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## **THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE - VII**

KINALI ISLAND'S ARMENIANS SPEAK

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### **compiled by**

Narod Avcı, Rudi Sayat Pulatyan

### **editor**

Ludmilla Büyüm

### **interviewers**

Atom Şaşkal, Narod Avcı, Rudi Sayat Pulatyan

### **translator**

Yeşim Öztarakçı

### **proofreader**

Sarah Atkinson

### **cover concept**

Sera Dink

### **page layout**

Selin Hamzaoğlu

### **index**

Lara Taş

### **special thanks**

Altuğ Yılmaz, Evridiki Pingo, Eyüp Ensar Dal, Nazar Büyüm,  
Stella Karachristianidou, Tamar Matik

### **cover photograph**

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Anarad Hıçutyun Binası  
Papa Roncalli Sokak, No: 128  
Harbiye, Şişli, 34373 İstanbul  
T. 0212 240 33 61  
F. 0212 240 33 94  
info@hrantdink.org  
www.hrantdink.org

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**KINALI ISLAND'S ARMENIANS SPEAK**  
THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE - VII

## **A note from the publisher**

*This book is the product of an oral history project conducted since 2011 as part of the Hrant Dink Foundation History Program. The seventh installment in the 'Sounds of Silence' series, this book presents twelve out of nineteen interviews of Armenians from Kinaliada, conducted between July 2020 and October 2020.*

*In addition to interview texts, which were edited with an effort to preserve the interviewees' spoken language and reflect the chronological order of events, the book also includes an introduction about the history of Kinaliada, as well as a general assessment of the project and interviews.*

*In the interview texts, Armenian words used by the interviewees are italicized; footnotes provide brief information about these words as well as certain words and some names, places, events, etc. referred to in the interviews.*

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## INTRODUCTION

NAROD AVCI

### ARMENIANS AND LIFE IN KINALIADA

An article in Masis newspaper dated July 14, 1855 predicted Kinaliada would become the summer resort that Armenians would prefer in the future. The report said: *“The blessing ceremony of the Armenian Surp Krikor Lusavorich Church, being built in Kinaliada, was held on Friday, and it was a source of great happiness for the Armenian community on the island. This island, as everyone knows, is the closest of the Princes’ Islands to the mainland. Moreover, it has beautiful fresh air and a fast-flowing stream. It seemed to be an island suitable for settlement and crowding by the Armenian community. There is no doubt that this island will be a beautiful summer place where Armenians can have fun.”*<sup>1</sup>

Because Kinaliada is the closest island to Istanbul among the Princes’ Islands, it was named *Proti* during the Byzantine Period, meaning 'first' in Greek. In the Ottoman period, the island was named 'Kinalı' due to its red soil. Other known names the island has had include Akonae, Akoni, Akonitis, Tinaki, Prota, and Protis.

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<sup>1</sup> Damadyan, Krikor, Vağarşag Seropyan. *Nersesyan Tibrats Tas Kinalı Gıghzi-150*. [Kinaliada Nersesyan Muganni Essemble – 150<sup>th</sup> year], (Istanbul: Mart Printing House), 2007, s.23.

In 1453 Mehmet II went to Kinaliada, Burgazada, Heybeliada and then Büyükada before besieging Istanbul. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kinaliada was under the rule of the Metamorfofis Monastery of the Greek Orthodox community, which was built on the island's Hristos Hill during the Byzantine period. According to the known information about Kinaliada, there was no Muslim population on the island until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Kinaliada's inhabitants were engaged in fishing and viticulture.

With the sale of Metamorfofis Monastery to Chios Greeks at the time, the lands on the island, including the monastery, were connected to Anaros Island in the Aegean Sea. The sanctuary, which changed hands several times in the following years, was last purchased by Alexander Ypsilanti and subsequently donated to monastery on Heybeliada. Ypsilanti, on the other hand, taking part in the struggle leading to the separation and declaration of Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821–29, was stripped of citizenship, and his property confiscated by the government. The Greek Patriarchate managed to keep the Metamorfofis Monastery under the monastery administration of Heybeliada, thus preventing the monastery's seizure.

After this event, we know that some lands were given to the Anglican Armenians due to their relationship with the British government. Kinaliada became one of the summer resorts favored by Armenians of different sects with living conditions improving on the island over the years. The Armenian population settled on the island since the 1800s continued to grow over the years in parallel with improvements in transportation. The increase in population made it necessary to open places of worship and institutions to meet the island's educational needs. Because of these new needs, the construction of Surp Krikor Lusavorich Armenian Church began in 1855, and in the same year, Nersesyan Armenian School was opened. A year after this date, Surp Krikor Lusavorich Armenian Cemetery was built on the land west of the church, donated by Anber *Hanim*<sup>2</sup> and Ohannes Yazicioğlu. These

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2 *Hanim* (Tur.): Mrs.

structures, which allowed the continuation of cultural and religious activities, played an essential role in the lives of the Armenian community in Kinaliada for more than a century.

### **A place of exile: Kinaliada and General Vartan**

During the Byzantine period, islands were places of exile for those who disagreed on religious issues, who lost power struggles, or otherwise fell from grace. We know that the islands were first used as places of exile during the time of Eastern Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. Constantine exiled Bishop Nerses I and his delegation, who had been sent to him by the Armenian King Arshag III in 350, to Büyükada, because of religious differences.

Kinaliada, being a place of exile, has been home to people who have, or want to have a say in its administration for many years. One of the important names exiled to Kinaliada was General Vartan (Vardanos), a member of the Mamigonian family. The exile of Vartan to Kinaliada and his subsequent death there increased the importance of the island for the Armenians. Vartan, one of the critical generals of Byzantium with the wars in which he participated, began to march with the soldiers he gathered with him toward the imperial palace when he received the news that the then Emperor Nikiphoros I (802–811) had descended from the throne. When he arrived at the walls, he learned that the emperor was still on the throne and thus he had to surrender. General Vartan was then exiled to Kinaliada after the failure of the revolt he had initiated. He was later allowed to build the Vardanos Monastery on the island.

In the following years, when rumors arose that Vartan was preparing a new rebellion, Nikiphoros I sent a party to Kinaliada and had Vartan's eyes gouged out. After this incident, Vartan took the name Sava and retreated to the monastery. The wounds in his eyes began to heal but he did not allow his family to visit him for years and led a modest life, taking only water and some basic food. Vartan's experiences deeply touched the people of Istanbul at the time, and he was declared a saint by the people. So much so that people sought

healing by bringing their patients to him. We know that Vartan spent the rest of his life in Vardanios Monastery on Kinaliada; after his death, he was buried on the right side of the church in the monastery.

In the years coinciding with the death of Vartan, Nikiphoros I was killed by the Bulgarian King Krum, and his son-in-law Mikhail Rangave I (811–813) ascended the throne. However, the latter was unable to overcome the administrative problems that arose during his short time on the throne, and he was ousted when Leon V, also known as the Armenian Leon, declared himself king. After Leon ascended the throne, he exiled Rangave's sons to Kinaliada. The tomb of Leon, who died in 820, is located in the Metamorfosis Monastery on Kinaliada.

### **Religious institutions**

Today, Kinaliada has one Greek Orthodox Church, one Armenian Apostolic Church, a Greek Orthodox monastery, a holy spring, and a mosque.

To our knowledge, there were three monasteries in Kinaliada during the Byzantine period. However, detailed information remains only about Metamorfosis Monastery (Hristos-Upper Monastery). Of these monasteries, only Metamorfosis Monastery is still in active use. The monastery housed other exiles such as Emperor Romanus Diogenes. The U-shaped building, restored several times over the centuries, also served as an orphanage toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the information we have, monks who lived in the Metamorfosis Monastery were engaged in viticulture, cultivation of olives, growing of cabbage and fragrant flowers, as well as the reproduction of religious books and manuscripts.

The Lower Monastery, which has not survived, is believed to have been located on the property opposite the motor pier in Kinaliada. Sarcophagi and ancient stones were found during construction work on the site, but there has not been further investigation as to the origin of these. The Panayia Greek Orthodox Church, used by

the Greek and Syriac communities in Kinaliada, is located on the land where the monastery used to be. Today there is a column capital and a marble fragment in the garden of the church.

A third monastery, believed to have once existed in Kinaliada, is the Vardanios Monastery, built by General Vartan during his exile and named after him. Although the information about this monastery is limited and its reliability controversial, it is stated in some sources that the building was once in the area where the Kinaliada Police Station stands today.

The construction of the Armenian church in Kinaliada started in 1855 to meet the needs of the islanders. Before the church opened, the Armenian population on the island continued to worship by gathering in private houses. Religious officials would come from Istanbul to perform rituals such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. However, due to transportation difficulties, the ceremonies often could not be performed. For this reason, the Armenian population on the island requested that the government of the time build an Armenian Church on Kinaliada. Construction of Surp Krikor Lusavorich Church began in 1855, and was opened by Patriarch Hagop III on September 22, 1857. The church, which was severely damaged after the great earthquake of 1894, could only be repaired through the efforts of the then Board of Trustees. The church, whose last restoration was in 1988, is in active use today. Another place of worship on the island is the Kinaliada Mosque, an example of modern architecture. The mosque, whose construction made use of materials from the Karaköy Mescid, which had been destroyed during road construction in Karaköy in 1958, was completed with the support of the island inhabitants of different faiths and was opened for worship in 1964.

## Education

In 1855, Nersesyan Armenian School, offering co-education, was opened in Çınarlı Köşk Street, now known as 'Çınaraltı' to meet the educational needs that arose in parallel with the growing Armenian

population on Kinalıada. Nersesyan School consisted of three classrooms along with a kindergarten class, and students from Kartal and Pendik, as well as students from the other islands, attended the school. Various documents show that not only Armenian but also Turkish students were taught at Nersesyan School.

In addition to Nersesyan School, it is known that there was a private school that belonged to Kirkor Oksiyan, a Catholic Armenian from Kütahya. Oksiyan moved to the island in 1876, opened a school in the hall of his house, and had dozens of students until it closed in 1884.

After the great earthquake in Istanbul in 1894, Nersesyan School, like the Armenian Church in Kinalıada, was severely damaged, and closed for a while. With the islanders' and the Patriarchate's support, the damaged buildings of Nersesyan School and the School Foundation were rebuilt. The restoration work, which began in 1911, was completed in 1917, and the school reopened with six classrooms.

Besides earthquakes, the many fires that occurred in Kinalıada also changed the face of the island. The scarcity of water and the fire brigade's inadequacy led to greater size and severity of fires on the island. In the autumn of 1929, an especially terrible fire in the island's market area destroyed Atamyán Theater, Nersesyan School, and the surrounding buildings. Because of this fire Nersesyan School became unusable, which disrupted the school life of the students. In response, Dikran Kazazyán donated his two-storey house, in a garden between Saki Bey and Köşklü Streets, to the School Foundation to be used as a school. The school, which in 1917 had 150 students, was closed in 1938 due to insufficient numbers.

With the growth of the Greek population in Kinalıada, Panayia Greek Primary School opened in 1869 with a single classroom, next to the Greek Church. The school, which was known to have had thirty students until 1965, closed in 1973 due to insufficient numbers.

After Nersesyan School was closed, the Armenian population of Kinalıada sent their children to Kinalıada Primary School. The school

opened in 1924 under the name 'Kınalıada İlk Mektebi' but four years later, with the adoption of Latin letters, changed its name to 'Kınalıada Primary School'. It is known that 33 Armenian and six Greek students graduated from the school between 1935 and 1972. The school is currently in active use.

The girls' orphanage at Metamorfozis Monastery on Hristos Hill is another educational institution on the island. The orphanage was moved to a vacant building in Yedikule in 1915 while it was used as military headquarters during the First World War. This orphanage, attached to the monastery, closed in 1927. Although we do not have direct access to information in the sources about the closure of the orphanage, it is possible to relate the closure to the 1927 decision to ban religious education throughout the country.

Donated by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to the Surp Krikor Lusavorich Armenian Church, Kınalıada Children's Camp, which has been continuing its activities since 1965 as an affiliate of the Association of Graduates of the Karagözyan School, also known as the Karagözyan Orphanage Gazturman Gayan Summer Camp, Kınalıada for Armenian children, has turned it into a summer place.

## Transportation

As the population preferring summer resorts grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so did the need for transportation between Istanbul, the islands, and the Bosphorus. The fact that kayaks, which were the primary means of transportation at the time, were insufficient to meet this need, and which did not provide safe navigation, created the need for ships. Ships under British and Russian flags initially met this need. In the time of Mahmut II, the steamship named 'Swift' first came to the Ottoman Empire and started its service first on the Princes' Islands and then on Çekmece. However, this vehicle was later prohibited by the Ottoman Empire; transport to the island was then carried out by small steamboats once a day. In 1846, when the steamboat named 'Yeyticaret' was put into service,

regular trips to the Princes' Islands began. As the population grew, Şirket-i Hayriye ferries docked twice a day at the old pier in Kınalıada. The beginning of regular ferry services increased the population of the islands, and in turn, development increased as well.

Although we have not found any information in the literature about how transport on the island was conducted on Kınalıada, which has an area of 1,356 km<sup>2</sup> and a length of 2,000 meters, it is known that donkeys and horses were used, as on other Princes' Islands. However, unlike the other islands, animals have not been used for transportation in Kınalıada for many years. With the removal of phaeton from the islands in 2020, the islands were opened to electric vehicles. These vehicles provide intra-island transport in Kınalıada today.

### **Transformation**

Political decisions targeting non-Muslim communities living in Turkey affected the non-Muslim communities living in Kınalıada and led to changes in the island's demographic structure. As can be seen from the oral history interviews conducted within the scope of this study, the pogrom of September 6–7 (1955) and the 1964 Expulsion of Istanbul Greeks with Greek citizenship left lasting traces in the memory of the people of Kınalıada.

In 1955, debates over the future of Cyprus led to a rise in nationalism and discrimination against the non-Muslim community throughout the country. On September 6, on the morning news, state radio announced that a grenade had been thrown at the Consulate of the Republic of Turkey in Thessaloniki, into the garden of the house where Atatürk was born. The subsequent news spread by the newspaper Istanbul Express led to a pogrom against non-Muslims throughout Turkey, especially against the Greek community. Although it later became clear that it was a Turkish person, who was a Greek citizen, had thrown the bomb into the Turkish Consulate garden as a provocation, there were

violent incidents in the neighborhoods densely populated by non-Muslims on 6-7 September 1955. The Princes' Islands were also affected by these events. The boats departing from Istanbul were filled with people who perpetrated attacks on the entire non-Muslim population, especially the Greeks on the islands. Büyükada was the island most affected by these attacks. Kınalıada, on the other hand, was the least affected by the events of September 6-7 among the Princes' Islands and Istanbul. This is mainly because Osman Belge, the commissioner at the time, did not allow boats approaching Kınalıada to dock at the island. In Kınalıada, where there were no external attacks, only church windows and cemeteries were vandalized.

The expulsion of Greeks with Greek citizenship from the country in 1964 was one of the most significant political decisions that influenced the island's demographic change. As the Cyprus problem was becoming more and more acute, it was announced that the '1930 Residual, Trade and Circulation Agreement', which had granted the right to free movement, residence, and trade to people living in Turkey and Greece, thus also safeguarding Greeks of Greek citizenship residing in Turkey, was repealed. Immediately after this decision, the government decided to deport all Greeks with Greek citizenship. Following this decision, 12,000 Greek citizens were deported, only allowed to take 20 kg of their belongings and 20 dollars with them. In the cases of marriages between two different Greek nationals, one person of the family was deported, while the other was allowed to stay in Turkey. This decision separated Greek citizens in Turkey from their relatives and friends of Greek citizens and the overall migration of families who did not want to separate, leading to a significant decrease in the Greek population in Istanbul. With the exile in 1964, 45,000 Greeks were forced to emigrate from Turkey, 2,902 properties worth 300 million liras were confiscated during this period. The Greek population of the islands and many districts and neighborhoods suffered a tremendous blow in 1964. With the decline of the

Greek population, the Greek elementary school on the island had to be closed due to an insufficient number of students. In the following years, the Syriac community on the island began to use Panayia Greek Orthodox Church.

### **The population on the islands**

The available information on population trends, specifically in Kinaliada, is limited. According to available sources, we know that toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the population of Kinaliada was 398. The distribution of the population was 100 Catholic Armenians, 100 Apostolic Armenians, 100 Orthodox Greeks, and 98 Muslims. We can see that the Prince's Islands population, which in 1840 was 1,816, increased to 6,000 by 1865. This increase in the Princes' Islands increased the population in Kinaliada. We know that the Armenian population of Kinaliada in the 1880s had forty households in winter and sixty to seventy in summer. According to the 1935 census, a total of 16,807 people lived in the Prince's Islands.

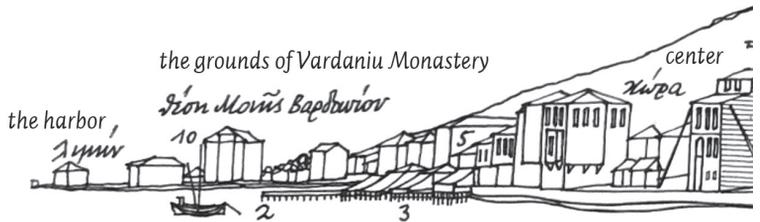
When the Greek community was forced to leave the island in 1964, the abandoned sites fell into ruin over time. As demand for the islands increased in the 1970s, new buildings were constructed on the vacant lots. Buildings constructed without official development plans altered the landscape of the island and resulted in a distorted development. Population growth also accelerated with the construction. According to 1992 data, the population of Kinaliada reaches 25,000 in the summer months, and about 20,000 of these are Armenians. Although the 2020 population data states that 16,000 people officially reside in the Prince's Islands, it is estimated that this number increases tenfold during the summer months.

Kinaliada has been the preferred summer resort of the Armenian community for more than a century. The fact that most of the population on the island is Armenian during the summer months positioned Kinaliada differently for the Armenian community. The history of Kinaliada and its position within the Princes' Islands is

examined with this study, which will contribute to the literature on Kinaliada. Simultaneously, this study aimed to make visible the family stories, entertainment and cultural activities, and daily life practices of the Armenians of Kinaliada, based on individual historical narratives.

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1. βασιλοσυναγα
2. ναινισια
3. παραθαλασσια καρενια, τσαρδωμια
4. παζω ασοβαθρας
5. αγορα (αγιασμα του γαρι), Πλατεια
6. Οδοδοχος νεος και σχολη
7. Αρμενικος νεος
8. Αρμενικo νεκροταφειο
9. Hotel Chshab
10. Ομια Αρσενίου
11. Ομια Νιμοζαϊδου



Kinaliada's front and bird's eye view sketches by Akillas Millas.

