

Welcome to the Armenian Mirror-Spectator

*The First English Language Armenian
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Wanted: Owners of Six Tons of Gold Left in Historic Armenia

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By Edmond Y. Adazian

Every time a nostalgic Armenian travels to the land of his ancestors, currently occupied Turkey, he or she is surrounded by the ubiquitous volunteer guides who offer their services to hunt for hidden treasures. Amrenian Weekly's Khatchig Mouradian, who had recently visited Diyarbekir, recounts his experience with those treasure hunters and quotes Hrant Dink who used to say: "You are digging and looking for treasures underground and you fail to realize that the real treasure was walking on the ground in these lands and was annihilated."

My own mother once visited the house in Adana where she was born; the occupants of that house, who still did not have the deed, had inquired from her where the family had hidden their treasures, after offering lavish Turkish hospitality. Many Turks welcome the visits of the Armenians as tourists, but many more to this day look for opportunities to strike gold with the help of those nostalgic tourists. And indeed, when Armenians were being deported, it seldom crossed their minds that they were heading to a "final solution" perpetrated by Talaat Pasha. They were all led to believe that they were being subjected to some temporary measure, and that they would return to their towns and homes at the end of the war. Thus, they either buried their treasures or left them with their trusted Muslim friends, like many Armenians and Greeks featured in Kemal Yalçın's books.

Recently a story emerged in Switzerland about six tons of gold, shipped from historic Armenia to Geneva to be deposited at the Credit Suisse Bank, which refuses to release the treasure to a Turkish family who claims ownership.

The news first broke in the Turkish newspaper, Hurriyet, on October 17. A commentary about the case also appeared in the Turkiye newspaper by Prof. Cagri Erhan, who, rather than questioning the provenance of the treasure, questions the Credit Suisse Bank's motives for refusing to give the gold to a businessman from Elazig (the historic Armenian city of Kharpert) named Sayid Ali Bayraki.

The Turkologist Hagop Chakerian has translated the article for the daily Azg in Yerevan, spicing it with his own comments. Most of the information about this developing story comes through Mr. Chakerian's article, published in the November 11, 2011 issue of Azg. The Elazig businessman, Sayid Ali Bayraki, has been fighting for many years to receive 800,000 Ottoman gold coins inherited from his father. The Swiss ambassador in Turkey, Raymond Kuntz, has traveled to Elazig to discuss the case of the gold, the origins of which are still shrouded in mystery.

Isn't this an extremely extraordinary story? But how could one carry 800,000 Ottoman gold coins, which weigh six metric tons, from Turkey to Switzerland? According to Mr. Bayraki, his father transported the six tons of gold to Switzerland, traveling on land and by sea. Today, the 800,000 Ottoman gold coins are worth \$3.5 billion.

In addition to involving the Swiss ambassador to this case, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself has intervened on behalf of Mr. Bayraki. According to the latter, his father had shipped six tons of gold right on the eve of the putsch by Gen. Kenan Evren on September 12, 1986, who established military dictatorship in Turkey. It is not difficult to conclude that Bayraki's father was part of the "deep state," which has created the reign of terror in Turkey. Today, the web of misdeeds of the "deep state" is being entangled by the Ergenekon investigations.

Professor Cagri states: "As far as I know, in the first years of Republican Turkey no citizen has owned that kind of money. For example, when the IS bank was founded in 1924 its entire capital was 250,000 Turkish liras. It is a major problem to hide that kind of money from the government. According to Bayraki, his father had earned that money doing business and he had hidden the gold in a hole dug under the house. Earning the gold by doing business is questionable because after the Turkish Republic was established, business was no longer conducted through the Ottoman currency. It looks like Bayraki's father trusted the gold to the Swiss bank believing that the banking system which kept secrecy on Nazi gold would treat his treasures in the same way. But missed the fact that the gold deposited in the Swiss banks did not belong to the Nazis; it belonged to the Jews.

The Nazis, who had exterminated millions of Jews and usurped their property, had a special interest in the gold deposited by their victims in Swiss banks.

In the 1990s international scandals broke out about the gold deposited in Swiss banks and the government was forced to divulge some secrets to the US and British governments. To this day, many organizations related to Holocaust victims have been chasing those banks. If the 800,000 gold coins were deposited in the Swiss bank imitating the "Nazi gold," then suspicions should arise because their source is unknown. Talaat Pasha has written in his "secret file" that 70,000 Armenians were deported from Elazig. No Armenians returned to Elazig. The wealthy Armenian families were also deported.

Almost all the deported families hid their gold in a secret place or trusted to their Muslim neighbors, hoping to return one day. And for years stories were being circulated about hidden Armenian treasures. Additionally many Armenians visit their parent's native towns to discover their hidden treasures.

Professor Cagri concludes his remarks by the following statement: "2015 is around the corner. Armenians attach great importance to the 100th anniversary of the 'so called' Armenian Genocide. There is no doubt that the Armenian lobby, which misses no opportunity, has already focused on the gold whose source is 'unknown.' The bank Credit Suisse is already considering the case 'scandalous' and believes 'there is some conspiracy behind it.' Therefore, we see where the case is heading and it is not right to involve the prime minister. This may create an embarrassing situation for the entire country."

Professor Cagri maybe is referring to the Armenian lawyers when he mentions lobbyists, who went after the French and German banks and insurance companies and did a laudable job in recovering some of the funds owed to the victims of the Genocide. Fortunately, the good professor is not aware that the same lawyers have put aside the Turks for the moment and are at each other's throats suing each other.

One cannot dispel the suspicions of conspiracy when the lawyers who were going after Turks and Turkey have turned their guns on each other. By the same token, the generous benefactors who initially contributed princely

sums to build a Genocide Museum are again at each other's throats, suing each other and jeopardizing the completion of the museum in time for 2015.

In the meantime, many victim groups are suing the Turkish state and the government is drowned in thousands of lawsuits. The European Court of Human Rights is inundated with lawsuits. Last year, there were 5,000 cases. That figure has jumped to 7,000 this year. Turkey is losing almost all the cases.

Recently, Foreign Minister Ahmad Davutoglu joined Justice Minister Sadoulla Erguin to give a press conference about these court cases. He stated that the flood of lawsuits at the European Court, means that here is a sickness in Turkey which should be remedied.

"Turkey has to adopt a new strategy to forestall so many lawsuits. We need to change our methods of defense since we lose almost all cases," he said. He classified the cases in three categories: a) cases triggered by Turkey's foreign policy. Ankara's aggression on and occupation of Cyprus territory has produced an avalanche of court cases; b) Turkey's antiquated domestic laws which trample citizens' and minority rights have generated 19,000 cases and c) cases generated by the suppression of freedom of speech and press (like Article 301 in the penal code).

The world is suing Turkey and winning the cases, while Armenian lawyers fight each other. Six tons of gold are sitting in the Swiss bank. The gold is up for grabs and it can do a lot of good for Armenia. We have to rise up to the occasion.

It is time to leave behind internecine squabbles and go after the gold.

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