

THE DEMOGRAPHIC MOVEMENTS OBSERVED IN AKHALKALAK DISTRICT IN THE LAST DECADES OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Melkonyan A. A.
Academician of NAS RA

In the 1880s one of the peculiar features of the demographic development of Transcaucasia and the districts of Akhaltskha and Akhalkalak was the drastic increase in the number of the Armenian population in the cities¹. This was primarily due to the rise and development of market relations. Gradually more and more Armenian merchants, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs moved to the cities, where great opportunities awaited them.

This was particularly obvious in the provinces of Tiflis, Yelizavetpol, and Baku. With this regard, the Caucasian Calendar states, "The Armenians constitute a majority in all the cities of Tiflis Province. In Tiflis City they comprise almost half of the population (45 %), the other half being Georgians (26 %), Russians (24 %) and Tatars (Tartars) (5 %). In the other cities, the Armenians outnumber the Georgians. In Akhaltskha, for example, the Armenians make up 93 % of the population. Even in Telav and Segnakh, cities in a purely Georgian country, the Armenian population constitutes 73 % and 89% respectively. In contrast to this, the villages of Telav and Segnakh represent quite the opposite picture: the 49,103 inhabitants of the former comprise only 2,869 (6 %) Armenians, and the 74,142 inhabitants of the latter 5,567 (7.5%) Armenians"².

As for the peasantry of Tiflis Province, the Armenians constituted an overwhelming majority in Javakhk, Samtskhe, and Lori, as well as in the districts of Akhalkalak, Akhaltskha, and Borchalu.

Akhalkalak District did not undergo any serious territorial changes after its establishment: in the last decades of the 19th century, it covered an area of 2392.86 square versts (249,255 dessiatinas), or 2723.12 kilometres.

The district was divided into two police municipalities: the center of the southern one was Bogdanovka, and that of the northern, Baralet. The police municipality of Bogdanovka was larger in territory, covering 1491.55 square versts, or 1697.41 square kilometres. Baralet reached 901.31 square versts, or 1025.71 square kilometres³. Each of these two police municipalities had 5 equal village communities, but Baralet, whose territory was smaller, had a denser population: out of the 110 villages of the whole

¹ Melkonyan A., Javakhk in the 19th century and the 1st quarter of the 20th century (A historical research), Yerevan, 2007, pp. 103-108.

² Кавказский календарь на 1882г., Тифлис, 1881, стр. 312. In all the 6 cities of Tiflis Province together (except for Tiflis), the Armenians constituted 79 % of the population (idem, pp. 314-315).

³ By 1913 the district territory had enlarged a little, amounting to 2,407 versts (Кавказский календарь на 1913г., Тифлис, 1912, стр. 212).

district, 65 belonged to Baralet, and 45 to Bogdanovka⁴. Before World War I different nationalities inhabiting the district represented the following demographical picture:

Table 5

Year ⁵	Armenians	Georgians	Russians	Greeks	Jews	Muslims	Others	Total
1886	46,386	3,735	6,674	102	53	6,824	14	63,788
1894	49,807	3,714	7,272	56	52	4,962 ⁶	6 Poles	65,869
1897	48,403	6,322	4,750	35	22	6,827	910 ⁷	67,269
1914	81,014	6,905 ⁸	7,185	-	-	3,036	19 Poles	98,159

The aforementioned data help us calculate what percentage each of the different nationalities of the district formed. It is obvious that the Armenians retained their constant numerical superiority. Thanks to the high birth rate prior to World War I, their relative number was 82.5 % of the entire population, while that of the Muslims diminished due to the continuous emigration. The percentage of the Georgian and Russian population was mostly stable, fluctuating between 6 % and 10 %. A considerable increase was noticeable in the number of the Georgians from 1894 to 1897, whereas that of the Russians drastically dropped at the same time: Lynch observed this fact during his visit to Akhalkalak in the late 1890s⁹.

In the 1880s the Armenian settlements having more than a thousand inhabitants amounted to 14. In 1885 some of the largest Armenian villages represented the following picture with regard to their population:

Year	Armenians	Georgians	Russians	Greeks	Jews	Muslims	Others
1886	72.7%	5.8%	10.4%	0.1%	0.08%	10.7%	0.02%
1894	75.6%	5.6%	11%	0.08%	0.07%	7.5%	0.009%
1897	72%	9.3%	7%	0.05%	0.03%	10.1%	1.3%
1914	82.5%	7%	7.3%	*	-	3%	0.01%

Alastan - 1,298;

Gumburdo - 1,121;

Heshtia - 1,546;

Kartzakh - 1,612;

⁴ Кавказский календарь на 1891г., Тифлис, 1890, стр. 2-3. The 10 village communities of the 10 villages of Akhalkalak District represented the following picture as per their centers and number of villages: Aragova (13 villages), Baralet (23), Varevan (9), Vachian (11), Gorelovka (8), Diliska (9), Kartzakh (10), Satkha (8), Khertvis (11), Heshtia (8).

⁵ See Akhalkalak District of Tiflis Province, pp. 18-19 for the data of 1886; Lalayan Yer., Works, vol. 1, p. 96 for 1894; Кавказский календарь на 1907г., Тифлис, 1906, стр. 129-130 for the data of the population census of 1897, Кавказский календарь на 1915, Тифлис, 1914, стр. 242-243 for 1914.

⁶ Out of the 4,962 Muslims, 4,372 were Turks and 590 Kurds.

⁷ The 910 representatives of other nationalities included 810 Kurds, 53 Poles, 17 Lithuanians or Letts, 17 Germans, 9 Lezhins and Chechens, 3 Persians and 1 Ossetian.

⁸ The 6,905 Muslims include 135 Muslim "Georgians."

⁹ Lynch H. F. B., Armenia. Travels and Studies. Vol. 1, New York, 1990, p. 86.

Satkha - 1,374;
Vachian - 1,276¹⁰.

As for Khertvis, the continuous emigration of the local Armenian population to the villages of the district converted this fortress town into a township inhabited mainly by Sunni Muslims. Meanwhile, Khertvis had only 1,314 Turkish Meskhetians, who still preserved their memories of once being Christians. In 1890 55 of the district villages had a population comprising 50 households; in 33 of these, the number of the families fluctuated between 50 and 100; twenty of the villages had a population of 100 to 200 families, and in 2 villages, the inhabitants consisted of more than 200 households¹¹.

In the early 1880s, the lack of lands compelled the entire population of Chiftlik, Modigya, and Khumris villages, about 130 families, as well as 52 families (435 people) from the Russian Dukhobors' villages, to emigrate to the newly-conquered marz of Kars. The inhabitants of Chiftlik, located 1 to 1.5 kilometres west of Akhalkalak City, on the left bank of the stream Karasnaghbyur, emigrated to Mazra village of Kars, this being instigated by the authorities. The site of the village was used for the construction of a station for the Russian troops; soon the whole garrison of the semi-destroyed fort moved there.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Akhalkalak was gradually acquiring the image of a city. In the northern part of the Central Street, a Russian church was erected through Stepanos Ananikian's efforts. The surroundings of Sourb Khach (Holy Cross) Church and the Armenian schools functioning there were improved. Near this church, at the western extremity of the street intersecting the Central Street, at the crossing of several streets, the City Park was founded in 1880: the people of Akhalkalak tenderly called it *Khas Bakhcha*. The park was 40 sazhen (85.3 meters) long and 22 sazhen and one arshin (about 47.6 meters) wide. It had a fence and was planted with trees. A traveler passing through Akhalkalak in 1885 wrote, "The buildings of the city, which are erected of finely-finished stone and lime, are separated by regular wide streets"¹².

In 1912 Gaspar Shahparonian and his son Vardan Shahparonian built the first hydroelectric station in Akhalkalak on the river Taparvan. They also built a watermill as well as a meat factory and mills processing oil, soap, and wood. It was through their efforts that the new building of the local parish school opened in 1912¹³. In 1890 Akhalkalak was given the status of second-class city. In 1896 it was granted municipal autonomy.

¹⁰ Кавказский календарь на 1886, Тифлис, 1885, стр. 118.

¹¹ Кавказский календарь на 1891, Тифлис, 1890, стр. 2-3.

¹² Ճանապարհորդական յիշատակարան, Արձագանք, 1885, 21 հուլիս, էջ 42-43:

¹³ Շիրինյան Ս. Խ., Ախալքալաքցիներ, Երևան, 2000, էջ 107-108: Նազարյան Ս., «Ջավախք» շաբաթաթերթը, ԲԵՀ, 1992, 1, էջ 201: The new building of the school built by Vardan Shahparonian, standing up today, housed the local Armenian school in the first years of the Soviet rule. Now part of it belongs to the Russian school, the other to the Regional Cultural Centre.

The following table reflects the ethnic make-up and displacements of the population of Akhalkalak City.

Year ¹⁴	Armenian	Georgian	Russian	Greek	Jew	Muslim	Other	Total
1886	4,079	45	61	40	53	15	10	4,303
1894	4,290	48	55	29	52	22	6 (Poles)	4,502
1897	4,136	129	703 ¹⁵	40	189	44	199	5,440
1914 ¹⁶	6,697	262+35= 297 ¹⁷	284	-	-	35	6	7,284

This table leads us to the following conclusions: first, both in the entire district and Akhalkalak City, the Armenians constantly maintained their numerical dominance over the other nationalities. In the thirty years following 1894, the growth of the Armenians constituted more than 50 %; the Russian population increased for five times, and the Georgians for more than 6 times. The point is that during that period, gradually more and more Russian and Georgian officials were appointed in the district authorities, while the region was always predominantly Armenian-populated. The discriminatory policies against the Armenians become clearly apparent from the names of the appointed officials and their national identity recorded in the annual volumes of the Caucasian Calendar.

It is interesting to note that the municipal budget of Akhalkalak was in far better condition than those of the other cities in Tiflis Province. In this regard, the Caucasian Calendar reads, "All the cities in Tiflis Province are buried in debts, except for Akhalkalak, which has a surplus of 23 thousand rubles"¹⁸. However, this does not speak of the prosperity of the city at all; since Akhalkalak represented a small town, it had modest needs which were often neglected by the authorities so that the budget was in a seemingly good condition.

The severe natural disaster that befell the district at the end of the century had a great influence on its demographical make-up. On December 19, 1899, a severe earthquake struck the district, with its epicentre in Merenia Village. Particularly heavy damage was inflicted upon about 30 villages in the north of the district; in certain villages the number of the fatalities amounted to 10 % of the entire population. The earthquake caused the death of 86 people in Merenia; 48 in Bezhan; 46 in Metz Samsar; 27 in Pokr Samsar, and 14 in Agana, the number of the victims amounting to

¹⁴ See Table 5 for the sources referred to. The number of the Armenians also includes about 30 families of Armenian gypsies called „boshā“: they lived in the north of the city (see Վանցյան Գ., Պատմական ակնարկ բոշաների անցյալից, Մուրճ, 1894, 7-8, էջ 1074).

¹⁵ We tend to think that the 703 Russian inhabitants fixed in 1897 also included the family members of the officers' staff of the military town.

¹⁶ The data for 1914 miss the number of the Greeks and Jews and represent that of the other nationalities only partially: therefore, we have no complete data about the entire population of the city.

¹⁷ The 262 Orthodox Georgians also include 35 Muslim "Georgians".

¹⁸ Кавказский календарь на 1887, Тифлис, 1886, стр. 186.

248 in only 28 villages. These 28 villages had 2,043 private houses built of mud with some insignificant exceptions: of these 672, i.e. about one third, were reduced to ruins. Out of the 15,140 head of animals, 2,357 were killed. Only very few houses remained semi-standing. In the villages that are mentioned below the number of the ruined houses was as follows: Ekhtila - 69 out of the total of 72; Pokr Samsar - 51 out of 54; Bezhano - 117 out of 125; Balkho - 45 out of 48; Merenia - 117 out of 130; Drkna - 19 out of 21; Lomaturtskh - 19 out of 26, and Pokrik Sirg -10 out of 10¹⁹. The churches of the district suffered severe damage, too. So heavy was the harm inflicted by this natural calamity that its news reached St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire. Tsar Nicholas issued a circular and allocated a certain sum to the victims' fund from his own means. Catholicos of All-Armenians Mkrtych Khrimian gave a considerable amount of money from the budget of the Holy See of Ejmiatzin. He ordered the Primate of the Georgian-Armenian Diocese to allocate 1,000 rubles from the diocese budget and ordered all the other dioceses to raise money for that purpose²⁰. The victims of the earthquake also received considerable funds from some Pan-Russian and Pan-Caucasian charitable organizations.

¹⁹ See National Archives of Armenia, fund 35, list 1, file 103, p. 68 for more details about the damage caused by the earthquake of 1899. The document whose authenticity was confirmed by the District Head himself is fully included in the Appendix of the Armenian original of the present work.

²⁰ Կոստանդյան Է. Ա., Մկրտիչ Խրիմյան. հասարակական-քաղաքական գործունեությունը, Երևան, 2000, էջ 401: