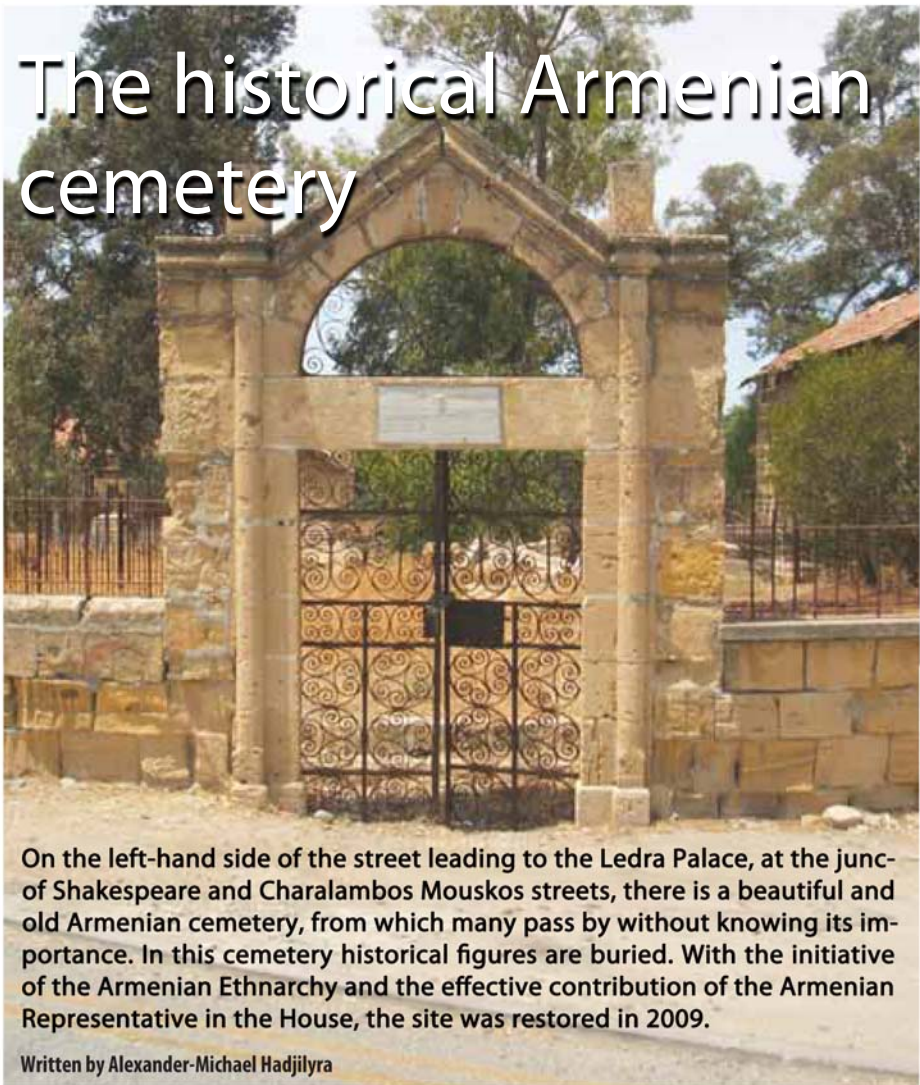


The historical Armenian cemetery



On the left-hand side of the street leading to the Ledra Palace, at the junction of Shakespeare and Charalambos Mouskos streets, there is a beautiful and old Armenian cemetery, from which many pass by without knowing its importance. In this cemetery historical figures are buried. With the initiative of the Armenian Ethnarchy and the effective contribution of the Armenian Representative in the House, the site was restored in 2009.

Written by Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra

In the late 18th century, the affluent Armenian families that came from Turkey increased the number of the existing small Armenian community in Cyprus, thus creating the need for some place of repose. It is believed that the first burials in the Armenian cemetery were carried out circa 1810. In 1860, a fire at the Armenian Prelature deprived us of the register information. This task was per-

formed by the new priest Hovhannes Shahinian, since 1 November 1877.

Over the cemetery gate, the marble inscription informs us that the surrounding wall was constructed with the contribution of the faithful, in 1888. The cemetery's chapel is dedicated to Saint Paul. According to the inscription it was constructed with the contribution of Constantinopolitan Boghos (Paul) Odadjian.





an, in 1892. Boghos Odadjian (1853-1891) was a translator for the Cyprus government, as his marble tombstone says. The number of burials increased dramatically after the arrival in Cyprus of nearly 10.000 Armenian refugees who escaped the Hamidian massacres (1894-1896), the Adana massacre (1909) and the main Genocide (1915-1923), that even arrangements were made to bury some Armenian Protestants on the south side of the cemetery and a few Armenian Catholics on the north side.

Soon, the cemetery proved small to accommodate so many, and the last burial took place on 5 July 1931, as the community acquired a new site to the west of Ayios Dhometios, on Gregoris Afxentiou street (by an irony of fate, since 1974 that cemetery lies in the buffer zone and visits are only allowed on Sundays). Up until 1963, some liturgies were held in the chapel, such as the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and All Souls' Mass. In August 1934, the corpse of the great bene-

factor Garabed Melkonian (of the founders of the Melkonian Educational Institute) remained there for three days, which according to his wish was transferred from Egypt and was interred in a mausoleum at the grounds of the Melkonian.

In early 1963, due to the widening of Shakespeare street, about 100 graves were demolished and the remains were transferred to a mass grave in the Ayios Dhometios cemetery. After the bloody events of 1963-1964 and due to the proximity to the buffer zone, the site was somehow neglected, until in 1988 a partial restoration of the chapel was carried out and the site was cleaned up.

Complete restoration

The complete restoration of the entire cemetery was carried out between June 2008 and May 2009, with the initiative of the Armenian Ethnarchy and the effective contribution of the Armenian Representative in the House, Mr Vartkes Mahdessian, who for this purpose secured an allocation of €155.000. On 22 March 2009, members of the Armenian-Cypriot community planted small cypress trees and a memorial service was held. In late March 2010, a commemorative inscription was placed on the south side of the cemetery with the names of the 419 persons who rest there. Finally, on 11 April 2010 Archbishop Varoujan celebrated the re-consecration of the chapel, Divine Liturgy and a memorial service, in the presence of Representative Mr Mahdessian and about 100 faithful. It was the first liturgy since 1963!

Historical figures

Historical figures are buried in the Armenian cemetery, such as big landowners and entrepreneurs Melikjan Melikian (1842-1914), Artin Bey Melikian (1858-1921), Boghos Eramian (1840-1918) and Sdepan Eramian (1880-1937), as well as the dragoman Apisoghom Utudjian (1853-1929). To realise the historical significance of this cemetery, let us mention that when the British arrived in Nicosia, in July 1878, outside the walls of



the city were only Koshklu Chiftlik, a tannery, a café, three Turkish cemeteries and the Armenian cemetery. Of the aforementioned, the cemetery is the only one existing today.