

Save our graves : tombes arméniennes à Surat India, une nouvelle histoire révélée)

Liz Chater, who has an ongoing project to photograph and record as many Armenian graves in India as possible, was fortunate to stumble upon a wonderful set of photographs posted on the Indian-Armenian Friendship NGO Group page on the popular social networking site Facebook. Striking up a conversation thread with the Arpine Gyulinyan who had made the posting, it quickly became clear to Liz that there were a number of others as well.

Arpine who is happily married and lives in Surat permanently with her husband Piyush Dalal had recently visited the Surat Science Centre. At the entrance was a large photograph entitled "ARMENIAN CEMETERY". Enquiring about the photograph with staff members she was advised that the Science Centre's photographer, Sanjay Choksi, was extremely knowledgeable about all the cemeteries in Surat including the Armenian one. Sanjay kindly agreed to take Arpine and her husband Piyush to the Armenian cemetery the next day.

Through Arpine, permission was sought of and granted by Sanjay for copies of the photographs to be sent to Liz with a view to trying to get them transcribed and translated into English. Knowing of their historical importance and the fact that these graves had never before been translated into English, Liz turned to experts in this field for help.

Liz approached Professor Sebouh Aslanian, Assistant Professor, Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History at UCLA and Very Reverend Father Krikor Maksoudian of Arlington, Massachusetts a professor of Armenian Church history and a past director of the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Centre New York, both of whom very generously agreed to assist with these difficult transcriptions. Very Reverend Fr. Krikor had previously assisted Liz with the grave transcriptions for her *book: "Armenian Graves, Inscriptions and Memorials in India DACCA 1722-1977"* published last year. There are very few people who are able to successfully transcribe from the now extinct Julfan dialect. The graves at Surat are of that very rare dialect and Liz was indeed very fortunate to have two such exceptional experts willing to assist and help break down historic barriers. The Armenians of Surat are of particular interest to Professor Aslanian and he was keen to help with the translations.

For family historians and scholars alike, the newly translated Armenian graves of Surat will open up avenues of research that had been closed for many years. This project is a fine example of social networking operating in a positive and useful fashion, bringing individuals together who normally would never meet, and on this occasion Liz was simply a conduit by which the whole process passed. She is delighted to host and share this joint effort on her website and also wishes to thank all those involved for their time, effort and patience to ensure the rare and important details of these monuments are available for the future researcher. The English transcriptions can be found at:

http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~chaterfamilytree/graves_at_surat.htm.

There are a number of other graves that require to be photographed, it is hoped that these will be completed shortly. Additional transcriptions are being added weekly to her website.

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source : Alice Kanterian