

THE CILICIAN ARMENIANS IN THE USA AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIVE ARMENIAN CRADLE

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The Cilician Armenians have emigrated to the USA for individual, educational, economic, political, cultural, religious and other reasons. The emigration (mainly of bachelors: students, tradesmen, artisans, farmers and workers), which, at the beginning bore a temporary character and was prompted by educational and economic reasons, was subsequently transformed into a mass deportation following the periodic massacres (1894-1896, 1909) and the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) perpetrated in the Ottoman Empire. It involved Armenians from their Homeland, including Cilicia, deprived of the prospects of a safe economic, political, cultural and religious life¹.

The horrible massacres organized by the Young Turks in Adana (Cilicia), in 1909, compelled Armenians to emigrate to unknown horizons. Though these massacres had occurred in Cilicia, the groups of Armenians departed from nearly all the Armenian-inhabited regions of the Ottoman Empire, since the terror of finding themselves in a similar situation in those places anytime was too great. Rev. Macallum, the missionary who was the eyewitness of the carnage and the miserable state of the Cilician Armenians suggested to the organization, rendering medical, material and other assistance to the survivors of the massacre to allocate all the available amounts for transferring the miraculously saved Armenians to the USA, Canada or Brazil, since it was clear that “the next massacre was only a question of time”².

Until 1911, the Armenians leaving the Ottoman Empire for the USA departed from certain regions: those emigrating from Western Armenia left from the main port on the Black Sea, Samsoun, while those emigrating from Cilicia sailed from the Mediterranean port cities of Alexandrette and Beirut. During the subsequent years, numerous Armenians escaping the Turkish policemen left for America from these two ports, where police control was comparatively loose³.

As the Cilician Armenians increased in number and gradually settled in the USA, national structures, educational, cultural, benevolent, spiritual, political and other national unions, as well as various organizations (compatriotic, party, professional and others), having an important role and significance in the preservation of the national identity, were created with a view to reassembling and reorganizing the nation in the all-

¹ Ավագյան Բ., Ամերիկայի Միացյալ Նահանգների հայ գաղութի պատմությունը (սկզբնավորումից մինչև 1924 թ.), Երևան, 2000, էջ 42:

² Mirak R., *Torn Between Two Lands. Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 55.

³ Ibid., p. 60.

assimilating American environment and to making the ties with the native cradle and people more effective and durable.

The first Armenian organization founded in 1886, in New York, "The Armenian Union" had taken also two schools, found in the Motherland, under its patronage and had raised a considerable sum in favor of Zeytun set on fire at the end of the 19th century and in favor of other national institutions⁴.

Already at the end of the 80s of the 19th century, the created compatriotic unions had gradually embraced nearly all the native towns, villages and burghs, including also Cilicia (particularly: Adana, Marash, Urfa, Hadjn, Ayntap, etc.). The above-cited compatriotic unions were well-organized and rapidly populating national unions, which, gaining in breadth in the course of time, founded their branches in nearly all the cities of the vast country where their compatriots lived. In this respect, Bishop Moushegh Seropian has noted: "Just as there is no town or village left in Armenia and Cilicia where America has not its representatives, so there is no town or village in America, 20 or more compatriots of which haven't got a special organization in their birthplace contributing to the cause of education"⁵.

In addition to the Cilician-Armenian "Krtasiratss" (Education-Lovers'), "Ousoumnasiratss" (Study-Lovers') and "Dprotsasiratss" (School-Lovers') societies, functioning in the USA, numerous compatriotic societies and unions appeared gradually, especially beginning from the 1900s, to support in every way the native Armenians in despair, to restore the demolished localities and schools, as well as to support the innumerable orphans. Deriving from the above-mentioned "Study-Lovers'" societies, reorganizing their former activity in the course of time and owing to historical circumstances, these compatriotic societies and unions bore, starting from 1914, the names of "Ayriakhnam" (Widow-Supporting), "Vorbakhnam" (Orphan-Supporting), "Vorbasirats" (Orphan-Lovers'), "Akhkatakham" (Charitable) and "Npastamatuyts" (Allowance-Granting), in accordance with the new tasks set before them. A number of ("Tiknants Vorbakhnam") Women's Orphan-Supporting and ("Hivandanotsayin Ozhandak") Hospital-Care Auxiliary societies of the Cilician-Armenian Compatriotic Unions also functioned along with the above-cited new societies entitled to support the fellow-countrymen and in close cooperation with them. All the enumerated societies assigned considerable material means to find out the expatriated compatriots and especially those exiled to Deir-el-Zor and to the other areas of the Arabian Desert in order to render them multilateral assistance. The above-mentioned compatriotic unions made also an appreciable contribution to promote, materially, morally and militarily, the Caucasian, in 1916, and subsequently the Cilician volunteer movements, to forward financial assistance through the Cilician Catholicosate in favor of the needy fellow-

⁴ Սերոբեան Մուշեղ Եպիսկոպոս, Ամերիկահայ տարեցոյցը, Ա տարի, 1912, էջ 170-171, 175, 176:

⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

countrymen and to assist, by all possible means, the nation-supporting efforts of the allowance-granting society of the Middle East and other organizations⁶.

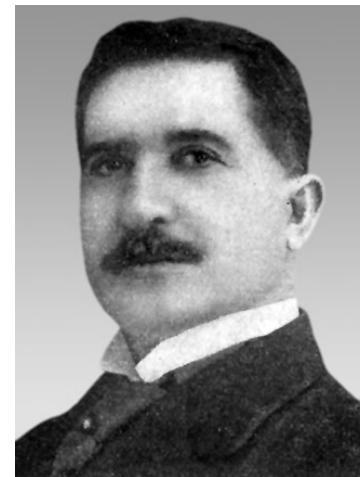
The Armenian-Americans actively participated in the volunteer movements organized in the years of World War I, then in the Caucasus and subsequently in Cilicia beginning from the self-defensive battles of Van, in 1915, till the heroic battle of Arara, in 1918, when the Armenian volunteers bravely fought side by side with the regiments of the Entente States, Czarist Russia and France against the German forces and the Young Turk and Kemalist authorities.⁷ The motto of the volunteer movement was: "Autonomy to the six vilayets and to their inseparable part - Cilicia, under the strong protection of Russia"⁸.



Poghos Nubar

On October 27, 1916, the governments of France and Great Britain, with the participation of the Chairman of the Armenian National Delegation in Paris, Poghos Nubar, had come to a joint agreement in London (Sikes-Picot Agreement) to form a regiment called the "Oriental Legion" ("Légion d'Orient"), composed of Armenian and Arab volunteers, which would fight, as an auxiliary force, in the years of the war, as part of the French army, exclusively in Syria and Cilicia (which formed a part of Asian Turkey) and subsequently, following the victory against the Turks, would secure, as an urban garrison, the autonomy of Cilicia under French protectorate⁹.

On November 26, 1916, the "Oriental Legion" was established out of voluntarily recruited Ottoman subjects. The recruitment had started in Egypt, the core of which was formed from 600 Moussalerians (who found asylum in Port-Said through French support)¹⁰, then also from 300 Egyptian-Armenians, as well as deserting refugees from the Ottoman army and other places¹¹.



Mihran Svazlian

⁶ Մելիսիանցի Գ., Նախնիներ (1915-1918), Պոստոն, 1929, էջ 216:

⁷ Ավագյան Ք., op. cit., pp. 114-119.

⁸ Կիրակոսյան Զ., Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմը և արևմտահայությունը (1914-1916 թթ.), Երևան, 1965, էջ 187: Լազեան Գ., Հայաստանը եւ Հայ Դատը ըստ դաշնագրերու, Գահիրէ, 1942, էջ 81:

⁹ Ճիզմէճեան Մ.Գ., Պատմութիւն ամերիկահայ քաղաքական կուսակցութեանց (1890-1925), Ֆրէզնո, 1930, էջ 345: Պոյաճեան Ս.Յ., Հայկական Լեգէոնը. Պատմական յուշագրութիւն, Ութթրթաւոն, 1965, էջ 8, 9, 10, 13:

¹⁰ Սահակյան Ռ. Գ., Թուրք-ֆրանսիական հարաբերությունները և Կիլիկիան. 1919-1921 թթ., Երևան, 1970, էջ 115, 116:

¹¹ Յուշամատեն Մուսա Լերան, խմբ. Մ. Գուշագճեան, Պ. Մատուռեան, Պէյրութ, 1970, էջ 426:



The Armenian National Union of America

(founded in 1917)

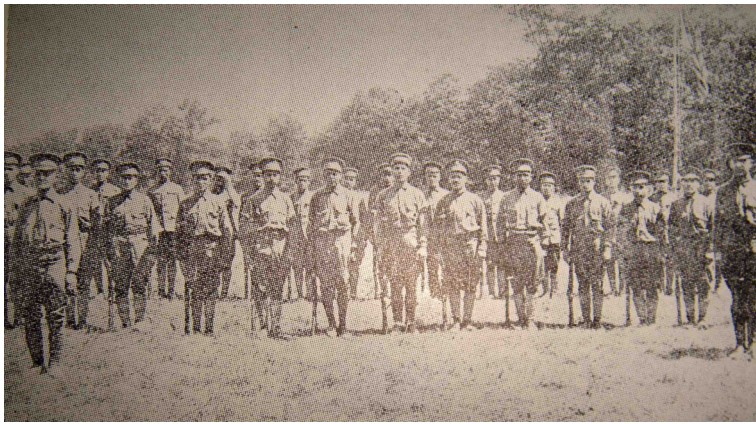
testifies with deep appreciation that Mr. Haroutyoun Sarenikyan Marashtsi, in response to the appeal of our Union in 1917 and in accordance with the instructions of the Armenian National Delegation, has been registered as a volunteer and has courageously fought under the French flag at the Palestinian and the Cilician fronts in the name of justice and the liberation of Armenia.

Armenian National Union of America Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 1921

The volunteer movement had aroused great enthusiasm among the emigrant Armenians and particularly among the Armenian-Americans. Owing to the high consciousness manifested by the Armenian-Americans with regard to its unity, it had become possible to hold in Boston, from 16-26 March, 1917, seven sessions of solidarity negotiations, during which the ANUA had been organized. The Union was composed of the representatives of the four parties (Social-Democratic Hnchak, Reorganized Hnchak, Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnak, Armenian Constitutional Democrats), of the Armenian Apostolic church and the Evangelical church and of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. A central body for the Union consisting of 18 members had been elected (Chairman: Mihran Svazlian)¹². After a short time 187 branches of the Union had already been created. The Union was recognized by the American official circles as a body representing the Armenian-American Community, becoming thus the first Armenian lobbyist organization in the USA. The object of the Armenian National Union of America was to unite the material and moral forces of the Armenian-Americans and to put them in the service of the liberation and reconstruction of Cilicia and the immediate assistance of needy people, as well as to realize Armenian-supporting propaganda and diplomatic enterprises in the USA¹³.

¹² Տեղեկագիր Հայ Ազգային Միության Ամերիկայի. 1917-1921 թթ., Պոստոն, 1922, էջ 11, 12: Սահմանադրություն եւ կանոնադրություն Հայ Ազգային Միության Ամերիկայի, Պոսթօն, 1917, էջ 2, 19, 20: Թէոդիկ, Ամէնուն տարեցոյցը, ԺՁ տարի, Կ. Պոլիս, 1922, էջ 286:

¹³ Ավագյան Բ., Հայ առաջին լորբիստական կազմակերպությունը ԱՄՆ-ում, Հայոց պատմության հարցեր, Երևան, 2003, 4, էջ 98-104: Ճիգմէճեան Մ. Գ., op. cit., p. 353.



In a short time, in only six months (from June 9 to November 3, 1917), 5.000 Armenian-Americans had registered to participate in the volunteer movement started under French patronage, however, because of the shortage of transportation

means (instead of putting at their disposal one or two large transport ships, 17 freighters of insufficient tonnage, carrying at most 70 people each, had been provided¹⁴), only 1.172 volunteers had the possibility to depart, while the remaining subsequently joined the USA army and fought against Germany on the Western fronts.¹⁵



These young people, mostly from Kessab, Sebastia, Harpoot, Arabkir, Chenkoush, Tigranakert and Husseyunik embraced nearly all the Armenian-inhabited States of USA.¹⁶ The majority of these volunteers were members of the Reorganized Hnchak,

¹⁴ Պոյաճեան Տ. Յ., op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁵ Տեղեկագիր Հայ Ազգային Միութեան Ամերիկայի, p. 27. Տեփոյեան Պ. Յ., Միհրան Տամատեան (1863-1945), Գահիրէ, 1956, էջ 196:

¹⁶ Յուշամատեն Մուսա Լերան, p. 426. The Armenians in Massachusetts. Boston, 1937, p. 54.

Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), Social-Democratic Hinchak and Armenian Constitutional Democratic parties¹⁷. According to P. Tepoyan's definition, "The Armenian-Americans were, by nature, trained and highly-qualified patriots thanks to the party efforts of several decades. Undoubtedly the environment of free-thinking and free-life had its great share in nurturing that patriotism"¹⁸. Among those Armenian-Americans who registered as volunteers in the "Oriental Legion" were a number of high-ranking military men (Commanders: Jim Changelian, Hayk Azatian, Tigran Boyadjian, Ruben Herian, Garageuzian, Vahan Churkents, Very Rev. Fr. Vagharshak Arshakouni, John Shishmanian and others)¹⁹.



Jim Changelian



Hayk Azatian



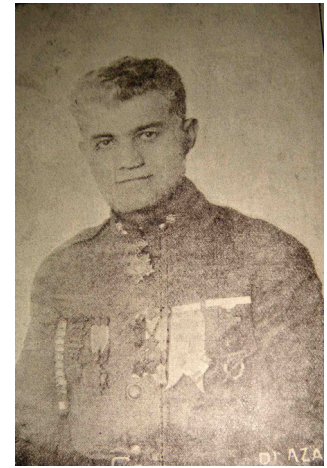
Ruben Herian



**Very Rev. Fr.
Vagharshak Arshakouni**



John Shishmanian



George Tagagjian

¹⁷ Պոյաճեան Տ. Յ., *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁸ Տեփոյեան Պ. Յ., *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹⁹ Յուշամատեան Մուսա Լերան, p. 428. Պարթեւեան Սուրէն, Արարա. Հայկական Լեգիոնը, Աղեքսանդրիա, 1919, էջ 88, 102:

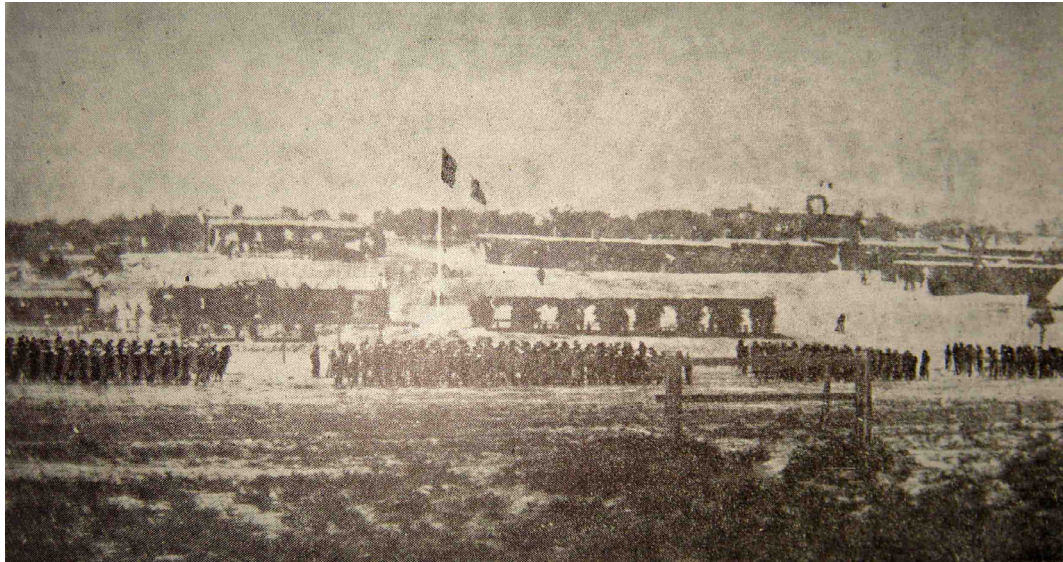
**Onnik Gouyoumjian****Vahé Sahatjian****Gaspar Menak**

The representative of the Armenian National Union of America, Ruben Herian, has personally participated in the preparation of the identity documents of Armenian-American volunteers at the basement of the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church of New York.

**Yessayi Yaghoubian and Ruben Herian in the center**

The volunteers passed a preliminary training period in Paterson (State of New Jersey), were registered in New York, then sailed to Bordeaux or Marseille (France) and subsequently to Port-Said (Egypt) or Monarca (Cyprus) to be equipped with arms, to get trained for months and to join the other Moussalerians receiving training there until then²⁰.

²⁰ Պոլաճեան Տ. Յ., op. cit., pp. 10, 46.



In Monarca (Cyprus)



Armenian-American Legionnaires training in Cyprus, 1916



Armenian Rehabilitation Center for Cilician Volunteers, 1918

The Armenian-American volunteers of the “Oriental Legion” have, along with their brave fellow-countrymen, had a serious input on September 19, 1918, in the defeat and retreat of the German-Turkish army on the impregnable heights of Arara, in Palestine. Twenty-two Armenians were killed and more than 70 were wounded in Arara²¹. Subsequently, the legionnaires participated in the battles fought for Syria and Lebanon, where, following the separation of Syrian regiments, the “Oriental Legion” was renamed “Armenian Legion” (“Légion Arménienne”)²².



²¹ Պարթևեան Ս., *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²² Քելեշեան Մ., Սիս-Մատեան. Պատմական, բանասիրական, տեղագրական, ազգագրական եւ յարակից պարագաներ, Պէյրութ, 1949, էջ 592: Forgotten Heroes. The Armenian Legion and the Great War. An Exhibit Commemorating the 83rd Anniversary of the Armenian Legion's Victory on September 19, 1918, at Arara (Palestine). September 23-December 31, 2001. Prepared by Barbara Merguerian (ALMA), Watertown, 2001, p. 7.

According to the definition of the legionnaire lieutenant Vahan Portugalian: “The “Armenian Legion,” as armed forces, was, in the full sense of the word, the first Armenian force, which had been created, after centuries, on the basis of state principles”²³.

On October 30, 1918, the Moudros Armistice signed between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire ratified the capitulation of Turkey, and according to the 16th clause the Turkish forces should be evacuated from Cilicia. On the 17-19 December, 1918, the “Armenian Legion” stepped into the desirable land of Cilicia²⁴ to superintend and to defend the strategic strongholds, the Armenian-inhabited towns of Adana, Ayntap, Marash, Urfa and Hadjn. As a result, about 120.000 Armenians deported from Cilicia during the Armenian Genocide, returned to their native homes, hoping that, under the protection of the British-French forces, they would restore their interrupted life in Cilicia. However, the British (on November 1, 1919) and the French (on January 18, 1920) regiments departed from Cilicia²⁵ “delivering the Armenians to their merciless enemy”²⁶.



In 1920, the Armenian soldiers and the Armenian people offered a heroic resistance in Marash, Sis, Pozanti, Urha-Edessa, Ayntap (intermittently during 314 days) and Hadjn (struggle for existence during 8 months) against the Kemalist hordes, but the number of victims was exceedingly high.

With the French-Kemalsit Treaty signed in Ankara on October 20, 1921, France officially confirmed its retreat, leaving Cilicia under Turkish domination²⁷ and leaving, at

²³ Forgotten Heroes, p. 4.

²⁴ Սահակյան Ռ. Գ., op. cit., p. 118.

²⁵ Forgotten Heroes, pp. 3, 7, 8.

²⁶ Քելեշեան Մ., op. cit., p. 594.

²⁷ Forgotten Heroes, p. 11.

the same time, for the Ottoman Empire a large quantity of arms, ammunition, outfits, etc.

The withdrawal of British and French troops from Cilicia compelled the Armenians to emigrate again. The historian Leo has written in this regard: “Cilicia was being emptied of Armenians as was emptied Armenia itself.”²⁸

Twenty years after the heroic battle of Arara, France delivered also to Turkey the last stronghold of Cilicia, the Sandjak of Alexandrette, found until then under French protectorate²⁹.



**Monument of the Arara Battle Heroes in
Jerusalem**

According to Missak Keleshian's definition: “France lost its prestige in the East. After leaving Alexandrette to Turkey, in 1938, France was compelled to evacuate Syria and Lebanon in 1946 under very shameful conditions. What a pity for the old noble France!”³⁰

Although the efforts exerted for the liberation of Cilicia failed in the end, nevertheless, the significance of participation of the volunteer Armenian-American youth in the military successes of the “Oriental Legion” (“Armenian Legion”) was also undeniable.

Thus, during the First World War and the following years, which were disastrous for the Armenian people, the Cilician Armenians, together with the rest of the Armenian community of the US uniting all their intra-communal

(intellectual, financial, public and party) resources, supported the cherished enterprises aiming at the defense, liberation and rehabilitation of the native cradle and its people by diplomatic, political, military and human means.

**Translated from Armenian by
T. H. Tsoulikian**

²⁸ Պարսամյան Վ. Ա., Հարությունյան Շմավոն Ռ., Հայ Ժողովրդի պատմություն, Երևան, 1979, էջ 438:

²⁹ Քելեշեան Մ., *op. cit.*, p. 651.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 650.