



Freemasons of Armenia



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Above: **Crest of the Grand Lodge of F&AM of Armenia**

Below: **Catchick Paul Chater (Khachik Pogose Astwachatoor).**

Bottom: **Yeprad (Euphrates) Lodge No. 1078, 1912.**



The history of the Armenian Freemasons begins under the auspices of the United Grand Lodge of England. The English East India Company introduced Freemasonry of English origin in Madras (now Chennai) in 1730. Many Armenian merchants who were already established tradesmen in India and Southeast Asia also played an important role in the East India Company. They followed the English rules of conduct and often traveled throughout Europe and, at the same time, had ascended in the Indian social strata.

As the first instance of an active member of Armenian origin in one of the Informative Bulletins of the Cannongate Lodge in Edinburgh, (1762) it is stated that '...four Worshipful Masters would represent the United Grand Lodge of England in the territories of the Middle East, Aleppo and Iran...' Among those four persons, it was the name of the Armenian Dr Manasse who was appointed as Provincial Grand Master for Armenia by order of the Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge of England, Earl Ferrers, from 1762 to 1764. Until 1805, when the name of Manasse officially disappeared, the group of four lodges headed by these Worshipful Masters was called 'All Armenia in the East Indies' – remarkable for this period, the foundation of the first lodge composed of members of Armenian origin.

On 6 October 1837, in the city of Madras, Colonial India, Lodge Armenian No.685 was consecrated under the auspices of the United Grand Lodge of England. This lodge had a brief life (1865) as a result of ups and downs in its activities. It was linked to prestigious families of established Armenian merchants in that city. Lodge Armenia No.685 worked in the Armenia Street in that city.

The last Masonic link of Armenian origin, and of relevant importance in Victorian India, was Sir Paul Chater (Khachik Pogose Astvatsatoor). Born in Calcutta in 1846, he was a prestigious and successful man who developed all his potential in imperial



Hong Kong. He has been Worshipful Master of Lodge Perseverance No.1165, Grand Master of the Hong Kong District and the South of China for the United Grand Lodge of England (1881-1909), one of the first Armenian masons in having the Masonic High Degree 33° and, even today, the District of the United Grand Lodge of England for Hong Kong and the Far East auspices a lodge called Paul Chater Lodge of Installed Masters No.5391. Undoubtedly, he was one of the masons of Armenian origin who had reached one of the highest points on the scale of Regular Freemasonry.

Closer to historic Armenia, during the Ottoman Empire, the upper classes of Armenians had begun to interact defending the ideas proclaimed by the West, those of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'. At the same time, the Grand Masonic Powers (whether Grand Lodges or Grand Orients) planned the mission of westernising the region and founding as many Masonic lodges as they could. The Grand Orient of Italy, the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the United Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Orient of France worked actively to spread the formation of Masonic lodges in the heart of the Empire.

The right moment had come for the Armenians to plant the foundation of the first Armenian-speaking Lodge. That first one was born in Izmir (Smyrna) on June 5, 1864. Lodge Metsn Tigran (or Decran Lodge) No.1014 was installed under the auspices of the United Grand Lodge of England. Then on 22 February 1866, in the district of Pera, Istanbul, the foundation of Lodge Ser (Love) took place under the patronage of the Grand Orient of France (Regular at the time). Hundreds of Armenians were initiated in both lodges, which worked continuously until the first years of the last decade of the nineteenth century, when Sultan Abdul Hamid II started the terrible repression of the Armenian Nation throughout the Empire. The members of these lodges had been the lights in the cultural revival of the Armenian nation, with a net influence up to these days. Other lodges of less relevance at the time were Armenak (1872, Izmir, Grande Oriente d'Italia) and Ararat No.76 (1882, Cairo, National Grand Lodge of Egypt).

During the early years of the twentieth century, the Armenians had the opportunity to join a Masonic lodge once again. In the Ottoman Empire, in Hyusenig (Kharpert-Harpout), among the cities with a high density of Armenian population, many Armenian brothers presented a petition to the Grand Lodge of Scotland to found a new lodge, Euphrates No.1078 (Yeprad Lodge, 1910, Harpout, Mamuret Al Aziz). Paradoxically, of the nearly forty members that were part of this lodge, only one would





survive the tragic events suffered by the Armenian people during the Genocide that started in 1915. The Masonic certificate of this surviving brother is still intact in the hands of his descendants. The last attempt of the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire to create a Masonic Lodge was in 1919, when after World War I, on 1 May, a group of brethren received the Charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland, consecrating Lodge Hayastan No.1185. Although it had over a hundred members (125), this lodge tyled its door for the last time in 1923, again due to the new political situation at the onset of the formation of the new Republic of Turkey. The Rituals in the Armenian Language of this lodge are still available in the Library of the UGLE.

Following the devastating events that occurred between 1915 and 1923 to the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, they tried to rebuild their lives and re-settle in the countries to which they were forced to emigrate. The Great Armenian Diaspora was born and the Armenians were scattered throughout the four corners of the globe. On the other hand, the first Republic of Armenia (1918-1921), which had several ministers who were members of lodges in the Grand Orient of France (Simon Vratzian, Alexandre Khatissian, to name two), would lose its sovereignty against the Red Army and become a Soviet Republic; thereby finding itself into an anti-Masonic context. That is why, until the 1950s, no large concentrations of Armenian Freemasons occurred except in isolated and individual cases (Michael Apcar, 33°. Yokohama, Japan, or Noradunghian Mihail, 33°, Romania).

The following lodges were born in cities that were distant from the Armenian Homeland. Ararat No.582 (1952, Grand Lodge of Michigan, USA), Ararat No.404 (1957, Grand Lodge of Argentina, Buenos Aires, Argentina), Ani No.11 (1959, District Grand Lodge of New York, Beirut, Lebanon), Mount Ararat No.9239 (1987, UGLE, Surrey, England), Ararat No.738 (1993, National Grand Lodge of France (GLNF), Aubagne, France), Hayastan No.94 (1994, Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, USA), Arménie Hayastan No.957 (1995, National Grand Lodge of France, Paris, France), Northern Lights No.9 (1995, Grand Lodge of Russia, Moscow, Russia), Lumières D'Ararat No.1049 (1997, GLNF, Lyon, France) and Urartu No.442 (2000, Grand Lodge of Argentina, Buenos Aires, Argentina).

The most significant aspect of this series of events is to appreciate the fact that from the diaspora came the most important event of this story: the Birth of the Grand Lodge of Armenia.

Hayastan Lodge No.94 in Washington DC, began preparations for this dream. On 16 December 1999, the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, to which Hayastan No.94 belongs, gave birth to the Sojourning Lodge Massis No.99. With the additional participation of the National Grand Lodge of France and the Grand Lodge of Russia, took place the project of creating the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Armenia. To that end, in May 2001 the First World Conference of Armenian Masons was held. There, all issues pertaining to the big step of consecrating this Grand Jurisdiction were settled. Mason

brethren from the United States, Russia, France, United Kingdom, Lebanon and Argentina were present at this Conference.

For the same purpose as the creation of Massis Sojourning Lodge, the National Grand Lodge of France created the Lodge France-Arménie, while the Grand Lodge of Russia founded, on 4 December 2001, Lodge Ser (Love) No.18. All of them were founded for the same objective, the foundation of a new Regular Grand Lodge for all Armenians.

On the historical day of 30 July 2002, in the capital city of Yerevan, the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Armenia was ceremoniously consecrated by the three Grand Lodges mentioned above. After decades, and for the first time in history, Armenian freemasonry had its own Masonic Jurisdiction and Autonomy in its native land.

As stated in its Constitution, the Grand Lodge of Armenia works regularly respecting the ancient landmarks of Regular Freemasonry. Its Constitution also provides for the performance of Masonic Tiled Meetings in three ritual rites: Emulation Ritual, York Ritual and Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. In 2002, the first four founding lodges were established: Massis No.1, France-Arménie No.2, Ser No.3 and George Washington No.4. The first three coming from the Jurisdictions of the three founding Grand Lodges, namely: Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, National Grand Lodge of France and the Grand Lodge of Russia respectively. The first Grand Master was the Most Worshipful Brother Christopher Sahakian, succeeded by the MWB Armen Janian, MWB Armen Garabedian, MWB Armen Simonian and MWB Gilbert Stepanian. The present Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Armenia is the first native Armenian, MWB Karen Hakobian.

In the philanthropic and social field, the Grand Lodge of Armenia founded Noah's Children Charity, by means of which, year after year, a great many philanthropic activities are undertaken to help those in need.

In July 2008, the Supreme Council of the 33° for Armenia was founded and consecrated. Its first and present Sovereign Grand Commander was the Illustrious and Very Powerful Brother Christopher Sahakian. Both the foundation of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Armenia and the Supreme Council 33° for Armenia opened a way in being the first Caucasian state in having these institutions. The Armenian Supreme Council is composed of the Lodges of Perfection, Chapter Lodges, Areopagus, and Consistory.

Today the Grand Lodge of Armenia of Free and Accepted Masons has over 11 lodges working and has a global structure sustained by Brethren of the Armenian diaspora and enriched by new members that are constantly being initiated in the land of the young Free Republic of Armenia (est. 1991). Meanwhile, Armenian Diaspora lodges are still being born.

Within a few years, there would be three centuries of speculative freemasonry. Among Armenians, the Craft has accomplished its mission of surviving and working constantly regardless of political, geographic and cultural problems that it was by necessity subjected to.



Top: Signature of a Master Stone Mason, Zvartnots Cathedral, Armenia. 7th century AD



Above: Armenian gravestone with Masonic Symbolism, in DACCA, India, 18th century.

