

beating or kicking with heavy boots or pulling out fingernails to extract confessions. Vahram Alazan described his ordeal in the NKVD prison in Yerevan, the same prison where my father was held. His interrogator, the son of an old friend of his, wanted him to confess that he was keeping a journal. He wanted to lay hands on it in the hope of finding derogatory comments about Stalin and Beria and tributes to Trotsky. Alazan denied keeping a diary but his interrogator did not believe him. He showed no mercy to his father's old friend. He made him stand against the wall without food or water for forty-eight hours straight, and he beat him on the head and chest. Alazan fainted and collapsed a few times, but the guards brought him around and made him stand again and keep taking the beating. Alazan commented with sorrow and commiseration, "That is what the Stalin era did to people, it turned that naïve and innocent young man into a ferocious beast. He would have beaten his own father the same way he beat me."⁴⁴

44 Alazan, «Տառապանքի ուղիներով» (Through the roads of suffering), p. 34. After weeks in solitary confinement, Alazan was assigned to a common cell. There he witnessed the torture, pain and suffering of his fellow inmates, among them Grigor Vardanian, a Western Armenian and the president of ՀՕԿ (Հայաստանի Օգնություն Կոմիտե, Armenia Assistance Committee). This committee, founded in Yerevan in 1921, was actually an arm of the Soviet regime in the Diaspora. Ironically, the committee was dissolved in 1937, its leaders were accused of spying, and they were brought back to Armenia and imprisoned. Another interesting fellow whom Alazan met in prison, among the many described in his memoir, was Khmbapet Shavarsh, a revolutionary fedayee and the protagonist of Yeghishe Charents' satirical poem, «Խմբապետ Շաւարշը» (Captain Shavarsh). Alazan recalled him as a straightforward and funny man who once said to him, "Even if they give you twenty or thirty years, it still isn't enough. All those years you spent fetishizing their *kolkhoz* and their tractors, and not a single poem about our homeland or our Mother Arax. Have you learned your lesson?" (Ibid., p. 45). Khmbapet Shavarsh was later executed by firing squad.