

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF RUBEN GASPARYAN TO THE FIELD OF  
RESEARCH OF THE CILICIAN ARMENIANS' HISTORY**  
(the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)

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**Ruben Gasparyan**  
(1962-2013)

The frames of scientific interests of Ruben Gasparyan included mainly the Cilicia's history from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. to the early 20s of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. He paid a special attention to the social-economic, national-liberation, educational and other basic issues of the Cilician Armenians. The scholar published special articles and documents on the mentioned themes.

The monograph of Ruben Gasparyan was published in 1999, "The Cilician Armenians at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>1</sup>. As the historian mentions rightly, "the administration of Sultan Hamid was conducting a policy for detaching the Cilicia from Western Armenia economically, politically and ideologically"<sup>2</sup>. The matter is that the Sultan was taking steps to give effect both to the isolation of the Cilicia's Armenians and to the physical annihilation of the population, making use of the Great Powers' equivocal policy. The Ottoman authorities were widely using the bigotry of the Mohammedan ignorant classes against the Armenians. Officials with relevant characteristic were being appointed on the places for that purpose, such as the vali (governor) of Aleppo, Anis Pasha. As R. Gasparyan was sure the abovementioned facts prove that "...the Armenian massacres had been organizing by Abdul Hamid in Cilicia in a manner of planning, slowly and cautiously"<sup>3</sup>.

Abdul Hamid II was aimed at keeping the patriarchates of both Constantinople and Jerusalem under his control. Furthermore, the sultan was seeking to get the Catholicosate of Sis as an autonomous unit, separating it from the Holy See of St. Etchmiatsin. The report of the Russian ambassador in the Ottoman Empire, I. Zinovev, proves this fact<sup>4</sup>.

The persecutions on the ground of nationality were intensified in parallel with the religious oppressions. R. Gasparyan calls the reader's attention to the fact that the persecutions were not becoming obstacles for liberation movement to be weakened. In particular, it was carried by the Social-Democrat Hntchakian Party in Cilicia. A number

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<sup>1</sup> Գասպարյան Ռ. Հ., Կիլիկիահայությունը 20-րդ դարի սկզբին, Երևան, 1999:

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

of its representatives were organizing and conducting the battles in certain places of Cilicia, Zeitun, Chok-Marzvan, Aintap, Hatchyn and elsewhere<sup>5</sup>.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF/Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun) also launched its activities in Cilicia. The Second General Meeting of ARF made a decision of establishing a control center in Cilicia in 1898, taking into consideration the unique location of the Mountainous Cilicia. And the third General Meeting of that same party decides to esteem Cilicia “as a concentration area, adequate to Sasun”<sup>6</sup>; finances were provided and the Responsible Body of Cilicia with membership formed. Nevertheless, it did not succeed to create a wide network in Cilicia.

The eminent figure of ARF party, S. Zavaryan, taking into consideration the situation in Cilicia, had come to a conclusion that the Armenians of Cilicia were ready to fight for their liberation only in Mountainous Cilicia - Zeitun, Marash, as well as, in the south - Kesab. R. Gasparyan doesn't minimize the role of the Armenians in the other provinces of Cilicia, pointing to the abovementioned idea of the Armenian Liberation Movement's well known figure. The historian argues that the condition of Cilicia was bearing a resemblance with that created in the Western Armenia. He presented the reasons for such a situation in both parts of Armenia. R. Gasparyan calls the reader's attention to the fact that there occurred a gap between various segments of the Western Armenians because of administrative divisions and policy of the Ottoman government. Besides, the separate and, sometimes, contradictory actions of the Armenian national parties were not creating favorable conditions for a united struggle.

A large number of historical researches on the massacre of the Cilicia's Armenians in 1909 have been put on paper and the evidences and researches of both Armenian and foreign witnesses and historians published. R. Gasparyan was able to collect the historiographic literature and archival documents; on the basis of their research he concluded that the massacres were organized by the so called former government, that is, the Abdulhamidian, and by the newest one, that is, the Young Turks<sup>7</sup>.

In the work a separate chapter is dedicated to the self-defense battles of Cilicia in 1909<sup>8</sup>. R. Gasparyan considers necessary the scientific investigation of the Armenian's resistance, which should be given a special place and role<sup>9</sup>. Along with the evidences about the mass killings published for many decades in our historiography, during recent decades the self-defense battles have started to be elucidated, too.

R. Gasparyan analyzes deeply and skillfully the struggle for existence of Armenians in Adana, Dyort-Yol, Sis, Sheikh-Murad (Sharder), Baghtche, Hajn, Marash and in other localities. Discussing the resistance battles, the historian makes the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 35-42.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

following conclusion: “The heroic battles of 1909 proved once more that the only hope of being liberated from the Turkish bloody scimitar (yataghan) is the armed struggle, life and death battle”<sup>10</sup>.

R. Gasparyan has dedicated a special chapter to the elucidation of the problems on the numerical and material losses the Cilician Armenians suffered and of the matter on the organizers of pogroms<sup>11</sup>.

The Ottoman authorities begin to falsify the real facts and reality exactly after the massacres of the Cilician Armenians, presenting the victim as a perpetrator. Different canals have been applied for that purpose, up to some foreign diplomatic missions. By the way, the mentioned policy is kept on in our days, too.

Comparing the archival papers, the witnesses’ memories and the historiographic researches, according to which the death toll ranges from 25 to 30 thousands, R. Gasparyan noted: “We think that even this figure can’t be considered definitive as the overall records... are reflecting the reality in part only. The Ottoman government was prohibiting and making complexity tendentiously; therefore, it is infinitely difficult to find out the exact number of victims through the scrupulous investigations. According to the reports published in some news- sheets this unit makes approximately 35 thousand”<sup>12</sup>.

R. Gasparyan examines the damage caused to the Cilician Armenians. He studied both the published and the archival records for its determination. According to the calculations of historian George Breazul, the material damage reached 20 million Turkish lira. The numerical analysis doesn’t cover 80 thousand Armenians including orphans, who had lost their properties and were impelled to exist in hardship<sup>13</sup>.

The cited facts permit us to conclude that the massacres, organized by the Ottoman authorities, had political and economic reasons along with deprivation of Armenians of their Homeland.

The entire Armenian nation was commemorating the 90<sup>th</sup> year of the Armenian Genocide in 2005. The government organized a committee, which had intended to publish the works dedicated to the history of Armenian tragedy together with other arrangements. The new work of R. Gasparyan was published in that year<sup>14</sup>.

The Ottoman Turkey was in a socio-economic and political difficult condition at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The liberation struggle of the subject peoples was escalating day by day. The empire was experiencing a deep crisis, and the Great Powers were making use of it, having an intention to enlarge their domains and influence at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. The rulers of dying empire were making efforts to save it from the collapse and disintegration. And the first

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 43-57.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Գասպարյան Ռ. Հ., Հայկական կոտորածները Կիլիկիայում (XIX դարի 90-ական թթ. - 1921 թ.), Երևան, 2005:

blow was delivered to the Western Armenia and the Armenians of Cilicia and the Armenian-populated areas of Asia Minor.

In the preface of the work R. Gasparyan examines the available historiographic literature of both Armenian and foreign historians about the massacres of the Cilician Armenians, pointing out that though voluminous and solid works have been written by historians, “there is no complete work or research about the massacres of the Cilician Armenians, liberation movements, defensive battles, where the abovementioned core issues could be discussed as component parts of a whole”<sup>15</sup>.

R. Gasparyan has widely applied various documentary evidence, stored at the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts after Mesrop Mashtots (Matenadaran), the National Archives of Armenia and Russia. The investigation of the historian embraces the period from 1909-1921. He has thrown a short look at the massacres of the Cilician Armenians in 1890 as a continuation of the ottoman policy’s manifestation.

R. Gasparyan divides the works of foreign authors and historians on the events in Cilicia into two groups in a conventional way; the first group consists of those who discussed impartially the events between 1890 and 1921; they are James Bryce, Arnold Toynbee, Johannes Lepsius, Fridtjof Nansen, David M. Lang, Christopher Walker and others. He extensively used the historiographic literature published in the French. Of course, R. Gasparyan has also applied the memories, books and articles of the Armenian witnesses and historians, the reports of periodicals, the documentary evidence and the comments of foreigners when elucidating the main problem.

R. Gasparyan underlined: “Now a powerful army of the history falsifiers operate abroad, which through the forgery of facts defends the official standpoint of the Young Turks, according to which the Armenian partial pogroms (and not genocide) were the result of both the Russian orientation of Armenians and the aid they provided for the Russian Army”<sup>16</sup>. The Armenian historian proved that all that was a total lie.

R. Gasparyan discusses the condition of the Armenian population not only in Cilicia, but also in the whole of Western Armenia. The historian calls the reader’s attention to the fact that Turkish chieftains, enjoying the patronage of the government, were plundering the Armenian peasantry in the exact sense of the word. Such were conditions in Cilicia. The Cilician Armenians were paying numerous taxes. R. Gasparyan points out that “the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire were undergoing heavy taxation by the Mohammedan ecclesiastics, too”<sup>17</sup>.

The ruling elite of the period of the reign of Abdul Hamid II adopted the ideology of pan-Islamism. It was firstly against the Armenians and outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire against Russia, where Turkish-language and Muslim peoples lived.

Being unable to suppress the liberation movements of the Western Armenians, the sultan initiated mass slaughter of Armenians in the 1890s, the victims of which

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

numbered 300 thousand. Seventy five villages had been destroyed only in the Marash province; 2327 houses were burned, 6630 Christians killed<sup>18</sup>.

Anyhow, Abdul Hamid II was not satisfied by all this. He was preparing a new massacre of the Cilician Armenians in 1905-1906, which was schemed by the Turkish military commands of both Adana and Aleppo. Nonetheless, the slaughter was postponed<sup>19</sup>.

The massacre of Adana and the self-defense battles of the Cilician Armenians in response thereto took place in the next year of the revolution (1909) organized by the Young Turks.

The historian elucidated the self-defense battles of the Cilician Armenians, concluding, "the heroic battles of 1909 proved once more that the only hope to be liberated from the Turkish bloody yataghan is the armed struggle, life and death battle"<sup>20</sup>.

R. Gasparyan especially studied the massacres and deportations of Armenians of Cilicia in 1915-1916. The objective of the Young Turks, who seized the helm of the Ottoman Empire, was to annihilate the Armenians in their cradle, who were considered as an obstacle for the realization of the Young Turks' pan-Turanian plan and capture of lands and properties of Armenians<sup>21</sup>.

The deportations and massacres of Armenians in the provinces of Adana and Aleppo, in Cilicia and Syria were carried into effect by the member of the so called Young Turk triumvirate, Minister of the Marine, Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Turkish army in Syria during WW I, the war criminal, Jemal Pasha.

To prevent the Armenian national movement the Ottoman authorities applied manifold intrigues and false promises as a result of which it had not been possible to organize general resistance. In this situation the heads of Zeitun had not been able to develop a united plan of actions against the Turkish slaughterers. It is true that some self-defensive actions anyhow took place. The Turkish genocidal plan started to work with the full intensity and in a fastest way<sup>22</sup>.

The Young Turk authorities began the deportation of the Zeitun Armenians. Eight thousand Armenians out of 30 thousand were subjected to deportation to Konia and the rest to Deir al-Zor. On the basis of various archival documents and recollections of witnesses R. Gasparyan described the horrors suffered by the deported Zeitun Armenians. Nearly two hundred fifty thousand to three hundred thousand out of one and a half million Armenian victims, subjected to Genocide, were Cilician Armenians. Only four thousand stayed alive<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

R. Gasparyan elucidated the heroic resistance of Suetia's Armenians on the Mountain of Musa. Describing the geographical location of Suetia, the six villages, situated on the southern and eastern slopes of the Musa Mountain in a round way, the author underlined the double-natured positions of their heads either to resist or to obey the order of the authorities. The self-defense instinct of the population advances here. Realizing that the displacement means physical destruction, the prevailing mass of inhabitants "took the route of self-defense spontaneously, relying on their glorious past of fighting experience"<sup>24</sup>. They heroically fought against the Turkish troops. The Armenians of Suetia were saved unexpectedly. The sudden appearance of the French protected cruiser *Guichen* provided an opportunity for Armenians to make contact and to ask for help. The French warships transported 4 200 people to Port Said, Egypt, on 14 September<sup>25</sup>.

The scientific investigations of R. Gasparyan were mainly aimed at elucidation of both the tragic history of the Cilician Armenians at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the heroic, national-liberation and self-defensive struggle. He affirmed once more in his researches the continuity of the genocidal actions of Abdul Hamid II and the Young Turks and the heir of their anti-Armenian criminal policy, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. R. Gasparyan elucidated the self-defensive struggle of the Cilician Armenians in more details.

The historian analyzed the conditions of the survived Cilician Armenians after the end of the World War I. He brought into circulation the researches of both Armenian and foreign scholars. Interpreting the heroic struggle of Armenians in Marash, Hachn, Ayntap, Zeitun and in other places and analyzing the French policy in Cilicia, R. Gasparyan concluded, "the Cilician Armenians became victims because of double-faced policy of France, too, which sacrificed them for the sake of its economic and political interests"<sup>26</sup>.

In the last years of his life R. Gasparyan was working<sup>27</sup> on the publication of the unpublished works by A-Do (Hovhannes Ter-Martirosyan)<sup>28</sup>. The unpublished memories of Eghishe Buranyan from Van were published jointly. The two works have been published after the death of R. Gasparyan<sup>29</sup>. The abovementioned co-authors prepared

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 223.

<sup>27</sup> He worked with co-author R. Sahakyan.

<sup>28</sup> Ա-Դո, Իմ հիշողությունները: Առաջաբանը և ծանոթագրությունները՝ Ռուբեն Գասպարյանի և Ռուբեն Սահակյանի, Երևան, 2015:

<sup>29</sup> See Ա-Դո, Ռուսական ցարերը և հայկական հարցը. Առաջաբանը և ծանոթագրությունները՝ պ.գ.թ Ռուբեն Գասպարյանի և պ.գ.թ. Ռուբեն Սահակյանի, Երևան, 2013: Բուրանյան Ե., Իմ անցյալի հուշերից. Վասպուրականի ողբերգություն. ներածությունը և ծանոթագրությունները՝ պ.գ.թ Ռուբեն Գասպարյանի և պ.գ.թ. Ռուբեն Սահակյանի, Երևան, 2013:

the preface and annotations of another work by A-Do for publication, which was translated into French<sup>30</sup>.

The scientific investigations of Ruben Gasparyan are important contribution both for the study of the history of the Cilician Armenians of the period of the Armenian Genocide and for the Armenian Cause and the Armenian territorial demands (Western Armenia and Cilician Armenia).

***Translated from Armenian  
by V. M. Gharakhanyan***

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<sup>30</sup> See Les Grands événements du Vaspourakan Van 1915, A-Do Présenté par Jean-Pierre Kibarian, traduit de l'arménien par Alice Kegelian, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation société bibliophilique Ani, Paris, 2015.