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(1900-1922)

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## **THE DECLINE OF THE WESTERN ARMENIAN PRESS (1900-1922)**

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### **Summary**

Western Armenian neutral press of the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century displayed the ethnic, political and cultural life of Western Armenians, living in the Ottoman Empire. It was almost the last period of the history of Western Armenian print that manifested not only the reality of the Armenian communities in the western regions of the Ottoman Empire, but also the real existence of the Armenian population in western part of the Armenian Homeland - Western Armenia until the Armenian Genocide. After the genocide and patricide perpetrated against the Armenian nation in Western Armenia and the end of the First World War, Armenian press published in Smyrna and Constantinople, lost its national and spiritual bases that it ever had in the Homeland and began to function as a spiritual sphere and a means of information for the Armenians of Smyrna (until the 1922 disaster of Smyrna) and Constantinople.

The press under study was published in three periods of different political situations: during the reign of Abdul Hamid (1900-1908), the reign of the Young Turks (1908-1918) and the period of the cease-fire until the coming of the Kemalists to the power.

In the period between 1908-1914 the definite informative materials about the Armenian population also contained thorough information about the economic and cultural life of the nation. From the pages of the press readers learned not only about the Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire and the native Armenian population in Western Armenia and Cilicia, but also interesting facts about the Armenians living in Eastern Armenia, Russia, Europe, the Near and Middle East, the USA. Moreover, the informative reliability became one of the most important problems in which was interested the neutral press. It was reached due to broad and versatile approaches to the reality. In these conditions, with comprehensible reservations, the press acquired the status of the source from the viewpoint of displaying the real picture of this period, and disclose its typical and derived sides. In this sense, some valuable materials and publications were published in such periodicals as "The Byzantium", "The Encyclopedist", "The Messenger", "The Eastern press", "The Flower", "The Union" and others.

The Armenian press revealed the Young Turks government's radically reactionary, Pan-Turkic direction of policy during the massacres of Adana, when 30.000 Armenians were killed. Those bloody days of the 1909 had cognitive meaning for the Armenian press which unmasked pseudo compatriotic assurances and deceitful character of stentorian agitation of the leading Young Turks. The tragic events of Adana enriched the

press with new moods: the protection of national rights, and with a critical attitude towards the Young Turks' committee and government. The neutral press wrote that the alternative to Adana were the reforms in Western Armenia. It is not incidental that the theme of the reforms again reaching the diplomatic level became the main problem of the Armenian press until the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I.

The periodicals of the 1900-1914 influenced the development of the Armenian literature, continuing its national traditions and simultaneously speaking about Western Armenian new literary trends. On its pages some famous literary persons of that time came forward: M. Metsarents, D. Varujan, R. Zardaryan, A. Harutyunyan, Tlkatinci, R. Sevak, O. Chifte-Saraf, Z. Esayan, T. Chokuryan and others who promoted the Armenian literature and literary critical mind.

Between 1915-1918, during the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire the Armenian press in Western Armenia and other Armenian- populated regions was abolished. The Armenian press of Constantinople turned out to be in an almost suffocative condition. As a result of persecutions of the Ottoman military censor until the 1914, 25 of more than 30 periodicals ceased to exist. In 1915 the Young Turks left in the arena only 4 national newspapers: "The Byzantium", "The Time", "The News", and the "The East Magazine" issued in the Armenian language with the Turkish transcription which were published in predominantly reduced scale, and didn't have any information autonomy. It is hard to say whether it was possible for any Armenian edition to be issued in Smyrna in those years; at least we don't have any material. Armenian press in Turkey shared the faith of the Armenian people doomed to the genocide.

The above-mentioned position of the Armenian press in Constantinople remained unchanged until the ceasefire in Mudros in October 1918. Between 1918-1919, the new magazines published in Constantinople had a comparably short life due to the political and economic destabilization in Turkey and the necessity of a stabilization of the country. Among all the newspapers that suffered from persecutions and the despotism of the Young Turks, only the "The Time" and "The Last news", based on the qualitative information, were preserved. During that period there was some recovery in the humorous press. Such periodicals as the "Clever David", the "Agha Ignat", "The Shavigh" (which hereafter integrated with the previous edition and was called "The Shavigh-Ignat Agha") were published (the last 2 editions were published under the editorship of Otyan). The humour of the above-mentioned editions in which the authorities and the defunct party of the Young Turks, the repressive policy towards the Armenians, extremist trends of the new Turkish government, the treacherous position of Turkey at Paris Peace Conference, became the objects of some clear revelations, seemed quite valuable.

On the pages of comic press corresponding to the style of the genre, the arrow of satire was directed against the Turkish media, the purpose of which was the promotion of everything that could conceal criminal activity of the Young Turks. The publications edited by E. Otyan contained a big political potential that demonstrated the national

character of the extremist Kemalist movement, mutual sympathy of the Kemalists and the Ottoman government of the postwar years under the guise of a formal coercion.

Between 1919-1920 a new trend was noticed: the number of specialized publications significantly increased in Constantinople, which can be explained by the emergence of various national associations in connection with the termination of the war. Medical, legal, sports, theater, women's and other communities with different goals began to function some of which published books, according to their own preferences (the "Law", "The Armenian Physician", "The Armenian Woman", "The Armenian Scout", "The Armenian Youth" and others). Despite the huge number of specialized publications, the publications with their distinctive national character remained advanced in the social and spiritual spheres of the press. From the pages of these publications the pieces of the national ideals came out, which survived the genocide of Constantinople and Western Armenia, the issues, related to the international policy towards the Armenian issue, the national self-determination and the national liberation. The newspapers "The Time", "The News", "The Voice of the People", and others featured the dynamics of the development of the Armenian issue, the attitude of the international community, and at last the national hopes and disappointments that were ignored.

In the early 1920s, most of the press publications dealt with the issues related to the fate and existence of the Cilician Armenians, the Armenian orphans, the First and the Second Republics of Armenia. By the quality of the issues discussed in their diversity, there were discussions related to the legal, intellectual and economic situation of the Armenians of Constantinople, as well as the issues related to the national treatment. These discussions concerned almost all the aspects of the Armenians' life in Constantinople, thereby presenting the true face and the history of the communities of those days. These papers collaborated with the new forces, thinkers, who survived the genocide, who had rich journalistic and publicistic experience, such as E. Otyan, V. Tekeyan, B. Kechyan M. Shamtanchyan, O. Chifte-Saraf, Teodik G. Galustyan and others.

Between 1919-1922 before the invasion of the Kemalists in Smyrna and the collapse of the local Armenians' community, the press did its special informative function together with the other national agencies. The newspapers "Atrushan", "Daphne", "Ready" and others were published. The last of the Mohicans of Smyrna's press reflected the national reality of the former community, disclosing the questions and the essence of the national character of full with disasters, a hard period for the Armenians.

In the 1922s, the press published in Constantinople gradually lost its anti-Kemalist focus. A negative and hostile attitude of the Turkish authorities towards the Armenian media was obvious. Ankara's government oversaw the press, thereby preventing new publications. After 1923, only a few Armenian publications had to keep their existence.

In fact, in 1922 completes the history of Western Armenian press which was more than 80 years old, the beginning of which is considered to be 1832, related to the release of the newspaper the "Lro Gere" in Constantinople. From 1923 to this day, the Armenian press that has been published in Constantinople, as is commonly believed, has entered another stage of the history of the Armenian Diaspora's press.