthly church newsletter (1997).
- Lradou (Newsletter) quarterly newsletter of the Office of the Armenian Representative (2006).
- Gibrayer (Armenian-Cypriots) weekly online newsletter (1999) - in English.
- Azad Khosk (Free Speech) monthly online newsletter (2011).
- [www.cyprusarmenians.com](http://www.cyprusarmenians.com) official tri-lingual website (2007), sponsored by the government of Cyprus.

## CHRONOLOGY

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578 AD	The first documented presence of Armenians in Cyprus.
610-641	Some Armenians arrive during the reign of Armenian-descended Emperor Heraclius for political reasons.
717-728	Some Armenians arrive during the pontificate of Catholicos Hovhannes Odznetsi for commercial reasons.
965	More Armenians arrive after the liberation of Cyprus from the Arab raids by patrician Niketas Chalkoutzes for military reasons.
973	Catholicos Khatchig I establishes the Armenian Prelature in Nicosia.
1136-1138	Emperor John II Comnenus moves the entire population of the Armenian city of Tell Hamdun to Cyprus.
1267	Several Armenians flee to Cyprus after the fall of Jerusalem.
1291	Many Armenians arrive in Cyprus after the fall of Acre.
1322	30.000 Armenians escape to Cyprus after the Saracen attacks on Cilicia.
1335 and 1346	A new wave of Armenian refugees arrives in Cyprus after the Mameluke attacks on Cilicia.
1403 and 1421	Thousands of Armenians arrive in Cyprus after the Ottoman conquest of Cilicia.
1441	Some Armenians from Cilicia are encouraged to settle in Famagusta.
May 1571	The Notre Dame de Tyre or Tortosa church is officially granted to the Armenians by a firman.
July 1821	Amongst the 470 executions by the Ottomans is the Armenian priest of Nicosia, der Bedros.
1860	The belfry of the Virgin Mary church in Nicosia is constructed, by donation of Hapetig Nevrouzian, one of the first in Ottoman Cyprus.
1894-1896	The Hamidian massacres take place in Ottoman Turkey, resulting in 300.000 deaths. About 1.000 Armenians find refuge in Cyprus, of whom about 100 stay.
1909	The Adana massacre takes place resulting in 30.000 deaths. About 2.000 Armenians flee to Cyprus; almost all return.
1915-1923	Ottomans and Young Turks perpetrate the Armenian Genocide, causing over 1.500.000 deaths. About 8.000 Armenian refugees arrive in Cyprus, of whom about 1.300 settle permanently.
1916-1918	The Armenian Legion is formed and trained in Monarga, near Boghazi, consisting of over 4.000 Diasporan Armenians, who later heroically fought the Ottoman Empire.
30 June 1918	Archbishop Taniel Hagopian consecrates Saint Stephen's church in Larnaka.
15 February 1924	High Commissioner Sir Malcolm Stevenson lays the foundation stone for the Melkonian Educational Institute.
13 February 1926	Archbishop Zaven der Yeghiayian inaugurates the Melkonian Educational Institute.
2 August 1931	Catholicos Sahag II unveils the mortar obelisk on top of Mekhitar's Hill at the Magaravank.
24 April 1932	Archbishop Bedros Saradjian unveils the mortar Genocide monument in old Nicosia.
8 September 1933	Catholicos Sahag II unveils the stone column at the square of the Magaravank.
14 January 1945	Archimandrite Krikor Bahlavouni celebrates the first Liturgy in almost four centuries at the Ganchvor church in Famagusta.
28 July 1946	Pastor Yohanna der Megerditchian lays the foundation stone for the Armenian Evangelical church in Nicosia.



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1 July 1947	Pastor Yohanna der Megerditchian inaugurates the Armenian Evangelical church in Nicosia.
11 April 1948	Bishop Ghevont Chebeyan consecrates Saint George's church in Limassol.
24 April 1954	Bishop Ghevont Chebeyan lays the foundation stone for the marble Mausoleum of the Melkonian Brothers.
15 January 1956	Bishop Ghevont Chebeyan unveils the marble Mausoleum of the Melkonian Brothers.
5 August 1960	Berge Tilbian is voted Armenian Representative at the Greek Communal Chamber, securing 60,49% of the votes.
16 August 1960	Cyprus gains its Independence; Armenians are recognised as a religious group by the Constitution.
13 November 1960	Armenians opt in the referendum to belong to the Greek-Cypriot community.
21 December 1963- 26 March 1964	Intercommunal troubles; extremist Turkish-Cypriots take over the Armenian quarter of Nicosia and the Ganchvor church in Famagusta.
19 July 1970	Dr. Antranik L. Ashdjian is elected Armenian Representative, securing 56,30% of the votes.
12 November 1972	Archbishop Makarios III and Catholicos Khoren I inaugurate the new Nareg School in Nicosia.
24 April 1975	Recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the House of Representatives.
25 September 1976	Archbishop Makarios III and Bishop Nerses Pakhdigian lay the foundation stone for the new Virgin Mary church in Nicosia.
3 October 1976	Dr. Antranik L. Ashdjian is re-elected Armenian Representative, securing 50,96% of the votes.
10 December 1979	Strovolos Improvement Board re-names Cyclops street into Armenia street. The street sign is officially placed on 15 January 1980.
8 May 1981	AGBU President Alec Manougian unveils the twin monument for the Armenian Alphabet and Mother Armenia at the Melkonian.
22 November 1981	Catholicos Khoren I and Co-adjutor Catholicos Karekin II inaugurate and consecrate the new Virgin Mary church in Nicosia.
14 March 1982	Aram Kalaydjian is elected Armenian Representative, securing 58,36% of the votes.
4 March 1984	Catholicos Karekin II inaugurates the new Prelature building.
13 July 1986	Aram Kalaydjian is re-elected Armenian Representative, securing 65,08% of the votes.
24 May 1987	President Spyros Kyprianou lays the foundation stone for the new boarding section of the Melkonian.
30 May 1987	President Spyros Kyprianou inaugurates the new AYMA club.
6 March 1988	Minister of Interior Christodoulos Veniamin inaugurates the Kalaydjian Rest Home for the Elderly.
21 October 1989	Acting President Vassos Lyssarides inaugurates the new boarding section of the Melkonian.
22 October 1989	AGBU President Alec Manougian inaugurates the new Nicosia AGBU club.
19 April 1990	The House of Representatives recognises 24 April as National Remembrance Day for the Armenian Genocide.
24 March 1991	Representative Aram Kalaydjian unveils the sandstone statue of Saint Gregory of Nareg in Nicosia.
24 April 1991	Official unveiling of the Armenian Genocide Monument in Nicosia.
19 May 1991	Aram Kalaydjian is re-elected Armenian Representative, securing 67,00% of the votes.
22 October 1995	Bedros Kalaydjian is elected Armenian Representative in a by-election, securing 60,34% of the votes.
18 May 1996	President Glafcos Clerides inaugurates the new Nareg School in Larnaka.

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26 May 1996	Bedros Kalaydjian is re-elected Armenian Representative, securing 73,91% of the votes.
16 February 1997	Catholicos Aram I consecrates the Holy Saviour of All chapel in Nicosia.
3 February 1999	Catholicos Aram I inaugurates the “Vahram Utidjian” Hall.
23 March 2001	Aglandjia Municipality re-names Ephesus street to Melkonian street. The street sign is officially unveiled on 7 April 2001, by Mayor Andreas Petrou.
27 May 2001	Bedros Kalaydjian is re-elected Armenian Representative, securing 57,13% of the votes.
21 October 2001	Presidential Commissioner Manolis Christophides unveils the marble khachkar (cross-stone) dedicated to the eternal friendship of Armenians and Greeks in Cyprus.
28 April 2002	Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian unveils the marble tomb-ossuary in front of AYMA.
1 December 2002	Armenian is recognised as a minority language in Cyprus.
1 May 2005	Donator Aleco Bezigian unveils the bronze bust of Archbishop Zareh Aznavorian in Nicosia.
9 October 2005	Dr. Vahakn Atamyan is elected Armenian Representative in a by-election, securing 52,03% of the votes.
21 May 2006	Vartkes Mahdessian is elected Armenian Representative, securing 52,60% of the votes.
28 June 2006	President Tassos Papadopoulos inaugurates the “Raphaelian” wing of the Kalaydjian Rest Home for the Elderly.
24 November 2006	The President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan lays the foundation stone for the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Larnaka.
6 May 2007	Armenians pray, for the first time since the 1974 invasion, at Saint Makarios Monastery (Magaravank).
6 March 2008	Marios Garoyan is elected President of the House of Representatives.
28 May 2008	President Demetris Christofias unveils the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Larnaka.
28 September 2008	Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian unveils the tuff stone khachkar (cross-stone) in Limassol.
5 November 2008	President Demetris Christofias inaugurates the new Nareg School in Limassol.
28 February 2010	Representative Vartkes Mahdessian inaugurates the new AYMA hall.
11 April 2010	Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian re-consecrates the chapel of Saint Paul and celebrates the first Liturgy since 1963.
8 May 2010	Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian and Representative Vartkes Mahdessian inaugurate the renovated functions’ hall next to the Saint George church in Limassol.
5 May 2011	President Demetris Christofias inaugurates the new Larnaka AGBU club.
17 May 2011	Minister of Education and Culture Dr. Andreas Demetriou inaugurates the new Nicosia Nareg auditorium.
22 May 2011	Vartkes Mahdessian is re-elected as Armenian Representative, securing 67,67% of the votes.
25 December 2011	Archbishop Varoujan Hergelian consecrates the tuff stone khachkar (cross-stone) dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Adana massacre and the myriads of Armenian martyrs.

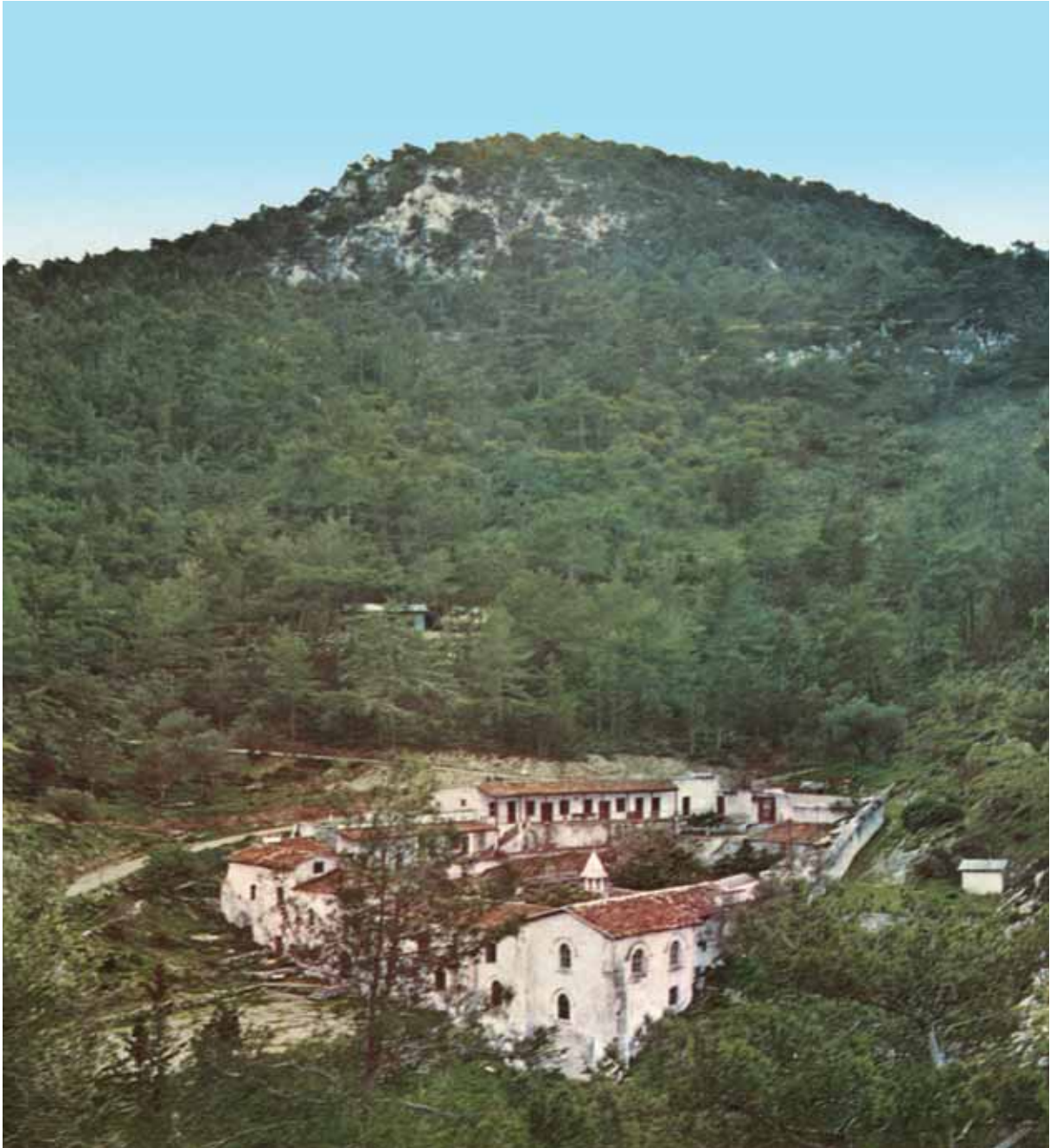


Map showing places of origin of Armenian-Cypriots

Map designed by Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra

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● The Armenian Monastery (Magaravank or Sourp Magar) before 1974







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