

Muslim Armenians

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Branches of Hamshentsi Armenians

According to professor Bert Vaux (University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee) Hamshentsi Armenians are divided into 3 main groups: Western, Eastern and Northern.

Western Hamshentsies (Hemshinli) resides in the area of Bash-Hemshina. They live primarily in mountainous villages of Rize province. They are Sunni Muslims who in large numbers also reside in the areas of Chamlihemshina (Viya) and Hemshina. A much smaller number of them live in the western provinces of Turkey, such as Istanbul, Sakarya, Dyuzche, Kochaeli and Zonguldak. They speak a different dialect of Turkish, called 'Hemshinche'.

Eastern Hamshentsies (Homshentsi) are originally from the Khopa Hemshina region. Homshentsies are also Sunni Muslims who predominately reside in the province of Artvin and in other parts of the region such as the city of Kemallasha (Makriali), Khopa and in the village of Muratli (Berlivan), which is part of a sub-province called Borchka.

Great portion of eastern Hamshentsies used to reside in Adjara (Georgia), but they were deported to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan by Joseph Stalin. In 1989 a great number of these deported Hamshentsies relocated to Krasnodar region of Russia after wrongly being labeled as 'Turk Meskhenties'. This eastern group of Hamshentsi Armenians speaks in an archaic Armenian dialect, which they self-proclaimed as 'Homshentsi Lizu'.

Northern Hamshentsies (Hamshentsi) is comprised of Christian Hamshentsies who refused to convert to Islam and fled the town of Hamshen during the conversion of their compatriots to Islam. They primarily settled in the regions of Samsun, Djanik, Kurshunlu, Charshamba, Ordu, Giresun and Trabizon (in the valley of Karda-dere 'black river' located to the east of Trabizon).

Currently, majority of them reside in the Krasnodar region of Russia, as well as in Sochi and Adigei (Southern Russia). As Christians, northern Hamshentsies have maintained their unique culture and Hamshentsi self-identity. Just like their eastern compatriots they speak Hamshentsi dialect, which they call as 'Hyeren'.

Culture

Hamshentsi Armenians are known for their long tradition of storytelling, jokes and historical narratives. Some of the jokes told by Muslim Hamshentsies are based on more ancient Armenian stories and fables that survived the Armenian conversion to Christianity. Hamshentsi Armenians have traditional dances accompanied by their local musical tunes played on a musical instrument called Tulum (Western Hamshentsies), Shimshir-Kaval (type of a flute used by Eastern Hamshentsies) and Hamshna-Zurna (large wind instrument used by Northern Hamshentsies).

Traditional pastimes of Hamshentsi Armenians residing in Turkey are growing corn and tea, raising and maintaining of husbandry and working with beehives. Some Hamshentsies in Turkey are renowned gun makers as well. Northern Hamshentsi Armenians residing in de-facto independent Abkhazia and southern Russia are known not only for growing tobacco, fruits, corn, tea and silk worms, but they are also in the food services and commercial transportation business as well.