
Famous Armenians...Insufficiently Verified

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Compiled by Jirair Tutunjian from "Figures of Armenian Origin from Ancient Times Until Our Days" by Artsvi Bakhchinyan (Zangak-97, Yerevan, 2002)

In addition to the many famous Armenians whose ethnicity is well documented, there are famous persons some Armenians claim as their own, despite sparse or suspect documentation. Here are some of these famous "Armenians".

Eleanora Duse. Celebrated European stage actress born in Vigevano (1858) and died in Pittsburg (1924). She was supposed to have been descended from the famed Duzian family of Constantinople. Her grandfather-Luigi Duse-- was comedia d'arte actor and her father-Alessandro-was an equally famous actor. She died in a car accident.

Jacques-Andre-Joseph Aved. Armenian-born French painter (1702-1766).He painted the portraits of King Louis XIV and Wilhelm IV of Prussia, in addition to other European celebrities. He died in Paris.

Antonin Artaud. Dramatist, born in Marseilles (1896) and died in Paris (1948). A leading figure in the Theatre of the Absurd movement, he was also an actor and theatre director. His mother (from Izmir) descended from a famous Armenian Nalbasoghlu family.

General Wilhelm Guderian. Born in Poland in 1888, he was a leading German general in WWII. Hugo Scheinbach, director of the Hamburg Orientalist Institute, has insisted Guderian's Armenian origins.

Guderian died in 1954 in Germany.

Edouard Balladur. Born in Izmir in 1929, served as Prime Minister of France from 1993 to 1995. His ancestors originated in Nakhichevan. His father was a commander in the French army in Cilicia, Turkey. Although he was married in an Armenian Catholic church and such famous French publications as "Le Figaro" have mentioned his Armenian ancestry, Balladur has not mentioned whether he is Armenian.

Basil Zakharov. The famous and notorious international arms merchant was born in Anatolia (1849) and died in Aleppo (1936). When a boy, he was adopted by a wealthy Greek and changed his name to Zakarides.

Settling in Russia, he changed his name to Zakharov. A millionaire, he owned private banks and was a benefactor. After 1917, he left Russia.

His Armenian origin has been "verified" by his cousin and mentioned in various non-Armenian publications.

Welimer Khlebnikov. One of the most famous Russian nationalist poets was born near Astrakhan (1885) and died in 1922. In addition to poetry, he wrote novels and plays. He had an immense influence on Mayakovski and Pasternak. In his autobiography, he wrote that there was Armenian blood in his veins (Alabovs-Halabians). His sister, Vera Khlebnilova Aslanyan, was a painter.

Giacomo Casanova. The famous 18th century lover-memoirist-spy-adventurer was born in Venice. Three clues are given to his Armenian origins: His family name was Noradoongian (means Casanova in Italian); he was sent by

Venetian authorities to spy on Armenian monks in Trieste; he was baptized in the Armenian Catholic Soorp Khach Church.

Count Ciano. The foreign minister of Italy and son-in-law of Mussolini. According to Venice's Mkhitarist archives, his family descended from the Cilician Armenian Vostichian princely family.

Vivien Leigh. A British actress, she was born in Darjeeling, India (1913) and died in London (1967). Star of "Gone With the Wind", "Waterloo Bridge", "Lady Hamilton" and "Ship of Fools", Leigh was the wife of Sir Laurence Olivier. Her mother, Gertrude Yakjee, was born in Ireland and was considered Armenian.

Hermens van Rijn Rembrandt. The famed Dutch painter (Leyden, 1606-1669 in Amsterdam) might have been of Armenian descent. His first name and dress also indicate that he might have been Armenian.

Marshal Constantine Rokosovski (1896-1968) was a famed "Russian"/Soviet military leader in WWI and WWII. He was also Poland's defense minister. He mentioned his Armenian origins in a Yerevan speech in 1968 and said his ancestors had immigrated from Ani to Poland.

Alexander Suvorov (1730-1800). Perhaps the greatest military figure in Russian history. His mother, Avdotia Feodoseyevna Manukova, was from the Manookian family of Astrakhan. His maternal grandfather was Fedosay Manukov (1668-1738), the commander of the military in Astrakhan.

Eleftherios Venizelos. Born in Cyprus, he is a Greek statesman. Has said that he believed his father was Armenian.

Salman Kerdahi. Egyptian theatrical producer, he was the first person to present an Arabic-language play in Arabic-speaking African countries. In addition to Egypt, he has presented plays in Tunisia and Algeria in 1907. He died in 1909 and was buried in a Christian cemetery. It's believed his name was Soghomon Kerdahian. His Armenian roots have been verified by Tunisian theatrical figure Mohammed Habib.

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