

Mandaeans play within the book. Naturally, this is due to no fault of the author; research on the Mandaeans within Iraq has been prohibitively difficult to conduct since the first Gulf War. Furthermore, before the fall of Saddam Hussein, even those Iraqi Mandaeans who lived outside of Iraq were hesitant to talk about their former home, for fear of endangering their correligionists there. Consequently, much information has been suppressed, the Mandaeans censoring themselves more often than not, and prevailing upon Buckley to exercise delicacy with her own information. The dearth of information regarding the Mandaeans in Iraq has not been alleviated since the toppling of the Baathist regime; of late, the fog of war has obscured the situation of the Mandaeans in Iraq.

This information vacuum is doubly unfortunate because the Iraqi community is the largest and most well-established of the Mandaean communities, and yet its position today is the most precarious. Since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Iraqi Mandaeans have shared in the trials of their compatriots, and have also been subject to terrible persecution at the hands of criminals and religious extremists. Because Mandaeans traditionally work as jewelers, they are largely perceived as fabulously wealthy, and have become a frequent target for looters and thieves. Despite the fact that both scholars and authorities on Islamic law have identified them with the Sabians of the Qur'an, their esoteric nature makes them an easy target for religious demagogues seeking to unify their communities against perceived threats, internal and external. In Falluja alone, thirty-five families have been forced to convert to Islam – a situation which would have been inconceivable at any other time in the history of the modern state of Iraq.⁸ If their welfare is not soon ensured by the modern rulers of Iraq and the international community, this unique faith will pass into history, like so many other treasures of the ancient Near East.

⁸ Elizabeth Kendall, "Iraq: The Persecution of Mandaeans." *Assist News Service*, 31 January 2004.

Review

Bülent Fevzioğlu, Suna Atun; *Kıbrıs Türk Halk Edebiyatında Destanlar ve Ağıtlar Üzerine Bilgiler – Belgeler – Araştırmalar; Mağusa 2001-2003, Samtay Vakfı Yayınları* (vol. 1: ISBN 975-6653-02-7, pp. xxiv+308; vol. 2: ISBN 975-6653-05-6, pp. xii+335; vol. 3: ISBN 975-6653-04-3, pp. xiv+430).

On the 21st of January 2001, in Famagusta in Northern Cyprus, the SAMTAY Foundation started their activities (Suna and Ata Atun History of Famagusta Research and Literature Foundation), the aim of which was the preservation for future generations of the cultural legacy of Turkish Cypriots. The Foundation was set up by Suna and Ata Atun,¹ who were inspired by

¹ Suna ATUN (born 1949) – by education a pharmacist, by interest a researcher into the history of Famagusta, a successful businesswoman, the first female ship owner in North Cyprus, the founder of the *Revitalise Famagusta Old Town Association* (in 1999), President of the SAMTAY Foundation, the author or joint author of several books published by the SAMTAY Foundation (c.f. footnote 3), the author of numerous papers on history, literature and folklore which have been given at national and international historical and literary conferences.

Ata ATUN (born 1948) – a graduate of the Al-Hikma American University in Baghdad and Century University in Los Angeles, awarded the degrees of PhD (1989) and Asst. Professor (1998) in the field of civil engineering; a lecturer at the Near East University in Nicosia (Northern Cyprus), the author of numerous academic textbooks as well as academic publications to do with civil engineering. The Chairman of the A&S ATUN Ltd. Group of Companies, in conjunction with his wife, Suna Atun, the founder of the SAMTAY Foundation.

Bülent FEVZİOĞLU (born 1959) – poet, writer, publicist; he was forced, for financial reasons to finish his education while in the 6th class of primary school, since the age of 12 he has worked for a living. At 15 he was conscripted into the army to defend Turkish part of Famagusta (1974); the first of his works of poetry was published in 1976; the author of an uncountable number of press articles, over 100 poems and song texts, twelve books; a tireless compiler of literary and cultural sources relating to Turkish Cypriots; the coordinator of the work of the SAMTAY Foundation.

a profound love for their beautiful city of Famagusta where every stone constitutes a piece of history. As Suna Atun writes in the preface to the first book published by the Foundation 'Writers and historians say that *history is not simply made up of wars, skirmishes, trophies and armies*. The lives of individuals, their passions, thoughts, the works they have created and produced, their political struggle – all these are the pages that constitute a history book. With the exception of a few foreign researchers nobody has taken it upon himself to write the history of our town... Those minute inscriptions on walls, the tattered photograph that turns up, the yellowed mouse-gnawed newspaper cuttings together with the incomplete recollections of those still alive... constitute everything that resembles the smouldering light of candles that flicker to illuminate the history of our town...' ² And it was then that the SAMTAY Foundation came into existence in order to save from total oblivion what was possible for future generations. Hence the Foundation's beautiful motif: 'to transform the past and present on to documents to be carried to the future'. The Foundation's achievements are indeed impressive. Within the course of a mere three and a half years they have produced nine books, with another four awaiting publication. ³

Folklore is indeed a national treasure, its heritage representing a natural proof of a continuity in its existence. The book presented in this article is the result

² B.Fevzioğlu, S. Atun: *Mağusa Haritasında...*, p.9.

³ The publications that have appeared thanks to the SAMTAY Foundation, include: 1.Bülent Fevzioğlu, Suna Atun: *Mağusa Haritasında Yüzlerinin ve Yüreklarının İzdüşümleri Kalmış 116 İNSAN* (a biographical compendium of 116 individuals connected with Famagusta, who have worked for the culture of Famagusta over the course of the last century), 472 pages; 2.B.Fevzioğlu: *Bir Yanım Yazı Bir Yanım Şiir* (the poetry and prose of Bülent Fevzioğlu), 180 pages; 3.B.Fevzioğlu, S.Atun: *Kıbrıs Türk Halk Edebiyatında Destanlar ve Ağutlar* (the subject of the present article), three volumes, in total 1123 pages; 4.Ata Atun: „*Excerpta Cypria*“dan *Mağusa Yazıları /M.Ö.66 – M.S.1772/* (a selection and translation into Turkish of those fragments of Claude Delaval Cobham's *Excerpta Cypria* that relate to the history of Famagusta), 330 pages; 5.B.Fevzioğlu, S.Atun: *Kıbrıslı Türklerde Sportif Etkinliklerin Başlangıcı ve Kıbrıs Türk Futbolundan Tarihsel Kesitler* (a comprehensive work on the history of the sport of Turkish Cypriots, starting with the first horse race on the Island which were initially organized in 1892 under British rule), 390 pages; 6.*Hakeri'nin Kıbrıs Türkçesi Sözlüğü* (a dictionary of the language of Turkish Cypriots under the authorship of Bener Hakkı HAKERİ), 350 pages; 7.*Harid FEDAI – Makaleler [1]* (a selection of approx. 60 articles by the well-known Cypriot literary specialist); 8.S.Atun, B.Fevzioğlu: *Kıbrıs Türk Edebiyatında Öykünün 107 Yıllık Kronolojik-Antolojik Tarihsel Süreci*, cilt 1 (the history of Turkish Cypriot short-story writing from its inception in 1897, the first of three parts that have been planned the entirety to appear at the end of 2005 and which will run to approx. 1500 pages), 9.S.Atun: *Kıbrıs Türk Edebiyatında Yergi Şiirleri ve Şairleri* (a detailed study of the satirical poetry of Turkish Cypriots), 170 pages.

of time-consuming, arduous research in libraries and archives coupled with interviews with representatives of the last remaining producers of folk art, or their descendants. All this effort had as its aim the assembly and publication (and the consequent preservation) of two forms of Turkish literature: *destan* and *ağut*. ⁴ The work in question comprises three volumes (in total 1123 pages) and constitutes the greatest work to date on the legacy of Turkish Cypriot folk literature. It contains a biography of folk bards and poets, their works, and an invaluable collection of reproduction photographs. The great merit of the book is that it presents articles and papers that encompass the subject matter, ones that were published earlier or given at academic conferences. The reader is therefore exposed to a comprehensive examination of the subject matter without a need to refer to numerous academic journals and conference materials. The authors incorporated in the work include such eminent names as: Harid Fedai, Mahmut İslamoğlu, Bener Hakkı Hakeri, İsmail Bozkurt, Oğuz Yorgancıoğlu, Mustafa Gökçeoğlu to mention but six.

The book presents all the works of the *destan*, that are known amongst the Turks of Cyprus. The earliest were created during the first half of the nineteenth century. These are works that describe actual events, heroic acts, the adventures of heroes (often romantic in nature). Consequently the heroes of the *destan* are most often individuals fighting for some righteous cause, lovers, outlaws escaping justice and finding shelter in the mountains (here of especial note is the *Destan of the Hasanbulli Brothers*, which recounts the deeds of three brothers escaping British justice in the last years of the 19th century). The book also mentions works written in Greek, the most interesting of which are: *Destan in Honour of Atatürk* written after the death of the Turkish leader by the Cypriot folk poet Haralambos Azinas as well as the satirical *Destan on Laziness* by the Turk Cypriot Mustafa Muzaffer, written in Greek. Cypriot *destans*, in contrast to the more bombastic *destans* created in Anatolia, can display a freer, even frivolous, character. We therefore have in the book in question didactic *destans* where the heroes can be animals (for example a fly, mouse, frog, cockerel); unfortunately there is only a passing mention of the existence of *destans* of the *Destan A and G* type which are of an erotic nature. ⁵

⁴ *destan* – “1.epic, epic poem; 2.(folk literature) ballad, song”; *ağut* – “dirge, lament, funeral song, lamentation” [Redhouse Yeni Turkish-English Dictionary, İstanbul 1974, pp.288 and 20]. In the present work reference will be made to the original terms: *destan* and *ağut*.

⁵ Behind the Turkish initials A. and G. there lies an uncensored reference to certain parts of the body. One can suppose that the authors took into consideration moral attitudes in deciding to reject this particular type of literature. One is left with the hope that *destans* of an erotic content will be worked upon and published by researchers from SAMTAY in a separate work.

The second type of folk poetry mentioned in this book, *ağıt*, arose as an expression of pain following the death of someone close or one respected within a given environment. The oldest of these works (by an unknown author) was created towards the end of the 19th century and expresses the pain of a young man who loses his fiancée during a deluge. Of particular importance are the works written following the death in a car accident in 1936 of the young lawyer Süleyman Şevket, a man respected by both communities. His personage is extolled in works of *ağıt* by both Turks and Greeks. Of especial importance amongst *ağıts* are those that describe the misunderstanding between two men in love with the same woman and the tragic death of one of them, murdered by his rival or those which display remorse at the death of a woman killed by a jealous man. This sort of work constitute a rich source of information concerning the customs of both societies in Cyprus. There have appeared since 1955 *ağıts* which lament the death of Cypriots of Turkish nationality murdered by nationalists from the EOKA organization. *Ağıts* of this content matter often appear within the output of the current generation of poets. One of the most beautiful works of this type has been written by Bülent Fevzioğlu and deals with the death of Turkish fighters who fell fighting against adherents of *enosis* (events from 1958, 1964, 1974).

Each volume of S.Atun and B.Fevzioglu's work has been met with favourable press and academic reviews. Here are a few samples: '*Destanlar ve Ağıtlar*, as with other books of the SAMTAY Foundation, displays a depth of documentation and source material. We should always have at hand this sort of book from which we can learn so much.' (E.Çetinel: *Halkın Sesi Gazetesi*, 09.09.2001); 'Thanks to the SAMTAY Foundation the culture of Turkish Cypriots has gained works of value. *Destanlar ve Ağıtlar* is a work which should be on the bookshelf.' (A.Baturay: *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 09.02.2003); '*Destanlar ve Ağıtlar* is a work of significance which should be used by those who convey knowledge about our literature and those who would like to acquire this self same knowledge.' (B.H.Hakeri: *Halkın Sesi Gazetesi*, 02.08.2003); 'The SAMTAY Foundation has been awarded the Turkish award from the Association for Research into Folklore for 'service to folklore' for the year 2002. Amongst the justifications for the award were given, among other things: the book *Destan and ağıt in the Folk Literature of Turkish Cypriots*, which was planned as a three-volume work, of which two have been published to date is closely connected with Turkish Folk Culture and constitutes a rich source of knowledge.' (Haber: *Kıbrıs Gazetesi*, 10.01.2003).

Finally I would like to express my hope that Suna and Ata Atun and B.Fevzioglu's passion will bear fruit in subsequent excellent works that will constitute a further, equally important stage in the preservation from oblivion of recollections from the past. The tempestuous history of Cyprus and the association on a daily basis with a past forged by Greek, Romans, Byzantines, the soldiers of Richard the Lion Heart, Lusignans, Venetians, Ottomans and the British have left

their mark on the consciousness of Cyprus's inhabitants and have taught them to be more sensitive, even though this is something a lot are probably not conscious of. I would like (and believe that this equally is the wish of the authors of this book) all Cypriots to be able to appreciate the treasures of their past and culture and be able to preserve this heritage. It is a heritage imbued with a love for one's homeland, with the events narrated in the *destans*, with the sorrows described in the *ağıts* and the daily worries and joys recounted in the *türkü* folk songs. As Bülent Fevzioğlu has said in one of his poems:

„Famagusta, that Fortified Town, is the love within us
A love a little like *destan*, a little like *ağıt*, but most of all like *türkü*.”

I wish the authors of the book, and all the inhabitants of the 'Island of Afrodite', that they live a little (from) the *destans*, a little (from) the *türkü*, but least of all (from) the *ağıt*.

Grażyna Zajac