

**ANATOLIAN RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS PLATFORM/  
CULTURAL HERITAGE CARRIERS VANGUARDS OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE / Part 3**

Van Armenian Cultural Heritage and "Silent Pines" (Sessiz amlar) Documentary" with Fatih Gden

**TOPICS:** Van historical and cultural heritage sites, Christian architectural structures in Grpinar, Nestorian structures, the formation and screening processes of the documentary

*In this installment of our series "Those Who Back Our Cultural Heritage Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage", our guest is art historian Fatih Gden from Van. He is also the documentary producer of the documentary "Silent Bells" (Sessiz amlar).*

Fatih Gden- I continueam completing my master's degree inat the Department of Art History at Van Yzyıl University. I have been doing fieldwork on Christian religious architecture in the Lake Van basin for about 10 years. It was In 2011, a friend and I decided to travel around our geography area and region to take photographs. We realized that we didn't not know anything about the geography we lived in. We started to realizeunderstand this when we saw an old church structure or a monastery in every village we visited. Therefore, after a while, we started to take photographs of these structures and archive them. Afterwards, I decided to study aArt hHistory. As a result of my research, I created a seriouscomprehensive archive on Armenian churches. I continue this endeavour and , I still see myself at the beginning of the road. There are professors who are doing very serious studies in this sense. I decided to carry out studies in the sense of bringing this work together with our people. research in collaboration with people in the region.

**Nkhet Everi- Can you give us some information about the region? Van is a very important city.**

Fatih Gden- We had very, very little information about the region. We know knew about the monastery on Ahtamar Island. Maybe people knewow about the seven churches. (Church of St. Sofia, Church of St. John, Church of the Holy Mother of God, Church of Zhamatun of St. George, Chapel of the Holy Seal, Church of the Holy Cross, and Church of St. Sion) They also know that there is a monastery on the island of arpanak Island. I was shocked to learn that, according to the data of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, in 1878, there were 399 churches and 57 monasteries within the borders of Van sanjak, Van province.

According to a census conducted by the Ottoman Empire after 1915, 10,000 of Van's central population were Muslims and 24,000 were non-Muslims. However, the number of buildings surviving today may or may not exceed 100. Fieldwork is still ongoing. We can come across cChurches can be found in some mountain villages which are not documented. These are structures that are not in the literature on this subject.

**Nkhet Everi- As far as I know, you also have written a thesis. Isn't it not on Christian religious architecture in Grpinar? Have you ever discovered a placechurch or monastery? Because discovery is a very different thing.**

Fatih Gden- I have been working on the Christian religious architecture in Grpinar for two years. I have listed 76 villages in total in Grpinar, about 25 of these villages are completelyentirely Armenian villages, another 30 are mixed Kurdish-Armenian villages. The remaining 20-odd or so are completely Kurdish villages. Within the borders of today's Grpinar district, we found 9 buildings, 2 of which are documented in the literature. Hokyatz Monastery and a monastery in the Norduz Valley called Der Meryem. Apart from these two, seven of the buildings we found are not yet in the literature have not yet been documented because they are, located in villages where no academic study has been conducted. Two of them are Nestorian, that is, monasteries belonging to the Eastern Syrians.

Gürpınar is a very difficult geography. Feraşın Plateau is a region where military operations are very intense, so it is very troublesome to go there. I tried to go there a few times, but I couldn't get permission. I was able to go during the peace process. Now, I need to go again and take measurements, but I cannot go.

One of the most important buildings in this region is the Hokyatz Monastery, which, according to Armenian history, was used as a leprosy hospital in the 4th century. It is a very large and magnificent building with 22 rooms where Armenian pilgrims on pilgrimage on their way to Jerusalem stayed. It is a very important building, but it is in a very difficult geographical location where no one knows about it which is unknown.

We tried to include the building in the documentary Silent Bells, but we could not go to shootfilm there because the military would not give us permission.

Der MaryMeryem Monastery has a beautiful sidestory. When newly married couples living in that region don't have children are unable to conceive, they go to that monastery, slaughter a rooster, and make offerings. And interestingly, the vast majority of them have children. If the baby is a girl, they name her Mary, and if it is a boy, they name him Jesus. When you visit the villages in that region, you can see that there are already many children named Mary and Jesus. We are preparing a project about this subject.

**Nükhet Everi- Can you briefly tell us a little bit about Nestorian buildings?**

Fatih Güden- In the southernmost part of Gürpınar, there is a region we know as Kirkgeçit, where there is a hamlet. 20 kilometers south of Kirkgeçit town, there are located the villages of Topyıldız and Atbinen. One of which has a church, which is largely destroyed. The monastery is partially intact. Even the people there don't realize how precious it is.

**Nükhet Everi- This proves one of my theories. The Assyrian Empire could not go towards enter Van. Even if it tried to go, it couldn't takeconquer it. The Urartians couldn't not take Mesopotamia either. So, they drew a border in time. Right on that border is the Nestorian cChurch.**

Fatih Güden- Exactly so, and we even discovered Early Iron Age structures there, which we call known as Dirhe. They are called giant houses by the people of the region. It is believed that giants built them. Some researchers saypostulate they were Urartian border outposts.

**Nükhet Everi- What are your future projects?**

Fatih Güden- The documentary part of the Silent Bells project is the first legphase of several different projects. Our aim in making the documentary part is to raise awareness of about our people. We decided to make undertake such a project in order to raise awareness of the society in which we live in so that at least the churches and monasteries' current state can be preserved. As the second partphase, the more we show this film to our own people, to the people living in this region, the more we will make them aware, the more awareness we will create. I mean, from shepherds to villagers, they all look atperceive those structures as treasure.

As you may have seen in the documentary, I have a friend who is a painteran artist and paints beautifully. We are planning to organize a photography and painting exhibition with him. Lastly, I am planning to organize a student exchange project between Armenia and TurkeyTürkiye. In other words, we can host students who are studying a corresponding subject at the postgraduate level in Armenia. , who correspond to this field, andWe can show them these buildings, and we can provide a cultural fusion,interaction and understanding in order to break down eliminate prejudices.

Firstly of all, we were able to get a small amount of financial support for the documentary. I hope we will be able to find support for future projects.